SUBJECT CHOICE AS EVERYDAY ACCOMMODATION /RESISTANCE: WHY STUDENTS IN ENGLAND (STILL) CHOOSE THE ARTS.

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ABSTRACT

High school students are expected to make choices about which subjects they study. These choices are not completely open but steered by what is on offer, previous achievement and conversations with teachers, family and friends; choices are patterned by class, gender, able-ness and race. We offer the perspective of subject choice as resistance. The paper use student focus group data from a three year study of the visual and performing arts in thirty schools in England. We show that students chose the arts not simply what it might do for them in the future, but also for what it provided for them in the everyday. We suggest that the quotidian is an important aspect of choice-making which, in the case of arts pedagogies, both accommodates the highly regulated norm but also offers a counter. This analysis points to avenues for further research on subject choice as well as providing important clues for school reform.

The longer students are in school the more they appear able to make choices about what they study. However, their subject choices are limited by prior attainment and guided by teachers and career advisors. School decisions about what subjects to offer limit what it is possible to choose. Students' options are made within qualification frameworks and informed by popular views of what subject choices will be advantageous. Students' understandings of their 'horizons of possibility' (Kelly and Harrison, 2009), their multiple identities and allegiances, their family responsibilities and peer networks are also important. Student subject choice strategies vary too – from "keeping your options open" to "do what you are good at" to "this subject is harder than that one" to "university entrance means you must do these."

There are policy concerns about subject choice. In England for instance, government interest (e.g. Department for Education, 2017; House of Commons, 2018) has led to waves of initiatives intended to raise 'aspiration' and improve career advice and associated work experience schemes (Hughes, 2017; Watts, 2013). The UK government for example commissioned research into subject choice behaviours using 'nudge economics' in order to examine individual 'biases' (Jin, Muriel, & Sibieta, 2010). There is also a large scholarly literature about subject choice which includes: surveys of the factors affecting choice (Jin, et al., 2010; McCrone, Morris, & Walker, 2005; Vidal Rodiero, 2007); choice in STEM (Tripney et al., 2010); perceived difficulty of subjects (Cuff, 2017); class, race and gender in subject choice (Davies, Telhaj, Hutton, & Coe, 2008; Ianelli, Smyth, & Klein, 2016); students' location (Open Public Services Network, 2015); the influence of schools (Anders, Henderson, Moulton, & Sullivan 2017; Francis, Hutchings, Archer, & Arnelling, 2006); students' aspirations (Archer and Yamashita, 2003; McDowell, 2000); career education (Gibson, Oliver, & Dennison, 2015); and family influence (Brooks, 2003; Kniveton, 2004). Patterns of gender, race and class in subject enrolments point to larger social influences and practices involved in choice. Subject choice is a complex business.

Our interest in school choice arises from a project examining performing and visual arts education in English high schools (which we explain in more detail later in the paper). We conducted focus group interviews with senior students who were arts subject choosers. When we asked them about their subject choice, about a third said they wanted a career in the arts. But we were surprised when students told us, almost without exception and regardless of class, race and gender, that their choice was because the arts were different from their other subjects. That difference was important to them; they chose the arts, they said, because of what it offered them. This paper is the result of our analysis of the reasons that they gave. We focus on the critical reasoning and agency of the students, in keeping with our commitment to the sociological tradition which acknowledges the rights and expertise of children and youth to speak about their own lives (Qvortrup, Bardy, Sigritta, & Wintersberger, 1994). In this paper we make the case that sometimes subject choice constitutes an affirmative form of everyday accommodation/resistance.

Our argument proceeds in four steps. We firstly discuss the question of resistance in more detail, then provide information about our three-year study of thirty English secondary schools. Next we present an analysis of student focus-group data related to choice; our participants are secondary school students in England who have chosen to study the arts at a time when these subjects have been downgraded in key examination and school audit frameworks. We conclude by arguing that in the context of the marketised and cultural restorationist curriculum in England, particular subject choices can constitute a practice of everyday accommodation and resistance. We begin with a brief contextual signpost.

