Exploring moral character in everyday life:
Former democratic school students’ understandings and school experiences

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Abstract

This thesis presents the life journeys of former democratic school students, seeking to understand the impact of their school experiences in relation to the development of their moral character during education and equally to sustaining their moral character throughout life. Moral character in this inquiry refers to what individuals perceive as intrinsically good and valuable for themselves and others around them. The significance of this particular focus of this inquiry lies in the increased recognition in research suggesting that a strongly developed moral character could enhance an individual’s general wellbeing, such as happiness and flourishing, as well as support the individual in meeting the challenges presented in day-to-day living. However, there remains a gap in knowledge with regard to the educational factors that might have contributed to the cultivation of the individual’s moral character.

Adopting a social constructionist paradigm and assuming knowledge and understanding as relational and co-constructed through shared meaning-making – this research took a narrative approach and a life history method of inquiry, including individual in-depth interviews with a focus group of former students of Sands, a British democratic school. The key method of analysis was developing and comparing portrayals of the participants’ narratives of their life journeys, in order to explore and identify a typology of their courses of action in everyday life, in relation to their moral character and how they have understood the impact of their school experiences on the development of their moral character.

The data show a strong overlap in the participants’ understandings of what has enabled their capacity to practice and enact moral character in everyday life. This has been contributed to by three key factors in their schooling and educational experiences – which seemingly remain relevant and even supportive to their pursuing on-going meaningful living: (a) having the freedom to explore and express who one really is as a person, (b) having the opportunity to take responsibility for one’s own life, (c) becoming aware that there is always an option or choice in any situation, thus one has the ability to enact change in one’s life.

The key finding of this inquiry is that all three identified factors are anchored in the school’s commitment to itself as a personal learning community and the democratic pedagogy of freedom. This thesis concludes that the significance of moral education in schools lies in its emphasis on how this is taught rather than what is taught. The considerations of the school as a community and a democratic pedagogy of freedom are therefore recommended for future determinations of moral education programs considering the profound importance of the students’ moral character development and their flourishing.
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Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed

L. E. Miedema

Dated
20/06/2016
**Preamble**

My first experience with education and its shortcomings was when I was in primary school. My teachers had believed me to be stupid and would frequently send me out of the classroom while explaining new topics to my classmates. This went on until my mother discovered what was happening and decided to send me to a family friend who was also a child psychologist. The psychological test indicated that in fact my intelligence reached far beyond what my teachers had believed, and the next week I was attending a new primary school. With some after-school help from some amazing people who showed trust in me, I had caught up with most of the work within weeks. However, by this time I had developed a fear of failure, which made me realise the different impacts education can have on a child’s character development, their happiness and their school success.

To my astonishment, I raced through gymnasium – the highest level of Dutch secondary school – with exclusively high marks. I felt as if, from secondary education onwards, a seed – planted years before – was starting to sprout. I felt a deep conviction that education could and *should* be different. From then on, I started exploring *how* education could be done differently as a personal mission to make a difference in the world.

This history became part of my own narrative as a means of making sense of the world around me. It thereafter functioned as a compass for expressing how I wanted to make a difference. I started my educational career by attending The University for Humanistic Studies (Utrecht, The Netherlands). This university offered an intellectual environment where my ideas could be tested and narrowed down, and functioned as a community in which I learned what it felt like to flourish. My interest in education was broadened by the idea (and the hope) that education – if done properly – could function as an important vehicle to enhance personal flourishing, and to provoke social change. I began to feel that many issues were being overlooked or left untouched in education, such as environmental sustainability, empathy for diversity, responsibility, and the relationship between national citizenship and global citizenship. These explorations led me to theories and research related to moral education. Over the years, I came to conclude that the educational programs which proved able to support these moral education aims were unfortunately almost never to be found in mainstream schools, and thus were offered to a small minority.

This thesis represents a new chapter in my search for new ways in which education can contribute to an individual’s flourishing.
Chapter One

Introduction
1 Introduction

All education which develops power to share effectively in social life is moral. It forms a character which not only does the particular deed socially necessary but one which is interested in that continuous readjustment which is essential to growth. Interest in learning from all the contacts of life is the essential moral interest. (Dewey, 1916, p. 152)

As societies become more complex in structure and resources, the need of formal or intentional teaching and learning increases. As formal teaching and training grow in extent, there is a danger of creating an undesirable split between the experience gained in more direct associations and what is acquired in school. This danger was never greater than at the present time, on account of the rapid growth in the last centuries of knowledge and technical modes of skill. (Dewey, 1916, p. 6)

A narrow and moralistic view of morals is responsible for the failure to recognize that all the aims and values which are desirable in education are themselves moral. (Dewey, 1916, p. 152)

One hundred years later and these quotations from Dewey are still as relevant as ever. For Dewey, a full notion of education is inherently moral and democratic. However, this is not the case for contemporary educational programs. The past decades have seen an increasing international emergence of interest, research and focus on new moral education initiatives, the majority of which view moral education as a separate subject, additional to the mainstream school curriculum (Berkowitz, 2009; Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Walker, Roberts, & Kristjánsson, 2013). This is in contrast to Dewey’s view that education, democracy and morality are in fact interconnected (Dewey, 1972; Noddings, 2002).

The importance of moral education is growing; this is acknowledged by governments, NGOs, the EU, the UN, educators and researchers. The motivations behind this emergence differ widely depending on the different agendas and aims regarding the importance of education (Gill & Thomson, 2013). Some concerns, for instance, are grounded in the growing immigration issue, religious intolerance, climate change and the need to cultivate moral citizens who can cope with these challenges (Dubel, Manschot, & Suransky, 2005; Nussbaum, 2012). Other concerns are grounded in the perspective that there is a need for students to become more virtuous, enhance academic achievement, or the need for a country to prepare its students in such a manner that it can compete on a global labour market (Brown, 2015; Couldry, 2010; Gill & Thomson, 2013; Nussbaum, 2006).
This thesis however is grounded in the following perspective. Due to the liquid nature of modern times, individuals are faced with many challenges (Bauman, 2007; Giddens, 1991). One of these challenges is living in a society in which various forms of demoralisation take place (Lynch, 2007; Taylor, 1994). This is problematic because it is suggested that developing moral values and being able to live by them is of profound importance for individuals to give meaning to their lives and to live happy and fulfilled lives (Veugelers, 2011). For example, numbers of burn-outs and mental-illnesses are increasing and visible already from very young age groups (Couldry, 2010). It is suggested that these numbers are linked to the inability of individuals to understand what they stand for in life and to make associated decisions that support what is both good for them and makes them happy. Educators such as Noddings (2003) highlight their profound concern in relation to young people’s feelings of emptiness, loneliness and lack of recognition.

It is suggested that a strongly developed moral character and the ability to harmonise their actions with their moral character can help an individual to cope with the related challenges of modern times, and enhance their possibility for living a flourishing and meaningful life. However, the available research on the development of moral character is largely limited to the effects of moral cognition (Oser, Althof, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2008; Park, 2004), while new research shows that morality in fact includes one’s behaviour and emotions in addition to one’s cognition (Park, 2004; Seider, 2012).

Furthermore, research suggests that education can play a central role in providing the right space for individuals to construct their values and develop their moral character (Noddings, 2002). However, the majority of the available research is quantitative (see e.g. Park, 2004) and limited to the safe environment of the classroom, whereas arguably the significance of a moral education program becomes visible in its sustainable factors, once the students have left the school (Seider, 2012).

Therefore, acknowledging the importance for individuals to live a flourishing life, this thesis explores the following research question: how do former democratic school students understand the impact of their school experiences in relation to their moral character in everyday life? It is not the purpose of this thesis to discuss the nature of morality or virtues, or when certain behaviour can be considered to be moral or not. Indeed, as MacIntyre (1981) argued:

One response to the history of Greek and medieval thought about the virtues might well be to suggest that even within that relatively coherent tradition of thought there
are just too many different and incompatible conceptions of a virtue for there to be any real unity to the concept or indeed to the history (p. 27).

Such an exploration of morality fits another type and scope of research. This thesis, by exploring the above research question, does however aim to explore the notion of moral character and which moral character-values are considered to be helpful by individuals in everyday life. In addition, this thesis aims to investigate what possible educational factors of a full notion of moral education might help the participants to practice their moral character, having left the school and facing the challenges related to these modern times.

In England, one of the places which is historically known to provide such full notions of moral education in the most enhanced, innovative, radical and alternative ways, is Devon. Devon is characterised as a hub for all sorts of educational initiatives, which today includes Park School, The Small School, The Alternative Education Co, Dartington Hall Trust and Schumacher College, attracting a growing international interest and visits from figures such as Deepak Chopra. It was in Devon in 1926 that Dartington Hall School opened its doors, introducing alternative views on education, characterised by a holistic pedagogy of freedom: students should be free to play, to wear what they want, no compulsory lessons and no punishment (Gribble, 2006). Dartington Hall School closed in 1987, but as a result of its closure came fourteen students and three teachers who cooperatively decided to start a new school: Sands School, which opened immediately afterwards in 1987 (Gribble, 2006). Sands School is a secondary democratic school and promises to provide a full notion of moral education as discussed above (Fielding, 2010). Whether this is indeed the case will be part of the exploration of this investigation. However, its promising ethos has led the present researcher to select this particular school as the sample school for this study. Therefore, former students of Sands School, as previous students of one of the only two democratic secondary schools of Britain, are the main focus of this study.

The participants’ understandings and experiences form the central focus of this research. The significance of this investigation is therefore grounded in exploring the life-narratives of the six former democratic school students through one focus group and individual interviews. Such an investigation requires a qualitative and in-depth approach (Wengraf, 2001). In order to reach an in-depth level of interviewing, a narrative approach has been adopted, using a life-history method of inquiry (Goodson & Gill, 2011). The key method of analysis is developing and comparing ‘portrayals’ of the participants’ life stories, in order
to explore and identify a typology of their courses of action in everyday life, their moral character and their understanding of the impact of their school experiences (Goodson, 2013).

The indications of the related findings have revealed implications for an effective and meaningful moral education program, and a deeper understanding regarding the notions of moral character and the true morality of a moral education program.

This thesis is comprised of seven chapters, including this introduction, and is structured in the following way:

Chapter two gives an overview of the theoretical perspectives of moral education in modern times. The chapter first highlights the context of particular societal changes in which the re-emergence of moral education is embedded, regarding different perspectives on the cause of demoralisation in society and the associated needs for both individuals and democracy in relation to moral education and moral character. A conceptualisation is then offered of empty, thin and full notions of moral education to discuss the different perspectives of how moral education can be understood.

Chapter three gives an in-depth account of how democratic education, as a full notion of moral education, will be understood in this thesis in relation to Sands School – the sample school of this study. This is done by comparing Kohlberg’s notion of the Just Community Approach and Dewey’s notion of democratic education (e.g. Dewey, 1916; Kohlberg, 1985; Noddings, 2002; Oser, Althof, & Higgins-D’Alessandro, 2008).

Chapter four explains how the research was conducted by discussing the methodology. It will be argued why a narrative approach and a life history method of inquiry was employed to conduct this study, through individual interviews and one focus group. In addition, it will be described how the data from the interviews was collected and analysed.

Chapter five gives an overview of the findings of the investigation. The chapter starts with presenting the characteristics of Sands School, followed by a presentation of the findings of the data. It discusses the findings according to three research dimensions: (1) the participants’ understandings of their moral character, (2) their courses of action in life, and (3) the participants’ understandings of the impact of their school experiences. Throughout the chapter it will be highlighted what implications the findings may suggest and how the research question of this study has been answered.

Chapter six discusses the findings and the associated indications of the research through using a theoretical lens. It will be discussed, with reference to Dewey (1916, 1938,
1972), Noddings (2002, 2003) and Freire (1998), how the main indications of the impact of the school as a personal community and using a democratic approach of freedom can be understood. A main conclusion will then be offered regarding the research question in relation to the meaning of a full notion of moral education as ‘the morality of a non-moral approach to education’. The chapter will conclude by giving a critical account of the findings by identifying two main paradoxes.

Chapter seven offers an overview of the entire journey of the research project. This is done by summarising the thesis, offering some concluding critical reflections in relation to the study and highlighting the overall contributions of the study and some possible implications in relation to future research directions. Lastly, the thesis will be concluded by some final reflections from the researcher.

In writing research, a researcher has a choice whether to present their findings in the intimate first person voice, or in the less personal third person. This thesis, aside from some small parts, such as the acknowledgements, preamble and final reflection, is written in the third person. My grounds for this are as follows. Through the process of conducting the research interviews, it was necessary for me to engage in a personal, open, empathetic and engaging manner with my participants. It is part of the process of deep narrative enquiry that the researcher is personally invested in their interactions with participants. This personal involvement, however, is not always desirable, once the researcher’s role shifts from interviewing to interpreting data and writing up. At this point, it can be desirable for the researcher to take a step back and to see the data through a new lens. By writing in the third person, I endeavour to achieve this, presenting the findings from a consciously critical distance.
Chapter Two

Theoretical perspectives on the role of moral education in modern times
2 Theoretical perspectives on the role of moral education in modern times

2.1 Introduction

Through the past decades, moral education has gained an increasingly international focus in the modern west (Walker, Roberts, & Kristjánsson, 2013). In order to address and understand the current debate around moral education, moral character and the role of democratic education in relation to this thesis, this literature review consists of three parts: (1) This chapter will begin by offering a general outline of the different societal developments and challenges that are said to have influenced the re-emergence of moral education. This will be done by addressing the demoralisation debate and its influence on identity. (2) Different views will then be described on the role of education for identity – and moral character development – in relation to the described demoralisation debate. This will lead to the final part of this literature review by (3) arguing that there are different notions of moral education which will be identified and explored.

2.2 The context of the re-emergence of moral education: challenges and needs for the self, society and morality

Anxiety and audacity, fear and courage, despair and hope are born together. But the proportion in which they are mixed depends on the resources in one’s possession. (Bauman, 2001, p. 142)

The globalised world in which individuals live brings new challenges for both individuals and society (Giddens, 1991). Education has always been known to be shaped by and altered according to the time it is set and the corresponding aims that governments decide education should meet (Gill & Thomson, 2013). Examples of different aims of education are: a means to a social end, a means to academic advancement, and a means to develop the individual (Gill & Thomson, 2013). As the above quote of Bauman (2001) proposes, whatever challenges inhabit a certain time of human history, it is “the resources in one’s possession” that matter most (p. 142). Herein lies an important role for education, for it is suggested that education can offer the space and the appropriate resources – to individuals and therefore society – to equip individuals with the skills and knowledge needed to deal with the challenges of modern
times (Bauman, 2007; Dewey, 1916; Noddings, 2002; Nussbaum, 2006). However, the skills and knowledge offered by state education depend on the perceived challenges of society, which are heavily influenced by governmental agendas (Gill & Thomson, 2013).

This thesis focuses on moral education because – in light of the different challenges of modern times that individuals and societies are now faced with – moral education is said to have become more relevant than ever (Nussbaum, 2006; Veugelers, 2011). Moral education has therefore been experiencing an increasing international re-emergence during the last decades (Walker, Roberts, & Kristjánsson, 2013).

This thesis acknowledges that there are many different motives behind this re-emergence. However, it views the re-emergence of moral education mainly as a consequence of what some schools of thought call the ‘demoralisation of society’ (e.g. Bauman, 2007; Brown, 2015; Giddens, 1991; Mirowski, 2013; Sennett, 1998; Taylor, 1994).

In order to understand why different notions of moral education have emerged, the first part of this section will outline the main different perspectives on the demoralisation of western society. In the second part of this section, the corresponding individual challenges relevant to moral education will be addressed. This aims to highlight the different purposes and agendas that moral education is said to cover.

2.2.1 Four perspectives on demoralisation in western society

The demoralisation thesis states that there are certain societal processes causing levels of demoralisation to be experienced by individuals (Lynch, 2007), and highlights some of the challenges modern individuals are faced with. Lynch (2007) describes that central to the demoralisation debate is the interconnectedness between morality and well-being. According to Lynch (2007) this is due to the fact that the term ‘demoralisation’ refers to a crisis which works in two ways. Firstly, demoralisation arises when people lack a moral framework by which they can live their lives, which could lead to unethical behaviour. Secondly, this can lead to demoralisation “in the sense of being anxious, confused and depressed as a consequence of this” (Lynch, 2007, p. 134). In other words, the demoralisation thesis refers to a situation in which people are facing difficulty living their lives in a positive, fulfilled and meaningful way.

Lynch (2007) offers an overview of the four main versions of the demoralisation thesis recognisable in western culture. It should be noted that these different perspectives on what
causes demoralisation to arise in society are supported by a range of people, movements, ideologies, and different religious and political standpoints.

**Demoralisation and the 1960s revolution of liberalism**

The first perspective on the demoralisation of the west is said to be caused by “the liberal, ‘expressive’ revolution of the 1960s” (Lynch, 2007, p. 135). Briefly explained, this refers to the emergence of liberalism in America in the 1960s (Mirowski, 2013). This movement of liberalism does not refer to the absence of moral values, but rather the emphasis on certain liberal values such as ‘openness’ and ‘tolerance’.

This critique echoes Charles Taylor’s (1994) theory in relation to the problematic nature of this emphasis. Taylor argues (by referring to Allan Blooms’ work *The Closing of The American Mind*) that the liberal movement which emphasised the values of ‘openness’ and ‘tolerance’ causes a decline of other values. As a consequence of values such as ‘tolerance’ becoming an institutionalised dogma, it has now become unacceptable to address, evaluate or judge other people’s perspectives or behaviour. According to Taylor (1994), such an approach of ‘you must do you what you see fit, and I will do what I see fit’ is at the heart of modern individualism (Taylor, 1994). Taylor describes that in a sense this flattens morality, because if everyone is allowed to do what they see fit, there is no standard by which individuals can be criticised. Furthermore, this approach makes it difficult to articulate, in a public domain, what individuals consider to be truly valuable and important to human life. (Taylor, 1994)

**Demoralisation and secularisation**

The second version of the demoralisation thesis is, according to Lynch (2007), caused by the “increasing secularization of western society” (p.140). In short, this argument implies that the “moral decay of society” is a direct “consequence of the declining significance of religion in western society” (Lynch, 2007, p. 140). This argument, coming from the perspective of a religious critique on a secular society, stresses the necessity of religion for the moral well-being of western society. Lynch (2007) explains that this argument is twofold. First, because religious values are said to be grounded in an absolute and binding truth, i.e. God, and therefore transcend the understandings of the human self. From this perspective, if values are no longer based on this absolute religious truth, values become subjective to human understanding, and therefore “relative – a matter of pragmatics, taste and choice” (Lynch,
According to this view, values will then become the prey of a narcissistic and consumer culture, because only religion can function as a moral authority.

Second, because according to this critique, religion offers a necessary space in society in which individuals can be educated morally. From this perspective, both individuals and the state cannot offer such an ecology. Only religion can offer the appropriate moral ecology because it offers “tradition, authority and community”, which is essential in training individuals morally, but also in offering a community that is necessary to “reinforce and celebrate these moral commitments” (Lynch, 2007, p. 142).

Porpora’s call to “return to The Most High” (Porpora, 2001, p. 297) echoes the argument that an absolute truth or authority is needed for morality to thrive. Porpora (2001) offers an analysis of the role of religion in *Landscapes of the Soul: The loss of Moral Meaning in American Life*. However, he concludes that “[t]he real religious divide in America does not concern belief. It concerns “emotional attachment to the sacred” (p. 299). With this, Porpora means that today’s moral malaise is not so much related to belief itself, but the way individuals understand their relation to their place in the cosmos (which could be religious but does not necessarily have to be). Porpora’s argument for this goes as follows. For Porpora (2001), morality concerns an individual’s ultimate goal because, basing himself on the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, we are morally defined by the good that moves us. In other words ‘the good’ shows itself to the individual as what the individual considers to be a final cause, or an ultimate concern that influences the way they act. Porpora gives the example that if it’s the good of ‘tolerance’ that moves an individual, this individual will become tolerant themselves because of being moved by it. However, and this is the key of Porpora’s argument, such a goal or moral purpose does not arise from nothing, it must originate from somewhere. And this ‘somewhere’, according to Porpora, has to be related to what the individual ultimately understands as the meaning of life, and therefore concerns the individual’s understanding of their place in the cosmos (e.g. The Most High). Fundamentally, according to Porpora, morality therefore implies not only moral space and social space (the values of others and groups individuals identify themselves with) but also metaphysical space: “a worldview that identifies our place in the cosmos” (Porpora, 2001, p. 20). Thus, more precisely, according to Porpora (2001) today’s moral malaise is caused by individuals’ inability to understand their meaning of life in a metaphysical sense.
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**Demoralisation and contemporary capitalism**

Lynch (2007) calls the third perspective on the cause of demoralisation “the ideologies and lifestyles of contemporary capitalism” (Lynch, 2007, p. 143). This argument (widely supported by e.g. Bauman, 2001; Castells, 2010; Giddens, 1991; Taylor, 1994, although not entirely the same) is nowadays more commonly referred to in a broader sense, for example as a critique on globalisation processes and the agenda of neoliberalism (Brown, 2015; Mirowski, 2013). The thought is that globalisation and capitalism did not suddenly appear out of nowhere, there was (and is) a specific neoliberal agenda behind these movements and processes (Lauder, 2006; Mirowski, 2013).

Lynch (2007) describes that this critique implies a whole variety of theories and arguments. However, in short, the key argument for why global capitalism causes demoralisation in society is that financial profit is valued above human well-being. This results in situations where practices like work and consumption receive a distorted degree of moral value, and are prioritised over non-market related values (Lynch, 2007).

There are many extensive arguments and theories about how this influences and affects the lives of individuals. However, Lynch (2007) notes that the key argument found in most of the theories is that contemporary capitalism:

> reduces citizens into consumers, giving people a distorted view of the nature of happiness and society and twists their desires to commodities and lifestyles that have little real benefit for them” (Lynch, 2007, p. 143).

Thus, contemporary capitalism causes demoralisation both on an individual level (through influencing their ability to understand what it means to live a meaningful and happy life), and on a societal level (through dehumanising social environments where major social institutions value profit above human well-being) (Lynch, 2007).

Nick Couldry (2010) echoes this critique on demoralisation. More specifically, Couldry argues that neoliberalism causes demoralisation because it provides a dominant narrative (the narrative of market functioning) in people’s lives where there is only space for market-based values. Real, moral and meaningful values then become what Couldry (2010) calls ‘market externalities’ (p. 136). Couldry defines neoliberalism as “a rationality that denies voice and operates with a view of life that is incoherent”. With ‘voice’, Couldry means the different ways individuals express authentic types of agency and how individuals are able to give account to themselves and give meaning to their lives. In this sense, the human voice is being denied because, as Couldry (2010) argues, when the dominant narrative of society is
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a narrative of market functioning, these authentic types of agency cannot exist. Those meaningful values such as “fulfillment at work, friendship, a sense of mutual trust, a sense of community” (Couldry, 2010, p. 36), but also “‘the comfort of belonging’, ‘the comfort of being useful’ and ‘the comfort of sticking to our habits’” (p. 37) are not considered to be meaningful within market economics. However, these moral values are crucial for a good and fulfilled human life (Couldry, 2010). Therefore, when neoliberalism looks at “markets as the source of human values” (Couldry, 2010, p. 37), these economic values are not coherent with what can be considered a view of life which includes happiness, fulfilment and a certain quality of life. In this sense, according to Couldry (2010), as long as neoliberalism is the dominant narrative, and therefore market values are the dominant values, individuals and society as a whole will experience a moral vacuum.

Sennett also identifies capitalism as a cause of demoralisation. Sennett (1998) refers to this by explaining how capitalism has changed working life and how this is affecting people’s personal and emotional lives, or as Sennett calls it, people’s “personal character” (Sennett, 1998, p. 10). In short, one of the consequences of capitalist structures is that work now has a flexible, short-term and temporary nature (Sennett, 1998). According to Sennett, the key problematic factor which arises from new capitalism is this flexible and temporary time dimension. This is because, in order for individuals to be able to shape their character\(^1\), a coherent narrative of identity and life history is needed. Pursuits of long-term goals are important for the expression and development of character in order for things such as loyalty and commitment to exist. However, Sennett (1998) argues that it is impossible for individuals to create such a narrative and life history (and therefore a sense of a sustainable self) when they live in a society where all structures are based on episodes and fragments. This goes hand in hand with risks and uncertainties, which is not a desirable environment to focus on creating a sustainable self narrative. In other words, according to Sennett (1998) what is missing in modern times are narratives and, with them, connection, in order to give shape to another movement of time. In summary, Sennett (1998) explains that:

the conditions of time in the new capitalism have created a conflict between character and experience, the experience of disjointed time threatening the ability of people to form their characters into sustained narratives (Sennett, 1998, p. 30).

\(^1\) Sennett defines character as “the ethical value we place on our own desires and on our relations to others” depending on the individual’s “connections to the world” (Sennett, 1998, p. 10).
In that sense, according to Sennett (1998), new capitalism is causing demoralisation in society because the development of a self-narrative which includes moral values (such as mutual-commitment, community, loyalty, trust and mutual responsibility) cannot thrive in an ecology which emphasises entrepreneurial virtues such as flexibility.

Demoralisation and rationality

The fourth version of the demoralisation thesis is very much connected to the third one and is referred to as “a growing influence of rationality” (Lynch, 2007, p. 147). Lynch (2007) explains that this critique concerns the central place that rationality has been given in society and people’s lives due to its interrelatedness to the growth of new capitalism. A growing influence of rationality, as suggested by Lynch (2007), causes demoralisation in several ways. Lynch (2007) suggests that because of the growth of capitalism, we have now come to think in a calculating way about matters in life which are in essence non-rational such as friendship, love and loyalty. Lynch (2007) argues that this can lead to a weakening of commitment to such non-rational values, and fails to provide answers to individuals about matters of a meaningful life. In addition, such a focus on rationality can narrow our understanding of possible alternatives for how individuals can structure society (Lynch, 2007). This can lead to unhealthy institutions, which is referred to as the McDonaldization thesis by Ritzer. This includes the idea that, because of the overemphasis on rationality, different parts of society become organised in a similar way to a fast-food restaurant. In other words, society is modelling itself with a focus on “efficiency, measurability, predictability and control through non-human technology” (Lynch, 2007, p. 150). Furthermore, Lynch describes that a critique on this dominant rationality includes the perspective that ultimately such a use of rationality can lead one to become separated from “basic human qualities a the capacity for true emotion” (Lynch, 2007, p. 151).

This critique fits with Taylor’s argument against instrumental reason. Taylor (1994) describes instrumental reasoning as a means-ends reasoning. This involves situations where one answers certain questions by organising their means most effectively to achieve some end, instead of deciding questions along the lines of other considerations. In other words, considerations of efficiency and effectiveness are being considered to have primary importance (Taylor, 1994). Taylor (1994) describes how this used to be different. For instance, now people might be deliberating in which country best to live in order to get the best job opportunities. Taylor (1994) suggests that in previous centuries such matters were
predetermined by one’s upbringing. Again, the counter argument to this is that matters such as love and friendship are suggested as moral values which perhaps should not be decided on along the lines of efficiency and effectiveness, because they do not need to serve an additional purpose. They could be an end in themselves (Taylor, 1994).

In short, this critique on the growing role of rationality implies that the perspective of this rationality is driven by market-values. This fourth critique therefore can be seen as a symptom or result of the third critique: a consequence of society being dominated by a market-oriented, globalised and neoliberal agenda. In this sense, demoralisation is caused because market considerations are dominating alternative considerations, including matters which do not concern the market.

In other words, the main critique on why society is experiencing demoralisation is because moral values are being pushed aside by a dominant narrative of neoliberalism (Couldry, 2010). This, it is suggested, has led to a decline of both morality and humanity, because markets don’t have humans, they have only individual interests and a focus on profit (Brown, 2015). Therefore, a dominant market – and instrumental rationality – based narrative cannot provide answers to questions concerning what makes a human life meaningful and fulfilled (Brown, 2015; Lynch, 2007; Taylor, 1994).

This argument is developed even further, claiming that democracy is facing, more than ever, the challenge of being democratic.

Democracy – and educating for democracy – under threat
Among the many scholars who support this perspective is Brown, who describes how this dominant narrative of neoliberalism is ‘undoing the demos’ (Brown, 2015). ‘Demos’, Greek for ‘the people rule’ or ‘rule by the people’, is under threat because according to Brown (2015) neoliberalism is affecting human life and leaves behind humanism itself. With this, Brown (2015) means that neoliberalism – as a rationality which is remaking “citizenship and the subject” – is no longer ruled by the people, but by the market (Brown, 2015, p. 40). Because this includes that citizenship loses its “distinctly political morphology and with it the mantle of sovereignty”, there is no longer the space for ‘the people’ to decide themselves on matters which they think are worthwhile (Brown, 2015, p. 109). Instead, according to Brown (2015), everything is being financialised, which is what Brown calls the “model of the market” (p. 31), meaning, everything is being defined by what it is worth. In other words, everything is defined by an instrumental rationality as discussed in the previous section.
Brown (2015) describes this process by suggesting that this is a movement from *homo politicus* to *homo oeconomicus*:

> We are no longer creatures of moral autonomy, freedom or equality [*homo politicus*]. We no longer choose our ends or the means to them. We are no longer even creatures of interest relentlessly seeking to satisfy ourselves. In this respect, the construal of *homo oeconomicus* as human capital leaves behind not only *homo politicus*, but humanism itself. (Brown, 2015, p. 42)

In this sense, Brown (2015) argues that this dominant focus on homo oeconomicus, and its replacement of homo politicus, places democracy under threat. If individuals start understanding democracy as a market place, then they will no longer understand it as a domain in which they can come together in order to rule and thus govern themselves. As a consequence, the very idea of ‘the people’ falls apart.

Thus, Brown (2015) describes how homo oeconomicus is dominating all spheres of society – including education. The idea of educating for democracy, according to Brown (2015), then also falls apart. With homo oeconomicus being a dominant approach, educating students to become intelligent citizens who can govern themselves gets replaced with a focus on the students as an investment. As a consequence, the students are being (directly or indirectly) taught the notion that they should be entrepreneurs, which is getting rid of the notion that individuals are social and political creatures. In this sense, neoliberalism is reshaping citizens into entrepreneurs. Therefore, education is facing the crisis of becoming entirely market-based, where the main underlying focus and motives of students are how to be the most ‘valuable’ to future employers.

However, similar to Brown (2015), Nussbaum (2006) argues that education plays a central role in a democracy. More specifically, Nussbaum states that “*nothing could be more crucial to democracy than the education of its citizens*” (2006, p. 387). Nussbaum (2006) asserts that it is through primary and secondary education that young students learn certain “habits of mind” which are necessary for them to become citizens of a democracy (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 387).

Nussbaum (2006) describes that this should include three capacities: “the capacity for critical examination of oneself and one’s traditions” (p. 388), the “ability to see themselves as not simply citizens of some local region or group, but also, and above all, as human beings bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern” (p. 389), and the ability of “narrative imagination (...) the ability to think what it might like to be in the shoes of a person different than oneself” (p. 390). However, when market-based values have a priority
and educating students is aimed at investing in them as entrepreneurial citizens, these capacities will not be taught and addressed.

In this sense, a shift takes place. With the most crucial role of education for democracy losing its purpose, coupled with the citizens of a democracy understanding it as a marketplace and losing the understanding that they need to gather to govern, and democracy itself valuing the wellbeing of the market above the wellbeing of its citizens, the most crucial meaning of democracy ceases to exist: a society governed by its ‘demos’ or ‘the people’ (Brown, 2015; Nussbaum, 2006, 2011). Now, the people are not representing the ruling order or their government. Instead, ‘democracy’ represents the current order against the people (Brown, 2015; Mirowski, 2013).

2.2.2 Liquid Times: other challenges and needs for the self and society

What challenges?
Paragraph 2.2.1 aims to show that there are different perspectives on why morality is being pushed to the background of people’s lives and being overtaken by increasingly market-based values (Lynch, 2007). This has several problematic consequences. In short, according to multiple theorists and researchers, besides morality’s importance as an end in itself, a decline of morality threatens the existence of a democratic society (Brown, 2015). When democracy values the wellbeing of the market above the wellbeing of its people, a shift occurs. It is no longer the case that the people are ruling. Rather, the market has the highest word. Therefore, it can be argued that democracy in that sense is representing the current order (who value the market above all) against the people (Brown, 2015).

Additionally, such a moral crisis has several consequences for individuals. Firstly, moral values are necessary for individuals to give meaning to their lives (Veugelers, 2011). Moreover, the extent to which individuals are able to shape and express their moral values is now suggested to correspond with how well individuals are able to cope with the challenges of modern times (Bauman, 2001; Giddens, 1991). In that sense, the ability to shape and express one’s moral values influences one’s general wellbeing as well (Couldry, 2010; Walker, Roberts, & Kristjánsson, 2013).

The described challenges are central examples of challenges that belong to the modern times we live in. These modern times – generally referred to as postmodernity, the ‘late modern age’ or ‘modernity’ (Giddens, 1991) or as Zygmunt Bauman (2007) refers to them,
‘liquid times’ – are characterised by the rapidly changing circumstances of the reality individuals live, as a consequence of globalisation processes such as global capitalism. The ‘liquidity’ refers to what Bauman (2007) describes as the nature of time, working life and people’s identity which have become episodic. In other words, they are no longer continuous, cumulative and directional, but like liquid: constantly changing and flowing into many different directions.

