Critical Information Literacy and Political Agency:

A critical, phenomenographic and personal construct study of young people's experiences of political information

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Abstract

This work focuses on young people's experiences of political information, to identify how information literacy instruction may support young people to develop political agency. To explore the phenomenon of political information, the study uses three theories: personal construct theory, phenomenography and critical pedagogical theory. The methods used were surveys, repertory grid interviews and semi-structured focus groups. Prior to the collection of substantive data, a survey was conducted to gain insight into the participants' political knowledge and attitudes. To identify what sources of political information young people are exposed to, 23 repertory grid interviews were conducted with 14 and 15 year old pupils in a secondary school in South Yorkshire, England. To map the different ways in which these sources are understood, three focus groups were conducted in line with the phenomenographic approach.

Parents, friends and teachers were found to be the most influential sources of the wide range of political information the participants use and are exposed to. Additionally, mass media and social media were found to be significant. The interview and focus group data was analysed using personal construct theory and phenomenographic techniques to produce a set of personal construct categories and a phenomenographic outcome space. The participants experienced the production of information, the evaluation of information, the relationship between their use of information and their sense of political agency, and their conception of politics in variously complex ways. Although the majority of experiences of political information were found to be lacking a critical dimension, the potential for young people to critically evaluate information and its sources was identified. Several critical pedagogical concepts were identified as being of potential use to practitioners seeking to support young people in the development of critical capacities. The most relevant of Giroux's critical pedagogical concepts to illuminate the structural issues affecting young people's experiences of political information were identified as political illiteracy, the banking model of education, media literacy, political agency, civic literacy and critical consciousness.

These findings contribute to information literacy and information behaviour theory. Most significantly, the recommendations emerging from the analysis of the research data through the outcome space and construct categories may help practitioners in their work, to better understand the information literacy needs of young people in relation to political participation.

Declaration

This thesis is the result of the author's original research. It has been composed by the author and has not been previously submitted for examination which has led to the award of a degree.

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1. Introduction to the research

This study explores the qualitatively different ways young people construe and experience political information, in order to understand how information literacy instruction may be improved to support young people to find, understand and use information when developing their political beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. The insights made in turn contribute to a practical understanding of how young people's information landscapes are shaped by power and authority. The work builds upon existing information literacy theory and practice through the application of the phenomenographic research approach, personal construct theory and critical pedagogical theory.

The theoretical approach taken contributes to understanding the role information literacy education can play in supporting young people to develop political agency - the means by which they can meaningfully participate in local, national and international political issues, which in turn supports strong and legitimate democratic political systems. The study explores young people's experiences of political information to develop an understanding of how they relate to information, for the purpose of making recommendations for the development of effective information literacy instruction.

The thesis takes the following positions:

1) Democracy can be understood in a number of ways and exists in various states. However, the 'ideal' form of democracy for the creation of social equality is radical and critical in conception:

> When understood radically, democracy is about the processes of public decision-making to which economic, social and cultural institutions must be subjected in order to be legitimate and binding upon citizens. Such a radical concept of democracy is concerned to *judge* social, economic and political institutions, not to presuppose their legitimacy. (Angus 2001, p.10)

This conception of democracy can be strengthened through the knowledge and participation of citizens. However, as this was not the focus of the literature review, the full background to the context has not been reviewed. For background about the democratic system, its strengths and weaknesses, I recommend Bromley et al. (2004).

The thesis asserts that political engagement and participation make the democratic system more reflective of the needs and desires of those who make their voices heard. An assumption is made that it is important for as wide a range of people as possible to make their voices heard in order for the system as representative as possible. It is hypothesised that political participation should be based on high levels of political knowledge and critical awareness in order for people's political decisions to be as well-informed and motivated towards the social good as possible. This is based on Giroux's assertion that politics is not only about power but about political judgements and value choices, and that civic education and critical pedagogy are crucial for truly democratic societies (Giroux 2011, p.71);

2) Information literacy is an intrinsic part of learning with the potential to act as a catalyst for social change. For a detailed discussion of the history to this premise, I recommend the background paper produced by Christine Bruce (2004), but this idea is central to the literature review for this study.

3) Information literacy research and practice must take an explicitly political stance because it is inherently and unavoidably political (Whitworth 2014b; Andersen 2006; Pawley 2003). It was important therefore for this research to take a critical approach to research design as well as to employ critical theory to develop an understanding of the research phenomenon and seek for the outcomes of the research to be transformational to some extent. It is necessary to make these approaches and aims explicit, rather than to claim a neutrality that does not and cannot exist in work of this kind (Kincheloe et al. 2010).

The rest of this chapter outlines the work that has been conducted. The background and rationale for research are explained and the research questions and methodology are described. Finally, the thesis chapters are summarised.

1.1 Research process

A thorough literature review concentrating on several relevant disciplines was conducted, which provides context for the research and identify a set of research questions to provide focus for the research. To answer the research questions, I undertook a review of the literature of information literacy, critical literacy theory and political participation, as well as related fields such as political theory, information behaviour and wider critical theories.

The fieldwork stage of the research took the form of fieldwork in an English secondary school. Three research methods were used: repertory grid interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires. The findings were used to produce a phenomenographic outcome space and recommendations for how critical information literacy may be implemented by library workers.

1.2 Background

The research stems from a perceived problem of young people's disengagement with politics and a general national decline in participation in formal political activities such as voting. There is also a pervasive sense that young people do not know enough about the world around them to make informed choices. Young people are often framed as being in a position of 'deficit' in terms of information skills (Whitworth 2009; Rieh & Hilligoss 2008; Johnson & Kaye 2000). The goal of this research is to identify whether these concerns are valid and explore what contribution librarianship can make to political agency through information literacy instruction.

The research explores the possibility of using critical pedagogical approaches for teaching critical thinking skills and evaluation of information from a perspective which acknowledges the political nature of education and the ways critical thinking can be used to support political engagement and democratic society.

The use of a critical theoretical approach contributes to the development of a theoretical basis and methodologies of library and information studies, at the same time as exploring the potential efficacy of critical library instruction as a way of helping learners to develop critical skills. Critical pedagogical theorists argue that education is an appropriate setting for teaching critical thinking skills with a foundation in social justice; this research explores the possible ways of incorporating critical pedagogy into library instruction with an explicit focus on political agency, which is a key element of social justice.

The research takes a critical theoretical approach, prompted by the work of those writing about the democratic potential of libraries and the ways in which they can challenge social injustice through their potential transformative space for empowering communities (Eryaman, 2010). The work of critical pedagogical theorists Henry Giroux and Paulo Freire, among a number of others, was heavily

drawn upon to inform the critical theoretical foundation to the research approach and the analysis of the research data.

1.3 Motivation for the research

The purpose of the research is to investigate young people's levels of critical information literacy, to find out how they perceive sources of political information, how they interact with these sources and the extent to which their interaction with these information sources is critical and influences their attitudes and decisions when it comes to making political decisions and participating in public life. This work was motivated by my experiences during my Master's degree in Librarianship at the University of Sheffield, for which I conducted research into the role of public libraries in supporting democracy. The results of the study indicated a perception of libraries as serving democracy and their principles as being closely connected to democratic issues such as intellectual freedom and information provision, but there was a lack of understanding about the practical and philosophical ways in which they could actively support the development of knowledgeable and active citizenship within the constraints of their position within local council structures. The democratic role of libraries was an area I was keen to research further, with a specific focus on library instruction and the role of information literacy in supporting political participation.

1.4 Research design

The methodological approach to the study is discussed in depth in Chapters Four, Five and Six. This section provides an overview, outlining the aims of the study, the research questions, and the approaches and methods used to explore these questions.

1.4.1 Research aims

The primary aim of this study is to explore young people's experiences of political information, with a view to supporting their information literacy skills through a deepened understanding of their perceptions and constructs surrounding the phenomenon. By combining phenomenography, personal construct theory and critical pedagogical approaches, the study aims to provide both bottom-up and top-down perspectives on the research subject, providing insight into the

individualistic and personal reasons behind experiences of political information and structural explanations for these perceptions, to develop suggestions for information literacy practitioners which could help them to develop approaches and methods to meet the needs of their own learning communities. It is through the development of critical information literacy approaches to political information that educators can support young people's development of political knowledge, meaningful political participation and political agency. The study explores young people's experiences of political information to develop an understanding of how they relate to information, for the purpose of making recommendations for the development of effective information literacy instruction.

1.4.2   Research questions

This study asks the following questions:

1) What sources of information influence young people's political opinions and worldviews?
2) In what qualitatively different ways do young people conceive of the sources of information which influence their political opinions and worldviews?
3) Do they think about this political information critically?
4) What aspects of critical pedagogy may be of most use to those seeking to support political agency through critical approaches to information literacy?

These questions seek to focus on the qualitatively different ways in which young people experience the phenomenon of political information, and played a key role in determining the appropriate methodological approach for the research. The research approach is summarised in the next section.

1.5   Methodology and methods

This research uses repertory grid interviews, focus groups, surveys and observations to explore the research phenomenon. Through consideration of the characteristics of each, the study combines phenomenography, personal construct theory and critical pedagogical theory to build a well-rounded methodology with deep insights from bottom-up and top-down perspectives. The process of combining the approaches is discussed in Chapter Four.

1.6   Fieldwork

The fieldwork for this study took place in a state-funded secondary Academy school in Doncaster, South Yorkshire, over a period of three months between May and July 2013. I was present in the school on a full-time basis and used the staff development room as a base for my research. When I was not conducting surveys, interviews and focus groups, I was observing lessons, talking with staff and analysing the data I had collected. I was also involved in extra-curricular craft classes and debating society with the aim of allowing myself to become a familiar and casual presence in the school environment. Staff were encouraged to introduce me to their students as a former pupil of the school and a student doing research, so that I was not perceived as an authority figure. I also encouraged students to address me by my first name. I developed good relationships with the participants, who were open and frank in their discussions with me about the research topic and other conversations during my time in the school. The school's staff, both teachers and administrators, were extremely supportive of my work and were accommodating and helpful, which enabled me to conduct my research successfully.

1.7   Structure of the thesis

This thesis takes the following structure:

Figure 1.1: Thesis Structure

Chapter Two focuses on the state of political participation in the UK, including different forms of political participation, trends in participation, the role of political knowledge in influencing participation, and the concept of political agency. The chapter then focuses on young people's participation and recommended methods for improving participation.

Chapter Three focuses on education in the UK and pedagogical theories relevant to the research phenomenon. It provides an overview of the UK education system and the role of curricula. It then considers the different concepts of literacy relevant to political participation, including information literacy, and discusses critical approaches to pedagogy which focus on supporting young people's critical awareness of social injustice for the benefit of individuals and society through the development of political agency. The chapter closes with a discussion of the concept of critical information literacy and its relevance to political participation.

Chapter Four outlines the methodological approach of the research; the theoretical approaches of personal construct theory, phenomenography and critical pedagogy, and the issues inherent in designing a mixed methods research project with different yet complementary theoretical approaches.

Chapter Five discusses the methods chosen for collecting data based on the theoretical approaches to the research and the ethical considerations made before conducting the study. The choice of methods is explained and justified, with a consideration of the benefits and drawbacks of each method, as well as a description of how they were employed within the research itself. Risks associated with the research are considered. A description of the fieldwork site is also provided.

Chapter Six discusses the data analysis process for the various research methods and explains how the theoretical approaches informed the several stages of analysis. The presentation of the data in the following two chapters is also explained.

Chapter Seven presents the findings from the repertory grid interviews, including construct categories which form a narrative of participants' construct systems relating to political information.

Chapter Eight presents the findings from the analysis of the interview and focus group transcripts, which were used to develop the phenomenographic outcome space which contains categories of description which encompass the variation in experience of the research phenomenon among the participants.

Chapter Nine discusses the findings and how they relate to previous studies, and explores what these findings can tell us about young people's experiences of political information and how we can support their learning through information literacy.

Chapter Ten presents a discussion of the application of critical pedagogical theory and how it may contribute to the development of critical conceptions of information literacy, with specific reference to how it can support the political agency of young people in the UK. The phenomenographic outcome space is presented and discussed.

Chapter Eleven draws upon the research results and discussion to present conclusions about the research and makes recommendations for further work. The contribution of this study to original knowledge is considered.

2. Conditions of and for Political Agency and Participation

This chapter provides an overview of the current state of political participation in the United Kingdom and a general discussion of the conditions necessary to enable people to participate in processes and to develop a sense of political agency. The chapter considers the literature on political behaviour and attitudes from different disciplines with specific links to education and literacy. The chapter takes the following structure:

- Section 2.1 identifies definitions and conceptions of political information to provide a background to the concept;
- Section 2.2 discusses the different manifestations of political participation;
- Section 2.3 discusses the importance of political participation to democratic society as identified in the relevant literature;
- Section 2.4 discusses political participation in the United Kingdom, including young people's participation, political socialisation, the extent to which youth disengagement can be considered a problem, and the possible reasons for youth disengagement;
- Section 2.5 discusses critical theoretical explanations for the decline of young people's political participation and declining engagement more generally;
- Section 2.6 presents suggestions for increasing young people's political participation;
- Section 2.7 discusses the role of political knowledge in relation to political participation;
- Section 2.8 draws the chapter to a close with conclusions regarding the condition of political participation and how through supporting access to information, supporting the development of knowledge and understanding and helping young people to develop a sense of political agency, librarians may be able to contribute to the improvement of the relationship between individuals, communities and the state with regard to political issues.

First, as described above, the following section presents an introduction to what political participation is and the ways it can be understood.

2.1 What is political participation?

Political participation is generally considered to be key to the health of democratic society (Hansard Society, 2013, p.7; Wilks-Heeg et al. 2012, p.4). There are a number of forms of political participation which Manning (2013) describes as "normative", and Li & Marsh (2008, p.252), among many others, refer to as involvement in "conventional politics". These include voting and voter registration or enrolment, signing a petition or contacting an elected official, all of which fall within the scope of the health of democratic society. In contrast, other forms of political participation are not considered to fall within the scope of 'normative participation' and take place on the terms of the individual rather than being on terms established by the state (Ibid, p.248).

There are several definitions of political participation in different areas of academic research. Within the field of comparative politics, the term is usually used to describe different forms of participation, including active and passive forms of participating in political processes, aggressive and non-aggressive behaviours, structural and non-structural objects, governmental and non-governmental aims, mobilised and voluntary action, and intended and unintended outcomes (Seligson et al., 1988, pp.241-242). In political science, the term usually refers to mechanisms through which the public are able to express their opinions and/or exert influence on political or economic decisions:

> By political participation we refer simply to activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action – either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies. (Verba et al. 1995, p.38)

Within this thesis, the term political participation reflects a broad conception and is used to describe a broad range of activities with which individuals and groups can engage to seek to influence political, social and economic decisions made by those in power. The following section provides examples of what may constitute political participation.

2.2 Forms of political participation

As identified above, political participation can be divided into two forms of action: normative, or hegemonic, participation (Manning & Edwards 2013, p.21) and non-normative participation, which refers to "new or different ways of doing politics" (Ibid) that are not generally considered to conform to hegemonic ideals. A system in which individuals participate in a range of methods of participation can be seen as a more effective form of democracy, in which "freedoms of speech, association and protest" can "give rise to a myriad of different forms of political engagement" (Wilks-Heeg et al. 2012).

A number of detailed indicators of democratic engagement are identified by Keeter et al. (2002b) and can be broadly divided into three categories: civic, electoral and political engagement, and include behaviour such as: active membership of groups/associations; volunteering; fund-raising for charities, community participation/problem solving; regular voting; persuading others; contributions to political parties; assisting candidates with campaigns; contacting officials; contacting print and broadcast media; protest; written petitions; boycotting and boycotting activists; email petitions; and internet engagement.

Further indicators are identified by the Hansard Society (2009), including thoughts in relation to: an interest in politics; perceived knowledge of politics; propensity to vote; discussing politics; perceived political efficacy; the present system of governing; perceived influence over decision-making at the local and national levels; reasons for not feeling influential in decision-making; and the desire to be involved in decision-making. Putnam (2000) also identifies voting, joining political parties and service organisations, signing petitions, attending political events and community meetings, church attendance, and membership of unions and professional associations as signs of declining community and civic engagement. The Democratic Audit (Wilks-Heeg et al. 2012) uses the following indicators of political participation to gauge citizen engagement in the UK:

- Election turnout
- Party membership
- Signing a petition
- Discussing politics or political news with someone
- Presenting views to councillor or MP
- Attending a political meeting
- Membership of campaigning organisations

The activities outlined are generally considered to be normative forms of political participation which are viewed as valid by the majority. However, there are a number of other activities which are considered by some as valid although they do not take a normative form (and may in fact be illegal in some cases). These include protest marches, sit-ins, civil disobedience, violent action, and acts of terrorism. Some non-normative activities can be viewed as valid because although more antagonistic and critical in many cases and illegal in some others, the activities still represent the expression of political opinions which may influence policy at different levels.

The forms of political participation identified above can be described as *repertoires*, which Norris describes as "the ways in which people choose to express themselves politically" (Norris 2002, p.190). She suggests that in recent years, there has been much diversification in forms of political participation and that it is not necessarily appropriate to conceptualise these repertoires along the traditional lines of voting, campaign activism, community organising and particularised contacting activity. The line that was previously drawn between what Norris describes as "conventional" and "protest" forms of political participation has been blurred as a result of new social movements mixing forms of participation and combining voting and lobbying with alternative modes of action for change including boycotts, protests and internet networking (Ibid, p.191). She suggests that the less traditional repertoires have undergone a degree of normalisation as a result of an increase in the number of people who are willing to get involved in lawful demonstrations.

Furthermore, there has been blurring between the conceptions of "political" and "social" action, through social movements' mixed approaches of seeking policy and legal change and taking action to change social behaviour directly, for example lobbying for changes in packaging regulations at the same time as establishing community recycling facilities. Norris theorises that the political and the social are often blurred around issues of identity politics, where individuals' involvement in religious groups and LGBT groups for example can be seen as expressions of political communities (Ibid, p.192). This, Norris concludes, limits the usefulness of traditional conception of political participation which only views citizenship activities designed to change policy processes and the government. She suggests this excludes "too much that is commonly understood as broadly political" (Ibid, p.192) and that

"legitimate" protest activities should also be considered as political participation. "Legitimate" forms of protest, in this context, appear to be lawful demonstrations, which may in itself be limited when considering what actions people may feel the need to take to challenge what they perceive as being socially unjust and inhumane, for example, when those in power are not responsive to lawful challenges.

However, this broad notion of political participation as outlined by Norris (2002) is useful for the purposes of this study, and it is important to be aware of the multiple repertoires of political participation and their intersections with the social when considering the benefits of participation and what can be done to support people to become involved in political action.

2.3 The importance of participation

Political participation is generally accepted as being an important aspect of democratic societies (Giroux 2012a; Moy & Gastil 2006, p.445). Norris states that "one does not need to subscribe to the stronger claims of "strong", "direct" or "participatory" theorists of democracy to believe that any long term decline in electoral turnout, party membership, and associational activism is and should be a matter of genuine concern" (Norris 2002, p.222).

The rationale given for the implementation of initiatives to encourage political participation is that participation increases the efficacy and validity of democratic systems (Tapia & Ortiz, 2010). The re-engagement of the public in formal democracy is deemed to be vital to sustain viable and healthy democracies (Moy & Gastil, 2006) and to avoid a number of problems including: the weakening of the mandate and legitimacy for elected governments due to low voter turnout; the weakening of political equality due to the estrangement of sections of the community; the weakening of effective dialogue between the public and councillors and MPs; the weakening of effective recruitment into politics; the rise of undemocratic political forces; the rise of a 'quiet authoritarianism' within government; and public distrust and disillusionment (Print, 2007).

2.4   Political participation in the UK

The previous sections have introduced the concept of political participation, identified forms of participation and discussed the importance of participation to the success of democratic political systems. This section discusses data relating to political attitudes and levels of political participation in the UK, paying particular attention to young people's engagement, the reasons for youth disengagement with politics, and critical theoretical perspectives which seek to explain young people's political attitudes and participation.

There has been much discussion of a 'democratic deficit' in the UK (Demos, 2008) and worldwide (Print, 2007; Hill, 2009). In the UK, research has found levels of democratic engagement to be low and in decline (Hansard Society, 2014). Civic and political participation have been in decline across many established democracies for a number of years (Dalton, R. J., 2006). In the UK, the Democratic Audit is a method of measuring levels of participation and attitudes towards participation. In the Democratic Audit 2012, concerns were raised about engagement with politics across a large part of the population, because figures indicated that approximately half of the population said they had not taken part in any political activities over the previous two or three years.

The aforementioned 2012 study demonstrates a decline in a wide range of political activity, not only voting. Other studies have explored demographic issues in more depth, including the Audit of UK Democracy (Wilks-Heeg et al., 2012a), which identified class divides in political participation. For example, while 56 per cent of respondents from social classes AB (higher and intermediate managerial, administrative, professional occupations) had signed a petition in the previous two to three years, only 25 per cent of respondents in social classes DE (semi-skilled and unskilled manual occupations, unemployed and lowest grade occupations) had done so.

Changes in general political attitudes over time in the UK have also been observed by the British Social Attitudes Survey (2015), which identified significant changes including:

- Only 17% trust governments most of the time, just as only 16% did in 2009, but far less than the 38% who did in 1986.

- Fifty-seven per cent believe they have a duty to vote, in line with the 58% who did so in 2009, but down from 76% in 1987. The proportion saying "it's not worth voting" has almost doubled in this time.
- The proportion not identifying with any political party has more than doubled.
- Thirty-two per cent say they have "quite a lot" or "a great deal" of interest in politics, similar levels to 1986, when 29% expressed this view. (National Centre for Social Research, 2015)

The British Social Attitudes Survey also identified that although most people are "not normally active in politics", many people "do follow what is happening" (Ibid), citing data which shows that less than half of the population have "engaged in a political action other than voting or signing a petition", but that 65% of people follow political news on a daily basis and that half of those surveyed "say they sometimes talk about politics to family and friends". This fall in engagement with political activity, but not political interest, indicates an issue with the political system and issues of validity, as discussed in section 2.3.

A number of studies have been conducted which aim to gain an understanding of public perceptions of the democratic system and explain why involvement in the democratic process is in decline. Suggested reasons include: feelings of lack of influence through formal democracy; perception of the main political parties as too similar and lacking in principle; perception of the electoral system as unequal; requirement to commit to too broad a range of policies; feelings of a lack of information or knowledge about politics; inconvenient voting procedures; feelings of alienation from society; a lack of incentive for participation; and feelings that participation will not lead to change (The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust, 2006).

Smith (2005) identifies a number of problems within local and national government which he perceives as reasons for disengagement, including: a lack of creativity in designing strategies for participation; organisational and professional resistance to involving the public; failure to respond to the outcomes of participation; a lack of cultural change in public authorities; a failure to create an inclusive environment for participation; and a failure to publicise opportunities for participation.

These issues refer to the general population of the UK. The following section identifies issues which specifically relate to young people's participation in politics.

2.4.1   Young people's political participation

Focusing more closely on young people's political participation is important, because their attitudes often differ to that of the older population, and their ability to participate in formal political processes is limited by age restrictions on activities such as voting. This section looks more closely at levels of participation in young people using available data, reports and research papers. It considers the role of political socialisation and what factors have an effect on young people's development. The importance of young people's participation is discussed. The ways in which young people have been found to participate within communities is explored and trends are identified, with issues of causality being addressed. Reasons for disengagement are identified, followed by reasons for young people's engagement and an identification of research that has investigated young people's political attitudes, including their strong levels of interest and engagement in political issues and current events. Examples of methods suggested to improve engagement are identified. The conclusion to the section considers current events which will have an impact on young people's participation, and considers the role of information literacy as a way for library and information studies to contribute to the agenda.

Young people are often characterised as being politically apathetic (Henn & Foard, 2014), which is usually linked to statistics which note that their participation in elections is low and in decline. This decline is in turn usually attributed to young people's attitudes to politics and politicians, which can be characterised as "dissatisfied and alienated" from the political process (MYPLACE 2014, p.99). Much has been written about the decline in young people's political participation, levels of political knowledge and prevailing attitudes of political cynicism and apathy. For example, the Hansard Society (2012, p.23) found that young people are less likely than older people to be interested in politics, feel knowledgeable about it, and vote. In the 2012 Democratic Audit, only 12% of 18-24 year olds say they are absolutely certain to vote, which represents a decline of 10 percentage points in a year (Ibid, p.4).

Other research into young people's political attitudes has found that young people's sense of political agency is low, and there is little motivation to participate because they have negative views about politics and their degree of ability to control political change (Grundy & Jamieson 2004, p.237). Some research suggests that young people who feel that they *can* influence political change are more likely to feel it is worthwhile to participate in politics (Benton et al., 2008; McKinney & Chattopadhyay, 2007).

The political participation of young people is important for the functioning of a democratic society; not only because they are voters and leaders of the future, but because they are citizens in their own right. Indeed, a great deal of responsibility is often placed on young people and their engagement with democratic systems. They are often blamed for weaknesses in democracy due to declining levels of participation (Amnå, 2012; Putnam, 2000). However, from the perspective of those who support the concept of political socialisation, youth disengagement from politics is not the sole responsibility of young people themselves, because their attitudes and dispositions are influenced by external factors. This is discussed in the next section.

2.4.2   Political socialisation

Political participation throughout life, including identification with political parties is understood as being influenced by political socialisation during individuals' formative years (Dinas, 2014). Political socialisation is the "study of the developmental processes by which children and adolescents acquire political cognition, attitudes, and behaviors" (Powell, L. & Cowart, 2012). Through political socialisation, norms and behaviours are transmitted from one generation to another, and political orientations and cultural attitudes are developed (Ibid). Those who support the concept of political socialisation believe that through political socialisation, parents and educators can influence young people's political behaviour and encourage attitudes which increase their propensity to participate in political life. Theorists such as Putnam (2000) and Skocpol (2003) believe that parental beliefs play a significant role in young people's political socialisation and consider the family to play a crucial role in the cultivation of democratic habits (Maisel & Berry 2010, p.vii). Dinas (2014) found that children of politically engaged parents were more likely to become politically engaged

themselves, and also that although the process of political socialisation meant that children who were more likely to adopt the political views of their parents were also more likely to then abandon this political identification as a result of developing their own independent political identities, which runs counter to popular belief in political socialisation literature that children of highly politicised parents are more likely to stick with their parents' political beliefs (Dinas 2014, p.847).

The theory of political socialisation suggests that young people's political attitudes are built and then remain into adulthood, which is why encouraging knowledge and engagement in young people is considered important to democratic systems. Studies suggest that although young people's political attitudes may still be in a state of flux and development, many of these attitudes become fixed through political socialisation at an early age (Hooghe & Wilkenfeld 2008, p.166). It is therefore important to investigate the formation of political attitudes at an early age, in order to understand the influence of various sources of political information and socialisation.

A number of influencing factors have an impact on political socialisation, including the media, education and family. The use of various mass media has been found to increase political participation, although the impact of the internet on promoting citizenship is debatable and is arguably not as influential as traditional mass media. Other forms of political socialisation have been affected by broader social changes, such as de-industrialisation, the demise of trade unions, and social and geographical mobility, which Marsh (1989) argues have had an effect on the traditional political socialisation of young people. It is evident from this range of perspectives that political socialisation comes from many sources, which should be taken into account when exploring young people's relationships with political information, because it is likely that many of these sources of socialisation will be identified as sources of information, but some of the more abstract and structural sources may not be consciously acknowledged. The concept of political socialisation seeks to explain how people develop their political attitudes and behaviours, including non-participation. The following section discusses the extent to which non-participation can be considered a problem for UK democracy.

2.4.3 Is there a youth democratic deficit?

When exploring young people's political participation, it is important not only to be conscious of the influencing factors in people's lives, but also the extent to which the phenomenon of youth disengagement should be considered a legitimate concern. The political attitudes and predicted behaviour identified by Benton et al.'s (2008) research were deemed sufficient to warrant concern about a "continued 'democratic deficit' within British society" (Ibid p.ix). These research findings suggest that young people's levels of interest in political participation are low, and that research into reasons and solutions for this is warranted. However, The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (White et al. 2000, p.43) argued in their research into young people's politics that "it is not possible to assess whether young people are more disenchanted with politics than their predecessor generations" and suggest that concern about a 'democratic deficit' are misplaced (Ibid p.44). It has been suggested that young people's participation is simply changing, rather than being in decline. Although young people are less likely to vote than older citizens, they have been found to participate in politics in a broad range of other ways (Loader et al. 2014, p.145). This indicates that although there may be a problem with young people's levels of participation in formal political processes, overall engagement may not be as significant a problem as non-participation in voting specifically.

2.4.2.1   Changes to young people's political participation over time

In contrast to suggestions that there is a democratic deficit with regard to young people's participation, much research has found that young people are in fact more civically and politically minded than young people of previous generations, which is evidenced by higher levels of volunteering, charitable donations, and interest and involvement in non-formal and single-issue political causes (Loader, 2007). Young people are not necessarily disengaged, and in fact people aged between 18-24 may even be more trusting of the government and less cynical about the motivations of politicians (Bromley et al. 2004, p.5). The issue of young people's participation is complex and based on different values and

understandings of what methods of participation are deemed valid and what political attitudes are viewed as appropriate.

A number of the studies identified above which report a decline in young people's participation are based on a narrow definition of political participation. This is problematic because of the ways young people engage with the world around them, as identified in the research which has shown that young people are in fact politically minded (Loader et al., 2014). A narrow conception of political participation is argued to inevitably result in the perception that young people are politically apathetic, when this is not the case. Manning & Edwards (2013) argue that a normative conception of political participation has resulted in the perception of young people as politically apathetic, when in fact they are engaged in non-normative forms of participation, suggesting that "the discourse of youth apathy holds the institutions of this narrow regulatory model of politics as its focus, as 'real politics'. If young people lack knowledge and interest in electoral politics, then they are deemed to be lacking knowledge and interest in politics". (Ibid 2013, p.21) However, as discussed in section 2.2, there are many ways in which political participation can occur outside of a normative model. This is discussed with relation to young people below.

2.4.2.2   *Engagement in alternative forms of participation*

Research into youth engagement has identified that where young people do engage with civic life, there has been a move from involvement in wider forms of civic engagement to more individualistic activities and politics which focus on specific causes (Carpini, 2000). A number of studies have found that young people prefer less formal methods of political engagement (Dalton, R. J., 2006). Similarly, Benton et al. (2008) found that although the majority of participants did not support a political party or feel likely to get involved in local politics or contact politicians, they did feel attached to voting as a civic right and responsibility (Ibid 2008, p.ix). This finding has been backed up by several post-election studies since 2008 identified by (Schwarzer, 2011), who found that young people are interested in politics but are less likely to participate in elections. Henn & Foard (2011, pp.13-14) found that there is a relatively low level of party identification among young people, but fairly high levels relating to intentions to vote. These findings indicate that the

issue of young people's political participation may have more to do with the limitations of formal political processes to represent the needs and interests of younger people.

When taken into consideration alongside the issues regarding the wide range of manifestations of political participation discussed in section 2.2, it is apparent that although there may be legitimate concerns with young people's engagement with normative political processes, there is the potential for the agency they display in other forms of political participation to also be applied to formal political activities which are more readily acknowledged by politicians and policymakers. It is therefore important to identify the reasons for young people's disengagement in some modes of political participation, to gain an understanding of these reasons and build support for young people's engagement in areas of current under-engagement. These reasons are discussed in the following section.

2.4.4 Reasons for young people's disengagement

Studies have identified many reasons theorised for young people's political disengagement. The most significant of these issues are identified in this section.

Dermody et al. (2010) conducted a thorough review of research that has been carried out into youth political attitudes and behaviour, and provide a number of reasons for political disengagement, including a lack of interest in political issues; feelings of alienation; distrust of politicians; a weakened sense of civic-mindedness; and a lack of political efficacy, or feeling ill-informed about politics.

These issues are of serious concern to the authors, and represent several key issues of relevance for political participation. These issues are discussed in more detail below.

2.4.2.3   Lack of interest in political issues

Conventional wisdom and the reporting of mass media often offer a decline in young people's interest in political issues as an explanation for youth disengagement. This suggestion is supported by a number of studies which have identified a decline in interest in political issues amongst young people (Park, 1999). However, a study by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation into young people's politics found that "[i]n spite of generally low

levels of interest in politics, the issues that concerned the young people covered the broad political agenda" (White et al., 2000). This finding is supported by Henn & Foard (2011), who found that the issue for young people was more likely to be confidence in their knowledge and understanding of political issues rather than their interest in them (Henn & Foard 2011, p.7); in fact, their study identified an *increase* of political interest in young people over time: "the current generation of 18 year olds seem to have more interest in politics and in elections than the cohort of young people who took part in our 2002 study" (Ibid, p.6). Other studies have also found that the ways in which young people conceive of "politics" may not be accurate, and is often limited to an idea of politics being solely related to Westminster (Henn & Foard 2014; Gerodimos 2010; The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust 2006). This means that generalisations about young people's interest in politics may not be an accurate representation of their interest in issues relating to politics when politics is construed more broadly.

2.4.2.4 Decline in a sense of civic duty

It is often assumed that young people are not concerned with political issues and have little desire to involve themselves in the democratic process when they reach an age at which they are able to because people are no longer compelled by a sense of "civic duty", which informs their attitudes and behaviours (Curtice, 2010). This decline in civic duty itself has a number of possible explanations, including a decline in faith of the degree to which politicians represent the interests of the people and the point of participating at all (Dermody et al., 2010), which is discussed below.

2.4.2.5 Failures of the political system

There are significant problems with the formal political system as it exists, which arguably justifies young people's cynicism and disenchantment just as it does that of older people (which is explored in section 2.7). Studies have found that young people often hold politicians in low esteem and do not trust or respect them (White et al. 2000, p.2; Richardson 1999). Henn and Foard found that "young people in Britain are deeply

distrustful of these political players who are charged with conducting formal politics on their behalf" (2011, p.15).

Within the field of Political Science, authors such as Bowman (2012) identify young people's disengagement as a legitimate response to the failure of UK politics to represent young people's needs and interests or to fulfil their more general election promises. Abstention from politics by young people does not just take the form of non-voting, but can be seen across the board.

A critical theoretical perspective of political disengagement as a result of the failure of systems of power to represent the needs of the public and serve the common good is discussed in section 2.7.

2.4.2.6 Lack of knowledge about politics

Henn & Foard (2011) suggest that young people's lack of participation may be due to a lack of confidence regarding their levels of political knowledge. They used data from 2011 and 2002 national surveys of youth participation to assess whether young people's political participation had changed over the intervening years. The 2011 survey took data from 1025 18 year olds who were able to vote for the first time. They concluded that young people are interested in political matters, and that there has in fact been a positive shift in interest from their original 2002 survey; more participants indicated in interest in politics and a small majority believed they would discuss political issues with friends and family in the future. The researchers also found that young people were able to respond to questions about the issues they considered most important with a high degree of detail and sophistication. The authors suggest that these research findings indicate that young people are not disengaged or disinterested in politics, but that a large number of young people lack the confidence about their levels of political knowledge. For example, 46% of participants said that they did not feel confident about their understanding of political parties when it came to voting in an election and 47% said that they do not know enough about "what is going on in politics in general" (Ibid p.8).

2.4.5   Summary

This chapter so far has identified the many manifestations of political participation. This study will be taking a broad view of political participation to ensure that as many forms of engagement and conceptions of the 'political' as possible are acknowledged.

Regardless of the problems associated with the political system in the United Kingdom, participation in formal political processes is something that should be supported as much as possible and viewed as a baseline for political participation, to ensure that elected representatives have a mandate for the power they are given.

Despite the arguments around the extent to which political participation is in a crisis or decline, levels of participation are lower than they have been, for several reasons, including a sense that participation will not make any difference. The reasons for older people's disengagement are reflected in young people's disengagement, but supporting young people's political socialisation and development of political knowledge and understanding may help to address these problems, which will be discussed in the rest of this chapter.

Although the issue of young people's disengagement may not be as extreme as is sometimes feared, it is necessary to help young people to channel their interest in political and social issues into meaningful action, including helping them to find information and to critically evaluate the information they encounter so that they can become politically informed and participate in action to effect the social change they wish to see. This is one of the many suggestions for improving young people's participation discussed in the next section.

2.5   Increasing young people's political participation

A range of suggestions have been made to improve levels of political participation in the population as a whole, including: educational approaches, such as citizenship education; improving the procedural aspects of the democratic system, including postal voting, proxy voting, developing online voting, increasing the number of polling stations, giving workers time off to go and vote, and changing voting system from First Past the Post to Proportional Representation; and introducing legislative approaches such as compulsory voting and

reducing the voting age. This section will discuss the recommendations which are relevant to improving young people's political participation, including political socialisation, lowering the voting age, improving overall educational attainment, and improving citizenship education.

The UK government established the Youth Citizenship Commission in 2008 to identify define what citizenship means to young people, to increase young people's participation in politics and promote active citizenship, and to lead a consultation on whether the voting age should be lowered to 16 (Mycock & Tonge, 2014). A wide variety of solutions have been suggested to help young people become engaged and informed. Recommended approaches appear to cover all bases from formal political education, citizenship education, youth forums, lowering the voting age, providing information through the media (primarily television but also the internet), to changing politicians and political representation (Ibid).

To tackle disengagement that comes from a lack of trust on politicians or the political system and encourage higher levels of participation, Henn & Foard (2011, p.16) asked young people what they thought should be done. Suggestions included for political parties to directly connect with young people through listening to and talking with them, visiting educational institutions, using questionnaires and surveys, holding debate forums and conferences, using the internet and social networking and sending emails. A key issue raised was that it is important for political parties to understand the needs and interests of young people, which can only occur meaningfully through communication with young people themselves.

A recurring recommendation is education for democracy, including citizenship and political education (Benton et al., 2008; Keating et al., 2010; Sunshine Hillygus, 2005). These recommendations include reference to the importance of young people's ability to become independently knowledgeable about political issues to be able to make informed decisions. This section explores some of those recommendations.

2.5.1   Lowering the voting age

The political participation of young people is important for the functioning of a democratic society; not only because they are voters and leaders of the future, but because they are citizens in their own right. A number of social changes are being implemented to reflect a changing representation of adolescents and the degree to which their political views can be heard. A deal was struck for the Scottish Independence Referendum in 2014 which gave 16 year olds the right to vote (Hennessy 2012).

Many of those who support the lowering the voting age for general and local elections argue that it would improve the efficacy of the UK democratic system and encourage young people to get into the habit of voting (Dinas, 2012). It is argued that citizenship education, youth engagement campaigns and high-speed interactive media give the current generation the ability to be the most politically aware and educated ever (Coatman, 2008), and many argue that 16 year olds should be able to apply this knowledge and awareness in practice. Campaigners for a lower voting age often claim that by not allowing 16 and 17-year-olds to vote, the message is sent that their views are not valid and that they are not full citizens. This has a marginalizing effect which can influence their future participation (Ibid).

It is important to note, however, that campaigners do not simply argue that lowering the voting age will result in successful participation. They argue that the right to vote must be accompanied support to cast their vote knowledgeably and meaningfully, through effective citizenship education and other formal education to provide young people with the information and skills they need to become knowledgeable and actively involved (Coatman, 2008).

In addition to suggestions relating to education for younger voters, other suggestions for making reducing the voting age a successful intervention include making first-time voting compulsory (Gottfried & Birch, 2014). They argue that the political system is not responsive to young people's needs and interests, which discourages young people's participation, and that compulsory voting for first-time voters will increase turnout, encouraging the formation of habitual voting at the same time as increasing the likelihood that the political

system would respond to the needs and interests of younger people. However, this may create resentment among young people (Mycock & Tonge, 2014). It should be noted that the suggestion of a structural intervention in the form of making first-time voting compulsory is not presented as a panacea, and is recommended as part of a wider set of actions to support young people's political involvement, including citizenship education.

Lowering the voting age is not universally supported as an appropriate intervention to increase engagement, however. There are arguments against lowering the voting age. One of the arguments is that 16 and 17 year olds do not possess full autonomy because of their still-developing neurobiological and social maturity, and are therefore incapable of making informed choices (Degerman, 2014). People of this age, Degerman argues, are not always fully self-governed individuals and are not therefore able to give legitimate consent to governmental power. It is apparent from the conflicting ideas between the multiple voices in the debate around young people's voting rights that the issue is complex, and the impact of lowering of the voting age for the Scottish Independence Referendum remain to be seen at the time of writing this review.

2.5.2   Improving overall educational attainment

There is a considerable amount of literature documenting links between educational attainment and civic participation, including interest in politics and voting (Finlay & Flanagan, 2009, p.1; Sunshine Hillygus 2005). Correlations are often made between the length of time spent in formal education and levels of political engagement (Finlay and Flanagan, 2009, p.1).

The relationship between education and political participation has been the subject of much research. Those who argue that higher levels of education result in higher levels of political participation suggest that this is the case because education imbues individuals with the abilities required to participate in politics, such as comprehension and communication skills (Berinsky & Lenz, 2010, p.358).It is argued that improving educational attainment has positive results for involvement in politics, because more educated people are better able to understand the abstract aspects of politics, and to research and evaluate

the candidates and issues (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993, p.136). This suggestion relates to general information literacy skills, which are discussed in Chapter Three.

2.5.2.1 Issues of causality between education and participation

It is difficult to establish causality between overall educational attainment and political participation. There are too many other possible influencing factors to be able to convincingly demonstrate that education alone is solely responsible for a desire and ability to participate. Berinsky & Lenz (2010) call into question "the large direct effect of education on political participation" as a result of their analysis of levels of education and voter turnout. They suggest that a causal link cannot be established between levels of education and political participation, but that it is instead a proxy of pre-existing characteristics, such as personality and family characteristics which lead to higher levels of both participation and educational attainment.

2.5.2.2 Providing citizenship education

In addition to suggesting that improving educational attainment of young people overall improves political participation, many theorists and policy-makers also advocate for civic education as part of the school curriculum. Citizenship education in the UK is discussed in Chapter Three, so this section will only address the argument that it improves younger people's political participation.

As with establishing a causal relationship between educational attainment and levels of political participation, it is also difficult to demonstrate that civic education has an effect on political participation. Manning and Edwards (2013) conducted a systematic review on literature in the fields of civics and citizenship, asking the question "does civic education for young people increase the normative political participation of young adults?" (Manning & Edwards 2013, p.3). Their systematic review looked at studies that "address the effect of civic education on the normative political participation of young people" (Ibid, p.7), and concluded that the evidence for increased normative political participation as a result of civic education is "both tenuous and mixed" (Ibid, p.19). They found that some studies did not find an effect of civic education programmes on voting, and that studies that claimed to

find a statistically significant effect actually found a modest effect. and also that the effect of civic education on voter registration was more mixed, with some effects being more significant for different groups and some studies showing no correlation between civic education and voter registration at all. With regard to the impact of civic education on political expression, however, there did appear to be clearer positive effects (Ibid, p.20). It must be noted, however, that the review does not include qualitative studies that could establish causality in terms of civic education resulting in higher levels of political expression and normative political activities; because the authors did not believe that qualitative studies would be suitable content for the systematic review (Ibid, p.22). This limits the depth of understanding that can be gained from the study and does not provide an insight from young people themselves.

The issue of young people's political engagement is complex and levels of political participation are not easily measured. It is important to be aware of the difficulties associated with drawing causal explanations, particularly from data which is only able to understand a phenomenon based on an assumption about how young people conceive of 'politics' as a concept. Some research has suggested that young people's concept of citizenship, civic engagement and participation is often narrower than that of older people and may be limited to activities that require low levels of time, effort and commitment (Benton et al. 2008, Selwyn 2007).

Conceptions of politics are inextricably connected to attitudes towards politics. Much research has found that young people demonstrate low levels of engagement with politics when they feel that politicians do not represent their concerns and that politics in general is 'not for them' (Benton et al. 2008, p.35). This disengagement does not necessarily correlate with levels of political interest or knowledge, but there is a measurable impact with regard to political participation in young people which demonstrates a lower level of political activity in people whose political attitudes towards politics are negative or apathetic, which raises concerns regarding formal methods of political participation such as voter turnout (Park et al. 2004, p.31).

2.5.3   Criticisms of drives to increase political participation

Although it is commonly assumed that simply increasing the number of people who participate in formal modes of politics will improve democracy (in the abstract sense), it is important to acknowledge that public participation in politics is often *not* encouraged by governments and other agencies for the benefit of the abstract concept of democracy, but for their own political gain. Government bodies including the Department of Communities and Local Government (2008) have promoted the benefits of participation, which they suggest include:

- Satisfaction, fulfilment and personal growth
- More interaction between people with different backgrounds
- Removal of perceptions of injustice through increased transparency about the decisions that are being made
- Revival of civic society and local democracy by involving groups such as young people
- Creation of mechanisms for citizen participation
- Building strong civil society where people and organisations seek solutions to societal problems (Department of Communities and Local Government 2008, pp.21-22)

While these theoretical benefits may or may not have an outcome in actuality, Clarke (2013) argues that it is important to consider *why* the government is so keen to involve what he describes as 'ordinary people' in policy decisions. He argues that current attempts to involve the public are based in depoliticisation; ordinary people are seen as both 'above' politics in that they are not motivated by power and self-interest in the way that politicians are perceived to be, at the same time as being 'below' politics in that the public are not distracted by "big ideas" or ideologies (Clarke 2013, p.212). He describes this as the "symbolic valorization" of the ordinary person.

This causes problems when people who were at first considered ordinary begin to act politically, such as becoming informed about issues. They are then redesignated as 'activists' or as 'special interests', which means that they are no longer viewed as ordinary and their opinions are deemed less valid. Another issue Clarke raises is that the knowledge of ordinary people only has limited currency; a lay perspective can be seen as merely anecdotal and only specific to a certain area, thus lacking strength and validity. He argues

that the voices of ordinary people are only heard as legitimate if they do not challenge their positioning at the bottom of the "hierarchy of legitimacy" and if they are able to produce direct experience of the issue being discussed (Clarke 2013, p.213).

Clarke critiques the neoliberal approach to public participation, which he argues "furthers the larger processes of privatization, marketization, and the global dominance of capital." (Ibid, p.220) He raises three issues for thinking about how the politics of enrolling ordinary people through participation in the neoliberal project works:

1) Neoliberalism is always in the process of being revised and seeks to dominate other political discourses. As a result it adopts the language of these discourses to make itself appear desirable and acceptable. Its circumstances are always changing because of this constant revision.

2) Its circumstances always include the "failure of the neoliberal project" (Ibid, p.221). It has antidemocratic tendencies which can be seen as a response to the social movements of the 1960s and 70s. The idealised neoliberal free market is unattainable but idealised, which makes it appealing and provides momentum.

3) It is important to grasp the political foundations of neoliberalism in order to understand its origins and understand how personalisation, choice and participation "in and around public services" are an inherently contradictory concept.

He concludes that the desire for ordinary people's participation is significant, but that the process is difficult because people do not always respond in the way that the neoliberal system would prefer; they do not necessarily come when summoned, and when they do, what they have to say may not be wanted. It is important to bear this in mind when exploring young people's use of political information for political agency, in order to ensure that agency which manifests itself in ways which may be disregarded by neoliberal systems are taken into account in the analysis and presentation of the research data.

2.6 Political knowledge

Political knowledge is based around access to and the ability to make use of, political information. Grönlund (2007) structures political information in three dimensions: knowledge about how the political system works; knowledge of the current political debate and everyday politics; and knowledge of political actors and their ideological differences.

It has been argued that political knowledge has a sizeable and statistically significant impact on the British citizens' likelihood of voting (Larcinese, 2007). Political knowledge is necessary for people to fully engage in social and political life as active citizens (Moy & Gastil 2006; Ohlin 2001; Carpini 2000). It has also been suggested that individuals with higher levels of political engagement through political knowledge are more likely to be able to participate successfully, through participation in politics, possession of meaningful, stable attitudes on issues, an ability to link their interests with their attitudes, an increased likelihood to choose candidates who are consistent with their own attitudes, and an increased likelihood to support democratic norms (Carpini & Keeter, 2002).

Research has suggested that the higher the level of relevant political information available to the public, the higher the voter turnout, and that people are less likely to vote when they cannot assess how likely their vote is to make a difference (Matsusaka, 1995) and that people are unwilling to vote when they feel they risk selecting the 'wrong' candidate (Feddersen & Pesendorfer, 1997). Some authors theorise that an increasing amount of national television has a detrimental effect on turnout because local news media, which produce more directly relevant political information, is crowded out by less relevant national content (Baekgaard et al., 2014).

2.6.1 Sources of political information and knowledge

Political information can be encountered and knowledge can be gained from a number of sources, including (but not exhaustively): newspapers (both in their reporting of the news and comments they make on it through feature articles etc.); television news; political advertising; alternative news, including comedy shows, satire, political dramas, and political discussion shows; public library and information services; local authorities; internet discussion boards and political blogs, social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, friends, family, and teachers.

An important point to consider is that people are likely to encounter multiple sources of political information, only some of which will be of a format that is considered 'mainstream' or normative. It is important when exploring people's use of political information to be aware of the breadth of information sources and to explore what people do with the

information they encounter (Coombs & Cutbirth, 1998), and to be aware of the political nature of distinctions between 'formal' and 'informal' sources of political information and assumptions about what sources and genres of information can be considered valid. These distinctions are often drawn by those writing about the phenomena, who inhabit 'authoritative' positions in the discourse. These distinctions and assumptions should be challenged within a dialogic approach to information literacy (Whitworth 2014, p.140), which this research aims to reflect.

Winchester (2015) conducted qualitative research into Australian young people's political decision-making and the factors which influence their choices. She found that in relation to low-involvement voter decision-making, important factors include individuals' level of perceived knowledge and their passive information seeking behaviours. She also found that exposure to the media plays an important role. Contrary to what may often be assumed, the findings suggest that young people continue to rely on traditional media formats such as newspapers and television, than social media when seeking information about current political issues. Although this research takes a consumer behaviour approach which has theoretical foundations that run counter to critical pedagogical theory, the study's use of qualitative semi-structured face to face interviews, with a similar sample size to that of this research, in a country with similar cultural and political characteristics to the United Kingdom, provides a useful insight which can be used as a comparison.

2.6.2   Access to information

Research has demonstrated that access to information, including media coverage of local politics, contributes to encouraging and sustaining political information (Baekgaard et al. 2014). However, several problems have been identified relating to access to information regarding areas such as election dates, candidates and results. Berry and Dunleavy (2014) describe a number of ways in which information for voters in the UK fares unfavourably in comparison to voters elsewhere in Europe, including consistency of reporting of elections and results and a lack of useable information sources for the public. It is important for people to be able to access information about local, national and international elections

because people are unlikely to participate in something where they are "uncertain what is at stake" (Ibid).

2.6.3   The impact of the internet on political knowledge

A prevailing suggestion among academic authors and wider society is that the internet has enhanced people's access to news and political information (Norris 2001, 2000; Ohlin 2001). However, the situation is complex and it is important to consider access to information from a perspective which highlights social issues such as the influence on class, education and other factors on access to information and the ways in which people engage with it to transform it into knowledge and make practical use of it.

For example, a number of authors suggest that new communication technologies actually have the potential to increase the size of the existing information gap (Bonfadelli 2002; Van Dijk and Hacker 2003; Jerit et al. 2006; Hargittai and Hinnant 2008; Eryaman 2010). Although the internet provides potential opportunities for interaction between citizens and representatives, as well as between citizens themselves, there is also the potential for voters to be overwhelmed by the wealth of information (trustworthy and otherwise) available on the internet (Coombs and Cutbirth 1998).

Johnson and Kaye's (2000) survey of politically interested internet users identified some key issues specific to online sources of political information. They theorised that due to the speed of news reporting online, there is less time for journalists to effectively fact-check which can lead to less reliable reporting than other sources, such as television news. The study suggests that individuals who are very interested in political affairs use the internet rather than television as main source of political information, because they are seeking a depth of information beyond that which television news can provide. They conclude that younger individuals and less educated people tend to view the internet as more credible than older people do, as do older people and less educated people. They suggest that more highly educated individuals are more critical of the media in general. They also suggest that women tend to view television as the most credible medium, whereas men view newspapers as more credible. They suggest that people who rely on the internet as their main source of political information view it as a more credible source, which they argue will

have a causal effect as more and more people come to rely on the internet for political information.

Although this study was relatively small in scale for this kind of research, over 300 participants were surveyed and the overall trends can be seen as relatively reflective of an overall picture. There are some issues of causality which are not addressed – for example, do people view a source as credible because they use it, or do they use it because they view it as credible? However, the conclusions drawn relating to demographic differences in what people view as credible are of interest.

2.6.4   How political knowledge influences attitudes and behaviours

Political knowledge plays a role in people's ability to participate in public life, ability to make choices that match their beliefs and their willingness and confidence in participating at all. Martin et al. (1993, p.1) argue that people with higher levels of knowledge and more access to information are more likely to have consistent attitudes, to vote in line with their policy preferences, and to engage in tactical voting. These are all measures of what could be considered 'successful' political participation, or the means by which individuals are able to demonstrate 'political agency'.

Some writers theorise that increased political knowledge results in citizens being more likely to participate in political processes (Bartels 1996; Heath et al. 2002; Baekgaard et al. 2014) and that they will be more able to make decisions that are in line with their views and policy preferences (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Heath et al. 2002).

It must be acknowledged that simply increasing individuals' levels of political knowledge via whatever means does not result in an increase in participation, understanding or meaningful and informed engagement with public life. Regardless of teaching, individuals will still choose to reject information even if it is relevant to a form of participation they wish to engage in (Whitworth 2014, p.59). This can be the result of one or many personal constructs that exist internally and cannot be addressed by simply providing access to information.

2.6.5   Measuring political knowledge

It is difficult to measure political knowledge, not least because it is a difficult concept to clearly define. However, efforts have been made by a number of authors within political science. Some methods use self-reporting, such as the Hansard Society's Audit of Political Engagement (2014). This may not be accurate because people's perceived knowledge of politics may not match up with their actual knowledge.

Other methods used include testing. Martin et al. (1993) developed a short quiz to measure political knowledge, to be used in the UK. They ensured that they included gender, age, level of education, level of political interest and strength of political allegiance in the study, in response to US research indicating that there are relationships between political knowledge and a number of demographic variables relating to political interest and activity. Levels of political interest were self-reported by participants, whereas strength of political allegiance was derived from answers to relevant questions in the questionnaire. The content of the questions to gauge political knowledge was generated after considerable research into how items should be selected – most of the items related to aspects if the political system rather than highly topical issues which would become outdated quickly. Most emphasis was given to UK concerns, but some questions were of international relevance. The success of the survey structure and content following several revisions and trials enabled it to be included in the 1992 British Election Study.

2.6.6   Levels of political knowledge

Studies measuring political knowledge have found a range of conflicting results, sometimes within individual studies. For example, the Hansard Society (2012) suggest that "Perceived knowledge of politics has also fallen to 44%, a decline of nine percentage points, and more people than ever – 15% – claim to know 'nothing at all' about politics." However, knowledge of parliamentary politics has been found to be stable or growing: "Knowledge levels about Parliament have remained stable over time amongst most groups, but have particularly grown amongst 18-24 year olds, with those claiming at least 'a fair amount' of knowledge rising gradually to 31% from 17% in Audit 1" (Hansard Society, 2012, p.4).

Questions relating to forms of participation beyond voting suggest there has been a decline in participation, despite there being a wider range of methods for participating. For example, the 2012 Audit found there was a 27% decrease in the number of people reporting to have signed a petition, including electronic petitions online (p.36). There is also a decrease in the number of people reporting an intention to vote in the event of an immediate general election, which has dropped to 48% (p.73), and an increase in the number of people who say they are absolutely certain not to vote, which has increased to 16% (p.88).

To an extent, data of this nature is unhelpful for research into how to improve meaningful participation, because knowledge does not necessarily translate into action, and action is not always based on a high degree of knowledge. It is difficult to ascertain that people have made choices based on political knowledge or through being good at rationalising their behaviour (Heath et al. 2002).

2.6.7   When "knowledge" is not the factor influencing behaviour

The relationship between political knowledge and political participation and behaviour is not a simple issue of the former improving the latter. There is a complex set of conditions and biases that influence political behaviour and attitudes. Heath et al. (2002) discuss how people are able to 'get by' when participating through heuristics, or information shortcuts, and follow cues from influential figures in their lives so that they can act *as if* they were politically knowledgeable without actually possessing political knowledge. This means that individuals' political behaviour is not always based on a fully-informed and knowledgeable foundation, and that people will still participate, often effectively (for example, voting for the party which purports to stand for the values the individual also holds), without a high level of knowledge.

Furthermore, some research has found that many people have ingrained political beliefs and attitudes which shape their participation more strongly than factual information does, and that even when provided with factual information to correct commonly held assumptions that are factually incorrect, particularly around contentious issues, many people are inclined to dismiss this information if it challenges their existing worldview

(Garrett & Weeks, 2013, p.9). This bias towards pre-existing attitudes and beliefs is described as "motivated reasoning" (Hart & Nisbet, E. C., 2011) and describes how it enables people to reject the corrective information. In some cases, individuals' strongly held existing beliefs and attitudes can actually become *more* ingrained (Ibid), especially if that belief is based on political partisanship (Nyhan et al., 2013; Hart & Nisbet, E. C., 2011).

Political knowledge is not the only influence on political behaviour, as identified in the previous section. Other influences, such as heuristics, allow people to make political decisions, such as voting for a particular political party, without having access to the information or knowledge that would enable them to make informed decisions. Kaid (2004) discusses the influence of peripheral cues, heuristics and simple messages, and how in certain circumstances these influences outweigh the ability or desire to make informed choices, for example when people have low levels of involvement or ability in making voting decisions, "gut-level affect" and other heuristics can be the deciding factors (Kaid 2004, p.34). Research indicates that in many cases, this use of heuristics does lead people to make the political decisions they would have made had they been more informed about their options (Ibid), but this is not always the case, and it can also result in the use of inaccurate or misleading information, particularly among people with lower levels of political sophistication (Lau & Redlawsk, 2000).

2.6.8 Summary

Political knowledge is one component required for people to make informed political decisions. However, as has been discussed in this section, it is not the only factor required for people to have the abilities, skills and desires to participate in political processes (and sometimes is not a factor at all). Although most people do rely on heuristics to make political decisions with some degree of success in making the "correct" decision based on these information shortcuts, research demonstrates that people with less political sophistication are less successful at using heuristics successfully. It is therefore important for people to be able to make decisions based on knowledge and understanding, rather than reliance on cognitive shortcuts.

This ability to critically evaluate information is one aspect of critical pedagogy, which many critical theorists argue is the only or most effective way of helping people, through education, to ensure they possess the skills and abilities they need to be active political agents. The next section discusses this critical pedagogical perspective.

The following section discusses the concept of political agency, and identifies how it can be a useful lens through which to view young people's political attitudes and information experiences in order to understand how educators can support young people's political participation.

2.7   Critical theoretical perspective of political disengagement

Critical theorists have written widely about the causes of political disengagement. A key writer whose theories are central to this research is Henry Giroux, a critical pedagogical theorist whose work focuses on education for social justice. His perspectives on political participation are discussed in this section.

For Giroux, a decline in political participation reflects a more general decline in political engagement in all its manifestations. The decline in political participation is the result of a combination of factors, including structural inequality, a decline in public space, the increasing influence of the market on private lives, and the declining presence of any kind of substantial content in democracy (Giroux, 2012b; Giroux, 2002). The decline in political participation is reflection of disenchantment and feelings of hopelessness relating to how the political system has failed on a number of counts, including a lack of adequate regulation of the financial sector, and government policies which favour the wealthy (Giroux, 2012c). Political disengagement, he argues, is the result of "political exhaustion and impoverished intellectual visions" which are supported by the popular rhetoric that "there are no alternatives to the current state of affairs" (Giroux 2002, p.94).

Another cause of political disengagement discussed by Giroux is a lack of public understanding about the "interface of private issues and public concerns". This inability to understand how private issues are related to public problems at the societal level is described as an "obsession with the private", which Giroux argues "burdens politics by

stripping it of the kind of political imagination and collective hope necessary for a viable notion of meaning, hope, and political agency" (Giroux 2011, p.87).

This situation is not presented as hopeless, however. Giroux argues that educational reform with a focus on the relationship between politics and ethics is the only viable solution to the problem of political disengagement:

> Rather than believe the fraudulent, self-serving hegemonic assumption that democracy and capitalism are the same or that politics is a site of contestation, critical exchange, and engagement is in a state of terminal arrest, it is crucial that progressives respond with a renewed effort to merge politics and ethics with a revitalized sense of the importance of providing the conditions for forms of critical citizenship and civic education that provide the knowledge, skills, and experience to produce democratic political agents. (Giroux 2002, p.96)

The role of education in enabling people to have a sense of political agency through the development of the abilities required to become knowledgeable and critical citizens is key to Giroux's concept of critical pedagogy, which aims to raise awareness of structures of power and social injustice in order to subvert them. This is discussed in depth in Chapter Three.

2.7.1   Political agency

Critical theoretical perspectives argue that the most important requirement for successful and meaningful political participation is the possession of political agency; this is the process of "learning how to deliberate, make judgements, and exercise choices, particularly as the latter are brought to bear on critical activities that offer the possibility of change" (Giroux 2011a, p.144). These skills and abilities are associated with having the desire, knowledge and ability to take political action not only to improve one's own circumstances, but to improve society and the political system for the public good:

> "Democracy requires a certain kind of citizen…citizens who feel responsible for something more than their own well-feathered little corner; citizens who want to participate in society's affairs, who insist on it; citizens with backbones; citizens who hold their ideas about democracy at the deepest level." (Berman, 1997)

This political agency supports the development of what is described by Clarke (1996) as "deep citizenship", a state in which individuals are "guided by an ethic of care centred on a concern for self, others and world, embraces the political possibilities in society" (Ibid). This section discusses the concept of political agency and connects it to more traditional notions of political participation, to present political agency as a more meaningful goal of information literacy education.

There are a number of definitions of political agency within the disciplines of political philosophy, anthropology and cultural studies. In the context of critical theory, and in this study, political agency describes an individual's capacity to participate in political issues in the world around them, through the positive exercising of social and group rights. It is the capacity or desire to choose actions consistent with a coherent sense of self, for example the ability of an individual to vote for a political party based on policies that reflect their beliefs. In the case of the critical theoretical definition, emphasis is placed on political agency's likelihood of increasing an individual's desire to participate in political actions, both formal and informal, on local, national and international levels. The process of gaining political agency "involves learning how to deliberate, make judgments and exercise choices" (Giroux 2003, p.134), which leads to the possibility of social change through more involved and active citizens. Citizenship is viewed as a form of empowerment; the skills to critically examine history, and develop self-knowledge, and critical and social agency are viewed as central to this empowerment (Giroux, 2006b).

Giroux defines political agency as "[having] the capacity to make decisions and to govern, not just to be governed" (Giroux, 2013) and describes people who possess political agency as being "skilled enough to participate in effectively shaping the basic social, political and economic orders that govern their lives" (Giroux, 2002). A fundamental aspect of political agency is the potential for action through political participation in a meaningful and critical way, which challenges structural inequality and social injustice. In contrast to many normative conceptions of political participation, however, political agency does not only manifest itself in measurable political action, which makes demonstrating the impact of education on political agency potentially difficult. This issue is discussed below.

2.8 Summary

It should be noted that this study uses a broad definition of the concept of 'political participation', because research into young people's political participation has demonstrated that they more commonly engage in forms of political participation which go beyond the scope of normative participation. It is therefore important to acknowledge these alternative modes of engagement in the study design to ensure they are not overlooked.

The state of political participation in the UK is difficult to measure and influenced by a wide range of factors. Political knowledge in and of itself is difficult to define and even more difficult to measure. Accurate information about the importance of political information for political participation is not available because the subject is extremely complex.

The political participation of young people is important for the functioning of a democratic society; not only because they are voters and leaders of the future, but because they are citizens in their own right. Indeed, a great deal of responsibility is often placed on young people and their engagement with democratic systems. It is important to support young people to make informed political decisions and to help them to develop a sense of political agency, which will encourage them to feel confident and able to participate in political processes and to challenge structural issues which limit the impact their political participation can have. It is also important to explore the development of young people's political attitudes because political socialisation has been found to fix individuals' conceptions of citizenship and their relationship with the state from an early age.

The majority of the literature indicates that access to high quality information is important for people to make political decisions that match their voting or other participatory intentions. There is a concern in much of the literature that people lack the information and/or skills to develop political views and take the appropriate actions to participate in the political process.

Researchers have not been able to strongly establish causality between levels of political knowledge and efficacy of participation, particularly in relation to formal methods such as voting. There are too many variables to be able to conclude that people with more political knowledge are therefore more able to make political decisions that match their systems of belief. There is also not a sufficient amount of definitive research to establish causality between knowledge and intent; it is not possible to conclude that those with higher levels of political knowledge are more likely to want to participate politically.

There is an apparent problem with young people's participation, both in the forms of participation they are willing to engage in, the knowledge they are applying to decision-making scenarios, and their general faith and belief in politicians and political parties, or more broadly, the democratic system as it currently functions as a whole. The degree of the problem is open to debate, but it is generally accepted that the political participation of young people is important for present and future democratic society. Regardless of whether or not levels of participation and engagement are lower than they have been in previous generations, it is still important that young people are provided with the means to become politically knowledgeable and make informed decisions about the world around them.

Young people cannot be viewed as a hegemonic group with the same political attitudes and behaviours, just as adults cannot. Research has demonstrated that many young people are not politically apathetic, and do in fact participate in political activities, especially when the concept of 'political' is taken in its broadest sense. Despite the flaws in the democratic system as it stands, it is still of benefit to encourage young people to develop political interest and knowledge and to participate in a wide range of political activities, both formal and non-formal, which can enable people to become aware of these flaws and seek to change them. Education is one method of facilitating increased political knowledge and interest.

It is important to understand the complexities of the issues surrounding young people's political attitudes and intentions to participate; research has demonstrated that the situation is too complex than to simply suggest that those who are less likely to participate would change their political attitudes and behaviours if exposed to the same conditions as

those who are more likely to participate. Underlying factors such as family background and social class affect people's behaviours, and therefore must be acknowledged when exploring political behaviour. It is also important that these new voters are provided with the resources to be knowledgeable, form opinions about what they are being asked to vote for, and have the interest to involve themselves in the election process.

The review of the literature makes assumptions based on the premise that the current democratic system in the United Kingdom is structurally flawed. However, the current system of democratic governance is unlikely to undergo significant structural improvement in the foreseeable future, and it is therefore appropriate to seek to support individuals to participate meaningfully in the existing political processes to try to ensure better representation to meet the interests and needs of the public. However, a fundamental contention of this study is that providing the public with access to information is not sufficient to ensure that the democratic system functions properly, for two main reasons:

1) Granting access to information does not ensure that individuals are able to understand and use the information to which they have access;
2) Access to factual information alone does not result in behavioural changes.

This thesis therefore argues that a more holistic change to education relating to political information is required to effect substantive social change and improve engagement with political processes based on not only access to accurate information, but also the opportunities to understand this information more meaningfully.

From a critical theoretical standpoint, access to political information for people to become knowledgeable is a vital aspect of democracy. It is therefore perhaps more important, for the purpose of research into young people's political participation and the ways in which young people can be provided with the means to meaningfully participate, for research to focus on how young people develop knowledge, the sources they use and how this relates to their political attitudes and intentions to participate. The relationship between political knowledge and attitudes is complex and not based on purely rational systems of thought; therefore any development of critical information literacy theory must take this into account.

When exploring how library and information science can make a contribution to strengthening democracy and making citizens' participation more meaningful through political information and knowledge, it may be more useful to consider theories of political agency and the subjective nature of people's perceptions of politics, information and participation, than seeking to compare and contrast these aspects on individual or group levels.

Political agency is a useful lens through which to view young people's political attitudes and participation, because it considers attitudes (including cynical and distrustful ones) and willingness to participate as well as more normative modes of participation as manifestations of active political life. It could be used by educators to explore ways of supporting young people's political participation not only through helping learners to develop the skills and abilities to critically read texts to make informed decisions about their political opinions and choices, but also to become aware of the structural issues in place which place limitations on the efficacy of this critical way of understanding and to develop the capacities to challenge them.

This chapter has explored political participation, disengagement, knowledge and agency, identified the trends in participation on a national scale, considered the reasons for declining participation and discussed a theoretical approach to making participation more meaningful on a general level. It has also focused in on a specific proportion of the population – young people. The next chapter explores issues relating to education and pedagogy and the role these have on the development of political participation.

3. Education, Pedagogy and Information Literacy

This chapter provides a background to information literacy, critical pedagogy and critical approaches to information literacy. A comprehensive review of the provision of education relating to political participation and citizenship is beyond the scope of this review. However, an overview of citizenship education provision in UK secondary schools is provided in Appendix A.

It was also beyond the scope of this review to provide comprehensive coverage of critical approaches to education. Instead, texts with key relevance to this project's central focus of developing information literacy for the development of political agency are discussed, with attention paid to the work of Henry Giroux, whose texts are of particular relevance to the role of information literacy in democratic society. Existing critical theoretical approaches to information literacy are explored, to give a picture of the degree of engagement with the concepts of critical pedagogy in the field of information literacy and identify approaches which may be useful for the context of libraries supporting political engagement in the UK.

The chapter takes the following structure:

- Section 3.1 provides an overview of information literacy, the various definitions and frameworks, discusses the strengths and weaknesses of information literacy, and identifies the relevance of information literacy to political participation and democracy more widely;
- Section 3.2 introduces critical pedagogy and explains its relevance to the research phenomenon, as a lens through which to view education as a method of supporting people to develop political agency and the means through which to participate in political processes;
- Section 3.3 synthesises the previous two sections through a discussion of the development of critical information literacy and its role in supporting political agency;
- Section 3.4 draws the chapter to a close with conclusions about the position of information literacy as it is now, and as it could and may be developed to take into account critical theoretical perspectives.

3.1 An overview of information literacy

Information literacy is a complex social practice that comprises of a spectrum of competencies which is discussed most commonly within the field of library and information studies. Information literacy emerged as a concept in the 1970s, and over the last forty years has been defined, redefined, conceptualised and reconceptualised by theorists and practitioners around the world. The focus of this research is the development of a theoretical approach to information literacy that can specifically support the development of political agency. It is not within the scope of this review to provide an account of the history of information literacy, for which I would recommend Part One of Whitworth's (2014) *Radical Information Literacy: reclaiming the political heart of the IL movement.* This section focuses instead on the different conceptions of information literacy and the criticisms of these conceptions, and then looks to the social and political relevance of information literacy. Suggestions for the development of information theory and practice with specific relevance to the improvement of democracy are identified.