The arts in English schools

Across the world, the arts struggle for a place in the valued curriculum. However, in England, defending the arts in schools is an urgent and important task. While figures are contested, it seems undeniable that the new English Baccalaureate (EBacc)[i], a school performance audit measure in which no arts subjects are counted, has had a negative effect on arts subjects. The EBacc has been supported by universities who have changed their view on which subjects count most towards university entrance – the arts are not on their list of 'facilitating subjects'[ii]. Schools have responded variously to the EBacc but there is growing evidence to suggest that a 'risk management' approach has led the majority to reduce the arts subjects on offer to students, as well as intensify advice to students to choose the arts only if they intend to take up further study and a career in the arts field (paper in review). However, some students are still choosing the arts and our study offers a lens on the reasons why some appear to 'buck the trend'.

Resisting school in the everyday

We located very little research which discussed school or subject choice as resistance: Emilia Baron and Nancy Bell (2015) are an exception, they examine why girls chose to attend an all girls' school contra to some peers' views, mobilising dialogical self-theory drawn from social psychology. While our approach differs, we concur with their view that choices must be understood within the broader social context and also social relationships. We take a post-critical and sociological approach to subject choice using the lens of resistance.

Much of the educational research on resistance draws on a critical approach. Its intent is emancipatory and it is concerned with better understanding social struggle in order to better inform social change. Perhaps the most consistent picture of student resistance is that of school refusal. Students refuse the requirements and routines of schooling in multiple ways. They may yell out, act out, walk out, refuse to listen, subvert school surveillance systems. They may daydream, get distracted and/or do the bare minimum Andrew Hope (2010) has shown that students resist the surveillance exercised through the national curriculum through playful concealment and the creation of alternative online identities (see also Marx, 2009).

Rebecca Raby (2005) suggests that critical research on resistance falls into four areas: (1) collective actions, that challenge dominant power relations, (2) heroic localised actions which disrupt and challenge dominant power relations, (3) passive indirect actions that challenge the capacity of authorities to act, and (4) the appropriation of symbols from the dominant culture to make statements about social-structural conditions. Raby critiques the modernist binary constructed through this research – resistance means either/or, accept or reject what schooling is on offer. Raby suggests that 'postmodern' resistances include re-appropriating hate speech, redeploying a stereotype, countering dominant definitions through bodies, emotions and intellect, and/or deconstructing dominant discourses and binaries.

It is in actions, relations and meaning-making that resistance to dominant power is exercised (Vinthagen and Johansson, 2013). Some educational research on youth sees resistance as activism, organising and acting collectively to bring their concerns to the notice of authorities (Fine et al., 2004; Giroux, 2013). However, some scholars taking a 'post' critical approach (e.g. Bhaba, 1984; Szkudlarek, 1993) have argued that resistant practices other than outright opposition or fleeting disruption exist in everyday life – for instance practices of survivance (Vizenor, 2008), coping, accommodation, mimicry and avoidance. Irma Olmedo (2003) examined the 'inbetween', both/and resistant practices of immigrant parents. Resistant practices changed over time and were sometime not intended as resistance, they were entangled with institutional power, not separate from it.

The most well-known educational book on resistance, Paul Willis' (1977) *Learning to labour: How working class kids get working class jobs* depicts young working class lads resistance to and rejection of the classed pedagogies of their schooling. Their actions (re)produced their social class position; resistance did not change inequitable social relations but actively constructed them. Willis' work was critiqued for its masculinist approach: more inclusive but similarly focused work continues to document resistant youthful school activities – students who adopt anti-school identities and attitudes (Lloyd, 2005; Russell, 2011) and/or skip school altogether (Olafson, 2006).