Other challenges related to the consequences of the globalisation processes are the destruction of the environment, the increasing shortage of clean drinking water for billions of people (Dubel, Manschot, & Suransky, 2005), and challenges such as a massive ‘immigration phenomenon’ or the ‘formation and development of groups and movements’ against gender discrimination, or religious intolerance and the war on terrorism (Zahabioun, 2013, p. 197; Nussbaum, 2012). Key to these times is that there is a sense of risk connected to them, which is enhanced by the fact that challenges no longer limit themselves to a national and local scale (Bauman, 2007).

The accompanied key challenges for individuals therefore, as part of these liquid times, are that life-successes now depend on the speed which individuals are able to get rid of their old habits (Bauman, 2001). Bauman (2001) argues that what has changed in the ‘problem of identity’ is that people’s existential questions have changed from ‘how do I get there’ towards “‘where could I or should I go? And where will this road I’ve taken bring me?’” (Bauman, 2001, p. 147). Giddens elaborates on these new challenges for the identity development of late-modern individuals. Giddens (1991) describes the emergence of life-politics: a new way of how late-modern individuals are shaping and needing to shape their identities and therefore their lives. He describes how this is a new movement from emancipatory politics, which is characterised as a politics of life chances; freedom from. In this sense, ‘freedom from’ refers to a situation where the key movement relates to breaking free from something, towards a politics of lifestyle; freedom towards, which is characterised by self-actualisation in a “reflexively ordered environment” (Giddens, 1991, p. 214). This politics of life revolves around questions such as ‘how we should live our lives in emancipated social circumstances?’.

What is needed?

With such conditions, Giddens argues that “only if the person is able to develop an inner authenticity”, can the “narrative of the self-identity” be “shaped, altered and reflexively
sustained in relation to rapidly changing circumstances of social life, on a local and global scale” (1991, p. 215). Giddens argues that, in order to do so, a widespread change in lifestyle is needed, which brings back an important emergence of moral and existential questions. Hence, as Giddens argues:

life-political issues supply the central agenda for the return of the institutionally repressed. They call for a remoralising of social life and they demand a renewed sensitivity to questions that the institutions of modernity systematically dissolve (Giddens, 1991, p. 224).

In short, Giddens (1991) argues the need for a re-emergence of moral and meaningful or existential questions. With society now being based on episodes and fragments, Sennett (1998), in line with Giddens (1991), also argues that what is needed is things which help individuals to sustain their character. According to Sennett, what is missing for people is that they do not have a coherent life narrative. What is needed is a re-emergence of people’s life narratives to give individuals connection, and to give shape to the forward movement of time (Sennett, 1998).

In line with Giddens (1991) and Sennett (1998), Bauman (2001) argues that what is needed is a different type of learning, which Bauman (2001) refers to as ‘tertiary learning’. This refers to education which includes preparing its students for life, and is not just focused on subject knowledge. Similar to Nussbaum’s (2006) criteria for democratic education, Bauman (2001) describes four tasks which education should now first and foremost focus on. These include, firstly, “cultivating the ability to live daily and at peace with uncertainty and ambivalence” (p. 138). This means that students should be able to recognise a variety of standpoints which should happen with the absence of authority. Secondly, “instilling tolerance of difference and the will to respect the right to be different” (Bauman, 2001, p. 138). Thirdly, “fortifying critical and self-critical faculties and their consequences” (Bauman, 2001, p. 138), which implies that students should learn to take responsibility for their own choices and the consequences of those choices. Finally, students should be taught how to change frames and be trained “resisting the temptation to escape from freedom, with the anxiety of indecision it brings alongside the joys of the new and the unexplored” (p.138). Bauman (2001) describes that such an education could only work if it adopts an open-ended approach, using a crisscrossing of curricula and events.
To conclude, there is a need to reinvigorate moral and democratic values into society and the lives of individuals. Research suggests that moral education aims to do just that (Noddings, 2002; Nussbaum, 2006; Veugelers, 2011).

2.3 Theoretical perspectives on the relevance of moral education in modern times: identity development and moral character

2.3.1 What is moral education?
Moral education is defined in many different ways, for it depends on which school of thought answers the underlying broader question ‘how should we live?’, or ‘what does it mean to be (a good) human?’ (Noddings, 2002; Nussbaum, 2006). Moral education can be referred to by different terms, and vice versa. These terms include: character education, values education, social and emotional learning, human centred learning, humanistic education, citizenship/civic education, human rights education, Socratic learning, service learning, and democratic education (e.g. Dewey, 1916; Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Gill & Thomson, 2013; Giroux, 2001; Noddings, 2002; Oser, Althof, & Higgins-D’Alessandro, 2008; Veugelers, 2011). Moral education can be both the entire curriculum of a a school, a certain subject or educational activity within a school, can be taught at all school levels (primary, secondary etc.) and can also take place informally or in a non-formal way (Veugelers, 2011). This means that moral education can also happen in between classes (informal) or outside of school (non-formal) entirely such as in service learning.

The main two ‘camps’ however are ‘character education’ vs. ‘moral education’ as both terms are said to work as an umbrella term for all the other variations such as those mentioned above (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Walker, Roberts, & Kristjánsson, 2013). In general, the term character education is more often referred to in America, and moral education is more commonly used in European countries. However, this can depend on the school of thought behind the program, the foundations of the program, or the culture or the purpose of an activity.

Moral educators, such as Kohlberg (1981), often critique character educators as too focussed on merely nurturing virtues (which can be understood as character habits), with additional critique that this has aspects of indoctrination of either conservative or religious virtues (Noddings, 2002). In turn, moral education receives the critique that it is too focussed on moral reasoning and cognition (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006). The ‘moral of the story’
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however, is that there can be many educational programs recognised which, while referred to as character education, include various pedagogies related to moral education (Walker, et. al, 2013), and vice versa, today’s moral education programs include a focus on virtues and character building.

Despite the many similarities, character education is generally recognised as a form or a particular interpretation of moral education, which ultimately makes moral education the umbrella term for all other variations listed above (Park, 2004; Walker, et. al, 2013). Since this thesis aims to explore a particular variation of moral education – democratic education – it is helpful to refer to an ultimate umbrella term under which democratic education can be understood. This thesis therefore uses such a definition of moral education which recognises an umbrella interpretation of moral education, coming from Walker et. al (2013), viewing moral education “primarily in terms of the cultivation of young people’s moral characters and virtues” (p.3). In this sense, ‘moral character’ is understood to “encompass the evaluable, reason-responsive and educable sub-set of the human personality”, and virtues refer to “the main vehicles of that sub-set” (Walker et. al, 2013, p. 3).

2.3.2 History and development of moral education: towards human flourishing

Moral education is not a new approach to education. In fact, it dates back as far as the ancient Greek philosophers (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). Many of today’s moral education programs share a close connection to Aristotle’s philosophies, in particular Aristotle’s notion of ‘the good life’ and the ‘eudaimonic man’ which refers to a life that is full and good. In this sense, full and good – referring to human flourishing – can be understood as Aloni formulates it, which is a focus of education that assists ‘human beings in attaining their best in the main spheres of human experience’ (Aloni, 2007, p. 83). In this sense ‘good’ refers to Aristotle’s meaning of good: that our actions become good if we choose them with the right motives and value them intrinsically, meaning that the individual values them because they find them worthwhile in themselves (Walker et. al, 2013). If an individual starts to choose their actions in this intrinsic manner, without the need to reflect on whether they are good beforehand, the person’s virtues have become part of their Phronesis, or in other words their practical wisdom (Walker et. al, 2013). According to Aristotle, this is when one’s life can become truly virtuous and flourishing (Walker et. al, 2013). In this sense, the flourishing of the student is often understood as a focus of educating the student as a whole, including the aspects of educating the head, the heart and the hands (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006).
Walker et. al (2013) offer an overview of how the different aims of moral education have evolved over the centuries. In order to grasp both how moral education has developed over the many years, and the various different interpretations it could inhabit, this overview will be briefly addressed.

In short, Walker et. al (2013) describe a development of emphasis regarding the student in moral education from the eighteenth century view of ‘the sinful pupil’, to the early twenty-first century view of ‘the flourishing pupil’. In other words, over time, moral education according to Walker, Roberts and Kristjánsson has taken

the form of explicit educational aims concerned with the socio-moral, psycho-moral (especially emotional) and the political development of students – with student flourishing now typically being presented as the inclusive meta-objective of all those aims” (Walker et. al, 2013, p. 2).

Before elaborating on the development of different aims through the centuries, according to Walker et. al (2013), it should be noted that this is merely one perspective. The focus in the twenty-first century on the flourishing of the pupil, as referred to in the above quote, is only supported by some educators. As will be discussed more deeply in chapter three (see e.g. table 3.1), when looking at the implementation and aims of moral education programs, they differ widely (e.g. Berkowitz, 2009; Gill & Thomson, 2013; Giroux, 2001; Spring, 2004; Veugelers, 2011). Besides the aim to contribute to the flourishing of a student, there are still dominant ideologies supporting aims which are for instance market-based, or focussed on higher academic achievement while using focusing on the flourishing of the student to reach such other aims (Gill & Thomson, 2013; Giroux, 2001; Veugelers, 2011).

According to Walker, Roberts & Kristjánsson (2013) the eighteenth century was characterised by focussing on ‘the sinful pupil’ due to the dominant influence of the Christian belief in original sin. In this sense, despite Rousseau’s claim that children are in essence good, most of the moral education in the eighteenth century believed that teachers had the duty to discipline the students to “overcome their sin” (Walker, et. al, 2013, p. 4).

In the nineteenth century the focus changed slightly towards educating the ‘the polite pupil’. However, the belief that children had to ultimately be taught to overcome their sinful nature was still at its heart. The change that was now recognisable came from a need for “effective socialisation of each respective class” (Walker et. al, 2013, p. 5). In other words, this new focus was more about social control by aiming to develop “well-respected gentleman and ladies” through teaching manners rather than actual character development.
From the early twentieth century, moral education became more explicitly integrated in school policies and curricula, resulting in a shift in focus towards ‘the morally adjusted pupil’ (Walker et. al, 2013). This focus experienced a certain golden era in the UK, in that it lasted right up to after World War II (Walker et. al, 2013). Walker et. al (2013) give examples of reflections of this ‘golden era’. These include the Board of Education (which made it explicit in 1906 that their main focus on public education would be a moral focus), and after the 1940’s governmental papers were published such as *Citizens growing up: at home, at school, and after*, and *Young citizens at school* by the Scottish Education Department.

After experiencing a decline just after World War II, moral education in the late twentieth century experienced a re-emergence after Kohlberg’s most influential thesis in 1958. Highly influenced by Kohlberg’s findings, the main focus became on the ‘cognitively developing pupil’ (Walker et. al, 2013). Central to this approach was the perspective that a school should function as a ‘just community’ in order to facilitate an environment where students get trained in their thinking processes to be able to understand and learn to act according to the morally good (Kohlberg, 1985; Oser, Althof, & Higgins-D’Alessandro, 2008). The student’s cognition is considered here to be of main importance.

The turn of the twenty-first century marks the focus on the ‘emotionally vulnerable pupil’ (Walker et. al, 2013). Kohlberg’s focus on cognition proved to be insufficient in creating moral students (see also Noddings, 2002). Instead, a renewed appreciation for emotion became the reaction, recalling pre-war traditions (Walker et. al, 2013). Key to this focus was the understanding that in order to create moral citizens, the students’ “fragile and emotional selves” should be healed and empowered.

Walker et. al, (2013) suggest that new concepts around the early twenty-first century focus on ‘the flourishing pupil’ are still emerging, making it difficult to offer a solid and closed account of what exactly the current focus is. However, according to Walker, Roberts and Kristjánsson, the consensus among the majority of moral educationists is that the new focus emphasises the flourishing of students, even though that still includes different interpretations of flourishing. They describe that the shift towards focussing on flourishing rather than the emotion and empowering of students was caused by new research showing that a mere focus on empowerment does not lead to moral behaviour. Emotional intelligence does not automatically include moral constraints on the behaviour of the individual (Walker et. al, 2013). In fact, one of the results of high self-esteem was to increase bullying behaviour, use of drugs and dangerous sexual behaviour (Walker et. al, 2013). The majority of current moral
education projects today seem to aim at addressing previous criticism on the focus of creating a self-centred individual, thereby broadening the focus to include the personal, the social, the cultural and the political aspects of a good human life.

However, as described before, this is only a consensus among certain educationists. Indeed, although the claim of Walker, Roberts and Kristjánsson that the central purpose of education is now focussed on student flourishing is widely supported (see e.g. Gill & Thomson, 2013; Noddings, 2002), it is not a consensus shared by all. There are various educational theories available which do not focus mainly on student flourishing. Althof, Higgins and Oser (2008) for example, but also Giroux and McLaren, (1986) describe that the current movement is going increasingly into the direction of citizenship education rather than student flourishing or their social-emotional development.

Park (2004) offers an overview of the 21st century research results – as described above by Walker et. al (2013) – in relation to character development and what influences an individual’s character and its effects, which point out that character can indeed be cultivated and emphasises the relevance of this for education. In addition, the different factors which influence character development are biological factors, parents and family structure, role models, close relationships, positive institutions such as schools and the culture in which an individual lives (Park, 2004). Furthermore, research shows that developing good character does not only depend on cognitive abilities: “unlike moral judgements – which is cognitive – character additionally includes emotional and behavioural competencies” (Park, 2004, p. 43). Park (2004) therefore states that “character is important for positive youth development not only as a buffer against mental and physical health problems but also enabling factors that promote and maintain adaption and positive youth development” (Park, 2004, p. 43). In this sense, by character he means particular positive and moral character strengths. For example, studies have found that character strengths such as optimism helps the individual to “interpret stressors as less threatening to their basic needs of relatedness, autonomy and competence” (Park, 2004, p. 43), which helps the individual as a buffer against certain challenges in life. On the other hand, certain character developmental assets such as sense of purpose are “associated with positive outcomes such as school success, leadership, valuing diversity, delay of gratification, and helping others” (Park, 2004, p. 43). Walker, Roberts and Kristjánsson describe similar research results showing that character strengths such as hope and gratitude contribute to the experience of life satisfaction and other virtues or character strengths tend to contribute to a person’s resilience (Walker et. al, 2013).
In other words, moral education can help the individual develop and maintain particular character strengths by offering an environment where individual character strengths can be identified and fostered. In sum, this helps the individual both to buffer against certain challenges in life and helps the individual to flourish in terms of enhancing their general well-being (Park, 2004).

Park concludes that there are three necessary domains which should be included by research and practice efforts in relation to understanding character and character development, which comprise “the psychological good life” (Park, 2004, p. 41). These are “positive subjective experiences” (such as happiness and life satisfaction), “positive individual traits” (such as values), and “positive institutions” (such as schools) (Park, 2004, p. 41). However, Park notes that most research is limited to quantitative results, focusing mainly on moral cognitions instead of moral behaviour.

It is problematic that the predominant approach to understanding the relationship between education and students’ moral character is quantitative. As stated above, research shows that the relevant domains are not limited to the domain of cognition, but include the individual’s behaviour and emotions (Gill & Thomson, 2013). It is difficult to reach a particular in-depth understanding, which is necessary to explore an individual’s relation between their emotions and their behaviour, through quantitative study (Silverman, 2011). This is due to the fact that appropriate research questions are ‘what’ and ‘how’ questions. Those particular questions are intended to explore a deeper level of an individual’s understanding, allowing to explore their motives and emotions behind certain actions for example (Silverman, 2011, p. 25). Qualitative research methods are more appropriate for exploring such questions, since quantitative research methods cannot reach this additional in-depth level of questioning (Silverman, 2011).

With the background and the development of different perspectives of what moral education should focus on in mind, the question relevant for the purpose of this thesis however, is in what way moral education would be particularly relevant in the described modern times?

2.3.3 Why moral education in modern times?
It can be argued that one should focus on moral education in general because, according to several researchers, philosophers and theorists (e.g. Bauman, Dewey, Gill & Thomson, Noddings, Nussbaum) individuals are not born with common moral values, they construct
them. It has also been suggested that having moral values is crucial both for the individual (in terms of their buffer against life challenges and enhancing their general wellbeing) and society (in order for society to work, it needs not only good people, but also people who are critical thinkers, responsible etc. in order for democracy to function) (Noddings, 2002, 2003; Nussbaum, 2006; Veugelers, 2011).

Moral education is suggested to be relevant for the modern individual because it is argued to harmonise those aspects needed for the modern individual to be able to both cope with the corresponding challenges, and to flourish in a life that is good (Veugelers, 2011). Of importance is the fact that moral education is suggested to help the student develop and sustain their character (Seider, 2012). In particular, for the purpose of this thesis, it is of importance that this includes the individual’s moral character, which focusses on what an individual experiences as intrinsically good (see section 2.3.4 where character and different types of character are discussed through the work of Seider, 2012).

As previously identified, one of the things needed in relation to the challenges accompanied by the modern times we live in, is the re-emergence of moral and existential questions in light of the various forms of demoralisation in society and its function for giving meaning to an individual’s life. In addition, Giddens (1991) argued that a part of this need for a re-emergence of morality is that this helps the individual to develop an inner authenticity which is needed for “the narrative of the self-identity” to be “shaped, altered and reflexively sustained” (p. 215). In line with Giddens, Sennett (1998) elaborated on this by describing how this would be crucial for the re-emergence of people’s life narratives, as opposed to other dominant (neoliberal) narratives. Moral character is the particular part of an individual’s identity which refers to strengths such as the ability to create an inner authenticity and personal, moral life-narrative (Seider, 2012). In that sense, nurturing moral character forms the cornerstone of today’s relevance for moral education and therefore the focus of this study.

2.3.4 Defining moral character
Defining character and moral character isn’t straightforward, because there is still no consensus amongst theorists and researchers about the variations of the different terms. This thesis will rely on defining the terms, such as character and moral character, on those theorists who understand moral education in the broad umbrella-like manner described above. The majority of these underlying theories are anchored in developmental psychology (e.g.
Berkowitz), philosophy of education (e.g. Dewey, Noddings and Nussbaum) and critical pedagogy (e.g. Veugelers).

Berkowitz (2011) defines character as “a set of psychosocial characteristics that motivate and enable individuals to function as competent moral agents” (p. 3). Berkowitz explains that character can be understood as consisting of three components: cognition, emotion (or affect) and behaviour. In other words, an individual’s character is formed by “the sum of that individual’s thoughts, feelings and actions” (Seider, 2012, p. 20). Berkowitz (2011) explains how these components are reflected in the work of educators and pedagogues when it is mentioned that education should be about educating the head (cognition), the heart (affect) and the hands (actions/behaviour). Similar studies (Davidson, Lickona & Khmelkov, 2008) suggest that the whole of an individual’s character consists of different types. Three types have been identified: ‘performance character’, ‘civic character’ and ‘moral character’. All three of them form the individual’s character (see Figure 2.1 for an overview).

Seider (2012) has developed this taxonomy of character types in more detail, and has done extensive research on their practices within schools. This thesis acknowledges that there are different interpretations available regarding the definitions of identity, character and different character types (see e.g. Arthur, Powell, & Lin, 2014; Krettenaurer & Mosleh, 2013; Lapsley, 2010; MacIntyre, 1981). For the purpose of this thesis however it is most helpful to lean on definitions which allows one to make specific distinctions of character (such as performance, civic and moral), since it will help the present researcher in researching both the understandings and practices that individuals might have regarding the moral aspect of their character. This is why this thesis will mainly use the definitions regarding character types along Seider’s conceptualisation, since he makes such specific distinctions.

Performance character, according to Seider (2012) (see also Davidson, Lickona & Khmelkov, 2008), refers to the qualities of character that an individual would need in order to “realize one’s potential”, such as resilience, effort, perseverance and self-discipline (Seider, 2012, p. 32). Performance character is therefore the part of character including “behavioural skills and psychological capacities” that enables the individual to actually put their character into practice (Arthur, 2014).

Civic character is related to an individual’s role “within the local, national and global communities” (Seider, 2012, p. 33). Civic character strengths are about “the numerous social skills necessary to work productively with others for the common good” (Seider, 2012, p. 33). In other words, civic character virtues and skills are necessary for an “engaged and
responsible citizenship” (Seider, 2012, p. 33). Civic character, due to its nature of strengthening those skills in the individual that have a positive effect on their community and thus society, is often the emphasis of a lot of moral education programs (Seider, 2012).

Moral character entails a set of qualities that are needed for “successful interpersonal relationships and ethical behavior” (Seider, 2012, p. 32). This means that moral character is mostly grounded in the individual’s relationships and interactions with the people around them (Seider, 2012). Whereas performance character is neither focused on what’s good or bad, moral character is about what is being intrinsically experienced and viewed as good by the individual, not only for themselves but also for the people around them. Moral character therefore is crucial for guiding the individual’s actions. Hence, performance character without moral character can for instance lead to success, however without moral character this could permit successes which include horrific actions (Davidson, Lickona, & Khmelkov, 2008). In addition, and relevant for the purpose of this thesis, a developed moral character is essential for the individual to recognise what is of value to them personally: which choices would be good choices for them, which relationships are good relationships for them. In other words, a

Figure 2.1 Taxonomy of character types (Seider, 2012, p. 33)
developed moral character functions as a crucial element in character development for the individual to develop their own best potential: as a cornerstone for a flourishing life. Hence, it is also the individual’s moral character which guides their performance character and decides which aspects will be put into practice. In other words, character habits that are related to moral character enable the individual to “respond well to situations in any area of experience” (Arthur, 2014, p. 14).

Suggested examples of moral character virtues are courage, compassion, resilience, integrity and respect (Seider, 2012). However, it should be noted that what character virtues belong to which type of character are still very much open for discussion. For example, the character virtue of perseverance is suggested to belong to performance character (perseverance as referring to what is needed to reach your goals). However, perseverance can easily also be understood as essential for moral character (perseverance as in staying true to oneself).

Studies show that performance character, civic character and moral character are interrelated. Each individual holds a particular combination of these types of character, and the sum of all three of them forms the whole of that individual’s character (Seider, 2012). In Figure 2.1 it can be seen that the individual’s character as a whole is suggested by various researchers, such as Berkowitz (2011) and Seider (2012), to form in its entirety the individual’s ‘moral identity’. Seider defines moral identity as “the extent to which individuals integrate their morality into their subjective sense of personal identity” (Seider, 2012, p. 34). Of all three types of character, moral character is suggested as having the strongest influence “upon an individual’s moral identity”, followed by performance character and finally civic character (Seider, 2012, p. 34).

In summary, moral character is suggested to have the most important influence on a person’s moral identity development. In addition, it is the most important element of a person’s character in order to not only develop their own moral values (essential for one’s meaning of life and general wellbeing and happiness), but also to recognise those things in life which are important to them and others around them. Furthermore, moral character functions as a compass to direct the person’s actions in life. A developed moral character can therefore be suggested as a key notion of moral education in relation to which aspects could help individuals to deal with the challenges associated with modern times. Moral character therefore forms the main focus of this study.
However, when schools decide to include moral education in their curriculum, they do so in different ways and with different purposes (Davidson, Lickona, & Khmelkov, 2008). Often, educating moral character does not represent the central focus. Rather, performance character and civic character prove to gain a considerable amount of attention instead (Seider, 2012), either for the purpose of enhancing academic achievement, or aiming to create responsible citizens. In short, it can be said that not all moral education programs prove to be effective and include different notions of what moral education should look like.

2.4 Different notions of moral education: from empty to full

2.4.1 Berkowitz’ criteria for effective moral education

Berkowitz developed a model to address the aspects that a good moral education (and thus a good moral education teacher) should include, which he has called PRIME (Berkowitz, 2009). PRIME stands for: Putting academics in perspective, Relationship Building, Intrinsic Motivation, Modelling Goodness, and Empowering Students (Berkowitz, 2009).

In short these aspects entail the following. Putting academics in perspective, on the one hand, means that academic achievement should never be the sole purpose of education. According to Berkowitz (2009), only civic and moral socialisation justifies education. Berkowitz means that education should always be both about character development and academic development. On the other hand putting academics in perspective refers to Berkowitz’ argument that knowledge transfer only goes so far. Often individuals don’t remember the majority of the facts they have learned. Indeed, as Berkowitz (2009) argues, teaching facts are important, but it should go alongside teaching students how to learn and “fostering a thirst for learning” (Berkowitz, 2009, p. 10).

Berkowitz (2009) argues that central to moral education is Relationship building. More than any other pedagogy, what has the most impact on the student is they way they are treated by others (by their parents, their peers and their teachers).

Intrinsic motivation refers to the importance of not teaching with a reward-punishment manner. Berkowitz (2009) argues that in particular working with punishments has a counter-productive effect and can in fact lead to “serious negative side effects” (p. 12). Although this seems like common sense, Berkowitz stresses the importance after various studies suggest that many teachers don’t know of alternatives to external motivation techniques. Simply through “privately and quietly praising them” (p. 12) can intrinsic motivation be promoted.
Only if students intrinsically and authentically care about their class and their school will they be open to learn (Berkowitz, 2009).

Modelling goodness refers to the responsibility the teacher has to ‘be the character they want to see in the students’. Berkowitz (2009) explains that a teacher – whether they intend it or not – always functions as a role model, and they impact the students’ character through their own character. Therefore, it is essential not to act hypocritically and to ‘walk the talk’. If your aim is that the students learn about their character and good character development, you have to set an example.

According to Berkowitz (2009) Empowering students should be central to moral education. With empowering, Berkowitz (2009) means that problems, questions, plans and decisions should not all be made by the teacher, but passed back to the students, valuing their voice and opinions. This can be done through pedagogical methods such as cooperative learning and class meetings. Berkowitz (2009) stresses that this is often not possible in educational systems that are still too often dominated by a hierarchical, authoritarian and paternalistic culture. Rather, accepting that students can outrun the teacher can lead to authentically valuing the students and in turn promote “more learning, more love for learning and strong character” (p. 14). See Appendix B for an overview of criteria which, according to Berkowitz & Bier (2004), should be included in moral education for these PRIME guidelines to yield effective results.

Despite the various research results (e.g. academic motivation, presocial and democratic values, as shown by Berkowitz and Bier, 2004) highlighting the effectiveness and importance of moral education and the requirements for reaching positive results, moral education – if implemented at all – is often not implemented in a recommended manner. Furthermore, there is a continuing disharmony between research data and implementation of moral education (Berkowitz, 2009). Moral education, in particular fuller notions, are often left out of mainstream education in England.

Research shows that in many cases, moral education is still interpreted as a separate part of the curriculum related to teaching ethics and discussing ‘soft’ topics such as spirituality (Davidson, Lickona, & Khmelkov, 2008). Instead of interpreting moral education with an inclusive and curriculum wide approach, the general reaction of teachers is often ‘I teach English, not character’ (Davidson, et. al, 2008). The central point however for a full notion of moral education is that character development is primary to any subject teaching, for without space for character development, knowledge transfer itself can become pointless.
Therefore, it is argued that a full notion of moral education entails a curriculum wide approach, valuing character and academic development as two sides of the same coin. Character development in this sense should be understood as Berkowitz and Bier (2004) have described. This refers to the positive development of the “complex set of psychological characteristics that enable an individual to act as a moral agent” (p.73). Examples of such characteristics are moral action, moral values and moral emotions (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). Despite the available pointers towards effective moral education however, there is a need for renewed research data showing the effects of such a full notion of moral education.

2.4.2 Gap in knowledge
Moral education programs can be found at all school levels. However, the majority of current moral education programs and related research data can be found at the elementary and middle school levels, despite the fact that research shows that character-related challenges are mostly experienced at secondary school level (Davidson, Lickona, & Khmelkov, 2008). It is during the transition into young adulthood when youngsters start experiencing questions in relation to their identity (Gill & Thomson, 2013).

In addition, the majority of the research exploring the effectiveness of moral education is done within the safe environment of the classroom. However, this thesis argues that one of the most challenging aspects related to the modern times in which the students live, is to what extent they are able to sustain their narrative of their self-identity. In other words, the real challenge for moral education is to what extent it helps the students practice their moral character once they have left the safe environment of the school. It is said that the purpose of moral education is to equip the students with the necessary tools for later life (see e.g. Seider, 2012; Walker, Roberts, & Kristjánsson, 2013). However, there is a lack of qualitative research exploring how former students of such an educational program are able to practice their moral character in everyday life, and their perceptions on which aspects of their education they are still finding helpful or hindering to that process.

This thesis therefore aims to explore which possible factors of moral education can provide sustaining life skills for their alumni and help them deal with the correlating challenges of modern times.
2.4.3 Thin, empty and full notions of moral education

With Berkowitz’ (2004, 2009) criteria in mind, this thesis proposes that the different notions of moral education can be categorised as thin, empty and full notions. This refers to the way moral education is understood, implemented and taught. This thesis suggests that the delineation from an empty to a full notion can be understood as follows.

Empty

On the left end of the spectrum, this thesis suggests that the thinner the notion, the more education is understood as a means for economic growth as described before by referring to Brown (2015). This includes an educational approach which is primarily focussed on academic achievement and considers students as ‘entrepreneurs in the making’ for the global labour market. Such an educational approach represents an empty notion of education in the sense that there is no attention to teaching character development and nurturing meaningful, moral and democratic values. An example of such an interpretation can be found in the UK’s most recent White Paper (2010). The first sentences of the document, concerning The Importance of Teaching, reveal the primary purpose to be of an economic nature:

> So much of the education debate in this country is backward looking: have standards fallen? Have exams got easier? These debates will continue, but what really matters is how we’re doing compared with our international competitors. That is what will define our economic growth and our country’s future. The truth is, at the moment we are standing still while others race past. (The Schools White Paper, p.3)

Thin

A thin notion of moral education is suggested by this thesis to include certain aspects of moral education, but with a narrow interpretation of its purpose and meaning. Examples are schools that include subjects such as ‘citizenship’ or ‘ethics’, but interpret moral education as separate from ‘normal’ subjects (Davidson, Lickona, & Khmelkov, 2008). In other words, the subject of ‘citizenship’ will not extend beyond the parameters of that class. In addition, the main focus will often be on citizenship education as a means to an end, either because it is policy to do so, or it is used as a means to reduce school drop-outs or enhance academic success. This entails that performance character and civic character will most likely – if at all – be the main focus rather than moral character. In this sense, a student’s emotions might be recognised in such an approach, but perceived as a means to an end, in order “to be able to study and work better, and achieve better results” (Gill & Thomson, 2013, p.74). The manner of
Exploring former democratic school students’ moral character in everyday life

implementation is characterised by providing the students with what virtues to value, a one-way direction from teacher to student as opposed to collaborative learning. In this sense, moral education is considered as a subject and teaching certain skills, rather than understanding moral education as allowing space for the students’ character development.

Full

This thesis suggests a full notion of moral education, following Berkowitz’ (2009) criteria, to include a cross-curriculum approach, addressing the entire ecology of the school as opposed to limiting moral education to one single subject. Ways of implementation will include collaborative learning, allowing space for the students to find answers for themselves and acknowledging the importance of building relationships as central to the educational environment. This notion of education includes the perspective that character development and academic achievement are two sides of the same coin. In England, such educational approaches which affect the school as a whole can most often be recognised in alternative education rather than mainstream education (Gill & Thomson, 2013). Alternative education in this sense should be understood as described by Lees & Noddings (2016, in press). This handbook offers an unusual compass in relation to their definition for alternative education, in the way that it acknowledges an open ended definition, but focusses on autonomy, self and social empowerment:

“authors identify with the notion that we do not know “exactly” what an educational alternative is or can be. This is celebrated here. We also do not know exactly to what our alternatives are alternative. […] what is presented is nevertheless grounded in its own North: principles of autonomy and self / social empowerment. The collection of voices – each chapter – acts then as an intelligent invitation to alternative education. (Lees & Noddings, 2016, in press).

This thesis acknowledges that the fuller the notion of moral education, the more helpful it can be for the individual’s moral character development and the corresponding challenges they face in the modern times they live in. In addition, this thesis also acknowledges moral education to be relevant for all school levels. However, in light of the discussed societal dilemmas concerning the decline of moral and democratic values, and because research shows that both the development and challenges of identity and character are experienced mostly during the years of transition into adolescence, this thesis will focus on the level of secondary
Exploring former democratic school students’ moral character in everyday life

education. It is argued that an example of such a full notion of moral education in the UK, on secondary school level, is Sands school in Devon (Fielding, 2010; Gribble, 2006).

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the different perspectives on demoralisation and related challenges and needs for individuals and societies, in which the re-emergence of moral education is embedded. It has been proposed that one of the main added values of moral education in modern times is its focus on allowing the development of an individual’s moral character. It is suggested that the development of moral character, e.g. the ability to develop and express one’s moral values, can contribute to an individual’s general wellbeing, flourishing and the development of character strengths which can help an individual to deal with the associated challenges of modern times. However, as was argued, the majority of moral education initiatives do not include an approach which can facilitate the development of moral character. A categorisation was proposed to distinguish the different moral education programs into empty, thin and full approaches, acknowledging Berkowitz’ (2009) PRIME criteria to reflect the ingredients for an effective moral education program. It was argued that a particular interpretation of democratic education, under which Sands School is suggested to belong, can be understood as a full notion of moral education.

Exactly how a full notion of a democratic moral education program can be understood, and which perspective is adopted by this thesis will be discussed in the following chapter.
Chapter Three

Defining democratic education
3 Defining democratic education

3.1 Introduction

As the previous chapter highlights, democratic education can be understood under the umbrella term of moral education. However, the term ‘democratic education’ itself has many meanings and interpretations that shift over time. This chapter explores what democratic education actually implies, with a specific focus on how democratic education could be understood in the light of the interest of this thesis, that is how it is provided in Sands School, the subject school of this study.