3.1.1 Definitions of information literacy

Information literacy is a complex concept, comprising of a variety of skills, decision-making, cognitive and affective elements (Williams & Wavell 2006, p.4). Kapitzke (2003, p.40) states that the meaning of information literacy has never been fixed, despite its being the topic of numerous conferences and a considerable body of scholarly work. Although there is a general consensus about what constitutes an information literate individual, there are a number of specific definitions set out by different organisations and groups. These definitions tend to focus on the idea that IL is a "set of purposeful information practices" (Limberg et al. 2012, p.95). Whitworth (2014) identified three key texts from which theories, models and frameworks of information literacy evolved, shown in the first three rows of the table below. The rest of the table identifies definitions of information literacy by authors and organisations, which may or may not explicitly cite the aforementioned authors, but which Whitworth (2014) argues all share significant traits with one of more of the original definitions:

Author	Definition and details
Zurkowski (1974)	The first paper to use the term 'information literate'. Information literate individuals are those who "have learned techniques and skills for utilizing the wide range of information tools as well as primary sources in molding information solutions to their problems" (Zurkowski 1974, p.6). In contrast, those who are not information literate can be described as "literate in the sense that they can read and write [but] do not have a measure for the value of information, do not have an ability to mold information to their needs, and realistically must be considered to be information illiterates" (Ibid).
Burchinal (1976)	"To be information literate requires a new set of skills. These include how to efficiently and effectively locate and use information needed for problem-solving and decision- making… Part of such competency includes comfortable use of a computer terminal for sifting through available information from various data banks to select useful data for resolving the problem at hand." Burchinal (1976)
Hamelink (1976)	"A new "information literacy" is necessary for liberation from the oppressive effects of the institutionalized public media."

Table 3.4.1: Definitions of information literacy from the three originating texts

Modern interpretations of the concept of information literacy tend to stem from Zurkowski's text. The most commonly referred to definitions of information literacy by educational institutions and LIS-related organisations are presented in the table below:

Institution/Organisation	Definition of Information Literacy
Association of College and Research Libraries (2015)	"A set of abilities requiring individuals to recognise when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information."
Chartered Institute for Library and Information Professionals (n.d.)	"Knowing when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner... An information literate individual has an understanding of: A need for information; The resources available; How to find information; The need to evaluate results; How to work with or exploit results; Ethics and responsibility of use; How to communicate or share findings; How to manage findings."
Jisc (Joint Information Services Committee)	The term "i-skills" is used to describe information literacy and IT skills. i-Skills are defined as: "the ability to identify, assess, retrieve, evaluate, adapt, organise and communicate information within an iterative context of review and reflection."
Research Information Network (n.d.)	A broader interpretation of information literacy than CILIP and Jisc definitions: recognises that 'information' must be taken to include research data; and clearly also encompasses the ability to manage, and where appropriate preserve and curate one's own information and data.

Moscow Declaration on Media and Information Literacy (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization & International Federation of Library Associations, 2012)	Media and information literacy is "A combination of knowledge, attitudes, skills, and practices required to access, analyse, evaluate, use, produce, and communicate information and knowledge in creative, legal and ethical ways that respect human rights. Media and information literate individuals can use diverse media, information sources and channels in their private, professional and public lives. They know when and what information they need and what for, and where and how to obtain it. They understand who has created that information and why, as well as the roles, responsibilities and functions of media, information providers and memory institutions. They can analyze information, messages, beliefs and values conveyed through the media and any kind of content producers, and can validate information they have found and produced against a range of generic, personal and context-based criteria."

Table 3.4.2: Definitions of information literacy

As illustrated above, multiple definitions of information literacy exist. Although this may be problematic in that it means that a unified theory of information literacy is difficult to establish, it may be seen to be a benefit because the different definitions allow them to be used appropriately within the different contexts in which they are applied. Criticisms of the lack of one definition is among several criticisms of information literacy discussed in the following section.

3.1.2 Criticisms of information literacy

A number of criticisms of information literacy have been made, many of which are relevant to this study. These are discussed below.

3.1.2.1 Criticisms of definitions and efforts to define information literacy

Although the definitions identified in the table above share significant characteristics and a substantial degree of commonality in definitions (Tuominen et al. 2005, p.333), there is no one universal definition, and instead definitions and approaches tend to be chosen based on the political and organisational contexts for which they were developed (Virkus 2003, pp.31-34). Although discussion about the definition and of information literacy is ongoing, it has been suggested that a focus on defining the term information literacy may be a waste

of energy that would better be focused on implementing strategies of developing information literacy in practice (Andretta, 2005).

However, the lack of a consistent definition of information literacy may be problematic. Elmborg (2006, p.193) suggests much of the confusion about the definition of information literacy stems from the complexity of the word 'literacy'. The disagreements in definition go further than semantics or technicalities, but reach through to the very values of librarianship and views about its role. He theorises that confusion about the definition has prevented critical judgement about its importance. A lack of clarity about what issues information literacy addresses in what ways may limit discussion about what the role of information literacy should be in society and education, and to what extent it should act as a force to challenge social and educational issues.

3.1.2.2 Conceptualisations of information literacy

It is evident from the range of definitions of information literacy that the concept can be understood and used in a number of different ways. One of the most useful ways of understanding these conceptions is by exploring the origins of information literacy. Whitworth (2014) identifies three key papers which influenced the development of IL: Zurkowski (1974), Burchinal (1976) and Hamelink (1976). These papers take different approaches to the conceptualisation of IL, presented in the table below:

	Zurkowski	Burchinal	Hamelink
Approach	Knowledge Mgmt	Educational	Transformational
Theoretical foundation	Economic & political liberalism. Economic pragmatism.	Instrumental approach	Liberatory approach (c.f. Freire)
Direction	Top down: developed *in* populations to assimilate to emerging ICT & info rich society	Top down: developed *in* populations to assimilate to emerging ICT & info rich society	Bottom up: developed *by* populations so they can defend selves against *cognitive costs* of society
Information landscape	Wide information landscape – including IT as central	Wide information landscape – IT only a part	Awareness of variety of learner experiences

Social value	IL fundamental to health of economy, political system and decision-making in society.	IL fundamental for adults to function effectively in emerging society	IL foundation for countering tech & info-rich system. Liberation from oppressive media
Theoretical foundation	IL as more of an *epistemology* than a form of learning	IL as *educational* problem: developing information seeking, problem-solving and decision-making skills	IL as political, recognising differences in people, oriented towards empowerment
Institutional location	None identified	Universities and schools	
Determination of context	By educators	By educators	By community
Offer	Skills. Generic capabilities	Skills. Generic capabilities	Skills. Opportunities for transformation. Capabilities context-dependent
Validation and processing of information	Equal	Equal	Not equal – different ways of thinking & forms of authority

Table 3 4.3: Key papers on the emerging theoretical and practical concept of IL.
Adapted from Whitworth (2014, pp.27-46)

Building on these definitions, Whitworth (2014, p.43) presents information literacy as an umbrella concept for other literacies in different contexts. Media literacy is seen as "information literacy with a specific focus on the texts, structures, and values of the broadcast media". Similarly, scientific literacy can be viewed as IL which has a specific focus on scientific information, and so on. In this mode of conception, information literacy is viewed as the overarching 'literacy', which should be seen as "the scrutiny of claims to cognitive authority in particular contexts" (Ibid, p.23).

3.1.2.3 Positivist approach to information literacy

Other criticisms of definitions of information literacy include criticisms of the positivist approach taken to information literacy which is reflected in the use of language in definitions, such as ACRL's use of the terms "effectively" and "efficiently", which do not

reflect the nature of information literacy as part of an interpretivist or critical social science (Whitworth 2006, p.4). While information literacy theory appears to be moving away from a positivist understanding of information literacy, with phenomenographic research contributing to a theoretical understanding of many frames of information literacy (for example Lupton & Bruce 2010; Andretta 2007; Bruce et al. 2006), information literacy practice has not yet caught up. Whitworth identifies a gap between theory and practice, arguing that, at best, information literacy practice struggles to accommodate the view that IL is "dialogic, multifaceted, and rooted both in personal psychology and collective decision-making processes" and "at worst, actively represses it in favour of a monologic, technical, standards-based approach" (Whitworth 2014, p.89). He argues that this situation is the result of the institutionalisation of IL, which is heavily HE-dominated and led by competency-based approaches.

3.1.2.4 Limited conceptions of what constitutes a 'valid' source of information

Whitworth (2014) criticises traditional approaches to information literacy for their limited conception of what constitutes 'valid' sources of information. He argues that there is a need to move information literacy "beyond just the evaluation of texts, and into an understanding of all potential information sources within a landscape, particularly including other people" (Whitworth 2014, p.160). The concept of radical information literacy represents a move from normative understandings of information sources and is explored in section 3.3.3.

3.1.2.5 Skills-oriented focus of information literacy

The skills-oriented focus, "check-box" (Nicholson, 2014) or "step-by-step process" approach (Webber & Johnston 2000, p.384) directly maps information literacy onto assignments and curricula focuses exclusively on skills and reduces the complexity of learning and knowledge to limited and isolated units (Ibid). This approach may serve to isolate information from its social, political, cultural, historical, and technological contexts (Jacobs & Berg 2011, p.386; Špiranec & Zorica 2010, pp.142-143).

The skills-oriented nature of information literacy mean that it is often conceived of as a problem-solving device. When instruction is structured around the idea that information literacy is a problem needing to be overcome, and that information literacy instruction is the process of providing "survival skills" (Jacobs & Berg, 2011), learners are viewed as being in a position of deficit (Accardi et al., 2010; Jacobs & Berg, 2011). This prevents engagement with the deeper and more meaningful aims of information literacy as presented by frameworks or definitions such as the Alexandria Proclamation.

The technical and tool-based aspects of information literacy practice may be problematic. For example, Whitworth suggests that despite the fact that information literacy initially aimed to reach beyond a positivist and quantitative approach to learning, that this aim has been lost and instead there tends to be a focus on rubrics and skill-sets, which do not help individuals to apply their abilities in different contexts (Whitworth 2009, p.113).

Elmborg (2006) argues that there has been a lack of attention paid to the role of schools as "shapers of student consciousness". Whitworth (2014, p.93) suggests that this is a consequence of the positivistic LIS research paradigm decontextualizing phenomena, separating students from their "social and economic contexts", and results in LIS' insufficiency in understanding real, non-HE, non-library-based information landscapes.

3.1.2.6 Lack of theoretical and critical depth to information literacy

Criticisms have been made regarding a lack of critical depth in information literacy models and frameworks, and the lack of a 'theory' of information literacy. Although much research of information literacy in practice has been conducted, there remains a lack of engagement with a theoretical approach. Buschman, for example, criticises LIS for being simultaneously both under- and over-theorised in approach, arguing that "LIS cast as a science has flattened libraries and information systems/products into objective and neutral entities studied without reference to context or power" (Buschman 2007, p.1492), while suggesting that at the same time there has been "an over-theorised notion of power and domination proliferates within areas of LIS theory adapted from postmodern sources" (Ibid). This failure to engage with substantive political issues has also been raised by Elmborg (2010) and

Kapitzke (2001, 2003). Gage (2004) goes so far as to describe his perception that the library and information profession as having become a "hollowed out reification of consumer society" which "systemically fails to problematize issues of importance" (Gage 2004, p.73).

In some cases, had theory been applied to the development of frameworks and models, some authors argue that the outputs would be more easily applicable in practice because there would be a consistent underlying theoretical foundation. Discussing the ACRL Framework, Whitworth (2006) suggests that the attention to pedagogy contains potentially contradictory aspects, highlighting the inclusion of both strategic and communicative action. He analyses the framework using Habermasian theories, and suggests that although the contradictions inherent in these forms of action is not fatal, it is likely to cause difficulties for information literacy instructors if they want to apply the ACRL recommendations meaningfully (Whitworth 2006, p.8). He argues that the standards reduce the concept of what it means to be "critical" to a minimum and reduces teaching to the technical level. This "deflects attention away from the structural causes of inequality" (Ibid), which he argues fails to appreciate information literacy's social scientific nature. He argues that this approach to information literacy instruction has a negative effect on students, who are not encouraged to develop a flexible, enquiring attitude and therefore are less able to become the "critically enquiring minds important to a democracy" or the "flexible, adaptable workers the business/industrial sector declares it needs" (Ibid, p.9). It is apparent that even where information literacy's more "critical" aspects are referenced, these may not be applied meaningfully. This will be explored in more depth in the later discussion of critical theoretical approaches to information literacy.

It is argued that this lack of deep engagement with critical theory has led to an overemphasis on a positivist approach (Kapitzke 2003, p.11). It is argued that this impedes the development of critical reasoning (Pankl & Coleman, 2010). Whitworth (2009a, p.113) suggests that information literacy's tendency towards a positivist approach to knowledge reduces information literacy education to sets of "rubrics" or "skills", which prevents learners from being able to use what they learn creatively in new and unexpected situations and does not challenge people to question what they know. It has been suggested that information literacy, if not approached with thought, can mask an

exclusionary ideology which prevents equitable outcomes in education. Kapitzke (2003, p.38) suggests that, due to its positivist philosophical orientation, the information literacy framework is incompatible with emergent concepts of knowledge and epistemology for digital and online environments.

A number of authors argue that information literacy lacks a synthesised theory with which to justify its claim to being a discipline or field in its own right (Whitworth 2014; Lloyd 2013). Where critical pedagogy is used in IL in the UK, for example through interpretive, holistic approaches (Whitworth 2014, p.51), it is most often found in libraries in higher education (Whitworth 2014, p.53). The needs of learners in higher education differ greatly from learners in other areas of formal learning and individuals and communities outside of formal learning environments, which remain under-researched and under-theorised: "despite its constructivist and innovative pedagogical tradition, and its clear desire to integrate, it has failed to break out of the library and HE sector in any significant way." (Whitworth 2014, p.52). If information literacy is to be considered its own discipline, more work is required to present a unified theory of information literacy, based on empirical research *outside of higher education* which can be applied across library and information sectors.

3.1.3 The politics of information literacy

A number of authors strongly argue that information literacy, framed as part of education, is inherently political, which is an under-acknowledged issue (Walton et al. 2011, p.189). This is an important to address because information literacy is largely concerned with judgements about value, which practitioners have a responsibility to acknowledge and handle to enable students to move into higher intellectual development. Whitworth (2009b) connects the concept of noöpolitics, a term coined by Vernadsky (1945 in Whitworth, 2011) which is interested in how authority and control are established in information sources to reproduce cultural hegemony. Whitworth (2009b) provides examples of disinformation and ways in which news reporting has been distorted, such as the representation of Islam by 'Western' news agencies (Ibid, p.198), which influences popular sentiment about political issues. The messages sent by media representation

influence the ways in which people understand the 'truth'. This has a direct impact on children's views and development, including their political beliefs and sense of agency.

Related to the idea that information influences people's relationships with the world around them, many forms of information literacy education may be seen to be closely tied to the Freirean concept of "banking education", in which knowledge is treated as cultural and economic capital (Elmborg, 2006, p.193) which the teacher "deposits" for the student to capitalise upon (Buschman 2008, p.7). Critical theorists argue that this kind of education trains people in the capitalist ethic, and they become passive receivers rather than active agents with a critical consciousness. To challenge this, Elmborg argues that in order to align themselves with the democratic values they invoke, libraries must engage in critical literacy and focus on the links between educational processes and the politics of literacy: "Neutrality is not an option" (Elmborg 2006, p.193)

When considering the necessity of information literacy education to engage with the political, it is important to be aware of the limitations that must be placed on explicitly political approaches to information literacy education. Information literacy practitioners must work within certain ethical constraints, which includes not interfering in the political lives of others (Garner, 2006, p. 84).

3.1.4 Information literacy and democracy

The democratic potential of LIS is a popular topic in the discipline. Authors frequently cite major works such as Ranganathan's Five Laws of Library Science (1931) and Gorman's Enduring Values (2000) in reference to the democratic values of the profession. Information provision, education and public space are listed among the ways in which libraries contribute to democratic ideals (for example Belfrage 2000; Buschman 2007; Garner 2006; Hill 2009 Jacobs and Berg 2011; Joint 2005; Kranich 2001; Madsen 2009; Worpole 1995). Considerable emphasis is placed on the ways in which libraries can actively engage people with democratic participation through helping them to become independent learners with strong information literacy skills, which will enable them to find the information they need in order to successfully participate in political life (Jacobs and Berg 2011).

However, the democratic role of libraries is an area which remains under-theorised (Buschman 2007). With specific reference to information literacy, although the roots of IL included engagement with the political and potentially liberatory nature of information and its dissemination and use (Hamelink 1976), the focus of IL education has tended to use the conceptualisation of IL presented by Zurkowski (1974) with a theoretical basis in political and economic liberalism, and has tended to be instrumental in approach (Whitworth 2014, p.30). In other instances, IL has been presented as an essential element of democratic society, for example by Owens (1976, p.27), who argues that voters with information literacy are better placed to make informed decisions. The problematic nature of Owens' assertion must be acknowledged, in that it presents information literacy as central to meaningful political engagement, but places the citizen in a deficit position, which more progressive approaches to information literacy reject. Furthermore, Owens' approach can be criticised for failing to take into account the non-rational aspects of political decision-making such as heuristics, and the way in which political participation is reduced to formal engagement in electoral processes (Whitworth 2014, p.39).

More recent engagement with the political nature of IL has appeared on the fringes of the discipline, but is not a central focus of mainstream IL discourse. This is not to suggest that there has been no critical engagement with the political nature of IL. Some statements on information literacy do acknowledge political issues concerning the concept. For example, the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) statement on Information Literacy (2006) identifies information literacy as a prerequisite for participatory citizenship, social inclusion, creation of new knowledge and personal, vocational, corporate and organisational empowerment and learning for life. It mentions that a thriving national and global culture, economy and democracy will be best advanced by people able to recognise their need for information and identify, locate, access, evaluate and apply the needed information.

Suggestions have been made as to how librarians can act to support democracy, including offering information literacy education to help people identify and evaluate information to make informed decisions in their everyday lives, their work and how they govern themselves. Further research into the ways that information literacy provision can support

democracy through political engagement would be of benefit to information literacy theory and practice, and must be critical in approach in order to challenge pre-existing notions about the role of libraries and librarians in political contexts that have often resulted in these democratic goals not coming to fruition (Buschman 2007).

This section has provided an overview of the general concepts relating to information literacy. The next section discusses studies of young people's information literacy more specifically, which shed light on the differences between younger and older individuals' IL competencies and information behaviours, and demonstrate the need for a deliberate and considered approach to exploring young people's information literacy in the context of information relating to political agency and participation.

3.1.5 Young people's information literacy

A number of methods of measuring information literacy are used within library and information studies for research projects and assessment of learners. The majority of information literacy research focuses on higher education and students' information literacy in relation to their undergraduate education, but there is also a smaller body of research into the information literacy of people younger than 18 years old. This section briefly explores some of these studies to emphasise the fact that levels of information literacy in young people is often found to be less than is needed to effectively locate and use information. The aim of this research project is not to assess the levels of young people's information literacy, and it is therefore not necessary to identify and assess a range of projects which have sought to do so. However, a brief overview of some key projects provides an insight into the research approaches that have been used and an idea of how the phenomenon is understood and conceptualised within the LIS discipline.

3.1.5.1 Young people's information literacy "incompetency"

Many studies identify the limitations of young people's information literacy abilities, and particular interest has been shown in identifying their flaws in relation to the use of online information. Some notable studies are discussed in this section.

The Centre for Information Behaviour and the Evaluation of Research (CIBER) at University College London reports a that pre-university students find it difficult to assess the relevance of information they are faced with, construct effective searches and use the narrowest of criteria to evaluate their newly found information (Centre for Information Behaviour and the Evaluation of Research, 2008). Although it is acknowledged that research on the topic is patchy, in its report, CIBER identify a number of trends in research into how children and young people become competent in using the internet and other research tools (i.e. their information literacy skills). These trends include a lack of evaluation of information, poor understanding of information needs, ineffective search strategies, and difficulty with assessing the relevance of search results (CIBER 2008, p.12).

The results of a study by Taylor (2012) of the information search behaviour of the "millennial generation" mirror these findings. Taylor explored how young people determine the validity of information gathered online in a longitudinal study over five weeks. Using quantitative analysis, he found that young people "proceed erratically through the information search process making limited attempt to evaluate the quality or validity of the information gathered". The participants did not consider the verification of information sources to be important, which he suggests indicates a non-critical view of online information sources. He backs up his findings with suggestions that the prevailing educational view is that students have incomplete cognitive thinking skills, which creates difficulty in discerning valid and invalid information. It is also suggested that the neoliberal social views of the millennial generation are indicative of a consumerist approach to education, which results in the focus on a search product, rather than the process of evaluating and verifying the content.

Other studies have also identified weaknesses in young people's online information seeking and use. Demos (Bartlett & Miller, C., 2011) conducted research into young people's "digital fluency", the skills of which are synonymous with information literacy. They found that many young people do not take care to discern the quality of the information they encounter online, and often struggle to find the information they need and instead settle on the first thing they find. Concern was also raised about their lack of fact-checking and inability to "recognise bias and propaganda". The report expressed concern about young

people's tendencies to rely on inaccurate information which "they should probably discard" and described how the outcome of this lack of information literacy is that young people are "vulnerable to the pitfalls and rabbit holes of ignorance, falsehoods, cons and scams" and that "inaccurate content, online misinformation and conspiracy theories…are appearing in the classroom" (Bartlett & Miller, C., 2011).

Research within library and information studies has identified a deficit of critical thinking and critical literacy skills in some young people (Taylor 2012; Cody 2006; Oberman 1991), as well as a lack of information literacy skills (Rieh & Hilligoss, 2008), which may be key to effective democratic engagement (Garner 2006; Kapitzke 2003; 2001). These findings mirror concerns expressed by critical theorists that there has been a "failure to maintain a critical awareness of information in the general population" (Whitworth 2009, p.131).

3.1.5.2 Differences between adult and youth information literacy

Some research has taken a comparative approach, looking at the differences between adult and youth IL. (Rieh & Hilligoss 2008, p.49) suggest that adults are more likely to consider whether information is "accurate, current, novel, objective, reliable, authoritative, trustworthy, understandable, well-written, comprehensive, easy to obtain, and on topic", whereas young people are "more likely to select information based on whether they think the information they have retrieved is related to the topic, new, interesting and convenient". Young people were believed to be less interested in authority, readability and "recency" of information. Similarly, Shenton and Dixon (2004) found that young people aim for quantity rather than quality when it comes to using information, with priority placed on finding information quickly with the least possible effort. Rieh & Hilligoss (2008) also found that young people verify information significantly less than adults, which supports Johnson & Kaye's (2000) findings that younger people tend to view the internet as a more credible source of information than older individuals.

3.1.5.3 Young people's information literacy competency

Not all research has concluded that young people lack important information literacy skills to quite the extent of those previously mentioned. For example, D'Esposito & Gardner (1999) found that many students are keenly aware of the need to discern reliable information on the internet, but that differences between the perceived need for credibility of information may differ depending on the type of information – news or entertainment – for example. The issue of young people's establishment of information credibility is complex; Rieh & Hilligoss (2008) identify a social nature, dependent upon whether others consider a source credible, such as a respected member of teaching staff. A number of factors influence credibility judgements, based on context and 'cognitive flexibility', such as the ability to distinguish between types of information resource (the general web or scholarly databases, for example). Not all students are able to evaluate credibility for themselves, and rely on teachers to do this for them. Notably, Rieh and Hilligoss (2008, p.59) found that once the credibility of an information source has been questioned, all subsequent information from that source may become suspect from that point onward.

Smith (2010) explored how young people experience information, taking a phenomenographic approach, exploring the research phenomena from the point of view of their research participants. She found that some young people lack a consciousness about how the information they are seeking is to be used. The participants who expressed their experiences of information in ways which fitted in Smith's fourth category (store of unprocessed information) tended to see information as "factual knowledge which needs to be stored and regurgitated when necessary" and did not see information as something which necessarily needs to be understood (Ibid, p.170). This indicates a lack of critical, analytic thinking and that there is "a need to help young people to be more conscious about the nature of the information that they need to answer a question i.e. how they will use that information", and that through helping learners to understand their information experience more reflectively, information literacy education could support more effective learning. Smith suggests that approaching the issue of young people's information skills by seeking to understand how young people use information helps us to see young people more positively, rather than taking a deficit approach and viewing them in the negative

light in which they are often seen, for example as the 'Google generation', or disengaged, poor learners.

3.1.6 Summary

Although differences exist in theoretical perspective and approach, and understandings of the concepts of information, literacy, and information literacy, a common conclusion of much of the research in the field is that young people need support to develop information literacy competencies. However, when looking at political agency, the most appropriate way of conceptualising information literacy is from a bottom up perspective, taking into account Hamelink's perspective of IL (1976), rather than Zurkowski's (1974) approach to IL which does not offer a view of agency (Whitworth 2014, p.32). Taking a phenomenographic approach and using critical theory may be beneficial in this regard; these approaches are discussed in Chapter Four.

This section has explored issues around literacies, information literacy and young people's particular characteristics relating to information literacy. A range of 'literacies' can be understood as having a role to play in the development of young people's political agency and ability to use information to become informed and to develop political knowledge and attitudes.

Several limitations of information literacy have been identified, which highlight a lack of theory in information literacy research as well as a lack of strong methodological rigour. Additionally, potential problems with young people's information literacy have been discussed. The following section discusses critical pedagogy, which is an area of particular relevance to critical approaches to information literacy.

3.2 Critical pedagogy

This section discusses critical pedagogy, which is an area of critical theory, focusing specifically on education and theories of teaching and learning. This section provides an overview of critical pedagogy as a whole, but focuses most specifically at aspects which are of particular relevance to library and information studies and information literacy education

in relation to supporting democracy. The work of key theorists is outlined. However, the aim is not to provide definitive accounts of each theorist, but to identify the aspects of their work most relevant to critical information literacy. The section is broken down thematically into areas which are of particular relevance to library and information studies and particularly school and public librarianship, such as schooling and the role of critical pedagogy in supporting democracy, and the impact of neoliberalism on public services and democracy.

3.2.1 Definitions of critical pedagogy

Critical pedagogy derives from the critical theory of the Frankfurt School of philosophers and focuses on the critique of society by identifying relations of power, and suggesting ways in which people may create a more just and equal society (Ashwin and McLean 2005; How 2003). However, critical theory (and by extension critical pedagogy) cannot and should not be considered "as a universal grammar of revolutionary thought objectified and reduced to discrete formulaic pronouncements or strategies" (Kincheloe et al. 2010, p.164).

Critical pedagogical theory is couched within wider critical theory, the major purpose of which is to make problematic what is taken for granted in culture, so that a degree of social justice can be had by those who are oppressed (McCarthy 1991, p.43). It is political in tone and explicitly refers to the need to achieve social change through education to create a viable notion of politics which represents the needs and interests of all citizens, especially those who are marginalised and oppressed by structures of social and political power. It is interested in power relations, emancipatory approaches to education and the equitable treatment of students who may be considered 'non-traditional' for a variety of reasons (Ashwin and McLean 2005, p.4).

When applied through practice in education, critical pedagogy develops conceptual tools to enable people to become reflective and use language to question knowledge and power in society (Day 2005; Morrell 2004; Luke 2000; Giroux 1993; Shor 1992.) It is based on the belief that education needs to go beyond teaching 'functional literacy' because education is inherently political; it is connected to "the acquisition of agency and the ability to struggle

with ongoing relations of power" (Giroux 2011, p.147). This nature of education makes it a precondition for creating informed and critical citizens (Giroux 2011, p.147).

Critical approaches to pedagogy value the importance of teaching analysis and critiquing skills around the relationships between texts, language and power, as a way to develop a language for challenging social injustice. Critical pedagogy includes ways of thinking and communicating which seek a deep understanding of the root causes, contexts and consequences of actions and discourse in society (Shor, 1992).

Critical pedagogical theory stems from the work of theorists such as Paulo Freire (1970, more years). It has since been built upon by several critical theorists, including Henry Giroux (2012b; 2011b; 2010; 2009; 2006; 2005; 2003; 1997; 1989; 1988). Giroux's work is notable for its focus on critical literacy for supporting democracy, which develops Freire's beliefs about the democratic potential of education. Literacy is understood as the way in which we read the world (Freire, 2005) and as a set of practices that function to either empower or disempower people (Freire & Macedo 1987, p.141). Students are encouraged to question and critique texts and the surrounding world (Pinhasi-Vittorio 2011; Freire & Macedo 1987).

Critical pedagogy is an educational movement which gives students the opportunity to develop the knowledge, skills and sense of responsibility necessary to engage in a culture of questioning, through thinking critically, questioning events in society and striving for socio-political equality (Pinhasi-Vittorio 2011, p.122). These abilities allow young people to challenge perceived inevitability of social injustice, and engage in meaningful participation and leadership.

3.2.2 Critical pedagogy in the classroom

A major focus of critical pedagogy is praxis; the process of enacting critical theories in practice with the specific goal of confronting the social issues of power and dominance (Powell et al. 2001, p.773). This praxis tends to be referred to as "critical literacy" and the literature search for this review reveals it is most commonly found in the subject area of English, in the United States far more so than the United Kingdom. Critical literacy

education has not been fully integrated into any curricula at a national level, but examples can be found around the world. For example, critical literacy has been used to explore gender equality (Cherland & Cherland, 2008; Jones & Clarke, L. W., 2007; Bee, 1993), homophobia (Young, 2009; Martino, 2001), racial equality (Hall & Piazza, 2008; Rogers & Mosley, 2006), and class equity (Jones, 2006; Powell, R. et al., 2001). A key recommendation of many writing about how to enact critical pedagogy in the classroom is that it can be extremely effective to connect issues to young people's own lives and experiences in order to help them understand the larger-scale impact of social issues, but that this needs to be an explicit part of course design and with an awareness that texts are not neutral and their authority should be critiqued (Jones & Clarke 2007, p.100).

3.2.3 Key critical pedagogical theorists

The table in Appendix B outlines key critical pedagogues and the areas their work focuses on. It should be noted that the content of the table is provisional and open to contestation. It must also be acknowledged that there is an imbalance in the depth in which each theorist is presented. This is because I have chosen to present the most relevant aspects of critical pedagogy as it relates to library and information studies, and because background reading in some theorists was required to grasp the meaning presented by other theorists in referencing the work of others. The table does not aim to be exhaustive but instead presents a selection of relevant theorists for possible further exploration in future research or praxis.

3.2.3.1 Key questions and areas of exploration in critical pedagogy

Critical pedagogy focuses on a number of key questions relating to the education and its relationship with social justice and equality. Common questions for the critical educator include: What knowledge is of most worth? Whose knowledge is most important? What knowledge should be taught, and just as important, what knowledge is not to be taught? How does the structure of the school contribute to the social stratification of our society? What is the relationship between knowledge and power? What does this imply for our children? What is the purpose of schooling? Is it to ensure democracy or to maintain the

status quo and support big business? How can teachers enable students to become critical thinkers who will promote true democracy and freedom? (McLaren 1997, p.47). These questions are asked by many critical pedagogical theorists, including Henry Giroux, whose work is core to the critical analysis element of this study in Chapter Eight. An introduction to his theories is presented below.

3.2.4 Henry Giroux

This study draws upon the theories discussed by Henry Giroux, whose writing on critical pedagogy is of particular relevance to critical approaches to librarianship (Canadian Association of Professional Academic Librarians 2015; Eryaman 2010; Pankl & Coleman 2010; Gage 2004; Buschman 2003). Eryaman (2010) provides a useful background to Giroux and his career, including the development of the focus of his work from the development of a critical pedagogy for radical democracy, shifting toward postmodern, feminist and postcolonial theories.

Giroux's work on critical pedagogy is influenced by the work of Paulo Freire and Ira Shor, who focus on critical education as a basic element of social change, based on the belief that participatory democracy is crucial for social justice. This review and the rest of the study will therefore also draw from some of the key theories of these authors, who have heavily influence Giroux's work.

This section briefly summarises some of Giroux's key theories as an illustration of the relevance of his work to the development of information literacy theory in relation to political agency.

3.2.4.1 Key topics

It is not within the scope of this review to present an in-depth discussion of all of Giroux's works. However, some of the key themes discussed by Giroux and associated authors are presented below as an introduction to the concepts that are applied in the discussion of their relevance to young people's critical information literacy and their perceptions of political information sources in Chapter Eight. The themes explored include: political

literacy, the democratic potential of education, the politics of disimagination, and the influence of the media on young people's political agency.

3.2.4.1.1 Political literacy

Political literacy is a term used in multiple academic fields and can be defined in different ways, including a conception which focuses on the development of skills and abilities required to participate in formal political processes, although some organisations in the UK acknowledge the need for political literacy to focus on helping young people to develop political ideas and opinions rather than solely learning about political institutions (Citizenship Foundation, 2012).

In the context of critical theory, the definition of political literacy goes even further than the idea that political literacy is about the development of political ideas based on a knowledge of politics. It refers to "dialogue that raises awareness of the value of one's own culture, history, and associated information landscapes" (Whitworth 2014, p.37) and is viewed as a key tool with which citizens can "counter hegemonic oppression" (Carr & Thesee 2008, p.173). Giroux suggests that increasing young people's political literacy through teaching and guidance from radical educators is a way in which the formal education system can begin to help people tackle the problems of social injustice and unequal distribution of power and resources. This requires educators to identify the ideologies that inform their teaching, and the provision of a theoretical framework in which literacy is considered not only as a technique but also a constitutive process of constructing meaning and critically interrogating the forces that shape lived experiences.

3.2.4.1.2 The democratic potential of education

Despite his various criticisms of schooling, Giroux expresses hope for the education system and presents an alternative possibility for the impact of schools on democracy. He believes that critical pedagogy is the most appropriate, and perhaps only, avenue through which young people have the opportunity to develop "the knowledge, skills, and sense of responsibility needed for them to participate in and exercise the leadership necessary for them to govern the prevailing social order" (Giroux 2012, p.116-7). Critical pedagogy aims

to raise awareness of structures of power and social injustice in order to subvert them. He views civic education (learning how to become a skilled citizen) as "the foundation for expanding and enabling political agency" (Giroux 2002, p.97), at the same time as acknowledging that people are influenced and educated across a wide range of public spheres outside the context of formal education.

3.2.4.1.3 The influence of the media on political attitudes

Giroux expresses concerns about the role of the media and the ways in which it is driven by values and ideas that are corporate and conservative. He argues that the media makes claims to be neutral but is driven by "vocabularies, values and ideas that are corporate and conservative" (Giroux 2012b, p.32). A lack of consciousness about the ways in which media outlets are influenced by neoliberal attitudes can be attributed to a lack of critical education both formally through the education system and informally through wider society, which is particularly problematic for young people, who are increasingly expected to make political decisions but have not yet had the life experience to develop knowledge and critical thinking skills through alternative means.

3.2.4.2 The relevance of critical pedagogy to LIS research and practice

Some case studies exploring critical theoretical approaches to information literacy provision have been conducted. Major themes in the papers about critical literacy written by library and information scientists and practitioners tend to focus on the need to build critical elements into existing information literacy practice, and the need for librarians to have an increased awareness of social and political contexts in which information is grounded, to conduct information literacy instruction in a more critical way, thereby enabling students to develop critical literacy skills that they can use in their everyday lives and within educational settings.

Allan & Kapitzke (1999) discuss the relevance of the development of new epistemologies to an understanding of information literacy, including the argument that "the formation, production, regulation and critique of knowledge necessarily entails relations of power and capital" (Allan & Kapitzke 1999, p.5). They claim that these new perspectives destabilize

notions of the library, because the concepts of authorship and readership, text and knowledge as interpreted by the institution of the library do not fit with these new epistemological perspectives. They also argue that these new perspectives challenge commonplace assumptions about the authority of teachers and librarians as arbiters of what constitutes legitimate knowledge (Ibid). The authors critique a number of different standards of school- and university-level approaches information literacy training, including Eisenberg and Berkowitz's Information Problem-Solving: The Big Six Skills Approach to Library and Information Skills Instruction (Eisenberg & Berkowitz, 1990) and the American Library Association's nine "information literacy standards for student learning" (American Association of School Librarians & Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 1998), criticizing the hierarchical nature of the former and the tautological statements made by the latter, problems which prevent information literacy instruction in these formats from being effective and clear guidelines for use in the internet age, where information is not linear and students need to be more than passive recipients of such information.

The authors argue that to meaningfully engage with democratic issues and help students to become active agents in society, information literacy tuition must address the various constructions of knowledge and enable students to learn the skills required to recognise these constructions themselves.

With specific reference to Giroux, Gage (2004, p.67) suggests that Giroux's work is relevant to librarians due to its focus on how the production, circulation and use of information and knowledge are connected to issues of power, and the political economy. Additionally, Eryaman (2010) discusses how Giroux's theory of radical democracy and the application of his concept of "border pedagogy" (Giroux, 2005b) may be used in public libraries to enable people to develop the capacities to understand how systems of power and control are legitimised by ideology through information, and to directly address the unequal distribution of power and information through library provision.

3.2.5 Criticisms of critical pedagogy

Criticisms of critical pedagogical theory often come from the political right. The Texas Republican Party, for example, argues that educators seeking to teach students critical thinking skills are trying to indoctrinate people and force their worldviews on them (Strauss, 2012). Not all criticisms of critical pedagogy come from the political right, however. Gibson (1986) presents a clear and balanced account of critical theory to show its strengths and weaknesses so that it can be applied appropriately in educational settings. He suggests that critical theorists sometimes have a tendency to root all the problems in the world in the capitalist economic relationship, which he argues is "politically dogmatic" (Gibson 1986, p.170). Stating that "Reductive crudities of the Left of Right are an inadequate base for educational theory" (Ibid), he suggests that the most likely way to successfully implement critical theory in the practice of schools and society is to strike a balance and mixture of approaches.

Other criticisms of critical theory include that authors tend to turn to "sloganising" rather than offering prescriptive recommended actions, and declining to offer practical actions for teachers. However, it is acknowledged that a central value of critical pedagogy is the importance of the application of theoretical principles by practitioners themselves, rather than theorists, and that it should not be the role of critical pedagogues to offer authoritarian or generalised prescriptions to solve the problems of the education system (Gibson 1986, p.63, Kincheloe et al. 2010, p.164). This means that a general model of critical literacy instruction could not be developed which would be true to the values of critical theory.

Gibson (1986, p.173) also criticises critical theory for its "notorious denseness" of language, and use of obscure and technical terms, which, he believes, are a barrier to its application in practice. This use of language can contribute to the perception of critical theory as self-important (Brookfield 2004, p.1). This dramatic language may in some cases result in disengagement from valid criticisms of education systems and curricula. For example, (Cornbleth 1990, p.52) suggests that use of the term "hidden curricula" in relation to schooling implies a conspiracy, without evidence. Instead she recommends using the term

"implicit curricula", which although less dramatic, more accurately refers to the effects of the less explicit, subject-based learning which schools may not be aware they expose learners to.

3.2.6 Summary

This section has discussed critical pedagogy and explored the benefits and drawbacks of it in relation to applying it to LIS research. Henry Giroux has been identified as a relevant theorist whose work may make a valuable contribution to the understanding of young people's conceptions of political information and political agency. It is of merit to consider critical literacy from a critical pedagogical viewpoint to apply theories to information literacy and political agency because critical pedagogy deals with issues of effective democracy directly, whereas taking a neutral and atheoretical stance to concepts of critical thinking and critical literacy may fail to address these issues.

3.3 Critical approaches to information literacy

As explored in this chapter so far, two main strands of critical approaches to information literacy are apparent: the theoretical, and the practice (or praxis) based. The following section discusses critical information literacy, which is theoretically informed, yet emphasises the need for the development of theory through praxis.

Critical information literacy can be broadly defined as "the application of critical pedagogical theories to information literacy instruction" (Swanson, 2004). It draws on critical pedagogy and has ties to social justice. Although critical pedagogical theory has not been applied to library and information studies wholesale and very much remains on the margins of information literacy discourse (Cope 2010, p.24), it has been recommended by a number of theorists within the discipline who believe it is an important area with which to actively engage, particularly with regard to information literacy provision (Gregory & Higgins 2013; Accardi et al. 2010; Eryaman 2010; Elmborg 2006; Gage 2004; Doherty & Ketchner 2005; Kapitzke 2003).

Critical approaches to information literacy have been taking place since the inception of the concept in the 1970s (Whitworth 2014) and the adoption of the concept of information literacy by the Association of College and Research Libraries (McDonough 2014, p.8), not always involving the application of a specific label or identification as 'critical'. Much of the work that takes place under the label of critical information literacy has been taking place under the label of critical media literacy or media studies for many years (Whitworth 2011, p.211).

However, there is an emerging movement which self-defines as 'critical information literacy', which can be considered to be a loosely connected network of individuals writing and practicing critical approaches to information literacy based on the same theoretical foundation and schools of thought. An extensive interpretive synthesis of critical information literacy texts was conducted by McDonough (2014), and is recommended reading as an extensive, thematically coded examination of the concept of critical information literacy. This review will provide an overview of the key themes associated with critical information literacy, including its general aims, the emergence of critical approaches to information literacy in the UK, the benefits and drawbacks of critical information literacy, research into critical information literacy and manifestations of it in practice.

3.3.1 Critical information literacy in theory

Critical information literacy aims to support social justice and democracy, through the "reversal of general trends towards the exclusion of most people from participation in the debates, decisions, activities and processes of knowledge formation affecting their lives" (Whitworth 2009, p.118). Critical information literacy research and writing has seen increasing publications and activity in the United States and Australia (Tewell, 2015), but with the exception of the National Information Literacy Framework Scotland (Irving & Crawford, 2007) which does refer to critical information literacy, there has not yet been significant engagement with the concept in the United Kingdom. It has been suggested that most librarians and media specialists in schools use "critical" in the sense of detecting flaws in logic, factuality, or argumentation (Kapitzke 2003b, p.6) with reference to the authority, accuracy and relevance of sources and whether they contain bias or assumptions. This

echoes the conception of critical literacy as a set of analytical skills, as identified in the previous section.

Critical theory has not yet been widely applied in library and information studies, which may be reflective of an overall absence of critical theory in LIS more generally. Schroeder & Hollister (2014) surveyed librarians through five professional discussion lists to identify to what extent librarians working in higher education are aware of critical theory. Although the participants were self-selected and therefore more likely to be aware of critical theory, the survey found that a small percentage of those aware of it were exposed to critical theory as part of a LIS programme (Ibid, p.24). The research uses normative methodologies to investigate the topic of critical theoretical approaches to LIS in practice, which may have been better approached with critical methodologies which could have more deeply explored questions of the self-application of critical theoretical approaches. More in-depth research about the ways in which LIS practitioners engage with critical theoretical literature would be useful, because the conclusions to this research are limited to suggesting that if LIS courses featured critical theory, people would be more aware of it as an approach to practice to support the social justice-related aims of librarianship. While this is a good starting point, it does not provide an insight into how and why critical theory is used by LIS practitioners. These weaknesses have been acknowledged by one of the authors (Schroeder in Sanders 2014).

However, some academics and practitioners (the majority working in the United States but including some in Australia and the UK), have begun to explore key themes, including the role of critical theory in information literacy education in secondary and higher education. Authors including Susie Andretta, Annemaree Lloyd and Drew Whitworth suggest that a critical or "radical" approach to information literacy could help to address some of the shortcomings of information literacy. A number of research projects, case studies and thought pieces are brought together in books from Library Juice Press, including *Critical Library Instruction* (Accardi et al. 2010) and *Information Literacy and Social Justice: Radical Professional Praxis* (Gregory & Higgins, 2013) which are edited by practicing instruction librarians from the United States who share an interest in librarianship for social justice. The chapters within these books are authored by practitioners who are applying critical

pedagogies from within and outwith librarianship, including queer, anti-racist and feminist pedagogies. The text as a whole emphasises the importance of using theory to inform practice. This is unsurprisingly a dominant theme among LIS literature which engages with critical pedagogies, given the highly practical motivations behind critical pedagogy itself.

3.3.2 Transformative window of information literacy

Lupton and Bruce (2010) present a model of information literacy which views information literacy from three perspectives: behavioural, sociocultural and critical. The critical "window" that can be used to view information literacy is described as the 'transformative' focus of information literacy, which places an emphasis on the "emancipatory nature of information literacy for the individual and society" (Ibid, p.5). The transformative perspective of information literacy is concerned with the emancipatory potential of the processes and outcomes involved in information literacy (Lupton & Bruce 2010, p.5). The authors argue that the transformative perspective of information literacy would encourage social critique and support democracy, and should be viewed not as "separate from the more commonly practised views of information literacy" (Lupton and Bruce 2010, p.22) but should be viewed as part of one model which encompasses all three perspectives (generic, situated and critical).

3.3.3 Radical information literacy

A more recent critical theoretical approach to information literacy is Whitworth's (2014) work on radical information literacy, which aims to fill a perceived gap in information literacy research through engagement with the underlying theories of information literacy (Whitworth, 2015).

Radical information literacy has some degree of overlap with critical information literacy. However, where critical information literacy appears to have developed organically though praxis and communities of practice (largely in the United States), Whitworth's concept of radical information literacy is based on his interpretation of the history of information literacy and the potential theory behind it, from a top-down perspective. It is led by the belief that the more radical elements of information

literacy as it was perceived by Cees Hamelink (1976) have not been adopted, whereas the more positivist and libertarian vision of information literacy as described by Paul Zurkowski (1974) have resulted in the institutionalisation of information literacy and a number of associated problems and limitations (Whitworth, 2014b). The radical conception of information literacy is not new, and Whitworth acknowledges that practices have been occurring "whenever assumptions about learning and practices are challenged or questioned, and scrutinised in democratic, participatory ways" (Ibid, p.168), but the text represents a theoretically grounded understanding of information literacy which recommends approaches to research currently lacking in theoretical foundation, and is unique to the context of information literacy in the United Kingdom.

Radical information literacy aims to help people develop a number of abilities, including the ability "to understand how to transform one's own world, and the cognitive authorities which constrain it" (Whitworth 2014, p.203). This view of information literacy acknowledges that being information literacy requires having access to good information, but also "morale, motivation and opportunities for deliberation" (Ibid, p.171); this can be connected to critical perspectives of political agency, as explored in Chapter Two. The aim of radical IL is to address perceived low levels of "informed participation" and help people to participate in the decision-making structures of society (Whitworth 2014, p.178).

3.3.4 The benefits of critical approaches to information literacy

The benefits of engaging with critical understandings of information literacy relate in the most part to social justice and democratic goals (Ryan & Sloniowski 2013; Doherty & Ketchner 2005; Accardi et al. 2010; Elmborg 2006; Eryaman 2010; Gage 2004; Kapitzke 2003b).

An associated benefit of critical information literacy is its potential to address issues of dehumanisation, which Whitworth (2009) argues lead people to believe that they have little or no power to effect change in society to make it more fair and equal. A critical conception of information literacy would arm people with the thinking and information

abilities to effect change. This belief in one's ability to change society and unfair conditions, as an outcome of education, relates to critical pedagogical assertions that critical pedagogy can support the development of political agency. Similarities have been drawn between information literacy and the theories of Paulo Freire, particularly when information literacy is understood as "the set of skills, values and critiques that individuals and communities need to create their own channels for information" (Hamelink, 1976 in Whitworth 2009a).

This sense of one's ability to effect change connects to concepts of political agency, discussed in the previous chapter. Critical information literacy can be used to explain biases, foster critical thinking, interrogate assumptions, and question validity. These abilities contribute to the development of political agency. Concepts such as false consciousness, civic illiteracy and the culture of militarization (Giroux 2013) can help information literacy practitioners support the development of political agency by strengthening critical abilities, awareness and understanding of structures of power, including media representation of sociopolitical issues.

Critical information literacy skills are of increasing importance to citizens in a society which contains structures and processes which often create barriers to participation in democratic processes. Critical information literacy is a literacy which can help to create the conditions for people to develop political agency – that is, the knowledge, awareness and ability to participate in political systems and challenge social injustice. Critical information literacy skills are important because to participate fully and make meaningful and informed decisions, members of society need to be aware of the various forms of the ways in which information can be distorted, suppressed and destroyed.

3.3.5 Drawbacks of critical approaches to information literacy

The focus of this research is the implementation of critical information literacy within the context of school libraries, but is also relevant to libraries in other contexts. A number of problems have been identified which have been found to or may cause difficulties in implementing the ideals of critical information literacy in practice within school and public libraries, which are explored in this section. Problems include practical and theoretical

issues, which can make the gap between the over-reaching ideals of critical information literacy and the daily reality of information literacy work in practice seem like a chasm (Jacobs & Berg 2011, p.385), but which could be addressed to enable the implementation of critical information literacy. Owing to the highly contextual and practical nature of the drawbacks of critical approaches to information literacy, the specific issues are discussed in the context of the findings and recommendations emerging from this study in Chapter Ten.

3.4 Summary

Although there is an emerging interest in critical information literacy, there is still a scarcity of research within librarianship and information science about critical information literacy or critical pedagogical approaches to librarianship in general, and what does exist tends to be opinion pieces rather than examples of practice or in-depth research. A number of writers have strongly argued for the importance of engaging with critical theory in library and information studies, but that this does not appear to have filtered through into practice, particularly in the United Kingdom. This may be due to internal (professional) or external (education system) barriers, or a lack of understanding of the topic as a result of a failure to engage library and information studies students with a sufficient amount of theory in taught and research degrees. Critical literacy provides an opportunity for information literacy to contribute to the democratic goals of library and information studies; to provide people with the agency needed to participate meaningfully in political processes and challenge social injustice. This should be a major element of information literacy instruction in school and public libraries to enable people to become actively and meaningfully involved in the democratic process.

It is important for learning environments and providers to develop their own practice of critical instruction based on the needs of the students and communities, as necessitated by the critical pedagogical approach. It would not be appropriate to use critical pedagogical theory to produce a framework that could be rolled out on a large scale.

It is important to acknowledge that people do not only learn through formal education, but that the public pedagogy of the mass media shapes the worldviews and identities of young

people. Therefore, when researching critical information literacy and the information sources which influence young people, it must be understood that formal education is not the only, and perhaps not even the most influential factor, that has an influence on young people's attitudes, and worldviews.

It is also important not to make value judgements of young people's engagement with information sources based on traditional approaches to bibliographic instruction, particularly when the use of information relates not to scholarly work but everyday decision-making. Critical information literacy offers librarians the opportunity to suggest alternative approaches to information literacy in a positive and constructive way, rather than critiquing the problems and shortcomings of existing information literacy frameworks in what may be interpreted as negative and unconstructive.

Critical information literacy represents a theoretically valuable contribution to librarianship for the development of political agency and social justice more broadly, but reviews of the literature indicate that there are few examples of how it could be applied in practice. This is especially the case in the context of education in the United Kingdom, and more generally there is a lack of research which approaches understanding what young people actually have and need in terms of critical literacy abilities *from their perspectives*. UK-based empirical research into young people's perceptions of the critical aspects of information literacy, and recommendations for best practice, are therefore much needed to better understand the potential benefits of critical pedagogical approaches to information literacy instruction with the aim of supporting the development of political agency.

4. Theoretical Approach

This section outlines the methodological approach taken, the theoretical approaches used and the research methods used to address the research questions as outlined in the table below:

Research Question	Research Methods
1. What sources of political information do young people perceive as influencing their political opinions and worldviews?	Repertory grid interviews
2a. In what qualitatively different ways do young people conceive of the sources of information which influence their political opinions and worldviews?	Interviews, diaries, focus groups
2b. Do young people think about this political information critically?	Literature review, repertory grid interviews, focus groups
3. What aspects of critical pedagogy may be of most use to those seeking to support political agency through critical approaches to information literacy?	Literature review, repertory grid interviews, focus groups

Table 4.1: Research questions and the methods applied to answer them

The development of the research questions is discussed in section 5.2.

During the design process, a number of research methods were investigated, with consideration given to the most suitable forms of data collection within the critical theoretical approach to the project overall. A combination of research methods were used to answer the research questions, and the rationale for the use of each research approach are presented in this chapter.

The timing of this research did not line up with any significant local or national political events (if the research had taken place a year later, the fieldwork stage would have lined up with the run up to the Scottish Independence Referendum). Setting up an artificial or hypothetical political event in order to observe a process of information behaviour would not have yielded authentic data from the participants. I therefore chose to focus on identifying *types* of information sources used by participants and understanding how they view and judge them, rather than looking at a *process* of information use.

It was especially important to be conscious throughout the research process that what constitutes the 'political' varies between individuals. When talking about politics, it is important to acknowledge that the state may not always be the focus of the conception of politics for the individual (Clarke, P. B., 1996). As discussed in Chapter Two, when talking about political participation, it is important to have a broad conception of 'valid' forms of participation and when talking about political information, it is important to understand that different sources hold different amounts of cognitive authority depending on the individual user's perceptions and personal constructs. This is an area I was keen to explore in this study.

The considerations described above helped to inform my choice of theoretical approach, which is discussed in the following section.

4.1 Introduction

The study explores how young people engage with and relate to information relating to political issues and current affairs, and it was important to approach this topic from the perspective of young people themselves. The approach to the research was strongly influenced by three theoretical approaches: personal construct theory, phenomenography and critical pedagogy. These theories informed the choice and application of the research methods used throughout data collection and analysis. Phenomenography and personal construct theory provided a means to gain insight into the ways participants experience the phenomenon of political information as *they* understand it. Critical pedagogical theory allowed me to develop a structural and theoretical means of understanding the research phenomena during the later stages of analysis and when discussing the implications of the research findings.

As well as the benefits of using a strongly theoretically informed approach to this study, there are benefits for information literacy as a discipline more widely. The use of these theoretical approaches adds strength to information literacy research and responds to Whitworth's call for more theoretical contributions to IL research to develop understanding

about the relationships between subjective and intersubjective issues relating to making judgements about information (2014, p.92).

The following sections discuss the use of personal construct theory, phenomenography and critical pedagogy and how they can and have been successfully combined in this study.

4.2 Personal construct theory

Personal construct theory is a theoretical approach developed by George Kelly (1955). It originated in clinical psychology as an approach to treatment, but has been used in a number of disciplines including marketing, human resources and education. The fundamental premise of PCT is that people's unique psychological processes are channelled by how they anticipate and predict events, based on theories and stereotypes which are developed throughout life. These theories, or ways of understanding reality and the things we put our attention to, including information sources, are described as *personal constructs*. These personal constructs are different for different people. Kelly theorised that through exploring personal constructs we can explore how people observe the world from the perspective of the research subject in a way that other methods of exploration may fail to do:

> It's fatally easy to talk to someone and think that we've understood them, but
> unless we do so in their own terms – which means finding out what their
> personal constructs are – we run the risk of simply laying our own thinking
> onto them. (Jankowicz 2004, p.12)

Personal construct theory can be approached using a variety of methods alongside or instead of repertory grid interviews. For example, I could have used non-verbal approaches such as drawings for working with children (Fransella & Dalton 2000, p.81) but the research phenomena would likely have been too abstract for participants to express pictorially. Fransella and Dalton (Ibid) recommend the method for working with children in psychological issues such as relationships with family members and for eliciting intense emotions.

I decided that non-verbal methods would not bring more benefit to the data collection process than the verbal method because in introducing myself and my research topic to the participants prior to beginning the data collection process, it was evident that the participants were confident in expressing their thoughts and feelings about the phenomena verbally. The benefits of the repertory grid technique identified in section 4.2.1 outweighed the potential benefits of other personal construct theory approaches.

Although a number of methods and techniques are possible for conducting research using personal construct theory, the most common technique is the repertory grid interview (McKnight 2000, p.731). The approach to the repertory grid technique taken in this study is discussed in detail in section 5.4.2.4.

4.2.1   Benefits of personal construct theory

A theoretical benefit of repertory grids in the context of this research is that personal construct theory, the psychological theory within which repertory grids are based, has a philosophical foundation of constructive alternativism. This perspective denies the possibility of any absolute truth (Bannister 2003, p.187). Similarly, the phenomenographic approach emphasises the differences in individuals' ways of understanding the same phenomena. The repertory grid method therefore lends itself to use alongside phenomenographic research.

As discussed in the previous section, personal construct theory tends to focus on the individual and their relationship with the phenomenon under study. However, the personal construct theory can successfully be used in combination with critical theory to explore constructs which may limit individuals' ability to critique the political system and restrict their ability to identify "opportunities for resistance to coercion" that individuals have developed as a result of the ruling ideology (Kalekin-Fishman 2003, p.151). Use of personal construct theory in this study takes the idea from Kalekin-Fishman (2003, p.151) that exploring young people's constructs relating to sources of political information, including their ideas relating to authority and validity of these information sources and the messages being conveyed, can "shed light on how to let go of the fetters of ideology" (Ibid).

I decided that personal construct theory was an appropriate theoretical approach for this study because the research phenomenon was, although necessarily open to interpretation by participants, an identifiable 'object'. I wanted to explore different concepts of a particular kind of information – political information – and how different perceptions and ways of construing the sources of this kind of information were influenced by and influenced young people's sense of political agency and critical information literacy abilities. I also wanted to explore how individuals' conceptions could be understood to support the status quo and be influenced by the ruling ideas in society, to identify how information literacy provision can help young people to challenge this to develop their political agency.

4.2.2 Drawbacks of personal construct theory

The drawbacks of personal construct theory relevant to this study include that personal construct psychology tends to take an individual approach to the issue under analysis and is not easily applied to community or wider social phenomena (Fisher & Savage 1999, p.2). However, authors such as Kalekin-Fishman (2003; 1993) have explored the use of personal construct theory on a "nomothetic" level (Fisher & Savage 1999, p.2), where research subjects can be seen as exemplars of a population. This was used to the benefit of this study, as discussed in the next section.

In the context of this LIS-related study, a drawback is that personal construct theory is fairly a fairly unusual approach to research in LIS, and the studies that have used the approach have not applied it to the topic of information literacy. Other studies that have applied personal construct theory, or the repertory grid method, have taken heavily quantitative approaches to data analysis to identify general trends, which is not the aim of this study. This means that there are relatively few precedents which can be used to validate the application of the method and the outcomes in this study.

Another disadvantage of the repertory grid interview technique is shared with most other semi-structured interview approaches, in that it can be difficult to ensure that as many relevant topics as possible are covered during the interviews, that researcher bias is minimal and that the interview goes into an appropriate level of depth on each of the

topics brought up by the participants. However, by following the principles outlined in personal construct theory handbooks and applying phenomenographic principles to the approach, I was able to ensure that the research was conducted to a high standard and met the relevant criteria for the validity of the data and results.

4.2.3 Personal construct theory in LIS

As identified above, a number of LIS studies have also utilised personal construct theory and the repertory grid approach (Birdi 2011; McKnight 2000; Crudge & Johnson 2007; Zhang & Chignell 2001). The majority of this research has been in the field of information retrieval research. However, some key observations can be made from these studies which are of use in the preparation for this study, including that the use of repertory grid interviews can offer the opportunity to explore issues in more depth than other interview methods, because of the ability to analyse the relationships between people's constructs (Birdi 2011, p.291; Crudge & Johnson 2007, p.277). The use of the repertory grid approach as part of PCT has been of benefit in several LIS studies when seeking to externalise people's mental models around information and learning resources (Crudge & Johnson 2007, p.261; McKnight 2000, p.733). These studies confirmed that the use of PCT as a tool for aiding the exploration of young people's perceptions of political information may be beneficial in this study.

4.3 Phenomenography

This section discusses the phenomenographic approach that formed the empirical foundation for the research. It outlines the key elements of phenomenography, its use in library and information science research, its benefits and drawbacks and its appropriateness for the research.

Phenomenography is a qualitative theoretical framework within the interpretivist research paradigm, with its roots in an empirical rather than theoretical foundation. It was developed by educational researchers in Sweden with particular focus on answering questions about thinking and learning within educational research, and variations in student learning outcomes (Marton, 1986). The original focus of phenomenography means

that the topics of studies using phenomenography are usually related to these original phenomena, including learning and learning experiences in different contexts, within the field of education.

Phenomenography is concerned with the question of how individuals make sense of the world through an on-going process of interaction. Marton describes phenomenography as "research which aims at description, analysis, and understanding of experiences; that is, research which is directed towards experiential description" (Marton 1986, p180). An emphasis is placed on the understanding of the qualitatively different ways in which individuals experience and interpret the same phenomena and the variation among these experiences (Marton 1981, p.180). This fundamental principle - that there are a variety of ways of experiencing a phenomenon which are qualitatively different but interrelated (Marton 1986) - means that phenomenography focuses on describing things as they appear to and are experienced by people.

The primary research method in a phenomenographic study is usually face-to-face interviews (Marton 1986), but other methods, including drawings, focus groups and written surveys have also been used (Edwards, K., 2007). These methods allow the researcher an insight into the sense-making undertaken by the research participants in relation to a specific phenomenon. This focus on ways of experiencing can be used to uncover variations within a participant group, for example, the different ways in which young people perceive, conceptualise or understand of particular sources of information. Andretta (2007, p.155) defines the terms "perceive", "conceptualise" and "understand" within the context of phenomenographic research as meaning "a way of being aware of something" and suggests they can be used interchangeably. This study also uses these terms in this way.

Phenomenography looks at a research phenomenon from a second order perspective. This refers to makes statements not about the world from the perspective of the researcher, but about the way others experience the world. The 'second-order' perspective focuses on the ways of experiencing phenomena from the perspectives of the people experiencing them (Marton & Booth 1997), and establishes variation in the collective ways these phenomena are experienced in practice.

The second-order perspective is a particularly appropriate approach to take to this research because this study seeks to explore how young people perceive political information and what can be described as their critical information literacy. Seeing the concept of the 'political' from the perspective of the research participants and how they understand it helps us to understand how they perceive political information and to understand where they are coming from when they talk about how and why they interact with people and sources the ways they describe them.

Phenomenographic research tends to focus on what Merton (1968) describes as *middle-range theories*; theories which are concrete enough to be clearly relevant to library and information science, but which are abstract enough to be applicable beyond their original scope (Wildemuth 2009, p.42). This research develops middle-range theories in specific relation to critical information literacy, an emerging approach to information literacy within library and information science, but which may also inform educational praxis more generally, outside of and in partnership with those working LIS theory and/or practice.

Hughes (2014, p.44) outlines the processes and outcomes of a number of approaches to information literacy research, including phenomenography. The processes in IL, from a phenomenographic perspective, involve iterative development of categories of description, outcome space and dimensions of variation which are based the relationship between the participants and the phenomenon, from a non-dualistic, second order perspective. The outcomes are patterns of variation associated with people's experience of a phenomenon, and the findings are designed to support the development of curriculum and pedagogy.

4.3.1   Relationship between phenomenography and phenomenology

It is important to acknowledge that phenomenography and phenomenology are different approaches to research, but are both methodologies within the interpretivist paradigm and both approaches seek to explore phenomena as they appear to people (i.e. their 'lifeworlds') (Larsson & Holmström 2007, p.62). The most significant difference between the two is that phenomenology takes a first-order perspective in which the researcher seeks to identify the singular essence and meaning of a phenomenon, and phenomenography takes a second-order perspective, where the aim of the research is to

identify the participants' ways of experiencing the phenomenon. Whereas in phenomenology, the aim is to clarify the foundations of a phenomenon through a singular understanding, phenomenography aims to identify the different ways in which a phenomenon is experienced. Additionally, the focus of phenomenography is on the collective meaning and understandings of a phenomenon, whereas phenomenology focuses on individual experience. The outcomes of the two approaches also differ - whereas phenomenology results in the production of 'meaning units', phenomenographic research seeks to generate an 'outcome space' which details the variation in the ways of experiencing the phenomenon.

4.3.2   Benefits of phenomenography

Marton contends that the most significant strength and opportunity of phenomenography is that it provides a way of rigorously conducting empirical research around the qualitatively different ways people experience specific aspects of the world (Marton, 2000). There are a number of additional benefits to the phenomenographic approach which are of particular relevance to this study, including that phenomenography can be especially useful when studying an previously understudied phenomenon that requires introductory work to identify what possible variations in experience exist (Russell 2003, p.127). Another benefit is the holistic nature of the approach, which allows the exploration of collective human experience despite the potentially broad nature of the range of ways of experiencing the phenomenon under study (Åkerlind 2005, p.72).

Another benefit of phenomenography in the context of this study is that through considering the phenomenon of political information phenomenographically, an outcome is an understanding of the variation of experiences and different ways of thinking about the behaviours and attitudes of young people. This becomes a powerful way of seeing, which is associated with "powerful ways of acting" (Marton & Tsui 2004, p.8). These outcomes lend themselves to a study which seeks to support young people's political agency and participation through the development of information literacy theories and practices.

A notable benefit of taking a phenomenographic approach to this doctoral study is that the quality of many previous doctoral studies is believed by phenomenographers to indicate that it is possible to conduct high quality phenomenographic studies as a solo researcher (Åkerlind 2005b, p.329), as opposed to other approaches which may usually involve more than one person working on the analysis of data in order to achieve different forms of validity and could therefore be difficult to achieve to a high standard when working alone on a doctoral thesis.

4.3.3   Drawbacks of phenomenography

The use of the phenomenographic approach has several drawbacks, which are discussed below.

4.3.3.1 Lack of theoretical and methodological guidelines

One of the criticisms of phenomenography is that although a sufficient amount has been written about its theoretical principles, there is a lack of detail about the practicalities of actual research in practice, particularly how data is analysed (Åkerlind 2005, p.324). However, within the paper in which he acknowledges this problem, she addresses a number of the gaps in the literature and provides a series of accounts from the literature, providing an overview of commonalities and differences in various approaches to phenomenographic research, as well as describing in detail the methods of analysis that can be used.

A further disadvantage of the phenomenographic approach is that there is no manual of phenomenographic method. The absence of a comprehensive guide makes engaging in this research approach a challenging undertaking. However, much effort has been made to read deeply around the approach and seek advice from academics in library and information science with experience in the approach. It is hoped that this professional and academic engagement has resulted in the effective and appropriate use of the phenomenographic method.

4.3.3.2 Establishing validity

Phenomenographic research aims to identify the full variety of ways in which individuals can experience and understand a phenomenon. It is impossible to know when there are no new insights to be found from data collection, which means it is very difficult to ascertain whether the outcome space does indeed fully represent the research phenomenon. Kaapu et al. (2006) suggest that around 20 cases are required to gain a full insight into the variation of ways a phenomenon can be understood, and that after this no new conceptions will emerge. Depending on the topic and research environment, it could prove difficult for a researcher to achieve this minimum number of cases.

4.3.3.3 Iterative nature of the research outcomes

It is important to acknowledge that the phenomenographic outcome space is not a final structure presenting all possible experiences. When using the outcome space, it is important for it to not become reified and treated as a definition of the phenomenon (Whitworth 2014, p.164), and instead it should be seen as a tool which can only be fully validated through its use by those who are actively engaged with the phenomenon, who can judge its relevance.

Ideally, the outcome space is constructed through a dialogic and participatory process which ensures that the conceptions of the participants are being represented accurately. Unfortunately, the structure of the fieldwork process and the time limitations meant that I was unable to construct the outcome space in this manner. However, the interview process was dialogic and during the interview process and later in the focus groups I was able to ensure that the participants' views were being accurately interpreted, which goes some way to mitigating this potential weakness.

4.3.3.4 Generalisability of phenomenographic research findings

Another limitation of phenomenography include that it is not suited to research which seeks to make broad generalisations (Russell, 2003). Additionally, as there is no single process or technique prescribed for the analysis of phenomenographic data, it can be

difficult to choose an analysis approach. However, a range of approaches are reported in the literature and this can be viewed as an advantage which provides freedom for the researcher. Although the absence of a distinct approach has been a point of frequent criticism (Ashworth, P. & Lucas, 2000; Richardson, 1999), some argue this a standardised approach to phenomenographic analysis is neither possible or desirable (Bruce et al., 1997).

The sample group within a phenomenographic study is not representative of the more general population, even though it may be representative of one or more of the demographics of the smaller community being researched (Åkerlind 2005). If the study were to be repeated, the researcher (or another researcher) may get very different results from a sample group in a different context, not only because of variations in the researchers' analysis of the phenomenon but also because of the participants' different ways of experiencing the phenomenon. It is therefore not possible to suggest that phenomenographic research outcomes enable generalisation because the sample group is not and could never be representative of a broader population (Ibid, p.12).

However, although the participant sample does not reflect the range of racial variation in the year group being studied at the school in which the fieldwork was conducted, the range of genders and academic performance is reflected. It is therefore possible to suggest that the results of this study are generalisable to a group with similar characteristics of the year group and the school in the study. It is also possible to suggest that the range of variation identified in the outcome space may still be relevant to groups which are not completely similar to the participant sample, although the outcome space from this study may not represent the full range of variation of experiences of a different sample community. The demographic details of the school and the participant sample have been described in section 5.5 so that researchers and readers, may come to their own conclusions about the generalisability of the research findings.

4.3.4   Phenomenography in library and information science research

Most phenomenographic research resides within the field of educational research, focusing on conceptions of teaching and learning and understanding people's experiences of skills and competencies in their work. However, phenomenography has been applied in a

number of LIS research studies, mainly in Australia and Sweden (Limberg & Sundin, 2006) within the field of information behaviour, but is also considered one of the key theoretical perspectives used in information literacy research (Limberg et al., 2012). Phenomenography underpins the emerging area of 'information experience' which builds upon the phenomenographic approach to information literacy taken by scholars such as Bruce et al. (1997) and Lupton (2008). The table below identifies phenomenographic research within the LIS discipline:

Author(s)	Topic
Andretta (2007)	Ways of experiencing IL
Boon et al. (2007)	Conceptions of IL
Bruce et al. (2006)	Different ways of approaching teaching and IL
Bruce (1995; 1997; 1998; 1999)	Conceptions of information and IL
Diehm & Lupton (2012)	University students' approaches to learning IL
Diller & Phelps (2008)	Evaluation of HE library IL program
Forster (2013)	Nursing, IL, ethics & professional competence
Limberg (2000); Limberg & Sundin (2006)	Students' experiences of information seeking
Lupton (2008)	Undergraduates' experiences of IL
Massey (1996)	Conceptions of information literacy
Maybee et al. (2013)	Ways of experiencing 'informed learning' lessons
Nielsen & Borlund (2011)	Students' perceptions of public libraries' role in learning, IL and librarians' information competencies
Sayyad Abdi et al. (2013)	Website designers' experience of IL
Salha (2011)	School librarians' perspectives of IL
Smith (2010)	Young people's experiences of information
Steinerova (2008)	Doctoral students' experiences of information use
Vartiainen (2005)	Information systems students' perceptions of moral conflicts
Virkus & Bamigbola (2011)	Masters students' experiences of Web 2.0 tools
Wakimoto & Bruce (2014)	Academic librarians' experiences of archives
Yates et al. (2012)	Older Australians' health information use

Table 4.2: Phenomenographic studies relevant to Library and Information Studies

The majority of these studies have focused on the perceptions of educators, or on the experiences of learners during an information search process, rather than individuals' perceptions of information sources and use outside of a learning context, which this study explores. The most relevant phenomenographic studies to this research are discussed below.