Willis (2018) has recently written about mis-interpretations of *Learning to labour*. His concern was, he argues, to focus on the

> capacity of ordinary human beings to make meaning in their daily practice and to see human agency as always creatively productive, even if and certainly bounded in crucial ways, and, of course, subject to unintended consequences (p.1)

Expressing some frustration with subsequent empirical projects that sought to duplicate or reject his 'resistance as reproduction', he proposes that researchers need to focus on 'seeing into' embodied cultural practices embedded in their particular contexts, taking particular note of the sensuous, symbolic and artefactual aspects of everyday experience. His interest, he suggests, is in production and change, how 'located social agents make creative and active sense of their conditions of existence and possibility and how that changes the whole' (p.6).

Eve Tuck and K Wayne Yang (2014) argue that the models of change that underpin much resistance research are limited. Youth resistance is neither simply reproductive, nor developmental, proceeding from disempowerment to empowerment, they say. Arguing for more nuanced approaches, they suggest that resistance is productive – it produces a new reality, 'it changes the conditions in which one resists' (p.12). Resistance may apparently peter out, go nowhere, become stuck and messy, but nevertheless a new line of thinking/being/acting has been brought into being.

Maria Hynes (2013) proposes that a focus on 'affect' moves resistance research away from the focus on reason, action and the macro or micro political and/or their imbrication. Affect is taken to be something beyond emotion, beyond the subject and their consciousness . Affect is social, open and transitional. Hynes argues that affect, in the form of embodied transitions, works below the level of consciousness. Affect may thus be important in understanding the ways in which power and resistance work together to produce action. Michalinos Zembylas (2017) interrogates teachers' resistance to 'difficult histories'; arguing that attending to affect is integral to teachers dealing with multiple perspectives, common vulnerabilities and assymetries of power, ambiguity, ambivalence and paradox.

We take from these studies that resistance takes many forms, including inbetween strategies which both resist and accommodate institutional power/norms. Resisters may struggle to fully explain their actions, as embodied 'affect' may be as important in their motivation as reason. Resistance may thus also be affirmative, not simply a rejection/refusal. We add to this the analytic framing offered by Johansson and Vinthagen (2016) who suggest that resistance can be best understood as a repertoire of practices in which situated and particular relations between actors and specific temporalisations and spatialisations intersect. We bring this framing to the analysis of our project and student data.

The TALE research project

Tracking Arts Learning and Engagement(TALE) was a three-year longitudinal research project funded by Arts Council England from 2015-18. The project partners were the Royal Shakespeare Company

Education (RSC) and Tate Schools and Teachers team. The project investigated (1) what teachers learn from deep engagement with cultural organisations and how they translate this into classroom pedagogies, and (2) what their students gain from these learning experiences.

The research was conducted in thirty schools, fifteen nominated by the RSC and fifteen by Tate, because of the long-term professional involvement of either a teacher (arts organisation) or school (arts organisation) with the gallery/company. The schools were spread across the regions of England and served a range of communities; three are special schools and the remainder are secondary schools. This was a purposive not a representative sample; sites were chosen for their potential to give empirical and theoretical richness to a critical but appreciative inquiry. We interviewed students studying the arts in years 10-13 (ages 14-18) each year, in each of the schools, and administered a survey on arts participation to all students in years 10-13. (The full survey design and reports can be seen on researchtale.net). All data used in this paper is anonymised.

We draw here primarily on data from student focus groups (n= 244, students =1026) undertaken in Years One and Two of the study. About two thirds of the students were boys, showing the gendered nature of arts education (we discuss questions of class, gender and race in a subsequent paper). The focus group data has been coded and analysed thematically taking a grounded approach (Charmaz, 2006). Groups varied in size but were generally around four to five students. Students were all either studying a visual arts subject and/or Drama, and/or were studying Shakespeare in English using (arts organisation) active rehearsal room approaches (Franks, Thomson, Hall, & Jones, 2014). Each year we asked the students about their current experiences in their arts lessons, their career intentions, and about their participation in the arts out of school. Focus groups generally lasted around thirty minutes, although some were longer: these were recorded and key extracts were transcribed. While teachers nominated students, parent consent and consent from students was also obtained. Focus groups were usually conducted in lesson times, often in spare classrooms and corridors and it was not unusual for them to be interrupted by end of lesson bells. We were mindful not to take students away from their class for too long, and this meant that we were sometimes unable to pursue particular issues in depth. Like all data, this corpus is particular, situated and limited.

