Awkward adolescence: developing an age appropriate approach to public praise and recognition for Year 10 students.

Matthew Abbott

A Research & Development Project Submitted for the MSc in Learning & Teaching 2019

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Abstract

This research explores how an understanding of mid-adolescent preoccupations (self-concept, peer group influence and the social nature of public praise) can enable schools to develop systems of public praise and recognition for Year 10 students. Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979) to summarise the findings from the literature review, it highlights the overlapping influences of school, home and friends and the significance of the differing roles adopted by the students. The literature review points towards the need for increased student engagement and agency in mid-adolescence in order to develop of a system for public praise and recognition.

Through a mixture of phenomenological and quasi-participatory research methods, and by working with friendship groups, a system for public praise and recognition is trialled and refined. The student involvement problematizes the conflicting perspectives of the school and the student within the peer group, but offers a solution which accommodates mid-adolescent needs (peer approval, minimum social awkwardness) with a form of public recognition. The creation of a celebration breakfast, involving friends and allowing privileges (such as the use of mobile phones) is a first step in developing an age appropriate approach to public praise and recognition for Year 10 students. The findings reinforce the importance of student agency, as well as the need for mid adolescents to be seen as individuals within the wider institution of the school. They also point towards the need for further training for educators on the phases of adolescent development.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The boy in Year 10 and why what he said matters

In June 2018, as a newly appointed Headteacher, I decided to bring our annual Prize Giving ceremony into the school day. Whereas it had previously been a fairly private affair restricted to the parents of the students who had won prizes, I wanted to recognise these students' successes publicly and as a whole school community. I believed that the event would be motivational, positive and less exclusive. I thought it would also address a gap in our systems of praise for KS4.

A few days after the letters and invitations had been delivered, a boy in Year 10 told me that he did not want to be part of it. He indicated that he would rather not have his achievements acknowledged publicly and commented that receiving a certificate and a book was patronising. Although he ultimately did attend and even spoke positively about the experience, my reflections on our conversation sparked a desire in me to explore the ways in which schools can recognise individual achievements publicly and, in particular, for students in Year 10.

Most developmental psychologists suggest that the age of 14 or 15 (Year 10) signals the start of mid-adolescence (Coleman, 2011; Steinberg, 2002) coinciding with a peak of self-consciousness and ego-centricism (Rankin et al., 2004; Sebastian et al., 2008). The adolescent has a growing need to resolve the conflict and contradictions between their inner and outer worlds as they look to develop their identity separate from their parents (Kracke & Noack, 1998). Kroger (1996) expresses the formation of adolescent identity as the "balance between that which is taken to be the self and that considered to be the other" (p.13).

Head (1997) comments that Kroger's use of the word "balance" is vague; further to that, I consider it to be insufficiently expressive of the process of identity formation which occurs in mid-adolescence and which can certainly be overlooked while schools focus on exam preparation, progress measures and academic outcomes. During mid-adolescence the line between the inner and outer worlds is not clearly delineated; the self and the other overlap as 15 year olds explore how they are perceived by others and, from an existential perspective, who they believe they might be or want to be (Sebastian et al., 2008).

Through this action research, I explore the ways in which our school, and schools in general, can better incorporate a stage-age fit when recognising student achievement publicly. By collaborating, and carefully reviewing, with Heads of Year, form tutors, the school counsellor and, most significantly, the students themselves, I demonstrate that an approach to public praise and recognition needs to be supported by an appropriate understanding of adolescent development. Doing this in a way which would be acceptable to the boy in Year 10 is the challenge, and potential reward, of this research.

Further relevance for our school context

This research is situated within an area that has been unresolved for our school for many years. Whereas merits have been broadly successful in engaging the younger students (particularly in Years 7 and 8), this system has not been fit for purpose from Year 9 onwards for several years. Despite a general acknowledgement of this fact, there has been a history of doing little to address this gap.

In 2017, with the arrival of a new Assistant Headteacher, a review of the school's approach to praise and reward systems was carried out. Her intent was to make "praise more meaningful" to the students. To emphasize the desire to understand how praise connects with young people, the new document was entitled the '*Authentic* Praise Policy' (my italics). The Assistant Head identified some of the challenges and reasons why this has been a problematic area for the school. For example, she identified (compared to other schools) that there was not a culture of giving material rewards for achievements, coupled with a strong resistance amongst the teaching staff for a shift to a reward policy with financial inducements.

The new policy acknowledged the previously unstated relationship between academic and social self-worth and emphasized the need to recognise the importance of individual autonomy and a sense of connection within the wider school community. Crucially, however, the praise strategies outlined in the policy did not differentiate between the different age groups, nor were the students engaged in the construction of the policy beyond some superficial conversations.

As a result, rather than creating an authentic system for praise and recognition at Key Stage 4, the new policy inadvertently reinforced the difficulty of establishing an effective system for Years 9 and above. Systems that were trialled (for example, reward cards or the newly constituted points system) were dismissed as being "a bit primary school-ish" (Year 10 student). This feedback, along with the lack of engagement by students beyond Year 8, therefore further highlights the importance of creating a system which could meet the needs of the student, instead of being designed, perhaps, according to the needs and assumptions of the adults.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Purpose, scope and rationale

When approaching the literature review, my greatest concern (which proved to be a realistic one) was that there would be a tendency in the literature to discuss praise in the classroom, rather than across the school (e.g. Benware & Deci, 1984; Diener & Dweck, 1980; Brophy, 1981). As I was primarily interested in the possible awkwardness and social embarrassment which can be associated with praise in a public forum, I focused the first part of my literature review on understanding the social nature of praise, so that I could examine the interaction between praise and wider institutional discourses as well as the salient features of mid-adolescence, in particular the role of the social group in Year 10.

An early, and important, finding was that the specific phases of adolescence are not necessarily explicitly considered in much research into praise. For example, Henderlong & Lepper, (2002) write comprehensively about praise, but do not delineate in any clear fashion between children, teenagers or adults, let alone the developmental differences between early, mid or late adolescence. Most literature rarely looks at the cross-over between praise and adolescent development. Furthermore, the link between these two areas and school connectedness, or the enhancement of student agency, is also underexplored. By considering connectedness and agency, I hoped to establish a bridge between public praise in school and mid-adolescent self-concept since, at the heart of my research, is the question of how institutional aims and approaches can work more harmoniously with, or at least in acknowledgement of, adolescent identity formation and self-concept.

These decisions helped to streamline my literature review which is structured according to the following areas:

- The social nature of praise
- Mid-adolescent self-concept and the influence of peers
- Developmental contextualism: stage environment fit
- Developing engagement through agency in the school setting

By selecting these four areas I have sought to prevent my literature review from being too broad or general. These areas relate to the key words in my research title: 'adolescence', 'age appropriate', 'public praise' and 'Year 10'. In order to focus predominantly on the interrelationship between public praise, adolescent development and connectedness within the school environment, I have not explored the large amount of research on different types of praise or the links between praise and motivation. In a longer study, it might be useful to do so.

I have restricted my review to Anglophone literature since the UK, US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have comparable educational systems and comparable cultural norms and expectations.

The social nature of praise

Kanouse et al. (1981) define praise as being:

> "*positive evaluations* made by a person of another's *products, performances or attributes*, where *the evaluator presumes the validity of the standards* on which the evaluation is based" (p. 98 – my italics).

What is striking about this definition is the apparent supremacy of the 'evaluator' over the recipient of the praise. In fact, the recipient of the praise appears to be rendered passive by the process of praise, a point emphasized by Hattie & Timperley (2007) who refer to the person giving feedback (be it a teacher or other adult) as the "agent" (p. 81). Inherent in the phrase "the evaluator presumes the validity of the standards" are two important distinctions, namely the elevated status of the evaluator and, crucially, what constitutes the "standards" which are worthy of praise. As I explore later when discussing features of mid-adolescence, this definition also problematizes the potential conflict between the norms and values of the school and the developmental norms of a fifteen-year-old and their peer group (Watling, 2019).

Arguably, three important factors underlying praise are: the intended impact, the relationship between the praise-giver and the recipient, and the actual impact. The intention behind most school praise is usually to improve or reinforce some desired quality in a student, be it behaviour (Bear et al., 2016) or attainment through feedback (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). It is important to note, however, that praise does not necessarily lead, and certainly not in a simplistic Pavlovian sense, to improved outcomes (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002). Praise can, in fact, serve to undermine or devalue the work and worth of the recipient. This is because praise is a two-way interaction rather than a uni-directional act. Despite being, in one sense, superficially passive, the decision to accept or reject the praise lies with the recipient. Henderlong & Lepper (2002, p.775) state that the "role of the recipient is just as critical as the role of the evaluator", further suggesting that the context, as well as the content, of the praise has a significant impact. I would broaden this to include the institutional context as well as that of the immediate context.

Taking the institutional context into account accords with Hedegaard's (2001) comments on institutional motives:

> "From the institutional perspective, motives are seen as object motives, or objectives that build on institutional values and purposes. From the child's perspective, motives reflect the child's social situation of development, which also implies the child's social position in the institutional practice." (p.24)

This quotation exemplifies the passive-active interplay between the recipient and praise-giver within the wider socio-historical context of the school. For example, that our school, like most schools, has a Praise Policy supports the point that praise (and related reward systems) are a part of an institution's "values and purposes." As a result, the recipient's response to praise is likely to be framed by the extent to which they feel connected not only with the person giving the praise, but also with the institution in which it is given.

Despite the clear importance of socio-historical context, studies on praise do not tend to make the public or private nature of praise a prime focus of their research. One exception (Blaze, 2014) is an investigation into the impact of 'loud praise versus quiet praise' on positive behaviour in the classroom; it provides a useful starting point for considering the social nature of praise. Blaze uses the term 'loud praise' to refer to praise which is heard by other students, as well as the intended recipient. Blaze set out to test whether, as suggested by other studies, teachers really should "rely less on public praise and more on private praise, especially with adolescents" (Bear, 2008, p.1410) when looking to improve classroom behaviour.

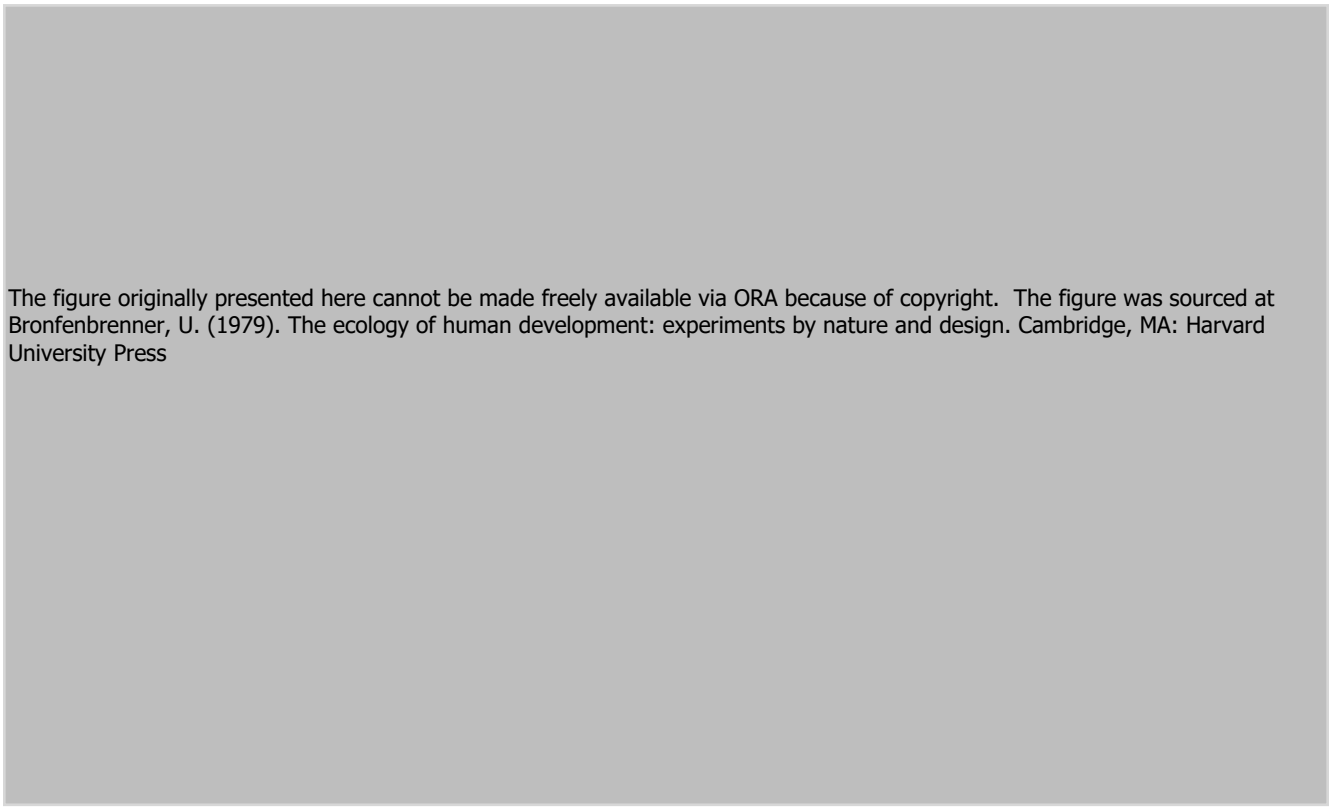
In his exploration of this area, Blaze (2014) directed four teachers to use loud and quiet praise over a repeated course of twenty minutes while the increase and decrease in acceptable and unacceptable behaviour was observed and recorded. The data suggested

that when the teacher stopped the praise, irrespective of whether they had been praising publicly or individually, desired student behaviour decreased by 20%, whereas during praise, it increased by 31%. His conclusion was that any form of praise had a positive impact on the students and that neither form was markedly more effective. This empirical study addressed some of the concerns expressed by other researchers that public praise might lead to negative outcomes (Ware, 1978; Bartholomew, 1993; Brophy, 1981). However, while Blaze's conclusion emphasizes the positive effect of employing praise of any sort, I question whether this study may have inadvertently been a study into what happens when praise is withdrawn, rather than a study of the comparison between public or private praise. Additionally, although there is discussion of teacher preference for different praise types, it does not take into account the relationship with the teacher, nor the nature of the classroom climate.

For a mid-adolescent at the peak of self-consciousness (Rankin et al., 2004), the stakes regarding public praise could not be higher, and yet, in the literature on praise and ego involvement, the focus tends primarily to be on the positive or negative impact of the praise-giver on the recipient, without due acknowledgement of the complexity presented by the context in which the praise takes place. Recognising that public praise is inevitably filtered through the student's relationship with the teacher, with the school, and also through the student's peer group, it is inevitable that there will be some form of ego involvement. This is because public praise puts a spotlight on the ego (Watling, 2019) and therefore can be perceived as being about the person, rather than the task.

Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979) to explore the social nature of praise

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979) is a useful tool to summarise this interaction between the student and the environment in which the praise takes place (Fig. 1 below). The attractiveness of Bronfenbrenner's model for my research is his emphasis on "the environment *as it is perceived* rather than as it may exist in 'objective' reality" (1979, p. 5 – my italics).



As shown above, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model consists of a series of concentric circles at the centre of which is the individual. The circles closest to the individual (and therefore most influential), are referred to as the micro- and mesosystems. The microsystem is of most direct relevance for this study since it comprises those elements of closest influence on an individual, namely family, school and friends; the mesosystem highlights the interaction between these areas. Outside these spheres of influence are the exosystem and the macrosystem. Typically, the exosystem is described as those

aspects which could affect a child's development such as a parent changing jobs; the macrosystem refers to national and global events which can impact the individual, albeit indirectly.

Although originally conceived as a model of concentric circles, subsequent researchers, for example, Fabian & Dunlop, (2002), have represented the micro- and mesosystems in the form of a venn diagram. In this format (Fig. 2 below), the overlapping influences between school, family and friends are more clearly highlighted. In addition, the dynamic interaction between these areas is also more evident. This adapted model of Bronfenbrenner's ecosystem is therefore able to not only demonstrate the multi-faceted social nature of praise, but also emphasizes the individual and their ego at the centre of these influences.

