



*Citation for published version:*

Stone, S 2015, 'School Mealtimes: Resistance in the Course of Living', Masters, University of Bath.

*Publication date:*  
2015

[Link to publication](#)

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**Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences**



**DISSERTATION**

**Submitted for the Master of Research Programme**

**School Mealtimes: Resistance in the Course of Living**

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**September 2015**

**Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
MRes Programmes**

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## **Acknowledgements**

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Kyoko Murakami, for her unfaltering support, critical engagement and expert guidance. She has been my inspiration in following this path; thank you for believing in my potential and encouraging me.

I would also like to thank the head teacher, dinner ladies and all the children at St Peter's Catholic Primary School. Thank you for giving me your time and sharing experiences with me.

Last but by no means least, I would like to give special thanks to my partner and daughters, for your patience, support and giving me a reason to smile at the end of each day.

## **Abstract**

This research will explore the everyday lives of children and dinner ladies during their school mealtimes practices. More specifically, it will investigate how resistance occurs in everyday interactions between the relations of children, their peers and dinner ladies. Much of school mealtime policy and research has been shaped and continues to be shaped by the promotion of nutrition and health. However, this does not capture the social significance of mealtimes or offer any understanding of institutional school mealtime practices. At present, there is limited research that understands how children read and negotiate school mealtime situations and how dinner ladies control the boundaries and respond to contestations of the rules. This research attempts to fill this gap in knowledge and contribute to school mealtime literature.

Using ethnographic evidence this research explores how different forms of resistance are used by children and dinner ladies during mealtime practices in a primary school, in South West England. The research aims to rethink resistance in school and explore the school mealtime as an integral part of children's socialisation in education. To illustrate these ideas, this dissertation draws on the analytical frameworks of Ochs and Shohet (2006) to explore mealtime socialisation, Foucault theory of resistance (1967, 1991) and Valsiner's (2015) three levels of resistance. Drawing on Ochs and Shohet's (2006) ethnographic evidence from various parts of the world, it is argued that food and eating is not just biologically significant but a way of becoming competent and appropriate members of family and community. Foucault offers insight into disciplinary powers and more importantly, why resistance might traverse, but not exclusively, in opposition to the effects of power. Whilst Valsiner's work on resistance, illustrates that everyday resistance can be complex, silent and sometimes counter intuitive. My research seeks to contribute to the understanding of how resistance can be understood during school mealtimes. The research will conclude that resistance during school mealtimes can be deployed by children and dinner ladies explicitly and more commonly, through implicit means.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

In this chapter, I will discuss how school mealtimes have been shaped and continue to be shaped by policy that tends to focus on nutrition and the promotion of health. Secondly, I will discuss mealtime literature to understand what can be learnt from previous research and show where this research can fill a gap in knowledge. Thirdly, I will introduce the purpose of the research, the primary research question and reveal the theoretical framework of this research. Finally, I will offer an overview of the dissertation.

The school meal service is an integral way that schools encourage and support the health of children, placing great emphasis on promoting nutrition and health. A variety of government policies, initiatives and researches have generated interest into the nutritional quality of school dinners (Gustafsson, 2002, Evans and Harper, 2009) with related interest to the types of food available in schools as a means of tackling the obesity epidemic (Walters et al, 2005, Curtis, 2004), satiety and food selection (Smith and Ditschum, 2009) and the influence of ambiance on nutritional health (Stroebele and De Castro, 2004). Underlying these discourses is a concern with civilising children through the process of eating and gaining control over the outward self (Elias, 2000). However, without addressing the social significance of school mealtimes, school nutritional policy may only play a limited role in influencing what children eat (Moore et al, 2010). Current policy is in danger of underestimating the social significance of school mealtimes (Daniel and Gustafsson, 2010) and researchers are now beginning to explore the temporal and spacial aspects of school mealtime practice (Pike, 2008, Pike, 2010).

In the context of eating practices in everyday life with family and friends, many researchers have explored parent-child relationships and the use of mealtimes as a site for child bonding, socialisation and talk (Laurier and Wiggins, 2011, Schieffelin and Ochs, 1986). In this context, mealtimes are central to defining and organising the family and social life (Charles and Kerr, 1998, DeVault, 1991, Ochs and Shohet, 2006). Research in this growing field brings to light the significance of food practices and socialisation (Ochs and Shohet, 2006, Jackson, 2009, Punch et al, 2010, Laurier and Wiggins, 2011). These researches hold key understanding into how the social construction of mealtime convey implicit and explicit rules, values, norms that socialise children into appropriate ways of behaving to become competent

members of society (Ochs and Shohet, 2006). Furthermore, Grieshaber (1997) has used a Foucauldian analysis to examine family mealtimes to explore how power relations between children and adults play out via food practices. However, there is still little understanding of how everyday resistance plays out in the context of school mealtime practices. Few researches have systematically explored the school mealtime to understand resistance in reoccurring everyday practices between children and dinner ladies. This research will address this gap in knowledge.

This research will draw on ethnographic evidence from school mealtimes to examine how conflict and resistance between dinner ladies, children and their peers are learnt, refined, negotiated and transformed during eating practices. My interest in the topic of resistance was initially triggered when I began the fieldwork and noticed children subverting the rules in creative ways, almost like a game. As I continued to observe the mealtime, I noted that children use different strategies to resist mealtime rules. This led me to narrow my focus and ask the primary research question of how different forms of resistance are used by both children and dinner ladies during the practice of mealtime, in a primary school dining hall in South West England. What is meant by resistance will be explained and defined throughout this dissertation. However, for a point of clarity, resistance has been loosely defined as everyday actions of non-conformist behaviour. The following section will briefly address why mealtimes are important phenomenon to study.

Mealtimes are an important phenomenon to research because they are complex situations where children learn a lot about themselves and the communities in which they participate. Typically, mealtimes are taken for granted, everyday routine practices. However, children do not eat in solitary, devoid of social and moral values or expectations. Rather, in these situations, school institutions have expectations for children's conduct during mealtime practices and children come to know and abide by school rules through participation in explicit and implicit guidance. More specifically, this research conceptualises mealtimes as powerful mechanisms for socialisation, which can forge relationships that define, reinforce or modify social order. According to Ochs and Shohet (2006, p. 36) 'mealtimes facilitate the social construction of knowledge and moral perspectives through communicative practices that characterize these occasions'. This is important because children become socialised into discipline and the affordance these situations bestow, and from here, children learn ways to bend, negotiate or subvert social and cultural rules. To answer the question of how different

forms of resistance are used by children and dinner ladies during mealtime practices, I will draw on the theoretical perspectives of Foucault and Valsiner, which will be explained fully in the reviewed literature. The following section will give a brief overview of the contents within this dissertation.

### **Overview of the Dissertation**

Chapter 2 begins with a discussion of the literature pertaining to dominant discourses around mealtime socialisation and school mealtimes. Following this, I provide a detailed overview of Foucault's theory of resistance and Valsiner's three levels of resistance. Chapter 3 provides a discussion of the research methodology to show the steps taken to answer the research question of how different forms of resistance are used by children and dinner ladies during mealtime practices. Chapter 4 presents the empirical findings of this research. Here I have provided ethnographic examples of both children's and dinner ladies resistance during mealtime practice. Chapter 5 provides a discussion where I attempt to explain and make clear my interpretations of the empirical work undertaken in relation to the theoretical framework. Chapter 6 attempts to synthesise the research to conclude that resistance strategies are deployed by both children and adults in explicit and often implicit ways.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I will explore mealtime as a form of socialisation to illustrate that mealtimes are complex situations where children learn a lot about themselves and the communities in which they participate. This is important because children do not merely incorporate food into their bodies during mealtimes, they also learn many implicit and explicit social and cultural norms. Secondly, I will briefly examine school dining halls to show how conflict and resistance can emerge from environmental features and practical constraints. Thirdly, I will explore a Foucauldian perspective of resistance to illustrate how resistance is an ambiguous counter force, which is interwoven with power. However, Foucault refused to define any limits to resistance, which means a normative understanding of resistance is lacking. In the final sections, I will deploy Valsiner's three levels of resistance to elaborate on the work of Foucault and offer an explanation of resistance that is subtle and powerful.

### **Mealtime Socialisation**

Mealtimes convey both implicit and explicit norms about the communication of food, culture and socialisation. Drawing on Ochs and Shohet's (2006) ethnographic evidence from various parts of the world, it is argued that food and eating is not just biologically significant but a way of becoming competent and appropriate members of family and community. During meaningful participation in mealtimes practices members share knowledge that is both embedded in and organised by local understandings and constructs of the world. Ochs and Shohet emphasise that mealtimes are powerful mechanisms for socialising children into commensality, sociality and morality. During mealtimes, children learn social and cultural rules and norms through both verbal communication and social action. Blum-Kalka (2009, p. 264) supports this notion with her analyses of family mealtime conversations, suggesting that children are socialised into adult worlds through language, guidance and participation. This means that children learn social contexts through their exposure and participation in social life. According to Schieffelin and Ochs (1986, p. 168) 'the process of becoming a competent member of society is realized to a large extent through language, by acquiring knowledge of its function, social distribution, and interpretations in and across socially defined situations'. This highlights that the acquisition of language is first to understand and then a tool to perform. Moreover, it is important to note that mealtimes are more than inducting novices

into the traditions of expert mealtime knowledge. Rather, mealtimes are malleable and can be recreated and altered through social and experiential asymmetrical relationships (Ochs and Shohet, 2006). This means that mealtime members can build, strengthen, undermine or modify practices and social relationships, affecting each other's ways of thinking, feeling and acting in the world. The following section will discuss the school mealtime setting.

### **The School Dinning Hall**

Typically, school meals in the United Kingdom are eaten in dining halls that have many other functions for school life, such as, assemblies, physical exercise, drama or music performances and are often used as places of worship (Pike, 2010, Gustafsson, 2002). Noise levels in these overcrowded and multi-purpose spaces are a common problem for many school mealtimes. Fell (1994, p. 142) argues it is because of 'a combination of high ceilings, bare walls and uncovered floors, often coupled with a serving hatch with kitchen behind, makes a cacophony of high-pitched voices, rattling cutlery and washing up noise'. This makes school dining halls notoriously noisy and often continuously moving places that can contribute to chaos, confusion and increase the anxiety and stress of both adults and children. Moreover, a conflict arises here because it is a responsibility of the dinner ladies to control the noise levels, which requires the restriction of children's ability to socialise and talk (Daniel and Gustafsson, 2010, Pike, 2010). Therefore, mealtimes can be sites where asymmetries of power interweave and create negative ambiances in which the complex ebb and flow of resistance plays out. Sometimes compounded by the fact that dinner ladies have limited powers in which to control the dining halls. According to Daniel and Gustafsson (2010, p. 272) 'the theme which emerges most strongly within our study relates to the children's dislike of adult intrusion into what they view as their limited and therefore precious opportunity for interaction with their friends'. This is an important issue that can inadvertently give rises to conflict and resistance situations. In the following sections, I will explore a Foucauldian perspective of resistance and power to understand what is meant by resistance.

### **Foucauldian Perspective of Resistance**

To understand a Foucauldian perspective of resistance, an understanding of what Foucault meant by power is needed because he conceptualises resistance in relation to power. According to Pickett (1996, p. 47) Foucault developed his understanding of resistance a decade before his conceptualisation of power. The first period of his work saw the

publication of *Madness and Civilisation* (1967). Here Foucault was interested in the foundational issues in society where power was not yet formed as a central issue. Rather, Foucault aimed to reveal the moment when reason was set apart from madness. This work was the beginning of medicine as an institution, which seeped into different discourses, making it possible to struggle against established powers of confinement and reason (Foucault, 1961). According to Pickett (1996, p. 451) ‘within this work is an understanding of revolutionary action, substantial portions of which Foucault retained in his later treatment of resistance’. Foucault cannot explain how or why anyone should resist power and rejects totalising theories on the grounds that they would become another agent of power. Foucault’s analytics of power and resistance, although complex and not always consistent, are significant in identifying the structural constraints within discourse and practice. In terms of school mealtimes, exploring resistance maybe a useful way to move beyond abstract theories to methodological strategies of researching resistance in a particular situation.