This paper reports on a cluster of themes around students' reasons for studying the arts and experiences of the arts. These themes were developed by two of the research team working independently and then comparing analyses to arrive at a collective view.

We are not suggesting that the students' responses are in any way 'authentic'; students are as much swimming in discourses as their schools and teachers. Students are however in a subjugated position of power vis à vis their teachers and the wider school system and there is obvious merit and importance in listening to their voices on the ways they understand their education to be being shaped. We see the foregrounding of educational everyday experience as in keeping with a sociology of children and youth that argues that schooling is not just about 'becoming' but also about 'being' in the here and now (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998).

Choosing the arts

The remainder of the paper proceeds in two sections. We first of all report the results of our thematic analysis of students' reasons for choosing the arts. We then discuss the students' resistance repertoire with intersecting relations, temporalities and spatialities.

Looking to the future

Fewer than half of the students we talked with intended to pursue the arts further through formal education, but almost invariably they saw their personal arts practice as something they would keep doing alongside paid work[iii]. In short, they saw the arts as related to the ways in which they live their lives now and in the future.

Discussions about careers were often vague – being an artist or author, working in theatre. In schools where teachers had done a lot of work around arts careers, students were more likely to be more specific, nominating for instance graphic design, marketing or social media, but these jobs were usually associated with what they might study next rather than what job they might do.

> For me as creative, I don't know what I'm going to do in the future but what I'm choosing for A-level will help with that. (S8, Y11, 5/17)

Some students of course did have a strong career goal, though they recognised that they might have difficulties earning a living:

> Author. It is not a stable job opportunity shown by society. Not everybody gets to be a famous author and the people who fail to be famous authors end up struggling financially so I'm trying to look for an opportunity that allows me to write or allows me to be in a place where I can sit there and enjoy what I'm doing while also having time on the side to be able to write. (S3, Y12, 5/17)

This 'next-step' position, shared by many, is not unrealistic given the reality of what is contentiously called, in scholarly literatures, a 'choice biography' (Woodman, 2009), in advice literatures a 'portfolio career' (Handy, 1994), and colloquially a life of jobs rather than a job for life. Most young people now have to make choices about serial work and training options before they win their first secure position. We could be concerned about students' lack of awareness of the range of occupations available to them in the creative industries and beyond and how they may change their ideas as they gain more experience and education. However, their orientation to their next step does have a logic grounded in the realpolitik of the labour markets of high modernity. Rather than hold firm to a particular job, a more diffuse notion of heading towards something in theatre, or in media or in visual arts, is likely to be both realistic and strategic. The very lack of career specificity may, according to some youth research, actually stand students in good stead in making their way in precarious times (Wyn and White, 1997).

Students often reported that their parents and friends were worried about the arts as a career choice. However, they pointed to the transferability of what they had learnt.

> I get 'oh you're doing drama, oh no career for you then!' But the skills I've built up – confidence, teamwork, building things in a group - that will help in an office or anywhere (S6, Y12, 5/16).

This view resonates with that of arts and creativity educators/researchers who argue for the arts by suggesting that it powerfully instils vocational dispositions and skills (Mc William and Haukka, 2008; Trilling and Fadel, 2012).

