



Schooling Inequality:
Aspirations,
Institutional Practices
and
Social Class Reproduction

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‘God couldn’t be everywhere so he made Grandmas’

For my Grandma,

Sonia Goldstein, 1924 – 2016

xXx

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Abstract

Despite a mass expansion of the higher education sector in the UK since the 1960s, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds remain less likely to enter university (and in particular elite institutions) than their advantaged counterparts. Governmental approaches to narrowing this gap have tended to revolve around the provision of greater information and a raising of aspirations. This thesis contributes to sociological knowledge through exploring young people's aspirations and opportunities in light of this context, paying close attention to how these are shaped through interactions with the institution of education. It does so through a focus on three schools in one city in England. Grand Hill Grammar (an independent fee paying school), Einstein High (a state-maintained school in a wealthy area) and Eagles Academy (a state-maintained school in a disadvantaged area). The fieldwork included a survey of over 800 pupils in years 7, 9 and 11 in each school, semi-structured interviews with 6-8 pupils per year per school and one careers advisor per school (n=60). Overall, whilst there were notable differences in the expression of occupational and educational aspirations across the three schools, my findings question a direct causal relationship between social class and aspiration. I found many young people in all schools aspiring to attend university and get a 'good job'. Nevertheless, this thesis highlights the everyday institutional structures and practices at play which were powerfully rendering young people more or less able to pursue a desired pathway. This was largely manifest in the differential structures of GCSE and A Level options alongside variations in the practices of careers advisors in each school. In this thesis I offer a critique of the dominant political conception of 'aspiration', offering instead a Bourdieusian account which considers the role of what I call *institutional concerted cultivation* in the reproduction of social class inequality.

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List of Abbreviations

- A Level – Advanced Level
- BSA – British Sociological Association
- BTEC – Business and Technology Education Council
- DfE – Department for Education
- DfES – Department for Education and Skills
- DT – Design Technology
- FSM – Free School Meal
- GCSE – General Certificate of Secondary Education
- GP – General Practitioner
- FE – Further Education
- HE – Higher Education
- HEFCE – Higher Education Funding Council for England
- IDACI – Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index
- IMD – Index of Multiple Deprivation
- IT – Information Technology
- LSOA – Lower Layer Super Output Area
- LSYPE – Longitudinal Study of Young People in England
- NPD – National Pupil Database
- NS-SEC – National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification
- OED – Oxford English Dictionary
- Ofsted – Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
- POLAR – Participation of Local Area
- PRU – Pupil Referral Unit
- RAT – Rational Action Theory
- SEN – Special Educational Needs
- SOC2010 – Standard Occupational Classification 2010
- SPSS – Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
- STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths
- UCAS – Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

Chapter 1: Introduction

Is inequality in education synonymous with deprivation?
Are aspirations unbounded by institutions and regulations?
The ideologies and nobility of mobility is just misdirection
When in the segments of disadvantage intersection
Live the bitter inedible remnants
That gives the system indigestion
Do the disadvantaged suffer more due to misconceptions?
Who is letting these kids down? Let's be honest with our accusations
Is it teachers in fact who have a poverty of aspiration?
Why some pupils view education as an aberration
While for others it provides validation and imagination
Can this problem be solved by Professors like math equations?
Or will this agenda fall victim to propaganda and procrastination
Is inequality in education synonymous with deprivation?

~ Poem by Lee Mckenna ~

In this thesis I explore young people from different social class backgrounds' aspirations and expectations for the future, alongside their knowledge and perceptions of university. I also analyse the structures and practices in place within different schooling contexts which serve to reproduce privilege or disadvantage for pupils. I do this through a unique mixed methods comparison of three different secondary schools in one urban locality in England. The schools are: Grand Hill Grammar (an independent fee paying school), Einstein High (a state school in a wealthy part of the city) and Eagles Academy (a state school in one of the most disadvantaged areas in England). The fieldwork included a survey of over 800 pupils in years 7, 9 and 11 in each school, semi-structured interviews with 6-8 pupils per year per school and one careers advisor per school (n=60). In addition I conducted various observations and extensive field notes were taken. Overall, in this thesis I demonstrate that young people from various backgrounds appear to hold relatively high aspirations for the future and express similar beliefs in the purpose and value of a university education.

Despite this I argue that powerful educational structures and practices serve to reproduce inequalities in outcomes through either restricting or enabling pathways to adulthood for different young people. The mechanisms through which this appeared to be functioning included: variances in the GCSE and A Level subject options and distinctions in the practices of careers advisors. In this thesis I introduce the concept of *institutional concerted cultivation* as a tool to explore institutional practices oriented to making young people more or less ‘cultivated’ or ‘packaged’ and demonstrate how these actively contribute to inequalities in young people's opportunities and transitions. This introduction will situate the thesis as emerging from a context of vast inequality in access to higher education (HE) alongside an intensive neoliberal agenda of ‘raising aspirations’ as the route to ‘widening access’. Subsequently it will discuss the initial starting point for this project and explain a change of direction and research questions. Finally it will map the structure of the thesis by providing a brief overview of each chapter.

1.1. Research Context: Mind the Gap

Ample sociological evidence has highlighted the persisting inequalities within the UK education system through its expansion and, in particular, the under-representation of working-class students at university (e.g. Archer et al., 2003; Reay et al., 2005; Boliver, 2011). In 2001, for example, 87% of 21-30 year olds from social class I (professional) possessed university level qualifications compared to only 6.1% from social class V (unskilled) (Gilchrist et al., 2003: 76). Despite the gap closing slightly over the years, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds remain much less likely to be admitted to HE and specifically to elite universities (Boliver, 2013; UCAS, 2015). I begin by exploring this pattern in greater depth in order to locate this thesis within the context of the vast inequalities in access to HE. It must be noted that whilst the picture to follow is focused on the inequalities of class, there are also large disparities in educational attainment and access to university related to ethnicity and gender and the intersection of these with social class. For example, girls (from all backgrounds) have continually outperformed boys in education, in 2015 58.9% of girls achieved the benchmark of 5 A*-C GCSEs including English and maths compared to 49% of boys (DfE, 2016a: 3). Ethnicity intersects with class such that Free School Meal (FSM) eligibility¹ more strongly predicts

¹ FSM is commonly used in government documents as an indicator of deprivation. It has been problematized for its inability to capture all pupils living in poverty, but it is argued that it is the most useful measure currently available (for discussion of this see Gorard, 2012). FSM is not synonymous with ‘class’, nevertheless

underachievement for white pupils than any other ethnic group (Cassen and Kingdon, 2007; Gilborn, 2008). For example figures from the DfE (2016a) demonstrate that amongst those pupils eligible for FSM, white boys perform the lowest; only 24% achieved 5A*-C GCSEs including English and maths in 2015. In stark contrast, in the same year 81% of Chinese girls eligible for FSM achieved 5A*-C GCSEs including English and maths (DfE, 2016a: 24). Ethnicity also intersects with class when considering the implications for access to HE. Evidence demonstrates that Black Caribbean girls and boys on FSM have continually outperformed their white counterparts (DfE, 2016a)², despite this Black Caribbean young people experience the greatest disadvantage in their attempts to gain access to elite universities (Boliver, 2013). This raises important questions about the HE admissions process in terms of ethnicity and inequality; however these issues are beyond the scope of this thesis. As is discussed in Chapter 3, this research was undertaken with a primarily white cohort, so is not dealing with questions of ethnic inequality. For now it is important to point out that whilst the rest of this introduction (and indeed the thesis) is focussed primarily on issues of class inequality, we should remain aware that the working class are not a homogeneous group and that class disadvantage often intersects with ethnicity and gender.

Successive governments have painted a picture of the mass expansion of HE as a success story. For example, in the 2003 White Paper *The Future of Higher Education* - which still forms the basis of policy makers' understandings - Charles Clarke (then Secretary of State for Education and Skills) begins his forward by declaring:

British universities are a great success story. Over the last 30 years some of the finest brains in the world have pushed the boundaries of knowledge, science and understanding. At the same time a university place has ceased to be the preserve of a tiny elite but been extended to hundreds of thousands more students each year. In the early 1960s only 6 per cent of under-21s went to university, whereas today around 43 per cent of 18–30 year olds in England enter higher education.

(DfES, 2003: 2)

I am using it here to discuss the intersection of class and ethnicity in terms of inequalities in schools as FSM is the main indicator of parental income available (an important facet of class).

² It is important to note that when including all young people (not just those on FSM) white pupils outperform Black Caribbean pupils (Gilborn, 2008).

Whilst Clarke goes on to acknowledge that there remains a need to improve access to HE, there is nevertheless great emphasis on the increase in numbers attending university. The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) have similarly attempted to highlight the positive and ever expanding nature of the HE landscape. Figure 1 (below) from their 2015 end of cycle report is used as evidence of a continual increase in 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas (POLAR3³ quintile 1) entering HE in England. They assert that this group are 65 percent more likely to enter HE in 2015 than they were in 2006, and that the gap in entry rates between them and those from more advantaged areas is the smallest it has ever been with those from quintile 5 ‘only’ 2.4 times more likely to attend HE than those from quintile 1 (UCAS, 2015: 13). This reading serves to construct a positive and progressive picture of the English education system as consistently lessening inequality. Gillborn (2008) argues that:

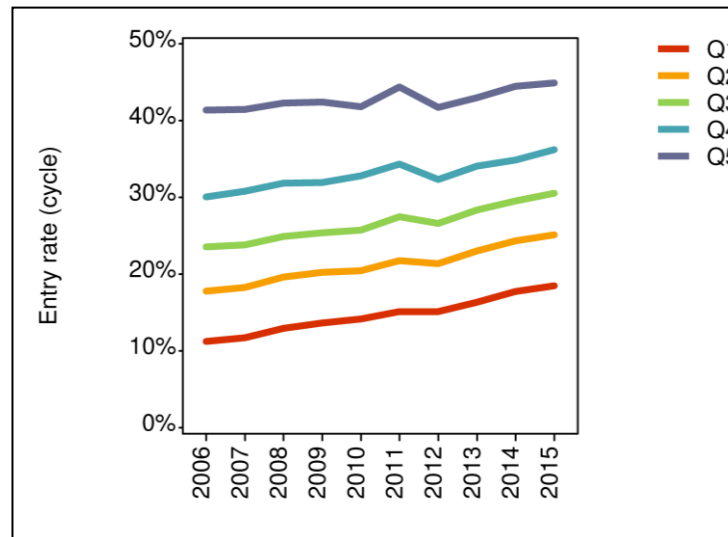
Talk of ‘closing’ and/or ‘narrowing’ gaps operates as a discursive strategy whereby statistical data are deployed to construct the view that things are improving and the system is moving in the right direction.

(Gillborn, 2008: 65)

Interestingly, despite UCAS data showing a continual increase in disadvantaged young people entering HE since the rise in tuition fees in 2012, the DfE (2016c) report demonstrates a drop in pupils from state schools entering HE with 66% of 18/19 year olds entering in 2012 compared to 62% in 2013. Furthermore their data show that the gap between the entry rates for those from independent schools compared to state schools has continually increased with a 13 percentage point gap in 2008, a 19 percentage point gap in 2012 and a 23 percentage point gap in 2013 (DfE, 2016c: 11).

³ POLAR (Participation of Local Area) is a classification devised by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) which represents the proportion of young people who continue to HE from each area. POLAR3 indicates that this is the third version. Quintile 1 represents the most disadvantaged area and 5 the most advantaged area.

Figure 1: 18 year olds in England HE entry rates by POLAR3 groups [Q5 = advantaged groups]

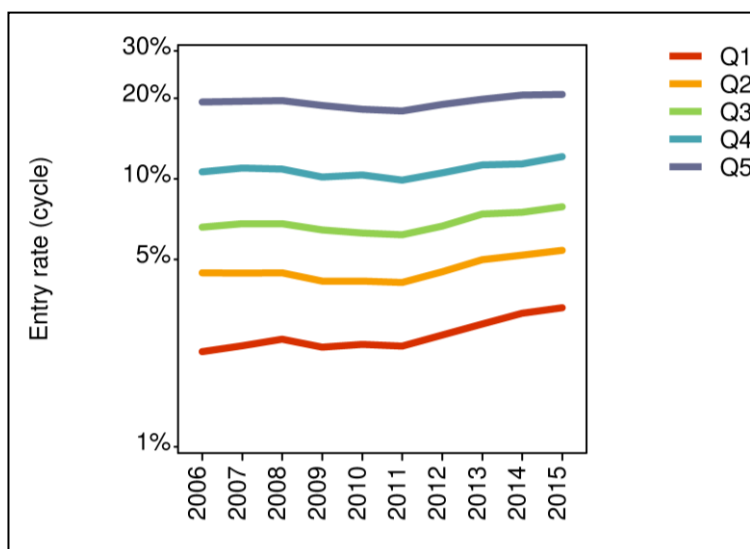


Source: Figure 68 from *UCAS end of cycle report* (UCAS, 2015: 95)

Whilst UCAS have presented this chart to illustrate what they see as a success story, an alternative interpretation is possible. Leaving aside the problems with the way in which UCAS measure deprivation and present the data, an important point is that the parallel lines indicate the persistent gap has never been closed. Figure 1 highlights the way in which coming from the most advantaged neighbourhoods directly correlates with greater chances of entering HE. When we look more closely at the picture between institutions this pattern is amplified. In contrast to the above quote by Charles Clarke, Reay et al. (2001) argue that the mass expansion of HE is not unproblematic as it has created a system of inequality within the sector, such that those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds *are* increasingly entering HE, but are segregated within the newer ‘post 92’ universities⁴ (see also Boliver, 2011). Reay and colleagues (2001) stress the importance of not only focusing on the aggregate of entries but also looking at the distribution between universities. For example, in 2015 only 3.3% of 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas (POLAR3 quintile 1) entered higher tariff institutions compared to 20.7% of those from the most advantaged areas (POLAR3 quintile 5) (see Figure 2):

⁴Prior to 1992 there existed a distinction between research intensive degree awarding institutions (universities) and polytechnics which specialised in vocational programmes. Following a mass expansion of the HE sector, polytechnics were granted degree-award giving rights.

Figure 2: English 18 year olds entry rates to higher tariff institutions by POLAR3 groups



Source: Figure 73 from *UCAS End of Cycle Report* (UCAS, 2015: 73)

In line with the need to scrutinise the inequalities within the HE sector, Vikki Boliver (2013) through a fine grained analysis of UCAS has focussed on the Russell Group⁵; asking how fair is access to these institutions? She explores the notion of fairness through a focus on those from different backgrounds who are similarly qualified and considers the extent to which they equally make applications to and receive offers of admissions from such institutions (Boliver, 2013). The figures presented by UCAS only break down *entry* rates by deprivation level, as a result the picture of inequality in application and admission rates are glossed over. Boliver discusses the importance of separating these factors out arguing:

A significant limitation of equating access with entry is that it conflates the choices that prospective students make about which university to apply to with the decisions that universities make about whom to admit from among those presenting themselves as applicants.

(Boliver, 2013: 346)

⁵ The Russell Group is a self-formed and self-promoted alliance of 24 of the ‘old’ institutions. Despite only making up 15% of the UK’s HE sector, in 2011/12 they secured 73% of all research grant income (Russell Group, 2014). They have been successful at marketing themselves as the ‘elite’ and ‘leading universities’ (Boliver, 2013) generating support from government ministers. It could be argued that the Russell Group- in the increasingly marketised HE landscape- has become a brand. The Russell Group label has become an apparent marker of objective quality, leading specific recruiters to target Russell Group graduates. This contentious issue was discussed in the media where the question was posed over whether the Russell Group could be considered an ‘oligarchy’ (Coughlan, 2014). Boliver (2015) suggests that the Russell Group do not, in fact, appear to be distinctive from other ‘old’ institutions (for further discussion see Chapter 7).

Boliver begins by analysing the distribution of entries to various types of institutions⁶ over the period 1996-2006, without bringing in any controls for application rates or prior qualifications. Her findings demonstrate that those from advantaged backgrounds are overrepresented in the Russell Groups and underrepresented in 'new' institutions. Of all those who entered HE in that period, 22% entered a Russell Group university whilst 58% entered a 'new' one. When looking at HE entrants from manual class backgrounds only 13% entered a Russell Group whilst 70% entered a 'new' university. Meanwhile for entrants from higher professional/managerial class backgrounds 35% entered a Russell Group and only 42% entered a 'new' institution (Boliver, 2013).

Next Boliver unpacks this picture of inequality in entry rates through modelling propensity to apply and receive an offer from a Russell Group. She finds that there exist grave inequalities within both of these steps. Those from manual class backgrounds or from state schools are less likely to make an application to a Russell Group institution than their counterparts from higher professional/managerial backgrounds or who attended private school, even once controlling for A level attainment (odds of 0.69 to 1 and 0.48 to 1 respectively). When they do apply, young people from manual class backgrounds and those from state schools are only around two thirds as likely to be made an offer from a Russell Group as their similarly qualified counterparts from higher professional/managerial backgrounds and those from private schools (odds of 0.72 and 0.66 to 1 respectively) (Boliver, 2013).

Boliver concludes that: 'Access to Russell Group universities is far from 'fair'' (Boliver, 2013: 358). Through comparing odds ratios, she shows that being from a higher professional/managerial class background or attending private school increases the likelihood of applying to a Russell Group by as much as an A grade at A level does. When young people from state schools do apply to Russell Group institutions they need as much as a B grade A level more than their privately educated counterparts before they are as likely to receive an offer of admission (Boliver, 2013). The government have been vocal in acknowledging that there exists inequality in the application rates, but seem to ignore the potential for discrimination in the admissions stage:

⁶ Boliver breaks her results down by 'Russell Group', 'Other Old Institutions' and 'New Institutions' however due to limitations of space I will not be presenting the figures for all three, for further detail see Boliver (2013).

Even where young people from disadvantaged backgrounds gain the level of qualifications to go to a selective university, they have a lower propensity to apply. Where they do apply they have an equal chance of success.

(BIS, 2011: 59)

Here, the government clearly make a case for the need to focus upon young people themselves, upon the need to ‘raise aspirations’. They suggest that the problem lies with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds having a ‘lower propensity to apply’ and argue that if they apply they have an ‘equal chance of success’. Whilst Boliver’s work *does* support the point that young people from disadvantaged background are less likely to apply to selective universities⁷, her finding also directly challenge the government’s rhetoric as she shows that, in fact, young people are not treated equally in the admissions stage. She writes:

These findings highlight the inadequacy of national policy on ‘fair access’ which focuses almost exclusively on eliminating barriers to university application...when clearly what is needed is a policy that promotes not only equality of opportunity to apply but also equality of treatment in admissions.

(Boliver, 2013: 358-359)

This thesis sits within this specific context. In considering what equality in admissions would look like it is important to understand how different structures and practices at school level may contribute towards some young people becoming presented as more desirable candidates for university, such that two pupils with equal qualifications but from different backgrounds and/or schools may not be equally likely to apply to elite universities or may be treated differently during the selection process.

This study also sits within a context of increased diversification of school types in England. At the time of writing this thesis nearly 66% of all secondary school pupils in England attended academies or free schools (DfE, 2016b). These school types offer increased flexibility and autonomy from local government and as such they may differ in terms of the curriculum, school hours and how they are organised and governed. Andrew Wilkins (2016) argues that as the government have devolved power to schools by way of a market

⁷ It is important to point out that the political response to this issue has been focussed on ‘raising aspirations’, as will be discussed in Chapter 2, this is problematic as it fails to consider the structural realities which may cause young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to be less likely to apply.

logic; schools have become increasingly and incessantly monitored and held accountable through a business discourse of self-regulation, responsibility and performance management. He argues that this can be seen playing out clearly through the transformation of school governance from a non-technical role which encouraged citizens to be democratically involved with school decision making to a 'skills-based' position whereby governors are selected based on their professional expertise and skills. In this climate, schools have become 'performance oriented' rather than 'learning oriented' (Watkins, 2016). Thus, whilst schools may differ in their ethos and curriculum, they are all similarly measured upon one main axis: pupil attainment. This is underlined by the central importance placed on league tables and through the use of regulatory bodies such as the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). Results are compared side by side as if each school's outcomes are an objective measure of its quality with a somewhat disregard for the context of the school and the communities it serves. This thesis contributes to the discussion through considering the ways in which different schools in fact provide different opportunities for young people and how this in itself is related to broader structures of inequality.

1.2. From Conception to Realisation: The Transformation of Research Questions

I began this research project within a context of a transformation of the HE sector towards the end of 2012. It was a transformation which saw most universities increase their tuition fees from £3,000 to £9,000 per year. This coupled with an already stratified and unequal HE system and a lack of research into the effect of tuition fees on students in the UK meant that I started this journey intending to explore the impact this increase may have on disadvantaged young people. Were the fees acting as a deterrent, an obstacle or a barrier for them more so than for their more advantaged peers? Did young people even understand the new system and what were schools doing to educate them on these issues? This thesis thus originally set out to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent do young people's knowledge and perceptions of the increased tuition fees vary by social class background?
2. How do their perceptions of this debt fit in with their views of various other forms of debt?
3. In what ways are different schools providing information about the tuition fee system?

4. How might information about- and perceptions of- the increased tuition fees, finances and debt feed into young people's horizons for action?

Rather than asking young people directly if they felt put off by the tuition fees, I built the topic into my methods in a more subtle way such that if the fees were an obstacle for them it would have come up in conversation. Interestingly, the topic was rarely discussed by the participants. Whilst I would not want to conclude that the tuition fees are not an obstacle for many disadvantaged young people, my findings suggested that at least for my sample, the fees were of secondary consideration. Rather the young people I spoke to were deeply concerned that they would not secure the necessary GCSE results to progress to the next level of education, thereby preventing them from securing a place on a desired university course. During my fieldwork powerful issues of structural inequality emerged and were too important to ignore. Thus I have focussed this thesis on the specific structures and practices within the contemporary English education system which appear to reproduce social class inequality, rendering some young people less able to pursue a university pathway despite a deep aspiration to do so. I hope that this thesis does justice to my participants' narratives and goes some way to challenging the narrow and limited political vision of education which centralises young people's culture, agency, 'choices', 'aspirations', motivation and ability as the driving forces behind the stratified education sector, whilst rendering structural inequality and poverty invisible. This thesis will shed light on the deeply entrenched institutional structures and practices which contribute towards maintaining an unequal system. It will do this through focusing on these new research questions:

1. To what extent are social class variations in young people's aspirations and expectations of continuing significance?
2. In what ways do young people's knowledge and perceptions of university and its purpose vary by social class background?
3. How do schools shape horizons for action? To what extent do they differ?
4. What are the specific structures and practices within educational institutions today that serve to produce disadvantage or privilege with regards to young people's trajectories?

1.3. Thesis Structure

Chapter 2 opens this thesis by reviewing the relevant literature and locating the central research questions within it. I begin by situating the research as emerging from and

building upon the Bourdieusian strand of literature in the sociology of education which exposes the processes by which young people experience structural disadvantage within education, impacting upon their chances of success and ability to make ‘informed choices’. Following this I goes on to review the literature around young people’s ‘aspirations’, discussing how my work builds upon it through exploring the way in which aspirations and habitus are *constructed* at different stages in different contexts. Overall, as well as making a case for its academic relevance, this chapter positions the thesis in line with the body of work seeking to challenge the neoliberal discourse upon which much education policy is based. Rather than situating inequality within disadvantaged young people, their families, schools and communities this thesis documents the structural ways in which young people face inequalities within education.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodological and epistemological approach taken in the research. I begin by explaining the decision to draw upon a Bourdieusian methodological and theoretical toolkit through arguing that this position enables a strong relational and reflexive project which takes account of both structure and agency. Secondly it goes on to describe the fieldwork process; detailing the two phases of sampling, the two phases of data collection and the data analysis process. The chapter concludes with a reflexive consideration of some of the ethical issues encountered during the fieldwork. In this section I discuss issues of anonymity and consent but also explore the impact of my own social class background on the research before going on to reflect on issues of objectivity and subjectivity. Here I draw upon the work of feminist thinkers to argue that my work is strengthened by the fact that it is both subjective and objective.

Chapter 4 sets the scene for the rest of the thesis through describing the fieldwork context; specifically it provides an overview of the three schools where the research was conducted. The first half of the chapter introduces each school in turn describing: its history and location in relation to the development of English educational policy, its current structure of management and governance, its demography including size and type of students on roll and finally its admissions policy. The second half of this chapter draws upon some of the quantitative data collected in this thesis to provide a more in depth picture of the social classes of the pupils who attend each school. It does so through presenting descriptive statistics of the pupils’ reporting of their parents’ occupations and experience of HE alongside whether their parents are homeowners or not. These variables are used as indicators of levels of parental economic and cultural capital. Overall this chapter seeks to highlight the vast differences between the schools and the young people who attend whilst also drawing out the fascinating points of connection across each one.

Chapter 5 is a reflexive account which explores the deeply emotional process of conducting research closely tied to one's own trajectory and life experiences. It does so through documenting my experience of becoming attached to one of my participants Jake, a year 11 pupil from Eagles Academy who was extremely bright yet continually resisted the school's authority due to problems at home. I consider how my emotional connection to his life and struggles with an uncaring institution led to me to try to 'rescue' him. In this chapter I tell his story alongside my own before discussing the battle I entered with his school. I conclude by considering whether it could be said that I 'went native' and discuss the extent to which this experience has impacted upon my thesis whilst also reflecting on the powerfully deep insight I gained into the workings of inequality within education. I thought long and hard about the specific location of this chapter in the thesis but ultimately decided that, in the spirit of reflexivity, it should foreground the three analysis chapters. As is discussed in Chapter 3, it is important to make visible our subjective attachments to our research and participants from the beginning. Through doing this it is hoped that the reader can understand the thesis with the voice, experiences, perspectives and influences of the researcher openly stated.

Chapter 6 is the first of the data analysis chapters. It attempts to forefront the structural and institutional level analysis with a focus on the individual aspirations, expectations, knowledge and perceptions of the young people attending each school. In the first half of the chapter I explore this in relation to careers. I argue that whilst the majority of young people from all schools had 'high aspirations' for the future, there remain distinctive (classed) differences in how these were constructed and narrated. As this chapter will demonstrate, the majority of the Eagles Academy pupils articulated concrete career aspirations, at times with a fixed back-up plan. In contrast the Grand Hill Grammar and Einstein High pupils' aspirations were often presented as vague or broad; some young people in these schools were even unable to imagine a future self at all. I argue that this is part of the construction of a middle-class habitus centred on 'keeping the options open' something which is picked up and nurtured in the institutional context as will be discussed in Chapters 7 and 8. The second half of the chapter engages with the young people's discussions of university. It works to dispel the myth that disadvantaged young people do not have a desire to further their education, showing that the majority of pupils in my research from all schools and year groups wanted to attend university expressing similar justifications for this. Nevertheless I argue that there exists a distinctive inequality in relation to proximity to, and familiarity with, the university sphere.

Chapter 7 continues the analysis though exploring the opportunity structures young people experience in the different schools which serve to enhance or restrict their chances of fulfilling the aspirations outlined in Chapter 6. I discuss how the Eagles Academy pupils are faced with a timetable blocking system which restricts the GCSE and A Level choices they can make whilst the Grand Hill Grammar and Einstein High pupils, unrestricted by such a system, experience an immense and diverse landscape of options. This chapter also describes the different ways in which young people are informed of and supported in developing a 'package' of 'useful' and 'valued' subjects which will help them gain access to (elite) universities. This chapter draws upon the theorising of Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) to consider the unequal and arbitrary ways in which different subjects become legitimised and constructed as representations of superior forms of intelligence; something which transforms class distinctions into academic distinctions. It also engages with the work of Bowles and Gintis (2011) by reflecting on the ways in which education today can still be argued to be providing a sorting mechanism, whereby young people are sifted into labour market positions based on their class backgrounds.

Chapter 8, the third and final analysis chapter exposes the deeply unequal institutional practices in place whereby careers advisors conduct work on young peoples' aspirations and habitus. Inspired by the work of Annette Lareau (2011), I introduce and unpack the concept of institutional concerted cultivation as a tool to understand the way in which Grand Hill Grammar, equipped with an advantaged position in the field, works to cultivate a particular disposition towards success. That is, through an in-depth analysis of observation of a careers event I discuss the process by which young people are schooled in how to construct themselves as 'well rounded', how to 'network' and to how 'get around the systems'. In contrast, I discuss the way in which the careers advisor in Eagles Academy, faced with young people with increasingly high aspirations but relatively little chance of fulfilling them, must work to realign aspirations with position in social space, cultivating within the pupils a particular disposition towards failure. Whilst all schools appeared to conduct some work to 'dampen aspirations', the form this took and the response from the young people differed. In this chapter I discuss how the Grand Hill Grammar and Einstein High pupils, secure in their dominant position in the field, confidently challenged the careers advisors. Meanwhile this was deeply problematic and painful for the Eagles Academy pupils as, unable to contest the school, they came to internalise the idea that they were lacking in the ability necessary to fulfil their ambitions.

Chapter 9 draws this thesis to a close by returning to the research questions and responding to each one individually. Through doing so it weaves together the analysis chapters

considering the overarching arguments across each. This chapter then goes on to provide some recommendations for policy and practice before discussing some of the limitations of the project and considering some potential avenues for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

Education must be a force for opportunity and social justice, not for the entrenchment of privilege. We must make certain that the opportunities that higher education brings are available to all those who have the potential to benefit from them, regardless of their background. This is not just about preventing active discrimination; it is about working actively to make sure that potential is recognised and fostered wherever it is found.

(DfES, 2003: 67)

Despite policy declarations of this kind and a mass expansion of the HE sector since the 1960s, participation rates remain deeply stratified; with those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds being less likely to apply or be accepted to university and in particular elite institutions, even once controlling for prior attainment (Boliver, 2013). Regardless of whether we believe that university is ‘the best’ route to adulthood, a job or future happiness, *all* children regardless of background should have equal access to the *option* of HE. The introduction to this thesis explored in some depth this picture of inequality in the landscape of HE; demonstrating the stark pattern of class segregation across the sector. In this chapter I will critically engage with sociological literature which attempts to explain this pattern. Through doing so I will situate this thesis within the Bourdieusian school of research which highlights how certain young people experience systematic disadvantage within education through their lack of symbolically recognised forms of capital; rendering them less likely to progress to HE. Following this, I engage with other sociological literature which critically examines the political rhetoric around ‘raising aspirations’ as the route to greater equality; considering the way in which young people’s ‘aspirations’ and ‘choices’ are largely influenced by structural location. Overall this literature review locates my research questions as emerging from the need to further challenge the neoliberal individualistic agenda that continues to frame the assumptions on which policy is built by exposing the institutional structures and practices implicated in the reproduction of class inequality through differential opportunity structures alongside the active construction and management of aspirations.

2.2. Social Reproduction: Bourdieu and Beyond

It is important to point out that a Bourdieusian approach is not the only way to understand social reproduction in education. These issues have been discussed in a number of ways by various sociologists. Whilst there is not the space here to offer a comprehensive overview, it is nevertheless helpful to briefly consider some well-recognised approaches in order both to explain the rationale for the choice of Bourdieu and to keep in view some of the limitations of this approach.

The first perspective which must be recognised is that of Raymond Boudon (1974). Boudon argues that inequality in educational opportunity does not, itself, explain inequality of social opportunity. He argues that increasing educational opportunities (and thereby reducing the ‘primary effects’ of class differentials) does not lead directly to greater levels of social mobility. For Boudon, along with others such as Breen and Goldthorpe (1997) the explanation for this persistent gap lies with the decision making of young people themselves (something Boudon (1974) attributes to ‘secondary effects’ of class differentials). This approach, more broadly termed rational action theory (RAT), is the idea that young people engage in a rational cost benefit analysis of particular education or career decisions. Arguably in this way working-class young people may self-select out of academic pathways as there are a number of risks involved for them. This is a theoretical model which places a lot of emphasis upon the individual and their rational calculations. Whilst RAT is not a theoretical position adopted in this thesis, it is briefly evaluated in this literature review alongside Bourdieu’s concept of habitus (see section 2.6).

Another widely drawn-upon perspective is one proposed by Bowles and Gintis (2011). Rooted in the Marxist tradition, it departs from RAT in focussing on the social structure as the unit of analysis. In their seminal text *Schooling in Capitalist America* (originally published in 1976) Bowles and Gintis (2011) chart the ways in which the schooling system serves the interest of employers through creating a suitably socialized workforce. Young people from different backgrounds are trained in particular ways by different intuitions to take up their place in the labour market. The education system equips them to possess the right dispositions for their specific rung of the occupational ladder. In this way education acts as a funnel, directing young people onto particular pathways. Whilst both Boudon (1974) and RAT, offer useful insights into young people’s decision making processes, in this thesis young people and their choices are not the primary unit of analysis. Similarly, whilst Bowles and Gintis (2011) offer a useful analysis at the structural level their theory leaves little room for young people’s agency. Nevertheless Bowles and Gintis (2011) are drawn upon at times

in this thesis as I argue that there are remarkable similarities between their observations of the American system in the 1970s and the functioning of the British education system as observed in this thesis (see Chapter 7).

Bourdieu's theory offers a more complex analysis which locates power and power struggles at the specific interplay between individuals and structures. His analysis is of a relational nature, paving the way for a nuanced account which attempts to keep both structure and agency at its heart. As a central feature of this thesis, overcoming the structure/ agency dualism is discussed in section 3.1. Bourdieu's theory also offers an analysis which places great emphasis on culture and values. This is something which is often left unaddressed in theories such as that of Boudon (1974) and Bowles and Gintis (2011), whose models are more directly connected to the economic. Bourdieusian literature has enabled us to explore the ways in which possession of various forms of capital (including cultural and social), associated positions in social space and the embodiment of all of this in the form of habitus- tastes, dispositions and practices are manifested, experienced and responded to by individuals and social structures. Bourdieu helps us to understand not only how young people make different decisions, but also why this is so. In particular the concept of habitus can help us to understand how young people's dispositions towards the future may be constructed in different ways in different contexts. Through exploring the way in which aspirations may interact with institutions such as education Bourdieusian theory enables a complex and nuanced analysis which considers both the individual effects but also the implications of this for the reproduction of social class inequality at a structural level.