### **Discipline and Control**

In his later work, Foucault defined the nature of power as a relationship of action that is exercised and not possessed by individuals (Foucault, 1982). Disciplinary powers are exercised by those more powerful than their subordinates as a means to directly control the operations of the body. The diffusion of disciplinary mechanisms normalises aspects of surveillance and discipline, which can influence and modify the actions of children to eat their meal and obey the school rules. Regulatory mechanism of bio power ‘reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives’ (Foucault, 1980, p. 39). This illustrates the way disciplinary powers can modify the actions of children during mealtimes. Foucault does not offer a locus for resistance, but suggests resistance is also a form of power that can, but not exclusively, traverse in opposition to the effects of power (Foucault, 1982).

This Foucauldian perspective is in no way an exhaustive account but a means to show that power is ambivalent, both a means of social control and a means of resistance. However, many commentators have pointed out Foucault’s tendency for a one-sided analysis of power within the institution, leaving the immanence of resistance theoretically underdeveloped (McNay, 1994). In short, McNay argues ‘power relations are only examined from the perspective of how they are installed, which overestimates the effectiveness of disciplinary practices at the expense of other various practices that also constitute the social realm’

(McNay, 1994, p. 102). Therefore, a more normative explanation of resistance is needed to include the everyday activities of individuals who resist in a mundane and invisible way. According to Dews (1995, p. 80) Foucault's value laden theorisation of intention rather than transgression, as a limit imposed on the subject, 'debars him from formulating such a transformation theoretically'. This highlights a failure to represent the voices and bodies of those that are controlled. In the following sections, I will elaborate on Foucault's work by exploring Valsiner's three levels of resistance.

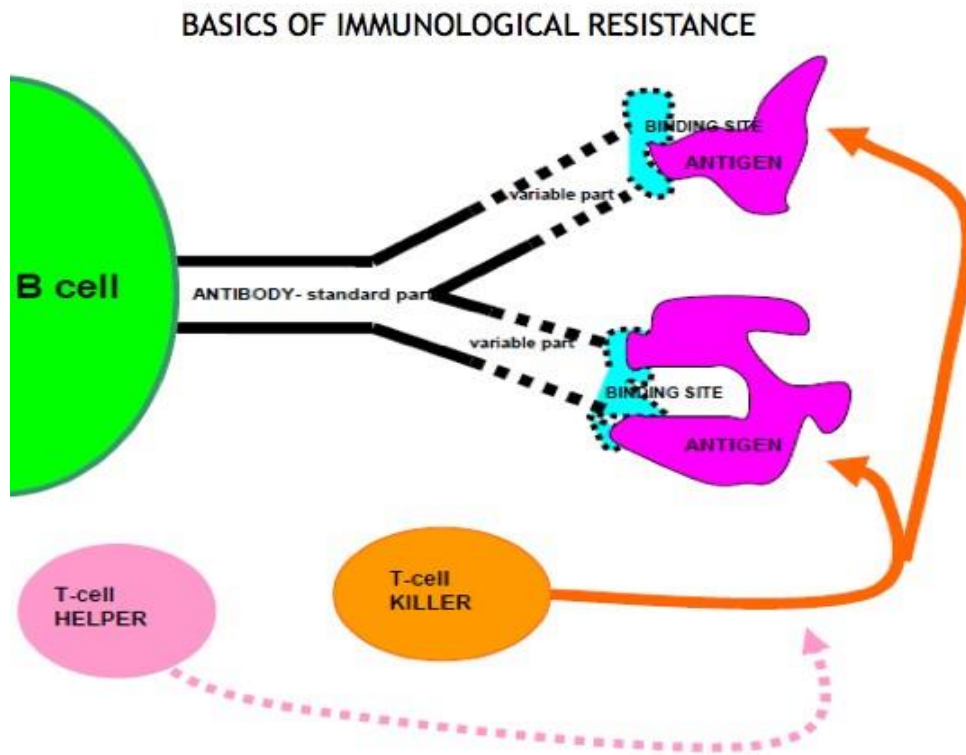
### **Valsiner Perspective of Resistance**

In 2015, Valsiner was a discussant at the International Society for Theoretical Psychology: Resistance and Renewal, where he shared his three theoretical approaches to understanding resistance. Firstly, he spoke of resistance as a counteraction that has a biological mechanism within which the phenomena feelings are located in the functioning of the immune system. Secondly, resistance was conceptualised as a neutralisation, with a phenomenological orientation that focuses on the subjective lived-through experiences. Finally, resistance as collaboration, this draws on an ever-active social constructivist perspective that opposes itself to the biological orientation. This orientation conceptualises the personal lived-through experience as accepted but occurs without the body that enables the experience. In the following sections, I will examine each level of resistance and explain in more details.

### **Resistance as a counteraction**

This is a biological orientation that draws on immunology to understanding resistance. In abstract terms, this means to follow a traditional counter-action notion, relating to the immune system (Valsiner, 2015). In figure 1, Valsiner illustrates this notion with an example of the human body resisting an incoming attack.

### **The Basics of Immunological Resistance**

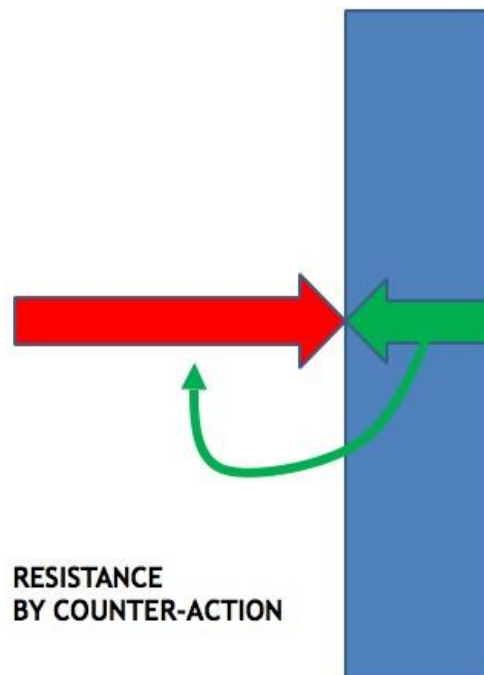


**Figure 1 Valsiner's (2015) diagram of Immunological Resistance.**

According to Morrison and Bennett (2009, p. 226) 'the immune system is very sophisticated and complex, and designed to help the body to resist disease'. The immune system helps the body to recognise previous different incoming attacks and respond in a rapid and decisive manner. 'Typically, recognition of a pathogen by the immune system triggers an effector response that eliminates or neutralises the invader' (Thomas et al, 2007, p. 1). This conceptualises counteraction, as a barrier that blocks an impact and then sends clandestine signals to eliminate it. According to Parham (2015, p. 11) 'the memory cells allow subsequent encounters with the same pathogen to elicit a stronger and faster adaptive immune response, which terminates infection with minimal illness'. This highlights the ability of the body to recognise, eliminate and then remember the invading pathogen. Valsiner supports this point with the work of Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling (1797) to suggest that all-natural organisms react to protect themselves and counter the impact. 'A poisonous snake is not poisonous to its own bites' (Valsiner, 2015). In figure 2, Valsiner illustrates that counteraction warrants some form of force to which there is a barrier that has a counter force.



## Resistance by Counteraction



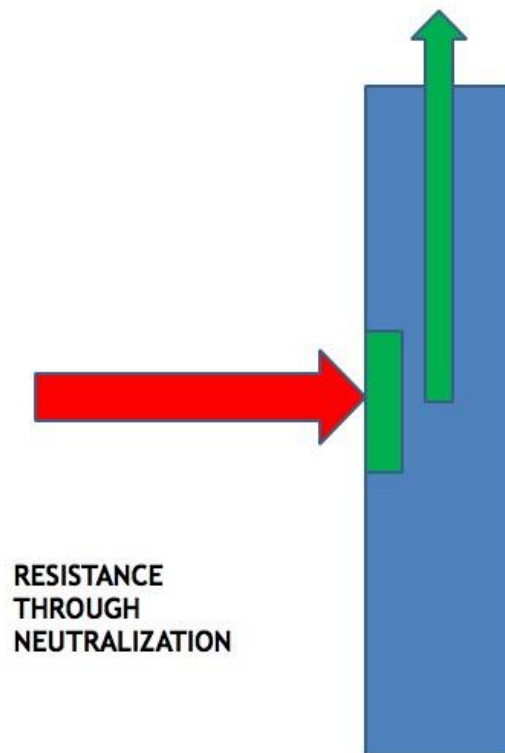
**Figure 2 Valsiner's (2015) Diagram of Resistance as Counteraction**

This is important to the idea of resistance in a psychological sense. Children set up particular resistances to the incoming endless messages, from both adults and peers, as a way to counterbalance the powerful other. The following section will discuss resistance as a neutralisation.

### **Resistance as a neutralisation**

According to Valsiner (2015) the general principle is very simple; resistance occurs through ignoring the messages from powerful other. The diagram in figure 3 shows that resistance is neutralised by blocking the message or impact from the powerful other, and then the activity goes in a different direction.

## Resistance Though Neutralisation



**Figure 3 Valsiner's (2015) Diagram of Resistance as Neutralisation**

Valsiner (2015) supported this point with an example of resistance as neutralisation from World War Two:

In World War Two, German soldiers marched to occupy Paris. When they got there the Germans were horrified because the Parisians did not take them very seriously. Yes, the Germans could punish the Parisians, but they went on enjoying themselves as much as one can do in a wartime situation. The German army found this very offensive. After a while, the Parisian lifestyle was like a Germany soldier's holiday and so they were no longer a fighting force. As a result, German soldiers had to be constantly recycled and assigned elsewhere to maintain a military orientation.

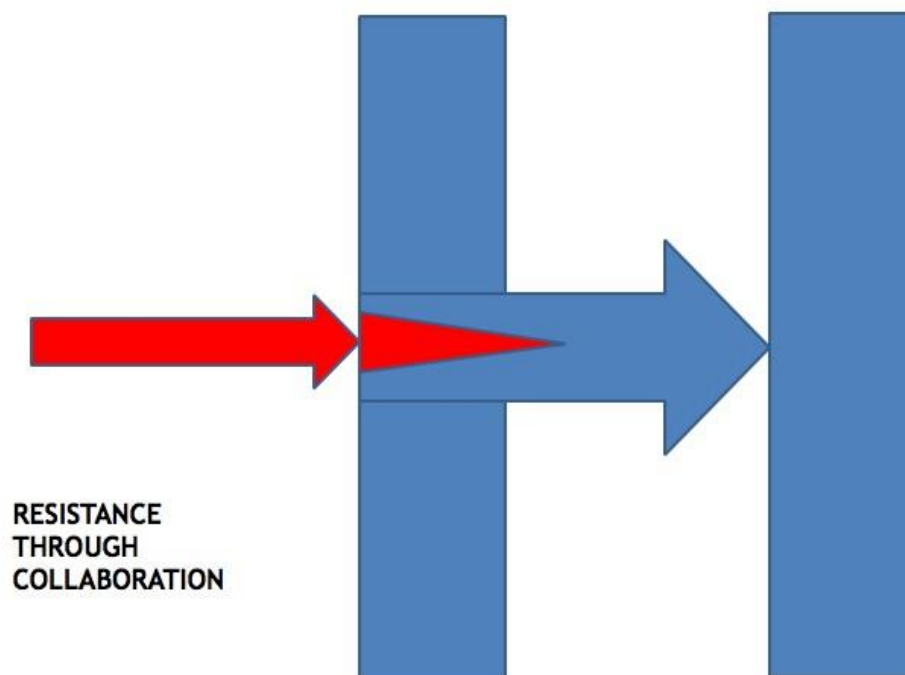
This example shows that the powerful incoming message is heard but not followed. If one responded to the powerful message or impact, that would be an example of counteractions, as discussed in the above example. Rather, in this case, the message or impact gets ignored and

something alternate is developed. The next section will investigate the final level of resistance.