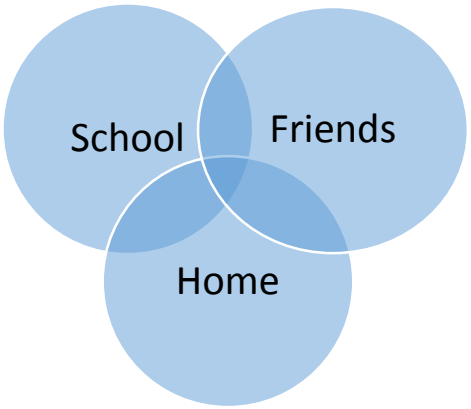


Figure 2: Focus on the interaction between the micro-mesosystem, adapted from Fabian, H. & Dunlop, A.W.A., 2002.

Ego Involvement

Positioning the individual at the heart of this interaction draws further attention to the question of ego involvement in praise. Although research in favour of effort-focused, rather than performance-orientated praise, is compelling (Chalk & Bizo, 2004; Henderlong

& Lepper, 2002; Deci &Ryan, 1985; Dweck, 2000), I believe that excluding any notion of, at the very least, indirect ego involvement is unrealistic and, in the case of the mid-adolescent development, contradictory. It misses a vital aspect when considering praise at this age.

Amemiya & Wang (2018) argue that Dweck's work (e.g. Dweck, 2012) has been misinterpreted by parents and teachers. Similar to Covington (1984), Amemiya & Wang identify that older children often interpret praise as an indication of low ability, irrespective of whether there is any direct ego involvement or not. Ego is inseparable from effort. They posit that "students use effort praise to assess their abilities" (p. 199). The implication is that a student with low underlying self-esteem will negatively filter any praise received, perhaps even seeing it as an embarrassing consolation prize in place of actual achievement. This is particularly the case with low ability students, or by students who perceive their ability to be lower than their peers (Barker & Graham, 1987; Lam et al., 2008; Moller, 2005)

Amemiya & Wang (2018) suggest that 14-18 year-olds may actually be more likely to interpret effort praise as a comment on ability as a direct result of the fact that this is the point when school culture moves towards target grades and GCSE performance. They believe that the "performance-orientated goal structures" (p. 199) render inevitable this interpretation by the students. As a result, it becomes important to consider Dweck's work (2000) within a developmental and socio-cultural framework. Many of Dweck's examples notably come from the US equivalent of Year 6 and Year 7 (Diener & Dweck, 1978; 1980; Elliott & Dweck, 1988, Farrell & Dweck, 1985). In fact, very little of the

research focuses on students in mid-adolescence who are undertaking preparation for high stakes external examinations. However much effort is praised, I would argue that the majority of students know the value of achieving well at their GCSEs and therefore would perceive praise, in this respect, as a reflection on their sense of worth. In essence, Amemiya & Wang, (2018) see the shift in school culture at Key Stage 4 as a "misalignment" (p.202) between effort-orientated feedback in the classroom and the demands of the GCSEs, expressed through the school culture of setting target grades and the pressure of achieving highly.

As outlined at the beginning of this section, Kanouse et al.'s (1981) definition of praise, places the emphasis on three key aspects: "*positive evaluations* … of another's *products, performances or attributes*, where *the evaluator presumes the validity of the standards* …" In light of Amemiya & Wang's findings (2018), the question emerges whether there can ever be a shared sense of standards (positive or negative) held by the praise-giver and the recipient. It seems impossible to conceive of shared standards that can simultaneously be held by the institution, the student's peer group and by the individual student.

Finally, although Amemiya & Wang's research (2018) emphasizes the inharmonious interaction between the external world of the school and the internal world of individual adolescent development, it stops short of examining the intersection between these two elements. This provides an interesting area for further research, given their assertion that effort praise can "backfire" in adolescence, and it is for this reason that I believe that an improved understanding of self-concept in mid-adolescence, an aspect missing from

much research regarding praise, would aid understanding of the impact and potential of whole school praise.

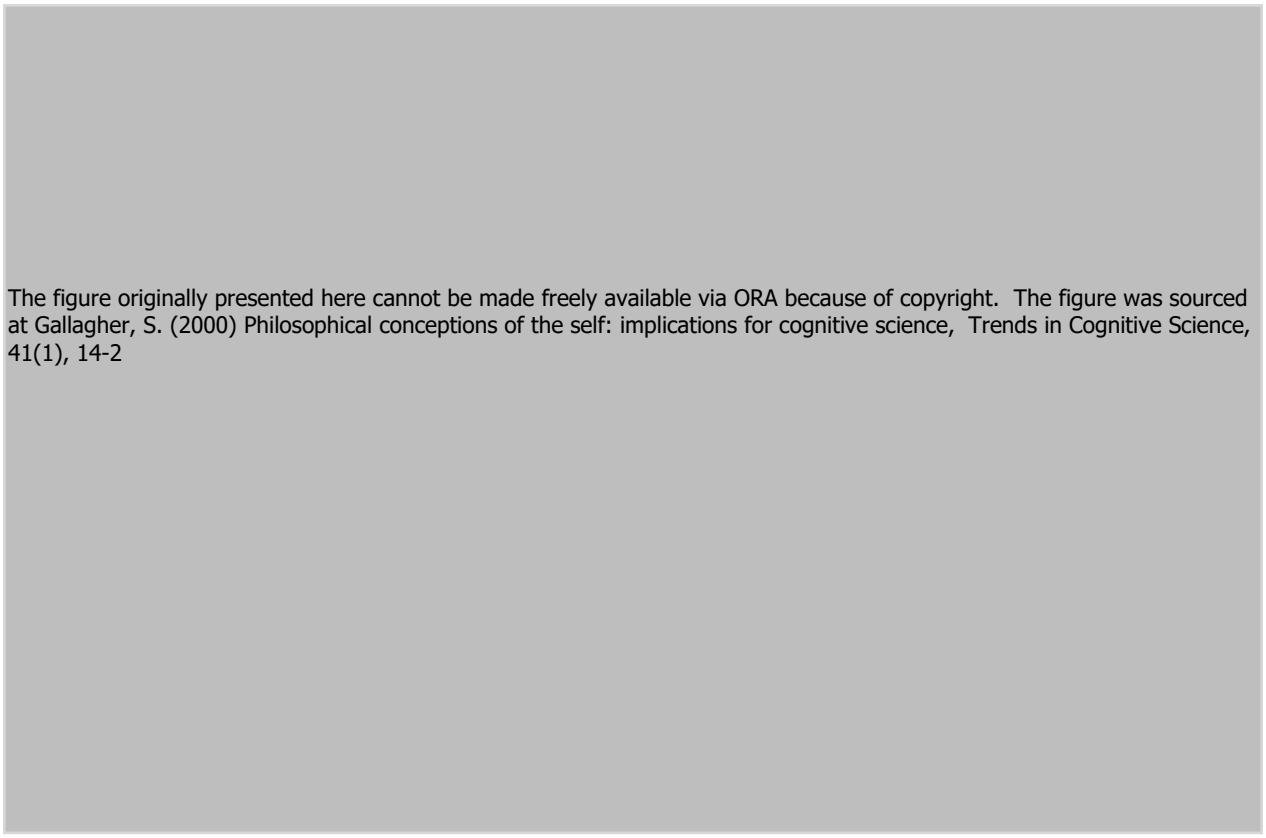
Mid-adolescent self-concept and the influence of peers

In preparation for the independence and autonomy of adulthood and in a profound departure from the childhood understanding of self (Damon & Hart, 1988; Head, 1997), a salient task of adolescence involves attempting to understand the inner world of the emerging self and its integration with the outer world. Rankin et al. (2004) conclude that feelings of self-consciousness and ego-centricism peak around the age of 15, a time in which this intense need to answer questions relating to values, identity and future worth is at its strongest. This process is variously described as an exploration of self-concept, self-esteem and identity (Coleman, 2011; Brinthaupt & Lipka, 2002; Steinberg, 2002), with the terms self-esteem and self-concept often being used interchangeably (Dusek & McIntyre, 2003). Coleman defines self-concept as "the overall sense of self which includes body image, self-esteem, self-evaluation and self-worth" (p. 59). This definition is helpful since it picks up on physical, socio-emotional and cognitive development which are central features of adolescence and also brings in an element of evaluation or judgement which is inherent in praise as discussed above.

Stripped back to a basic level, the development of self-concept in adolescence can be divided into two essential questions: 'What am I like?' and 'How am I perceived by others?' (Sebastian et al., 2008). The first of these questions relates to past events and experiences from which a person is able to make statements about the self: e.g. I am good at making friends. The second is concerned much more by the way in which an individual

interprets how their actions and words are reflected back by others, sometimes referred to as the 'looking glass self' (Gallagher, 2000): e.g. other people think I am good at making friends.

At the peak of adolescent ego-centricism the 'imaginary audience' (Elkind, 1967) is at its most powerful and can give the adolescent the erroneous, but powerful impression that they are under constant observation and evaluation by others. Incorporating the concepts of the 'looking glass self' and the 'imaginary audience' into the adapted model from Bronfenbrenner might look something like the figure below, with the thicker white line denoting the additional influence of the peer group in the three intersecting areas:



Sebastian et al.'s (2008) integration of findings from four different experiments using neuroimaging lends support to the view that the preoccupation with others' perceptions, is a distinctive feature in adolescence. By comparing how adolescents and adults respond

to stimulus questions, Sebastian concludes that adolescents use a different part of their brain (medial prefrontal cortex) than adults when thinking about scenarios with a socio-emotional element. It appears that adults are more likely to draw on past experience, whereas adolescents depend to a greater extent on filtering events through how they perceive themselves to be viewed by others in the present. Sebastian et al. suggest that this information might explain the heightened self-consciousness in adolescence as well as the influence of the peer group.

Although acknowledging its importance, this research leaves unanswered what exactly the role of the peer group is in relation to the healthy development of the adolescent sense of self. In one of the final questions expressed as an area to pursue, the authors acknowledge this by indicating that further work could be usefully carried out on the importance of environment to deepen our understanding of adolescent self-concept, an idea that Eccles & Roeser (2003) call 'stage-environment fit'. In terms of my research question, one way of doing this might be to consider how the school environment manages public praise and how adolescents interpret it through the imaginary gaze of their friends and wider peer group.

Watling's work (2019) on adolescents' reputation management brings into focus the conflicting demands from the close environment of the peer group and the wider environment of the school. Watling explains reputation management as the attempt to control the way in which we are perceived by others:

> "Managing one's own reputation is complex, requiring insight into the expectations of his or her peers for what is normative and 'acceptable' behaviour and requiring consideration of how the expectations of others fit with one's own values." (p.1)

At the heart of this definition, the people whom the individual views as his or her "peers" will have the greatest bearing on behaviour and even attitudes towards success and failure. Juvenen & Murdock (1995), also cited by Watling, provide a useful example of this in their work on effort. In their study of how ten, twelve and fourteen-year-old students conceptualise effort, they concluded that ten and twelve year olds were much more likely to emphasize their effort to impress their teachers, as they perceived that their teachers put a high tariff on effort and hard work. Conversely, the fourteen-year-olds were much less likely to refer to effort in front of their peers. In fact, there was increased approval from the peer group if effort appeared to be minimal or non-existent. Although there were only 100 students in each of these groups, the findings appear to be consistent with the idea that mid-adolescent self-concept is significantly influenced by peer group approval, sometimes in conflict with wider environmental values and norms (Elmer & Reicher, 1995; Coleman, 1974).

Henderlong & Lepper's (2002) discussion of sincerity and praise provides an example of how adolescent self-concept is often bound up with praise. Henderlong & Lepper assert that general praise is unlikely to be consistent with beliefs about the self since the praise will appear insincere, or false. When praise is seen as being sincere, it connects more meaningfully with the recipient (and hence his or her sense of self). Kohn (1993) asserts that it is "less likely there will be a gap between what someone hears and what he thinks about himself if we don't make sweeping comments about what he is like as a person" (p.108). Given the social nature of much praise, and the power of the 'imaginary audience', it is little wonder that many 14-18 year-olds will draw conclusions regarding personal judgement implicit in praise, even if it is not consciously intended. This observation raises difficulties in terms of whole school public praise, since by its nature it

can easily tend towards broad general praise and so could therefore be seen by the adolescent as insincere and, at worst, as a cynical form of adult manipulation.

Developmental contextualism: stage environment fit

The search for inner meaning, or adolescent soul-searching, while individual, is also inextricably collective (Eriksen, 1968; Roeser & Lau, 2002). Recognising this and incorporating Eriksen's work on the communal nature of the search for identity, Eccles & Roeser (2003) argue for a 'stage-environment fit', a term they use to underline the importance of the integration of academic and socio-emotional outcomes in the school environment. Eccles & Roeser argue that school systems need to match adolescent development in a number of ways, namely: teacher expectations, teachers' sense of their own efficacy, teacher-student relationships, classroom climate and lastly school ethos. In particular, they emphasize the school's role in "mediating organizational and social practices" (p.130) to enable adolescents to develop healthily.

An unintended complication of Eccles & Roeser's (2003) emphasis on these so-called "mediating…practices" is the risk of rendering the adolescent a passive participant in the creation of an appropriate 'stage-environment fit'. The element which appears to be missing from Eccles & Roeser's work is the role of the students themselves and that of their peer groups. As was demonstrated by the recent attempt to review our school's Praise Policy, this exclusion of active student participation, I would argue, misses the point of the developmental needs of the mid-adolescent.

Furthermore, life outside the school gates is also a factor which can affect engagement and attachment with whatever "mediating organizational and social practices" a school may use. Hudley & Gottfried (2008) highlight the importance for students to adjust to the environment in which they are educated. They write that "students who perceive the beliefs, norms and expectations to be supportive of, and consistent with, their own aspirations and achievements are more likely to experience that culture as motivational" (p.280). Their definition of school culture extends beyond the classroom to include the wider school environment and the attitudes contained within it.

Effective adjustment to the school environment is more likely where there is a high level of congruence between the values and norms of the adolescent's three main external worlds of family, school and peers (Phelan et al., 1998). In their ethnographic study, Phelan et al. focus on the transitions to and from these three realms, identifying the complications and calamities that can occur at the borders between these 'worlds'. This supports the use of Bronfenbrenner's model (1979) in recognising the interaction of these 'worlds' on the individual, and further brings in the extent to which these 'worlds' integrate.

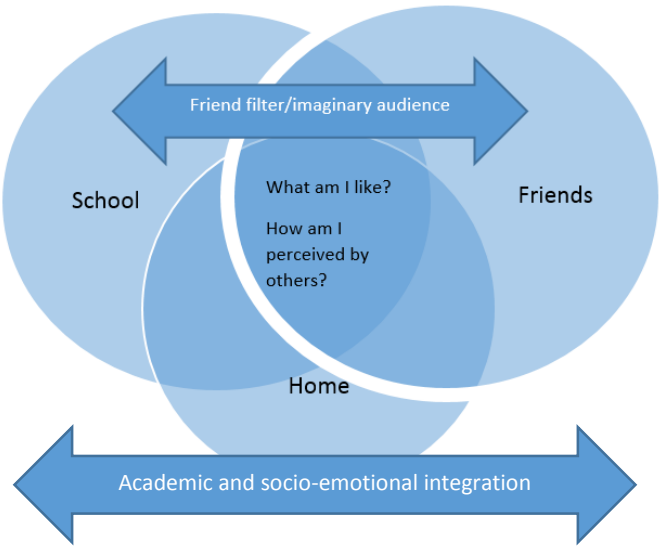


Figure 4: The responsive school environment: recognition of stage environment fit

Phelan et al. (1998) emphasize that the transition between 'worlds' can be relatively straight-forward, complicated, or almost impossible. The study exemplifies how students may or may not engage with the dominant discourse of their school and judges that this is due in part to whether they are perceived as "students and people" (p. 196). The solution offered by Phelan et al. to this dilemma is to emphasize the importance of students' "role as mediators of their own experience" (p.196) and they conclude with a call-to-arms that, as educators, we need to ask "students to tell us what affects their lives and their ability to connect with and engage in educational settings" (p. 208). In contrast to Eccles & Roeser (2003), their view is that it is the adolescents themselves who act as the mediators and integrators of internal and external meaning, combining their external experiences in multiple contexts with their internal, developing sense of self.