When embarking on a thesis drawing primarily upon Bourdieu, it is important to be aware of the criticisms and limitations of his tools. One of the main critiques of Bourdieu's work is that it is deterministic. It could be argued that his theory does not help us to understand how some people are able to transcend their background and move in social space. In relation to this thesis, it might be questioned whether his framework can account for young people who express aspirations which are 'out of sync' with their background. However I argue that there is scope to bring Bourdieu back into this analysis through exploring how these expressions are related to the interaction of institutions in the construction and development of aspirations and also how, when aspirations are not in line with objective chances, institutions intervene to re-orient aspirations in line with originary habitus. Importantly, the Bourdieusian tools which I will deploy in this thesis are used in a more fluid and flexible manner. Much recent sociological work has similarly developed Bourdieu's thinking tools more dynamically, understanding the way in which concepts such as habitus encompass a degree of agency. For example Ingram and Abrahams (2016)

discuss the way in which a cleft-habitus may lead to reflexivity and thus allow for transformation. Morrin (2017) similarly discusses how ‘fractures and fissures’ in the habitus can lead to agentic moments. In this way Bourdieusian theory is being developed in a less deterministic way which does not fix people in static and reproductive positions.

As the use of Bourdieusian theory has become more common in the sociology of education, some have pointed to the dangers of ‘habitual’ (Reay, 2004) and ‘superficial’ (Hey, 2003) usage. This thesis avoids these pitfalls, offering instead a deep engagement with the thinking, in particular through its attempt to use Bourdieu as a method of research (see 3.1) an engagement which, despite its limitations has proved fruitful to developing sociological knowledge.

2.3. Elimination, Elimination, Elimination

The chances of entering higher education can be seen as the product of a selection process, which throughout the school system is applied with very unequal severity, depending on the student’s social origin. In fact, for the most disadvantaged classes, it is purely and simply a matter of *elimination*.

(Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979: 2, emphasis in original)

This powerful quote from Bourdieu points to the barriers facing young people from disadvantaged backgrounds as they navigate an education system where their culture, practises, knowledge, tastes and dispositions (habitus) are constantly and arbitrarily denigrated. One of the major reasons cited for this ‘elimination’ in respect of HE relates to the ‘attainment gap’; young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have continued to achieve lower GCSE grades than their advantaged counterparts. In 2015 only 33.1% of pupils eligible for FSM achieved 5 A*-C GCSEs including English and maths compared to 60.9% of other pupils⁸ (DfE, 2016a: 21). The main issue of contention around this point relates to the *reasons* for such a gap. Major government reports such as the aforementioned 2003 White Paper touch on this issue of the need to raise attainment but arguably not in any substantial way:

Success in opening up higher education to all who have the potential to benefit from it depends on building aspirations and attainment throughout all stages of

⁸ This statistic only includes pupils educated within the state sector, if private school students were included no doubt this gap would be much larger.

education... young people and their families need to be encouraged to raise their aspirations and achieve more of their potential in examinations prior to entry to higher education.

(DfES, 2003: 68)

Strangely throughout the document, despite acknowledging the need to increase attainment in schools, there is no discussion of how this is to be achieved, there is an apparent assumption that raising aspirations is the key to raising attainment. This individualistic focus is not unusual in government rhetoric aimed at closing this gap, and it is pervaded by the discourse of meritocracy; the belief that if you work hard and aim high you will achieve your goals, regardless of background. Bourdieu argues that meritocracy is a 'sociodicy', an ideological tool used to mask the real structural inequality in the system (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979). Similarly Reay argues that: 'The myth of meritocracy normalises inequalities, converting them into individual rather than collective responsibilities' (Reay, 1998b: 1). Through a focus on raising individual attainment and aspirations, policy makers have shifted the focus away from themselves and structural inequality. This can be seen playing out dangerously in questionable statistical research such as that by Peter Saunders who, drawing from the meritocracy thesis, argues that class inequality is justified as the poor are innately intellectually inferior (Saunders, 1995). Saunders' arguments and evidence have been largely discredited (Marshall and Swift 1996; Savage and Egerton, 1997; Breen and Goldthorpe, 1999). However subtle undertones of this type of discourse remain present in political rhetoric around meritocracy. Whilst key government policy declarations do not tend to connect innate intelligence with background, they do call upon a fixed notion of ability when making reference to young people with 'potential' (see previous two quotes from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) 2003), often overlooking the complex ways in which class impacts upon ability to demonstrate a level of legitimated 'intelligence' or indeed 'potential'. The first half of this chapter situates my thesis as emerging from, and building upon, the Bourdieusian strand of sociological literature which demonstrates- in opposition to political rhetoric- the processes through which social-class background powerfully shapes educational opportunities and outcomes. In this thesis I engage primarily with Bourdieusian theories as they are conducive to a fine grained understanding of education as a tool for the legitimisation of dominant culture and a mechanism for the reproduction and entrenchment of privilege. I have found this theoretical school most useful to an analysis of the interrelations between structure and agency alongside a strong relational sociology.

Bourdieu argues that the ability to succeed in education and establish a form of ‘academic capital’ (or institutionalised cultural capital) is related to the amount of symbolically recognised capital ones family has access to (Bourdieu, 2010). The education system is constructed by the dominant in society, reinforcing and legitimising the dominance of one class over another through a process of symbolic violence; asserting itself and the superiority of the culture it teaches as neutral and natural knowledge when in fact it is culturally arbitrary (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Through secondary pedagogy, the education system teaches symbolic mastery (the ability to think abstractly) and relies on the assumption that individuals have acquired a level of this at home through primary pedagogy. However, working-class children are less likely to have acquired symbolic mastery, since the closer a family is to material necessity (defined by the relative amount of economic capital possessed) the more they rely on practical means of survival, and as such are more focussed on passing on these skills (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990).

Thus, these different skills sets (of which neither is inherently superior or inferior but is merely misrecognised as such) are developed in relation to the structural location of one’s class; creating unequal access to the tools necessary for exhibiting what is arbitrarily considered ‘high ability’ subsequently leading to working-class children and their skills and knowledge being devalued by schools, as a result they are less likely to succeed within the education system. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) argue that the main way in which class inequality is reproduced, and certain students are misrecognised within the institution of education is through language. They highlight that ‘linguistic capital’ is unequally distributed amongst children from different class backgrounds and that this is the primary mechanism by which they are distinguished within the education system (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990).

The education system- rather than being a neutral vehicle within which *all* aspiring, hardworking, young people have equal chances of succeeding- relies on middle-class forms of knowledge, specific behaviours and ways of speaking which working-class children have less access to developing. Arguably then, in order to succeed within education one needs to display middle-class characteristics. This type of assertion was in fact made in 2014 by *The Telegraph* newspaper with their headline: *Working class children must learn to be middle-class to get on in life, government advisor says* (Graham, 2014). Whilst this could be a media (mis)representation of government views, it is indicative of the underlying assumption of

policy makers that there is something wrong with working-class students and their culture⁹; that parents are to blame for their inability to support their children's education or for their lack of 'parenting skills' (Gillies, 2005; 2008). Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) highlight the way in which through the language of developmental psychology, middle-class parenting practices are constructed as 'normal' and 'the best' and are contrasted to the working classes who are positioned as ignorant when it comes to the correct ways to raise children. This unquestioned, underlying normalisation of middle-class practices (Savage, 2003) has resulted in policy being directed at remedying this issue (of 'problematic' parenting practices¹⁰), rather than questioning the arbitrary favouring of middle-class culture, symbolic capital and abstract mastery over working-class young people's practical skills and abilities. Most crucially, policy often misses the link between what is portrayed as the 'best' parenting practices/ educational supplementing (particular extra curricula activities) and finances. Bourdieu argues that cultural capital's power lies in its ability to disguise itself as distinct from economic capital, however they are explicitly linked and conversion between them often occurs (Bourdieu, 1997).

Drawing upon Bourdieu's theorising, Diane Reay (1998b; 1998c), Annette Lareau (1997; 2000; 2011) and Fiona Devine (2004) highlight the classed inequalities in parents' abilities to support their children in education through engaging with teachers and supplementing schooling in the home. Whilst working-class young people are often totally reliant on the schools provisions to succeed, their middle-class peers have access to other means to help them achieve educational success (Reay, 2012a). Devine (2004) discusses how economic capital is mobilised by the middle classes to avoid particular schools or pay for private education to secure advantage. Further, she argues that cultural capital: knowledge and linguistic competencies were drawn upon by these parents to ensure educational success for their offspring. In a similar vein, Reay (1998b) illustrates the way in which mothers 'monitor' and 'repair' their children's school work. She argues that the middle classes use their cultural and economic capital to compensate for the gaps in the education system by 'providing the trimmings'. Meanwhile, working-class mothers struggle at the 'repair' stage

⁹ At the time of writing this thesis, David Hoare (the then Chair of Ofsted) resigned from his post following controversially referring to the people of the Isle of White as 'inbred' when addressing a Teach First conference. He claimed that the island was plagued by 'a mass of crime, drug problems [and] huge unemployment' (Weale and Adams, 2016). As was highlighted by Polly Toynbee (2016), Hoare's comments locate the 'problem' of poor educational attainment, not with structural inequality and poverty, but rather with the poor genetic stock of the people on the island.

¹⁰Language used in initiatives such as 'troubled families' are indicative of this construction of the family unit as the problem in need of addressing.

as they do not have as much of the cultural capital or educational competency to be able to help their children (or the economic capital to pay for tutors) when they are falling behind in education. It is problematic that the education system relies on learning continuing outside of school when resources to enable this are not equally accessible to all. Reay (1998b) also found a 'class' difference in the amount and quality of parental contact with teachers. She argues that cultural capital is at the root in terms of confidence, knowledge, assertiveness and feelings of entitlement (or not). Similarly, Lareau (1997) found that middle-class parents saw themselves as 'partners' with the teachers and were confident and comfortable monitoring and challenging the school. The habitus of middle-class parents is, more often than not, at ease with the education system and likely to be similar to the habitus of middle-class teachers. Consequently, an understanding is more easily formed and they are more likely to be equipped with the tools needed to achieve their goals (Reay, 1998b). In short, Reay argues that middle-class mothers work hard to ensure their children get the best of the school's resources whilst working-class mothers have more of a 'helpless' attitude to education, since their habitus does not coincide with the middle-class educational field, generating lower confidence and feelings of incapability (Reay, 1998c).

Roker (1993) similarly finds that some parents appear to possess greater power in relation to the education system than others. In her research these were the parents of those young people in private schools. She coins the term 'parent power' to refer to the way in which parents were able to influence and direct decision making in the school as they were paying for the education. That is, their demands were listened to and actioned by the school, as they were in a sense important 'customers'. Brantlinger (2003) conducts a detailed and considered analysis of the specific interactions between middle-class parents and professionals in schools in the USA. She argues that middle-class mothers' direct involvement in pushing forward specific agendas of benefit for their children has a direct negative effect on working-class pupils. For example she cites efforts to maintain ability streaming which appear in a class segregated fashion with the best teachers and resources diverted to the top sets which are also dominated by middle-class children. Thus as the above literature has demonstrated parental capitals and habitus affect the ability to help ones child succeed in the education system through providing extra support or influencing and directing school practices. Rather than being a meritocratic system, it is evident that structural inequality within education equips some young people with a head start over others.

Another way in which inequality can be seen to be manifest in education is in regards to parental ability to interact and intervene with school matters due to different compositions

of social capital. Horvat and colleagues (2003) found that middle-class parents were more connected with other middle-class parents and professionals than working-class parents. They discuss the various ways in which these networks translated into advantage. Firstly this was through the way in which networks were collectively mobilised in response to a situation in school deemed to be problematic for a child; middle-class parents approached and challenged the school 'en masse'- a highly effective strategy. Working-class parents, however, tended to react in individualised ways, a response which is easier for the school to ignore. Secondly they discuss how middle-class parents used their various networks' resources to support them when intervention in school matters were considered necessary, for example when their child was not selected for the gifted and talented programme or was not getting the specialist help required for a learning difficulty. Working-class parents in contrast relied on the school's professional expertise and judgement in these situations (Horvat et al., 2003). Fiona Devine (2004) similarly discusses the centrality of social capital to the reproduction of advantage in education. She argues that middle-class parents draw upon their social capital to generate useful information about 'how to work the system' when making decisions about their children's schooling. She argues that they benefit from informal 'personalised knowledge' rather than relying on facts and figures.

Other literature has demonstrated the inequality in ways in which parents are able to influence the development of their children into middle-class, autonomous and entitled individuals who are recognised and valued by the education system (Allatt, 1993; Pugsley, 2004; Lareau, 2011). Lareau, in her influential book *Unequal Childhoods* (2011) powerfully and eloquently documents the different parenting practices amongst middle-class, working-class and poor families in the US. She argues that middle-class parents engage in 'concerted cultivation'. They viewed their children as projects, seeking to inculcate them with forms of symbolically legitimated capitals acquired through extensive engagement in extra-curricular activities which provided them with an advantage in the education system. These young people moved in primarily adult fields and were taught that they were entitled to adult consideration and recognition. In contrast, she termed the working-class and poor parents' practices as 'the accomplishment of natural growth'. In these homes children had a more childlike social life centred on family and community. These young people were often left to occupy themselves, invent games and navigate social situations on their own. Through these activities they became creative and innovative individuals, developing useful skill sets and characteristics to traverse the social world. However, as these were not symbolically recognised in the middle-class education system, they were not afforded any exchange

value. Lareau (2011) argues that these young people thus grew up with a sense of constraint in relation to dominant institutions.

Allatt (1993) conducted a similar study to Lareau, but focussed only on middle-class families who had sent their children to private schools. The parents in her research sought to instil a sense of autonomy in their children through allowing them a degree of agency to make decisions themselves. Individualism, responsibility and self-motivation were extremely important for the families. Allatt discusses how rather than issuing clear directives parents would make 'suggestions'. Advising a course of action but ultimately letting the young person 'choose' for themselves. However she highlights that this sense of agency was foregrounded by strong family backing, she writes: 'Extensive familial support was set within a system which encouraged a sense of responsibility for one's own actions, transmitting to young people a valuable form of cultural capital' (Allatt, 1993: 151-152). Similarly, Pugsley (2004) found that parents were not exerting pressure upon their children but rather subtly steering them. In line with Allatt (1993), she argues that this 'ensures that the power of the discourse lies in the silence which surrounds it' (Pugsley, 2004: 88). Whilst these middle-class young people are presented to the education system as individual autonomous agents who have made their own decisions and are solely responsible for their successes, there exists a powerful and unrecognised structure of privilege behind them which has served to give them a hidden advantage.

2.4. Institutional and Informational Inequalities

Potential students need high quality advice and guidance to make informed decisions about whether higher education is the right option for them and, if so, which route to take and what subjects to study to prepare them for their desired course...Making sure that young people have access to high quality, aspirational information, advice and guidance is an important part of what schools can do to raise aspirations and support progression. Schools will, subject to the passage of the current Education Bill, be under a new legal duty to secure independent, impartial careers guidance for their pupils in Years 9-11.

(BIS, 2011: 56-58)

In the 2011 White Paper which set out a number of educational reform plans including increasing the cap on tuition fees to £9,000, the discourse of government as provider of *education* was transformed to government as provider of *information* about HE (Davies, 2012). The focus has now become providing young people with the tools to make

‘informed decisions’ about HE, such that they are all equally able to make the right ‘choice’ about their future. Hutchings (2003) argues that the information giving process is not neutral: those presenting it may do so with a specific purpose and those listening may adapt what they hear to suit their own perceptions. She questions the clarity with which we can draw a distinct line between ‘information (seen as unbiased fact) and advice or guidance (seen as context and person specific)’ (Hutchings, 2003: 98). She found –in line with Ball and Vincent (1998) - that working-class young people engaged with information about university in a different way to their middle-class peers; they were extremely suspicious of careers advisors and prospectuses (‘cold’ knowledge), seeing them as having ulterior motives. They preferred to rely on ‘hot’ knowledge (word of mouth) but had less access to reliable forms of this (Hutchings, 2003). It is also important to consider the ways in which gender may intersect here, for example, Reay (1998a) found that girls seemed to share and discuss information about university more than boys did. Thus, whilst the process of careers advice must be viewed critically, it *is* important to consider the inequalities in access to careers provisions, something which this thesis will do. This section further situates my research questions within the sociological literature which has explored the ‘school effect’ in various ways. To what extent are different schools providing different information, advice and guidance about HE? And how does this have implications for young people’s aspirations and choices?

Roker (1993), through a comparison of a private girl’s school and a state school catering to a predominantly advantaged cohort, argues that the private school served to inculcate within the girls an ‘edge’. She asserts that this edge took the form of ‘personal elitism’ and ‘structural elitism’. Roker describes personal elitism as about having high and concrete aspirations but also relates to the development of particular forms of interpersonal communication skills such as confidence (Roker, 1993). Arguably this can be understood as the development of a dominant habitus. Structural elitism on the other hand refers to the way in which the private school girls benefitted from superior resources and practices in regards to teaching and careers. Roker’s research provides a strong background to exploring the influence of schooling practices in the reproduction of inequality. It is particularly insightful in demonstrating the distinctions between fractions of the dominant classes; however there remains a need for more research which considers this in relation to the experiences of working-class young people.

Another strand of literature *has* analysed schools with various class compositions in order to further understand this institutional effect (Pugsley, 2004; Reay et al., 2001; 2005).

Pugsley (2004) through a comparison of eight different schools, one sixth form college and

one further education (FE) College highlights the inequalities across the sector with regards to careers advice and guidance. Echoing Roker's (1993) work, Pugsley found that the quality of careers engagement within the private sector was substantially better than in all other institutions. In contrast she found some of the most disadvantaged schools were relying on 'agreements' with local universities and thus not providing much in the way of careers advice. Interestingly she also found that state schools with predominantly middle-class intakes operated with limited careers services as it was assumed that parents would supplement the service. Reay et al., (2005) also found a vast difference in the quality of careers services across the sector. They argue that there is a distinctive 'school effect' which they discuss as the way in which the 'institutional habitus' of the school plays a part in structuring young people's choices (Reay et al, 2005; see also Ball et al., 2002). This was mainly in the form of vastly differing careers advice and guidance on offer. However they acknowledge the explicit connection between institutional and familial habitus arguing that the careers advice offered was largely driven and shaped by the habitus of the parents within each school, a finding which also resonates with Pugsley (2004).

Donnelly (2015) argues that it is important to consider not only the amount of careers advice given in a particular school, but that it is necessary also to scrutinise the various 'messages' being sent off. He argues that a strong 'framing' of HE and specific universities results in more young people applying to such institutions. Donnelly (2015) argues that the hidden messages schools disseminate towards certain pathways are similar to middle-class parenting practices which, in 'expectation' of a specific route, may be prevalent without being made explicit. My thesis builds upon the work of Roker (1993), Pugsley (2004), Reay et al., (2005) and Donnelly (2015) in that I am similarly exploring the differential provisions of careers advice and guidance within different schooling contexts. However whilst these studies have focussed exclusively on sixth form pupils, my research takes a step further back, considering how these processes influence the development of specific habitus from an earlier stage in education. Through this I will contribute to the literature by providing a more detailed analysis of the specific ways in which the practices of schools, over time, serve to reproduce inequality. I unpack Donnelly's (2015) assertion that the schools' practices can be likened to those of middle-class parents and in doing so build upon Annette Lareau's work (2011) to develop the concept of institutional concerted cultivation. This is in part influenced by Reay and colleagues' (2005) notion of 'institutional habitus'. However, it differs in that whilst institutional habitus pertains to the way in which the particular cultural dispositions of institutions can influence young people, institutional concerted cultivation is deployed as a conceptual tool to focus in particular on the *practices*

of cultivation undertaken by an institution. Furthermore in contrast to the dominant policy approaches which position young people as passive receivers, my research brings in young people's agency, exploring the way in which the careers work is accepted, internalised, rejected or otherwise responded to by young people.

Whilst the political interventions to widen access to HE focus on the individual and their 'aspirations' and 'information', the sociological literature highlights another layer of distinction in the process of application for HE places. As discussed in Chapter 1, Boliver (2013) demonstrates that disadvantaged university applicants with the same grades as their advantaged counterparts remain less likely to receive an offer from a Russell Group institution. One explanation for this is that those educated in the state sector are routinely predicted lower grades than their peers in independent schools, indicating the need for universities to adopt a post qualification offer system (Boliver, 2013). Gazeley argues that: 'The academic potential of working-class pupils is more likely to be underestimated than that of middle-class pupils' (Gazeley, 2010: 301). Other academics have argued that this gap can be explained through elements of the university application process which focus on factors other than attainment (such as personal statements and interviews) (Evans, 2012; Jones, 2013).

UCAS present the personal statement as a valuable opportunity for applicants to demonstrate the way in which they 'stand out from the crowd' (UCAS, 2014¹¹). However, from a Bourdieusian perspective the admissions process favours the display of forms of capital and 'distinction' which the dominant classes have the greatest access to. Jones found the biggest inequality here was related to work experience, with private school students in particular being much more able to draw on symbolically recognised forms of this. He comments that many of those from state schools 'struggle to make meaningful connections between their low-status sources of income and the often high- status degree programs for which they are applying' (Jones, 2013: 412). Even when they do possess valuable experiences needed to identify them as 'unique' or of 'high calibre', they face a further barrier of being unaware or unsupported in how to 'play the game' or 'package themselves' (Ingram et al., 2012; Allen et al., 2013; Bathmaker et al., 2013). Sarah Evans (2012) movingly discusses the way in which this process leaves working-class young people feeling not good enough for specific institutions; as lacking in that 'special something' necessary to

¹¹ Incidentally, at the time of writing this thesis, this phrase was no longer visible on the UCAS website.

secure admission. She argues that working-class young people's experiences, skills and talents are misrecognised and discounted within the system whereby a hierarchy of authentic forms of intelligence has been established (Evans, 2012). Rather than enabling all young people to 'stand out', personal statements provides those with the most symbolic capital a further advantage in the application process (Evans, 2012; Jones, 2013).

Garforth (2014) argues that the admissions process is highly individualized and problematically removes the contextual data from the application presenting the applicant as if they were a classless being. Social class and everything that goes with it is presented as 'background information'. In this way the admissions process is presented as neutral, as treating all applicants the same. This is problematic. As has been demonstrated above, the inequality of opportunity associated with coming from a particular class background is stark and may seep through the personal statement in subtle ways. Whilst class is implicit in the applications to HE it appears that the admissions tutors are able to sweep it under the rug and argue that one applicant was more suitable than another without acknowledging the differential access to the opportunities which enabled them to appear in this way.

Overall then, research from a Bourdieusian perspective has already provided us with a breadth of knowledge of the specific ways in which the education system reproduces social class inequalities; however there remains further work to be done, not least because some of the most foundational and insightful studies are now several years old. Alongside a consideration of structural inequality it becomes important to explore the role of agency (and its structural relations) in the reproduction of inequality. This is of particular importance under a political climate of neoliberalism where the individual is placed at the heart of policy interventions, where society is presented as meritocratic and young people are left to accept responsibility for any educational failure as reflecting only their own inability or laziness. The rest of this chapter responds to a political rhetoric around widening participation in HE through raising individual aspirations by exploring the literature on young people's 'aspirations', habitus and 'choice'.

2.5. Aspiration, Aspiration, Aspiration

The government approach to widening access to HE is premised on the assumption that there is a need to raise aspirations, that there exists a 'poverty of aspiration' and that this is more damaging than poverty itself. Gordon Brown famously said during his speech on education in 2007 at the University of Greenwich:

Poverty of aspiration is as damaging as poverty of opportunity and it is time to replace a culture of low expectations for too many with a culture of high standards for all.

(Brown, 2007)

This focus continued under the coalition government; in 2012 David Cameron addressed the conservative party conference with a speech in which he promised to build an ‘aspiration nation’, commenting: ‘It’s that toxic culture of low expectations – that lack of ambition for every child- which has held this country back’ (Cameron 2012). In 2015 Cameron referred to the Conservatives as ‘the party of aspiration’ (Cameron, 2015). This political sentiment individualises structural inequalities, placing the responsibility for unequal outcomes within disadvantaged communities, families and young people themselves. This approach can be identified as feeding directly into policy interventions aimed at equalising opportunities as noted with the publishing of reports such as *Unleashing Aspiration* (BIS, 2010). Diane Reay powerfully refers to the discourses of ‘raising aspirations’ as an ‘ideological whip’ used to beat the working classes (Reay, 2012b: 9). It is relevant to briefly situate the development of this political rhetoric in relation to the historical transformation of the state. Raco (1999) traces the transformation of a politics based on the ‘expectational citizen’ who expected a level of support and provisions from the state, to the ‘aspirational citizen’ who aspires to achieve on their own without governmental interference. This politics of aspiration as described by Raco (1999) is naturalised through neoliberal discourses which present the welfare state as being in opposition to innate human desires to provide for oneself and accumulate material goods and wealth. He writes:

The Keynesian social contract in which citizens could expect to be supported in times of adversity has given way to an individualist politics of aspiration-building in which individuals are to be liberated to peruse their innate and natural aspirations.

(Raco, 1999: 440)

Today the idea of the individual aspirational citizen who merely requires their aspirations to be ‘unleashed’ to enable them to become actualised has become a normalised and naturalised position from which to construct policy and interventions. Roberts and Evans (2012) liken the discourse of aspiration to Bourdieu’s concept of ‘doxa’, they write:

...(T)he discourse of ‘aspiration’ amounts to what Bourdieu calls doxa- a taken for granted assumption, the common sense approach, one which is seemingly embraced and understood by political parties of all persuasions (and probably ingrained into wider public consciousness) as being an incontrovertible self-evident truth.

(Roberts and Evans, 2012: 72)

This section critically engages with the sociological literature which provides a critique of this discourse by exploring young people’s aspirations as constructed from within social and material structures. Through this I situate my research questions as emerging from the need to further scrutinise the way in which aspirations are *constructed* and *managed* in different schooling contexts. The topic of young people’s aspirations is by no means an under researched area; a large body of work has already contributed to a thorough critique of the governments’ aspiration raising agenda. There is not space here to cover everything that has been written on young people’s aspirations; rather I will introduce and then discuss some key areas in the literature which inform the backbone of this thesis.

Numerous studies have argued that the concept of aspiration frequently called upon by politicians is individualistic, narrow and linear tending to be solely related to education and career. It is further argued that this discourse glosses over the social and contextual nature of aspiration construction (Brown, 2011; St Clair and Benjamin, 2011; Roberts and Evans, 2012; Allen, 2013). Some of this work also questions the culturally loaded and hierarchical notion of aspiration used in government policy, arguing that the ‘ideal’ aspiration is based on a middle-class model which marginalises and excludes other alternative forms of aspiration (Brown, 2011; Roberts and Evans, 2012). This literature also stresses the importance of an awareness of the distinct difference between ‘aspirations’ and ‘expectations’, something often conflated in policy (Nilsen, 1999; St Clair et al., 2013; Khattab, 2015). Whilst some literature has found a connection between class background and educational aspirations (Croll, 2009; Croll and Attwood, 2013) seemingly feeding directly into the political agenda; others stress the structural and psychological mechanisms by which disadvantaged young people may come to acquire ‘lower’ aspirations than their advantaged peers (Hodkinson et al., 1996; Hutchings and Archer, 2001; Reay et al., 2001; Archer and Yamashita, 2003; Reay et al., 2005; Archer et al., 2007). Furthermore other work has demonstrated that disadvantaged young people do not require aspiration raising interventions as they already possess extremely high aspirations, far higher than the UK labour force could accommodate (Rose and Baird, 2013; St Clair et al., 2013; Archer et al.,

2014). Interestingly this line of research has been picked up in policy reports. For example the Social Exclusion Taskforce, in acknowledging research findings states: ‘Disadvantaged young people do not have fundamentally different aspirations from their more advantaged peers’ (Social Exclusion Taskforce, 2008: 10). However this conclusion has evidently not filtered through into political debates and interventions to date remain focussed on the need to raise aspirations. Finally, some literature has challenged the assumption that aspirations are in fact directive and predictive of outcomes for young people, arguing that evidence of any causal link is rather thin on the ground (Cummings et al., 2012; Gorard et al., 2012; Khattab, 2015). The rest of this section will unpack these main areas of literature.

When researching young people’s aspirations it is important to be clear on its definition. ‘Aspiration’ is a concept which is problematic to define simply; it appears to take on different meanings in different times and contexts. *The Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) defines aspiration as¹²: ‘The action of aspiring; steadfast desire or longing for something above one’ (OED, 1989). This definition locates aspirations as about aiming for ‘something above’. Sociological literature has more usefully provided less symbolically loaded definitions. For example, Quaglia and Cobb (1996: 130) define aspirations as: ‘a student’s ability to identify and set goals for the future, while being inspired in the present to work towards those goals’. St Clair and colleagues (2013: 721) suggest that ‘aspirations are, at minimum, an important component of the imagined future towards which young people orientate themselves and their current efforts’. These definitions introduce a temporal element to aspirations, something not captured in the OED. Gavin Brown helpfully reminds us that aspirations are not disconnected from young people’s lived emotional experiences noting that ‘aspirations are an affective orientation to the future’ (Brown, 2011: 19). I find these sociological definitions to be useful starting points for my research as they are broad, encompassing a conception of aspiration as about more than career or education. They centralise an awareness of the affective and do not enforce a particular hierarchy upon notions of aspirations.

As has been mentioned government policy frequently and problematically conflates aspirations with expectations. In terms of research it is important to understand these as distinct dispositions. Nilsen (1993) lays the foundations for such a considered approach

¹² It is of interest to note that the dictionary initially traces the definition of aspiration back to Latin to refer to the act of breathing: ‘The action of breathing or drawing one's breath’ (OED, 1989). This indicates a sense of naturalness to the concept, implying that anyone without an aspiration is abnormal. It is also indicative of the idea of the centrality of aspiration to existence; it is the vitality of life.

arguing that expressions of imagined futures can take the form of either ‘dreams’, ‘hopes’ or ‘plans’¹³. St Clair and colleagues (2013) distinguish between ‘ideal’ aspirations which they describe as: ‘what the individual would do for a job were there no real world constraints’ and ‘realistic’ which is: ‘what the individual expects to be able to do for a job given the circumstances within which they live’ (St Clair et al., 2013: 724). Following the literature this thesis will treat aspirations as distinct from expectations, exploring each one in different ways whilst at the same time considering the intimate relationship between the two forms of young people’s imagined futures.

In line with the ambiguous nature of the term ‘aspiration’ much literature has critiqued policy (and at times academic research) which draws upon an individualistic, one-dimensional and linear conception of aspiration. Brown (2011) argues that young people’s aspirations, rather than being limited to career and education are broad and varied. His research demonstrated the centrality of aspirations for stability, security and happiness voiced by young people. Roberts and Evans (2012) similarly found that future happiness for the young people in their study was more central to their aspirational narratives than were jobs. St Clair and Benjamin (2011) dispute the individualistic and fixed notion of aspirations arguing that they are constructed socially and stress their performative nature. They suggest that rather than being isolated ‘things’, aspirations are constructed and presented by young people at a given time to serve a specific purpose. They argue that it is necessary to conceive of aspirations as in constant flux and construct a dynamic model which sees aspirations as in a constant feedback loop. They argue that aspirations are time and context specific and that it is important to understand the various influences upon them.

Classic texts have demonstrated the intra-class differences in aspirations pointing to the key role of labour market, schooling and family experiences upon these (Brown, 1987; MacLeod, 1995) Archer and colleagues’ (2014) research found that the main influences upon young people’s aspirations were the family, school, hobbies and TV. However they note a caveat that the extent to which these sources came into play depended upon social class; young people from working-class families were less likely to be influenced by the family and more so by the school. This is important as it demonstrates the centrality of the

¹³Nilsen describes dreams as unrealistic ideals and desires: ‘Dreams can be thought of as belonging in a timeless realm, with no space or place associations’ (Nilsen, 1999: 190). Whilst hopes appear more concrete, plans are the most tangible and are the means through which hopes become actualised. It is important to be aware that there is an evident fluidity to these concepts and they are connected in interesting ways.

school to the development of aspirations, something which will be further explored in this thesis. Allen (2013) similarly stresses the contextual nature of the aspiration construction process and considers the ways in which these may be influenced by families and institutions. She found that young people's aspirations were created and remoulded within a context of external judgement. Allen gives an insightful example of a young person whose priority in terms of her imagined future relates to having a child soon (and young), feeling that this is more important than a career. However the young person is aware of the undesirable external societal image of this and how it is not considered an acceptable aspiration. Allen talks about the subsequent 'practices of (self-) regulation in the formation of the 'aspirational subject' as a place of class struggle' (Allen, 2013: 772).

The dominant discourse around aspirations continually devalues working-class young people's aspirations positioning them as inferior to their middle-class counterparts (Brown, 2011). Roberts and Evans (2012) problematize the polarity of the notions of 'low aspiration' versus 'high/appropriate aspirations'. The hierarchical nature of this serves to construct some (working-class) aspirations as inferior and less desirable and reputable, powerfully asserting that working-class young people must aspire to move out of their class of origin and into a 'brighter' future. It is interesting to consider that this discourse of raising aspirations thus crucially contributes towards a continual devaluing of working-class forms of work as young people are encouraged to 'aim higher', inferring that a particular career or life path is somehow 'lower'.

Some quantitative studies have demonstrated the way in which class background impacts aspirations for university such that even once controlling for attainment, middle-class young people are more likely to aspire to remain in the education system for extended periods of time (Croll, 2009; Croll and Attwood, 2013)¹⁴. Other qualitative studies have illustrated the complex ways in which this may occur as certain futures become excluded from the imaginary in classed ways (Hodkinson et al., 1996; Hutchings and Archer, 2001; Reay et al., 2001; Archer and Yamashita, 2003; Reay et al., 2005; Archer et al., 2007). However, other research has questioned the notion that working-class young people are even in need of aspiration raising initiatives. For example, St Clair and colleagues (2013) through a longitudinal study of the aspirations and expectations of 300-500 working-class

¹⁴ It is important to note that whilst these studies have found a small class effect on aspirations after controlling for attainment, they conclude that the government should focus on attainment rather than aspirations as attainment remains the biggest predictor of participation in HE.

young people (ages 12/13 and 14/16) powerfully uncovered a high level of aspirations for education and careers. Whilst they noted that ideal aspirations were higher than realistic aspirations, both forms were notably higher than could be feasibly supported by the labour market. For example 84% of the younger cohort, aspired to the highest classified occupations according to SOC codes (1-3) (managers, professionals and associated technical occupations). This figure dropped to 67% when they were asked to name their realistic occupational expectation. Nevertheless these figures are starkly compared by the authors to the proportion of the entire UK workforce employed in such industries (41%) (St Clair et al., 2013: 729). Similarly, studies by Rose and Baird (2013) and Archer et al. (2014) both document no shortage of high aspirations amongst disadvantaged young people. It is interesting to consider this fact alongside the point raised earlier that aspirations can be understood as performative (St Clair and Benjamin, 2011); these young people were perhaps demonstrating their ability to articulate dominant-valued career aspirations. It is possible to question the government's agenda in light of this; arguably raising aspirations merely results in young people having an understanding of and ability to articulate what we want to hear about their future desires. Overall, it appears that the literature is not conclusive in regards to whether working-class young people have 'lower' aspirations than their middle-class counterparts. My research thus emerges from a need to further explore the extent to which such differences, if prevalent, remain significant issues demanding school or governmental interventions. If they differ, in what ways do they do so and what are the implications of this in regards to privilege or disadvantage afforded in accordance?