### **Resistance as a Collaboration**

According to Valsiner (2015) resistance can be a form of collaboration that negates the message or incoming impact from the powerful other. Figure 4 shows that the powerful message or impact is accepted, followed and maybe even intensified in speed or exaggeration.

### Resistance Through Collaboration



**Figure 4 Valsiner's (2015) Diagram of Resistance as Collaboration**

Valsiner explained the diagram with an example of making hero figures out of historical figures. 'The glorification of Vygotsky in the last 30 years has done more damage to understanding Vygotskian ideas than any other critics of his work' (Valsiner, 2015). The principle here is that the message or impact becomes encapsulated into the existing field and becomes reduced over time. At the same time, the existing field can claim very nicely that

they have acted in good faith to support the message or impact. Valsiner (2015) supports this point with an example of different governments implementing educational visions:

In an unnameable European country, where a conservative political party has come to power, it decides they need to implement a Piagetian approach to education. All teachers are taken to courses to learn the Piagetian language, and nothing changes in the classroom. Following this, a new political party comes to power and decides they now want to teach a Vygotskian approach. Again, nothing changes in the classroom. The ministry of education can claim that in both cases they have implemented large changes to the education system. This is, most of all, how administrative work negates the powerful message.

This level of resistance is almost counter intuitive, as resistance mainly occurs by accepting the message or impact. Educational perspectives have often assumed that the power perspective should be taken to understand resistance. However, this example of resistance as a collaboration has shown that resistance can be a silent process that negates through acceptance. Children can set up resistances to incoming endless messages from both peers and adults, and some of these messages will be internalised and used for their own purposes.

## **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I have explored mealtime as a form of socialisation. This illustrated that children learn social and cultural norms through their exposure and participation in mealtime practices. I have explained that mealtimes are both the means and ends to children acquiring cultural knowledge, modifying social practices and relationships in becoming competent members of their school mealtime practices. Secondly, I illustrated that practical aspects of the school dining halls coupled with dinner lady responsibilities and the children's desires to chatter, can increase stress and lead to conflict and resistance. Thirdly, Foucault's analytics of power and resistance, although complex and not always consistent, show that resistance is both ambiguous and never in a position of exteriority to power. Finally, I elaborated on

Foucault's work by deploying Valsiner's three levels of resistance. This revealed a normative understanding of resistance that conceptualises resistance as a counteraction, a way of neutralisation or a collaborative act that negates the message or impact of the powerful other. In the following chapter, I will explain the methodology used in this research, arguing that ethnography is the most suitable approach to provide answers to the question of how different forms of resistance are used by children and dinner ladies in the practice of school mealtimes.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

In chapter 2, the reviewed literature has produced recurring themes that are embedded and dependant on the interrelated components of culture and social context. In this chapter, I will explain the methodology that I used in this research. I will begin by examining the philosophical orientation and ethnographic approach taken to illustrate the methodological assumptions that reality is constructed, modified and interpreted as children experience and interact with social life. Secondly, I will examine knowledge as intersubjective; exploring detailed understandings of meaning and action through my own subjective researcher position. Thirdly, I will explore the process of fieldwork, which entails discussion on design, access and entry, methods of data collection and analysis. Finally, I will discuss the ethical considerations of this research.

### **Philosophical Orientation**

This research is ethnographic and seeks to gain a comprehensive understanding of social action. Children and dinner ladies construct varied and multiple meanings from their experience in situated mealtime practices. The coexistence of different perspectives from alternate meaning making and social action makes the mealtime practice full of contradictions and complexity. An ontological assumption here is that the social world is contingent on children's subjectivities, which continuously emerge and evolve as a process of interaction with each other and their surroundings. This means that social realities are constituted in each person's own consciousness. This is important because to achieve coherence in meanings, context can be better understood from sharing the same framework for sense making. In the following, I will explore the epistemological orientation of this research.

According to Geertz (1973) the object of the ethnographer is to explain culture through thick descriptions, whilst continuously reflecting, thinking and analysing to construct knowledge. In explaining culture, I am only able to produce knowledge according to my own subjective reality and from my observer position. Therefore, I make sense of children's actions by trying to understand the meanings they attribute to their practices during the mealtime. Moreover, the interrelated components of the mealtime practice make it difficult to atomise socialisation or resistance into an objective scientifically researchable phenomenon. 'Dominant

methodological approaches have often positioned children as objects in theory and practice, excluding them from context or process' (Corsaro, 1985, p. 2). Therefore, an epistemological assumption of this research is that phenomenon needs to be studied in its natural setting, rather than fragmented and studied through artificial means. As a result, we have no direct access to the world 'out there', which means that my interpretation of informant's experiences during the mealtimes is not a direct reflection of reality but rather a specific interpretation of situated activity. A strength of ethnography lies in its ability to encounter, respect, record and represent, partly in its own terms, the irreducibility of human experience. Being in the field for an extended period of time gave me an impression of human life in this school context, enabling me to make connections and piecing together elements of social and cultural structure, practice and meaning. As I listened, 'I learnt the answers to questions that I would not even have had the sense to ask if I had been getting my information solely on an interview basis' (Whyte, 1993, p. 301). In the following section, I will examine reflexivity to show how researchers are inescapably part of the social world in which they are exploring (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

### **Reflexivity**

Arguably, a defining strength and contentious limitation is that this methodology is subjective and prone to bias. In ethnographic research the boundaries between the self and others become blurred, due to my intimate and complex immersion within the research culture. 'The inquirer and the "object" of inquiry interact to influence one another; knower and known are inseparable' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 37). I recognise that it is impossible to disentangle myself from the research itself and I am aware how this research has been shaped by my own values, interests, choices, perceptions and interactions during the inquiry. To limit these influences, I have kept a reflected journal and systematically critically evaluated the motives of my decisions. 'The researcher should not waste time trying to eliminate 'investigator effects': instead, she should concentrate on *understanding* those effects' (Delamont, 2002, p. 8, original emphasis). This highlights that I am not neutral, my interpretations colour the experiences with the light I cast them in, and reflexivity is an alternative means to address the positivist terms of reliability and validity. 'Reflexivity expresses researchers' awareness of their necessary connection to the research situation and hence their effects upon it' (Davies, 1999, p. 3). Critical evaluation and reflection have been a feature of this research from the onset and for its whole duration, from gaining access to the field to writing up this

representation. In the following section, I will explain how the social world is guarded and requires sensitivity in order to build trust and rapport.

### **Field Entry**

On the first day of the fieldwork, February 2015, I wore conservative looking clothing to reduce any sharp differences and ease my presence into the school community. ‘The researcher must judge what sort of impression he or she wishes to create, and manage appearances accordingly’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 68). I was greeted by a dinner lady named Mrs Swan, whom I had never met before (in February 2013, I conducted a small three-month study in this research setting). We introduced ourselves and she handed me a disposable apron and hand sanitiser, informing me of the new procedures. In these moments of putting on the disposable apron, I had strong feelings of embarrassment and demoralisation because I was being assigned a new identity that felt uncomfortable to me. She gave me the role of pouring milk or water for the children and scraping the younger children's plates. After a short time, I realised the uniform of the disposable apron seemed to make me less visible to adults in the community with whom I was already familiar. Instead of seeing ‘Sam’, they saw three dinner ladies in disposable aprons. The teachers with whom I used to freely chat, tended to look straight through me and initial, occasional attempts to say hello went unnoticed. This was an exciting insight that to some extent communicated an institutional invisibility of dinner ladies.

Approximately two months later (April, 2015) I decided to wear more informal clothes beneath the disposable apron to attune more closely with the dinner ladies attire. ‘Self presentation will be closely related to the roles played in the setting’ (Delamont, 2002, p. 155). I became friendly with two particular dinner ladies named Mrs Brown and Mrs Peel, who later became key informants. During each mealtime sessions, we found five minutes here and there to chitchat about families, weekend pursuits and holidays. Adapting my appearance and exchanging personal information seemed to improve rapport and relax interactions with both Mrs Brown and Mrs Peel. Building trust by revealing more of myself appeared to make them feel less judged and I became more accepted, which seemed to make my presence less noticeable. Initially, all dinner ladies were vigilant, active, keeping the room tidy and tightly controlled, but as time passed (May, 2015), they became more relaxed in their duties, chatty with each other, and I noted that the floor and tables visibly contained more food droppings.



The position of accepted marginal member of the mealtime practice enabled me to gain in-depth insights into how children read and negotiate social situations and how dinner ladies control the boundaries and respond to contestations of the rules. Moreover, I consciously chose not to participate in disciplining the children so that I could be positioned in a way that would allow me to observe the children's covert tactics for subverting the rules.

## **Design**

This is an intrinsic case study, situated in St Peter's Catholic Primary School in South West England. The fieldwork period was six months, from February until July 2015. I visited the school to participate in mealtime activities every Monday. 'A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident' (Yin, 2014, p. 13). The case is set within their lunch hall, which seats approximately one hundred students per sitting. More specifically, this is an embedded multiple case design, in which children's practices are embedded within the greater context of the school community. The rationale for this design was that multiple cases of the same phenomenon might corroborate, qualify, or extend the findings that might occur were there to be only one case. My aim was to 'appreciate the uniqueness and complexity of the case, its embeddedness and interaction with its context' (Stake, 1995, p. 16).

According to Yin (2003, p. 98) a strength of a case study is that it can explore multiple sources of evidence and converge different lines of enquiry. Moreover, case studies capture unique features of embedded complex social phenomenon that may be otherwise missed, for example, with rigid questionnaires or in the controlled confines of laboratories. A limitation raised by this design is the legitimacy, respectability or representativeness in the findings due to being based on one or a small number of cases. 'Significance rather than frequency is the hallmark of case studies, offering the researcher an insight into the real dynamics of situations and people' (Cohen et al, 2007, p. 294). Moreover, according to Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p. 32) generalisation is not the primary concern of a case that has intrinsic interest. This illustrates its logical significance rather than a statistical connection to the wider population. However, a common critique is that case studies are 'not easily open to crosschecking, hence they may be selective, biased, personal and subjective (Cohen et al, 2007, p. 293). This reaffirms the continual need for critical awareness, reflection and

understanding of any preconceptions or personal, theoretical and political orientations that are shaping the research through endless iterations, choices and perceptions.

## **Participants**

The field was recruited through existing relations from previous research links (Stone, 2013). The primary school is Catholic state funded, containing approximately 210 pupils each year. Their intake is largely working class and feeds into both local state and private secondary schools. The children's ages range from four through to eleven.

During my weekly visits (February until July 2015) I was in contact with the whole school over mealtime. This included male and female children and teachers of varied ethnicities. All dinner ladies and kitchen staff were female, and all dinner ladies held dual roles as classroom assistants. Informants include a boy named Johnny and his eating partners Tom, Jim, Malcolm and Harry, who interacted with each other and Mrs Peel; a girl named Emily interacting with Mrs Swan; a boy named Charlie and a girl named Clara, interacting with Mrs Rivers and Mrs Brown respectively. I had numerous brief informal conversations with up to approximately twenty children per mealtime visit. Two dinner ladies, Mrs Finch and Mrs Swallow have had limited influence on this research due to Mrs Swallow's ill health and my not being able to establish enough rapport with Mrs Finch. Mrs Finch and I were extremely friendly to each other, but relationships grow slowly and with sensitivity, trust, respect and understanding and this relationship was not ready to become informative. In April (2015) the fieldwork revealed particular social events that were identified and explored with more precision. On this premise, informants were selected from purposive sampling during naturally occurring events, thus shaping the analytical framework and funnelling process.