4.3.4.1 Young people's experiences of information

A second key research project in relation to this research is Smith (2010). Smith used phenomenography to explore the qualitatively different ways in which young people experienced information. Through drawings and semi-structured interviews, Smith explored how young people experience information. Her findings are presented as a hierarchical outcome space with six categories of description over four levels:

Category of Description	Level of Complexity
Category One: Knowledge of sources of information – information is experienced as residing in information sources.	Level One: Information landscape
Category Two: Receiving information - information is experienced as something that is received.	Level Two: Acquisition of information
Category Three: Process of finding information – information is experienced as something that is found.	
Category Four: Store of unprocessed information. Information is experienced as something that is internalised and unprocessed which is stored.	Level Three: Knowledge base of internalised information
Category Five: Processing information – information is experienced as something that is internalised and processed.	
Category Six: Use of information – information is experienced as something that is "put into action"; it is used.	Level Four: Application of information

Table 4.3: Phenomenographic outcome space of young people's experiences of information (Smith 2010)

A strength of Smith's study is that a central principle of the work is that she did not aim to make distinctions between the research participants' experiences based on demographic characteristics (in the case of their research this was the different year groups and ages of participants) and instead looked at the collective voice of the group. This is an approach typical in phenomenography and is reflected in my study.

Smith suggests that her findings provide new insight into the complex ways in which young people experience information, but acknowledge that a limitation of the study is that it utilises only one research approach (phenomenography) (Smith 2010, p.161). The use of a grounded theory approach and the repertory grid technique had both been considered, however. In this study, I apply both a phenomenographic approach and the repertory grid technique in an effort to strengthen the purely phenomenographic approach taken in the previous research.

4.3.4.2 Information literacy frames

A key author in the discourse around conceptions of information literacy is Christine Bruce, whose phenomenographic research into the different ways information literacy can be conceptualised through different frames has made a significant contribution to the understanding of information literacy in context (Bruce 2013; Bruce 2008; Bruce 1999). Bruce et al.'s Six Frames for Information Literacy Education (2006) is of particular relevance to this research, especially the sixth frame. This is referred to as the "relational frame" (Ibid, p.3).

The relational frame uses phenomenography as its conceptual framework and conceives of information literacy as a complex practice which involves the other frames within it, and within which learners' conceptions and perspectives change as they interact with the subject information and its meaning and relevance. Bruce et al. (2006) describe the relational frame as a way of viewing information literacy and associated phenomena contextually. This involves designing learning and education in ways which enable learners to "discern more powerful ways of seeing the phenomena in question" (Ibid), and assessment which identifies which ways of seeing information literacy and related phenomena students have developed. One method of encouraging learners to understand information literacy in more complex ways is through reflective practices (Bruce et al. 2006, p.5). The relational frame requires the use of learning resources which are of relevance to each learner so that they can meaningfully reflect on their use, rather than ignore learning resources because they are presented in abstract terms.

Whitworth (2014) suggests the relational frame provides a helpful conceptual tool for thinking about explicitly political approaches to information literacy education, and suggests asking to learners to consider the Digital Divide, associated values and issues, and tasks related to policy, technology and training as an example of how the relational frame may be used (Whitworth 2014, p.48).

A number of challenges were identified by Bruce et al. (2006, p.14), including the need for consistent and coherent design or implementation within one or more frames, the ways in which members of teaching teams consciously or unconsciously work with different frames, teachers and students working with different frames in the same context and the adoption of frames conflicting with the frames that underpin institutional values, policy or direction. These challenges provided a useful starting point for my own considerations regarding how information literacy theory could take a more critical approach, and informed the design and analysis of this study as well as the recommendations for practice and research in Chapter Nine.

4.4 Critical pedagogy

This section focuses on the benefits and drawbacks of the application of critical pedagogical theories, which builds on the discussion of the application of critical pedagogy on library and information research as discussed in Chapter Three.

The research is based on a critical theoretical approach with a focus on education, referred to as critical pedagogy. In the context of this research, literacy (and by extension information literacy) is viewed through a critical lens, drawing heavily on the Freirean conception of literacy as transformative for social relationships and structures of power (Whitworth 2014, p.79).

The general approach to the literature review selection of research questions, data analysis and presentation of findings is informed by critical pedagogy. This approach was taken because the research focuses on the relationship between information literacy (an aspect of education) and political participation (an aspect of democracy and social justice), and critical pedagogy provides an ideal theoretical foundation for explaining the phenomena

because it places an emphasis on this, and can provide useful theory to give a new way of understanding the phenomena (Wildemuth 2009, p.41).

Critical theory provides a lens through which to understand complex phenomena such as political information, political agency and education for critical citizenship, as well as providing suggestions for challenging the problems within the systems and structures being explored. Giroux (2003a, p.148) argues that theory is an important tool for mapping the relationship between structures of power, texts and everyday life, which helps us to understand and develop strategies to approach these issues to work towards social change. The application of critical theory to the research approach and analysis provides an insight into the structural issues that phenomenography cannot address. This is discussed in the following section.

4.4.1   Benefits of critical pedagogical theory

A significant benefit of critical pedagogical theory in the context of this study is that it provides the opportunity to analyse individuals' perceptions from a broader perspective. Applying social and cultural theories to the ways in which young people understand political information provided the opportunity identify the potential educational influence of various sources on a social level, which could not have been achieved through personal construct theory or phenomenography alone. The application of critical pedagogical theory allowed me not only to apply social theories to the outcome space, but also to make recommendations for how to resolve the more problematic aspects of the relationships between young people and political information.

Additionally, with specific reference to LIS, Benoit (2007) discusses the benefits of using critical theory and identifies that it can be used as a way of understanding three key research foci:

a) The ideologically distorted subjective situation of some individual or group;
b) Exploring the forces that have caused the situation;
c) Examining how these forces can be overcome through awareness of them.

He argues that a critical theoretical approach is well-suited to knowledge-based public agencies such as LIS. I used the three foci identified above as foundations for the analysis in Chapters Eight and Nine of this study.

4.4.2 Drawbacks of critical pedagogical theory

As discussed in Chapter Three, critical theory and the critical pedagogical approach are not without their critics. A number of the criticisms are relevant to the application of critical pedagogical theory in research. Giroux (2002, p.98) warns that those applying critical theory must avoid indulging in theoreticism. He argues that theory needs to connect academic debate and public issues, ideally by providing tools with which people can address the social problems identified through the use of critical theory. Giroux recommends the development of vocabularies and conceptual resources which can link "theory, critique, education and the discourse of possibility" (Ibid, p.99). The aim of this research is to work towards the development of these tools in area of information literacy.

Giroux acknowledges that critical pedagogical approaches are often unpopular with ruling elites (including those in control of higher education), because a core purpose of critical pedagogy is to enable students to become critical citizens and challenge educational institutions to become more democratic and socially just (Giroux 2010, p.16). The critical pedagogical approach creates the conditions to cultivate a willingness in students to "temper any reverence for authority with a sense of critical awareness" (Ibid), which can be met with discomfort from the systems of control and power it seeks to challenge.

Although critical pedagogical theory in LIS is an increasingly popular field of study with a burgeoning number of publications in the last five years (Leckie et al., 2010), it can be difficult to conduct research and apply it in the workplace. Although some research has suggested that a large proportion of librarians in the US are familiar to varying degrees with critical theory and many claim to apply it to their work (Schroeder & Hollister, 2014), it is unclear to what extent this work is successful or has impact. No comparable research has been conducted in the UK to gauge how familiar with critical theories UK practitioners may be, but as critical theory is not a compulsory part of LIS postgraduate courses and exposure to critical theories is often the result of autodidacticism, it may be assumed that LIS

practitioners and researchers may find critical theory unfamiliar and difficult to engage with.

A critical theoretical approach is appropriate for this research not only to provide an insight into the weaknesses of current approaches to information literacy and librarianship more generally, as identified in the literature review, but to provide an insight into the ways in which critical theory can act as a way of addressing the needs of young people with regard to their relationship with information about politics, current events and other information that shapes their worldviews and plays a role in their development of political agency. Section 3.1 addressed the suitability of a phenomenographic approach to the research, and section 3.2 has addressed the relevance of a critical theoretical approach. The next section will address the appropriateness of combining the theoretical approaches.

4.5 Combining theoretical approaches and methodologies

This section discusses the combination of the theoretical approaches and methodologies applied in this study.

4.5.1 Phenomenography and critical pedagogy

Although relatively uncommon and novel, it is possible to bring together phenomenographic research and critical pedagogical theory in research (Ashwin & McLean, 2005). In the context of thinking about teaching and learning in higher education, the authors address the ways in which a combination of phenomenography and critical pedagogy can be successful. Combining phenomenographic and critical theoretical approaches can add strength to both approaches. Ashwin and McLean suggest that critical approaches often consider the structural issues relating to a research problem, but lack suggestions for practice.

A phenomenographic approach to the research provides a balance to the "polemic and commitment" of critical pedagogy (Ibid). The application of critical pedagogy to phenomenographic research in an education setting addresses phenomenography's abstraction from political and social realities (Ibid). Although this abstraction from the

external world of the learner is a deliberate aspect of phenomenography (Marton & Booth, S., 1997), and engagement with critiques of society and alternative futures is deliberately avoided (Ashwin & McLean 2005, p.4), the value of engagement with structural issues as viewed by critical pedagogues is of value to this research because it provides a theoretical foundation on which the recommendations emerging from the findings can be based to ensure that praxis supports the democratic and justice-focused goals of critical information literacy.

4.5.1.1 Similarities between critical pedagogy and phenomenography

Ashwin & McLean (2005, p.6) present commonalities that demonstrate the ways in which the approaches can work together in research:

- No world-person dichotomy (non-dualist approach): people cannot be understood as separate from the world; people produce social reality; objective and subjective worlds are or should become one.
- Student-teacher relations: environments in which learning is 'genuine' are more likely to result in engaged students; teachers need to identify with students and work with them as 'co-investigators'.
- Becoming more fully human: it is important to be open to change; students need to be able to learn and critically; teachers should help students to 'reinvent' their experienced world.

It is important to note that the authors only draw similarities between critical pedagogy and phenomenography as presented in one key text from each of the approaches; Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2005) and Marton and Booth's *Learning and Awareness* (1997). This is because there are variations of perspective within the approaches so the authors felt it was not appropriate to claim to present a single version of either perspective (Ashwin and McLean 2005, p.5).

4.5.1.2   Differences between critical pedagogy and phenomenography

As well as the similarities in the two approaches which allow them to complement each other, there are differences which enable them to strengthen each other when used in combination. First, the shared 'non-dualist' perspectives of critical pedagogy and phenomenography come from different angles; critical pedagogy is concerned

with non-dualism from an ontological, objective perspective and phenomenography acknowledges non-dualism from an epistemological, subjective perspective (Ashwin and McLean 2005, p.6). This difference of perspective means that critical pedagogy can usefully inform phenomenographic approaches.

Subjective, phenomenographic accounts can be criticised for their failure to acknowledge structural factors such as social class when exploring why different people experience learning in different ways. Issues that are not explicitly experienced by research participants cannot be considered in phenomenographic research; for example, if a student is not aware of the ways in which class influences their choices and decisions, a phenomenographic approach does not acknowledge it as a relevant cause of variation in people's experiences. This failure to acknowledge objective structures of power and control in the external world is a weakness that can be addressed by the application of critical pedagogy. In contrast, the critical pedagogical position of non-dualism as epistemological, focusing on structural issues as well as subjective factors, can strengthen the research approach by widening the focus to include aspects that participants are not necessarily aware of themselves (Ashwin and McLean 2005, p.7).

Second, phenomenography suggests ways of understanding and overcoming the structural elements identified by critical pedagogy, by focusing on the variation in ways that people experience the problems. As an example, they argue that although social class can be a barrier to engaging in higher education, but thousands of working class people engage successfully. The examination of individuals' experiences can contribute to understanding why not all people overcome structural elements (Ibid, p.8).

4.5.1.3 Critical phenomenography

Recent discussions of phenomenography in LIS and education have suggested the potential merit of a critical approach to phenomenographic research, which would help the researcher to "become aware of the ideologies that lie within a context; a social system, a particular tool, or any other phenomenon open to phenomenographical enquiry"

(Whitworth, 2014b). This idea was explored by Russell (2003), whose research into whale-watching practices applied feminist theory and phenomenography, but critical theoretical approaches to phenomenography are highly uncommon. Whitworth suggests that questions that would be asked by a critical phenomenographic researcher would include:

- What power structures are revealed within the phenomenon?
- How can the experience of variation be used to shed light on what is valued and what is not valued?
- How does this understanding affect the usefulness of the outcome space as a subsequent resource for network or community learning? (Whitworth 2014b, p.327)

The investigation of these questions would contribute to the theoretical approach by preventing the data analysis process from concealing the assumptions and authority claims inherent in the outcome space, which is beneficial because in phenomenographic research, issues of power and authority are not central to the exploration of the phenomenon. Critical phenomenography is presented as a theoretical framework that has the potential to illuminate learning experiences with an acknowledgement of these dimensions of power (Whitworth 2014b, p.328).

4.5.2   Phenomenography and personal construct theory

The epistemological and methodological congruencies between phenomenography and personal construct theory make combining them within one research study an appropriate option. It is of fundamental importance to both of the constructivist approaches to be "sensitive to the individuality of conceptions" of research phenomena (Ashworth & Lucas 2000, p.297). Personal construct psychology is heavily influenced by phenomenology (Parker 1999, p.3), which, as discussed in section 4.3.1, differs to phenomenography with regard to the focus of analysis, but does bear foundational similarities in that both approaches are concerned with exploring phenomena as they appear to people in terms of their lifeworlds (Larsson & Holmström 2007, p.62). This supports the combination of phenomenographic and personal construct approaches.

Although the repertory grid interview, the method most commonly associated with personal construct theory, has a clear and fairly rigid structure, the content of the interviews within that structure are very much dependent on the participant, with some direction in the form of interview techniques such as laddering from the interviewer. This approach does not conflict with the application of phenomenographic principles in the interview process, even though the phenomenographic approach traditionally does not involve heavy structuring of interviews.

There is also a similarity in the outcomes of both approaches. Kelly believed that people's construct systems exist in a hierarchy (Kelly 1991), which bears significant similarities to the production of a phenomenographic outcome space, in which the categories are ideally related to each other in a hierarchy.

A notable difference between phenomenography and personal construct theory is that phenomenographic methods do not seek communicative validity from participants in the studies. In contrast, personal construct theory's therapeutic origins mean that the approach often involves communicating the findings from the analysis of repertory grid interviews with participants, to help the participant to understand their worldviews in a therapeutic context. This is not the situation for phenomenographic research, where interpretations are made on a collective basis to understand the variation in ways of understanding the research phenomenon. This study takes the phenomenographic approach to communicative validity, which I believe was an appropriate choice to make not only because the participants described experiencing the same phenomenon in different ways at different times throughout the study, which is an observation that reflects those of Åkerlind (2005, p.330-331), but also because the participants had limited time to give to the study and had already made significant contributions during the school day; more time to discuss the research findings with them would not have been feasible.

There are significant similarities between phenomenographic interviews and repertory grid interviews, which lend the repertory grid interview to being used in phenomenographic studies. The purpose of phenomenographic interviews is to explore variations in the experiences of a phenomenon, and the focus of the repertory grid interview is the relationship between the participant and the research phenomenon, rather than the

participant *or* the research phenomenon. Similarly, repertory grid interviews seek to uncover participants' conceptions of the research phenomenon, which is based on their relationships with the elements in question. However, repertory grid interviews focus on individual perceptions of phenomena and are not ideally suited to being used to draw generalisations across a group of participants unless the elements and/or constructs are pre-defined by the researcher, thus limiting the extent to which the findings truly reflect the perceptions of the research participants. Applying a phenomenographic approach to the data collection and analysis, through interviews and additional methods, may allow the study to more effectively focus on collective awareness and the variation of experiences of the phenomenon. The repertory grid interview becomes a starting point for developing an understanding of the variation in the ways a phenomenon is experienced.

4.5.3   Personal construct theory and critical pedagogy

In the preparatory research for this study, no previous studies were identified which combined both personal construct theory and critical pedagogical theories within LIS. Although critical approaches to psychology do exist, the application of critical approaches to personal construct psychology (PCP) are not widespread. The more critical use of Kelly's PCP has tended to take place in the United Kingdom (Parker 1999, p.4), whereas in the US the approach is connected to more conservative approaches to psychology (Ibid, pp.5-6)

4.6 Summary

This chapter has discussed the theoretical frameworks which form the study's foundations. This study combines three theoretical approaches: personal construct theory, phenomenography and critical pedagogy. To do this successfully, it was important to understand the nature of each of the approaches and identify where there may be ideological conflict, where compromises were needed, and where it was important to ensure that the use of one approach did not undermine the integrity of another.

The following chapter discusses the methods used to collect the data and how they fit within the theoretical approaches outlined in this chapter.

5. Research Design

This section discusses the methods chosen for collecting data based on the theoretical approaches to the research which were discussed in the previous chapter, and the ethical considerations made during the research process. The methods sections are presented in such a way that the benefits and drawbacks of each method, which shaped the choice of methods, are discussed, followed by an explanation of how the method worked in practice when it was applied to my research.

This research uses a number of methods; questionnaires, repertory grid interviews, observations, class activities and focus groups. The methods used were chosen following considerable exploration of what methods had been used by previous, related research projects, and which methods were appropriate based on the theoretical approach being taken in this research. The final methods were selected as the most appropriate way to collect the data based on the theoretical approach, the ability of the methods to assist in answering the research questions, and the practical limits of a doctoral research project, such as working as a solo researcher, time and money. The table in Appendix C is an audit trail which outlines the research methods used, the number of participants involved at each stage, the amount of data generated, and the methods of analysis applied to the data.

5.1   Deciding on an approach to the research

When deciding on what approach to take to the research topic, I considered Doherty & Ketchner's involvement in teaching programmes for their research, which they describe as being deeply integrated with the school as a whole (Doherty & Ketchner 2005, p.5). This level of involvement, they argue, allowed them to apply a critical approach to information literacy in a more successful manner than if they had pursued it through the library's work alone. Although it was not possible for me to embed my own study so deeply in the work of the school, this study takes the recommendation to view information literacy as the territory of not only librarians, or even only educators, and the research methodology is designed to explore the phenomenon of political information and critical information literacy for political agency from the perspective of the research participant. The research

questions, which are presented in the next section, were designed to take this approach to the research into account.

5.2 Developing the research questions

The process of developing the research questions took place over time in several stages. The original research proposal sought to focus on the ways in which public libraries contribute to democratic engagement through supporting people to take part in politics. It was necessary to adjust the focus of the research in two ways: the site of the fieldwork (and therefore the sector in which the research would take place and the area of library and information studies the findings may be relevant to), because it was very unlikely that I would be able to find a suitable site to conduct fieldwork and find a participant group I could maintain throughout the process; and the conception of and methods for assessing democratic engagement – the original focus of the research was narrow and for the most part only took into consideration normative forms of participation such as voting, and took a more quantitative, top-down approach to suggested methods for assessing and measuring democratic engagement. It was therefore necessary to adjust the focus of the research.

After extensive reading around the ways in which libraries claim to contribute to democracy, an area in which this assertion repeatedly came up was the field of information literacy. This was interesting because it offered a way to tie concepts of political participation with education and library instruction, and presented a natural fieldwork location in secondary schools, where there may be a readily available pool of potential participants. The focus of the research became an investigation into young people's levels of critical information literacy, to find out how they perceive sources of political information, how they interact with these sources and the extent to which their interaction with these information sources is critical and influences their attitudes and decisions when it comes to making political decisions and participating in public life.

To gain a deeper understanding of the situation, I wanted to find out what the needs of young people may be. I decided to focus on teenagers as a result of an interest in the work by critical theorists including Paolo Freire and Henry Giroux; particularly the latter's concern with the way teenagers are often conceptualised as "the abandoned generation" (Giroux, 2003c).

It was important to consider the full range of sources of political information for young people. I wanted to ensure that participants had the opportunity to identify all the sources of political information they encounter and engage with, irrespective of any ideas I (or the literature) may have about what sources of information are valid. I also wanted to ensure that beyond the basic identification of news and political information sources used by young people that I gained an understanding of what participants actually took from these sources. I did not want to judge or rank people's use of information sources, or take a value-laden approach to the research in which I decide what constitutes appropriate and effective forms of political information, but instead wanted to pay attention to what people actually do with the information they encounter, through choice or chance.

Prior to conducting the literature review I was aware of some dissatisfaction from the academic community with relation to the UK education system's level of provision of education about politics and citizenship. I was therefore interested to investigate the extent to which young people themselves considered this to be an issue, and to explore the role that information literacy may have in supporting access to and use of political information.

In accordance with the phenomenographic approach, the research questions were formulated with interpretive awareness. This involved bracketing the theories and biases I developed during the literature review stage of the research.

5.3   Consideration of alternative research methodologies

During the process of designing the research it was necessary to consider a variety of approaches to the research, to compare the relative merits and demerits and select the most appropriate theoretical and methodological approaches and data collection methods.

This section discusses the approaches I decided not to use and the reasons they were not the most appropriate methods.

When developing the methodology I considered multiple epistemological and ontological approaches. This section discusses some of the approaches I considered before settling on my research design and provides an explanation about why I chose not to follow these research routes.

5.3.1 Information behaviour

A potential theoretical approach to the research phenomenon that I chose not to take was that of information behaviour. Within LIS, research into people's information use tends to fall within information behaviour or information literacy. Information behaviour research tends to focus on exploring "those activities a person may engage in when identifying his or her own needs for information, searching for such information in any way, and using or transferring that information" (Wilson 1999, p.249). I decided that this approach would not be the most appropriate because I anticipated that, given the wide (and not defined) range of potential sources of political information, what young people perceived as 'political information' would often not be sought out in a deliberate and conscious manner and would occur both within the research setting (school) and outside it. The use of information for becoming politically informed is not a linear process that would be observable by a researcher, and therefore trying to gain a holistic picture of the phenomenon would have been extremely difficult. Information behaviour studies tend to require a degree of observation of the phenomenon in context, and this would have been extremely difficult given the broad and abstract nature of the phenomenon of political information.

An information behaviour study would not have been a suitable approach for this study because the research focuses on critical literacy and political attitudes, which do not adhere to clear-cut frameworks and models and are extremely difficult to measure. I decided that attempting to standardise the complexities of research into identifiable stages of information behaviours would not be appropriate for the study of political information use, which is especially non-linear and non-rational in nature, potentially even more so in younger individuals who are still developing their identities and worldviews. The context of

the research phenomenon is such that a specific task or project relating to it could not be the used as the central focus of the research; for example, investigations of student's understanding of a particular academic concept could be based on a class project.

Although information behaviour research increasingly includes passive as well as active information behaviour, my interest in critical thinking and young people's conceptions of authority, rather than a desire to understand a process of information seeking and use, led me to choose to explore sense-making and evaluation of information from an information literacy perspective. However, some information behaviour theories are drawn upon in the analysis and discussion chapters, because the phenomenographic approach has been used more widely in information behaviour research than information literacy research, and some information behaviour theories proved useful to illuminate the findings.

A number of the approaches I took to data collection and analysis which drew upon personal construct psychology and phenomenography are more commonly found in information behaviour research. However, phenomenography can be considered one of the three key theoretical perspectives of IL alongside sociocultural practice and discourse analysis (Limberg et al., 2012). My decision to apply these theories to information literacy research contributes to the increasing amount of research combining IB and IL (Limberg & Sundin, 2006), which can be viewed as a positive step for information literacy research (Whitworth 2014, p.67).

5.3.2   Grounded theory

Another approach I considered was the grounded theory approach. Grounded theory is often used in qualitative research in order to provide a rigour to the methods that could otherwise be challenged. In grounded theory, qualitative data is coded and grouped into categories (as in phenomenographic research) and themes are generated from the data rather than being hypothesis-led. I considered using a grounded theory approach because it is more frequently used in LIS research than phenomenography and a clear approach to methods and data collection are readily available.

Grounded theory is recommended for topics where little research has previously been conducted, and although some research into young people's use and perceptions of information do exist, there has been no specific exploration into young people's engagement with information specifically relating to political knowledge and understanding from a LIS perspective. A grounded theory study would therefore have been appropriate.

However, I chose to take a phenomenographic approach, for the following reasons:

1) A central focus of grounded theory is to give voice to individual perspectives in great depth. Although phenomenography does not offer the same opportunity for a depth of understanding of individuals, individuals' perceptions are nevertheless all taken into account in the phenomenographic approach, as discussed in section 4.3. The purpose of this study was to look at the variation in experiences of a group of young people and consider the logical relationships between participants' conceptions of political information. This approach provides an understanding of the whole picture in a way that a grounded theory approach could not.

2) Grounded theory tends to place an emphasis on the development of theory. The aim of this research was to identify what sources of information young people encounter and how they view them, and to explore how *existing* theories of critical pedagogy and critical information literacy may be useful if librarians and other educators were to seek to support the development of political agency. Although the phenomenographic approach does generate an outcome space, which could be viewed as a theory of sorts, the outcome space in this study seeks to draw together existing theories and identify how in the context of the phenomenon of political information, they relate to one another and can be drawn upon in practice. The research therefore focuses less on generating new theories and more on synthesising existing ones, which lends itself better to a phenomenographic rather than grounded theory approach.

5.4   Research methods

This study uses three methods of data collection: questionnaires, repertory grid interviews and focus groups. In this section I discuss the benefits and drawbacks of each of the methods, how I planned my use of each method, reflections on their application, and the process of analysing the data I collected at each stage of the study.

5.4.1   Questionnaires

The data from the questionnaire was only intended to give a background sense of the levels of political knowledge that the participants had and a general idea about their interest in politics and attitude towards political participation, which would be explored in the later stages of research. A brief questionnaire was a quick and effective way of collecting this data, which when analysed could be presented in a clear and simple manner to give an overview of political knowledge and attitudes. It could also be broken down into levels of political knowledge of different kinds; UK and international political processes, citizens' rights and public spending.

5.4.1.1   Benefits of questionnaires

A significant benefit of self-completion questionnaires is that they are quick to administer (Bryman 2012, p.233). I was able to administer multiple questionnaires to participants during registration and allow them to complete them on their own, whilst I was present in the room to assist with any questions the participants may have had. As time was limited, it was of significant benefit to collect the data from this stage of research as quickly as possible. It was also more convenient for me to distribute and collect questionnaires in batches rather than conduct individual interviews, and was more convenient for participants to complete the questionnaires during registration period.

Another benefit of self-completion questionnaires is that interviewer effects are eliminated (Bryman 2012, p.233). Although the vast majority of the questions in the questionnaire were multiple choice and fact-based, two questions, "how interested in politics would you say you are?" and "do you think the voting age should be lowered from 18 to 16?" required

participants to give their personal opinions. It was therefore beneficial to minimise the amount of social desirability bias that may be exhibited by a participant when a researcher is present (Bryman 2012, p.244).

5.4.1.2 Drawbacks of questionnaires

A disadvantage of self-completion questionnaires is that there is no opportunity for researchers to ask participants to elaborate on their responses (Bryman 2012, p.234). However, this was not a problem in this situation because the questionnaires were only designed to give a sense of the level of political knowledge and a very brief indication of their general levels of interest and views on youth participation in politics. The repertory grid interviews and focus groups aimed to probe more deeply into the issues.

Another problem with self-completion questionnaires is that it is important to not ask too many non-salient questions, which discourages participants from completing them and can reduce response rate (Bryman 2012, p.234). It is also difficult to ask a large number of questions because respondent fatigue may affect response rates (Bryman 2012, p.235). In order to avoid this I kept the questionnaire as brief as possible and only asked salient questions. I only collected data about the participants themselves which would be useful for data analysis and to get an idea about the demographics of my participant group (age, gender and ethnicity), which is also good practice from a data protection perspective (Information Commissioners' Office, no date). As the participants completing the questionnaire had been told what the questionnaire topic would be and were still interested in taking part, they were sufficiently interested in it to complete the questionnaire, took the task seriously and from the responses, appear to have completed it in earnest.

A possible risk with self-completion questionnaires is partial completion, which can cause problems at the data analysis stage (Bryman 2012, p.235). Guessing answers without thinking that the answer given is correct can also be a problem. Participants were asked to try their best to answer all the questions but not to guess. An 'I don't know' option was provided to minimise the chance that guessing would occur, although this cannot be ruled

out because participants may have been reluctant to show their ignorance and lack of political knowledge.

5.4.1.3   Questionnaire design

The closed-question self-completion questionnaire was devised to give an idea about levels of political knowledge. It was based on a questionnaire written by Martin et al. (1993) and questions used in Heath et al.'s 2002 study. My questionnaire reflects the balance found in the original questionnaire, featuring questions about local, UK and European issues, as well as questions relating to civic rights. I sought to ensure that gender, age, level of education, level of political interest and strength of political allegiance were included in response to US research indicating that there are relationships between political knowledge and a number of demographic variables relating to political interest and activity. Levels of political interest were self-reported by participants. The content of the questions to gauge political knowledge in the original research was generated after considerable research into how items should be selected – most of the items related to aspects if the political system rather than highly topical issues which would become outdated quickly.

Most emphasis was given to UK concerns of the time, but some questions were of international relevance. The success of the survey structure and content following several revisions and trials enabled it to be included in the 1992 British Election Study. The questions used in this study were based on these foundations, with updated content to ensure relevance and accuracy. My version of the questionnaire reflects the balance found in the original questionnaire (Martin et al. 1993), featuring questions about local, UK and European issues, as well as questions relating to civic rights.

More recently, The Hansard Society has included political knowledge questionnaires in their UK Audits of Political Engagement 1, 4 and 7, and the most recent audit for 2013, Audit 10 (Hansard Society, 2013). The question statements in the 2013 survey were:

1. The minimum age for voting is 16
2. Members of the House of Lords are elected by the British public
3. Government and Parliament are the same thing
4. Cabinet ministers stop being MPs when they become a minister
5. You are automatically registered to vote if you pay council tax

6. Political parties receive some state funding
7. British Members of the European Parliament are directly elected by British voters
8. Most of the money that local councils spend is raised locally through council tax
9. There is a minimum number of days that MPs have to attend Parliament each year

These were true or false questions. I decided *not* to design a true or false questionnaire based on these questions because I wanted to try to minimise the amount of guesswork on the part of participants and the influence that wording of the questions may have on responses. I instead chose topics that were likely to be more relevant to the participants and which they were more likely to have heard about because of current events.

In designing the questionnaire I adhered to recommendations made by Bryman. These included the importance of avoiding long questions, double-barrelled questions, very general questions, leading questions, questions that include negatives, and technical terms (Bryman 2008, p.239.

I also weighed up the benefits and drawbacks of providing an 'I don't know' option for multiple choice questions. I decided that the potential for participants to tick 'I don't know' when they could not be bothered to think about the right answer was less important than the benefit of participants being less likely to feel forced into answering a question even when they were unsure of the answer (Bryman 2008, p.244).

When choosing which information to collect about the participants themselves, I asked only relevant questions, according to data protection principles. I needed the name and tutor group information of participants to be able to include them in later stages of the research, and their age and gender in order to conduct analysis to explore whether there were any differences in political knowledge along these demographic lines. I asked these questions at the end of the questionnaire to minimise the effect of "stereotype threat" which can cause participants who identify as women (or girls) to perform less well when they are asked to state their gender before a test (Steele 1999).

After the questions had been devised and the questionnaire text written, I checked with three members of teaching staff that the language was clear and that participants would be able to understand the content.

The questionnaire as it was presented to participants can be found in Appendix D. Also in Appendix E is a table indicating the questions asked and the rationale for their inclusion.

5.4.2   Repertory grid interviews

The repertory grid is a technique of cognitive modelling which has its origins in clinical psychology (Kelly, 1955). It is a technique used to elicit both "the conceptual content embodied in an individual's mental model and the relationships which exist among these concepts" (Latta & Swigger, 1992) – or, how people think about things and make connections between them. A strength of the method is that the researcher is able to explore an individual's construct system in the context of a particular situation or environment, rather than in terms of an absolute truth (Birdi 2011, p.277).

There are a variety of ways to use the repertory grid technique: it can be used simply as a set of ratings scales, a form of structured interview which may or may not use ratings in order to identify participants' perceptions without bias from the interviewer (Jankowicz 2004, p.14).

The repertory grid method is flexible and has proven useful to library and information science research. Repertory grid studies have been used with success a number of times in the discipline (Birdi 2011; Crudge & Johnson 2004; Oppenheim et al. 2003; McKnight 2000; Latta & Swigger 1992). These previous research projects have used the method for a variety of different topics, such as envisioning library space and discussing library collections, and different approaches have been taken, such as providing elements for the participants rather than eliciting both elements and constructs from the participants. There is also precedent for the method being used as a measure of political construing (Fransella & Bannister, 1967).

In the context of this research, repertory grid interviews were used to build a sense of how the research participants perceive politics, the information sources they use and the relationships they create between them. In preparatory reading around young people's involvement in politics, it became apparent that not all young people (indeed, not all people of any age) view 'politics' in the same way. Some issues that young people identify as being of importance in their lives are 'political' (for example, housing, employment, and

education) but they did not conceive of these issues as 'political'. Many viewed politics as being closely related to distant notions of the Houses of Parliament and issues that do not affect them or their everyday lives (White et al. 2000, p.46).

5.4.2.1 Use of repertory grids in related research

Although the repertory grid method has not been widely used in library and information science research, three relevant projects have been identified:

Birdi (2011) used the repertory grid approach to explore the perceived characteristics of fiction readers and their associated genres, in the context of UK public libraries. As well as the application of personal construct theory and the use of the repertory grid method, the research included digital recordings of the interviews which were then transcribed and analysed to further explore the perceptions underpinning participants' constructs. This provided insight into the rankings each participant gave when constructing the grid and allowed the research to investigate the tensions arising between the "raw" data in the grids and the commentary. This provides an additional qualitative element to the research with the addition of an understanding of meanings which would otherwise have been lost if the grid had been used in isolation.

McKnight (2000) analysed the representation of information sources using the repertory grid method. The research was experimental, to explore the viability of the method, and used only one participant. As a result, the findings are not generalizable, but the author concludes that the repertory grid method may be an effective method for exploring how individuals understand information sources. McKnight used the triadic method to elicit constructs, and used statistical methods of analysis including two-way hierarchical cluster analysis, which allows a researcher to analyse construct clusters and element clusters.

Crudge and Johnson (2007; 2004) applied the repertory grid technique in a study of Information and Communications undergraduates' conceptions of search engines. The study was experimental and aimed to identify whether the repertory grid method was suitable for this line of enquiry and to identify how information seekers construct different understandings of search engines. They concluded that the method was suitable for identifying a finite set of constructs from participants without introducing unacceptable

levels of researcher bias, and that the method allowed for the production of measures which were relevant to the participants because they had provided them themselves. They identified more complex ways of understanding the research object than had been anticipated, without placing a heavy cognitive burden on the participant. These are all benefits of the repertory grid method that gave it potential for use in this study.

5.4.2.2   Benefits of repertory grids

A benefit of repertory grids is that they serve to minimise researcher bias when developing interview questions. This is of particular relevance to this research because it is important to not assume the issues of relevance to the research participants, whose concept of the political may be very different to that of the researcher. The use of the repertory grid technique places the participant as the authority about themselves and their understandings; it enables the realm of discourse to be chosen by the participant through their choice of elements and expression of their perceptions through their own choice of constructs (Jankowicz 2004, p.13). Wherever possible, the researcher does not put words into the mouth of the participant, and must ensure that when seeking clarity that the participant's voice is not lost.

The flexibility of the repertory grid method was found to be of great benefit when designing an interview that would work with young participants. For example, although a 'classic' repertory grid model tends to use triads, it has been found that using two elements can be easier for children to understand (Cohen et al. 2011, p.499) because it can be too cognitively demanding to conduct triadic comparison. This is supported by Fransella et al.'s assurance that "there is nothing sacrosanct about the triad. It is equally reasonable to use two elements for elicitation" (Fransella et al. 2004, p.28). When I trialled the repertory grid method in pilot interviews they worked more successfully when diads rather than triads were employed. The topic of the interview itself was often complex to grasp for the participants, and the stages, although explained, were not always well understood, so simplifying the process wherever possible was a benefit.

Another benefit of the repertory grid is that it provides a more individualised technique; the respondent provides not only the responses to questions, but also creates the conceptual framework through the process of giving the topics of discussion and relationships between them (Cohen et al. 2011, p.497). Furthermore, the assessment of the relationships between elements and constructs allows for within-respondent analyses to be carried out (Ibid) – that is, I was able to ask deeper questions about what the participants were saying and the participants were able to explain and ask further questions of themselves and their own understandings of the constructs they were creating and discussing.

The depth of research is another benefit of the repertory grid method. It is possible to go into quite a deep level of discussion with participants using the "laddering up" technique (Cohen et al. 2011, p.499-500). The exploratory technique provides an opportunity for the researcher to ask which part of the construct the participant refers, and why, when the constructs are elicited. For example, in one interview a participant said that they viewed The Daily Mail as "intellectual" (P21). When asked in what ways they thought it was intellectual, and to describe in more detail, this construct was divided into two constructs; the participant suggested that The Daily Mail in some ways "tries to be intellectual" and also that some sources "actually are intellectual" (P21). These two ideas were viewed as distinct from one another by the participant and different sources were viewed as behaving in different ways based on the two separate constructs. On a practical level, repertory grids have a benefit over semi-structured or unstructured interviews because although they may last as long as a repertory grid interview, the data yielded may be less precise (Jankowicz 2004, p.16).

A further benefit of the repertory grid technique is that it is a way of ensuring the reliability of qualitative data because information is drawn from the participants and analysed in a reliable fashion (Jankowicz 2014, p.15).

5.4.2.3   Drawbacks of repertory grids

Although the repertory grid method has a number of strengths, there are also a number of drawbacks associated with its use. Some of these can be overcome with the appropriate degree of preparation and planning, but some of these are inherent in the method.

As previously identified by Easterby-Smith et al. (1991), the length of time it takes to complete one repertory grid interview can be a major drawback. A 20x10 matrix can take up to 90 minutes to complete. This was found to be a limitation within a school environment, especially because the interviews took place during break-times. Although structured in format and repeated as similarly as possible for each participant, there was a great variety in the duration of interviews, particularly if a respondent felt unable to contribute ideas, or had a large number of thoughts and ideas about the topic. This meant that the interviews could be as short as forty minutes, but could also potentially go on for well over an hour and a half, which not only increases the amount of analysis required, but could also have potentially caused problems relating to keeping participants beyond the planned time and them missing lessons. In this instance, the teaching staff were very accommodating and it was not a problem, and I sought to ensure that teaching staff were kept informed and that students apologised for their late return to lessons. I had to make the decision whether to allow participants to talk at length in response to questions, whether to cut interviews short or whether to allow the interviews to take place in as natural a way as possible. It was decided that, because content was valuable and relevant, and even where participants were talking at length off-topic, this was an important research finding and should not be omitted.

Some approaches to the repertory grid method recommend that the researcher provide a set of predefined elements in order to provide consistency across all of the interviews in relation to a specific phenomenon (for example, a family group's relationships with each other, in which each member of the family constitutes an element in a predefined set). However, although this provides the conditions for a greater range of statistical analysis methods, in some contexts it limits the researcher's understanding of the participants'

construct system and the key elements within it. It is therefore usually recommended for the researcher to allow the participant to choose their own elements when this is possible.

Although being able to allow participants to choose the elements is a major benefit of the repertory grid technique, it also presents a limitation: participants may omit potentially relevant elements, which means that potentially significant or interesting issues, areas and sources of information may have been missed. However, the repertory grid does not (and cannot) represent the entirety of a person's experience, and still enables the researcher to explore at a relatively deep level, the participants' construct system even with this limitation.

Some approaches to the repertory grid use a predefined set of constructs, as well as a predefined set of elements. Again, this offers the conditions to allow for a wider range of statistical analysis across different grids, as opposed to just analysis of each grid individually. This can be useful for identifying trends within a group, or differences across different demographics within the study. However, it also increases the likelihood that the researcher will bias the interview conditions by imposing their own assumptions or research priorities on the interview, and that the participant will not express their own constructs as willingly.

5.4.2.4   My use of repertory grid interviews

As with the questionnaires, the process and questions for the repertory grid interviews were piloted. I conducted four pilot interviews which lasted between half an hour and an hour and a half, which allowed me to explore variations on timing and the appropriate length of interviews for both the amount of data I wanted to collect and the length of interview in which participants would feel comfortable and engaged. I considered several aspects of the interviews, including the topic, how to introduce it, the length of the interviews, their structure, whether participants seemed to feel at ease, if participants understood what was being asked of them in the questions and repertory grid process, if they were able to name enough elements for the exercise to yield sufficient data, if they understood the language I was using and if the triad system for repertory grids would work. Piloting was also a useful process for me to learn how to better bracket my presuppositions

as a researcher and to modify the way in which I approached questions to ensure I did not influence participants' responses.

Although there can be benefit to choosing discussion topics with participants, this is not recommended for researchers who are still learning how to use the technique and in situations where the participant expects the researcher to take charge (Jankowicz 2004, p.29). In the context of this research both of these factors were relevant.

The repertory grid interviews were conducted in accordance with a combination of recommendations for phenomenographic interviews and personal construct theory. It was important for the interviews to focus on the participants' experiences and understanding of the world to reveal their beliefs, values and experiences (Barnard et al., 1999). The format of the repertory grid interview was ideal for this because the structure of the interview was effectively determined and led by the elements elicited by the participants themselves, with minimal prompting. During the unstructured components of the interview, I ensured that I did not introduce ideas into the interview that the participant had not already expressed, in line with Åkerlind et al.'s (2005) instructions.

The process of eliciting elements and constructs and then comparing and ranking them required a system of constant clarification and elaboration, which allowed me to ensure that the meaning being construed was that of the participant, that I had understood what the participants meant, whether or not I thought they had been clear and I had understood what they were trying to express. I ensured that each construct elicited was recorded on and that the participant had an opportunity to discuss these constructs. This is in keeping with the phenomenographic requirement for all perceptions to be given equal attention, regardless of how infrequently the perception is communicated by participants.

Introduction

Participant was informed about what the research is about and the interview structure. Participant was asked if they were still willing to continue and if they were comfortable for the interview to be audio-recorded.

Elicitation of elements

A set of relevant objects/spaces/issues are identified. These are the "elements". Elements can be provided by the researcher, prompted by the researcher or entirely led by the respondent. It was made clear that the definition of 'political information' is up to them and that there is no wrong answer. If necessary, it is explained that the information sources might give them information about politics, current events, or other things that shape how they see the world. In the case of this research, some prompting was occasionally necessary.

Elicitation of constructs

A set of constructs was developed by the participant. The eliciting of a set of constructs presents the ways in which respondents differentiate between those elements (Kelly 1955). Elements were presented in pairs and participant is asked to talk about what they think the differences are between them. When necessary, the participant was informed that these differences may be practical or physical, for example one may be accessible all the time whereas one may be accessible only at certain times of day, or the differences could be more abstract; for example, one may be associated with happy things, whereas the other may be associated with sad things.

Throughout this process, the interviewer checked with the participant that the constructs being noted down were being done so accurately and represented a clear picture of the construct being described.

Construction of grid

The elements were related to the constructs in a process led by the researcher. Elements were listed along the top of the grid, constructs in the left and right columns. The 'preferred' construct was listed in the far right column and the 'less preferred' construct was listed in the far left.

Ranking

The participant was asked to give each element a ranking, on a scale of one to ten, where one represented the construct in the left column and ten represented the construct in the right. e.g. Element 'BBC Radio One', construct 'boring vs. interesting' may be given a 7, representing the participant's relatively high perception of interest associated with the element.

Figure 5.1: The repertory grid interview process

5.4.3   Focus groups

A focus group is "a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of research" (Wildemuth 2009, p.242). Between six and ten participants is recommended in order to sustain and control discussion (Morgan 1997, p.47). Group members should be homogenous, but not close friends (Ibid). Ideally, between four and six separate groups will be used in one study (Ibid). In the case of this research, the four focus groups were all students in the same year group in the same school, and care was taken to ensure that close friends were not placed in the same groups. Although four groups were planned, only three of the four were conducted because some participants did not wish to continue taking part in the study.

5.4.3.1 Benefits of focus groups

A strength of focus groups is that multiple research participants are present and encouraged to discuss the research topic with each other, comparing their views and experiences. Differences of opinion are made explicit. As a result, the researcher is able to directly observe similarities and differences in the ways participants conceive of the research phenomena. The data that is produced is more than just answers to the interviewers' questions. If the researcher is also recording data about the ways in which the participants interact, valuable insight can be gained from these observations in addition to the content of what the participants choose to talk about. A researcher may be able to observe the opinions of participants shifting as they form their opinions and attitudes during discussion with fellow participants: "people will become more aware of their own perspective when confronted with active disagreement and be prompted to analyse their views more intensely (Wildemuth 2009, p.277).

Kitzinger (1994) argues that interaction is the crucial feature of focus groups because the interaction between participants highlights their view of the world, the language they use about an issue and their values and beliefs about a situation. Interaction also enables participants to ask questions of each other, as well as to re-evaluate and reconsider their

own understandings of their specific experiences. This is an aspect of focus groups I was keen to utilise in this study, to explore how young people's interactions with each other may influence their perceptions of political information sources.

5.4.3.2   Drawbacks of focus groups

There are a number of potential drawbacks to the focus group method, particularly when discussing contentious or personal issues. These include the potential for difficulties in arranging suitable times for focus groups for several participants at once, difficulties associated with encouraging a wide enough range of participants to take part, disagreements and irrelevant discussion which may distract from the main focus of the research, and difficulties in controlling and managing focus group sessions. Some individuals may also find focus groups intimidating or uncomfortable, and some may feel under pressure to agree with the dominant view in focus groups rather than expressing a different opinion. In addition, focus groups can be difficult to record, transcribe and analyse due to the nature of their size and the potential for participants to speak over each other.

Neuman (2014, p.472) identifies several drawbacks to the use of focus groups, which I made efforts to address when planning and conducting them for this research. One of the main disadvantages of this method over individual interviews is that focus groups may yield less data than individual interviews. I addressed this issue by also conducting individual interviews. Another drawback is that "only one or a few topics can be discussed in one focus group session" (Ibid); this was not a significant issue because I did not have a large number of topics I wanted to explore with the participants and wanted to allow them to discuss whichever topics in the general area of political information and political attitudes were most significant to them. Neuman also describes a "polarisation effect" that can occur, in which attitudes of participants may become more extreme after discussing them in a group. In the context of this research, this may in fact be advantageous, because one of the things I sought to observe in the focus groups was the ways in which participants may communicate information and meaning to each other which may have resulted in them changing or developing their opinions about the topics being discussed (this is explored in more depth in Chapter Seven). I made an effort to not dominate the conversation, and tried

to ensure the free expression of all group members through the way I moderated the discussion. However, it is inevitably possible that some participants may have felt limited by my presence as a moderator.

In terms of analysis, Neuman suggests that focus groups can sometimes be a problem for researchers who may find it difficult to "reconcile the differences that arise between individual-only and focus group-context responses". The design of this methodology seeks to identify the differences that arose in the different stages of the fieldwork process and use them to the benefit of the research, in the form of a phenomenographic outcome space. In such an outcome space, it is possible for participants to inhabit one or more of the areas simultaneously or at different times.

5.4.3.3   My use of focus groups

The previous sections have identified the various benefits and drawbacks of the use of focus groups and the justification for using them in this study. The remainder of this section discusses how the focus group method was utilised in this research, how the data was analysed, and how the findings will be presented in Chapter Seven. The robustness of the data and findings are also discussed.

I do not believe that it was not epistemologically possible to conduct what could be considered completely unstructured focus group interviews, because I came to this stage of the research with a theoretical framework in the early stages of development, based on previous stages of the research. Although I avoided developing hypotheses during the data collection process, it is possible that some ideas about the social reality I was investigating fed through into the types of questions I was asking when seeking further information from the participants when conversation was running dry. However, the unstructured nature of the focus groups allowed the responsiveness to individual and situational changes that are one of the major benefits of unstructured interviews (Wildemuth 2009, p.224).

The questions asked in the focus group were based on the themes emerging from the repertory grid interviews. These included questions and points to talk around such as:

- What issues concern you? Locally, nationally, in your everyday life?
- Do you intend to vote when you can? Why or why not?
- Do you think the voting age should be lowered? Why or why not?
- How do you feel about taking part? Is it important?
- Can you tell me a bit about what you learn in school? What would you want to learn about?
- Do you like discussing issues that concern you?
- Do your parents talk to you about political issues? What kinds of things do you talk about?
- What do you think about news on TV?
- Can you tell me what kinds of things you use facebook for?
- Do you think the news is biased or unbiased? How do you tell?

These questions could be seen as the foundation of a semi-structured interview, but were used most often as an aide-mémoire (Wildemuth 2009, p.223). The questions were used as a broad guide to topical issues that I might have wished to cover in the focus groups, and the wording of the questions served only to help me record my thoughts, rather than being used verbatim during the focus groups. I did not pay attention the order of the questions, instead allowing the structure of the focus group discussions to be open and flexible, and dependent on the flow of conversation between participants. A benefit of using these questions as an aide-mémoire was that a certain degree of consistency was established across the different focus group sessions.

5.5   Selecting a research site

The research site was chosen after I had decided to take a mixed methods approach to the research using critical theory to inform the process; the details about the research site are presented before a description of the methods, to reflect the order in which the methods were applied during the fieldwork at the research site, rather than to reflect the chronological progression of the research design.

 The research took place at The Hayfield School, a secondary school in Doncaster, South Yorkshire. The school operated as a grant maintained secondary comprehensive school from 1971 to 2011, and in 2011 became a 'converter' Academy (The Hayfield School, 2014). The school has approximately 1,200 students aged between 11 and 18.

As a past student and having a family member who is a member of staff at the school (my mother is head of the year group my participants were in), it was important to minimise the influence that this could have on the research participants. Before beginning the research, I asked several students if it concerned them that I was "Mrs. Smith's daughter". Several participants responded that it did not concern them, because they said that Mrs. Smith was well-liked. Teachers were able to confirm that the year group generally had a positive relationship with my mother and they did not seem to be influenced either way in terms of choosing to participate or not participate in the research. The vast majority of research participants only became aware of the relationship between me and my mother towards the end of the research period, so I am not concerned that the research was overly influenced by this.

My familiarity with the layout of the school, the school day, lesson structures and topics and the majority of the staff was very helpful because settling into the research environment did not take very long and I was able to make decisions about the best way to collect data based on my understanding of the environment. For example, I was aware of the type of relationship one particular member of staff tends to have with students and that he would be able to encourage them to talk about their feelings and thoughts about politics openly without feeling embarrassed or self-conscious. I decided that this would be the best way to get the students to open up, and by allowing him to lead the conversation after we had discussed relevant topics I would like him to bring up, I was able to observe and not participate heavily, which I think created an environment in which the students were more open and forthcoming with their thoughts and opinions. My understanding of the language and culture of the interviewees allowed me to use research methods that would otherwise have been impossible to employ effectively, such as unstructured focus groups, which rely on an understanding of the meaning of participants' experiences, which are governed by the cultural conventions of the research setting (Wildemuth 2009, p.225).

I deliberately chose to conduct my research in an environment with which I am familiar to reduce the challenges of familiarising oneself with an entirely new research environment. I was also aware of the benefit of choosing a familiar environment in terms of having an understanding about what participants were referring to, such as geographical locations,

members of staff and lessons. This helped to give me confidence as a researcher, which was an important message to put across to both members of staff and research participants to set them at ease and allow me to conduct research successfully.

The length of time between being a student at the school myself and returning to conduct research was a sufficient period to allow the required degree of separation from the research environment and participants (I left the school in 2005 and therefore did not know any of the students in attendance at the school during the fieldwork period), and I do not feel that my relationship with any aspect of the research environment coloured my interpretation, data collection or analysis, which is an important requirement of any research with a phenomenographic approach (Bryman 2008, p.15).

I decided that conducting research in a school, particularly a school environment I was familiar with as an ex-pupil, had the most potential for yielding rich data without risks associated with research conducted outside of a mainstream educational context. The potential loss of insight into a more diverse range of information experience was mitigated by efforts to reach as many students as possible in a school year group which has a diverse cohort in relation to its geographical setting. The topic researched is largely not academic in nature (that is, the subject of political agency and related topics are arguably not widely taught within school environments) and the research methods focused on the elicitation of participants' ways of experiencing and understanding their political worlds.

After selecting the research site it was important to familiarise myself with the participant sample as part of the school population as a whole. The background to the participant sample is discussed in the next section.

5.6   Background to the participant sample

I selected participants in line with the phenomenographic research approach. I decided to focus on one year group in a school to compare participants' experiences of exposure to and interaction with sources of political information and to explore the variations in experience – that is, the various ways participants are aware of the same phenomenon (Limberg 2000, p.57).

Initially, I attempted the research with Year 11 students, who are aged between 15 and 16. However, a very small number of the cohort returned consent forms, so the sample would have been too small. In addition, the Year 11 students were preparing for exams and I was not sure that it would be a good idea to ask them to take part in my research as much as I had initially hoped to. As a result, I decided to attempt the research with Year 10 students. I received far more consent forms from them, which was felt by staff to be partly due to the differing nature of the two cohorts. Teachers described Year 10 students as being a much more amiable group, interested in topics beyond the classroom. It was also due to added support from the Head of Year 10, who ensured that group tutors reminded students to return consent forms if they wanted to participate, and reminded students herself.

I carefully planned how I would introduce myself and my research to the sample group, and made efforts to build a level of rapport, as recommended by Patton (2002). Contact was made with the Year 11 students by going around tutor groups during registration period. I introduced myself and described my research to each of the six groups, then asked if they had any questions while I handed out consent forms. It is possible that this method of introduction was not effective, because uptake from this sample was very poor. I found it difficult to engage the Year 11 students; they did not seem to understand who I was, my role in the school or how they should engage with me, which was another reason for abandoning that particular cohort as a route of enquiry.

I chose to take a different approach when introducing myself and my research to the Year 10 students. I introduced myself to the whole year group in a presentation during an assembly, and asked if they had any questions. I made sure to use simple language for what is quite a complex topic, and gave some examples. I tried not to give too many examples, however, because I did not want them to enter the research process with a preformed idea about what I was looking for. In contrast to how I was received by the Year 11 students, my relationship with the Year 10 participants developed during the process, and even from the outset I found that as a whole they were forthcoming, happy to talk about issues with me and did not worry about talking about personal issues.

When talking to the participants, I endeavoured to not force topics and instead allow them to bring issues up themselves, but asked for more information if they wanted to provide it when they were talking about interesting and relevant things during the repertory grid interviews and focus groups. The participants seemed pleased to be asked questions about politics, their opinions, the news and current events, their relationships with their friends, family and teachers in relation to politics and their opinions on the world and were often quite excitable and very engaged during discussions. Even the less forthcoming students began to open up during the repertory grid interviews when they came to understand the structure of the process. A level of respect was maintained throughout, and although I had told the participants that they were welcome to call me by my first name, they all continued to call me 'Miss'. They seemed to interpret me as something of a figure of authority because they asked my permission to do things that strictly I did not have the authority to do, although because of my relationship with the school, was able to do (for example, allow students to go to the toilet in the middle of a lesson as long as if challenged by a member of staff they said that I had told them it was permitted).

Very early on in the research it became apparent that the participants were comfortable with my position as a researcher. Throughout the research I endeavoured to ensure that my actions were consistent with the role I was taking in relation to the participants (Patton 2002). Following recommendations from Wildemuth (2009, p.224) I presented myself to my participants as a learner and a friend with a sympathetic interest in their lives, willing to understand their perspectives. Adopting this approach allowed me to build rapport with the participants, and I believe I was able to gain a more in-depth understanding of their lives than if they had perceived me differently.

After selecting a research site and identifying the characteristics of the participant sample, I identified the potential research risks to ensure that I could mitigate these wherever possible and address them in the most appropriate way. The risks identified are discussed in the next section.

5.7 Research risks

A number of risks planned are associated with the adopted methods. These are identified below.

5.7.1 Co-operation of school

The fieldwork relied on the co-operation of the school in which the research was conducted. I had a good relationship with staff at the school; the head teacher showed enthusiasm and was very supportive in negotiations around what were asked of the school and students during the research, and was keen for the work to contribute to the personal and educational development of the students. There was little risk that the school would revoke access, but this was always taken into consideration as a risk.

5.7.2 Student participation

Another risk was that the students would be unwilling to participate. I sought to lessen this risk through incentivisation – participants were entered into a prize draw for a tablet device, which was paid for with research funding and given to a student who had participated in the research through all the stages, whose name was entered into the draw alongside other students who had participated fully in the research. The prize was drawn and awarded in the end of term assembly. I was informed by the head teacher that they were an enthusiastic group and had expressed interest in the research, so I believed that although encouragement will be required, it would not be too difficult to gather a substantially sized sample. However, the research process was fairly long and required the involvement of participants through several stages, which placed some burden on the participants. Some degree of drop-off was expected, particularly with the diary-keeping element which students did not find worth their while outside of school hours.

I initially intended to focus on the 15-16 age group through the Year 11 cohort at the school. However, I decided that it would not be a good idea to attempt to use Year 11 participants for two reasons:

First, a very small number of consent forms were returned (8 out of a total 180 pupils) which indicated a lack of interest or desire to participate in the research. This may have been due to the way in which I introduced the research to the cohort, which I did during registration period, a time when pupils were observed to not be concentrating fully. During registration students were often involved in administrative tasks with their group tutors, and students were waiting to go out for morning break directly after registration. The pupils expressed some uncertainty about what the research was about and for, and did on occasion verbally express a lack of interest in politics. Even when offered the incentive of a tablet device, some of the students said that they did not feel this was enough of an incentive to take part in all the stages of the research because they did not feel they had anything to contribute.

Second, Year 11 students at the school begin GCSE study leave after the May half term holiday and are therefore not on-site during regular school hours, and are often only there for scheduled study sessions and exams. It was therefore unlikely that students would be willing to attend interviews and focus groups.

I instead chose to seek participants from Year 10, whose schedules were more suitable for participation in the research. I made efforts to ensure that the number of participants was between 20 and 50, the number of participants recommended as a minimum in phenomenographic studies (Limberg 2000, p.57). I decided that attempting the research with the year group below (Year 10) had more chance of success, partly because they were felt by teaching staff to be a more co-operative year group, and because they did not have the immediate pressure of exams. I introduced my work to the year group in the third week of the fieldwork placement, in a full year group assembly. Pupils were told about the research and what would be required of them (the content of the information sheet given to the Year 11s two weeks previously), and students were given the opportunity to ask questions during the assembly, immediately afterwards and during lunchtimes that week, during which time I made myself available in a staff office. Some students did take the opportunity to ask questions at all of these times.

5.7.3 Participant comprehension

There was a risk that participants would not understand what was requested of them for the diary stage of the research. This was mitigated by the fact that there were a number of other research stages, so there was still be enough data about the ways participants conceive of political topics and how they interact with political information to provide preparatory content for focus groups.

An important aspect of minimising risk was to ensure that my study adhered to the principles of ethical research. This is discussed in the next section.

5.8 Research ethics

It is important to design and conduct research ethically in any circumstances, but when working with young people and a topic of a personal and sensitive nature it is even more important to ensure that the participants are safe and their data is secure. The Economic and Social Research Council guidelines focus on the principles of integrity, quality and transparency, with an emphasis on the importance of the full informed consent and voluntary involvement of participants, confidentiality and anonymity, and the avoidance of harm (Economic and Social Research Council 2012, p.3). This study is funded by the ESRC, and all of the research carried out for this study adheres to these principles. The research approach and all research methods and consent forms were approved by the ethics committee of the Department for Computer and Information Sciences at the University of Strathclyde.

I made initial contact with the head teacher of the school, by email. This email, which had been approved by the departmental ethics committee, gave details about the nature of my research and the methods I wished to use. This was followed up by a telephone call with the head-teacher in which we discussed the purpose of the research and I answered questions about how my methods would work, how I would be able to access participants and what the nature of their involvement would be.

The head-teacher agreed to allow me to conduct research in the school, and from that point my liaison was a member of the senior management team whose responsibilities were in the teacher training department. I completed a Criminal Records Bureau form which was processed by the school. Once this had cleared, dates for the fieldwork were scheduled. I ensured that the schools and participants consented to the research.

The school provided me with a photograph identity badge which I wore at all times to ensure that staff and students knew my identity and purpose for being in the school. I ensured that participants knew they were able to withdraw their involvement in my research at any time.

5.8.1   Informing participants about the nature of the research

I wrote an information sheet to be read by participants and their guardians. I also gave a presentation in a year group assembly in which I presented myself and explained the nature of the research. At the end of the presentation students were able to ask questions about the research and what it would be used for.

5.8.2   Participant and parental consent

Due to the sensitive nature of the data to be collected and the age of the participants, it was decided that active consent rather than passive consent would be the most ethical way to approach the research. Although the school was content with the research taking place, and was aware of the requirements of each of the stages of research, they requested that parental consent be sought in addition to that of the participants themselves. One method could have been to provide information sheets with opt-out forms to be sent home with the relevant cohort, but after seeking opinions from teachers on the matter it was decided it was unlikely that every pupil would give the documents to their guardian(s). As a result it could not be guaranteed that informed consent could be provided. It was therefore decided that providing information sheets with consent forms for the participants and their guardian to sign would be more appropriate. I circulated information sheets and consent forms during registration period, during which time I asked students if they had any questions about the research.

The letters and forms given to participants and their guardians were approved by the departmental ethics committee. I asked for the students to take the forms home, read them and get them signed by "whoever was at home" (I made a conscious effort to not refer to 'parents' because a number of the students do not live with their parents, and use of the term 'guardian' or 'carer' may have made the students feel uncomfortable with me from the outset).

I visited tutor groups on several days over the following two weeks to collect returned consent forms, whilst distributing questionnaires to the participants who had returned them. Group tutors were asked to return any late forms along with questionnaires, which they placed in the class registers and returned to the office of the Head of Year, who then passed them to me.

5.8.3   Data protection and processing

The study involved collecting data of a sensitive nature as defined by the Data Protection Act (1998), which considers sensitive personal data to include information relating to political opinions. This specific requirement for the protection of sensitive data is applicable to this research in addition to the general principles under the Act as a whole.

Key data protection principles were adhered to throughout this research: only data necessary for the purpose of the research at hand was collected; the data was not kept for longer than necessary; data was kept securely; data was processed in line with the subjects' rights (Bryman 2008, p.119). Furthermore, to keep the data secure all data was kept on an encrypted hard disk. All data, both electronic and paper-based, were anonymised using a coding system. I collected the completed questionnaires at the end of tutor period from each of the tutor groups. They were stored securely in a locked filing cabinet in the school. The computer I used to enter the data was encrypted and the software used to analyse the data was password protected. All research data was anonymised using a coding system in order to protect participants' identities.

5.9   Summary

This chapter has discussed the ways in which the theoretical approach outlined in the previous chapter informed the development of the research questions and subsequent research design. The consideration of alternative methodologies was also discussed. The final research methods were identified and the details of the research site, associated risks and ethical implications were explored. The next chapter explains the processes undertaken during the several stages of analysis on the data collected through the methods outlined in this chapter.

6. Data Analysis and Presentation of Findings

Several stages of analysis were required during the study, utilising the theoretical approaches to the research. This process is described in this chapter.

6.1 Analysis of the questionnaire data

The data from the questionnaire was intended to give a background sense of the levels of political knowledge that the participants had and a general idea about their interest in politics and attitude towards political participation, which would be explored in the later stages of research. A brief questionnaire was a quick and effective way of collecting this data, which when analysed could be presented in a clear and simple manner to give an overview of political knowledge and attitudes. It could also be broken down into levels of political knowledge of different kinds; UK and international political processes, citizens' rights and public spending. The data from the questionnaire provided a sense of the overall levels of knowledge of the participants in order to be able to pitch interview and focus group questions at the appropriate level.

The data was manually entered into Qualtrics survey software for analysis, and triple-checked for accuracy. Quantitative reports were generated by the software, which were analysed to identify individual participants' performance in the questionnaires and to identify trends in the outcomes. The data from the questionnaires was divided into three categories:

- Demographic questions
- Questions relating to political knowledge which were used to give a basic indication of participants' levels of political knowledge
- Questions relating to political attitude, which provided a very basic insight into their political attitudes and interest.

This study does not seek to identify causal or correlatory relationships between levels of political knowledge, interest or attitude and demographic characteristics. Statistical analysis was therefore not conducted. The responses to each of the questions are presented in tables and the correct answers to the political knowledge questions are indicated.

The number of correct and incorrect answers to the political knowledge questions were analysed to identify general levels of political knowledge of the participants, broken into three classifications: low, medium and high. It was possible to achieve one of 23 scores in the 11 political knowledge questions (in increments of 0.5 from 0 to 11). When divided by three for the number of categories (low, medium and high) this does not achieve a whole number, so it was decided that the low category would encompass the eight lowest possible scores, the high category would encompass the highest eight possible scores and the medium category would encompass the remaining seven possible scores.

The responses to the question about level of political interest were analysed as a whole and then broken down by reported gender to identify if there was a significant difference in participants' interest depending on their gender which would need to be taken into account when conducting the focus groups and interviews.

It must be emphasised that this analysis does not seek to generate generalizable findings, but was used to get a sense of the overall levels of knowledge of the participants in order to be able to pitch interview and focus group questions at the appropriate level. This process was not central to answering the research questions for this study and the analysis of the questionnaire data is therefore presented in Appendix F.

6.2 Personal construct analysis

This section details the personal construct theory approach to the analysis of the repertory grid data. There are many different and valid, ways of analysing repertory grid data, involving qualitative and quantitative methods. The choice of procedure is dependent on the research questions and the reasons for conducting the interviews and what the researcher aims to uncover during the analysis process. I chose methods which are suited to the qualitative approach taken in this research, and which utilise personal construct

theory in ways that are compatible with the other theoretical approaches which are used throughout the research; phenomenography and critical pedagogy.

Many methods of repertory grid analysis are statistical in nature and designed for use within research where the elements and/or constructs on the topic(s) are provided by the researcher, rather than elicited from the participant (Jankowicz 2004, p.166) which makes it possible to compare grids with each other. McKnight (2000) identified the potential use of the repertory grid method to explore peoples' "information spaces"; the sources of information they use and the various ways they construe these sources of information. In order to make comparisons across individuals, he acknowledged that it is necessary to ask participants to construe the same set of elements, which can be negotiated by a group of participants. He theorised that it would be possible to identify a core set of common elements owing to the ubiquitous nature of many information sources, including e-mail, books and television.

However, in the case of this study, both the elements and the constructs were elicited from the participants. This makes comparison across grids (even where participants have identified the same elements as possessing similar or the same characteristics) methodologically unsound because of the nuances of meaning communicated by the participants when describing the types of information sources they encounter and their perceptions of the phenomenon.

Although it is possible to conduct analysis in quantitative, statistical ways, the context of this research led me to decide that it was not necessary or appropriate to focus heavily on quantitative analysis. A statistical approach would not significantly contribute to a depth of understanding about participants' conceptions of political information sources, and the relationship between their conceptions regarding the sources and their critical understanding of political information. Repertory grids are not usually recommended as a way of attempting to statistically compare perceptions between individuals (Faccio et al. 2012, p.193; Jankowicz 2004, p.196), and as a result, efforts within this research to compare constructs across grids are only intended to identify very general trends in how participants described different sources of political information.

Other methods of statistical analysis that do not require comparison across grids are possible. For example, it would have been possible to conduct multiple component analysis on each individual grid, using the construct codes as components and exploring individual participants' perceptions of elements using these component groups to identify potential trends across the whole participant group. However, this requires the development of hypotheses by the researcher in order to run reports within the software, which would have conflicted with the phenomenographic approach, which emphasises the need to allow the research participants and their discussion of the phenomenon to lead the direction of the research findings, rather than allowing the researcher to impose their own perception and hypotheses on the phenomenon. Although these hypotheses would have been drawn from previous stages of repertory grid analysis, such as the eyeball analysis process, to identify potential trends among perceptions, the focus of the phenomenographic approach is to identify the qualitative *variation* of experiences among the participants, not to identify statistical *differences* among them. Multiple component analysis would therefore be inappropriate in this context. Analysing the various ways in which participants describe their constructs regarding the elements and identifying the range of variation, through an exploration of the elements, constructs and relationships between them, is sufficient to construct a strong and meaningful outcome space which adequately conveys the participants' conceptions of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, a small amount of multiple component analysis was conducted on constructs relating to information quality and source authority, which is discussed in Chapter Seven.

6.2.1   Statistical analysis software

A small amount of statistical analysis was conducted. Where statistical analysis was used in this research, the software package Idiogrid was employed (Grice, 2002).

A number of statistical packages were considered before I decided to use Idiogrid, which offered more flexibility than packages such as RepGrid IV and was significantly more affordable than other packages. It could have been possible to use the quantitative analysis software SPSS to conduct repertory grid analysis, but this would have required a significant amount of time to manually set up the program to do this, which I decided against.

As discussed in Chapter Four, the repertory grid method was a highly beneficial approach to data collection in this context because the structure and format of the interviews allowed me to get a lot of information from participants in a replicable way (thus providing reliability) and with minimal researcher bias (thus providing validity). It was also a beneficial method for encouraging participants to discuss concepts and ideas they were unlikely to have consciously thought of or verbalised before. For these reasons, the method is in many ways just as important to this research as the data generated. However, the data generated must be analysed and meaning drawn from it.

As discussed in Chapter Four, previous library and information studies research has used qualitative approaches to repertory grid data analysis to explore a depth of meaning to good effect. The main aim of this research was to explore the qualitatively different ways in which young people experience different sources of political information, from their various perspectives. For this reason, the focus of the analysis on this chapter is on generating depth of meaning from the topics discussed rather than on assessing statistical relevance of the various conceptual and numerical comparisons between information sources.

The process of encouraging participants to talk about their conceptions of political information sources was a stepping stone on the way to the focus group discussions, in the sense that the content of the repertory grid interviews allowed me to ensure that the focus group discussion content would be relevant to the participants and that I could aim to explore in more depth the most salient issues raised in the repertory grid interviews. However, this chapter also discusses data which was not explored in more depth in the focus groups (due to time restraints as well as potentially being too personal for individuals to be comfortable talking about in a group discussion).