Finally, the literature on aspirations has challenged the assertion that raising aspirations would raise attainment. Gorard and colleagues (2012) through a comprehensive review of research evidence dispute that an association between aspirations/expectations and educational attainment can be concluded to be causal, arguing that no evidence of this actually exists. Similarly Cummings and colleagues (2012) found no evidence that changing young people's aspirations and attitudes to education had any impact on outcomes. Khattab (2015), through conducting analysis of data from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) combined with the National Pupil Database (NPD) demonstrated that, whilst there is an association between aspirations/expectations and outcomes; having high or low aspirations and expectations does not straightforwardly predict achievement level. He found that the majority of the students had high aspirations (58%), however only two thirds of these pupils achieved high results. This correlation could be indicating something rather different to the dominant meritocratic message.

Instead of outcomes being determined by low aspirations and expectations, aspirations and expectations could be understood as being structured by young people's perceptions of the possible for them in the future as defined by predictions of their likely academic outcomes. In this way we may be seeing the habitus influencing aspirations through the structuring of horizons for action. This will be discussed more fully in the following section.

2.6. Habitus, Aspiration and 'Choice'

Only in imaginary experience (in the folk tale for example), which neutralizes the sense of social realities, does the social world take the form of a universe of possibles equally possible for any possible subject. Agents shape their aspirations according to concrete indices of the accessible and the inaccessible of what is and is not 'for us'.

(Bourdieu, 1990: 64)

Here Bourdieu eloquently reminds us that young people do not construct their aspirations in isolation from their situations. According to this school of research social class is a force which impacts upon young people's perceptions of the possibilities for their future, which in turn influences their dreams, hopes and subsequently their plans. As with aspirations, policy assumptions of free choice tend to overlook the structural inequality underlying the decision making process. Stephen Ball and colleagues (2002) argue that young people's choices cannot be isolated from their context: 'The capacity for choice is unevenly distributed across the social classes' (Ball et al., 2002: 66). Hodkinson and colleagues (1996) argue that the belief that young people's transitions are characterised by free individual choice is a myth:

The whole of transition to work is permeated by structural and cultural factors. Consequently, the belief in largely free individual choice, upon which much current policy is based, is therefore, a myth that is either breathtakingly naïve or sinister.

(Hodkinson et al. 1996: 155)

This section will critically engage with the literature which has demonstrated how aspirations and 'choice' are influenced by structural class background through the habitus. The discussion of the nature in which 'choices' are constrained is situated within a conversation between Breen and Goldthorpe's Rational Action Theory (RAT) and

Bourdieu's notion of habitus¹⁵. RAT positions the individual as a rational agent who makes educational choices by weighing up the costs and benefits of each option in order to maximise utility (Breen and Goldthorpe, 1997). This is very much in line with the governments focus on raising aspirations discussed above; inherent in this discussion is the argument that the solution lies with the providing of greater incentives for- and information about- HE, such that the rational agent can make an 'informed' decision about their future. Reay et al. (2005) comment that this account of the student as a rational chooser removes emotion from the decision making process. Bourdieu's notion of habitus, allows for emotion and agency whilst still accounting for the structural way in which disadvantaged positions in social space contribute to inequality. As such it has been found to be extremely useful for thinking through the way in which both structure and agency play a role in the self-exclusion of working-class students from HE (Reay et al., 2005). (For further discussion of the way in which habitus has been used see Reay, 2004). Thus I have found habitus a more helpful concept than RAT to understand how young people conceive of their futures and make plans to work towards reaching them.

Bourdieu argues that a correlation between an individual's chances of attaining a goal and their aspirations for this goal does not occur due to rational calculation of their likelihood of success. Rather he argues that it is due to the dispositions of the habitus which are generated through socialisation in a particular field in relation to material circumstances. He writes:

The dispositions durably inculcated by the possibilities and impossibilities, freedoms and necessities, opportunities and prohibitions inscribed in the objective conditions...generate dispositions objectively compatible with these conditions and in a sense pre-adapted to their demands. The most improbable practices are therefore excluded, as unthinkable, by a kind of immediate submission to order that inclines agents to make a virtue of necessity, that is, to refuse what is anyway denied and to will the inevitable.

(Bourdieu, 1990: 54)

¹⁵ It is relevant to note that these two theories are not entirely incompatible; indeed other work has demonstrated that they can be applied together. Glaeser and Cooper (2013) for example argue that young people engage in cost benefit rationalisations, but that they are structured within boundaries enforced by the habitus.

Thus we can begin to unpick the ways in which aspiration for a particular future and ‘choices’ or decision-making processes may be structured and constrained by material conditions of existence. The habitus allows us to uncover the ways in which, not only working-class young people’s aspirations may be constrained but also the way in which middle/upper class young people’s decisions to enter HE are often a ‘non choice’ arising from their dominant position in social space, a kind of natural progression (Reay et al., 2005). Drawing from this theoretical position, many studies have documented the way in which this occurs. Possibly the most commonly cited and influential of these is Reay and colleagues study of university applicants from different schools and class backgrounds (Reay et al., 2001; Reay et al., 2005). This work documents the complex ways in which university choice is structured by material and psychological constraints as some universities become ruled out as ‘not for the likes of us’ (Reay et al., 2001; 2005):

Choice for a majority involved either a process of finding out what you cannot have, what is not open for negotiation and then looking at the few options left, or a process of self-exclusion. One working class student claimed to have ‘a choice of one’.

(Reay et al., 2005: 85)

Work by Archer and colleagues (2007) is also revealing of the processes underlying the construction of certain futures as unobtainable. They argue that working-class pupils’ attempts to generate symbolic recognition through investments in stylistic displays resulted in them being othered by teachers; positioned as lacking intelligence and unlikely to progress to HE. Moreover they discuss the way in which these young people’s investments in ‘style’ resulted in a view of HE as ‘not for them’. This was partially due to the same processes of exclusion through the habitus discussed by Reay et al. (2005), but was also due to a desire to purchase the goods necessary to maintain this symbolic capital within their peer group. This was seen as incompatible with student life which was characterised by debt and a lack of immediate income. As such they envisioned leaving school to enter the labour market and earn money as soon as possible (Archer et al., 2007).

Other work illustrates something of the deeply psychological and painful ways in which the habitus structures aspirations. Archer and Yamashita (2003) discuss the ways in which the young people in their study closed the door on certain futures seeing them as entirely out of reach. They argue that they not only ‘knew their place’, but also ‘knew the limits of their place’:

The young people understood the edges or horizons of these areas to be bounded by dense, impermeable limits, which were constructed through a complex interplay of social identities and inequalities of 'race', class and gender.

(Archer and Yamashita, 2003: 67)

This echoes the findings of Hodkinson et al. (1996) regarding the way in which young people's horizons for action structured their decision making process:

Young people make career decisions within their horizons for action, which incorporate externally located opportunities in the labour market as well as the dispositions of habitus...Horizons for action enable the choice of some careers but prevent the choice of others.

(Hodkinson et al., 1996: 149-150)

I find this concept of the horizon for action to be a useful tool to operationalise habitus and consider the ways in which ideas of the future are structured by it. Following Hodkinson and colleagues Ball et al. (2000) found that the young people in their study were similarly aware of- and making choices from within- their horizons for action (perceptions of the possible). The young people denied ambitions that they had due to an understanding of what is not possible for them. The authors problematize the concept of 'choice' stressing the limitations and constraints young people faced when making post-16 choices. They argue:

All of this makes the notion of 'choice' post-16 highly complex. The social trajectories and 'learning careers' of those young people and many of the others in our cohort, are constituted as much by chance and risk as they are by rational deliberation and effort. False starts seem almost the norm, set-backs are common and the social and domestic aspect of 'choice-making' are often more important than the educational.

(Ball et al., 2000: 40)

Roberts and Evans (2012) similarly argue aspirations are not always active decisions, but rather hopes influenced by the reality of a situation. Thus, in opposition to the political rhetoric regarding widening access to HE which places at the heart of it a commitment to 'raising aspirations' through providing more information at the end of compulsory schooling; there is a need to look more closely at the processes at work *throughout* education which may serve to create systems of advantage or disadvantage for different young people.

This may be by way of positioning certain routes to adulthood as inconceivable or indeed through rendering certain routes out of reach due to particular structural obstacles such as educational attainment. It could be argued that the neoliberal individualistic focus on raising aspirations is an inadequate attempt to treat the *outcome* of inequality not the *root* of it, namely the material and structural conditions of existence which serve to create a situation whereby one culture is arbitrarily positioned as superior and university is seen as unattractive and out of reach for some.

This thesis explores the way in which young people's horizons for action are constructed and managed through processes within schools. In this way I build upon existing research by extending the focus to look more broadly at how habitus, aspirations and 'choices' interact with educational institutions, how they are responded to by educators and in turn how these may be shaped and moulded by interventions in schools. The processes by which aspirations are 'constructed' and 'managed' in different contexts can be usefully unpacked with the conceptual tools provided by Pierre Bourdieu. How do different forms of aspiration connect to strategies of advantage/disadvantage? What happens to these aspirations when they interact with the educational system? How are middle-class aspirations cultivated?

Some literature has looked at the interactions between aspirations and institutions. For example Allen (2013) as has been mentioned above, explores the way in which young people's aspirations are realigned following institutional judgement. Spohrer (2015) discusses the other end of this, considering how young people internalise aspirational messages sent off by their schools and how this in turn affects their aspirations. These studies are a useful starting point however there is a need to build upon this sort of work through considering the middle classes experiences alongside the working classes. The majority of research looking specifically at young people's aspirations has focussed on those from working-class backgrounds. My research explores how middle-class aspirations are constructed and considers this in relation to the working-classes. In so doing I able to explore the power relations involved in this; unpacking how privilege or disadvantage may be functioning and being reproduced in these contexts.

Whilst the aforementioned literature provides a useful starting point for this thesis, the majority of it has focussed on young people's aspirations at a fixed point in time (excluding St Clair et al., 2013 and Archer et al., 2014 which were longitudinal); my research emerges from a need to further explore the way in which aspirations are formed throughout different stages. I am uniquely incorporating young people at earlier stages in their

schooling (see Chapter 3 for more details). It also differs in that I am beginning this research within a vastly different context. More than ten years have passed since the publication of the influential work on university choice by Reay and colleagues (2001; 2005) yet it seems as though not much has changed (Reay, 2014). This research emerges out of a need to revisit the issues they explored ten years later and in a somewhat different context of an increased financial burden for attending HE coupled with an apparent diversification of school types.

2.7. Conclusion

We cannot afford to let anyone's background hold them back from fulfilling their potential...People from all different backgrounds and ages need the chance to get on and get the information, advice and qualifications they need to open up opportunities. Raising aspirations, especially for children and young people, through high quality advice and the encouragement of and exposure to role models will increase motivation and a sense of ambition.

(BIS, 2010: 4-5)

As is highlighted in the above quote, taken from the document *Unleashing Aspirations* (BIS, 2010) the government approach to equalising opportunities for educational advancement is strongly rooted in the individualistic notion of increasing aspiration and information. Sociological literature has already mounted a strong critique of the focus on aspirations, but there remains a need for more research on this topic. This thesis builds upon this body of research through considering the extent to which social class variations in young people's aspirations and expectations are of continuing significance alongside an exploration of how different schools shape aspirations and horizons for action at different stages through their practices. In terms of 'information', political statements of the kind mentioned above imply that young people are equally free to hold the same aspirations and subsequently make the same choices once equipped with 'high quality, aspirational information, advice and guidance', (BIS, 2011: 58). This thesis, in line with the literature, adopts a critical stance to careers advice considering not only the provisions within different schools but also the *practices* of careers advisors alongside an analysis of how young people respond to and internalise the careers advice they are offered. Building upon the Bourdieusian strand of literature it also explores the extent to which institutional structures impact upon young people's agency to make choices and work towards a particular desired future.

2.8. Research Questions

It is worth briefly revisiting the research questions before moving on to Chapter 3 where I will explore the research process and methodology employed:

1. To what extent are social class variations in young people's aspirations and expectations of continuing significance?
2. In what ways do young people's knowledge and perceptions of university and its purpose vary by social class background?
3. How do schools shape horizons for action? To what extent do they differ?
4. What are the specific structures and practices within educational institutions today that serve to produce disadvantage or privilege with regards to young people's trajectories?

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Epistemological and Methodological Approach

The central aims of this study were to explore young people from different social class backgrounds' aspirations for the future alongside their knowledge and perceptions of university. It also aimed to explore the extent to which schools play a role in shaping these and how practices may differ across educational contexts. These research aims suggest the need for an epistemology which adequately accounts for both structure and agency. Young people's choices are important; however they must not be separated from the wider context within which they are operating. It is necessary to explore the ways in which these are *constructed* and *structured* by systematic and institutional factors. I believe that people have agency but that this is both limited and enabled by structures. A Bourdieusian approach is a useful way to overcome the traditional structure/agency binary. Bourdieu describes his position as 'structural constructivism' which he explains as follows:

By structuralism, or structuralist, I mean that there exist, within the social world itself and not only within symbolic systems (language, myths, etc.), objective structures independent of the consciousness and will of agents, which are capable of guiding and constraining their practices or their representations. By constructivism, I mean that there is a twofold social genesis, on the one hand of the schemes of perception, thought and action which are constitutive of what I call habitus, and on the other hand of social structures, and particularly of what I call fields and of groups, notably those we ordinarily call social class.

(Bourdieu, 1989: 14)

In his book *Outline of a Theory of Practice* Bourdieu argues that objectivist and subjectivist positions do not operate in opposition, rather they exist in a 'dialectical relationship'¹⁶ (Bourdieu, 1977). Not only are they both significant, but crucially they impact each other in specific ways. Structural forces construct subjectivities but subjective actions also reinforce

¹⁶ This assertion is also important when considering the researcher's scientific endeavours. To what extent can sociologists be 'objective' yet 'subjective' at the same time? This will be dealt with in section 3.9.3 where I reflect on my position of subjectivity and objectivity. For now though objectivist and subjectivist positions are considered in relation to my epistemology- theory of knowledge- to the way in which I view and understand the functioning of society and individuals within it.

structural systems. An example of the way in which Bourdieu's framework engenders an exploration of both structure and agency becomes evident in his theorising around the 'habitus', a concept central to this thesis. Habitus is the embodiment of cultural capital; it is tastes, 'dispositions' and ways of 'being, seeing, acting and thinking' (Bourdieu, 2002: 27). Bourdieu describes habitus as a 'structuring structure' and a 'structured structure' (Bourdieu, 2010: 166). That is; the habitus structures perceptions and practices but is also itself structured by social class divisions.

Employing a Bourdieusian approach means that 'the relational' is essential to gaining an understanding of systems of power. Analysis of 'the relational' incorporates considerations of individual agents' relations to both the field(s) in which they operate and specific institutions within such fields. In addition it is about keeping in mind agents' relations to each other and also institutions' relations to each other. It is argued that Bourdieu's work is not just a theoretical toolkit, but also a *method* for researching (Grenfell and James, 1998). Indeed much of his work is dedicated to describing his own 'theory of practice' (Bourdieu, 1977). This epistemological approach has influenced the decisions and directions of my thesis both in the constructing and carrying out of fieldwork and in the analysis stage.

Bourdieu's theory of practice is conducive to a mixed methods approach to empirical research as it is not bound to an epistemological stance as either positivist (quantitative) or interpretivist (qualitative). My research similarly adopts a mixed methods approach initially employing a quantitative survey and conducting subsequent qualitative interviews with a nested sample. These different methods are used in a 'complementary' manner (Small, 2011) with each technique lending itself to the generation of knowledge with regards to this specific topic. The data was collected sequentially, with the survey being conducted first. This illustrated the broad patterns of young people's perspectives on university which I was then able to follow up in the interviews in order to understand *why* such patterns were prevalent. The data generated by both methods are presented in this thesis alongside each other, rather than in isolation, as together they powerfully address the central research concerns.

3.2. Sampling Phase I

I employed a purposive sampling frame as my research aims call for a specific group of people to be the focus (Silverman, 2010). This section will discuss the various parameters of my sampling frame providing the rationale for the specific sample selected. Designing my research using a Bourdieusian framework meant that it was to be relational at all levels.

The first of these was at the school level; three schools in one urban locality in England were targeted as comparative fieldwork sites. These schools, and the young people within them, occupy different positions in the field of education. Grand Hill Grammar School is a private fee paying institution. The vast majority of their pupils come from middle and upper class backgrounds and they occupy a dominant position in the educational league tables. Einstein High School is government funded and free to attend, it is located in close proximity to Grand Hill Grammar, thus their pupil intake is largely the same. Einstein High also occupies a dominant position in the league tables due to its academic results.

To facilitate the relational element to the fieldwork the final school to be sampled needed to be located in a socio-economically deprived area and to occupy a low position in the league tables. I initially targeted an inner city ethnically diverse Academy which fit all criteria. Despite having contacts in the Academy, I was unable to gain access. This was likely to be related to the fact that they were in the midst of a difficult period of transition and a newly appointed head teacher quit during my negotiations. Following this I managed to secure access to Eagles Academy, a former local community school which was converted under the government's Academies Act 2010 aimed at transforming 'failing schools'. It is located in one of the most disadvantaged wards in England and is low in the league tables with relatively few pupils achieving the benchmarked GCSE results.

Selecting these schools was useful for sampling young people from various backgrounds but also crucially enabled a comparison of different educational establishments¹⁷. The schools themselves-and their relationship to each other and the broader political field of power- are a central part of this research. Whilst the individual pupils and their narratives are vital to this thesis and its findings; it is important to be aware that the unit of analysis is not the individual but rather the schools and how they function within the whole system of education.

The second parameter which was considered for sampling was that of age (or year group). I decided to focus on young people in years 7, 9 and 11. These year groups were selected to be a cross section of each school but also represent important moments of transition in secondary education. Year 7 pupils have just transitioned from primary school; year 9 pupils are at the point of selecting their GCSE options (or would have just begun them in the case of Eagles Academy); year 11 pupils are in their final year of compulsory education

¹⁷ For more information about the school contexts see Chapter 4.

and have to make career directing decisions about their next step. Previous literature has been critical of a focus on ‘transitions’ as fixed and linear, arguing that transitions (and associated decisions) occur at various stages in the life course, not just those enforced by the institution of education (Ecclestone et al., 2010). Whilst these stages are not necessarily the only or most important points of transition in young people’s lives, they do represent times in the educational system where young people are forced into a transition. As such these year groups pose interesting points to examine decision making processes. I decided not to target pupils in sixth form as they are a group who have already self-selected onto an ‘academic’ route. I wanted my sampling to be free to capture pupils who did not want to follow such a trajectory.

3.3. Schools: Getting In and Being In

Gaining access to each of my chosen schools was facilitated by a gatekeeper and the process of remaining in each institution and successfully completing such an ambitious project depended upon forming positive relationships with various members of support and teaching staff. The way in which this was accomplished differed in each school. Moreover how my research was received and positioned varied in relation to each school’s structures and narratives. This section describes this process for each school individually, reflecting on how I gained access and how I was perceived, positioned and treated within each institution. Before doing so it is interesting to note that in each school, despite my information sheets being clear that I was targeting pupils in years 7, 9 and 11, the focus of my research (university) meant that I was always initially passed to the sixth form staff. In Grand Hill Grammar, even at the point of administering questionnaires to the year 7s a form tutor contacted me to check that this was not a mistake. It is fascinating to reflect on this in terms of the age at which people generally expect research and interventions around HE to be targeted.

3.3.1. Grand Hill Grammar School

The first school I began negotiations with was Grand Hill Grammar as I anticipated that, being a private school, it would be the most difficult to get into. However this was not my experience, on the contrary, I found access to be easily and quickly negotiated through the use of an ex-pupil as a gatekeeper. This gatekeeper had passed me on to the teachers he was closest to in his school days. One of them in particular (Paul) took charge of this role and from then onwards made it his responsibility to oversee the research. I was not put in contact with individual head of years, rather Paul was to organise everything himself. In some ways this was good, as I developed a strong relationship with him and he would do

whatever he could to help me (including becoming an informal source of inside information about the school). However this arrangement was problematic as Paul was quite laid back which resulted in major delays with my fieldwork being organised as will be discussed further in this chapter.

Arguably, due to Grand Hill's powerful and dominant location in social space, my research was not a threat. I felt as though I was viewed as a naïve student needing help. Paul and other teachers I spoke to in Grand Hill appeared to anticipate that my research findings would portray them and their pupils in a wholly positive light. They seemed keen for their pupils to participate as a way of 'experiencing real research in action'. During my time at Grand Hill I was welcomed into the luxurious staff common room where I was given free tea and coffee and at times even treated to lunch. The staff members were very welcoming and trusting of me, it felt almost as though once I was in, I was completely in. Some teachers even assumed I myself was an ex-pupil.

3.3.2. Einstein High School

Einstein High was the most formal and efficient with regards to granting me access. My route into this school came through the use of an academic staff member at the local elite university who was in regular contact with the Principal of Einstein High. Following the Principal giving my project the go-ahead I had a meeting with another teacher in the school to iron out formalities. I was fascinated at the way in which this teacher closely scrutinised my research design and materials. She told me that she had just completed a masters dissertation so was aware of issues around researching. I did not feel that she was suspicious of my research; rather it felt like she was attempting to assert some control over the situation. She posed herself as an expert and made various suggestions and requested that I construct additional documents for teachers.

In Einstein High I was treated as a professional. I felt as though I was part of the normal business of the school yet at the same time I was on the margins. My meetings with pupils were arranged by the administrative support staff and I was only to visit the school during these tightly scheduled slots. I did not have much need to stray past the reception area as the interview room I was allocated was behind it. This meant that I did not gain as much ethnographic insight as in the other two schools. I offered myself as a resource for the school's careers and university programmes but this was never taken up. I felt as though this was not something they particularly believed they were lacking. A similarity with Grand Hill was that they perceived of the benefits of my project being that their pupils would experience first-hand research.

3.3.4. Eagles Academy

Securing access to a state school in a disadvantaged part of the city turned out to be the most problematic. My route into Eagles Academy came via a Professor in their sponsor elite university. Despite this contact vouching for me, I felt that the school remained suspicious of my research. Furthermore the senior member of staff tasked with communicating with me was extremely busy so it was hard to make any arrangements. It took a lot of phone calls and chasing to convince Eagles Academy to grant me access. This was agreed over the phone and due to time constraints I was not invited in for any meetings. I was passed on to the head of each relevant year, as such, in comparison to Grand Hill and Einstein High, I had many different contacts to work with.

It seemed to me more than coincidence that Eagles Academy was both the school in the most precarious position in the field, and the one where there was extreme caution about my access. My research and its findings may pose risks for Eagles Academy who were under immense political scrutiny as they tried to transform their reputation as a previously 'failing school'. Once I made it in, I became positioned as a spokesperson for university. I was framed as promoting the HE route and was used as part of their 'raising aspirations' agenda. For example, during a year 11 assembly which I visited to attempt to recruit participants, the head of year encouraged his pupils to get involved in my research to 'show the world that you have aspirations'¹⁸. In Eagles Academy, as so many doors were locked to monitor the access and flow of pupils in specific areas, I was given a personalised visitor pass. Other than having to sign in at reception I was able to use this to move around the school freely. I suspect part of this freedom came with teachers not having time to meet me to sign me in and out at every visit. It was also in part that I had multiple contacts in the school so no one in particular was overseeing my work there. At times I was provided with a free lunch, but often had to request this, tea and coffee was readily available in the hall. Staff members were often confused about my role within the Academy as I was never properly introduced to them. I was simply allowed to wander around as if I was any other member of staff. This was useful in some respects, but at times left me feeling uncomfortable and unsupported.

¹⁸ This was an important moment and has implications for sampling (as discussed in section 3.5) and informed consent (see section 3.9.1).

3.4. Data Collection Phase I: Questionnaires

Once the initial sampling parameters had been established and access was agreed in each fieldwork school, I began phase one of data collection¹⁹ which was to be a quantitative survey administered to all pupils in the selected year groups in all case study schools²⁰. The questionnaire collected data on young people's expectations and motivations for attending (or not attending) university. It included questions related to their familiarity with university, asking how many people they knew who were at or had been to university and whether their friends were planning to attend. Finally the questionnaire also captured demographic information including their parents' occupations and educational level²¹, household tenure and whether they were in receipt of FSM. I also included a question on gender but not one on race/ethnicity. This variable was initially included but following the piloting of the questionnaire I decided to remove it because it often confused the respondent and, as has been mentioned, is not a focus of this thesis.

The process of distributing these questionnaires varied in each school. I made it clear that I would prefer to visit during assembly to introduce myself and the research and answer any questions. However this request was only granted in Eagles Academy where I was given a 5 minute slot in each year group assembly. In Einstein High, this was not possible as they did not have year group assemblies at all. Grand Hill were not happy for me to use any assembly time which was designated for other things presumably deemed to be a greater priority. In all three schools the questionnaires were administered by form tutors during tutor period.

In total I received 871 completed questionnaires²² giving me a substantial quantitative dataset to work with. Table 1 breaks down the respondents by year group and school attended.

¹⁹ It is important to note that before beginning fieldwork I piloted my questionnaire and interview materials with a selection of young people from the target age range. These young people were recruited through my own personal contacts. The pilots were useful to check the viability of my methods and the reliability of the instruments. Following the pilot, one question was removed from the questionnaire (on race/ethnicity) and one was added (on how many of their peers were planning on attending HE). I also cut one interview activity as it was too long. Finally, the wording of a few questions on both the questionnaire and interview schedule were tweaked. The data from the pilots have not been drawn upon in this thesis, as they are not contextually situated within any of the fieldwork schools.

²⁰ See Appendix I for questionnaire.

²¹ It is important to note that these variables were self-reported by the pupils and thus are taken as a proxy for parental occupation and education.

²² These include some questionnaires which were only partially completed.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents in year group by school (column%)

	Grand Hill Grammar	Einstein High	Eagles Academy
Year 7	86 (32%)	99 (28%)	79 (31%)
Year 9	67 (25%)	110 (31%)	89 (35%)
Year 11	113 (43%)	94 (27%)	86 (34%)
Year Group Unknown	0 (0%)	48 (14%)	0 (0%)
Total	266 (100%)	351 (100%)	254 (100%)

Note: (%) have been rounded.

As Table 1 highlights, Einstein High have by far the greatest response rate, with almost 100 more pupils completing the questionnaire than in the other schools. The year 11 pupils at Grand Hill Grammar responded in the greatest numbers (113) closely followed by the year 9 pupils at Einstein High (110). The group with the lowest response rate was the year 9 pupils at Grand Hill Grammar, with only 67 returned questionnaires. The rest of the groups were similar with around 80-90 questionnaires in each. A number of pupils did not write their year group on the questionnaire. This was only a problem in Einstein High where the questionnaires were administered in mixed year group sessions. In all other schools the questionnaires were returned to me in year group packs so I could add this information myself. In Einstein High I was left with 14% of questionnaires with an unknown year group. The dataset provides a useful resource for exploring young people from different backgrounds, schools and year groups' dispositions towards university. It has also been useful to contextualize and compliment the qualitative phase. The specific process of coding and analysing the questionnaire data is discussed in section 3.8.

3.5. Sampling Phase II

As well as becoming a rich and useful dataset, the survey conducted in phase one contributed toward a second process of sampling for the next stage of fieldwork. At the end of the questionnaire pupils were asked if they wanted to volunteer to be part of the qualitative phase of the project²³. Of the 871 pupils who completed a questionnaire 206 (24%) volunteered for this. Discounting those pupils in Einstein High whose year group was unknown I was left with 198 to sample from (33 from Grand Hill Grammar, 73 from

²³ Information sheets about the project were also distributed along with the questionnaires. These can be found at Appendix II.I.

Einstein High and 92 from Eagles Academy). The tables below illustrate the distribution of pupils in each school and year that either opted in or out of the qualitative phase:

Table 2: Distribution of pupils volunteering to participate further by year group in Grand Hill Grammar (column%)

	Grand Hill Grammar			
Volunteered to Participate?	Year 7	Year 9	Year 11	Total
Yes	15 (17%)	1 (2%)	17 (15%)	33 (12%)
No	71 (83%)	66 (99%)	96 (85%)	233 (88%)
Total	86 (100%)	67 (100%)	113 (100%)	266 (100%)

Note: (%) have been rounded.

Table 3: Distribution of pupils volunteering to participate further by year group in Einstein High School (column%)

	Einstein High School			
Volunteered to Participate?	Year 7	Year 9	Year 11	Total
Yes	15 (15%)	31 (28%)	27 (29%)	73 (24%)
No	84 (85%)	79 (72%)	67 (71%)	230 (76%)
Total	99 (100%)	110 (100%)	94 (100%)	303 (100%)

Note: (%) have been rounded.

Table 4: Distribution of pupils volunteering to participate by year group in Eagles Academy (column%)

	Eagles Academy			
Volunteered to Participate?	Year 7	Year 9	Year 11	Total
Yes	34 (43%)	34 (38%)	24 (28%)	92 (36%)
No	45 (57%)	55 (62%)	62 (72%)	162 (64%)
Total	79 (100%)	89 (100%)	86 (100%)	254 (100%)

Note: (%) have been rounded.

It is interesting that despite Grand Hill being the easiest school to access and Eagles Academy being the hardest, the pattern of young people volunteering to be interviewed was reversed. The Eagles Academy pupils volunteered in the greatest numbers (36%) compared to only 12% of the pupils at Grand Hill (see Table 2 and Table 4). This could be partially explained by the way in which I was positioned by the school. As aforementioned, in Eagles Academy my research was promoted to the pupils which may have led them to see me as part of the curriculum. Another reason could be that my research appeared as an

unusual activity; they rarely have guests in from universities²⁴. In a similar vein, being part of a marginalised community, these young people's voices are often silenced and as such my research offered a potential avenue for them to be heard.

In Grand Hill Grammar only one of the year 9 pupils volunteered to be interviewed. This was problematic as I had planned to interview at least 6 pupils per year per school. Since only a total of 67 pupils in year 9 at Grand Hill had even completed a questionnaire it was clear that a number of form tutors had not distributed them to the pupils. I spent a lot of time trying to increase this figure; however Paul was very slow at chasing the tutors and was reluctant to hassle them. I even managed to get into the year 9 assembly to try to encourage pupils to complete the questionnaires. Unfortunately no more were ever distributed. Paul offered to recruit six year 9 pupils to be interviewed himself. Whilst there were clearly limitations to this strategy- they were not a comparable group as they had been selected by a teacher rather than volunteering themselves- I agreed as this was the only option I had. Interviewing pupils selected by a teacher also clearly poses ethical issues around informed consent; this will be discussed below in section 3.9.1.

Excluding the year 9s at Grand Hill Grammar I was left with a workable number of pupils to sample from in each school in each year group. At this point it is important to explain the additional sampling parameters used to select the necessary six from each group. The first consideration was gender. Whilst the focus of this research is not directly on gender it is important not to overlook it and its intersection with other factors such as social class (Bradley, 2016). By including an equal number of boys and girls in the sample I left open the possibility of a gender-sensitive analysis. The resulting sample consists of three girls and three boys from each year in each school. The second parameter was social class, specific measures of which were attainable through the survey. As it turned out the schools appeared more segregated along such lines than I had anticipated. Almost all of the pupils in Grand Hill and Einstein High could be classified as middle or upper class, with almost all of those in Eagles Academy coming from working-class families²⁵. A classed sample thus became implicit through selecting an equal number of pupils in each school²⁶.

²⁴ They do have university students working in their classrooms as extra academic support; however this is distinct from my proposed research which offered a more unusual form of interaction.

²⁵ See Chapter 4 for further details.

²⁶ Arguably my sample is skewed toward the middle/upper classes as the pupils in two out of three schools come from such backgrounds. As will be discussed below, I conducted a disproportionate number of interviews in Eagles Academy in part to make up for this. However, it is also important not to conflate the pupils in Grand Hill with those in Einstein High. Whilst they all come from dominant positions in social

Nevertheless it remained a sampling parameter and I tried not to select the anomalies, i.e. where possible I did not sample the middle-class pupils in Eagles Academy²⁷. I had hoped that race/ethnicity would be a factor of this research project and as mentioned I had initially been seeking access to an ethnically diverse school. However as this was not possible I ended up conducting fieldwork in three predominantly white schools. Not all of my participants *were* white British, but this was not something I had built into the research design and had no formal way of capturing their ethnic group. At times these issues came up in interviews but not always. As these pupils were a minority in my sample I will not be making any claims about race/ethnicity in this thesis.

I also tried to get a balanced sample in terms of responses to the question: ‘How likely do you think it is that you will go to university?’ I wanted to access young people from across the spectrum of responses ranging from ‘definitely won’t’ to ‘definitely will’. This was not straightforward as the number of pupils ticking each box was not proportionally represented in the volunteers²⁸.

The specific process of sampling students for interview involved sorting the questionnaires of those who had volunteered from each school in each year group into specific piles. As my sampling frame included three girls and three boys from each year group in each school I split the piles again by gender. In any pile where there were more than three to sample from I moved on to secondary sampling considerations. First I compared the pupils within each pile in terms of their social class backgrounds looking to ensure the least ambiguity in class terms. Where I still had choice between students who fit all of these criteria, I then looked at their responses to the question on their expectations for university, trying to ensure I had a variation in terms of those who indicated a positive, ambivalent or negative response.

Through applying these parameters I was able to comfortably sample a total of 54 pupils. This sample increased slightly as when interviewing the Eagles Academy year 11 pupils I felt that I needed to speak to a couple more of them as their narratives were more diverse than the others. The final sample included nine year 11 pupils in Eagles Academy leaving

space, they are distinct, in particular in relation to the schools they attend; something which in itself is a major focus of this research.

²⁷ Whilst a consideration of the experiences of middle-class pupils in a predominantly working-class school, and that of the working-class pupils in a predominantly middle-class school would have been fascinating, it was not the focus of this study.

²⁸ This issue is discussed further in Chapter 6.

me with a total of 57 pupils²⁹. I also sampled one careers advisor to be interviewed per school³⁰ giving me a total of 60 interviews conducted.