## **Methods of Data Collection**

In the following, I will discuss a range of data collection methods that I used to fit the purpose of my inquiry. A limitation of multiple data collection methods is that it amasses vast amounts of data, requiring mastery of multiple data collection techniques and requires excessive amounts of time to organise and collate collected materials.

## **Participant Observations**

As part of my immersion in the field, I observed informants and their behaviours whilst participating as a dinner lady, charged with the task of pouring milk or water for the children. This brought me into close proximity with the mealtime practice, whereby impromptu conversations with children and dinner ladies was very natural. This allowed me to observe events as they unfolded, get a feel for unspoken topics and ask questions to clarify my understandings. Participating in a mealtime role, as appose to being on the periphery with a notebook, eased my presence in the research setting. 'Participation in the everyday lives of people is a means of facilitating observation of particular behaviours and events and of enabling more open and meaningful discussions with informants' (Davies, 1999, p. 73). Informal conversations generated a rich form of data. 'It is a process, moving from descriptive observation to focused observation, narrowing ones field of observation to focus in on those problems and processes that are most germane to the research purpose and questions, and on to selective observation' (Cohen et al, 2007, p. 465). This illustrates the balance that is needed to absorb myself in the situation, whilst to some extent, observe and analyse in a detached way. 'Along with external events, recording feelings and instinctual manifestations', it is a commitment to gaining 'a clear idea of the metaphysical nature of existence' (Malinowski, 1989, p. 130). Beyond talking to informants, overhearing conversations, seeing activity and gestures, my aim was to notice what was silently taken for granted. To go beyond what people say they do to seeing what they actually do.

## **Recording Devices**

I initially used audio devices in the centre of the tables to collect the overall musicality of evolving conversations during mealtimes. However, I eventually abandoned this method because it was very disruptive for the children and the quality of the recordings was extremely poor due to the overall deafening noise of the busy dining hall. I took photographs for the purposes of spatial awareness and used a video recorder to observe non-verbal communication. The camera was a useful tool for capturing the essence of the mealtime movement, cross checking and clarifying observations and fieldnotes.

## **Fieldnotes**

Occasionally, I wrote brief notes *in situ* immediately after informal conversations with the children to remember exactly the questions asked and the answers given. Regular bullet

pointed fieldnotes were written as soon as I left the school building, usually sat in my car. I expanded these fieldnotes as soon as possible after the initial observation. I wrote an out-of-field reflective journal to record thoughts that developed in the back of my mind days after my fieldwork or as a result of thought-provoking conversations with my supervisor or colleagues. Fieldnotes provided me with a well organised source of accumulative material, which I periodically re-read and analysed as a way to critically reflect on my interpretations of events.

### **Group Interview**

As my position in the school became more established (May, 2015), Mrs Brown requested that I interview her so that she could contribute her dinner lady perspective to my understanding of mealtime. Mrs Rivers, Mrs Peel and Mrs Swan were also very enthusiastic to offer their perspective. I conducted a group interview (June, 2015) with four dinner ladies, Mrs Brown, Mrs Rivers, Mrs Peel and Mrs Swan, to yield a collective rather than an individual perspective. Mrs Finch asked me to give her a list of questions to answer in her own time, which I did as a way to value her opinion, but she did not return the answers and we seldom spoke of it again. I proposed a broad focus for discussion so that the women had the freedom to talk about what was important to them. The discussion topic was: what are the advantages and disadvantages of being a dinner lady? I prepared several other questions to use when managing the group to stay in focus but rarely used them. All members of the group interacted, and their contributions were a good balance. They respectfully challenged each other, agreed and supported points made or extended each other's ideas to introduce new ideas to the discussion. Although group interviews have a contrived nature, on this occasion, it was an appropriate technique for the informants to share their views.

This was a turning point to my relationship with the dinner ladies. Prior to the group interview and in my everyday integration, I assured the women that my intention was not to judge them or their practices on what was right or wrong, but to understand the mealtime experience within this school context. During the group interview, I sympathised with the everyday challenges the women faced due to atmospheric escalation, stress and often multiple and competing demands. I realised from the way our relationships changed after the group interview, my prior position was somewhat ambiguous to them. It seemed that my prior assurances were received sceptically and, by revealing an opinion of my observations, they felt less threatened by my presence. This was an unexpected development in building trust

and rapport with the dinner ladies. After my fieldwork ended, Mrs Peel contacted me via social media to stay in touch over the summer.

### **Methods of Analysis**

The conceptualisations of mealtime from researchers Ochs and Shohet (2006), Laurier and Wiggins, (2011) and Grieshaber, (1997) have been intrinsic to understanding mealtimes as cultural sites for socialising children into commensality and communicating expectations. I collected data with a broad focus and progressively became more focused through sifting and sorting, refining and reflecting to understand the informants' intentions, cultural structures and agency. This process is not an attempt to reduce data or complexity but rather a way of constructing thick descriptions, reflecting on meanings attributed to sequences or situations, whilst, grappling with incoherencies or inaccuracies. In inscribing social discourse, Geertz (1978, p. 19) writes, the ethnographer 'turns it from a passing event, which exists only in its own moment of occurrence, into an account, which exists in its inscriptions and can be reconsulted'. I have carefully considered the selection of data for representation in this research. This process is iterative and was guided by both the analytical framework and naturally occurring events. My initial attraction to the analysed episode was due to a felt sense that Johnny was being singled out for unjust treatment. Over the course of several months, I sympathised and aligned my interest with the child's perspective to understand the complexity that was contributing to this situation. During my extended fieldwork (until July, 2015), the process of collecting four dinner ladies' perspectives has contributed to a thicker description of events, revealing different understandings of the same issues. 'The reporting and analysis should strive to catch the different definitions of the situation from the different participants' (Cohen et al, 2007, p. 541).

I coded and themed my fieldnotes, noting significant points in the mealtime to revisit and review with the video footage. Nvivo was a useful tool to concertina data, making further connections to refine codes and themes. This allowed me to 'discover patterns and themes in the data and to link them with other patterns and themes' (LeCompte and Schensul, 1999, p. 3). This refers to giving meaning to stories through organising data into categories that relates to a framework that is guided by the research question.

## **Ethical Considerations**

The overall standpoint of this research is situational ethics. These underlying principles respect the context in which the research takes place, rather than judging according to absolute standards. ‘Social researchers must take into account the effect of the research on participants, and act in such a way as to preserve their dignity as human beings’ (Cohen et al, 2007, p. 84). In the following, I will consider the key principles of informed consent, confidentiality and avoiding harm.

### **Informed Consent**

Research subjects were ‘informed fully about the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research, what their participation in the research entailed and what risks, if any, are involved’ (ESRC, 2015). Deception was not a feature of this research. Information sheets and consent forms were given to the head teacher three weeks in advance of the fieldwork. This was to allow the community time to understand and reflect on their potential or actual involvement, ask questions and make any changes to the agreement. ‘Consideration must be given to how to express these questions in language that is meaningful to participants’ (Davies, 1999, p. 85). The information in these documents were written in non-technical language and piloted on lay persons to ensure its understandability before issue. Please see appendix one to view the information sheet and consent forms.

Whilst in the field, the video camera proved to be a useful tool in the long-term for reminding both the informants and me that I was a researcher conducting research. It was not that this fact had slipped my mind, but after my initial entry perhaps my desire to be inconspicuous meant I communicated my everyday research purposes less. Conversely, the more I was accepted into the setting, the more approachable I became to both the children and dinner ladies. I believe after approximately four months (May, 2015) they felt more confident in asking me more challenging questions. I welcomed being constantly questioned each week by the children about the reason for the camera and who would see the footage. This sparked many interesting conversations and ethical questions were raised. Informants were reminded of the purpose of the research and consulted for consent. ‘Since gatekeepers usually have authority over other individuals their consent does not always signal the agreement of these others, and researchers should seek consent from them directly to ensure that their participation is in fact free of undue coercion’ (Davies, 1999, p. 50). These conversations

were a good reminder of individuals' ethical rights, my responsibilities' and the purpose of the research.

### **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality and anonymity are about protecting the privacy and personal information of research participants. The school identity and location have been anonymised from the onset and have never been used as a means of identification. To ensure informants anonymity, pseudonyms have been created for all informants, which started at the fieldnote stage.

Confidentiality is much harder to ensure due to participant information being entangled with context and the phenomenon. 'Researchers must be cautious about the degree of confidentiality they promise and realistic about their own abilities to protect their informants' anonymity' (Davies, 1999, p. 51). Confidentiality is a complex issue which requires ongoing negotiated interaction between the researcher and informants'. The research data in electronic form has been stored on password protected files on fire wall protected servers at the University of Bath. All hard copies are securely stored in a locked cabinet and access to these data was strictly limited to me and my supervisor.

### **Avoiding harm**

Avoiding harm during the fieldwork and in writing the report has been a primary concern. I reported any immediate queries, risks, incidents or challenges to the lead supervisors of the mealtime activities. These tended to be issues regarding the children's wellbeing, where I have reported sick children or children having difficulties eating their meal to a member of staff. I kept in regular communication with the head teacher throughout the fieldwork. I did not report any serious issues, accidents, incidents or risks of causing harm, but I agreed that if a need arose, I would have alerted the head teacher as a first point of contact. As far as possible, I interacted in an honest and transparent manner, mindful of the wellbeing of all those with whom I interacted. In writing this dissertation, I have used pseudonyms throughout to ensuring informants' names and their personal information are not identifiable to potential readers.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I have discussed the methodology of this research. Firstly, I explored the ethnographic approach taken to illustrate how methodological assumptions have shaped this

inquiry. I have shown that reality is constructed, modified and interpreted as children experience and interact with social life. Secondly, I have discussed that when producing knowledge, it can only be done according to my own subjective reality and from my observer position. This means that I can only make sense of children's actions by trying to understand the meanings they attribute to their practices. I have highlighted the importance of reflexivity and shown my recognition that it is impossible to disentangle myself from the research itself. Thirdly, I examined the process of fieldwork, discussing the specific nature of this design and highlighted many key understandings regarding access and entry, methods of data collection and analysis. Finally, I discussed the ethical issues involved with this research to illustrate my carefulness and consideration with regard to consent, confidentiality and the strategies I have deployed to avoid harm. The following chapter will introduce the reader to some empirical findings of mealtime socialisation and resistance.



## Chapter 4: Analysis

### Introduction

Chapter 3 outlined the methodology of this research and explained the steps that I have taken to grapple with the themes of socialisation and resistance, which are embedded and dependant on the interrelated components of culture and social context. In this chapter, I will discuss the empirical work to illustrate resistance in relation to the work Foucault and Valsiner's and show that different forms of resistance can be found in the practice of mealtime. Firstly, I will explore the structure of St Peter's mealtimes to show how mealtimes are time constrained, noisy places where dinner ladies have to manage multiple competing demands. This will provide the context in which resistance is embedded and enable the reader to contextualise the discussions of practice in subsequent examples of resistance. Secondly, I will provide an example of mealtime socialisation to illustrate how children learn explicit and implicit cultural values and norms. Thirdly, I will explore a Foucauldian perspective of resistance to show how children resist discipline and control. During my fieldwork experience, I was struck by events that made me question my own understanding of resistance and with the help of Valsiner's three levels of resistance, I provide three illustrative examples to explore resistance as a counteraction, as a neutralisation and as a collaboration.