Six stages of analysis were applied to the repertory grid data:

- Eyeball analysis of individual grids

- Content analysis of individual grids

- Element categorisation

- Construct categorisation

- Structural analysis of individual grids (preferred poles, construct types)

- Comparative content analysis of grids (relationships between elements and other elements, and elements and constructs)
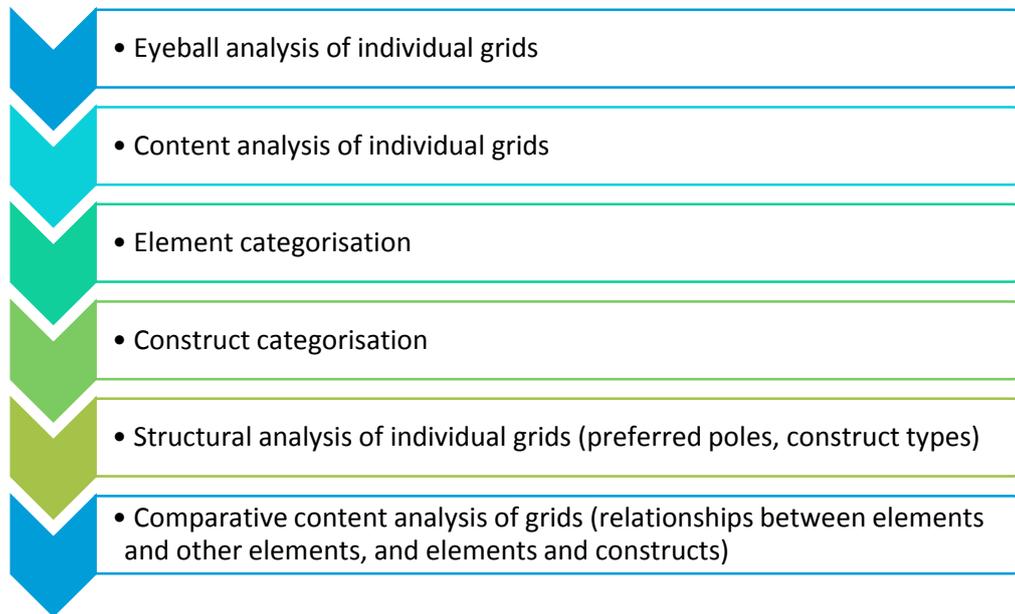
Figure 6.1: The stages of the repertory grid analysis

6.2.2   Eyeball analysis of individual grids

It was not possible to conduct thorough analysis of the repertory grids until after the fieldwork stage of the research had been completed due to the intensity of the data collection process. However, it was beneficial to conduct some basic eyeball analysis of the repertory grid data at this stage. This process helped me to gain a basic understanding of participants' conceptions of political information, to get a sense of how the participants view themselves as political actors, and to develop questions for the focus groups.

Jankowicz (2004, p.81) recommends a six-step procedure to eyeball analysis, which I amended to fit the context of my research and the methods used:

Recommended stages	Amendments made
What is the interviewee thinking about? Note the topic of the grid; if there is any information available on any qualifying phrases which were used during elicitation, note that, too.	In all cases the topic was provided by me, but where participants asked questions regarding the meaning of the topic, this was analysed.
How has the interviewee represented the topic? Note the elements. If there is any information available about the way elements were agreed, not it.	In all cases the elements were provided by the participant, but where prompting was necessary this was taken into account during analysis.
How does s/he think? How many constructs were obtained, given the length of the interview?	Awareness of the fact that participants may not have consciously considered the research phenomenon before.
What does s/he think? Note the scaling interval used. Look at the ratings. Is there anything obvious about the whole matrix of ratings?	Awareness of the possibility of ratings indicating uncertainty or disengagement with the task.
Look at the supplied elements, constructs and ratings.	All elements and constructs were provided by participants.
Draw your conclusions. Summarise the main points. Where you find yourself making interpretations of your own, you should do so in the light of the process analysis you have already conducted.	No amendments made.

Table 6.1: Recommended stages of eyeball analysis of repertory grids

6.2.2.1   Identification of preferred poles

An important stage of the repertory grid interviews was, while constructs were being elicited, to ensure that the two words or phrases elicited from participants to describe a single construct were placed on the grid the right way round – that is, that the preferred part of the construct was placed in the far right column and the less preferred part was placed in the far left column.

6.2.3   Content analysis of individual grids

The most commonly used method of content analysis of individual grids is a frequency count of number of elements and constructs elicited (Jankowicz 2004, p.152). Frequency counts are a rough guide to the general trends in constructs and elements, based on the

idea that participants will provide more constructs within topics about which they have more experience. It was important to give participants every chance to provide as many constructs as possible in order to ensure that the counts are valid. Although frequency counts are generally recommended as a method of comparing the constructs of one participant in a 'before and after' scenario, they can also be used to compare the constructs of participants as long as participants are given the opportunity to discuss whatever constructs they wish to.

6.2.3.1   Element categorisation

During the coding process it became apparent that the elements elicited were often described by different participants using different words; for example, different colloquial words were used to describe family members (grandma and granny, etc.). Radio stations were referred to in different ways; Channel 2 and Radio 2, for example. The terms were standardised in the coding process because the focus of the analysis was not the words used to describe the same elements, but the different constructs associated with the same elements. Where it was not absolutely clear that terms were being used to refer to the same element, they were not grouped together in the table. Where a participant did not or was not able to give specific details about an element (a particular radio station or news programme, for example) these were presented as 'unspecified'. The categories were not presented in any particular order or ranking, but the elements within the categories were presented in order from the element most often elicited to the least often elicited.

6.2.3.2   Construct categorisation

Construct categorisation is possibly the most important technique for analysing more than one repertory grid, to explore how a group construes a topic of common interest (Jankowicz 2004, p.88) – in the case of this research, how young people construe sources of political information.

Using the generic content-analysis procedure described by Jankowicz (2004, p.151), I pooled the constructs elicited from each participant to explore what potential meaning may be found in the category headings. The procedure is illustrated below:
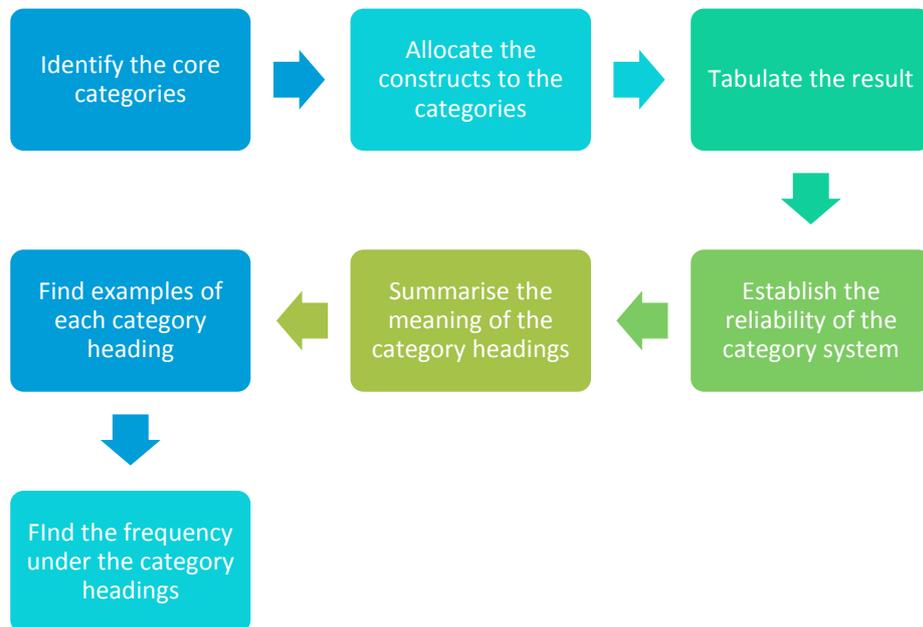
Figure 6.2: The construct categorisation process

The description of the categories in the rest of this section contributes to ensuring the reliability of the analysis; that is, the stability, reproducibility and accuracy of the coding process (Jankowicz 2004, p.28). In the absence of a co-researcher or colleague to also allocate constructs and compare the extent of agreement with, it is important to fully describe the category definitions.

In contrast to most other approaches to repertory grid analysis, I applied phenomenographic principles to the process, in the same way I had applied them to the interview process; Jankowicz (2004, p.167) discusses how using pre-existing theory is an appropriate approach to repertory grid analysis when using the method as part of a "bootstrapping technique"). I coded the constructs by listening back to the interviews and reading the interview transcripts, noted down the emerging themes and ensured that the constructs within the individual grids were translated into the appropriate category in the coding scheme(s). This ensured that even where the same words were used by different participants to communicate slightly different meanings in different contexts and in relation to different elements, the constructs were not simply placed into the same coding categories by virtue of them using the same words.

Equal importance was placed on all constructs discussed by participants, which is a fundamental principle of phenomenographic analysis, and analysing the data using not only the written grids but the recordings and transcripts ensured that individuals' conceptions were accurately described and coded. Constructs were checked, rechecked and amended as necessary to ensure that constructs were coded consistently and that different codes were not used to describe the same thing.

6.2.4 Structural analysis of individual grids

Analysis of ratings provides an insight that cannot be identified through analysis of constructs and elements separately: "Constructs tell you *how* a person thinks. The ratings of elements on constructs tells you *what* a person thinks" (Jankowicz 2004, p.19). Through content analysis I was able to summarise the different meanings in each of the grids by categorising them and counting the similarities and differences within each category.

Structural analysis of each grid was conducted manually to explore clustering of elements and constructs and identify significant clustering between different types of information sources (elements) and/or the constructs each participant associated with them. This provided me with insight into how the sources of political information were experienced in different ways by the participants as well as allowing me to identify general trends relating to the different sources. The results of this analysis are presented in Chapter Six section 6.3.5.

6.2.4.1 Analysis of construct types

The constructs elicited from participants during the interviews were analysed by their type. There are a large number of possible ways of labelling constructs, including formal aspects of constructs, the nature of their control over the elements, general diagnostic constructs and constructs relating to transition (Fransella 2003, pp.455-457) and Jankowicz (2004). Those which were applicable to the data from the repertory grid interviews are presented in the table below:

Type of construct	Description
General diagnostic constructs	
Core	Those which play a central role in the participants' construing of the phenomena and bear a deep and personal significance to the participant.
Remarkable	Those with implications to be drawn from them.
Unremarkable	Those with no implications to be drawn from them.
Affective	Those expressing a feeling or emotion
Behavioural	Those describing what elements do or what part they play in a process
Evaluative	Those which offer an opinion or assessment
Attributional	Those which incorporate perceived reasons for behaviour
Classification of constructs according to the nature of their control over elements	
Propositional	A construct which carries no implications regarding the other realm memberships of its elements is a propositional construct. This is uncontaminated construction. The relationship to other constructs is not obvious.
Constellatory	A construct which fixes the other realm memberships of its elements is called a constellatory construct. This is stereotyped thinking.
Pre-emptive	A construct which pre-empts its elements for membership in its own realm exclusively is called a pre-emptive construct. This is the 'nothing but' type of construction. 'If this is a torpedo it is nothing but a torpedo.'

Table 6.2: Construct categories taken from Jankowicz (2004) and Fransella (2003)

In this study, the repertory grid method is combined with the phenomenographic approach. This therefore renders some possible methods of analysing repertory grid data unsuitable for use within the epistemological context, and places greater emphasis on the use of other possible analysis methods.

It was also important to bear in mind Jankowicz's (2004, p.88) emphasis on the importance of not over-interpreting constructs in grids or seeking to draw generalisable results across a set of grids. The analysis of construct types may be conducted in great depth, but within the context of this study the analysis of construct types focused on core constructs and the identification of evaluative constructs for the purpose of category coding. It was conducted as part of eyeball analysis and served as a source of insight into the perceptions of each participant following each individual interview and is not used to draw generalisations between participants.

The majority of the analysis of construct types was conducted informally during the eyeball analysis process to help to provide a starting point for further analysis. Not all of the types of construct in the table below were identified in participants' grids, but where they were identified and read as significant to the participants' construction of their experience and understanding of political information, this is written into the findings in Chapter Seven within the sections on eyeball analysis and content analysis.

Analysis of relationships between constructs

Statistical analysis was employed to test the hypothesis that there may be a correlation between participants' perceptions of information sources as possessing authority and the information they convey being of high quality. This hypothesis was tested using multiple group components analysis and the constructs grouped together in the "authority of information source" and "quality of information" categories, which were the result of the construct categorisation process described in section 6.2.3.2. The structure coefficients of the all of the constructs in each individual were compared to identify whether the constructs relating to information quality and source authority were of significant strength in comparison to constructs within other categories. The results of this analysis are presented in Chapter Seven.

6.3   Phenomenographic analysis

This section details the phenomenographic approach to the analysis of the repertory grid interview and focus group transcripts. Data from both the focus groups and the interviews were used in the generation of the phenomenographic outcome space. The data from the individual repertory grid interviews can be viewed as "the starting point for building a picture of collective awareness concerning how particular phenomena may be experienced" (Yates et al. 2012, p.102), which was built upon in the focus groups.

There are a number of commonalities but also an accepted degree of variation in methods within phenomenographic research (Åkerlind 2005, p.322). With regard to commonalities, a core premise of phenomenography is the assumption that "different categories of description or ways of experiencing a phenomenon are logically related to one another,

typically by way of hierarchically inclusive relationships" (Ibid, p.323). It is expected that there is a relationship between the person experiencing a phenomenon and the phenomenon itself, represented through the different ways individuals experience the phenomenon.

The goal of phenomenographic research is to describe these different ways of experiencing a phenomenon and also to create a "logically inclusive structure" within which it is possible to place these different ways of experiencing (Ibid). This structure is described as the 'outcome space' (Ibid). An outcome space provides "categories of description that portray a collective conception of a phenomenon" (Andretta 2007, p.156). The aim of this outcome space is to encompass all the possible ways individuals within the group being studied can experience the research phenomenon; in the case of this research, how the 14 and 15 year olds within the research group perceive information relating to politics and current events.

Another commonality in phenomenographic research is that the aim is to explore the range of meanings within a sample group (Åkerlind 2005, p.323). This means that the data collected should not be analysed in isolation from data collected from the rest of the research participants. For example, no one interview transcript can be understood outwith the context of the rest of the interview transcripts. The aim is not to understand the range of meanings experienced by one individual, but to understand the range of meanings experienced within one group (in this case, the group of 14 to 15 year old participants). The repertory grid interview and focus group transcripts were therefore analysed together, and similarities and differences between the meanings expressed within the transcripts were identified for the creation of an outcome space. The ways in which I ensured the validity of the data analysis and findings are discussed in section 6.4.

The diagram below outlines the ways in which phenomenographic methods were applied during the research process:
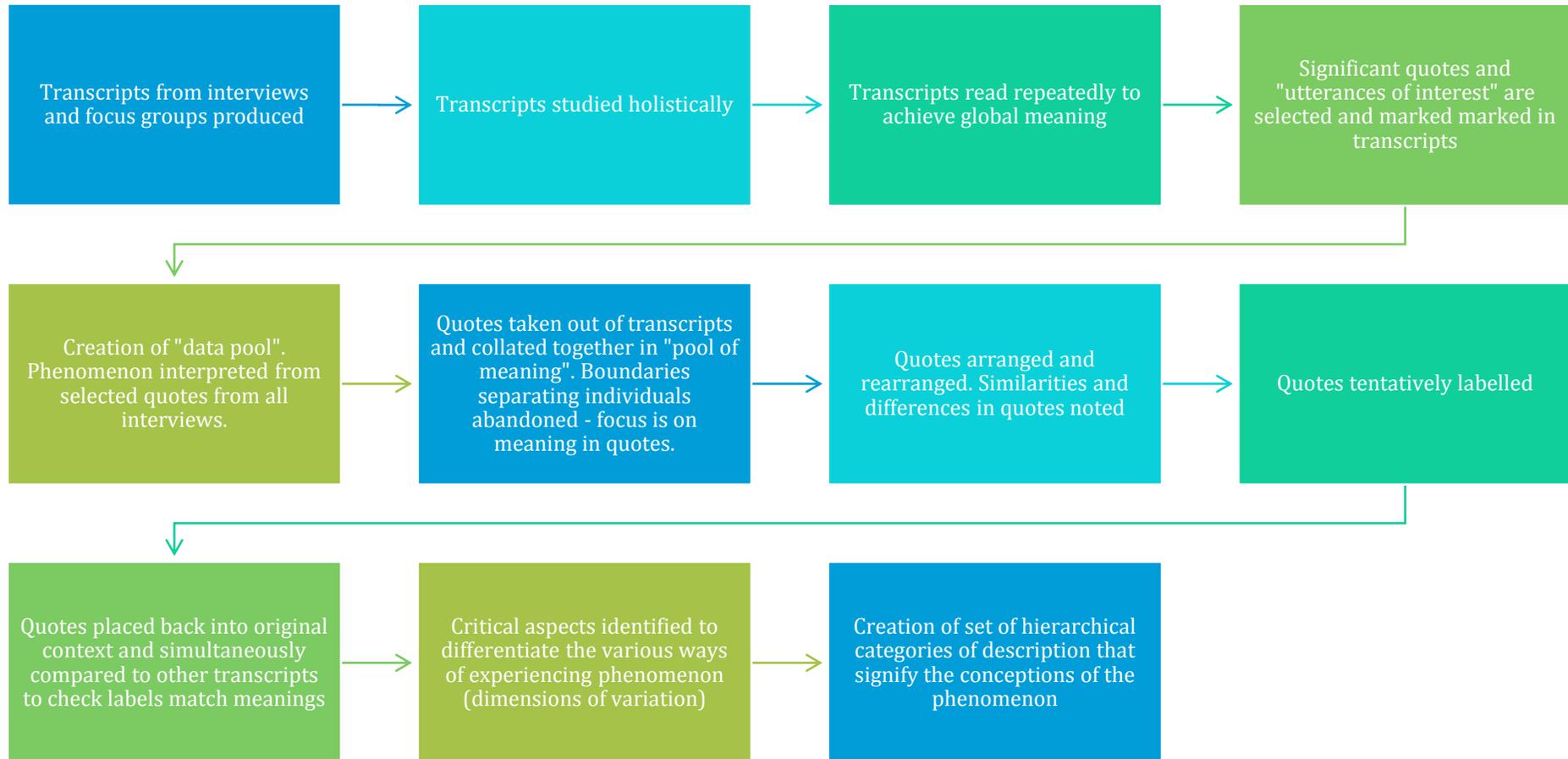
Figure 6.3: Phenomenographic analysis process (adapted from Åkerlind 2005, and Pang and Marton 2005)

6.3.1   Recording and transcribing the interviews and focus groups

Interviews and focus groups were recorded on a digital recording device and were transcribed in full for analysis, a method typical of phenomenographic research (Åkerlind 2005, p.323; Limberg 2000, p.57). I transcribed the recordings verbatim, and then subjected them "to an iterative process to identify fundamental categories of description in the data and a structural framework outlining the logical relationships between categories" (Smith 2010, p.160).

6.3.2   Transcript analysis process

Recommendations for phenomenographic research emphasise the importance of the researcher's familiarity with interview transcripts. To familiarise myself thoroughly with the data I read through each transcript at least four times and listened to each recording at least twice.

During the process of re-reading, common themes and theoretical concepts emerged. I coded these themes and concepts when they emerged in the data, and I wrote about relationships I identified within the coding schedule in memos. I was able to use the memos I wrote to record the ways in which my theoretical framework developed, which included elements of conflict and problems I had making sense of the data and the ways I had coded it. To resolve these conflicts I referred back to the raw data and compared the coding, theories and conclusions I had made to the raw data itself, in an attempt to refine the theories that were being applied and developed. This was an important process because it was important to ensure that the theories I developed and applied were appropriate, so I grounded my theories in the most thorough examination of the data possible (Wildemuth 2009, p.42).

The transcripts from repertory grids and focus groups were coded according to the phenomenographic approach, in which themes emerge from common links in the data rather than being decided on beforehand (Åkerlind 2005, p.323). During the coding process, irrelevant strands were removed (such as interactions between the interviewer and members of staff who occasionally entered the room). However, I took care to ensure that strands of interview transcripts that did not fit easily into the coding structure were not removed, because the phenomenographic approach places emphasis on the idea that all perceptions of a research phenomenon are valid regardless of

the depth in which the participant expresses their perception. All the issues raised by participants were to be seen as of equal importance.

Formal coding was conducted only after all the data had been collected. However, as the aim of the research was to gain an insight into the ways individuals conceive of political information and to understand how their sense of political agency may be shaped by their different ways of perceiving information, it was of benefit to look over the questionnaire data to inform the lines of questioning for later stages of research (the repertory grid interviews and focus groups) and to consider the outcomes of each repertory grid interview after they were conducted to inform the potential lines of questioning for the interviews that followed. It can therefore be considered that casual analysis of the first data collected partially influenced the focus of questions in later interviews (Limberg 2000, p.58), but the emphasis in the repertory grid interviews and focus groups was always on the perceptions of the participants and the semi- to unstructured nature of the interviews provided freedom for the participants to discuss issues of most relevance to them. After I had developed theories relating to the data I had coded, I undertook a process of "sorting" (Wildemuth 2009, p.42) to produce a finite set of categories to explain the phenomena.

It was important to maintain an open mind throughout the process of reading and analysing the transcripts, to avoid applying predetermined views or failing to explore potentially relevant themes emerging from the data (Åkerlind 2005, p.323). It was also important to read the transcripts as a collection rather than individual pieces of data, to focus on the collective rather than individual experience (Ibid). The focus was on identifying similarities and differences across the transcripts.

6.3.3   Categories of description and the outcome space

The focus in phenomenographic research is not on an understanding of the experience of single individuals; data is analysed to identify the qualitatively different ways in which a phenomenon is experienced by a group of people. Categories of description describe experiences of the phenomenon on a collective level (Limberg 2000, p.63) and often relate to one another hierarchically (Ibid, p.58). There are a limited number of categories, which must be faithful to the data collected and relate to each other logically. Together, the categories of description form an *outcome space.* This is a representation of the findings; a set of categories of description which present the different ways a phenomenon is experienced by a community. The outcome space and

the relationships between the categories within it provide an explanation of the different ways individuals experience the phenomenon being explored.

It is important to first distinguish the difference between the knowledge interests of phenomenography, that is conceptions (i.e., ways of experiencing), and how this relates to the categories of description. These two terms have often been confused in phenomenographic work and are a point of frequent criticism (Bowden & Walsh, 2000). Johansson et al. (1985) describe the relationship between conceptions and categories:

> Conceptions, which make up our unit of analysis, refer to whole qualities of human-world relations. They also refer to the qualitatively different ways in which some phenomenon or some aspect of reality is understood. When trying to characterise these conceptions, we use some categories of description. The categories are, however, not identical with conceptions – rather they are used to denote them. (Johansson et al. 1985, p.249)

Similarly, (Sandberg 1997, p.205) describes the primary distinction between conceptions and categories of description as being the focus on individual or collective ways of experiencing: conceptions refer to individuals' ways of experiencing an aspect of reality, and categories of description represent the collective ways of conceiving of something.

6.3.4 Generating the categories of description and outcome space

Marton & Booth (1997) identify three criteria for ensuring that the phenomenographic outcome space and categories of description are methodologically sound. First, the "individual categories should each stand in clear relation to the aspect of the world under investigation". Each category should describe a distinct way of experiencing the phenomenon. Second, these categories must relate to each other logically (this is usually in the form of a hierarchy). Third, the system should be "parsimonious". This means that the outcome space should include as few categories as is "feasible and reasonable" for identifying the variations in experience. (Marton & Booth 1997, p.114). The outcome space presented in Chapters Eight adheres to these phenomenographic principles.

6.3.4.1   Developing categories of description

Each category of description represents one way of experiencing the research phenomenon and must appropriately convey the ways in which the participants experienced political information sources, based on their descriptions of their experiences and observations drawn from my time spent with them. Categories of description are typically expressed in the form "something (x) is seen as something (y)" (Lybeck, Marton, Stromdahl & Tullberg 1988, p. 101) and I have maintained this format within the outcome space for this study.

The categories of description include the consideration of the structural aspect of participants' experiences of political information. These structural aspects contain two elements: the internal and external horizons of the particular categories. Yates et al. (2012, p.101) describe the external horizon as "what is in the background of the experience", and the internal horizon as "what is thematised, or in focus, the internal relationship of the phenomenon's parts to each other and its' cohesive whole" (ibid). This awareness structure is presented in Chapter Eight in the format of the diagram presented below and a description of the horizons:
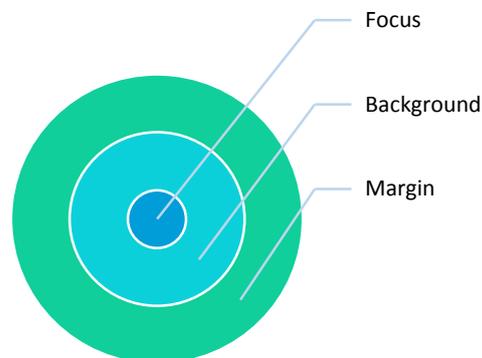
Figure 6.4: Example of the presentation of structures of awareness

6.3.4.2 Developing the outcome space

Following the development of the categories of description, I generated an outcome space, which is a structure to represent the logical relationships between the categories. Phenomenographic outcome spaces may represent three different structures between categories of description. An outcome space could be structured in one of several ways, including a hierarchy in which more

sophisticated perceptions logically include previous categories of experience, a representation of a history of experiences of a phenomenon, or a representation of developmental progression (Bruce 1999, p.14).

The outcome space presented in Chapters Seven and Eight of this thesis takes a combination of the first and final forms, and signifies the developmental progression in the different ways in which participants experience and understand political information, and how these ways of understanding the phenomenon build upon each other. However, some of the ways of experiencing political information necessarily include previous categories of experience.

6.3.4.3   Applying critical pedagogical theory to the research findings

During this process I referred back to the critical theoretical concepts I had identified in the literature review, to apply relevant theories to the coded data to produce a unified explanation of the research phenomena, grounded in middle-range critical pedagogical theory applied to issues relating to information literacy. These explanations seek to raise awareness of the structural and systematic problems associated with the research phenomena and present methods of delivering information literacy instruction. The critical discussion is presented in Chapter Nine, alongside a more general discussion of the relevance of previous LIS research.

6.4   Rigour of the research

Establishing the reliability of the coding process is an important aspect of the construct categorisation stage of repertory grid analysis (Jankowicz 2004, p.166). The coding process took place in three sweeps, making the coding structure more reliable (Ibid).

The findings from the repertory grid analysis are presented in Chapter Seven. These findings provided the basis for the development of the phenomenographic outcome space, in combination with the findings from the focus groups. The process of analysing the focus groups and developing the outcome space is discussed in the next section.

6.4.1 Interpretive awareness

To ensure the reliability of the data and analysis when taking a phenomenographic approach it is necessary to acknowledge inevitable researcher bias and explain how it is dealt with within the research. (Sandberg 1997; 2000) terms this "interpretive awareness", which is an acknowledgement of the subjectivity of phenomenographic research and efforts to control and check the researcher's interpretations. These checks were made at the following stages:

During the formulation of the research questions: I suspended any theories and biases I may have had in relation to the possible outcomes of the research and focused on describing rather than explaining participants' experiences of the research phenomenon.

During the selection of participants: As I was researching one specific year group in one specific school, it was not practicable to select a diverse group of participants, but I did seek to ensure some degree of balance in terms of gender overall and in the focus groups.

During the interview process: I conducted pilot interviews and focus groups to develop my skills and test the interview schedules. I made an effort to not ask leading questions or suggest ways in which the participants might experience the research phenomenon. I began each interview with the same information and introductory questions. The repertory grid approach to the interviews allowed the participants to focus on the aspects of the research phenomenon that were of relevance to them.

During the analysis process: I constantly referred to the data as a whole when analysing the transcripts and read the participants' statements in context. Where it did not seriously impede understanding of the participants' meaning I did not alter the representation of the speech of participants. This minimises the ways in which the data is constrained. During the phenomenographic data analysis process, the categories were developed iteratively, and the inconsistencies in the transcripts served as ways of identifying different ways of experiencing the research phenomenon.

During the reporting process: the categories of description within the outcome space are usually hierarchical in nature. The categories were developed through the analysis of the transcripts and include quotes to illustrate how they were developed and to justify my choice of the categories.

6.4.2 Communicative validity

Communicative validity refers to the quality of the research process, including the interpretations of the data and the conclusions drawn from them (Lather, 1994; Lankshear 1993, p.363). It was established at several stages of the study. First, prior to conducting any interviews, I sought to create a "community of interpretation" (Apel, 1972), communicative validity is created through an "understanding between researcher and research participants about what they are doing" (Sandberg 2005, p.54). I introduced myself and my research in a whole year assembly, then visited each tutor group to talk to the students and ask if they would like to participate, giving them the opportunity to ask questions about the study. I also observed Sociology and History lessons and registration periods, where I spoke to them about the topics they were learning about and reminded them of the purpose of my study. This helped me to establish a rapport with the participants as well as what Sandberg (2005, p.54) describes as "clarification from both sides [which] contributed to establishing a fruitful community of interpretation for the subsequent interviews".

Second, during the interviews and data collection, I reminded participants about my interest in their experiences of political information. I assured them that there were no right or wrong answers and that I would not make personal judgements about the issues that will be discussed. The repertory grid interviews and focus groups were conducted in the form of a dialogue, with verbal descriptions of the participants' conceptions of political information discussed between myself and the participants, with as few scheduled questions as possible and a heavier use of follow-up questions such as "what do you mean by that?", "can you tell me more about that?" and "can you give an example?". This allowed me to focus on the lived experiences of the participants and convey "an openness toward the research object" (Sandberg 2005, p.55).

Third, when analysing the transcripts, I ensured that communicative validity was established through coherent interpretation of the texts. I focused on each transcript in its entirety rather than analysing extracts out of context, which helped to ensure that the meaning of the statements made by the participants were analysed and understood accurately. This involved analysing how each participant understood political information, and then comparing the different ways of understanding political information across the whole participant group. I grouped together the excerpts of interview transcripts which bore similarities to ways of understanding political information, and then

compared them across groups. This process resulted in me further amending the categories of description through establishing more coherence in my interpretation of the data. This results in higher communicative validity (Sandberg 2005, p.56).

Sandberg (2005, p.56) and Åkerlind (2005b, p.330) also describe how communicative validity can be achieved through the process of discussing research findings with other researchers and professionals within the relevant research community to ensure that the research methods and interpretations are regarded as appropriate. Throughout this research process, I have had regular contact with my doctoral supervisor and communicated my findings through conference presentations, peer-reviewed publications and discussions with fellow researchers, librarians and other educators. The process of "intersubjective judgement" (Sandberg 2005, p.56) experienced during the communication of my research findings has validated the categories of description and outcome space appropriately (Åkerlind 2005b, p.330).

A further degree of communicative validity can be gained in qualitative research from discussing the research findings with the participants. However, this is not an approach always sought in phenomenography (Åkerlind 2005, p.330) because of the nature of the outcome space, which represents the collective experience of participants rather than identifying individuals' perspectives. Furthermore, the research findings may "go beyond the individual's explicit understanding at the time of the interview", and their experience of the phenomenon may alter between the interview and being consulted about the findings and interpretations.

6.4.3   Pragmatic validity

Pragmatic validity refers to the insight research outcomes provide which help individuals to develop "more effective ways of operating in the world" (Marton & Booth, S., 1997), including "useful insights into teaching and learning" (Entwistle 1997, p.129). The findings from this study provide an insight into young people's experiences of political information and applies theory to practice in a way which aims to be applicable and useful. This study explicitly aims to support the introduction of critical approaches to information literacy for the development of young people's political agency, and several of the recommendations in Chapter Nine provide guidance for practitioners about how this can be done. The study can therefore be seen as possessing pragmatic validity.

6.4.4   Transgressive validity

Transgressive validity refers to the extent to which the findings adequately represent the "ambiguity, complexity, and multiplicity in the lived experience" as it is expressed by the participants (Sandberg 2005, p.57). Lather (1994) suggests that transgressive validity can be sought by looking for differences and contradictions in the lived experiences expressed by participants, (as opposed to the coherence in lived experience sought by typical phenomenographic analysis). To do this, I looked for instances in the repertory grid interviews in which participants had described an element with a certain construct but then ranked it in a way which contradicted their original description of the element. This checking enabled me to gain a deeper insight into the ways the participants construed the information sources and their relationships with them, which led to a more precise and accurate set of categories of description and outcome space.

Analysing the repertory grids for construct type also supported the validity of the data. A high proportion of propositional constructs may indicate that the participant may have struggled to come up with meaningful constructs for some reason. This could be because the pair of elements were too dissimilar to adequately compare, because the participant was not able to verbalise their ways of construing the elements, or because the participant did not have any ideas about their way of construing. Only a small number of constructs were identified as being propositional or constellatory. Although some of the constructs were initially labelled as propositional during the first pass of coding, when relistening to the interviews and checking the coding for a second and third time I recoded the constructs because they proved to be more significant than initially indicated. For example, some participants expressed a significant preference for watching rather than listening to or reading about current events. Constructs such as "I read it vs. I listen to it" (P15) were not as propositional or constellatory as initially thought, and they did in fact did influence participants' engagement with the sources of political information they identified.

6.4.5   Interpretive awareness

Sandberg (2005, p.58) argues that in interpretive studies, it is inappropriate to seek reliability through methods used for objective studies, such as replicability and interjudge reliability. Instead, he recommends seeking reliability through "interpretive awareness" (Ibid), which refers to the ways

in which the researcher demonstrates an awareness of their subjectivity throughout the research process, including the research design, question formulation, data collection, analysis and presentation of findings. Throughout this thesis I have sought to demonstrate how I reflected on my own subjectivities, theories, prejudices and ideological viewpoints and bracketed these wherever possible in order to ensure that the findings do not simply reflect my own biases, but also acknowledge evidence which challenges any presuppositions I may have had.

6.4.6   Catalytic validity

In addition to Sandberg's methods of establishing validity, Kincheloe et al. (2010) make recommendations for the justification of knowledge claims in critical theory through catalytic validity. Catalytic validity concerns "the degree to which research moves those it studies to understand the world and the way it is shaped in order for them to transform it" (Kincheloe et al. 2010, p.171). Research that possesses catalytic validity displays the "reality-altering impact of the inquiry process" (Ibid). Although this form of validity is more commonly seen in ethnographic research, it is also an appropriate measure of validity in other research which makes use of critical theory to inform the research design, analysis and outcomes (Ibid). The discussion in Chapter Eight provides examples of the catalytic validity that may have arisen from the process of conducting research with the young people at their school and discussing issues of interest to them, which several of the participants said they had not previously had the opportunity to do and which may have shaped their development as political agents.

6.5   Use of pronouns in the research findings

The use of pronouns in the presentation of the research findings is a conscious choice; "they" is used as a gender-neutral singular pronoun in reference to all participants regardless of the gender they reported themselves to identify as, for two reasons: 1) gender is not an aspect of the analysis in this research; 2) this use of non-gender-specific language is a political choice to prevent any potential inadvertent stereotyping of participants, by me or readers of this thesis, based on sexual stereotyping of political attitudes and roles. This choice is informed by the work of a number of critical theorists who state that "[m]ainstream research practices are generally, although most often unwittingly, implicated in the reproduction of systems of class, race, and gender oppression" and

observe that "[l]anguage is central to the formation of subjectivity (conscious and unconscious awareness" (Kincheloe et al. 2010, p.164). I therefore decided it would be appropriate to take this course of action in a thesis so heavily informed by critical theory.

6.6 Summary

This chapter has discussed the methods of data analysis and presentation employed in the study and explained the decision making process behind these. It has also discussed the various forms of validity evident in the research process and results. The following chapters will present the research findings that emerged from the analysis of the repertory grid interviews and focus groups.

7. Findings from the Personal Construct Analysis

This chapter presents findings based on the analysis of the repertory grid data. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how the findings from the analysis of the repertory grid interviews answer the research questions of this study.

7.1   Analysis process

Six stages of analysis were applied to the data generated from the repertory grid interviews (the repertory grids themselves and the interview transcripts). The process is explained in the previous chapter. The first stage of analysis was eyeball analysis, the findings from which are presented in the next section.

7.2   Eyeball analysis of individual repertory grids

After each interview, I read each grid individually to familiarise myself with its contents, following the procedure. The results of eyeball analysis were briefly noted observations and a descriptive summary of each of the repertory grids, the purpose of which were to develop questions for later stages of the research and to identify potential key themes to explore in later in-depth analysis. The sections below outline the significant observations drawn from the eyeball analysis.

7.2.1   Range of sources of political information

First, a broad range of elements were elicited across the participants in general. This was also reflected in most of the individual grids themselves; participants identified a variety of elements from which they receive political information. Most participants identified one or more family members, a newspaper, one or two radio stations, a television programme and one or two online sources. Although this was not uniform across all participants and some identified mainly television programmes or family members, for example, a generalisation can be made that participants appeared to be aware of their exposure to and/or use of a wide range of information sources in the context of political information.

7.2.2 Variation in conceptions of information sources

Second, there was much variation in the different types of constructs participants described; some participants did not offer many evaluative constructs and instead provided shallow, practical constructs, even when they appeared to grasp the concept of the interview topic. This suggests that they did not think very deeply about the topic or had not had occasion to develop especially complex thoughts about sources of political information. However, all participants did express some deep, original and more thoughtful constructs, which indicates that participants' thinking around the research phenomenon was not clichéd and indicates a degree of reflective thought about the information sources they use and an ability to verbalise these thoughts.

7.2.3 Variation in the ranking of sources of information

Third, participants used the ranking scales differently. Some participants appeared to prefer to rank elements against constructs by hovering around middle scores (4-6), whereas other participants swung in a more extreme manner between low (1-2) and high (9-10) scores. This reflects the subjective nature of the process and indicates that participants' rankings cannot be easily compared to one another in statistical analysis. As a result, only generalisations could be drawn from any comparison across the grids, which, as discussed in Chapter Six, would not contribute meaningfully to the understanding of the research phenomenon.

In addition to the themes identified above, the eyeball analysis stage included the identification of preferred poles, the results of which are presented below.

7.2.4 Identification of preferred poles

The identification of preferred poles was a necessary step of each repertory grid interview. The results of this process were often surprising and informative in themselves. The most notable themes which emerged from the process of placing constructs at the appropriate pole for the participants' conception of the constructs are discussed below:

7.2.4.1 A preference for information which presents multiple points of view

Some participants expressed a preference for sources which provided information in an argumentative context, such as in a chat show format in which multiple points of view could be presented at the same time (P7). The majority of participants preferred the poles of constructs which represent more conflict, debate and/or disagreement between speakers within one information source (P2, P6, P8, P17, and P31).

However, some participants preferred information to be provided in what they described as a more straightforward way, in a manner which they believed made the opinions and knowledge of different speakers seem to be less in conflict with that of other speakers (P9). This represents a variation of perception of preferable features of information sources within the sample.

7.2.4.2   Different perceived formality of information sources

Participants expressed varying preferences relating to perceived "formality" of sources. Some participants preferred to receive information from sources they considered to be formal or official (P7, P16, P24, P25), whereas some participants preferred information sources to be less formal (P8, P14, P23, P26, P31). Although there were some nuances of meaning in participants' use of the term "formal", the contexts in which the term was used were generally similar and reflect connotations of "officialness" and "seriousness" in tone. It could therefore be suggested that there is a variation in the ways participants view the 'ideal' tone and formality of sources which provide political information, which may have an impact on other perceptions about the source of information or the information being imparted. Deeper exploration of this issue is presented in Chapter Nine.

7.2.4.3   Different perceived abilities to relate to the information source

The majority of participants expressed a preference for sources of political information which they felt they could "relate to" (P21). One participant reported preferring to get information from people they already knew they were more likely to agree with (P2). In contrast, some participants said they preferred to be challenged and that they engaged with sources which they thought were more likely to change their worldview (P23). In the context in which this was discussed, the participant linked

this changing of their worldview to their ability to relate to the source, which they connected to the format of the source:

> Because the news, that's like an actual image, but the radio, that's just what they're putting across in your mind, so they could put it in a way to make you have a certain image, or one that allows you to have a free image of your own. But that image might conform to your opinions and ideas… So you interpret it in a way that meets your, kind of, world view. (P23)

7.2.4.4   Different formats of information

The format in which the information was presented influenced participants' perceptions of more than just their ability to relate to it. A number of participants reported preferring sources of information which provided visual and audio content as well as or instead of textual information (P4, P23, P26, P31, P32). This preference was not always related to the *ease* with which the participants said they felt they were able to access, understand or relate to the information, but was sometimes instead related to the *depth* of information they said they encountered from the different information sources:

> I think *BBC News* is more…in depth than Capital because on the radio stations they've only got a certain amount of time to actually speak before they put the music on again, so they just have to do a brief description. It always says if you want more information then look on the website, or look on *BBC News* or whatever, and on *BBC News* they have got a timeslot to speak but it's usually bigger so they can fit more information on it and more detail, in-depth. (P7)

This illustrates what may be considered a preference for sources of information which are not only text-based, but indicates that the reasons behind this preference may not (only) relate to a reduced cognitive load involved in the use of non-textual information sources, but also relates to the depth or amount of information available from multimedia information sources. This provides a potentially valuable insight into the variations in experiences and conceptions of different information sources by the participants and is explored in more depth later in this chapter.

7.2.4.5   Strength of views and influence of information source on participants

Some participants said they preferred information sources which they considered to be more open or obvious about their opinion, for example sources of information which were perceived to be biased but obvious about it (P17), or people whose political stances they were aware of (P16), which meant they felt they were able to evaluate the information these sources provided against the political biases. P6 said that they preferred information sources which they feel *don't* shape their opinions, but that they liked to know what beliefs the sources themselves may have about the information being imparted, because they felt this allowed them to make their own informed decisions by using the person not only as a source of "factual" information, but also as a role model (or anti-role model) and point of reference along a political scale.

In contrast, others preferred sources which they conceived as being neutral, or which they were unaware of their opinions or biases. For example, P15 reported that they preferred sources of information which they perceived to have less strong views. However, several of the sources of information identified by the participants often communicate strong political views as their raison d'être (political billboards, for example). This raises the question of whether participants' conceptions of political information sources included the notion that 'neutral' information sources are inherently more reliable than 'political' information sources. This is an issue I sought to explore in more depth in the focus groups and is discussed in the next chapter.

7.2.4.6   Passive vs. active engagement

One participant expressed a preference for information sources which they believe require more active involvement; P6 reported that they prefer sources of information which they have to actively seek out, rather than sources which are "always there" and are engaged with in a passive way. They said that they felt this way because then engagement is more "deliberate" and the information is perceived as more valuable and useful. This indicates a willingness on the part of the participants to engage actively with information and the potential for young people to engage with information in a way they may feel is more valuable than the passive methods with which they may be more familiar. This is explored in more depth with a critical theoretical lens in Chapter Nine.

7.2.4.7   Complexity of information

When participants discussed how they perceive the target demographic of the information sources they use or encounter, a number of participants reported preferring sources which use more complex information or present more complex pictures of the issues being discussed (P23, P7, P8). They reported preferring sources which they view as being aimed at older audiences, rather than younger audiences (P7, P32). It is relevant to note here that the majority of participants viewed themselves as being able to understand the information that they are exposed to and expressed the perception that they were closer in ability to the information sources which were older than those specifically designed for child audiences. Only one participant talked about how they feel that certain information sources they encounter, such as the *BBC News* website, sometimes use language that they considered to be "above [their] level of intelligence" (P7).

Although there is the possibility that interviewer bias influenced participants' reporting of their levels of comprehension of information sources, the general reported preference for more complex and higher levels of information communication indicate again that there is the potential for individuals within the demographic explored by this study to be encouraged to engage with more complex information which challenges their levels of understanding. A critical pedagogical exploration of this analysis is explored in Chapter Nine.

7.2.4.8   Amount of detail in the information provided

A recurring preference expressed by participants was that "more" or "more detailed" information was considered to be better. However, more information was not always considered to be the best situation in all contexts. For example, P23 reported that they prefer less information as opposed to more information, as long as they were able to make an informed decision based on a small amount of "correct" information presented by someone who could be considered an expert on the matter at hand. This conflicts with a view later expressed by the same participant that they prefer more detail in the information sources, which illustrates the highly contextual nature of the perception of information sources and their usefulness, even within the one example scenario (that of using an identified set of information sources for making decisions about political issues).

Somewhat unrelated to the scenario of making political decisions, but a construct elicited from several participants when they were discussing their conceptions of various forms of news media, was an explicitly expressed preference for more information relating to the details of violent crimes. On a number of occasions participants described a preference for more information based on their preference for a higher level of detail in information sources such as television and radio news reports relating to violent crime. A recurring theme was the way in which participants engage with more gruesome and grisly reporting, which they consider to be more truthful because more detail is provided, and a visual representation of the information is available which in their eyes adds to the validity of the information. For example, P24 reported preferring "more gruesome" rather than "less gruesome" sources.

It is apparent from the variation in preferences relating to the amount of information that preferences are highly contextual and dependent upon whether an individual is looking to be entertained, or is seeking to make what they would consider an "informed decision" (P23).

7.2.4.9   *Summary of the findings from the analysis of preferred poles*

Through the analysis of participants' preferred poles, I was able to identify some interesting and surprising results in relation to how participants make choices about how they interact with the information sources they encounter. Analysis of preferred poles provided some initial insight into the various ways in which participants construe the various information sources. The benefits of approaching the research phenomenon from a phenomenographic perspective using personal construct theory techniques were twofold; exploring the participants' perceptions of their preferences in depth allowed me to consider the underlying construct systems and ways of experiencing the phenomenon of sources of political information, many of which I may have missed had I not conducted this stage of analysis, or taken an entirely different approach. I was able to use some of these emerging ideas in focus groups to explore participants' perceptions in more depth. The focus group findings are discussed in Chapter Eight.

Through exploring participants' preferences relating to the constructs they identified, it became apparent that many of the participants were comfortable with being challenged by the information sources they encounter and are not resistant to engaging critically with information sources in principle. Although some of the responses may have been led by a desire to 'please' me as the

researcher, and participants may have overplayed their willingness to think critically and in-depth about the information they use, the potential to challenge information critically is found in the reporting of preferred poles but also when ranking sources of information on the grid and describing the constructs associated with them. This consistency within the perceptions of the participants suggests a genuine willingness and potential to deeply engage with the information they encounter using the kinds of critical capacities discussed in Chapter Three.

This section has presented findings of the first stage of eyeball analysis. The remainder of the analysis discusses findings from the more in-depth analysis of the repertory grid data, beginning with the presentation of findings from the content analysis of individual grids.

7.3   Content analysis of individual grids

This section describes the content analysis process and the findings that emerged.

7.3.1   Frequency count of elements

The participants were asked to name eight to ten sources of political information and current affairs that they thought helped to shape their opinions and knowledge about politics and the world around them. The majority of participants provided ten elements (n = 21). The other two participants provided eight and nine elements. All of the participants were able to identify enough elements to make the repertory grid process methodologically sound and to generate a sufficient amount of data to make the outputs meaningful: Jankowicz (2004, pp.42-43) recommends at least six elements and seven constructs to be able to gain a depth of insight into an individual's personal constructs. The number of elements and constructs elicited by participants in this study indicates that the participants were able to understand the research topic and the task being asked of them at this stage.

The focus on the qualitative aspect of information sources and use mean that it would be inappropriate to seek to infer too much from the number of times these elements were elicited; they could simply be the most obvious sources that sprang to mind when participants were asked about where they get information from, and therefore cannot be interpreted as the most valuable

or significant sources of information from which they receive the most valued information, for example.

7.3.2   Frequency count of constructs

From the 23 repertory grid interviews conducted, 524 constructs were elicited in total. Participants were asked to consider the differences between the information sources (two at a time). On average, participants provided 23 separate constructs (with some of the participants providing the same construct pairs as each other). The lowest number of constructs elicited was 10 and the highest was 40, indicating a wide range of participants' ability or willingness to participate in the task of verbalising their personal constructs. I observed that participants who were interviewed later in the schedule tended to provide more constructs, which may indicate that as my experience of interviewing increased, I was able to elicit more information from the participants. I also observed participants discussing the process with each other, which may have increased later participants' understanding and may have meant that they were more prepared than the participants interviewed earlier in the study.

7.3.3   Element categorisation

The participants identified a wide range of sources of information that they use when they have an information need relating to politics, current events and the world around them, or which they encounter passively that they are aware communicates information of a political nature. The most frequently cited sources of political information were people (mainly family members, particularly parents but also grandparents, and friends), television, social media, the internet and the radio.

Between eight and ten elements were elicited from each participant. These were coded into the categories presented in the chart below:
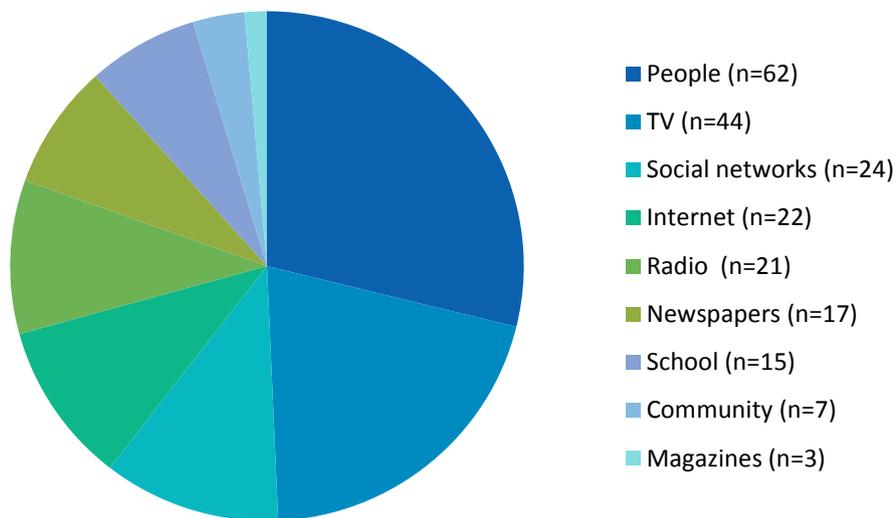
Figure 7.1: Sources of political information identified by participants

The majority of information sources elicited from the participants are unsurprising and, as will be discussed in Chapter Nine, reflect the types of information sources identified in the literature as being key information sources for young people. The participants identified people as their main sources of information, usually their parents but also other family members and friends. Participants reported that they gained information about news and current events from traditional news sources, including television, radio and newspapers as well as the internet, search engines and social media.

7.3.3.1   People

The category with the highest number of total elicited elements is people; most often parents, but also other family members, friends and teachers. The reliance on people as a source of political information may traditionally be interpreted as potentially problematic, especially if the sources they rely on are not adequately knowledgeable about relevant issues and processes. However, it is not appropriate to draw conclusions about the suitability of information sources based solely on format, and instead it is necessary to seek more understanding about the participants' use of people

as information sources. When talking about their conceptions of these sources of information, participants often talked about their conception that people were not always the 'best' source of information, but described them using constructs such as "always there" (P6), "easy to access" (P16) and "tells you straight" (P16). This indicates that accessibility and approachability of sources may play a more significant role than evaluative categories such as reliability, accuracy and validity.

Parents were the most frequently elicited elements, with grandparents also featuring highly in results. There was not a significant gender divide between the participants' parental information sources, with fifteen participants identifying their mother as a source and sixteen identifying their father. Seven participants identified a grandfather as an information source and ten identified their grandmother, which indicates the ongoing presence and relevance of grandparents in the lives of this participant group.

Friends were another category of elements which featured highly in the repertory grids, although participants more often described them with constructs which indicate they are not viewed very highly as sources of good quality information than constructs which indicated they were considered high quality sources of information. These constructs include "they talk about gossip", "they have less information" and "they are less into politics" (P25), and "they give an imbalanced presentation" (P22). However, many participants also provided constructs to describe their friends which indicated they were considered good sources of discussion through which to develop opinions, such as "they have a similar point of view to me" (P22), "chilled out" and "talks about things I can relate to" (P14).

Teachers were included in the category of 'people' rather than school, because the way in which the participants described their conceptions of teachers as a source of political information indicated that they viewed them as people they could approach for information outside of lesson time and about non-subject related topics:

> If I see something in the newspaper and there's things in there that I don't understand then I'll usually go to them. (P7)

Participants reported that they wanted to know about how teachers think about things outside of the classroom, including their political views, and were aware of the limitations of the role of the teacher in a traditional classroom:

> I think my dad will give it from his point of view, whereas the teacher, I don't think, they wouldn't be allowed to, I don't think he would express his own opinion infront of the class because I don't think that would be professional. (P7)

This suggests that although some participants may have viewed teachers as part of the structure of formal education in some ways, they conceived of teachers as possessing a different role with different responsibilities *beyond* the confines of the classroom. Several participants talked about how they would like to know what their teachers' political beliefs and party affiliations are so that they could orientate their own political beliefs around this.

7.3.3.2   Television

Included in the 'television' category (n = 44) are news programmes (n = 31), morning chat shows (n = 7), comedy news shows (n = 3), news and politics discussion programmes (n = 2) and children's news programmes (n =1).

Participants identified a range of different news programmes, which they most often described with the 'practical' constructs described previously in this chapter, such as what the geographical coverage of the reporting is, what topics are reported and how often they watch the programme and what time of day they watch it.

The majority of elements relate to the BBC in some way, which participants described with constructs such as "reliable" (P26, P22), "trustworthy" (P22, P28) and "unbiased" (P17, P23).

Newsround, a children's news programme produced by the BBC, was identified by one participant as a source of political information. Although the participant expressed awareness that the programme is aimed at a younger audience than they are themselves – saying that it is a "kiddy news programme" (P24) - it was interesting to note that the participant said they were more likely to watch that than news programmes aimed at adults. The possibility that there is a gap in political and news information aimed at an appropriate level for teenagers was a topic I explored in more depth in the focus groups.

Three different comedy shows were identified as a source of information by one participant. The participant described their understanding of comedy shows as serving several purposes, including "looking at banal sort of news and making it interesting" (P21). In comparison to Facebook, the comedy show *Mock the Week* was viewed as more reliable, and in comparison to the *BBC News*

website, comedy show *Russell Howard's Good News* was viewed as "more lighthearted" as opposed to "dire". The participant also suggested that they were more likely to remember information if it was presented in a funny way. This indicates that the participant viewed comedy shows as serving as a source of factual information, they represent an alternative viewpoint which is appreciated.

I sought to explore in more depth the perceptions of participants regarding the relative merits of news programmes and news comedy programmes as sources of information in the focus group stage of the research, which is discussed in the next chapter.

7.3.3.3   The internet

Sources of political information on the internet were the third most frequently elicited category of elements. Online news articles, including those produced by sources traditionally associated with radio and television broadcast news, were included in this category instead of the 'television' category, because participants expressed notably different ways of using and conceiving of these sources and it was therefore appropriate to consider them as distinct in format and category.

Google and other elements related to the use of search engines constitute the majority of elements elicited in this category (P2, P4, P16, P17 and P26). Participants reporting using search engines to find out more about current events, for example information "when Margaret Thatcher died" (P2).

Constructs relating to search engines suggest some concern about evaluating search results in comparison to information from sources they construed as reliable, although some participants reported that they felt somewhat competent:

> P2: *BBC News* tells you like a more, not a biased opinion, do you know like, whereas google, you could click on a website what's more biased.
> I: Would you feel confident working out which one was biased and which one wasn't? If you found something?
> P2: Erm, probably, like if I knew what I was looking for like, yeah.

One participant reported that they thought the internet was more likely to provide out of date information when they were searching for specific topics:

> The information you get off the internet when you're looking for information on a specific topic, it's often hard to find. You get lots of older stuff. Like say something was on the news and I want to find out more about it, I'll google it, but I'll get something more older than when I'm looking for it. (P14)

Several participants initially identified "the internet" when asked what sources of information they use to find out about politics and the world around them, and were prompted to specify which specific part of the internet they use. Some participants initially, or after this prompting, identified "Google" as a source of political information, which I did not ask them to clarify and this was left as the element which would later be explored for constructs. Some participants, however, referred to Google as the information itself rather than as a source:

> P16: Um, the internet, I get a lot from social networking sites, opinions and things.
> I: Where abouts on the internet in particular?
> P16: So like Twitter, I get a lot of opinions from there, then I get TV, like on *Look North*, hear all about the world, what's going on.
> I: Anywhere else on the internet?
> P16: Google. I don't use Facebook. I use Snapchat and some people have opinions on there but that's more personal.

7.3.3.4   Social media

Social networks, or social media, were coded as a separate category to the internet, because social media functions in a more active and interactive way than webpages and apps more broadly.

Although social media and the internet were frequently elicited elements, there was not a great variety within these categories. The majority of participants reported Facebook and Twitter as the main forms of social media they engaged with, and most participants said that they used news websites as sources of information on the internet.

Facebook was viewed predominantly in a negative light in comparison to other elements. For example, P32 suggested that in comparison to the *BBC News* website, Facebook offered less of a range of links and information:

> If something's happened on Facebook a lot of people say the same stuff, so you don't really get a variety of information. (P32)

Political information on Facebook was also described as being "brief" (P14) and "not very in-depth" (P7), being more like rumours and criticism than anything else" (P23), "not necessarily the truth" (P23) and "just one person's point of view" (P7).

Facebook was construed by several participants as a conduit for finding out what their friends' views are:

> A lot of my friends talk about like what they think about like…what they're gonna do
> when they're older, like whether they'll vote Tory or everything like that. (P5)

These views shared by friends were construed as being the same as or similar to the participants:

> Facebook could be my friends and they would sort of have the same, ideas as me
> because in my community of friends we've all got very similar opinions on things. (P7)

This was a recurrent theme when participants were talking about how they interact with their friends, what they talk about and how they share opinions. I explored this theme through class observations and the focus groups, discussed in the next chapter.

Twitter was the second most frequently identified source of political information in the social media category. Participants described following both friends and people they know, and celebrities. Different participants had different levels of trust for the different people they follow on Twitter; some trusted their friends more, but some were reluctant to believe anything anyone writes, even if they know the person tweeting. In comparison to *The Sun* and discussing the reliability of the information, P28 said:

> *The Sun*'s obviously put down to journalists and they want to get more readers and
> everything so you don't really know if it's true or not, and then on Twitter, people that
> you know are tweeting so that could just be rumours as well. (P28)

Similarly, P23 suggested that in comparison to Facebook, the information posted on Twitter may be less reliable because it is less likely to be backed up with a reliable source:

> [U]sually it's just a person posting it so it could…it's not as reliable, because it might be
> somebody else that's tweeted it that it's their thought basically…so they might put it in
> a way that makes it sound like it goes with their opinion. On Facebook though it could
> be from a reliable page or source that, like a news page. (P23)

This conception of Twitter as an unreliable source of information because it is seen as a place to post opinions that may not be based on information was a topic I wanted to explore in more depth in the focus groups.

One participant identified MSN messenger as a source of political information. However, this messenger client was discontinued several years ago and upon further exploration of what the participant meant it seemed they were instead referring to the MSN homepage, which they understood as being a source of news about sport and celebrity gossip.

One participant identified emails as a source of political information, suggesting that they receive emails about current news and events: "emails you get all news" (P14). However, this was not described as a major source by the participant and very few constructs were elicited in relation to this element.

One participant identified Snapchat, a mobile phone app through which users send photos and short videos, often with captions, as a source of political information. However, they were not able to give examples of what ways in which the information they send or receive may be political and appeared to consider it to be more about personal information: "I use Snapchat and some people have opinions on there but that's more personal" (P16).

Only one participant (P9) reported viewing Tumblr as a source of political information, which they said had exposed them to the concept of feminism, which they had not previously encountered. This was a topic I sought to explore in more depth in the focus groups.

7.3.3.5 Radio

Fifteen participants identified the radio as a source of political information, with seven identifying the local radio station Capital FM and six reporting BBC Radio One as the station they most often listen to (be it actively or passively). When talking about the radio as a source of information, participants described listening to news bulletins and chat segments of radio programmes as the specific areas from which they got political information.

Participants described their engagement with the radio as a source of information in different ways. Some constructs elicited referred to active engagement with the radio, listening to it deliberately (P32) in comparison to the radio just being on in the background:

It's sort of background noise as well sometimes, when you're just driving in cars. (P23)

The radio did not represent a core source of political information for any of the participants and receiving information via the radio was usually a by-product of using the radio to listen to music.

7.3.3.6 Newspapers

14 participants reported reading one or more newspapers either in print or electronic form, including websites and apps. These were usually newspapers which their parents buy and are therefore present in their homes, or the free Metro newspaper provided on public transport in the UK. The majority of newspapers identified are tabloid newspapers, and also politically right-wing in stance.

The positive aspects as construed by the participants included that newspapers are visual sources:

> I quite like having pictures so I can see what's going on. (P24)

The amount of detail available in newspapers was also perceived by participants as a positive (P7).

Negative aspects about newspapers as construed by participants included that they may be biased (P24), they can be formal in tone (P7, P16). The content of newspapers was also generally considered to be less relevant to the participants themselves than other sources of political information:

> And the people who write *The Daily Mail* are probably a lot older. And they focus on things more like politics. They talk about law, and what David Cameron's doing and stuff like that. (P16)

7.3.3.7 School

Sources relating to formal education, in the form of school lessons, teachers and other aspects of schooling were less frequently elicited than the majority of other element categories, suggesting that participants did not consider formal education to be a major source of information about politics. This was picked up as a topic of discussion for the focus groups, because I wanted to explore why the participants did not consider school to be a source of information, and whether they had any thoughts about whether this was a good or bad thing, or if there were any potential benefits or drawbacks to having formal education about politics and participation. All students at the school have citizenship lessons as part of the Personal and Social Education curriculum, which I sought to explore in more depth in the focus groups.

Only one participant suggested that books were a source of political information in their lives; this book was Animal Farm. This book is on the English Literature curriculum for GCSE students.

Several of the participants identified school as a source of political information, but expressed a dissatisfaction with the extent of this education. They criticised citizenship lessons for focusing on how politics and voting works, rather than helping them to understand how to make political decisions or get involved in political life beyond the ballot box.

7.3.3.8   Community

The category of 'community' comprises of billboards, banners, village meetings and local newsletters. One participant supplied the majority of these sources, citing them as examples of where they get information about development work taking place in their local community, which they actively participate in campaigns against with their parents. Two other participants identified billboards of sources of political information about party political activities and campaigns:

> Sometimes I see things advertised on the side of buses, or billboards and things like that. Especially when it comes to voting. (P7)

When asked to provide more thoughts about these particular sources of information (through use of the laddering technique), participants were not able to provide much detail about them other than to observe that they were aware they existed in their local area. Very few constructs were elicited from discussion of these elements, and those that did were peripheral and insignificant. This suggests that this category of source is not a main source of political information for the participants and does not play a significant role in the development of their knowledge and attitudes.

7.3.3.9   Magazines

Three participants in total reported that they considered magazines to be a source of political information (P16, P23 and P28). One participant described how they viewed magazines as "more likely to be true than what [my] dad says because he just makes it up" (P28). Although this may indicate a lack of faith in their father's knowledge than the reliability of the magazine, the participant goes on to describe how they conceive of the information imparted by the magazine as more reliable by virtue of its print format:

P28: My dad just says it verbally so it doesn't really count but, magazines is more
evidence of what they're saying
I: So there's verbal and written?
P28: Yeah.
I: And then written does count?
P28: Yeah cos it's more reliable.

Another participant described an affective element of reading magazines, saying that "magazines cheer me up" (P16). Affective constructs are discussed in more depth in section 7.3.4.5.

7.3.3.10   Summary of findings from element categorisation

This section has discussed the analysis of the elements provided by participants when identifying where they consider themselves to get political information from. It has described how participants have a broad conception of the political and are conscious of encountering a wide range of sources of political information.

Acknowledging a broad conception of what constitutes political information is a central aspect of the critical and phenomenographic theoretical approaches taken to this research as well as within the method of data collection and analysis applied through the repertory grid method. By allowing participants to identify their own sources of political information without imposing 'acceptable' boundaries on them, I was able to get an insight into what the participants understand by the terms 'political' and 'information' as well as an understanding of what sources they actively use and passively encounter. As a result, a wide range of sources were identified, with a number of different people contributing to the most popular category of source. A number of forms of popular media and internet sources were identified, with traditional news sources and formal education playing a less significant role in the development of political knowledge and attitudes than may have been expected.

Some of the sources identified were unexpected, such as extended family members and a weekly lesson in their school referred to as World News Wednesday, which all play a central role in the participants' understanding of how they learn about political issues and form opinions and attitudes based on the knowledge they gain through these sources. Further exploration of participants' understanding of these information sources, which will be discussed in the following section, provides valuable insights into how the sources contribute to participants' political lives.

The next section explores the different ways in which different participants conceive of the sources of political information they identified, and how when discussing the same sources of information, they describe their understanding of them in a variety of ways.

7.3.4   Construct categorisation

Using the process described in Chapter Four, the constructs elicited from each participant were pooled to explore what potential meaning may be found in the category headings. These construct codes were then placed into categories, as presented in the table below. Some constructs were coded with more than one category where it would not have been comprehensive enough to only categorise the construct once. These categories represent different ways the participants construe what they consider to be the sources of information in their lives from which they gain information to develop knowledge and opinions about politics and the world around them:

Category 1: Describing practical features of the information, source or its use	
Format of information	Place of use
Geographical coverage	Location of speaker
Location of information	Intended audience
Topic coverage	Size of audience
Political content	Financial cost
Frequency of use	Communication between speakers
Time of use	
Category 2: Assessing the quality of the information	
Relevance of information	Quality of information
Amount of information	Level of technology of the source
Speed of information acquisition	Level of privacy
Tone of information	Truth of information
Level of complexity	Reliability of information
Level of knowledge of the source	Validity of information
Clarity of information	Importance of information
Currency of information	Level of formality
Plurality of opinions	Political stance of speaker
Accuracy of information	
Category 3: Assessing the authority of the source	
Identity of source	Intentions of source
Type of speaker	Outlook of source
Personality of source	Morals of source
Standing of source	Opinions of source
Freedom of source	Modernness of source
Level of trust in source	Experience of source
	Influence of source

Category 4: Describing a socio-political understanding about the source	
Cultural context of information	Level of comfort with source
Social class of the speakers	
Category 5: Describing affective responses to the information or source	
Influence on mood or emotion	Level of entertainment
Ability to relate to source	Agreement with the source
Interest in source	
Category 6: Describing how the participant interacts with the information	
Ability to use	Choice about use
Ability to understand the information	Ability to communicate with the speaker

Table 7.1: Construct categories and coding scheme for repertory grid constructs

The repertory grid data was coded using the completed grids with supplementary data from the interview transcripts and interview recordings. This ensured that the meaning behind the constructs as they were noted down accurately represented the participants' perceptions. The codes within each of the categories are explored in the following sections. The charts in these sections illustrate the frequency each category of construct was elicited from participants.

7.3.4.1 Category 1: Constructs describing practical features of the elements

This category contains categories through which participants described constructs relating to the practical features of the elements.

7.3.4.1.1 Format of information

This category is the most heavily populated category, with 23 separate constructs from different participants. The subcategories within this category are:

- Geographic coverage
- Audience characteristics
- Topic coverage
- Political content
- Time of use
- Frequency of use
- Communication between speakers
- Size of audience
- Location of information
- Location of speaker
- Financial cost
- Place of use

This code was applied to the constructs which directly referred to the format of the information source, for example "it is visual vs. it is aural" (P7) or constructs which describe how the participant uses or engages with the source of information as a result of the format of the information, for example "I listen to it vs. I read it" (P15 and P2). The majority of the constructs elicited in this category were provided at the beginning of the construct elicitation stage of the interview, and were not obviously significant or core for any of the participants. Instead, these constructs appeared to be reflective of participants' uncertainty about the interview and what kinds of responses they should give, before they warmed up and their constructs became more meaningful.

The category is a 'practical' category and constructs within it are observations on a shallow-level characteristic of the sources. Nevertheless, it may be interesting to analyse potential relationships relating to evaluative categories such as perceived levels of reliability or validity, and explore whether participants may be more likely to trust one type of source over another by virtue of its format (written, verbal, visual etc.). This will be explored later in this chapter.

7.3.4.1.2 Geographic coverage

This category includes constructs which refer to the geographic coverage of the information sources. 15 participants identified a construct relating to the geographic coverage of an information source. In some instances this construct was peripheral and a shallow observation about the characteristics of the source, as with observations about the format of the information. These constructs were identified as stereotyped and propositional constructs which was superficial in nature. These were often presented at the beginning of the elicitation of constructs stage, possibly as an 'easy' response prior to engaging in deeper thought about their conceptions of political information sources.

In some instances, geographical features of the political information represented a core construct for participants, and appeared to play a central role in how interested the participants were in the information provided by the sources and how relevant they perceived it to be to their lives.

Further analysis indicated that constructs relating to geographical coverage also corresponded with the perceived relevance of the source, which suggests that even when geographical coverage is not core to the participants' conceptions, it may have an influence on their evaluation and use of the information source.

7.3.4.1.3 Audience characteristics

This category refers to constructs which describe who the perceived audience of a particular source may be. The majority of constructs within this code relate to the participants' perceptions about the age of the audience and whether the information is aimed at younger or older people (n = 11). This category tended to be used by participants in a similar way to the category "format of information", when they were unsure about what their thoughts about different information sources were but wanted to make suggestions. However, some participants related this construct to how likely they were to use a source and how much they were able to understand the messages being communicated.

7.3.4.1.4 Topic coverage

This category refers to constructs through which the participants observed a specific kind of content from the information sources. It also includes constructs which refer to the extent of news coverage, for example "it is all of the news vs. it is selected parts of the news" (P14). Other constructs in the category refer to participants' perceptions of elements which are people, and whether the topics they talk about relate to only themselves, or other people and issues as well (P8 and p16). This was not a significant construct for any of the participants.

7.3.4.1.5 Political content

Constructs which refer to participants' perception that the elements' topic coverage includes or was solely politics are included in this category. Seven out of 23 participants explicitly identified political content in their constructs. This is a relatively low proportion of participants. This may be explained by the way the interview topic was introduced - I asked participants to identify eight to ten elements that they see as sources of information about politics, society and current events, so their implicit understanding when eliciting constructs may have been that *all* of the elements they were comparing included some kind of political information, and therefore when identifying differences between sources, political content (or lack thereof) would not necessarily be a consideration. However, this may also be an indication that when identifying their set of elements they focused more on the 'society and current' events aspect of my request for information sources rather than the 'politics' aspect, which may have been because participants' conceptions of politics and the

political, and their conscious interactions with political information, was relatively limited. The variety of participants' conceptions of the idea of politics is discussed in the next chapter.

7.3.4.1.6 Time of use

This category refers to constructs provided by participants through which they discussed the time of day they tended to engage with different elements or constructs which indicated the availability of the element at different times of day. This was not a core category for any participants.

7.3.4.1.7 Frequency of use

This category includes constructs which refer to how often participants use or encounter the various sources of information. Seven participants provided constructs in this category. This construct was not a core construct for any participants, but may be used in further analysis to identify potential relationships between evaluative constructs and the frequency with which participant use the sources. This is explored later in the chapter.