Therefore, the first part of this chapter will define what democratic education is, drawing mostly on the work of Veugelers. The second part aims to scrutinize the concept of democratic education by comparing two examples in the work of Dewey and Kohlberg respectively. The third and final part highlights certain criticism on the described examples and will finish by offering an overview of today’s democratic schools internationally and within the UK.

3.2 What is democratic education?

3.2.1 From a political to a social and cultural level

The concept of democratic education has, hand in hand with moral education, experienced a new revival of interest in the last decades. This renewed interest can be partly seen as a renewed appreciation of communities, accompanied by “strong philosophical attacks on liberalism” (Noddings, 2002, p. 12). As Noddings (2002, p. 64) describes, liberalism has been accused of an overemphasis on individual’s autonomy, while neglecting the role of the community and promoting and “arrogant universalism”. On the other hand, concerns about religious or cultural intolerance in pluralistic democratic societies have drawn attention towards the need for democratic education (Derriks & De Kat, 2006; Noddings, 2003; Nussbaum, 2012; Veugelers).

Overall, in line with the above mentioned concerns, democratic education is often understood as preparing its students to become active and good citizens in a democratic society by the time they reach working-life as an adult (Oser, Althof, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2008). The term ‘democratic education’ is typically associated with citizenship
education or civic education, and it is widely thought that, in this sense, all public education in a democratic society is democratic education. However, as we shall see, this is only a narrow understanding of the scope of the term (Nussbaum, 2006).

Nussbaum (2006) describes that even though public education is “crucial to the health of democracy”, most recent “educational activities in many countries […] focus narrowly on science and technology, neglecting the arts and humanities. They also focus on internalization of information, rather than on the formation of the student’s critical and imaginative capacities” (Nussbaum, 2006).

True democratic education goes a step further than general public education teaching about democracy. Oser, Althof and Higgins-D’Alessandro (2008) suggest the term ‘democracy education’ to describe this distinction: “When we use the term ‘democracy education’, we refer to schools that do not only teach about democratic government but actually implement structures of democratic student participation, at least in certain areas” (p. 402). This type of democratic education views the school itself as a democracy on a small scale. Democratic education in this sense follows a ‘critical pedagogy’ (Giroux, 1986) in Veugelers, 2011, p.22) with a main focus on “organizing democratic processes in education and linking school and social action”. This type of education is organised to allow much more space for the students to have a voice in their own education with attention to their own personal experiences. In other words, not only the content of this type of education relates to democratic practices, the pedagogy with which the education is taught is also constructed in a democratic way.

For the purpose of this project, democratic education should be understood as transcending the focus of the political level of citizenship. Emphasis such as the above described community, democratic student participation, the relation between school and social action and personal experiences shows that this concept “has been deepened into the social and cultural levels” (Veugelers, 2011, p. 14). After extensive research on moral and democratic education, Veugelers (2011) concludes that, “the concept [of democratic education] has also been broadened by crossing over the national borders and speaking of European citizenship and global citizenship” (p. 14).

Table 3.1 describes the different emphases of the educational ideologies, based on Veugelers’ analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Ideologies</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>‘Nationalist Education in the Age of Globalization’</td>
<td>‘The nationalist educational ideology emphasizes the native language, the national culture, the national history, nation-building and security’ (Veugelers, 2011, p. 14).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Schooling Workers for a Global Free Market’</td>
<td>‘The global free market ideology emphasizes comparability and standardizing, economic and technological development, and the international competitive position of countries. In subject matter the emphasis is placed on languages, on mathematics and science. This ideology is strongly promoted by organizations like the World Bank and the OECD’ (Veugelers, 2011, p. 14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Globalizing Morality’</td>
<td>‘The globalizing morality ideology emphasizes human rights, democracy, cultural diversity and sustainability. In content, the emphasis is on moral development and a morally founded sustainable world citizenship. This ideology is especially promoted by UNESCO and NGO’s’ (Veugelers, 2011, p. 15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Spring (2004) suggests that educational systems will each have a combination of these ideologies in their policies and practices. Democratic education as discussed in this thesis can be mostly understood in relation to the educational ideology of a ‘Globalizing Morality’, where there is a main focus on moral development and “morally founded sustainable world citizenship” (Veugelers, 2011, p. 15).

3.3 Examples of democratic education scrutinised: Dewey’s democratic education and Kohlberg’s Just Community

A well-known and much referred to example, when speaking of democratic education, is Kohlberg’s Just Community Approach, which focusses on moral cognitive development. Although political in nature (i.e. aiming to teach citizenship), the Just Community movement also transcended the political level by going “beyond personal and moral decision making, treating the moral climate of a whole system as a central tenet” (Oser, Althof & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2008, p. 396). In other words, Kohlberg’s pedagogy also expanded the content of the teaching in the Just Community schools into the practice in the classroom, since he believed that “education for justice requires making schools more just places in which
students are encouraged to play active roles in creating justice” (Oser, et al., 2008, p. 396). The Just Community Approach aimed to teach its students an understanding of democracy by letting them participate in democratic forms of school life. Participation was therefore at the heart of the Just Community schools. According to Oser et al. (2008), in order to promote moral reasoning and participation, the following elements characterised the Just Community Schools:

- the community meeting, the fairness (or discipline) committee, small advisory groups and the agenda committee (preparation groups), moral dilemma discussions in the classroom, training and supervision provided to teachers, the informational inclusion of parents and scientific evaluation’ (Oser, et. al, 2008, p. 397).

Compared to most public education seen today, it is understandable that the Just Community Approach is often referred to as the example of democratic education, considering the level of participation offered to its students in school-wide meetings and democratically made decisions. However, in light of the type of democratic education most relevant to Sands School, an extra step in differentiating the meaning of democratic education must be taken, specifically, relating to its purpose.

Although heavily leaning on and referring to the educational philosophies of Dewey, many of the later interpretations of democratic education such as those of Giroux and Kohlberg differ in their own way from Dewey’s intentions or perspectives. Relevant for the discussion in this chapter is the difference in purpose of democratic education which, it can be argued, can best describe the type of education taught in Sands School.

3.3.1 Different purposes

When discussing democratic education it is important to pay attention to Dewey’s work. Opinions differ about how influential Dewey has been since it is not documented how widely Dewey’s philosophies have reached actual educational practice. However, as Noddings (1998) describes: “There is no question that he was enormously influential on the domains of philosophical and educational thought” (p. 22). As Westbrook (1993) puts it, Dewey is often seen as one of the most significant (American) philosophers of the first half of the twentieth century since “[h]is career spanned three generations, and his voice could be heard in the midst of cultural controversies in the United States (and abroad) from the 1890s until his death, at the age of 93, in 1952” (p. 1). Dewey is particularly influential in relation to his thoughts and ideas about democracy and education. This is where one can argue that there can
be seen an additional dimension to the meaning of democratic education seen in programs such as the Just Community Approach of Kohlberg.

For Dewey, it could be said that democracy and education, but also purpose of life, weren’t seen as separate concepts; they were all connected. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey (1916) starts by describing the connection between life, education and social life:

It is the very nature in life to strive to continue in being. Since the continuance can be secured only by constant renewals, life is a self-renewing process. What nutrition and reproduction are to physiological life, education is to social life. This education consists primarily in transmission through communication. Communication is a process of sharing experience till it becomes a common possession. (Dewey, 1916, p. 6)

Dewey was concerned that “the lives of students were so often systematically sacrificed to some future good”, which meant that education “was thought to have a purpose ‘out there’, somewhere beyond the present interests and purposes of the students” (Noddings, 1998, p. 23). In other words, the interests and experiences of the students should instead be understood as a purpose in themselves. In this sense, for Dewey education is not simply a means to an end, such as cultivating good or just citizens. This contrasts with the Just Community Approach where the basic underlying rationale of all its goals is:

that a dynamic democratic school life introduces the students to democracy in the wider society through learning, learning and doing and, most importantly, by convincing students of the importance of democratic action and thus engendering motivation for them to become future active citizens. (Oser, et. al, 2008, p. 402).

For Dewey, education was not about convincing. Although he did underline the importance of democratic life, he viewed democracy as a mode of associated living as opposed to of a state where one can impose the “culture’s specific values and knowledge” (Noddings, 1998, p. 29).

Dewey connected this democratic living and other social processes with morality, naturally as one connected whole. As Noddings (2002) points out, “for Dewey, ways and means and ends and outcomes form a whole” (p. 75). With this, he meant “we cannot effectively teach children who are ‘organic wholes’ as though they were mere collections of attributes or ‘faculties’” (Noddings, 2002, p. 75). The school therefore has a moral responsibility to society, in terms of “maintaining the life and advancing the welfare of society” (Noddings, 2002, p. 75).

This connection could also be seen in the lessons of Dewey’s experimental democratic school. If a student wanted to learn about a boat, they should be in a harbour. In this sense, the
Exploring former democratic school students’ moral character in everyday life

school was organised as a co-operative community in order to “foster social spirit and develop democratic character in children” (Westbrook, 1993, p. 5). It can continuously be seen that, for Dewey, theories and actions were connected. In addition, in terms of the purpose of Dewey’s democratic schooling, there is much more focus on the student’s self-realisation, than can be seen in the Just Community Approach. This self-realisation is connected to their contribution to society, but not subordinate to it. As Westbrook (1993) describes, individuals would reach this self-realisation by:

utilizing their peculiar talents to contribute to the well-being of their community, and hence the critical task of education in a democratic society was to help children develop the character, the habits and virtues, that would enable them to achieve self-realization. (p. 5)

3.3.2 The role of the teacher

Another difference can be seen between Dewey’s conception of the role of the teacher and that of the Just Community Approach. According to the latter, the students should be convinced about a certain kind of behaviour, even though they may otherwise have to come to these conclusions themselves for example through moral reasoning. At the Just Community school, the teacher would still be the expert including on the curriculum, since one of the goals of the school and of education is “for experts to impart knowledge and ideas using diverse pedagogies, curricular issues are – except for consultation and input on fairness issues such as grading –outside the domain of democratic decision making” (Oser, et. al, 2008, p. 404). By contract, Dewey insisted that the students must be involved in ‘setting objectives for their own learning’ (Noddings, 1998, p. 25). He also emphasised the equality between the teacher and the student. Only in response to the differences in experiences between the adult and the child will the teacher treat the child differently than other adults. However, this different treatment has nothing to do with valuing the teacher as an expert. On the contrary, for children and adults, the ‘principles of conduct’ were the same whether inside or outside the school (Noddings, 2002, p. 73).

3.3.3 The school as an environment of associated living

Overall, it was characteristic for a democratic school as understood by Dewey for the students to live democratically, by which he meant:
students working together on common problems, establishing the rules by which their classrooms will be governed, testing and evaluating ideas for the improvement of classroom life and learning, and participating in the construction of objectives for their own learning. (Noddings, 1998, p. 9)

In all of this, Dewey valued the environment as a crucial element, since this should allow the students also to experience the *space* to express themselves in such a manner. These educational activities are quite similar to how democratic education was understood by Kohlberg and his Just Community Approach, and the Just Community school therefore echoes Dewey’s thoughts and influence. For Dewey, however, the connection between the purpose of student participation and democratic living, as said before, should be seen as both an end in itself and as a means toward the achievement of adult democratic life. In addition, “[w]hat is learned in such participation is not a batch of information to be applied at a future date but the skills and actual procedures, the very mode of life, of democracy” (Noddings, 1998, p. 29).

### 3.3.4 Dewey’s democratic citizenship

Finally, although not the end goal or purpose of his democratic education, it is good to mention what Dewey’s thoughts about democratic citizenship were, for Dewey was very explicit about the importance of democratic citizenship also being taught. Democratic citizenship would require:

> powers of self-direction, administration, and responsibility. Training in mere obedience is insufficient. Further, life in the industrial United States is dynamic, constantly changing. Therefore, the child must be educated so that he may take charge of himself; may not only adapt himself to the changes which are going on, but have power to shape and direct those changes (Noddings, 2002, p. 75; see also Dewey, 1972).

In other words, abilities such as critical thinking and knowing how to steer oneself were seen as crucial capabilities related to letting a child grow and preparing it for a democratic mode of life. Which, as Dewey pointed out, would become ever more important since societies were becoming more complex. These preparations in skills can still be recognised in democratic education today, and are just as relevant, if not more so than when Dewey was writing on democracy and education, a hundred years ago.
3.4 Criticism, a changing society and democratic education today

3.4.1 Criticism and a changing society

As can be seen, conceptions of democratic education have evolved somewhat over the years, although democratic education as seen today is often still infused with Dewey’s ideas and influence. Due to criticisms of its overemphasis on cognitive development, the Just Community program has moved to a broader focus:

while the original high school Just Communities emphasised skills related to building a democratic community, current programs strongly emphasise citizenship education – the development of democratic political skills and civic attitudes (Oser, Althof & Higgins-D’Alessandro, 2008, p. 397).

In addition, the programs have been implemented in Europe on all grade levels, in contrast to the USA where the schools were all high schools. Furthermore, modern initiations of the Just Community Approach are often seen as more suitable for research, than for schooling. More criticism has come from parents and policymakers who have preferred to hold on to more traditional or Aristotelian values and found the content of the program much too abstract and theoretical; they often miss the practical connection of this type of education (Noddings, 2002). This practical aspect, as we saw, was emphasised in Dewey’s approach (Dewey, 1972; Noddings, 2002).

Although Dewey has often been criticised for being a ‘Rousseauen romantic’, by virtue of his view that the “child’s native impulses were the ‘starting point, the centre, the end’” (Westbrook, 1999, p. 3), Dewey in fact posited (contra the romantics), that leaving the interests and purposes of the child ‘just as they stand’ would prohibit their growth. Dewey has also been criticised by traditionalists who promote subject matter as the centre of attention which should simply be ‘received and accepted’ by the child. But by Dewey’s lights, the traditionalists are failing in “connecting the curriculum to the interests and activities of the child” which will also prohibit their flourishing (Westbrook, 1999, p. 3).

In line with Bauman (2007), Giddens (1991) and Giroux (2001), Veugelers (2011) gives an extensive analysis of this changing society in relation to education. He describes that

[c]ontemporary society, characterized by individualization and globalization, continuously demands value development and the active and creative dialogical and joint formulation of norms. (Veugelers, 2011, p.19)
Therefore, according to Veugelers, the quality of education depends not only on the “individual ‘academic’ school performance of students”, but also on the “contribution education makes to social justice and motivation for social change” (Veugelers, 2011, p. 19). Hence, as Giroux (2001) describes, in order for a democracy not to be equated with today’s tendencies such as “consumer behaviour, market operation and privatization” (Giroux, 2001), topics such as “empowerment, power relations, ethics, and giving meaning to life must be reintroduced into the public debate and into education” (Veugelers, 2011, p. 19). The importance of the need for this continuous value development process mirrors Bauman’s (2007) notion of the nature of society as a ‘liquid identity’, as stated in the previous chapter. With this, Bauman (similarly to Dewey) means that society is in a state that it has to be continuously reinvented, and ‘creating society and linking human beings’ would therefore be a continuous process, like liquid constantly changing its shape.

This constantly changing and global nature of society has a huge effect on the experiences of young people, their possibilities for flourishing and therefore also their education. To conclude this overview, Veugelers’ (2011) analysis will be referred to, where he describes what type of education could prepare its young people for such a society. It can be read in Veugelers’ work how democratic education, as conceptualised here, has taken shape through a combination of certain characteristics and emphases, influenced by the factors of such a changing society. In this sense, this type of education can be called also a humanistic perspective and ‘critical democratic citizenship education’. As Veugelers puts it:

> [f]ollowing Dewey (1923) and Freire (1985) democracy can be considered as a humanistic way of life that emphasizes humanising processes and creates space for giving meaning of life’ (Veugelers, 2011, p. 18).

Again, central to the perspective of democracy here, is seeing democracy much more as a process than a state: much more as a lifestyle, which is reflected in their vision of what democratic education should look like. As was seen in Dewey, the political is underlined as of significant importance, but not as the end goal: the political level here is ever connected with the interpersonal level.

This type of democratic education, or as Veugelers calls it, a humanist perspective on moral education and democratic citizenship education, requires in summary three types of learning that should support each other: ‘reflective learning, dialogical learning and democratic learning’. An overview of their meaning can be found in Table 3.2 below. Veugelers speaks here of ‘critical’ democratic citizenship to emphasise “the dynamic process
and the right to take one’s own stance” (2011, p. 18). This overview highlights the different purposes of democratic education as we have noted. The type of democratic education as focussed on in this thesis, is not just focussed on cultivating a specific kind of citizenship as is often thought of.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Three types of learning required for a humanist perspective on moral education and critical democratic citizenship education (Veugelers, 2011, p. 31)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflective learning</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Articulate one’s own interests, feelings, ethical and aesthetical concerns, meaning making, and moral values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Inquire into the own identity development and reflect on the own learning process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Regulate the own learning process and taking responsibility for own autonomy and giving meaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dialogical learning</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Communicate in an open way with other people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Analyse and compare different perspectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Analyse the social, cultural and political power relations involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Democratic learning</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Concern for others and appreciation of diversity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Openness to jointly building agreements (developing norms).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Stand for your own autonomy and critical thinking and action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Involvement in enlarging humanity and in building democracy as a permanent process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3.2 Three types of learning*

The purpose and learning of democratic education goes beyond this political level and can be interpreted as a holistic approach, focussed on the individual’s flourishing, with democratic citizenship only as one important part of this whole.

### 3.4.2 Democratic schools internationally and in the UK

Democratic education can take many different forms in schools, in terms of school management, pedagogy, available curriculum, rules and regulations etc. Most schools which practice democratic education, in the sense this thesis is concerned with, are known as alternative or independent schools. This means that they are rarely recognised as public schools or funded by governments. In order to build up a network, strengthen their position and promote democratic education, most democratic schools, including Sands School, are linked or connected to organisations such as the ‘European Democratic Education Community’ (EUDEC), the ‘International Democratic Education Network’ (IDEN) or the

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2 Veugeler’s three types of learning should all be the elements or processes included in this type of democratic education, not just ‘democratic learning’.

3 In some countries, for example The Netherlands, alternative schools are funded alongside mainstream education.
Exploring former democratic school students’ moral character in everyday life

‘International Democratic Education Conference’ (IDEC). Through exchange programmes, conferences and a wide range of digital contact, schools can share their views and expertise on matters such as community, pedagogies of learning or school and learning models.

Democratic schools can be found all over the world “in countries as diverse as New Zealand, Japan, Thailand, India, Israel, Ecuador, and America” (Carnie, 2003, p. 91). For example EUDEC is known to represent about 60,000 people across 29 countries, including more than 58,000 school students, 43 schools and 24 school start-up groups as well as 3 other organisations: the German National Association of Free Alternative Schools (BFAS), UK-based Phoenix Education Trust and the Swiss Union of Student Organisations (USO) (EUDEC, 2014).

According to the Alternative Education Resource Organization (AERO), the UK has eight types of democratic education based institutions, which include colleges and learning centres: ‘Kilquhanity Children's Village (Scotland), Park School (Totnes, Devon), Room 13 (Scotland), Small Acres School (London), Self-Managed Learning College (Brighton), Summerhill School (Leiston, Suffolk)’ and Sands School (Ashburton, Devon) (AERO, 2014). However, it is said that Summerhill School and Sands School are generally considered the only two truly democratically-run secondary schools in the whole of the UK (Carnie, 2003). As seen in Figure 3.1, according to IDEN (2015) the highest density of democratic schools can be found in Europe.

These organisations have in common that they consider democratic education to lean on two central pillars, or values, which are ‘self-determined learning’ and ‘a learning community based on equality and mutual respect’ (AERO, 2014). By self-determined learning they mean that the students in a democratic school are the ones who decide how to spend their time and pursue their interests (AERO, 2014). The learning community, based on equality and respect, is understood as the environment of the school, or the setting, where everyone’s rights are respected.

This leads us to another common aspect of the democratic school which is the whole School Meeting. In these meetings both students and teachers sit together, often once a week, to discuss matters as varied as curriculum decisions, reflections about teaching and teachers, personal matters, communal matters, new projects or hiring staff (Fielding, 2010).
3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the term ‘democratic education’ is often misinterpreted (Nussbaum, 2006) and misused (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Seider, 2012). It pointed out the mistaken presumption that mainstream education within a democratic society teaches through a democratic model. In fact, true democratic education is often understood as ‘alternative education’ and refers to a full notion, which includes not only teaching about democracy but teaching through democratic practices. In analysing Dewey’s example of democratic education, this chapter acknowledges a Deweyan understanding as the relevant interpretation of the democratic teaching at Sands School. This provides a conceptual basis to further explore the educational practices in Sands School through the empirical investigation (see Chapter 5).
Chapter Four

Methodology
4  **Methodology**

4.1  **Introduction**

Given the research question which explores *how former democratic school students understand the impact of their school experiences in relation to their moral character in everyday life*, this study is anchored broadly in the qualitative paradigm (Silverman, 2011). Research questions that allow such an investigation include “what” and “how” questions, which, according to Silverman (2011, p. 25), are most appropriately explored through qualitative research methods.

As shall be seen, the present researcher found it important that the topics of the research would be reflected in the manner of conducting the research. Researching the possible contributing factors to democratic education as type of *full* moral education relates to topics such as the importance and acknowledgement of student voice, the empowered and cooperative approaches as opposed to authoritarian, and the importance of not being hypocritical (Berkowitz, 2009; Fielding, 2010). Therefore it was necessary to conduct the interviews in ways that would allow these aspects to flourish. A social constructionist methodology and narrative inquiry approach would permit the relationship between the participant and the researcher to be as cooperative as possible, allowing the participants and the researcher to build a relationship of trust and care, and to let the structure of the interview be as open as possible.

The main research question, stated above, consists of three research dimensions. These were explored accordingly: first (1) it aims to find out how the participants understand their own moral character. After identifying this, it then explores to what extent such understanding of their moral character showed any overlap with (2) their courses of action in everyday life. Finally, the third research dimension considers (3) to what extent their school experiences might have had an impact on their ability to practice their moral character in everyday life.

This chapter aims to give a schematic overview of how the research was conducted. In order to do so, the methodological approach which was adopted will be discussed, highlighting the significance of a narrative approach to research. It will then describe how narrative inquiry was used as a research method and the steps taken in the research process. The chapter will then describe the approach of data analysis, where participants’ portrayals
functioned as the key point of departure. The chapter will conclude with the ethical considerations together with a reflection on some of the research limitations.

4.2 Methodological approach

4.2.1 Epistemological perspective of social constructionism

Influenced by Humanistic Studies, this thesis has adopted the view that individuals can have very different realities, their own truths depending on their personal narratives, and that they therefore can perceive apparently similar experiences in very different ways. In addition, this thesis perceives the process of identity development and creating meaning in life, as a process of identity construction, influenced by external factors such as the environment, the culture in which individuals live and their close relationships (Giddens, 1991; McAdams, 1993). In other words, this thesis does not consider that individuals are born with a set, unchangeable identity and understanding in relation to the meaning in their life. Rather, these are constructed by various factors through the course of one's life. This puts an emphasis on the role of education as an important factor within that process (Dewey, 1972).

The methodological approach for this research is therefore embedded in the epistemological perspective of social constructionism, since it supports the idea that every individual has their own unique experiences and realities in ways of making sense of the world and that their identity is constructed by their environment, through their interactions, their culture, and the symbols and institutions etc. that they are confronted with throughout the course of their life (Crotty, 1998). In this sense, adopting a social constructionist paradigm, this thesis assumes knowledge and understanding as relational and co-constructed through shared meaning-making.

This paradigm enabled the present researcher to value the participants’ personal understandings, values, beliefs, experiences, reflections and their courses of action as a study of research. Furthermore, in terms of how individuals are making sense of their lives, this thesis is anchored in the view that the construction of knowledge and therefore the construction of one’s identity happens in a narrative manner (Bruner, 1990; Goodson, 2013), meaning that ‘identity is a life story’ in which an individual understands and constructs their life through developing a story or a personal myth of their life (McAdams, 1993, p. 5). The methodological approach of this research is therefore a narrative approach.
This means that this thesis does not aim to either falsify (e.g. Popper, 1934) or verify (e.g. Carnap, 1936) a particular hypothesis along the lines of a positivist approach, meaning, it is not the aim of this thesis to prove (or disprove) particular facts. This research is not about proving facts. Moreover, this thesis does not consider reflexivity to be a separate activity from social science (as is perceived by the natural sciences and a positivist approach), which is a necessary perspective if one aims to prove or disprove particular facts. The present researcher rather emphasises that philosophical reflection and the practice of social sciences are ‘intrinsically connected’ with one another (Delanty & Strydom, 2003). In other words, this thesis does not seek to separate the object of the research from the researcher. On the contrary, they are interrelated and this interrelatedness is considered to be a valuable scope for research.

4.2.2 Narrative approach to research

Life stories
This project has adopted a narrative approach because the key focus of this study is on the participants’ life stories, which are said to disclose various elements related to the relation between an individual’s character and their behaviour or practice (Goodson & Gill, 2011). Many theorists (e.g. Arendt, Butler, MacIntyre and Ricoeur) address this crucial role of making narratives (also referred to as stories or myths) in identity – and character – development (also referred to as the self, the self-identity or the self-narrative).

Taylor (1994) argues that the individual is a self-interpreting animal, because the way individuals make sense of their lives within the broader scope of the world is through interpretations. Couldry (2010) elaborates on this relationship between the self and making narratives by explaining that it is through developing narratives that the individual is able to understand them: “Since we persist in time, an irreducible dimension of what we must each understand is how we persist in time: how ‘what I am’ is ‘what I have become’ (Couldry, 2010, p. 97). McAdams (1993) goes further, suggesting that identity is in fact a life story, explaining that:

A life story is a personal myth that an individual begins working on in late adolescence and young adulthood in order to provide his or her life with unity or purpose and in order to articulate a meaningful niche in the psychosocial world. (p. 5)
According to McAdams, one’s life story will develop over time and will, accordingly, include particular themes and patterns. The emergence of motivational themes, as McAdams argues, already starts to develop from one’s childhood. McAdams refers to Carl Rogers, explaining that the main motivational themes of individuals will in some way always reflect an inherent tendency towards self-actualisation. Such motives and themes, according to McAdams, help an individual to organise their behaviour, actions and decisions. Therefore, someone’s motives can reveal why people act the way they do. As the above quote emphasises, the transition into adulthood also relates to a particular transition into the individual’s life story. It is at this stage in the individual’s life, which happens for different people at different times and in different gradations, that the process of re-selfing starts. The individual can start to become aware that they themselves are responsible for defining their self, and become active in a search as to what their self, or a new self, will be. McAdams (1993) points out the role of history here, for it is through creating an understanding of the history of the self that a personal myth can be developed. This process often starts in adolescence. In other words, in order for the individual to create a sense of self, it is necessary for them to create an account which explains “how the past came to be and how, ultimately, it gave birth to the present” (McAdams, 1993, p. 102).

Goodson (2013) elaborates on this by arguing that a life story is indeed a lot more than just a story: “it might hold a series of crucial clues as to how we act and live. It might help us to understand differences in personal styles (…). Life stories, then, are a crucial ingredient in what makes us human and, in turn, what kind of human they make us” (Goodson, 2013, p. 63).

Research shows that (see McAdams, 1993), once individuals start to actively take responsibility for creating their personal myth, it becomes clear that the ability to do so varies between different individuals. According to McAdams (1993) ‘mature identity in adulthood’ is characterised by the fact that the individual now not only has to become involved with orienting their personal myth to their self, but also developing a creative involvement to the social world “which is larger and more enduring than the self” (p. 113). The more creative this involvement can be, the better the mythmaker is, according to McAdams. As discussed in the literature review, creating these narratives is essential for making meaning in one’s life. Narratives create meaning in individuals’ lives, because they can provide connection, coherence and purpose in the world that can otherwise seems chaotic and lacking meaning.
However, not all individuals have this ability of creating strong narratives which can guide the development and practice of their moral character.

**Narrative capital and courses of action**

Goodson (2013) offers a narrative theory in which he categorises the different levels on which individuals are able to develop and practice these self-narratives. According to Goodson, someone’s narrative capital functions as an “armoury of narrative resources” (2013, p. 63), which individuals use when making sense of accounts, in the way they respond to the situations that occur in their lives, and these “equip us to actively develop courses of action and learning strategies” (Goodson, 2013, p.63). Goodson explains that these life stories are unique to each individual but can be divided into different general categories (Goodson, Loveless, & Stephens, 2012). These categorisations of different types of life stories become visible in the degree to which “personal elaboration or description was linked to the development of a “course of action”” (Goodson, 2013, p. 68). In other words, an individual’s courses of action show to what extent the narrative of a person is being “employed in living and directing a life” (Goodson, 2013, p. 72). Hence, according to Goodson (2013) a person’s narrative, or life story, often functions as a resource or guidance for the way individuals make decisions in their lives and thus how they choose to act or to live their lives.

People can employ their life narratives in either an open or closed manner (Goodson, Loveless, & Stephens, 2012). A closed manner refers to someone who employs their life story as if it’s a scripted life story: the life story is predetermined and has a foreclosed quality. This could be for instance someone whose parents were teachers and who therefore feel it is inevitable they too will become a teacher. Such scripts can also function as the basis of transforming one’s life (e.g. moving from script to script) (Goodson, 2013). A more open manner of employing one’s life story would be when a script provides a starting point “in a life of vigorous activity and change” (Goodson, 2013, p. 72). This would be the case for instance if an individual, whose parents and grandparents were teachers, feels like they can write or develop their own script and decide to become a veterinary surgeon instead.

Exploring these different manners in which a life narrative is employed in someone’s courses of action allows one to make a portrayal of that person (Goodson, 2013). A ‘portrayal’ is a term used for an individual portrait that exposes the detailed thematic understandings of that individual’s particular life narrative and narrative capital (Goodson, 2013, p. 41).
The delineation of courses of action is relevant for the present research design in at least three ways. First, exploring the participants’ courses of action is needed in order to investigate to what extent the participants are able to practice their moral character in everyday life. Or, in other words, to what extent the participants’ understandings of their moral character are harmonised (or reflected) in their actions.

Secondly, exploring the participants’ courses of action also functions as an indicator of the extent to which their school experiences might have had an impact on how they practice their moral character. It could be the case that the participants’ awareness of the interview’s focus on Sands may influence how they tell their life story. However, by exploring how the participants act in their everyday life, or which choices they have made, it is possible to build a richer picture of the participants’ self-narratives and thus to identify discrepancies. In this sense, investigating participants’ courses of action allows confirmation that what they *say* is the same as what they *do*. For this reason, this research maps out participants’ courses of actions in their time *before* Sands School, *during* Sands School and *after* Sands School.

Third, courses of actions are interconnected with life experiences. According to Park (2004), if one wants to understand character in light of the ‘good life’, there are three domains that should be included in research: “positive subjective experiences” (such as happiness and life satisfaction), “positive individual traits (such as values) and “positive institutions” (such as schools) (Park, 2004, p. 41). Therefore, this second dimension of the research question, which investigates participants’ courses of action, aims to include the dimensions of positive subjective experiences and positive institutions (positive individual traits are referred to under the section of moral character-values).

Given the significance placed by contemporary debate on life narratives as a means of understanding individuals’ choices and the values that underpin them, it seemed appropriate to conduct this research through narrative inquiry. A narrative inquiry approach allows in-depth, rich exploration of participants’ narrative capital.

*Everyday life*

The above descriptions regarding which concepts were researched and why (such as courses of action, identity construction and life stories) all relate to the everyday life of the participants. It is important to specify how everyday life should be understood in this thesis, because the term has proven to be interpreted in various different ways (Felski, 1999). Felski (1999) gives a clear overview of these different interpretations, referring to for instance
Lefebvre, Heidegger, Habermas and Featherstone. In some cases, the term everyday life is used to describe the repetition of tedious events, where gender has been a big influential factor during many years of using the concept, i.e. to refer to the opposite of heroic or exceptional episodes, rather to “the sphere of woman, reproduction and care” (Felski, 1999, p. 17). In other cases, the term everyday life is used to describe what is considered to be a ‘non-intellectual relationship to the world’ as opposed to an intellectual one (Felski, 1999). These, however, are not how the term ‘everyday life’ is used in this thesis. For the purpose of this research the definition given by Felski (1999) herself can be used instead:

...everydayness is not an intrinsic quality that magically adheres to particular actions or persons (women, the working class). Rather, it is a lived process of routinisation that all individuals experience. [...] Conversely, the everyday lives of others can seem deeply alien to us, precisely because the quotidian is not objectively given quality but a lived relationship. (Felski, 1999, p. 31)

To be more specific, ‘everyday life’ in this thesis refers both to (a) the daily experiences of the participants – such as school, work, friendship, culture and activities – but also to specify the step from an understanding to (b) the practice of that understanding. Or in other words, to what extent an understanding is lived by. The title of this thesis, “Exploring moral character in everyday life: Former democratic school students’ understandings and school experiences”, refers therefore to (a) what extent the participants’ moral character is practiced during (b) their daily activities.

4.2.3 The research’s approach to validity and reliability, the issue of subjectivity and an ethos of trust

The terms ‘validity’ and ‘reliability’ are often used in a positivist manner, where subjectivity of the researcher is seen as separate from the object of study and clear cut facts are sought after (Crotty, 2003; Maso & Smaling, 2004). As explained before, this thesis does not seek to do this. However, validity and reliability are relevant to this research, albeit in a different manner.