Living in the present

Students chose the arts because it was different. The arts teachers we observed worked hard to try to make their teaching 'fit' both the school's curriculum requirements and their own vision of the purposes of arts education, albeit Deweyian or something more radical. Studio (Hetland, Winner, Veenema, & Sheridan, 2007) and rehearsal room (Neelands, 2009) pedagogies were their preferred

modes We observed these in action, and the students' conversations reflected this as their general and positive experience of how their arts lessons were taught. In explaining their arts education, they almost always created a comparison with regular, core subjects, particularly Maths and Science, but also sometimes English. The arts were not-the-rest-of-the-curriculum, where teaching, content, process and assessment were more tightly controlled, where default pedagogies dominated.

Even if students liked and were successful in the regular subjects they took, they still objected to their constraints. They saw the press to cover content and produce texts for audit purposes as often near-overwhelming in their regular subjects. One student suggested that the regular curriculum learning was being 'like a robot', a vivid metaphor for the daily practice of prescribed answers, highly structured routines and approaches to learning and assessment.

For the students then, the arts constituted a desirable curriculum 'other'. We have summarised exemplar student comments about 'arts as other' in Table 1; the quotations are typical of the key themes identified in the first column.

The Everyday	Student Experience
Students have more agency in the arts	It's more laid back, free. They let you do your own thing. You're learning in the way you want to, not a strict way, 'oh you've got to do this or that'. They give you the guidelines of what you have to have completed by a certain point and they let you get on with it, instead of telling you every step of the way (N4, Y11, 6/16).
There is no right or wrong in the arts	It allows you to be more experimental. In Drama, you have to try different ways of doing something until it works. That is a skill I've applied to other subjects, even academic lessons where you don't often do that, if you take a different approach it might be the right way. In lots of subjects there's always one right answer you have to strive to get right, but Art is what you do and what you achieve (S1, Y10, 1/16).
The arts build self-belief	The arts builds confidence and team building skills so when you go out into the world you are not going to work with your friends. It teaches you to work with others and get along with them no matter what. You get to see the world from other people's point of view (S6, Y10, 5/16).
The arts produce a sense of well-being	Art is my relaxing subject because the other subjects I chose are quite challenging and I liked Art from when I was younger. It is very therapeutic. It's not just book work or where you have to constantly keep up to speed. You can go at your own pace. You are doing what you want to do so it relaxes you more (SW2, Y11, 5/16).
The arts are demanding	People, especially last year, in our year they just didn't value art as a hard subject and I was like well you try and do three art subjects which is all coursework and we have an exam as well so it's double the amount most people do. Cause it's creative you have to produce something on a large scale that's good. You can't produce something quite crappy (W6, Yr13, 4/17).
Arts teachers are a bit different	The teachers are quite laid back. They allow us to be independent. If we have an idea, they help us make it happen. For the next couple of weeks or so they let us get on with it. We catch up every two weeks or so (SW4, Y12, 6/16).

Table 1: The arts as other

Students often talked about the sense of freedom that the arts brought. They referred to taking responsibility for what they did and their growing independence in ideas and in behaviour; they said

that their understandings of what they could do, and what they might be and become, were produced largely through their arts experiences. These students' views are congruent with research on young artists and creative writers which suggests that they are motivated by imagination, feelings of freedom, self-expression, deepening self-understanding and the sense of being their 'true self' (Harrington and Chin-Newman, 2017).

Students talked about the self-belief that arises from being able to manage unfamiliar and challenging situations – showing work in public, performing to an audience, working with new people, conquering fear and nervousness, developing strategies to deal with new situations. Students sometimes spoke about the sense of efficacy and possibility they got from coming up with an ambitious idea and seeing it through to completion. Many noted that working with others meant that they were more able to deal with differences in views and behaviours (Hall and Thomson, 2017; Thomson, 2012). The agency afforded by arts pedagogies led to what the students often called 'confidence'.

Students taking a visual arts subject always told us that exploring ideas involves risk and failure, and that failures were valuable occasions for learning. Some students taking Drama said the same, stressing the need for experimenting with interpretation. A failure could always lead somewhere and be turned into something else. This was not the case in other subject areas such as Maths and Science, most students reported, where there were clear right and wrong answers. The value of 'possibility thinking' (Craft, Jeffrey, & Leibling, 2001) was usually seen by students as being particular and restricted to the arts. These interconnected notions of play, exploration, risk and failure are integral to visual and performing arts thinking (Fisher and Fortnum, 2014) and the students were already part of these disciplined/disciplinary ways of thinking.