7.3.4.1.8 Communication between speakers

This category refers to any constructs which relate to perceptions about how the speakers within the elements (for example news presenters, panel members on television programmes, and classmates) communicate with each other. These constructs include whether or not speakers argue with each other, the civility of communication and whether or not the speakers are in agreement. Four participants identified the five constructs in this category. These constructs were not core for any participants, but closely related constructs about whether the information sources offered multiple points of view (discussed in section 7.2.4.1) were core for some participants. I was interested to explore whether conceptions about the presentation of different points of view influenced how participants relate to the information they encounter and whether participants critically evaluate speaker(s) when they are involved in discussions about politics and current events. I therefore observed lessons and encouraged discussion and debate in the focus groups, which I discuss in depth in the following chapter.

7.3.4.1.9 Size of audience

This category includes simply those constructs which refer to the perceived size of the audience of the sources of information. Only three participants identified constructs in this category and it was not a core construct for any of the participants.

7.3.4.1.10 Location of information

This category includes constructs which refer to whether the information provided by the source is located in one or multiple places, such as websites. Two participants identified constructs in this category, but it was not a core category for either of them.

7.3.4.1.11 Location of speaker

This category includes constructs which refer to whether the speaker is located at the site of the information they are speaking about, or are based remotely. Although only two participants identified constructs in this category, it was a core construct for P9 and had a significant influence on how the participant evaluated the reliability of the information provided by the elements they identified.

7.3.4.1.12 Financial cost

This category refers to constructs provided by participants which refer to the monetary cost of a source of information. Two participants identified constructs in this category, but it was not a core construct for either of them. In both instances the construct was elicited when participants were struggling to think of relevant constructs and as such they were coded as peripheral constructs.

7.3.4.1.13 Place of use

This category includes the one construct which referred to the place one participant reported using an information source. This was not a core construct for the participant.

7.3.4.2 Category 2: Constructs evaluating the quality of the information

This category of constructs includes aspects of participants' perceptions which relate to how they judge the quality of the information they use or encounter. Several of the categories which emerged from the coding of constructs contribute to the participants' assessment of the quality of information sources. This particular subcategory contains the constructs elicited when participants spoke specifically about their perceived signs of the quality of information sources. There were relatively few of these constructs and the way they were used to describe the ways in which information may be of high or low quality varied greatly. This reflects a variation in understanding of the concept of information quality and how it was evaluated when considering the characteristics of the different information sources.

7.3.4.2.1 Amount of information

The most frequently elicited construct group in this category was the amount of information each source provided, with 51 constructs from 19 participants relating to the amount of information available from different sources.

Due to the nature of the interview process and the elicitation of constructs, it was not possible to conduct statistical analysis on whether the elements identified were viewed as providing enough information to result in a sense of political efficacy or the ability to make an informed decision. However, several participants provided constructs describing how much information they construed sources as providing and then ranked each element along this construct. From this process it is possible to make the generalised observation that on average, participants ranked *Google Search*, teachers, newspapers, internet news sources and television news relatively highly in terms of the amount of information they provide. The radio, other television shows, billboards and Facebook were ranked lower in terms of the amount of information provided, and family members, school lessons, and other social media sources were ranked lowest on average in terms of the amount of information provided.

It is important to note that participants had different preferences about the amount of information provided by different elements, with some participants stating that they preferred to encounter *less* information from sources of political information (P3, P9, P32), which the participants explained was

because they considered it easier to deal with what they saw as smaller amounts of more useful information than handling large amounts of less useful information.

7.3.4.2.2 Validity of information

Participants used different words to express their conceptions about what, from an information literacy perspective, can be understood generally as the *reliability* of information. This coding category includes all constructs through which participants expressed whether or not they thought sources were reliable, including explicit use of the word "reliable", but also includes terms such as "biased" and "likely to twist the story" when they were used by the participant to convey a sense of reliability. It also includes constructs that refer less explicitly to the reliability of information in a traditionally information literacy-related sense, and takes into consideration the context of the constructs as they were being elicited in the interview.

It is noteworthy to observe that during the repertory grid interviews, all participants conflated the terms "reliable", "valid" and "unbiased" on the occasions that they referred to more than one, and on a number of occasions the terms were used in place of one another. As discussed above, this was taken into account in the categorisation of constructs, and is discussed in relation to young people's information literacy in Chapter Nine.

7.3.4.2.3 Currency of information

This category contains the constructs elicited which refer to how current the participants perceive the information provided by the sources to be. Most of the constructs in this category describe whether the elements provide information about historic or current events, but also included in the category are constructs which describe how relatively current the information sources are.

This construct category includes descriptions of conceptions of the difference between social media sources such as Twitter, which contain up to date information about current events, in contrast to publications such as magazines and newspapers which, as a result of their periodical format, contain less current information. Sources described as being more current included Twitter, local and national television news, local and national radio news, and individual family members.

7.3.4.2.4 Clarity of information

This category contains the constructs elicited which refer to how clear the participants perceive the information from the sources as being. This is more related to how clear the message is being put across by the information source than the capacity of the participant themselves to understand the information.

This construct is highly subjective, and due to the majority of elements identified by participants in relation to this category being family members, it is not possible to compare participants' ranking of elements for perceptions of clarity of information sources. However, the majority of participants preferred information which they viewed as possessing clarity, which they described in a variety of ways, including "they tell me straight" (P16), "it is direct" (P23 and P26) and "they explain it better" (P21). However, one participant (P26) said that they were willing to sacrifice the clarity that comes with an information source having a clear stance on an issue if it meant that the source provided information that was open to interpretation.

7.3.4.2.5 Truth of information

This category contains the constructs elicited which refer to how 'true' participants perceive the information as being and is associated with constructs that describe interpretations of fact.

Eight of the participants discussed their perceptions of whether they perceived information sources to tell the truth (or not). The elements which participants perceived as telling lies or spreading rumours and untruths were some family members, Facebook and Twitter (P28), friends and newspapers (P17), *The Sun* newspaper, *Daybreak* television programme and BBC Radio One (P9). This represents a broad range of the information sources identified as a whole.

In the majority of interviews, when asked how information could be evaluated for truth and accuracy, participants were uncertain, and many suggested that these characteristics were self-evident.

7.3.4.2.6 Relevance of the information provided by the source

This category contains the constructs elicited which refer to how relevant participants think the information provided by the sources they identified is to their own lives. The six participants who discussed constructs relating to the relevance of the information provided by the sources all brought up this conception in relation to how high in quality they viewed the information as being. This indicates the contextual nature of quality as evaluated by the participants, and as a result the construct for relevance was placed in the overarching category for evaluation of quality. People as sources of information tended to be considered more relevant to individuals' own lives, whereas the television, although ranked highly as a source of entertainment, was considered by the majority of participants to communicate information that was less relevant to their own lives and which presented information that would not affect their own families, communities and political decisions. For example:

> I like watching the news on the TV but it's usually about things that are abroad, and that aren't ever really going to affect me. (P12)

7.3.4.2.7 Tone of information

This category contains the constructs elicited which refer to the tone of the information provided by the sources. Discussion in the interviews, the process of identifying preferred poles and the eyeball analysis of grids which followed indicated that participants tended to prefer information sources which they perceived as being calmer, more polite, less serious and more relaxed, and which they perceived to be more like them. This is a theme which I explored in more depth in the focus groups and is discussed in the next chapter.

7.3.4.2.8 Accuracy of information

This category contains the constructs elicited which refer to how accurate participants perceive the information to be. The four constructs in this category communicate participant perceptions about whether the information they received from sources was accurate or precise. This was not a core construct for any of the participants.

7.3.4.2.9 Level of complexity

This category contains the constructs elicited which refer to how complex participants perceive the information they encounter. Four participants described the ways in which their relationship with political information is influenced by their ability to understand the information. They were aware of the use of the information for various purposes, and some degree of meaning was being sought through an understanding of the content. Some participants described how information was too complicated for them and how this meant that they avoided using or chose not use particular sources of information, such as *BBC News* (P7) and internet news (P23).

7.3.4.2.10 Importance of information

This category contains the constructs elicited which refer to how important participants believe the information they encounter is. This is different to how relevant they perceive the information to be to their own lives, which is a separate construct category. None of these constructs were core to any of the participants.

7.3.4.2.11 Level of technology associated with the source

This category contains the constructs elicited from one participant which refer to the contrast in levels of technology employed by different information sources. The participant (P16) was communicating the difference between the online sources of political information and the print sources of information they identified. This was not a core construct.

7.3.4.2.12 Level of privacy afforded by interacting with the information source

This category contains the two constructs elicited from participants which refer to the level of privacy afforded to the participant when engaging with different information sources.

TV and online sources received rankings close to the poles that indicated lower levels of privacy, in comparison to rankings closer to higher levels of privacy for people and mid-range rankings for social media and classroom-based sources. In both instances, the participants described how they felt they were more likely to trust the authority of a source based on the privacy they could have when they

were using or speaking to the sources of information they were describing. One participant also discussed their own information sharing behaviour:

> I wouldn't post as much on my public wall as I do talk to my friends, because the privacy issues…I've set my profile to friends of friends because I trust my friends have reasonable friends (P5)

This indicates an awareness and concern for how far their own discussions about politics can be shared and seen. I was interested to explore the relationship between privacy and trust in more depth in the focus groups, and this is discussed in the next chapter.

7.3.4.2.13 Speed of information acquisition

This category contains the constructs referring to how quickly one participant (P16) thought they were able to acquire the information they desire from the sources identified. This participant was the only one to discuss the issue of speed as a manifestation of convenience, which was considered by the participant to be a measure of the quality of the information. P16 ranked online sources most highly in relation to how quickly information could be retrieved or received, with television documentaries and Snapchat (a video and photo app) ranked lowest. People (parents, grandparents, sister) were ranked with mid-range scores, alongside *The Daily Mail* newspaper.

7.3.4.2.14 Plurality of opinions

This category contains the constructs elicited which refer to differences of opinion between speakers within the information sources. Several participants described how they preferred information sources which presented more than one opinion, either through balanced reporting (P17, P26) or multiple speakers with different points of view (P1, P9). The presence of several opinions appears be used by participants as an indication of the quality of an information source regardless of the perceived knowledge of the speakers within the information source, which indicates that plurality may act as a heuristic device. This is discussed later in the chapter.

7.3.4.2.15 Political position of the speaker(s)

This category contains the constructs elicited which refer to participants' knowledge, lack of knowledge, or perceptions about what political affiliations or positions the sources of information or speakers may hold. Where participants identified that the information sources or speakers held particular beliefs, they were usually not connected to political affiliation and as a result were not coded in this category. In this category, where participants did identify that the beliefs and opinions of speakers were connected to a notion of a political spectrum, they were most commonly associated with an unclear notion about the nature of the political spectrum, where the majority of elements sat along it, and the names of political parties. For example, P2 said that their grandmother was definitely a Labour supporter, but did not know the name of the party they know their mother supports:

> P2: Erm, I've forgotten what it's called. I think it begins with a T… where they think, like, she agrees with Margaret Thatcher. Mum likes Margaret Thatcher, I don't know what it's called, I forgot.

Some participants also experienced confusion as to how to understand the political positions of sources of information which were not people, such as newspapers. There was some confusion over whether it was possible for a newspaper to hold a political opinion because it is an object not a person, and some participants expressed uncertainty about the ownership and production structures of newspapers. This is an indication of an area in which participants may benefit from education on the subject to support their media and information literacy.

7.3.4.3 Category 3: Constructs evaluating the authority of the source

This section presents the findings relating to constructs which participants used to determine the *authority* of the elements, or information sources. These constructs are distinct from the construct category in the previous section, which contains constructs which participants used to describe the ways they evaluate the *quality of the information* communicated by the sources.

Using Jankowicz's concept of "evaluative constructs" (2004, p.51) as a guide for identifying relevant data, I was able to identify several constructs which offered opinions and assessments of the information sources themselves, rather than the content of the information which they were perceived as providing.

When discussing sources of political information, all of the participants discussed the ways in which they understand the sources of information using some evaluative constructs. This indicates that the participants were comparing the information sources with some methods traditionally associated with information literacy practices and critical thinking. However, although a significant proportion of these evaluative constructs can be connected to traditional notions of information literacy and/or critical thinking, some of the evaluative constructs identified are usually not considered to be acceptable practices of information literacy.

The following section describes how the participants perceived each of the constructs relating to their evaluation of the sources of information they identified, and where relevant, relates back to the evaluative constructs relating to the quality of the information itself.

7.3.4.3.1 Opinions of source

This category contains the constructs elicited which refer to the perceived opinions of the sources of information. This includes constructs that communicate the perception that the source does or does not have opinions at all, the perception that the source is more or less opinionated, the perception that the sources make their opinions clear or not, the perception that sources share their personal views, and the perception that the participant shares the same opinions as the source. A relatively high number of constructs were coded in this category, which indicates that when asked to discuss differences between sources of information and characteristics of them, the participants were conscious of the opinions of the sources of information they encounter.

The majority of constructs relating to opinions were elicited when talking about elements in the 'people' category, which indicates that participants may be especially influenced in their information use by their awareness of the opinions of the people they speak to about political and social issues. However, a number of elements described as being highly opinionated or possessing an agenda were mainstream and social media sources, such as Facebook, Tumblr, *BBC News*, *The Daily Mail*,

The Daily Mirror, *The Andrew Marr Show*, *Mock the Week*, and *Russell Howard's Good News*. Events such as village meetings were also viewed as involving strong opinions.

7.3.4.3.2 Knowledge of source

This category contains the 17 constructs elicited which refer to the amount of knowledge the participants perceived different sources to have. Although the rankings of elements according to these constructs cannot be assessed statistically because not all participants identified the same sources of information as elements in their grids, it is nonetheless of interest to note that several participants did perceive the same elements as knowledgeable where there were crossovers across individual grids. These include *BBC News*, *BBC Question Time*, teachers, and school lessons.

7.3.4.3.3 Level of trust in sources of information

This category contains the constructs elicited which refer to how much participants trust the various sources of political information. Participants described different levels of trust in different sources based on their information need. For example, P12 described how they were more likely to go to the BBC for information if it was for a school project, whereas if it was "just for news out of personal interest" they said they were more likely to go to *The Daily Mail*.

Several participants talked about how their trust in an information source is influenced by several factors. One of these was perceived association with scandal and malpractice, even when the specifics are not known. When the laddering technique was employed, it became apparent that although this participant did not have a deep level of knowledge about their perception of a scandal that had taken place around *The Daily Mail*'s reporting:

> P12: If I needed to find something out for school I'd go to the BBC because I trust them more, but if it was just for news for personal interest I'd go to *The Daily Mail*.
> I: Why would you trust the BBC over *The Daily Mail*?
> P12: I just trust them more in general. And *The Daily Mail* had something to do with a scandal, I think like hacking or something. *BBC News* is probably more trustworthy and reliable.
> I: Can you tell me a bit more about that? The hacking?
> P12: I don't know…I don't really know what happened, but I know it was bad.

This is likely to be the News International phone hacking scandal which was investigated between 2005-2011 and the resulting Leveson Inquiry of 2012, even though *The Daily Mail* were not the central focus of the inquiry. This perception nevertheless influenced their degree of trust in *The Daily Mail* and how they saw it as an untrustworthy source in comparison to the BBC. It is possible that misremembering information about the News International scandal has influenced this participant's trust of an unrelated information source. This is not necessarily a negative influence, because an increased degree of critical thought before trusting information from tabloid newspapers may contribute to a more nuanced engagement with news sources. This is in itself an aspect of critical information literacy, and is discussed in Chapter Nine.

7.3.4.3.4 Influence the information source has on the participant

This category includes constructs which describe the amount of information participants construe themselves as absorbing from the information sources.

7.3.4.3.5 Level of formality

This category contains the constructs elicited which refer to how formal participants perceive different information sources to be. A roughly equal number of participants preferred informal and formal sources of information. The participants who preferred formal sources described how they viewed formal sources as more authoritative, with the two constructs going hand in hand. This is explored in more depth in Chapter Nine, with a critical discussion of heuristics of quality and authority from the analysis of the repertory grids and focus groups.

7.3.4.3.6 Type of speaker

This category contains the constructs elicited which refer to the characteristics of the person speaking within particular sources of information. This category includes perceptions about the perceived level of respect people have in the speaker (P21), whether the speakers are known to the participant or strangers (P23, P16), if the speakers are celebrities or 'normal people' (P23), and the age of the speaker (P16). The category also includes constructs which convey if the participant views the information provided as coming direct from the speaker or if the participant is reporting in a second-hand capacity (P12, P26). It also includes a construct through which the participant

communicated a perception that some sources of information are not 'people' (P16). The rankings of elements along this construct varied among the participants and no significant trends were identified.

7.3.4.3.7 Intentions of the information source

This category contains the constructs elicited which refer to participant perceptions of the intentions of the information sources. The language used when discussing the intentions of the sources in the case of the three participants who discussed the purpose of the elements and the information they were sharing echoed the language I observed in school lessons. I decided that this would be something to explore in more depth in the focus groups, to explore the extent to which participants understood the language of media literacy that they were applying in the construct elicitation, or whether this terminology was reproduced without depth of understanding.

7.3.4.3.8 Morals of the information source

This category contains the constructs elicited which refer to perceptions about whether sources have a moral responsibility when gathering and imparting information and whether they act on these responsibilities. There were no identifiable trends relating to which sources of information participants thought were more moral, but elements which were identified as acting responsibly and being guided by morals included *BBC News* (P9, P21), *BBC Question Time* (P22), *The Andrew Marr Show* (P21), parents (P9, P12, P21, P22), and *The Independent* (P22).

7.3.4.3.9 Freedom of speech of information source

This category contains the constructs elicited which refer to how 'free' one of the participants perceived a particular source as being. This construct was elicited when P8 compared a Playstation game *Call of Duty* with their friends. They expressed the conception that people communicating through the game had to be careful with their choice of language both when they were playing and having conversations about politics and current events whilst playing the game because of the rules of conduct and forum guidelines for online multiplayer games (although these are not always adhered to). In comparison, they perceived that other elements, including discussions with their friends, did not have codified rules of conduct.

7.3.4.3.10 Modernity of the information source

This category relates to how "modern" participants viewed information sources as being. This category includes the constructs through which participants P16 and P31 expressed that they viewed their grandparents as being more old-fashioned in outlook.

When the other elements were ranked along these constructs, it became apparent that P31 views their friends, the Breaking News phone app and Capital FM radio station as the most modern of the elicited sources (ranked 9), followed by *BBC 10 O'clock News*, the morning TV programme *Daybreak*, the Yahoo homepage (ranked 8), then their parents and the comedy programme *8 Out of 10 Cats* (ranked 7). Their grandmother was then ranked significantly lower, at 3.

These rankings are similar to those provided by P16 in relation to their construct pair of old fashioned vs. modern, in which the Snapchat app was considered the most modern (10), followed by Twitter and Google (9), then their older sister (8). Their parents were ranked at 6, similarly to P31's ranking of 7. TV documentaries were ranked at 5, a fashion magazine at 4. Similarly to P31, P16 ranked their grandparents at 3. *The Daily Mail* was perceived as being the most old fashioned in outlook by P16, ranked at 2. Although generalisations cannot be drawn from a comparison of only the two participants who provided constructs on this topic, it is interesting nonetheless to note that their grandparents and parents were ranked at similar levels of perceived 'old-fashioned' or 'modern-ness', which may indicate a grouping of the two generations in terms of how participants perceive the relevance of information from adult sources more generally.

7.3.4.3.11 Experience of the information source

This category relates to the perceived experiences of the information sources. The perceived depth of experience of some information sources played a role in how authoritative (P2 and P16) viewed them to be. P2 viewed their friends as relatively inexperienced (2), in comparison to both of their parents and maternal grandmother (9), maternal grandfather (10), and paternal grandfather (8). The participant viewed themselves as having a similar amount of experience to their friends, including a lack of knowledge and experience relating to some topics:

> I argued with one of my friends about Margaret Thatcher and then afterwards I realised
> it was stupid, cos we both don't really know! (P2)

The participant suggested that this lack of experience meant that they needed to learn more before they could be considered authoritative sources:

> Friends are pretty much the same as me, just more learning to do cos there's less experience. Granddad's got much more experience. (P2)

P16 viewed their parents and grandparents as relatively experienced (9 and 10 respectively) in comparison to their sisters (6). *The Daily Mail* and television documentaries were considered as being experienced (9), with Google and the regional news programme *Look North* ranking most highly (10) and Twitter and Snapchat the lowest (6 and 4). Look Fashion was ranked at 7. When the construct "less experience vs. more experience" was elicited from this participant, they were comparing their parents to their sisters:

> I'd say my mum and dad have a broader knowledge which is probably better, because they've been around for longer and they've got more experience. Whereas my sisters, although they think they know a lot because they're learning a lot at school, they don't know a lot about wider world affairs. (P16)

This life experience endows the participants' parents with more authority in the eyes of the participant.

7.3.4.3.12 Personality of information source

This category contains one construct relating to the personality of some information sources. The personality of some sources of information influenced P28's views of them as authorities when it came to political information. The construct "it is selfish vs. it is unselfish" was elicited from the participant when they were discussing how they understand their grandfather's political views:

> It's more of a like, selfish point of view, because it benefits themselves and they don't think about other people…it is kind of selfish though, if you think about it, because he only thinks it because it will benefit him. (P28)

This awareness of what the participant described as the "personality" of their grandfather influences how they interpret the information and opinions expressed by him:

> Sometimes he says things and I think "no that's not what it really is", like with news things and immigration, because I know what he's like! (P28)

7.3.4.4 Category 4: Constructs describing a socio-political understanding about the source

This category includes constructs which relate to participants' socio-political understanding about the sources of information they identified through the elicitation of elements. The categories are defined below.

7.3.4.4.1 Cultural context of the information

This category includes constructs through which one participant expressed a perception that context played a role in the way a source provided political information: "it is not influenced by culture and history vs. it is influenced by culture and history" (P22). In the interview in which this construct was elicited, the participant was comparing history lessons in school (and the notion of history more broadly) with political banners and adverts. They considered history to be subject to interpretation and scrutiny more than political banners and adverts, and suggested that there is limited factual evidence to support the theories developed by historians. They backed up this assertion with evidence they had gained from watching historical documentaries about the Ancient Egyptians in which the theories developed by historians in the last century had been debunked in the face of more modern technology and understanding of sociocultural contexts.

7.3.4.4.2 Social class of the information source

This category also includes constructs participants provided which indicate a perception of the class of an element. This construct was elicited when P1 compared *BBC Breakfast News* presenters with their brother. It is possible that this construct played a role in the development of constructs relating to the authority of information and the quality of information, which is a hypothesis discussed in more depth in section 7.4, alongside other constructs relating to authority of the source and quality of the information provided.

7.3.4.4.3 Level of comfort with the information source

The third construct in this category relates to a construct which indicated a participants' level of comfort with one or more elements. This specifically relates how P17 described how they were more comfortable using the internet as a source of political information than their mum because they said

they were happier to "just do a search" than to approach their mum about something they were uncertain about.

7.3.4.5 Category 5: Constructs relating to affective responses to the information source.

The constructs in this category include those relating to the level of influence the information has on the participants, the degree to which participants agree or disagree with the messages communicated by the information sources, their level of interest in the information presented by the source, their emotional reactions to the information, how entertaining the information is, and how much participants feel they can relate to the sources.

7.3.4.5.1 Participants' agreement or disagreement with source

Several participants discussed the ways in which they did or did not agree with the source of information and/or the information they communicated. Key sources of disagreement included television programmes, family members and Margaret Thatcher (P6):

> My dad was so against her, and then…I was trying to get it, I was trying to talk to my dad about a different point of view like, from people who did support her and that it's not right to like celebrate her death and stuff, my dad were like, cos my dad came from like a mining village so, that affected my dad, but he wasn't listening to my point of view about how she did help some people, like a different point of view, he's stuck in his ways. (P6)

P2 discussed how they tend to disagree with their mother about political events and history, which they said often resulted in emotional responses such as anger, frustration or annoyance with the information source because they felt they could not get the information they desired from the source and could not have balanced conversations.

Participant 12 connected agreement with a source to whether or not they were likely to believe them:

> P12: Sometimes, when we're all together, talking around the dinner table or something, my sister'll just be like, opinionated. My dad'll talk generally about anything.
> I: Is that in order to balance out your sister?
> P12: No she's just…she likes talking about what she thinks…
> I: Do you think you're more likely to believe what one of them says more than the other one?
> P12: Probably my dad over my sister because sometimes I don't agree with my sister.

Whether or not participants agreed with the information sources was not strongly correlated to any other constructs, but it is of interest to note some of the participants' perceptions about the role that agreement with a source (particularly those which are people) plays in debating with it, believing it and extracting information which can contribute to the development of knowledge and formation of opinions

7.3.4.5.2 Participants' interest in the source

Some participants described a basic construct of interest or disinterest in a source. Elements participants described as boring or uninteresting included *BBC News at 10* (P14), Capital FM (P6), Hallam FM (P6) and the *Daybreak* television programme (P21).

Elements participants described as being interesting included their parents (P2, P1), television (P23, P21), certain newspaper stories (P24, P21), World News Wednesday (P6), the radio (P32), and the internet (P22). The reasons participants gave for being interested in these sources varied. Some participants explained that they were interested in more "gruesome" and "controversial" news stories on television and in newspapers (P6, P21). Other sources of information, such as the radio, were described as being able to present content to deliberately interest different listening audiences (P32). The internet was construed as interesting by P22 because of the amount of information available and the opportunities it affords for "getting side-tracked and coming across something you're not looking for".

This construct did not correlate strongly with any particular elements across the interviews. Ranking of elements on this construct was very much dependent on the participant themselves and the other factors influencing their perceptions of the source.

7.3.4.5.3 Outlook of the information source

This category contains the constructs elicited which refer to participants' perceptions about how positive or negative sources are in their outlook and attitude. This category includes constructs relating to how participants think information sources feel about the potential for social change (P21), and if they express their feelings (P21, P26). Participants preferred elements which were more positive and associated with positive emotions, and the participants who described how often they

were likely to use the information sources ranked more positive elements as being used more frequently.

7.3.4.5.4 Influence of the information on participants' emotions and moods

Several participants described how certain information sources have an influence on their emotions and moods. Elements including television news were construed by several participants as eliciting strong emotional responses, including P14 who said that they "hate" the *BBC News* because it talks about issues that are going on around the world and this is very much information which the participant is not interested in encountering. Other participants described affective responses to encountering television news:

> I have an opinion on the news where I find news really depressing and bad. I don't really like to watch it because I find it puts me in a bad mood! (P16)

Some participants reported that mood had an influence on their choice to use information, including P16 and P21 who said that they chose to avoid television news and newspapers because the content makes them sad.

P21 identified Facebook, *Mock the Week* and *Russell Howard's Good News* as being "funny" or "lighthearted", which they thought had benefits for learning about political issues. For example one participant commented: "You remember stuff more if it's funny" (P21). The influence of affect on information sharing and use is a focus of previous LIS research, which is discussed in relation to this study in Chapter Nine.

7.3.4.5.5 How entertaining participants find the information source

Several participants compared elements with each other in terms of how entertaining they find them. Elements such as comedy news programmes tended to be ranked highly, with newspapers ranking relatively low. P9 described how they thought newspapers sparked their imagination more because the format offers more descriptive potential and provides images to help paint a picture. P16 said they found Twitter entertaining because "controversial issues tend to be discussed" on there. Similarly, the choice of information source was sometimes influenced by the entertainment value that comes from perceived controversy:

> I look on *The Daily Mail* because it's controversial and stuff so it's interesting to read. (P21)

In some instances, participants explicitly stated that how entertaining they found different information sources influenced how often they used them, and this was reflected in their ranking of the elements along the relevant constructs. Where participants discussed entertainment and frequency of use and both were identified as constructs but not explicitly discussed in relation to each other, the rankings did not reflect a strong relationship between the two. This indicates that level of entertainment was not a core construct on these cases. Nonetheless, it is interesting to consider the role that entertainment value plays in engagement with political information sources, which is explored further in the next two chapters.

7.3.4.5.6 How able participants are to relate to the information source

Some participants described the perception that they felt able to relate to certain sources. The kind of political topics discussed between friends was construed as something P14 could relate to, which they described as "chilled out" and something that "just comes up in conversation". The relevance of the information discussed by and the perceived 'level' of peers is a theme which emerged in a number of the constructs when participants described their constructs relating to their friends, which I explored in more depth in the focus groups.

P15 described their conception that books were easier to "get where they're coming from" in contrast to billboards, which was related to the amount of information the two formats are able to communicate: "books I probably get where they're coming from because you're reading it more in-depth, rather than billboards you just get a few lines about it" (P15). This relates to the later construct "I know what they're on about vs. I don't know what they're on about", which emerged as the participant described how their friends are sometimes not very clear in their communication of political issues. The rankings for these two constructs were broadly similar.

7.3.4.6 Category 6: Constructs relating to participants' choice about using the information source

This category includes constructs which refer to a choice about how they use or engage with the sources of information they identified. Some of the constructs in this category were core to one participant, who described their conscious choice to search for information about current events and politics on the internet, in comparison to their choice to go to village meetings when they wanted to find out about local campaigns and events, which was construed as the "obvious" source of information on these topics (P21). They described how they chose to seek information in person for local issues because it helped them understand how to get involved more easily and they knew they would be able to find the information they needed by just being present at the meeting. In contrast, the internet was described as being a good port of call for information that was not obviously going to be discussed at a particular local event.

The participant ranked each of their ten elements in the extremes during the ranking of this construct. The participant's mum, village meetings and banners and signs were ranked 1 or 2 which indicated that these were construed as obvious sources of information on some topics, and the internet, History lessons, *The Sun Newspaper* and *Channel 5 News* were ranked between 7 and 10 which indicates that these sources are considered by this participant to be sources which would provide the information needed for a specific information need.

7.3.4.6.1 Participants' ability to understand the information

This category includes constructs which participants used to express how able they feel they are to understand the information provided by the sources they identified. The elements which were generally considered to be easier to understand were some family members (P2, P22, P24), school lessons (P26) and *The Daily Mail* (P12). Those which were considered more difficult to understand included *BBC Question Time* (P22), *The Independent* (P22), *Google* (P2), Twitter (P23) and friends (P23, P22).

Several news programmes were considered less difficult to understand by some participants (P12, P17, P24, P26) but others said they found them harder to understand (P22). Similarly, there was significant variation in rankings along this construct for participants' parents. This indicates variation

in experiences of information from these two sources, which in the case of parents may be explained by the variation in relationships between participants and their parents as well as parents' communication of political issues, and in the case of television news may be explained by variation in participants' levels of comprehension of information of this type and format.

A number of participants described the ways in which their relationship with political information is influenced by their ability to understand the information. They were aware of the use of the information for various purposes, and some degree of meaning was being sought through an understanding of the content. Some participants described how information was too complicated for them and how this meant they did not use particular sources of information. This is in line with the findings of HeadsUp (2009) who found that "The use of technical terms and long words" accounted for much of the perception of politics being boring and complicated.

7.3.4.6.2 Participants' ability to use the information

This category relates to constructs participants used to describe how easy or hard they find it to access or use the elements or the information they hold. P16 construed google as being an easy to use source of political information in comparison to Snapchat, which was considered less easy (or nearly impossible) to find information about politics on because that is not the purpose of the application. Other elements ranked along this construct which were considered easy to engage with for the purposes of finding out about politics were the participants' sister, Twitter, *Look Magazine* and *The Daily Mail*. Elements that were considered to be more difficult to engage with in this context were *Look North*, parents, television documentaries and grandparents (P16).

Information sources considered to be readily available by P12 were *BBC News* and *ITV News*, their mum, dad and sister. Facebook and Twitter were considered to be slightly less readily available, and school tutor group lessons were considered to be the least readily available. P21 also considered their parents to be easily reachable for support with political information needs. They also considered *BBC News* and television comedy shows to be within easy reach for information. *The Daily Mail* was ranked as being less readily available. P22 considered their brother and Facebook to be easily available for information about politics and current events, with friends, television news and their dad slightly less so. Their grandmother and uncle, *BBC Question Time* and *The Independent* were ranked as being the least readily available.

7.3.4.6.3 Participants' ability to communicate with the information source

The constructs in this category related to participants' conceptions about whether they could or would communicate directly with the information source about political issues. P2 talked about how they felt comfortable arguing with their parents, sister's boyfriend and friends about political issues, which they said happened quite regularly. In contrast, they reported that they felt much less likely to argue with all of their grandparents. One reason given for this was that they may receive *too much* information:

> I don't want to know everything. My grandad could just talk forever about it! (P2)

Similarly, P17 reported that they were very likely to argue with their grandma, mum and friends about political issues. The elements they ranked low for along this construct were radio stations, television programmes and Google, which they identified as being "impossible" to argue with on a practical level, but they ranked newspapers and *Daybreak* as sources where they might have more of an opportunity to disagree with and communicate this fact.

P9 reported that they felt very able to complain to their parents if what they had said offended them, and slightly less so but still able to complain in PD lessons and World News Wednesday at school. Tumblr was also ranked highly (9) for the ability to complain if the content offends them, which indicates that this social media platform may possess different characteristics in the eyes of the participant to other forms of social media and the internet which were ranked lower (Facebook was ranked 7 and *AOL headlines* 1).

Both P3 and P9 discussed constructs relating to the ability to debate with information sources, which for P3 was specifically identified as a characteristic of World News Wednesday. In contrast, P9 did not always view school as a forum for debate:

> Stuff that we talk about in class, we don't get to debate about it, it's more like the teacher tells us it, or another person tells us it, and then the teacher will just talk about it, we can't discuss it, but then on Tumblr you'll see a picture and it'll come with a little caption about it, and then everybody will talk about what they think about it, and they can have a debate on it, whereas in school you can't. (P9)

This was not always the experience for this participant however, who also expressed the view that school can be a forum for debate:

> In school in lessons we'll sometimes have debates about stuff in the news. And then in tutor we have World News Wednesday when we go through all the big headlines and discuss them. (P9)

This is a variation in experience and construal that emphasises the differing ways of viewing the same phenomenon, not only between participants but also within the construct system of one individual. This is taken into account in the construction of the phenomenographic outcome space in the next chapter.

7.3.4.7 Summary of findings from construct categorisation

This section has explained the coding categories for the constructs elicited from participants in the repertory grid interviews, and has identified the more significant constructs which will be analysed alongside elements or other constructs.

It is apparent from the description of construct categories that the participants construed of their political information sources in a wide variety of ways. This variation in experience is a useful starting point for the development of categories of description in a phenomenographic outcome space, which will be discussed in the next chapter. The next section presents the analysis of the constructs in different ways; through the exploration of different construct types, in order to build on the understanding from this section's analysis of the themes of the participants' constructs, with an exploration of how the constructs and elements analysed in the previous two sections related to each other within participants' grids.

7.4 Relationship between Categories 2 and 3: quality of the information and authority of the source

During the construct categorisation, two categories emerged which related to evaluative constructs elicited from participants which describe how 'good' the information source or the information it communicates are: Category 2: constructs evaluating the quality of the information; and Category 3: constructs evaluating the authority of the information source.

During eyeball analysis, it became apparent that there may be a correlation between these two construct categories, which would mean that elements which participants viewed as providing higher quality information would also possess more authority in the eyes of the participants, and

that elements which were perceived as possessing authority would be viewed as communicating information of a higher quality.

Although it is not possible to establish correlation between the two categories, I conducted multiple-group components analysis to test the hypothesis that there was a relationship between construct categories 2 and 3. This process is described in Chapter Six section 6.2.4.1.1.

7.4.1   Constructs evaluating the quality of information

On average, just over half (53%) of the constructs provided by participants correlated strongly with the scores they had given elements when ranking them in terms of the perceived quality of the information communicated. Roughly half of the constructs within category 2 indicated a strong correlation between the construct category as a whole and the how the constructs within the category were used to rank the elements. Roughly half of the constructs in this category do not correlate as strongly with the element rankings (but still correlate fairly strongly), which indicates that these constructs are not necessarily central to how this participant evaluates the quality of information. Overall these results suggest that the coding of this category was accurately conducted.

Some constructs from outside of Category 2 were strongly correlated with the constructs from Category 2, which indicates that these constructs may relate to how the participants evaluate the quality of the information. It is not possible or to establish causality, but it is possible to suggest that where participants consider information to be of a high quality they will also report to use it more often.

Some constructs from Category 3 correlate strongly with constructs from Category 2, which indicates there may be some degree of crossover when it comes to considering the quality of information and the authority of the source. This is not surprising, given that considering an information source to contain high quality information may in itself be a measure of the authority of the information.

The relationship between information quality and source authority is not easily analysed statistically because it is complex and highly subjective to the participants, but the stronger correlations may indicate the core relationships for some of the participants. The constructs which tended to correlate most strongly with the component analysed were constructs relating to how much information was provided, whether the information provided presented all possible angles, how

likely the information was to be true, how up to date the information was and how important the information was perceived as being. This indicates that these constructs are the ones participants used most commonly and/or saw themselves as most successfully using to evaluate the quality of information from the information sources they identified. These constructs are related to some of the core principles of information literacy, which is discussed in Chapter Nine.

7.4.2 Constructs evaluating the authority of the source of information

The same multiple group component analysis process was applied to Category 3: constructs evaluating the authority of the source of information. This yielded slightly less strong results in the correlation between the component and the constructs within the category, with an average of 43.2% of the constructs in category 3 in each participants' grid correlating strongly with the component. This indicates that participants' conceptions of how to establish which information sources should have authority may be slightly less well-established than their conceptions of how to establish what information can be considered to be of a high quality. This is not to say that participants' perceptions are accurate or successful when assessed in terms of formal information literacy frameworks or conceptions of media literacy, but relates to participants' own internal methods and systems of judging information and information sources.

This slightly weaker correlation may also indicate that participants' awareness of what constructs they use to assess authority of individuals is less strong than their awareness of what constructs they use to assess whether information is high quality or not. It may also, however, indicate that my coding of the constructs into Category 3 (authority of source) was less successful and accurate than the coding of constructs into Category 2 (quality of information), which may be the result of Category 3 constructs often being far more subjective than those in Category 2, and often relating to people (e.g. "they are selfish vs. they are unselfish" (P28) and "they are not my friends vs. they are my friends" (P23). This did not always translate easily onto other elements when participants ranked them along each construct.

Analysing constructs between participants is not recommended as a generalisable indication of element qualities because of the highly subjective nature of participants' constructs and rankings. However, these results provided me with insights into how the participants may evaluate

information quality and source authority which I used to develop focus group topics for discussion and as a lens for understanding the later discussions.

7.5 Answering the research questions

The findings from the repertory grid interviews address questions 1, 2 and 3:

1) What sources of political information influence young people's political opinions and worldviews?
2) What are the qualitatively different ways in which young people conceive of political information?
3) Do young people think about this political information critically?

7.5.1 Question 1) What sources of political information influence young people's political opinions and worldviews?

The participants in this research report using or being exposed to a number of sources of information that they feel influences their political opinions and worldviews. The most significant source reported by participants is *people*, most often their parents, but also other family members, friends and teachers. Other sources include those within the categories of television, the internet, social media, radio, newspapers, school, magazines and books. The chart in section 7.3.3 illustrates the frequency with which the participants identified different sources of political information, grouped by category. Sections 7.3.3.1 to 7.3.3.9 present the categories of sources and the individual elements within them.

This chapter has identified which sources of information participants report themselves as using and being exposed to in relation to politics and the shaping of their worldviews. The following chapter explores in more depth how the participants use these sources, communicate meaning with each other, and further explore whether they think critically about the information they encounter.

7.5.2 Question 2) What are the qualitatively different ways in which young people conceive of political information?

The construct categorisation and structural analysis of the repertory grid data help to answer this research question. It is apparent that the participants conceive of what they consider to be political information and the sources that provide it in a variety of different ways, and that the ways in which different participants perceive the same sources can be very different.

Through construct categorisation I was able to identify six major themes of construct through which participants expressed their understanding:

1) Constructs describing practical features of the information, source or its use
2) Constructs evaluating the quality of the information
3) Constructs evaluating the authority of the source
4) Constructs describing a socio-political understanding about the source
5) Constructs relating to affective conceptions
6) Constructs describing the participants' choices about using the information

These categories represent qualitatively different ways in which participants express their views about the sources of political information and the perceived characteristics of the information they receive from the sources. There are contradictions inherent within individual participants' conceptions of information sources (explained by Kelly's (1955) *fragmentation corollary*), as well as a range of ways of viewing the same source between different participants (explained by Kelly's (1955) *individualisation corollary*). This indicates that political information sources are understood subjectively, using a range of methods of evaluation and different extents of critical thought, depending not only on the individual's capacity but other contextual variables, such as a participants' relationship with a human source of information, or the situation they feel they are likely to be in when seeking information from an online source of information and the compromises they are willing to make in order to attain information that they perceive as good enough for their immediate need.

7.5.3   Question 3) Do young people think about this political information critically?

The analysis of construct types indicates that the participants have some difficulty evaluating the political information sources they encounter in a critical manner. Even where the sources of information can be seen as more easily critically assessed, such as textual information or formal learning resources, there were relatively few instances in which participants discussed their ability to challenge the authority of information sources, the truth, validity or reliability of the information. When participants did discuss aspects of critical evaluation, several participants referred to whether or not an information source was "bias" (rather than biased) and there was a lack of clarity about what this means as well as looks like in practice, which may represent the communication of received wisdom rather than an understanding of these aspects of critical analysis, which indicates an area in which young people may require more support.

However, participants did talk about some evaluative aspects of their experiences with political information sources. The constructs within Category 2 indicate that the participants are capable of and do compare sources of political information using a variety of ways of understanding the sources and their characteristics. The language used to describe some of these characteristics and ways of evaluating the quality of information, although sometimes inaccurate and not always conveying the sentiment behind the construct accurately, but participants did nonetheless appear to critically evaluate the quality of the information they encounter in their own ways.

Participants often conflated the notions of truth and opinion, both of which were described as "facts" by several participants. This lack of clarity of concepts could be seen as another area in which young people would benefit from learning about in order to effectively evaluate the reliability of political information.

8. Findings from the Phenomenographic Analysis

This chapter presents the findings results from the phenomenographic analysis of the data from the focus groups and interviews. The analysis process and presentation of findings in an outcome space are distinctive to the phenomenographic approach, and were designed to explore the qualitatively different ways in which the phenomenon of political information was experienced by the participants. The outcome of this analysis is an outcome space which presents the structure of form of the variations of these experiences. The findings are used to suggest ways in which young people can be supported in their encounters with political information, to develop more sophisticated ways of engaging with the information sources and their content.

This chapter includes a discussion of the research findings and the range of ways in which the participants were found to perceive the research phenomenon. These are presented in the form of an outcome space and a detailed account of the categories of description, the purpose and development of which were described in Chapters Four to Six. The results in this chapter seek to answer Research Question 2: *In what qualitatively different ways do young people conceive of the sources of information which influence their political opinions and worldviews?*

The chapter is structured as follows:

- Section 8.1 revisits the considerations made when presenting phenomenographic research results, drawing on the discussion of the theoretical approach, research design and analysis process in Chapters Four to Six;

- Section 8.2 presents the full outcome space itself, including categories of description, levels of complexity, dimensions of variation and structures of awareness;

- Section 8.3 presents the categories of description, which are representations of the variety of ways in which the phenomenon of political information was experienced by the participants;

- Section 8.4 presents details of the levels of complexity of the outcome space on which the categories of description are located and explains the increasingly

sophisticated ways in which the phenomenon of political information is experienced as the levels develop;

- Section 8.5 discusses the variation in the structures of awareness and dimensions of variation within the categories of description;

- Section 8.6 summarises the research findings and addresses how the findings answer the *Research Question 2: In what qualitatively different ways do young people conceive of the sources of information which influence their political opinions and worldviews?*

8.1 Considerations when presenting phenomenographic findings

As discussed in Chapter Four, phenomenographic research requires the consideration of several methodological factors when planning and conducting data collection and analysis, and presenting the research findings. The presentation of findings in this chapter remains faithful to the participants' input by using participant quotations to allow the participants to 'speak for themselves' where possible. The narrative seeks to describe individuals' conceptions accurately rather than providing explanation in the place of direct participant conceptions, and equal attention is paid to all aspects of individuals' experiences.

The findings do not seek to generate grand and novel theories, but to make "modest claims that accurately explain what is in the data set" (Wildemuth 2009, p.42). Nevertheless, the findings presented in this chapter address an empirical gap in critical library and information studies research, and the conclusions drawn from the emerging themes contribute to the understanding of young people's experiences of political information in novel methodological and theoretical ways.

The next section presents the categories of description which make up the content of the outcome space.

8.2   Outcome Space

This section presents the outcome space for the variation in experiences of political information sources. As described in Chapter Four, the outcome space is a structured representation of the finite set of categories which emerges from the phenomenographic analysis of participants' variety of ways of experiencing the phenomenon under scrutiny. In this study, the outcome space contains categories of description which describe the ways in which the participants of this study experience political information, and provides an explanation of the relationships between the categories of description. The analysis of the data from the repertory grid interviews and focuses groups yielded six different ways in which the participants experience political information:

1) Political information as a range of sources of information;
2) Political information as something which is encountered out of context;
3) Political information as something to fill a knowledge gap;
4) Political information as something through which to gain meaning and context;
5) Political information as something relevant to one's own life;
6) Political information as something which can help to achieve social change.

The results of this study present an outcome space which takes the form of an inclusive, hierarchical outcome space. This is reflected in the levels of the outcome space:

1) Awareness
2) Acquisition
3) Engagement
4) Application

Within each category of description, which denote different ways of experiencing political information sources, four dimensions of variation were identified. These dimensions describe specific focuses within each of the categories of description:

1) Production of information
2) Evaluation of information
3) Information and agency
4) Conception of politics

Level	Level One: Awareness	Level Two: Acquisition	Level Three: Engagement		Level Four: Application	
Category of Description (Political information (PI) experienced as…)	Category One: Identifying a range of sources	Category Two: Encountering political information out of context	Category Three: Filling a knowledge gap	Category Four: Gaining meaning and context	Category Five: Applying relevant information to own life	Category Six: Helping to work towards social change
Meaning	PI as different to information more generally	PI as sources of relevant information	PI as objects which can meet a superficial need	PI as places understanding can be gained	PI as useful for making informed decisions	PI as necessary for taking informed action in civic life
Structure of awareness — **Focus**	Known sources of PI	Entertainment	Meeting a need quickly & easily	Own biases & assumptions	Making informed decisions	Relevance of PI to social change
Structure of awareness — **Background**	Other sources of PI	Facts about political issues	Availability of more complex information		Own political & social context	Personal context & evaluation of PI
Structure of awareness — **Margin**	General sources of PI	Development of political knowledge	Challenging self to understand complexity	Benefit of PI for understanding	Broader social & political issues	
Dimensions of variation — **Production of information**	PI external to individual. Not perceived as being part of a system of production or the individual's own repertoire of information.			Individual is part of the process of the production of new information		Active sharing & production aiming for social change
Dimensions of variation — **Evaluation of information**	PI sources & their content are not evaluated		Superficial; PI taken at face value	Evaluation of basic credibility	PI is subject to critique & evaluation	
Dimensions of variation — **Information and agency**	PI not connected to individuals' conceptions of own agency		Superficial acknowledgement of PI & agency relationship	Active use of PI to help develop (perhaps illusory) 'sense' of agency	PI viewed as necessary to create conditions for agency	Engagement with PI connected to personal action
Dimensions of variation — **Conception of "politics"**	Politics as irrelevant formalised process removed from individuals' lives	Politics as world events to be entertained by	Politics as world events to have an opinion about	Politics as world events & systems of power to be knowledgeable about	Politics as systems of power affecting personal lives	Politics as systems of power affecting other people's lives/rights

Table 8.7.1: The outcome space

8.3   Categories of description

Categories of description represent the different conceptions participants express about the research phenomenon; a "conception" being a "qualitatively distinct manner in which the subjects were found to voice the way they thought" about the phenomenon (Marton & Booth 1997, p.36). In this study, the phenomenon under analysis is political information. It should be emphasised that the categories of description within an outcome space do not represent the experience of specific and identifiable individuals, but are formations of characteristics identified in the analysis of the data from the participant group as a whole, and describe one way of experiencing political information. The following sections describe the categories of description in the outcome space for this study.

8.3.1   Dimensions of variation

Within the categories of description, which denote different ways of experiencing political information sources, four dimensions of variation were identified. These dimensions describe specific focuses within each of the categories of description and are summarised in the table below. The meaning is described within the explanations of each category of description in sections 8.3.2 to 8.3.7.

8.3.1.1   Production of information

This dimension describes how participants experienced the production of information in each category. It details the way in which participants understand the systems of production associated with information, and their own role in that process.

Category of Description	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six
Production of information	Not perceived as being part of a system of production or the individual's own repertoire of information		PI external to individual - not processed	Individual is part of the process of the production of new information		Active sharing & production aiming for social change

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Table 8.2: Dimension of variation: Production of information

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8.3.1.2   Evaluation of information

This dimension describes how participants experienced the evaluation of information in each category. It describes the way in which participants evaluate the information provided by the political information sources in their lives.

Category of Description	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six
Evaluation of information	PI sources & their content are not evaluated		Superficial; PI taken at face value	Evaluation of basic credibility	PI is subject to critique & evaluation	

Table 8.3: Dimension of variation: Evaluation of information

8.3.1.3   Information and agency

This dimension describes the relationship between participants' conception of information sources and their sense of political agency. It denotes the perceived role that participants describe information as playing in the development of agency in each category.

Category of Description	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six
Information and agency	PI not connected to individuals' conceptions of own agency		Superficial acknowledgement of PI & agency relationship	Active use of PI to help develop (perhaps illusory) 'sense' of agency	PI viewed as necessary to create conditions for agency	Engagement with PI connected to personal action

Table 8.4: Dimension of variation: Information and agency

8.3.1.4   Conception of politics

This dimension describes the variation in ways of construing the term "politics". This can be understood structurally as a development of a relationship with politics. As discussed in Chapter Six, participants were not directly asked what their conception of the term "politics" was, and instead the ways of experiencing the idea of the political was inferred from the descriptions of the sources of political information the participants identified and described. In order to identify sources of political information and describe their

conceptions and uses of political information, individuals must have some kind of conception of "politics". The dimensions of variation in the conception of politics are presented below:

Category of Description	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six
Conception of "politics"	Politics as irrelevant formalised processes	Politics as formal processes and events which are entertaining	Politics as range of world events to have an opinion about	Politics as world events & systems of power to be knowledgeable about for future decisions	Politics as systems of power affecting personal lives	Politics as systems of power affecting other people's lives/rights

Table 8.5: Dimension of variation: Conception of politics

Conceptions of politics were frequently brought up in the repertory grid interviews in the beginning stages when participants sought to clarify what was being asked of them, and what kinds of information would be considered 'valid' answers (all types of information were considered valid). Several participants asked for clarification about what was meant by "politics" when asked to provide a list of places from which they get political information. The response was always that politics means whatever they think it means, offering them the space to discuss where *they* thought they got political information from, in as broad or unspecific a sense as they liked.

In the focus groups, views of what "politics" means were often discussed in the context of explaining why politics "isn't for me". Several of the reasons given by participants in the interviews and focus groups for their lack of engagement with politics were reasons identified in several studies of young people's political engagement. For example, HeadsUp (2009, p.3) found that "young people made it clear that they wouldn't get involved if the issues didn't affect them or they didn't think they had a chance of influencing the outcome"; this is a finding reflected in the results of the present study. HeadsUp also found that young people often perceive politicians as "setting a bad example" (2009, p.4), which one participant of this study said was a significant factor in their own lack of interest in learning about and participating in political events. Throughout the study as a whole, a passive tone was often observed when it came to how the participants discussed political

and world events, as if these issues were not directly connected to their own lives. However, this was not the case for all participants, as the dimensions of variation identified above indicate.

In addition to the expanding conception of politics in terms of the participants' relationship with the concept and their role in political life, an expanding conception of the landscape of politics was observed. Some participants conceived of politics as being solely about Westminster politics and formal processes, whereas others discussed broader political issues such as environmental issues and feminism as being political. Although many participants expressed a lack of interest in politics, when asked about what issues concern them about their futures, the three major categories were immigration, unemployment and benefit fraud. These are issues that could be considered to fall within the category of "politics" when it is more broadly defined. These different conceptions can be conceptualised as a set of concentric circles, moving from a narrower conception of politics to a broader and inclusive definition:

Politics as *all* issues affecting public life

Politics as social issues

Politics as affecting the individual

Politics as current events reported in media

Politics as formal processes
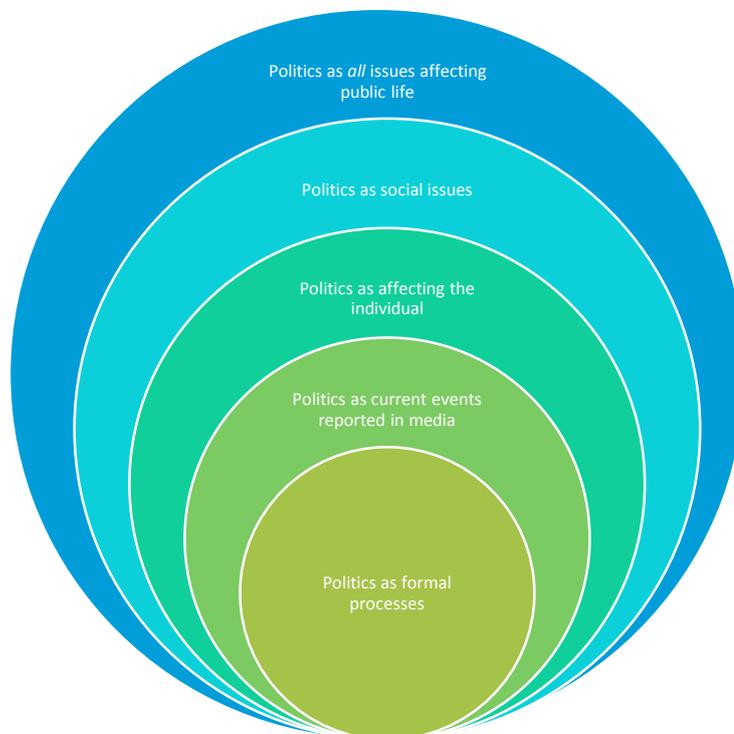
Figure 8.1: The broadening horizon of conceptions of politics

8.3.2 Category One: Political information is experienced as a range of sources of information

Category One represents the most simplistic way of experiencing political information. Political information and information sources are seen as external to the self, and the focus is on the characteristics of the information source rather than the content or characteristics of the information itself. Individuals are aware that potential sources of political information exist, but do not consider themselves to engage with the information provided by the sources. Political information and information sources are seen as external to the self, and the focus is on the characteristics of the information source rather than the content or characteristics of the information itself. Sources of political information are experienced as being different in content to sources of information more generally (although information sources may be seen as being sources of political information as well as other types of information):

> I suppose sometimes my friends talk about political stuff, but not usually. We normally just gossip and that. (P32)

In this category, there is extremely little engagement with the content of the information sources. The following quotation exemplifies this:

> Well I know there are lots of places I could find stuff out, I just don't really care about politics so I don't really use them myself. (P14)

8.3.3.1 Production of information

Although the sources of information are acknowledged as existing, they are not engaged with and not perceived as being part of a system of production or the individual's own repertoire of information. For example, a participant may identify that newspapers can be a source of political information, but they say that they do not themselves read newspapers:

> My mum and dad read the newspapers but I don't usually, unless there's something interesting on the front. (P12 FG3)

8.3.3.2   Evaluation of information

In this category, information sources and their content are not evaluated. Individuals identify what sources of information might provide political information to other people, but these information sources do not form part of their own information repertoire and are therefore not evaluated.

In this category, information is experienced as an external object which does not have clear boundaries. For example, some participants referred to the internet as a single source of information rather than as a collection of discrete sources.

8.3.3.3   Information and agency

In this category, political information sources are not connected to individuals' conceptions of their own agency or how they could apply the information to increase their knowledge, understanding or ability to participate in political processes.

8.3.3.4   Conception of politics

In Category One, politics is conceived as something young people do not and should not be involved in. There is little or no knowledge of formal systems of politics such as the names of political parties or how often elections are held:

> You've got Labour and then…the other one…does it begin with a T? (P14)

Politics is construed as being solely related to Westminster politics and is removed from the individuals' lives:

> Every morning they stick on the news to see what's going on. I'm not bothered about politics. I don't care about who's going to be the next Prime Minister or something. (P12)

There is a conception that politicians and politics is removed from the lives of 'ordinary' people:

> I'm not too fussed about [politics]. It kind of annoys me, the fact that the Prime Minister is usually someone who's been brought up middle class, that's never

had to pay for anything, so they don't quite know how our parents feel, they
don't quite know what it's like to work and have to earn and stuff like that.

In this category, negative attitudes towards participating in politics are connected to a lack
of belief that young people have the capacity to make responsible decisions. When asked,
participants were extremely divided about giving 16-17 year olds the right to vote, with
similar proportions of participants responding that they thought the voting age should or
should not be reduced. In this category, politics is experienced as something that happens
later, not now, and is related to opinions about whether young people do or do not have
the capacity to make good decisions about electoral politics:

No I don't think we should be able to vote at 16. You can't trust us to do the
right thing! When you're 16 you're in education. At 18, you're in control and
you know what you're talking about, and you can have a view. Politics is to do
with education and you're still in education. (P23)

8.3.3.5   Structure of awareness

The structural aspect of Category One is presented in the diagram below:

Focus: Known sources of political information

Background: Other sources of political information

Margin: Sources of information more generally
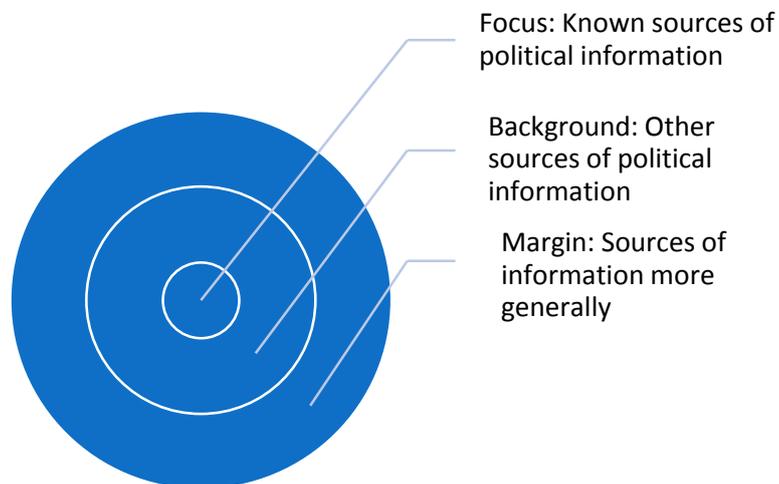
Figure 8.2: Structure of awareness for Category One

When experiencing political information as a range of sources, the focus of the experience
is on the potential range of sources which could yield political information, which although
not encountered directly by the individuals themselves, are used by people known to the

individual. The focus of the experience on known sources of political information is illustrated by the following quotation:

> P14: Erm, I suppose newspapers [are a source of political information] but I
> don't read them
> I: Do you know the names of any newspapers?
> P14: The Sun - that's the one my Grandma reads.

This focus is drawn from a wider selection of sources more generally, which are in the background of the experience, and are conceived as containing political information, but are not focused on because there is no indirect understanding of the content because they are not used by people known to the individual. In the margin of experience are sources of political information which are not of import to the phenomenon of political information.

8.3.4 Category Two: Political information is experienced as something which is encountered out of context

In this category, young people experience political information out of context. Information is acquired both passively and actively, but outside of a specific and acknowledged political information 'need'. This decontextualisation of the information renders the category distinct from Category Three, in which the information and aspects of its production are not consciously acknowledged or understood, but are used to meet an information need. The information that people encounter, although consciously acknowledged as being part of an information landscape, as in Category One, and a source of information, the information is not actively used for any purpose. Participants who expressed conceptions relating to this category did not seek to make meaning from the information they encountered because they did not perceive it as having relevance to their lives or contexts:

> My mum always has the radio on in the car on the way to and from school and
> I suppose I pick stuff up from that, but it's not really anything to do with me. I
> don't get most of it. Some of it probably sinks in though. (P15)

8.3.4.1 Production of information

Although the sources of information are acknowledged as existing, they are not engaged with and not perceived as being part of a system of production or the individual's own repertoire of information. For example, a participant may identify that newspapers can be a source of political information, but they say that they do not themselves read newspapers.

When experiencing political information out of context, little consideration is given to the system of production in which the information source is located. The individual themselves does not use the information actively to form opinions or communicate meaning, and therefore does not contribute to the production of information.

8.3.4.2 Evaluation of Information

In this category, information sources and their content are not evaluated; information is acknowledged as existing, but is not engaged with at any level. The focus of engagement with information sources is largely based on how enjoyable the individual finds the interaction or use of the information source. The evaluation of the suitability of the information is based on affective constructs such as whether the source is entertaining, or whether the information is conveyed in a dramatic manner:

> I like listening to the news on the radio because they go into lots of detail and you can imagine things as they're happening. I think they're more graphic than they're allowed to be on TV, and it's almost worse because it's left to your imagination, like gruesome things. Like when that soldier got beheaded. I definitely remember that. (P3)

8.3.4.3 Information and agency

In this category, individuals do not directly connect conceptions of political information sources to their potential political agency. Information sources are engaged with for reasons that do not relate to becoming more politically informed and active. The benefits of political information on agency are experienced as an added bonus to active or passive engagement with the political information source:

> Russell Howard tries to see the funny in the dire stuff, so it's a bit more light-hearted. It's easier to watch. You remember stuff more if it's funny. And there's never anything good on the news, whereas on Russell Howard there's the bit at the end of it, like someone's got bionic legs and they can walk now and it's brilliant, but there's never anything like that on the news. (P21)

For this participant, the bonus of watching a news-themed comedy show was that they felt they were more likely to remember the details of the events than if they were watching a straight news programme because the humour made the information more memorable. This is reflective of a more general way of experiencing information in this category - the perceived likelihood of remembering the information being conveyed by the information sources is centred on the interest and engagement of the recipient, including in the classroom.

8.3.4.4 Conception of politics

In this category, there is some awareness of the existence of formal political processes and political issues. In terms of political knowledge, several participants expressed an awareness of the existence of "right" and "left" on the political spectrum but did not know which political parties in the UK would traditionally be considered to be politically right or left.

The conception of politics is that it is a formalised process which takes place well beyond the realm of young people, but that it is entertaining to loosely follow in the news and on television:

> I watch the news if it's on TV, like in the morning. I don't usually know what it's about but I try to keep up to date, it's quite interesting. (P1)

The purpose of engaging with politics in this way is for entertainment rather than to develop knowledge and understanding of the processes for later meaningful engagement.

This conception of politics is slightly more complex than that of Category One, in that politics is perceived as being about world events as well as political processes, but these events and processes continue to be conceptualised as the formalised processes of traditional governmental politics, such as elections and debates. Some of these events are viewed as entertaining:

> I don't know what it was. This woman had to stand up for so many hours when she...I don't know what it was all about. She had to stand up. She wouldn't sit down or something, while there was this big government meeting or something. It was fun to watch but I wasn't sure what was going on. (P8)

8.3.4.5 Structure of awareness

When experiencing political information out of context, the focus of the experience is on whether the information is of benefit to the individual for purposes other than to become politically informed, for example, whether the information is being presented in an entertaining format. The focus of the experience on the entertainment value of sources of information is illustrated by the following quotation:

> I think I like *Mock the Week* because the concept of it is looking at banal sort of news and making it interesting, and it's funny. (P21)

Facts and information about politics and current events may be picked up every so often as a by-product, which places them in the background of the experience. Active engagement with political information sources for the explicit purpose of developing knowledge and/or agency is not within this experience of the phenomenon and is located on the margin of the experience.

Focus: Entertainment

Background: Facts about politics and events

Margin: Development of political knowledge and agency
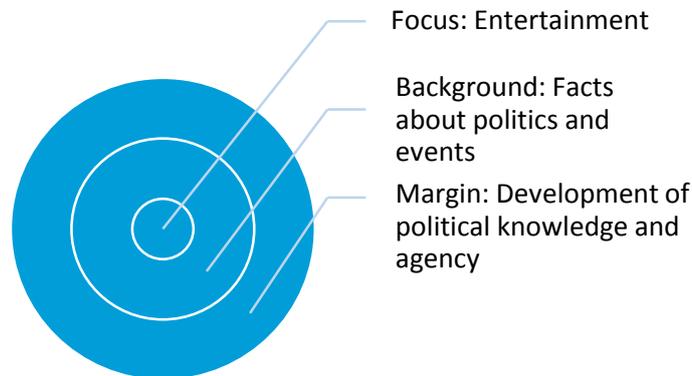
Figure 8.3: Structure of awareness for Category Two

For the majority of participants, the information sources identified as elements in the repertory grid interviews and discussed in the focus groups were sources of information they themselves used. These were central to the focus of attention within this category of description. Sources of information which were not used by the participants themselves were acknowledged, but not central to the focus of attention and lay on the external horizon within this category of description.

8.3.5   Category Three: Political information is experienced as something to fill a knowledge gap

Category Three represents a more complex understanding of political information, in which young people deliberately acquire information for in order to form an opinion about a political issue (in the broadest sense of the term political, from the perspective of the participant, or in order to achieve an educational qualification).

In this category, political information is experienced as an external object which can help to meet an internal need:

> If I want to find out more about something I've heard on the news I'll Google it, just to find out the basic facts so I know what's going on. (P26 FG3)

The perceived need can be for a basic current awareness, as exemplified by the quotation above, or can be in order to have an opinion about something political, as in the quotation below:

> I hate it when my Grandad comes out with something, like when he's watching the news, and I know he's wrong, but I don't have the facts to back myself up if I said anything to him about it. If I could say like, that's not how many people are benefits cheats really or whatever because I knew the facts, that'd be good. (P7 FG2)

When experiencing political information as something to fill a knowledge gap, engagement with political information sources are viewed as beneficial but not essential. There has to be a payoff to engaging with the information sources, be that the ability to present an opinion to peers or authority figures, or a qualification:

> I can see the value of learning about politics but I wouldn't want to do it at school unless I could do it as a GCSE. You can't do it as a GCSE at this school. I think you can at other schools. (P8 FG1)

8.3.5.1   *Production of information*

In this category, information is produced by the individual for specific outcomes. Political information is experienced as external to the individual; it is not processed but 'facts' are used to meet perceived information needs.

Political information provided by school subjects is connected strongly to educational outcomes, including qualifications for getting into higher education, but is also connected strongly to 'real world' outcomes, such as understanding how to function in society:

> School's not all about qualifications, like in Life Skills we learn things like credit cards, how to write a CV, job interviews and that. And I think that's really important. (P26 FG3)

For some participants in this study, language learning was strongly connected to its application in real life:

> When we start secondary school we learn either French or German. And I don't think it should be that because we're not likely to go on holiday to France or Germany. (P12 FG3)

In this category, political knowledge is understood as a commodity, which can be acquired through the accumulation of political information, to be used in the context of formal educational qualifications for the purposes of employability, or to form political opinions

because it is "expected" for people to have opinions about news, politics and current affairs.

In relation to specific lessons identified as being sources of political and social information, participants whose experience of the phenomenon falls within this category view the role of education more broadly as being to gain qualifications and other requirements for employability. For example, when talking about the purpose of cultural education, the need to understand diversity was connected strongly to employability:

> If you can show you know about different cultures, and we can be like the same with everybody, do you know? Like we are equal with everybody, even if they're different. I think that's good when you're going for a job, just to say that you know about it. (P31 FG1)

Some participants viewed subjects such as PD, which students do not gain qualifications in, as being pointless *because* there is no GCSE grade connected to the lesson material:

> If you're not getting a GCSE in it, there's no point in doing it. You could use the two hours a week to do something else, like another maths lesson or catching up with everything that you've missed if you were off school poorly. I just think it's pointless. (P2 FG1)

> I have RE last thing on a Friday and I'd rather be doing coursework. I see it as an hour of sitting around doing nothing. (P1 FG1)

> I like RE. I like learning about different religions and that. But I think that if you made it a shorter, you could use that time to catch up, on some of the other work that you need to catch up on, if you'd been off or something. (P9 FG1)

Experiences of political information in this category conceptualise information as something which can meet an information need, but the phenomenon of political information is not conceptualised as being part of a process, cycle, or industry. Individual pieces and fragments of information are viewed as discrete objects, with no consideration of the system of production.

8.3.5.2   Evaluation of information

When information is experienced as something which can fill a knowledge gap, individuals conceive of the information they encounter as serving a specific purpose: to fill a perceived knowledge gap. This gap may be a lack of knowledge about the 'facts' around a specific event or social issue, or relate to a perceived lack of political stance either generally (for example, what political party to identify as being aligned with) or in relation to a specific political or social event (for example, immigration levels or benefit fraud). The evaluation of information in this category is superficial; individuals use the information they encounter to fill this gap with little or no consideration of the systems which produce the information, and do not use the information themselves to reach a deep understanding of the issues. For example, information received from people is taken at face value and the inherent biases of the individual are not taken into consideration. The outcome of the process of engaging with the information is an opinion or statement to superficially fill the perceived knowledge gap.

In this category, information is evaluated based on existing predispositions and assumptions, and information shortcuts. Individuals may hold strong opinions about political and social issues, such as unemployment benefits, based on the perceptions they have developed when they feel they need to have an opinion on something:

> P31 FG1: I don't want to judge people like but it's hard not to form an opinion when you see people getting things when they're not doing anything for it.
>
> I: Where do you find out about what people are doing?
>
> P31 FG1: On TV, they show how our money's being given to people that don't do anything, don't work. I just don't think it's fair, we earn it and they just take it and don't do anything good with it. Like on that Skint programme, you see people on benefits but they have a massive TV, and it doesn't make sense. Like, surely you'd need food, and clothes for your children more than you need a massive TV.

This opinion was shared by the majority of participants who expressed an opinion about this issue. Despite having family members who claim disability benefits, several participants insisted that the majority of people on benefits were claiming them illegitimately:

> The woman across the road from me, she lives in a council house, and she's on benefits and she has another child like, every year, obviously to get more benefits, but my uncle's on benefits because he's disabled, but she's obviously on them for no reason, just because she's got children. She could go out and get a job, she just can't be bothered. I see her going to get her kids from school and I see her smoking and on the phone all the time and doing nothing with her life. (P2 FG1)

This example illustrates how, despite possessing information based on their own lived experiences of relatives who receive some form of benefits, some other forms of information participants have been exposed to about the nature of benefits and the people who receive them - for example via the mass media - has a more significant impact on shaping their worldview. This may indicate that the other forms of information confirm existing biases, or are perceived as possessing more authority. This was found to be the case in the analysis of several of the repertory grid interviews in the previous chapter, where sources of information such as television news and newspapers were perceived as being more authoritative, reliable and accurate than sources of information such as family and friends.