The general term of reliability used in social research concerns the extent to which the same result would be reached if the research were repeated (Babbie, 2007). In narrative research the relationship between the researcher and the participant has a central place. It is through the interactions that the life story of the participant is told. Many factors influence how the interview will be, such as the way the participant perceives the researcher, and how
the researcher perceives and treats the participant (as equal or authoritarian, interested or apprehensive etc.). It is therefore known that when another researcher interviews the same participant, the interview will develop into a completely different conversation. A different relationship will have developed and the researcher and the participant will notice different aspects of each other which will guide their actions (e.g. questions and replies) in a different manner (Babbie, 2007). However, this does not mean that reliability within this research does not play a role. On the contrary, in narrative research, with a life history method of inquiry, it is exactly the focus on the relationship between the researcher and the participant which is considered to be crucial (Goodson, Biesta, Tedder, & Adair, 2010). In life history interviews, the quality of this relationship is essential. Central to this relationship is an environment of trust. Without there being trust between the researcher and the participant, a life history interview cannot take place. Hence, if the participant does not feel safe and trusted, they will feel blocked from speaking openly and in an in-depth manner about their life story (Giddens, 1991). Or, as a result of not feeling trusted, the participant might not feel accepted, which can also lead to the colouring of their narrative in order not to be judged.

The reliability of this thesis therefore lies in the manner in which the present researcher has built up a relationship with the participants. In order to develop a trusting relationship where the participants could feel trusted and equal, the present researcher consciously chose to be open about every aspect of the research process. Creating an environment where the participants would know the researcher and her reasons for conducting the study and would feel that they could ask any questions etc. enabled such relationships to be formed.

In terms of validity, this is a term used to indicate the extent to which the empirical methods reflect the actual meaning of the concepts which are researched (Babbie, 2007). The aim of this research however was not to establish whether or not the perspectives of the participants were correct, but rather to understand what their understandings, perspectives and experiences are. Hence, as Aloni states, “we cannot speak of an educational ideal of good human life without the individual experiencing it as good and successful” (2007, p. 84). In this sense, the subjectivity of the participants is the object of this study and is therefore considered to be valid and meaningful exactly because it is that individual’s personal truth which matters in this case (Crotty, 1998).

With subjectivity – or rather, considering the cooperative approach, intersubjectivity (both the subjectivity of the researcher and the subjectivity of the participant are in dialogue) –
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playing a central role in this research, particular precautions were made. Maso and Smaling (2004) argue that, especially for qualitative research, (inter)subjectivity plays an important role. They elaborate on this by referring to Gadamer (1960) who argued that a researcher needs to have a ‘real question’, arisen from a personal interest, in order to drive the research forwards and to embark on new research findings. In order to do so in a way that research findings can emerge however, there are several precautions that should be made (Maso & Smaling, 2004). These are that there should firstly be a balance between being engaged, and taking distance. Being engaged is important for the quality of the relationship, and a certain distance is necessary to give space to the participant for their story to emerge. The second aspect concerns ‘openness’, which refers both to openness towards the research project, and openness as in an ‘open-hearted’ approach (Maso & Smaling, 2004). It is important to be receptive for any particular unexpected research results and, in terms of being open-hearted, to invite the participant to speak about themselves. The third factor entails self-knowledge from the researcher, which functions as a form of openness towards oneself. This is crucial when only one researcher is collecting data material. Self-knowledge helps the researcher to recognise wherein the real question lies in terms of what they want to know and to what extent they feel they are steering the research. Lastly, the ability to engage in ‘role taking’ is perceived as important (Maso & Smaling, 2004). It is necessary as an empathic ability, in order to understand ‘the other’ and to anticipate on the behaviour that the participant is revealing. This is crucial for recognising when the researcher either needs to let the participant speak, when not to break a silence or when to ask an in-depth or probing question instead.

The present researcher aimed to incorporate these precautions as much as possible by putting central importance on her reflexivity. Making frequent reflections about her observations and possible expectations helped the present researcher to be as transparent and open as possible.

\[4\] Interpretations from Maso and Smaling (2004) are translations from the present researcher, from Dutch to English.
4.3 Research methods

4.3.1 Narrative inquiry

This empirical and qualitative study researches the life stories of six participants through a narrative approach. In this sense, narrative is both the object of study (the narratives of the participants) and the methodology, by using elements of the life history technique of inquiry (Becker, 1970; Goodson, Loveless, & Stephens, 2012). In short, narrative research can be understood as an umbrella term, and life history as a technique “within this broader research methodology” (Goodson & Gill, 2011, p. 23).

The life history technique of inquiry refers to a distinction made by Goodson (2013) between life stories and life histories. This technique embraces:

stories of action within theories of context, by moving from the unique life stories of the former students, their unique experiences etc. to their life history. By doing this, stories can be ‘located’, which means they can be seen as the social constructions they are, located in time and space, social history and social geography”. (Goodson, 2013, p. 5)

In other words, when using the full life history technique, the researcher will ‘locate’ the participant’s life story in a particular context of that wider (socio-historical) story (Goodson, 2013). This could be for instance the hippy years of the seventies, if the participant’s life story takes place in such a context. By adding this additional ‘level’ to an interview, the researcher can connect the participant’s life story to a bigger picture and the recognition of the extent to which a person’s life story was influenced by their context can help the researcher to understand their story. However, this is an intensive and time-consuming process, beyond the scope of this research.

Fortunately, the life history technique of inquiry can be used in various manners, and does not have to extend to such a process of ‘locating’ the participants’ life stories in a particular bigger context (Goodson & Gill, 2011). For the purpose of this research, only some elements of the life history technique were used; the object of study was the participants’ life stories, not their life histories. The life history technique of inquiry was used in order to allow referencing, instead of locating, towards particular contexts of the participants’ life stories.

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5 The research focus is on the participants’ life stories. When life histories are mentioned, this merely refers to the technique or method which was used to conduct the interviews.
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(Goodson & Gill, 2011). The difference is that the context of a life story might be merely mentioned, but the life story itself does not have to constantly be related to its context. This approach allowed the interviews to be semi-structured and shorter than would have been possible for a full life history interview, which takes up a lot more time due to its open ended nature, as can be read in section 4.3.2. This way of researching enabled this thesis to develop understandings about the former students themselves, their character, their values and beliefs.

Referring to factors of context in the data collection is crucial when exploring the understandings of moral character. Hence, as Park (2004) described, when looking at character strengths, their constructions and understandings, “research and practice efforts should include the three domains identified by positive psychology as comprising the psychological good life” (p. 41). These domains are, as described before, ‘positive subjective experience’ such as happiness and life satisfaction, ‘positive individual traits’ such as character strengths and values, and ‘positive institutions’ such as schools or communities. Using elements of the life history method enabled the researcher to include all three of these domains in the study. This allowed the present researcher to explore the former students’ understandings, beliefs, values and meaning making as part of their moral character and their behaviours or practices of their moral character in everyday life, including any influencing factors they might experience in putting their moral character into practice. In other words, using a life history method fits with the aims of the research. In addition, the narrative approach and the life history method allow the data to emerge. This fits well with the purpose of this thesis, which intends to be as open as possible. The methods used are methods of inquiry, based on curiosity rather than assumption.

4.3.2 Rationale of the semi-structured life history interview and focus group

Goodson and Gill (2011) argue that life history interviews can be conducted in different manners, they may be “topical” or “complete” (p. 22). A complete life history interview, as briefly referred to above, can take many hours or even days where often a single question is asked and the interview is left as open a possible. For the purpose of this study, a full life history interview was established to be beyond the time constraints of the project. Instead, it was decided that it would be most appropriate if the life history interviews were conducted in a slightly semi-structured manner, allowing the possibility of asking some guiding questions in relation to the three research dimensions.
However, as will be described in more detail below, within this, the interviews in this research were conducted with as much openness as possible, letting the participants speak in the flow of their story (Goodson, 2013). Letting people speak about their life story requires that the interviewer start with a broad question such as ‘would you like to tell me a bit about your life, where were you born?’ or, ‘how did it came to be that you are here now today’? The nature of a narrative approach to interviewing then means that the interviewer lets the participant speak, and tries not to break the flow of their speaking as much as possible (Goodson, 2013). The questions that are then asked are merely questions that relate to clarifying certain aspects of what the participants tell the interviewer, or to ask more in-depth about something they’ve said.

As a means of focussing and warming into the research, it was decided to start the range of interviews with a focus group. This allowed the participants to meet each other and, as they had all gone to the same school at different times, to collect their school memories. Using a focus group in this case was particularly relevant because group dynamics can often “bring out aspects of the topic that would not have been anticipated by the researcher and would not have emerged from interviews with individuals” (Babbie, 2007, p. 309). This can then help the researcher to let the data emerge in interviews and data analysis. Conducting a focus group was therefore not only decided on because it would be a good method to collect in particular their school experiences, it was also intended to create an accessible environment (Babbie, 2007). Because one-on-one interviews are sometimes perceived as imposing, with just the participant and the interviewer, it can be strategic to start with a group interview where the participant finds him or herself amongst other participants (Babbie, 2007).

4.4 Research design

4.4.1 Choice of school

The present researcher had conducted extensive preliminary desktop research in order to find a school in England which appeared to deliver a full notion of moral education. Part of this preliminary orientation involved the researcher contacting a significant number of possible ‘leads’ into such a program. The first results proved to be unsuccessful because, even though some head teachers seemed very keen to have the proposed research done at their school, finding willing former students proved to be very challenging. In addition, the majority of schools did not meet the suggested criteria of a full notion of moral education.
However, after continuing the preliminary desktop research, the researcher came across the notion of democratic schools within the UK, which appeared to be promising as a possible example of a full notion of moral education. The process resulted into getting into social contact with one former student of such a democratic school, Jack, with whom an indicative in-depth conversation about the nature and experiences of his democratic education, at Sands School, was held. The preliminary desktop research pointed out that Sands School in Devon is embedded in an area of England which is historically characterised by innovative, holistic and alternative education initiatives. In addition, Sands’ ethos and aims promised to meet the suggested criteria of a full notion of moral education at least on paper, in particular in relation to other schools in the UK. Summerhill is the other democratic school in the UK which operates both as a primary school and as a secondary school. Summerhill is a boarding school rather than a day school such as Sands. This thesis will however not elaborate further on the differences and similarities between the two schools, because it cannot do justice to both schools within the scope of this research. Of profound importance is primarily to reach an in-depth approach which is why the present researcher decided to choose to focus on one particular school.

The combination of what the conversation with Jack indicated, along with the additional findings of the desktop research, resulted in the selection of Sands School as the sample school for this study.

4.4.2 Participants selected through snowball sampling

Because the importance of this research lies in exploring which educational factors might still helpful to their students once they have left the school, a group of former students was selected. It has been suggested that once individuals start to reach mature adulthood they become (or can become) more aware of, and more confronted with their life challenges (see e.g. Erikson, 1959). It is at this stage in their lives that it becomes more important than ever for them to be able to practice their moral character (McAdams, 1993). In response to this, only participants who had left the school at least ten years previously were selected: the youngest participant is twenty-seven years old (which is ten years later), and the oldest participant is forty-one.

Participants were recruited by snowball sampling where Facebook was used to get in contact with Sands School’s alumni (Baltar & Brunet, 2012). The present researcher had socially come into contact with one former democratic school student, who provided access to
the private Facebook group of Sands’ Alumni. The present researcher then posted an invitation to participate on the page along with some background information. This method resulted in a vast collection of replies: alumni who were enthusiastic about the research and supportive, alumni who wanted to participate and alumni who were contacted by a manner of snowball sampling from other democratic schools. There was interest in participating in the research from democratic schools across Europe, Australia and Canada.

Unfortunately such a number of participants could not be included within the scope of this study. Due to the prime importance of the study being in-depth, time constraints and the very high concentration of data anticipated for each participant, it was decided to select six former students.

The selection of the participants was made on the basis of practical considerations. Because it was essential for the present researcher to speak to the participants in person, participants who could all easily attend the interviews in a convenient location and an equal number of men and women were selected. The final selection resulted in six participants, from which three are male and three are female.

4.4.3 Participants invited for interview – permission to collect data granted

After the first preliminary through Facebook and email, the researcher telephoned the participants. This was done for the purpose of introducing herself, expressing her gratitude, highlighting the research details, but most importantly to emphasise the open approach of the research. Through a first informal phone call the researcher intended to create an informal opportunity for the participants to ask questions or express possible concerns. After this ethos was established, permission from the participants was granted to participate in the research. This was followed up by applying for the Ethics Tier 1 Approval before the interviews were conducted. This permission was granted according to the University of Brighton Ethics Tier 1 guidelines. It was furthermore decided to send the participants the ‘information sheet’ about the research and the interviews, and the ‘participant consent form’ (see Appendix H and I), according to the ethics criteria of The University of Brighton, prior to their first meeting at the focus group. This would allow the participants time to think, to ask questions and finally to decide.

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6 It should be noted that this was done through a democratic process and after the majority of votes had approved to accept the present researchers onto their page (there were no votes against it).
4.4.4 Data collection

The data collection was done by one focus group in which five of the participants were interviewed together and six one-on-one individual semi-structured life-history interviews.°

Focus group 1.5 hours with purpose of gathering school experiences

The focus group was specifically intended to ask the participants about their school experiences. The rationale behind starting with a focus group was to allow a situation in which the participants could exchange experiences about the school they all attended, at different times. This would allow the present researcher to notice any particular similarities or differences in relation to their experiences and to draw out memories. In addition, the focus group functioned as a starting point of common ground between interviewer and interviewee for the individual interviews, as well as a check-point for any discrepancies between the two. In terms of facilities, the focus group was conducted in a classroom provided by the University of Brighton.

Individual semi-structured life-history interviews, 1.5-2.5 hours

These interviews lasted between 1.5-2.5 hours with the purpose of building on ideas raised in the focus group. However, the individual interviews had a much broader focus and were more intended to explore participants’ moral character and everyday life. In terms of facilities, on request of the participants the interviews were conducted either at their home or a neutral place provided by the researcher, which would be decided upon after consultation with the participant.

Three research dimensions

The interviews and focus group were focussed around understanding participants’ perspectives on the three research dimensions. See Table 4.1 for an overview of the associated guided questions that were used:

° It should also be noted that after desktop research into the theory behind Sands’ ethos and aims there was a ‘cut’ made before conducting the interviews. Thus, the present researcher did not ask the participants what they thought about for example ‘freedom’, they mentioned this themselves without any previous intervention from the researcher’s side.
1. **Participants’ understandings of their own moral character:**

Guiding questions around explicit moral character values and their role in relationships and interactions with people were asked to tease out participants’ understandings of their own moral character (Seider, 2012).

It should be noted that solely the participants’ own understandings about their moral character strengths were collected.

2. **Participants’ courses of action:**

Discussion is now focussed around the sole actions and behaviours that become visible in participants’ life stories. Questions were asked around what the participants have actually done, their behaviour and the decisions they have made in life, with a particular focus on these decisions (Seider, 2012). As decision moments can help reveal why a person acts in a certain way and what motivates, empowers, hinders or helps the individual to act according to, or in contrast with, how they want to act. In addition, the ‘courses of action’ in the data collecting process functioned as an additional reference point in establishing to what extent certain values were their own values or if they were perhaps taken over or ‘copied’ from the school.

3. **Participants’ school experiences:**

This research dimension was primarily looked at in the focus group. A drawing was used which was made by one of Sands former students (see Figure 5.2) to ask them if this made them recall anything from their own time at Sands School. The participants were asked if they could write down, or draw anything that came to their minds when they thought of Sands. From this general exchange of memories, increasingly more specific questions were asked (such as their different school experiences, to particular examples, and finally making the step towards the impact of their school experiences). This was followed by some open questions about the impact of their school experience.

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*In order to explore what factors of their education might help or hinder them with putting their moral character in practice, it is necessary to compare to what extent they are able to harmonise their own moral character with their own courses of action in everyday life and possible related struggles.*
Additional data-collecting tools

Alongside the guiding interview questions that were asked (see Table 4.1), the researcher used additional tools for collecting the data. Throughout all the interviews this included an audio recorder. Furthermore, memos and observations (such as on their body language) were made during and after the interviews on a small and therefore not too obtrusive notepad. The focus group was also filmed. This was done with the purpose of capturing body language, which can offer an important insight into what the participant is saying in a non-verbal manner (Goodson, 2013). Because a focus group is conducted with several participants, it is harder for the researcher to focus on both the conversation and the body language, and this led to the decision to film the group. In addition, the film recording functioned as an extra reference when it was not clear on the audio-file who was saying what. Filming individual interviews was avoided, because this could influence the open, trustworthy and relaxed atmosphere which is prefered for a life-history interview (Maso & Smaling, 2004). In order to conduct an interview which takes the form of a conversation and includes an in-depth discussion of a participant’s life, it is crucial that the participant feels taken seriously, comfortable and trusted by the researcher.

In addition to the guiding interviews, it was decided to start the focus group with one additional tool by introducing a drawing (Babbie, 2007). This drawing, made by one of Sands former students (see Figure 5.2), pictured the different characteristics of the school and its grounds, functioned to introduce the question to the participants of recalling their own school experiences.

Talking about one’s values can be experienced as very ‘abstract’ and difficult to relate to. Therefore, additional data collecting tools to tease out the participants’ core moral character-values were prepared. For instance, a vignette was prepared so the participants could talk about a situation which would reflect a (moral) dilemma. Talking about a ‘could-be’ situation can sometimes enable the participant to uncover what type of things they value above other things (Wengraf, 2001). However, surprisingly, already in the focus group and continuing in the individual interviews, the participants naturally and automatically started to talk about what they value in life before the chance arose to ask them about this. It was rather a challenge to round up the interviews instead of an effort to make the participants talk about the topics which needed to be explored. The use of tools such as the vignette was therefore not necessary.
Exploring former democratic school students’ moral character in everyday life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Three research dimensions</th>
<th>Guiding interview questions</th>
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| 1. Participants’ own understanding of their moral character | - What they value most in life: the things they could stand for and fight for (and why they would fight for these). The ‘why’ question helps to reveal what core strengths or values are sometimes underneath a story.
   - What values they think belong to a life that they would recognise as a ‘good life’ (and why).
   - What values they think would belong to someone they view as a truly ‘good person’ (and why).
   - What they value in their best friendships, in a ‘good friend’ (and why).
   - How they wish to interact with people. |
| 2. Participants’ courses of action | - How come you chose to do/or not do that certain thing? Such as: how come you chose to leave that school in the end?
   - Were you happy with your choice? Why, or why not?
   - How come you first acted in that way, and now you were acting in this way? |
| 3. Participants’ school experiences | - Do you still recognise any of those values in the way you do things today? Either explicitly or implicitly?
   - How does that reflect in your actions today?
   - Why was that significant for you?
   - Can you give an example of that?
   - Do you think your time at Sands helped you or hindered you in developing that skill?
   - Was Sands in any way particularly influential for you? |

Table 4.1 Guiding interview questions

After the data was collected, all the interviews were transcribed (see Appendix G for an extract of the transcripts). The transcripts, the memos and observations were then used for the data analysis.

4.5 Approach to data analysis

The data analysis was done in four stages (see Appendix E for a more extended overview):

1. Identifying themes:
   This was done through preliminary coding. This included first, focussing on common emergent themes within each interview. Secondly, identifying emergent common themes between the interviews.
2. **Progressive thematic focussing:**

This included progressive coding; through bathing in the data (such as going back and forth between the transcripts), the researcher kept going back and forth between the identified emergent themes of the participants personal life-histories, and identified themes that were recognised as common themes between the participants. Through this process, some initial categories already became visible.

3. **Setting up portrayals:**

After the identified themes, portrayals were set up from each participant. Setting up a portrayal means that from the thematic focussing, such as described above, one can now create thematic understandings. As Goodson (2013) describes, “[t]he portrayal refines these general thematic analyses and presents them in a form of a detailed individual portrait of a life narrative” (p.41).

4. **Categorising and discussing the portrayals:**

After the portrayals were set up, these were compared with each other. Through the process of comparing, categories were set up between the portrayals of the participants. The identified emergent themes and categories of the portrayals were then compared by viewing the portrayals through the lens of the three research dimensions: (1) the participants’ own understanding of their moral character, (2) the participants’ courses of action and (3) the participants’ school experiences. This allowed the researcher to recognise emergent common themes in relation to the three research dimensions. As a result, “similar instances” could be recognised “over and over again” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 61). After this process was completed, the identified categories allowed a typology of the three research dimensions to be set up to discuss the emergent findings. The presentation of these findings is visible in chapter five.

Goodson’s (2013) life history method has proven to be helpful in terms of developing the ‘portrayals’. These portrayals have formed the key point of departure for the analysis. Portrayals, which are carefully developed after identifying the main themes that have emerged from the interviews and their transcripts, help to categorise a “detailed individual portrait of a life narrative”, and a journey through their understandings and practices (Goodson, 2013, p. 41).
Furthermore, while using the life history method as the main method, some principles of the Grounded Theory Method (GTM) were used in relation to the coding of the interviews. These coding principles seemed fitting because the GT open approach to the data harmonised with the intended open approach of the research. In addition, the GTM includes the perspective that there are multiple constructions of reality and that we can make theories of social processes, which suits this type of research. This perspective therefore supports the research of individuals’ narratives and their different types of understandings (and thus realities) and enabled this thesis to develop the findings from the acquired data (Babbie, 2007).

In addition, GT proved to be helpful in terms of a constant comparative method for the data that emerged. In this sense, an open eye to the data was essential, also known as ‘theoretical sensitivity’ (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Hence, according to grounded theorists, any development of new data or theory cannot emerge if the researcher is already committed to “one preconceived theory” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 46). Therefore, different ways of coding were adopted, such as open coding, axial coding and selective coding. These different types of coding functioned as a way of bathing in the data (Goodson, 2013).

When conducting qualitative narrative (and thus long and open) interviews, the high volume of transcripts is inevitable. The challenge is then how to make sense of all the information the participants have shared, how to compare this data with each other, to recognise emergent themes and how to categorise them. The combination of the life-history approach to the portrayals and the above stated principles of the Grounded Theory method enabled this thesis to do so (Babbie, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

4.6 Ethics and research limitations

4.6.1 Ethical considerations
As is known, all research that involves human participation should work within the parameters of ethical considerations and make sure that the research is done “in an ethical manner that respects the dignity, safety, and rights of research participants and that recognizes the responsibilities of researchers” (University of Brighton, 2011/2012, p. 21). This thesis received Ethics approval according to the Tier 1 requirements from the University of Brighton.
The present researcher took particular care to deal respectfully and appropriately both when conducting the interviews and processing the data. Being aware of the level of intensive participation from the participants and the fact that speaking about one’s life can touch upon sensitive issues, the present researcher made sure that several ethical considerations were met.

In terms of risk, the participants were asked to talk about their lives, their values and beliefs, what they stand for in life and related aspects. This sometimes touched upon sensitive or confrontational topics for the participants, for instance in describing situations where some of those values were significantly absent such as mainstream education, or other negative experiences from their past. This sometimes led them to shed some tears. When this happened the present researcher acted according to what she thought would be the right thing for that person at that time. This included in all situations being sensitive and understanding. On some occasions this meant that the present researcher pointed out that they could take a break, that the participant did not have to talk about anything they didn’t want to or that the audio recording could be switched off. Sometimes this meant offering a tissue or making a cup of tea. However, there were no occasions where participant or researcher judged the interview too difficult to continue. The participants rather expressed their happiness and thankfulness for sharing their story. In all cases, the interviews could have easily taken a lot longer and in most cases the participants expressed interest in follow-up interviews. The present writer took this humbly and thankfully as an indication that she had dealt appropriately with the participants who were sharing their personal stories, even if that sometimes included sharing painful memories.

In order to make sure that other ethical considerations were met, two different documents were provided, both acquired from, or based on, the Ethics and Governance Committee of the Faculty of Education and Sport of the University of Brighton (see Appendix H and I). In terms of minimizing risk, it was made explicit in the Participant Information Sheet—which was made available to participants prior to conducting the interviews – that the participants could choose not to answer questions if they didn’t want to. In addition, it was pointed out that the participant could stop the interview process at any time and withdraw from the study if they choose to, without providing the researcher with any reason. This document also described the confidential nature of all the data and that the data would be stored in a safe place. All the transcripts or other ways of referring to the participants were anonymised using the alias the present researcher had designated to them. This was to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Furthermore, the ‘Participant Consent Form’ (Appendix I)
enabled the participants to disagree with any issues about the research before the research was conducted.

Overall however, with the positive reactions of the participants in mind, the present researcher believes that the process of collecting the interviews, the focus group and the individual interviews, has been a pleasant experience for both the researcher and the participants. The present researcher has felt incredibly thankful for the willingness, input and openness of the participants in sharing their stories. In addition, it was a joyful experience to share particular ideas about education and to experience that one does not stand alone. It gave the present researcher a real boost receiving the positive feedback of the participants, who were enthusiastic about the research and its importance or ‘need’ as they had put it. Some of the participants expressed that the interviews had made a real impact on them, by reflecting and sharing in such an in-depth manner. This was equally the case for the present researcher, who felt that she had gained some amazing wisdom from each and every interview, feeling filled with thankfulness, respect and joy after having been part of such life story sharing.

4.6.2 Considerations of the limitations of the research

It can be argued that the participants who took part in the research were naturally willing to take part, considering the fact that participation was voluntary. In this sense, it could be suggested that the data is to some degree self-perpetuating. However, this was not a concern for the purpose of this research. As stated before, echoing the social constructionist paradigm, the significance of the investigation lies in exploring the richness and the depth of the participants’ life narratives (Crotty, 2003; Maso & Smaling, 2004). Rather than intending to generalise, it was intended to engage the participants in developing shared meaning and understanding.

The qualitative and in-depth approach that was adopted for the purpose of this investigation meant that the research would have to be carried out on a small scale. In order to reach the particular depth that was intended for the interviews, especially considering the scope of an MPhil thesis, special care was taken to choose an appropriate number of participants (Babbie, 2007). The small scale of the study was therefore not perceived as a concern, rather a necessary precaution to allow particular depths and details to emerge from the participants’ lived experiences, including their attitudes, feelings and articulations of their actions (Maso & Smaling, 2004). In this sense, considering the in-depth exploration of the emergent themes, this small scale investigation offers a rich ground for future research.
4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has given an overview of the methodological considerations of this research. Anchored in a social constructionist paradigm, this thesis regards knowledge and understanding as relational and co-constructed through shared meaning-making. Echoing this paradigm, this research took a narrative approach and a life history method of inquiry, including six individual in-depth interviews and one focus group of former students of Sands, a British democratic school. The key method of analysis is developing and comparing portrayals of the participants’ narratives of their life journeys in order to explore and identify a typology of their courses of action in everyday life, in relation to their moral character and how they have understood the impact of their school experiences on the development of their moral character.
Chapter Five

Presenting the findings
5 Presenting the findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter represents the empirical part of the research. The main research question being explored is: ‘how do former democratic school students understand the impact of their school experiences in relation to their moral character in everyday life?’ The investigation of this question consists of the three main research dimensions: (1) the former democratic school students’ understandings about their moral character, (2) their courses of action in everyday life and finally (3) their understandings of the impact of their school experiences in relation to practising their moral character in everyday life.

In order to investigate the research question, the research findings will be presented as follows. Firstly, the particularities of Sands School, the subject school of this study, will be discussed. This aims to give a clear overview of the extent to which Sands can be understood as democratic education as reviewed in chapter three, and highlights the characteristics which will be reflected upon throughout the participants’ findings. This will be followed by introducing the participants through giving a summary of their life narratives. The findings will then be presented according to the three research dimensions, drawing upon the data from the focus group and the individual interviews. The chapter will conclude by highlighting what the key-findings indicate. It should be noted that the purpose of this chapter is primarily to present the findings, which means this chapter will not elaborate on connecting the interview data to existing theories. This will be done in chapter six.

5.2 Sands School: a democratic full notion of moral education

In the first part of this section the policies and practices of Sands School will be explored. The school documents will be the main focus, because it is the agenda and interpretation of the school itself that is of interest for the purpose of this study. This way, it can be explored to what extent the former students’ school experiences overlap with the school’s intentional pedagogies.

9 Throughout this chapter the concepts which are discussed should be understood as described in the theoretical part of the literature review (chapter two and three).
The second part of this section will reflect on the described literature on democratic education (see chapter three) in comparison to the policies and practices of Sands.

5.2.1 Sands School – general characteristics

On the edge of a National Park, surrounded by green hills, lies the village which is home to Sands School. The surroundings of the school are characterised by a lot of greenery and the school itself is surrounded by a large garden, trees, a vegetable garden and a sports area. *Figure 5.1* shows that the main school building looks like a large white house (left), along with some of the greenery which surrounds the school building, including the vegetable garden (right).

*Figure 5.1 Main School building Sands and the vegetable garden*

On the grounds of the school there are four separate smaller buildings, one for the purpose of art classes, painting, photography and sculpture classes, one for woodwork, a gym with a climbing wall, and a science lab. See *Figure 5.2* for a student artist’s impression of the grounds.

It can be argued that from the very first moment that Sands started to exist, it could be called a democratic school. It was designed by a group of fourteen students and three teachers who came together as a result of the recently closed Dartington Hall School in 1987 (Gribble, 1998; 2006).

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10 Taken by a former student of Sands, credit to Mrs. Phillips-Moore.
Sands is a small, independent and fee paying school (£9,300 per year) which does not require students to wear a school uniform. It teaches children between the age of 11 and 17. The student population is around 60 students, with no more than 16 students in one class, with most coming from a middle class background (Ofsted, 2013; Sands, 2014-15; Woods, 2011).

### 5.2.2 Ethos and Aims

According to Ofsted (2013) the school’s website provides a good and informative standard, which includes the disclosure of the school’s ‘Ethos and Aims’, their ‘Approach to Learning’ and how their ‘Management’ is structured. Sands (2014) presents itself as ‘the alternative face of education’, by which they mean that they:
believe that everyone should be treated equally, be happy, and have access to a good education. At Sands, no-one has more power than anyone else, the teachers and students are equal and there is no headteacher. We try to get rid of all the petty rules, making room for everyone to be happy and free to express themselves in whatever way they feel. The school is democratic, with everyone having their say and equal vote in the weekly School Meeting which everyone may attend’ (Sands, Ethos and Aims, 2014).

It seems that, when referring to ‘petty rules’, they refer to mainstream education. An overview of their aims and objectives (as presented on their website) has been made for this research, in Table 5.1 below. What can be noticed when reading these first impressions of Sands is that there does not seem to be a main focus on academic achievements, or how to score high in GCSEs. Rather, their Ethos and Aims section is introduced by mentioning the importance of equality, being happy and the right to good education. When reading the aims and objectives, as described in the table below, this good education seems to be marked by themes such as: a democratic environment, a sense of a shared responsibility and mutual respect, student voice/own control in terms of choosing their own curriculum and having a say in the management of school life, the ability for everyone to go at their own pace and a learning environment which is relevant, fun, rich and attractive. It is emphasised several times that these are the children’s rights (Sands, 2014).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aims</th>
<th>Objectives (‘We will achieve these aims by respecting and following the following Principles’)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| To create a socially democratic environment that encourages in children and staff a sense of responsibility and mutual respect. | • The value of the student voice in the management of school life.  
• The value of social equality between students and staff.  
• The right to choose what to study.  
• The right to challenge the relevance of what you are studying.  
• The ability to go at your own pace and not be compared with others.  
• The use of common sense to ensure that the school runs safely and smoothly, thus avoiding the need for petty rules.  
• The right to a rich and attractive educational environment.  
• Shared responsibility for the upkeep of that environment.  
• Equal esteem for all school activities. |
| To allow children as much control as possible over their own education commensurate with their age, skills and interests |  |
| To create an environment in which children grow to be self-aware, confident adults. |  |
| To create an environment where learning is relevant and fun. |  |

*Table 5.1 Aims and Objectives of Sands School (Sands, Ethos and Aims, 2014)*
5.2.3 **Approach to Learning and Core Learning Principles**

The aims and objectives lean on Sands’ views on how to approach learning. David Gribble, one of the co-founders of the school, is quoted in Sands’ Prospectus in relation to their view on learning:

> Children have an innate self-respect. They are trustworthy so long as they are trusted. They have a ready sympathy for others as long as they are treated with consideration. What schools should be doing is nurturing each child’s natural dignity. (Sands Prospectus, 2014, p. 2).

This view on the child’s trust and natural dignity can be recognised in the emphasis on letting the children be in control of their own learning, their management of the school life and their view on equality and responsibility. The latest Ofsted (2013) report confirms that the school is outstandingly successful in obtaining such a pedagogic approach, ensuring that the ‘[p]upil’s behaviour and personal development are outstanding’ (p. 4). As part of this approach to learning, the student’s welfare, health and safety are also ranked outstanding by Ofsted. Ofsted remarks that a result of the school’s democratic pedagogy, such as its focus on mutual respect between students of all ages, very little bullying is said to be experienced by the students (Ofsted, 2013).