3.6. Data Collection Phase II.I: Interviewing pupils

When constructing my methodology I was aware that the timing of the interviews over the course of the school year could have implications for the data produced. Thus I made it a priority, where possible, to conduct the interviews in all schools simultaneously such that, for example, the narratives of the year 7 pupils in all schools would be comparable in temporal terms. Whilst I was aware that the timing of the interviews would have implications for the extent to which the young people were informed about university and careers, the order in which I interviewed each year group was chosen for practical reasons. I began with the year 11 pupils such that the interviews would have the least possible disruption on their GCSEs. I then decided to interview the year 9 pupils, leaving the year 7 pupils until last meaning that they would have had longer to adjust to secondary school. There was one exception to this, in Grand Hill Grammar the year 9 pupils were the last to be interviewed as I continuously struggled to get a sample of them.

The slots allocated for interviews with pupils varied in each school. In Grand Hill Grammar, I was not allowed to conduct interviews during *any* class times so I had to interview the young people over their lunch. This was problematic as it meant that I was intruding on their free time. However in Grand Hill they have an extra-long lunchtime period to enable them to participate in activities after eating. As a result they were still able to meet with me, eat lunch and have a small amount of free time. In Einstein High, I was only allowed to conduct interviews during their equivalent of citizenship, as this class was viewed as the least important in the timetable. In Eagles Academy, I was allowed to take the year 7s out of any lesson I wished, whereas for the year 9 and 11s I was asked to use either their physical education lesson or their 'co-curricular' slot (one afternoon per week where pupils are required to stay late to participate in extra-curricular activities).

²⁹ I also interviewed four pupils (two from Einstein High and two from Eagles Academy) who had severe learning difficulties or child protection issues which meant I felt their interviews were too sensitive to use. These were dropped from the analysis and not included in the 57.

³⁰ The only school which had more than one careers advisor was Grand Hill Grammar. Their full time careers advisor of many years had recently gone down to part time and they had employed a second. I decided to only interview the original careers advisor.

3.6.1. Interview materials: interview schedule

Despite sampling from a range of ages, I constructed one semi-structured interview schedule for use with all pupils³¹ (some interview stimulus varied according to age, this will be discussed in the following section). This allowed me to ask similar questions while altering them slightly to ensure they were applicable to the specific phase of education a pupil was in. For example when discussing GCSE options I asked the year 9 and 11 pupils which subjects they had chosen whilst for the year 7 pupils I enquired whether they had given any thought to what GCSE subjects they might select in later years. The interview was split into four main sections: the first explored their background information- who they lived with and what they did in their spare time; the second was focussed on careers and their GCSEs; the third looked at university and the final section considered their knowledge and perceptions of debt.

The careers section of the interview aimed to tap into young people's horizons for action. That is, I wanted to explore their perceptions of the future, their 'aspirations' and also the pathways and barriers they envisioned when considering how to reach such goals. Whilst I was interested in university and career aspirations, I was conscious to ask the question in such a way that would allow their answers not to be limited to such topics. The question I asked was: 'What do you think you might be doing when you're 25 years old?' Whilst most young people did focus on university or career aspirations some answered in other ways³². On the one hand it is possible to argue that providing a concrete age to visualise, restricted the pupils' answers, however it also narrowed down what could be a daunting task. It enabled them to think about their future selves in material terms and meant that their answers were comparable. It was interesting how many of the pupils took note of the age and used it to as a benchmark for their response, counting forward and thinking about what age they would be when they finished university. Some of them asked me how old I was when thinking about their answers. Others asked me if people are still at university at 25. This was followed up by specific probing around careers and subsequent questions were around mobility plans, what their parents thought about their future and also a concrete question about their specific next step (in education or otherwise).

³¹ See Appendix III.I for interview schedule

³² See Chapter 6 for more details.

3.6.2. Interview materials: plasticine modelling

Plasticine modelling is a particularly non-intimidating creative method unlike, for example, drawing which may invoke feelings of inferiority regarding ability. As such we found it to be a useful and fun research tool. It enabled the students to solidify the abstract issue of identity, and thus talk openly and in-depth about such issues.

(Abrahams and Ingram, 2013: 3.2)

Following Ingram (2011) and Abrahams and Ingram (2013) I employed the visual creative method of plasticine modelling to elicit young people's sense of self and imagined future selves. Whilst this would have been a fascinating activity to do with all pupils, due to time constraints with the interview slots allocated, it was only done with the year 7 pupils. This method entailed asking participants to construct two plasticine models, one that represents who they are now and one that represents how they imagine themselves when they are 25 years old. These directions enabled the year 7 pupils to be more creative and have extra time to visualise their future selves than the older ones. It also gave them a way to express something quite abstract- namely their identity and imagined future identity. This is a more difficult task for a younger child; as such this method was particularly important for this age group. This visual activity also served to alter the power dynamic between me and the year 7 pupils, giving them greater control over the shape of the interview (Mannay, 2016).

Gauntlett (2007) argues that creative methods which build in reflection time can lead to rich data. Asking my participants to make a plasticine model enabled them to slowly construct a concrete version of something quite difficult to visualise. This worked very well and at times even dominated the interview as I did not put a time limit on the session. In a couple of instances we did not manage to get through the rest of the interview schedule. This was not a problem as it was a crucial way to explore young people's identities and visions of themselves in the future. At times I asked them questions from the interview schedule whilst they were making the models. This was the first time I had used plasticine modelling in a one-to-one setting. In my previous work this activity had been part of a focus group (Abrahams, 2012; Abrahams and Ingram, 2013). I had initially intended to run this as focus groups but it became difficult to organise with the schools so I resorted to doing it in interviews.

Whilst overall the one-to-one plasticine modelling worked well, there were a couple of issues which arose during this process. The first is that a lot of young people were initially

unsure what to make and I felt that the intensity of the one-to-one setting was putting pressure on them to think of something fast. I found this method to work much better when I left the room for a period of time and returned once they had started creating something. I continued to employ this strategy in all plasticine modelling, telling the young person I was just going to the toilet. This seemed to work well and helped them to relax, giving them more time to think of something to make. However I am conscious that they may have been suspicious about why I was leaving the room, indeed one pupil asked me after the interview whether it had been a test. The second issue I encountered was with regards to silence. The young person and I felt a pressure in such a setting to be vocal, filling any silences. Interestingly this was not something I felt in a focus group, although I made an effort to get a conversation going this was largely drowned out by the groups' discussions and laughter about their models. In a group setting if one person wishes to be silent, they can. In a one-to-one setting, if the young person is silent then the whole room is silent. I often felt that the silence made the young person feel pressure to finish quickly so I would make casual conversation with them about school and their favourite subjects and teachers. When I was not doing this they would often try to fill the silence themselves by asking me questions. On the flip side this was also a strength of my design as it enabled young people to feel confident enough to ask me questions. They could focus on their model whilst doing so, removing some of the intensity. Overall the young people found this activity to be fun and engaging and I generated rich data on young people's identities- something which is notoriously difficult to do in traditional research contexts.

It is important to point out that the visual data created through this method was not interpreted in isolation from the young person's narrative. Mannay (2016) argues that interpretation of visual data must be embedded within the interview. I have not imposed my own meaning on their objects; rather I have understood their creations in line with their personal narratives. The plasticine models served as a useful tool to elicit stories rather than being images open for interpretation, void of explanations from the participants.

3.6.3. Interview materials: vignette and debt sheet

With the year 9 and 11 interviews I did not use plasticine but I did use two alternative stimuli: a vignette and a debt sheet. These were also used with the year 7 pupils – time permitting³³. The vignette method involves preparing and presenting participants with a

³³ The vignette was used in all 18 of the year 7 interviews but the debt sheet was only used in 14 of them due to time restrictions.

carefully created hypothetical scenario and then questioning them about it. The vignette was used to elicit information about the young people's knowledge and perception of university and its purpose. I constructed two vignettes, each about a young person going to university³⁴. Barter and Reynold (2000) comment that the context of a vignette needs to be slightly 'fuzzy'. It must provide enough information for participants to comprehend the story but be vague enough to 'force' them to discuss their judgments, bringing in their own contextual factors. When constructing the vignettes I was conscious of this and careful to provide important details but leave others out. The characters in the stories were purposefully constructed to be slightly different in terms of their class background and choice of subject and university. I decided not to follow class stereotypes entirely, making the working-class character attend the elite university whilst the middle-class character attended the post-1992 institution. Having these two opposing universities meant that I was able to explore whether they had any awareness of the differences or beliefs about such institutions or if they had heard of one, both or neither of them. I specifically selected two local universities such that they would be more familiar with them. I also altered the subjects in the vignettes in order to explore whether they had any perceptions of the 'value' of different degrees.

Another issue to consider was the gender of the characters, Hazel (1995) argues: 'Although capable of empathising with members of the opposite sex, young participants seem to concentrate on characters and figures from their own sex' (Hazel, 1995: online). This suggests that the vignettes would work best if the character's gender is matched to the participant's. As such I made two versions of the vignettes, one with male names (to use with the boys) and one with female names (to use with the girls). In order to be sensitive to any young people not identifying with a particular gender, I planned to offer those young people the choice of characters. This situation however did not arise during the interviewing.

Vignettes are a non-intimidating method, allowing young people the freedom to choose whether to talk about their own situation or to relate it to the abstract third person (Sundaram and Wilde, 2012). In the case of my research I found this method to be useful as the pupils were able to talk about the vignette; why they thought the character had made such decisions and what they thought about this separate from their own plans. This means

³⁴ See Appendix IV for vignettes.

they were able to say that they disagreed with a vignette character's decision to attend university but at the same time that they hoped to go. At times some pupils linked their responses to the vignette into discussions of their own lives. Interestingly one of the year 9 boys from Grand Hill Grammar referred back to the vignette during the follow up questions about his own personal plans for university. He aligned himself to the character saying he felt his family would encourage him to go to university 'almost a bit like Jo'.

The fourth part of the interview was intended to explore young people's awareness of debt. I constructed a 'debt sheet'³⁵ in order to tap into this. The sheet contained images and names of various kinds of debt. Young people were shown the sheet and asked, first if they recognised any of them, secondly if they could explain what they thought they were and finally if they imagined they might borrow money in any of those ways in the future. The responses were interesting and varied, illustrating the diversity in knowledge of these issues. A lot of the young people claimed to be familiar with the majority of the forms of debt but upon trying to explain them it became apparent that they did not really understand them. I was fascinated by the few young people who immediately began to talk about Monopoly when they saw the word 'mortgage'- something I had not even considered before. As this research is no longer focused on young people's perceptions of debt and its relationship to student debt, this part of the interview is not drawn upon during the analysis section of this thesis.

3.6.4. Interview reflections

Overall, despite previous research describing the difficulties of gathering qualitative data from teenagers (Bassett et al., 2008); I found the interviews to be rich and insightful. I have considered the question of why I was able to gain such a mass of in-depth data with teenagers whilst others have been less successful. One possible answer relates to the topic of study. The questions I was asking the pupils were of direct relevance and interest to them. Many of the questions I asked were things which they would have been used to discussing with careers advisors, teachers, parents and peers. Later I discuss my class background and its potential to increase the quality of the interviews with the working-class pupils. I also feel that my age may have been a factor which enabled them to relax and be open, as they believed I could relate to them. Many were keen to ask me questions about my own experiences. Similarly, in contrast to previous research (e.g. Bassett et al., 2008), I

³⁵ See Appendix V.

did not find that the presence of a recording device intimidated young participants. This is potentially related to the increased normality and visibility of technology and recording devices in their lives.

Whilst most of my interviews went smoothly, I did encounter some difficulties. The main issue I faced was during the year 9 interviews at Grand Hill when one participant turned up with a friend. I had not conducted a double interview before and was not prepared as I was not given any advanced warning. My interview schedule, unlike that of a focus group was not set up to be a three way conversation. Nevertheless I managed to quickly adapt to suit the situation, asking one young person at a time initially but inviting them to respond together during the vignette section. There were inevitably issues with these interviews and the data they generated. For example, peer pressure may have played into the dynamics of the responses I received. At times I noted the young people disagreeing with each other. Often this led to one voice being silenced as the other took charge. I made an effort to encourage them both to speak and reassured them that there were no right or wrong answers and that both their points were valid.

Another ethical dilemma I encountered during the course of the interviews relates to the disclosure of information to my participants. Initially a lot of the pupils were extremely curious about the answers to my questions. They wanted to know more information about university and would often ask me questions about it before or during the interview. This was particularly prominent during the vignette section with the younger pupils who appeared to view this somewhat like a test and wanted to know if their answers were 'correct'. As it was important for my design to explore how much they knew themselves, I told them that I would answer all of their questions after the interview, reassuring them it was not a test.

3.7. Data Collection Phase II.II: Interviewing Careers Advisors

As part of an exploration of the extent to which schools shape horizons for action, I decided to engage with the careers services in each school, conducting semi-structured interviews with one careers advisor per school³⁶. The interviews all lasted for roughly one hour each and we covered issues ranging from their role in the school, their targets and pressures through to their perceptions of students. The careers provisions in each school

³⁶ See Appendix III.II for careers interview schedule.

were quite different. Whilst Grand Hill Grammar and Eagles Academy both had a full time careers advisor on site permanently; Einstein High bought in an external impartial careers advisor who also worked in other schools in the city. This had implications both for the work they did in the school and how our interviews unfolded. For example, in Einstein High the careers advisor was not responsible for organising careers events, but was only there to provide one-to-one guidance sessions and often drew upon careers work and experiences from other schools during the interview.

I had intended to observe some careers sessions and activities in each school, in Eagles Academy, following our interview, the careers advisor invited me to observe some one-to-one sessions, which I gratefully accepted. In Grand Hill Grammar, I asked the careers advisor if I could do the same thing but was turned down on the basis of the students' rights and respecting their personal space and private conversations. It is interesting to consider the difference in the ways the careers advisors viewed their pupils' rights. In Eagles Academy, the careers advisor encouraged me not to bother with consent forms for these sessions and told me that the young people were used to being observed in such a way³⁷. In Grand Hill, the students and their privacy seemed of utmost importance, during our interview the careers advisor informed me that the interview would need to be terminated if any young person dropped in. This actually happened at one point and the careers advisor was quick to ensure I had switched the recorder off. In comparison at Einstein High, as our interview had run over time a young person appeared at the door for their scheduled one-to-one slot, the careers advisor sent the boy back to his class so that we could finish our interview. This difference could be related to the fact that Grand Hill Grammar is a private school where the staff may often feel under pressure to fulfil the needs of the pupils at all times to keep parents happy. Nevertheless the distinction is fascinating and indeed can be seen playing out in the analysis section when looking at the way in which the different schools support their pupils.

Despite not being able to observe careers sessions in Grand Hill, I was welcomed to attend a careers days for sixth formers which consisted of alumni coming back to talk about their occupations. Excerpts from field notes from the day have been woven into the analysis.

³⁷ I did opt to gain written consent from all the pupils whose session I observed. See section 3.9.1 for further details.

3.8. Data Analysis: Questionnaires and Interviews

The coding and analysis of the survey data was done using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Following inputting all 871 questionnaires, it was necessary to do some initial coding of the variables to convert them into a useable format. The main variable which required such work was 'parental occupation'. This was an open question for pupils to write in their parent(s) jobs which needed to be coded into an occupational classification scheme. I decided to use both the Standard Occupational Classification 2010 (SOC2010) codes and the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC); SOC2010 enabled me to retain a level of detail around the specific occupational groups whilst NS-SEC would allow for a more broad coding in line with the dominant classification framework. I created individual variables for each parent's occupation³⁸. This coding was not straightforward, at times there was a lack of detail given about a parent's job making it impossible to ascertain the relevant code for the occupation listed. Examples of this include 'manager', 'owner' and 'accountant'. I was often left to make decisions using additional information (such as parental educational level) to aid with the coding of occupations.

Another difficulty I encountered through the coding process was that some pupils had ticked two boxes instead of one or had otherwise indicated being 'in the middle' of two responses. In these instances I used logical reasoning to make a decision about which box to assign them to. Through my coding I gained some insight into the problematic nature of rigid questionnaires with fixed option boxes which force people to select one predefined response. The young people in my research who ticked two boxes may be understood as vehemently opposing such rigidity and challenging my predefined categories³⁹.

In addition to the issues involved in coding the quantitative data it is important to point out that whilst it formed a central part of the original research design, the results of the survey have only limited analytical use in this thesis. This is because the initial survey was designed to address the original research questions and was thus not able to speak to all parts of the analysis following a change in focus. For example, there was no question on the survey about young people's career aspirations, something which became important to this project

³⁸ It is often the case that when classification systems are used the two parents in the household's occupations become merged giving a household NS-SEC. I instead chose to keep both parents coded individually as this allows for a more nuanced analysis.

³⁹ I do not wish to imply that this was necessarily undertaken in a conscious manner, rather their responses implicitly represent a challenge to such predefined categories.

at a later stage. In this way it is notable that the survey is not drawn upon in relation to all aspects of the analysis, nevertheless parts of the survey remain important and have been useful in contextualising and supporting certain arguments in the thesis.

The method of qualitative data analysis undertaken in this thesis is not easily classifiable in line with the traditional sociological methods. I do not wish to force my data analysis process into a specific box but rather to be honest about how I came to the conclusions of this thesis and discuss how certain elements of my analysis may fit or differ from dominant approaches. Hammersley and Atkinson (1997) argue that the data analysis stage of research is not necessarily a distinct phase and highlight the ways it is prevalent throughout the course of research. They write: 'Formally, it starts to take shape in analytic notes and memorabilia; informally, it is embodied in the ethnographer's ideas and hunches' (: 205). This was indeed my experience of the analysis process. Throughout my fieldwork I made notes on issues I felt were emerging strongly from my observations across the interviews. For me, analysis started during the data collection phase. At this point I was so close to the data, I had a real sense of what was going on.

I began the stage of formal data analysis once I had left the field and had a psychological break, as such I was deliberately one step removed from the data. This was an important process as gaining a distance from the field enabled me to relook at the data collected with greater objectivity⁴⁰. Nevertheless the notes made in the field on 'initial ideas and hunches' provided crucial insights to aid this process. My approach to analysis was thematic and I used NVivo to sort and manage the mass of data collected. I coded the transcripts into themes initially guided by the different sections of the interview and subsequently added codes to account for themes emerging directly from the data. Hollway and Jefferson (2013) warn against the problems of data fragmentation and assert the importance of 'keeping the whole in mind'. When beginning analysis I was cautious about fragmenting and dissecting transcripts, feeling that each individual's complete story was important. In order to avoid this I began to read through whole transcripts. This started to become difficult and I was faced with the question: how do I keep 'the whole' in mind when there are 60 transcripts? What I began to realise through analysis was that the context and bigger picture (or unit of analysis) for my specific research project was not each individual's whole story; rather the 'whole' was the context of participants *in relation to each other and the schools*. This

⁴⁰ What I mean by this is that my data analysis process was able to be less guided by my emotions of the field, in particular since the fieldwork became so emotional for me, for further elaboration see Chapter 5.

understanding enabled me to cut up my data in multiple ways to explore the relations within it. For example, I constructed large mind maps of individual responses to specific questions asked about the vignettes in order to visually compare responses between each school and year group⁴¹.

My approach to analysis was not wholly directed by my original research questions. Whilst they remained present in guiding the analysis, my approach also involved a close reading of the data to allow themes to emerge directly from it. Whilst this was daunting and uncomfortable at first, guided by my supervisor who encouraged me to get ‘comfortable with the uncomfortableness’ of this phase, I found it to be a refreshing and liberating process as I was free to explore my data from multiple angles. Through this process I constructed a list of themes which I felt were of central importance. This was based not only on my interviews but also on what I had seen and experienced throughout the fieldwork. Of course this list was far too long for a thesis, as such I had to make some important decisions about the direction of the analysis. Following discussion with my supervisor, I re-evaluated my original research questions considering what was now apparently at the heart of the thesis. I then began to write starting with what I felt was of central importance to my participants, academia and wider society. I began by describing and unpacking various areas of the data and subsequently built up the analysis with theory. I utilised Bourdieu in this process as a tool to inspire and help me ‘think’ about my data and its implications. Bourdieu has been described as good to ‘think with’ by both his sympathisers (Grenfell and James, 1998) but also his by critics (Jenkins, 1992). Jenkins (1992) argues that this is because Bourdieu’s theorising is deeply rooted in empirical research and also because he provides rich and continuous reflections on the complexities of social life and the practice of research. In sum, the process of understanding, analysing and writing about my data involved a careful crafting. I centralised the participants’ narratives over any particular analytic framework and rather used theory to think through and understand their discussions in relation to broader structures of inequality.

It is important to note that this approach whilst seemingly inductive is notably different from the ‘grounded theory’ approach prescribed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in that I am conscious that it is never entirely possible (or indeed desirable) to view the data free from any framework; my personal subjectivities and affinities to Bourdieusian scholarship clearly

⁴¹ See Appendix VII for mind maps.

influenced the process as is discussed below in section 3.9.3. Moreover, even when the research questions were put to one side, they had already influenced and framed the data through their original role in the design of the methodological tools. Data analysis is a messy and continual process. Whilst I have presented the data in this thesis as polished and conclusive, clearly there are alternative ways to understand it and indeed additional avenues which are yet to be explored.

3.9. Ethics and Reflexive Considerations

‘Sociologists, when they carry out research, enter into personal and moral relationships with those they study’ (BSA, 2002: 2). I believe that it is my duty as a sociologist to reflect on the ethics of my research project and the issues which arose during the course of the fieldwork. The biggest stumbling block I encountered ethically was my experience of getting emotionally involved in caring about one of my participants and trying to help him. This is dealt with in Chapter 5 which reflexively locates the researcher in the research and considers the way in which this experience led me to question who I am as a sociologist. For now, it is important to reflect on my position and relationship to the other participants in the research. This section will discuss issues of anonymity and consent before going on to reflect on my social class background alongside other power dynamics in the interview relationship. Finally I will reflect on the impact of my epistemological position on the analysis and discuss notions of objectivity and subjectivity in research.

3.9.1. Anonymity and consent

All schools and pupils involved in this research have been given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. The careers advisors, however, were not given pseudonyms rather they are referred to in the thesis as ‘careers advisor’. Similarly unless there was a specific need to give a teacher a pseudonym they are identified by their status (e.g. head of year). It is important to point out that whilst I have made every effort to anonymise these professionals, within each school the careers advisors will be recognisable (as there is only one per school). This posed an ethical dilemma for me regarding anonymity. A popular way to overcome this problem would be to identify them broadly as ‘professionals’, this was not an option for me as the fact that they were careers advisors was of central importance to the core of this thesis. Whilst I have chosen to keep the detail of their position in, I have disguised their gender in an attempt to anonymise as far as possible. Nevertheless I am aware that they may still be recognised internally. As such I have ensured that any sensitive quotes which may jeopardize participants’ positions or reputations within their place of

work have been excluded. All other names mentioned in interviews and detailed descriptions of places have been removed.

My personal ethical stance on consent is that the most important consent is that given by the research participants themselves, in this case the young people (and careers advisors). Nevertheless ethical committees require that when interviewing young people under the age of 16 it is important to seek parental consent. The schools' stances on consent were not always in line with mine or my university's which posed ethical and moral dilemmas which I had to deal with whilst in the field. The process of gaining parental consent and the importance placed on it was different in each school. Out of all of the schools it was Einstein High who placed the greatest importance on this. They were not happy for any interview to take place without it and waiting for parental consent delayed the fieldwork phase in this school. Initially letters were sent out to the parents⁴², when some did not respond the school sent out follow up e-mails which boosted my response rate. I ended up with a full set of signed parental consent forms in Einstein High. In Grand Hill Grammar however, very few of the young people returned their consent forms. Paul did not think this was a problem. I attempted to chase these up and asked for parental e-mail addresses, but was never given them. Paul strongly encouraged me to go ahead without parental consent, arguing that the school was giving consent on behalf of the parents and that this was enough. He told me that parents expect their children to participate in these sorts of activities and there was no need for further consent. I continued to ask young people to return their forms but very few ever did this. I still felt it was important to consult with parents and as such I distributed opt-out forms. In Eagles Academy, when I first mentioned parental consent the teachers looked worried. They asked if I could do an opt-out form instead. They told me that they really struggle to get any consent forms back. In line with my ethical committee I felt that I should initially aim for written parental consent. I attended parents evening in the school and guided by the teachers approached relevant parents with my information sheets and consent forms. I managed to get signed forms from all of the year 11 parents this way. The year 7 and 9 head of years distributed the forms for me and informed me that they had them back. Acting in good faith, I took their word on this and proceeded with fieldwork.

⁴² See Appendix II.III for parental information sheets and consent forms.

The next form of consent needing to be dealt with was that of the participant. I carefully constructed consent forms and information sheets for careers advisors⁴³ and ‘child friendly’ versions for the young people⁴⁴. Ensuring informed consent is always difficult, but it is particularly problematic in a school context. This is because young people may feel pressure to take part in the research as it is taking place during school time and being promoted and supported by the school (especially in the case of Eagles Academy where, as discussed, my research was introduced positively during assembly). To opt out of such a project is almost going against the school. This issue was enhanced in Grand Hill Grammar when the teacher ‘asked’ six year 9 pupils to participate, whilst in all other cases young people had elected themselves. As I was aware of this I made every effort to inform the pupils about the research process once they arrived and checked that they were happy to participate. Once the interview was over I explained to the pupils how I was going to use their interview and checked again that they were happy for this to happen. In most cases there were no problems with this. However, one year 7 boy from Eagles Academy Jay was an exception. Despite having initially volunteered to participate in the interview, when he arrived to meet me he did not seem happy to be there and kept looking down at the floor. I spoke to him for a while and he told me that he did not want to do it anymore. I asked him why and he said: ‘it’s embarassin’ init’. I was keen to interview him as he was one of the few young people who had ticked on their questionnaire that they were ‘definitely not’ going to go to university. I assured him it was not embarrassing and showed him the plasticine. I talked through exactly what we would do and what I would ask him and after a little while he seemed to be happy to progress. I told him that we would stop at any point if he was unhappy to continue. After starting the plasticine modelling he got really into it and began to enjoy himself. Following the interview Jay confirmed that he was happy for me to use his interview. Subsequently I spoke to his head of year who informed me that their pupils are not very trusting of strangers. Trust is crucial to the success of interviews but is often harder to attain with marginalised young people who have often felt ‘let down’ by dominant institutions (Bassett et al., 2008).

This experience with Jay highlighted to me that an information sheet and consent form is often not sufficient to ensure young people are comfortable. It does not give enough information and the official nature of the wording can sometimes confuse them and

⁴³ See Appendix II.II for careers advisor information sheets and consent forms.

⁴⁴ See Appendix II.I for young people information sheets and consent forms.

complicate things. I found myself explaining the process to most of the young people and abandoning the information sheets as they were so formal they often scared the participants. Furthermore I often opted to do the consent form after the interview on the basis that the young people were more informed as to whether they wanted their interview to be part of my research or not.

3.9.2. Social class and power dynamics

Going into the field I was conscious of my class background and the effect this might have on the rapport I built with participants and the quality of the interview data. I have always felt that my class background is embodied and displayed through my style of dress, how I accessorise and wear my hair along with the way I walk and talk. This is in a sense produced by my habitus, developed in a working-class primary field (Bourdieu, 2010). Having spent many years reflexively adjusting my habitus to a middle-class field I would argue that I now occupy a position which is not firmly in either field but rather in ‘the third space’ (Bhabha, 1994; Ingram and Abrahams, 2016). This position was of benefit to my research as it enabled me to switch between a middle and working-class self at different times. This was something I consciously implemented during fieldwork.

Hammersley and Atkinson (1997) argue that the interviewer’s appearance can be crucial to shaping relationships in the field. I made a conscious effort to play down my working-class self during interviews with the students at Grand Hill and Einstein High and during interactions with teachers in all institutions. I straightened my hair and wore it down at all times, removed my gold jewellery and dressed relatively formally. However I did not want to appear too distant from the pupils or be viewed as a teacher. I did not wear suits, but rather dressed smart casual. I was also conscious of my speech and attempted to speak with a more neutral accent, pronouncing my words more clearly. In Eagles Academy I played up my working-class side. Whilst I maintained a professional appearance I was not so concerned with always wearing my hair down and often had it gelled up. I also kept my gold chain on during fieldwork. In Eagles Academy I was less conscious of my voice when interacting with the young people and was able to speak as I normally would which was more in line with their own vocabulary and accents.

Whilst it is not always the case that class matching in interviews directly leads to more valid and in depth data (Mellor et al., 2014); I feel that my class background engendered a level of trust with the Eagles Academy pupils which would not have been possible if we did not share similar life experiences. I was also conscious of the power dynamics in the interviews in terms of age. Being an adult I was in a position of power in relation to the participants.

This was complicated by intersections of class and gender (Mellor et al., 2014) at times I felt my power was *challenged* by some middle-class male participants, but overall I felt I maintained a dominant position in all interviews⁴⁵.

3.9.3. Bourdieu tinted glasses? Making the objective and subjective visible

My main problem is to try to understand what happened to me. My trajectory may be described as miraculous, I suppose – an ascension to a place where I don't belong. And so to be able to live in a world that is not mine I must try to understand both things: what it means to have an academic mind – how such is created – and at the same time what was lost in acquiring it. For that reason, even if my work – my full work – is a sort of auto-biography, it is a work for people who have the same sort of trajectory, and the same need to understand.

(Bourdieu in Bourdieu and Eagleton, 1992: 117)

What is objectivity? What is subjectivity? Do I want to be objective? Can I be objective? How do objectivity and subjectivity work together? What is the *purpose* of my research? Whose side am I on? These are all questions I struggled with when trying to understand and expose the science behind my research project alongside my personal, political, emotional, value-laden motivations and perspectives that I brought to bear on this journey. Some of this is dealt with in Chapter 5, for now it is relevant to state my position on debates around objectivity and subjectivity, pointing to the ways in which my research is at once subjective *and* objective.

Feminist standpoint epistemology rejects the positivistic notion that social science can or should be neutral and value free. Stanley and Wise (1983) argue that the notion of 'objectivity' in science has historically been no more than male subjectivity. Collins (1986) argues that it constitutes better more truthful science to be open about our attachments to our research as confessing that the knowledge we create is only partial, has a greater validity than presenting partial knowledge as if it were universally true (see also Harding, 1987). Whilst I agree with this position, I do not wish to argue that my project is entirely subjective with no objective scientific value. What is the middle point of this debate and how can it be achieved? There have been various attempts to offer alternatives to the rigid

⁴⁵ The power dynamic was of course different with careers advisors where overall I always felt that due to their institutional status, they were in a position of power over me, despite me asking the questions.

concept of objectivity, to account for its contextually related nature. For example ‘situated objectivity’ (Williams, 2015); ‘good enough objectivity’ (Jenkins, 2002) and ‘corroborative objectivity’ (May with Perry 2011).

Whilst these are all useful in pushing forward the debate, I have found Gayle Letherby’s concept of ‘theorised subjectivity’ to be the most helpful for overcoming this binary in my own work. Theorised subjectivity acknowledges the existence of a ‘truth’ and reality which can be explored and exposed; but the influence of subjectivities on the research process make a conclusive objective and final declaration unrealistic. Rather what *is* possible is the ‘theorisation of the subjective’. Beginning with the subjective rather than attempting to find a way to defend the objective, will itself lead to greater objectivity (Letherby et al., 2013). Following this line of reasoning I will first highlight how my work embodies an element of subjectivity⁴⁶ before arguing that my research method entailed objectivity and that my conclusions tell a ‘truth’ about society.

Theorised subjectivity has close resemblances to the argument of Pierre Bourdieu that the route to objectivity is through being reflexive. Bourdieu calls for Sociologists to situate themselves within ‘the field of cultural production’ and to acknowledge the impact of this position and the subsequent ‘scholarly gaze’ imparted on the data (Bourdieu cited in Wacquant, 1989: 34). I cannot detach myself from Bourdieu’s theory, when looking at my data I always do so through a Bourdieusian lens. This in itself is not a weakness; Bourdieu’s theory of practice has enabled a rich analysis of relations and structures of power- the central focus of this thesis. In addition to wearing Bourdieu tinted glasses, I bring to the project a range of values and preconceptions developed through growing up in a dominated position in society; facing poverty and structural inequality directly. My passion, motivation and interest in this topic and for Bourdieu’s work emerge from these experiences. Bourdieu argues that ‘experience linked to one’s social past can and must be mobilised in research’ (Bourdieu, 2004: 113). Similarly Letherby writes: ‘If our aim is to get anywhere near an objective truth, we need to see subjectivity not as a hindrance but as a resource in this endeavour’ (Letherby et al., 2013: 92). Rather than attempting to disregard my values I embrace my background; treating the understanding, familiarities, empathy and emotions I possess as powerful resources in my endeavour of exposing the mechanisms of inequality in education.

⁴⁶ This is elaborated upon in Chapter 5.

Alongside embracing my subjectivities, my research has encompassed an element of objectivity. I employed a systematic and rigorous method of data collection. I asked the same questions using the same materials to different groups of people in order to observe and understand the similarities or differences between them. I did not ask leading questions to suit my own agenda and even changed the direction of the research when my initial hypothesis proved incorrect. My findings are intrinsically situated within the powerful themes which emerged directly from the data I collected. Whilst my conclusions could never be wholly objective, neutral and value free, they serve to demonstrate the deep and problematic workings of social class inequality within the British educational system today.

3.10. Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis employed a mixed-methods, Bourdieusian approach to data collection and analysis. Doing so engendered a strong relational approach which allowed for consideration of both structure and agency when exploring young people's aspirations and expectations alongside the institutional structures and practices which reproduce inequality in education. In this chapter I sought to make visible the research process and have discussed various methodological and ethical issues which arose through the duration of fieldwork. In this chapter I also began a reflexive conversation about the impact of the researcher on the research and discussed issues of objectivity and subjectivity. These points will be revisited and explored in greater depth in Chapter 5 but for now, Chapter 4 turns to a more detailed consideration of the schools, unpacking the specific context of each one.