Adolescent role playing

The importance and influence of multiple contexts and multiple relationships is further outlined by Finkenauer et al. (2002) in their discussion of the different roles that an adolescent will play in his or her life and, importantly, through which a different identity may be expressed. An adolescent expresses a different identity at home, at school or with friends. This understanding of the different roles played by adolescents is also discussed in Harter's (1999) studies into teenagers' self-descriptions. Harter's research outlines the contradictory nature of the self and the ways in which it is mediated in and through different contexts, with Harter identifying eight dimensions (in essence, an extension of Phelan's family, school and peers) from which conflicting notions of the self then emerge. In a further study (Harter & Monsour, 1992), young people were able to identify not only

conflicting attributes, but also that they were different types of people in different situations. Self-concept appears to be at its most fluid during adolescence and self-esteem varies dependent on situation.

To summarise this section, a number of significant factors relating to public praise need to be taken into consideration if an age appropriate approach is to be developed. As well as recognising their heightened ego-centricism and introspection, it is important to note that mid-adolescents are also negotiating the different 'worlds' they inhabit (Phelan et al., 1998). Although reasonably adept at role playing (Finkenauer et al., 2002), the dominant concern relating to peer acceptance, described by Harter (1990) as "the social mirror, as it were, validat[ing] the self" (p. 368), complicates Eccles and Roeser's (2003) search for "mediating…practices" in the school environment. In terms of stage-environment fit, although it would appear important for the school to provide structures which enable students to mediate their experiences, a recognition of external constraints such as GCSEs (Amemiya & Wang, 2018) is essential. The solution offered by Phelan et al. (1998) is the need to maximise student engagement and agency with whichever system for public praise is developed.

Developing Engagement through Agency in the School Setting

Roeser & Lau (2002) define a positive environment for the adolescent as being one where the ego has room to grow within the supportive ethos of the school. They conclude that individual connectedness (or belonging), autonomy (freedom to act) and individual competence are key for mid-adolescents and question how these can be operationalised into the structures in the school. Eccles & Roeser (2003) develop this further by

identifying the importance of what they refer to as “symbolic measures”which can be taken by the school to emphasize the active role of the student to the students themselves.

While a seemingly straight-forward and persuasive proposition, what is less clear is how schools might go about facilitating this sort of environment and which measures might symbolise the sympathetic and healthy inclusion of the adolescent. Reflecting on the superficially passive nature of praise as discussed earlier, whatever system is put in place needs to reflect student voice and aim to increase engagement through agency (Phelan et al., 1998; Graham, 2004).

This emphasis on agency is one which is advocated by Coleman (2011) who writes:

> “Adolescents are not passive recipients of whatever the school offers them, but are active agents in assessing, filtering and utilising the opportunities to be found within the school.” (p.171)

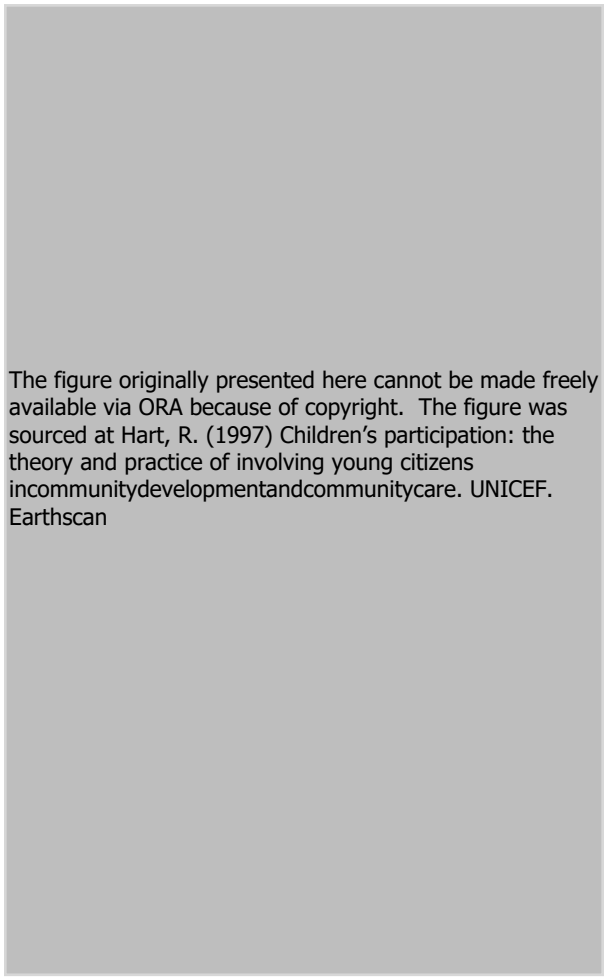
Similar to Hedegaard (2001), Coleman indicates that person and context are indivisible. However, he not only recognises the two-way dynamic between the values and norms of the individual and the values and norms of the institution, but goes further to suggest that young people could be viewed as ultimately constructing their own adolescence by affecting how adults behave, as well as processing their life experiences. One example Coleman cites to support this view of adolescence is in the work of Keijsers & Laird (2010) and their study on information management. Keijsers & Laird showed that adolescents are adept at actively controlling the information that their parents have access to with the aim of influencing their parents’ actions.

The implication of Coleman's position (2011) is that serious consideration should be given to how to listen to young people as well as developing more opportunities for agency so that there can be a healthier transition into adulthood. The underlying need for Year 10 students to relate in a meaningful way with systems of praise might explain why our school's merit system is not an effective way of recognising achievements. Mid-adolescents' resistance to merits could reflect a rejection of the early years of secondary school and pre- or early adolescence. Merits and point systems are symbolically child-like and suggest an adult-initiated and adult-managed acknowledgement of successes, rather than something which is collaborative. The implication of this is that the *how* of praise becomes as, if not more, important than the *what* of praise (Priestley et al., 2012).

Holland et al. (1998) discuss agency in terms of power relations, coining the phrase 'figured worlds' to reflect the way in which individuals perceive and enact their roles within any given context. Cultural norms both constrain and provide people's perception of their ability to act within a particular space. Holland's discussion of "positional identity" (p.125) further emphasizes the interplay between power, status and identity. This is particularly salient when considering public praise for Year 10 as we have seen that there are two key positional identities which the mid-adolescent is negotiating: firstly, that of the institution of the school and secondly, that of the peer group.

The challenge for schools, then, is to develop a system which symbolically recognises the need for connectedness, autonomy and competence (Roeser & Lau, 2002) through providing the opportunity for agency within the peer group as well as the school as a whole. A drawback to Coleman's proposition (2011) is that he doesn't provide, with the exception of the study by Keijsers & Laird (2010), any real concrete examples of effective

adolescent agency. Establishing a "potentiating architecture" (Edwards, 2014) which gives support, but which offers the chance for adolescents to develop their potential through their own acts, is at the heart of my aim to develop an age appropriate approach to praise and recognition for Year 10 students.



Hart's (1997) 'Ladder of Participation' (Fig. 5) offers an attractive way of considering the question of involvement and avoids the false dichotomy of entirely teacher-led or entirely student-led initiatives. By using a stepped approach, Hart demonstrates that there are different ways of engendering student agency, depending on the nature of the activity and context. Significantly, the first three rungs of Hart's Ladder are ones which masquerade as participation, but are in fact non-participatory since they are for the benefit of the adults, rather than the young people. Hart labels these manipulation, decoration and tokenism. The top five promote active participation, but vary according to the degree of participation.

Rather than view these five as a hierarchy of increasing agency, Carroll et al. (2017) suggests that they might rather be seen as equally valid approaches and would perhaps be better viewed as a circle of possibilities, rather than a linear development. The advantage of this suggestion is that it emphasizes that the ideal is not to aim for the

highest rung of “child initiated decision, then shared with adults”, but rather to tailor the approach according to achieving an appropriate fit for the context. Hart himself writes: “The important principle is…choice: programmes should be designed which maximise the opportunity for any child to choose to participate at the highest level of his ability” (Hart, 1997, p.12).

One final element to consider in the development of student agency and genuine participation in the school context is how to define the term ‘engagement’. Kohut (1984), for example, outlines that belongingness is expressed through companionship, affiliation and connectedness. His definition brings in the peer group as well as the wider school community and emphasizes that companionship and affiliation lead to an overall a sense of connectedness. This implies that engagement is more than mere activity, but rather the inclusion of a number of relational and personal elements. Other studies support this view by considering interaction alongside the extent to which the individual feels autonomous (Barber & Schluterman, 2008; Lee & Robbins, 2000). Like Phelan et al. (1998), there is an emphasis on the overlapping worlds of home, friends, school and community.

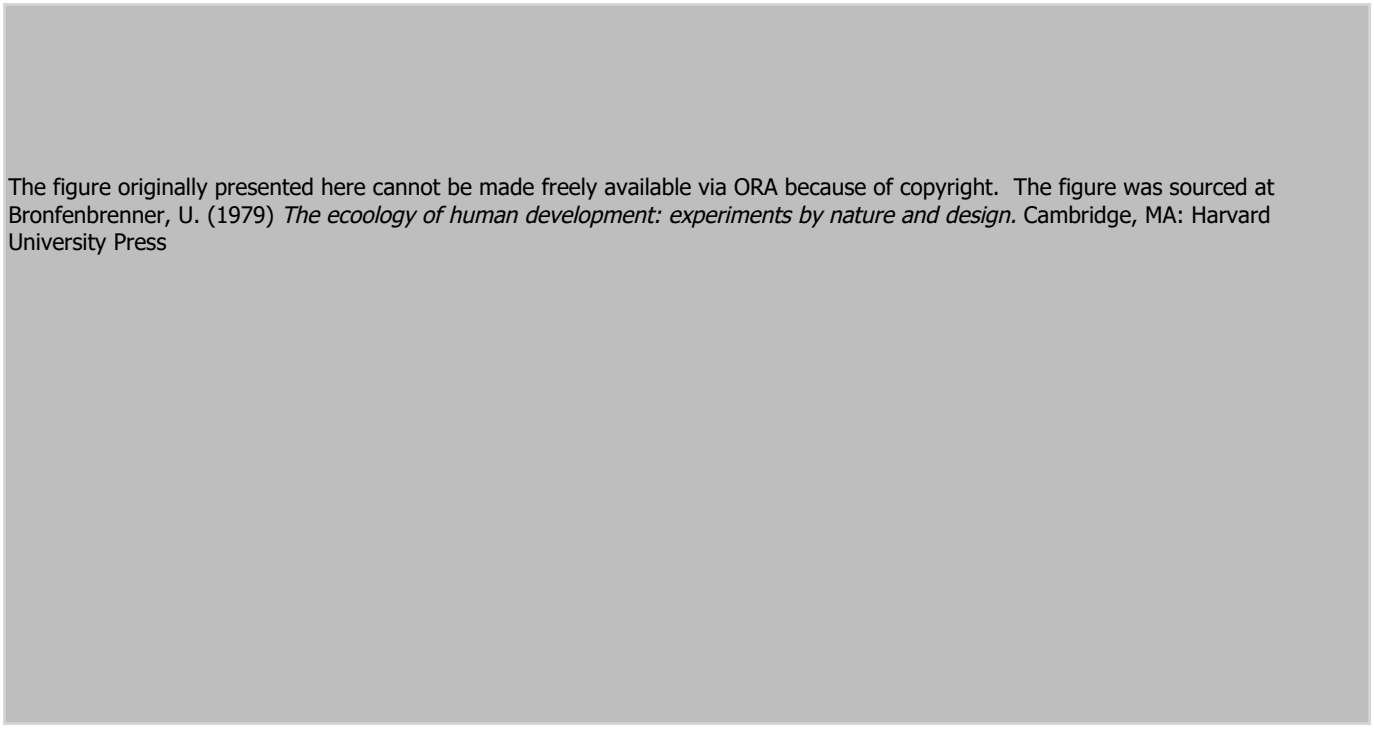
The Hemingway Measure of Adolescent Connectedness (Karcher, 2001) was developed following the need to assess the impact of a peer mentoring programme and to measure its impact. It covers the social elements with which an adolescent comes into contact and, drawing on data from 1451 adolescent samples, provides a reasonable measure for assessing connectedness and by extension engagement. In their review of Karcher’s work, Carroll et al. (2017) sought to combine the social worlds underpinning The Hemingway Measure of Adolescent Connectedness (that of friends, family, school and community)

with a greater focus on the emotional side of connectedness. Using a sample size of 1673 gathered over two separate studies, Carroll et al. developed their Self in a Social Context – Social Connectedness Scale (SSC-SC). Interestingly, one of Carroll et al.'s conclusions was that there was a moderately large correlation between relationships with friends, and connectedness with school, something which has implications for my study given my desire to find a common ground between school and student motives.

Drawing on previous studies on adolescent connectedness (Barber & Schluterman, 2008; Jose et al., 2012; Libbey, 2004) Carroll et al. assert that "the emotional element within social connectedness is integral to an individual's sense of how they fit in the world and how others think of them" (p. 106). Although the SSC-SC does not distinguish between early, mid and late adolescence, it combines emotion, autonomy and relational elements in a way that draws together self-concept, agency and the context. Since this literature review has emphasized the centrality of self-concept and agency to the design and delivery of my research, the SSC-SC could provide a means of measuring and benchmarking different students' attitudes towards praise and recognition within their existing perceptions and relationships.

Overall summary and final research questions

By exploring the key words of 'adolescence', 'age appropriate' 'public praise' and 'Year 10', through this review I have developed an understanding of each of these areas in relation to establishing an age appropriate system of praise, positioning them within an adapted version of Bronfenbrenner's ecological system (1979):



The lack of literature on the interrelatedness of these aspects suggests that my research focus will enhance understanding in this area.

My review points towards the benefits of exploring the active role of the adolescent and his/her peer group in mediating public praise while taking into account the wider context. Acknowledging that the mid-adolescent self is strongly mediated through the reflective gaze of the peer group raises a number of important implications when attempting to publicly praise a Year 10 student, not least the consideration whether public praise is even advisable given this stage in an adolescent's development.

The review suggests that my research needs to be designed in a way that enables us to understand better the "positional identity" (Holland et al., 1998) of the Year 10s in our school and to consider the meaning that they currently ascribe to public praise. For this reason, the first two research questions that will frame my action research are:

- What constitutes public praise in our school?
- What value do Year 10 students attribute to praise outside the classroom?

The most compelling finding from my literature review is that the Year 10 students will need to be actively involved, not just consulted, so that my research can bring together the *what* and the *how* of my enquiry question. As a result, the third question which I intend to explore is:

- How can public praise be used meaningfully with Year 10 students?

This third question, building on the first two, brings attention to what constitutes meaningful praise for the individual, for his/her peer group, and for the school.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Rationale for phenomenological and quasi-participatory research

My three research questions for developing an age appropriate system of public praise in school are grounded in students' perception and experience of three related aspects: i) their *identification* and *awareness* of what constitutes public praise; ii) their *experience* and *evaluation* of this praise; iii) their potential to *co-construct* meaningful public praise. Since the student experience of public praise (either as passive recipients, or potential active creators) is at the heart of these questions, I looked for an appropriate qualitative approach which would enable me to "obtain a view into participants' life-worlds and to understand their personal meanings" (Johnson, 2008, p.395).

I recognised that I could apply a broadly phenomenological approach to the first two research questions since such an approach would enable me to explore how the Year 10 students understand their everyday world (Cohen et al., 2014). I was interested in this approach because of the emphasis on "the reality of an object [being] only perceived within the meaning of the experience of an individual" (Creswell, 2013, p.78). As my literature review raised questions about the interrelation between the external worlds of the school and the peer group, as well as the internal world of the individual, I believed that a phenomenological approach would be most effective.

Acknowledging the importance of Gallagher's 'looking glass self' (2008) and my term 'Friend Filter' to describe the impact of the peer group in mid-adolescence, I decided that semi-structured friendship group interviews would enable me to understand students' experiences and perception within the dynamic of their existing social groups. I recognised, however, that this approach would not provide sufficient scope to answer my

third research question which required the students to act as co-researchers to achieve the agency and sense of connection (Ruddock & McIntyre, 2007) that my literature review indicated might be a by-product of a student-led reward system. I therefore decided to combine the peer group interviews with aspects of participatory research. By applying the principles of participatory research, I hoped to empower the students as active agents by co-designing an improved approach (Creswell, 2013).

Therefore, in summary, in order to achieve "methodological congruence" (Morse and Richard, 2002 in Creswell, 2013 p.50), and to test out my model for effective design of public praise, I chose a mixture of phenomenological and quasi-participatory research methods.