Heuristics may also play a role in the conception of information in this category, with information shortcuts serving a purpose in place of deep engagement with information and the development of understanding and meaning. For example, the opinions of celebrities may be a source of political information which serve to help young people make political decisions about who they might vote for:

> The internet is useful like though, like on social media I see celebrities saying who they're voting for, and I think if someone sees so and so saying that, they'll think "oh I'll go for that" and then base their decision on those people. (P21 FG3)

8.3.5.3   Information and agency

When information is experienced as something to fill a knowledge gap, the relationship between information and political agency is acknowledged, but superficially. Information is not conceived as being central to the development of agency, but engagement with information sources contributes to a sense of agency in terms of the development of

functional vocabulary, and attitudes which help to give a surface appearance of political efficacy.

8.3.5.4   Conception of politics

In this category, the conception of politics is more complex than in the previous two categories. The perception of the 'boundaries' of what constitutes politics are broader and include a range of world events that span further than formalised political processes and electoral events, and includes issues such as immigration, welfare and employment (these were the three main issues of concern identified by the participants).

As in the previous category, individuals take some degree of interest in what they view as politics, but whereas in the previous category this was for the purposes of entertainment only, in this category the casual interest in political issues when they are presented to them are also viewed as something it is worth forming an opinion about:

> I think it is interesting. Just to know what everyone thinks, and what's happening. Like with how some people are able, to choose their summer holidays, when they are…Certain schools can say, "We want our six weeks' holidays there." But then that could interfere, if you've got two kids that go to different schools, they might place them at different times. I think we should have a say in that, like it's to do with us. (P22)

This is not to say that the participants with this conception of politics then necessarily go on to participate in political processes, but they do appear to connect their exposure to political information to the formation of opinions about politics, which indicates that they view the formation of opinions about political issues as being within their 'remit', even where any more connection to participation or agency may be conceived as beyond their conception of their role in political life.

8.3.5.5 Structure of awareness

The focal element of this category is political information which meets a direct perceived information need. This involves information sources which can be acquired easily and from which the 'necessary' information can be gleaned with minimal effort. Meeting the information need is motivated by a need to be 'seen' to have something to say about

political issues, and the opinions of other people are therefore a focus of the experience. The focus of the experience on how information can meet a need quickly and conveniently is illustrated by the following quotation:

> If I want to just keep up with what's going on I'll put the radio on, the news is on all the time and it's in nice small chunks, it just tells you what you need to know without too much detail. (P31)

More substantial information is on the external horizon of the structure of awareness; it may be perceived as an 'ideal', but is not needed to fill the knowledge gap and is therefore not the focal point of this way of experiencing political information. Information which is construed as being *too* complex to understand exists on the margin of the experience; it is available to the individual but is dismissed as being too much to engage with at all.

Focus: information which can meet a need quickly and conveniently

Background: information which is more complex and takes more effort to understand

Margin: information which is construed as being too complex to understand
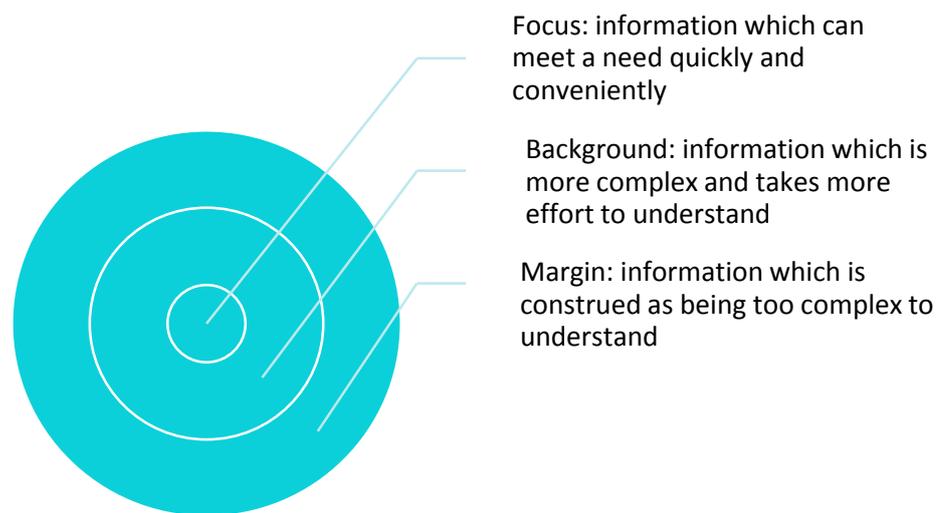
Figure 8.4: Structure of Awareness for Category Three

8.3.6 Category Four: Political information is experienced as something through which to gain meaning and context

In this category, people experience political information as something to through which to gain meaning and context to their emerging political attitudes and opinions, and the information they encounter on a daily basis more broadly. The information sources encountered are experienced as potentially useful resources for sense-making with regard to political systems and socio-political issues, and to give context to the other opinions and

worldviews they encounter. There is some awareness that the topics learnt in school subjects such as Sociology are relevant to everyday life:

> He [the Sociology teacher] always brings up things in the news, like how does that fit in with what we're doing, like family or youth or something. (P15 FG1)

In this category, information is experienced as something which can be used to develop opinions, beliefs or attitudes, and contribute to understanding real-life situations. This reflects a shift from experiences in the previous categories of information being external to the individual, to an experience of information as being *internal* to the individual.

When information is experienced as something through which to gain meaning and context, individuals are drawn to information sources which are part of a wider process but which present an easy to manage amount of information which does not fundamentally challenge existing worldviews. More challenging information sources are not the preferred source of information, although there is an awareness that these information sources may have something valuable to contribute in terms of providing a background context and deeper explanation for sociopolitical issues.

8.3.6.1 Production of information

When political information is experienced as something which can provide meaning and context to an individual's interaction with the outside world more generally, information is used to develop considered opinions. The individual is part of the process of the production of new information. Information is therefore experienced as being *internal* and *subjective*. Information is processed for understanding, knowledge and the formation of one's own opinions.

In relation to an awareness of information sources being part of a system of production, there is an acknowledgement that information is produced by people and comes from some kind of context itself. There is a conscious acknowledgement in this way of experiencing the phenomenon that political information is produced through a process, for example through a news cycle.

8.3.6.2 Evaluation of information

When political information is experienced as something through which to gain meaning and context, the evaluation of information extends to whether the information source and the information being communicated meets the basic standards necessary to be considered credible by a wider social group. Conceptions in this category are informed by an awareness that information may not always be suitable for use and that it may be subject to critical analysis. In contrast to conceptions in Categories One, Two and Three, the need to evaluate the quality of the information being encountered is consciously acknowledged before the information is used to meet the information need. Whereas in Category Three, any information that can fill a perceived information gap in need of filling (for example, a lack of opinion where it is felt that an opinion is needed regardless of the way in which the opinion is formed) will do, in Category Four, in order to provide meaning and context within the information need, the information must be evaluated. For example, before seeking information from a person, the inherent biases of that individual must be known (even if they are ultimately ignored) before the information provided is used. Similarly, before using information from a newspaper to shape a viewpoint, it must be acknowledged that the information may be influenced by the producer of the information:

> P7 FG2: The newspapers can be very biased because the editor or whoever it is who's written that particular article writes it, so they put their own view into it.

This is not to say that the evaluation is always deep, but the neutrality and reliability of the information or source is questioned to some extent. However, the focus of this category of experience is on information provided by sources which confirms existing biases or provides reductive, simplistic and/or populist explanations for complex social issues:

> You see them, like people, cos my mum always goes on about, how people are taking all the taxpayers' money and stuff. She says whenever - cos she works in town and, whenever she goes out for lunch, she always sees people at 12 and in the afternoon on a Tuesday, walking around with their friends. And she's like well, some of them you can tell are off work, but others you can tell they're probably on benefits. And I think sometimes it is just like a stereotype, but I think quite a few times it is true. (P8 FG1)

Although the participant expressed awareness that their mother may have been making stereotypical judgements about the reasons people were present in public spaces during working hours, the participant ultimately believes their mother's judgement about the reason for people not being in the workplace - because they are claiming unemployment benefits, which both the participant and their mother view as being something the individuals they see should not be entitled to.

8.3.6.3 Information and agency

When political information is experienced as something which can provide meaning and context, the relationship between information and agency is implicit. Although political opinions may be developed through a preference for information sources which confirm existing biases or provide simplistic, reductive or populist explanations for complex issues, individuals actively use information to help themselves to develop a 'sense' of political agency and connect the information they encounter with its relevance to their own lives:

> The news is like my main influence, because when my dad has the TV remote
> we watch it and I learn about uni prices, benefits, immigration and stuff. (P6
> FG3)

When political information is experienced as something through which to gain meaning and context, emphasis is placed on the use of and engagement with information sources for the sake of understanding the "right" political views to hold. For example, voting may be construed as being a choice between the right and the wrong party:

> I wouldn't want to be able to vote because I don't know enough. I mean, what
> if I voted and I voted for the wrong party - the ones who lost? (P8 FG1)

Political information is experienced as something to help an individual make the 'correct' choices and express the 'correct' opinions (where 'correctness' is determined by adherence to populist opinion). Political identities are experienced as something which can be right or wrong, and to have the wrong opinion or attitude may be socially embarrassing:

> I feel like I need to know enough so I can say something when my mates are
> arguing about something because otherwise I'll look like an idiot. Like, I do
> have opinions anyway on some things but I feel like I need to watch the news

> so I can keep an eye on what's going on, and then I can just see what people
> say about it in the paper and that's enough. (P12 FG2)

8.3.6.4   Conception of politics

In this category, politics is conceived of as political processes and world events which it is useful to be knowledgeable about for future participation in political life and the decisions that individuals will make as part of this participation. The perceived 'landscape' of politics is broader than in previous categories and includes an awareness of the systems of power that affect the issues affecting their lives and the world more broadly:

> It's a bit annoying though, because whenever you think of it, they tend to be
> older, white men, basically. But then because they're older, they're thinking
> about their generation but a lot's changed. So they're going about in school as
> if it was like then they went. The school board tells us how to learn. I don't
> think that's right. (P8 FG1)

As well as perceiving the role of themselves to be that of an opinion-former, participants in this category viewed themselves as people who can and should be able to possess knowledge about political issues. The position of the individual in relation to political life is not that of an active participant, however. As in the previous categories, politics is conceived of as something which is beyond the realm of their own life as a young person, but whereas in previous categories this was a permanent situation in which, regardless of age, politics was not something they viewed as relevant to their own lives or something to ever get involved in, the conception of politics in this category is that it will be something to get involved in at a later stage in life:

> I think it's important to be thinking about things now because even though I
> can't vote yet, I do want to. So I need to know what I think about things. (P3)

8.3.6.5 Structure of awareness

When experiencing political information as something through which to gain meaning and context, the focus of the experience is on the individual's own biases and assumptions about political and social issues. Information which confirms existing biases or explains perceived injustice in a simple way is preferred and given more credence than other

information. The focus of the experience on the individual's own biases and assumptions is illustrated by the following quotation:

> Back to the benefits thing, like if you said infront of people like I just did that most people are on benefits, someone would be like "well my sister's friend's cousin's brother's mum is in a wheelchair and she's on benefits" - I'm like, well I'm going to stick to my point, just because you know someone, who's on it because of a certain reason, well that doesn't account for the thousands of people who are on it just because they can't be bothered to go out and get a job. (P15 FG1)

More complex information to explain issues are in the background of the experience. Although there is an awareness that situations are likely to be more complex than they are explained as being by some sources, these sources are not engaged with in as much depth as the simpler sources, as exemplified by the following quotation:

> I mean I get why he [Sociology teacher] talks to us about how politics is everywhere and to do with everything we do but, it's a bit much. I just want to know, why, like, we have to pay for people who aren't working hard or whatever, because I don't think that's fair. And I can find that out from *Skint* [TV programme] and places like that. (P5 FG2)

The diagram below illustrates the structure of awareness for this category:

Focus: Own biases and assumptions, information which confirms these

Background: Information sources construed as providing more complex explanations

Margin: Benefit of engagement with political information for deeper understanding
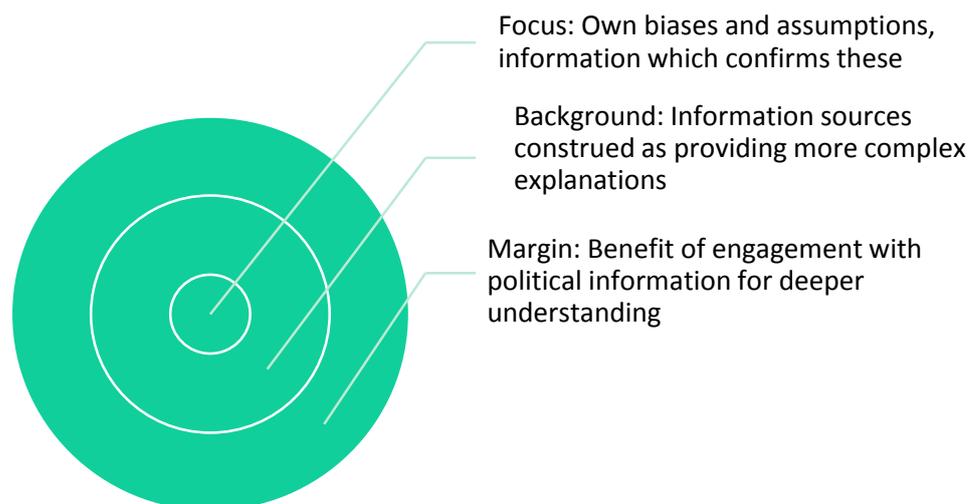
Figure 8.5: Structure of awareness for Category Four

The focus in this category is on the individuals' own worldview, including their own biases and assumptions. An awareness of more complex and challenging information sources is on the external horizon, and the benefit of engagement with political information to gain a deeper understanding of 'why things are how they are' is not an essential part of this experience, and is not viewed as necessary to meet the information need of 'getting' something sufficiently to feel satisfied in understanding an issue.

8.3.7 Category Five: Political information is experienced as something which is relevant to one's own life

In Category Five, political information is experienced as something which is relevant to the life of the young person. Participants who expressed conceptions which fitted into this category had a more sophisticated and complex understanding of the use of political information and how it was relevant to their own lives. Political information is seen as something which can be used to develop an understanding of politics and society and to form opinions and meaning about the world. In this category, the experience of political information is internalised because it is used to make sense of the world, as in Category Four, but is also applied to personal lived experiences.

In this category, participants perceive politics as a phenomenon which is or should be closely related to everyday life. There may be an awareness of a disparity between the lived experiences of the political class and the general public:

> It kind of annoys me, the fact that the Prime Minister is usually someone who's been brought up middle class, that's never had to pay for anything, so they don't quite know how our parents feel, they don't quite know what it's like to work and have to earn and stuff like that. (P18 FG2)

Perceptions of political information are related to experiencing political information as relevant only if it was readily apparent that it is of direct relevance to one's own circumstances:

> I think the only time I care about politics, is if it affects me or my family. If it doesn't, I have no reason to care about it. (P23 FG2)

> If it affects somebody else's family in here, I don't generally think that I'd care about it, because it doesn't affect me. (P27 FG2)

8.3.7.1 Production of information

When political information is experienced as something which is relevant to one's own life, the individual is, as in Category Five, part of the process of the production of new information. In this category, individuals become a central part of the production of information. The relationship between the individual and their interpretation of meaning from the information sources is direct and the information is internalised to make sense of how political issues affect their everyday lives, for example as part of the education system. The meaning is communicated through informed and considered opinion, in discussion with others and through political action such as involvement in local campaigns, and the individual is a part of the production of new information. This is exemplified with the quotation below:

> Sometimes I think I know about something but then I get talking to my mum or I'll hear something on the news and it makes me realise there's more to it than I thought, and I learn from that. And then when I'm talking to my friends they might think the same thing I used to, like about why that man murdered that soldier, and I'll tell them it's different. (P27 FG2)

8.3.7.2 Evaluation of information

A central aspect of this category which differentiates it from previous categories, is that the information is not only acknowledged as existing, and encountered, but is actively engaged with in the form of information evaluation and discussion. Within this category of description, individuals experience political information as something which is subject to critique and evaluation.

One of the most frequently elicited sources of political information identified in the previous chapter was family members, and in this category of the outcome space, the information is subject to challenge and debate:

> When we have family meals, yeah, we always talk about stuff, we talk about what's in the news. Then, because there's me, my brother, my sister, my sister's roommate, my mum, my mum's boyfriend and my grandparents all

around the table. We all have different views, and we're kind of throwing stuff across the table in debate. It's nice to like do is as a family. I won't do it with my friends, because that'd be weird. I don't want to get angry with them. I do that with my brother! (P8 FG1)

Discussion between family members who were identified as sources of information also played a role in the experience of political information for one participant:

My dad's girlfriend's a journalist for magazines, but my nana always thinks she's right and they always have disagreements about news, especially Diana dying, and the royals and all that. (P31 FG1)

Another participant discussed how political discussion was actively avoided when certain members of their family were present:

We disagree a lot. We don't bring politics up much, especially when both my nanas are around. (P8 FG1)

In Category Five, political discussion in several forms, including discussion between peers and with authority figures, both in school and outside of school, is a central component of young people's experience of political information and is actively engaged with to help make sense of relevant political and social issues.

8.3.7.3 Information and agency

In this category, the relationship between information and agency is explicit. Some participants whose experiences of political information fall within this category viewed aspects of their formal education, including encountering information, as serving more of a purpose than just helping them to achieve academic qualifications. There is an acknowledgement that information is necessary to create the conditions for political agency. For example, what they learn about in school was viewed as being relevant to their roles as social beings with agency:

I think it's like skills for life as well, because we've met all our friends here. And hopefully we'll keep in touch. Like, when we go to uni – if we hadn't started off at school we might find it hard to make friends and we wouldn't know how to meet other people. (P22 FG1)

> I don't think it's just about the qualifications, cos that's the main reason, to get qualifications, but I think it's also about growing and not being socially awkward. (P29 FG1)

When political information is experienced as something which is relevant to one's own life, the connection between information from academic lessons and its relevance to everyday life is acknowledged. For example, one of the Sociology teachers regularly tried to teach students about how academic concepts apply to everyday life. This was viewed by several participants as being a useful and preferable way of teaching and learning than more traditional methods:

> I FG1: Do you like that style of teaching then?
>
> P15 FG1: Yeah. You learn more.
>
> P31 FG1: You do in sociology. He always brings up things in the news, like how does that fit in with what we're doing, like family or youth or something.
>
> P15 FG1: Well, it's kind of like they expect us to read from our notes and stuff. If it's just copied, it doesn't make sense, because it's not in our own words, and we're not going to remember it if we've not really thought about it and just looked at it and written it down. So I think it's better when they talk to us, because they can be talking and then they ask you to answer a question and if you haven't been listening you don't know what they're on about, so you have to make sure you're listening.

An example of the way in which participants who studied GCSE Sociology connected topics they were learning about in class to politics and to their own lives is the Married Couple's Allowance:

> David Cameron's trying to reduce tax for married people. Not stop tax completely, but make it less for married people. I think it's a form of pressure, cos like he's basically saying that he wants people to get married, cos that's how he thinks people should be. But if you're not happy like that, then well. Like what we were learning about in Sociology. It's like forcing people to be married - because people are that obsessed with money now. Cos money's such like a precious thing. (P9 FG1)

A recurring theme throughout discussion with participants about their opinions regarding votes for 16 year olds was that many participants had little faith in people their age to make the 'right' choice when it came to voting, which was connected in many cases to a

conception that young people did not have the capacity to use political information to make informed choices. The need for information was construed as being central to the ability to make meaningful and knowledgeable choices:

> P25 FG3: I still think you should be 18 when you vote cos think about how many idiots there are our age
> P4 FG3: There are so many immature people in our year
> P30 FG3: yeah but they wouldn't vote though
> P25 FG3: or they'd just vote for t'laugh
> P4 FG3: But then I know people who are 18 and they can vote and they're more immature than me and they can vote
> P25 FG3: I think we need to know more about it, we should learn more about it at school.

This awareness of the role of education for supporting the development of one's own political opinions also includes a critical conception of the role of teachers, and concern for how political education could be provided:

> P4 FG3: But then you've got to be careful because if you've got a teacher who's really Labour then they're not gonna say good things about Conservatives are they so, I don't know how you'd do it.

> P25 FG3: I think if you got taught in school you'd have to make sure it was someone...like totally neutral.

> P4 FG3: Yeah and like someone who actually voted on...like you know there are people who vote for Labour regardless, and then you get people who actually look into it each time and see which one is the best, I think you need someone like that, because otherwise you're going to get someone who's like really Labour and they'll be like "yeah these are good" and then they'd say some good things about Conservatives so they don't look too...but then they'll go back to Labour and just be positive about them in the end...

> P30 FG3: If they followed a party, they'd influence us.

> P12 FG3: They might totally lie about each one, and persuade you more to the one they're talking about.

8.3.7.4   Conception of politics

In this category, politics is conceived as something directly relevant to and affecting the individual's own life. It is seen as something to engage with, but is located in a position of more power than the individual themselves:

> I like the BBC because if something happens in the news, they make it so that you can understand it and conceive it, and how it relates to people. Say in politics, they show how things relate to the lower classes and things. (P2)

Whereas in the previous category, politics is conceived as something to be interested in for the purpose of future engagement, in this category politics is viewed as something to take an active interest in now. Forming political opinions is viewed as important:

> People who don't really care about politics are quite fascinating, like what they base their own opinions on. Like where do they get their opinions from?! I prefer people who care about politics because they understand that I care about politics and won't laugh at me because I'm 15 and have opinions about things like that. (P15)

8.3.7.5 Structure of awareness

In this category, using information to make knowledgeable decisions is the focus of the experience. Information which can help individuals to make sense of their lived experiences is central to the experience, which places the individual's own lived experience in the background of information experiences. For example, the quotation below illustrates the way in which a participant connected a cultural norm in Germany with their own familial financial circumstances:

> But then in Germany, don't you do that thing where, if you get a mortgage, like it's really hard to get a mortgage. But then it's better in the long term. In Germany if, God forbid, somebody's parents die, their mortgage gets passed on to the children so they don't end up in debt or anything, because of the house. My mum always says that we should do that here, because she'd do it. (P8 FG1)

Political information which is not deemed pertinent to the events in the individual's own life are on the margins of the experience; it is acknowledged as existing but will not become the focus of the experience until such a time as they come to be construed as being of direct relevance to the individual's own circumstances. The quotation below exemplifies this:

> I don't need to know about all the political parties yet but when I'm old enough to vote I can just go to the websites, that's where all the information is, like what they say they're going to do and that. (P6 FG3)

Additionally, broader social issues that are not perceived as being relevant to the individuals' own circumstances are on the margins of the experience.

Focus: making informed decisions

Background: own circumstances

Margin: irrelevant political information and broad sociopolitical issues
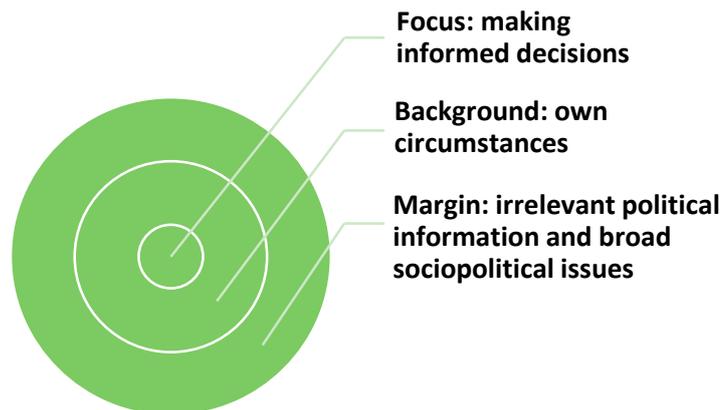
Figure 8.6: Structure of awareness for Category Five

8.3.8 Category Six: Political information is experienced as something which can help the individual work towards social change

Category Six is located alongside category four on level four of the outcome space. It represents a way of experiencing political information as something which can be actively used, understood and applied to not only one's own personal context, but a wider social context, in order to work towards social change and political reform.

The perception of political information from category four is built upon not only with a sense of the potential for political information to inform action, but also with a critical exploration of the information and application of the information to wider contexts.

This was the least heavily populated category in the coding of the interview and focus group transcripts, but nonetheless does represent an important aspect of participants' experiences of political information, which bears phenomenographic validity and should be considered equally as important as other more populated categories of description.

8.3.8.1 Production of information

In this category, individuals are developing a consciousness of the structures of power and systems of production involved in political information. They actively take part in the systems of information sharing and production with a view to enacting social change, by sharing sources of information such as links to news articles via social media, for example. They also share their own opinions on political issues, thereby contributing to what can be considered political information when it is construed as broadly as it was by the participants in this study.

Individuals also involve themselves in the production of political opinion, taking part in dialogue with the sources of political information they identify. This includes discussions and debates. Political opinion is *acted upon*, which relates to the sense of agency discussed in section 8.3.8.3. Individuals also contribute to the process of the production of information through sharing information and their own interpretations of the meanings and opinions being shared.

8.3.8.2 Evaluation of information

Within this category of description, individuals experience political information as something which is subject to critique and evaluation. They are able to use critical thinking skills relating to the information they encounter to assess the reliability of information and understand how aspects such as bias and misinformation from systems of power such as the government and mass media can be used to promote certain points of view which shape public opinion on political matters.

The following discussion that took place between participants in one focus group illustrates this way of experiencing the evaluation of political information:

> Px FG2: I'm not racist at all but you know that thing that happened? That thing in London where that black person...
> Px FG2: Yeah.
> Px FG2: I wasn't racist, but I saw it and I was a bit...
> Px FG2: That was terrorism though wasn't it. That was terrorists.

Px FG2: But then, anybody could have done that. People kill each other every day, horribly. They cut them up because they're really psychopathic. But because this person was black...Am I allowed to say that word?

I: Yep.

Px FG2: ...Black, **the media kind of thought, "Oh yeah, we'll get that" and they just...**

Px FG2: Yeah, made it massive like...

Px FG2: ...because he was black.

Px FG2: The media do think every bad thing that a coloured person does, is a terrorist attack to a certain extent.

Px FG2: Like white people do that every day. It's kind of just like saying, that all the Asian community are going to do that then, because that one person did it.

[my emphasis]

Px FG2: Yeah they think they're all in some secret alliance together, and that they're all planning something...

Facilitator: This is the media you're talking about?

Px FG2: Yeah, they just kinda say "Oh, they did it" and then because of that there were all those mosque attacks and stuff. It's people being stupid and the media is encouraging it.

Px FG2: It's people not understanding other peoples' religions, and people wanting to stick with their own views.

Px FG2: Like it's not like black people are going to come and shoot down the school any time soon, are they? The media is saying that because they are of African descent, they're just going to do it. [my emphasis]

Within this category, individuals are aware that they experience political information via mass media, whilst applying critical thought to the messages being communicated:

I FG1: And what do you think the role of the media is?

P9 FG1: Bad. They just make things massive.

P2 FG1: They just want a big story.

P15 FG1: They want to make us scared that terrorists are out to get us all the time.

P29 FG1: They want to get money from us because they know that people are generally interested, and they know that if they write about it or talk about stuff people care about then people will pay to read it or watch it.

Other participants discussed their conception of how learning about other cultures and histories in school can contribute to their understanding of the world around them:

P14 FG3: We need to learn about different cultures, not just our own. Say we were in a different country, and we always expect people to know about us, and then we assume just because we're English we don't need to learn about other cultures.

> P6 FG3: We say stuff about "all these foreigners coming over here" but think about all the people who move abroad from England and they don't bother learning their language. I watched a programme about people saying all foreigners coming over don't know anything because they don't speak English, but then when we go over to other countries on holiday or move abroad, and we expect everyone to talk English. We don't make an effort with their countries.

> P25 FG3: I think that's true. I think we need to still learn about their cultures, their history…but every topic we do is like American history. If it was about learning about cultures and history, shouldn't we do like one topic on American, one on ours, one about another country?

Some participants had an awareness that subjects such as Religious Education and Personal Development provided them with information that contributes to their understanding of other cultures, and viewed this as something important:

> I wouldn't say it's a waste of time or pointless, because you have got to learn about other people's cultures, find out what they do, like it *is* interesting. (P31 FG1)

The participants discussed how they thought it was important to appreciate other people's cultural contexts and understand the differences between people, in a way which conveyed a higher level conception of world citizenship and associated notions of inclusivity, tolerance and social awareness.

8.3.8.3 Information and agency

In this category, the relationship between information and agency is explicit. When political information is experienced as something that can help the individual to work towards social change, individuals connect their engagement with political information to *action* through the conception of being informed enough to become involved in political activities. These activities can be low in intensity, such as sharing political opinions through debate and discussion both online and in person, but also include more intense involvement in activities such as protests.

In this category, information is connected to a sense of agency and potential for social change. One participant discussed in more depth their use of Tumblr as a source of information about political and social issues - specifically for this participant, information about feminism:

> On Tumblr you'll see a picture and it'll come with a little caption about it, and then everybody will talk about what they think about it, and they can have a debate on it… And there'll be different things that they talk about, like…feminism and stuff I hadn't learnt about before. (P9)

8.3.8.4 Conception of politics

In this category, "politics" is construed as any issue in the public domain or relating to public policy. This includes issues of fairness and justice, and distribution of social goods. An example of this conception of politics is the understanding of politics to include issues of gender equality:

> Well like, does feminism and stuff count as political because I don't really care about politics politics but I'm interested in other stuff. (P9)

This conception of politics also includes awareness of issues around public accountability and good governance, which was communicated by some participants as a lack of trust in political officials' trustworthiness:

> It's just sad when you see all of them shouting at each other and you can't trust them anyway, they never do what they say they're going to do, it's really pathetic. (P1)

8.3.8.5 Structure of awareness

When political information is experienced as something which can support social change, the focus of the experience is on how the information being encountered can be used to articulate the need for and work towards social change. Information that is encountered is placed into a broader social context and the inherently political nature of the information is acknowledged. The relevance of the information to not only enabling the individual to participate meaningfully in political processes but to working towards achieving benefits for society more broadly is the centre of the experience. The focus of the experience on the

application of the information encountered to politics and social change, is illustrated by the following quotation:

> I like going to village meetings even though I'm the youngest one there because it's where you find out local things that you don't hear about , even in *The Free Press*. I like to know what I can do about things, how I can help. Like the other day, with the protest against the building work, they were saying what you can write in letters to the councillors and that. (P26)

The relevance of the information to helping the individual to achieve social change is experienced alongside evaluative approaches to discerning whether the information being encountered is reliable and accurate and can therefore be trusted to use as part of making informed decisions and taking action.

The individual's own personal political and social context is in the background of the experience and is used to connect the relevance of the information being encountered to social change and how the individual is placed to use the information and take action. The quotation below exemplifies this:

> I know I'm only young but I still think there are things I can do…even though I can't vote yet and I don't know loads of things. It helps to know about what's going on and then you can stand up for things when it matters. (P14)

The diagram below illustrates the structure of awareness in this category:

Focus: Relevance of information to politics and social change, evaluation of information

Background: personal context
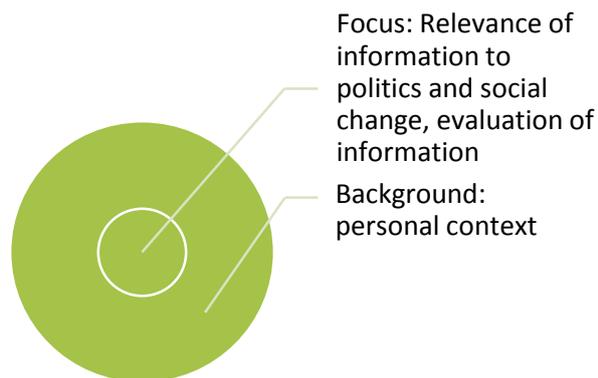
Figure 8.7: Structure of awareness for Category Six

8.4 Levels of the outcome space

The following sections describe the four levels which form the structure and hierarchy of the outcome space. These are illustrated below:
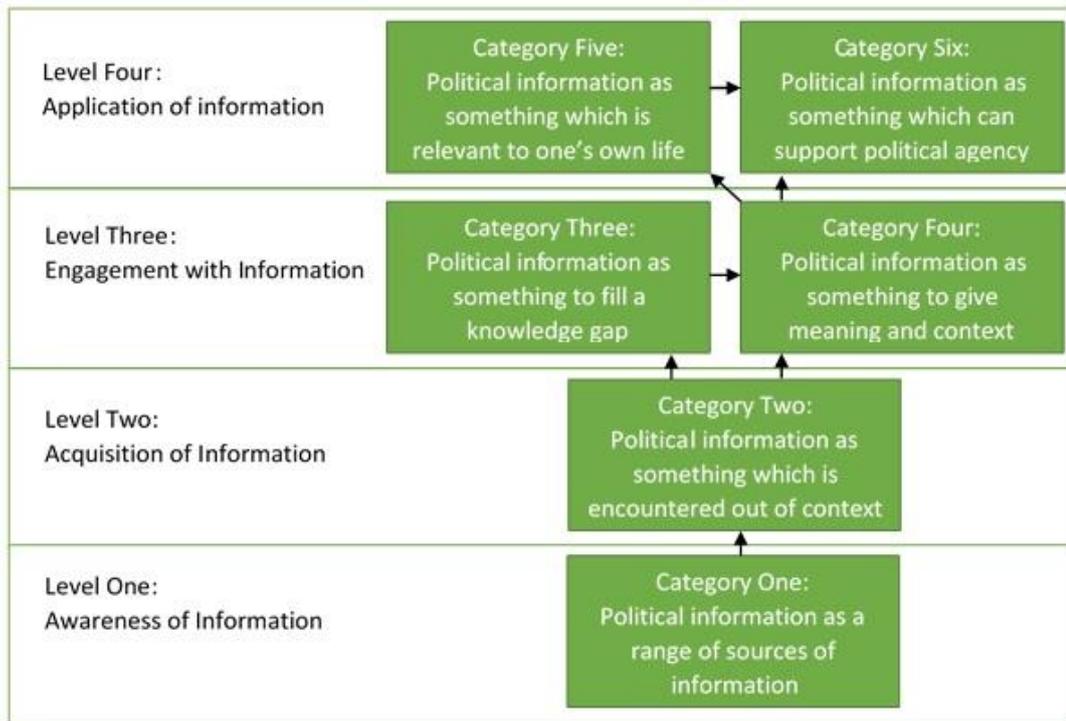
Figure 8.8: The hierarchical relationship between categories in the outcome space

8.4.1 Level One: Awareness of information

Level One represents the least sophisticated way of experiencing political information. *Category One: Political information as a range of sources of information* is located on Level One of the outcome space, because it represents the least complex way of experiencing political information. There is an awareness that information about politics exists, and an awareness of several different sources of political information. On this level, political information is seen as external to the individual, even where human beings are identified as information sources. Political knowledge is not acquired from the information because the information sources do not transmit information (neither passively nor actively) to the individual.

8.4.2   Level Two: Acquisition of information

Category Two: Political information as something which is encountered out of context is located on Level Two of the outcome space. This level represents a slightly more complex level of understanding than Level One, but is still relatively basic. On this level, participants are not only aware that information about politics exists, but are also aware that political information is received and transmitted by themselves and other people or sources. It remains external to the individual and is not viewed as being contextual, but is conceptualised as being subjective rather than objective, as observed on the previous level. Although individuals are aware that they encounter and acquire political knowledge through exposure to political information, this knowledge it is not engaged with through discussion or questioning.

8.4.3   Level Three: Engagement with information

Level Three of the outcome space contains *Category Three: Political information as something to fill a knowledge gap* and *Category Four: Political information as something to give context*. On this level, participants are aware that they encounter political information and acquire knowledge from it, and also form meaning and understanding with this information, which sets it apart from the previous two levels, and adds to the sophistication of the experiences on this level. Information is experienced within different contexts but is still experienced as being external to the individual. Discussion and debate around the political information encountered is seen on this level and Level Four, as a manifestation of the processing of the information and development of meaning and understanding. However, the knowledge and understanding gained from engagement with the information is not meaningfully applied in any way that could be understood as 'transformative'.

8.4.4   Level Four: Application of information

Category Five: Political information is experienced as something which is relevant to one's own life, and *Category Six: Political information is experienced as something which can help the individual work towards social change*, are on Level Four of the outcome space, which

represents a more complex experience of political information. Experiences of political information on this level can be understood as being 'transformative' to some degree. On this level, participants are aware that they encounter political information and acquire knowledge from it, and then develop meaning and understanding from the information, but also *do* something with this information to put it to use, which is not present in the previous levels. Use of the information can include communicating meaning to other people, using the information to make choices and decisions, or using the information to take action. It thereby includes both passive and active notions of the application of information.

8.4.5   Summary

This section has presented the four different levels of the outcome space on which the six categories of description are located. Although these levels do not directly correlate to information literacy or informed learning processes, they may be viewed as a rough process of information use, as presented in the diagram below. This process is discussed in relation to previous phenomenographic studies in the next chapter.

The following section presents the outcome space and the structure of its contents; the levels of awareness, categories of description, and dimensions of variation.

8.5 Variation in the structures of awareness and dimensions of variation

A significant observation can be made regarding the development of the structures of variation across the categories of description: there is a shift from external to internal ways of experiencing political information, which indicates an increasing degree of sophistication within the outcome space as the categories of description develop. Observations can be made regarding the development of the dimensions of variation across the categories of description:

1) As the categories of description move up the hierarchy, the individual becomes more involved in production of information and is more aware of systems of production;
2) The individual exhibits more sophisticated experiences regarding the evaluation of information and information sources;

3) The individual experiences an increasing sense of agency derived from the experiences of political information.

Additionally, observations can be made regarding the similarities between the construct categories identified in Chapter Seven and the aspects of awareness that exist within the structures of awareness. These are discussed below.

8.6 Summary of findings

The phenomenographic analysis of the focus group and interview transcripts identified six qualitatively different ways in which political information is experienced by young people. Together, these categories represent the phenomenon of the experience of political information, and are:

1) Category One: Political information is experienced as a range of sources of information
2) Category Two: Political information is experienced as something which is encountered out of context
3) Category Three: Political information is experienced as something to fill a knowledge gap
4) Category Four: Political information is experienced as something to give meaning and context
5) Category Five: Political information is experienced as something which is relevant to one's own life
6) Category Six: Political information is experienced as something which can help achieve social change

These categories represent a breadth of experiences which were experienced by individuals, but do not represent the experiences of specific individuals and instead represent the range of experiences communicated by all of the participants. Some of the participants experienced political information in only one of these ways, whereas other participants experienced political information in several of these ways.

The analysis also yielded several dimensions of variation, which are common themes experienced in different ways in each category of description. These dimensions of variation are:

1) Production of information
2) Evaluation of information
3) Information and agency
4) Conception of politics

Central to and in addition to the different ways in which young people experience political information, are the variety of ways in which they conceive of the notion of politics itself. These different ways of understanding what politics is and means to them have been described, and presented as an inclusive and expanding concentric structure.

This chapter has presented the findings from the interviews and focus groups conducted for this study. The qualitatively different ways in which young people experience political information are presented in the form of an outcome space. The outcome space can stand alone as a representation of young people's variation in experiences of political information, which may contribute to an understanding of the phenomenon and enable educators, including librarians, to approach helping young people develop their information literacy skills relating to political knowledge and participation. However, as discussed in Chapter Four, a critical dimension is lacking.

The next chapter discusses how the findings from Chapters Seven and Eight relate to previous research, and identifies relevant critical pedagogical concepts which could help add a top-down consideration of the structural and systemic reasons behind young people's experiences of political information, in order to suggest ways educators may approach political education and information literacy to help young people acknowledge and understand the structural influences on their information experiences, worldviews and sense of political agency.

9. Discussion of Findings

This chapter discusses the findings from Chapters Seven and Eight, relating previous studies from LIS to the personal construct analysis and phenomenographic analysis of the data from this study. The discussion includes studies which have focused on the phenomenon in question (young people's experiences of political information and perceptions of politics in general), which due to the novelty of the research and approach from a LIS perspective can often be found outside of the LIS literature. The majority of phenomenographic studies in LIS take a learning-centred approach and focus on experiences of information literacy as a learning process, rather than experiences of information as a 'pure' phenomenon. However, one comparable study has been identified (Smith 2010). The outcome space generated in this study is compared to the findings of the previous relevant outcome space and other studies are drawn upon to illuminate individual aspects of the outcome space and to identify the ways in which this study contributes to the development of understanding young people's experiences of information.

The chapter is structured as follows:

- Section 9.1 discusses the findings from the personal construct analysis in Chapter Seven, connecting the results of the analysis from this study to previous LIS research and research from areas such as Political Science. The studies referenced bear similarities and/or differences to the findings of this study in relation to young people's sources of political information and their conceptions of them, which are highlighted throughout the section;

- Section 9.2 discusses the findings from Chapter Eight, connecting the findings of previous LIS-related phenomenographic studies into information behaviour and young people's experiences of education. The key similarities and differences in terms of categories of experience, levels of the outcome spaces and structures of awareness are discussed;

- Section 9.3 summarises the discussion of the findings from Chapters Seven and Eight, to summarise the ways in which personal construct theory and phenomenography illuminate the understanding of young people's experiences of political information and contribute to theory in this area, in preparation for the exploration of how the findings and application of theory can contribute to practice in Chapter 10.

9.1 Research Question 1: What sources of information influence young people's political opinions and worldviews?

This section discusses the findings from Chapter Seven, connecting the results of the analysis from this study to previous LIS research and research from other relevant disciplines. The following section identifies similarities and differences in the most frequently identified sources of information used by young people in this study, in comparison to findings from previous relevant studies.

9.1.1 Discussion of the findings from the repertory grid analysis

The participants in this study report using or being exposed to a number of sources of information that they feel influences their political opinions and worldviews. The chart in Chapter Eight Section 7.3.3 illustrates the frequency with which the participants identified different sources of political information, grouped by category. The most significant source reported by participants is *people*, most often their parents, but also other family members, friends and teachers. The other most frequently elicited sources were mass media (television, radio and newspapers), the internet and social media. Less frequently identified sources of political information were based in school and the community.

This section discusses what can be learnt from the identification and analysis of the most frequently identified sources of political information the participants discussed in the interviews and focus groups. In Chapter Seven, a broad range of young people's political information sources were identified. The majority of these sources were conceptualised by the participants as being informal information sources, and the constructs and descriptions used by the participants roughly correspond with Kaye's (1995) typology of formal sources of information as "those which are constituted in some regularized or legal manner in relation to the user", and informal sources of information as "those which have no such basis" (although Kaye's typology relates to management information, the definitions are broad enough to apply to other contexts). In meeting political information needs, participants for the most part, perhaps unsurprisingly, did not seek information in formal, scholarly resources such as textbooks, but they also did not report using subject specific websites. Instead, the use of people, mass media and social media was far more prevalent, which is in line with Kaye's (1995) suggestion that people "frequently prefer personal and informal contacts

and sources to published documents and formal sources generally". Participants' experiences and conceptions of these preferred sources are discussed below.

9.1.2.1 *People*

The 'people' category constituted a significant proportion of the information sources identified by the participants. The use of people as primary sources of information is well-established in information behaviour literature (Gross & Latham 2007; Smith and Hepworth 2005; Case 2002) as well as political science literature (Eichhorn et al., 2014). People make up an important aspect of participants' political information repertoire, which supports the findings from several studies, including Yates (2013) and Williamson et al. (2012) that family, friends and other social networks play an important role in people's informational worlds and are often a preferred source of information through discussions.

The phenomenographic and personal construct analysis of the data provided an insight into the variety of ways young people experience people as sources of information. In Chapter Seven, I discussed the range of relationships participants have with family members, friends and teachers, and in Chapter Eight I demonstrated how this variation can be mapped onto a phenomenographic outcome space. In Categories One and Two, individuals do not evaluate the characteristics of the various information sources, including people, but in Categories Three to Six, individuals experience different ways of being aware of and critiquing the inherent biases of the people from whom they receive political information. The individuals' levels of involvement with people as sources of information increase as the Categories of Experience develop. This is in line with Yates' (2013, p.181) observation that in Category One of her outcome space, people do not distinguish between "formal" and "informal" or "expert" and "layperson" when it comes to using the information provided, whereas in Category Six (Participating in Learning Communities), in which people play a significant role in individuals' informational world, people play a more central role in individuals' experiences of political information. In Yates' presentation of Category Six, however, although the aspect of information evaluation is present (for example where participants identify some people as more knowledgeable (p.154)), it is not a core aspect of the experience of the phenomenon, which contrasts with the outcome space in this study, where evaluation is an element of the Structure of Awareness throughout the outcome space.

Family members and friends were frequently identified as people with whom they discuss political issues and share political information. This is in line with findings from Levinsen and Yndigegn (2015), whose participants also identified these people as key to political discussion. These people were often construed by participants as reliable sources of information, which echoes the findings of Savolainen (1995), who described participants' conceptions of family members and friends as reliable sources of information. Additionally, several participants described information from people as being presented in a more understandable way, which corresponds to Smith's (2010) findings that "participants deemed that information from people was easier to understand" than information from other formats of source.

The significance of other people as a source of political information is indicative of the importance of other people to the process of learning information literacy identified by Diehm and Lupton (2012, pp.13-14). Participants in this study discussed how their interaction with friends, family members and teachers shape not only their political views but also the ways in which they understand the transmission of information, how mass media functions and how opinion can be presented as fact, for example. The constructs used to describe the choice of people as sources of political information echo the findings of Gross and Latham (2007), who found that factors influencing students' choice of person included the immediacy, ease of access and the perceived expertise of the person and their level of comfort and familiarity with the person.

The use of people as sources of information and the participants' associated constructs raises the question of how *effective* the use of people as sources of political information by young people is. Research has found that young people over-estimate their information literacy capabilities (Gross & Latham, 2009) and that low-skilled individuals are unable to assess the capabilities of others (Kruger & Dunning, 1999). These findings are echoed in the findings from this study, which identify several aspects of the evaluation of political information which can be viewed as potentially ineffective. The findings presented in Chapters Seven and Eight indicate that the participants of this study may benefit from support from teachers, librarians and other educators skilled in information literacy to help them understand the issues such as bias, which some of the participants were aware of to an extent, but in many cases dismissed because the information exchanges were perceived as meeting immediate information needs, even if the information received was not accurate or complete, as observed in experiences of information within Category Four.

9.1.2.2   Mass media

Another key theme which emerged from the presentation of the research findings was the significance of mass media in young people's political information repertoires. Several forms of mass media, including television news, newspapers and the radio, as well as television news comedy shows and magazines, were cited not only as sources of political information, but were construed as being sources of significant *amounts* of information, highly *trusted* sources of information and very *influential* sources of information when it came to participants' discussions around gaining knowledge and forming opinions. These findings are in line with the concept of mass media being a "mobilising agent" for political participation (Norris 2002) and supports Scheufele & Nisbet's (2002) hypothesis that "traditional mass media maintain a key role in promoting democratic citizenship" even in the present day when the internet is often promoted as being the main mobilising agent for political engagement. This assertion is also made by Williamson et al. (2012), who identified print media as an information source with continuing relevance to young people.

However, the participants in this study did not actively acquire print media as a source of political information. When they described how they encountered newspapers, they reported to read whatever was lying around at school and on buses or whatever their parents purchased. This is in line with findings from (Sveningsson 2015, p.4) who found that young people were most likely to read the newspaper if it was on the table at home, usually at the weekend. The same study also found that engagement with television news often occurred as a way for young people to spend time with their parents; this is congruent with the findings from this study. It is also in line with the empirical study by Foster & Ford (2003) who found that serendipitous discovery can be a significant element of information encountering and that methods to exploit serendipity may be learnt. This is something which bears further exploration in relation to encountering political information.

Television specifically was cited as a major influence on participants, which echoes the findings of the HeadsUp report, which found that "TV seemed to be the most favoured medium" for young people when it comes to political information (HeadsUp 2009, p.6). From a critical perspective, this raises issues with how effective television is as a source of political information, especially television news, which participants often reported as their first and most frequently accessed information source. Fahmy identifies the limitations of television news, arguing that political news fails to

"communicate the centrality of politics to the social and economic circumstances shaping young people's political lives". The result of this is that young people disengage from political life (Fahmy 2006, p.149). The participants in this study frequently associated political information on television news with Westminster and formal political processes, which are the forms of politics many young people do disengage from, and which Henderson (2014) found were often synonymous with each other in the minds of young people in the UK, and which serves to remove politics from everyday life.

This was observed to an extent in participants of this study, as described in Chapter Seven, where participants discuss how they watch the news to become informed, but often feel it has little to do with their own lives and experiences. Television was viewed more as a source of entertainment and conceptualised in passive ways. This suggests there is a limit to the mobilising capabilities of television as a source of political information, which echoes Fahmy's assertion that television may contribute to political "malaise" (Ibid).

Several participants identified the entertaining nature of the television programmes they watch and talked about how they construed topical comedy shows as being educational (7.3.4.5.4). This belief may have some validity; Becker and Waisanen's (2013) examination of the impact of political comedy argues that exposure to political comedy has an "encouraging effect on individuals". Not only this, but watching political comedy shows may also contribute to political agency. Becker and Waisanen (2013) argue that watching shows such as The Colbert Report and The Daily Show increases the likelihood that young people will engage in politics. When discussing political information received from mass media sources, participants tended to identify not only entertainment or information as characteristics of the sources. This is in line with Case's assertion that the binary conception of entertainment vs. information is arbitrary and inaccurate (Case 2007, p.108) and too complex an issue to categorise content as being one or the other (Ibid, p.113).

Three different comedy shows were identified as a source of information by one participant. This mirrors the findings of Kim and Vishak (2008) who identified that entertainment media is increasingly reported as an important and informative source of political information.

This may reflect Kim and Vishak's conclusions that "entertainment media facilitate fairly stable and chronically accessible attitudes, such as stereotypical or ideology-based judgments, and generate

relatively little additive effect of new information in political judgments". The authors emphasise the importance of exploring the role of entertainment media on political knowledge and attitudes of younger citizens, suggesting that an over-reliance on comedy news programmes as a source of political information may have implications for levels of political knowledge because entertainment media may be a less effective format for acquiring political knowledge than news media, and retention of knowledge may be less (Kim & Vishak, 2008).

The findings from Chapter Seven relating to the number of participants who reported that they use print media such as newspapers to find information about current events, and their use of social media to communicate with friends rather than to find out about current events, support the findings of Williamson et al. (2012), whose study of the everyday life information seeking of young people identified that young people use a range of formats of information to "suit their particular needs and purposes".

9.1.2.3   The internet and social media

Most participants identified at least one online source of political information, including social media resources. Their descriptions of their use of the internet for political information echoed the findings of several studies of young people's information use more widely. As discussed in Chapter Seven, several participants identified the internet as a single source of political information and then when asked to specify what information they found through the internet as a source referred to Google as information. This is similar to findings from (Smith, M., 2010) who found that participants referred to Google as 'information' rather than as a 'source of information'. This is in line with Buckland's (1991) discussion of the word 'information', in which he argues that as a result of the ambiguousness of the term, its meaning can take several forms, including the conception of "information-as-thing".

When participants identified the internet as a source of political information, the websites consulted were most frequently identified as news websites from major news publishers such as the BBC. These sites were visited directly rather than via search engines. This finding is in line with that of Williamson et al. (2012), who also found that participants have a high degree of trust for "quality online sources".

The frequency with which social media and the internet more generally were named as sources of information echoes the observations of several authors, that the internet is one of the most significant sources of information for children and young people (Madden et al., 2006). However, when discussing their use of social media, the majority of participants identified it as a source of political information in that they communicate with friends and are exposed to content shared by their peers rather than social media being a source of political information in terms of news gathering. This finding concurs with that of Williamson et al. (2012), who also found that young people perceive social media as an important method of communication rather than active searching for information.

Several participants who said they use internet to supplement information or rumours they heard elsewhere, and expressed the opinion that they were not sure how to evaluate which search results would be most relevant apart from by clicking top links. This behaviour is of course not limited to young people, but studies of young people have found that it is indeed common within this group (Bartlett & Miller, C., 2011). Other participants reported that they use social media to discuss current events and political issues. This finding is supported by Green et al. (2015), who identified that many young people do take part in political discussions via social media.

One participant reported viewing Tumblr as a source of political information, which they said had exposed them to the concept of feminism, which they had not previously encountered. In this sense, Tumblr could be viewed as a form of "alternative media" (Atton, 2006), which provides access to information and opinions not typically available through more mainstream media, and which may provide people (of all ages, but in this instance young people) with an insight into "subaltern" political and social communications, thereby enabling them to develop agency.

9.1.2.4   School

In addition to the position of teachers as sources of information, specific aspects of schooling were identified by participants as sources of political information. School - citizenship lessons specifically, were identified by several participants as being one of the main agencies through which they could be informed about politics. Although some participants in this study identified citizenship lessons as one of the agencies for political information, they noted that their own political learning through these lessons was limited and they found citizenship education to be lacking in sufficient relevant

content to feel knowledgeable enough to make meaningful political decisions. This echoes the findings of Fahmy (2006, p.137) who identifies citizenship education as focusing on political literacy and traditional civics, based on factual knowledge in ways which do not motivate young people to become involved in politics or equip them with the skills and awareness they need to engage in political life. Similarly, the HeadsUp (2009) report finds that young people are not aware of the extent of formal political education in schools. However, where HeadsUp come to the conclusion that the fault must lie with young people due to their lack of "awareness" about the content of the compulsory Citizenship curriculum, I would argue that the participants in this study did not lack awareness about what they were *supposed* to be taught, and rather that they did not conceive whatever they *were* taught to be *sufficient*, as illustrated by quotes from participants in Chapters Seven and Eight. As was found in the HeadsUp study (HeadsUp, 2009), participants suggested that more political engagement could help to combat apathy and ignorance, and this was an attitude several of the participants of this study were keen to express.

9.2 Research Question 2: In what qualitatively different ways do young people conceive of the sources of information which influence their political opinions and worldviews? and Research Question 3: Do young people think about this political information critically?

In this section, the findings from Chapters Seven and Eight are discussed in connection to the findings of previous LIS-related studies into young people's experiences of information to answer the second research question: *In what qualitatively different ways do young people conceive of the sources of information which influence their political opinions and worldviews?* The key similarities and differences in terms of categories of experience, levels of the outcome spaces and structures of awareness are discussed. The section is structured in the format of the categories of description from the outcome space in Chapter Eight, and each section draws upon the findings of previous studies which are relevant to the findings drawn from the outcome space in each category.

9.2.2   Discussion of the findings from the personal construct analysis

The personal construct categorisation and structural analysis of the repertory grid data help to answer this research question relating to the different ways in which young people experience and understand political information. It is apparent that the participants conceive of what they consider to be political information and the sources that provide it in a variety of different ways, and that the ways in which different participants perceive and construe the same sources can be very different.

Through construct categorisation, six major themes of constructs were identified:

1) Category One: Constructs describing practical features of the elements
2) Category Two: Constructs evaluating the quality of the information
3) Category Three: Constructs evaluating the authority of the source
4) Category Four: Constructs describing a socio-political understanding about the source
5) Category Five: Constructs relating to affective responses to the information source
6) Category Six: Constructs relating to how the participant interacts with the information

These categories represent qualitatively different ways in which participants express their views about the sources of political information and the perceived characteristics of the information they receive from the sources. These ways of construing sources indicate that political information sources are understood subjectively. Participants used a range of methods of evaluation and different degrees of critique.

The ways of construing political information have not previously been explored using the repertory grid technique, so it is not possible to compare these results with previous personal construct studies. However, ways of conceptualising information have been identified by several previous LIS and related studies, and the most relevant studies of are discussed in this section.

9.2.2.1   Category One: Constructs describing practical features of the elements

This category was the most heavily populated and represents the most basic of the ways of construing the information sources, on the basis of their practical characteristics. The subcategories within this category are geographic coverage, audience characteristics, topic coverage, political content, time of use, frequency of use, communication between speakers, size of audience, location of information, location of speaker, financial cost, and place of use. This finding is similar to that of

Crudge and Johnson's research into conceptions of search engines, where constructs similar to those in Category One of this study were described as "basic description" (Crudge & Johnson 2007, p.266). The identification of these kinds of characteristics of information sources is a necessary starting point for the further analysis of the information, but is not significant to the study. In addition to the category of "basic information", Crudge and Johnson's study identifies subcategories of construct which, owing to the difference in the nature of the phenomenon under scrutiny, do not correspond with the grouping of subcategories into major categories in this study, but which bear a resemblance in terms of the ways information sources can be construed. These include constructs of quality, relevance, ease of use, and the effort, and boredom, all of which were identified as ways of construing political information in this study. Other relevant aspects of this study are discussed later in this section.

9.2.2.2   Category Two: Constructs evaluating the quality of the information

Categories Two and Three within the personal construct analysis most closely resemble ways of understanding information literacy. Although the definition of information literacy can be difficult to pin down, as discussed in Chapter Three, the constructs within Categories Two and Three relate to the evaluation of information based on perceived characteristics of the sources and the information they communicate. This is one way in which information literacy can be conceptualised (Webber & Johnston, 2000, p.383).

Category Two specifically focuses on ways in which the participants describe their evaluation of the quality of the information being communicated. The measures they use include the amount of information, its perceived validity, truth, currency, clarity, relevance and accuracy, among several other subcategories. This study was not an exploration of young people's information seeking behaviour, nor an assessment of their information literacy skills, and it is therefore not possible to identify to what extent the findings of young people's reported behaviours and skills match their actual behaviour, and how these compare to findings from comparable studies. However, it was possible to identify what facets of information the participants report influence their attitudes to the information, and it is possible to compare these measures of information quality with how young people in other studies judge information quality. The most relevant studies are discussed below.

The majority of participants provided at least two or three constructs relating to how they evaluate the quality of the political information they encounter. The rankings of the elements along these constructs and their comments in relation to information quality indicate that it is an important factor in their use of political information. This contrasts with Gross and Latham's (2009) findings that information quality was not a high priority for young people. The need to evaluate quality for Gross and Latham's participants was managed through the use of academic resources for the purpose of study, and in everyday life, information quality was not perceived as important. The findings from their study indicate that information use for political knowledge and participation may be viewed differently to both information use for academic purposes and information use in everyday life.

The participants most frequently judged the quality of information in relation to the amount of information provided by the source, and considered how relevant and current the information was to be of key importance to its degree of validity and truth. This corresponds to the findings of Shenton and Dixon (2004) who observed that quantity was often preferred over quality in young people's assessments of information.

The speed of information acquisition and degree to which the information was considered understandable was also central to participants' evaluation of political information. Sources which were considered to be easy to acquire and use tended to be ranked more highly along other constructs and participants identified a preference for these sources. This is again in line with the findings of Shenton and Dixon (2004) who identified that the principle of least effort can come into play when young people are seeking information.

Other factors influencing the perceived quality of the information and the source included the currency of the information, and features such as accuracy, authority and trustworthiness, as well as how understandable, easy to obtain, and relevant the information was perceived as being. This contrasts with the findings of Hirsch (1999) who determined that the younger participants in their study were less concerned with these characteristics and more interested in whether information is new, interesting and convenient. The newness of information was not a measure of information quality for the participants in this study, but the level of interest in the information and how convenient it was were factors in the assessment of information quality, as well as the other factors previously identified. In contrast with the study of college students by Rieh and Hilligoss (2008), it

appears that many (although not all) participants *do* judge the quality of information by its presence on the internet, which suggests that age and experience may be a factor in the development of information literacy skills in everyday life.

A notable absence from the constructs relating to the evaluation of the quality of political information was a critical dimension focusing on *how* information could be established as true, reliable, valid etc. When asked how information could be evaluated for these characteristics, participants were uncertain. This echoes the findings of Gross and Latham (2009), who also identified an absence of critical thinking about information.

9.2.2.3   Category Three: Constructs evaluating the authority of the source

This category included constructs which participants used to determine the authority of the elements, or information sources. As discussed in Chapter Seven, this is distinct from Category Two, in which the authority of the information is conceptualised, rather than the source itself. However, as discussed in the previous section, the constructs identified by the participants relating to the evaluation of the quality and authority of the information and the source can all be connected to the concept of information literacy and an understanding of the ways in which information can be judged.

Sources which ranked highly for authority did so because participants considered them knowledgeable, experienced, trustworthy and well-intentioned. Other factors which influenced how authoritative sources of political information were considered to be included the personality of the source, their level of formality and 'modern' they were considered to be in general terms. These criteria, and the other criteria identified in Categories Two and Three are similar to those identified in a systematic review of the literature by Pickard et al. (2014).

One of the most significant findings relating to the identification of sources of political information used or encountered by the participants in this study is that the majority of participants preferred to receive political information from other people, regardless of the constructs they related to these sources. This is in line with Case's findings that people tend to prefer other people of sources of information, even when the information is not as reliable or authoritative as from other sources (Case 2007, p.200).

Another significant finding was that despite many participants using evaluative words and discussing their concerns around the authority and quality of information, the participants often used inaccurate words to describe the aspect of information evaluation they were talking about. This indicates a possible shortfall in critical evaluation skills, similar to the findings of previous studies in which a lack of evaluation of sources was identified, despite participants' indication of awareness of methods of evaluation (Becker, N. J., 2003). Although this study focused on student search skills using the internet, this lack of understanding and/or application of evaluative criteria was observed in relation to offline information sources as well as online sources within this study.

9.2.2.4   Category Four: Constructs describing a socio-political understanding about the source

This category was less heavily populated, reflecting the limitations of the depth of understanding of political information by the participants. No related studies were identified which could be considered relevant to the illumination of this category.

9.2.2.5   Category Five: Constructs relating to affective responses to the information source

This category includes those constructs relating to the level of influence the information has on the participants, the degree to which participants agree or disagree with the messages communicated by the information sources, their level of interest in the information presented by the source, their emotional reactions to the information, how entertaining the information is, and how much participants feel they can relate to the sources. These affective elements can be found in other classifications of emotion, for example in the semantic space for emotions illustrated by Lopatovska & Arapakis (2011, p.582).

This affective dimension to ways of construing information sources was also found by Crudge and Johnson (2007), who identify an "affective layer" to the constructs provided by the participants in their personal construct study of conceptions of search engines, which includes boredom, confusion and frustration (Ibid, p.274). Both studies tended to find that the emotions being conveyed were negative, although the significance of this is not possible to identify because it was not an explicit aim of either study to explore the full range of emotions experienced by participants when using certain information sources. It is interesting to note that in the same way that I did not explicitly ask participants to talk about emotional elements of their experiences of political information, Crudge

and Johnson did not require their participants to make their emotions explicit - yet both studies yielded a strong dimension of affect from the participants, who were forthcoming with their emotional experiences. In the same way that I have not sought to measure the extent to which affective constructs influence the evaluation of information sources, Crudge and Johnson assert that the application of psychological theories of emotion would be required to effectively consider this issue, which is beyond the scope of both their study and this study.

The most significant aspect of this category is the influence of sources of political information on young people's emotions and moods, and the ways in which the participants expressed a preference for certain sources and an avoidance of others because of their perceived affective and emotional impact. For example, television news and newspapers were avoided by some participants because the content makes them "sad". This is in line with assertions by Yadamsuren and Heinström (2011) that engagement with television news can have affective responses, many of which can be negative.

Although the engagement with political information as it is conceptualised in this study is not part of an information seeking process, some information seeking behaviour research is of relevance here, particularly around the phenomenon of information avoidance, because they approach the topic with the assumption that affective factors can influence people's choices about using information (Savolainen 2014, p.59). Indeed, affective factors may often be more influential than cognitive needs in relation to information seeking (Wilson., 1981). In the same way that emotions and feelings may result in individuals avoiding active information seeking, emotions and feelings in this study resulted in individuals avoiding passive information encountering. Savolainen's analysis of affective influences in information seeking identified negative emotions as a core factor in people's information behaviour. The findings of this study reflect this assertion; the majority of constructs relating to affective responses were about negative emotions and feelings, such as sadness, anger and frustration. These were key motivating factors for participants' avoidance of engagement with information sources.

However, positive emotions and feelings also played a motivational role for participants. Some expressed a preference for sources of political information that are perceived as funny and entertaining, and believe the information is more likely to help their development of knowledge and understanding. Although positivist in nature and therefore contradictory in epistemology to this study, the Uses and Gratifications paradigm may be a useful lens through which to view this finding.

Lin (1993) used the uses and gratifications approach to identify several positive outcomes sought by young people when engaging with different forms of media. One of the forms of gratification was entertainment, which was a positive affective element identified by participants in this study when discussing their engagement with television news. Another affective element was the enhancement of interpersonal communication, with some participants discussing how they may encounter information online, on television or the radio or in a newspaper, and then discuss the information they had encountered with friends and family. Entertainment and the enhancement of social interaction are two of the five goals for media use identified within the uses and gratifications paradigm (McQuail, 2005), and these are identified in the reasons participants engage with media in this study.

9.2.2.6   Category Six: Constructs relating to participants' choice about using the information source

This category includes constructs which refer to the participants' choice about how they use or engage with the sources of information they identified. It relates mainly to one participant's constructs and discussion around the category will therefore be limited.

The constructs in this category relate to participants' ability to use, communicate with, and understand the information source. The participant expressed a preference for people as a source of political information, citing their ability to engage in discussion and clarify their understanding as a reason. As discussed in Section 9.1.2.1, this finding is in line with that of other studies that have found that people tend to prefer other people as sources of information.

The internet was used by the participant as a back-up for information when they were aware that some topics would not be easy to acquire from other people, the news or local events. This specifically related to using Tumblr to find out about issues such as feminism. This supports the argument that social media can act as a source of information and perspectives that differ to those present in mainstream media and may act as an "expanded space" which exposes people to more sources of information and opportunities to discuss political and social issues (Sveningsson, 2015, p.7).

Some participants identified encountering sources of political information when they were passing the time. This reason for engagement is similar to the "pastime motive" for encountering information of the uses and gratifications paradigm discussed in the previous section (Curnalia & Mermer, 2013). Others identified encountering political information through online sources as a by-product of using social media sites, for example. This can be understood as serendipitous encountering, which is identified as an increasing aspect of daily life with the proliferation of social media (Nguyen, 2008).

9.2.3   Discussion of the findings from the phenomenographic analysis

Unlike most other phenomenographic studies within the LIS field, this study did not aim to identify the difference in experiences of information literacy or the processes associated with using information or processes of learning, but the variation in experiences of what can be described as 'being exposed to political information'. The rationale for this focus is discussed in Chapter Four, but the main reason for this is that experiences of political information do not occur in the same way as formal academic subjects in a formal learning environment. The observation of a fixed learning process was therefore not possible. Furthermore, young people's ideas about what the concepts of 'information' and 'political' are vary widely. In order to capture young people's experiences, it was therefore necessary to give participants the scope to discuss their experiences and conceptions as broadly as they wanted to. The outcome space developed in Chapter Eight therefore cannot be easily transposed into levels of information literacy or presented as increasingly sophisticated ways of using information, but nevertheless there are several aspects of the political information experiences of young people where studies of experiences of information literacy and information are applicable. These are discussed in the following sections.

9.2.3.1   Categories of description

In addition to the construct categories which emerged from the personal construct analysis of the repertory grid interviews, phenomenographic analysis of the focus group and interview transcripts identified six qualitatively different ways in which political information is experienced by young people. Together, these categories represent the phenomenon of the experience of political information, and are:

- Category One: Political information is experienced as a range of sources of information
- Category Two: Political information is experienced as something which is encountered out of context
- Category Three: Political information is experienced as something to fill a knowledge gap
- Category Four: Political information is experienced as something to give meaning and context
- Category Five: Political information is experienced as something which is relevant to one's own life
- Category Six: Political information is experienced as something which can help achieve social change

These categories are discussed in relation to previous studies of experiences of information in the following sections.

9.2.3.1.1 Category One: Political information as a range of sources of information

Category One of the outcome space in this study represents the least sophisticated way of experiencing political information, in which it is conceptualised as a range of sources of information.

Previous studies, such as Diehm & Lupton (2014), have identified that young people draw upon a broad range of information sources to meet their information needs, including other people such as their peers, lecturers, friends, library staff and experts and networks outside of the university; books, journal articles and websites; and information tools such as the Internet, Google, library databases and the library catalogue. Sonnenwald (1999) presents this range of sources of information as an "information horizon", which can vary from person to person and are determined both individually and socially.

Other phenomenographic studies have identified that the most basic way of experiencing information is to understand it as a repertoire of information sources. For example, Yates (2013, p.102) identifies Category One of her outcome space as a "knowledge base". However, whereas Yates' participants, in the context of health information, experience this knowledge base as something which they actively construct, the participants in the present study experience the range of sources of information as something they are passively aware of but do not engage with or use. More similarly to this study, Smith (2010, p.143) presents Category One of her outcome space as an "information landscape", which participants experience as an "external entity" and do not actively engage with. This form of engagement with information bears similarities to the uses and gratifications theory relating to passing time, which Curnalia & Mermer (2013, p.76) directly connect

to the way people may feel pressure to be politically informed, but not care about political outcomes.

There is a difference in the manner in which the information landscapes of the two studies were illuminated, however, because Smith's (2010) approach involved methods beyond asking participants directly about which information sources they encounter, and is therefore not solely reliant on the conscious reflections of participants in the way the present study is. It is possible that the full information landscape of the participants in this study is broader than participants were able to identify, but given the extremely broad range of information sources identified overall, this seems unlikely. Within the information landscapes of both studies, family were identified as a significant source of information. The dinner table was identified by multiple participants in both studies as places where news and awareness of current affairs are picked up (Smith & Hepworth 2012, p.162).

9.2.3.1.2 Category Two: Political information as something encountered out of context

In Category Two, political information is experienced as something which is encountered out of context, in which political information sources are acknowledged as being potentially relevant and useful, but are not actively engaged with. This passive way of experiencing political information is acknowledged as one of the forms of information behaviour by Wilson (2000), with specific reference to face-to-face communication and exposure to television content, with no intention to act on the information. This way of experiencing information as external and decontextualized is again reflective of Bruce's (2008, p.54) description of information as objective and decontextualized within the first and second faces of informed learning.

Similarly, Bates (2002) refers to passive information behaviour in which the individual is available to "passively absorb" information. This conception is in line with the passive monitoring described by some participants, who talked about how they liked to know "what's going on", through listening to the radio, watching the news or browsing a newspaper to keep an eye on current events. This is also reflective of Savolainen's discussion of passive information seeking, which is exemplified by "routine, sometimes absent-minded watching of television news" (Savolainen 1995, p.273). Savolainen discusses the use of this method of "passive monitoring" as relating to maintaining a background level of awareness of everyday conditions, such as the weather, and describes how certain current events or particularly dramatic events may sharpen individuals' focus on forms of information if they

are of specific personal interest or come close to the individuals' own life world. This change from passive information behaviour to active information *seeking* behaviour is reflected in the outcome space of this study between Categories Two and Three, where there is a need to fill an information gap, for example to find out the 'facts' around a specific event or social issue of particular interest or of emerging relevance to the individual.