### St Peter's Dining Room

St Peter's primary school has a relatively small dining area, so children are organised into two sittings. The children eating sandwich lunches are allowed to sit straight down to a table, whilst the children eating hot dinners queue around the periphery of the room and wait to be served their meal at a food servery counter that connects to the kitchen. The timings of a typical mealtime are as follows:

12:15	Reception and infant classes one, two and three enter the hall.
12:30	All first sitting children are seated.
12:35	Children who have finished are asked to line up at the back of the hall and wait to go the infant's playground.
12:40	The majority of infant children leave the hall with a dinner lady.
12:45	Junior children enter the hall, which are classes four, five and six.

12:50	From this time onward second sitting children leave the hall as and when they are finished.
13:15	Mealtime ends and the bell is rung for afternoon classes.

This illustrates that school meals are to be eaten in minimal time and with minimal fuss to ensure that all children can be fed within the allotted time. Both mealtime sittings contain approximately one hundred children and are typically supervised by two dinner ladies. The dinner hall is located in the centre of the school and teachers and other members of staff irregularly pass through. Dinner tables are arranged into rows, each row assigned to a different year group and the children can typically choose where to sit in their row of tables. ‘Creativity is encouraged, but acknowledged within the boundaries of certain well-defined perimeters’ (Alder and Alder, 1998, p. 203). Please see appendix two for floor plan. In the following section, I will explore the mealtime in more detail to illustrate how different competing demands pervade the mealtime.

### **The School Dining Hall**

Mealtimes provide opportunities for children to socialise beyond the confines of the classroom. The norms of communication in this school are that children are allowed to quietly talk to other children in their vicinity. Therefore, children consistently explained to me the importance of sitting with their friends. It is a responsibility of the dinner lady to keep noise at an appropriate level and children are frequently asked to quieten down. I observed many children that looked to be enjoying the pursuits of interacting with friends or playing collaborative games around the table. However, the dining hall represents an area of discomfort to children who were not hungry, felt unwell or struggled to manage loud overwhelming social situations (Burke and Grosvenor, 2003). This large communal multipurpose facility is often a very noisy hectic space (Fell, 1994, Pike, 2010). The noise levels and multitude of things all happening at once contributes to chaos, confusion and a felt sense of intense, transient pandemonium. I observed dinner ladies strained in their practical duties of monitoring and controlling the room, doing both detective and policing work, whilst attending to the soft skills of sensitively caring for the wellbeing of children. In these difficult situations competing demands pervade. The mealtime constraints can contribute to dinner ladies becoming over sensitive or over reactive to issues that do not necessarily need to be brought up as disciplinary or behavioural. During the early period of my fieldwork, my

understanding of discipline and resistance was relatively simplistic but as my immersion and involvement evolved, I began to accommodate a more complex and embedded understanding. This is the context in which stress, conflict and resistance plays out. In the following section, I will explore mealtime socialisation to illustrate how children begin to internalise cultural and social values.

### **Mealtime Socialisation**

In St Peter’s primary school, the infant children are regularly prompted with instruction of table manners, which transmits and transforms guidance as to how, for example, to use cutlery and comply, or not, with requests. Consistent with Ochs and Shohet (2006, p. 42) ‘mealtimes are pervaded by talk oriented toward reinforcing what is right and wrong’. Children are typically sanctioned for breaking the rules and praised when they perform appropriate behaviour. Consider, for example, the following incident that occurred two months into the fieldwork (March, 2105). In this example, Mrs Rivers is interacting with a table of reception class children. She helps some children to cut up their food and then notices Clara eating her meal:

Mrs Rivers:	Well done Clara! aren’t you a good girl using your knife and fork to eat your lunch today. Isn’t she good Mrs Swan? ( <i>Mrs Swan is pouring drinks</i> )
Mrs Brown:	Wow! Clara, that’s great ( <i>They all smile</i> )
Mrs Rivers:	No Charlie, like this ( <i>Mrs Rivers holds up the knife and fork to show Charlie technically how she is holding them.</i> )

This example illustrates how Clara’s previous guidance and present conformity to the school rules is reinforced with a positive celebration for learning and performing local social norms; a moral message that can be heard by all children sitting in the vicinity. ‘One task of social interaction is to create and maintain a sense of shared understanding’ (Schieffelin and Ochs, 1986, p. 165). Moreover, it shows how children’s interaction with practical activities can lead to new skills and knowledge about appropriate ways to act, think and feel during mealtimes. ‘Every interaction is potentially a socializing experience in that members of the social group are socializing each other into their particular world views as they negotiate situated meanings’ (Schieffelin and Ochs, 1986, p. 165). This example is not as common as the many other small, every day, tacit, messages and cues that seep into the cultural practice of commensality. Mealtime comportment is embedded in practice and children internalise

cultural rules and social values, eventually becoming competent and contributing members of the school's mealtime practice (Ochs and Shohet, 2006). 'The broad disciplinary functions of the school in the regulation of everyday thought and behaviour also underscore its seminal role as an agent of socialisation' (Chum, 2013, p. 150). In the following example, I will explore how children are socialised into disciplinary practices and provide an illustrative example of resistance.

### **Resistance: Foucault**

Disciplinary power is based on the supervision and organisation of bodies. 'In both 1967 and today, children have readily associated the serving of school food with institutions such as hospitals and prisons which emphasise authority, control and the regulation of bodies' (Burke and Grosvenor, 2003, p. 35). Surveillance allows children's bodies to be regulated by everyday routines that set the norms for judgements, often without the children knowing precisely who is being watched at any given time. Individual actions are judged according to others, which is a means to measure inconsistencies and address abnormal behaviour (Foucault, 1991). There are many mealtime rules. For example, children are not allowed to leave their seat for social purposes, throw or share food with friends and must seek permission to leave some of their meal. However, I have observed on numerous occasions children breaking all of these rules successfully without detection. This example took place five months into the fieldwork (June, 2015). Emily, who is in a year four class, has pushed all the food on her plate to one side to give the impression that she has eaten most of her meal. She raises her hand to get Mrs Swans attention:

Emily:	Can I go on? ( <i>Eat her dessert</i> )
Mrs Swan:	No eat your fishcakes and you've hardly touched your peas.
Emily:	I don't like fishcakes
Mrs Swan:	Well you need to eat half and finish your rice or you're not going out to play.

This exert should not be read as bad practice as it is not intended to represent or discuss a judgement that questions children satiety or preferences. Rather its purpose is to illustrate how children circumvent power. As soon as Mrs Swan is out of range, Emily quickly and discreetly eats her dessert, scrapes the contents of her dinner plate into the bin and goes out to play. On this occasion, Emily's actions were hidden from Mrs Swan. Children comply fully,

partially or not at all with Mrs Swan's requests to eat more food. Rebukes, in the cases of children who get caught in the act of resistance, brings to the fore a concern for children's wellbeing and behavioural expectations to set a good example to younger children, thus contributing as appropriate and competent members of the mealtime practice (Ochs and Shohet, 2006). Minor infractions are met with disciplinary action to reform the unwanted behaviour (Foucault, 1991). However, resistance is diverse, irreducible and as equally prolific as power. Moreover, Emily becomes an agent of power through her small everyday acts of resistance. This one small example is not a revolutionary action by itself but combined with a plethora of other small, seemingly insignificant, interactions the disciplinary power is undermined.

A Foucauldian perspective is important in understanding how strategies of resistance can circumvent power, and in many cases, the same can be said for power circumventing resistance. However, in order to understand resistance phenomena, a theory of resistance is needed that has clear theoretical implications for empirical data (Valsiner, 2015). The remainder of this chapter will explore Valsiner's three levels of resistance. The illustrative example that I use is one episode in which all three levels of resistance are found.

### **Resistance: Counteraction**

Resistance as a counteraction is the most traditional notion of resistance. This is a social power strategy that influences others or has the ability to counter-act an incoming influence (Valsiner, 2015). Valsiner conceptualised this level of resistance in terms of the body's immune system. To recap, it warrants some form of force to which there is a barrier that has a counter force. I will illustrate with an example of Johnny and Mrs Peel that took place two months into the fieldwork (March, 2015). Prior to mealtime, there was an earlier dispute in the playground over a football match to which Mrs Peel presided over to resolve the issue. Johnny and Mrs Peel are now in the dining hall:

Johnny is sitting down eating his lunch when suddenly he stands and walks to the next table. He sees Mrs Peel approaching him and returns to his seat. Before he sits down he directly faces Mrs Peel and bounces on the spot shouting:

### **Incident A**

Johnny:	Kill the Nazi! ( <i>Fist clench, punching the air</i> )
Mrs Peel:	( <i>Sternly</i> ) Sit down! Now! ( <i>Mrs Peel immediately lurches forward with serious expression and folded arms</i> )
Mrs Peel:	( <i>she removes one folded arm and points her finger at Johnny</i> ) If I have to tell you one more time Johnny, I will send you to the office to eat your dinner!

A few minutes later, Johnny shouts out in a loud and clear voice:

### Incident C

Johnny:	I'm going to kill a Nazi!
Mrs Peel:	( <i>no immediate reaction</i> )
Johnny:	( <i>shouts</i> ) I am going to kill Adam and ...
Mrs Peel:	( <i>bellows slowly</i> ) Johnny!
Johnny:	... Eve and have a great, great, great, great time.
Mrs Peel:	( <i>sternly</i> ) Johnny! ( <i>Mrs Peel tugs Johnny's jacket</i> ) Stop! Now!

Mrs Peel stands opposite Johnny, calmly looking at him whilst blowing her nose. Johnny responds by eating his yogurt in a caricatured fashion, personifying the 'good boy' image. The attack has been eliminated. This is the last time Mrs Peel and Johnny come into direct confrontation during this mealtime.

This example illustrates Johnny and Mrs Peel blatantly clashing as counter forces; for every explosive action there is an explosive reaction. In terms of the immune system, Mrs Peel represents the human body, which 'triggers an effector response that eliminates or neutralises the invader' (Thomas et al, 2007, p. 1). In the social situation, her presence in the room represents a general system of domination which Johnny rises against. Mrs Peel must resist Johnny's attack as Johnny resists oppression. 'Counter-action carries a sense of opposition to a system of rules' (Wangling, 2011, p. 274). Johnny's provocative outbursts of shouting the word Nazi directly towards Mrs Peel is very powerful. Moreover, the school is Catholic so suggesting to 'kill Adam and Eve' is an aggressive and violent act against both person and

place. Johnny's outbursts are perhaps an overspill to earlier decision making in the playground, exacerbated by a felt sense of restriction in the dining hall.

Furthermore, this example illustrates how Mrs Peel's threat to Johnny of having to eat his dinner in the school office was not enough to curtail his behaviour. This denotes a recognition that Mrs Peel has limited powers to punish and her threats are sometimes empty. My fieldwork experience is that dinner ladies are challenged, and requests resisted more frequently than other adults within the institution. This conceptualisation of counteraction is useful in understanding explicit confrontation, but it does not explain other forms of resistance that occur in the next moments. In the following section, I will explore resistance as neutralisation.