Furthermore, in the school’s section on ‘Approach to Learning’ they describe that one of their aims is to provide learning in a range of subject areas (English, French, Mathematics, Sciences, Woodwork, Music, History, Geography, ICT, Drama and Art), in order to prepare students for GCSEs. In addition to this subject-focused learning, they describe that they focus just as much on teaching the children skills that help them with learning. Paramount to their approach is to teach them how to think critically (Sands, 2014). In their Prospectus (2014-2015) they emphasise that:

> Sands puts the well-being of the child before academic success. Unless children feel valued and respected, their work is of little importance to them. We have found that this approach means that many children do better at Sands than they would elsewhere. (Sands, 2014-2014, p. 5)

As part of this approach, each student has a personal tutor with whom the student decides on their personal curriculum (Ofsted, 2013). Two afternoons a week the students have space to choose a different topic such as Japanese, Yoga or extra tutoring. But this time can also be filled with socialising, playing games, or baking cakes (Sands, 2014). The lessons are not compulsory, and it’s the responsibility of the student to attend classes and make sure they are on time, since there is no school bell. As they describe in their Prospectus, ‘[t]his is done to
encourage self-motivation. Experience shows that students choose to educate themselves and are very positive in lessons’ (Sands, 2014-2015, p. 5). The latest Ofsted inspection confirms that the students are indeed proving to be ‘eager learners’ and are ‘keen to contribute to lessons’ (Ofsted, 2013, p. 4). In line with this ownership of the school, the students also participate in cleaning and tidying up the school in the last 15 minutes of the day. As Sands School describes,

\[t\]his fosters ownership and care for the school. Students monitor the success of the cleaning rotas and ensure everyone contributes to the core of the school by defining clear boundaries for those who might want to avoid these chores. (Sands, 2014-2015)

Sands School also mentions some core learning principles which, in their view, point out some differences in terms of style or rhythm of learning, compared to other schools. The core principles and descriptions are listed in Appendix C.

5.2.4 School Management
The school is organised in a democratic way (Gribble, 1998; 2006). At Sands this means that school matters are decided by the staff and the students together. The main place where discussions between staff and students take place is the weekly School Meeting, a management structure which seems to characterise democratic schools internationally (Fielding, 2010). The School Meeting is usually chaired by different students, and during the week students and staff can pin up their requests of topics they would like to discuss at the School Meeting. Matters that need decisions or problem solving are put to a vote. Other groups of management that are responsible for making certain decisions are the Staff Meeting, The School Council, Student Led Groups, The P.T.A and The Governors. All of these are accountable to the school meeting (Sands, 2014). See Appendix D for an overview of what these groups entail. According to Ofsted (2013), leadership and management at the school are indicated as ‘good’, highlighting that that the school makes “good use of its democratic structures to carry out the leadership tasks and management of the school” (p. 6), but could improve the manner of evaluating its overall performance.

5.2.5 Alternative education and democratic education
Besides explaining the democratic nature of the school through mentioning the different groups of management, as shown above, there is little explanation in the school documents
Exploring former democratic school students’ moral character in everyday life

about what they understand as democratic education. Sands (2014) refers to the description of EUDEC where they mention the two pillars of democratic education, (1) self-determined learning and (2) a learning community based on equality and mutual respect. However, the school publicity is more informative about their understanding of ‘alternative education’ and why they call themselves the ‘alternative face of education’. They compare characteristics they have identified as being typical for mainstream education with characteristics of alternative education. For them, mainstream education is characterised by:

- ‘Large scale – many with approaching or even exceeding two thousand students as staff’
- ‘Very hierarchical – a top-down approach with students (and most staff) having very little, if any, meaningful say’
- ‘Highly prescriptive – a strict allocation of students into age-based cohorts following a fixed curriculum’
- ‘A high degree of conformity and disciplinarianism – uniforms, lots of rules and punishments’

(Sands, 2014)

Alternative education is characterised by the following elements, which oppose the above mentioned mainstream education:

- ‘Human scale – small enough overall for people to know each other with small enough classes for teachers to teach to the individuals
- ‘Non-hierarchical – all adults and children are genuinely involved in decision-making’
- ‘Non-prescriptive – students learn what is appropriate to them at the right age for them’
- ‘Freedom of expression – students are free to be themselves’

(Sands, 2014)

It can be noticed that mainstream education is presented here as the ‘bad guy’, by for example using wording like ‘even exceeding two thousand students and staff’ versus ‘human scale’, instead of ‘small scale’. It is clear that there is some judgment in terms of how Sands School perceives mainstream education.
5.2.6 Holistic Democracy

However, despite the minimal explicit exploration of the concept on their website and in their school documents, education at Sands is clearly democratic in the sense meant by Dewey and Veugelers (see chapter 3). Hence, the democratic type of education as described by Sands School is very different to public education teaching about democracy. At Sands, democracy seems much closer to Dewey’s (1916) sense of democracy as a mode of associated living. This can be seen in the school meetings, the flat management structures, the equality between the teachers and the students, and students’ freedom to have their say and choose their own curriculum.

Sands, like Dewey, sees education as meaningful in itself and not just a means to an end; the interests and experiences of the students are the purpose in themselves (Gribble, 1998). In addition, the environment is treated as a crucial element of education, along similar lines as Dewey. This can be seen in the attention Sands has given to the school grounds and the different areas allocated for different subject matters (see Figure 5.2).

It can be argued that an additional final step can be made in defining what type of education is the subject of this research. To make this final distinction as to what type of democratic education is meant in this research, it is helpful to refer to the work of Woods (2011), who has conducted a case study of Sands School in comparison with three other schools. Sands scores significantly high on Woods’ (2011) analysis on dimensions of Holistic Democracy. He explains that democracy is often understood as entailing “equal participation of all in the creation of their social environment and in the decisions which affect them” (p. 9). He then explains that we can also recognise a perspective on democracy, called holistic democracy, which transcends this interpretation. According to Woods, holistic democracy strives towards a way of living ‘which aspires to values that represent the best of human progress’ (p. 9). This means that education “grounded in a rich vision and analysis of democracy, means more than a form of system redesign in which co-construction concentrates on ‘intellectual capital’” (Woods, 2011, p. 62). In other words, with a holistic perspective on democracy, education is not only focused on developing academic skills and content knowledge. It includes focusing on the development of the student as a whole which means personal development and therefore a focus on the values and what is meaningful to the students themselves becomes a field of attention as well.
5.3 Introducing the participants

Although all the findings refer to the themes which emerged from the portrayals of the participants, the full portrayals will not be displayed in this chapter due to their magnitude (see Appendix G for an extract of one of the transcripts as an example). Instead, the findings will only be clarified by extracts of their portrayals by using quotes from the interviews, showing merely the results of the thematic analysis (see chapter 4). However, to offer an overview, the participants will now be introduced by summarising their portrayals, focusing on: where they grew up, the main events in their lives and what aspects characterise them as who they are.

5.3.1 Walter

Walter is a twenty-seven year old man doing a PhD. He was born in a major city in the UK, into a Jewish family with one older brother. In his early years his family moved to Devon which symbolised a huge change for Walter. Walter loved the freedom of the countryside environment and being able to go off on his own into the fields. What characterises Walter is this early and conscious urge for freedom. He experienced difficult years of battling against the Steiner school he went to, where his need for a sense of freedom wasn’t met. Already from an early age on Walter experienced being very clear about how he wanted things to be different. This was reflected in him asking the teachers lots of questions about why the school was being run the way it was, and would later be characterised by his choice to go to Sands, and his motivations for further studying right up to deciding on a PhD. Recurring themes in Walter’s life are that he finds it very important that things make sense and aren’t pointless. He strives for things to be personal, respectful and clear. He therefore takes a lot of care and patience to consider things and decisions in-depth, with an attention to detail. This reflects in his PhD work and the related teaching where he strives to treat every student individually and with as much attention for every person as he can muster. Walter understands the big factors of influence in his life to be the move to Devon, going to Sands, real friendships, and his relationship with his girlfriend Lily.

5.3.2 Jack

Jack is a 29 year old man who is involved in several independent projects which he runs himself. These include his own video production company and the organisation on which he’s
most proud of and excited about: ‘Inspiral’\textsuperscript{11}. Inspiral is a project that Jack runs to explore and create innovative ways of cooperating (such as forms of open democracy) with individuals in local communities, in order to create change in anything that needs improvement. Jack grew up in Oxford with his single mum who, according to Jack, was very busy working as a psychotherapist and “borderline depressive” a lot of the time (Individual interview, Jack, p. 7). He describes his relationship with his mother as being problematic. Despite loving her very much, he describes periods of not knowing how to communicate with his mother and long periods of loneliness. Jack experienced a disruptive youth and would often get into trouble (for example fights), being disruptive and being kicked out of many different schools. After going to two different pupil referral units, Jack and his mother moved to Devon for Jack to be able to go to Sands School, where he received a scholarship. Going to Sands School symbolises the biggest life change for Jack: it marks the start of living a positive life which included being happy, intimately knowing yourself, opportunities, family and having real friends. What characterises Jack is wanting to stand up against authority, exploring opportunities, wanting to be free to do what he wants, the urge to intimately understand himself and his search for how people can cooperate in the best way possible with each other.

5.3.3 \textit{Pat}

Pat, in her late thirties, is a single mother of one son and is self-employed. She is currently in the stage of exploring what she wants to be her next career step. She describes that she has put her career on a little pause to be able to be at home with her son as much as she can. Pat was born in London and grew up there with her single mother. She describes that she had a very unhappy childhood, being made to feel that she was ‘the bad kid’ at different types of school, and that her mother was often too busy to really be there for her and to stand up for her. Pat describes that it had a big impact on her that her mother was often very absent. Despite some related feelings of anger and frustration about the absence of her mother in her childhood, Pat’s mother still plays a big part in her life, which is reflected in the times that Pat refers to her and talks about her. Pat describes that her childhood was being marked by not feeling acknowledged, respected and understood and that she felt a big lack of support throughout her younger years. Pat feels that she missed a lot of opportunities because of this lack of support. Her childhood was characterised by things not being dealt with, not being able to be who she

\textsuperscript{11} This is an alias for Jack’s organisation.
was and not experiencing the existence of alternatives. The big turning point in her life was going to Sands School, which she feels saved her life. Sands symbolised change for her in terms of finally feeling acknowledged and slowly starting to build up the self-confidence and belief that she was not in fact a bad kid after all, leading to the realisation that she had the ability to turn her life around. Another important factor of influence for Pat, which happened soon after her time at Sands, was going to an ashram in India. The process of self-acceptance continued there and through meditation she learned to start loving herself. Other aspects which characterise Pat are her focus on acknowledging everybody’s needs, taking responsibility for one’s life and striving for authenticity.

5.3.4 Matilda

Matilda, 38, owns her own two shops, including a clothing shop and a home ware/lifestyle shop. Matilda does not describe her life in a linear manner, instead she sees life as one big tapestry of experiences, all mingled and connected to each other. What characterises Matilda is her gratitude for her life and the knowledge that she can do anything if she puts her mind to it, which drives her forwards. Matilda enjoyed a liberal upbringing from her parents on a farm in Devon with her older half-sister, Anna. Her life has been characterised with always enjoying the freedom and the space to explore her boundaries and to be who she wanted to be. This was reflected in her early start with “dressing up and make-up, smoking cigarettes” before the age of 10 (Individual interview, Matilda, p.3). Sands School symbolised a continuation of her upbringing to her. In addition, she explains that she experiences a deep trust that things are alright somewhere and you’re always exactly where you need to be. It’s very important for Matilda to live in the moment which is reflected in her courses of action such as the process of how she opened the shop, not worrying about what other people would think and having the confidence in her abilities. Other themes that are important in Matilda’s life are taking responsibility for her own decisions, not wanting to conform to any boundaries, striving to be authentic, the knowledge that there is always a possibility to change things, acknowledging everybody’s needs, and the urge to do her bit of good in the world to function as a ripple-effect. As of now, these themes are reflected in Matilda’s journey to explore how she can become a mother, which is currently her key-wish in life.
5.3.5 Anna

Anna, 41, is Matilda’s older half-sister, sharing the same mother who came from a line of gypsies. Anna’s father came from a family of high aristocracy but did not feature in her life. Instead, Anna’s childhood was marked by her bad relationship with Matilda’s father, who acted as her stepfather. This bad relationship was characterised by Anna’s heated tantrums of resistance and powerlessness towards his dominance. She experienced freedom and liberal thinking from her mother’s side, and boundaries and dominance from her stepfather’s side. Throughout Anna’s life she kept a high dislike for authority and any other form of dominance. Although Sands School did have different forms of impact on Anna, the school symbolised no significant change for Anna. However, there were two major people in her life which caused her life to make a 180 degree turn: meeting her best friend Leyla and her husband Preston. Both people symbolised a different change for Anna, but they have in common that Anna felt that she could (and still can) be completely who she is with them. Meeting Leyla marked a time of self-development for Anna, which continues up to the present moment. What characterises Anna is her need to feel acknowledged, empowered, her wish to reach her full potential, wanting to have a say in things and take control, needing things and people to be congruent and the search for who she is and where she’s supposed to be in the world. Central to her life right now is her family-life as a mother of two children, a boy and a girl, and her self-employed work as a massage therapist and a trainer for Parent Effectiveness Training Courses.

5.3.6 Boris

Boris, 38, has just entered family-life by having a son with his recently married wife. After moving from Wales, Boris grew up in Devon with his mother, stepfather and several brothers and sisters. As a child, Boris was a bit of a bully, very disruptive and went to many different types of schools, including mainstream education, Montessori and Steiner schools. There were a lot of problems at home between his mother and his stepfather, which marked Boris’ childhood. For Boris, a lot of these problems were related to money issues. The money struggles and relationship problems between his mother and his stepfather forced him from an early age on to take responsibility in the way of caring for his younger siblings and doing all kinds of duties in the house. It had an impact on him not to be able to spend time with his friends instead. Boris left home at the age of 15, during his time at Sands School. Sands symbolises a massive life-change for Boris which, according to him, saved him from ruin.
Sands School marks a shift in Boris’ life where he learned to take ownership and responsibility over his decisions, learned that there is always a choice and an opportunity and that he could be a nice and positive person while being strong. Sands also symbolised family and role-models for Boris, who by then felt very disconnected from his own family. These themes keep recurring throughout Boris’ life. This is reflected in his proactiveness in finding jobs and looking for opportunities. At 18 Boris met a millionaire, whose lifestyle and being free from money problems made a big impression on Boris. From then on Boris’ main goal in life was to become financially independent in order to achieve a sense of freedom and being able to enjoy life and to not run the rat race from one payslip to another. Money, for Boris, became a key to freedom: not money to show money, but money to be enabled to do certain things in life, such as taking a year off to be with his new-born child. According to Boris, if everyone had enough wealth everyone would be happy. Boris started working from an early age and his jobs have always been marked with lots of responsibilities. He has now been working for a very successful company in a managing position for the last 10 years for the same employer. This employer symbolises a role model for Boris: being both a family man and knowing how to do business. Themes that characterise Boris are: having a positive outlook on life, being entrepreneurial, needing to have control, wanting to break the cycle of financial dependence, feelings of family-loyalty, and the knowledge that there are always options in life as long as you keep moving forwards.

5.4 The participants’ understandings about their moral character

The findings of the participants’ moral character from the first stage of the data collection process, the focus group, will now be presented.

5.4.1 The common aspects of the participants’ moral character - focus group

The focus group was used in particular to converse about the participants’ school experiences. However, by talking about their school experiences, their own moral character could be revealed in matters such as why they valued certain school experiences. The focus group started with showing the participants a drawing of the school (see Figure 5.2) which was made by one of the students from Sands. The drawing shows a map of the school and the school grounds. After showing this, the participants were asked to draw or write on a separate
Exploring former democratic school students’ moral character in everyday life

piece of paper how they remembered their school experiences with whatever came to mind. This method allowed everyone to think for themselves, before the possibility of influencing each other, in advance of starting the group conversation (Wengraf, 2001). It was surprising to see that their drawings were not only showing experiences as expected, such as ‘fun’ or ‘weekly school meetings’, but the drawing also included values which are related to their moral character and that of the school. Moral character values such as ‘freedom’, ‘respect’, ‘responsibility’ and ‘self-expression/confidence/insight’ were shared by everyone and visible within the first twenty minutes.

The main three aspects of moral character which the participants all shared were (a) freedom, (b) respect/self-respect and (c) responsibility (See Appendix J). These three aspects were all presented by participants as aspects that they viewed as of high importance and wanted to have included in their own lives.

**Freedom**

The first, freedom, was by far the most talked about and acknowledged as a key-value. According to the participants, this key-value was also emphasised by the school. For the group, freedom was meant as freedom to express yourself, to be able to be who you are as a person. In that sense, for them, freedom was also linked to authenticity. But they also discussed the freedom to be able to explore. They talked and agreed about the importance of being free to explore your boundaries when you are a child, although they did emphasise how important a safe place was in order to be able to explore in a constructive way. Freedom also related to them in the way of being free to have a choice and a voice in situations. There was a discussion about how freedom is connected to responsibility and that you can’t go without responsibility when it considers freedom. In this respect, the participants acknowledged the importance of freedom not only for themselves, but also for others.

**Respect**

Secondly, respect, in the way it was understood by the group, was also connected to equality. In this sense, respect is crucial for respecting everybody’s needs and to listen to everyone. To them, respect should not only be for others but also towards yourself. Several times it was emphasised that to be good, you need to feel good within yourself. Whatever you do, it needs to come from a good place, and in order to do that, you need to learn to respect yourself.
Responsibility
The third value, responsibility, was mostly mentioned in relation to the responsibility for your choices, and how they thought (similar to the views of their school) that you need to have ownership of your decisions. They viewed responsibility as a very positive and important value, in the sense that they connected this to being able to have a voice. When you are given the responsibility of your own choices (such as choosing if you go to school or not) you also get a chance to have a voice.

The findings of the individual interviews will now be presented.

5.4.2 The common aspects of the participants’ moral character - individual interviews
In order to explore common values related to moral character, the portrayals of the participants were compared with each other, according to their moral character before going to Sands School, during their stay at Sands, and their life after Sands until now.

Trauma and the absence of moral character
The aspects of their moral character before attending Sands are most clearly recognised by the participants when they talk about experiences in their life that frustrated them or did not go the way they wanted. All participants, except for Matilda, speak of experiencing some trauma before going to Sands School. The experience of trauma is for all of them related to their core moral character values not being present. Because they didn’t feel free or respected and therefore didn’t feel like they had a voice, they experienced situations of feeling extremely lonely, disconnected, unhappy or even depressed. This unhappiness resulted for most of them in disruptive behaviour such as rages, aggression, bullying, getting into trouble with the police for various reasons, drugs and fake suicide attempts. Unsurprisingly, their school results suffered and half of the participants were expelled multiple times. Jack explains how he got into a cycle of losing care about himself and others:

I was like getting shot gun cartridges, from the school. I started out, from some kids whose dad was a farmer, and making little booby-traps with them, and messing about. And dropping bricks off bridges onto cars. Just stuff that you do when you kind of, when like your empathy for people is kind of seized up, and got rusty. Because, you’ve forgotten how to care about yourself. So in turn, you forget to care about others. (Jack, Individual Interview, p. 4)
Pat explains how she felt just before arriving at Sands:

Basically it got to the point that I was like, it doesn’t matter how nice a person I am, it doesn’t matter what I do, how hard I try, I’m never going to be all right. I’m always picked out for something even though it’s not my fault. It’s not my fault that I don’t like tight clothes, it’s not my fault that, like, that I don’t want to eat their shitty food. So, ‘fuck you’ basically. That became it. It was like a fuck you, I’m against you. And that was so unhealthy, it totally fucked up my development. (Pat, Individual Interview, p. 11)

Where more common moral character values can be recognised in the focus group, more diverse and personal moral characters can be recognised in the individual interviews. However, the main moral character values as noted in the focus group, are indeed also visible in their own personal narratives. After comparing their portrayals it can be seen that they have several moral character values in common with each other. The main four are freedom, respect, responsibility and self-knowledge. An overview of these four moral character values is presented in the graph below (see Figure 5.3). In most cases, it can be seen that more than half of the participants start developing or recognising aspects of moral character from the moment they start attending Sands School. Once these moral character-values are either recognised, developed or decided upon by the participants, these aspects do not seem to disappear. In fact, their opinions or expressions about these aspects may increase.

![Figure 5.3 Moral character values – before and after attending Sands School](image-url)
Exploring former democratic school students’ moral character in everyday life

Freedom
Similar to the findings of the focus group, ‘freedom’ means for the participants the freedom to express yourself, to be who you are, but also the freedom to explore and to make your own decisions, and to have your own voice. In this sense, freedom for them is connected to autonomy, a word that they sometimes use instead of freedom. It refers to, rather than being overruled or dominated by an adult for instance, the freedom to do what they wish. ‘Freedom’ is the only moral character value that all the participants have valued from their life before going to Sands School. Already from a young age on the participants seemed to remember to be aware that they valued freedom, that they enjoyed the experience of it and in contrast, that they dislike the memories connected to the moments they felt that freedom was taken away from them. Walter for instance mentions his very early memories of his favourite moments in childhood, which were connected to the freedom and the outdoors:

Well, I loved the freedom of it. And being able to just go off on my own, and I loved being able to just be in the countryside all the time and. (Walter, Individual Interview, p. 4)

And the moments of frustration were when he was restricted by rules he did not agree with and could not see the purpose of. The fragment below refers to one of the school activities Walter was made to do at the Steiner school he visited:

It was the pointlessness of the whole thing and the futility of it and being made to do it and having someone else just deciding what to do. Which was of no importance or value at all. And I, I don’t have very clear memories of that time but I remember a lot of things being like that. And having that sort of reaction to it. And I very nearly left the school after a while. Eehm… Because I was very unhappy there. And my parents basically gave me the choice whether to stay or go somewhere else. (Walter, Individual Interview, p.5)

Respect
The moral character value of respect as explained in the individual interviews is also in line with the meaning given in the focus group. The value of respect is understood firstly as being respectful to yourself and others. However, in addition the participants share an understanding that respect is also related to being heard, being acknowledged and being treated equally (and treating others equally). They emphasise that this should count for all ages. They share the frustrations they felt in their childhood where they were dominated by parents, teachers or other adults. In this sense, respect is also related to its opposite: being treated unjustly. The
participants recall early memories of not being taken seriously or being overruled simply for being young. The majority also describe developing an aversion to authority. Anna described in her interview her moments of frustration in her childhood of not being heard and not having any control over that:

Peter going ‘while you’re under MY [raises voice] roof you’ll do as I say! And I found that very confusing, and really unfair because it was obvious one side kind of freedom freedom freedom, right, your freedom isn’t suiting me [bounces her fist on table], down comes the kind of, the boundary. And I used to fly into huge rages. I mean, I’m sure that Matilda probably talked about it bit? But, I mean you know, I used to smash things up. I would be so fuming, it felt so unjust, so unfair. And this man who I hated had this amount of power and control over me. (Anna, Individual Interview, p. 8)

Responsibility
Responsibility is another moral character value widely shared amongst the participants. They also relate ‘responsibility’ to ‘freedom’, since freedom for them doesn’t mean you can just do anything you want. There has to be an inner responsibility connected to it, where you are responsible for your choices and the consequences of those choices. ‘Choice’ is a keyword for the participants which they connect to responsibility. Responsibility for them is all about taking your life in your own hands and realising that you are not a passenger in life, but that you have a choice. They also describe that their life changes when they start to realise they have this choice and the responsibility for their own life. The experience that there is always an option, opportunity or choice that you can make in life in any life situation seems to be a big cornerstone in their lives. They describe that knowing this, or having learned this by experience has enabled them to feel happier. This feeling of happiness, as they describe is, is connected to the realisation that they don’t have to be a passenger in life (or a victim), but that they can actively enact change themselves, and that they have their own responsibility to do so.

And we have the opportunity, the responsibility to, at any point, yes at any point, if you’re not happy, to take responsibility for your part in that. And make something different (...). And if you’re allowed to do that - to make your own choices and work as a team. You know, there’s always a possibility, basically. There’s always hope there is always a possibility there is always a different way of approaching life. So, okay if this doesn’t work, don’t just sit around and moaning. But okay so what do we do then? How do we get around this? So it does… It does give you those tools. (Pat, Individual Interview p. 28)
Self-knowledge

Self-knowledge is being understood as a necessary, deeper understanding of yourself, which also relates to being honest with yourself, to loving yourself, to being congruent and self-confident. They agree with each other that really knowing yourself is necessary to be able to do good things, since good things have to come from a good place according to for instance Matilda. And therefore, according to the participants, without really knowing yourself you can’t be happy, because you don’t know what your boundaries are and what is good for you. Jack for instance refers very clearly to this connection between self-knowledge and happiness:

If you don’t understand why you’re not able to make yourself happy or understand yourself and love yourself, you’re solving half the problem I think. You need to understand… The reasons of why you’ve not been good to yourself. (Jack, Individual Interview, p. 13)

Authenticity

Authenticity is a moral character value that is mentioned quite often by the participants. Authenticity is connected to self-knowledge for them. Hence, they think you need to be really honest and really know yourself to be able to be authentic. They value authenticity because they recognise that only you know what’s best for you, which relates again to their value of freedom and responsibility. You need to have freedom to be able to discover and to be who you are (authenticity) and have the responsibility to do so. Matilda explains how this works for her:

So I think that’s being in tune with yourself. So that’s definitely one thing that I always remind myself, what’s right for me? And then if it works, it could work for others, because it’s just a good place where it comes from (Matilda, p. 16)

5.4.3 The participants’ moral character in relation to Sands School’s moral character

An overlap can be seen between the participants’ moral character and the moral character as presented by Sands School. It has been shown that Sands’ ethos includes five values that can be recognised as moral character values, which were: 1) equality, 2) respect, 3) responsibility, 4) self-awareness and 5) self-confidence. As can be seen in the sections above, all five moral character values are reflected in the participants’ moral character. However, only respect is recognised by half of the participants before attending Sands School. Equality, responsibility,
self-awareness and self-confidence are only being recognised as values from the time the participants have attended Sands School.

This could suggest that Sands School had some influence in introducing these values into the lives of the participants. However, this might also be pointing towards a correlation between the ability to recognise certain values and one’s age. The participants are all experiencing puberty when they attend Sands School, which is often indicated as a time in the lives of individuals when they become more self-aware and conscious about questions related to their identity, who they are as a person, who they want to be, and what they value in life (Gill & Thomson, 2013).

5.4.4 Conclusions and implications

The following conclusions can be drawn from the above described findings:

- Before going to Sands School, when experiencing hardship, trauma or any form of unhappiness, the moral character of the participants is absent (or not lived by).
- ‘Freedom to be who you are’ is the only moral character-value which is recognised by the participants before going to Sands School.
- The majority of the participants start recognising, developing or living by aspects of their moral character from the moment they start attending Sands School.
- Being treated respectfully (or trustworthy, equally, carefully etc.) helped the participants to act respectfully themselves.
- Once having left Sands School, their moral character-values do not disappear. Rather, the prominence and incorporation of their moral-character-values in their everyday lives increases.
- The moral character-values (freedom, respect, responsibility, self-knowledge and authenticity), as understood by the participants, show an overlap with the ethos of Sands School.

These conclusions could indicate different implications in relation to what factors help or hinder individuals practice their moral character in everyday life. It has been indicated that there is a significant difference in the presence of the participants’ moral character-values before their attendance at Sands School (absent) and after their time at Sands (present). In addition, the developed moral character-values have an overlap with the school’s ethos.
Firstly, this could indicate that referring to a period in their lives where the participants experienced types of unhappiness due to absence of their core moral character-values helped the participants to formulate their moral character-values. This could suggest in other words, that sometimes it’s easier to develop an insight into what your core-values are when you focus on situations where they are absent.

In addition, this could indicate that the consequence of experiencing variations of trauma could have influenced what types of moral-character values we choose to live by. For example, it was due to the intense frustration of powerlessness, which Anna experienced as a result of the dominance and lack of acknowledgement from her stepfather, that Anna started to value deeply the ‘freedom to be who you are’ and being treated ‘equally’ and ‘respectfully’ no matter what age you are.

However, Figure 5.3 (see also Figure 5.4) suggests that the participants did not feel that they were living by these moral character-values during the times of unhappiness they described. This is in contrast to after their time at Sands School, where the participants also experience difficulties but are still able to live by their moral character-values. This could
indicate that, in order for moral character-values to be incorporated into an individual’s life, the individual needs to have experienced life-events where these moral-character-values are present, which would include positive subjective experiences that can be offered by their education (Park, 2004).

Keeping in mind the participants’ moral characters, it will now be explored to what extent the participants’ actions in everyday life correspond with their moral character. And thus, to what extent the participants are able to put their moral character into practice.

5.5 The participants’ courses of action in everyday life

5.5.1 Participants’ courses of action
The participants’ courses of action became most visible in the individual interviews. In the focus group the participants talked in a more abstract manner about their views and understandings than about their actual actions in everyday life; the conversation involved more talking about how people should act, or what behaviour the participants agreed or disagreed with, rather than elaborating on their own actions. Therefore, the findings of the focus group and the individual interviews will be presented in a combined manner. Figure 5.4 presents the overview of the findings of the participants’ courses of actions according to the time in their life before Sands School, during their time at Sands and after their time at Sands. The Figure focusses either on those actions that the participants have in common, or on one course of action that is mentioned particularly often by one participant. The courses of action which have been marked bold, point towards courses of action that all the participants have in common.

Before Sands
Lack of acknowledgement and battling
On the whole, Figure 5.4 shows that almost all of the participants, except for Matilda, have experienced their childhood years as years filled with different forms of battling, being frustrated and finding ways to resist certain situations. Their expressions of frustration, or battling, resisting, being disruptive or disengaged is linked in the way that they all point towards one key experience or feeling: not being acknowledged. This is referred to in several
ways, such as not being heard or respected or understood or not being able to be who you are or do what you want.

Yeah… Of not being acknowledged and, yeah… Yeah, yeah… Unfortunately all of those bad feeling stayed with me from long time. Not being the good girl. Because I was really very active, and kind of exploring and wanting to do my own thing. I wasn’t kind of compliant and passive. And I think instead of building that up, or acknowledging that, and pointing me a direction, you know. (Pat, p. 12)

**Being disruptive or frustrated**

The majority of the participants (Walter, Jack, Pat, Anna and Boris) point out that it was due to this frustration of the lack of acknowledgement that caused them to be disruptive. This disruptive behaviour included getting into fights, smashing glass or breaking things, screaming or yelling to the persons who they felt did not acknowledge them and calling them names, tantrums of crying, or starting drinking or doing drugs. In one case this included fake suicide attempts. Only Walter seemed to express his frustration in a non-violent manner which involved asking lots of questions. In contrast, Jack explains how he started not to care anymore in his childhood, how he felt that he lost his empathy which made him be disruptive in all kinds of ways from dropping bricks unto cars to calling his teachers names.

I’ve kind of been more or less booted out of a couple of my schools. Where is kind of, my mum would have put me out because I wasn’t getting on there. Or.. Like I called my primary school teacher a scrotum. (Jack, p. 4)

**Feeling disengaged**

Another expression of this frustration which the participants describe is acting and feeling disengaged. This was characterised by the participants as not being interested in for example school, or not wanting to be engaged. In line with acting disengaged, a similar described type of behaviour is letting things just happen. Some of the participants describe that all this frustration led them to either feel like there weren’t any opportunities, or not knowing what alternatives there could be and thus letting the things they disliked just happen. However, they also describe the additional frustration this caused since they disliked the feeling of not being able to act differently, and to act more in the way they would have wanted to. Boris for
example describes how he feels that his previous teachers in school just didn’t know how to handle him, which made him feel ever more distanced from school than before.

And I understand it now why she would have probably done that. Because she was just given me some medicine. But it was the wrong sort for me. You know, that just pushed me and alienated me further away from the school on the subject. And it just further compounded my rebellious nature. (Boris, Individual Interview, p. 5)

Resisting
All of the participants, except for Matilda, described showing types of resistance. This behaviour of resisting is also interlinked with what they described as acting disruptively or disengaged. Hence, often their resistance would take shape in behaviours such as getting involved in fights or refusing to act a certain way and have heated tantrums or discussions instead. Anna for example described that not being able to have a say in things made her terribly frustrated which would always end up in some form of resistance, which she explains as fighting. Her main fight was against her stepfather who often did not allow her to do the things she wanted.

And this man who I hated had this amount of power and control over me. Yeah, I absolutely hated him and I fought furiously against that. At this stage you react to power with fight, flight or submission. It was always fights for me. You know I never gave up the fight. You know, it would normally end up with me leaving the room, slamming some doors, smashing something up and then going to my room and then absolutely sobbing my heart out. Of the unjustness of it. (Anna, Individual Interview p. 9)

Exploring boundaries
The person who sticks out in recalling very different behaviour in comparison to the other participants is Matilda. She did not describe any type of disruptive behaviour or frustration or feeling the need to battle. She described being able to do what she wanted for as far as she can remember. She described how mostly her mother was very liberal and allowed her to explore her own boundaries. The main type of behaviour that can be recognised in Matilda’s life story is doing what she wanted and exploring her freedom. She illustrates this by explaining that she was busy with ‘smoking fags’, putting on make-up, dressing up and boys from an early age.
Yeah, so yeah my mum was really good at giving us choices. And talking us through those choices about you know, and explaining I think a lot of the time. Giving us the time to explain things instead of just saying no. There was a lot of space to explore things on our own terms, which I think is amazing. (Matilda, p. 2)

**During Sands**

*No more battling: feeling acknowledged and getting involved*

The courses of action that the participants described while attending Sands School are significantly different from their actions in comparison with before they went to the school. Where the main themes of courses of action, in the time before going to Sands, are ‘being frustrated’ and behaving in manners that relate to ‘battling’, ‘resisting’ or ‘disengagement’, now the main themes are ‘being active and getting involved’ and ‘no more battling’. Pat describes how overwhelmed she was by suddenly feeling accepted.