Students often told us that the arts were 'relaxing', a term that is worrying to teachers as it seems to ignore intellectual challenge. The students were however saying that in arts classrooms they did not experience the same continuous press for short-term goals, the classroom conversation did not revolve almost entirely around daily learning outcomes and exams; the students talked about this as a physical relief from pressure. They also talked about the 'flow' of working in arts, a complete absorption in which it was possible to lose track of time. We interpreted these statements as both a manifestation of the generally understood value of arts engagement to wellbeing and as directly related to the distinct, 'other' pedagogies employed by their arts teachers; the arts offered a differently embodied experience.

It is probably not surprising that those students who chose the arts were united in their view of the benefits of the arts to their wellbeing. They might perhaps have chosen the arts in part because of this very affordance. But these students' views overall accord with other research and reports about the beneficial health effects of arts engagement (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, 2017; Clift and Camic, 2016). Of course, while it might be important to be more explicit about the positive connections between arts and health, there are also dangers in presenting them as an alternative medicine or a simple remedial antidote to performative stresses. However, the affective and bodily dimensions of their arts choices are significant.

Art and drama rooms often acted as sanctuaries for students, places they could retreat to and places where they 'belonged' and could find like-minded others (c.f. Miles, 2016). Many students referred to themselves as creative and found affirmation of this identity with peers and their arts teachers. These students' sense of an agentic self was strongly connected to the relationships with their teachers. They spoke about their arts teachers being different from others. The more person-centred processes (Fielding, 2004) of the classroom were elided with the person of the teacher, who was often seen as someone who was interested in the students' ideas and did not see the

importance of their own or their students' work as being simply about getting a good grade. The more open-ended pedagogies of the arts often led to philosophical conversations about the arts and wider social issues, including possibilities for the future. Such discussions often took a decidedly political turn, critical of education and other social policy.

Our analysis suggests that the 'teacher difference' that students appreciated was not insignificant. Their arts teachers introduced students to a wide range of arts and cultural activities and, particularly in the first years of secondary school, enthused and supported students to take up arts practices in serious and sustained ways. Arts departments are small, compared to other subjects, and students often got to know and were taught by all of the staff. They often told us about good relationships with these staff. A corollary of the 'freedom' they felt to choose and to make mistakes was that they also felt trusted and respected. Their ideas were taken seriously. When they proposed a potential project, teachers took their ideas up and steered them to resources that they might find valuable. The pastoral elements of arts pedagogies did not eliminate surveillance but relied on interpellation rather than overt imposition (Hunter, 1995).

However, being 'other' was not entirely positive. While they compared the arts favourably with regular subjects, students were very conscious of a hierarchy which placed Science and Maths and English at the top. Many reported that the arts were seen as being just a bit of doing and making, something they resented. Many pointed out the amount of time they spent at weekends, holidays and after school rehearsing, practising, attending performances and exhibitions, completing large solo and group projects. They pointed to the personal habits they had to acquire in order to be successful – discipline, self-criticism, team-work, independence. In nearly every school, students told us that peers, teachers and sometimes family members assumed that they were academically less capable because they were taking arts subjects. At the same time, many students noted the ways in which the arts were used to promote the school and the ways in which performances and exhibitions were lauded and applauded. This approbation did not always translate into resources (see Figure 1).