Recognition of the potential power and pitfalls inherent in participatory research

Having decided to include an element of participatory research into my study, I was conscious that I needed to consider the drawbacks as well as the attractive elements associated with this approach. Despite Freire's (1993) idealistic exhortation that participatory research reconciles "the poles of contradiction so that both [teacher and students] are simultaneously teachers and students" (p.53), I was concerned that my role as Headteacher and the views of other staff would inadvertently restrict this as a piece of participatory research, in fact running the risk of falling into Hart's (1993) categories of non-participation such as tokenism, decoration or manipulation as explored earlier.

A key question (which I discussed with fellow MSc students) was how I would enable the students' agency to come through the discussions and the final decisions. Since

participatory research has a transformative purpose, I needed to shift my focus onto the meaning of public praise for the participants, rather than for me as the researcher (Creswell, 2013). I knew that I would need to plan opportunities for the students to take decisions on their own and to see their viewpoint being considered and adopted by the adults associated with Year 10, but I was concerned that this would cut across the normative practices of the Head of Year and Year team. Groundwater et al. (2015) identify this paradox as one of student "positioning" (p.11) within the adult world, while Christensen & James (2008) highlight the mixed messages that can be inadvertently conveyed, potentially leading not to liberation, but actually constraint.

I therefore needed to be honest about the scope of the participation in my research. Milbourne's (2009) three tests for participatory research: "young people trusting adults; adult power-holders trusting young people and the need to promote wider trust in young people's abilities" (Milbourne, 2009, p.354) guided me to design an approach with the intention to build trust. For example, I regularly shared the points raised by the students with other adult stakeholders, and vice versa, while respecting the confidentiality of all individuals' responses. Additionally, keen to empower the students, I used group interviews, with the understanding that these "can decrease the influence of the interviewer…[and] recognise the important of peer culture and the social construction of meaning" (Groundwater et al., 2015, p.124). Given the focus of my research, this decision also enabled me to incorporate the voice of the peer group as well as the individual students.

A more challenging aspect of my research was how to maintain the voice of the individuals in the analysis of the research. James (2007) draws attention to the fake involvement of

students where the words are attributed to them, but the point of view is that of the researcher who has selected and the data to meet his own ends. Groundwater et al. (2015) express the same problem in the following way: "voice has become a trope and, sometimes, a mask for adult interpretation of children and young people's voices" (p.62). A major consideration was how I would therefore collaborate authentically with the students. Although I had set up the research aims, I was able to provide the students with opportunities to analyse the data and to decide how and in what ways the data would be shared. For example, I involved the students in the preparation of the poster for the poster conference at my MSc review day. This partial involvement of the students accords with Graham et al., (2010) regarding the unnecessary requirement to involve students at all phases of participatory research.

Overview of research, including internal and external collaboration points

Having decided on my overarching research methodology, I planned out four phases of research and reflection to enable me to answer my research questions and achieve my overall aim of developing an age appropriate system of public praise for Year 10 students. The process that I designed involved reflecting on gathered data at each phase, so that I could not only trial a system for public praise, but also refine it following feedback. I moved from a broadly phenomenological approach in phases 1-2 to a quasi-participatory approach in phases 3-4. In addition, I recognised that I needed to gather data to evaluate the potential for the system to continue beyond my research. I deliberately planned in moments of collaboration with the Head of Year 10, the Year 10 tutor team and, by using the approaches and freedom offered by participatory research, with the students.

The table below shows the phases and main methods of generating data and collaboration points:

Phase	***1: Understanding context***	***2: Exploring experience***	***3: Creating agency and co-construction***	***4: Evaluating and refining system***
Month	*October/November*	*December*	*January-March*	*April-June*
Focus	Analysis of existing school data	Understanding student experience: RQs 1+2	Student co-construction: RQ3	Evaluation and refinement of approach through feedback.
Methods	Analysis of student **survey** and policies **Semi structured interviews** with experienced Heads of Years 10+11; School Counsellor	Baseline **questionnaire** to ascertain nature of each group **Semi structured group interviews** (x3)	**Focus group** participatory research (x3) **Large focus group** participatory research	Whole year group **survey** **Peer review**
Collab-oration Points	Collaboration with Year 10 form team, in particular Head of Year.		Collaboration with students as co-designers. Discussion with School Leadership Team; analysis by Head of Year and tutor team.	Peer review at Poster Conference and also presentation at Royal Holloway University conference.

Since my research relied heavily on semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion, I needed to find ways to triangulate my findings. I was concerned that my research might be one dimensional and insignificantly nuanced. As result, I decided to divide the Year 10 student focus groups into three different friendship groups. I used the knowledge of the Head of Year and form tutors to identify three groups of five students who would participate in the research. I interviewed each group separately in Phases 2 and 3 and was scrupulous in not sharing information from one group to another. Although

I cannot know for certain whether the students discussed the research outside of our interviews, the fact that they came from distinctly different friendship groups would suggest not.

By using the Head of Year and Year 10 tutor team in a collaborative capacity I was able to ensure that my own assumptions and beliefs (Creswell, 2013, p.15) were held in check by six other members of staff, all of whom were invested in a different way in the issue that I was exploring. In addition to this, I collaborated with the School Leadership Team and used their feedback to help me tighten up my approaches and to refine aspects such as the way that the students' ideas could fit within the existing culture and practice. It was interesting to note that the Year 10 form teachers were far more conservative in their consideration of the student generated ideas which gave me feedback about how the wider staff might react to the final proposals. These collaboration points became, therefore, crucial in triangulating my analysis, findings and final evaluation.

At one point during a discussion with the Year 10 form tutors, the Head of Year 10 asked in what capacity I was carrying out the research: for my MSc, for current Year 10 or for future years, to which I answered all three. This reasonable question, however, highlighted to me the reality of what Creswell (2016) refers to as the problems of "studying in your own backyard" (p.19). By this he means several things: the issues regarding any pre-determined expectations held by the researcher; whether the researcher is seen as a researcher or colleague; and interesting ethical and power issues. Eilertsen et al.'s discussion (2008) of using research to promote one's own agenda helped me to look for ways to reduce the "power differentials" (p.297) by providing colleagues with choices throughout and attempting to bracket my role as researcher (Creswell, p.80)

as being separate to that of Headteacher. I recognise, however, that this is a limitation to my research since in every other conversation with colleagues, I am viewed as the Headteacher.

Consideration of Eilertsen's "power differentials" calls to mind Altricher's (2008) warning about the difficulties of tackling institutional, rather than individual practice (Altricher, 2008, p.46). Given that I hoped that the outcome from my research would be adopted for the whole year group, it was therefore important for me to collaborate with people outside our context because I wanted to position my research within a broader academic and educational context, but also because I wanted to benefit from feedback from people without a knowledge of our school and with whom I did not have a Headteacher relationship.

In terms of external collaboration, therefore, I met with Dr Anna Woodham, King's University, who provided me with some questions for consideration with regard to participatory research and the potential pitfalls in this approach. I found her suggestions about how to involve students, even when carrying out the phenomenological research helpful. For example, she suggested using phrases with the students such as "You are going to help improve the school reward system" as being an effective way of introducing the purpose of the research as well as "de-emphasiz[ing] the power relationship" (Creswell, 2013, p.48) that might conflict with a free and frank discussion. She gave me suggestions as to how I could present myself in the role of the researcher, rather than Headteacher. I did this by reiterating their right to choose, by letting conversations run without comment and by emphasizing each time we met that I was in this role.

I also met with Dr Dawn Watling (Royal Holloway University) whose work on Reputation Management I had found useful and interesting and discussed the potential problems associated with my research area. As a result of this collaboration, I presented my research at Royal Holloway's South East Research Network for Schools conference on 5th July and found the post presentation questions helpful in enabling me to reflect further on my findings.

I also collaborated with fellow educators on the Oxford Learning & Teaching MSc course and used the opportunities provided by 'contact' days to discuss my methodological approaches. The feedback at the Poster Conference helped me to articulate and condense my findings and recommendations.

Finally, as part of our school-based CPD, I presented my poster to colleagues and was able to deepen my understanding of our institutional knowledge from their questions.

Specific Research Methods

i) Surveys and questionnaires

I used surveys in Phase 1 and Phase 4 to provide me with a general picture (Cohen et al., 2014) of the Year 10 attitude to public praise. For both of these phases, I wanted to gather a large amount of information in an efficient manner (Munn & Drever, 1995) to frame and evaluate my research. The survey in Phase 1 was designed while narrowing down my research focus. It highlighted the need to explore the question of public praise from a year group, and not an adult or institutional, perspective. I carried out a survey in Phase

4 in order to obtain feedback from the whole of the Year 10 cohort, which complemented the evaluation from the focus groups.

Prior to the establishment of the peer group discussions, I adapted Carroll et al.'s 'Self in a Social Context – Social Connectedness Scale' (2017) so that I could factor the students' connectedness with school into my research (Appendix D). Although I was aware of the limitations of using a tick-list questionnaire and the potentially superficial nature of answers given (Munn & Drever, 1995), I weighed this drawback against the usefulness of considering the students' answers from the three groups against the context of family, friends, community and school. I hoped that this information would shed light on the differences between peer group perspectives and also provide a gauge of the impact on the students' sense of agency following the intervention.

ii) Semi-structured interviews

During the course of my research (as shown in the table above) I organised several semi-structured interviews with the school counsellor, the Heads of Year 10 and 11 and the three student focus groups. I also convened a large student focus group interview to assist in establishing the final trial system. I chose to use semi-structured interviews because they would enable me to adapt my questions in the light of answers given and so deepen my understanding of the perspectives of my interviewees. I considered this decision against the resulting difficulties that I would have in analysing the data in a systematic way (Cohen et al., 2014).

In designing the interviews, I adopted a 'funnel' approach (Kahn et al., 1961), starting with general questions and moving to specific areas which related in particular to my literature

review (Appendix C). According to Litosseliti (2003), the 'funnel' approach is more likely to relax the participants, an element that would help to "de-emphasize the power relationship" (Creswell, 2003, p.48) with the students, in particular. I included prompts and probes (Drever, 1995) so that I could deepen responses to initial answers. In addition, I considered how my question design would elicit deeper responses (Litosseliti, 2003, p.59) by using such phrases as "What do you think about…"; "Can you say more about…" and "Is this an adequate summary?"

Due to time constraints, I wasn't able to pilot each interview fully. However, I used the first student focus group each time to test the questions for the students and made changes in the light of the first interview or discussion. For example, after the first interview (Appendix C), I changed the order of my questions and also included a follow up question about Year 7 as it became apparent during that interview that comparing the Year 10 experience to the Year 7 experience would help to draw out the ways in which attitudes towards public praise changed during adolescence.

In summary, as I was interested in student experience, using semi-structured interviews afforded me the opportunity to explore and clarify responses in more detail and reduce potential ambiguity (Drever, 1995). I audio-recorded the conversations (see ethical considerations below), but did not video record them. I weighed up the loss of being able to analyse paralinguistic features with the potential inhibiting effect of video recording. On balance, I believed that I would obtain better data for the purposes of my research questions by adopting this method. As mentioned above, I sought to verify the reliability of the results by using more than one friendship group, as well as adopting the questioning techniques suggested by Litosseliti (2003).

iii) Focus groups and group discussions with students.

The main reason for deciding to use groups of students, aside from wanting to involve as many different friendship groups as possible in the participatory element of my research, was to take advantage of the interaction that occurs in focus groups and group discussions (Litosseliti, 2003; Morgan, 1997; Groundwater et al., 2015). Further to this, if used effectively, in focus group discussions "the participants' rather than the researcher's agenda can predominate" (Cohen et al., p.436). In both respects, these potential benefits connect with the aims of my research.

In order to maximise the emergence of the participants' voices, I spent time reflecting on how to chair or 'moderate' the group discussions. I reiterated group rules at the start of each session (Appendix C) to reinforce guidelines for sharing views (Litosseliti, 2003) and to avoid losing individual voices, a potential limitation of this approach (Morgan, 1997). I also allowed for a degree of digression in order to provide students with a more relaxed environment. Merton et al. (1990) indicate that another limitation can be the context and personal dynamics between individuals in the group. In terms of my research aims, I considered this a potential benefit since I hoped, by observing these interactions and the degree of social conformity (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013), I would be able to increase my understanding of what constituted the 'Friend Filter' in each social group.

Other relevant limitations of which I was aware included arriving at a 'false consensus' (Litosseliti, 2003, p.19) and the non-transferability of conclusions reached by each group. For this reason, I tried to reduce the amount of coverage in each focus group discussion and also reiterated regularly to the participants the aim of the research in achieving a system of public praise which would be adopted by their year group. This meant the

students were often motivated beyond agreeing within their peer group, as they were aware of a greater goal.

Ethical Considerations

I used the *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* set out by the British Educational Research Association (2018) to ensure high levels of ethical consideration in the planning, execution and presentation of my research. I supplemented my understanding of these guidelines by referring to Cohen et al. (2014, pp.75-104) who place a strong emphasis on informed consent, confidentiality, and clarity as to how research is disseminated. With regard to dissemination within the school, and due to the transformational nature of quasi-participatory research, I judged it important to be explicit to the students about their involvement (Creswell, 2013) as well as the likely impact within school.

Once I had received permission from the Chair of Governors to carry out my research and obtained ethical clearance via CUREC, I informed all participants about my research and gave them time to consider their involvement before seeking signed consent (Appendix B). Additionally, I reinforced the right to withdraw at any point. For example, when one student did not attend the large focus group discussion, I did not pursue this in the way I would as Headteacher, but rather noted her absence for the purpose of my research.

Due to the potentially sensitive nature of my research in terms of the students' relations with teachers and with their wider peer group, it was particularly important that I considered "how to balance maximising the benefits and minimising any risk or harm" (BERA, 2018, p.8). I was scrupulous in not sharing student comments with the Head of

Year or the tutor team. I protected the anonymity of comments by ensuring that only I had access to the recordings which were made on a portable audio digital recorder. The recordings were password protected and all notes kept in a locked file. The notes have been and will only be used by me in relation to this research.

By carrying out quasi-participatory research, I was acknowledging the Year 10 students' competence and right to express their views (Groundwater et al., 2015). Emphasizing "trust, respect and reciprocity" (Groundwater et al., 2015, p.47) throughout all phases of the research, I hoped to sidestep a restrictive power dynamic. An important way of doing this was to demonstrate the equal value of the students' voices. When questioned about the likelihood of their suggestions being adopted I responded honestly, indicating that the form teachers and Head of Year would engage seriously with their suggestions, but that they would also have their points of view.

Finally, a unique ethical issue of working with groups is that "what participants tell the researcher is inherently shared with the other group participants as well" (Morgan, 1997, p.32). Being aware of this factor meant that I was clear to the students about our agreed ground rules (Appendix C) and the right for all participants to have a voice. I was mindful of the existing power dynamics within the group of friends and emphasized potential issues with breaches of confidentiality (Groundwater et al., 2015, p.60).

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

Phase 1: Understanding context

In order to understand the established practices and culture within the school in relation to public praise and recognition, I interviewed two long-standing Heads of Year (both of whom have a combined total of twenty-three years' experience), the in-house School Counsellor and also distributed a student survey (Appendix A) in tutor time to all Year 10 students (*n*=141). It was completed by 116 students. My intention was to triangulate the responses from these three perspectives to gain an initial understanding of perceptions relating to my research questions, as well as potential ways forward.

Although the anonymity of the survey allowed for the students to write more 'honest' responses, I recognise that since the survey was carried out in a school setting, this might still mean that the students gave the replies that would be expected of them, or perhaps deliberately provocative ones. I also recognise that the students would still see this survey an institutional tool, even if subconsciously, and that this would have inevitably shaped their responses. However, the information complemented themes that emerged through the interviews with the Heads of Year and the School Counsellor and provided a useful starting point for the small group discussions which followed (Phase 2).

Relationship, individual attention and authenticity

The Heads of Year stressed the inherent value of giving individual attention, rather than group praise which they considered could appear rehearsed and inauthentic. They

believed that individual attention could "build bridges" as well as individual confidence. The Head of Year 10 expressed it simply:

> *Individual praise has more value. I'm not sure that students want public praise.*

The Heads of Year stressed how easily students "saw through" group praise. This preference for individual recognition was also reflected in the students' responses where 62% of respondents indicated that one-to-one praise was valued, 52% indicating the same for private praise from the Head of Year, 50% a positive phone call home and 49% valuing private praise from the Headteacher. Interestingly, if this praise was given publicly, even by the same people, the value dropped to 46% for the Head of Year and 39% for the Headteacher.