Yeah… So I’d, going to Sands felt like it saved my life, really. Because I finally found people who were on my side. You know, being interviewed by David Gribble, understanding about what happened, and you know… And saying, you know, yeah we want to give you a place. You know, it was like… It was quite a big thing really, to be accepted. [starts crying] When you felt like you had been so unaccepted. (Pat, Individual Interview, p.14)

The behaviour that most of the participants (Walter, Jack, Pat and Boris) describe are the opposite of their time before attending Sands School. They describe that their behaviour and courses of action changed because they felt that, for the first time, they were acknowledged, respected and heard. They describe that they were so amazed by the school, by the fact that the teachers were more like friends, by the fact that they could do what they wanted, that they were allowed to have a say in their curriculum and the running of the school that they themselves felt that they developed respect in return. They describe how this made them feel that they, finally, didn’t have to battle any more. Walter described that this meant a lot to him.

And, you know in a way, the academic school side of things is secondary to the kind of ownership and running of the school community and participating in that. And I loved all of that because that were all of the things that I had been battling against all my life really. Ehm… I’m sure that’s why the school meant so much to me because those things meant so much to me and always had. (Walter, p. 18)
For the participants, this feeling of acknowledgement made them feel interested and that they wanted to get involved with the running of the school. The courses of action that illustrate this are: helping out with cooking the school lunches, actually going to class, cleaning up your mess, and wanting to have an active role in the running of the school such as being the chair of the weekly school meetings. Boris described that from being uninterested in school, Sands became a place you couldn’t keep him away from.

Sands, initially... I just played the adolescent idiot. But then I got into it. And then you couldn’t keep me away from school. You know, I used to cycle to school, which was I think, every day, was a 28 mile round journey, on my bike, you know, wind, rain, whatever. (...) yeah in total. There and back. And, you know, that’s a kid of 14, 15. And I wasn’t waiting on a school bus. I was getting on my bike and cycling to school. And, school’s got to be doing something good to get that sort of motivation for a student to want to... You know. (Boris, Individual Interview, p. 11)

**Home away from home**

Another course of action that illustrates their feeling of ‘no more battling’ is that all the participants describe how much they wanted to go to school. Pat for instance describes that, to her astonishment, she thought that she didn’t even skip school once. In some cases (Walter, Jack, Pat, Anna), the participants even went to school if they didn’t have any class. And in the case of Walter, Jack and Boris, they went regularly (once a week or every two weeks) back to the school to visit, once they had left the school. Walter described in what way the school was like a second home to him.

And, you know I was able to have friendships with teachers and see them. You know which is very different from sort of, you know it’s much less of a formal separation than sort of state schools, where there is definitely a separation. And the whole environment at Sands is much more... Is much more sort of like a second home. Because it’s small, and it’s, I think a lot because of the democracy in it and everyone’s participating. Everyone has chosen to be there. (...) Everyone sort of has sense of ownership of the school. It does become an environment where you sort of feel comfortable being there... And like to be there... As much as possible and you actually... you know even if, you know, they choose not to study many subjects, and have days when they are not studying any subjects they still come in and in the school and just... Because it’s *their* environment. (Walter, Individual Interview, p. 18)

The participants describe how they either felt at home at the school, or experienced the school as a home away from home. This appears to be another factor that made the participants feel
that they didn’t have to battle any more. They described that what helped to create that sense of ‘feeling at home’ was that they had real conversations with their teachers. Not only about subject content, but mostly conversations about life or philosophical questions. The participants describe that the fact that they could communicate with the teachers in this manner made them feel that the teachers were your friends, rather than an authority in front of the black board. This is connected to different courses of action in comparison to their time before Sands. Where some of the participants describe that they were rude or cheeky to their teachers, like Boris, they describe that at Sands they started to feel respect and act respectfully towards their teachers instead.

I just found them interesting and engaging and, you know, they were like therapists to me a lot of the time. I could go to them and talk about a lot of the problems, that were not school related at all, and they could like give me some advice and a way through and stuff, you know. So, they don’t get paid for that, bless them, you know what I mean? (Boris, Individual Interview, p. 12)

*Being able to be who you are*

In line with feeling at home at the school, the participants describe that they felt they could be who they were at the school, and in addition have the space to explore who they were. Matilda for instance described that if she set her mind to do something, she could and would be able to just do it. Boris described how he started to act more calmly and less disruptively because he felt that the school was just allowing him to be who he was. He described how this made him reconnect with who he actually was. And Pat described her relief at finally being able to wear what she wanted and how she started to wear very colourful clothes and got pierced and dyed her hair. She described that she finally felt that it was okay to be her without the fear of judgement which she deeply experienced at her previous boarding school.

That is basically it. Being able to express things without fear of. Being able to express deepest things without fear of judgment and having it being in an accepting place. And that started at Sands. Finally being able to say, this is how I feel. And having adults go, yeah, I can totally relate to that. That’s why we built the school like that. You know…, woow, that’s great! (Pat, p. 31)
After Sands

Proactive and independent

The courses of action that the participants have in common from their time after Sands up to now have several characteristics. Where the time before Sands was characterised by ‘battling, frustration, lack of acknowledgment, feeling disengaged’ and the time during Sands by ‘feeling at home, getting involved and exploring or being who you are’, their time after Sands is characterised by ‘independence and striving to arrange things in life in the way they want’.

On the whole, the participants were being proactive from the time they’ve attended Sands School, up to their everyday life now. In other words, instead of ‘letting things just happen’, which characterised some of their courses of action before attending Sand school, they now take much more control over their actions, such as taking responsibility, taking initiative and exploring opportunities. Matilda, the only participant who did not describe the same level of battling or frustration in her time before Sands, describes this proactive attitude which characterizes all the participants' courses of action.

I mean I always think this is my life, this is mine. I can create what I want. You know, and it’s, I can make this, and I can make it healthy and I can make it positive and you know. I can be a bigger person… I can be responsible. I’m in control of those things, at any time of my life. And that is such an amazing feeling, just to go I’ve had enough of those, actually I don’t want to do this anymore. You know, we are so rich in, you know, if it didn’t work out, you can find something else. (Matilda, Individual Interview, p. 32).

Own boss and flexibility

Their independence can be recognised by their types of occupation. All of the participants are their own boss. Walter is a PhD candidate, which was counted as ‘own boss’ related to the independent nature of a PhD, such as deciding your own topic, content, daily schedule etc. The other five participants are their own boss in the sense of owning their own shop such as Matilda, or their own massage practice such as Anna. Being their own boss allows them to have flexible lifestyles and working hours as well. Boris for example has allowed himself one year off to be able to be with his new-born child.

(…) where the lady was asking the dads, you know, how much time have you got off from work? And there were nine dads there. And every single one of them had to be back to work within two weeks. And couple of them had bosses who didn’t even do paternity leave, yeah? And I just thought… I just don’t have that issue. And they come to me and I was like, no, I’m all right. You know, I didn’t want to say much more than
that. I’m taking off until January for fucks sake. You know what I mean? I’ve worked into a position into my life, where I have flexibility like that when I need it. (Boris, Individual Interview, p. 30)

Doing what you want as best as possible

The deep wish of ‘doing what you want’, or ‘doing what seems to be worthwhile to you’ which was marked by the ‘frustration’ in the participants’ time before Sands and the ‘relief’ during their time at Sands, can still be recognised in their everyday life now. The wish to do what you want, which is interlinked for the participants with the freedom of being who you are, is also connected to their shared dislike of authority. For the participants, ‘freedom’ is difficult to combine with authority, which can be noticed by the independent nature of the participants’ occupations. Anna for example describes how having a voice for her is connected to being self-employed:

I wonder, how many children, former students of Sands School, are going to those sort of jobs as well. Because personally I just, you know. I mean, I went to College, and so I also experienced mainstream education then, but you know, I’m self-employed now, I don’t work in… I can’t imagine working in that sector where I’d be that restricted and not have a voice. That actually, I just wouldn’t choose it. I would find some other way to earn a living. (Anna, p. 30)

‘Doing what you want’ can also be recognised in the courses of actions that eventually have led the participants to their jobs. The majority of the participants (Jack, Pat, Matilda and Anna) have quit either further or higher education, to change to another course or to do something else completely. Walter is the only participant who has continued education right up to an MA and a PhD degree. Anna is the only one who shows some regret for not being able to study for a degree and describes that she feels that she has not reached her full potential yet. However, she does show her proactiveness by finding alternatives in developing further by first doing and now giving a Parent Effectiveness Training Course. Jack describes how he didn’t like the fact that that the content of one of his courses wasn’t open for discussion. And he wasn’t willing to do something he didn’t like which made him quit his degree:

I remember sitting with David who was the course leader of the film production degree, and saying… A couple of things. Mainly that we didn’t touch any digital. (…). So yeah, and then I didn’t like his response. So again I was in a position where I felt
like emotionally, socially I was in a position where I felt like I had no fear really. Kind of standing up to authority. (Jack, p. 23)

**Working on yourself**

Another course of action which the participants have in common is ‘working on yourself’. Almost all of the participants (Jack, Pat, Matilda, Anna and Boris) describe several times in their life stories that they are actively working on themselves. This can be in terms of self-reflection, wanting to change bad habits or characteristics, choosing to listen to their own personal needs, seeking therapy, learning to do meditation or wanting to be good to others. Pat for example describes a time shortly after her time at Sands School when she realised she needed to take care of herself, and to sort out her life.

But really just ended up, you know, with people that had quite serious addictions. But they were really quite heroin addicts and that really made me think, like, fuck this is not… I’ve got to make another change, really. And that’s what it was. Was going to India and making myself sit with myself, not going to all the crazy parties. Just meditating every day, I went to every single meditation. And eating good food. And trying to… You know, meeting nice people. And talk about. And that’s really what it was. (Pat, p.23)

5.5.2 **Conclusions and Implications**

The conclusions that can be made about the participants’ courses of actions are the following:

- There is a significant change in the participants’ courses of action from the moment the participants started going to Sands School The key difference is that, in their time before Sands, their actions (for some participants this mostly included their school experiences) are mainly dominated by ‘negative movements’, such as resistance, getting into fights and being disengaged or feeling frustrated. Whereas from the moment they start attending Sands School their actions are starting to be dominated by ‘positive movements’, such as starting to be engaged, getting involved and start treating themselves and others around them respectfully.

- Their courses of action after they have left Sands School are a continuation or an intensification of their dominant courses of action during their time at Sands School.

- On the whole, the participants are being proactive from the time they’ve attended Sands School, up to their everyday life now. Instead of ‘letting things just happen’, which characterised some of their courses of action before attending Sand school, they
now take much more control over their actions: such as taking responsibility, taking initiative and exploring opportunities. In other words, they have developed a certain degree of agency.

- The participants’ moral character-values are increasingly incorporated in their courses of action which are related to their time during Sands School and after Sands School. For example, the moral character-values of ‘freedom’ and ‘equality’ are reflected in the nature of their independent jobs and being their own boss. Hence, this allows them for instance to avoid having to answer to any other authority than themselves (apart from cultural, societal or governmental limitations or structures), it gives them the flexibility to arrange their own time and to incorporate their own way of how they would like to do things.

The main implication that follows out of the above described conclusions is related to the role of the environment such as the personal character of Sands School and their democratic pedagogy of ‘freedom’. The participants ascribe their change in courses of action from their time before Sands and their time during Sands to the characteristics of the school which are related to the informal side of the school and its environment, such as: the small scale, the democratic element of the school meetings, the freedom which the students have to decide their own subjects, whether they’ll go to school or not, what to wear to school, the equality between the relationship of the teachers and the students and its personal focus and henceforth the fact that the students have an equal say to their teachers.

These characteristics are described by the participants as reasons for why they started to feel differently (more positively) and henceforth started to act differently. These characteristics suggest that they helped the former students to feel acknowledged and understood. In addition, the fact that their voice really mattered and was heard (such as due to their say in the school meetings), and that they could decide on the running of the school, suggests that they not only started to feel meaningful within themselves (such as the realisation that they’re not a bad person after all) but also that they started to feel a sense of ownership of the school. In other words, the students started to experience a sense of belonging.

The above could lead to the following implications. Firstly, a school which incorporates a personal (small scale) environment that includes a significant amount of freedom for its students appears to promote a sense of belonging for its students. This sense of
belonging, related to the amount of freedom in which the students have a say in their education and the running of the school, helps the students to realise that their voice matters. In turn, this helps the students to feel acknowledged, which allows an environment in which the students can feel understood and meaningful. Such a ‘free environment’ invites the students to take ownership over their actions, which promotes their agency (Giddens, 1991).

Secondly, in line with the above described consequences of a free and personal environment of a school, this also suggests the implication that such a school could help individuals to develop and incorporate putting their moral character into practice. Hence, it can be noticed that the participants’ moral character-values are not incorporated in their lives before going to Sands School, which is a time characterised by difficulties, certain levels of trauma, unhappy experiences and negative behaviour. However, the findings of the participants’ expressions of their moral character-values over time and their corresponding courses of action do not suggest that when the participants are experiencing difficult times, they cannot practice their moral character. On the contrary, the participants do experience difficult times throughout their lives including during their time at Sands and after, and show courses of action in which their moral character-values are indeed incorporated.

In contrast to their time before Sands, the participants are able to live by their moral character-values to a much higher degree after their time at Sands. This could indicate that, in order to incorporate one’s moral character-values, the individual needs to have experienced positive situations in which their moral character-values were present. Therefore, this could imply that, a type of education which helps to incorporate an individual’s moral character into the practice of their lives, needs to include a free and open environment with a pedagogy of freedom.

5.6 The participants’ understandings of the impact of their school experiences

5.6.1 The participants’ understandings of the impact of their school experiences
The participants’ understandings of the impact of their school experiences, which were mentioned in the focus group, did not differ from what the participants mentioned in the individual interviews. Therefore their understandings, both from the focus group and the individual interviews, will be presented in a combined manner. Only the six most common understandings (which are shared by all of the participants) of the impact of their school
Exploring former democratic school students’ moral character in everyday life

experiences will be presented, starting with the three most mentioned and significant ones according to the participants.

**Freedom: to explore and to be who you are**
The key school experience which is mentioned by the participants as being of most significance in their lives then and now is ‘freedom’. The ‘free’ nature of Sands School has left a big impact on the participants. With freedom the participants refer to several aspects of the school, such as:

- the freedom to choose what to study and whether to go to class
- allowing the students to be autonomous and different
- free to be who you are: it’s okay to be you
- free to explore who you are and what you prefer
- everybody is equal.

**It saved my life vs. continuation of upbringing**
This freedom to choose (e.g. your subjects, what to wear, any matters in the school meetings), the freedom to be who you are and the space the participants felt that they had to explore their boundaries is described by three of the participants to have been one of the main reasons Sands School symbolises a massive shift in their lives. Jack, Pat and Boris make very explicit that their lives completely turned around from the moment they went to Sands School it changed their lives. The freedom that it is okay to be you is very important for the participants. Pat for example explains how from the very first moment she was at Sands, during her interview, she noticed the difference of the environment compared to all her previous experiences. She explains how she felt that for the first time it was okay to be herself and she felt accepted for it. It felt for Pat as if people were on her side for the first time.

So I’d, going to Sands felt like it saved my life, really. Because I finally found people who were on my side. You know, being interviewed by David Gribble, understanding about what happened, and you know… And saying, you know, yeah we want to give you a place. You know, it was like… It was quite a big thing really, to be accepted. [starts crying] When you felt like you had been so unaccepted. (Individual interview, Pat, p. 14)
Boris explains how he feels that Sands saved him from ruin and that, just like Pat, one of the most important impacts was related to the approach of the school: the importance of being free to be who you really are, and to explore who you really are as well.

Sands saved me from ruin, for sure. If I had stayed in mainstream education, I would have come out with nothing. And very little understanding of what opportunities exist when you do have nothing as well. I would have just got out feeling very failed. And probably gone down a much more negative route in life. They made me understand that the education, yes, it’s important, but it is not the make-up of your character, is the be all and end all. And you know, how you actually go out in the world and can say who you are. And put yourself out there, is the most important thing. (Individual interview, Boris, p. 8)

Being allowed by the school to be who you are and to be autonomous had a big impact on the other participants as well. They describe how the free nature of the school allows the students to “go with the flow of what you feel like doing” (Focus Group, Anna, p. 31). According to them this also helped them to get to know themselves better and to learn the things they liked and didn’t like. Walter also describes this freedom as one of the main things he loved about the school, it made him feel as if he finally didn’t have to battle anymore. The sisters Anna and Matilda describe that the free nature of the school had its impact on them as well. However, together with Walter, this impact was not of a life changing nature for Matilda and Anna as it was for Jack, Pat and Boris. Matilda and Anna describe how the free nature of the school wasn’t that new for them: it was in many ways a continuation of their liberal upbringing. Matilda describes how the school functioned as a “double whammy” for them.

If I can be in this world, and do the best I can for myself and for others then, I’ve done something important. And I think that’s something that’s definitely come from not only having an education, but we also had it at home. So we had as much of what we had at school as we did at home. So we had a double whammy of liberal, freedom, you know, good food. (Focus group, Matilda, p. 15)

Anna also describes that the school definitely left its impact on her, and that even now after all those years she notices she still talks about Sands and that things she learned there are still relevant for her now. However, for Anna, who also went to Dartington Hall School which had similar pedagogies, the liberal nature of the school wasn’t new. For Anna it was more certain events or people in her life that left a big impact on her.
It was... I don’t remember it being... Like some events in my life have really been like, whoow! You know, my sister being born. And I don’t remember schooling particularly feeling like that. (Anna, Individual Interview, p. 16)

In other words, there is a division between the role of the impact of Sands School in relation to its notion of freedom. On the one hand there are Jack, Pat and Boris who understand Sands’ impact to have been life changing. On the other hand there are Walter, Matilda and Anna who recognise the impact of the experience of being free to choose and to be who you are. However, for them this impact was not of a life changing nature. And only Matilda and Anna describe that this free nature of the school wasn’t anything new to them and was in fact in line with the liberal nature of their upbringing.

**A necessary condition**

The school experiences of the participants that are related to ‘freedom’ form a key experience in relation the other school experiences which had had an impact on the participants. All the other school impacts are in one way or another connected to the experience of being ‘free to be who you are’ and being ‘free to choose’. More specifically, the ‘free’ nature of the school appears to be the condition which makes the other impacts of school experiences, as described by the participants, possible.

*There is always a choice: you have the ability to enact change*

Another key school experience, which the participants describe as still being of influence in their everyday lives now, is the feeling or understanding and trust that there is always a choice or opportunity in every situation. This is connected to the experience of freedom in the way that the participants describe that it was because of the free nature of Sands, and because they were encouraged to *make* their own decisions in the school and received a lot of freedom to do so, that they had the opportunity to experience that their choices had consequences. They learned to realise that it was up to them to enact change if they wanted to and to take responsibility for that change by consciously making decisions and exploring the options in a situation. Boris explains that the school allowed you to first get ownership of your decisions.

And there’s the other side of the school itself, the spin of that school. Which was about just sort of making children aware to take ownership of decisions. And that decisions that they make, they *can* make them, but they have consequences, pros and cons with them. And letting you sort of fall on your face potentially of the decisions that you make. And then you can come back and look at, why that happened there. What happened there. It was more about life skills, I would say, as a school. (Boris, Individual Interview, p. 2)
Empowerment

Most of the participants (Jack, Pat, Anna and Boris) experienced a sense of empowerment through this. The feeling of empowerment for them is connected to the feeling that they have the ability to enact change and make their own decisions. With going to Sands School, they felt that, for the first time, there were alternatives and opportunities and that they had the power themselves to enact these alternatives. Pat describes that learning that there is always a choice can give you hope in the sense that there is always an alternative to the situations you don’t like.

You know, there’s always a possibility, basically. There’s always hope there is always a possibility there is always a different way of approaching life. So, okay if this doesn’t work, don’t just sit around and moaning. But okay so what do we do then? How do we get around this? So it does... It does give you those tools. (Pat, Individual Interview, p. 29)

For Jack, problems became less problematic, because he started to see them as opportunities. This is in line with the rest of the participants when they describe that they think a good life is about creative living: being able to be creative with solutions. Jack describes this process of slowly feeling more ownership over his own decisions.

So really, it’s a sort of, every problem is an opportunity for you to gain insights and learning a new way and that you can improve something. And I kind of think that that’s more important than any single issue about like academic. (Jack, p. 32)

Everything that you do is now your choice. Practically. There is more a responsibility or new and burden on you, you’re accountable for what happens now. It’s like you can’t just blame the teacher if you had a shit day in the school. It’s like you haven’t found something interesting in a place where essentially there are loads of things to do, and loads of interesting people and opportunities. So you start taking responsibility, and I think that’s such an important part of a wider level. You know, you need to become accountable and be like, oh yeah actually I do have the power to make decisions. (Jack, Individual Interview, 13)

The impact of learning that ‘there is always a choice’ is still visible in the lives of the participants today. Boris, Jack and Matilda describe how this experience has helped them either to become fearless, or not letting fear hold them back from doing what they really want. They also describe how it helps them to take risks and opportunities.
It’s your life and your responsibility

The third key school experience that the participants have in common is in line with the above described experience that there is always a choice. In addition to learning that choice and change is always possible, and that you can enact that change yourself, the participants also learned that this was their own responsibility. The participants describe how they started to realise that this was their own life and that if they wanted their life to change in any way they should not wait for someone else to do it for them: it would be up to them. The participants often use the metaphor of not wanting to be a passenger in life, but taking the responsibility for ‘driving’ your own life forwards.

And if you’re a passenger, then, you don’t develop skills of navigating and you don’t become conscious of your destination. You’re just a passenger in the vehicle that someone else is driving. And that’s the kind of education system that 99 percent of the people come from and 99 percent of society lives in. (Jack, p. 17)

Pat describes how she started to learn about taking responsibility for her own life:

And so I did started understanding about that responsibility. And that all ties back into Sands. You know being responsible for your choices are making choices and being able to. I mean I probably wouldn’t have gone to India because, without that, to make your own choices that that was okay. (Pat, Individual Interview, p. 25).

Taking their life into their own hands is an attitude that connects all the participants together. All of the participants describe this experience as being of impact to them. For Jack, Pat and Boris it was this school experience that made the main impact on them which they still live by today. For others, such as Matilda, their school experience fitted in an already existing life philosophy.

I mean I always think this is my life, this is mine. I can create what I want. You know, and it’s, I can make this, and I can make it healthy and I can make it positive and you know. I can be a bigger person... I can be responsible. I’m in control of those things, at any time of my life. And that is such an amazing feeling, just to go I’ve had enough of those, actually I don’t want to do this anymore. (Matilda, Individual Interview, p. 32)
Interconnectedness between freedom and responsibility

This third key school experience which had a significant impact on the participants is connected to the first described key experience: the sense of freedom which the participants experienced at Sands School. According to the participants, without this free nature of the school, learning about these life skills would not have been possible. The interconnectedness between these first three key school experiences also highlights the participants’ understanding that freedom cannot go without a sense of responsibility.

Three other school experiences which the participants understood as being of impact to them will now be highlighted. The following three school experiences however have been of less significance to the participants, in terms of to what extent they still play a role in their lives today, in comparison with the above three school experiences. Nevertheless, as school experiences in themselves, they were understood by the participants as particularly meaningful.

Sands was like a second home: a personal environment

The participants all describe how Sands formed a unique and personal environment for them. This impact was of less significance for Anna, who experienced Dartington Hall school. For Anna, Dartington Hall school had a much more impressive environment, including the grounds and the resources.

The other participants describe the small scale of Sands being particularly meaningful for them such as the small classes and the school being much more like a big house. Another aspect of this personal environment that they describe is how the teachers and students interact with each other. It had a big impact on the participants that the students were treated equal to the teachers, and that the teachers were much more like friends who you could have equal conversations with. All the participants describe the personal and philosophical conversations about life and the universe with the teachers as having had a big impact on them. The fact that you could have these conversations with your teachers and that there was a lot of space to do so has meant a lot to the participants. For some of the participants, including Jack and Boris the teachers felt like family to them. The other participants experienced Sands as a second home. Walter for example explains how Sands School was experienced as the students’ own environment.
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Everyone sort of has sense of ownership of the school. It does become an environment where you sort of feel comfortable being there… And like to be there… As much as possible and you actually… you know even if, you know, they choose not to study many subjects, and have days when they are not studying any subjects they still come in and in the school and just… Because it’s their environment. (Walter, Individual Interview, p. 18)

Boris explains how he felt like the teachers were his friends and family.

Sean, is really physical. He was the history and the PE teacher. And he really was… The inspirational sort of father figure, sort of guide for me. He was physical, strong, and I’m quite like that. I was like that, not so much now. I needed to burn off energy. And Sean was brilliant in that. He used to come in from Totness, we used to cycle together to school and stuff, for a period of months (...). Their teaching is brilliant. By virtually the fact that they are friends. And I can still go and see them, have a cup of tea. Have a chat. Just put the world to rights. And, they are not my Sir, or my Miss. They are my friends at the end of the day. (Boris, Individual Interview, p. 6)

Feeling acknowledged, respected, listened to

Another school experience which the participants share in their understanding of what had an significant impact on them, was the way they felt that they were treated, for example the fact that their opinion in the school meetings was valued and listened to. The fact that they felt that teachers and students were equal and that there was space for you to be heard, was pointed out by the participants as being particularly meaningful. Jack for instance refers to the intimate time he felt the teachers had for him. Boris explains how the teachers treated everyone individually and how this made him feel respected and acknowledged, and that therefore school finally understood what was good for him and how to help him going forwards. Pat describes how she felt acknowledged and how this helped her to start feeling like she was an okay person after all. Later in the individual interview she described how this was the important start for her to feel like her future could be a positive future.

Yeah, acknowledged, and listen to, and being able to be myself, mainly. Being able to be myself. Started to make me feel like that I was an okay person anyway. And, yeah… I think being every day able to, yeah, be in a place where you had a say. I don’t think I even skipped any school…I didn’t, I think, you know… I went to lessons I got involved. (Pat, Individual Interview, p. 20).
Learning practical and life skills: academic side of things was secondary
The last school experience of impact that will be described here connects all of the above. The school experiences which are mentioned by the participants as most significant are all experiences which refer to the informal side of their school: the personal side, the practical-and life-skills rather than the academic side. In addition, the participants are also unanimous in their opinion that the academic side of the school wasn’t the school’s strong side. Walter for instance refers to the democratic nature of the school, such as the school meetings, as being of high importance to the students. These, by the participants perceived as really exciting aspects of Sands School, highlighted the school’s acknowledgement of the importance of focusing on life skills and not only on academic achievement.

And, you know in a way, the academic school side of things is secondary to the kind of ownership and running of the school community and participating in that. And I loved all of that because that were all of the things that I had been battling against all my life really. Ehm… I’m sure that’s why the school meant so much to me because those things meant so much to me and always had. (Walter, Individual Interview, p. 18)

Anna also acknowledges the role that Sands School had for her in terms of developing life skills. However, she experienced frustration in the way that she felt that the school couldn’t offer provision for her to flourish academically, in the way that she would have wanted to.

So, you know, it has been, there is a lot of life skills that I have learned from there. I don’t feel like I’ve achieved academically. (Anna, Individual Interview, p.18)

Also Pat, for whom Sand school functioned as a life saver, missed a certain degree of academic encouragement.

Overall amazing. I felt at the time, maybe a bit dramatic, but it saved my life really, the direction of it. But the only slight negative was, I wanted to be pushed. I think that I dropped half of my GCSEs. I was taking eight, I dropped half of them. About two weeks before, because I freaked out. And, in hindsight, I would have liked a bit more, I made the choice and that was great. And I made up for it later, but I would have liked a little bit more support and pushing, whether or not I would have been able to continue I’m not sure. I think that’s the only thing. But overall, absolutely, completely positive. (Pat, p. 38)
5.6.2 Conclusions and Implications

The findings of the participants’ understandings of the impact of their school experiences show the following conclusions:

- The three key-school experiences which had a significant impact on the participants are: (1) Freedom to be who you are, (2) There is always a choice and you have the ability to enact change, and (3) It’s your life and your responsibility.

- These three key-understandings, related to the impact of their school experiences, still play a prominent part in the lives of the participants today.

- The participants recognise the informal side of the school, in contrast to the academic side of the school, to have had the biggest impact on them.

It has been indicated that the three key-school experiences point towards the difference in knowledge – in Aristotelian terms of practical knowledge – in relation to the time of the participants before they attended Sands School, where they did not experience living by their moral character-values. The participants describe those three key-understandings to be the main factors that help them during everyday life, even after having left Sands School for many years. These factors appear to help them in terms of leading a happy life, feeling empowered to enact change and recognise opportunities (autonomy), feeling ownership over their life, recognising who they are and choosing what they want in life and what is good for them (authenticity). In other words, this thesis suggests that those three key-understandings, functioning as practical knowledge (Aristotelian incorporated and lived by knowledge), helps the participants to practice their moral character in everyday life.

Thus, this suggests that the difference between being able to live by their moral character-values in difficult situations (after their time at Sands) and not being able to do so (before their time at Sands), is practical and lived-by knowledge of these three key-understandings and the positive experience of these understandings and the participants’ values being lived by.

In terms of future implications for education, this points towards the following. A type of education that can support and help its students to develop and practice their moral character in everyday life should include the following aspects:

1) School as a community:
   - A small scale: to enhance and enable the feelings of belonging and personal character in order to be able to offer acknowledgement of all the students.
- A personal environment which includes a personal and equal relationship between the teachers and the students: to help offer the students a sense of belonging.

2) The above two aspects anchored in a democratic pedagogic approach of freedom:
  - Where the students are free to have a say and an equal vote in school-meetings related to the running of the school: to help offer the students a sense of belonging, ownership and the experience that their voice matters.
  - Where they are also free to make their own decisions such as deciding on their subjects, whether to go to school and what to wear to school: to help the students to learn to take ownership of their decisions, and to enable them the feeling that it’s okay to be who you are.
  - A free space where the students have (or can choose) different options, such as different types of school activities (school-play, school-lunch, working in the vegetable garden etc.): to help the students experience that there are always opportunities.
  - A free space in which academic knowledge and life skills are approached with equal importance, allowing the students and teachers a free space to discuss and experience matters such as: (a) You are free to be who you are, (b) There is always a choice and you have the ability to enact change, (c) You are the one living your life and it is your responsibility to do so (authenticity).

Having now discussed the main research question, the concluding remarks of this chapter can now be discussed, by considering whether the research questions have indeed been answered.

5.7 Conclusion: have the research questions been answered?

Have the research questions been answered and explored with the empirical research as presented in this chapter?

Recapitulating the research questions and process

The above paragraph, in which the participants’ understandings of the impact of their school experiences has been discussed, functions to bring together the findings for the main research questions and shows indeed that the main research question has been answered. The main
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research question is: how do former democratic school students understand the impact of their school experiences in relation to their moral character in everyday life?

In order to answer this, the main research question was split into the three sub-questions which presented the three research domains of the findings: (1) the former democratic school students’ understandings about their moral character, (2) their courses of action in everyday life and finally (3) their understandings of the impact of their school experiences in relation to practising their moral character in everyday life.

This division into three dimensions was made in order to investigate how the former democratic school students understand the impact of their school experiences in relation to their moral character in everyday life. To do so, it was necessary to first explore to what extent the participants are able to practice their moral character-values. This meant that first the understandings in relation to the participants’ moral characters were collected, and then their courses of action in life. In this way – by comparing these two dimensions – it could be explored to what extent there could be seen a correlation or harmonisation between their courses of action and their moral character. In other words, to what extent are the participants able to practice their moral character? Are their actions and behaviours in line with what they say are their most important moral character values?

After having collected the related findings, it could then be explored if their common experiences of attending Sands School might have had any impact in either helping or hindering them in practicing their moral character when having left the school, and in facing the modern challenges of everyday life. So, what have the findings revealed?

What do the findings indicate?

The findings have pointed out that the participants show a significant overlap between what they understand to be their moral character, and their chosen courses of action in life. In other words, their common moral character-values (freedom to be who you are, respect, responsibility, self-knowledge and authenticity) can indeed be recognised in their courses of action. For example, the fact that all the participants have chosen jobs where they can be their own boss, choose their own work-schedules and choose the way they do things harmonises with valuing the freedom to be who you are.

To summarise the presented findings of this chapter, an overview has been created in Table 5.2. The table shows in the first two columns to what extent the participants’ moral
character-values harmonise with their courses of action. The last two columns indicate which factors the participants have identified as being (and still being) helpful to them when practising their moral character in everyday life, in relation to the impact of their school experiences. In other words, the factors which are indicated and can be seen in Table 5.2, are understood by the participants as factors that they relate back to their experiences at Sands. These are all particular life-skill-lessons that they learned, or awarenesses that they have developed, or experiences which still live on today such as the experience that you are in essence who you are and always free to be that person.

And so, with the final dimension being discussed, the research question has been answered. Former democratic school students understand their school experiences to have been of lasting impact, in relation to the practice of their moral character in everyday life, in the following manner.

According to the participants, the informal and personal ‘side’ of the school has taught them several life-skills. There are three main realisations that the participants acquired as a result of attending Sands School which they perceive as being still helpful in their day-to-day living. These are that (a) you are free to be who you are, (b) there is always a choice and you have the ability to enact change, (c) you are the one living your life and it is your responsibility to do so. These three realisations represent the main impact that Sands has had on the participants’ understanding of what they find helpful today when they wish to practice their moral character.

These three realisations reveal two other key-findings. These key-findings suggest in what way moral education – such as is presented by Sands School – could be an effective educational program for helping individuals in developing and practicing their moral character during the course of their life. The three main understandings of the participants all relate to, were made possible by and are anchored in the school’s democratic pedagogic approach of freedom and its community nature. Note that it is not the focus on cultivating students to become good and moral citizens that has helped these former students to essentially become such. Indeed, it has not been what the school has taught, but the way in which the school has taught their students that has proven to be of particular and significant impact to these students.