- The art room failed to have paper towels in there for like four months. I know it's just paper towels but it just goes to show the funding towards the arts isn't really up to par. I think that is an issue.
- We have to put on school concerts in order to raise money for the music department, generally we don't have much more income than that I don't think. I think the same goes for extra curricular, the productions.
- Almost all of the arts budgets are raised by their own performances instead of actual funding from the government. (SW3, Y11, 6/17)

Figure 1: Funding policy impacts on the arts

Many students were aware that they and their work could be seen as a kind of cultivated 'finishing school' rather than an engagement with serious and demanding disciplines. They knew however that studying an arts subject might work in their favour if they wanted to go to universities or take particular courses where portfolios or interviews were involved. But they also knew that it equally might not. This simultaneous denigration and elevation of the arts - useful for as a signifier of student achievement and accomplishment but also not really seriously intellectually rigorous and 'academic' – was resented and usually rejected.

In the arts, teachers and students alike saw the acquisition of qualifications as important, even if they were critical of the form that they took. Students still had to meet exam requirements. They often had to produce copious documentation to demonstrate learning, even if this sometimes 'felt'

more relaxed, they 'owned' the process and they could also sometimes see the benefits of it. (See Figure 2.)

- Everything that you've done you have to document in your book. It doesn't have to be chronologically ordered.
- Once you've got to documenting you've got it all finalised so you know what you've got to do to do. You can flick through and know what you've done and you know what needs to be added.
- I've not been doing that well with documenting. We get new books every topic. I've been more focused with the actual work.
- That was me last time. I did all my work and was like oh god... Now I do more documenting (E2, Y10, 2/16).

Figure 2: Making learning available for assessment

The pressure of exams did mean that at particular times of the year the arts became more like regular subjects, and while teachers often did their level best to maintain their studio and rehearsal room pedagogies, they had little choice but to switch the conversation to one where discussions of outcomes, levels and grades dominated, and where the usually more relaxed rhythm of work was accelerated and pressure and monitoring intensified. While external audit imposts could be reined in for some of the time, there were also periods of the year where they were dominant. During these times, the more radical purposes and practice of arts education gave way to the overarching practices of the default norms of regular subjects (Thomson, Hall, & Jones, 2010), and performative measures came strongly to the fore. The teachers and students accommodated the required patterns of being, saying, doing and relating.

Everyday accommodation/resistance

We were struck by the affirmative quotidian perspective that students offered. They spoke to us about arts education as much in terms of their everyday experience, as of future benefits. Being at school just 'felt better' if they did an arts subject.

There is a common sense to thinking of school as an everyday. After all, students attend school for at least ten years, for seven hours a day for about forty weeks a year. It is a large part of their lives. However, the scholarly use of the everyday does not simply equate to time-served. The everyday is, according to Sztompka (2008), the observable manifestation of social existence; it includes relationships with other people, and always occurs in a specific context. The everyday is habituated, affective, embodied and localised in time/space.

Everyday activities are regular and routine and follow a family pattern of thinking, saying, doing, relating and being (Schatzki, Cetina, & Savigny, 2001). According to Schatzki (2010) everyday practice has recognisable actions, rules, an agreed action-ends combination, and meanings shared among participants. The regular classroom and its 'other' can be seen as everyday pedagogical practices. This view positions the arts experiences that students described to us – the sense of agency and efficacy produced by studio and rehearsal room pedagogies, the sense of well-being that comes from deep haptic engagement with a meaningful and challenging task, the more person centred relations with other students and their teachers – as embodied counters to the dominant institutional norm.

In choosing to study the arts as an everyday 'other' curriculum practice, the students could be seen as motivated more by their current experience than their future. Yet all of the students we spoke to were concerned about their futures. As we reported, they had a strong sense of their next move and

most of them had some sense of a direction in which they were headed. While this did not manifest as a step-by- step plan, students did have a sense of a future of contingent and flexible decision-making. Students might also be seen as showing a preference for keeping things as they are rather than opting for change and concerned about what they might not have if they opted for something different. This is a negative way to interpret students' choice to retain the arts despite its lack of importance to school performance measures or to university entrance. But students clearly did value what the arts had to offer and they didn't want to give this up. We suggest that a more fruitful way to think about this choice is to see it as a strategy of affirmation and accommodation/resistance.