### **Resistance: Neutralisation**

According to Valsiner (2015) resistance as neutralisation occurs through ignoring the message from the powerful other, it is heard but not followed and the resistant activity goes in a different direction. Going back to the example with Johnny and Mrs Peel, I will now explore the interlude between Johnny's outbursts in incident A and incident C. Immediately after incident A, Mrs Peel continues to move around the hall surveying the children. Johnny is initially fixated on her whereabouts and every time Mr Peel's back is turned Johnny reacts with less overt aggression:

### **Incident B**

Johnny:	<i>(Muffled) Heil Hitler! (performing a Nazi salute)</i>
Johnny:	<i>(Shouts) Food Fight!</i>
Mrs Peel:	<i>(no reaction)</i>
Johnny:	<i>(eats his meal and chats to his friends)</i>

After incident A, Mrs Peel is immediately drawn into other issues that concern a group of year six boys. Eight boys are sitting on PE benches at the side of the room eating their meals on their laps because there are no free tables with enough seats for them all to sit together. Mrs Peel asks them to fill up the single seats on other tables, but they are reluctant to separate their

friendship group. For the duration that Mrs Peel is in the vicinity trying to arrange the year six boys, Johnny continues to subtly say Heil Hitler and perform Nazi salutes whenever her back is turned. This continues many times. According to Alder and Alder (1998, p. 40) 'breaking the rules and getting into trouble is overtly recognized as prestige conferring'.

Perhaps some of Johnny's behaviour is aimed at elevating his peer status. Nevertheless, Mrs Peel is too distracted with a new situation that has arisen to focus on Johnny's, now, relatively undistruptive behaviour. Johnny receives no attention from Mrs Peel at this point. When Mrs Peel is the other side of the room, Johnny completely desists and eats his meal whilst talking to his friends.

In this example, Johnny is the powerful other and Mrs Peel ignores his behaviour to deal with more serious issues of the moment. Therefore, Johnny does not have the connection for a counteraction anymore and his behaviour becomes neutralised and diminishes over time. This level of resistance has a phenomenological orientation that focuses on subjective lived through experiences (Valsiner, 2015). Both Mrs Peel and Johnny make meaning from previous mealtime experiences and interactions, learning how to respond to situations over time.

Incident C occurs as soon as the year six boys are settled. As we saw in incident C Johnny increases efforts in breaking the peace, which exceeded the threshold of Mrs Peel's neutralising resistance and Johnny is met with rebuke and a counteraction for the second time. In the final example, I will discuss incident D, which occurs in the moments after Mrs Peel has disarmed Johnny's counteraction and Johnny redirects his attention to the friends on his table.

### **Resistance: Collaboration**

According to Valsiner (2015) resistance can be a form of collaboration that negates the message or incoming impact from the powerful other. This level of resistance is almost counter intuitive, as resistance mainly occurs by accepting the message or impact. During incidents A, B and C, I observed the five children on Johnny's table looking surprisingly oblivious, they continue their conversations and eat their meals paying little or no attention to Johnny. It cannot be said that they are unaware, but they seem to accept his behaviour as normal. It is most noteworthy at the end of incident C when Johnny is eating his yogurt in a funny fashion whilst Mrs Peel looks on. For the first time, Tom laughs and explicitly acknowledges Johnny's interaction with Mrs Peel. This example begins with non-verbal communication:



## Incident D

Mrs Peel:	<i>(walks away)</i>
Johnny:	<i>(eats his yogurt in a speeded-up fashion again)</i>
Tom:	<i>(giggles again)</i>
Jim:	<i>(Jim looks gravely at Tom, and then to Malcolm)</i>
Jim and Malcolm:	<i>(Shuffle their chairs in the opposite direction to Johnny, almost in anticipation of a reaction from Johnny.)</i>
Johnny:	<i>(Loudly) Look what I can do with my arm. (Wildly spins his arm like a Catherine wheel, which jerks his body and leaves him facing Malcolm.)</i>
Tom:	<i>(giggles)</i>
Johnny:	<i>(Looks to Mrs Peel, then lifts Malcolm out of his chair and pushes the chair away.)</i>
Tom:	<i>(Grave expression)</i>
Malcolm:	<i>(Tries to reclaim the chair and Johnny kicks it away.)</i>
Tom, Jim and Harry:	<i>(start talking again, visually ignoring the dispute)</i>
Johnny:	<i>If you get a different one I am going to kick it away. (chair)</i>
Malcolm:	<i>(Malcolm takes another chair and sits down, Johnny tries unsuccessfully to kick it away.)</i>
Tom:	<i>(immediately faces Malcolm) And I can write with my left hand</i>
Johnny:	<i>(inaudible) Roars (he stands)</i>
Malcolm:	<i>Haha! (points to Tom and returns some talk about arms)</i>
Mrs Peel:	<i>(is in the background overseeing the situation)</i>
Johnny:	<i>(leaves the table)</i>

There are several points to be made in this example. Firstly, during incidents A, B and C Johnny's friends did not overtly react to Johnny's rebellious behaviour with Mrs Peel. They collaborated with each other to resist Johnny's behaviour, which minimalised the effect it had on the table dynamics. Secondly, it is important to note what happened when Tom giggles, acknowledging Johnny's rebellious behaviour to some degree in Mrs Peel's and Jonny's final

interaction. Both Jim and Malcolm seemed to be aware that this would cause an unpleasant reaction from Johnny as they moved their chairs in the opposite direction. ‘As managers of their own spontaneous events, children become sensitive to the delicate balance involved in negotiating the vastly complex issues that arise in pair and group play’ (Alder and Alder, 1998, p. 100). Brief moments pass before Johnny spins his arm. The events that follow bring Malcolm and Johnny into confrontation and the rest of the boys revert back to collaborating in conversation, seemingly ignoring Johnny and Malcolm’s dispute. In this case, Johnny is the powerful other and the boys resist Johnny by encapsulating his behaviour as normal, which acts to reduce its effects. At the same time, Jim, Tom and Harry can claim very nicely that they have acted to support both Johnny and Malcolm, thus resisting being involved or brought into direct confrontations themselves. Tom, Jim, Harry and Malcolm enact considerable peer group agency to eliminate the threat that Johnny poses, as in the final scene Johnny roars and leaves the table. Importantly, Johnny is able to remain friends with his peers and I observe him eating his meal with these boys daily. They choose to sit together each mealtime and this example illustrates how resourceful children are in managing and resisting difficult situations whilst remaining friends.

## **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I have discussed resistance in relation to the analytical framework of Foucault and Valsiner’s to illustrate that different forms of resistance can be found in the practice of mealtime. Firstly, I explored the structure of St Peter’s mealtime practice to show how mealtimes are time constrained, noisy places where dinner ladies have to manage multiple competing demands. This provided the context in which resistance is embedded and enabled the reader to contextualise the resistance discussions in the subsequent examples. Secondly, I provided an example of mealtime to illustrate how children are socialised into commensality, sociality and morality. Thirdly, I explored a Foucauldian perspective of resistance to show how children can respond to being monitored and controlled, and become agents of power through their own small, everyday acts of resistance. The final episode explored Valsiner’s three levels of resistance to illustrative resistance as a counteraction, as a neutralisation and as a collaboration. This revealed subtle differences in children’s and dinner ladies deployment of resistance strategies and their effects.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I will elucidate the common themes emerging from the substantive discussions in both the analysis and reviewed literature to answer the question of how dinner ladies and children use different forms of resistance in the practice of mealtime. I will explore what can be learnt about mealtime socialisation and then resistance. In doing so, I will explore the strengths and limitations of Foucault and Valsiner's conceptualisations of resistance.

### **Mealtime Socialisation**

This research set out to explore mealtimes as a form of socialisation to illustrate that children develop competences in understanding and reproducing cultural values and social norms. Children's ongoing participation in language and cultural routines are key elements in evolving their membership in culture (Corsaro, 2011). I have shown that mealtimes are cultural sites which socialise children into commensality, communicative expectations, sociality, morality and local understandings of the world. In accordance with Ochs and Shohet (2006, p. 35) 'this notion of cultural site assumes that members will act in conventional ways, yet not necessarily share common understandings and knowledge of the situation at hand'. The illustrative example of positive reinforcements and guidance on how to appropriately use and hold cutlery was merely one small way to convey cultural knowledge which children interpretively reproduce. The school mealtime is replete with social messages of appropriate ways to think, act and feel in the world. Moreover, children bring their own experiences and expectations to mealtime interactions, which are factors that contribute to the composition of alternative understandings (Schieffelin and Ochs, 1986). Central to this view, is the importance of collective, communal activity, whereby children negotiate, share and create cultural and social understandings with adults and each other (Corsaro, 2011). To some extent, this occurs through resisting what is already known to incorporate new understandings; a point which will be picked up later in the chapter. The remainder of this chapter will discuss what this research has learnt about resistance. The following section will explore how environmental features, practical constraints and interactions contribute to a discussion of school mealtime resistance.

## **Dining Hall Interactions**

My work has attempted to illustrate some of the difficulties concerning environmental features of the school dining hall and the effects they have on both children and dinner ladies. These issues are particularly important to me because of my own lived experiences during the fieldwork. The atmosphere can be incredibly overwhelming and extremely loud, where a person has to shout just to be heard. Daniel and Gustafsson's (2010, p. 271) school mealtime research, observed 'wilful defiance of the staff, relatively loud conversations across the halls and talking back to the lunchtime supervisors'. At intense moments, my experience felt like being the designated driver in the midst of a wild party, where I found myself on a different wave length to the majority. Perhaps this is due to my limited experience within this type of environment. However, I cannot stress enough the difficulties involved with the noise levels, time constraints of feeding children to relieve space for the next sitting, and the multiple strains from managing and organising competing demands. Similar to the findings of Gill Fell (1994) 'there were the tirades born of frustration and a feeling of invisibility; problems with the inevitable 'half-dozen' children; difficulties with other members of staff'. Therefore, my aim was to illustrate dinner ladies' resistance to all of these things, which enables them to keep smiling whilst sensitively caring for the wellbeing of children and importantly, keeping the mealtime running. This brings to the fore an important point that resistance can be strategic and have a useful function. Valsiner's three levels of resistance are especially useful in understanding how resistance strategies are deployed by both children and dinner ladies to manage and alleviate stressful situations without unpleasant confrontations. In the following section, I will first explore the contribution of a Foucauldian perspective to this research.

## **Resistance: Foucault**

Using a Foucauldian theoretical perspective, this dissertation has investigated ways in which school mealtimes are organised and controlled through the social practice of commensality. Foucault offers insight into disciplinary powers and more importantly, why resistance might traverse, but not only, in opposition to the effects of powers. According to Pike (2010, p. 278) 'children's food practices in school appeared to be highly regimented with instructions issued about where they could sit, how they should sit, how they should eat, what they should eat and when they could leave, how they should leave and so on'. This research confirms these findings and suggests that mealtime supervision allows dinner ladies to regulate a range of disciplinary practices and techniques with the aim to produce docile bodies (Foucault, 1991).

However, the illustrative example showed Emily resisting Mrs Swan's request to eat more of her fishcakes and reveals her breaking the school rules of leaving the table without gaining prior permission. According to Grieshaber (1997, p. 665) 'negotiation over food rules was treated as a means for establishing domestic order and through which the daily rituals of family living are socially constructed'. However, it could also be argued that Emily's conduct was born from an internal ambivalence between a moral obligation to do what is right and a deep personal sense to do what is right, which led Emily to resist the rules and move beyond what is typical or expected to do something else. Foucault does not offer a theory of why or how someone should transgress nor did he suggest what the implications might be for a such resistance. I think such an accusation would not trouble Foucault too much, as he avoided a totalising theory of resistance claiming that such a theory would entrap the very system it was trying to oppose (Pickett, 1996). Therefore, I have used this perspective to show why resistance might occur as a limit imposed on the subject. Furthermore, Foucault suggests that struggle or resistance should engage and undermine what is most invisible and insidious in prevailing practices (Ball, 1995). This highlights an individual need for critical examination, reflecting and thinking, which enables a regime of practices to be analysed and struggled against. However, Foucault did not theoretically formulate how this might occur in everyday, non-revolutionary, practices. The picture of resistance becomes much richer when Valsiner's three levels of resistance is applied. In the following section, I will explore Valsiner's perspective of resistance.