What these main findings indicate and how they can be understood theoretically will be discussed in the following chapter.
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<th>Courses of action in everyday life in which moral character values are reflected (referring to figure 5.2)</th>
<th>The participants’ key-understandings of which factors help them to practice their moral character in everyday life, as a result of the impact of their school experiences</th>
<th>Manor in which key-understanding helps to practice moral-character-values (such as freedom, respect, responsibility, self knowledge, authenticity)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freedom to be who you are →</td>
<td>• Being their ‘own boss’</td>
<td>1) Freedom – to explore and to be who you are →</td>
<td>In addition to feeling free, which is a moral character-value for the participants in itself, this also allows the participants to feel that it is okay to be who they are, which motivates them to be honest. The freedom to be who you are motivates the participants to open up and be truthful to themselves, which helps them to act authentically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect →</td>
<td>• ‘Aiming to be best possible for others’</td>
<td>2) To be aware that there is always an opportunity, or an alternative choice and that you, yourself, have the ability to always enact change →</td>
<td>The understanding that there is always an opportunity, or an alternative choice and that you, yourself, have the ability to always enact change, gives the participants both a feeling of hope and empowerment. Hope (that there are alternatives available and possible) and the feeling of empowerment helps the participants to live by their moral character-values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility →</td>
<td>• ‘Aiming to be best possible for others’</td>
<td>3) To understand that it’s your life and your responsibility →</td>
<td>The understanding that no one else will be able to lead your life than you, that you are the only one who can live life the way you want to, helps the participants to feel that they have their life in their own hands. This understanding motivates the participants to take ownership and responsibility over their lives and to experience a sense of self-direction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-knowledge →</td>
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Chapter Six

The morality of a non-moral approach to education
6 The morality of a non-moral approach to education

6.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to reflect critically on the main findings of this study and to discuss what these findings could indicate. This will be done by reflecting back on some of the literature presented earlier in this thesis, drawing mainly on the work of Dewey (1916) and Noddings (1998, 2002, 2003), and highlighting some new literature that proves to fit well with the emergent findings, including Dewey’s later work (1938) and Freire (1998). The main argument that will be put forwards concerns the added value which the key findings of this research present in relation to the earlier discussed criteria for effective moral education and the distinction between empty, thin and full notions.

This chapter is therefore structured in the following way: first, it will discuss how the main findings of the role of community and a democratic pedagogy of freedom can be understood in relation to existing theories. Secondly, these understandings will then be related to the earlier discussed criteria for effective moral education.

6.2 The role of freedom and community

The previous chapter has highlighted several aspects of the explored question of how former democratic school students understand the impact of their school experiences in relation to their moral character in everyday life.

As identified in the previous chapter, the participants’ main shared understandings of the impact of their school experiences were: (a) you are free to be who you are, (b) to be aware that there is always a choice in life and that you have the ability to enact change and (c) the understanding that it is your life and you have the responsibility to live it. It is these three understandings that function as ‘tools’ for the participants to practice their moral character. Furthermore, it was indicated that these main understandings were anchored in their school’s democratic pedagogy of freedom and, according to the participants, the nature of the school as a personal community.

Before elaborating on the role of freedom and community, it is helpful to note that the impact of these two core school strategies can be understood in a particular manner. As described in Chapter five (see e.g. “it saved my life vs. continuation of upbringing”, p. 117),
the type of education which was offered by Sands School was described by three of the participants to be life changing and was described as a shift in their lives. The participants (e.g. Jack, Pat and Boris) described that it changed for instance the way they thought education could be, it changed the direction of their lives drastically and it changed and enhanced their personal wellbeing and happiness in general. Such a shift reflects quite a profound change in an individual’s life. Such shifts echo what Lees (2014) and Neuman and Aviram (2003) describe in their work – which they call a Kuhnian shift or discovery – referring to Kuhn’s theories of paradigm shifts. Lees (2014) explains that one can speak of a Kuhnian shift if it concerns a shift which changes an individual’s perception, their experiences of the world around them, and “the way one lives one’s life and sees the world and self” (p. 8). According to Lees (2014) when an individual experiences a transformation of a concept, such as what they think education would look like, it can manifest in an actual transformation of the individual. It can indeed be suggested that the shifts described by the participants can be interpreted as such. Neuman and Aviram (2003) specify this transformation into two central concepts: “(a) awakening and taking responsibility; (b) flexibility and an easy-going approach”. These two concepts are indeed both recognisable in the accounts of the participants (see Chapter five). For example, the participants have described that they had observed a shift in their lives in for instance the manner in which they now were taking responsibility in their lives, and starting to increasingly enjoy life (see e.g. Jack’s quote, p. 120).

Now the weight of the impact of the school’s democratic pedagogy of freedom and the nature of the school as a personal community has been addressed, the question left to explore is how this democratic pedagogy of freedom and the role of the school as a community can be understood.

### 6.2.1 A democratic pedagogy of freedom

The first way that points towards a particular democratic pedagogy of freedom, relates to the freedom which the participants experienced in having a choice in matters that concern them: being free to choose what to study, being free to decide if they want to attend lessons, etc. The participants have described this aspect of freedom as having had a significant impact on them. According to the participants, this freedom of choice taught them not only how to choose, but also to take the responsibility for their choices:
And there’s the other side of the school itself, the spin of that school. Which was about just sort of making children aware to take ownership of decisions. And that decisions that they make, they can make them, but they have consequences, pros and cons with them. And letting you sort of fall on your face potentially of the decisions that you make. And then you can come back and look at, why that happened there. (Boris, Individual Interview, p. 2)

Apart from the democratic aspects of having an equal vote, and a choice in their education etc. the participants’ understandings of the impact of their school experiences points towards another aspect of freedom: the freedom to be who you are. The understandings of the participants indicate that the pedagogic approach of Sands School goes beyond the democratic aspects of being free to choose whether to attend lessons and being free to have a vote in the school meetings. The participants have described the impact of this approach of freedom to include being respected for who you are, being acknowledged and being allowed to make mistakes. The participants have referred to this freedom by pointing towards the equal nature of their relation to their teachers. With the teachers and students treating each other equally, the participants were able to have dialogues and other types of philosophical conversations with them.

This particular democratic approach with such a focus on freedom can be recognised in different theories in relation to moral and democratic education. The main argument which can be found for such an educational approach of freedom entails the perspective that only through allowing freedom, can the student learn. In this sense, learning refers to both developing knowledge and developing one’s being.

Such a democratic pedagogy was most crucial to Dewey (1916). Dewey insisted that learning could only happen through interaction, which refers to Dewey’s focus of experience in education (1938). Learning can only take place through participation, through interaction and a shared process of inquiry which cannot happen through traditional and authoritarian approaches where the teacher is the sender and the student is the mere receiver (Biesta, 2006). As discussed earlier in this thesis, according to Dewey (1916), the only way a child can construct their values, to learn a sense of self-direction in life, to develop a sense of responsibility, is through experience. Therefore, the school must create an environment where the student can experience such things (Dewey, 1938). Such experiences, interactions and a shared processes of inquiry cannot take place within a school model where the teacher and the student aren’t equal, and where the student isn’t free to interact and participate in a cooperative manner with the lessons.
In *Experience and Education* Dewey (1938) takes extra care to emphasise the importance of freedom, which not only allows the student to learn mentally and physically in the sense of staying healthy, but is also crucial in putting *being* before *seeming*, which is a necessity for teachers if they want their teaching to meet the needs of their students:

> Without its [freedom’s] existence it is practically impossible for a teacher to gain knowledge of the individuals with whom he is concerned. Enforced quiet and acquiescence prevent pupils from disclosing their real natures. (Dewey, 1938, p. 62)

The disclosure of the real nature of the student, according to Dewey (1938), is essential for the student to be able to develop fully. According to Dewey, we only become who we are through our participation with the social. And therefore the freedom to interact with each other within education is a necessity. Indeed, this fits with the findings which indicated that the former students of Sands connect their experience of freedom to ‘being able to be who they are’ in addition to being free in a democratic way such as being able to make their own choices and having a vote in the school meeting:

> there’s a balance in there. And that’s what I mean about being, if you’re allowed to explore and find your own boundaries. And your own kind of knowledge of things, then you do get healthy boundaries. Because you do have to interact, you do have to kind of meet and then you have to make a decision from that place. (Matilda, Individual Interview, p. 29)

Another source of literature which fits with the identified findings, and is in line with Dewey’s approach, comes from Freire (1998). Freire writes extensively about the role of freedom in education, and many factors of his theory fit with the emergent data of this thesis. The key-findings of the participants’ understandings in relation to the importance of knowing that there is always a choice and the knowledge that this comes with the responsibility to live your own life, are reflected in Freire’s perspective about the relation between autonomy and freedom:

> Autonomy is a process of becoming oneself, a process of maturing, of coming to be. It does not happen on a given date. In this sense, a pedagogy of autonomy should be centered on experiences that stimulate decision making and responsibility, in other words, on experiences that respect freedom. (Freire, 1998, p. 98)

In this sense, freedom is crucial in education for students to be allowed the space to make their own decisions. According to Freire (1998) it is through making decisions that an
individual can learn to decide, and the consequences of such a decision – when experienced by the student – is what makes the decision-making process a responsible one.

Again, this approach to education does not consider freedom as a vehicle or necessary space to instil particular skills in the students. On the contrary, both Dewey’s (1916, 1938) and Freire’s (1998) approach of freedom points towards its necessity for students to develop their ‘being’. Indeed, Freire (1998) describes that our being in the world is necessarily being with the world: “our being is a being with” (p. 57). By this, Freire means that individuals are incomplete, and that it is through our being aware of this incompleteness that education becomes possible. Being with the world then means that individuals, as being incomplete, are eternal seekers in the world with our dreams, with making history, with using our hands, with learning and with our presence (Freire, 1998). Just like Dewey (1916), teaching according to Freire (1998) is not just a matter of transferring knowledge. It is about providing spaces to the students in order for them to be free in being curious about their search of their being and in order for them to be free to have dialogues. According to Freire (1998) having true dialogues (and thus freedom) are crucial for education, for it is through dialogues that students can “learn and grow by confronting their differences” (p. 59). Indeed, this is similar to Dewey’s (1916, 1938) perspective on the role of freedom in allowing students to interact, to participate and for the shared process of inquiry. Again, this approach of freedom, as an emphasis on being with, and learning through dialogues, fits with the research findings. The findings have pointed out that the participants have understood the main impact of their education to have been these free spaces, which to them meant first and foremost an experience of that it was okay to ‘be’:

Yeah, acknowledged, and listen to, and being able to be myself, mainly. Being able to be myself. Started to make me feel like that I was an okay person anyway. And, yeah… I think being every day able to, yeah, be in a place where you had a say. I don’t think I even skipped any school… I didn’t, I think, you know… I went to lessons I got involved. (Pat, Individual Interview, p. 20).

One last distinction of this democratic approach to freedom which should be made, is how this freedom should be understood in relation to boundaries and authority. Freedom in this sense does not mean freedom without limits. On the contrary, the findings have pointed out that the former students of Sands understand the impact of their school in terms of taking responsibility for their choices and for their life. Indeed, the participants, as can be read in Matilda’s quote above, describe an appreciation for learning about their boundaries. This
notion is also reflected in Freire’s (1998) perspective of the importance of freedom in education. For Freire (1998) “freedom is not the absence of limits” (p. 99). The freedom as discussed here, should be understood as a freedom where there is a mutual respect between authority (discipline) and freedom:

Authoritarianism is the rapture in favour of authority against freedom. And unbridled freedom is the rapture in favour of freedom against authority. Both authoritarianism and freedom with no bounds are undisciplined forms of behaviour that deny what I am calling the ontological vocation of being. (Freire, 1998, p. 83)

This last distinction reflects even more deeply on what manner this democratic pedagogy of freedom can be understood. This distinction indicates that the pedagogy, in which the participants’ main understandings were able to be formed, was not a pedagogy that was merely curriculum-centred where there is no freedom for the student and the student is the receiver of the information given by the teacher as sender (Biesta, 2006). But these understandings were also not formed through an opposite pedagogic approach where anything goes and freedom is considered to be limitless. Considerations for other people’s needs, responsibility for one’s actions and choices have been indicated in the findings to form an important part of this democratic approach of freedom. In this sense, this democratic approach of freedom should not be interpreted as an individualistic approach either. Indeed, the development of the student’s being is considered to be equally important to the development of the student’s knowledge. But this development of being is crucially imbedded in the social space (Dewey, 1972). In addition, for Dewey (1972) this relation to the social is also moral:

What the normal child continuously needs is not so much isolated moral lessons instilling in him the importance of truthfulness and honesty, or the beneficial results that follow from some particular act of patriotism, etc. It is the formation of habits of social imagination and conception. (Dewey, 1972, p. 72)

In other words, this development of the individual’s being is perceived as a process which involves interaction with others. To repeat Dewey (1916, 1938), we become who we are through our participation with social space. This points out to the second factor which the findings have indicated as being of importance for the participants, which is the role of the school as a personal community.
6.2.2 The role of community

The findings have indicated that the participants have understood the impact of their school experiences mainly to have come from the informal side of the school. With this informal side, the participants mean that it was the ‘life-skills’ which they learned from the school that they considered to have had the biggest impact on them. These life-skills are considered by the students to be those lessons which deviated from the lessons about certain subjects. They considered the democratic factor such as the school meetings, or preparing the school lunch together, to be part of this informal side. But this informal side also refers to what the participants have called the personal character of the school in the sense of it being a place where the students ‘liked to be’ and where they felt it was ‘a home away from home’.

It does become an environment where you sort of feel comfortable being there…And like to be there […]. And, you know in a way, the academic school side of things is secondary to the kind of ownership and running of the school community and participating in that. And I loved all of that because that were all of the things that I had been battling against all my life really. Ehm… I’m sure that’s why the school meant so much to me because those things meant so much to me and always had. (Walter, Individual Interview, p. 17)

Again, it is Dewey (1916) who elaborates on the importance of a social environment where it is not only possible to experience social life, but also where it is possible for the students to be good. In other words, the school should represent an environment which invites and allows the students the space to be good.

Noddings (2002) draws on this perspective of Dewey in relation to the importance of the school as a community by emphasising the importance for a student to experience a sense of belonging. The quote above reflects the finding that indicated that the participants experienced a sense of belonging in the personal character of the school. This was enhanced by the small scale of the school, by the sense of ownership due to the democratic elements of the school, but also by the equal relations between the teachers and the students which made the teachers be perceived as friends rather than your ‘mister or your misses’ (Boris, 2015).

Noddings (2002) describes that “one need satisfied by community is identity or recognition” (p. 221). Noddings’ (2002) approach of the school as a community fits with what the findings have indicated. Noddings (2002) argues that without a sense of belonging, it is easy for individuals to experience feelings of rejection and loneliness, which can lead to all kinds of disruptive behaviour. For Noddings, the school plays an important role in preventing all kinds of disruptive behaviour and unhappiness which arise from feelings of loneliness and
rejection. Jack for instance described that it was through this personal character of the school, where people for the first time in his life suddenly had ‘intimate time’ for him, that he slowly became happier. And he described that this sense of belonging, which he increasingly felt for the school, allowed him to become interested again in having empathy for himself and others, and learning in general.

According to Noddings (2002), in this sense, educating through democratic methods – which includes an approach of freedom and equality – and creating an environment of community in the school, is educating for happiness. In fact, if one wants to educate for democracy, this should be done through educating for happiness (Noddings, 2003).

In addition, it is through happiness, according to Noddings (2003), that the chance for disruptive behaviour gets reduced. Hence, as Noddings (2003) argues, it needs to be acknowledged that chances of individuals acting in an undemocratic and immoral manner will be increased if they feel deeply unhappy, lonely or rejected. Therefore, education for happiness is not only crucial for the wellbeing and the development of the student, but also in turn for contributing to creating democratic ways of living (Noddings, 2003). Whether this means individuals are able to practice their moral character even if they’re unhappy, and how moral character could be practiced despite situations which are characterised by immoral circumstances, is an important question to be asked, but one that cannot be explored and done justice within the scope of this study.

It can however now be discussed what can be understood from the above connections between the research findings and the available literature in relation to what this means for effective moral education.

6.3 The morality of a non-moral approach to education

6.3.1 A full notion of moral education: the morality of a non-moral approach to education
The connection between the literature and the findings leads to a conclusion in relation to what aspects of education might help students in developing and practicing their moral character in everyday life, once they have left the environment of the school. The findings indicate that according to the participants the biggest impact of their education – in which their main three understandings are anchored – has been (1) the personal character of the school as a community and (2) the democratic pedagogy of freedom.
This suggests that those factors, which seem to have been helpful for the participants in practicing their moral character, are anchored in the manner of how the students were taught to a greater extent than what was taught. Hence, the democratic character, the freedom and the community feeling, which the former democratic students have described, are factors related to a pedagogic approach.

This poses an important question in relation to the nature of the majority of current education programs. As has been argued in the beginning of this thesis, the majority of moral education programs understand moral education to be a separate subject in the school’s curriculum such as ‘ethics’ (Davidson, Lickona & Khmelkov, 2008). Most of the moral education programs and current related research therefore focus their attention on what to teach (Berkowitz, 2009). There is currently a variety of research available about which virtues and moral values schools should cultivate. In addition, the manner in which those virtues are then taught, are most often done in a traditional and authoritarian way where the teacher is providing the information for the students.

However, the findings of this research suggest that it is not focusing on and cultivating moral values which helps the students develop and practice their own moral values. Rather, it is a particular environment and approach of allowing the students space in which the students are set free — in order to explore their own values, their own boundaries and first and foremost their own being — which has helped the participants in practicing their moral character later in life.

The heading of this section summarises the conclusion of this research. The morality of a non-moral approach to education, in this sense, proposes that by focusing on the student’s being rather than on cultivating moral values, the student can enjoy an education which is inherently moral. Hence, as the findings of this research suggest, through an educational approach which allows the students the space to be who they are, where they are free to make their own decisions and are held responsible for them, where they have the freedom to have a say in their own education, the running of the school, where they are equal to their teachers, where they have the space to explore their own boundaries, or in short: where they are allowed the space to ‘be’ in a school which offers a community where everyone can ‘be’, the development of their moral character can indeed take place in a manner which stays with the students for many years after having left the school (e.g. Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1998; Noddings, 2002).
The former democratic school students have not described having had any lessons about virtues, moral values, or any other types of morality. However, the findings indicate that they have indeed developed at least aspects of their moral character, according to the participants, as a result of their attendance at Sands School. Indeed, referring back to Dewey’s (1916, 1938) notion of democratic education, it is in allowing the students the freedom to experience in education, which makes their education intrinsically moral.

Therefore, the aspect of morality of a full notion of education, refers to its focus on allowing the students the freedom to experience and to be. In other words, this does not entail a focus on morality or cultivating moral virtues. Therefore it can be argued that the morality of a full notion of moral education lies in its non-moral focus.

With this final implication for moral education in mind, the criteria for an effective moral education can be discussed.

6.3.2 PRIME criteria revisited

One of the aims of exploring the research question of how former democratic school students understand the impact of their school experiences in relation to their moral character in everyday life, was to investigate what possible factors of moral education could be helpful to individuals on a longer-term basis, in relation to practicing their moral character in everyday life. It was argued that one reference point for what an effective full notion of moral education should entail, could be understood through Berkowitz’ (2009) PRIME criteria.

According to Berkowitz (2009), for moral education to be productive it should be Putting academics in perspective, focus on Relationship Building, work with Intrinsic Motivation of students rather than a reward/punishment method, it should be Modelling Goodness, and Empowering Students through methods of cooperative learning. By reflecting back on these criteria, it can be concluded that the aspects of his PRIME model are indeed recognisable in the manner of teaching in Sands School as perceived by the participants. Indeed, the participants have described how they consider the main focus of school not to have been on academic achievement, and how their relationships to their teachers and each other played a central role in terms of feeling connected and having friends. In addition it is clear from the data that the school did not work with a reward and punishment method. On the contrary, the students were free to decide matters such as whether to go to lessons or not. Furthermore, the modelling is reflected in how some of the participants perceived their
teachers as role models. Finally, the empowering aspect of the PRIME model is reflected in the school’s democratic pedagogy of freedom.

However, the findings of this research do suggest that an additional consideration should be added to this PRIME model. Considering that a democratic pedagogy of freedom and the role of the school as a community have been indicated as the two main factors of impact on helping the participants to practise their moral character in life, the model seems to lack such emphasis on pedagogy. Indeed, the PRIME criteria can be understood as criteria which should be included within a pedagogy or educational approach. However, such criteria can easily be misinterpreted as capable of being integrated in a traditional authoritarian manner of teaching. Even the criteria of empowering students, which refers to cooperative learning, does not emphasise that this should happen through allowing students space to be free to make their own decisions. Hence, this could be interpreted as merely given an ethics assignment which should be made through group-work, which can still exist in an authoritarian approach.

It could be that Berkowitz (2009) has formulated his PRIME model in such a manner on purpose. This does allow the model to be integrated in many different educational programs and manners of teaching. However, if the findings of this research indeed indicate such a significant value to effective moral education, its emphasis would contribute to enhancing the quality of education in general. Hence, the argument which the above findings have indicated is that a full notion of moral education exists in the entire pedagogic approach of a school, and not merely in one subject.

Therefore this thesis suggests that this aspect of a ‘democratic pedagogy of freedom and community’ should be added to Berkowitz’s (2009) criteria simply by adding the letter ‘d’, to make the model PRIME-D. In this sense, it is argued that for the PRIME model to truly function as an effective model, it should prepare its students for life through a democratic approach of freedom and community. In this way, it can be argued that such a full notion of moral education is PRIME-D.

6.4 Concluding critical remarks: directions and dilemmas for democratic education?

This chapter will conclude with some critical remarks that can be made as a result of the above indications of the findings of this research. These critical remarks will be described by briefly stating two paradoxes in which those remarks are grounded.
6.4.1 The paradox of personal flourishing in modern times

One of the main critiques that democratic education, with a focus on an approach of freedom, often receives is that it is ‘too individualistic’. Some theorists and educationists (e.g. Biesta, 2006) argue that an educational program which focusses primarily on the flourishing of the pupil has in fact become the victim of individualism as a result of neoliberal politics in modern times, such as described earlier in this thesis by Brown (2015), Couldry (2010) and Taylor (1994).

This is an important remark to notice, since this thesis started off by arguing that empowering individuals in practicing their moral character in everyday life was aimed to help individuals in dealing with the related challenges of the liquid and modern times. One of those challenges was described as the possibility that individuals are becoming ‘entrepreneurial subjects’, referring to Brown (2015) and Taylor (1994), as a result of a demoralisation of the self into a mere consumer on the global labor market – becoming victimised by those neoliberal politics.

Indeed, the courses of action of the participants seem entrepreneurial in their level of individual proactiveness such as setting up their own business. The question which should then be posed is, whether this indicates a paradox? In other words, does focussing on the flourishing pupil as an educational aim mean that the student is treated in exactly the way as they would be done with a neoliberal perspective on education?

According to the perspective of this thesis, the short answer is simply ‘no’. One of the aims of introducing the empty, thin and full categorisation of moral education was to be able to distinguish those educational aims. Indeed, there are moral education programs, referred to in this thesis by the empty and thin notions of moral education, which can be considered to include such an ‘entrepreneurial’ focus within their moral education curriculum (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). Where the full notion of moral education can be distinguished from the empty and thin notions is both in their interpretation of their educational aims and in their pedagogic approach. It has been argued that there are moral education programs which use their focus on enhancing personal flourishing as a means to an end for enhancing for example academic achievement. A full notion of moral education considers focussing on the flourishing and well-being of the students as an end in itself. Only an approach which values the flourishing of the student as an end in itself can be understood as a non-instrumental approach and can therefore not be considered to follow a neoliberal agenda. In addition, it is the democratic pedagogic approach of freedom that sets the full notion of moral education apart from the
empty and the thin notions. Hence, as has been argued, such an approach considers the students to learn and develop crucially through their interaction and shared inquiry and value construction with the social space of the school, their peers, their students and the environment of the school. Such an approach can therefore not be considered to be individualistic.

It should be noted however, that despite the intentions of any school, the school will always to some extent depend on the existing structures, rules and regulations from the dominant governmental order (Couldry, 2010; Brown, 2015; Woods, 2011). In this sense, if this governmental order does follow rules and regulations which include an individualistic, entrepreneurial or neoliberal agenda, all schools will be forced to share such an agenda to some extent.

This leads to the second paradox which can be discussed.

6.4.2 The paradox of the democratic school as alternative education

Another critical remark which follows out of the indications of the findings is related to the fact that Sands School is a fee-paying alternative school. This points towards two critical considerations. First, although Sands School follows a democratic pedagogic approach which includes notions of equality, by being a fee-paying school, it does not become equally available to everyone. Despite the fact that Sands School offers scholarships for children from less advantaged backgrounds, the barrier of the tuition fees results in the fact that the majority of Sands’ students will have to come from a middle class background in order to be able to afford their attendance. This is problematic to the extent that, according to Dewey (1916), in order to offer a true democratic environment in which the student can develop through interaction with the social space in the fullest way, a social group with many differences is preferred over an isolated group (Biesta, 2006). In this way, Sands School cannot offer such plurality within its environment. However, as mentioned in the first paradox, this is mostly due to the fact that Sands School is tied to the rules and regulations from the dominant governmental order that it has to answer to. This ties into the second critical consideration.

Within the current English government, democratic schools such as Sands School, are considered to offer alternative education in contrast to the standard of what the English government considers to be mainstream education (White Paper, 2010). This means that for schools to be ‘free’ from the mainstream manner of teaching they have to be considered as an independent school (such as a ‘public school’ or a ‘free school’) as opposed to a state school
This means that the school cannot be ‘free’ to attend for everyone, as the school is deemed to be a fee-paying school. As has been argued before, the mainstream method of teaching in England cannot be considered as democratic education (Fielding, 2004).

This indicates a crucial paradox in relation to mainstream and democratic education within Britain. Namely the paradox that mainstream education in Britain, which is supposed to be a democracy, is indeed not democratic education. Furthermore, in order to be a democratic school within the democracy of Britain, the school must become an alternative and thus fee-paying school in order to be allowed to exist. This is problematic in consideration of the most crucial pillars of democracy which points towards the importance of equality (Nussbaum, 2006).

This chapter will therefore conclude by posing an important question in relation to future recommendations. If it is indeed accepted that the role of education is crucial both for the development and wellbeing of individuals themselves, and for maintaining a healthy democracy in terms of educating individuals to become critical thinkers and moral beings (e.g. Brown, 2015; Nussbaum, 2006), then this thesis recommends that the regulations around what should be considered as free mainstream education and fee-paying education should be revisited. However, with the current situation in mind, this thesis suggests that the question which should be posed is the following: how can mainstream schools continue their current pedagogical approach – which is, referring to Berkowitz and Bier (2004) authoritarian and one-way in nature – and also allow their students to develop their being in such a manner that they will feel capable of practicing their moral character in everyday life? The challenge is especially great when it is a different educational approach of interaction with social space that seems to be the key for such development, and which is not adoptable by authoritarian manners of teaching. This is a question however which cannot be explored within the scale of this thesis and is therefore suggested here as possible food for thought for future research.
Chapter Seven

Conclusions and future directions
7 Conclusions and future directions

7.1 Introduction

This final chapter aims to offer a concluding overview of the research project in its entirety. In order to do so, a brief summary will be given of the research process to highlight the leading arguments of this thesis and the related indications of the findings. In the second part some critical reflections will be offered concerning the research. Finally, this chapter will conclude by highlighting in what manner the conclusions of this thesis can contribute to a wider academic debate, and how this results into suggestions for future research.

7.2 The morality of a non-moral approach to freedom: the role of a democratic pedagogy of freedom and community for moral character in practice

It was argued that the main research question which has been explored, how do former democratic school students understand the impact of their school experiences in relation to their moral character in everyday life, is embedded in a growing concern for the place and development of moral values in people’s lives. It was acknowledged that there are multiple perspectives in which this concern is anchored. This thesis however has chosen to view this concern from the perspective of a growing demoralisation in society and related challenges for both individuals and democracy, as a consequence of the nature of modern times. The main argument put forward was that the development and practice of moral values plays a central role in enhancing individuals’ wellbeing and happiness and contributes to the possibility of living a full and flourishing life.

As discussed, in light of the various concerns related to demoralisation, moral education has experienced a growing international interest (Walker, Roberts, & Kristjánsson, 2013). However, the aims and pedagogy vary widely across different notions of moral education. Most research currently available is limited to a focus on moral cognition and does not transcend exploring the scope of the classroom (Seider, 2012). This thesis therefore aimed to focus specifically on which sustaining factors a moral education program might offer to its students for practicing their moral character in everyday life. In order to do so, it was argued to explore the experiences of former students from what can be considered a ‘full notion’ of moral education.
However, the majority of schools, if implementing moral education in any way, do this in a narrow way and thin manner. In this sense, moral education is considered to be a separate subject of the school’s curriculum, often called ‘citizenship education’ or ‘ethics’. And the mode of teaching happens mostly through the teachers providing the students with knowledge about citizenship-rights and virtues. The main idea that lies behind such an approach is that teaching about virtues can cultivate the students to act more virtuously. The main purpose of schools making an effort in cultivating virtues varies from enhancing academic success to cultivating good and democratic citizens. In this sense, the main aim of most moral education programs which are empty or thin notions consider moral education as a means to an end (Gill & Thomson, 2013).

In contrast, in line with Dewey’s (1916, 1938, 1972) views on education, Berkowitz’ PRIME criteria was acknowledged as a full notion of moral education. This refers to a moral education program which is not limited to one subject of the curriculum but has a curriculum wide approach. In addition, by referring to Dewey’s (1916, 1938, 1972) theories, it was argued that the fuller the notion of moral education, the more helpful this could be for the development of the student’s moral character. In England, the Devon area has historically been characterised as an educational hub for innovative pedagogical approaches (Gribble, 2006), which have indeed been recorded to adopt holistic pedagogies involving the entire environment of the school. Therefore, in order to explore in particular a full notion of education, Sands School – which is one of the two only secondary fully democratic schools in Britain – was chosen as the sample school of this study.

Through a qualitative narrative approach with a life history method of inquiry, six former students from Sands School were interviewed. The narrative method of inquiry provided a richness of data and portrayals were set up from each participant. Through thematic analyses of these portrayals there were different themes emerging which could then be categorised. In order to make sense of the data, the findings were divided into three dimensions which were compared with each other: the participants’ understanding of their moral character, their courses of action in life and their school experiences.

The data showed that there is a significant overlap between what the participants stand for in life, and their courses of action. These findings indicated that there were three main understandings which could be recognised, all presenting understandings which the participants considered to help them with practising their moral character in everyday life. According to the participants, it was due to their school experiences at Sands that they started
to develop these understandings, which were: the importance to realise that (a) you are free to be who you are, (b) to be aware that there is always a choice in life and that you have the ability to enact change and (c) the understanding that it is your life and you have the responsibility to live it.

This indicated the following conclusion. The educational factors which helped the participants to develop those understandings are anchored both in the personal and informal character of the school as a community, and secondly in the democratic pedagogy of freedom. The literature which was then explored created a deeper understanding of what these two main educational factors mean and in what way they could have helped the participants to practice their moral character later on in life.

The role of the community (Noddings, 2003) emerged as playing a crucial role in enhancing a sense of belonging for the participants, which could in turn help the participants to become happier and increase their empathy for themselves and others around them. The democratic pedagogy of freedom emerged as another crucial cornerstone for making a moral education program particularly meaningful. Through the work of Dewey (1916, 1938) and Freire (1998) it could be understood that freedom in this sense meant not only the freedom for the students to choose their own school matters, but most profoundly a freedom and a space to be who they are. It was concluded that it was offering such a social environment of freedom that allowed the students to learn through experience, through participation and through shared manners of inquiry. This is, according to Dewey (1916) how individuals can develop who they are, because they become through their interactions with social space. In this sense, Sands’ pedagogy represents neither a curriculum-centred approach, nor an individualistic-centred approach. It was then argued that such an interaction with social space would not be possible in a non-free and non-community type approach to education, or, in other words, in the majority of traditional mainstream and authoritarian schools (Biesta, 2006).

It was therefore concluded that the morality of a true and full moral education program lies in its non-moral focus. The findings of this research indicate that it is not through focussing on what moral values or virtues to teach – which is the main focus of the majority of moral education programs – but how to teach which makes all the difference. Indeed, the participants did not get taught to develop any particular moral values, but their life stories disclosed a richness of their developed moral characters and their abilities to stay true to those in remarkable ways throughout the courses of their lives.
7.3 Critical reflections

The ethnicity and socioeconomic background of the participants, due to, for example, Sands’ geographical location, meant that the majority of the former students were white and middle-class. For these reasons, if, for the purpose of future studies, one wanted to build upon the given findings of this thesis, it could therefore be a valuable contribution to extend this research to a comparative research in order to reach a bigger scope for generalisations and to include a wider range of ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. This was unfortunately not possible in consideration of the scope of this MPhil thesis and the importance which was put on researching the former students’ life stories in an in-depth manner and thus focusing on quality rather than quantity (Wengraf, 2001).

7.4 Contributions and future directions

This thesis offers a rich grounding for future research with regard to the educational factors that might contribute to the cultivation of individuals’ moral character. The findings of this thesis do not intend, due to the small scale of the study, to offer generalisations. Instead, through the rich and in-depth nature of the data, the findings offer certain indications that can contribute to future research for deeper explorations. These indications can contribute in the following manner.