Students understood and accepted that they needed to take regular subjects, particularly those associated with their next step. Even if they found the pedagogical practices dull, bookish and 'robot'-like, they knew this was unavoidable. They also knew that, even in the arts, there were times when the 'other' pedagogical practice had to give way to something much more like the regular classroom in order to meet assessment requirements. In choosing regular subjects and conforming to assessment regimes, they were accommodating pedagogical practices that they did not enjoy and of which they were often highly critical. At the same time, they also chose the arts and valued the 'otherness' of its pedagogical practice, precisely because these did not conform to the norm. This is perhaps a strategy of avoidance. But choosing the arts could also be understood as a form of affirmative resistance to an unadulterated diet of normative compliance. For some of the time most days, they got to be, say, feel and do something different.

As a resistant everyday practice, the choice of an arts subject afforded a repertoire in which students experienced schooling differently, through their bodies, emotions and intellects. They felt freer, more able to take risks and to develop their own agendas. The material space of the art room and drama rooms allowed for long-term independent and collaborative work often at scale, while the extended time produced ambitious projects. Achieving something that seemed out of reach when first started led to a strong sense of agency, and an individual and collective identity based around creativity and the 'other'ness of the arts (c.f. Johansson and Vinthagen, 2016). Students were able to construct and articulate a critical view of schooling, which ran counter to the regular everyday school practice. This critique often extended to government policy (c.f. Raby, 2005). This kind of conversation was encouraged by studio and rehearsal room pedagogies which instantiate the tenet that the exploration and communication of ideas are central to the arts disciplines.

While the students that we spoke with were not in a position to re-design their schools any more than their teachers were, or to reform curriculum policies that made the arts a lesser subject, they were nevertheless highly critical of dominant regular pedagogies. But they accommodated them. They used the process of subject choice to ensure that at least some of their everyday school experience was different from the regular pedagogical approaches. And in doing so, they were ensuring that the arts survived, and that other ways of 'doing school' were still visible, viable and possible. This kind of resistant refusal is characteristic of an inbetween strategy that offers immediate benefits, as well as keeping long term possibilities alive. While it did not lead to political or personal transformation, it did, as Tuck and Wang (2014) suggest, change the conditions in which tstudents were educated/living.

Importantly, we argue, resistant practices such as affirmation, avoidance and accommodation can do more than provide benefits for individuals and groups. Resistant practices carry with them the potential for creating alternative institutions. Feminist sociologist of the everyday Dorothy Smith (1987, 1993) for example argues that while institutional relations frame and dominate everyday life, subjugated practices - or counter-publics as Nancy Fraser (1993) has it have the potential to 'rewrite' the ways in which an institution functions; Anna Hickey-Moody (2012) has shown how the arts support such counter institutional work. While such practices might be subjugated now their

'co-existence', as Kathleen Gibson-Graham (1996) puts it, shows that other ways are both viable and possible. The arts pedagogies that the students valued point us to the importance of thinking about the pedagogies which produce the everyday present of schooling, as well as its longer term purposes.

We note in conclusion that many of the literatures on subject choice which we referred to at the beginning of this paper pay little attention to students' critical analysis and agency. Much of the critical literatures on resistance do not include subject choice. We suggest that the everyday perspectives offered by these students indicates that there is still much to understand about the affective, everyday experiences and sense-making of students in schools. Further 'resistance oriented subject choice research focused on class, race and gender and in different locations and subject areas is warranted.

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[i] To achieve the E Bacc a student must achieve 5+ A*-C grades in English, mathematics, two sciences, a foreign language and history or geography at GCSE level

[ii] Facilitating subjects are those which are taken in addition to specified prerequisites.

[iii] This response dovetails with the larger survey results (it included students taking and not taking arts subjects) where about a quarter of the surveyed students reported that they were planning to study an arts subject in the future, with only a fifth considering an arts-related career.