Chapter 4: The Three Schools

4.1. Introduction

As was discussed in Chapter 3, my research sampling began with selecting three contrasting schools in one urban locality in the South of England. Grand Hill Grammar School⁴⁷ (an independent fee paying school), Einstein High (a ‘high performing’ state school in a wealthy part of the city) and Eagles Academy (an ‘under-performing’ state school in a deprived part of the city). The schools were selected purposefully. They were chosen in part as a way to access young people from different socio-economic backgrounds and as it turned out, did this more completely than expected. However they also present interesting and different contexts from which to observe the functioning and development of different practices and dispositions (or habitus). Through understanding and contextualising each school in relation to one another but also to wider policy in England I aim to avoid an analysis which (inadequately) takes the unit of analysis to be the individual (James, 2011). Adopting a Bourdieusian approach enables young people’s narratives to be situated within their wider community and schooling contexts which themselves are situated within broader societal and political structures and struggles. Public and governmental attention is often given to GCSE results which are, ‘misrecognised’ as markers in and of themselves of ‘a good school’ (James, 2015b). During a context of marketised education, parental choice becomes a prominent feature of political discourse around schooling. In this context schools focus on marketing themselves to parents largely through their league table position. Due to political pressure to ‘raise standards’ in education through ‘raising attainment’ in schools, the measurement of institutions against a benchmark of GCSEs is incessant. Whilst the specific benchmark is constantly in flux, the fixation on GCSEs and in particular traditional ‘academic’ subjects (such as maths, English and science) as superior forms of knowledge has remained constant through time (Harrison et al., 2015). In this chapter I will challenge this simplistic notion of educational institutions and their ability to educate through contextualising each of my fieldwork schools within their history and the political challenges or pressures they may be facing. This chapter begins by presenting the GCSE results in each school, setting them up in line with political convention from ‘top of the league’ to ‘bottom of the league’. This is important as despite their limitations, GCSEs remain crucial as they are illustrative of the different pressures and opportunities facing

⁴⁷ All schools have been given Pseudonyms which in part reflect their character.

each school and the young people within them. Subsequently I will explore what lies beneath these results through presenting a brief overview of each school in terms of its history, governance structure, location, demographics and cohort information. The second part of this chapter provides a more detailed look at the family backgrounds of the cohort of children attending each school in the year groups selected for sampling (7, 9 and 11).

4.2. In a league of their own?

Table 5: GCSE results by school

	Grand Hill Grammar	Einstein High	Eagles Academy
School Status	Independent School	Academy-Converter Mainstream	Academy-Sponsor Led
% achieving 5A*-C GCSE (or equivalent) including English and maths in 2015	99	87	48

As is illustrated in Table 5, both Grand Hill Grammar and Einstein High are above average in terms of GCSE results in England. In 2015 99% of pupils at Grand Hill Grammar and 87% of pupils at Einstein High achieved the government benchmark of 5A*-C GCSE (or equivalent) including English and maths⁴⁸. Meanwhile only 48% of pupils at Eagles Academy achieved these results. The average for England that year was 54%. These figures to some extent hide the differing levels of advantage and disadvantage in outcomes for young people in each school. In Grand Hill Grammar this benchmark figure is largely irrelevant as their pupils achieve far higher results than this. They are not required to provide this data to the DfE for the performance tables and instead focus their attention on competing with other private schools. Their results appear in the ‘independent schools league table’ whereby percentage of A and A*s are what really counts. In 2015 roughly 70% of all GCSE entries at Grand Hill were graded A* or A.

Another note on these figures is the introduction of ‘equivalents’ to the measures. These GCSE ‘equivalents’ which include vocational variants (such as Business and Technology

⁴⁸ I have chosen to present the GCSE results from 2015 as this represents results from the academic year in which my fieldwork took place (2014/2015). The year 11 pupils interviewed took their GCSE exams in 2015. Exact sources for the figures used in this chapter cannot be referenced as this would de-anonymise the schools.

Education Council (BTEC) qualifications) alongside a group of skills-led qualifications render the benchmark less comparable across schools. This is particularly important in Eagles Academy. In 2012 the DfE reports that 40% of the cohort achieved 5A*-C GCSE (or equivalent) including English and maths. However if we disregard the ‘equivalents’, less than 20% achieved this benchmark indicating a large number of young people in Eagles Academy were entered into ‘equivalents’. In theory, these equivalents- in particular the skills-led group- provide invaluable alternative provisions for young people (Harrison et al., 2015). However, they remain (misrecognised as) inferior qualifications rendering young people’s opportunities upon leaving school vastly different, as GCSEs become the ‘gatekeeper’ for opportunities post-16 (Cornish, 2015). As schools are allowed to include equivalents in their results, young people in schools in precarious positions in the league tables are being streamed and picked out to take BTECs early on if the school fears they may not be capable of the GCSE. Whilst the young people in Grand Hill and Einstein High were all taking GCSEs, many of the pupils in Eagles Academy were enrolled on BTECs- some not of their choosing⁴⁹. This indicates that despite a focus on GCSE benchmark measures which purportedly are comparable, the schools and the pupils appear to be operating in leagues of their own. The rest of this chapter will unpack and explore what is beneath these different results and positions.

4.3. Grand Hill Grammar School

Grand Hill Grammar School is an old educational establishment founded in the 1500s; a time when very few children were educated and where education was mainly controlled by religion. According to their website, Grand Hill was originally founded by Royal Charter as a place ‘for boys to be instructed in good manners and literature’. Subsequently, they received an endowment from two of the city’s wealthy tradesmen who envisioned Grand Hill as a place for ‘their sons to be educated’. With the 1944 Education Act, Grand Hill became a direct grant Grammar School meaning that half of its students were funded through private fees and half were funded directly by the state upon successful completion of the ‘11+’ exam. In 1979, when direct grants were abolished and the tripartite system was replaced by the comprehensive, Grand Hill became fully independent and began admitting girls. Today, Grand Hill Grammar is an independent co-educational day school charging just under £5,000 per term in fees (equating to just under £14,000 per annum). The board

⁴⁹ For further discussion around this issue see Chapter 7.

of governors at Grand Hill are made up mainly of alumni from the school and ex-parents. They have a high average age and the majority (11 out of 16) are male. They appear to be drawn from various senior roles including educational professionals, consultants and chartered accountants/financiers, and one is a partner of a multi-national law firm. Though there is limited public information regarding how this board are appointed, I was informed by a professional in the school that they are chosen strategically to suit the school's needs, e.g. a chartered surveyor to advise on the building.

Grand Hill houses an infants and junior school for ages 4-11, an upper school for ages 11-16 and sixth form for ages 16-18. At the time of the last independent school inspection, carried out and reported in 2015, there were roughly 700 pupils in the upper school and 300 in the sixth form. Grand Hill is located in one of the wealthiest parts of the city close to the centre and next door to the local Russell Group University. It attracts students mainly from 'the leafy suburbs' in the North West of the city. However a number of the pupils are also drawn from outside of the city. According to the inspection report, Grand Hill has 'a wide socio-economic mix of pupils'. They provide means tested assisted places and bursaries which are allocated to pupils once admitted if they have a household income below £40,000. At the time of inspection 15% of the pupils in the school were receiving such support. The report also highlighted that approximately one fifth of the school came from ethnic minority backgrounds. In 2015 Grand Hill had identified roughly 100 pupils with learning difficulties, 20 of whom had a statement of special educational needs (SEN). Grand Hill's gender mix is interesting as it was a boy's school until the late 1970s when it became co-educational; however, to this day, girls remain outnumbered. In 2015 61% of the pupils in the school were male.

Grand Hill consistently admits roughly 130 pupils per year, promising parents class sizes no bigger than 22. If more than 130 are admitted the school is forced to add extra classes. Roughly half of these places are allocated to children already in the junior school. The remaining half are distributed to pupils based on their results in entry exams which, similar to the old '11+', consist of verbal and non-verbal reasoning and English assessments. These entry tests are crucial to the school's presentation and position as a highly 'academic' institution. A professional within Grand Hill explained to me that all of the independent schools compete for what they call the 'top 100' pupils. In their quest to encourage the 'best' students to accept places with them, Grand Hill offer non-means tested scholarships to those deemed exceptional through their performance in the tests.

4.4. Einstein High School

In comparison to Grand Hill Grammar, Einstein High is a relatively new school. It was built in the context of New Labour's *Building Schools for the Future* initiative as a community comprehensive in 2006 at a cost to the local authority of £36 million. However, following the Liberal Democrat and Conservative coalition governments' expansion of the academies programme through the Academies Act 2010, Einstein High opted to convert to an Academy in 2012 and was awarded the status of specialist science school. This means despite Einstein High being recently built as a community school, it is now independent from local authority control and funded directly from central government. Since this was an optional conversion, Einstein High was not required to have a 'sponsor' to direct them. As an Academy trust, Einstein High is now a 'company limited by guarantee' and an 'exempt charity'. They have a board of trustees who also constitute the governing body⁵⁰ and are responsible for the direction, management and structure of the school including the shape of the curriculum. They are also responsible for the admissions process. When Einstein high converted to an academy the governors of the original community school became members of the trust. The governing board today is made up of a combination of members elected by parents and staff and those nominated by the academy trust. The board consists of the head teacher, parents, other teaching and support staff and local community members. The majority of the board including the head teacher are females.

Einstein High had fewer than 1,000 11-16 year olds on roll as of 2014⁵¹. In partnership with another academy school in close proximity it has a post-16 centre on site for 16-19 year olds. The post-16 centre is large having just under 800 pupils on roll as of 2014, half of which were located at Einstein High and the other half at the partner school. There is also a specialist school for severely disabled children located on site and pupils from Einstein High are given opportunities to volunteer in the school. Einstein High is located in one of the wealthiest parts of the city. The Lower Layer Super Output Area (LSOA) which the school is situated in is one of the least deprived in the country being ranked in the top 30% of LSOAs in England in terms of the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). Moreover, just 6% of children living in this LSOA are classified as living in poverty according to the

⁵⁰ Although the trustees and the governors are supposed to be two separate layers of governance, they are made up of the same people in Einstein High.

⁵¹ Following drawing upon 2015 figures for the GCSE results, henceforth I will use figures from 2014 to provide the contextual and demographic information for each school. This is because the DfE's 2015 performance data does not include the level of detail required for this purpose. Furthermore these figures align with the time in which I was selecting each fieldwork site.

Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI). Unsurprisingly then, given the location of the school, Einstein High has very few pupils requiring extra support. Figures from the DfE highlight that only 4% of the pupils on roll in 2014 were eligible for FSM and only 5% had a statement of SEN.

Einstein High is a fascinating school because it is widely believed to have been oversubscribed before it even opened its doors in 2006. This is interesting given the discourse around parental choice and the importance of league tables as a way of identifying a 'good school'. The conventional means by which parents are assumed to judge the quality of a school would take a further five years to materialise. Thus it is likely that other indicators of potential quality will have figured in these choices. Reay and colleagues (2011) in their influential book *White Middle-Class Identities and Urban Schooling* demonstrate the way in which middle-class parents often reject league tables and use other more informal indicators when selecting schools for their children, at times in relation to perceptions about peer groups. It is likely that the parents applying to Einstein High in great numbers before official measures of quality were visible, may have been identifying a middle-class peer group as the primary factor affecting their desire to send their children to Einstein High. The school is continually increasing in popularity; in 2015 over 680 applications were lodged for only 189 places. As Einstein High is an academy it has autonomy over how to allocate places when oversubscribed. Thus far they have maintained the selection criteria set out by the local authority. Places are reserved for a number of children with a statement of SEN; subsequently priority is given to applications in the following order: 1. looked after children; 2. children with siblings in the school who live in the first or joint priority area; 3. children in the first priority area who live closest to the school as measured by a straight line from home to the school⁵². Due to immense oversubscription Einstein High's effective catchment area has continually shrunk. In 2015 the pupil who lived the furthest from the school with no siblings and was offered a place, lived less than 1km away from the school gate.

4.5. Eagles Academy

Eagles Academy, like Einstein High, is a new school. It was built in 2008 at a cost of £30 million. In contrast to Einstein High, it was not built on empty land to fulfil a need for a

⁵² There are further criteria but due to the nature of oversubscription the school never needs to go further down the priority list.

new state school for a rapidly growing young population. Eagles Academy was built to replace an old established community school previously occupying the land which was deemed to be a 'failing school' by Ofsted and forced to close its doors to the local community. It is of interest to note that this Ofsted report is not publicly available as Ofsted do not hold reports for schools which do not exist. Thus the measures upon which Eagles Academy was considered to be 'failing' are unclear. Eagles Academy, being designed by a famous architect has a shiny new building; however it is built upon and haunted by a history of 'failure' and 'underachievement'. As such I would argue it is constantly living in a state of insecurity regarding itself and its future. Ofsted is prominent in the school and continual 'improvement' is at the heart of its ethos and culture as it tries to 'prove itself'. As laid out in the legislation around the conversion of failing state schools, Eagles Academy (unlike Einstein High) was required to have a 'government approved' sponsor before it could be established. The sponsor must donate £2 million towards the building of the school. In addition, the government advise that sponsors are 'responsible for improving the performance of their schools' (HM Government, 2016). Eagles Academy is jointly sponsored by the local Russell Group University and *The Guild of Commerce* – a regionally-based commercial interest group with a long history of charitable engagement and development. Eagles Academy has a specialist status of 'Enterprise and Skills'. The sponsors of Eagles Academy have a large influence on the shape and direction of the school and form the majority of the governing body. The board of governors comprises of five Guild members who are either chartered accountants or company directors, one is also an ex-soldier. Three figures from the university also sit on the board: one is a professor of education, one a senior management member and one a widening participation officer. It is interesting to note that there are no parent or teacher governors. The only school staff member from the Academy on the board is the 'company director'. Another interesting note about the governing body is that the head of Grand Hill is himself one of the governors of Eagles Academy. Similar to Grand Hill, the governing body are mainly white males; however they are of a markedly younger cohort with few retired members.

In 2014 Eagles Academy had just over 1,000 3-18 year olds on roll (with a capacity of 1,400). 700 of which were in the secondary school (11-16 years). The school has a primary, secondary and sixth form on site. The sixth form is very small with only 50 students of all ages (16-19 years) registered as attending at the start of the academic year 2013/14. Eagles Academy also has its own Army Cadet Force onsite which, according to their website, provides 'good citizenship' amongst their students through army-style training and leadership, encouraging discipline and self-reliance. Eagles Academy is located in a very

poor area in the South of the city. It is a relatively isolated community which is almost entirely white British. It is also in one of the most deprived areas in the whole country. The LSOA which the school is situated in is ranked in the bottom 5% of LSOA's in England in terms of the IMD. Moreover, more than 60% of children living in this LSOA are classified as living in poverty according to the IDACI rank. As would be anticipated the nature of the local community shapes the student body and thus presents the school with multiple challenges as a great number of children who attend Eagles Academy are affected in different ways by such deprivation. According to statistics from the DfE, in 2014 roughly 40% of the students on roll were eligible for FSM and almost 18% had a statement of SEN.

As Eagles Academy remains undersubscribed they are obligated to accept any student that applies. However it is of interest to consider the criteria put in place by the board of trustees (also the governing body) for if such a circumstance arose. The school does not adopt the local authority designed method of selection. Rather they stipulate that they would use a pupil banding system. All applicants would be required to sit a non-verbal reasoning test to sort them into five 'ability' bands of equal size. Pupils with SEN would also be required to participate. Once students have been sorted into bands the school would admit equal numbers from each band (20%). Within each band the following criteria of preference would then apply: 1. children with a statement of SEN; 2. children in local authority care; 3. children with siblings already attending the Academy; 4. children who live furthest away from the nearest alternative school; 5. children who live nearest to the Academy.

4.6. Parental Resources

As has been highlighted above Grand Hill, Einstein High and Eagles Academy appear to serve different communities in the city. However, official statistics do not provide much information as to the specific social class backgrounds of the pupils attending each institution. The primary measure of deprivation used by the DfE is FSM which only provides partial information as it only distinguishes those on welfare support to those in work but tells us nothing about the differentials in income and occupational levels of the parents. Thus this section seeks to supplement these figures through drawing on primary data collected during my fieldwork on the parents' in each school's occupation and educational level as well as household tenure - indicators of economic and cultural capital

(Bourdieu, 1997). The data are derived from responses to the initial questionnaire⁵³ distributed to all pupils in each school from the year groups of interest (7, 9 and 11). The survey itself more broadly functioned to provide quantitative data on the pupils' expectations for university but also as a method of sampling a cohort to interview qualitatively⁵⁴. It is important to recognise that the results are derived from the students' *self-reporting* of their parents' jobs and qualifications. This presents important points for discussion yet also limitations. It is interesting as it allows for a consideration of whether the pupils were actually aware of their parents' occupations- this is itself an important finding and at times 'don't know' responses have been included in the analysis. However it presents limitations in that often partial or incomplete information was provided. This made the subsequent coding of the raw occupations into SOC2010 and NS-SEC codes problematic. Despite the problems encountered with some of the responses, the majority of occupations were easily classifiable and coded and the tables below provide rich data illustrating clear patterns of difference and similarity across each school. Through presenting the mothers and fathers at each school individually (rather than conflating them to create one variable) I am able to illustrate some fascinating gender patterns which intersect with differences across the schools.

4.6.1. Mothers' education and occupation

Table 6: Whether mother has attended university

	Grand Hill Grammar	Einstein High	Eagles Academy
Yes	74	70	9
No	17	18	59
Don't know	9	11	31
Total Count N = 100%	247	317	204

Note: (%) have been rounded.

As Table 6 demonstrates, there exists a clear and statistically significant pattern across the three schools in relation to the proportion of mothers who have attended university ($\chi^2(4) = 239.298, p < 0.001$). Whilst 74% of mothers at Grand Hill and 70% of mothers at Einstein High were reported to have attended university, only 9% of the mothers at Eagles Academy fell into this category. Interestingly Eagles Academy pupils were the most likely to respond to this question with 'don't know'. This could indicate a difference in the level

⁵³ See Appendix I for questionnaire.

⁵⁴ For further information see Chapter 3.

of discussion in the home around university. In addition to the differences in mothers' levels of cultural capital (as indicated by university participation); there was a clear and statistically significant pattern in relation to the NS-SEC classifications of the mothers in each schools ($\chi^2(14) = 288.537, p < 0.001$). This is presented below in Table 7.

Table 7: Mothers NS-SEC by school⁵⁵

NS-SEC	Grand Hill Grammar	Einstein High	Eagles Academy
1 Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations	37	27	1
2 Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations	26	43	4
3 Intermediate occupations	9	8	4
4 Small employers and own account workers	1	3	2
5 Lower supervisory and technical occupations	1	1	2
6 Semi-routine occupations	5	5	21
7 Routine occupations	1	2	15
Not working	20	12	52
Total Count N = 100%	218	259	184

Note: (%) have been rounded.

In Grand Hill Grammar the majority (63%) of the mothers' occupations fell under NS-SEC 1 to 2, with the greatest number located in NS-SEC 1 (37%). In Einstein High the mothers were also mainly to be found in NS-SEC 1 to 2 (70%). However they differ from Grand Hill in that the majority within this group are coded at NS-SEC 2 (lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations) (43%). In stark contrast only 4% of the mothers in Eagles Academy fell under NS-SEC 1 to 2, rather they can be found mainly in NS-SEC 6 and 7 (semi-routine and routine occupations) (37%). A large proportion of the mothers in all three schools were not working, however this was most extreme in Eagles Academy where 52% of the mothers were in this position. Interestingly more mothers in Grand Hill Grammar were not working than in Einstein High (20% and 12% respectively). This could indicate that the fathers at Grand Hill potentially had a higher salary than those

⁵⁵ 210 Cases (24%) were coded as 'system missing' and thus excluded from the table. 19 of those relate to a 'don't know' response, the remainder are either unclassifiable due to a lack of information or an empty box (which could either mean a parent not present in the home or an opt-out of answering the question).

at Einstein High and thus were able to support the mothers to stay at home, however it is not possible to say this conclusively as I do not have data on incomes.

Whilst NS-SEC provides a clear overview of the occupational classes of the mothers and the immense differences between the schools, through consideration of the SOC2010 codes⁵⁶ we can take a step back to explore in greater depth which specific occupations the mothers in each school feature in greatest numbers. The majority of the mothers who fell into one specific occupational category in Grand Hill Grammar were those classified as 'Health Professionals' (27.6%) this category includes doctors, dentists, psychologists, pharmacists amongst others. The largest group of the mothers within this category were the 'Medical Practitioners' e.g. doctors (15.5% of mothers in Grand Hill were classified here). A substantial proportion of the mothers in Einstein High were similarly found in these occupations: 23.3% were classified as 'Health Professionals' with 9.3% being 'Medical Practitioners'. However the majority of the mothers in one specific occupational category in Einstein High were 'Teachers and Educational Professionals' (24.2%). This was also a substantial category amongst the mothers of Grand Hill Grammar (14.4%). In stark contrast only 1.1% of mothers in Eagles Academy fell under the category 'Health Professionals' (and were all nurses) and only 4.5% could be classified as 'Teachers and Educational Professionals'. Another occupational group which featured strongly in Grand Hill and Einstein High was 'Business, Media and Public Service Professionals' (including barristers and lawyers). 17.8% of mothers at Grand Hill and 12.8% of mothers at Einstein High fell into this category compared to only 1.1% at Eagles Academy.

In Eagles Academy the majority of mothers in employment fell under the category of 'Elementary Administration and Service Occupations' (29.2%). This category includes cleaners, school dinner ladies and lollipop ladies (school crossing patrol) amongst others. Within this category the majority of mothers were cleaners (13.5% of mothers at Eagles Academy were classified as such). In contrast none of the mothers at Grand Hill and 0.4% of mothers at Einstein High were found in this classification. Another occupational group the mothers at Eagles Academy appeared present in great numbers in was 'Caring and Personal Service Occupations' (22.5%). This category included carers, child minders and nursery or teaching assistants, most in this category were classified as carers (19.1% of mothers at Eagles Academy fell into this category). This compared to only 4% of Grand

⁵⁶ The figures presented below on mothers' SOC2010 occupational groups are drawn from Table 16 which can be found in the Appendix VI.I. The table was not embedded in the body of this chapter due to its size.

Hill and 5.3% of the Einstein High mothers (0.6% and 0.9% respectively being carers). Finally 18% of the mothers at Eagles Academy were classified under ‘Sales Occupations’ including retail workers. This compared to only 2.9% of Grand Hill and 1.3% of Einstein High mothers. Next I will turn to the education and occupations of the fathers in each school.

4.6.2. Fathers’ education and occupation

Table 8: Whether father has attended university

	Grand Hill Grammar	Einstein High	Eagles Academy
Yes	75	75	12
No	17	16	57
Don't know	8	10	32
Total Count N = 100%	240	295	152

Note: (%) have been rounded.

Similar to the pattern demonstrated in regards to the mothers’ educational level, as can be seen in Table 8 there was a statistically significant difference in the proportion of fathers in each school who had attended university ($\chi^2(4) = 198.724, p < 0.001$). In Grand Hill and Einstein High 75% of fathers were reported to have attended university compared to only 12% of those at Eagles Academy. Again, the pupils at Eagles Academy were the group most likely to report that they did not know the answer to this question (32%). As was mentioned above, this likely maps on to the discourses amongst family members in the home. In addition to the difference in terms of university attendance, the fathers in the three schools were located in distinctively different occupational categories, as will be presented below.

Table 9: Fathers NS-SEC by school⁵⁷

NS-SEC	Grand Hill Grammar	Einstein High	Eagles Academy
1 Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations	70	57	3
2 Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations	18	26	5
3 Intermediate occupations	2	3	4
4 Small employers and own account workers	7	7	14
5 Lower supervisory and technical occupations	1	3	15
6 Semi-routine occupations	1	1	12
7 Routine occupations	2	3	17
Not working	2	1	30
Total Count N = 100%	197	232	111

Note: (%) have been rounded.

Table 9 demonstrates a statistically significant difference in terms of the distribution of fathers by NS-SEC in each school ($\chi^2(14) = 297.452, p < 0.001$). Similar to the mothers, the fathers in Grand Hill were mainly classified under NS-SEC 1 to 2 (88%), with the greatest number located in NS-SEC 1 (70%). The fathers of the Einstein High pupils were also mainly apparent in these top categories (83% in NS-SEC 1 to 2 with 57% in NS-SEC 1). In contrast, the fathers of the Eagles Academy pupils were barely present in these top NS-SEC classifications (8% in NS-SEC 1 to 2). Whilst they appeared more dispersed than any other group in terms of their spread across the scale, they were mainly located in NS-SEC 4-7 (58%). Although there were far fewer fathers 'not working' than mothers in *all* schools, there remained interesting patterns with regards to the distribution of fathers who were out of work by school. In Eagles Academy 30% of the fathers were not working. This is in stark contrast to only 2% of those in Grand Hill and 1% in Einstein High. Another interesting gender contrast to be highlighted is that fathers in all schools were located in higher NS-SEC categories overall compared to mothers. To take a couple of examples 70% of the fathers in Grand Hill were located in NS-SEC 1 compared to 37% of the mothers.

⁵⁷ 331 Cases (38%) were coded as 'system missing' and thus excluded from the table. 24 of those relate to a 'don't know' response, the remainder are either unclassifiable due to a lack of information or an empty box (which would mean a parent not present in the home or an opt-out of answering the question). It is important to note that there appears a much smaller total count for the fathers of Eagles Academy than the other two schools, this may in part reflect that there are more single parent families in that school.

Similarly in Einstein High 57% of the fathers appeared in NS-SEC 1 compared to 27% of the mothers. In Eagles Academy, there are notably more fathers in NS-SEC 4-5 (30%) compared to 4% of the mothers.

Through looking more closely at the SOC2010 codes for the fathers⁵⁸ we can identify the specific occupations which the majority of working fathers fell into. The fathers' occupations in the main were more dispersed than the mothers, nevertheless some clear patterns emerged. The majority of fathers in Grand Hill and Einstein High fell under the category 'Business, Media and Public Service Professionals' (29.4% and 17.9% respectively). None of the fathers at Eagles Academy were classified here. In Einstein high a category following closely behind this, which a substantial portion of fathers fell into (17%), was 'Science, Research, Engineering and Technology Professionals'. This category included engineers, scientists and information technology (IT) professionals. At Grand Hill Grammar 12% of fathers fell into this category whilst only 1.3% of fathers at Eagles Academy did so. Similar to the mothers, a large proportion of fathers in Grand Hill Grammar fell under 'Healthcare Professionals' (16.5%) with 13.9% being 'Medical Practitioners'. In Einstein High 9.6% of the fathers were 'Healthcare Professionals' with 5.7% being 'Medical Practitioners'. In comparison only 1.3% of fathers at Eagles Academy fell under this classification. It is interesting to note that a larger proportion of the mothers at both Grand Hill and Einstein High were in these occupations than the fathers.

At Eagles Academy the fathers fell under distinctly different occupations. The majority of fathers in one occupational group were located in 'Skilled Construction and Building Trades' (19.2%) which included builders, plumbers, plasterers, painter and decorators. A large number were also classified as 'Skilled Metal, Electrical and Electronic Trades' (14.1%) which included mechanics and electricians. The second largest group the fathers at Eagles Academy belonged to were 'Transport and Mobile Machine Drivers and Operatives' (17.9%) which included 12.8% being some form of lorry or van driver. This is compared to only 2.6% of fathers at Grand Hill and 1.3% at Einstein High. Finally a large proportion of the fathers at Eagles Academy, similar to the mothers, were found under 'Elementary Administration and Service Occupations' (14.1%), however within this group they

⁵⁸ The figures presented below on fathers' SOC2010 occupational groups are drawn from Table 17 which can be found in the Appendix VI.II. The table was not embedded in the body of this chapter due to its size.

appeared more under bin men and security guards rather than cleaners. This compared to 0.4% of fathers at Einstein High and none of the fathers at Grand Hill.

It is interesting that the occupational distinctions between the mothers and fathers appear most stark at Eagles Academy. Mothers *and* fathers at Grand Hill and Einstein High were doctors, lawyers and teachers. At Eagles Academy the mothers appeared as cleaners, carers, school dinner ladies, lollipop ladies and retail workers, the fathers appeared as builders, plumbers, plasterers, electricians, mechanics, drivers, bin men and security guards. My data appears to suggest that occupations are more gender-segregated lower down the occupational scale. It is interesting to note that even the commonly used titles for these jobs are gendered.

4.6.3. Household tenure

Table 10: Please tell me about the house that you live in most of the time⁵⁹

	Grand Hill Grammar	Einstein High	Eagles Academy
We own the house or pay a mortgage	91	89	30
We rent it from a landlord	5	5	7
We rent it from the council or a housing association	1	1	39
I don't know	4	5	25
Total Count N = 100%	260	336	240

Notes: (%) have been rounded.

As Table 10 illustrates there is a further statistically significant difference across the schools in terms of tenure ($\chi^2(6) = 366.914, p < 0.001$). 91% of pupils at Grand Hill and 89% of pupils at Einstein High reported that they lived in a house which they owned compared to only 30% of the pupils at Eagles Academy. Whilst the number of those reportedly living in a private rented property was relatively similar across the schools, 38% of the Eagles Academy pupils reported that they lived in a council or housing association property compared to only 1% of pupils in Grand Hill and Einstein High. Whilst it may seem as though the figure for those pupils in Eagles Academy claiming to live in a privately owned property is low (30%) in comparison to the other schools, this still seems quite high considering that only 4% of mothers and 8% of fathers at Eagles Academy occupations fell

⁵⁹ 'Living with a foster family or in a children's home', 'other' and 'not answered' have been classified as system missing and excluded from the table due to the low cell count.

into NS-SEC categories 1 or 2. Upon looking more closely I discovered that of those young people at Eagles Academy who specified that they owned their home 79% of mothers and 56% of fathers were classified into NS-SEC 6-8 (semi-routine occupations, routine occupations or not working). There is more than one potential explanation for this picture, it could be that the pupils at Eagles Academy had ticked this box without really understanding it; thinking it just meant that it was *their* home. However, given that a large proportion of them (44%) were in year 11, it is unlikely that this accounts for the high number. An alternative explanation relates to the *Right to Buy* initiative introduced in the Housing Act 1980 by the then Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher which enabled council tenants to purchase their properties with a large discount. As discussed earlier in this chapter Eagles Academy is based in one of the most disadvantaged areas in England and house prices are relatively low due to this. As such it is not unrealistic to believe that a number of the parents in this school were able to buy their homes despite being in semi-routine or routine occupations as the homes would have been relatively cheap. In line with this, it is important to highlight that being a homeowner in the catchment area for Einstein High means something quite different to being a homeowner close to Eagles Academy. Whilst they perhaps both signal a level of ‘aspiration’, they represent quite different resources in the form of assets transferable into capital of the sort discussed by Bourdieu in respect of economic capital (Bourdieu, 1997). Interestingly, similar to the picture with parental education level discussed above, a large proportion (25%) of the young people at Eagles Academy reported that they ‘didn’t know’ what type of house they lived in compared to only 4% of Grand Hill Grammar and 5% of Einstein High pupils. This, again, could be indicative of the type of conversations the young people are privy to in the home.

4.7. Conclusion

In conclusion, as has been demonstrated, the three schools identified differ considerably not only in terms of their position within the league tables and the demographics of the community they serve but also crucially in terms of their history⁶⁰. Grand Hill being a very old institution has a history of privilege and exclusivity. Einstein High appears to have no history- or indeed a very short one- yet, due to the community it serves, it has an assumed history of achievement. Eagles Academy is presented as a shiny new school having no

⁶⁰ See Appendix IX for summary table of the three schools.

history, perhaps neatly illustrated by the removal of the Ofsted report from the internet. However it remains underpinned by a history of failure. This is of central importance as each school's past powerfully shapes its current context and symbolic reputation. The historical backdrop also has a powerful effect on how each school is managed today and how the pupils within the school are perceived and treated. Whilst the schools are different they are also connected in fascinating ways. For example *The Guild of Commerce* who sponsor Eagles Academy today are the same group who endowed Grand Hill in the 1500s and linked to this point the head of Grand Hill is one of the governors at Eagles Academy. These differences and connections are important as, firstly, each school and its pupils are not being analysed in this thesis in isolation but rather in relation to one another. Secondly it is of central importance as the schools and pupils have particular identities that were forged relationally; they are perceived and understood by others in relational terms.

As has been indicated, each school draws on pools of students from different social class backgrounds by nature of the area within which it is located. Whilst in theory Grand Hill is the only fee paying school, Einstein High is also exclusive to wealthy families. The effective catchment area of the school is tiny and getting smaller whilst at the same time house prices in the direct vicinity are double the average of the city and continually increasing. A BBC news article in 2014 reported that it is cheaper to send your children to private school than Einstein High due to the inflated house prices in the local area. Official statistics and publically available sources provide limited information on the actual background of the children attending each school. As I have shown through exploring data collected in the three schools, the parents of the children in Grand Hill and Einstein High possess greater stocks of economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1997) than the parents of the Eagles Academy pupils. This was illustrated by statistically significant differences in the distributions of parents in each school in terms of the proportion who attended university, NS-SEC positions and the percentage of homeowners. This is important for two main reasons, first it indicates inequality in the parents' abilities to support and supplement their children's learning (Reay, 1998b; Lareau, 2011). Secondly in an increasingly competitive educational field parents have become valuable resources for schools to draw upon and this segregation across the city renders Eagles Academy less powerful in the field of education.

It is important to point out that whilst class remains central to this research, the participants from each school will not be categorically assigned to individual social class boxes. Rather the classification of the school attended is used as a proxy to understand the workings of class privilege or disadvantage. As has been discussed, the schools were largely

segregated and as such the majority my participants' class backgrounds match the demographics of their school. For this reason it seemed unnecessary to assign each young person to a definitive class and discuss them in such rigid terms. Understanding class through a Bourdieusian lens encompasses an awareness of class as relational rather than binary or linear and thus I did not feel it was appropriate to situate my participants in this way. Rather I discuss class through analysis of the role of the school (and at times parents) in the reproduction of privilege or disadvantage.

Chapter 5: A Journey to Reflexivity

5.1. Introduction

I went on a journey with a child through the education system. I felt his pain and understood his struggles with an establishment which is uncaring and fails to adequately account for social class differences. For a time, through this journey I saw only one truth, his truth. I understood only one perspective, his perspective. And I heard only one story, his story. Through this reflective account I have relived this experience yet simultaneously removed myself from that position in an attempt to be reflexive and come to understand the story in relation to broader power structures. In doing so I am able to look back with more objectivity (or with a truth about my subjectivity) yet also to see more than one side. In this chapter I will discuss my experience of getting emotionally involved with caring about Jake (one of my participants), unpacking the way in which my connection with him due to my background, schooling experience and position as a sociologist engendered a deep empathy for his situation and struggles. However I will also discuss how this involvement led me to engage in a battle with a powerful institution- education- and to learn how the system (doesn't) work. Through this experience I learnt the hard way that one's relationship to the field can cause deep emotional impact for the researcher. Amanda Coffey in her influential book *The Ethnographic Self* writes that 'fieldwork is personal, emotional and identity *work*' (1999: 1, emphasis in original). She argues that fieldwork can often impact us more than our participants:

The reality that the impact of fieldwork is usually greatest for us and not for our hosts should remain the firm reason why we should be open about our attachments to and emotions about fieldwork and our hosts.