In the students' written answers they frequently named a specific teacher to exemplify positive recognition. This importance of the student-teacher relationship lay at the heart of whether the praise was accepted or rejected. The two following responses indicate how easily praise can be accepted or rejected and reinforce the importance of the relationship between praise-giver and recipient (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002):

> *Mr M praised me because of my badminton skills, and then I got in the badminton team and so I worked harder so he didn't want to regret his decision of giving me the opportunity.*

> *They always make me feel like they are being patronising or sarcastic when they have praised me which makes me feel like the praise if worthless and meaningless.*

As well as expressing the importance of individual relationships, these responses also reflect the existential questions in mid-adolescence which are raised by Sebastian et al. (2008) and the ways in which comments made by others are viewed as comments about

identity, rather than just the task or work in hand. It seems important that the first comment (and several others like it – see Appendix A) refers to a specific teacher, whereas the "they" of the second comment indicates a more general response, one that perhaps rejects the institutional norms of the school and reflects on the importance of connectedness.

Recognition rather than praise

The students were, at best, ambivalent to the idea of public praise in assembly (with 70% thinking it made no difference to them). Similarly, the counsellor expressed the view that public praise in assembly risks being too generalised, saying "It's just you in the role of Headteacher talking about something." Instead, she explained that students who see her talk about when the "tutor has noticed something about the group." Whether it's negative or positive is less important than "the fact that it's been noticed" and by extension that the student has been recognised as an individual. Although it is worth reflecting on the nature of students who tend to see the School Counsellor, the issue of independent recognition, or "being seen", is one that was also commented on by the Heads of Year in their approach to creating individual relationships with the students in their year groups.

The interview with the School Counsellor provided a more nuanced exploration into the distinction between recognition and praise. She defined recognition as being "seen" by a person or an institution, whereas she considered praise to be something that's "given in a more distant manner". This view was similar to the Heads of Year who thought personal recognition a sincerer form of relating to the individuals in the year group. Just as

Amemiya & Wang (2018) see praise as potentially backfiring, the Counsellor stated: "I was even thinking about if you give lots of praise is that saying why aren't you achieving?"

The distinction between praise and recognition is important as, at the heart of the Counsellor's responses, was the emphasis she placed on the psychodynamic development of the individual in mid-adolescence. Similar to Colman (2011), she drew attention to the transitional nature of being a Year 10 student and how this "time of struggle" between individual desires and the emergence of an adult identity means there is intense "reflection around their own thinking and desires." Because of this time of struggle, it becomes more evident why praise on a whole school level could be seen as being superfluous or superficial by the student. This provided me with a rich area to pursue in the group discussions in Phase 2, namely the relevance of public praise systems to the students' individual values and "struggles".

The Friend Filter

Unsurprisingly, the role of the peer group and reputation management (Watling 2019) was a feature picked up by the Heads of Year, counsellor and (inadvertently) by the students. An interesting aspect was the way in which it was commented on. Whereas the Heads of Year were motivated by wanting to avoid the embarrassment of speaking in front of the peer group, the counsellor went further, suggesting that "the peer group decides who gets the praise." She thought that praise could weaken students socially since it would threaten their standing within a group and could potentially risk social exclusion. These views seem to support my adopted model of Bronfenbrenner's ecological system (1979) with the emphasis on the boundaries between peer group,

school and family. Although the students didn't explicitly write about their peers in their responses, an interesting, if unintended consequence of the method of distributing the surveys in form time, was the evidence of shared work on the surveys. Of the 114 returned surveys, 24 had similar answers to another survey in the written section, some verbatim. It seems that the peer group influenced the responses despite the desire for this to be an individual survey.

Can a system for public praise actually work?

The Heads of Year raised the question of whether an organised system of public praise would, or could, be successful with mid-adolescents. Based on their experience they were unclear how it would be received by the students. This view was supported in the year group survey by the students' clear preference for private (64%) over public (36%) praise. This reinforced the importance of working with the students themselves in developing an age appropriate system.

When I asked the counsellor whether she thought a system of praise and recognition ran counter to the point of adolescent development she responded in the following way:

> *I think we can still have it, but I wonder the way praise is expressed. Could that be thought about differently? Something that makes it into smaller groups and at different points…something which categorises different struggles in different areas.*

This comment enabled me to begin to consider how any system would need to be flexible enough to respond to individual and group needs within the Year, rather than being an attempt to find an age-equivalent version of the merit system used with Years 7 and 8.

These conclusions reinforced the need to work with the students more closely and to gain a more nuanced understanding of how praise and recognition interact with the peer group. They also suggested how difficult developing any system with public praise might be, especially given the way in which praise and recognition seemed have an important existential dimension. Given these initial findings, I decided to use Phase 2 to probe further the student experience so as to develop a system which would reflect the students' preferences and perception, and potentially be a system which could act as a "social mirror, as it were validat[ing] the self" (Harter, 1990, p.368).

Phase 2: Exploring experience

In this next stage of my action research, I conducted three semi-structured group interviews (Appendix C) with three different groups of friends in Year 10. As explained previously, the purpose was to engage not only with the individual Year 10 experience, but also to see how it might be mediated through friends' responses and compared across different friendship groups. In order to establish the connectedness with friends, family and school, and to provide me with a rough measure of connectedness with the school, each group completed the adapted Self in a Social Context Social Connectedness Scale (Appendix D).

The aim of these interviews with the three groups of five students was to establish their involvement in developing an age appropriate system, to explore their views regarding public praise and recognition and to deepen my understanding of the responses from the Heads of Year, Counsellor and year group survey. The interviews enabled me to elicit a more in-depth student perspective on my first two research questions:

- What constitutes public praise in our school?
- What value do Year 10 students attribute to praise outside the classroom?

In an attempt to counteract my own prejudices and beliefs, I analysed the transcripts using an approach employed by Hamilton (2002). Firstly, I recorded my initial impressions from the recordings, then spent time closely looking at the transcripts and finally organised my findings into categories relating to my research questions. I focused on the words and phrases used by the interviewees to guide my interpretation.

The connectedness scale (SSC-SC; Appendix D) gave an initial impression of how connected to the school the students considered themselves to be. Across the three groups of friends, one group (Group A) was less connected, one very connected (Group B) and one a mixture of students who were highly connected and only partially connected to the school (Group C). Despite the variation in perceived in levels of connectedness, there was a striking degree of congruency in the answers from the students within each of the groups.

All three groups of students found the concept of public praise a difficult one to articulate. Each of the recordings highlighted long pauses in the think time for the groups when asked to identify instances of public praise. The most common understanding of public praise linked to the recognition of sporting achievements or attendance. Public praise was seen as something that happened in the daily assemblies, but rarely elsewhere. The general agreement, as expressed in the extract from Group C (below), was that this level of public attention was extremely embarrassing, both on a personal and social level:

> Student A: *I don't really like my name being called out in assembly.*
> Student B: *I'd have like a heart attack.*

Student A: *Because I'm like… it's my name. I feel like I'm going to get into trouble. I feel like I've done something wrong.*
Student C: *If they're like you did great, then people look at you like…*
Student B: *Try hard. That word.*
Students A and C [together]: *Oh, it's so annoying.*

This exchange is helpful in illustrating the intersection and incongruence (Phelan et al., 1988) of the inner world of the adolescent with the worlds of the peer group and the social norms of the school. The exchange lays bare the conflicts at the borders between the individual, the peer group and the dominant discourse within the school. There are micro-tensions relating to identity ("Because I'm like…it's my name.") and the peer group ("then people look at you") in relation to the school's procedure for praising and identifying students publicly.

An additional feature of the group discussion was the way in which individuals adapted their responses in the light of one another. I did not see this as necessarily being a drawback with using focus groups (as expressed for example by Litosseliti, 2003; Morgan, 1997; Groundwater et al., 2015) since I was interested in the influence of the peer group on individual responses. As shown in the exchange above and the example below from Group A, there was a negotiation of meaning and agreement by the friends during the conversations:

Student E: *Maybe individual recognition.*
Student F: *No!*
Student E: *Like with no one around you.*
Student F and G [together]: *Yeah!*

In addition, similar to the first example, this interaction draws attention to the pressure of the peer group presence when individual praise is given. All groups felt that they were being "judged" (one group actually using that word) by their peer group which outweighed any praise being given.

Interestingly two groups (Group C and B) suggested that recognition for achievements was something that could be managed by the peer group, to the exclusion of the school systems:

> Student B: *Having a secure bunch of friends is almost better than having praise in a way because if you've got a secure bunch of friends, they will give you the praise themselves.*

This comment was echoed by a student from Group B:

> Student H: *I feel like in school, friends and groups of friends is the most important thing.*

Although these comments confirm the importance of acceptance and popularity amongst peers (Coleman, 2011), they clearly problematize the nature of this study, since they suggest that the students do not want any form of public praise because of the threat that it poses to friendships, perception by others in the wider peer group and sense of self.

However, as well as expressing typical mid-adolescent fears about ego representation (Watling, 2019), the interviews also drew attention to more positive factors. For example, the fact that the students saw public praise as only happening in assemblies, suggested that they might be open to other forms of public praise, done on a smaller scale. Equally, the students' discussion about what didn't work, for example, the use of merits beyond Years 7 and 8 led to debate as to what might work. The students began to synthesize their expressed desire to have *"*some sort of acknowledgement*"* (Student I) with an acceptable form of recognition and reward. The students in Group A (who were the least connected by the SSC-SC) even began creating a system which would be valued and, to a degree, envied by others:

> Student J: *Give us food, yeah.*
> Student F: *Something we can have.*

Student E: *What's that thing they've got in* [names another school]? *When you like get so many points and cash in rewards. So that matters more than other stuff.*
Student K: *Yeah, 100%*
Student F: *'Cos no one's taking the mick out of you because you've got all the cash at the end.*

Despite the students' clear dissatisfaction with the current system, this exchange hinted at a desire to design something better. Crucially, it also suggested that praise and recognition are linked to reward in the students' minds. Receiving something tangible seemed important for the students in terms of positive acceptance in front of the peer group and the reduction of embarrassment. This directly challenged the existing practice at the school as expressed in the Praise Policy which had traditionally, and still, separated rewards from praise.

These first sets of semi-structured interviews were useful in confirming the lack of congruence between the current system and the students' perceived needs. In order to put something in place which would satisfy the students' needs, I hoped that my quasi-participatory approach would increase the students' agency. At the same time, a degree of collaboration with the teachers and Year 10 team would also be necessary to bring these two perspectives together.

Phase 3: Creating Agency and Co-construction

Phase 3 consisted of activities designed to maximise collaboration and co-construction.

Student co-construction

The aim of this part of my research was to apply the principles of participatory research by co-designing the system with the students. Given the students' perceptions regarding

the self and the peer group obtained from Phase 2, this next step was essential in ensuring that my research wasn't merely an elaborate form of tokenism (Hart, 1997), and that it not only reflected the students' voices, but also provided them with agency.

By creating a simple 'WHAT, WHY, WHO and HOW' grid, I hoped that this "potentiating architecture" (Edwards, 2014, p.20) would enable them to explore my third research question:

- How can public praise be used meaningfully with Year 10 students?

The grid below summarises the answers from all three groups (the originals are scanned and included in Appendix E).

WHAT (the type of recognition) *Group A*: Something of value: e.g. food, credits for the restaurant system, full day inter-form sport, non-uniform days. *Group B*: A privilege: e.g. food, or treats, leniency for misdemeanours; contact home. *Group C*: A privilege: e.g. use of phone in dedicated area, food or free meal; contact home.	**WHY** (the reason for the recognition) *Group A*: Good behaviour, consistency over two weeks, recognition of good performance with homework and attendance, progress, Attitude to Learning scores. *Group B*: Positive behaviour: e.g. involvement in class, improvement in behaviour and attitude; academic progress. *Group C*: Good grades; positive behaviour
WHO (gives the recognition) *Group A*: Head of Year, Deputy Head, Headteacher [just like when you do something bad]. *Group B*: Head of Department, Head of Year, Head of Behaviour, Headteacher. *Group C*: Dependent on how big the reward is.	**HOW** (the recognition is given) *Group A*: Contact home, one-to-one, small meetings in lesson time. *Group B*: Individual, not public: e.g. taken out of lessons, email home, reward at the end of assembly. *Group C*: Individual, not public. Avoid any forms of embarrassment.

The type of recognition (What) suggested by all three groups indicated similarities in their thinking, despite the different nature of the groups. Rather than identifying just a monetary reward, each group suggested something related to food (e.g. food credits or a free meal). Crucially, this was allied to the idea that it needed to be something of value, or be seen as a privilege. There was some discussion about whether all students would value food or not, or whether this would only be seen as a privilege by some. This is reminiscent of the Counsellor's comment that a system which would effectively relate to the developmental struggles might be better if it were "something that makes it into smaller groups and at different points."

The differences between the groups' thinking began to emerge when they looked at a valid reason for the recognition (Why). These responses reflected the preoccupations of the differing friendship groups and their relationship with the school. For example, Group A which comprised students who were least connected to the school and most likely to be associated with negative behaviour in the classroom, emphasised wanting to be seen doing good things, but also were wary of any system being set up which would only reward the "good kids" (Student J). They recognised that they would be less likely to benefit from a system which was purely designed on behaviour and, instead, wanted a system which would recognise consistency over two weeks. This focus on improvement was also emphasized by Group B. Group C, the group least likely to associated with negative behaviour, were most allied to the traditional teacher position of giving rewards for good grades and good behaviour. These differences drew attention to a relatively common issue in schools: whether to recognise sustained good behaviour, or recognise improvements. What came to light through the discussion was the clarity with which the students saw this distinction too.

Despite the different examples given of potential privileges, all three groups wanted something of value, something worth having. Broadly speaking, they all thought that the reward should be given as a result of improvements *and* positive behaviour, although emphasized different things, depending what was valued most by the group. The groups were unanimous in wanting the recognition to be in private, an interesting dilemma given the intention behind this research to develop a system of public praise and recognition.

Collaboration with Head of Year and form tutors

Acknowledging the role of the Head of Year and form tutors as partial gatekeepers of whichever system would eventually be put forward, I deliberately met with the year group team before the final decision by the students. I presented them with the summary of the students' ideas along with an anonymised summary of the feedback from the first semi-structured group interviews. I also shared my working hypotheses at this point which I summarised accordingly:

1. *Recognising and considering the importance of mid-adolescent preoccupations with ego management and the social nature of praise will enable us to develop a more meaningful reward system;*
2. *Involving students in the design of the system will more likely lead to the production of a system which is of value and worth, as well as enhancing student agency.*

The Year team were broadly supportive of the approaches being taken, but it proved hard to generate a meaningful discussion because of the semi-formal nature of tutor group meetings. The Head of Year, however, was much more engaged, perhaps due to the fact that he had been involved in the initial semi-structured interview and because he could see an advantage for his year group. For example, he was markedly more positive about the students' idea that a reward could be 'phone time'. It was the form tutors, perhaps

indicative of their power relationship within school, who counselled against this. The discussion was positive, but polite. Despite my efforts to the contrary, it is perhaps inevitable that my role in school would have affected the tutors' responses (Eilertson et al., 2008). Additionally, although unlikely to have disagreed in a meeting, the tutors may well have later disengaged from the approach or actively undermined the system if they disagreed with the students being given additional rewards or recognition. Furthermore, even though the tutor team only comprises five teachers, expression of enthusiasm for a system of any sort indicated that whatever system the students created, there would be an additional challenge in teacher engagement across all subjects. This aspect of the collaboration with the team proved to be a helpful reflection point later on.

Student Co-creation

Following the general agreement from the Year 10 team and the School Leadership Team, all the students were brought together so that they could decide on a final reward system. In framing the conversation, I consciously applied Hart's (1997) Ladder of Participation, pitching the discussion as an adult initiated, yet shared process with the students. It would be disingenuous, however, to suggest that the students had focused on the need for a system of public praise – this was, in reality, an institutional motive, driven by me in the role of Headteacher. However, the way in which the process was to be shared and the "choices" (Hart, p.12) promoted by the students raised this discussion to the level of co-creation.