### **Resistance: Valsiner**

Valsiner's three levels of resistance has demonstrated that resistance can be both explicit and implicitly deployed by children and dinner ladies with very powerful effects. It has shown that resistance is complex, silent and often paradoxical in nature. Valsiner's conceptualisation has been important to tease out normative understandings that have theoretical implications for empirical phenomenon. In the following section, I will explore some implications that resistance has for children's development.

According to Valsiner (2015) resistance is necessary for children's development. The social life is often assumed to be benevolent, beautiful and harmonious but in reality almost everything that is said, the opposite can also be true (Kapoor and Chaudhary, 2015). According to Valsiner (2015) the child's resistance is necessary because children develop through distancing, friction, conflict and conflict resolution, not through joining in happy

harmonious communion. Many everyday activities during the school life are a collection of mundane and relatively meaningless events. 'Every act of being is a process of potentially becoming' (Valsiner, 2007, p.349). This means that children develop by moving into the unknown whilst simultaneously holding on to what they know. In terms of resistance, a child may resist oppressiveness, for example, of being asked to eat more food when they have had enough to find new ways to subvert and move beyond what is typical or expected, to do something else. Therefore, resistance can cause ambivalences that plays a part in human development. Moreover, resistance has potential to regulate meaning making and social order through ongoing everyday interaction. All these events come together in a haphazard way, which allows children to emerge from inconsistencies and become coherent and continuous adults (Valsiner, 2015). Therefore, resistance is a generative process of meaning making and a necessary aspect of children's development. However, the analysis has shown that it is not only children who resist; Mrs Peel's resistance holds significant understandings.

### **Resistance as a Counteraction**

This is a biological orientation that draws on immunology to understanding resistance (Valsiner, 2015). This concept of resistance is good way to understand direct confrontation in situations. The illustrative example of Johnny Shouting that he wanted to kill the Nazi and Mrs Peel's abrupt reactive handling of the situation to eliminate the threat, really encapsulates resistance as a counteraction. This was an attack on person and place, to push back at the oppressiveness of a system of rules that restricts children's movements in an overcrowded and noisy environment. In this example, there was a collection of factors that lead to the event where Johnny violently shows resistance, but the solution was swift and delivered with minimal fuss. Like an immune system, a triggered response eventually eliminates the threat with a tug to Johnny's jacket and a stern word in the eyeballs of the offender. As with Valsiner example that supports the work of Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling (1797) it is the most innate instinctual response to protect themselves and counter the impact.

However, the biological mechanism of the immune system can only explain the complexity of the social life to a certain extent. As a basic analogy it works very well but this theory is not complex enough to explain social life. The immune system, which represents power, is only capable of recognising, containing, eliminating and then memorising patterns for subsequent attacks (Thomas et al, 2007). This research has shown that the interaction of resistance and power is far more complicated than simply recognising similar patterns of attack and

administering powerful solutions. Nor does it fully comprehend the transformational aspect of power or variation in resistance. Again, this research has shown resistance is not a single monolithic force. However, I do not believe Valsiner ever intended this to be taken in a literal sense. Rather, it is a metaphor to show a system of movement, in whatever shape or size resistance or power may take when it is in the theoretical frame of a counteraction. This conceptualisation of counteraction offers real insight into how confrontational situations may develop and change. In the following section, I will explore resistance as a neutralisation.

### **Resistance as a Neutralisation**

The concept of resistance as a neutralisation reveals how resistance can be silent and effective, not at eradicating the threat directly, but in limiting its effects through lack of attention. According to Valsiner (2015) resistance as a neutralisation occurs when the message or impact from the powerful other is ignored and the activity goes in a different direction. In the illustrative example, Johnny's actions of saying Heil Hitler and performing Nazi salutes transgress commonly held norms in this community. However, Mrs Peel's attention is forced to move in other directions to resolve different disputes within the room. As a result, Johnny's resistant behaviour diminishes until he stops altogether just before incident C. Mrs Peel's resistance has a neutralising effect on Johnny's behaviour. Mrs Peel must resist endless incoming messages to protect herself from becoming overwhelmed and respond to situations that break a threshold of tolerance or threshold of infringement. On the other hand, I have observed numerous exchanges where a range of dinner lady requests have been resisted and ignored by children with nullifying effects. Resistance as a neutralisation is very subtle, discrete and powerful in everyday mealtime practices from both children and dinner ladies.

However, in the illustrative example it is difficult to know exactly if Mrs Peel intended to resist the situation with Johnny or if she was simply too busy with other competing demands to notice his continuing resistance. Therefore, this concept may assign Mrs Peel more credit for resistance than is due. It maybe that further research is required to validate the inner workings of how Mrs Peel handled this situation. Importantly, perhaps this also hints to the possibility that further research is required to fully comprehend the sophisticated and covert strategies of children's resistance. Nevertheless, these criticisms do not detract the explanatory power of resistance as a neutralisation or its effectiveness as a resistance strategy.

## **Resistance as a collaboration**

According to Valsiner (2015) resistance can be a form of collaboration that negates the incoming impact from the powerful other by accepting the message or impact. The illustrative example revealed the interactions between Jonny and his peers. The example saw how Jim, Tom, Harry, Malcolm collaborated during incidents A, B and C to accept Johnny's behaviour as normal, avoiding any confrontation been brought between them. The boys' table dynamics provide a beautiful example of participating in resistance without necessarily participation. However, it is most noteworthy when the collaboration is breached by Tom acknowledging Johnny's defiant behaviour towards Mrs Peel. This eventually brings Johnny into confrontation with Malcolm and any previous table conversations now excludes Johnny and Malcolm whilst they resolve their difference. Similar to Alder and Alders's findings (1998, p. 100) 'children had to routinely reconcile competing desires, settle different interpretations of what occurred and what it meant, select among competing plans, and make adjustments when things were not going well'. In this case, the boys collaborate to carry on as normal and as soon as Malcolm returns to the table he is immediately joined back into the safety of their collaboration with conversation. At this point the threat is defeated through resistance as a collaboration. This example corroborates Valsiner's conceptualisation of resistance as a collaboration.

What can be taken from this example is that resistance is communicated intuitively to disarm, which requires the compliance from other members. Moreover, it illustrated what happens when the collaborative connection is broken and how it is regained. This level of resistance brings to the fore an important point about resistance being a very powerful force. This raises an interesting point that is a similar to Foucault's notion for resistance in that when resistance wins it becomes an agent of power (Foucault, 1980). This research has demonstrated that children and dinner ladies set up resistances to a multitude of incoming endless messages. Some of these messages will be internalised, appropriated and reproduced whilst others are resisted in three different ways. This happens without explicit instruction and illustrates the silent process of resistance. Children learn in school through many strategies and many different specific examples (Valsiner, 2015).

## **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I have attempted to make clear the common themes emerging from this research and show how it relates to the reviewed literature and critique the analytical



framework for understanding resistance. Firstly, I explored mealtime socialisation to illustrate that children negotiate, share and create cultural and social understandings with dinner ladies and each other. This assumed that children and dinner ladies act in conventional ways but not necessarily sharing common understandings. Secondly, I explored the environmental features and dining hall interactions to show how this research supports existing school mealtime research and contributes to a functional understanding of resistance. Thirdly, I examined the work of Foucault and Valsiner to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of this theoretical framework in understanding how children and dinner ladies deploy different resistance strategies during mealtimes.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

### Introduction

This research has explored the lives of children and dinner ladies during their practices of mealtime. More specifically, it has shown how resistance occurs in everyday interactions between the relations of children, their peers and dinner ladies. My review of the literature and subsequent illustrations of how resistance might be explored within school mealtimes, suggests that there is ample room for a more diverse understanding of resistance that takes into account everyday practices and relations in institutional school mealtimes. In this chapter, I will recap the main arguments to draw some conclusions. Secondly, I will examine some limitations of this research. Thirdly, I will suggest some implications of the research for theory, policy and practice and make some recommendation for future research directions.

This research has illustrated that children learn social competences and skills that enable them to be able to change the social conditions with their words, actions, gestures, conduct and by the things that they refuse. Mealtime comportment is embedded in practice and children internalise cultural rules and social values, eventually becoming competent and contributing members of the school mealtime practice (Ochs and Shohet, 2006). This ethnographic evidence has shown that mealtimes are important cultural sites that are overflowing with explicit and implicit messages about the appropriate ways to behave, relevant to children's competent membership of the school community. However, children bring their own experiences and expectations to mealtime interactions, which are factors that contribute to the composition of alternative understandings (Schieffelin and Ochs, 1986). This is important because it directs the attention to understanding mealtimes as malleable, where children can recreate and altered their practices and social relationships through experiential interaction that occur from this mealtime composition. Children are very resourceful on their own, learning cultural knowledge through their participation in mealtime practices. It is only once children know the rules well that they are able to use strategies to bend, negotiate and subvert. Moreover, I have shown that resistance and socialisation have the potential to regulate meaning making and affect social order. If nothing more, this research has highlighted that the school mealtime should not be underestimated or undervalued for the role it plays in educating children.

Furthermore, I have examined some environmental features of the school mealtime to show how they contribute to the work of resistance. I have shown how this mealtime space provides a different sense of community where negotiation is more prevalent than other times of the school day. Moreover, I have illustrated that children resolve their own disputes, under more loosely supervised conditions, and this can be done, for example, as a form of collaboration. This is important because children and dinner ladies set up resistances all the time to the endless incoming messages from this noisy overcrowded environment. I have shown that during mealtime's children eat, talk, and play, which can bring them into conflicts with dinner ladies, as it is their responsibility to keep the noise level to an appropriate level and make space for the next sitting. 'Practices of resistance are symptomatic of the continuous circularity of power played out between children and adults in the dining room' (Pike, 2008, p. 419). This can lead to situations where both children and dinner ladies have to employ resistance strategies to ensure they do not become overwhelmed in one way or another. This is important to the understanding of resistance because it shows that resistance can have strategic value with a useful function. Resistance can be very beneficial and educators need to realise the importance of resistance, in order to understand its significance to social development in schools. In the following section, I will explore the analytical framework for understanding resistance.

This research has drawn on the work of Foucault to gain an understanding of resistance. I have illustrated that Foucault theorised resistance as a relation to power. This has meant that an understanding of power was needed in order to understand the diversity of resistance. Although power has not been a primary concern of this dissertation, it has been useful to show how resistance can transgress and transform in this relation. However, it should be acknowledged that resistance does not only occur in rebound or opposition to power (Foucault, 1990). Nevertheless, I have used this perspective to illustrate why resistance might occur as a limit imposed on the subject. According to Foucault, 'there is no single locus for resistance to occur, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary' (Foucault, 1990, p. 96). This is an important point that suggests a theory of resistance is not as useful as understanding resistance as a critical tool to create struggle. Here, the message is about thinking critically and dreaming the unimaginable to undermine the limits that are imposed on subjects. It is sensible to suggest that it is impossible to know what these strategies should be but to assert that freedom from oppression in one form or another is the ultimate goal. This philosophical perspective of resistance suggests that children have the

ability create, innovate and transform practices through resistance strategies in a multitude of ways to circumvent power. Furthermore, this research has attempted to integrate Valsiner's three levels of resistance to enhance the Foucauldian notion of resistance. The following section will discuss the concluding remarks of Valsiner's three levels of resistance.