(Coffey, 1999: 37)

This is something I felt deeply in my own research, even writing this chapter was hard for me as I relived memories of the pain this process has caused me. Coffey's words around the need to be open about these feelings, point towards a central point in Pierre Bourdieu's work, one that all sociological researchers should aspire to achieve; that is reflexivity. The concept of reflexivity has taken on many forms in different contexts, including within Bourdieu's own work (see Grenfell and James, 1998 for a comprehensive overview of Bourdieusian reflexivity in educational research). As such it is important to be specific

about the type of reflexivity I am embarking on. Bourdieu argues that reflexivity is about ‘objectifying the subject of objectification’ (Bourdieu, 2006: 10), he writes:

One should make it a rule to never embark on sociology, and especially the sociology of sociology, without first, or simultaneously, undertaking a self socio-analysis.

(Bourdieu, 1993: 49)

What does it mean to conduct a self ‘socio-analysis’? Coming from a sociological perspective, not a psychological or a psycho-social, the process of self-analysis has been difficult. For me, what Bourdieu is directing us to do, is to delve into our psyche and unpack the way in which this affects our *interests* and *interactions*. To understand how we are part of our research and indeed our research, in part, is a reconstruction of our own personal perspectives. It is about understanding that the ‘scholarly gaze’ (Bourdieu cited in Wacquant, 1989) affects the outcomes of research, that findings are not *objective* truths, but rather in part manifestations of our subjectivities. In this reflexive account I will unpack the specific way in which my own trajectory has impacted upon my work in terms of my interest in the topic and why I ended up so emotionally involved in the research. I also discuss how these experiences may have impacted the research and its findings whilst also reflecting on the detrimental effect it had on my health as it led me to question my role as a sociologist. I will begin by telling Jake’s story, followed by my own, before going on to re-visit Jake’s story paying particular attention to the affective dimension; unpacking my personal thoughts and feelings. Finally I will consider whether I ‘went native’ and explore the implications of this including for my work.

5.2. Jake’s Story

Before I even met Jake, a year 11 boy from Eagles Academy, I was told by a teacher that he ‘should be’ an A/B grade student (his target grades were all As and Bs⁶¹), but that he was currently working at D level. When I interviewed Jake in December 2014, he told me something similar; that he had been predicted As when he first arrived at the school and is told that he is fully ‘capable’ but that he ‘messes around’ too much in lessons so is not

⁶¹It was never made clear to me exactly how ‘target grades’ were established in Eagles Academy. They appeared to be distinct from ‘predicted grades’ which were affected by in class progress. Rather target grades were what the school felt a pupil ‘should be’ aiming for. The grades appeared to have been determined by the ‘ability level’ a pupil arrived at the school with in year 7 (as determined by performance at Key Stage 2).

reaching his potential. For example, when discussing his desire to attend university, Jake told me:

I do like learning it's generally one of my favourite things to do, and I'm very able...and people tell me that I'm able they just don't understand why I can be a bit of a tool sometimes, but I don't understand myself sometimes.

(Jake, Year 11, Eagles Academy)

During my time at Eagles Academy I often heard teachers refer to Jake as a 'tool'⁶², something he had clearly internalised. I was told he is the class joker who will do anything to get attention. Some teachers believed that this was because he was working above the average classroom level so the work set often bored him. The school's stance on Jake's behaviour was that he was fully able to control it but makes a conscious decision to mess around. In Eagles Academy there was no concrete support structure for bad behavior, unless a pupil was specifically diagnosed as having 'learning difficulties'. Even if they were I came to understand that support tended to take a back seat to discipline. For example I witnessed a support worker waiting for a pupil to complete a detention before being allowed to take him for a counselling session.

Jake's home life was not the most conducive to a productive learning environment. A lot of the problems he encountered out of school could have impacted upon his behaviour –or need for attention- within school. Jake lived with his single dad and three siblings (two younger). He told me in his interview that he does not have the best relationship with his mother. I came to learn that she was on benefits and perhaps depressed. It seemed as though she had a lot of mental health problems and even attempted suicide during my time in the school. Jake's dad worked long hours and as such Jake was often responsible for taking his younger siblings home from school and looking after them. Jake told me during the interview that his dad had had a hard time at school due to having undiagnosed dyslexia. When I asked if his dad had been to university he said:

No he did not...he's always been dyslexic my dad so he's a very hands on bloke he likes doing stuff like that, he wouldn't go to uni or everything cos he got a little bit mistreated in school because they didn't really know much about

⁶² A tool is a derogatory slang term often used in a similar way to 'fool'. Definitions of tool include someone who tries really hard to fit in and is often used but lacks the mental capacity to recognise they are being used (Urban Dictionary, 2016).

dyslexia back then, it wasn't well known- so I was told- so he just got looked at as stupid. He was in the lower set even though he had it in his head.

(Jake, Year 11, Eagles Academy)

During this interview I also learned that Jake had a deep desire to become an architect but did not have much information about how to reach his goal. This was a central focus point of my study so I was fascinated that despite having a full time careers advisor on site and having high 'target grades', he was not well informed on these issues. It appeared to me that Jake was not getting much support with regards to his 'aspirations' because the school did not believe he would achieve his target grades because he was 'lazy' and 'naughty'. As such, on visits to Eagles Academy, I started bringing in information for Jake about architecture and the route into it, something he was extremely grateful for.

Just before the Christmas holidays, I noticed that Jake was becoming increasingly down. He told me about how he was trying to improve his behaviour and get on with his work but that he was finding it hard to shake his negative reputation in the school. In addition to needing support with his pursuit of a career in architecture, I felt that Jake would benefit from an empathetic person to listen to him and understand his side of the various fights he would end up in with teachers. As such at the beginning of the new term in January 2015 I met with Jake and asked him if he felt that it was helpful to talk to me. He told me that he did find it helpful, commenting that nobody really listens to him and he rarely has an opportunity to talk about how he's feeling and getting on. Following this, I spoke to Jake's head of year and volunteered to work with him once a week in a mentoring capacity. My offer was gratefully accepted on the condition that I was consistent⁶³. Thus I began to work with Jake on a weekly basis but this soon escalated to more than once a week and I made numerous visits to Eagles Academy outside of my fieldwork slots throughout January, February and March. Reflecting on the work we did in this time I feel that a lot of it was similar to the type of things middle-class parents would do with their children, providing extra support facilitated by possession of the forms of capital necessary to successfully navigate the system.

Initially we began by working towards getting Jake a place at college. I helped him to fill in the application form, reminded him to attend the open day and helped him to prepare for

⁶³ It is important to point out that, as discussion with the head of year illuminated, this request of consistency was not posed in the interest of the child but rather to avoid inconveniencing form tutors.

the interview including convincing teachers to write letters of support claiming that his 'ability' and 'potential' were not fully demonstrated by his current progress. Having established forms of capital I was able to influence this situation through understanding and drawing on the symbolic capital of the teachers to help Jake's application. Following Jake securing this place at the local sixth form college, I realised that he now needed to secure the grades to be admitted to the A Levels he wanted- in particular he was passionate about physics and wanted to study it as an A Level. Central to this was that he required a B grade in maths GCSE. Despite having a 'target grade' of an A, his classroom work was of a D grade level. I was told by Jake's personal tutor that although he was 'naturally talented' in maths he had been put off the subject due to conflict with his maths teacher. Thus I began to put a lot of effort into helping him to progress in maths. Using the physics A Level and ultimately architecture as an incentive I continued to encourage Jake to begin to attempt some homework and revision for maths. I also set up an afterschool peer-led revision session, where I would come in and supervise whilst Jake and one of his friends Liam (another of my participants) did maths together.

During this time we were also working towards setting up a work experience placement in a big architecture firm, something I was able to organise through my personal contacts. Throughout my time in the school I felt that Jake's passion for architecture could have been mobilised as a route to engaging him in education; something which was not done. For example I recall a session with Jake where I explained to him that maths –which is central to architecture, was in fact central to music (something he appeared to be disengaged from). He was intrigued and clearly wanted to understand more about this connection. Thus I began to use his passion for architecture as a hook where possible to motivate and engage him. Organising a work experience placement was central to this. I also made a large revision timetable with Jake where I set up a gold star reward system and agreed to treat him with architecture related things. For example I said that I would take him to the 'Architecture Centre' when he gets ten gold stars.

Alongside my work with Jake in an academic capacity, I began to take on more and more of a pastoral role. Understanding that he had a difficult relationship with his mother and a father who was extremely strict (in line with the school) I recognized and understood Jake's need for a caring and compassionate mother like figure. This is something Jake's English teacher had similarly understood and employed when working with him. She told me that he does not respond well to being disciplined and that what he needed was extra care and attention. I noticed that Jake would often become really down if he was in trouble, this would have a knock on effect on his motivation to put in effort in the classroom. As such

when I came in to see Jake I would often try to lift his mood and went out of my way to help him organize minor things that often led him into conflict with teachers. For example I bought him a pack of pens and helped him to get a new school dinner card. In what was to become my final week in Eagles Academy, Jake was on a downward spiral with his behavior and as such was continually being punished and being punished for missing old punishments. I was aware that Jake's home situation had deteriorated and his mother had attempted suicide. Nevertheless the school continued to discipline Jake for his behaviour, seemingly unaltered by this knowledge. I recall defending his actions to his head of year on this basis and he responded: 'Most of our kids have problems at home but they get over it and get on with it'. During this difficult time I felt that the consistency of my empathy, care and support was extremely important and helpful for Jake. However this relationship began to cause conflict within Eagles Academy as it appeared to some teachers to be functioning in contradiction with their discipline regime.

On the 16th March 2015 I went into Eagles Academy to find that Jake was in a lot of trouble for walking out of school the previous week, when I discussed the details of this with him he told me that he had been in a fight with a girl who had ripped his shirt off him. Since both of his buttons had already fallen off his blazer he had no way of covering up his bare chest and was deeply embarrassed so he ran home to get a new shirt. The next day when I visited Jake, I brought a needle and thread and sewed two new buttons on his shirt. He was so chuffed and buttoned it up immediately, telling me that he couldn't remember the last time he was able to do that. This moment illustrates how deeply involved I had become with this young boy. I cared so much, not just about his academic progress but also about his wellbeing and emotions.

Monday 23rd March 2015 was the last day I went into Eagles Academy. By this point the school had begun to use me as a weapon. Recognising that Jake wanted to see me when I came in, they attempted to use this as a strategy to curb his bad behaviour. They told him that he could not work with me unless he had had his report card signed. In a similar vein to how I noted the support worker being treated, I was not allowed to take Jake out of detention and had to negotiate hard to remove him from isolation. On 19th March 2015 I arrived at Eagles Academy to find that Jake had again walked out of school, the head of year 11 at this point told me he wanted me to stop working with Jake as 'I was not improving his behaviour'. It seemed that this was to be his ultimate punishment for continually misbehaving.

Upon leaving Eagles Academy I offered Jake and his father my support outside of school. This way I felt I would not interfere with his in-school behaviour or come into conflict with teachers but would be able to continue to support Jake with his revision and work experience. I felt that my role outside of the school's boundaries would help me to use my resources the best way possible, drawing on all of my capital to help Jake succeed. However this was stopped abruptly after our first session as the school decided it was not allowed to continue due to reasons related to 'child protection' as they (for no reason that was ever explained to me or my supervisors) decided I was a potential 'risk factor' in his life!

Reflecting on this experience I am aware that my passion and commitment towards helping Jake was largely related to who I am as a sociologist, but also due to my background and the issues I have faced myself. The next part of this chapter will visit my own personal story before going on to provide a reflexive analysis, considering the extent to which I became *too* deeply involved in trying to 'fix' Jake's story or whether I indeed provided the right amount of dedication and care that he needed at the time. I will also consider the impact of this experience on my relationship with the school, my fieldwork and my own mental health.

5.3. Jessie's Story

I grew up in a relatively deprived area of Bristol with my mum who was a single parent and disabled. We survived on a very limited budget supplied by the welfare state. Although we could never afford a holiday, we often ran out of electricity and I rarely got any name brand clothes (except for those bought in a charity shop) I recall a very happy childhood. My mother also grew up in a working-class family in London. She had a terrible experience of schooling due to developing Narcolepsy⁶⁴ as a teenager something which, at the time, was not recognized. She was thus labelled as 'lazy' and put in the bottom sets of all subjects where she recalls having terrible teachers and subsequently failing her exams. My mum watched her own mother work every day in an exclusive department store where wealthy customers looked down on her. She would then return home and cook and clean for the family. Through witnessing this alongside her own traumatic experience of school, my mother began to feel that the system was unjust. During the early 80s she became mobilised by the feminist movement and, I would argue, the self-education which came

⁶⁴ Narcolepsy is defined as 'a rare neurological condition that affects the brain's ability to regulate the normal sleep-wake cycle. This can lead to symptoms such as disturbed night-time sleep, excessive daytime sleepiness and cataplexy' (Narcolepsy UK, 2016: Online)

along with it inculcated within her a degree of cultural capital and a feeling of empowerment. When I was born my mother was determined to be active in my education and ensure that I had a better experience than she did. Though I was born in London and spent my early years living with my nanna, my mum decided to move us to Bristol when I was 4 years old as she wanted me to attend the Bristol Steiner School. The Steiner School is an alternative form of education based on the work of Rudolf Steiner who famously wrote:

We should not be asking, what does a person need to know or be able to do in order to fit into the existing social order? Instead we should ask: what lives in each human being and how can this be developed? Only then will it be possible to direct the new qualities of each emerging generation into society. Society will then become what young people, as whole human beings, make out of existing social conditions. The new generation should not simply be made to become what present society wants it to be.

(Rudolf Steiner cited in Bristol Steiner School, 2015)

This is clearly in direct opposition to mainstream education; the ethos and approach of Eagles Academy functions more along the lines discussed by sociologists such as Bowles and Gintis (2011) to serve the purpose of capitalism by constructing the types of workers necessary for a particular social order. Although at the time you had to pay for Steiner schools, they offered means tested fees depending on situation and also allowed you to pay what you could when you could. As such my mother did not have to pay much but nevertheless ended up in debt to the school for years to follow. The Steiner ethos meant that teachers respected pupils and treated them as equal individuals; they rarely raised their voices. There were no strict rules, no one wore uniform and we addressed the teachers by their first names. In this school I developed an enormous amount of confidence. I did not feel the weight of authority nor feel restrained or restricted by regulation. Basil Bernstein might argue that this was a form of ‘invisible pedagogy’, in which school rules and restrictions were in place in implicit rather than explicit ways (Bernstein, 1990).

At that time the Steiner school did not offer GCSEs, thus I entered mainstream education in year 9. The state school I went to was quite a ‘rough’ school given the area we lived in; having a high proportion of young people on FSM (including myself) and having relatively low GCSE results. However it was quite small and friendly. When entering this school, although I was quite ‘bright’ and ‘able’ I quickly became a ‘naughty’ child. I objected to the ‘visible pedagogy’ (Bernstein, 1990) and authoritarian structure of the education system and

was often provoked by teachers being disrespectful⁶⁵. I recall a science lesson where the teacher asked me to remove my bag from the desk which I refused to do because I did not want it to get dirty on the floor. She proceeded to throw my bag on the floor herself; so I walked out. Despite such rivalry with teachers we had some allies, some who cared and understood our experiences. In particular the school had two fantastic and empathetic learning support mentors Gary and Lloyd. When we used to be kicked out of lessons, they would often collect our work and bring us into their room to finish it so we would not miss out on learning. They often joked around with us, seemingly more on our level, they were similarly dissatisfied by the relentless rules of the education system. They often turned a blind eye to 'bad behaviour' and were more concerned that we got an education. Gary and Lloyd were the first of many 'significant others'⁶⁶ who throughout my life have believed in, encouraged and supported me in numerous ways. On reflection I can see that this positive experience with Gary and Lloyd played a large part in the relationship I consciously developed with Jake. I felt that it is those individuals who get behind you and believe in you who have a lasting impact on your life and can often be a motivation to succeed.

I managed to leave school with decent GCSEs (despite the predictions of my teachers) and went on to study A Levels at the local FE college. An important moment in my story which must be mentioned is when my good friend from school Rochelle attempted to get into the same college as me to do maths A Level but was turned down as she had achieved a C at GCSE maths not a B. I remember feeling that this was a huge injustice as Rochelle was the best mathematician I knew. I was quite good at maths and was in the top set at school but I hated my maths teacher and could not understand her method of teaching. The only reason I managed to get a B myself was because of Rochelle's help in class as she attempted to teach me what our teacher could not. I remember Rochelle having missed a lot of classes due to problems outside of school and this resulted in her lower grade, not because she was not capable. I remember pleading with the teachers at college to let Rochelle in, telling them that she was really, really good at maths. When we were unsuccessful I felt really confused and let down. This moment in my story marks a crucial point where, feeling like something was deeply wrong the education system, I began to question its legitimacy, a fire which was only to be fueled by studying sociology. Reflecting back on this now I understand that if Rochelle had been to a middle-class school or had

⁶⁵ It would be interesting to conduct a piece of Bernsteinian research on the transitions of young people from Steiner schools to mainstream education in terms of the transition from an invisible to a visible pedagogy

⁶⁶ Whilst there is not space to list them all here, they have all been included in my acknowledgments

middle-class parents, it is likely that she would have been allowed into the college as someone would have phoned them and argued her case for her. Young people's voices (and especially young working-class people's voices) are rarely heard or taken seriously.

Whilst this is far from a comprehensive life story, the overview just given serves to illustrate some important parts of my own background and experiences in the education system. These moments in part inform how I see society and also make up who I am as a sociologist, they point to where my passions lie, what I believe in and why. As should now be clear my own story and many of my experiences and struggles resonate deeply on many levels with Jake's story. For example my experience with a difficult maths teacher and the success of peer led learning; my failure as a teenager to be able to rescue Rochelle from a derailed trajectory and my connection to Jake's family situation- being a young carer and having a parent who had experienced a difficult education themselves. As I have come to learn through my reflections, these points are crucial to understanding my motivations to fight for and try to save Jake from the cruel and unequal education system. These moments in my story are also intricately tied to my motivations to become a sociologist, and this- my sociological awareness- in turn underlies my attempts to rescue Jake.

Jake, to me, appeared to exemplify many sociological issues all tied into one. He had been a victim of labelling by the school as a naughty child and was struggling to shake this reputation and be allowed to transform himself. He was experiencing difficult circumstances outside of school related to poverty which impacted upon his ability to learn and be 'well behaved'. He had self-esteem issues as he was often told he was not good enough, his needs outside of school were not being fully met, yet he was expected to be able to learn in school. His working-class sense of humour and banter were not valued within the middle-class education system which powerfully asserts middle-class culture as the only legitimate form. Thus without any consideration of the difficulties he was facing in his life, Jake was constantly being disciplined and punished. He was not getting the support that he needed for his problems, but rather he was continually in trouble. He was sensitive and was often upset or discouraged by this which subsequently had a negative impact on his work. His dad was constantly being informed of his antics but did not have the confidence to challenge the system, instead he believed everything they said and often disciplined Jake further.

All of these issues meant that when I met Jake and came face to face with an exact example of everything that is wrong with our school system, I immediately became angry for him and passionate about helping him to fight the system where the odds were stacked against

him. I remember talking to him about sociology as I attempted to explain to him why I cared about helping him reach his goals. Taking the lead from Bourdieu's ideas around public sociology, I felt that the discipline could help Jake to understand his own oppression such that he could interpret his struggles and suffering in line with structural inequality rather than as outcomes of individual failure (Bourdieu, 2012). In contrast to my inability to help Rochelle, I felt that I *could* actually help Jake. I saw a way to use all of my established forms of legitimated cultural and social capital to intervene and have a real meaningful impact. I felt that helping this child was part of my role as a sociologist who is passionate about making a change in young people's lives. Pierre Bourdieu in *La Sociologie est un Sport de Combat* famously described sociology as a combat sport: 'I often say sociology is a combat sport, a means of self-defence. Basically, you use it to defend yourself, without having the right to use it for unfair attacks' (2001: 00:17:07 - 00:17:20). Burawoy, further developing these ideas around the combatant nature of sociology, maps the field arguing that there are two forms of sociology: the dominant one being that of professional sociology, a strand which seeks to work with policy, serving the interests of the dominant classes. At the other end of the spectrum is the subordinated strand of the discipline- critical sociology which aims to be public, serving the interests of the dominated classes (Burawoy, 2014).

Whilst these forms are intricately related, I feel that I fall more on the side of the public, critical sociologist as my main concern is to challenge systems of power in the name of equality. In opposition to the often cited ethical question of whether your research will have any effect on the participants (implying that we should attempt to go in and come out without leaving any mark); I have always felt that a large part of the 'impact' that research has is its ability to benefit its participants. I built into my research design a note that I would 'offer something back' to those in my research and felt that this opportunity to support Jake would go some way to making a change through my research. However as I discovered the system is too powerful to be changed in this way. Whilst Jake's story as set out above was purposefully factual⁶⁷, the next section returns to it, incorporating *my* perspective, thoughts and feelings during the battle with the school and the result this had on my psychological wellbeing.

⁶⁷ Whilst it is of course a story told from my perspective I have tried to tell it in an objective way without discussing my own feelings in depth.

5.4. Resisting the Un-Resistible: Fighting the system from within

They have made me feel like a naughty child who needs to be disciplined. I feel unwelcomed in their spaces. When I go into the hall I don't feel welcomed, the teachers don't want to talk to me. They smile at me through gritted teeth a lot of them, some of them just don't have time to talk but others? I feel like they are always watching me like they watch the kids. I am inside the belly of the beast, the heart of the panopticon. This school is built like a prison and behaves like a prison and I am not conforming to their regime of discipline and punishment. They only see good and bad which should be rewarded with positive or negative. They see me as a positive being rewarded to a bad egg, to a naughty child who is 'wrapping me around his finger'. They don't like naughty children getting attention and that is what I am doing.

(Field Note, 21st March 2015)

The weeks leading up to me leaving Eagles Academy had been difficult, the school felt to me like a ticking time bomb and I was caught in the middle. As the school continued to discipline Jake I began to fight. I had clearly aligned myself with him and as such the teachers began to become increasingly suspicious of me- and I towards them. Howard Becker famously argued that sociologists cannot be neutral, they unavoidably take sides; he suggests that the real question is 'whose side are we on?' concluding that sociologists usually side with the underdog (Becker, 1967). In Eagles Academy I made no apology for taking Jake's side- something which puzzled the teachers. My relationship with the head of year deteriorated and he became irritated and angry with me. In taking Jake's side I was dismissing the traditional 'hierarchy of credibility' (Becker, 1967) which would position the professionals (teachers) perspectives and truths of a given situation as superordinate to that of the child (Jake). Becker writes: 'By refusing to accept the hierarchy of credibility, we express disrespect for the entire established order' (Becker, 1967: 242). My alignment with Jake then appeared as an act of disrespect to the institution.

As I reflect on this time I am struck by the enormous amount of emotion work which I underwent. This was not just in the sense of the energy exerted through arguing with the school, but also due to a 'habitus tug' (Ingram, 2011). I recall working extremely hard to present my working-class self to the young people in Eagles Academy, to enable a mutual

understanding and greater levels of trust⁶⁸. Meanwhile I was also working to remain perceived as professional when interacting with teachers (something which, in dominant discourse, is synonymous with being middle-class). This became increasingly difficult as when my emotions increase in intensity, my working-class self becomes especially prominent in all situations. This line was often blurred as when interacting with the young people in front of the teachers they may have seen me tolerating- or at least not telling the pupils off for ‘messaging around’ in hallways etc. This was likely coupled with the teachers perceiving me more and more as a young undisciplined person who they could not control. This is the first time I have really felt my habitus collide and conflict as I struggled to maintain and manage both parts of it at the same time.

When Eagles Academy requested that I cut all ties with Jake I was deeply hurt and this moment marked the beginning of a mental breakdown for me. I reflected on a promise I had made to Jake which I was now being forced to break, that I would come in once a week until he had finished his exams. I had made this promise during one of the maths sessions where Liam had told me how much they valued the consistency of my support, he said that most of their teachers disappear and let them down. During this session I had also told Jake that we would postpone maths work until after the mock exams to which he responded by requesting that I still come in to see him as talking to me was helpful. I felt like all of my hard work had been trampled over by Eagles Academy and was shocked at their accusation that I was not helping Jake’s behavior. I felt like they were ignoring all the progress he had made in other ways. At this point I understood how our education system does not work and I was angry. Eagles Academy had no time for ‘care’ and appeared suspicious of any kind of love, attention, empathy and support directed at any pupil deemed too naughty. Understanding that the institution of education was not the place for caring people, that my attempts to fight the system from within were not working, I attempted to fight the system from without- reverting to the home as a place to continue to support Jake. However upon realizing the school had the power to override this arrangement overruling Jake’s father on the grounds of ‘child protection’ I spiraled into a deeper breakdown. Following a long and arduous argument with the school over this issue, with little communication or reasoning being provided, I felt as though they just wanted me to disappear. I was cornered into respecting the school’s request in order to protect my

⁶⁸ For more details on the specific methods of attempting to present my ‘working-class self’ see Chapter 3.

reputation as a researcher such that I would be able to tell this story so others could learn from it.

At this point I began to lose faith in sociology; I felt that we had a responsibility to intervene to try to make a better society, not just to write about it. I felt I was being banished back to my ivory tower. This critical sociological purpose often brings the sociologist into conflict with society as it disrupts and critiques the foundations and ideologies underlying the establishment itself (Burawoy, 2014). I felt like I had been overpowered by the institution, I felt overwhelmed and an enormous sense of injustice, helplessness and frustration. If, as Bourdieu suggests, sociology is a combat sport (*La Sociologie est un Sport de Combat*, 2001), I must have been practicing it wrong, I felt ill equipped to protect or defend myself with it. I lost control and I cried and cried and cried. I was unable to eat or sleep and began to question everything I had done. I felt like I had lost myself and did not know who I was anymore. As I began to reflect on this period I came to understand it as a process of mourning. I was mourning for I felt like I had lost someone I cared about and had no chance to say goodbye.

It is possible to argue that Eagles Academy's use of the term 'child protection' was more about 'school protection'. It seems as though this was never about protecting the child as I was quite clearly posing no harm to Jake, rather I was questioning the harm inflicted by the school. Such a term is an automatic catch-all which serves to close down any uncomfortable questioning of the school's system. It is, in a sense, 'going nuclear'. Furthermore, the concept of 'child protection' is extremely narrow, what about the child's *wellbeing* and rights? Whilst the school informed me that they would tell Jake that our out of school arrangement was 'suspended' I was never to gain any closure by saying goodbye to him myself or indeed be reassured that anyone had informed him why I had disappeared so abruptly from his life without explanation.

I later learned that Jake did not attend his work-experience induction day and am convinced that this is due to our work being abruptly stopped. The last time I saw him he did not have enough information and did not feel ready for the day. For many working-class young people whose habitus does not feel a sense of ease in a middle-class field, such an experience is daunting. Jake told me that he was worried about the day but I had promised that during our next session we would prepare for it including doing some research together and formulating some questions. As he lived on the other side of the city to the architecture company I also suspect that he would have been unable to find his own way there without support. Whilst some people (and indeed Eagles Academy) would adopt

the stance that it was Jake's responsibility to get himself there and indeed he should demonstrate independence and a willingness to 'sort it out' himself; I would argue that the support I was offering Jake was similar to the practices of middle-class parents which serve to maintain and reproduce inequality as all young people are presented and compared equally as having independently achieved whilst some receive more (hidden) support than others. The rest of this chapter reflects on whether it could be said that I 'went native', whether I was indeed too involved. Through this I will reflect on the impact this experience has had on my research.

5.6. Going Native?

'Going Native' is described as the process by which those immersed in a field for a prolonged period of time may 'lose their sense of being a researcher and become wrapped up in the worldview of the people they are studying' (Bryman, 2012: 445). Did I go native? Some might say I did. During this time I seriously considered becoming a learning support worker in a disadvantaged school! In fact prior to my relationship with the head of year in Eagles Academy deteriorating, he offered me a job. This to me demonstrates that at least during the early time I was in Eagles Academy my work was viewed as positive and helpful. I remained on my academic path as I acknowledged that in this case my desire was more related to helping Jake succeed than being a full time support worker. However, I did lose sight of my sense of being a researcher momentarily as I became wrapped up in Jake's worldview which was, in many ways, intricately linked to my own when I was growing up. Having been a young carer as a child and subsequently growing into a passionate and dedicated person I understand how I ended up so attached to Jake. I am a 'fixer' and am highly motivated by other people's needs. But was I too involved? All I could think about during this time was Jake. All I could talk about during this time was Jake. And I often spent most of my free time thinking of ways to help Jake. Furthermore I was deeply affected by Jake's feelings. If he was down, I was down; if he was happy I was happy. My counsellor described this as being 'attuned' to his feelings in a way that a mother does for a child. I felt his emotions as though they were my own.

Could I have had the same level of impact on Jake's life without caring quite *that* much? Potentially yes. I believe that it is important to care about your research, your participants and people in general. Whilst some argue that researchers must maintain distance from participants and not care so much. I believe that caring is what makes our work so powerful. I do not believe you can separate feelings from research. However through this experience I learnt that it is also important to protect yourself from harm caused by being

too closely involved. My deep involvement with Jake was at the detriment of my intimate personal relationship, my own mental stability and perhaps even my relationships with other participants. It is likely that the school's defensive response to me was a product of the bond I had built with the child. Eagles Academy, working within an extremely disadvantaged community under enormous pressure from the government, is an institution that is collectively afraid. Their existence is not guaranteed; anything deemed risky must be stopped as it may put the school in jeopardy. Perhaps if I had not been so openly caring and attentive they would have ignored me. My concern for Jake led me into conflict as I pushed the boundaries of my role within the Academy by constantly being around, visibly on Jake's side and seemingly defying teachers and school rules (Becker, 1967). On the other hand my attachment to Jake was what he needed. It was what was missing in his life at that point so perhaps, rather than going overboard, I was doing what was necessary for this child. Even with hindsight it remains difficult to judge.

I became more like a counsellor than a mentor. Was this potentially dangerous for me and the child? Maybe, I am not trained in this area. But on the other hand no one else was doing it and he needed someone. On reflection I should have requested that the school provide him with counselling, but by this point I did not trust in the system at all. Doing this alone without support was extremely damaging for my own mental health. I was so busy trying to protect and help Jake that I neglected to consider what it was doing to me. This is an important point that researchers should be aware of, we must be equipped to protect ourselves from such damaging scenarios through talking about these issues, being prepared to deal with them and knowing where to go for help.

It is important to highlight that during this period (January – March 2015) I was still conducting fieldwork. Thus my experience with Jake may have potentially impacted upon the rest of my data collection. This could have played out in several ways. One was that my interest in Jake's story may have influenced what I probed further for during the interviews. Another issue was that due to my attempt to remain consistent with Jake, I would prioritise our arrangement over an interview in my diary. Finally it also meant that I may have neglected the other participants in the sense of 'giving something back'.

The anger this battle engendered within me towards Eagles Academy also resulted in me adopting an almost uncritically negative view of the school. I recall feeling really let down because when I first entered Eagles Academy I felt an affinity to them over all of my schools believing that I was, in a sense, 'on their side' (Becker, 1967). I connected with the pupils and teachers (in particular the sociology teacher) and felt welcomed. I felt that these

schools are often at the receiving end of unfounded negative judgment from ‘outsiders’ and policy makers, none of which account for the problems they face within the communities they serve and the lack of resources they possess to deal with these issues. By the end of my time there I was so enraged by their practices and had become extremely critical of them, their ethos and agenda. Again, it is interesting to reflect on this in relation to Becker’s (1967) arguments around taking sides in the research process. His theorising appears to suggest a form of fixed affiliation to ‘a side’. I would argue that sides are in fact fluid. During my research my alignment altered, I initially felt I was on Eagles Academy’s side but I ended up on Jake’s side; a position which appeared in opposition rather than in support of the side of the institution.

Since I am aware of the way in which my experience has biased my view of the school and the professionals within it, I am able to manage and overcome this. Through employing reflexivity I have taken a step outside of the situation to view the bigger (Bourdiesian) picture. I now understand these practices in relation to structural positions whereby different schools experience different locations in the field, and are relationally disadvantaged or privileged by the political system of power. As I am now less emotionally involved in this situation I am able to understand some of the actions of the teachers in context of a school which contains numerous children with behavioural problems and difficult home lives, many of whom do not disrupt classes. Furthermore such schools are under immense pressure to improve outcomes, something made harder by pupils such as Jake. I recall a teacher telling me that they expel most of the naughty kids likely to achieve low grades early on such that they do not interfere with their league table position. Jake, it appears, had made it through as he had never been quite bad enough to warrant exclusion, and, I would argue, was on track to achieve good enough grades to help the school’s statistics without any effort and without curbing his behaviour. As such he remained at once an asset, yet also an irritation for the school.

Another way in which this experience impacted upon my thesis is through the resulting focus of the analysis. I have already argued in Chapter 2 that I have employed an epistemological approach that embraces both subjective and objective positions. My subjectivity, my values and perspectives emerge ‘from somewhere’- that somewhere is ‘my story’ (as discussed above) but also through my affiliation to Bourdieu, an alignment which itself partially emerges from a shared experience of domination. My subjective position though, has also emerged from and is intricately tied to the research process itself. Jake’s story caused me to become especially interested in the institution as the unit of analysis. Looking specifically at the way in which institutional practices serve to restrict some young

people's opportunities given that they have the same 'aspirations'. My focus is on the processes which reinforce inequality in education today. Interestingly I am reflecting on the possible approach which could have been to emphasize all of the positive elements of the current system. However my fieldwork experiences have caused me to focus on the negative as it appears too powerful to ignore. I feel that my (subjectively developed) sensitivity to issues of power and inequality is itself a form of objectivity. If we consider objectivity a quest for truth and an understanding of reality, then my subjective position has itself led me to this.

5.7. Conclusion: Is anyone *not* ok?

This title is taken from a field note I wrote during this difficult time where I posed a series of questions to myself: Is the child ok? Is the school ok? Is my supervisor ok? Is anyone *not* ok? To which I had to respond, yes, I am not ok. Research ethics processes and discussion often underestimates the effect of research on the researcher. As this chapter has demonstrated, my doctoral journey has shown me the importance of ethics for the researcher. Through the process of conducting a study so closely related and intertwined with one's personal background you may confront your demons and ultimately get burnt. By becoming emotionally involved in my research through caring about Jake I learnt the true meaning and need for reflexivity. Due to my own initial Steiner education I was not used to being in conflict with such a powerful institution, thus my battle with Eagles Academy caused me profound distress. However I am confident that I gained a deeper insight because of this. Through this experience I truly felt the full force of what it must be like to be a working-class boy in an authoritarian Academy school, where rules are rigid and exceptions are not made, where your culture is disregarded and your home circumstances ignored, where you cannot challenge authority and are often made to feel small, insignificant and powerless. Such an experience was intensely painful yet ultimately powerful as it highlighted where my passion and anger lies and motivated me to keep going. Thus, if I did 'go native' it was not in vain.