An example of how the students were free to reject proposals put forward by the adults was the emphatic rejection of an idea by one member of the Leadership Team that a reward could be a queue jumping pass:

> Student B: *Some people would like it and others wouldn't and would think it's like…oh, I don't really care about that.*
> Student K: *I don't really like the skipping the queue idea. If someone skipped the queue, I'd be annoyed.*

An early idea was that of having a breakfast instead of attending assembly:

> Student F: *Or you get a free breakfast in the boardroom*
> [General chatter in response to this idea]
> Student L: *What if you skip assembly? I'd personally behave for that.*

As well as enthusiastically embracing this idea, there were some students who tried to consider it from the school perspective. One even said, "The school might lose profit for breakfast." Other questions related to the buy-in from the teachers:

> Student D: *How would you get all the teachers on board. Some teachers wouldn't do it.*
> Student A: *What about the power? So, to make it work, let Mr [Head of Year] know. He's scary. Everyone will listen to him.*

Although broadly in favour, the students questioned the practical process and raised issues such as:

> Student B: *What if you don't want the breakfast?*
> Student A: *I wouldn't like the breakfast idea because it would always come down to the same people. They'll pick the same people every day and it won't really be effective because no one will change or improve.*
> Student K: *I like the breakfast idea, but I'm not really sure how the points system works to get it.*
> Student L: *I'm not sure if the points will work as it's the same as merits. Some teachers will give loads out and some won't give any. It won't be fair. But I like the idea of breakfast.*
> Student K: *If it's over a period of time then people just forget about it and then go back to how it normally is.*

Although the group agreed to a trial period, they raised questions relating to the exact involvement of friends; the potential unfairness of the system if some teachers didn't take part; whether everyone would be motivated; and the issue of keeping the system at the forefront of students' minds. It was therefore agreed that the system would run for a trial period. Every two weeks, the school would rank the students who had 100% attendance, no behaviour or homework concerns and the most merits to be invited to breakfast.

Phase 4: Evaluation

The first trial period lasted six weeks (from mid February to the end of March), with students who had been ranked the highest each fortnight attending the reward breakfasts. The system was refined after informal feedback from the students (i.e. reducing the number of participants to create more of a sense of privilege). However, the main changes were made following evaluation from the student focus groups (Appendix F) which were then further reviewed against a final year group survey.

Student Evaluation

Although expressed with different degrees of tact, there was a clear message from all three focus groups that the breakfast had not been well received. One student expressed the failure of the pilot accordingly:

> *"But I feel like people don't really want to have breakfast with teachers and stuff if they're by themselves."*

The overarching reason why the breakfast was seen as being so negative related to the strong sense that it wasn't reward enough. The students felt isolated from their friends and awkward spending time with teachers. Two groups even indicated that it was a disincentive and that it meant that students actively declined merits when given them by teachers. One exchange in particular encapsulated this view:

> Student E: *I feel that people being told that if they have a merit they have to go and have breakfast with the Head of Year they feel a little bit like I can't really relax and be myself, but I feel like if you're with your mates and playing music and messing about with your mates…*
> Student F: *You're in a more comfortable environment.*
> Student E: *Yeah. More separately.*

The exchange emphasizes the distinction between the institution and the individual through the contrast of having "to go and have breakfast" with wanting to "be myself". This accords with Hedegaard's view (2001, p.24) that "From the institutional perspective, motives are seen as object motives, or objectives that build on institutional values and purposes. From the child's perspective, motives reflect the child's social situation of development, which also implies the child's social position in the institutional practice."

What became clear through the analysis of the focus group evaluations was that the students did not associate their own "social situation" and the needs of their friendship groups with the system that was being trialled. They were critical of the system for not reflecting their needs:

> Student A: *It's because people are by themselves. [Student] didn't have any friends there, so he didn't want to come.*

Holland et al.'s (1998) concept of "positional identity" seems relevant here since, connected with the rejection of the reward, was a sense of not being comfortable, or being oneself. One student said, "I can't really relax and be myself", with others

expressing this incongruence by employing the same sense of mockery which they said had become part of the peer group discussion:

> Student F: *People who see it, who don't have it, they see it as a joke kind of 'cos you're going to breakfast on your own.*
>
> Student M*: If you go there, you're seen as a 'try hard'.*
> Student K: *It must be the same people every time.*
> Student M: *It doesn't make me want to do it.*

Interestingly, in order to cope with the awkwardness of having been involved in the creation of the system, some students sought to disown their connection to it. The students' peers had made them feel uneasy about their association with something which seemed to be a source of derision and therefore some denied their original involvement in its inception.

This feedback was also reflected in an email from one of the Year 10 tutor team. As a form tutor, she was in the privileged position of observing her tutees' responses and also was a triangulation point for the focus group students' feedback:

> *I've heard feedback from some as:*
>
> *'I really don't want to go.'*
> *I watched one of them put their head into their hands when their name was read out in assembly.*
> *I've also heard some being teased by other members of the year group about it.*
>
> *I have not, as yet, heard any positive feedback.*

These reflections reinforced the group awkwardness experienced during public announcements. It also prompted me to consider the importance of maintaining good information to the staff in the school and not assuming that there was understanding, or necessarily acceptance, of my approach to this research. In a longer study it would be interesting to review the impact of staff engagement on any adolescent reward systems.

I found it surprising, therefore, despite these very negative comments, that all three focus groups still wanted to come up with something which worked. It could be that they enjoyed the process of co-creation, a version of "being seen", even if they then assumed a different relation with the praise and recognition system when away from the focus groups. The students seemed at ease with adopting two contrasting identities, something which is not an uncommon feature of adolescence Harter (1999).

Group C proposed extending the privileges connected to the system ("If everything was put into it…it would be immense.") by giving students breakfast instead of assembly and allowing them to use their mobile phones and, perhaps most significantly, inviting a friend to join. The suggestion of involving a friend signalled a significant move to recognising the needs and acceptance of the peer group, and a move to the form of public praise being friend-focused, rather than school-led.

These new ideas raise some interesting questions. Certainly reviewing the effectiveness of the system from the students' perspective brought in the possibility of perfecting the system so that it was more acceptable to the wider year group. This approach was in tune with Hart's (1997) emphasis on participation being seen as an authentic process, rather than a tokenistic one. A second, more problematic aspect, however, also presented itself. During the conversation in each of the focus groups, the attitude to the system of recognition changed. Each began by highlighting why the system wasn't working, with one student even stating, "I think it's already lost." Later on in the conversation, as the students started to consider improvements, the mood changed and the students became more optimistic. This raises the question of whether the students might agree to aspects

when speaking with the Headteacher, but then reject the ideas when faced by the everyday discourses of their peer groups.

In preparing for this phase of evaluation, I arranged a meeting with Dr Dawn Watling (Royal Holloway University) whose work on adolescent reputation management I had found helpful in establishing the focus of my research. In our discussion of the impact of the trial up to this point, she questioned whether my aim might may well prove to be illusory since the peer group would find ways of subverting the threat of public praise each time the system was refined by the focus groups. Not only would this mean that I would have to question the premise that a stage-environment fit (Eccles & Roeser, 2003) for public praise was possible, but also it would cast doubt on the efficacy of participatory research in this area. As well as making the students' suggested changes to the system, one way to test out Dr Watling's view was to survey the year group in order to have a greater sense of their attitudes.

The counterbalance to this note of caution was the way in which the students seemed to take pride in having been consulted, even if the idea wasn't necessarily seen as a success. One student talked about being "responsible enough to have my ideas recognised" and another said, "And people will see that you've noticed us." This language was similar to a comments made by the Heads of Year and School Counsellor recorded in Phase 1 of the research. The Heads of Year talked about the importance of "being seen" and the Counsellor was less interested in whether the work was positive or negative, but more that it communicated something important to the students about "being noticed". This was another reason to widen the evaluation to the whole year group so that they could have a chance to act "as mediators of their own experience" (Phelan et al., 1998, p.208).

As a result of this feedback, some changes were made which are summarised in the diagram to the right. This was jokingly referred to as the Four F model due the alliterative connection between all four privileges. The incorporation of friends as part of the reward was considered to be the most important change, along with moving the breakfast to a less formal setting.

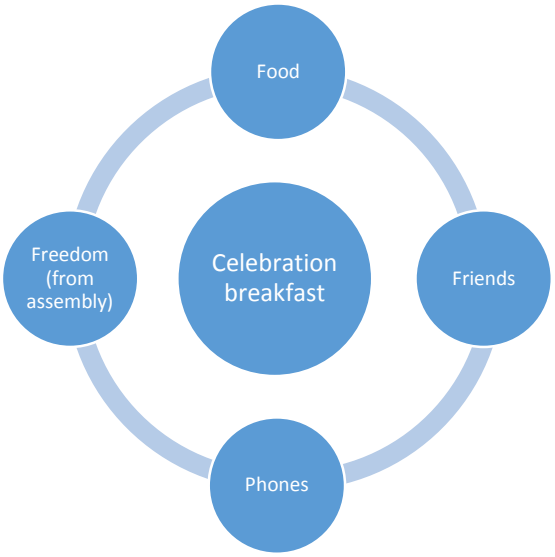


Figure 7: The 'four' F model of public praise and recognition.

Year group survey

A month later, at the start of a PSHE lesson in June, students (n=120) completed a survey (Appendix G). The survey was divided into two sections, the first a quantitative measure, the second qualitative, providing the opportunity for longer answers.

The first section indicated that students mostly (64%) thought that it was important to have a system to recognise achievements. A significant proportion, however, still did not (36%). In terms of the four 'privileges' being offered through the reward system that the students had co-designed, the biggest privilege was being able to spend time with friends (ticked by 75% of the students), followed by free phone time (70%), freedom from assembly (67%) and lastly free food (62%). The strong emphasis on friends further confirmed their importance as suggested through the literature review (Juvenon & Murdock, 1995; Sebastian et al., 2008) and my initial error in inviting just the students who were to receive a free breakfast. On reflection, and rather unsurprisingly, a free breakfast *without your friends*, was not a reward worth having.

A striking feature from the survey was the apparent ambivalence of the students towards what the recognition system was trying to achieve. Of the 120 students who took part in the survey, 22 (18%) thought that having a celebration breakfast could work; 42 (35%) did not think it could; and 56 (47%) indicated only that it *might* work. The answers provided by the open-ended questions provided some helpful feedback to understand the reasons behind these responses.

The most common aspects which were identified as being positive were (in order of frequency): the privileges themselves; the way that the system acted as an incentive; the sense that the system acknowledges the positive aspects of the year group; and the chance to invite friends. This feedback confirmed the need for the activity to be seen as valuable and an affirmation of year group identity, and by extension the connection with the school institution as a whole. The negative aspects (in order of frequency) were: not wanting to have any teachers present, especially the Headteacher; the awkwardness of the situation; and not wanting to have names read out in assembly. Therefore, despite the positives, it is clear that for the system to work, the social awkwardness of the situation and the embarrassment and potential threat (Watling, 2019) of being singled out for recognition, needed to be reduced further. Two short comments from the students sum up, in the language of the mid-adolescent, the progress that the system had made:

It's a step in the right direction

But…

Get rid of the teachers!

The next question on the survey asked for suggestions for improvements. Although covering a wide range of ideas (from changing the reward to removing the teachers), the suggestions made by the Year 10 students all shared the same features. The students reiterated the desire for the breakfast to be more student-led and for it to be less publicly highlighted. Very similar to the findings in the initial survey, the ultimate conclusion from the students was for the public recognition to be expressed in a private and informal way. Through the power and impact of the peer group and by piloting the system, the students had re-negotiated the concept of public praise into a private space.

The students who had attended a breakfast were broadly positive (75%), with the important comment from one student that "It [had] become more comfortable as it changed to people having friends."

Chapter 5: Conclusion and recommendations

Reflection on methodological approaches

In presenting my research to peers on the MSc and at the conference at Royal Holloway University, I used the following schematic to indicate the steps taken:



The neatness of this flow diagram does not, however, reflect the bumps and false starts that I experienced along the way. Despite broadly reflecting the process, one significant element of this research was what I would refer to as its 'messiness'. This view is echoed by Smyth & Shacklock (1998) in their work on the 'cleansing' of action research. For example, I had to take decisions such as deciding on the number of students who would receive a breakfast and, most significantly, I needed to trial the breakfast idea before the focus groups were completely clear about the decision. As a result, I believe that I risked disenfranchising the students, despite this being entirely contrary to my intention. Arguably, the impact of this was seen in the resistance shown towards the system when friends were excluded from the celebration breakfast.

I also had to motivate the teachers to engage with the research at different points and its on-going success was dependent on the teachers giving merits to the students. I certainly would not have been able to do this as a researcher, as I needed to draw on my influence as Headteacher. I managed in part to bracket off my views in carrying out my research, but I do not think I was able to remove teacher and student perceptions of me as

Headteacher in the course of this research. One student summarised this by saying "we've always grown up seeing the Headteacher as the scary person in the school." I accept that this is a consequence of "studying in your own backyard" (Creswell, 2016, p.19).

In terms of the participatory research element, I had not considered the ways in which discussions would be affected retrospectively by the reactions from the wider year group. Ironically, the Friend Filter which I had identified in my research (Elkind, 1967; Gallagher, 2000), had a negative impact on the student involvement. In the focus group evaluations, some students denied saying things, or agreeing to things, due to a clear desire to protect their ego from criticism of the peer group (Watling, 2019). This added a complicating dimension to the research giving it a *'two steps forward, one step back'* feel. As a result, in order to meet deadlines, I had to take a more active role which, it could be argued, reduced the authenticity of the student voice in the co-creation of the system.

Although it is, therefore, hard to say how representative the student involvement was of the final decisions, the one aspect that I emphasized throughout was the need to go back to the students to review effectiveness and to make changes as a result. Without this approach, I do not think that the incorporation of friends and latterly the removal of myself from the breakfasts would have happened. At Royal Holloway University while discussing my research, I was told by a delegate about a Headteacher in a different school who was giving students hot chocolate as a reward. In the delegate's view this was not successful. Reflecting on my own research, I can see how the approaches I have taken, with the continuous emphasis on feedback from the students, has avoided the same ultimate outcome. Therefore, although problematic, I consider that taking a participatory

approach was an appropriate way to carry out this research given the age-specific challenges presented by working with mid-adolescents.

An aspect which I had not expected to emerge was the way in which adults in the school would perceive the value (and even question the need) of recognising the achievements of the students. Due to differing views regarding the year group, varied understanding of student voice work, and even the idea of rewards, there was a perceived reluctance amongst some adults in supporting the system for recognition. Whether intentional or not, I believe that there is more work to be done in our school in engaging the adults in systems which recognise positives.

I did not have to make any significant ethical decisions during the course of the research, although did have a conversation with a parent who openly criticised one of the students in a focus group. Her opinion of the student was extremely negative. Balancing my response as a researcher and as Headteacher was difficult. Due to increasing behavioural issues, the student did not ultimately take part in the research, but I wonder what the impact of his involvement might have been. I have to acknowledge that a part of me wanted the parent to see some of the positives in involving the most badly behaved students.

Limitation

One limitation which emerged through the research was the way in which I wanted to measure social connectedness. Using the adapted scale (Appendix D) based on the work of Carroll et al. (2017), I wanted to consider the impact of the participatory research on

social connectedness with school by using a version of The Hemmingway Measure of Adolescent Connectedness (Karcher, 2001). This proved to be an unhelpful tool and did not provide enough data to suggest a perceivable pattern between the student involvement in the focus groups and increased connectedness. I now think that this model would need to be used over a longer period of time, with a clear system for analysing the links between the four areas of home, friends, school and community. My investigation into this did, however, lead me to consider the usefulness of Bronfenbrenner's ecosystem (1979) to understand the relationship between three of these areas: home, school and friends.