This thesis has contributed to the academic debate by exploring the notion of moral character and by investigating which moral character values are considered to be valuable by individuals in dealing with the challenges associated with modern times. In addition, this thesis contributed to the academic debate in relation to possible effective and meaningful moral education programs, by focussing on which factors might hold a sustaining impact on its students once they have left the school.

Furthermore, the above has resulted in a concrete suggestion for future determinations of meaningful moral education programs regarding their teaching practices. The findings of this thesis in particular highlighted that, in order for a moral education program to deliver a full and meaningful notion, it is advisable that attention is given primarily to the pedagogical approach of the program. This thesis suggests that creating both a personal character of community in a school and adopting a democratic pedagogy of freedom are profound educational elements for allowing individuals to develop their moral character in a sustainable
manner. Indeed, it was concluded that the importance and meaningfulness of a moral education program does not lie in its focus on *what* to teach, but *how* to teach. In fact, it was argued that the true morality of an educational program lies in its non-moral focus and thus its consideration of the students’ personal flourishing as a goal in itself.

However, with the above concluding indications and the contrasting authoritarian nature of the majority of current moral education programs in mind, this thesis will therefore conclude with posing a critical question for future considerations: how can mainstream education within Britain ensure such a meaningful climate which allows its students to develop their being, enhances their general wellbeing, flourishing, critical thinking and the development of their moral character, while having adopted an authoritarian approach?

### 7.5 Final reflections from the researcher

More than anything else, on a personal level this research project has functioned as a vehicle: embarking me on a journey that has taken me deep into my own understandings about moral character, about the role of and relationship between education, life, meaning, the self and society. By doing so, all my own foundations of knowledge and understanding were questioned and challenged. While writing about developing life-skills, I had to develop life-skills. While writing about the importance of flourishing, I had to make decisions to allow my own. This thesis has functioned as a friend, as a teacher, as a mountain that needed climbing and finally as the realisation that I have been on top of that mountain all along.

The project has functioned both as an end in itself, and as a chapter of a bigger story. I welcome the change that comes with parting from the project, for when one chapter closes another one opens. Professionally, closing this chapter means that I will continue with making an effort – now in a more grounded manner – to help creating spaces within and around education in order to allow students to flourish in their own being.
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Exploring former democratic school students’ moral character in everyday life

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Appendices
Appendix A: Terminology

Considering the diversity of definitions of the main theme of moral character and moral education, a short overview of definitions – provided by the literature – which are used in this research is provided here.

**Moral identity**, as defined by Larry Nucci as ‘the extent to which individuals integrate their morality into their subjective sense of personal identity’ (2001, p. 128).

**Character**, defined by Berkowitz (2011) as ‘a set of psychosocial characteristics that motivate and enable individuals to function as competent moral agents’ (p. 3). And by Park (2004) who explains that character ‘is the entire set of positive traits that have emerged across cultures and throughout history as important for good life’ (p. 46).

**Virtues** ‘are the core characteristics valued by moral philosophers and religious thinkers: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence’ (Park, 2004, p. 46).

**Character Strengths** ‘are the psychological ingredients – processes or mechanisms – that define the virtues’ (Park, 2004, p. 46).

**Performance character** refers to the qualities of character related to effort, perseverance, self-discipline and other qualities that an individual would need in order to ‘realize one’s potential’ (Seider, 2012, p. 32). Performance character is therefore the part of character including behavioural skills and psychological capacities that enables the individual to actually put their character into practice (Arthur, 2014).

**Moral character** entails a set of qualities that are needed for ‘successful interpersonal relationships and ethical behavior’ (Seider, 2012, p. 32). Moral character is about what is being intrinsically experienced and viewed as good by the individual, not only for themselves but also for the people around them. This means that moral character is mostly grounded in the individual’s relationships and interactions with the people around them (Seider, 2012). Character habits that are related to moral character enable the individual to ‘respond well to situations in any area of experience’ (Arthur, 2014, p. 14).

**Civic character** is related to an individual’s role ‘within the local, national and global communities’ (Seider, 2012, p. 33).

**Moral education** as a full notion, is a curriculum wide approach, valuing character and academic development as two sides of the same coin. (Berkowitz, 2009)
### Appendix B: Eleven requirements for effective moral education of Berkowitz and Bier (2004)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Quality of implementation</td>
<td>Studies have shown that for character education to truly be effective “it must be fully and accurately delivered” (Berkowitz &amp; Bier, 2004, p. 75). Meaning, implementers should be on top of this and “ensure such fidelity” (2004, p. 75).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Comprehensive, multifaceted character education</td>
<td>Research shows that the most effective moral education initiatives are the ones which offering a school wide and multifaceted approaches. Including elements such as: “classroom management, curricular, social-skill training, parent involvement, and/or school reform elements” (Berkowitz &amp; Bier, 2004, p. 76).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Student bonding to school</td>
<td>It has been demonstrated that the emotional attachment, or the belonging of a student to his or her school and classroom functions represent a central importance to moral education, as a “critical mediating factor” (Berkowitz &amp; Bier, 2004, p. 76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Leadership is key</td>
<td>According to Berkowitz the school leader of the school principal’s role is essential and “most critical individual in the success or failure of a character-education initiative” (Berkowitz &amp; Bier, 2004, p. 77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Character education is good education</td>
<td>Moral education represents the opposite approach in relation to “the current climate of high-stakes standardized testing in schools” (Berkowitz &amp; Bier, 2004, p. 78). The characteristics of moral (or character) education (such as collaborative learning, opportunities for student reflection, and student empowerment) point out that moral education can be understood as good education in general.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Character as primary prevention</td>
<td>Research points out that moral education programs have demonstrated to “both reduce risky behaviour and promote positive character development” (Berkowitz &amp; Bier, 2004, p. 79)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Staff development</td>
<td>In line with the importance of the correct implementation, Berkowitz &amp; Bier (2004) argue that for appropriate implementation staff development is crucial. The staff needs to understand the initiative and need to value it themselves for it to be implemented effectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Direct skill building</td>
<td>This relates to “the training of interpersonal, emotional and moral skills” (Berkowitz &amp; Bier, 2004, p. 79). The underlying idea is based upon an Aristotelian principle that training particular behaviour can turn behaviour into incorporated virtues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Parent involvement</td>
<td>Research show that both school and family are two major factors of influence on a child’s character development. Therefore, parent involvement can strengthen the connections between home and school and enhance the effectiveness of the moral education program. (Berkowitz &amp; Bier, 2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) Student reflection on social and moral issues</td>
<td>This refers to the Kohlbergian approach that including moral dilemmas in the classroom can institutionalise peer moral discourse, which shows to be “an effective means of promoting the development of moral-reasoning capacities” (Berkowitz &amp; Bier, 2004, p. 81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11) Adults as role models</td>
<td>This refers to the impact adults have on children as role models, functioning as a role model whether they want to or not.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Appendix C: Sands’ Core Learning Principles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sands Core Learning Principles (<a href="http://www.sands-school.co.uk/about-sands/approach-to-learning/">http://www.sands-school.co.uk/about-sands/approach-to-learning/</a>)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Some of the best learning happens outside the classroom</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We believe that some of the best learning happens outside of the classroom when a child asks a question that is pertinent to their situation and interests at the moment. The question may arise within a lesson, come out of a school meeting, within a tutorial, or perhaps organising a school event. As such it makes sense to design school days that aren’t crammed with lessons and give time for informal learning to take place. This kind of learning makes up a significant part of the Sands experience but is difficult to assess and quantify and requires placing trust in both your child and the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Each child experiences learning differently</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At the very heart of our model of learning is the child, each unique and each with different needs. Learning is a very different experience for each child – even within the same classroom, and more fundamentally, for some, conventional classroom based study doesn’t suit them at all and they need a different and tailored timetable. Because of our small class sizes and high staff to student ratio we are able to respond to your child’s individual learning style and needs. Every staff member will get to know your child well and appreciate their strengths and areas of challenge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Close relationships with staff supports learning</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our staff enjoys the experience of Sands because they enjoy the company of and challenges of being with this age group. There is no staff room, nowhere to hide from the energy and demands of teenagers. We believe that children are so much more than automatons that move from class to class and have created a school day that gives them and us time to be together socially and academically. Although this absorbs potential classroom time it does result in us having the chance to show the children over tea, lunch, on the spiral staircase, sitting on the lawn together, climbing, playing sport and music together that we are, like them, much more than classroom technicians.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children need support challenge</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When children are ready they all benefit from being challenged and brought away and out of their ‘comfort zones’. The informality of the atmosphere in school doesn’t preclude pushing individuals or groups to face difficult tasks – and discovering that overcoming challenges is a really worthwhile thing. Determination and motivation are necessary life skills if found at the right time and with sensitive support. So you will find your children in a stress about learning lines for plays, or with deadlines for projects or with exam work to complete that makes them stressed and worry. We don’t want to protect children from these events. They will receive lots of support and sympathy but also a fair amount of pressure and badgering to ensure they cross the hurdles and develop these essential life skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children need the freedom to make choices and learn from their decisions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrary to popular opinion, giving a degree of autonomy seems to reduce stress and anxiety. In fact, the invisibility children feel in bigger schools with lack of real choice seems to be at the root of their unhappiness. The children who join us, after being told they have failed the education system, rediscover their pleasure in learning, once they feel they can control their school lives and make choices about what and how they learn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning to use this freedom wisely is all part of the Sands experience. Your children will make some unwise decisions and approach school life in ways that seem immature to you, but learning to make good decisions it not something that we naturally do or suddenly discover at eighteen. In fact, the opposite seems to be true in the current culture. We believe that given the freedom to make mistakes, experiment with choice and learn about themselves in the process your child will become more and more skilled at making good decisions. It is certainly our experience so far, though the journey there can be quite a test for us all. Patience and a good sense of humour can help us survive it!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix D: Management at Sands School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways of management at Sands – different groups of decision making</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Meeting</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a weekly meeting of all students and staff in which we discuss and vote on any issues that arise there or that have been proposed by the sub-groups below.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff Meeting</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>although open to students, the staff meeting is essentially where we design the academic timetable, and individual tutees are discussed by the teachers and adults in the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Council</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>an elected group of 6 students and one teacher who discuss and investigate infringements or problems as they occur within the school. It takes its daily findings and suggestions to the School Meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Led Groups</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g. Useful Work Committee, Climbing Wall who take responsibility for tidying school and keeping unsupervised areas safe and orderly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>P.T. A.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In keeping with the philosophy of the school the School Meeting is not overseen by or answerable to other ‘stakeholders’. That does not mean that they are not appropriately supported and advised. The P.T.A. can suggest ideas to School Meeting for further discussion. It also acts as a parent forum to discuss ideas and issues of interest to parents. However, unlike many schools, parents do not tend to have roles as volunteers in the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Governors</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Governors also have only an advisory role at Sands. They comprise of educators, parents past and present, current and ex-students and independent adults whose job it is to protect the school’s constitution and maintain its financial well-being. They delegate all decision-making to the School Meeting and do not have a strategic role. They too may bring issues to the School Meeting for discussion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3.4 Different ways of management at Sands (Sands, 2014)*
### Appendix E: Overview of stages data collecting and analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Identifying Themes</td>
<td>Focus group</td>
<td>Exploring former students’ school experiences. Focus on ‘setting the scene’, getting to know each other, and building up a relationship. Throughout this process I will use field notes to help me recognize and remember possible themes that might emerge. The starting point will be about what they remember from their school, using a drawing made by a Sands student from the school grounds, and asking the participants to draw or write as well on a sheet of paper, before starting the dialogue. This, in order to allow them some time to recall their own experienced before being influenced by the others.</td>
<td>Field notes, filming, and audio recorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual interview</td>
<td>After focus group reflect on first impressions, already emerging themes that could be used as input for individual interview?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual Interview</td>
<td>The starting point of these interviews will be about their life stories, such as ‘where are you born?’ and will move towards ‘life history interviews’. (Goodson, 2013). From the exploratory introduction focus group, continuing with open interviewing to continue with in-depth exploring.</td>
<td>Narrative life history method, Audio recorder and field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcribing</td>
<td></td>
<td>Transcribing the interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Progressive thematic focussing</td>
<td>Emergence and exploration of different themes</td>
<td>Analysing: Starting first stage of analysing, in order to explore possible emerging themes.</td>
<td>Coding themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Setting up the portrayals.</td>
<td>Emergence and exploration of different themes/ Start setting up portrayals</td>
<td>Analysing: The purpose of the above described interviews is to set up different kind of portrayals that can reflect the different kind of understandings of the former students. Hence, from the data acquired from the interviews, I expect that different kinds of themes will arise concerning the students’ understandings of their moral character. The emergence of themes will be conducted through thematic analyses, by reading through the transcripts (‘bathing in the data’) (Goodson, 2013, p. 40). On the basis of the thematic density, portrayals can be set up.</td>
<td>Analyse themes on thematic density, narrative capital.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysing</td>
<td>Analysing and comparing the portrayals on common themes and categories</td>
<td>Start setting up categories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Discussion and presentation</td>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>In the last stage the analysis, after comparing the different portrayals, I aim to look how and if the portrayals can be categorized. This will include looking at the relation between the respondents’ own understandings and the relation to their actual practices in everyday life and possible inconsistencies or similarities. This last stage will be all about identifying, presenting and discussing what the portrayals are telling me about the development, understandings, practices and factors of influence of their moral character.</td>
<td>Discussing the compared portrayals and categories.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix F: Example of portrayal summarised by themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jack - Emerging themes and descriptions</th>
<th>#mentioned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My mum:</td>
<td>Mum: 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I was a mistake</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- My mum wasn’t really in the right space to be a mum.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- My mum and I: talking really openly, honest, no bullshit, cutting straight to the core of issues.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mum was the only thing that stayed the same with move to Devon.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Very busy, doing psychotherapy at home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Single mum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Struggling with money all the time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Stressed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Borderline depressive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- My persevering mum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Unhealthy dynamic with my mum (p. 21). I didn’t feel that I could have a normal argument with her.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I couldn’t find a way of communicating with her when we disagreed on something strongly (p.22).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Her basically needing support, more than I could offer (p. 22).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- A well-educated and loving mum (p. 25). Some of my traits came from her.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Jack and his brother Theo               |            |
| - We fought loads when we were younger |            |

| I was not a happy kid. Unhappy:         | Unhappy: 2  |
| - Your sense of self reduces a lot more. |            |
| - Lack of empathy                       | Loneliness: 6 |
| - Loneliness                            |            |
| - Making crap decisions                 |            |
| - ‘because I think that, I think the saddest lives that anyone can live is one that is alone and where they don’t understand other human beings. Or even if they do understand them and they spend time with human beings they then don’t understand how to work with them. They can’t create anything with them cooperate with them or make decisions with them or sure spaces with them. You know, even if they wanted to they can’t.’ (p. 34) |            |

| Happiness:                              | Happy: 21   |
| - Know yourself                         |            |
| - Really good friends                   | Know yourself: 2 |
| - ‘P. 13/14: If you don’t understand why you’re not able to make yourself happy or understand yourself and love yourself, you’re solving half the problem I think. You need to understand… The reasons of why you’ve not been good to yourself.’ |            |
| - There’s definitely a lot of things that I want to work on, in myself, sure. But I feel happy working on those knowing that I’m doing a great job as it is’ (p.31). |            |
| - Fun. ‘When people are having fun they’re most alive. When they’re having least fun, they’re most dead.’ (p.32) |            |

| Loneliness                              | 6          |
| A real friend:                          | Friends: 36 |
| - decent                                |            |
| - doesn’t patronize you                 |            |
| - really there for you                  |            |
| - who know you                          |            |
| - cares about you                       |            |
| - wants to support you                  |            |
| - makes you laugh                       |            |
| - enjoys you being happy                |            |

| Disruptive                              | 2          |
| Being booted out most of his schools    |            |

<p>| Just before moving to Devon it came to a head: |            |
| - Starting to get into trouble with the police |            |
| - Shotgun cartridges for making booby-traps |            |
| - Dropping bricks of bridges onto cars      |            |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>- Forgotten to care about yourself, so you’ve forgotten to care about others.</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empathy, when empathy becomes rusty: Forgotten to care about yourself, so you’ve forgotten to care about others.</td>
<td>Devon: 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving to Devon:</td>
<td>Sands: 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The biggest everything’s changed transition (p. 25). Definitely moving to Devon, far more than anything else ever.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sands School:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Completely ridiculous school.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Completely the opposite of everything I ever understood to be a school, including teachers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Trial Week, Kevin my first real friend.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I loved the school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- It didn’t fix me overnight, there was still some unhappiness there.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- It was like a family: teachers were the closest thing I had to uncles and aunts and even dads.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Overwhelming</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- A safe place</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Kids were so confident and smart</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Social independence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Slowly starting to get ownership of my life and my destiny</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I felt like there were opportunities and options</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Loads of freedom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Philosophical conversations. Life philosophy things:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Time created for it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Soundtrack of Sands: creaking doors.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Wandering around</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- To spend energy and time and value and attention for those sort of conversations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I didn’t really leave</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sands was a massive cornerstone (p. 25).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- My real socializing all happening suddenly at Sands when it was no friends, no friends, loads of friends. (p. 25).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- We’re all encouraged to be different (p. 31)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- ‘Sands has being a massive, massive, massive, massive part in for a main, inspiring and informing so many of the values that I live by. And I can’t give the school’s sole credits for all of those. But I think it just really helped me to make sense of those values’ (p. 33)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- ‘But human beings that are allowed to be who they want to be. And being around other be who are allowed to be who they want, is what makes you being able to be who you want.’ (p.34)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After leaving:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Pop star role</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Most popular person in the school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not having a dad.</td>
<td>Dad: 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- More of a challenge for my mum?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funny family:</td>
<td>Family: 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Christmas with just my mum.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel really strong now. Much better</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing yourself well.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Needed for being really deeply happy and grounded and fulfilled.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- You can’t take shortcuts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important to be helped as a child, to really have time for you. Intimately time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact of Book ‘a really good school’ bought by his mother. A.S. Neill Summerhill. “Can you stop reading if I can’t go there?”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of playing (p. 32).</td>
<td>Play: 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A safe place:</td>
<td>Safe: 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- To be able to navigate the darkest corners of yourself.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Lack of safety: struggling to laugh, don’t feel connected, don’t have good friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- You don’t feel like anything terrible can happen (p. 14).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I spend every day just fearing and hating school. 90% of the time trying to avoid fights.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exploring former democratic school students’ moral character in everyday life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ego:</th>
<th>Ego: 12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Power trip, ego clash</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Comes from not knowing yourself and not liking yourself.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Am I acting?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social independence from Sands</th>
<th>Film: 24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Film and Video Production</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities and options</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Freedom- freedom to explore, feeling safe</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being empowered. Sense of opportunities everywhere</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- And it don’t know whether you got it down as a value? But I feel like I really that sort of touches on it a bit, I think is about me feeling capable and empowered enough to always have the potential to improve the situation or help to fix the problem like in most cases, it’s just a matter of time and my extra information. As long as you have the information, the resources, potentially anyone can improve the lives of others.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>South Dartmoor College.</th>
<th>Dartmoor: 11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Up the road from Sands.</td>
<td>Lucy: 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Quit for six months. It just wasn’t Sands.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Working at South Dartmoor, with 1,5 thousand kids</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Lucy, like a sister: straight talking and blunt, no bullshit and she really encouraged me. Very respectful, she went out of her way for me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Lots of opportunities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I was loving life: coming up with ideas for projects, girlfriends.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Stages of growing up</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Heroic role</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Financially best bit of my life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Being the techie guy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Expanded my friends group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- This job expanded out to other work.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- First biggest video for England Netball.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pop star Role, hero role.</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- I’ve done so many things (pop star thing)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The need to show all the things that I’ve been doing (p.30)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humbleness later in life (p. 22, 23).</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quitting education</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bournemouth:</th>
<th>Bournemouth: 19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Peter and Donald my two best friends and they moved with me to Bournemouth.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I quit after 1 year.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Moving to Bournemouth that was a big thing (p.25). (because that was me paying the rent entirely on my own)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Passion Works</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Inspiral</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standing up to authority</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fear:</th>
<th>I felt like I had no fear.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- I’m just not scared of anything really (p. 31).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- My decisions are guided by my inspiration rather than by my fear,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mad adventures, fearlessness, makes me feel alive (p. 31)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trust myself</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Understand : 16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- The need to intimately understand yourself (p. 34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- ‘because I think that, I think the saddest lives that anyone can live is one that is alone and where they don’t understand other human beings. Or even if they do understand them and they spend time with human beings they then don’t understand how to work with them. They can’t create anything with them cooperate with them or make decisions with them or sure spaces with them. You know, even if they wanted to they can’t.’ (p. 34).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respect, time, space, listening, cooperating.
Appendix G: Extract from transcript Pat

**Interviewer:** Did you feel like that changed, or your feelings changed or your sense of happiness changed from the moment you went to Sands? Or were there other things that changed things for you? #00:52:01

**Pat:** Ehm… Being listened to. The school meetings were really important for me. Because… Any issue about the school… I basically got to have a say. And that was really really important. So I was always at the meetings. I had quite a lot to say. I loved those discussions, and I loved that we could all do that, and I loved that everybody was all equal. Yeah I loved that it was kind of casual, I loved that I could wear whatever I wanted to wear. I got quite colourful and pierced and dyed. [laughs]. Yeah… I think that was what was really good. The fact that everyone was chipping in. So some students would make lunch… Which was always absolutely delicious as well. Baked potatoes and salad was a favourite, and healthy. I think even at one point, even though I was really into… We got some broken plates, cheap plates that were not in a good condition. We just smashed them against the wall. There was a little, kind of ruins there. And got them and smashed all the plates up. It was really cathartic. And then of course we cleared up. They would let you do things like that. But also, cleaning it up.

**Interviewer:** So what made you act differently? So what made you listen? And what made you clear it up and not be like… ‘Fuck you’ to everyone!

**Pat:** Because they weren’t like that to me! You know, just these lovely… You know, I wasn’t… It wasn’t like I wasn’t raised with the sense of responsibility, or, you know that connection with people, so obviously I wasn’t as stupid, I would not have dreamt of, yeah… Smashed something and not cleaning it up. Because they were, well, it was expected, they were decent to us… So of course you wouldn’t then leave it for someone else. You know, it wasn’t their responsibility to clear it up. It didn’t feel like that. You were given some freedom but you were also expected to, you know, behave reasonably. Or it was like, this is our school, yeah, I wouldn’t have dreamt to. I was so grateful for the people, you know, being on my side. The teachers, you know never saying horrible and kind of demeaning words. Yeah, I was just so grateful for that. I wouldn’t have wanted to kind of mess that up, that relationship I don’t think. And even when I wasn’t really behaving brilliantly… Like maths, I found quite hard. You know, I got the same report as I had in the school before, which was, you know, would do really well if you tried [laughs]. But I was… You know… They still always tried to keep it fun. There was never, ‘shut up’! They would try to guide, like, ‘what are you finding hard’? Or, how about this? You know, there was always… Yeah… Room to do, yeah… And to be honest, if people were trying to learn, there wasn’t always the teachers. We’d end up saying to them, ‘there are students, can you please just shut up’. ‘We’re trying to work’, you know that… you know, ‘if you don’t wanna do it than do something else’. So, you know, there was that, really. This is our learning, it wasn’t necessarily down to the teacher. You know, if someone was behaving in a certain way. […]

**Interviewer:** so, ehm… If you look at things that were really really important for you. Did that have to do with why you think Sands saved your life in that way?

**Pat:** yeah, acknowledged, and listen to, and being able to be myself, mainly. Being able to be myself. Started to make me feel like that I was an okay person anyway. And, yeah… I think being every day able to, yeah, be in a place where you had a say. I don’t think I even skipped any school…I didn’t, I think, you know… I went to lessons I got involved.
Appendix H: Participant Information Sheet

University of Brighton
School of Education
Education Research Centre (ERC)
MPhil Education & Character Development

Participant Information Sheet

1. **Study Title**
   ‘Exploring putting moral character into practice: a study of former democratic school students’ understandings of factors that influence the practice of their moral character in everyday life.’

2. **Invitation Paragraph**
   I would like you to consider taking in this research project that I am doing which is a part of my MPhil degree. The research is about what former students of a democratic school find important in their life. And what they think plays a role in being able to include that what they think is important, to be a part of their everyday life, such as work, choices, or schooling. Throughout the process I will explain what we’re doing and what I will do with the data (what you tell me in the interviews) you give me. The invitation is for you to consider to take part in 2 anonymous individual interviews and one group interview with some other former democratic school students.

3. **What is the Purpose of The Study?**
   The purpose of the study is to explore what former democratic school students see as what’s important to them in life and what factors they experience as being helpful or hindering with bringing that into the practice of their everyday life. The study focuses on what factors might be helpful to implement in school curricula, to help young people pursue what they find important in life.

4. **Why have I been invited?**
   After the consideration of several possibilities you have been invited. For the purpose of this research your previous secondary school, with factors of moral/values education, has been chosen to be very valuable.

5. **Do I have to take part?**
   Participating in this MPhil (Research Master) research is completely your own choice. It’s up to you if you’d like to take part at any point of the process. If you’d like to take part, I will ask you to sign a consent form that shows you have chosen to participate, and that you can withdraw at any particular time, without the need to give me a reason.

6. **What does my involvement entail?**
To participate in the research means that we will meet 3 times over the time span of several months: I will ask you to participate in one group interview with some other former students of the democratic school. And 2 follow-up individual open interviews (in the form of a conversation). The interviews will not take longer than 1.5 hours each of your time. The interviews will be scheduled with you over the time period between October 2014 and February 2015. And they will be held either in a private (class)room at the University of Brighton, or another more convenient but appropriate location for you.

We will talk about topics related to what’s important to you in life and related factors that you might find either helpful or hindering with putting what you stand for in life in the practice of your everyday life. It is up to you what you’d like to bring up or not.

7. **What are the possible disadvantages, risks or benefits of taking part?**

It is totally up to you what you want to talk about or not. The purpose of this research is to talk about what is important to you in life. I do not think you will be experiencing any discomfort during the process. However, might it occur, you are free to change the topic we’re talking about, or take a break, or stop altogether; you decide.

Furthermore, I think it could be a valuable experience for you to get the chance to talk about yourself in an in-depth way and to go back to your roots by reflecting on the past and the present. In addition, through participating, you will be volunteering for the purpose of enhancing education by bringing new light on former democratic school students’ understandings about what’s important to them in life.

8. **Where and when does the study take place?**

Between October 2014 and February 2015, in a private (class)room at the University of Brighton, or another more convenient but appropriate location for you.

9. **What if there’s a problem?**

I would be very happy if you could tell me if there is any problem with the project, or the interviewing, or anything else. Also, at all times my supervisors and an independent contact person of the research centre, are available for you to contact them. The contact details are below.

10. **Will my part of the study be confidential?**

Throughout the entire research all information you give me will be confidential. The interviews you will give will be anonymous. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed only by myself. In any transcription no participants will be identified and I will refer to you with a subsequent name. After the analysing of the data and the publication of the thesis, the transcription and audio recording will be destroyed. Before I use the data I will check with you what I have and will wait for you to confirm if it’s okay to use for my thesis. Data will be used for the MPhil thesis, related conferences and possible articles. All data will go first through your own approval before I will use it.

I will store the transcripts and audio recordings on a password-protected computer. At any stage you can make an appointment with me to access the results of the study.
Only in the case you might tell me information during the interviews which discloses any serious (criminal) harm to yourself or others am I entitled to make your identity known, only in the case that this will ensure your own protection or that of others.

11. **What will happen if I don’t want to carry on with the study?**
   Nothing will happen. Your participation is up to you at all times. You can withdraw at any point without the need of giving me a reason for it. I will ask you if I may use the collected data given by you up to the moment of your withdrawal. If you don’t like to, I will destroy all the data given. Mostly, I can only be thankful for your participation until the moment of your withdrawal.

12. **What will happened to the results of the research?**
   The results will be used by me for my MPhil thesis and will be published in the thesis once this is completed. The results may also be used in related conference and possible articles. At all times the data will be anonymous. 
   All the data will be stored either on a password-protected computer or a safe in the office of my supervisors at the University of Brighton.

13. **Who has reviewed the study?**
   This study has been reviewed and given Tier 1 approval by the School Research Ethics and Governance Panel, School of Education, University of Brighton.

14. **Contact details**
   Lucinda Elyane Miedema
   MPhil Candidate University of Brighton
   Education Research Centre (ERC)
   School of Education
   University of Brighton
   e-mail: L.miedema@brighton.ac.uk / Lucinda.miedema@gmail.com
   Phone: 07922099173
   http://about.brighton.ac.uk/education/contact/details.php?uid=lem19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supervisors:</th>
<th>Independent Contact Person:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prof. Ivor Goodson</td>
<td>Dr. Tim Rudd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor of Education</td>
<td>Principal Lecturer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Research Centre</td>
<td>Education Research Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Brighton</td>
<td>University of Brighton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falmer, Brighton</td>
<td>Falmer, Brighton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:i.f.goodson@brighton.ac.uk">i.f.goodson@brighton.ac.uk</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:t.rudd@brighton.ac.uk">t.rudd@brighton.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tel: +44 (0)1273 644 559</td>
<td>Tel: +44 (0)1273 644 164</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix I: Participant Consent Form

University of Brighton
School of Education
Education Research Centre (ERC)
MPhil/PhD Education

Participant Consent Form

Title of Project: ‘Exploring putting moral character into practice: a study of former democratic school students’ understandings of factors that influence the practice of their moral character in everyday life.’

Name of Researcher: Lucinda Elyane Miedema

Please consider the following points before signing this form:
Your signature confirms that you are happy to take part in this study and that you accept the following:

1. I agree to take part in the ‘Exploring putting moral character into practice: a study of former democratic school students’ understandings of factors that influence the practice of their moral character in everyday life’ project. My participation is entirely voluntary.

2. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated October 2014 for the above study and the researcher has explained to my satisfaction the purpose, principles and procedures of the study and the possible risks involved.

3. I understand that I will be asked to give one group interview and two anonymous interviews, particularly my life story regarding what’s important to me in life and its practice in everyday life.

4. I agree to the information given to be analysed and to inform future practices.

5. I understand what my participation involves.

6. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

7. I am aware that all interview data will be stored in secure, locked storage within the University of Brighton/and or a password protected computer. No data will be stored on any hard drives or any other devices which can be remotely accessed. The data will be destroyed within a year of the completion of the research project.

8. I understand that any confidential information will be seen only by the researcher and will not be revealed to anyone else. With the exception of a situation where revealing your identity is the only way of preventing any harm caused to yourself or others.

Confirmation and consent:
I confirm that I have freely agreed to participate in the ‘Exploring putting moral character into practice: a study of former democratic school students’ understandings of factors that influence the practice of their moral character in everyday life’ project. I have received information about the project and what the participation involves and I agree to the findings being used as described above.

Name Participant……………………………………………………………………………
Signed ……………………………………………………………………………………
Date…………………………………………………………………………………………

Name Researcher…………………………………………………………………………
Signed ……………………………………………………………………………………
Date…………………………………………………………………………………………
### Appendix J: Focus Group Themes

In order of what came up in the interview:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Times mentioned in interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression, expressing yourself, who you are</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding Yourself</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Food</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly meetings</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Your own Voice/ having a say in it</strong></td>
<td><strong>21 + 4 = 25</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voting on things that are important to us</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More of a Home (Anna, Pat and Jack)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships (happy relationships/relationships to the teachers like your/friends/real relationships)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendships</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Side: Could have been better Wish that I had been pushed a bit more (Anna/Pat)</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Gribble, Sean Bellamy, Sybilla and the book ‘A really good School’</td>
<td>Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Respect and self-respect</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-insight</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith and Trust: trust in the school, faith that it’s worth doing that, adults to trust you to do that.</td>
<td>3+4= 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs: meeting everybody’s needs</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities and possibilities</td>
<td>13+4= 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-making and Discussions</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of the school then and now (30-80)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Process</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledging (everybody’s needs)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ownership (of the school)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mainstream education</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passenger and Autonomy</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustration (when people don’t give a shit)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boundaries</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts (mentioned as Sands’ strength) and creativity</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exploring former democratic school students’ moral character in everyday life

| Encouragement: wish to be more encouraged (Anna) | 10 |
| Making a difference (Matilda) | 3 |
| Skills: basic skills, relationship skills | 8 |
| Equality | 2 |
| Ripple Effect (Matilda) | 5 |
| Listening | 10 |
| Having the time (to listen, to work things though) | 3 |
| Institutions and structures | 3+8=11 |
| Restricted/not to have a voice (p. 30) | 6 |
| Rich people, alternative people, school dropouts | 2 |
| + of Mainstream schools: reach out more to local communities/charities/organisations | 1 |
| Measuring Children’s Progress | 7 |
| Fear | 2 |
| Participation (Walter) | 2 |
| Amazing Experience, extremely positive, totally incredible (going to Sands School) | Participants. |

**Top 10 in themes:**

**More than 20 times mentioned:**
1. Freedom: 35
2. Your own Voice/ having a say in it: 25
3. Needs: meeting everybody’s needs: 24

**More than 15 times mentioned:**
4. Respect and self-respect: 18
5. Academic side: 17
6. Opportunities and possibilities: 17

**More than 10 times mentioned:**
7. Responsibility: 15
8. Choice: 13
9. Relationships: 12
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