By way of concluding the discussion around subjectivity and objectivity in light of this reflexive account, I would argue that subjectivity is central to the research process. As researchers we might not consciously set out to take a side in the sense that Becker (1967) appears to advocate for, but through the research journey we inevitably end up taking a side, forming an allegiance or a support for a position. These allegiances though, are not fixed, but rather fluid and ever evolving; in a sense it could be argued that they are transformed by the uncovering of knowledge and truth. Thus perhaps the researchers

subjective emotions are themselves a deep form of objectivity as they appear and appeal to our instincts to help the fellow human being and are able to adapt as the truth of who the real victims are evolve. This chapter has started a reflexive conversation about my own relation to the research and to Jake, but this should not be the end. Grenfell and James (1998) eloquently sum up the nature of reflexivity when they write: 'Reflexivity is, by definition, endless. Given the will and the resources, it should be possible to continue to refine an analysis of one's relation to the object of study time and again' (: 144). Thus whilst it is a continual project, the reflexive insight provided in this chapter has helped to form the foundations for a strong, honest and robust theoretical analysis.

Through being open and reflexive about what happened to me I have been able to somewhat detach myself from Jake's story. Arguably this chapter itself is only a partial truth as it is a recollection of a story as told by me. Phil Hodgkinson argues: 'We are not trapped by our past, partly because the past changes as we re-story it from the present', (Hodgkinson quoted in Grenfell and James, 1998: 145). My ability to recover from the trauma I experienced was enabled as I reconciled some unresolved issues through the way in which I have re-experienced and re-told the story. I do not claim nor wish to be completely emotionally free from my memories of Jake. Nevertheless a partial detachment has meant that the rest of this thesis is not merely about Jake. His story needed to be told and indeed is indicative of the central argument of this thesis. It is a case study, an example of the way in which the education system through its practices, renders some more or less likely to succeed than others. However the rest of this thesis tells the story of the rest of my participants, it engages with young people from all years, careers advisors and institutional systems. Jake's story was a large part of the inspiration for the main focus of the analysis, this is not a weakness as Jake indeed was one of my participants. My interest in his life stemmed from the initial focus of this project and through my accidental ethnography I came dangerously close to the heart of the problem, I saw it, experienced it and felt it. And now I will write about it.

Chapter 6: ‘I just can’t stand the thought of *not* going to university, everyone should’

6.1. Introduction

As was discussed in Chapter 2, political discussion around widening access to university has tended to revolve around the need to ‘raise aspirations’ amongst disadvantaged young people. The literature on this topic is inconclusive in regards to the extent to which young people’s aspirations for the future are influenced by social class background (Hodkinson et al., 1996; Hutchings and Archer, 2001; Reay et al., 2001; Archer and Yamashita, 2003; Reay et al., 2005; Archer et al., 2007; Croll, 2009; Croll and Attwood, 2013; St Clair et al., 2013; Archer et al., 2014). Furthermore there is no evidence to suggest that raising aspirations would lead to increased access to HE as there is to no evidence of a causal link (Cummings, et al., 2012; Gorard et al., 2012; Khattab, 2015). Crucially, as Jake’s story attests, disadvantaged young people are often facing obstacles and barriers above and beyond their personal desires and motivations. The three analysis chapters presented next engage with these issues in depth. This chapter begins the discussion through exploring young people’s aspirations, expectations and knowledge in order to consider the extent to which social class variations in these are of continuing significance. As will be shown in the first part of the chapter, in line with St Clair and colleagues (2013) my findings suggest that many of the young people across all three schools were ‘aiming high’ when envisioning their future careers. Nevertheless I argue that there remain subtle yet powerful differences in the construction and expression of these aspirations across the social classes which serve to reinforce advantage or disadvantage.

In contrast to Roker (1993) who argued that the middle-classes gained an ‘edge’ through concrete career and university planning, the Grand Hill Grammar and Einstein High pupils appeared less able than the Eagles Academy pupils name a concrete and specific career ‘aspiration’, instead remaining vague or unsure. In this chapter I argue that this is a form of ‘strategic uncertainty’ which is part of the subtle construction of a middle-class habitus centred on ‘keeping the options open’. Being ‘uncertain’ enabled the young people to advantageously ‘explore’ various options, not closing down any doors. The second part of this chapter focusses on young people’s discussions of university. As with careers, the vast majority of pupils expressed a strong motivation to attend for similar reasons. However, as will be shown there were distinct class differences in the level of uncertainty expressed by pupils. The Eagles Academy pupils expressed a degree of uncertainty around their ability to

secure the necessary academic results to gain entry whilst for the Grand Hill and Einstein High pupils this uncertainty was often related to ‘keeping the options open’, considering university as one of various potential options available to them. This chapter finally goes on to demonstrate the immense inequality in relation to knowledge and familiarity with the university field, arguing that abstract sponsorship by an elite university does not afford the same knowledge or sense of entitlement to exist in the university field as does physical and symbolic presence.

6.2. Career Aspirations

The concept of ‘aspiration’ in public and policy discourse tends to be reified as a one dimensional, narrow and linear ‘thing’; thus we see the rhetoric around ‘raising aspirations’ which is always in relation to careers and assumes a hierarchy of aspirations as real and measurable. Interestingly, in line with other literature (Brown, 2011; Roberts and Evans, 2012; Allen, 2013) my data provide a challenge to this conception of aspirations as what constituted an ‘aspiration’ clearly varied across my cohort. When interviewing I asked all young people how they imagined themselves at 25 years old, this question left room for aspirations to be focussed around issues external to jobs. Most of the young people *did* focus around narratives of their future careers. Arguably the reason the majority answered this question in such terms, is in fact influenced by the widely acknowledged focus on thinking about and constructing a future around jobs. As was noted by St Clair and Benjamin (2011) aspirations are often voiced by young people to serve a specific purpose. The young people may have been responding to my question in line with what they thought that I wanted to hear. It is important to highlight that not *all* of the young people responded to the question (of how they visualised their future selves) in relation to jobs, this was particularly noted during the plasticine modelling which left more room for alternative visions. For example, one year 7 girl from Einstein High, Flo, created a model of her future self in relation to mobility and where she wanted to live:

Figure 3: Flo's Plasticine (present self)



Figure 4: Flo's Plasticine (future self)



Jessie So could you just talk me through what you've made and why you've made it?

Flo Well it's basically like at the moment we're living in the city and that is a dog whereas in the future I'd prefer to live in the country. That's supposed to be a building like a skyscraper but it doesn't look like it. But when I'm older I'd kind of prefer to live in the country and I've always wanted to have those two animals, have chickens and goats which is a bit weird but I don't know.

Here Flo constructs an envisioned future revolving around living in the country and having animals. Following this discussion I probed her on her 'career aspirations' to see whether she had any at this point:

Jessie Just tell me what you think you might be doing when you're about 25 years old, apart from living in the country?

Flo Oh right yeah sorry I forgot about jobs, well I'd either like to be like a GP or a primary school teacher

Flo did have a few concrete jobs that she was interested in doing but these had simply not featured in her initial thoughts about herself in the future. The aspiration which she prioritised was that of where she lived. Flo even followed this up with connecting being a general practitioner (GP) over a doctor to wanting to live in the country (she envisioned GPs existing in the remote countryside but doctors, she said, needed to be in a city with a hospital). Flo, much like the young people in Brown's (2011) research appeared to centralise and prioritise a future focussed around happiness, which for her meant living in the countryside with animals. Flo, like many of her peers at Einstein High and Grand Hill, when discussing career aspirations, tended to mention a few options all of which were professional occupations. In comparison, when the Eagles Academy pupils spoke of more than one job, it tended to be in relation to a 'back up' option. Thus, notwithstanding the

fact that careers are not the only important form of aspiration, the rest of this chapter turns to a consideration of young people's occupational aspirations.

6.2.1. 'I couldn't decide where to work, I wanted to do everything'

Interestingly, young people's aspirations for the future varied notably across the three schools. However this was not, as commonly assumed in policy, in the respect that those from disadvantaged backgrounds (the Eagles Academy pupils) had straightforwardly lower aspirations than the rest. In line with the literature (St Clair et al., 2013; Archer et al., 2014) my findings demonstrate that a number of young people from all schools aspired for middle-class professions. One caveat to this though is that the majority of year 7 pupils interviewed in Eagles Academy (4 out of 6) aspired to what might be considered working-class occupations. Interestingly, Archer and colleagues (2014) found something quite different; that aspirations appeared higher amongst younger pupils and became more 'realistic' as they got older. In the case of my research, these year 7 pupils, having only recently entered Eagles Academy, may feel more able to express their (low) aspirations, whilst the older pupils having already experienced intensive 'aspiration raising' messages and discourses may feel a pressure to be perceived in a specific and 'aspirational' light. Nevertheless the main distinction noted in my data is in regards to the *way* that aspirations were narrated. Across all schools, the Eagles Academy pupils were most able to name a specific 'career aspiration' from a young age. They even used the language of aspiration when discussing these. For example a year 11 boy Liam said: 'My aspirational goal since I was in primary school is to become an accountant'. Meanwhile those in Einstein High and Grand Hill Grammar tended to be vaguer about their career plans with many discussing their future selves in relation to current interests speaking about keeping their options open. Table 11 presents all of the pupils' career aspirations by school, year group and gender⁶⁹.

⁶⁹ The columns are colour coded to make it easier to see the patterns at a glance. The boys are coloured in green and the girls in purple. The shading indicates year group with the youngest group shaded the lightest.

Table 11: Career aspirations by school, year group and gender

	Grand Hill Grammar		Einstein High		Eagles Academy	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Year 11	Engineering -PhD or navy	Not sure	Media, TV	Law or architect	Accountant	Photography or music production
	Science/ engineering- research and development	Teaching or law	Maths area - maybe Accounting or further study	TV, media, politics or academics possibly PhD	Architect	Caring
	Medicine or science	Forensic or educational psychology or nursing	Engineering, pilot or meteorology	Mind or body - medicine or psychology	Military	Midwifery
					Policeman	Midwifery
						Unsure – possibly languages
Year 9	Civil service or something with people	Not sure - lots of ideas	Law	Architecture or medicine	IT/ Data management	Primary school teacher
	Medicine or drama	Lawyer	Research or computer programming	Doctor	Army	Teacher
	Something with computers	Not sure	Architect or physiotherapist or sports therapist	Caring - disabled or elderly	Accountant	Primary school teacher
Year 7	No Idea - maybe business or medicine	Baker	Working with animals	Football or swimming coach or art or skiing	Mechanic or electrician	Singer or children’s author
	Rugby or architect or nature film maker	Not sure	Photography maybe	Runner or footballer	Builder	Gastro doctor
	Computer programming	Drama	No idea	GP or primary school teacher	Footballer	Hairdresser

Before discussing the difference in relation to young peoples' narratives around careers in terms of concrete versus vague, it is interesting to consider a clear gendered pattern to these career aspirations. Gender has historically been found to structure career aspirations for young people, for example Furlong and Biggart (1999) demonstrate through a large dataset a strong gendered element to aspirations; the girls were aspiring for feminised occupations and boys aspiring for more traditionally masculine occupations. Interestingly, as my data demonstrate, 17 years later it appears that gender is still correlated with aspiration. As Table 11 highlights, the majority of the girls in all years at Eagles Academy were aspiring to careers in traditionally feminised industries such as caring, midwifery, teaching or nursing. Whilst this pattern was less pronounced in the other schools, there were a few girls in Grand Hill and Einstein high similarly hoping to enter this sector. There were no boys in any school who mentioned or aspired for these jobs. Meanwhile the boys across the schools were broadly aiming for careers in more traditionally male dominated spheres: finance; science and engineering; the military or IT sector. Interestingly in Eagles Academy a couple of the younger boys aspired for manual labour jobs- such as builder or mechanic- these were in line with their fathers' jobs as they discussed in their interviews. In contrast a number of the young people in other schools whose parents were in middle-class professions such as lawyers or doctors specifically told me that they did not wish to emulate their parents' careers. This interestingly contradicts a finding from Archer and colleagues (2014) that working-class pupils were less likely than their middle-class counterparts to aspire to follow in their parents' footsteps. Whilst my sample is small, it still poses an interesting contrast to their conclusion. My data suggest a reproductive element to occupational aspirations which was most strong in terms of gender and less so in terms of social class.

Table 11 illustrates that in Eagles Academy the majority of pupils were able to identify one primary career aspiration, at times they mentioned two but often this was in the sense of a backup plan. In contrast, at Grand Hill Grammar and Einstein High some pupils were unable to name a profession, with others listing lots of career ideas or specifying a particular industry of interest. This difference in dispositions, whilst not limited to the year 7 interviews was nicely captured during the plasticine modelling with them. For example, Daniel from Grand Hill Grammar, rather than making any concrete job, constructed an abstract model to represent his current 'struggles' and his 'brighter future':

Figure 5: Daniel's Plasticine (present and future self)



So what I picture life now is the struggle to get to when I'm 25 so I have to do all the work to get to where I want to be so...I have to graduate, I have to do a degree in something of my choice and that's the first part [pointing to the top part], that's the part where I've got to think and then when I'm here [pointing to the bottom part] I can have a family I can just get on with life yeah...the second one's a sun it's kind of freedom, yeah...So really it's like the work you do to get a better life determines how good your better life is.

(Daniel, Year 7, Grand Hill Grammar)

Following Daniel's explanation of his abstract model I probed him to explore whether he could visualise himself in material terms at 25:

Jessie Ok so just tell what you see yourself doing when you're about 25 years old?

Daniel I think I'll still be in uni cos I want a good degree and uhh it's hard to picture myself older you know.

Jessie Ok and what type of job do you think you'd want to do when you're older?

Daniel No idea maybe business, medicine.

Although he does not have any clear idea of what he wants to be doing job wise when he is older, he is clear that he wants to follow a university route and aspires to be in university

still at 25 as he feels this is the way to get a 'good job'. In a similar vein another year 7 pupil I spoke to at Grand Hill, Lottie made a model of her future-self wearing a suit:

Figure 6: Lottie's Plasticine (present and future self)



Lottie I've given this one my school uniform [left model] cos I'm at school and a book because I'm learning now...[T]his one is like in a suit [right model] cos it's probably gonna have work probably [laughs] and a bag cos adults always need way more stuff than children like their keys, their phones, their diaries, their loads of stuff.

...

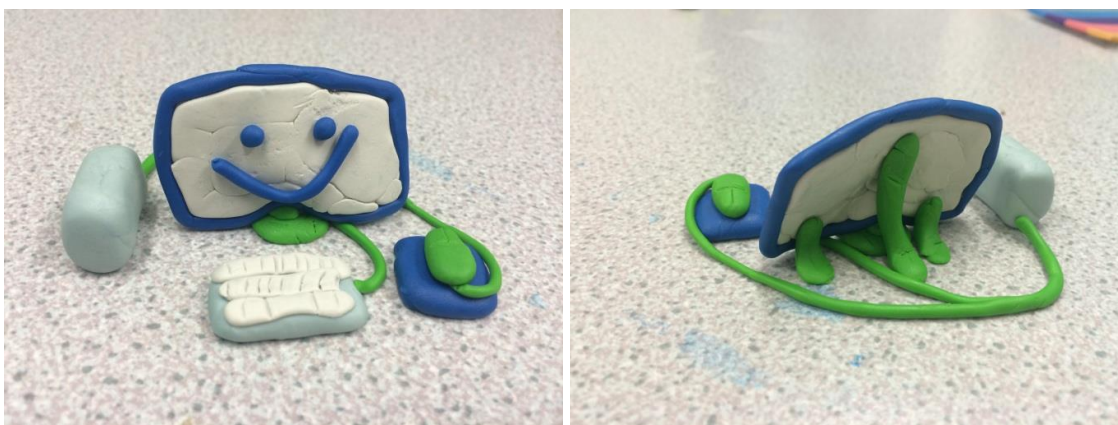
Jessie So just tell me a bit more about that, why did you give her a suit?

Lottie Cos I think if you're 25 you've finished university and you're tryna get a job so she's in a suit so going to a job.

Lottie imagines her future self 'getting a job' and associates this job with businesswear. It is interesting that Lottie has constructed her future self wearing a trouser suit rather than for example a dress or skirt. Unfortunately I did not ask Lottie why she did this, but it clearly raises fascinating questions about young people's perceptions of gendered employment sectors. Does Lottie see a career landscape in a patriarchal way, perceiving that she would need to display a form of masculinity to enter that world? Or does this just represent a conception of gender equality where girls can envision themselves in the future liberated to wear suits in the same way as men? It is likely that Lottie was not conscious of this issue, though it remains an important point of consideration, particularly if it is functioning at an unconscious level.

To return to the focus of this section, when I probed Lottie as to whether she had any ideas for any types of jobs she may want to do, she said: 'No, nothing'. So here Daniel and Lottie were able to visualise themselves in the future, but this was done in relation to attending university and having a 'brighter future' or some form of professional employment rather than in relation to a specific career route. Most interestingly at times the Grand Hill Grammar and Einstein High pupils were unable to even imagine a future self at all. For example Dylan a year 7 boy from Einstein High spent almost the whole of our interview designing an intricate plasticine model of a smiling computer to represent his present self; discussing how he likes to spend a lot of time on his computer and is very happy when doing so (see Figure 7):

Figure 7: Dylan's Plasticine (present self, front and back)



However, he was unable to construct one for how he imagines himself at 25. He says:

Dylan Now for the next one [pauses and thinks] no idea [whispers] what would I be like hmm it's difficult cos obviously you never know and I have no idea what I want to do when I'm older.

Jessie Ok so have you got any ideas of jobs that interest you?

Dylan Not really I'm just kind of going with the flow of life to be honest.

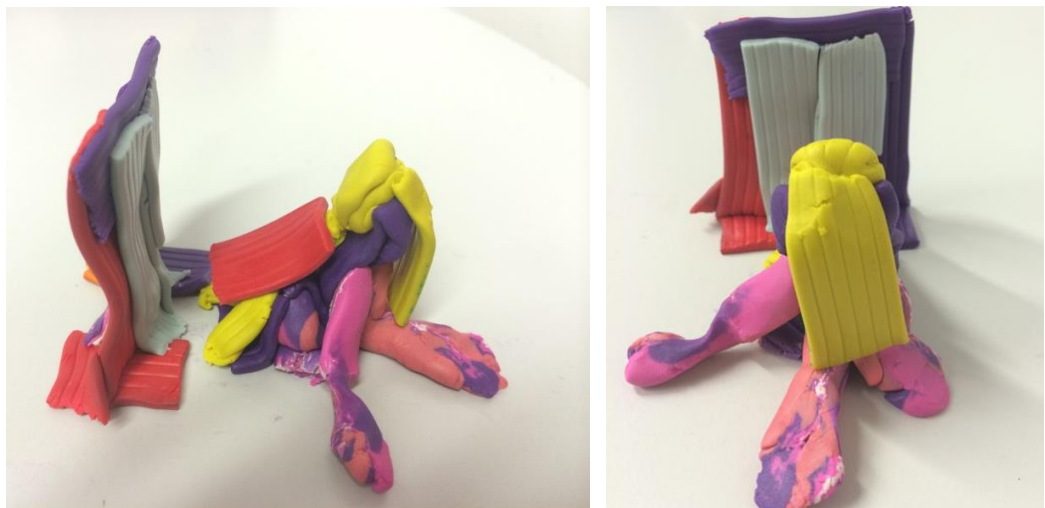
Schoon and colleagues (2012) argue that a level of uncertainty over career aspirations can be helpful as it encourages 'role exploration'. I want to argue that it is in fact part of a middle-class strategy of advantage, this will be expanded below, for now it is relevant to contrast these Grand Hill and Einstein High pupils' narratives to their Eagles Academy peers. The majority of the year 7 pupils at Eagles Academy constructed a model to represent a specific job that they hoped to be in at 25. For example, Jadon told me about his plasticine: 'I made a shovel, saw and hammer for when I'm older for my future I wants to be a builder like my dad' (see Figure 8):

Figure 8: Jadon's Plasticine (future self)



Similarly Ruby told me during her interview: ‘When I get older I wanna be like a hairdresser and I just like doing people’s hair and nails and everything so I just wanna be a hairdresser’. Following this she proceeded to construct an intricate model of a lady in a hairdressing salon to represent her future self:

Figure 9: Ruby's Plasticine (future self)



This is someone getting their hair done and that’s like the mirror because of the grey bits and it’s got a chair and I struggled tryna stand it up so that’s these little bits here and that’s her hair all done and straightened and cut and she’s ready to like go.

(Ruby, Year 7, Eagles Academy)

Ruby continued to tell me that her motivation for wanting to become a hairdresser was (similar to Jadon’s) because her mum was one. Thus, Jadon and Ruby in contrast to Daniel, Lottie and Dylan, appear very clear on the jobs they aspire for. This distinction in the level of certainty over careers followed through into the older years too. The following two

quotes from Grand Hill Grammar pupils Amelia (a year 9 girl) and Freya (a year 11 girl) are responses to the question ‘tell me what you think you might be doing when you’re about 25 years old?’

Well I’m not sure what I want to be when I’m older but I think I’ll probably go to university and then hopefully by that time I’ll have a job or something.

(Amelia, Year 9, Grand Hill Grammar)

Hopefully in a job that I enjoy, I’m not sure what kind of job yet cos I’m still unsure about what I want to do at university, so I’m not sure like a stable job that I enjoy.

(Freya, Year 11, Grand Hill Grammar)

As will be discussed in more depth in the second half of this chapter, interestingly both Amelia and Freya prioritise university in their narratives. Whilst they are unsure of what job they want to do they both focus on going to university. It is not my intention to argue that the Eagles Academy pupils did not envision university in their horizons; indeed, as will be shown later, the majority of those interviewed *did* want to continue to HE. Rather the point of difference relates to whether they followed up their hopes for university with a concrete career plan. Some of the Eagles Academy pupils, similar to those at Grand Hill and Einstein High *did* respond to the question of how they viewed themselves at 25 in relation to where they would be in regards to university. For example when I asked Nathan a year 11 boy from Eagles Academy what he thought he would be doing at age 25 he said:

Nathan Hopefully I’d have probably finished uni by then cos I’m hoping to go to uni, yeah, finished that and maybe applying for the job that I want.

Jessie Ok and is there a job, do you know what that is at the moment?

Nathan Yeah it’s a police.

Jessie Ok and do you know what in the police you want to do specifically?

Nathan Yeah I want to go into the dogs work with the police dogs.

Nathan, like many of his peers at school was able to pinpoint a specific career (policeman) and even role within the police (dog handler). For him university was a route into this role and he planned to study policing at university. Similarly when one year 7 girl Cherish

constructed a model of a university for her future self, it was coupled with an image to represent her hopes to become a gastroenterologist:

Figure 10: Cherish's Plasticine (present self [left] future self [right])



The older one's for university cos I wanna go to university to do Gastreology and then this one explains why I wanna do Gastreology because this is a bowel because last year I found out I have Chron's disease...So yeah I wanna learn how to be a Gastro doctor cos I know a lot about it.

(Cherish, Year 7, Eagles Academy)

For these young people university was more directly linked within their narratives as a means to an end, as part of a specific planned route, whilst for the Grand Hill Grammar and Einstein High pupils, going to university was taken-for-granted, it was a given, the next step, a place where they could then construct their career ideas. Bathmaker et al. (2016) discuss this in relation to the routes their undergraduate participants took into university. They argue that there was a classed distinction between those they classified as 'drifters' and those as 'planners'. The drifters tended to be middle-class participants who had the luxury of time to play with ideas. The planners tended to be the working-class students determined to make it to university in spite of the odds being against them. This middle-class confidence in the future, belief that they will be alright, that a job will fall into place is nicely captured in this moment during an interview with a year 11 girl from Einstein High, Victoria:

Victoria I guess there's quite a lot of options but I've always thought like when we're older they'll always be 20% more jobs available or something

that never existed now so I just heard it when I was younger and I'm always thinking ah I just don't know what to do but probably the job I'm gonna do doesn't exist yet so I'm just not gonna think about it.

[both laughing]

Jessie You might create the job, you might be that person

Victoria Yeah exactly

It is possible to interpret these differences in aspirations through the lens of habitus, considering the way in which a middle-class habitus developed and attuned to the field enables more confidence with regards to the future and also the luxury of time to make decisions. Bourdieu writes that: 'The experience of time is engendered in the relationship between habitus and the social world' (2006: 208). Perhaps the young people in Eagles Academy, having a habitus which has developed with more insecurity in regards to their chances of reaching their future goals, feel like they must find a career early on and stick with it. Meanwhile the Einstein High and Grand Hill Grammar pupils are more able to 'go with the flow of life', or indeed focus on issues around mobility rather than a job, being less fearful of the potential for unemployment, they are confident that it will work out in the end. This relaxed attitude towards the future resonates with Peter Aggleton's (1990) influential *Rebels Without a Cause*. Aggleton describes an apathetic attitude towards education amongst his participants whom he classified as 'new middle-class'. He found that they were distinctly opposed to displays of academic commitment, rather presenting a work ethic centred on 'effortless achievement'. These 'rebels' displayed a similar resistance to education as Paul Willis' 'lads' (Willis, 1977). However whilst Willis' working-class lads rejected education and its associated middle-class professions, planning instead to enter into working-class manual labour; Aggleton's 'rebels' displayed a sense of entitlement, believing that education was not necessary to grant them access to the middle-class jobs they desired. Rather, in challenging the school Aggleton (1990) argues that these young people were cultivating a particular characteristic of value within the industries they aspired to. In rejecting academic work, the young people 'acted as if their own innate talents and cultural capital would, *of themselves*, provide sufficient basis for entry into, and success within, fields of practice associated with creative art forms' (Aggleton, 1990: 135, emphasis in original). Aggleton argues that this attitude resulted in the majority being unable to pursue an academic path into HE. Nevertheless, he notes that due to a period of underemployment all of the participants were able to secure work in their desired

industries. In my research, this discourse of drifting⁷⁰ without a specific planned trajectory appeared as part of a middle-class narrative which fed through from both the parents and the school's practices. This is discussed below in respect of the parental nurturing of a middle-class habitus and in Chapters 7 and 8 in relation to the schools' encouragement of the development of a 'package' and of keeping career options open through 'facilitating subjects'.

6.2.2. 'The only thing they've sort of forced me to do is to keep my options open'

It became apparent to me that the narratives presented by the young people from Grand Hill and Einstein High around keeping their options open with regards to their future career paths was encouraged - and perhaps in part constructed- by their parents. For example Lottie a year 7 girl from Grand Hill told me about how her parents encouraged her not to make any decisions about the future yet:

Jessie Ok and so what do your parents say about your like thoughts about your future and your jobs do you ever talk to them about it?

Lottie Yeah they just say just when you get to it you gotta find out what you want but not now cos you got ages to go.

Jessie Yeah ok so they don't want you to really decide what you want to do yet?

Lottie No.

Jessie Ok and do they ever help you think of ideas like say you'd be really good at this or that?

Lottie Yeah they do but uhh but mmm I'm always a little bit, I dunno cos maybe I just don't really know what I want to do and I'm always like keeping my options open cos I might find something I really like.

Lottie mentions that she is generally focussed on keeping her options open as she does not know what she wants to do yet. This phrase 'keeping the options open' came up over and

⁷⁰ Whilst drifting has connotations to aimlessness, this is not the implication here and I want to be clear that this was in a sense 'strategic drifting', whereby the lack of planning and concrete aspirations was part of a middle-class strategy of advantage.

over again in the interviews with the pupils at Grand Hill and Einstein High and was further reflected in their discussions about their GCSE options (as will be further elaborated upon in Chapter 7). For example Mellissa a year 9 girl from Grand Hill told me about this when discussing her (lack of) career plans:

Jessie I know you haven't got a plan A yet but do you have a plan B?

Melissa No not really I'm just gonna kind of see how, I'm just gonna wait until I'm a bit older I'm just making sure that I keep, like with GCSE options, just keep my options open and don't like close it up at all so that if I did decide that I wanted to be like a doctor I could still do that, I've got like enough academic stuff and also if I wanted to decide oh no actually I want to go into product design I can do that, so that's just what my plan is at the moment.

This apparent middle-class familial strategy to 'keep the options open' rather than finding and working towards a specific career route is also discussed by Allatt (1993) in her fascinating study of middle-class parenting practices. She writes:

The need for hard work now in order to keep employment options open, was set within a context of *flexible futures*, a landscape of possibilities rather than discrete rigid paths.

(Allatt, 1993: 153, emphasis added)

I find this concept of 'flexible futures' to be a useful way to conceive of the middle-class strategy which serves to position their children in an advantaged position in respect of education and the labour market. The specific way in which this construction of flexibility is enabled or disabled by opportunity structures in schools will be explored in greater depth in the following chapter. Interestingly, during discussion of the parental role in respect of careers guidance, alongside the narrative of 'keeping the options open', I noted a distinct and clear encouragement towards the inculcation of cultural capital through extra-curricular activities such as music or sports. This excerpt from my interview with Daisy, a year 9 girl at Einstein High demonstrates such a leading:

Jessie Ok and have they ever said oh this would be a good job like have they ever said, have they got any plans for you for what they'd like you to do?

Daisy No not really they want me to keep my options open, like I do LAMDA which is London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts which is my drama-y thing and they encourage me to like do different groups and stuff and

I do different sports and they're definitely encouraging me to play an instrument like my piano and she said that I can stop doing grades after I've done Grade 5 so that I show some determination to learn piano and different aspects of it so...the only thing they've sort of forced me to do is to keep my options open and stuff.

Jessie Ok so and how is that, they've encouraged you to keep your options open and stuff, how is that? Is that related to your future do you think?

Daisy I'm pretty sure that they don't want me to do a career in music or anything but I think it's because when, especially with my mum, when she was younger she never really got the chance to play any instrument or anything like that and she wants me to have that choice I guess.

Jessie Like for 'on the side' or?

Daisy Yeah, I'm not really quite sure, but she really wants me to do an instrument and keep up my drama and everything but I enjoy it so I'm not complaining.

It is interesting that Daisy appears unaware of the connection between these activities which are encouraged by her parents and a strengthening of her position in the labour market. When I probed her on how she thinks this 'keeping options open' is related to her future, she says that she is pretty sure that they don't want her to undertake a career in music. It is interesting to consider the way in which a middle-class habitus is presented as developed naturally, such that these practices are not considered active attempts to increase one's chances of success in education and work, and are more so seen as being a 'good' in and of themselves. Bourdieu writes of the discrete ways in which middle-class forms of cultural capital (disguised as distinct from economic capital) are inculcated through primary socialisation and legitimated through education. He argues that this serves to construct an advantaged habitus, neatly attuned to favour the dispositions and practices of the dominant classes arbitrarily located as inherently 'better' (Bourdieu, 2010; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Annette Lareau follows up Bourdieu's theorising through demonstrating the specific ways in which the middle classes get ahead in society through what she calls 'concerted cultivation'. Through engaging their children in specific enrichment activities from a young age, middle-class parents attempt to consciously secure their children an advantage in education and society (Lareau, 2003). James' (2015a) considered account describes the way in which middle-class parents present their children as possessing 'natural' talents and

abilities which merely need to be nurtured through specific activities. This results in the young people being (mis)recognised as exceptionally 'bright', eliminating any discussion around the relation between economic and cultural capital in fostering these 'innate' qualities; perpetuating the myth that structural inequality in society is fair as the middle classes are inherently superior (Reay et al., 2011; James, 2015a). As is demonstrated in the above interview with Daisy, the recipients of this strategy are at times unaware of the specifics of the process. This inculcation of cultural capital was not only prevalent through parental engagements, it was also instilled at an institutional level through careers talks encouraging the development of a 'well rounded' individual who has something more to show than pure academic ability (see Chapter 8).

Interestingly some young people displayed a resistance to their parent's guidance towards careers, in particular when they seemed to be pushing them towards making money. This excerpt from my interview with Flo, a year 7 girl from Einstein High exemplifies this point:

Jessie Ok that's fine and what would your parents say if I asked them, what do they think about your ideas for your jobs?

Flo Another thing I'd quite like to be is a vet and they, if I say anything about it to them then they always, what they go on about is the amount of money you would get from the Job rather than whether you would enjoy it or how you could do it, it's really annoying like my dad always says oh you should be a lawyer cos you could get a lot of money and you're good at arguing.

...

Jessie Ok and what do you think about that, about going for a job that gives you money not necessarily thinking about a job that you like what do you think about that?

Flo Well I know you have to think about that as well like you wouldn't necessarily want to be, even if you loved getting rid of rubbish you wouldn't want to get like a job just stacking up rubbish for 20p an hour but...as long as you have enough money to live I don't really mind to be honest, but apparently [puts on dramatic parent voice] to have animals I will need a lot of money, I'm like ok! I don't really care I'm like 11 no 12!

Whilst recognising that money is an important aspect to consider with regards to her future, Flo demonstrates a resistance to the narrative that this is the primary thing to take

into consideration. She suggests she would be happy if she had enough money to live on, but clearly the passion for the job is more of a priority for her- at least at this age. Another year 7, also from Einstein High, John, presents a similar narrative:

Jessie Ok alright then and just tell me what would your mum say if I asked her. What does she think about that about your career ideas?

John She'd say that's good but try and get a good job, not, don't get stuck somewhere where you just, there's no, I don't really know, she wanted, she said that I should be a lawyer cos I argue all the time...but she wants me to get a good job but I'd rather be, I'd rather be happy with a job and earn less than earn more and not be happy probably yeah...she always said become something that you earn a lot out of but I dunno if I agree with that, like a solicitor or a Lawyer or something.

This rejection of financial gains as an important facet of one's motivation towards the future was only prominent in a minority of cases. It presents an interesting contrast with the narratives of the majority of the young people on the purpose and value of university as a means to acquire a greater level of financial capital (as will be discussed in the second half of this chapter). Thus, whilst aspirations encompassed some clear similarities, they clearly cannot be said to be linear and one dimensional 'real' things. What constituted a legitimate aspiration varied across my sample. Whilst the majority spoke of these in terms of careers and money it is important not to forget those who did not. The rest of this chapter turns to a discussion of the young people's aspirations, expectations, knowledge and perceptions about university.

6.3. University: Aspirations and Expectations

Contrary to government discourse around the 'poverty of aspiration', the majority of the young people I interviewed in *all* schools wanted to go to university. In fact the pervasiveness of the HE discourse appeared to be so strong that I found even pupils I interviewed who had extreme learning difficulties and working towards E grade GCSEs expressed a desire to attend university⁷¹. Furthermore there appeared to be confusion around what could be studied at university, in particular those young people with

⁷¹ These pupils have not been included in the general body of the analysis due to the sensitive nature of their interviews. For more information see Chapter 3.

disabilities and the year 7 pupils at Eagles Academy were the most unsure. Some of these young people asked me if it was possible to study hairdressing or mechanics at university⁷². St Clair and colleagues (2013) found a similar mismatch between educational and occupational aspirations amongst working-class young people, with some not realising that a specific career path required a degree and others feeling that a degree was necessary for industries where it was not required (see also Croll, 2009).