The usefulness of using Bronfenbrenner's model

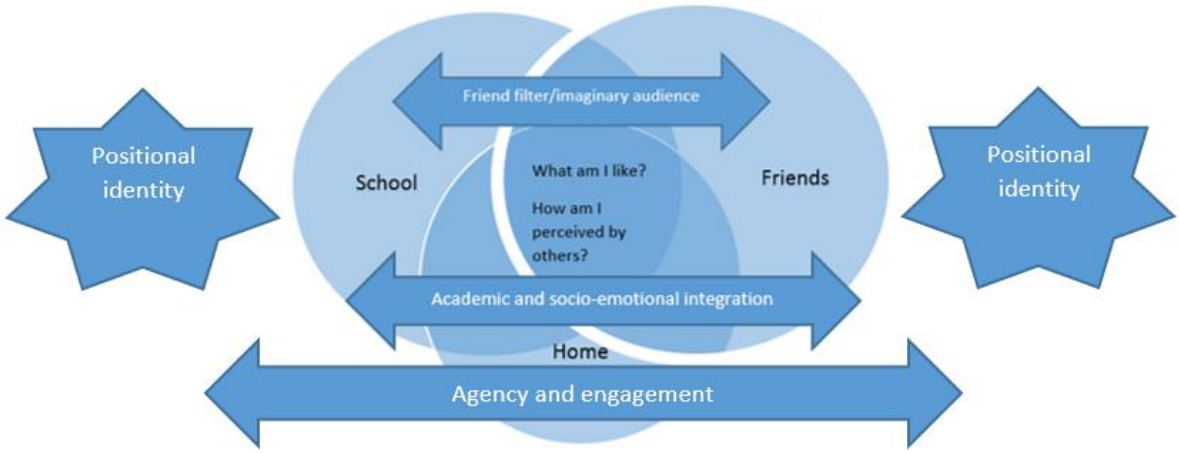


Figure 6: Integrating self-concept, agency and environment into Bronfenbrenner's (1979) micro- and mesosystems

To summarise the factors discussed in the literature review, the model adapted from Bronfenbrenner's work on ecosystems (1979), helped to emphasize the key findings from this research: the importance of relations (between the individual, their friends, teachers, school) and the questions being raised as part of the individual's identity development. It

provided a clear means of combining these with Holland et al.'s work (1998) on "positional identity" which proved to be a central part of the research as shown in the push and pull between the two major zones of influence: school and the friendship group.

Further work could be carried out on the extent to which the positional identity, as defined by the students' own values (and those of friends), overlaps with the norms of the school. Group C, which was more connected with the school and community showed a closer integration of academic and socio-emotional factors (Group C) and, as a result the Friend Filter was more porous, rather than an obstruction which seemed to be the case with Group A. One, as yet, unexplored suggestion from a student in Group A was to have a range of rewards. This might lead to a more socially acceptable and nuanced way of ensuring student engagement through the system of recognition.

Another area for further investigation is the involvement of the home, particularly since some students in the focus groups indicated that a phone call or email home would be seen as a positive.

Returning to the three research questions

1. **What constitutes public praise in our school?**

Responses to this first question were gained through scrutiny of the Praise Policy, the views of the Heads of Year, the student survey and the first focus group discussions. The findings indicated clearly that there was a gap between the stated policy and practice. Students struggled to answer this question beyond mentioning sporting achievements praised in assembly and Heads of Year indicated a preference to private praise in Key

Stage 4. It became clear that this was not a question which the school had articulated its thinking on previously.

One message that the students repeatedly gave was having some sort of praise which could be given publicly, but with an awareness and intention to avoid embarrassing situations. The final system co-designed by the students, despite being a public celebration, was ultimately the most discreet version of what was originally designed.

2. What value do Year 10 students attribute to praise outside the classroom?

This proved to be an interesting question since inherent in it is the belief that the Year 10 student would, or should, attribute positive value to praise outside the classroom. It is not clear from this research that they do, in fact. For example, in the final survey results almost half (47%) of the students ticked the box 'Maybe' in response to the question whether the celebration breakfast might work. This suggests that, should the school wish to continue in this approach, then it needs to be clearer about the purpose and value of public praise. Hedegaard's (2001) observation of the difference between the institution and the individual's motives and values remains at the heart of how this question might be answered in the future:

> "From the institutional perspective, motives are seen as object motives, or objectives that build on institutional values and purposes. From the child's perspective, motives reflect the child's social situation of development, which also implies the child's social position in the institutional practice." (p.24)

Therefore, any value that the student might attribute to praise outside the classroom has to be seen through the student's social position and not through the institutional motives. It also needs to be endorsed by the peer group. The value attributed appears to be

entirely relational, a point that is reinforced by the use of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory of ecosystem, specifically the mesosystem.

3. How can public praise be used meaningfully with Year 10 students?

In answering this question, I have found it useful to reflect on my learning throughout this process. The final answer is not a single thing, such as "through having celebration breakfasts with friends and no teachers." It is more nuanced than that.

The key is what is meant by the word 'meaningfully'. If by this word, we mean "sincerely", like Henderlong & Lepper (2002), then we have to allow for maximum student agency, engagement and belief in the system. If by this word we mean that praise is more meaningfully aligned with the institutional motives, then we have to be more honest about the purposes for which we are encouraging public praise. Perhaps the answer to this question has to come through the 'how' rather than the 'what of the system, in a way that is reminiscent of Priestley et al.'s (2012) discussion of teacher agency. The active involvement of mid-adolescents is the only way that a school can achieve the agency aspired to by Coleman (2011), and the exhortation from Phelan et al. (1998) that we need to ask "students to tell us what affects their lives and their ability to connect with and engage in educational settings" (p. 208).

An obvious point is the distinction between the institution's belief (expressed in part through my role as Headteacher) as to what constitutes appropriate and valuable recognition, compared to that of the students. Their emphasis of wanting to get something that "matters more than other stuff" (semi-structured interviews, phase 2), recognises that the reward for the mid-adolescent is the yardstick by which the public praise and recognition is deemed acceptable or not. Done well, an appropriate reward

could be seen as a way of crossing the boundaries between family, school and peers (Phelan et al., 1998).

A question raised by a participant at the Royal Holloway Conference, reminded me that the origins of participatory research with children and young people can be found in The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990). Article 12 makes clear the right of the child to express their thoughts when matters affect them and for their views to be considered seriously (Groundwater et al., (2015). If public praise is to be used meaningfully with Year 10 students, then we need to ensure that students are actively involved and their preferences acted upon. Removing myself and other teachers from the breakfast was, I believe, a "symbolic measure" (Roeser & Lau, 2002) which reflected my willingness to respond to the students' views, but also indicative of the difficulty of doing this. In essence the students were challenging the entire premise that praise and recognition should have a public dimension at all in Year 10.

Overarching research aim

I believe that, through a systematic research enquiry, I have been able to increase knowledge of how best to develop a system of public praise with Year 10 students. Recognising the central paradox that this can only be created by acknowledging the controlling nature of the Friend Filter, I believe that if schools are willing to engage with the students themselves, they can establish a system which is seen as authentic and meaningful. The clear message from the students is that a link needs to exist between Praise and Reward in any such system; and, secondly, that the public aspect is an institutionally-driven motive, rather than one supported by the students: the final system

was an attempt to balance the public and the personal with the withdrawal of the teachers. The contrast between Eccles & Roeser's (2003) school-created "mediating…practices" and Phelan et al.'s (1998) emphasis on students "as mediators of their own experiences" illustrates the push-and-pull of institutional and student motives.

In addition, when reviewing my work at our school CPD meeting, the fact that several teachers asked whether the breakfast would be used lower down the school makes me also think that there is a gap in teacher knowledge regarding adolescent development. In order to develop appropriate systems of praise and recognition, we need more teacher training in understanding the differing phases and needs in adolescence.

In summary, the main findings from this research are: the acknowledgement that there is always likely to be a mismatch between school values and norms and adolescent needs; the need for peer group approval whatever system is in use; the need for the sense of privilege associated with the system for recognition to outweigh the sense of embarrassment felt through the perceived gaze of the peer group; the need to ensure that genuine student voice (both individual and group) is part of teachers and school leaders' considerations when working with mid-adolescents; and further to this, the recognition that teacher knowledge of adolescent developmental phases is potentially underdeveloped.

Recommendations for professional practice and future research

One problematic feature is the resource intensive nature and sustainability of this research. If a participatory approach provides an opportunity for student voice and

agency, how then can this model be sustained over time? As soon as it is established and accepted by the students (assuming it is), the year group moves on and a new Year 10 begins their journey through mid-adolescence.

As much as co-designed systems can be "symbolic measures" (Roeser & Lau, 2002), it seems more sustainable to consider how to work on the culture of praise in the school. The comment by the school counsellor that students want to be "seen" or "noticed" sets an interesting challenge for schools to understand better how to do this. I believe that the values and vision agreed by staff, the explicit conversations as to what this means and the involvement of students, be they early, mid or late adolescents, would go some way to achieving this aim.

And finally

What might the boy in Year 10 say about this action research and the conclusions drawn from it? He is, of course, no longer in Year 10, and so no longer thinks as a Year 10 student (if such a generalisation is possible). However, my final thought is one of gratitude and humility as a school leader. What, I wonder, would have happened if I hadn't listened to him and not taken seriously his reservations about public praise in the form of Prize Giving? I would like to thank him for sparking an idea that has given me, and the whole school community, a chance to create a better environment to meet the complex and competing needs of mid-adolescents.

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Appendix A – **Student survey breakdown with themed analysis (Phase 1)**

Ways of recognising achievements	**Experienced in the past six months**	**Has value**	**Makes no difference**	***Post analysis (impact rating)****	***Post analysis notes***
Merits	36	2	59	*3%*	*Most negative and 2nd most experienced*
1-1 praise by your teacher (spoken or written)	38	36	22	*62%*	*Most positive and most experienced*
Your work being read out in class	20	10	50	*17%*	*2nd most negative*
Your work being displayed in the classroom or corridors	12	17	42	*29%*	
A phone call home	3	31	32	*50%*	*3rd most positive*
Written contact home	2	28	34	*45%*	
Private praise from Head of Year	7	33	31	*52%*	*2nd most positive*
Public praise from Head of year	11	28	33	*46%*	*Positivity drops with public factor*
Private praise from the Headteacher	2	30	31	*49%*	
Public praise from the Headteacher	5	24	38	*39%*	*Even more noticeable drop with public factor*
Public praise, for example in assembly	5	19	44	*30%*	
Public praise in the school magazine	3	21	40	*34%*	

* calculated as a percentage of the positive impact (column 3) divided by the number of students who had experienced this type of achievement recognition.

1. **Think of a time when you were praised or rewarded for something. How did it encourage you to try harder / do better? Try to give a specific example.**

   Positive and/or constructive response: 45
   Negative and/or critical response: 17

   Positive Themes:

   Verbal, specific praise (11 examples): *"In RS I said something and Miss said meet me after class to say how good it was and then I started trying harder to listen/contribute to lessons."*

   "I think that when teachers say 'Well done, that was a really great bit of work' then it makes you want to keep on having that comment so you try harder to keep your work at a high standard."

   Actual rewards –e.g. chocolates, merits (8): *"In Science with Mr S I got 10/10 and got a chocolate. It made me work harder and look forward to rewards like this in the future."*

   Opportunity to improve (6): *"In Maths I did more of the questions that was set for homework."*

   "History, I struggle with the exam style questions; comments about the fact that I am improving is encouraging."

   Praise in PE and/or involvement in team sport (6): *"Mr M praised me because of my badminton skills, and then I got in the badminton team and so I worked harder so he didn't want to regret his decision of giving me the opportunity."*

   Boost in self-esteem (7): *"Makes you feel good when you do well"*

   Good grades (3): *The only encouragement is a good grade. That's encouraging as it makes you revise more."*

   Parents being involved (2): *"My mum found out, thought it was good and that is encouraging to work harder and to make her happy."*

   Work being praised and displayed (1): *"When my work was praised and displayed on the wall by Mr B in Photography."*

   A common theme in these answers was the naming of a specific teacher which further emphasizes **the importance of the student-teacher relationship** which may explain the 62% score given to category of 1-1 praise in question 1.

   Negative Themes:

   Doesn't make a difference (11): *"When I get praise it doesn't really motivate me."*

   "Nothing changes me!"

"I try to do my best in all my subjects anyway so it doesn't make a difference."

Haven't been praised in Year 10 (3)

Idiosyncratic, one-off responses (3): *"Not much because I don't do much good." / "I was given a merit and it made me want to do worse so I asked for it to be removed." / "They always make me feel like they are being patronising or sarcastic when they have praised me which makes me feel like the praise if worthless and meaningless."*

Students who responded negatively to this question all indicated that no praise makes any difference on the previous tick list question.

2. **If you were to design a praise/reward system for our school what would motivate you? Do you have any suggestions?**

Food/rewards: 17
Merits as currency: 15
No change: 11
Trip/treat/extracurricular activity: 4
Reduce homework: 4
Praise students more often: 3
Solo responses: more frequent reporting; reduce other punishments; achievements every Friday in assembly
Suggested improvements to merit system: tally them up; use them more and not with any discrimination; link more explicitly to rewards

3. **Would you make the system public or private? Why?**

Public: 20; **Private**: 35; Not sure/don't know: 7; for the individual to decide: 2

The students who opted for 'private' often cited the threat of embarrassment as a key factor.

4. **Would you make it informal or formal? Why?**

Informal: 37 (with the majority of this number – 28 – being the students who put private in the previous question); Formal: 13; Not sure/don't know: 11; Both dependent on the situation: 3

Note: In reading these responses, I have some concerns that some students were unclear about the meaning of the word formal.

5. **Would you want any adults to be made aware of how you'd done? Which ones and why?**

Parents: 27; Form tutors/Head of Year/Headteacher: 10; No one: 28; whole school: 1

6. **Do you have any examples when you have been praised or rewarded that have led to you being more motivated to work harder and to believe that you can do better?**

   Two thirds of the boys declined to answer this question, or referred back to question 1. 21 boys wrote an answer which fell into one of the following categories, with individual responses written out in full below:

   Good grades: 7
   Personal acknowledgement by teacher: 3
   Sporting achievement: 2
   Parental rewards: 2
   Personalised feedback: 2
   "I got praised for doing lots of clubs and it made me want to continue."
   "Being told I was a good reader making me want to read a bit more."
   "For me praise is just knowing that your [sic] doing the right things."
   "Getting merits because you feel determined in your lessons."
   "Generally I think that praise is redundant it doesn't make me work harder."

Appendix B **– Gaining informed consent (Phase 2)**

I am carrying out research into the best ways to recognise Year 10's achievements and would like to invite you to take part.

I am interested in how you view public praise (from your Head of Year or members of the School Leadership Team) and what impact this has on you. I would like to work with three groups of friends in Year 10 to find out ways in which we can improve praise and recognition in ways which you consider are meaningful.

You will be required to attend 3 discussion group meetings, each approximately half hour in length and be prepared to come up with ideas and trial suggestions.

Our discussions will be voice recorded, but your contributions will be anonymous and all discussions will be confidential. Only I will have access to the recordings which will be password protected and kept securely.

Appendix C - **Student interviews (Phase 2)**

Displayed rules (adapted from Litosseliti, 2003):

- You should speak freely
- Your opinions are important
- There are no right and wrong answers; we are interested in both positive and negative comments
- Don't worry about agreeing
- Don't worry about being on the same track
- Allow others to speak

Welcome and thank you for joining this group. The purpose of our work together is to share your **ideas, opinions and experiences of praise or positive recognition in school**, but outside your normal classes. What we discuss will be very helpful in enabling me to understand **what you think of public praise and recognition**. It will also give us the chance to talk later around ways in which this could be improved for Year 10.

You have been invited because you are in Year 10 and **because you know each other well**.

The idea of a group discussion is to allow you to share your views in a relaxed and informal environment. There are no right or wrong answers, but rather different points of view. All points of view, both positive and negative, are important. Of course, what you say and how you say it, is up to you. You should not worry about what you are expected to say, whether you are on the right track or whether you all end up agreeing. Please make sure that you allow others to speak, and avoid interrupting each other.

So that I do not miss any of your comments, I would like to take record our discussion. I have asked for your permission to do this, as it will make my research much easier. I should point out that your contributions will be anonymous and confidential, and that any published research will contain changed names.

Our first discussion will last about 30 minutes. I would like to start by asking you to all think about and answer the same question:

1. **What does the word 'praise' mean to you?**

   Prompt: Can you think of examples of praise in school that you or other people have received? What sorts of things are you praised for in school?

2. **What sort of praise do you receive for in the classroom?**

   Probe: Can you think of any specific examples?

3. **Now thinking about outside the classroom, what sort of praise do you receive from your:**

   a. Form tutor?
   b. Head of Year?
   c. Anyone else?