The focus of the experience of political information in Category Two is on entertainment. Several participants in this study talked about how they feel more likely to engage with and learn from a source of information if it is funny or entertaining. This is in line with the hypotheses of several studies of the relationship between entertainment and political learning, for example Kim and Vishak's (2008) study of the effects of entertainment media on political knowledge. They discussed how an increasing number of young people consider entertainment media an "important source of political information". However, the results of Kim and Vishak's research indicated that entertainment is not effective for learning but is effective on individuals' perceived knowledge based on what is described as *impression formatio*n - that is, an affective imprint rather than the learning of accurate information. This is similar the findings of other studies, including Lee and Cappella (2001), Pfau et al. (2001) and Young (2004).

9.2.3.1.3 Category Three: Political information as something to fill a knowledge gap

In Category Three, political information is experienced as something to fill a knowledge gap, where political information as objects which can meet a superficial information need. Mawby et al. (2015) present this relationship with information as "disposable information seeking", in which individuals use information on a task-specific basis and only require a certain piece of information on a one-off basis. In Category Three, this manifests itself as a perceived need to use information sources to find a 'fact' about politics or current events, or a particular opinion that the individual can align themselves with, so that this knowledge or opinion can be articulated and enable the individual to present themselves as sufficiently knowledgeable or informed.

In this Category, information is acquired with a minimal amount of effort, both in seeking and evaluating the information. This is reflective of findings from several studies of information behaviour in which the principle of least effort is invoked, including that of (Shenton & Dixon, 2004) who described inquirers as being concerned with finding sufficient information while expending a

minimum amount of effort. Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2006) explored the everyday life information needs of urban teenagers. They found that participants rely on information behaviours relating to the principle of least effort, but argue that it "does not represent laziness or carelessness", but instead can be viewed as rational behaviour for participants who have limited resources, including time, effort and money (Agosto & Hughes-Hassell, 2006).

From a behavioural perspective, experiences of information in this category can be understood as *satisficing* - "finding a course of action that is good enough" (Simon 1957 in Barros 2010, p.461). Through satisficing, people are able to form opinions and make decisions without having considered the many possible rational options. When engaging in satisficing behaviour, the individual makes a choice "that attends or exceeds a set of minimal acceptability criteria" and which is "not necessarily the unique, nor the best" (Barros 2010, p.461). This behaviour was observed in young people's descriptions of their conceptions of their encounters with political information and their use of sources of political information. As described in Chapter Seven, some participants felt the need to have an opinion about something, but it did not matter to them how well-informed or accurate the foundation of this opinion was (i.e. they were satisfied with not holding the 'best' view), as long as they were able to express some kind of opinion about social or political issues.

In this Category, information is still viewed as objective, but in contrast to the previous two categories, is understood within its own context. This is similar to the way information is experienced within the third and fourth faces of informed learning as described by Bruce (2008, pp.53-4), where information is viewed from within a context in which it will be used, but is still seen as being external to the individual.

The desire to fill a knowledge gap in political knowledge may be understood in this category as being motivated by the desire to have a political identity. This is akin to the claim by McQuail (2005) that developing a personal identity is a motivating factor in engaging with news media. However, the depth of the development of identity in this category may be shallower than the sense of identity McQuail hypothesises.

9.2.3.1.4 Category Four: Political information as something to give meaning and context

In this category, people experience political information as something to through which to gain meaning and context to their emerging political attitudes and opinions, and the information they encounter on a daily basis more broadly. Information is experienced as something which can be used to develop opinions, beliefs or attitudes, and contribute to understanding real-life situations. Political information is experienced as something to help an individual make the 'right' choices and express the 'right' opinions. The experiences of political information in this category bear some similarities with experiences of information reported in previous studies. One such study is Smith (2010), in which one way of experiencing information involves conceiving it as factual knowledge which can be stored and "regurgitated" when necessary. This is in line with the way in which political information in this Category is not meaningfully engaged with for the creation of meaning or deep understanding, and is instead used solely for the purpose of having something to say about things that are happening in the world.

As in the previous Category, information is contextualised but still external to the individual, which is also the case in the third and fourth faces of informed learning (Bruce 2008, pp.53-4). There is an increased awareness in this category of the need for knowledge to access the information that exists within the perceived external environment, which bears a resemblance to the way information is experienced in the third and fourth faces of informed learning (Ibid).

Most significantly, the experience of political information as a source of development of political attitudes and opinions echoes the way in which Lupton (2008b, p.112) describes the potential for information to be used for transformation of the self. With reference to music students' experiences of information literacy, Lupton discusses how one way of experiencing information is that it can be used to develop a sense of identity and self-expression. In theory, information as it is experienced through the transformative window in this context offers the potential for questioning the status quo, challenging existing practice and empowering oneself and the community (Ibid) through music study, creation and performance. This translates similarly in the present study; information as it is experienced in this fourth category has the theoretical potential to be used for questioning the claims being made, the narrative being promoted and the way in which information is used to inform political attitudes. However, in this category, individuals do not seek to develop meaningful

knowledge and attitudes from engagement with political information, and the encounters are superficial. However, there is the potential for these encounters to become more meaningful. Whereas Lupton acknowledges that this theoretical way of experiencing information does not translate easily into practice within the context of the study of music, the theoretical potential for political information to be transformative in terms of young people's political identities *could* translate relatively easily into the practice of young people as active political agents. This indicates that the transformative window may be a useful lens to apply to information literacy work in this area, which is discussed further in Chapter Eleven.

9.2.3.1.5 Category Five: Political information as something which is relevant to one's own life

In this category, people experience political information as something which is relevant to their own life. Political information is seen as something which can be used to develop an understanding of politics and society and to form opinions and meaning about the world. Information is not only acknowledged as existing, and encountered, but is also actively engaged with in the form of information evaluation and discussion. The experiences of political information in this category bear some similarities with experiences of information reported in previous studies. When experienced as something which is relevant to one's own life, the focus of the experience of political information is on making informed decisions, with one's own social and political context in the background of the experience. This is similar to the "deep approach to learning" described by Marton (1997). Information is experienced as subjective, as in Bruce's (2008, p.53) fifth face of informed learning, in which information is conceived as being a part of "who we are" and subject to reflection.

The findings in Chapter Eight support the argument that discussing political issues occurs more commonly when political information is experienced as something which is relevant to one's own life. In this category, active discussion and evaluation of information contributes to individuals' application of political information to their own contexts and the development of their sense of political efficacy. Discussion is thought to be integral to feelings of efficacy among citizens, leading to higher rates of political activity (Andersen, V. N. & Hansen, K. M., 2007; Cho et al., 2009; Carpini & Keeter, 2002). Through group discussion and the expression of views, people are able to consider their viewpoints and learn from the experience because individuals are forced to support their points of view with reasons for holding these opinions (Huckfeldt, 2007).

Studies have been conducted on the impact of discussion on people's political knowledge. For example, Nisbet and Scheufele (2004; 2002) found that diverse discussion contributes to the development of deeper understanding about issues. However, they emphasise that people's exposure to different opinions is only as varied as the people they encounter and talk to. The participants of this study talked about their preference for hearing other people's opinions on television and the radio, but in relation to face to face discussion and debate, they often expressed a preference for talking to people who share their opinions and confirm the validity of their opinions. This indicates a potential limitation of the impact of the active engagement with political information sources identified in Category Five of the outcome space.

A previous phenomenographic study identified an experience of learning information literacy which is similar to the discursive element of Category Five. Diehm and Lupton's (2012) outcome space included multiple levels of awareness involving the role of interacting with other people for growth, learning and understanding. One example of this is how individuals learn through having their thinking challenged by people in positions of authority, such as academic supervisors. Although in the context of Diehm and Lupton's study this experience relates to the development of disciplinary knowledge, this is similar to the way in which participants in this study experience political information as helping them to develop an understanding of political issues and their attitudes towards them through discussion with others. "Learning to use information to grow as a person and to contribute to others" is another level of awareness in the study. This includes an aspect of the experience described as "growing and contributing through interacting with other people", in which participants engage with information through interaction with others, with a focus on "learning to use information appropriately" and "as a means to learn to understand others." This second focus is similar to the dimension of experience in this study in which young people use discussion with others as a means of developing their understanding of other people's opinions and attitudes and how these relate to other sources of political information and their own political identities.

9.2.3.1.6 Category Six: Political information as something which can support broader social change

In this category, political information is experienced as something which has the potential to help individuals make decisions and take actions which can effect social change and help the individual to take informed action in civic life. The focus of the experience is the relevance of the information to

effecting social change. In the background of awareness is the individuals' personal context and evaluation of information.

During the focus groups, participants were encouraged to feel free to discuss their thoughts and beliefs with each other. This was controlled to an extent and it was important to ensure that the discussions did not become so 'heated' as to discourage participants from speaking freely. During these discussions, however, I observed exchanges in which participants reasoned with each other and expressed a change of opinion, as described in Chapter Eight. From a phenomenographic perspective, this kind of event can be understood as "transformative" and involves the process of changing as a person through becoming more aware of contradictions in one's own views and ways of understanding the world (Marton 1997, p.38).

This way of experiencing information bears a resemblance to Locke's (2009) sixth category of description in her study of the ways education students learn to find and use information, in which information literacy is experienced as *learning to use information to grow as a person and contribute to others*. Locke's experience of developing this category of description is similar to the development of the sixth category of description in this study, in that it contains the least amount of relevant data and can therefore be viewed as the least complete picture of a way of experiencing the phenomenon under consideration (Locke 2009, p.115). Although the focus of Locke's study was experiences of information literacy as a learning process and the focus of this study was experiences of information itself, both of the sixth categories of description illuminate a way of conceiving information use as being for a purpose which serves society - in the case of Locke's participant this takes the form of using information to communicate values such as tolerance, security and peace, and in the case of the participant in this study, this takes the form of communicating issues such as gender equality.

In relation to the outcome space from this study, Lupton's (2008) phenomenographic research into students' experiences of information when researching an essay revealed three categories of experience, the third of which is category is "learning as a social responsibility". In this category, individuals feel a responsibility to work towards social change. Although the experience focuses on an academic project, this bears a resemblance to Category Six of this study, in which individuals experience political information as having the potential to be used to effect social change. Lupton's participants experienced information literacy in this category through several affective elements,

which is similar to the experiences of the participants in this study as described in Chapters Seven and Eight.

9.2.3.2   Dimensions of variation

Four dimensions of variation were identified:

1. Production of information
2. Evaluation of information
3. Information and agency
4. Conception of politics

These dimensions of variation are described in Chapter Eight Section 8.3.1. The different ways in which these dimensions are experienced bear similarities to young people's experiences of information in previous studies, which are discussed in the following sections.

9.2.3.2.1 Production of information

Within this dimension of variation, three different ways of conceptualising the production of information were identified:

1. Political information is external to individual and is not perceived as being part of a system of production or the individual's own repertoire of information;
2. The individual is part of the process of the production of new information;
3. There is active sharing and production of political information, aiming for social change.

The first way of conceptualising the production of information is shared across the first three categories of description. Information is experienced as something which is external to the individual, which bears a resemblance to the findings of Maybee (2007), who identified that when experiencing information literacy, one way undergraduate students view information as objective, separate and distinct from themselves. This way of experiencing information is shared across categories one, two and three. Information only becomes subjectively experienced and understood in the final (fourth) category of description, which is similar to the second way of experiencing the information dimension of variation in this study. This represents a more complex way of experiencing information, but is not framed as necessarily superior; instead, Maybee argues that understanding the different ways in which students are approaching information at different points

can help librarians to support students' information literacy more effectively. Some students may be looking to find the best information, whereas others may be seeking to create meaning. Being able to direct information literacy instruction to meet the needs of students, and help them to develop more complex conceptions where beneficial may help to improve the efficacy of information literacy instruction.

These three ways of experiencing the production of information are akin to the development of the informed learning experience within the Six Frames model (Bruce, 2008). The relationship between the individual and production moves closer, from an external entity to including the individual themselves, as part of the relational experience, in which information has the capacity to be transformational.

9.2.3.2.2 Evaluation of information

Four ways of experiencing the evaluation of information were identified:

1. Political information sources and their content are not evaluated
2. Superficial; political information is taken at face value
3. Evaluation of basic credibility
4. Political information is subject to critique and evaluation

These ways of understanding the evaluation of information bear similarities to the process of developing information literacy skills, and many of the ways in which political information was identified as being construed by the participants through the personal construct analysis in Chapter Seven are of relevance to this dimension of variation. The construct categories from the personal construct analysis represent the different characteristics of how political information and the sources which communicate it are evaluated by the participants, as discussed in Sections 9.2.2.2 and 9.2.2.3. The different ways of evaluating information, such as considering the currency, tone, clarity, relevance, complexity, importance, plurality and speed of acquiring information come into play within this dimension of variation. As discussed previously, it is not the aim of this study to judge the extent to which participants apply the evaluation of political information in practice, but it is possible to identify that the majority of participants do not experience political information through the fourth way of experiencing the evaluation of information. This indicates that the extent to which participants think critically about the information they encounter is limited, which supports the

findings of several studies that have also identified the limitations of young people's critical

information skills with relation to everyday and political information (Pickard et al., 2012).

9.2.3.2.3 Information and agency

This dimension of variation relates to the role participants view political information as playing in

their sense of political agency. Five different ways of experiencing this dimension of variation were

identified:

1. Political information not connected to individuals' conceptions of own agency
2. Superficial acknowledgement of the relationship between political information and agency
3. Active use of political information to help develop (perhaps illusory) 'sense' of agency
4. Political information is viewed as necessary to create conditions for agency
5. Engagement with political information is connected to personal action

The closeness of the relationship between information and agency becomes closer as these ways of

experiencing move from the first to the last way of experiencing this dimension of variation. This

progression is in line with the development of political agency envisaged by Giroux (2002) and

supports the assertion of several authors writing about critical information literacy that access to

information and information literacy skills have a key role to play in the development of citizenship

and democratic engagement (Ryan & Sloniowski 2013; Whitworth 2009; Doherty & Ketchner 2005;

Accardi et al. 2010; Elmborg 2006; Eryaman 2010; Gage 2004; Kapitzke 2003b).

9.2.3.2.4 Conception of politics

Six different ways of conceiving of politics were identified:

1. Politics as an irrelevant, formalised processes
2. Politics as formal processes and events which are entertaining
3. Politics as range of world events to have an opinion about
4. Politics as world events and systems of power to be knowledgeable about for future decisions
5. Politics as systems of power affecting personal lives
6. Politics as systems of power affecting other people's lives and rights

This variety of ways of conceiving of politics is representative of several studies which explore how

young people understand politics and what they think the concept constitutes. As discussed in

Chapter Two, many young people view politics as formal electoral systems which they view as

irrelevant, whilst still being concerned about single social and political issues and being interested in

forms of political participation alternative to voting and other traditional methods (Schwarzer, 2011; Benton et al., 2008; Dalton, 2006; Carpini, 2000).

The structure of this dimension of variation may be reflective of the way many young people do not view state-based formal and electoral politics and activism as relevant or meaningful, but are often concerned with social and political issues (Harris et al., 2010). In the majority of cases this does not manifest itself in a turn towards "antistate activism and cultural politics", but is represented by a more complex picture of uncertainty in young people about how to best engage in political life. No participants in this study were identified as being part of activist groups engaging in non-traditional forms of participation, but as discussed in the previous chapters, some participants did talk about their sense of responsibility towards voting and communicating their issues with elected representatives. This supports the assertion by Harris et al. (2010) that many young people are in the middle of complete disengagement and full participation in alternative activism, who are uncertain about how to go about affecting social and political change through their preferred methods of rational and discursive modes of participation (Ibid).

One of the key concerns raised by participants was that they do not trust 16 and 17 year olds to be informed enough about political issues, which echoes findings from HeadsUp (2009, p.3) and Fahmy (2006, pp.140-41) whose reports of qualitative research with young people both found that those who were against votes for 16 and 17 year olds believed that people this age may not be well-informed enough to be trusted with the responsibility of voting for elected representatives, and that they doubted the legitimacy of their own political opinions on the basis of their own perceived ignorance of politics.

In Category Six, the most advanced of the ways of conceiving politics, politics is viewed as something that individuals can get involved in to make changes in how the world around them is governed. This represents the "internal political efficacy" described by Norris (Norris 2002, p.29) in which people feel that they as citizens can affect policy-making processes. This is also reflective of Giroux's notion of political agency discussed in Chapter Three.

9.2.3.3   Levels of the outcome space

Understanding the relationship between the categories of description in the structure of the outcome space is an important aspect of addressing the research questions. This understanding of the relationships between the categories of description can be helpful for educators to support the development of political agency through more complex conceptions and ways of experiencing political information.

As discussed in Chapter Eight, four levels of the outcome space were identified, which may be loosely understood as a process of encountering and using political information:

1. Level One: Awareness of information
2. Level Two: Acquisition of information
3. Level Three: Engagement with information
4. Level Four: Application of information

These levels illustrate the hierarchical relationship between the categories of description within the outcome space, which represents a structured set (Åkerlind 2005, pp.71-2).

The four levels of the outcome space are not intended to represent a structured process of information literacy or informed learning experience, but instead represent increasingly complex ways of encountering and engaging with political information. Aspects of these levels bear similarities to aspects of outcome spaces in previous phenomenographic studies of information and information literacy. These are discussed below.

Level One: Awareness of information

On Level One, there is an awareness that information about politics exists, and an awareness of several different sources of political information. On this level, political information is seen as external to the individual. This way of experiencing information is also similar to the least complex way of experiencing information within the Seven Faces of Informed Learning described by Bruce (2008, p.54), in which information is experienced as objective and external, and which centres around a knowledge of sources of information.

This level bears a resemblance to Level One in the study by Smith (2010). In both of the studies, Level One represents a relationship with information in which young people are *aware* of a range of information sources. However, for Smith's (2010) participants, Level One: Information Landscape and the category within it - Knowledge of sources of information - also involved an awareness of the characteristics of the information being encountered, and an awareness of personally encountering different information sources. In this study, Level One: Awareness of Information and the category within it - Category One: political Information as a range of sources of information - describes how participants were able to identify potential sources of information that they do not themselves personally encounter, and which are not subject to an identification of their characteristics.

Level Two: Acquisition of information

On Level Two, there is an awareness that information about politics exists, and also an awareness that political information is received and transmitted by the individual themselves and other people or information sources. This goes beyond the basic level of awareness, and is akin to Level Two of Smith's (2010) outcome space, in which *Level Two: Acquisition of information* refers to active and passive ways of encountering and using information. In both Categories Two and Three of her outcome space, information is acquired. In both studies, experiences of information on this level are external to the individual. In this study, Level Two: Acquisition of information also refers to the process of encountering information, but differs from Smith (2010)'s Level Two in that for the participants of this study, the information which is encountered is done so out of context in a way which does not involve active engagement from the individual themselves. Whereas Category Three for Smith's (2010) participants involves actively seeking information and therefore engaging with it actively, the experience of political information within Level Two of this study does not involve active engagement with information, or information seeking.

Level Three: Engagement with information

On Level Three, there is an awareness of encountering political information, acquiring knowledge from it, and forming meaning and understanding. This is similar to Lupton's (2008b) second category in her analysis of the information literacy experiences of undergraduate tax law and environmental studies students, who experienced information as evidence to support an argument. However,

whereas Lupton categorises this as deep or holistic use of information, this is not the case for Category Three of the outcome space in this study which resides on this level. In the case of Category Three, information is used to form surface-level opinions or judgements and act in lieu of actual considered opinions. In Category Four however, which is also on this level, information is used to form opinions and beliefs in context, which does represent a deeper form of learning.

Similarities can again be found with the Levels of the outcome space in Smith (2010). Level Three: Knowledge base of internalised information (Smith 2010) and Level Three: Processing information (this study) are roughly similar to each other in that both levels involve some degree of *doing* something with the information that is being experienced. In both cases, information is internalised. Both outcome spaces also contain two categories at this level with a hierarchy within the level, where what is being done to the information by the individual is more complex in the latter category. However, whereas the two categories on Level Three in Smith (2010) involve unprocessed and processed information, both categories in this study involve the processing of information, at differing levels of sophistication.

Level Four: Application of information

On Level Four, there is an awareness of encountering and using political information and the development of understanding and knowledge, and an additional dimension of information *use.* This includes Category Five, in which political information is conceived by individuals as relevant to making decisions and taking action beneficial to one's own life, and Category Six, in which political information is conceived by individuals as relevant to making decisions and taking action for the benefit of society more broadly. These categories are similar to the concept of the "transformative window" of information literacy (Bruce et al. 2006; Bruce, 2008; Lupton 2008; Lupton & Bruce 2010). When viewed from a transformational perspective, information literacy has the ability to help people to challenge the status quo and effect social change (Lupton & Bruce 2010, p.5), and the authors connect this view of literacy to critical pedagogues, including Paolo Freire. In the sixth and seventh faces of informed learning (Bruce 2008, p.53) information is conceived as having the potential to transform us through our engagement with it, and is understood as being "inextricably entwined with beliefs, values and attitudes" (Ibid). This way of experiencing information is echoed in the fifth and sixth category of description in this study, in which information is viewed as something

which can help individuals to develop agency either for their own benefit or also for society more broadly.

Level Four: Application of information in both this study and that of Smith (2010) both refer to the way internalised and processed information is used in some way. However, whereas Smith (2010) identifies one way of experiencing the use of information, this study identifies two ways of experiencing the application of information: for the benefit of one's own life and immediate circumstances; and for the improvement of society more widely.

9.3 Summary

One of the aims of this study was to contribute to the understanding of how young people experience political information. The personal construct and phenomenographic analysis of repertory grid interview and focus group data generated a descriptive analysis of the variety of constructs the participants have around political information, as well as an outcome space identifying the variation in young people's experiences of political information. Through the presentation of the research findings in Chapters Seven and Eight, three of the four research questions were addressed:

1) What sources of information influence young people's political opinions and worldviews?
2) In what qualitatively different ways do young people conceive of the sources of information which influence their political opinions and worldviews?
3) Do they think about this political information critically?

This chapter has discussed the findings of the study, including a comparison of the personal construct analysis and phenomenographic outcome space to previous relevant studies. Consideration was given to the ways in which the findings of this study contribute to the understanding of young people's experiences of politics and political information, referring back to the concepts and literature explored in Chapters Two and Three.

The next chapter focuses on the application of critical pedagogical theory to the research findings to identify how critical approaches to information literacy may help to support the development of the more complex constructs and experiences identified in Chapters Seven and Eight and discussed in this chapter.

10. Critical Discussion

Chapter Nine discussed how previous research into young people, political attitudes and information relate to the findings of this study which focus on answering the research questions relating to what sources of political information young people encounter and the different ways in which they conceive of and experience these information sources.

This chapter builds on the discussion, and synthesises the issues discussed in the literature review in Chapter Three with the findings of the phenomenographic outcome space, bridging the gap between the more individualistic lens of the outcome space with the more structural lens of critical pedagogy. It uses critical pedagogy to consider the barriers to learning that emerge from structural inequalities within and beyond the learning environment (Ashwin & McLean, 2005).

Through this discussion, the final research question is addressed:

> Research Question 4: What aspects of critical pedagogy may be of use to those seeking to support political agency through critical approaches to information literacy?

The outcome space presented in Chapter Eight, and discussed in relation to other phenomenographic studies of young people's experiences of information in Section 9.2, is amended to include aspects of critical pedagogy, with an emphasis on the work of Henry Giroux. The focus of this chapter is on the relevant aspects of critical pedagogical theory and how they can be applied to information literacy education to support young people's political agency in ways which acknowledge the experiences of the young people themselves, informed by the results of this study. Although it must be acknowledged that neither phenomenography or critical pedagogy are well-suited to making generalisations about populations and their needs, it is likely that other young people in contexts similar to those studied in this research will have similar experiences and conceptions of politics, political information and political agency, and the findings and recommendations may therefore be a useful starting point for interventions in other contexts.

The outcome space from Chapter Eight is presented below, with the addition of a critical pedagogical lens:

Level	Level One: Awareness	Level Two: Acquisition	Level Three: Engagement		Level Four: Application	
Category of Description (Political information (PI) experienced as…)	*Category One: Identifying a range of sources*	*Category Two: Encountering political information out of context*	*Category Three: Filling a knowledge gap*	*Category Four: Gaining meaning and context*	*Category Five: Applying relevant information to own life*	*Category Six: Helping to work towards social change*
Meaning	PI as different to information more generally	PI as sources of relevant information	PI as objects which can meet a superficial need	PI as places understanding can be gained	PI as useful for making informed decisions	PI as necessary for taking informed action in civic life
Focus (Structure of awareness)	Known sources of PI	Entertainment	Meeting a need quickly & easily	Own biases & assumptions	Making informed decisions	Relevance of PI to social change
Background (Structure of awareness)	Other sources of PI	Facts about political issues	Availability of more complex information		Own political & social context	Personal context & evaluation of PI
Margin (Structure of awareness)	General sources of PI	Development of political knowledge	Challenging self to understand complexity	Benefit of PI for understanding	Broader social & political issues	
Production of information (Dimensions of)	Not perceived as being part of a system of production or the individual's own repertoire of information		PI external to individual - not processed	Individual is part of the process of the production of new information		Active sharing & production aiming for social change

Evaluation of information	PI sources & their content are not evaluated		Superficial; PI taken at face value	Evaluation of basic credibility	PI is subject to critique & evaluation	
Information and agency	PI not connected to individuals' conceptions of own agency		Superficial acknowledgement of PI & agency relationship	Active use of PI to help develop (perhaps illusory) 'sense' of agency	PI viewed as necessary to create conditions for agency	Engagement with PI connected to personal action
Conception of "politics"	Politics as irrelevant formalised process removed from individuals' lives	Politics as world events to be entertained by	Politics as world events to have an opinion about	Politics as world events & systems of power to be knowledgeable about	Politics as systems of power affecting personal lives	Politics as systems of power affecting other people's lives/rights
Critical Pedagogical Lens	Political illiteracy Manufactured cynicism		Banking education	Media literacy	Political agency	Critical consciousness Civic literacy

Table 10.1: Application of a critical pedagogical lens to the outcome space

The application of these concepts is framed through the idea of praxis; the interplay of theory and practice. Praxis involves work on several levels, at different scales. The aspects identified exist on different scales, but the actions and reflections of individual practitioners contribute to educational and social change on a macro level.
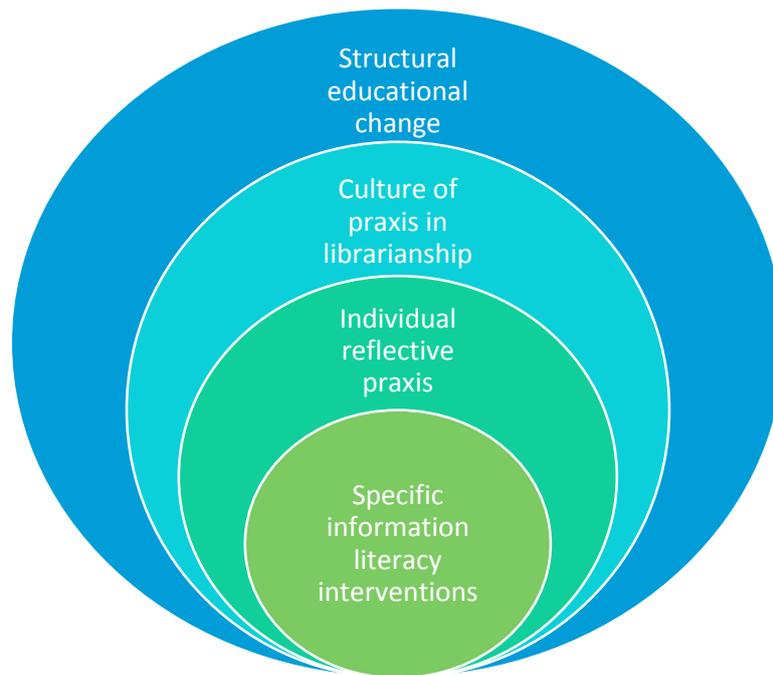
Figure 10.1: Framing the application of critical pedagogical theory

Before exploring the specific aspects of critical pedagogy identified in the outcome space above, it is important to explore broader critical pedagogical ideas that shape the foundations of the approach. The focus of this thesis is on the relevant aspects of critical pedagogy as they apply to information literacy work, and although it must be acknowledged that librarianship does not exist within a vacuum and is subject to the structures, limitations and contexts of education systems more broadly, due to limitations of scale and scope of the study, this section focuses mainly on the aspects of critical pedagogy which are relevant to the culture of praxis in librarianship, the individual praxis of library workers, and suggestions of specific information literacy interventions.

10.1   Structural educational change

It is not within the scope of this study to explore how structural educational change may be beneficial to young people's political agency, but a core element of Giroux's work is focused on the problematic aspects of education systems. He also discusses the need for discussion about schooling to be contextual and address the various "assaults" on education (Giroux 1994, p.123). It would therefore be remiss not to briefly explore the key problem he identifies in contemporary education which may go some way to explaining some of the experiences and attitudes of the young people in this study - that of the neoliberalisation of education.

10.1.1 Neoliberalisation of education

As discussed in Chapter 8, several participants viewed education as being about how to take tests rather than being about how to think critically, which connected to their experience of political information. A recurring theme throughout the focus groups was that participants construed the purpose of formal education as preparation for university and the workplace. Although this is indeed one of the purposes of education, and depending on political and philosophical stance may be seen as the main purpose of education, from a critical theoretical perspective this view of education may reduce the experience to little more than a series of tests, often prepared for through decontextualized rote learning and resulting in a lack of development of critical skills (Giroux 2011a, p.85).

Giroux (2013) argues that these views are the result of the neoliberalisation of education. Several participants reported that if they could not receive a qualification for political education, they would be less interested in it being included in their education. This attitude echoes Giroux's assertion that if learning is not connected to a grade, young people are less likely to view learning as valuable to their lives (Giroux, 2012, pp.36-37).

However, several of them still viewed political information as something which was important to have access to, and many of the participants did want to receive information through formal education, even if they were not being formally tested on their knowledge. This conception of education as being valuable for something other than qualifications for employment indicates that there is the potential for educators to encourage young people to view formal education as being

part of their development as engaged, knowledgeable and responsible individuals with a sense of responsibility towards democracy and society more broadly.

10.2   Theoretically informed recommendations

The remainder of this chapter focuses on aspects of Giroux's ideas within critical pedagogical theory to supporting political agency through information literacy instruction. The problems and recommendations were identified as being the most relevant to the conceptions and experiences of political information of the participants in the study and are connected to the outcome space, as presented in section 10.1.

10.2.1   A culture of praxis in librarianship

Understanding that pedagogy is political is, for Giroux, the first step in using critical pedagogical approaches for supporting learners' agency. In the context of librarianship, this first requires the acknowledgement that systems of education are implicated with structures of power (Giroux 2011a, p.71). He argues that educators must accept that education is not neutral and is inevitably political. This, can be a strength of education, and if embraced can help to reproduce characteristics of democratic societies (Giroux 2011a, p.147). Citing Gutmann, he argues that educators need to see the value of political education and "predispose" students to "accept those ways of life that are consistent with sharing the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in a democratic society" (Gutmann 1998 in Giroux 2011a, p.147). Applying this approach to information literacy education is the foundation of a culture of critical praxis in the area of information literacy, which does already exist in many pockets of the profession (Tewell, 2015).

A key element of critical pedagogy is the perception that learning environments are almost inevitably tied up in power relations. This is relevant even to libraries and information literacy, where although the relationship between the 'learners' and the 'educator' may be different to the typical classroom environment, issues of hierarchy and authority are still at play. As identified in this study, young people are conscious of this power differential and their positions in relation to the people providing their education, but may feel that they can learn more effectively, particularly in relation to political issues, when the relationship between the person 'teaching' them is able to be conceived of as a person, rather than as an apolitical professional in a position of power. As

discussed in Chapter Eight, understanding the teachers' own political positions was viewed as beneficial by the participants of this study. Although limited by their contexts within schools, there is scope for school librarians to build strong relationships with students, including, where appropriate and possible, the opportunity for a less hierarchical learning environment. Giroux stresses that this does not involve a complete breakdown of power differentials between learner and teacher, but involves transforming the relationship between educators and learners into an emancipatory practice that provides the conditions for both to "speak and be taken seriously" (Giroux 2005, p.27).

10.2.1.1   Public pedagogy

A fundamental aspect of the development of professional critical praxis in LIS is the acknowledgement of the ways in which education is produced outside of schools (Giroux 2003, p.38). Popular and media culture must be understood as "legitimate objects of knowledge" (Aronowitz & Giroux 1991, p.81). Giroux argues that the role of popular culture as the primary source of knowledge for young people needs to be explored and understood, because they are fundamentally different to traditional and scholarly resources in that they often communicate social issues such as poverty, racial conflict and gender discrimination (Giroux 2003, p.38). Giroux views popular culture as a form of public pedagogy, which is relevant to the findings of this study in that many participants considered forms of popular culture as being educational and helping them to develop knowledge and opinions relating to political and social issues. The benefits of using popular culture as an information source can be harnessed by educators, including library workers, rather than warned against as an invalid information source, as is so often the case in IL practice.

10.2.1.2   Border pedagogy

Another relevant theory to the praxis of information literacy is border pedagogy. Border pedagogy is an approach to teaching which seeks to help students understand their own historical contexts and experiences and to acknowledge how it influences their identities and culture. It considers questions of representation and practice, the ways in which these can marginalise and demean certain groups, and seeks to challenge how this othering is learned and internalised (Giroux 2005, p.25).

This approach to education within librarianship, and specifically information literacy instruction, may be used in situations where, as discussed in Chapter Eight, students' perceptions of immigration and

race are influenced by the mass media, which is demonstrably biased and unrepresentative, and as identified in Appendix A and discussed in Chapter Two, often result in misconceptions about the scale of certain issues, such as immigration levels and related perceived threats. There is the potential for library workers to work in partnership with teachers to address these kinds of misconceptions through information literacy activities, including not only helping students to locate accurate information and to challenge the messages promoted by the mass media, but also to critically interrogate the reasons behind their own willingness to accept misinformation as accurate, consider whose voices aren't being heard, and think about the reasons institutions of power support the dominant culture through promotion of inequality and fear of the other, for example. Giroux describes this kind of work as the provision of conditions "for students to engage in cultural remapping as a form of resistance" (Ibid).

In the context of critical information literacy, the concept of border pedagogy may also be useful when seeking to develop a culture of praxis in library environments. Giroux emphasises the need to ensure that all learners' voices are heard, and not only those of the students whose voices have traditionally been silenced. He emphasises the importance of taking all students' experiences seriously by "engaging the implications of their discourse in broader historical and relational terms" (Giroux 2005, p.25). The methods of interviewing and focus groups in this study offered participants the opportunity to voice their experiences of political information and their concerns and attitudes about social and political issues, and the use of personal construct theory and phenomenography ensured that the voices of all participants were given equal weight and taken seriously. Although it is not realistic to expect every school librarian to undertake this depth of research when identifying how to best support the political agency of their learners, the fundamental principles of the approaches may nevertheless be a useful starting point for engaging in this kind of work.

10.2.1.3 Spaces for speech

Another aspect of relevance to developing a culture of praxis in library environments is Giroux's emphasis on the need to provide spaces where students can critically engage teachers and other students in an environment where they "do not have to put their identities on trial each time they address social and political issues that they do not experience directly" (Giroux 2005, p.25). Giroux suggests that creating this kind of learning environment enables learners to further "the limits of

their own understanding in a setting that is pedagogically safe and socially nurturing rather than authoritarian and infused with the suffocating smugness of a certain political correctness." Although the scope of this study was not longitudinal or action-based in approach, I suggest that the process of involving students in focus groups where they were encouraged to speak freely, and participants were encouraged to challenge the statements being made by others, contributed to the development of participants' learning about the issues they were talking about, such as benefits cheating and immigration. This can be seen in excerpts of focus group transcripts presented in Chapter Eight. This kind of dialogue could be replicated in debating societies or other discussion groups facilitated by library workers, which is work already taking place in school libraries around the world, including in Scotland (Smith, in print).

It may be beneficial to create learning environments for students where they are able to ask questions and talk about the issues that concern them without fear of being ridiculed. My observation of lessons for background understanding in this study, as well as my facilitation of debating society within the school in which the fieldwork for this study was conducted, allowed me to see how the students communicate with each other respectfully, sometimes, but not always, with the guidance of teachers. (It is important to acknowledge that the majority of students in the school in question were white, and in a different school the discourse taking place may well have caused harm to some students at the expense of the learning opportunities of others, so the context of the situation must always be taken into account.)

10.2.1.4 Liberation education

Freire (2005) discusses the concept of the banking model of education, in which the teacher deposits the knowledge they have into the students who are assumed to have no knowledge. The learner is passive, unchallenging and uncritical, and the teacher makes all the decisions about discipline and programme content. Additionally, the teacher performs an authoritative role in which this role is conflated with an authority of knowledge. To counter this banking model of education, Freire recommends a liberatory approach to education to avoid the reproduction of inequality that occurs as a result of the banking model.

The theory of the banking model of education resonates with many of the structures, practices and attitudes observed and identified during the fieldwork stage of this study. Many of the participants communicated the view that school was for achieving grades to attend university to get jobs, and that their role of learners was to learn how to pass the exams. This conception of education as career preparation and nothing more is criticised by Giroux (2006, p.245), who argues that the public sphere of schools is one of the few remaining places with the potential to help people to become "competent to question the assumptions that govern political life" and "skilled enough to participate in shaping social, political and economic orders that govern their lives" (Ibid). The liberatory approach to education is viewed as a way of helping people to achieve these skills and competencies.

Participants often expressed their perception of education as something that is *done to them*, which is again in line with the banking model of education. When they said they wanted to find out more about politics so they could know how to participate and who the right person to vote for was, they saw teachers' role as giving them "facts". This may be interpreted critically as that the participants had an objectivist view of learning and knowledge in this context at least. Giroux (2011 p.38) "one is apt to find classroom situations in which "objective" information is impartially relayed to "able" students willing to "learn" it. Within this pedagogical framework, what is deemed "legitimate" public school knowledge is often matched by models of socialisation that reproduce authoritarian modes of communication.

Resisting and challenging the banking model of education and promoting the development of liberatory approaches to education are fundamental to many critical pedagogical praxes, including the work of a number of critical information literacy practitioners, as discussed in Chapter Three. For example, Doherty and Ketchner (2005, p.3) connect Kapitzke's (2003) critique of the nature of information literacy frameworks to the concept of the banking model of education, and argue that the library should provide a learning environment in which students feel in control of their learning. They approach their information literacy instruction with the intention of supporting "empowered, intentional learning" (Doherty and Ketchner 2005) based on Freireian ideals of liberatory education. They provide examples of how this was enacted in their librarianship practice through flexibility in the content they provided, the use of current events and world issues as a focus of learning, and active dialogue with the students as the course progressed.

This approach to education in librarianship is also supported by Pankl and Coleman (2010), who recommend establishing a dialogue amongst students and providing a classroom environment conducive to sharing and learning between students. By promoting activities which are relevant to each of the learners and allowing them to communicate with each other, Pankl and Coleman theorise that intellectual curiosity will flourish.

10.2.2   Individual reflective praxis

The individual praxis of library workers can (and does) take place as part of a broader culture of praxis in librarianship, and is used to inform the individual activities undertaken by library workers. The idea that library workers can conduct praxis as educators is an acknowledgement of their potential to serve as what Giroux describes as "public intellectuals" (Giroux 2006, p.247) who engage in practical politics and seek to educate their students about student rights, freedoms and substantive democracy, to tackle the problem of political illiteracy observed by Giroux as something which needs to be addressed at all levels of education (Ibid). Several aspects of Giroux's work may be useful in the context of information literacy praxis when seeking to help young people develop political agency through a development in complexity of their experiences of information.

A fundamental aspect of the notion of supporting the development of political agency is that it does not only involve equipping people with the "skills, capacities and knowledge they need to become critical social agents", but that it also requires educators to convince people that "such struggles are worth taking up" (Giroux 2003, p.56). This degree of politicisation may be extremely difficult to enact within educational institutions, but the approaches to individual praxis discussed below explore the need for educators' individual teaching philosophies to reflect the potential to support the right conditions for the development of political agency. These philosophies may be applied to library work, including information literacy instruction.

10.2.3   Specific information literacy interventions

Although this study makes an explicit effort not to view young people's experiences of political information and their information literacy abilities from a perspective of deficit, it is inevitably the case that several 'problems' or weaknesses in the perceptions and skills of the participants were identified during the data analysis. The phenomenographic outcome space presents different

perspectives of political information and the personal construct categories identified present the different levels of complexity with through the young people in this study construed political information and assessed various claims to knowledge and authority made by the sources they encounter.

Within the categories of description and construct categories, several 'problems' have been identified. Political beliefs are often based on perceptions of fear, threat and hatred, which may be the result of exposure to the misinformation and bias in the information sources they report to encounter (some of which is consciously acknowledged and some of which they may not be aware of). Additionally, many participants express the feeling that they cannot change anything when they do believe it is wrong or could be changed somehow. This perception is often not related to a perceived lack of power, or a perceived lack of power that they would want to change, but is instead connected to a lack of *desire* for power because they do not perceive young people as possessing the knowledge or responsibility to make decisions that could change political events and issues. With relation to information literacy, the majority of participants did not discuss constructs that could be considered to illuminate a critical dimension of their understanding, which indicates that critical thinking is not an aspect of information literacy often applied to political information. With regard to learning more generally, education was described by many participants as serving a purpose of employability rather than being connected to civic responsibility or other aspects of life.

The findings of this study supports Giroux's assertion that young people are influenced by several sites of education, including television, radio, newspapers and the internet (Giroux 2011a, p.137). Furthermore, the findings from this study show that participants are aware of these multiple sites of education and view them as legitimate sources of political information. Giroux views these sites of public pedagogy as "crucial to any notion of politics because they are the sites in which people often learn, unlearn, or simply do not get the knowledge and skills that prepare them to learn to become critical agents" (Ibid). It is therefore important for library workers and other educators to acknowledge these sources and ways they are used by young people to help people to understand how they act as sites of public pedagogy, and to develop the skills to critique them. This section identifies some of the theories and approaches advocated by Giroux as ways critical pedagogy can support the development of political agency, and connects them to the concept of information literacy.

10.2.3.1   Media literacy

Connected to the issues of public pedagogy discussed in section 10.2.1.1, Giroux asserts that it is not only important for young people to be able to critically interrogate cultural texts, but also for them to be able to produce aspects of culture through the use of new technologies. He argues that young people require the knowledge, skills, and tools to recognise when these new technologies act as a force for good through "enlarging democracy", but also when they "shut it down" (Giroux 2003, p.39), through systems of power, inequality and money which limit the extent to which democracy and informed citizenship are possible (Giroux 2011b, p.97). Many of the participants in this study discussed their use of various new technologies and talked about how they share and receive political information via social media and other technological tools as well as their exposure to many forms of mass media, but did not discuss the potentially negative elements of these forms of media.

Actively supporting young people to learn about the mass media and new technologies, and their potential for supporting or weakening democracy is one way in which library workers can support young people's political agency through information literacy-related work. This may include helping young people to understand how authority is established in the mainstream media through those with power and money using their influence to dictate whose voices are heard and whose are drowned out, and how the presentation of 'balance' in the media is not accurate and does not represent a 'fair' debate (Giroux 2011b, p.97). It also includes enabling young people to "critically read how texts express and represent different ideological interests" (Giroux 2005, p.108) and analysing texts "in terms of their presences and absences" (Ibid).

10.2.3.2   Civic literacy

The need to support young people to view education as more than a means of employment and social mobility but as the "first line of defense in taking up the issues of equity, justice and freedom" is a recurring theme for Giroux (1994, p.164).

This is a way of tackling what Giroux terms "civic illiteracy", which is framed as a lack of the abilities to fight for democratic public life and a sense of public responsibility (Giroux 2011b, p.91). He describes it as a "precondition for locking individuals into a system in which they are complicitous in their own exploitation, disposability, and potential death" (Ibid).

Citing C. Wright Mills, Giroux asserts that the ability to "translate private troubles into broader public issues" (Giroux, 2011c, p.83) is central to the vibrancy of democracy. The decline in society's ability to connect private troubles and public issues, Giroux argues, results in "civic illiteracy" (Ibid). In this state, individuals are not able to acknowledge how their own private troubles may relate to larger public problems and issues of social relations. This is understood by Giroux as being a "deficit in the realm of politics" (Ibid, p.84) in which the self is "privatized" and the principle of self-interest is glorified as a paradigm for understanding politics. As discussed in Chapters Seven and Eight, some participants appeared to conceptualise the purpose of political participation as being to ensure that the winning political party was the one whose policies would most directly benefit them, and expressed views about people less fortunate than themselves with extremely limited empathy and did not connect individuals' problems such as unemployment to wider social issues. In many cases, individual problems were viewed as the fault of the individual and there was little to no awareness of collective problems in society. This lack of awareness of collective problems makes it impossible for young people to view collective solutions as the answer to social and political problems, which Giroux argues needs to be challenged through education (Giroux 2006, p.229).

Giroux describes this level of (un)awareness as a state "in which it becomes increasingly impossible to connect the everyday problems that people face with larger social forces — thus depoliticizing their own sense of agency and making politics itself an empty gesture" (Giroux, 2011b, p.85). He attributes civic illiteracy to a number of causes, including popular culture, which urges people to define themselves through the "often trivialized and highly individualized interests of celebrities" (Ibid). As described in Chapter Seven, several of the participants discussed their conceptions of television shows and celebrities as sources of political information. These were sometimes viewed as highly influential sources of political opinion, regardless of the perceived quality of the information. Additionally, participants' socio-political attitudes can be viewed as highly individualistic. It may therefore be of benefit to further explore the influence of popular culture on young people's conceptions of citizenship, social responsibility and political attitudes.

Examples of larger social forces that are connected to "individual woes" are:

- Unchecked systems of finance
- Anti-democratic power of the corporate state
- Destruction of the manufacturing base (in the UK and US)
- Privatisation of public schooling

- Devaluing of education as a public good (Giroux, 2011b)

From a critical pedagogical perspective, to *not* conceptualise political information as serving a purpose beyond oneself and one's own individual needs (as observed in experiences of political information in Category Five) could be interpreted as what Giroux terms "civic illiteracy" (Giroux, 2011c, p.83). This includes a willingness to believe and invest in "hate talk" promoted by the media, which serves as an educational force which miseducates the public and encourages a "culture of cruelty" (Giroux 2011b, p.63) in which marginalised and vulnerable groups are othered and working class people are turned against each other rather than provided with the conditions to critique and challenge dominant systems of power and control.

An absence of what Giroux may describe as "civic literacy" was notable in the perceptions of the participants in this study, but was present in one category of the outcome space. Category Six includes a perception of political information as having the potential to help individuals meet information needs which do not only relate to individual issues, but also to help individuals develop knowledge, understanding and agency to challenge broader social issues. This way of experiencing political information was not the dominant form among the participants, but does indicate the possibility for young people in this age group to reach these kinds of conceptions if challenged and supported. Encouraging young people to connect their own private problems and concerns with external, systemic and political issues may help them to understand the causes of many of their concerns, and help them to direct their frustrations about the world upwards, rather than downwards, as was observed in discussions with many of the participants in this study around immigration and unemployment.

10.2.3.3   Challenging manufactured cynicism

Another critical pedagogical concept of relevance to the research findings is that of manufactured cynicism. Giroux describes this as the dominant view of young people as not being knowledgeable or responsible enough to participate in politics (Giroux, 2006, p.83). This was a view expressed by a significant proportion of the research participants, who expressed the opinion that people their age (14-15) lacked the ability to take politics seriously, make informed decisions, or vote responsibly. This echoes the findings of previous studies into young people's perceptions of their capacity for voting and the view that is generally expressed from opponents of lowering the voting age that

young people lack political awareness and are therefore politically irresponsible (Fahmy 2006, p.142).

This kind of attitude is explained by Giroux as being a symptom of manufactured cynicism, in which citizenship is reduced to the level of the individual and larger social problems are presented by governments and the mass media as unavoidable and unsolveable (Giroux, 2006a, p.14). An awareness of this concept may help educators to encourage learners to reflect on how they view themselves and other young people in terms of their roles as social actors, and consider whether conceiving of young people as apathetic or irresponsible is accurate, and how it may work against young people as political agents.

10.2.3.4   *Improving young people's critical skills*

Central to critical pedagogy is the idea that supporting people's critical skills helps them become critical and informed citizens. Kincheloe et al. (2010) suggest that supporting learners to critically analyse texts and other information sources can have a transformative impact on the learner, helping them to develop a "healthy and creative scepticism" which encourages them to pose problems, and to challenge the claims made by various sources, for example that of neutrality in learning resources and those made by organisations and manufacturers regarding their impact on the environment (Kincheloe et al. 2010, p.165).

Supporting the development of critical skills would not be a new aim of information literacy, but aspects of critical pedagogy are of particular relevance in the context of supporting political understanding and agency. For example, Giroux argues that the media fails to make a distinction between an informed argument and an unsubstantiated opinion (Giroux, 2011c, p.83). Several participants in this study discussed their perception that it was important for the media to provide a "balance" of viewpoints, but did not discuss the ways in which some viewpoints are more valid than others. This is an example of an issue relating to how authority is constructed by the media and not critiqued by young people, which is an area that should be addressed when seeking to develop the critical information literacy of young people in relation to their development of political literacy and agency.

10.2.3.5   Challenging misperceptions

Many of the social and political concerns raised by participants in this study related to immigration concerns, often specifically connected to perceived economic and cultural threat, which they identified as being based on the information they received from the media. The most frequently cited issue of concern to participants when asked in the interviews and focus groups was immigration. This may be considered an unsurprising finding, given the high level of media coverage and political focus on immigration in recent years, and it is reflective of the concerns of people in the UK more widely. A 2013 survey of 1,015 British adults aged 16-75 found that 55% of people think that immigration is "a very big problem" and 21% think it is "a fairly big problem" (Ipsos MORI, 2013a). A study by the charity Show Racism the Red Card conducted between 2012 and 2014 also identified young people's widespread misconceptions about the number of immigrants and non-white people in the United Kingdom and identified widespread negative attitudes towards Muslims and people born in other countries. The research, which surveyed 6,000 school children, found a "large degree of anxiety", often based on inaccurate information, about immigration, employment and Muslim people (Show Racism the Red Card, 2015).

A recurring perception expressed by participants was the impact of immigration on their employment opportunities. This echoes the perceptions of participants in the 2012-2014 Show Racism the Red Card study mentioned in the previous section, which found that 28% of participants believed jobs taken by foreign workers may prevent them from reaching their own goals and that 49% believed that migration is out of control or not being handled properly. These sentiments were echoed by the participants in the present study.

The findings of this study are similar to those of previous research, which identifies concerns around immigration based on two main themes: the economic threat of immigrants 'stealing' jobs and housing, and the symbolic threat to the host country's culture (Schmuck & Matthes, 2014). Political advertising through formats such as television adverts and posters have been found to have an impact on young people's perceptions of immigration, and the communication of the economic and cultural threat of migrants is more effective on "lower educated" young people (Ibid). Although Schmuck and Matthes' study does not establish causality between education level and susceptibility to fear campaigning, the research does indicate that education may be a way to address fears

around immigration, particularly in terms of increasing knowledge about the issues and thereby increasing individuals' ability to critically process information (Ibid, p.1592).

Whitworth (2011) identifies individuals' reliance on "cognitive schema", and argues that politically aware educators can help learners to become aware of their own cognitive schema. As this chapter has explored, through the use of methods such as repertory grids, phenomenographic interviews and focus groups, or even casual discussion with pupils, teachers and librarians may be able to help pupils to become conscious of the underlying assumptions and biases that inform their worldviews and information behaviours, many of which may be limiting individuals' capacity to learn and develop as critically as they may be capable of.

10.2.3.6   Challenging the normalisation of violence

Violence was a recurring theme in the research data. Several participants identified the internet as a source of political information and described how they watched videos of violent events, such as the beheading of the soldier Lee Rigby. Others described how they enjoy watching television news because of the graphic and violent descriptions of crime. Another described a preference for listening to the radio news because when violent acts were described they were able to fill the gaps with their own imagination. These experiences and perceptions can be connected to Giroux's assertion that a culture of violence influences young people's lives in ways which are becoming normalised and harmful to people's relationships with people who are removed from their immediate lives.

In Giroux's view, politics itself is now mediated through a "spectacle of anger, violence, humiliation and rage" (Giroux, 2011b) which results in the dehumanisation of people who are considered 'other'. This is connected to representations of poor people in the mass media, whose misfortunes are presented as funny and entertaining (Giroux 2011b, pp.166-67). This is reflected in the perceptions of the participants in this study who described how they enjoyed watching programmes about people who "live on benefits". These people are viewed as criminal and amoral, scrounging off the state. Assumptions were made about their worthiness, and their economic struggle was viewed as entertainment. Giroux describes this form of entertainment as "poverty porn" (Ibid) and connects it to a wider issue of violence in the media, because although not visibly violent, the suffering of the subjects represents "the worst and weakest moments of people's lives". He views this

dehumanisation as the result and cause of a lack of kindness, co-operation and community, which causes those with little power or wealth to be seen as "morally degenerate, disposable, and unworthy of compassion or justice" and "mocked and humiliated as if they deserve the hardships they face and are accountable for the difficulties in which they find themselves". This view is reflected by several of the participants in this study, as discussed in Chapter Eight.

10.2.3.7 Debate and discussion

Giroux identifies the political, pedagogical and civic value of debate leagues and suggests that they can be successful pedagogical tools for young people to identify social problems and discuss the potential for collective answers to these problems. Giroux argues that engaging in debates about values and ethics is a useful tool for ensuring that education is about more than teaching skills for employment and employability and supports the development of critical thought, critique and awareness of social and political issues (Giroux 2012, p.41).

The beneficial outcomes of debating activities as they are co-ordinated by the Urban Debate League in the United States include not only debating skills, but also the skills to conduct library research, electronic information retrieval, critical analysis and the ability to evaluate policy (Giroux 2006, p.229). As well as these "high-powered academic skills", young people are supported to develop the "essential critical knowledge and beliefs" to see themselves as advocates for democracy and view themselves as leaders who can influence and govern in society. This is particularly beneficial for children from under-privileged backgrounds whose voices may not traditionally be heard, and is viewed as important for all young people because as Giroux argues, children have little standing as citizens and their voices are often absent in the development of the policies and legislative processes supposedly designed to meet their needs (Ibid, p.231). Debating societies offer one method of helping young people to see themselves as having entitlement and agency in the decisions that affect their lives and in society more broadly.

A recurring theme emerging from the interviews and focus groups was the participants' desire to discuss and debate political and social issues. They talked about how they enjoyed discussing issues they cared about with their friends, families and teachers, and viewed discourse with their teachers and in a learning environment as a positive and enjoyable way of exploring topics they considered to be important as well as a method of developing their own attitudes and opinions. From observing

lessons in History and Sociology at GCSE level in the school, it was apparent that debate formats are a pedagogical tool employed fairly regularly and that the pupils themselves were familiar with the method and its structure. The application of the debate format was used in relation to specific curriculum content and the information source used was the subject textbook. Most pupils appeared to engage enthusiastically with the activities, related to each other with respect, and the learning outcomes presented at the beginning of each lesson did appear to have been reached by the end of the lesson, indicating that the use and application of the debate format was, in this context, a useful pedagogical device. The technique was also occasionally used by some group tutors on World News Wednesday, the weekly activity that took place in tutor period involving the group tutor facilitating a class discussion on topical issues featured in the news that week. I would therefore suggest that there is the potential for the school to use the method more extensively if they did wish to support the development of pupils' political knowledge, understanding and attitudes.

However, from a critical pedagogical perspective, some of the methods and outcomes would need to be developed further before the use of debating could be seen as a successful way to support political agency. When discussing why they viewed discussing and debating political issues as a good source of political information and learning, some participants talked about how they were able to find out what they should be thinking about things so that they can be seen to have an opinion regardless of what that opinion is and to what extent it is congruent with their political identity, as discussed in Category Three of the outcome space. This could be viewed from a critical perspective as a result of the banking model of education (Freire 2005, p.72) in which learners come to view education as a resource from which information is deposited into passive students for the purpose of achieving qualifications, rather than a process through which they develop meaningful knowledge and understanding of the world around them and the texts they encounter. Although political identities may arguably developed in relation to the perceived identities of those around us, it is important for young people to come to their own opinions where possible, based on their own critical evaluation of information. A wide range of sources of information could help to achieve this within debating methods of learning, with support from educators (including librarians) with regard to searching for, identifying and evaluating a wide range of information sources in preparation for the formation of arguments and the development of positions. This would support the development

of young people's experiences of political information from the limited perceptions of information and political identity in the lower levels of the outcome space presented in Chapter Eight, to a more complex understanding of the phenomenon as in Categories Five and Six.

In a UK context, and having observed the consciously and explicitly racist and hateful attitudes of some of the students I encountered during fieldwork, debates around social and political issues would in many cases require strong guidance from a facilitator, and potentially a more actively political approach to helping students prepare their debating points. Otherwise, it would be very easy for the hateful opinions (which are the result of populism, rather than hatefulness of young people themselves) of many young people to be validated by a lack of a clearly articulated counter-narrative. The call for the active involvement of educators in helping students to develop counter-narratives to mass media populism echoes the assertion of Young (1990) that the role of the educator should be to "assist students in making *new* constructions: not mere destruction, but *creation*" (Young 1990, p.71).

10.2.3.8 Critical consciousness

Deans (1999, p.22) describes critical consciousness as "the ability to perceive social, political and economic oppression and to take action against the oppressive elements of society". It has four components:

- Power awareness (understanding social history)
- Critical literacy (analytically reading, writing and discussing social matters)
- Desocialisation (examining the internalised myths and values of mass culture)
- Self-organisation/self-education (taking initiative in ongoing social change) (Ibid)

Individuals experiencing political information in the way outlined in Category Six conceive of political information as something which can be used for the benefit of wider society. This may be connected to critical consciousness, through using information to become aware of social and political issues of inequality and injustice, understand the ways in which the mass media and other forms of communication reproduce and maintain these inequalities and injustices, and use information to learn how to challenge these problems.

10.3 Complexity in the outcome space as the development of political agency

The outcome space identified four dimensions of variation relating to the variation of particular aspects of the phenomenon of political information. These were:

- Production of information
- Evaluation of information
- Information and agency
- Conception of politics

These dimensions of variation can be viewed as aspects of young people's information literacy, information and its relationship to political life which can be supported to become more complex, with the aim of developing their political agency.

In the view of critical pedagogical theory, an awareness and understanding of the systems of power and control that influence the information to which we are all exposed are core skills and capacities for the development of political agency. As individuals' experiences of political information become more complex, so too does their conception of politics. This development supports political agency by helping individuals navigate their information worlds, be aware of when they are exposed to political information which informs their worldviews, critique and evaluate the authority and reliability of the information they are exposed to, and to use the information in ways that can enable them to make meaningful political decisions, with an appreciation of the value of their beliefs and actions in the way the world around them is governed. This development can be found in the phenomenographic outcome space, in which the categories of description and the dimensions of variation and structures of awareness within them become increasingly sophisticated. Although none of the young people who participated in the study could be described as fully critical with a strong sense of political agency and an understanding of the relevance of critical information literacy to the development of their abilities to participate meaningfully and knowledgeably in the world around them, some of them did appear to have experiences of political information which indicate the potential for this outcome. The sixth category of description presents what could be understood as the critical pedagogical 'ideal' of an individual whose experience of political information is complex and their critical information literacy abilities strongly support their political agency.

10.4 Barriers to the implementation of critical approaches to information literacy

The previous sections have identified a number of critical pedagogical concepts that may be of relevance to practitioners seeking to use critical approaches to inform their practice when seeking to support the development of young people's political agency. However, several barriers to the application of these theories in practice must be acknowledged.

The focus of this research is the implementation of critical information literacy within the context of school libraries, but is also relevant to libraries in other contexts. A number of problems have been identified which have been found to or may cause difficulties in implementing the ideals of critical information literacy in practice within school and public libraries, which are explored in this section. Problems include practical and theoretical issues, which can make the gap between the over-reaching ideals of critical information literacy and the daily reality of information literacy work in practice seem like a chasm (Jacobs & Berg 2011, p.385), but which could be addressed to enable the implementation of critical information literacy. These problems represent the difficulty of enacting change, but it should be acknowledged at the same time that they represent the possibility for change (Whitworth 2014, p.168). This echoes the 'pedagogy of hope' discussed by Giroux.

10.4.1 Learner and educator willingness

Willingness of learners to adopt critical pedagogical approaches has been identified as an issue for critical practitioners. Doherty and Ketchner (2005) identified limitations to their method of critical information literacy instruction because of its novelty. They suggested that because the concept and method was so novel, students were not always prepared for the level of control given to them during the class sessions, because within the school environment they are very rarely given responsibility and develop "little to no sense of their own power" (p.7). However, they argue that once this sense of unease or confusion was overcome, students gained more from the sessions than they would have done otherwise because they were able to apply what they were learning to their own lives, and their own experiences were given value. Whitworth (2014, p.197) also acknowledges that not all individuals with responsibility for providing education will wish to undertake the work associated with critical approaches to information literacy.

10.4.2 Limited school resources and amenability

The implementation of critical information literacy requires, in the first instance, staff within schools who could provide instruction in this area. Critical approaches to information literacy often emphasise that information literacy not the sole jurisdiction of librarians and acknowledge that information literacy instruction is undertaken (consciously or not) by non-LIS educators (Whitworth, 2015). The majority of school teachers and librarians in the UK are already working under extreme pressure, and it would therefore be difficult to place an added responsibility, particularly a non-statutory responsibility, on the shoulders of these staff, given the lack of time and other resources to engage with work of this nature (Whitworth 2014, p.197). Furthermore, school libraries are not currently a statutory requirement in the United Kingdom, and where libraries are present, many of these are not staffed by qualified librarians, and some are not staffed at all. This significantly reduces the possibility of schools engaging with critical approaches to information literacy.

Teachers and librarians are frequently over-worked and deskilled (Giroux 2012, p.22). Asking them to take on the additional challenge of a novel pedagogical approach with minimum support and freedom to do so may not be reasonable. Giroux identifies the overburdening of educators, which he argues "prevent teachers from rightfully assuming their role as intellectuals performing a dignified public service" (Giroux, 1987). This problem is also observed by Freire and Macedo, who describe the working conditions of teachers as demeaning and oppressive, and "overwhelmingly replete with organizational constraints and ideological conditions that leave them little room for collective work and critical pursuits", including long working hours, isolated working structures and little opportunity for working collectively. Most significantly, Freire and Macedo argue, teachers are "prevented from exercising their own knowledge with respect to the selection, organization, and distribution of teaching materials" (Freire & Macedo 1987, p.17).

An additional issue may be that schools and local authorities may not be willing to allow teachers and librarians to take a critical pedagogical approach (Whitworth 2014b, p.197; Shor 1992, p.131), particularly as it is not advisable to present a structure for the programme of education before fully exploring the context and ensuring that the content for courses or schemes is relevant to the lives of learners (Giroux, 2011a).

10.4.3 Qualification and education of library workers

In order for school librarians to be able to critically engage with pedagogical theories, relevant topics would need to be addressed in the education of librarians themselves. This paper has already acknowledged that this is difficult because educational theory does not often feature as part of librarians' professional training and there is not often a requirement for librarians engaged in teaching work in the United Kingdom to hold a teaching qualification. The issues raised by critical pedagogical theory are often challenging and critical of existing practices, which LIS workers may find difficult to critique, and the values articulated can be challenging to defend if individuals are not well-versed in social justice discourse and critical theories. These areas are not commonly part of LIS qualifications and training (Andretta 2005, p.108), nor is there a professional 'toolkit' for engagement with the political issues that would necessarily be raised when seeking to change practice within educational environments.

10.4.4 Challenging the status quo

A lack of relevant education is not the only reason that challenging the status quo would likely prove difficult for the library and information profession. School librarians in particular lack power within their environments and often struggle to protect their jurisdiction as educators (O'Connor 2009a, p.282). Fister suggests that there is often a lack of action when it comes to defending librarianship's core values of "the defence of intellectual freedom, equality of access to information, and privacy" (Fister 2010, p.84).

This reputation for not challenging the status quo may have been beneficial in many ways, insofar as keeping quiet has often meant keeping out of the minds of those in power who have to ability to, should they choose to, look in detail at the work of individual librarians who may be quietly getting on with work that challenges the hegemony that other professional practices within the same organisation may well represent (Cope 2010, p.19). Streatfield et al. (2011) claim that there is a perceived unwillingness of school librarians and assistants to engage with more challenging aspects of information literacy, and Cope suggests that "LIS commentators tend to shy away from more complicated discussions of social and political power" (Cope 2010, p.13). This inability and unwillingness to challenge the status quo would certainly prove problematic for the development of

critical information literacy practices. Whitworth acknowledges the likelihood of difficulties of attempting to take a critical approach to information literacy, because of the likely challenge this poses to existing structures of authority (Whitworth, 2014a).

Whitworth (2014, p.157) also acknowledges the issues associated with trying to influence current practices and introduce more a progressive approach, suggesting that the position of the individual seeking to make the changes influences the impact the individual is likely to achieve. He argues that one's position in a social network affects how able one is to influence and shape practice within a landscape. Innovation made by someone without authority will not become fashionable unless it is taken up by those who do have authority.

10.4.5 Prevent Strategy

'Prevent' is part of the UK government's counter-terrorism strategy aimed at responding to the "ideological challenge of terrorism and the threat from those who promote it" (HM Government 2011). It is in force in schools and other establishments that deal with young people, such as youth clubs. Members of staff are required to report any young person they suspect may be "drawn into terrorism". The strategy has become increasingly controversial, with a number of reports of young (non-white) people receiving visits from the police as a result of their critical engagement with their education. For example, Ifhat Smith's 14 year old son was visited by the police after discussing eco-warriors and eco-terrorism in a school lesson (Sky News 2015). Another young person was reported to the police for reading a book about terrorism in their university library, as part of their studies (Ramesh, 2015). Arguably, the potential for the strategy to alienate young people and discourage them from critically engaging with their education and social and political issues is among several serious problems with Prevent, and has direct implications for educational work seeking to encourage young people to be active and questioning rather than passive and uncritical citizens. It could represent a significant barrier to practitioners who seek to encourage young people to find information about and discuss controversial political topics. The limitations of educators in relation to critical approaches to teaching have been enshrined in the new Teachers Standards, which include the requirement to "not undermine" British values. However, although the Teachers Standards pose questions around the professional and/or vocational role of educators, the

frequency with which 'values' are referred to may offer the potential for the Standards to be harnessed as a tool of critical pedagogy (Bryan, 2012).

10.4.6 Perceived role of libraries as neutral and/or apolitical

Libraries often claim to be neutral environments free of political bias (Lewis, 2008). This claim has been challenged by several authors, including Hansson (2010), who in the context of public libraries argues that there is no such thing as a "neutral" library because a plurality of "opinions, reference systems, ideologies, norms, values and beliefs" views in society is inevitable. Drawing on Mouffe's theories of agonistic pluralism, in which conflicts of political ideas are conceptualised as central to the health of democracies, Hansson argues that the form of quasi-"neutrality" he critiques emerges when public libraries follow their mission to seek to mirror the societies in which they are situated, but that the societies in which they are situated only accept the expression of liberal universals and exclude conflicting voices (Hansson 2010, p.255). Instead he argues, an acknowledgement of the political differences in multicultural societies must be acknowledged by society and the institutions within it in order to challenge the cultural hegemony that threatens the health of democracy (Hansson 2010, p.255).

With regard to the literacy practices of libraries, Elmborg emphasises the need for librarians to develop a critical consciousness about libraries and to accept that "libraries can no longer be seen as value-neutral cultural space, and librarians cannot be defined as value-neutral information" (Elmborg 2006, p.198). This view is support by Kapitzke, who argues that library neutrality is not possible, and suggests that doing so has historically prevented a critique of systems of power and control in librarianship that should now be challenged (Kapitzke 2003b, p.37).

10.4.7 Neoliberal structures of education

Nicholson discusses the way in which information literacy instruction is often inevitably conducted within structures which reflect neoliberal values and practices, including the "skills agenda" (Nicholson 2014, p.3). This is problematic for a number of reasons. First, the focus on skills and lifelong learning associated with neoliberal institutions contributes to a "dehumanizing neoliberal discourse" that casts workers as "portfolios" (Kalantzis & Cope, B., 2012). Second, Nicholson argues that "there are institutional biases against practices such as critical pedagogies, and transformational

and democratic activity is denied financial and social capital, and cognitive support" (Nicholson 2014, p.199). Echoing Whitworth (2014, p.197) she argues that "[o]ne should not expect support for direct democratic processes, such as radical information literacy, to emerge from most state apparatuses" (Ibid). This presents a significant barrier for those wishing to apply concepts of radical and critical information literacy in practice. Additionally, Giroux (2006, p.234) discusses how within neoliberalised forms of education, teachers are prevented from taking risks and designing their own lessons, and are stripped of authority, skills and creative possibilities.

10.4.8 Lack of practical recommendations

One of the main limitations of Giroux's theories is that there are few practical recommendations for challenging the problems he identifies. This is in part due to the contextual nature of critical pedagogy, and in part due to the understandings of the causes of problems within education and learning as being structural and therefore requiring collective action to achieve substantive change. This presents a significant barrier for practitioners wishing to improve practice on an individual level.

10.5   Summary

This chapter has explored the relevance of several critical pedagogical concepts, which answer the fourth research question of this study: *What aspects of critical pedagogy may be of most use to those seeking to support political agency through critical approaches to information literacy?* Suggestions have been made as to how these concepts shed light on young people's experiences of political information at a structural level and recommendations have been made relating to how the structure of and approaches to information literacy education could be adjusted to help young people to develop their experiences of political information in such a way that their political agency is supported to thrive. Additionally, some of the main challenges to implementing critical the relevant pedagogical approaches have been identified.

The table below summarises the critical pedagogical concepts that have been discussed in this chapter and their relationship to the relevant categories of the outcome space presented in Chapter Eight:

Category	Meaning	Relevant theory/concept
Category One: Identifying a range of sources of political information	Experiencing political information as different to information more generally	Political illiteracy
Category Two: Encountering political information out of context	Encountering political information as sources of relevant information	
Category Three: Filling a knowledge gap	Experiencing political information as objects which can meet a superficial information need	Banking model of education
Category Four: Gaining meaning and context	Experiencing political information as places from which understanding can be gained	Media literacy
Category Five: Applying relevant information to own life	Experiencing political information as useful for making informed decisions	Political agency
Category Six: Helping to work towards social change	Experiencing political information as useful for taking informed action in civic life	Civic literacy Critical consciousness

Table 10.2: Critical pedagogical concepts connected to the political information outcome space

The outcome space has been re-presented alongside relevant aspects of Giroux's and others' ideas around critical pedagogy, providing suggestions about how the information literacy education could be approached with the explicit aim of helping young people to develop their experiences of political information in such a way that their political agency may thrive. This may be seen as an experimental step towards "critical phenomenography" (Whitworth 2014, p.70) in which external influences and authority are considered as well as the hidden mental operations looked for by traditional approaches to phenomenography.