This research set out to examine how different forms of resistance can be used by children and dinner ladies during the practice of school mealtimes. The analysis has shown that resistance is not deployed as a single monolithic force. I have illustrated that children not only resist in an out right way, but that children have very sophisticated ways of bending the rules and changing the moral order. Therefore, the examples illustrated that resistance has been deployed by both children and dinner ladies explicitly and in many cases implicitly, where much attention needed to be paid to what appears to be normal in everyday interactions. This has produced an understanding of resistance that has relevance for the everyday activities of people who resist in a subtle and relatively invisible fashion. In illustrating how children can neutralise difficult situations with friends and dinner ladies through both words and gestures, I have shown that sometimes this is done silently and sometimes it is done with a force that counterbalances the attack. Moreover, this conceptualisation of resistance has been most useful in providing a concept that has clear theoretical implications for empirical mealtime resistance phenomena. Therefore, these findings are significant to educational practice because they highlight the importance of resistance in being a driving force for children's development. This assumes that children are active social agents with the potential to construct meaning and deploy their own strategies for resistance when faced with ambivalence. Finally, I will conclude with some methodological points.

The interrelated components of the mealtime practice make it difficult to atomise socialisation or resistance into an objective scientifically researchable phenomenon. Therefore, a key methodological feature of this research is that I was able to observe children and dinner ladies in reoccurring interactions with the people they are normally involved. These ongoing exchanges provided me with opportunities to investigate social relations and structures within the school mealtime context. In explaining culture, I have only been able to produce knowledge according to my own subjective reality and observer position. I acknowledge that this methodology is subjective, prone to bias and is context sensitive, and the primary aim of this research is not to make generalisations. However, where application is appropriate, it is

my aspiration that unique features within this research may hold key understandings that can make a connection to the general. The following section will discuss the research limitations.

## **Limitations**

A limitation of this research is my educational perspective on the role and function of schooling and mealtime. I believe the schooling system has a functional role that reinforces the social and economic tone of society, thus maintaining balance and stability in society. A full comprehension of this issue goes beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, it has to be acknowledged that my preconception of the values and aims of education has indirectly contributed to the theorisation of this research. Furthermore, my background prior to scholarly pursuits was in the industry of corporate, wedding and social events catering. Years of observing mealtime in a professional capacity in social contexts has meant that I have often had the tendency to view the school mealtimes as opportunities for socialising as oppose to simply eating a meal. I implicitly theorised the mealtime as ‘a time for pupils to relax and have a break from classroom activities, to socialise, and to let off steam’ (Blatchford and Sumpner, 1998, p. 89).

Therefore, my combined perspective of schooling and mealtime has meant that I have often had the tendency to conceptualise the school mealtimes as way to escape the oppressiveness of the controlled classroom to join in the more exciting and flexible conditions of the dining hall. I enjoyed observing children’s agency and merrymaking because my belief is that school experiences should be enjoyable, empowering and provide opportunities for critical thinking, reflection and action. This has meant I supported children’s resistance with my silence and found it difficult to be critical of rebellious behaviour even in the face of the distress and discomfort it brought to others. My inability to see beyond the excessive indulgence of release and jocular resistant behaviour was initially hampered. I was slow realised that for some, the classroom is a place of safety and pleasure and the mealtime an overbearing distressing practice. This reveals the limits in my understanding of the function of schooling and mealtime, which has affected the way I have theorised mealtime activities.

Both a strength and a limitation is that I have a previous history with this school as a parent and occasional volunteer. Two years ago my children attended this school so I was recognisable and familiar to people within the setting. This initially led to some role confusion as sometimes the children referred to me as Anna and Jane’s mom. This issue

lessened as my immersion increased and I assumed a participant researcher identity. My age, gender, ethnicity and motherhood experience meant that I fitted in with this school's image of a dinner lady. I could identify with the children and dinner ladies and have a 'shared experience' position (Berger, 2015). However, my familiarity with setting and individuals may have made me reluctant to ask difficult questions, assume what is given or confront individuals with potentially troublesome topics. Throughout the research process I have endeavoured to overcome these issues. However, my researcher position has impacted the way I construct the world, posed questions and filtered information from the participants, which ultimately affects the research process and outcome.

## **Implications and Recommendations**

### **Theoretical**

I have attempted to rethink the issue of resistance by examining how relations between children, their peers and dinner ladies play out in the everyday practices of school mealtimes. I have attempted to elaborate on the formidable work of Foucault to make a theoretical contribution and produce an understanding of resistance that has relevance for the everyday activities of people who resist, in a mundane and relatively invisible fashion. My aim has been to contribute to mealtime literature and perhaps extend an understanding of the ways resistance can be silent, strategic and counter intuitive. Further research needs to take into account that resistance is not always explicit, revolutionary or something that can be defined in relation to the effects of powers.

### **Policy**

Much of school mealtime policies and initiatives predominantly focus on the national standards for school meal provision (Buttriss, 2005, Evans and Harper, 2009, Pike, 2010). These reforms encourage schools to support the health of children, placing great emphasis on nutritional and health promotion. Therefore, current policy is in danger of underestimating the social significance of school mealtimes (Daniel and Gustafsson, 2010). In supporting this vision, this research attempts to go beyond the nutritional aspect of the school mealtime to encompass an understanding of how children are socialised and socialise in the social and cultural construction of school mealtimes. The mealtime period of the school day should not be underestimated or undervalued for the role it plays in educating children. It is

recommended that policy should place greater emphasis on eating environment to tackle the issues around overcrowded, multi-purpose, noisy spaces; the time available for children to eat; training for dinner ladies to manage behavioural issues that arise from commensality. In the following section, I will explore some practical implications that arise from this research.

## **Practice**

According to Pike (2010, p. 283) ‘teachers receive a great deal of training in classroom management and other aspects of behaviour and discipline, there is no formal training for lunchtime staff who may be responsible for up to 75 children at a time in an environment which is far less structured than the classroom’. Training schemes for dinner ladies are typically funded between the school and the local authority. Therefore, ‘training for supervisors vies with training needs of the other staff, the environmental repair of the buildings, the need for curriculum resources, the cost of day-to-day running of the school’ (Sharp, 1998, p. 119). Dinner ladies should be entitled to professional development despite these difficulties. However, the power of a few hours of training should not be overestimated in resolving all problems. Much can be done to raise the profile of the dinner lady within the school structure to support and value their commitment and contribution to the care and management of children. ‘The supervisors are part of an interacting system which reflects the collective attitudes and values of the school, the community and the wider social and political context’ (Sharp, 1998, p. 129). Therefore, dinner ladies need to be recognised as valuable, capable members of the staff, who are responsive to changing demands when caring for children. To do this, schools need to make a conscious effort to improve the status and visibility of dinner ladies. Perhaps this practical implication is too optimistic and a recommendation for further research would be to explore the institutional invisibility of the dinner ladies.

## **Chapter Summary**

This research has examined how resistance occurs in everyday interactions between the relations of children, their peers and dinner ladies during school mealtimes. My review of the literature and subsequent illustrations have demonstrated that resistance is used in different ways by both children and dinner ladies. This contributes to a more diverse understanding of resistance that takes into account everyday practices and relations in institutional school

mealtime practices. This is important because mealtimes play a significant role in educating children and I have shown that resistance can be a driving force of children's development. Secondly, I explored the limitations of this research to reveal how my preconceptions and researcher positionality has affected the process and outcome of this research. Thirdly, I have suggested some implications of the research for theory, policy and practice and made some recommendations for future research directions. The school mealtime is replete with social messages of appropriate ways to think, act and feel in the world. My ultimate aspiration is to bring attention to the school mealtimes and raise awareness to the possibilities of things that children consume as part of eating a meal in the school day.



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## Appendix One: Information Sheet and Consent Form.

**Information sheet**  
**09/02/2015**

Department of  
Education



*You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.*

### **Research Project Title**

How does the school mealtime facilitate opportunities for children's socialisation processes and preparation to becoming a member of society?

### **Purpose of the research**

Mealtimes are more than just nourishment of the physical body. They are complex situations where we learn a lot about ourselves and the communities that we participate. The aim of this research is to understand and explore children's socialisation processes and how they come to learn the rules of social interplay during the flexibility of mealtime interactions.

I would like to come to your school once a week (Fridays) for the rest of the academic year to observe your mealtime practices. During this time, I will take on a small role in assisting lunchtime duties as a way of becoming a member of your community. This will allow me to engage in the activities that I would like to observe. Primarily, my focus will be on how the children eat their lunch and interact with each other.

### **Who will I talk to?**

I will speak with children, dinner ladies, teachers and kitchen staff. Selecting people to speak with will be a mutual process. If participants prefer not to speak with me, they will not be questioned to ensure they can legitimately refuse to take part.

### **What will participating involve?**

I will observe the mealtime practices of the school hall and occasionally make notes. I will have informal conversations to deepen my understandings. Any recorded conversations will require specific formal signed consent.

### **Do I have to take part?**

Taking part in the research is entirely voluntary. If you do decide to take part, you can still withdraw at any time. You do not have to give a reason.

### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

I will report any immediate queries, risks, incidents or challenges to the lead supervisors of the mealtime activities. I will keep in regular communication with the head and teachers, and

report more serious issues, accidents, incidents or risks of causing harm to the teachers and head as a first point of contact.

There are no intended foreseeable discomforts, disadvantages or risks. If this changes during or after my engagement, in the first instance, it should be brought to the immediately attention of myself, primary researcher, Samantha Stone. If the complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, you must contact, Lead Supervisor: Dr Kyoko Murakami. Email: [K.murakami@bath.ac.uk](mailto:K.murakami@bath.ac.uk)

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will raise awareness of good practice and offer a deeper understanding of children's mealtime socialisation processes.

### **Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

It is essential to go as far as possible to hide the identity of people, schools and locations. All information that I collect during the course of the research will be kept confidential and participant's information will never be shared within the community or named in any publications or reports.

To ensure anonymity, fictitious names will be chosen for all individuals and the schools to anonymise the identities and location of the participants. However, anonymity cannot be guaranteed due to participant information being entangled with context. This means participants may be identifiable to people within their community.

Regarding archiving the research data, all personal information in electronic form will be stored on password protected files on a password and fire wall protected server at the University of Bath. Any hard copies will be securely stored in a locked cabinet. Only my supervisors and I will have access to these electronic and hard copy file. All information retained will be disposed of in a secure manner.

### **Who is funding the research?**

This research is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

### **Who has ethically reviewed the project?**

The research has undergone departmental ethical review and has been approved.

### **Contact for further information**

Please feel free to contact:

Samantha Stone, Tel: 0xxxx 4xxxx2, 07xxxxxxxx2, Email: [sls27@bath.ac.uk](mailto:sls27@bath.ac.uk) Lead Supervisor: Dr Kyoko Murakami. Email: [K.murakami@bath.ac.uk](mailto:K.murakami@bath.ac.uk)

*Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet.*



## INFORMED CONSENT

Department of  
Education



**Researcher:** Samantha Stone

**Course Title:** Master of Research in Education.

**Project Title:** How does the school mealtime facilitate opportunities for children's socialisation processes and preparation to becoming a member of society?

I, the undersigned, confirm that:

I have read the information sheet dated 09/02/2015 and the nature and purposes of the research project has been explained to me. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

I understand that my school's participation is voluntary and that we are free to withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that you will not be questioned to ensure you can legitimately refuse to take part.

The procedures regarding confidentiality and anonymity have been clearly explained to me. I understand that research data collected will be treated in the strictest confidence and will only be reported in an anonymised form.

I understand that information from observations and informal conversations will be used for a Masters dissertation, contribute to a PhD thesis and any subsequent publications, reports or conferences. You will never be named in any publications, reports or conferences.

The researcher will seek separate terms of consent for video, audio and photographic data collection. Video, audio and photographic data will not be used in publications, presentations or conferences without written consent.

The use of the data in research, publications, sharing and archiving has been explained to me.

I agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree for my school to take part in the above study.

Participant:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Researcher:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

# Appendix Two: Floor Plan of Dining Hall.