Probe: Is this praise more or less valuable than the praise you receive in the classroom?

4. **In summary, how would you describe the difference between praise you receive in or out of the classroom?**

5. **How do you know that praise is genuine and how do you know when it is not?**

   Prompt: does your relationship with the person make a difference; or the manner in which the praise is given?

6. **Do you prefer the word 'praise' or the word 'recognition'? Is there a difference to you?**

7. **What sorts of things do you think that schools should praise/recognise?**

8. **How do you think they should be recognised outside of the classroom?**

   [Following first discussion, adapted to: **What do you think are the best ways to be recognised outside the classroom?]**

9. **If you are publicly praised/recognised, how do you feel about this?**

   Prompt: How is this different to when you were in Year 7?

10. **If you are publicly praised/recognised, how do you think this is viewed by:**

    a. Your close friends
    b. The rest of the year group

    Probe: Is being accepted by your friends more important than receiving recognition/praise from school?

    Probe: Is being accepted by the year group more important than receiving recognition/praise from school?

11. **Is there anything else that you would like to say about public praise or recognition at our school?**

Appendix D: **Self in a Social Context – Social Connectedness Scale (Phase 2)**

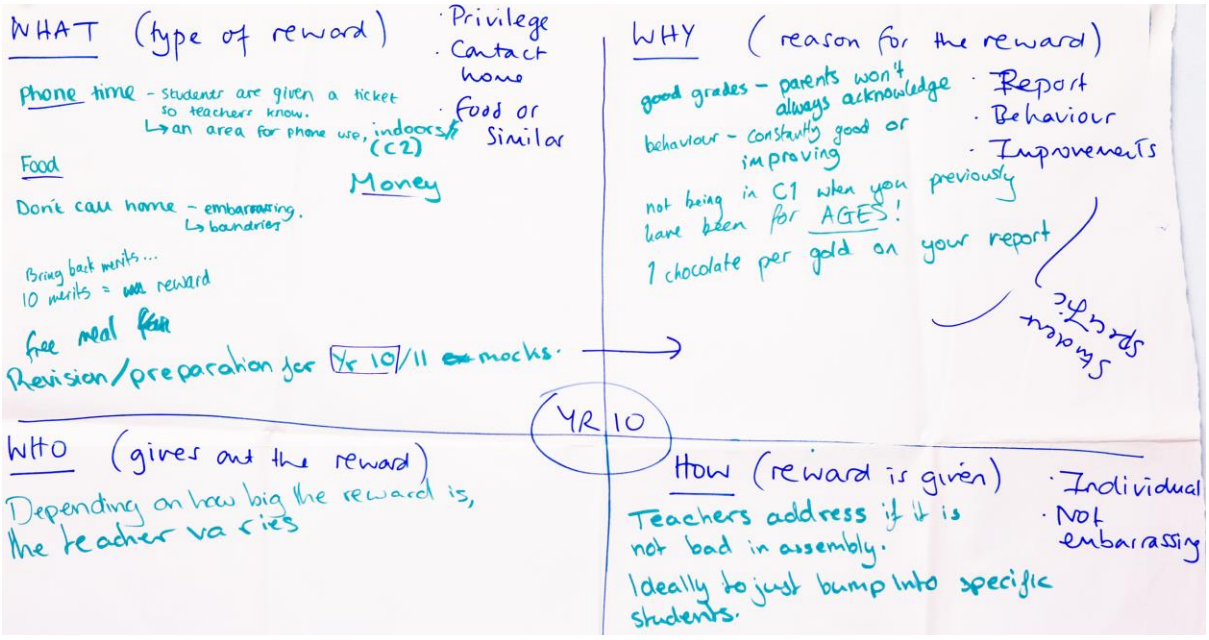
Friends	Not at all	Some-times	Most of the time	All of the time
I feel comfortable when I am with my friends				
I feel like I belong when I am with my friends				
My friends and I share the same values				
I feel valued by my friends				
My friends understand me				
My friends really listen to what I have to say				
I feel pride when I think about my friends				
My friends and I have a similar sense of humour				
I usually know how my friends are feeling				
I have fun when I'm with my friends				
I share similar interests with my friends				
My friends help me if I need it				
I respect my friends				
I have a friend that I trust with my deepest secrets				

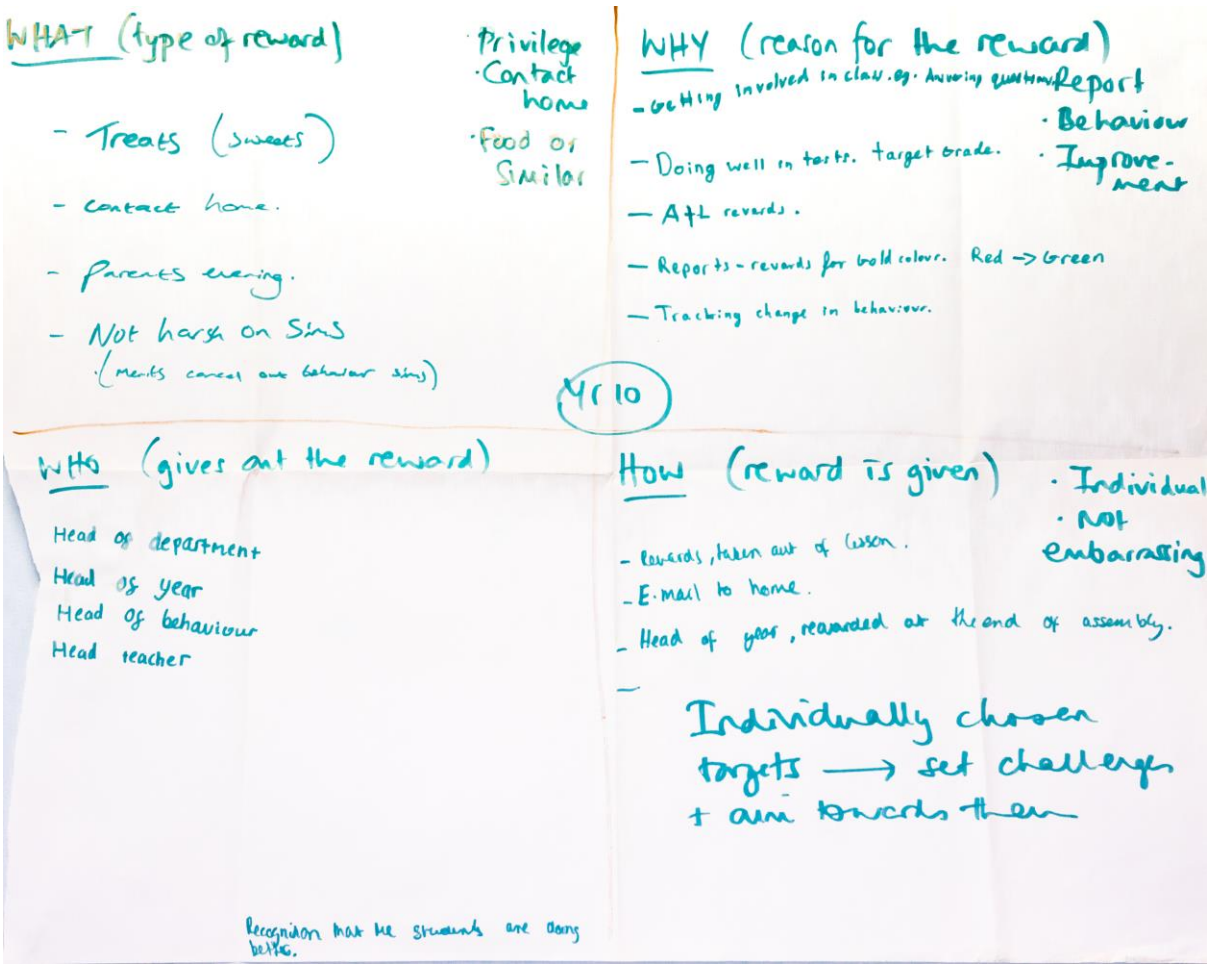
Family	Not at all	Some-times	Most of the time	All of the time
I feel like I belong in my family				
I feel valued in my family				
I feel that I am respected in my family				
Some people in my family really listen to what I have to say				
I have people in my family who I can confide in				
My family spends time together				
I usually know where my family are and what they are doing				

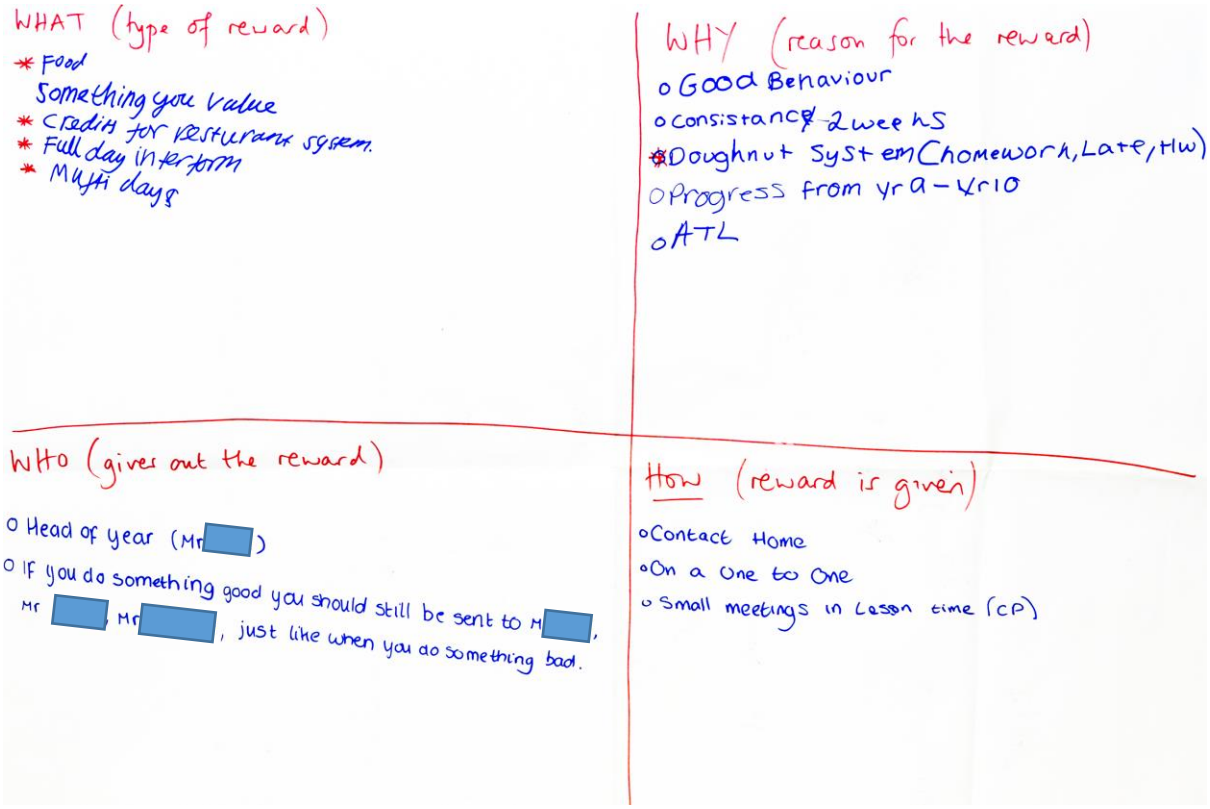
Community	Not at all	Some-times	Most of the time	All of the time
I participate in a community club or organisation (e.g. sports club, interest group or religious group)				
I have friends who volunteer to help out in the community				
I volunteer through an organisation in my community				
There are people in my street who say 'hello' when I walk past				
I help out people who need a hand				
I think that some of the people in my street think I am a nice person				

School	Not at all	Some-times	Most of the time	All of the time
I feel comfortable about how I behave at my school				
I feel pride when I think about being part of my school				
Some of my teachers really listen to what I have to say				
I feel like I belong at my school				
I feel valued at my school				
I respect my teachers at my school				
I feel safe at school				
I am fairly treated at school				
I work well with others in my class				

Appendix E – **Focus group discussion and idea generation (Phase 3)**






WHAT (type of reward)
* Food
Something you value
* Credits for restaurant system.
* Full day in form
* Multi days
WHY (reason for the reward)
o Good Behaviour
o consistance 2 weeks
* Doughnut System (Homework, Late, HW)
o Progress from yr 9 - yr 10
o ATL
WHO (gives out the reward)
o Head of year (Mr [redacted])
o If you do something good you should still be sent to Mr [redacted], Mr [redacted], just like when you do something bad.
How (reward is given)
o Contact Home
o On a One to One
o Small meetings in Lesson time (CP)

Appendix F: **Semi-structured group discussion following trial of reward system (Phase 4)**

Aspects which will be interesting to pursue:

- General feedback about the nature and communication of the reward.
- Difference between intended outcome and actual outcome.
- Any feedback from the year group/peers?
- Any sense of agency.
- What would do differently if knew what was going to happen.
- How gather wider feedback from the year group: questions in a survey?

1. Reminder of rules for communication and what we set out to try and do:
   a. Design a system of public praise which would be understood and valued by the year group.
   b. Give the year group more sense of pride in positive things.
   c. Create system partly designed by the year group, not just the teachers.

2. What have your year group been saying about the breakfast reward system?
   a. What are the worst things about it?
   b. What are the best things about it?

3. To what extent do you think that it has achieved the goal of recognising the year group for good work and good behaviour?

4. How do you think about your involvement in this trial?
   a. Do you think you had a big enough say in what we did?
   b. What do you think we got right?
   c. What do you think we should have thought of?

5. Do you think that there was anything more that we could have done to involve the year group?
   a. What could we have done more of?
   b. What should we have done less of?

6. In summary, do you think that the reward system is: of more or less value; more or less authentic/real/worthwhile? Why?

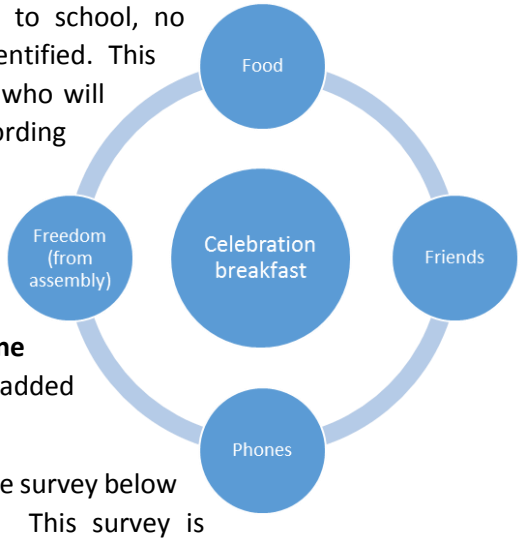
7. Finally, if we were to design a survey for the year group for their overall feedback, what questions would you want to know the answers to?

Appendix G: **Feedback Survey from the Year 10 (Phase 4)**

Review of Breakfast Reward System for Year 10

Over the past six months, we have been working to develop a more age appropriate system of public praise and recognition for Year 10.

Each fortnight the students with 100% attendance, no lateness to school, no homework concerns and no behaviour marks on SIMS have been identified. This is about half of the year group. In order to identify the students who will receive the reward breakfast, the top 10 students are selected according to how many merits they have been given.



Over time, the reward has been changed, so that it is seen less as "Breakfast with Mr … or Mr …" and more "Breakfast with Friends". It is based around four things which Year 10 students might think are worth having: **free food, freedom** from **assembly, friends** and **phone time**. The option to bring a friend and to listen to use phones was added from feedback from the focus groups.

We would like your help in reviewing the system. Please complete the survey below and overleaf so that we can continue to improve the system. This survey is confidential.

Mr … and Year 10 focus group students

1. How important is a system which recognises your achievements?

☐ Very important ☐ Important ☐ Not important ☐ Not important at all

2. Which of the following appeal to you? (Tick as many as you like)

☐ Free food ☐ Freedom from assembly ☐ Free time with friends ☐ Free phone time

3. Do you think the breakfast celebration could work?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Maybe

4. What do you like about the idea?

PTO

5. What don't you like about the idea?

6. What could we do to improve it?

7. If you have been part of the breakfast celebration, what was it like for you?

Thank you for taking part in this survey. Please return it to your form tutor.