Relating the findings of young people's experiences of political information to previous phenomenographic studies brings validity to the findings of those studies and the present research, and provides insights into young people's experiences of information in ways which present the opportunity for practitioners to provide the appropriate support for learners. However, these insights are only able to offer insights at the micro, individual level, rather than at the macro, structural level. The critical pedagogical lens applied in this chapter allows for a broader exploration and socio-political understanding of the emerging themes and issues relating to young people's attitudes towards politics and political information, which may not be adequately explained with the

application of the individualistic methods of phenomenographic and personal construct theory analysis.

To make the most of the research findings, the outcome space and related discussion should serve a useful purpose (Whitworth 2014, p.66). The application of critical theory to the outcome space in this study, offers the opportunity to make recommendations for practice as well as to challenge the structures in which information literacy is located, to make the work of supporting people's political agency possible. Some general recommendations relating to the use of the research findings and critical pedagogical practice were presented in this chapter. More specific examples are discussed in the recommendations section of Chapter Eleven.

11. Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter presents a conclusion with reflections on this study and suggestions for future work. The research questions are addressed in detail, with discussion of how the findings from the interviews, focus groups and observations address these questions. The phenomenographic outcome space and research methods are discussed as potentially useful methodological approaches in information literacy. The potential implications for practice from the research findings and discussion are explored. Finally, the contributions to knowledge made by this study, the limitations of the research, reflections on the methodology, and recommendations for future work are discussed.

11.1 Revisiting the research questions

This study was designed to explore young people's experiences of political information, their critical information literacy capacities and sense of political agency, and to identify the potential role of critical approaches to information literacy in supporting political agency. It seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What sources of information influence young people's political opinions and worldviews?
2. In what qualitatively different ways do young people conceive of the sources of information which influence their political opinions and worldviews?
3. Do they think about this political information critically?
4. What aspects of critical pedagogy may be of most use to those seeking to support political agency through critical approaches to information literacy?

These questions were explored through an analysis of the literature and primary research conducted in a school in South Yorkshire, England. The findings were used to build a phenomenographic outcome space which aims to contribute to the theory and praxis around critical information literacy. The questions are addressed directly in the following sections.

11.1.1 What sources of information influence young people's political opinions and worldviews?

The results from the repertory grid interviews indicate that young people use a wide range of sources of political information to become informed about politics and the world around them. These sources of information include family, friends, teachers, television news, newspapers, radio shows, comedy shows, social media and community meetings. Participants were aware that they passively encounter information sources as well as actively engage in debate and discussion with other sources. These all shape their opinions and worldviews, to differing degrees.

Chapter Seven of this study offers a detailed description of the different sources of political information that were perceived as influencing young people's political opinions and worldviews, from the perspective of young people themselves. Chapter Nine relates the findings of this study back to the extant literature on young people's information sources, about which there is limited knowledge within the LIS literature. This study has identified the sources of information young people are aware of encountering and using for finding and receiving what they understand as political information, and has explored the variety of ways political information itself is conceptualised by young people. It is important to be aware of the different sources of political information young people use, which as identified above include a wide range of people, mainstream media and social media sources. These are beyond the realm of traditional information literacy instruction and it is therefore important, if seeking to support young people's development of information literacy in relation to political information and participation, to acknowledge these varied information landscapes and the different kinds of skills and capacities needed to understand how to critically evaluate and use the information they provide, in the process of forming political opinions and agency.

11.1.2 In what qualitatively different ways do young people conceive of the sources of information which influence their political opinions and worldviews?

This research question was addressed through the use of repertory grid interviews, interviews and focus groups. The use of personal construct theory and phenomenography enabled me to identify the qualitatively different ways in which the participants understand and experience the sources of political information they identified themselves as encountering and using.

The nature of young people's experiences of political information varies greatly, as exemplified by findings presented in Chapters Seven and Eight. The degree of complexity in the experiences of political information varied not only between participants but was also dependent on their particular relationship with the information sources under scrutiny.

The outcome space in Chapter Eight presents the categories of description which describe the various ways the participants experience political information. The outcome space presents the hierarchical relationship between these categories. The insight provided by this outcome space helps us to understand how young people experience political information sources in different ways, which contributes to an understanding of how librarians and other educators can work to support their development of political knowledge and political agency.

Chapter Seven presents six main categories relating to how participants construe the sources of political information they encounter:

- Category 1: Constructs describing practical features of the information, source or its use
- Category 2: Constructs evaluating the quality of the information
- Category 3: Constructs evaluating the authority of the source
- Category 4: Constructs describing a socio-political understanding about the source
- Category 5: Constructs relating to affective conceptions
- Category 6: Participants' choice about using the information source

This personal construct analysis of participants' constructs relating to political information sources contributed to the development of the phenomenographic outcome space, which took the experiences described by the participants and grouped them into categories of

description which describe the variation in experiences of political information. This study identifies six main categories relating to how participants construe the sources of political information they encounter:

Category of Description (Political information is experienced as…)	Meaning
Category One: A range of sources of information	Experiencing political information as different to information more generally
Category Two: Something which is encountered out of context	Encountering political information as sources of relevant information
Category Three: Something to fill a knowledge gap	Experiencing political information as objects which can meet a superficial information need
Category Four: Something to give meaning and context	Experiencing political information as places from which understanding can be gained
Category Five: Something which is relevant to one's own life	Experiencing political information as useful for making informed decisions
Category Six: Something which can support social change	Experiencing political information as useful for taking informed action in civic life

Table 11.1: Categories of description and their meanings

These categories describe the qualitatively different ways in which young people experience political information, and how they relate their own social and political contexts to the information they encounter. These descriptions provide a depth of understanding of the meaning young people assign to the various sources of political information they encounter. Chapter Eight presents an in-depth analysis of the structures of awareness and dimensions of variation within each of the different ways of experiencing political information. Chapter Nine connects these findings to the extant literature on experiences of information and ways of construing information, to identify the ways in which the findings from this study are supported by previous research, as well as to identify the novel findings from this study into an under-researched area. This study indicates that young people do not have restricted access to information, but do experience this information in very different ways. The identification of the different ways in which political information as a phenomenon is experienced by young people represents a contribution to knowledge and understanding of how the library and information profession may support young people's development of political information skills and competencies.

11.1.3 Do they think about this political information critically?

To address this question, the constructs elicited from the repertory grid interviews were coded to identify if any of these constructs could be considered 'critical' from an information literacy perspective. The data from the interviews and focus groups was also analysed phenomenographically to identify which ways of experiencing political information involved a critical dimension.

In Chapter Seven, the personal construct analysis of the repertory grid data indicated that some participants had difficulty critically evaluating the political information sources they encounter. Even where the sources of information can be seen as more easily critically assessed, such as textual information or formal learning resources, there were relatively few instances in which participants discussed their ability to challenge the authority of information sources, the truth, validity or reliability of the information. When participants did discuss aspects of critical evaluation, several participants used inaccurate terminology, and there was a lack of clarity about what this means as well as looks like in practice, which indicates an area in which young people may require more support. Participants often conflated the notions of truth and opinion, both of which were described as "facts" by several participants. This lack of clarity of concepts could be seen as another area in which young people would benefit from learning about in order to effectively evaluate the reliability of political information. However, participants did talk about some evaluative aspects of their experiences with political information sources. Some participants were capable of applying critical thought to their comparison of political information sources.

11.1.4 What aspects of critical pedagogy may be of most use to those seeking to support political agency through critical approaches to information literacy?

Chapter Ten focuses on aspects of critical pedagogy which were considered the most relevant to this study, which most significantly involves the work of Henry Giroux.

Through the acknowledgement of some of the aspects of education and librarianship which can be viewed as problematic from a critical theoretical viewpoint, library workers may be able to alter their approaches to information literacy instruction to halt the reproduction of

the aspects of information literacy instruction which perpetuate damaging aspects of neoliberal approaches to education. Through an insight into which of Giroux's concepts may explain young people's perceptions of political information, library workers may be able to approach information literacy instruction in ways which support the development of critical conceptions of the multiple sources of political information they encounter, and thereby support their political agency.

This critical lens allows for a broader exploration and socio-political understanding of the emerging themes and issues relating to young people's attitudes towards politics and political information, which may not be adequately explained with the application of the individualistic method of phenomenographic analysis. This approach to the study supports Brookfield's (2004) assertion that the application of critical theory can help to move the focus of practice from specific contextual issues to problems stemming from structural inequities. However, as discussed in Chapter Ten, the application of critical theories often helps to identify and explain structural problems, but is limited in its provision of solutions. Nevertheless, the identification of the ways in which individual experiences and perceptions may be shaped by structural issues such as political influences within mainstream media can help us understand how political information 'works' and influences people, and how information literacy instruction can support young people in their development of political agency and their encounters with political information. The application of critical theory in this study has helped to identify how critical approaches to information literacy instruction can address some of the potentially most significant issues in young people's experiences and understandings of political information, and help to use our limited resources and energy to the greatest effect (Brookfield 2004, p.5).

The participants of this study expressed some uncertainty about how to assess the information they encounter via the television and other forms of mass media and it is apparent that media and information literacy has a role to play in supporting them in this context. Beyond a 'neutral' conception of information literacy, however, a critical approach to instruction around news media takes an explicitly political approach to communicating the reproduction of structural inequities and injustices by the media. One outcome of this would be the increased ability of young people to understand the limitations of mass media

as a political information source, and not only an increased consciousness of the ways in which the mass media reproduces social problems but also an increased consciousness of the social problems themselves. It is hoped that this increased consciousness would lead to the development of political agency through an increased awareness of structural inequalities and an increased awareness about how to challenge them.

11.2 Limitations of the research

Several limitations of this study must be acknowledged:

First, the research sample was relatively small, and although it surpasses the minimum suggested sample size for phenomenographic studies (Trigwell 2000), the findings cannot be considered to be generalisable. Although this was not the aim of the research project, it does limit the potential usefulness of the research findings.

Second, in phenomenographic analysis, is it usually recommended that coding is inter-judged by multiple researchers. This verifies the effectiveness with which the categories explain the ways participants have experienced the research phenomenon (Pang & Marton 2005, p.172). A limitation of this research is that it was not possible for anyone other than me to analyse and check the data analysis. However, the presentation of findings included rich description and a number of excerpts from the interview transcripts with the goal of providing a sufficient amount of evidence to permit informed scrutiny of the analysis (Ibid, p.173). Phenomenographic analysis requires the researcher(s) to 'bracket' their own perceptions while analysing the data that has been collected and developing categories of description. This can be difficult for a researcher working alone, which brings into question whether phenomenographic research undertaken by an individual researcher can be considered valid (Bowden & Walsh 2000, p.30).

Third, in personal construct theory, it is considered good practice to return to the research participants with the findings from the analysed data and ensure that they are satisfied that the analysis accurately represents their construct systems. This was not possible in this study because of the limited time-frame and access granted for conducting the research.

Fourth, following the perspective of Marton and Booth (1997, p.16), this study rejects the "quantity of stuff learned" as a measure of learning achievement. However, this necessitates the suggestion of alternative ways of looking at learning achievement, potentially using the outcome space as a measure of the development of depths of understanding of political information and political agency. This is a non-traditional approach which would be challenging to apply in practice.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that this study was only able to consider a limited number of theoretical perspectives. There is much to be learnt from an exploration of young people's experiences of political information from a learning theory perspective, particularly in relation to the cognitive development of young people and the dualistic phase of development. Unfortunately it was not within the scope of this study to span further disciplinary areas.

11.3   Reflections on the research methods

This section reflects on the choice of research methods and considers their suitability for this study. A detailed account of how the methods were applied is presented in Chapter Five, including detailed reflection of the practical issues considered. This may be of interest and benefit to readers considering applying one or more of the methods in their own studies.

11.3.1 Reflections on the theoretical approach

In the context of this research, literacy is viewed through a critical lens, drawing heavily on the Freirean conception of literacy as "something which can change social relationships and power structures" (Whitworth 2014, p.79).

The study involved the application of three theoretical approaches which, even in pairs, have not previously been frequently combined. The novelty of this combined approach, although rewarding in many ways, represented a significant challenge at doctoral level. In hindsight, combining phenomenography with personal construct theory, or approaching phenomenography from a critical pedagogical perspective, would have been a sufficiently novel approach. However, the study does explore the phenomenon of young people's

experiences of political information with a significant amount of depth, and the application of critical pedagogical theories to the findings offers an insight into the solutions to the

Although the application of three theoretical approaches (personal construct theory, phenomenography and critical pedagogy) was successful in this study and resulted in a depth of insight to the research topic that would not have been provided by the use of one theoretical approach, the use of three theories within a doctoral study proved a significant challenge. It may have been more appropriate, or at least equally beneficial, to focus on one theoretical approach and apply it as thoroughly as possible. For example, it was not possible within the scale and time-frame of this study to revisit the school and use the outcome space as a learning and teaching resource to test its applicability and usefulness, but if a purely phenomenographic approach had been taken, it may have been possible to do this.

11.3.2 The appropriateness of a phenomenographic approach for this study

This study explores how young people experience political information. 'Experience' is understood as the relationship formed between the individual and the world (Marton, 1981); in the context of this research, that is the relationship between the young person and the sources which they consider to provide them with political information. Perceptions of the research phenomenon can vary greatly between individuals, although young people are often treated as a homogenous group. I particularly did not want to cast judgement on the suitability of the information sources identified by the participants or come to data collection and analysis with preconceived notions regarding the 'effectiveness' of young people's perceptions or information literacy. The phenomenographic approach provides space for this.

A phenomenographic approach was particularly appropriate for the topic of young people's political attitudes, knowledge and interest in relation to their conception and use of political and news information because it is an area which the participants were unlikely to have previously discussed or thought about in detail. The opinions and thoughts they expressed in interviews and focus groups were likely to be 'works in progress'; thoughts that they had not had the opportunity to fully develop, around a relatively complex

concept, asked of them by a researcher to whom they were not necessarily confident in expressing half-formed thoughts. It was important to communicate to participants that they were welcome to think aloud, be doubtful and pause throughout all of the stages of research. Phenomenography allows for this form of communication of understanding and encourages participants to acknowledge the development of their thoughts.

This method was an appropriate in a school environment where there was a requirement to be highly flexible based on school timetables, alterations, participant availability and the emergence of new opportunities for research, such as the observation of classes, which was not a research method that was planned from the outset, but which was an opportunity offered to me by the teaching staff and allowed a new avenue through which to gain an insight into the research phenomenon.

11.3.3 Choice of Giroux as key theorist

A choice was made early on in the development of the research approach that the work of Henry Giroux was likely to be the most relevant to the phenomena of information literacy and political agency, for the reasons discussed in Chapter Four, including recommendations in several articles and book chapters relating to the relevance of Giroux to librarianship, particularly information literacy. In further support of this decision, Henry Giroux was one of the keynote speakers at the CAPAL Conference held in Ottawa in June 2015; this conference focused on critical approaches to librarianship, including information literacy.

However, Giroux's work, although strongly focused on the importance of political agency and the ways in which education systems and society more widely stifle the potential of young people to develop political agency, there is less specific focus on how *information* is one of the many problematic facets of society. Although some of his work does discuss the role of the mass media, it may have been more appropriate to choose a theorist whose work is more strongly centred on media literacy and political agency. Additionally, as discussed in Chapter Four, a common criticism of Giroux (and other critical pedagogues) is that he refuses to make specific recommendations about changing educational practice. This made the critical analysis and development of recommendations fairly difficult, and the selection of a more practically-focused theorist may have yielded more practical

recommendations. However, it is also important to acknowledge the need to challenge systems and practice at the theoretical level and the application of Giroux's work to the phenomenographic outcome space does offer the potential for practitioners to consider the application of the relevant theories identified to their own educational contexts.

11.4   Original contributions to knowledge

This research set out to be not only of theoretical use to the LIS discipline, but to be of practical use to librarianship and wider education. The recommendations are of practical benefit to school, public, further and higher education library services, educators and wider society. Throughout the research design process, it was important for this study not only to have relevance to LIS research in terms of methodological originality and interesting research results, but also for the project outputs to be practically useful. The study has already been shown to have an impact on professional discourse, LIS research and practice, which is discussed below.

The development of information literacy education is an iterative process (Andretta, 2006), and the thesis has been written with this in mind. It is hoped that the recommendations made will be of use not only in developing a deeper understanding of the theories surrounding information literacy, critical thinking, education and democracy, but also be a practical contribution to the development of information literacy in practice.

I write at a time when the librarianship profession is seriously challenged by deprofessionalisation and a lack of understanding about the social value of library and information services. School libraries are not a statutory service in the United Kingdom and information literacy, although an emerging field, has not been formally embedded in school education. It is hoped that this thesis is a move towards an increased understanding of the potential of information literacy from a critical theoretical perspective which will help deepen its value to society and contribute to an acknowledgement of the need for education to help people to become critical and engaged citizens.

11.4.1 Theoretical and methodological originality

The theoretical approach of the study is the first research to use phenomenography to explore young people's experiences of political information. It is also the first to combine critical pedagogical theory, personal construct theory and phenomenography in this way. The use of repertory grid interviews is also novel. It is the first research to use the method to investigate young people's political views and conceptions of political information sources. The research findings offer an original insight into the ways young people conceive of political information sources, and present a challenge to a number of assumptions made regarding young people's political attitudes and information use.

The use of phenomenography in information literacy research is relatively novel and few studies have explored young people's experiences of information. None have explored young people's experiences of *political* information specifically. The phenomenographic approach offers an insight into the dynamics of learning through interviews and observations which other methods of behaviour analysis and levels of knowledge cannot provide.

This study is a contribution to the development of information literacy theory, adding weight to the academic and intellectual argument about the social value of libraries and their role in strengthening democracy not only through providing access to information, but helping people to understand how to effectively use information.

The discussion of the relevance of critical pedagogy to young people's experiences of political information demonstrates that critical approaches to information literacy do have a role to play in the development of political agency in young people, and contributes to the understanding of the application of critical pedagogy to the field of LIS, which is currently under-considered (Seale 2013, p.40). As identified in the literature review, several factors are at play in the development of political agency. The outcome space from this study contributes to an understanding of the interplay between political knowledge, interest in politics, experiences of political information and perceptions of political self-efficacy.

Furthermore, this research contributes to the diversification of information literacy research. The information literacy research agenda has been identified as being in need of a change of focus, from "imposing preconceived notions and standard practices" to "understanding information experience from multiple perspectives" (Bruce et al. 2014, p.183). This study directly contributes knowledge and understanding of one of the issues identified by Bruce et al. (2014); that of issues around how the authority of information is established by different communities (Ibid). The findings and discussion of this study, relating to how young people derive authority from the various sources of political information they encounter is a starting point in this area.

11.5   Recommendations for further research

This section considers recommendations for further research.

11.5.1 Quantitative analysis of how authority is established

Owing to the application of three theories to the study (personal construct theory, phenomenography and critical pedagogical theory), the collection of a relatively large amount of data from interviews, focus groups and surveys, and the importance of ensuring that the phenomenographic analysis was thorough, it was not feasible to analyse the repertory grid data as fully as could otherwise have been possible. The focus of this study was not on identifying quantitative trends in the construal of political information, but on identifying the range of qualitative experiences of political information. In-depth quantitative analysis was therefore not conducted. However, there is the potential for this analysis to be conducted at a later stage, for example there could be scope for an exploration of trends in how young people's construction of the authority of political information.

11.5.2 Development of the use of phenomenography and personal construct theory in information research

This study applied phenomenographic and personal construct methods to information research, to explore the experiences of young people in relation to political information. The findings illuminate only a small area, and a recommendation for further study is the application of these approaches in studies of information experience more widely. In order to support young people's development of political agency through engagement with information literacy in relation to political information, it is first crucial to make ourselves aware of how young people experience political information, including how they encounter and use it (Bruce 2008, p.ix). The phenomenographic and personal construct approaches taken to this study offer ways of achieving these insights.

11.6   Recommendations for practice

The previous section identified recommendations for further research based on some of the key issues emerging from the findings of this study, addressing the aim of this original research into the applicability of critical pedagogical theory and personal construct theory to phenomenographic explorations of young people's experiences of political information. Although it is important to bear in mind Giroux's argument that critical pedagogy must not conceptualise pedagogy as the transmission of strategies and skills (Giroux 1994, p.30), it is possible to make some recommendations for practice which are applicable and adaptable for different contexts and which conceptualise teaching as more than the mere transmission of skills.

Another aim of the research was to identify the practical use of critical pedagogical theory to support the development of young people's political agency in the school environment and beyond, through the identification of relevant interventions following phenomenographic analysis of young people's experiences of political information. This represents a move from the description of conceptions to the generation of recommendations for practical interventions, as recommended by Larsson & Holmström (2007, p.62). Some recommendations are presented below.

11.6.1 Helping young people to understand how the media 'works'

One significant finding of the research was that the young people involved in the study were extremely concerned about the impact of immigration on their employment opportunities and the impact of benefit fraud on the health of the economy and related pressures on public spending. As discussed in Chapter Nine, these issues have been found to be grossly exaggerated in mainstream media and public perception of them has been found to be related to media portrayals. In order to make informed political choices and form decisions, it is important for people to be critical about the information they encounter and be able to locate accurate information when necessary. Basic 'generic' information literacy skills are therefore important, as acknowledged by Lupton and Bruce (2010), which in the context of political information would enable people to find political 'facts' and be able to interpret them.

However, it is also important to support the development of 'transformative' information literacy skills (Ibid), which in the context of information literacy for the development of political agency involves the development of the ability to find information about, for example, what different types of immigration there are, and then use this and other information to consider, perhaps in dialogue with others, to what extent immigration as it is portrayed by the mass media is as problematic as the rhetoric and messages around it seek to lead people to believe. This kind of topic has many links to media literacy, and it is therefore recommended that information literacy practitioners seek to explore this area when looking to approach information literacy from a more complex perspective than the 'generic', functional approach. As discussed in Chapter Ten, the critical pedagogical approach to this work would seek to help young people to understand how the "ideological infrastructure" of the mass media acts as a powerful "teaching machine" and a threat to informed citizenship (Giroux 2011, p.97).

11.6.2   Political education

A recurring theme throughout the focus groups and interviews was the perception from many participants that the political education they receive at school is not sufficient, or does not contain the relevant information, to help them be politically knowledgeable and

active. Beyond the perfunctory content of 'how politics works', however, political education would be of most benefit to young people if it involved a breadth of content, including helping them to learn how to critique how politics *does not* work, for many groups of people, including themselves. The development of political agency involves the ability to be reflective and critical, rather than merely knowledgeable about the 'neutral' aspects of political systems. A knowledge of structures and systems is a part of the development of political agency, but a knowledge of how to challenge these through protest and the assertion of democratic rights is also important.

Giroux argues that it is not enough to teach political knowledge alone, but that individuals must "learn how they can act on their beliefs, reflect on their role as engaged citizens and intervene in the world as part of the obligation of what it means to be a socially responsible agent" (Giroux 2012, p.8). Information literacy education is well placed to support the development of this knowledge, through helping learners find out what words in political vocabularies mean, to challenge assumptions with evidence they find online, participate in digital citizenship safely and learn to communicate their own opinions, which have been developed through engagement with the information and counter-narratives they have encountered, in discussions. Alongside political education in schools and other educational settings, information literacy instruction provided by library workers and other educators could help young people to appreciate the role of political information and knowledge in developing the understanding and values that underpin democratic societies and formative culture.

11.6.3 *Understanding of the role of popular culture in shaping young people's worldviews and perspectives*

Any information literacy work engaging with young people's use of political information for the development of political agency must acknowledge the breadth of sources young people encounter and which inform their political attitudes. Popular culture should be taken seriously as a source of political information, because this is where young people identify they encounter the majority of the information that shapes their worldviews. This study demonstrates the relevance of popular culture to the lives of young people, in

relation to where they feel they get information about politics and current affairs from. They evaluate it in the same ways they evaluate other, more traditional sources of information. Social media and news entertainment programmes blur the lines between these sources of information, and it is not always clear whether opinions or facts are one or the other, or a combination of the two. Similarly, people are a key source of political information for young people, and it is not always clear whether the information or opinions are being imparted by a friend or stranger, expert or non-expert, are indeed reliable. Information literacy practitioners need to be able to support young people in their use of these non-traditional, non-scholarly sources of information.

11.6.4   Application of phenomenography to information literacy

This study makes two main recommendations for the application of phenomenography in information literacy practice:

11.6.4.1   Consideration of the outcome space

As a product of analysis, it is hoped the outcome space will prove useful for understanding the different ways in which young people experience political information, and provide insight into what would be required for young people to move from less complex to more complex ways of understanding the phenomenon, in order to develop a sense of political agency and an increased engagement with political life (Åkerlind 2005, p.72).

11.6.4.2   Consideration of the transformative window of informed learning

The most relevant aspect of previous phenomenographic studies to the findings of this research into young people's experiences of political information and how information literacy can support young people's development of political agency through information use, is that of the transformative window of informed learning developed by Lupton and Bruce (2010). This transformative window may be useful to practitioners seeking to support a deeper engagement with information literacy for the development of young people's political agency. When information literacy is viewed through the transformative window, information literacy is approached from a critical perspective and is understood as a range

of ways to use information for the benefit of oneself and society. It is considered to be important for empowerment and social change, and supports the use of information to challenge the status quo and to empower oneself and the community (Bruce 2008, p.112). In practice, this involves engaging in "collaborative and participatory information practices that critique society and lead to social action" and is assessed through a process of "social critique and action" (Ibid). This way of viewing information literacy practice lends itself to the area of political participation and agency and warrants further investigation for application in practice in this area.

11.6.5 Engagement with critical pedagogy

The use of critical pedagogy in approaches to information literacy instruction is not widespread, but is an emerging area of practice, particularly in the United States (Tewell, 2015). This study connects young people's conceptions and experiences of political information to areas of critical pedagogy which could be usefully applied in information literacy instruction (and education more widely) to support the development of young people's political agency.

Critical approaches to information literacy acknowledge that pedagogy is always political, because it is "connected to the acquisition of agency". In the context of the development of young people's political agency, the political nature of education and learning is brought to the fore and used to support the abilities of learners to become aware of the relationships between knowledge, authority and power, and to be able to ask questions about who has control over how knowledge, values and skills are produced, through an increased capacity for social questioning (Cope 2010, p.19). These abilities result in an increased capacity for learners to take control of not only their understanding of learning, but also their ability to challenge and question the information they encounter, make meaningful decisions based on their understanding, and participate in society with an increased sense of agency.

It is important to acknowledge that the recommendations made in this study for critical approaches to information literacy do not mean that a relativist approach to knowledge and information is endorsed, nor does it mean to suggest that the role of the librarian should be non-authoritative in terms of classroom discipline and information provision and

support. However, it is important for librarians to play the role of facilitators rather than authorities (Whitworth 2014), to prevent the reproduction of problems within the education system. This takes the form of guidance in ways to evaluate information, rather than as an authority *telling* young people how to make critical judgements. One way in which this can manifest is through classroom activities which relate to the interests and experiences of each student, to engender intellectual curiosity (Pankl & Coleman 2010, p.9). Another is to create an environment which encourages sharing and dialogue among students (Ibid). Through these methods, some degree of 'authority' over the learning environment is maintained.

11.6.5.1   Examples of critical pedagogy in practice

The table below presents examples of critical information literacy praxis. Other less directly relevant examples are available in *Critical Library Instruction: Theories and Methods* (2010) and *Information Literacy and Social Justice: Radical Professional Praxis* (2013):

Author(s)	Focus	Critical theoretical concepts
Critten (2015)	Supporting students to understand how their learning is influenced by ideology	Ideology Critical consciousness Critical self-reflection
Jacobs (2010)	Wikipedia as the topic of problem-posing to encourage students to consider how knowledge is created produced and disseminated	Banking education Teaching the conflicts Problem-posing
(Swanson, 2004)	Problem-posing to expose students' beliefs about knowledge	Problem-posing Banking education
Higgins & Gregory (2013)	Encouraging students to consider capitalism's effect on information flows	False consciousness Corporatization of information Consciousness raising
Keer (2010)	Creating non-oppressive classroom environments	Liberatory education practices Critical thinking Authority of learners/educators Giving voice
Mirtz (2010)	Encouraging students to make decisions about information sources and their authority in non-traditional ways.	Disintermediation Challenging transmission models of education Transformative activities

Table 11.2 Examples of critical information literacy praxis

11.7   Conclusions

This study has explored young people's experiences of political information to develop an understanding of how they relate to information, for the purpose of making recommendations for the development of effective information literacy instruction.

The most significant findings to emerge from this study are those which relate to the critical capacities of the participants, their genuine interest in social issues and their intellectual curiosity about politics and how it relates to their lives. Throughout the fieldwork, it was readily apparent that participants do have the capacity for critical thinking and evaluation of mass media and other information sources. This needs to be encouraged and supported in order to ensure that young people make political decisions and take action based on knowledge and a fuller picture of systems of power and control, and how these are perpetuated through the information sources they use. This kind of work inevitably necessitates challenging the status quo in terms of the educational curriculum and modes of teaching and learning, which poses a significant barrier. Although tweaking current activities such as debating societies may be a good way to introduce critical information literacy in schools, these existing structures have their own problems with regard to perpetuating hierarchies and structures of authority which may need to be addressed.

Adding a critical dimension to the research findings provides the opportunity to identify practical, policy-based and theoretical ways in which information literacy can support the development of young people's political agency, to help us understand the socio-political and structural dimension behind *why* some young people do not experience political information in the higher levels of the outcome space and with the associated horizons and levels of understanding, and to help us develop ways of providing information literacy instruction which acknowledge the limiting contexts in which we work at the same time as challenging the assumptions and practices of education to improve the possibility of young people developing the capacities for meaningful political engagement, in their immediate communities and the world more broadly.

The findings of this study indicate that young people, or at least this participant cohort, do not represent the apathetic, anti-social and self-interested stereotype they are so frequently associated with (Fahmy 2006, p.3). It is also apparent, however that some aspects of their conceptions of political information, their critical literacy abilities and their general social and political frames are limited, which is often led by priorities that can be read as self-interested and anti-social. These outlooks appear to be based on ignorance, misinformation and fear, which this thesis theorises is the result of exposure to messages from the media, individuals whose opinions they hold in high esteem and other sources of information, to which they do not always apply critical thought when taking these messages on board. This chapter has identified the elements of critical pedagogical theory which may help educators to explore young people's constructs and how these are informed by their engagement with various forms of political information, and encourage young people to critically interrogate their own assumptions.

It is apparent that when considering young people's conceptions of political information, these conceptions are extremely varied. As the repertory grid findings indicate, young people have a broad conception of the 'political', and encounter a wide variety of information sources which they consider provide them with the information and knowledge to form opinions about the people and the world around them. It is important to be aware of the variation in young people's experiences and conceptions of information and politics when seeking to help them meaningfully participate in civic life, as well as to appreciate that there is a wide variety of valid forms of political participation that do not always conform to mainstream conceptions of politics, or of participation.

While the participants are aware of many of the key concepts of information literacy and critical thinking, they do not always apply these skills in evaluating political information sources and are not always aware of the bias inherent in practically all forms of political information. When they do identify political information as lacking in trustworthiness, participants are often inclined to use the information to help them form an opinion anyway, and are often unsure about what alternative information sources to seek instead. From discussion in individual interviews and focus groups, as well as observing lessons, it is apparent that many young people use 'shortcuts' and heuristics to form opinions about

political and social issues. This may be because more value is placed on their having an opinion, regardless of how informed it is, than their having an opinion based on knowledge of whatever facts there may be, critical thought about the issue, and an understanding of the wider social context.

It is crucial to acknowledge that young people's conceptions regarding what constitutes a 'political' issue is often different to that of the way adults conceive of the political, and that what constitutes information for young people (and adults) can be very broad. Additionally, political information can be very distinct from other kinds of information, and the information landscape takes a very different shape to information relating to academic disciplines. For example, concepts of entertainment and information are intertwined, and formal and informal information sources as well as human and non-human sources are part of the information experience. This sets political information and related issues of information literacy apart from other contexts, and it is important for theory and practice to acknowledge and act on this.

Recommendations for practice identified include suggestions for lesson activities, aspects of information, media and digital literacy to be considered in citizenship and political education, and more large-scale systemic changes to education to focus on young people's differing experiences of the same educational phenomenon, such as concepts of citizenship and political information. There is much scope for libraries to support critical pedagogy for political agency. Libraries themselves offer a space for the development of a formative culture where people can engage with social issues, seek information and support with information literacy. It is important to ensure that these spaces are available in schools (and the wider community) and that these spaces are nurtured with support from information literacy practitioners, as discussed in the previous section. However, as discussed in Chapter Ten, there are several structural and individual barriers which may make critical information literacy practice difficult for library workers and other educators and further work should be undertaken to tackle these.

Appendix A: Citizenship Provision in UK Curricula

Curricula in the United Kingdom

Under the Education Reform Act 1988, school curricula in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are controlled by the Department for Education. The curriculum in Scotland is set by the Scottish Government, which between 2011 and 2013 introduced the Curriculum for Excellence (Education Scotland, 2014). The curricula are statutory for all state-funded schools but do not apply to privately funded schools. Within the curricula, differing levels of statutory provision of politics and citizenship education are required.

This section has provided a brief overview of the presence of secondary education curricula across the United Kingdom. The following section focuses on citizenship education within these curricula, to provide an insight into the formal education young people receive relating to political knowledge and participation, and which may contribute to the development of political agency.

Citizenship in the National Curriculum (England and Wales)

The National Curriculum in England and Wales acknowledges the contribution that citizenship education can make to political participation and engagement. A Qualification and Curriculum Authorities advisory group recommended that teaching citizenship and democracy be part of the national curriculum in 1997 in response to concerns about declining political participation amongst young people (Kerr, 1999). The revised curriculum approved by the government in 2001 made citizenship education a compulsory subject within the national curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4 (ages 11 - 16) for all schools in England (Leighton, 2004). Citizenship has been a statutory part of the National Curriculum at Key Stage 3 and 4 since 2002 and is available as a non-statutory programme of study at Key Stage 1 and 2 (ages 5-11). At the time of writing, provision is in a state of flux between old and new programmes of study:

> The current national curriculum programmes of study for citizenship at key stages 3 and 4 have been disapplied with effect from 1 September 2013 and are no longer statutory…Citizenship remains a compulsory national curriculum subject at key stages 3 and 4. New statutory programmes of study will be introduced from September 2014. (Department for Education, 2013)

The citizenship curriculum covers a range of knowledge and skills aimed to prepare young people for involvement in society. This includes relating to social justice, human rights, community cohesion and global interdependence. The Department for Education (2012) describe citizenship education as providing "[T]he knowledge, skills and understanding to play an effective role in public life".

There is also an acknowledgement of the need for young people to be knowledgeable about formal political processes: "This includes voting, the importance of consultation" (Ibid) but also the less formal issues that people need to be aware of when considering their political views and how they will choose to participate: "membership of pressure groups, the role of the media and other ways of influencing decision-making" (Ibid). In 2014, the Department for Education launched an open consultation on GCSE and A level reform, which included a draft of revised GCSE subject content for Citizenship Studies. The aim of this content was to "[E]nable students to deepen their understanding of democracy and government, the law, rights and responsibilities and how we live together in society." (Department for Education, 2015)

Curriculum for Excellence (Scotland)

In Scotland, the Curriculum for Excellence embeds citizenship education into the eight curriculum areas (Expressive arts, Health and wellbeing, Languages, Mathematics, Religious and moral education, Sciences, Social studies, Technologies):

> Global citizenship brings together education for citizenship, international education and sustainable development education and recognises the common outcomes and principles of these three areas. All curriculum areas can contribute to developing the skills, attributes and knowledge that will create active global citizens. (Education Scotland, 2015)

Within the Global Citizenship theme, there is a specific focus on education for citizenship:

> Education for citizenship addresses the exercising of rights and responsibilities within communities at local, national and global levels. It encompasses the development of informed decision making, and the ability to take thoughtful and responsible action, locally and globally. Young people are citizens of today, not citizens in waiting. Education for citizenship is about developing in learners the ability to take up their place in society as responsible, successful, effective and confident citizens both now and in the future. (Education Scotland, 2013)

Appendix B: Critical theorists of potential relevance to LIS research

Theorist	Key areas/concepts
Michael Apple	Cultural politics, curriculum theory and research, development of democratic education
Stanley Aronowitz	Education and social class/power, labour, science and technology, social movements and political organisation
Mikhail Bakhtin	Genre, chronotope, unfinalisability, polyphony, strong objectivity, authority
Gloria Ladson Billings	Critical race theory, culturally relevant pedagogy, multicultural perspectives of education
Pierre Bourdieu	Capital (social, cultural, symbolic), field (dominant/dominated and orthodox/heterodox positions), habitus, social mobility, social networks
Antonia Darder	Class inequality, leadership, Latino education, pedagogy of beauty, racism
Paulo Freire	Conscientization, critical consciousness, critical literacy, ecopedagogy, hidden curriculum, multicultural education, student-centred learning, queer pedagogy
John Taylor Gatto	Class, hidden curriculum, home- and un-schooling, open source education, total institution
Henry Giroux	Anti-oppressive education, border politics, critical consciousness, critical literacy, cultural studies, curriculum studies, imperialism, media studies, militarism, multicultural education, pedagogy of hope, public pedagogy, queer pedagogy, schooling, student-centred learning, teaching for social justice, youth studies
John Goodlad	Collective democratic intelligence, education and democracy, humanism, praxis, progressivism, school as a cultural entity, school renewal
Antonio Gramsci	Absolute historicism, critical self-consciousness, cultural hegemony, praxis, role of intellectuals in society, prominent discourse, social relations
Matt Hern	Alternative forms of education, community development, deschooling, education and urban studies, gentrification, globalisation, participatory urbanism, radical democracy, radical urbanism, safety and risk
John Holt	Homeschooling, school reform, unschooling, youth rights
bell hooks	Capitalism, communities of resistance, feminism, gender, intersectionality, holistic education, literacy, praxis, race, teaching critical thinking
Ivan Illich	Commodification, conviviality, counterproductivity, de-institutionalisation, deschooling, economics of scarcity, gender, informal education, learning webs, lifelong learning, professionalisation, self-directed education, social relations, specific diseconomy
Douglas Kellner	Alter-globalisation, critical media literacy, culture industries, domestic terrorism, globalisation, media culture, media politics, technoliteracies
Joe L. Kincheloe	Kinderculture, critical cognitive theory, critical constructivism, multicultural education, postformalism, queer pedagogy, urban education
Jonathan Kozol	Civil rights, education reform, homelessness, multicultural education, race
Henry Levin	Cost-effectiveness analysis, economics of education, school reform
Donaldo Macedo	Bilingual education, contrastive analysis, language acquisition, language policy, miseducation, multicultural education, psycho- and sociolinguistics
Peter McLaren	Revolutionary critical pedagogy, queer pedagogy, social class
Ira Shor	Composition and rhetoric, critical literacy, critical teaching, race, empowering education, rhetoric of space and place, urban education, working-class studies
Shirley R. Steinberg	Christotainment, kinderculture, critical multiculturalism, media literacy, postformalism, queer pedagogy, urban youth culture
Howard Zinn	Civil rights and anti-war movements, communism, critical citizenship, labour history, history teaching, politics of history, race relations

Appendix C: Fieldwork Audit Trail

Research Method	Participants	Dates	Locations	Data generated	Method(s) of analysis
Questionnaires	27	13 – 17 May 2013	Tutor group classrooms	27 completed questionnaires	Quantitative
Repertory grid interviews	23	22 May – 17 July 2013	Study space, library and staff dev. room	23 repertory grids 23 interview transcripts (30 mins – 1hr)	Rep Grid software Phenomenographic analysis of transcripts
Class observations	c.90	3 – 28 June 2013	Humanities classrooms	Field notes detailing observations of approx. 20 lessons	Not analysed for use in findings
Focus groups	23	5, 10, 17 July 2013	English classroom	3 focus group transcripts (1hr 30mins each)	Phenomenographic analysis of transcripts

Appendix D: Political Knowledge Questionnaire

Questionnaire
Please return to your tutor at the end of tutor period

This is a questionnaire to find out a little about what you know and think about politics. It won't take long to complete. Please try your best and don't worry if you don't know the answers, just try not to guess, and tick 'I don't know'. Please complete it on your own. You don't have to answer any of the questions if you don't want to.

	Question	Options	Answer
1	Who is the current Prime Minister?	Nick Clegg	
		David Cameron	
		George Osborne	
		I don't know	
2	Which political party was Margaret Thatcher the leader of?	Labour	
		Conservative	
		Liberal Democrat	
		I don't know	
3	How often are general elections usually held in the UK?	**Every five years**	
		Every seven years	
		Every ten years	
		I don't know	
4	Can you vote if you are in prison?	Yes	
		No	
		I don't know	
5	Who is allowed to see reports, accounts, and records of decisions made by the local council?	Councillors	
		People aged over 18	
		Anyone	
		I don't know	
6	What kind of mayor does Doncaster have?	Civic	
		Elected	
		Both	
		I don't know	
7	What voting system is used in UK General Elections?	**First past the post**	
		Single transferable vote	
		Alternative vote	
		I don't know	
8	Who places limits on how much bankers can give themselves in bonuses?	**Bankers**	
		National government	
		The European Union	
		I don't know	
9	How much of the national budget for welfare goes to people on Jobseekers' Allowance?	**3%**	
		23%	
		43%	
		I don't know	

10	Are you allowed to hold a protest in a public space without telling the police first?	Yes	
		No	
		Not if it is a march	
		Only if it is a march	
		I don't know	
11	Does a citizen of the European Union have the right to live or get a job in any country in the European Union?	**Yes**	
		No	
		I don't know	
12	How interested in politics would you say you are?	Very	
		Somewhat	
		Neither interested nor uninterested	
		Not much	
		Not at all	
		I don't know	
13	Do you think that the voting age should be lowered from 18 to 16?	Yes	
		No	
		I don't know	
		I don't care	

Finally please could you give a few bits of information about yourself:

14 What is your name?			
15 What is your tutor group?			
16 How old are you?			
17 How do you describe your gender?			
18 To which of these groups do you consider you belong?	**White**	1. English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British	
		2. Irish	
		3. Gypsy or Irish Traveller	
		4. Any other White background, *please describe*	
	Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups	5. White and Black Caribbean	
		6. White and Black African	
		7. White and Asian	
		8. Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background, *please describe*	
	Asian / Asian British	9. Indian	
		10. Pakistani	
		11. Bangladeshi	
		12. Chinese	
		13. Any other Asian background, *please describe*	

	Black / African / Caribbean / Black British	14. African	
		15. Caribbean	
		16. Any other Black / African / Caribbean background, *please describe*	
	Other ethnic group	17. Arab	
		18. Any other ethnic group, *please describe*	

19. Would you be willing to take part in the next stages of the research? There will be a short interview and you will be asked to keep a diary using tumblr or on paper.

Yes		No		I'm not sure	

Note: The questionnaire was presented to participants printed double-sided on one sheet of A4 paper. Questions 1-13 were on side one and questions 14-19 were on side two. Correct answers to the multiple choice questions are presented here in bold.

Appendix E: Questionnaire Design Rationale

Question	Rationale for topic	Category
1. Who is the current Prime Minister?	This was considered to be an easy opening question to boost participant confidence and encourage participation.	National politics
2. Which political party was Margaret Thatcher the leader of?	This was considered a relatively easy question to boost confidence and encourage participation.	National politics
3. How often are general elections usually held in the UK?	This question relates to the national democratic process and was considered a relatively easy question to ask relating to this area.	National politics
4. Can you vote if you are in prison?	All convicted prisoners are prohibited from voting in parliamentary, local or European parliamentary elections, for the duration of their detention (House of Commons 2013). A Draft Voting Eligibility (Prisoners) Bill was published in November 2012 and on 16 April 2013 a motion was approved in the House of Commons to set up a committee to report on it. This question was asked because the issue had been reported in the media.	Civic rights
5. Who is allowed to see reports, accounts, and records of decisions made by the local council?	This question was designed to elicit responses relating to an aspect of civic rights and local democracy that is not taught to participants through formal education.	Civic rights and local politics
6. What kind of mayor(s) does Doncaster have?	Doncaster has two mayors; a civic and an elected mayor. There was a mayoral election in Doncaster on 2 May 2013 (the week before the questionnaires were circulated) which was high profile in local and regional news. This question was designed to identify whether participants were aware of the local democratic structure.	Local politics
7. What voting system is used in UK General Elections?	This question was designed to identify whether participants were aware of the method of selection of elected representatives in the national democratic system.	National politics
8. Who places limits on how much bankers can give themselves in bonuses?	The EU "banker bonus cap" was passed on 26 June 2013, a month after the questionnaire was conducted. The regulations came into force on 1 January 2014. Mass media news outlets were reporting quite heavily on this subject during the research period, including the weeks preceding the circulation of the questionnaire. This question was designed to identify whether participants were aware of an issue relating to the economic crisis which was of high profile at the time of the questionnaire being conducted.	International politics
9. How much of the national budget for welfare goes to people on Jobseekers' Allowance?	During 2013, a significant amount of mass media news reporting and other content focused on concerns about public spending and unemployment. Research reported in the weeks preceding the questionnaire being conducted	National politics, the economy,

	indicated that there are significant general public misconceptions about the extent of spending on unemployment benefits (Ipsos Mori 2013). This question was designed to identify whether the research participants shared the misconceptions of the general public.	public spending
10. Are you allowed to hold a protest in a public space without telling the police first?	This question was designed to identify whether participants were aware of their rights as citizens to protest and how they might go about it.	Civic rights
11. Does a citizen of the European Union have the right to live or get a job in any country in the European Union?	This question was designed to identify whether participants were aware of their employment rights as EU citizens.	International politics and civic rights
12. How interested in politics would you say you are?	This question was designed to identify how interested in politics the participants consider themselves to be.	Political attitude
13, Do you think that the voting age should be lowered from 18 to 16?	This question was asked in the context of the lowering of the voting age from 18 to 16 for the Scottish Independence Referendum and associated discussions about lowering the voting age for general and local elections to increase young people's participation in politics (citation)	Political attitude

Appendix F: Questionnaire Findings

This appendix presents the findings from the questionnaires. The questionnaire design, conduct and analysis are discussed in Chapter Four. The questions asked fall within three categories:

- Demographic questions (age and gender)
- Questions relating to political knowledge (local, national and EU politics and civic rights)
- Questions relating to political attitudes (level of political interest and thoughts on lowering the voting age)

The results of the data analysis are presented in this chapter, with an overview of the demographic information collected from the participants discussed first.

Demographic information about the questionnaire participants

The tables below show the demographic details of the participants, provided by the participants in response to questions at the end of the questionnaire.

Question 16: How old are you?

Answer	Response	%
15	22	61.11%
14	14	38.88%
Total	36	100.00%

Figure F1: Questionnaire participants by age

The questionnaire was conducted in May 2013, by which point the majority of the year group were 15 (students in Y10 would have been born between September 1997 and August 1998).

Question 17: How would you describe your gender?

Answer	Response	%
Female	24	66.66%
Male	12	33.34%
Total	36	100.00%

Figure F2: Questionnaire participants by gender

A significant imbalance between the genders of participants at this stage was observed. This was not a problem in the context of this research because I was not seeking to be able to make generalisations about the relationship between political knowledge, political attitudes and political agency based on gender. However, it was interesting to note and was something I bore in mind in later stages of the research. For example, when distributing questionnaires and asking students to participate during tutor period, I observed that girls and boys tended to sit on tables with their friends of the same gender, and when one girl expressed an interest in participating she would encourage her friends to do the same. In contrast, boys would take the questionnaire and not urge the other boys on their table to participate. This may account for the imbalance in gender between participants. It is possible that my presence as a researcher influenced the gender balance in participants, because as a newcomer to the classroom environment, it is possible that girls were more receptive to "helping" me with my research, as a woman in my 20s and someone they may have felt able to identify with.

Responses to questions relating to political knowledge

The tables below show responses to each of the questions relating to political knowledge. The correct answers to the questions are indicated in bold.

1. Who is the current Prime Minister?

Answer		Response	%
Nick Clegg		1	3%
David Cameron		36	100%
George Osborne		0	0%
I don't know		0	0%
Total		36 (+1)	100%

Table F1: Responses to Q1. "Who is the current Prime Minister?"

Question one was an easy opener to boost confidence and encourage participation. All participants answered correctly. It should be noted that one participant selected David Cameron and also indicated that Nick Clegg is the "sort of" Prime Minister, which indicates a high level of knowledge about the current structure of national government. This is represented in the table below with (+1) in the total.

2. Which political party was Margaret Thatcher the leader of?

Answer		Response	%
Labour		8	22%
Conservative		26	72%
Liberal Democrat		2	6%
I don't know		0	0%
Total		36	100%

Table F2: Responses to Q2. "Which political party was Margaret Thatcher the leader of?"

Similarly to the first question, this question was asked to boost participant confidence and it was anticipated that all participants would answer the question correctly, either because of Margaret Thatcher's high status as a cultural figure, local 'infamy' in the ex-mining communities of Doncaster, or following the media coverage of her death on 8 April 2013 (the month before the research was conducted). However, the 28% of participants who responded with either Labour or Liberal Democrats indicates that either participants were not aware of Thatcher's political affiliation, or had a low degree of knowledge about political parties in general. Overall levels of political knowledge are discussed in section 0, and participant understanding of the political spectrum is a theme which is discussed in more depth in the following chapters.

3. How often are general elections usually held in the UK?

Answer		Response	%
About every five years		31	86%
About every seven years		0	0%
About every ten years		0	0%
I don't know		5	14%
Total		36	100%

Table F3: Responses to Q3. "How often are general elections usually held in the UK?"

This question relates to the national democratic process and was considered a relatively easy question to ask relating to this area. The high number of correct responses to this question indicates that participants had an awareness of the ways in which this particular aspect of the national democratic process operates. It should be noted that 2013 was not a general election year in the UK.

4. Can you vote if you are in prison?

Answer		Response	%
Yes		11	31%
No		13	36%
I don't know		12	33%
Total		36	100%

Table F4: Responses to Q4. "Can you vote if you are in prison?"

This question related to the rights of citizens. At the time of writing, UK prisoners are banned from voting on the basis that by being convicted of a crime they have forfeited the right to vote. This question was asked with awareness that the issue had been reported and debated in mainstream media, as a result of the European Court of Human Rights stating that a blanket ban on prisoners voting was disproportionate. The dispersed responses indicate that this topic is not something participants were highly aware of despite heavy media coverage in the weeks preceding the questionnaire being conducted. However, it may also indicate that it is one very specific question regarding which participants were simply not familiar because of a lack of personal relevance, or a more general lack of interest in electoral rights.

5. Who is allowed to see reports, accounts, and records of decisions made by the local council?

Answer		Response	%
Councillors		8	22%
People aged over 18		3	8%
Anyone		7	19%
I don't know		18	50%
Total		36	100%

Table F5: Responses to Q5. "Who is allowed to see reports, accounts, and records of decisions made by the local council?"

This question was designed to elicit responses relating to an aspect of civic rights and local democracy that is not taught to participants through formal education. I anticipated that a low proportion of participants would answer correctly, and it was hoped that if participants did not know

the answer they would indicate that they did not know, as requested to at the beginning of the questionnaire and as instructed by me when explaining the process to participants. The responses to this question indicate that the majority of participants were not aware of the rights of anyone to access council information. Again, this may be because it is not something that is relevant to their lives, but it may also indicate that the rights of citizens is not an area with which participants were knowledgeable.

6. What kind of mayor does Doncaster have?

Answer		Response	%
Civic		8	22%
Elected		19	53%
Both		2	6%
I don't know		7	19%
Total		36	100%

Table F6: Responses to Q6. "What kind of mayor does Doncaster have?"

Since 2002, Doncaster has had two mayors; a civic and an elected mayor. There was a mayoral election in Doncaster on 2 May 2013 (the week before the questionnaires were circulated) which was high profile in local and regional news due to the outgoing mayor's controversial politics, decision-making and difficult relationship with many of the other local councillors. This question was designed to identify whether participants were aware of the local democratic structure. The civic mayor performs ceremonial duties and is not high profile in the local area, which may explain participants' general lack of awareness of the civic mayor's existence. However, just over half of the participants identified that Doncaster has an elected mayor, which indicates some degree of awareness of how the local political system operates.

7. What voting system is used in UK General Elections?

Answer		Response	%
First past the post		8	22%
Single transferable vote		10	28%
Alternative vote		6	17%
I don't know		12	33%
Total		36	100%

Table F7: Responses to Q7. "What voting system is used in UK General Elections?"

This question was designed to identify whether participants were aware of the method of selection of elected representatives in the national democratic system. Although all participants, as members of Year 10, receive lessons on citizenship and the political system as part of the Personal, Social and Health Education curriculum, the majority of participants did not answer this question correctly, with a third of participants responding that they did not know the answer. This indicates that knowledge of the democratic election process in the UK may not be as high as may have been indicated in responses to question 1. Again, this may be due to the issue not being relevant to their lives as non-voters whose first opportunity to vote in a general election is likely to be in 2020, seven years after this research was conducted.

8. Who places limits on how much bankers can give themselves in bonuses?

Answer		Response	%
Bankers		5	14%
National government		9	25%
European Union		9	25%
I don't know		13	36%
Total		36	100%

Table F8: Responses to Q8. "Who places limits on how much bankers can give themselves in bonuses?"

Mass media news outlets were reporting quite heavily on this subject during the research period, including the weeks preceding the circulation of the questionnaire. This question was designed to identify whether participants were aware of an issue relating to the economic crisis which was of

high profile at the time of the questionnaire being conducted. However, the majority of participants either did not know or incorrectly guessed the answer to this question, which indicates that this particular topic is either not something the participants possess knowledge about, or was not relevant to their needs and interests.

9. *How much of the national budget for welfare goes to people on Jobseekers' Allowance?*

Answer		Response	%
3%		5	14%
23%		14	39%
43%		1	3%
I don't know		16	44%
Total		36	100%

Table F9: Responses to Q9. "How much of the national budget for welfare goes to people on Jobseekers' Allowance?"

Research reported in the weeks preceding the questionnaire being conducted indicated that there are significant general public misconceptions about the extent of spending on unemployment benefits (Ipsos MORI, 2013b). This question was designed to identify whether the research participants shared the misconceptions of the general public. The responses to this question indicate a lack of knowledge and a significant degree of mismatch between perceived public spending on unemployed people and the actual figures. This was something I decided to focus on in more depth in the focus groups as a result of the responses to this question and the way in which many participants discussed the issue of benefits in lessons I observed. This is discussed in Chapter Seven.

10.   Are you allowed to hold a protest in a public space without telling the police first?

Answer		Response	%
Yes		8	22%
No		8	22%
Not if it's a march		7	19%
Only if it's a march		4	11%
I don't know		9	25%
Total		36	100%

Table F10: Responses to Q10. "Are you allowed to hold a protest in a public space without telling the police first?"

This question was designed to identify whether participants were aware of their rights as citizens to protest and how they might go about it. The dispersal of responses to this question indicate again that participants' awareness of citizens' rights, in this case the right to protest, is not high.

11.   Does a citizen of the European Union have the right to live or get a job in any country in the European Union?

Answer		Response	%
Yes		30	83%
No		2	6%
I don't know		4	11%
Total		36	100%

Table F11: Responses to Q11. "Does a citizen of the European Union have the right to live or get a job in any country in the European Union?"

This question was designed to identify whether participants were aware of their employment rights as EU citizens. The majority of participants responded correctly to this question, which indicates that they may have a relatively high level of knowledge about citizens' employment rights in the EU.

Levels of political knowledge

The data from the questions relating to political knowledge were analysed and the charts below show the levels of knowledge of the participants in the different political knowledge categories and overall. This information provided a sense of the overall levels of knowledge of the participants and allowed me to pitch interview and focus group questions at the appropriate level.

Categories of political knowledge

The 36 participants exhibited varying levels of political knowledge, with the lowest score attained being 1 out of 11 and the highest score being 9 out of 11. The arithmetic mean of the scores was 5.375. The mode (most frequently occurring score) was 5.5 (achieved by 9 participants). This indicates that the most participants had a medium level of political knowledge. This data provided me with an indication of the levels of political knowledge of the participants prior to my interviewing them which is discussed in the methodology chapter. The results of this analysis are presented in the table below:

	Low (0 to 3.5)	Medium (4 to 7.5)	High (7.5 to 11)	Total
Total participants	8 (22.22%)	22 (61.11%)	6 (16.66%)	**36**
Male	3 (21.43%)	6 (42.86%)	3 (21.43%)	**14**
Female	5 (22.73%)	16 (72.73%)	3 (13.64%)	**22**

Table F12: Political knowledge levels by gender

In graph form, the figures can be represented as below (the bars represent the percentage of participants who achieved scores in each category):
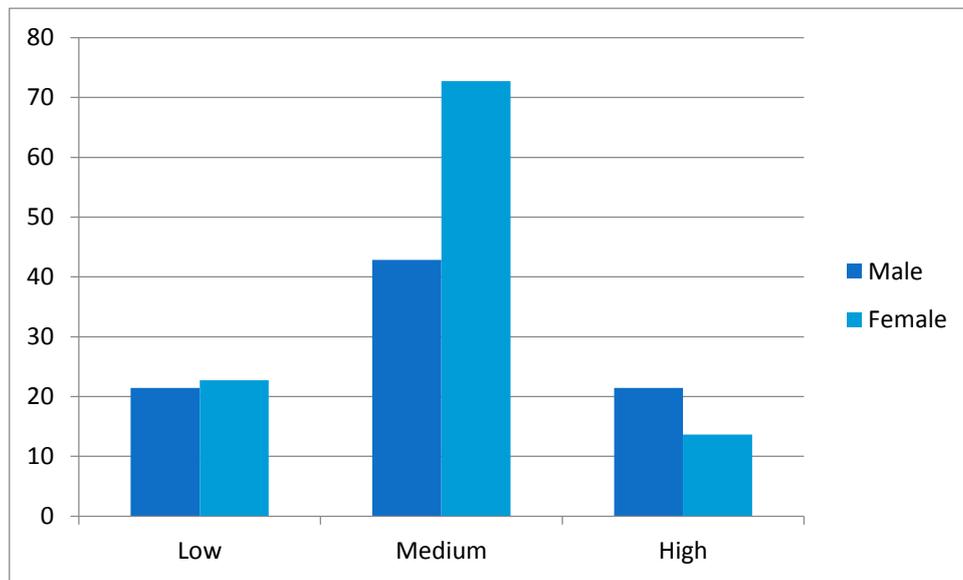
Figure F1: percentage of male and female participants with low, medium and high levels of political knowledge

It is apparent from the data above, that female participants more often had medium levels of knowledge, and that a higher proportion of male participants had high levels of knowledge. This may in some part be explained by a theorised increased likelihood of males to guess on political knowledge questions, but if this was the sole explanation one may expect to see an increased number of both wrong and right answers from male participants (Banwart, 2007, p.1153). Overall, boys' levels of political knowledge were higher, which is in line with research that highlights that boys generally outperform girls in measures of political knowledge (Fahmy 2006, p.74).

As well as analysing the final political knowledge scores, I assessed the significance of the number of "I don't know" responses, the analysis of which is presented in the table below:

"I don't know" response	Male	Female	All
Average	2.67	2.72	2.75
Median	2	2.5	2.5
Mode	1	2	1

Table F13: Average number of "I don't know" responses to political knowledge questions

The above table shows that on average, female participants answered "I don't know" to more questions than the male participants. This is in line with Mondak & Anderson's findings that "irrespective of actual knowledge levels, women are more likely than men to answer 'I don't know' on knowledge batteries" (Mondak & Anderson, 2004, p.507).

These findings helped me to prepare for the focus groups. I made an effort to divide the participants into groups not only with a balance of girls and boys, but also with mixed political knowledge scores. I aimed for focus groups of eight participants each, so I deemed it advantageous to split the different knowledge levels up in an effort to observe how participants with different levels of knowledge may interact with each other (although it is acknowledged that there are many other variables which would influence interaction, for example, friendship groups and difficulties between students within the year group, and I also took these into consideration when diving the participants into focus groups, with the aid of the Head of Year).

Political attitudes

The sections below present the findings relating to the questions about political interest and lowering the voting age.

Levels of political interest

The table below shows the responses to the question relating to political interest.

	All		Male		Female	
Very	2	5.71%	2	18.18%	0	0%
Somewhat	9	25.71%	1	9.09%	9	37.5%
Neither interested nor uninterested	9	25.71%	4	36.36%	5	20.83%
Not very	9	25.71%	2	18.18%	6	25%
Not at all	6	17.14%	2	18.18%	4	16.67%
I don't know	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	**35***	**100%**	**11**	**100%**	**24**	**100%**

Table F14: Question 12: How interested in politics would you say you are?

One participant did not respond to this question

This question was designed to identify how interested in politics the participants consider themselves to be. The responses to this question gave me a broad overview of the wide range of levels of interest in politics of the participants and enabled me to prepare for differing levels of engagement with my research. I was able to prepare possible prompts for discussion using the responses to this question along with the responses to the political knowledge questions.

Overall, 31.42% of the participants reported that they were very or somewhat interested in politics and 42.31% said they were not very or not at all interested in politics. These responses are comparable to those of the MYPLACE study (MYPLACE, 2014), which found that the level of political interest of young people across Europe (including the UK) that they surveyed was not very high, with 42% considering themselves interested in politics and 58% reporting that they are not very interested or not at all interested in politics. The participants in this study on the whole reported that they were marginally less interested in politics than the participant sample in the MYPLACE study.

Gender and political interest

It is apparent from the breakdown of level of interest by gender in the table above, that there are marked differences in the levels of political interest reported by participants of different genders. The graph below illustrates the number of participants who reported having each level of political interest.
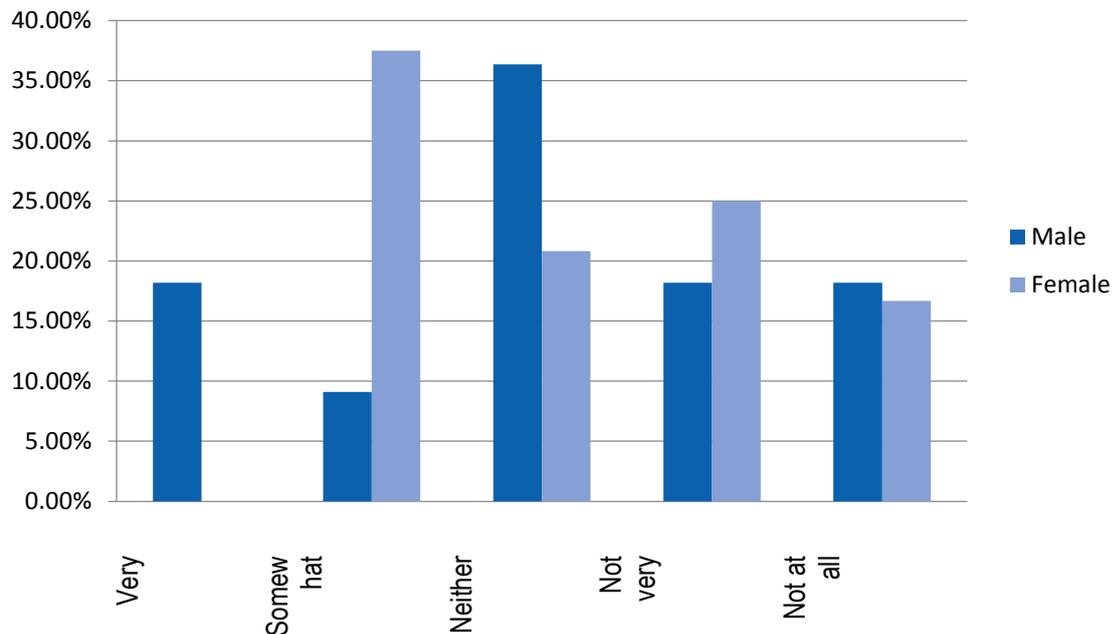
Figure F2: Reported levels of political interest by gender

The majority of girls reported they were "somewhat" interested in politics (38%), whereas a significantly higher proportion of boys reported that they were neither interested nor uninterested in politics (36.36%), and a similar proportion of boys and girls said they were not interested in politics at all (18.18% and 17% respectively). This indicates that in this case girls were more likely to report a moderate degree of political interest and boys were more likely to report a neutral level of interest. No girls reported themselves as having a high level of interest in politics whereas 18.8% of boys reported that they were very interested in politics. This is in line with Verba et al.'s (1997) finding that men are significantly more likely to report that they are very interested in politics, and may indicate that this trend manifests itself at an early age.

Although these findings are not generalizable due to the small sample size, it was useful to ascertain how interested in politics the participants were and to see if there were significant gender differences so that I could explore these issues in more depth in the focus groups. I was able to use the range of levels of political interest reported as a point for discussion when asking about political attitudes and interest with participants during the interviews and focus groups, to explore the potential significance of political interest to political agency.

Relationship between levels of political interest and political knowledge

The political knowledge scores from the questionnaire and the reported level of political interest of each participant from the questionnaire responses were analysed in SPSS, which revealed a moderate positive relationship between the two variables of 0.364. In addition, a two-tailed hypothesis test showed that there is a high significance level for the correlation between the two variables (0.05) which means it is possible to conclude that there is a statistically significant correlation between the political knowledge and reported political interest of the participants. Although this does not establish causality, it was of interest and benefit to be aware of this relationship when analysing the interviews and focus groups.

			Score in questionnaire	How interested in politics would you say you are?
Spearman's rho	Score in questionnaire	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.334
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.050
		N	35	35
	How interested in politics would you say you are?	Correlation Coefficient	.334	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.050	.
		N	35	35

Table F15: Correlation between political knowledge and political interest

The chart below illustrates the moderate positive correlation between political knowledge and political interest in more clarity than the table above:
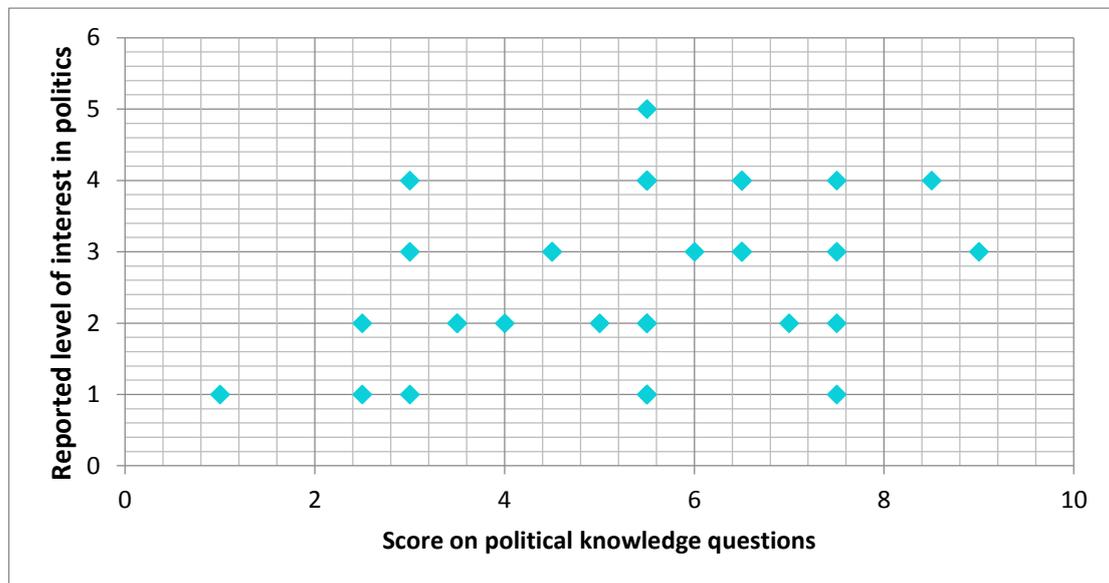
Figure F3: Relationship between interest in politics and political knowledge

The analysis of political knowledge scores identified that the relationship between political knowledge and political interest in the participants was weakly positive. This finding is not generalizable, because the questions asked, although based on other questionnaires devised to gauge political knowledge, have not been extensively tested for appropriateness and were devised to gauge the levels of knowledge of a specific age group in a specific geographic area. However, although it is not possible to use this data to support the hypothesis that there is always a correlation between political interest and political knowledge, this finding does echo those of several studies which found that levels of political interest can be a predictor of political knowledge (Eveland & Scheufele, 2000; Banwart, 2007).

Lowering the voting age

The table below shows the responses to the question relating to whether the voting age should be lowered:

Answer	Response	%
Yes	16	45.71%
No	15	42.86%
I don't	4	11.43%
I don't	0	00.00%
Total	35	100.00%

Table F16: Responses to Question 13:

"Do you think that the voting age should be lowered from 18 to 16?"

This question was asked in the context of the lowering of the voting age from 18 to 16 for the Scottish Independence Referendum and associated discussions about lowering the voting age for general and local elections to increase young people's participation in politics. 89% of participants responding either positively or negatively and only 11% reporting that they did not have an opinion on the matter. Of those who expressed a positive or negative response, 46% reported that they did think the voting age should be lowered and 43% thought it should not. These responses indicates an extremely divided set of attitudes about giving 16 and 17 year olds the right to vote.

As a result of this response I decided that this would be a key area of investigation for the later stages of the research. This proved to be a very fruitful area of discussion, which is discussed in more depth in Chapters Seven and Eight.

Summary

The data from the questionnaires was useful in informing later stages of data collection and analysis of the interviews and focus groups and helped to identify potential political attitudes, areas of knowledge or lack of knowledge, and overall trends in levels of knowledge. The most significant findings from the questionnaire analysis are:

- Most participants exhibited a medium level of political knowledge, but a greater proportion of female participants and a lesser proportion of male participants exhibit medium levels of political knowledge in comparison to the overall number of participants in that category;

- A higher proportion of male participants scored high in political knowledge, in line with other studies;

- A higher proportion of female participants scored low in political knowledge, in line with other studies;

- Weakly significant correlation between level of political interest and level of political knowledge may be observed, in line with other studies;

- There is a significant difference between the participants' reported levels of interest in politics. The boys generally considered themselves to be more interested in politics than girls, a finding supported by other studies;

- The participants expressed ambivalence and mixed opinions about lowering the voting age. This is discussed in relation to the phenomenographic outcome space in Chapter Seven and the relevance of critical pedagogy's views of political participation and citizenship in Chapter Eight.

Although the political knowledge questionnaire was not designed to thoroughly examine participants' level of political knowledge, and was not intended to be used to seek to establish causality between levels of knowledge and political interest, the analysis of the results proved useful in the identification of some correlation between the two, and enabled me to better pitch my interview questions to the participants.

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