Whilst a large number of pupils in all schools aspired for university (as was particularly clear in the qualitative data) there remained notable differences across the schools. These differences presented themselves most prominently through the quantitative data. Those at Eagles Academy were less likely than the rest to express a positive expectation for university, something which I argue could be partially explained by those pupils having less confidence in this being a probable outcome for them. In the initial questionnaire I asked pupils: 'How likely do you think it is that you will go to university?'⁷³ Unsurprisingly the Grand Hill Grammar and Einstein High pupils were the most confident that they would attend university (90% of Grand Hill pupils and 75% of Einstein High responded 'likely' or 'definitely will') this is compared to only 43% of those at Eagles Academy (see Table 12). However it is notable that 43% is still a relatively large proportion considering the proportion of pupils in that school who gain the necessary GCSEs to continue to HE. Another point to note here is that the Grand Hill pupils' figures are perhaps surprisingly low given the high academic achievement level within the school. Only 42% said that they 'definitely will' attend university. During my fieldwork I showed these figures to Paul (the teacher overseeing my project) and he was notably surprised. He told me that far more than 42% of their pupils will end up going to university. Whilst a lot of these pupils still anticipated HE as part of their future, many expressed more modest expectations (e.g. by ticking 'likely' on the questionnaire).

This question is essentially tapping into *expectations* rather than *aspirations*. As was discussed in Chapter 2, this is an important distinction (St Clair et al., 2013; Khattab, 2015). Whilst I do not wish to claim that one can be inferred from the other, I felt it more helpful to gauge their *expectations* at this stage. Interviews revealed further details about aspirations and these tended to support their expectations (as noted on the survey). That is, pupils who had responded that they 'definitely will' or were 'likely' to go to university did not tell me in the

⁷² See Chapter 3 for further discussion around the ethics of this.

⁷³ See Appendix I for questionnaire.

interviews that they did not *want* to do so. Similarly those who ticked ‘definitely won’t’ or ‘unlikely’ did not tell me that they wanted to go to university but felt that this was an unlikely outcome for them in their lives. By asking about expectations I am able to generate some interesting data which pertains to confidence in their chances of reaching university, this will be explored below.

Table 12: Percentages of young people in each schools’ response to the question: ‘How likely do you think it is that you will go to university?’

	Grand Hill Grammar	Einstein High	Eagles Academy
Definitely Won't	0	1	6
Unlikely	0	1	9
Not Sure	9	23	42
Likely	48	53	33
Definitely Will	42	22	10
Total Count N = 100%	265	350	254

Note: (%) have been rounded.

As was aforementioned, Table 12, highlights that expectations for HE were strongest in Grand Hill and weakest in Eagles Academy, nevertheless the table also in some ways contradicts the poverty of aspiration discourse as it demonstrates whilst the most popular response in Eagles Academy appeared to be ‘not sure’ (42%) almost half of the Eagles Academy pupils *did* expect to attend university ticking either ‘likely’ or ‘definitely will’. However, it is important to consider the distinct difference between these two boxes. In all of the schools the positive response ‘likely’ seemed to be preferred over ‘definitely will’, nevertheless the Grand Hill Grammar pupils were the most likely to respond ‘definitely will’ (42%) and equally, the Eagles Academy pupils were by far the least likely to tick this box (10%). My qualitative data shed some light on why these pupils opted for ‘likely’ over ‘definitely will’, revealing a distinctive difference in the justifications in the different schools. For example when I asked Abigail a year 11 girl at Eagles Academy why she ticked ‘likely’ on her survey, she replied:

Well I do really want to go to uni but obviously it just depends on if I get the right A Levels and stuff, that’s the only thing that’s gonna stop me really if I don’t get the right grades to get in.

(Abigail, Year 11, Eagles Academy)

This response was common amongst the Eagles Academy pupils and spanned across the years. For example, when I similarly asked Tyler a year 9 boy at Eagles Academy if there

was any reason he had ticked ‘likely’ rather than ‘definitely will’, he replied: ‘Because I might not have enough grades to actually get close to university’. In contrast to this, the reasons given at Grand Hill Grammar and Einstein High tended to focus more around choices and being open to other options ‘coming up’. For example in response to my question of why they had opted for ‘likely’ over ‘definitely will’, Lottie and Jasmine both gave reasons along such lines:

If like an opportunity comes up, a really good job before I go to university that I probably wouldn’t get if I went to university than I’d probably do something like that.

(Lottie, Year 7, Grand Hill Grammar)

I dunno like if I decide to go into like media or something or if like an amazing opportunity turns up like I’m not so fixed on university that I’m gonna turn that down so I dunno it’s a possibility but it’s not like the only way to get places.

(Jasmine, Year 11, Einstein High)

This difference is illustrative of a distinction within their horizons for action; their habitus. The Grand Hill Grammar and Einstein High pupils, confident in their ability to succeed in their exams and reach university perceive of fewer obstacles in their way. Rather they see the potential for alternative options which may seem more appealing. University to them appeared to be just one possible route amidst a landscape of opportunities. This sentiment was expressed overtly during a sixth form careers event at Grand Hill which I was invited to attend. During the day pupils were encouraged to ask questions to a panel of Grand Hill alumni. I was fascinated by the distinct suspicion as to the value of university with many of them questioning whether this was in fact the best route⁷⁴. Due to their families’ resources they are more likely to be in a position to capitalise on alternative opportunities for transition into highly valued work. Thus in a context of increased tuition fees alongside a mass HE system they seemed to be questioning the university route, being mindful that there may be alternatives. In contrast, the Eagles Academy pupils, due to their disadvantaged position in relation to the field of education, were less confident in their

⁷⁴ For further discussion of this careers event see Chapter 8.

ability to succeed in school and reach university. Nevertheless it remained on their horizon as they perceived of it as their only option to get 'a good job'.

6.3.1. 'I don't wanna go uni cos I won't know no one so it will be lonely'

Whilst almost all of the young people I interviewed did want to go to university, it is important not to overlook those that did not. Indeed they were a tiny minority (two pupils) who told me that they were not planning on going to university. They were both attending Eagles Academy. The first pupil I came across who expressed this position was Ashton a year 11 boy. He was interesting as he was a 'high achiever' in the school so he had been taken to visit universities and told me that his family also really wanted him to go but that he wanted to join the military and felt that university was not the right choice for him. He said:

I just don't think it's the right choice I wanna make, like obviously I don't know what it's actually like cos no one in my family's ever gone to it but I don't think I'd be that much focussed for university, so I think I'll be able to get like a decent A grade and then probably go on to the military like I wanted to.

(Ashton, Year 11, Eagles Academy)

Another boy who was adamant that he was not going to go to university was Jay, a year 7 pupil at Eagles Academy. He first talks about this early on in his interview when discussing his plans to become a professional footballer, when I enquire as to whether he will need to go to university for that he says:

Jay I don't wanna go uni cos it's like I don't like, it's weird cos I, I won't know no one so it will be like lonely.

Jessie Why do you think you wouldn't know anybody?

Jay Cos none of my friends wanna go uni they just wanna sit around and go out in cars and all that.

Later in the interview I discussed his survey with him:

Jessie I asked you on your survey how likely it is that you will go to university and you said 'definitely won't'.

Jay Yeah.

Jessie And you told me “no I’m not going to university” here [in open box].
So just tell me a bit more about why you wrote that?

Jay Cos it’s umm university aint really my thing to study, it’s just not, like my mum and dad, say they’ve run out of money than they’ve got to pay it and it aint really fair on them then, like my cousin, cos my aunty died she struggled to pay so she had to leave university, so it wouldn’t really be fair.

Jay had already told me that his aunt had passed away when his cousin was at university and she had had to drop out to arrange and pay for the funeral. His cousin’s experience seemed to be central to his opposition towards attending university. Thus, whilst there were some young people who were not planning on attending university, it did not appear as I had initially set out to investigate- that the increased tuition fees themselves had been the cause of these dissuasions. Whilst we can read a financial element into Jay’s reasoning, it is not clear that the fees were the object of this; indeed there are other costs associated with university.

It is important to consider for a moment that the fact that the majority of the young people I interviewed aspired to attend university could be partially a product of my sampling. My sample were not a representative cross section of those who completed the questionnaire but rather were a specific set of young people- those who had *volunteered* to be part of my research (on the very topic of university) following completion of a survey⁷⁵. Analysis of the survey responses uncovers an interesting fact about the cohort of volunteers and non-volunteers. The majority of pupils who had ticked that they were ‘unlikely’, or ‘definitely not’, planning to attend university, did not volunteer to be interviewed. Whilst Table 12 suggests that no young people in Grand Hill Grammar ticked one of these boxes (0%), there were in fact two young people who did so. The two cases merely added up to 0.4% and as such were lost in the rounding process. Nevertheless they did exist yet neither of them volunteered to participate further; in Einstein High eight young people ticked one of these boxes but only two opted to be interviewed; in Eagles Academy, 38 young people ticked one of these boxes with only five of them (13%) volunteering to be interviewed. Thus the overwhelming majority of young people who felt that they were unlikely or definitely not going to attend university, did not opt to be part of the qualitative element-

⁷⁵ There has already been a layer of self-selection out of participation amongst those who opted out of even completing the questionnaire. Nevertheless since it was during school time the majority of the year groups all completed the surveys. See Chapter 3 for more information.

perhaps feeling that this was more targeted at people who had responded positively to such a question. It is possible that my project was, in a sense, tainted by dominant discourse prominent in the messages sent off within the schools which assert that a university pathway is the most desirable. Indeed as mentioned in Chapter 3 when I presented myself and my research to the year 11 pupils in Eagles Academy during assembly I was used as a springboard to ‘sell’ university to them. The teacher encouraged them to participate in my research to ‘help dispel the myths that you don’t have any aspirations or plans to go to university, to show that we are aiming for it’ (Field Note 3rd October 2014). This may have discouraged any young people not planning to attend from volunteering as they may not have wanted to challenge this line or represent their school as a place where young people do not have aspirations.

6.4. University: Purpose and Motivation

When designing this research, as well as hypothesising that the tuition fees would be a deterrent for many disadvantaged young people, I also imagined that the young people from different social class backgrounds would have different perceptions of the value and purpose of university. However what I found was that across the board in all schools and all year groups the majority of young people connected university to personal economic gains. The first way in which I have explored this issue is through analysing the young people’s responses during the vignette section of the interviews⁷⁶ to the question of ‘why do you think [character] has gone to university?’ Most young people told me that they believed that the fictional characters in the vignettes had gone to university to ‘get a good job’ or to ‘get a qualification’ to enable them to get a better job. All responses to this question are captured in mind maps constructed during analysis; these can be found in Appendix VIII. Interestingly, whilst there did not appear to be any distinct class or age related differences to these responses, there was a noticeable difference in respect of the reason given for the two *different* characters (Amy/Aaron or Jade/Joseph). That is, when discussing Amy or Aaron (the more disadvantaged character), the young people often combined their reasons of ‘getting a better job’ with sentiments along the lines of ‘to provide for her/his family’. In addition it appeared that their definition of ‘a better job’ here pertained to greater levels of financial security. For example, many mentioned ‘getting more money’, or ‘to get money to help the family’.

⁷⁶ See Chapter 3 for further details on this method. See Appendix IV for vignette.

In contrast to these responses, when discussing Jade or Joseph (the more advantaged character), the young people often gave individualised reasons in relation to the character's own personal desires. Even when discussing this in relation to 'getting a good job', unlike with Amy and Aaron, this was connected to an aspiration to become a lawyer; money and financial security was not mentioned in regards to this character. Similar to discussion around Amy and Aaron's motivations for progression to HE, discussions around Jade and Joseph tended to feature their parents yet this was in a somewhat different way. That is, they often cited reasons related to 'making her/his parents proud' or 'following in her/his parents' footsteps. As was mentioned in Chapter 3 these characters were purposefully constructed to be quite obviously different in terms of their social class. It is fascinating that the young people seemed to have a similar class lens, regardless of their own personal class backgrounds. That is, the young people in all schools made similar deductions about the vignette characters' knowledge and choices and these deductions appeared to be dependent upon the social class of the character being discussed. In a sense it appeared that the young people were imposing horizons for action upon the fictional characters. The views expressed by all of these young people supports the point that they all tended to view university in similar ways, all expressing desires to attend for similar reasons. The next section considers the pupils discussions of their own personal motivations for attending HE.

6.4.1. 'I just want to go to university so I can get a good job'

Interestingly, following discussion of the vignettes, when I asked the pupils the question of why they wanted to go to university their responses were far wider than the reasons given in response to the vignette. That is, whilst the perceived economic gains appeared to dominate overall, the young people also cited other reasons in relation to cultural and social elements. Whilst answers varied across the cohort, as with the vignette responses, there did not appear to be any specific classed, gendered or age related patterns to these. To illustrate this I have selected a number of quotes from across the three schools.

As was mentioned, financial benefits tended to be the most common rationale for the university pathway. For example, when I asked Harry a year 11 boy from Grand Hill Grammar why he wanted to go to university he said:

Harry Mainly because, partly because you kind of have to. I mean people who have a degree earn consistently more by a large margin. And also there's the whole uni experience thing and yeah it's just more education which is never a bad thing.

Jessie Ok and what does the university experience mean to you?

Harry Umm it probably involves quite a bit of alcohol, yeah coming home at 3am yeah being late for lectures and all those joys, yeah.

Harry begins by pointing to the 'graduate premium'; that graduates earn more than non-graduates but does also include in his answer a variety of other reasons related to the social and cultural side of university including the desire to further his education. Pupils in Eagles Academy also discussed wanting to go to university to get more money. For example when I asked Tyler why he wanted to go, he said:

Because I want to have, be able to earn enough money that I can actually have a nice house nice car nice basically everything and make my parents proud of me.

(Tyler, Year 9, Eagles Academy)

Whilst Harry explicitly pointed to the fact that graduates statistically earn more, in Tyler's narrative (as with most of the pupils' answers) the economic benefit of attending university was implicit. The connection was often made through the belief that university would lead to 'a better job' which would then lead to more money. Holly told me about this when discussing her motivation for attending university:

It's like you see not many people get jobs but if you like go to university then get a degree or something you'll more than likely get a better job which means more money.

(Holly, Year 11, Eagles Academy)

It is interesting that Holly acknowledges labour market issues in her answer saying 'not many people get jobs'. The Eagles Academy pupils, coming from a community with a large number of people out of work, are closer to issues of unemployment thus it features more in their narratives around the future than it does for the other pupils. For some young people a degree was seen as crucial to facilitating entry to a particular job or industry of interest. Isabel a year 7 girl from Einstein High said: 'I think university would help me get the qualifications I want to get the job that I want'. Jake a year 11 boy from Eagles Academy also provided this rationale. When I asked him why he wanted to go to university, as was mentioned in Chapter 5, he said:

Because there's no other way I don't think that I can get into the field of architecture and I've heard that it's a really good experience and I do like learning its generally one of my favourite things to do.

(Jake, Year 11, Eagles Academy)

In addition to feeling like university was necessary for his career goals, as was discussed in Chapter 5, Jake also mentioned being motivated by a passion for learning. This type of response came up in other interviews too. For example Ruby a year 7 girl from Eagles Academy said:

I want to go to university because I want to learn different stuff other than what we learn in school I want to learn like how to look after myself and just learn to be someone different.

(Ruby, Year 7, Eagles Academy)

Learning here was not only meant in the academic sense, Ruby also mentions the value in university as a place to learn to be independent and develop a new identity. This discussion of educational learning alongside learning to be independent came up in interviews in all of the schools across the ages. For example, Melissa a year 9 girl from Grand Hill, amongst a long narrative of reasons she aspires for university, including the ability to do an 'advanced job', begins her discussion with a focus on the learning element:

Partly cos I'm just interested in studying things...I'm enjoying school [laughs] and I'm quite interested in studying further and especially...in a particular area of interest...[and]partly because I just think it kind of benefits you for the rest of your life like you learn to be independent.

(Melissa, Year 9, Grand Hill Grammar)

Similarly Sam and Jasmine, pupils at Einstein High expressed these sentiments, feeling that university was a valuable place to learn to 'live on your own', seeing it as a 'good halfway point between real life and school':

I think obviously I want to sort of broaden my job opportunities and some jobs have to be specific for you to go to university and also it, from what I've heard it's sort of a good experience of like your first steps of actually living on your own and kind of being...you won't have anyone else to support you just you so it's a good learning experience in that way as well.

(Sam, Year 9, Einstein High)

Most of the careers I want to do you sort of need a degree to get into like it's a good idea to have a degree and also...from what I've heard from other people who've been [to university] it's a really worthwhile experience and like it's kind of a halfway between like school and like being independent cos you're like living away from your parents but if you live in halls you've still got a kind of structure and you're like you can get a job and stuff but you're still like learning so you're not completely free of school so it's kind of like a good halfway point between like real life and school I guess and also like the whole social thing sounds really fun.

(Jasmine, Year 11, Einstein High)

As with the majority of pupils in all schools, both Sam and Jasmine begin by providing a rationale for attending university centred on the perceived economic gains associated with this route. Sam says that he wants to 'broaden his job opportunities' and Jasmine comments that you 'need a degree' to get into most of the career industries she is interested in. Nevertheless they both follow this up with further reasoning similar to Ruby's discussion, related to learning to be independent.

On a slightly different note, for some, a degree was seen as a 'back-up' plan. Jadon one year 7 boy from Eagles Academy told me he wanted to go to university 'so if I don't get my building job I can get a better job out of university'. This is an interesting challenge to the traditional notions of aspiration- and indeed professionals in the school may be encouraged to 'raise Jadon's aspirations'- as he first and foremost hopes to become a builder (like his dad) but if this fails he hopes to have a degree as a route to a 'better job'. It was not just in Eagles Academy that this type of phenomenon was noted. Molly a year 7 girl at Grand Hill told me that despite wanting to become a baker she planned to go to university and study German and history. When I asked her why this was she said:

Because it's a chance to learn and lots of people say if I want to become a baker I should go to college and study food tech but I don't really want to do that because baking is, you could pick up the skills...and also if you don't really have a plan B you could end up in a sticky situation.

(Molly, Year 7, Grand Hill Grammar)

Molly does not see the need to study for her perceived future trade as you can ‘pick up the skills easily’, she aspires to attend university and study subjects she is passionate about as a ‘back up plan’. Implied in her narrative, as with many others, is the belief that university provides a secure route to a good job. Overall then, as has been demonstrated in this section, young people in all of the schools from all year groups had similar motivations for attending university centred around: gaining a qualification to enable them to secure a ‘good’ job; furthering their knowledge; learning a degree of independence and to a lesser extent, socialising and having fun. The following section goes on to consider one of the central ways in which it became apparent that social class was structuring opportunities for university through familiarity with the field.

6.4.2. ‘Everyone in my family has gone to university, I don’t see why I shouldn’t’

One of the ways in which social class *did* become apparent as a dimension distinguishing the young people’s accounts of university ambitions related to social capital. That is, there appeared a distinct inequality with regards to the number of family and friends the young people knew who had experienced university. On the initial survey administered I asked the question ‘not including your parents/carers and teachers how many people do you know who are at or have been to university?’ The responses across the three schools are captured in Table 13 below:

Table 13: Knowledge of people at university by school

	Grand Hill Grammar	Einstein High	Eagles Academy
None	6	6	34
1 to 2	13	17	40
3 to 5	21	30	15
6 to 8	14	16	4
9 or more	47	31	6
Total Count N = 100%	256	347	249

Note: (%) have been rounded.

The above table demonstrates a stark contrast across the schools in terms of pupils’ knowledge of people who have experienced HE. In Grand Hill Grammar 47% of the respondents claimed to know 9 or more people who were at or had been to university, 31% of those at Einstein High had similarly ticked this box. This is compared to only 6% of those at Eagles Academy. These figures are quite clearly reversed when considering the proportion of young people who claimed to know no one who fit these criteria. That is, at

Eagles Academy 34% of young people ticked this box with 40% claiming to know only 1-2 people. In contrast only 6% of the Grand Hill Grammar and 6% of the Einstein High pupils said that they knew no one and only 13% and 17% respectively claimed to know only 1 or 2 people. This was supported through the qualitative phase of fieldwork where I asked participants to expand on this response, telling me who in particular they knew or confirming that they in fact did not know anyone. Sebastian a year 11 boy from Grand Hill Grammar told me: 'Everyone I know's been to university that's older; I don't think there's anyone who hasn't'. Poppy a year 7 girl at Grand Hill similarly said: 'Most of the grown-ups that I know actually went to university so, actually I don't think I know one that didn't go to university'. Others listed many of their relatives or family friends as people they knew who had experienced university:

All my relatives have been to university, lots of people around my area like on my street have been to university as well, I have three cousins that have been to university, their parents and then my other cousins, my grandparents they've all been to university.

(Max, Year 11, Grand Hill Grammar)

In contrast, the majority of the young people I interviewed in Eagles Academy did not know anyone who had experience of university, whilst some knew 1 or 2, at times it was clear that they had only guessed that a relative or friend had gone and were not certain. A further disparity was prominent between familiarity with Oxford and Cambridge. Lottie a year 7 girl at Grand Hill told me: 'Most of my family went to Oxford or Cambridge so I know a lot of people who went there'. This was not an uncommon response and many of the pupils at Einstein High similarly had parents or family members who had attended Oxbridge. Some of the young people at Grand Hill and Einstein High told me about how their parents talked to them about university, sharing their experiences and at times taking them on trips to visit the institutions they had attended. This included trips around Oxford and Cambridge. It became clear that this parental familiarity with university often led to increased involvement including advice and guidance including, what degrees can be studied and pathways to entering. For example, when I asked Melissa a year 9 girl at Grand Hill whether she discussed career ideas with her parents she said:

Sometimes with my parents we go through like degrees that I could do cos that's like, I dunno, sometimes it just crops up in conversation...when I go, oh that would be cool to be!

(Melissa, Year 9, Grand Hill Grammar)

Furthermore, it was clear that this familiarity or family connection to university fed into the pupils' motivations to attend themselves. As we saw earlier Ashton mentioned that none of his family had been to university when discussing his decision not to go. On the other hand many of the young people explicitly discussed their family having attended as a motivation to go as an influence on their decision either as encouragement or as an expectation. Nile a year 9 boy from Grand Hill, upon discussing his desire to attend university, drew a connection between his circumstances and that of Joseph, the fictional character from the Vignette. He said:

I think I'd be encouraged definitely, almost a bit like Jo, it's not really a good thing but I did kind of presume I'd go to university, I thought that everyone did...I think because I'm in this school it's almost an expectation. They push you to, you don't have to of course but that doesn't mean that you can drop out of everything. I think the jobs I've always had in mind involve going to university so yeah it wasn't so much being pressured by them [family] but it's more what I want to do.

(Nile, Year 9, Grand Hill Grammar)

During this conversation, Nile also discusses how most of his family have gone to university, contributing towards it being an expectation that he would follow that path too. Similarly, when I asked Flo a year 7 girl from Einstein High, why she had ticked 'definitely will' go to university she replied:

I probably did definitely will because my mum always goes on about how much I should go to university so I think she'd be pretty annoyed if I didn't.

(Flo, Year 7, Einstein High)

As was mentioned above the Grand Hill Grammar and Einstein High pupils were far more connected to Oxbridge than the Eagles Academy pupils. This familiarity often fed directly into their 'aspirations' to attend such institutions. For example William a year 11 pupil from Einstein High said:

I would quite like to go to Oxford because well both my parents went there and also I went to a summer school in the summer at Oxford for maths and I really enjoyed that and I really like the maths institute there.

(William, Year 11, Einstein High)

Another way in which a distinction between the young people's familiarity with university became apparent was through discussions of the vignettes. That is, when asked to discuss how they thought the characters came to find out about university, most of the young people cited school or parents as a source. These responses can be seen in mind maps in Appendix VIII. Interestingly, as with the earlier discussion around why the characters had chosen to attend university, the responses in each year, in each school to this question were largely similar. However a key distinction was noted in responses to the two different stories. Here, again, the young people appeared to have a classed awareness in respect of the different characters. Most thought that Amy and Aaron had found out about university through school with many mentioning the careers services. In contrast when discussing Jade and Joseph the majority of the young people thought that they would have found out through their parents. Another facet to this was that some of the young people from Grand Hill Grammar and Einstein High struggled to answer this question, discussing how they 'didn't know' how you find out about university because they have 'always known'. This excerpt from an interview with Flo, a year 7 girl from Einstein High, illustrates this sentiment:

Jessie Ok and how do you think that Amy found out about university?

Flo I don't know how you find out about university I just like know about university so I don't really know. Like maybe through school or just heard people talking about it or heard her parents talking about it.

Jessie Ok and when you say you just know about it what do you mean?

Flo Well like I can't remember being told about university I just remember knowing about university just like [I] remember knowing about school when I was little I was like I'm going to go to school when I'm older.

Flo's answers highlight a strong familiarity with university. She recalls knowing she was going to go to university in the same way in which she knew she would go to school when she was older. It is narrated almost as though, through a process of osmosis, such knowledge has seeped into her consciousness. Other young people from Grand Hill Grammar commented that there are always students around so they just see university all the time. It is interesting to consider the relevance of the location of the schools to the construction of this familiarity and knowledge. As was discussed in Chapter 4 Grand Hill is located next door to a Russell Group university. Although Eagles Academy is sponsored by

this same university, it is located on the other side of the city in an area characterised by relative social deprivation, high unemployment and rented public sector housing. Interestingly not many comments around familiarity were noted amongst the Eagles Academy pupils. It appears that social proximity (familial experience of university) and physical proximity (concrete visibility of university buildings and students) rather than abstract presence through sponsorship and engagement engenders a greater level of familiarity and knowledge. Overall, whilst the young people from all ages and backgrounds held similar aspirations and beliefs in the value and purpose of university, their knowledge and familiarity of it along with their confidence in their ability to reach their goals were largely mediated by social class. This suggests that raising aspirations is not the solution to issues of class inequality in access to HE for the young people in my research. Structural disadvantage and segregation of schools in terms social class are problems which need addressing if we are to begin to even the playing field for these pupils.

6.5. Conclusion

Hodkinson and colleagues wrote in 1996 about the way in which the habitus serves to structure young people's horizons for action, such that it 'enables the choice of some careers but prevents the choice of others' (Hodkinson et al., 1996: 150). I have found something rather different. The majority of young people I interviewed from disadvantaged backgrounds did not appear to be restricting themselves or setting their horizons in line with their opportunities or class background. Whilst some of the younger pupils at Eagles Academy did aspire to manual labour or low skilled work, this was narrated as more of a desire to emulate a parent whom they admired, rather than about an awareness of jobs available for 'people like them'. Whilst there was a notable difference (most visible in the quantitative data) across the schools in terms of young people's expectations and confidence in regards to attending university. The majority of the young people I *interviewed* in all schools aspired for middle-class professions and to attend university. Arguably, university itself appeared to be part of the Eagles Academy pupils' horizons for action. Due to their disadvantaged position in society, coming from communities plagued with lack of job opportunities, they do not see any alternative to university. University has become necessary to 'get a good job'. Thus they appeared to have constructed concrete career plans which involved university as a stepping stone. In contrast the Grand Hill and Einstein High pupils, having a habitus developed in a middle-class field of possibilities, whilst aspiring for university and discussing its necessity for everyone in society, did not appear to rely so heavily on this as the only possible route. They discussed this, along with their broad career

aspirations, as about keeping their options open and not shutting down any doors. This inculcation of a middle-class habitus through a form of strategic uncertainty was encouraged by parents and contributed to maintaining inequality as some young people were following paths to adulthood which were imbued with greater flexibility and a multitude of options. The following two chapters will explore the institutional roles in this process; considering the way in which inequality is manifested through the different practices of the schools as some more than others serve to instil and inculcate an advantaged habitus and position in the field through what I call institutional concerted cultivation.

Chapter 7: Opportunity Structures and Blocking Systems

7.1. Introduction

The previous chapter explored young people's aspirations and expectations for the future alongside their beliefs in the value of a university education. It demonstrated that the pupils had a great deal in common in relation to these issues; the majority of young people in all of the schools had 'high aspirations'. They all tended to view university as a place to gain a better education, believing that through this they would be rewarded with a good job. Nevertheless the chapter highlighted the distinct ways in which their narratives differed with the young people at Eagles Academy discussing more concretely formed aspirations and back up plans whilst those at Grand Hill and Einstein High expressed a form of 'strategic uncertainty', playing with ideas and 'keeping the options open'. I have argued that this contributes to the reproduction of inequality in education as young people from more advantaged backgrounds possess a tacit 'feel for the game' which encompasses a degree of 'flexibility' through 'keeping the options open'; as such they are likely to be left with a greater ability to make 'choices'.

This chapter contributes to the analysis through paying attention to the opportunity structures within each school in relation to enabling (or indeed restricting) young people's chances of succeeding in realising their aspirations. The pupils in each school already come from vastly different backgrounds with differing levels of resources (see Chapter 4). Thus, to what extent do the schools' opportunity structures compound this privilege or disadvantage? It is important to shed light on these issues of inequality because within the system of education and the labour market, all young people are judged on the same terms. Their subjects studied and grades achieved are viewed as outcomes of their own personal 'choice' and ability⁷⁷. This chapter disrupts such a discourse by arguing that young people's choices must be understood as situated within vastly different contexts. In Eagles Academy GCSE and A Level options are located within a 'blocking system', whereby pupils select

⁷⁷ It is important to note that some elite universities as part of their widening participation programmes do take into consideration differences in pupils' grades through 'contextual offers' which attempt to identify 'potential'. Contextual offers involve some young people being offered places contingent on lower grade requirements than others. However as will be argued in this chapter and the recommendations made at the end of this thesis (see Chapter 9) this is not enough to balance the inequality in young people's CVs, especially in light of the inequality in subject 'choices' as discussed in this chapter.

subjects from specific 'blocks'. Whilst the language of the blocking system is presented and may appear neutral at the outset, referring merely to the grouping of subjects, as I will show below, the system also functions to 'block' some routes for some young people. In contrast, the pupils at both Grand Hill and Einstein High benefit from a system of enhanced choice, with a vast array of GCSE and A Level options and no restrictive criteria in place to 'block' any pathways. Overall, drawing mainly upon theorising of Bourdieu and Passeron (1979; 1990) and Bowles and Gintis (2011) this chapter contributes to an understanding of how school systems and regimes continue to have strong implications for young people's educational options.

7.2. 'Option time in year 8 is extremely important. The decisions you make now will be a significant step for your future life choices'

As is indicated by this title (a quote from the Vice Principal of Eagles Academy taken from their year 8 options booklet) the decision to take certain GCSEs over others will be directive of the pathway a young person is subsequently able to follow. That is, certain subjects will open doors whilst others will close them. This situation is compounded by the A Level options presented and chosen. St Clair and colleagues (2013) found that due to inequality in careers advice and guidance some young people were unaware of the necessary qualifications for a specific pathway. They write: 'It was not unusual for somebody to want to be a lawyer and to attend university, but only be taking three GCSE examinations when eight would be necessary for the next stage of study' (St Clair et al., 2013: 735). As this chapter will demonstrate, my findings suggest these discrepancies may also occur due to institutional structures and practices which intervene to direct pathways. It is not simply that young people are unaware of which options are best for them; they may also have been presented with a more or less limited choice set. It is important to note that in Eagles Academy the pupils make these 'life directing' choices in year 8 (during their second year of secondary schooling) and begin studying for the GCSEs in year 9. In the other two schools option time is in year 9 and GCSEs begin in year 10. Inevitably this in itself creates an inequality as the Eagles Academy pupils are forced to make these choices and begin a pressured course of study at a younger age, equipped with less knowledge and experience.

When analysing young people's justifications for choosing specific subjects, there were clear similarities and differences across the schools. In the majority of instances young

people tended to give reasons related to having a passion for a subject or being good at it. Some young people spoke about their career aspirations and how such subjects tied into this. At Einstein High a lot of the young people spoke about their parents being key to this decision making. Many of the young people cited the school or teachers as largely influential; however whether this was in regards to support or institutional restrictions differed across the schools. In Eagles Academy young people tended to discuss the school's role in terms of teachers making judgments of their 'ability', or indeed being affected by the blocking system. The careers advisor tended to feature little in their discussions. Meanwhile, In Grand Hill Grammar (and at Einstein High) the young people spoke about the schools immense support in regards to options time and how this connected to future jobs. For example, when I asked Nile about whether he found the careers service helpful he replied:

Yeah, I'm really glad that even now we're starting to do it [careers advice] because now is the time we are starting to make decisions about GCSEs which is...It just feels like a piece of paper but I know it will be a big part of my life in years to come and I'm really glad that Grand Hill Grammar take an interest in giving us the help that we need.

(Nile, Year 9, Grand Hill Grammar)

Whilst it is important to consider young people's recollection of the motivations for studying specific subjects, crucially young people actually have an extremely limited set of options to choose from in the first place. This is a fact which is neatly disguised in the quote from the Vice Principal of Eagles Academy as it attempts to locate within the students a large degree of agency over their future. When discussing the discrete yet powerful ways in which the education system serves to reproduce a hierarchical system Bourdieu and Passeron write:

Even when it seems to be imposed by the strength of a 'vocation' or the discovery of inability, each individual act of choice by which a child excludes himself from access to a stage of education or resigns himself to relegation to a devalorized type of course takes account of the ensemble of the objective relations (which pre-existed that choice and will outlast it) between his social class and the education system, since a scholastic future is of greater or lesser probability for a given individual only in so far as it constitutes the objective and collective future of his class or category.

What is meant by this is that, rather than being wholly agentic, the choices young people make are highly indicative of their class background. In particular, decisions to opt for specific routes based on perceived (or professionally defined) strengths or weaknesses are reflective of the objective realities of their class of origin. Whilst I argued in Chapter 6 that young people's aspirations were not being restricted by horizons for action. Here the impact of social class upon trajectory manifests itself through 'choice' or lack thereof. In addition to the way in which young people may self-select or be assigned to devalued subjects, this chapter highlights the way in which the starting point for making such choices is largely influenced by the opportunities or constraints they are faced with in each school. Young people in all of the fieldwork schools had a limited choice set due to the national curriculum's (arbitrary⁷⁸) valuing of a specific set of core 'academic' subjects (namely, maths, English, science and a language) which form the basis of the GCSEs taken, leaving limited scope for a variety of alternative options. Nevertheless, the young people in Eagles Academy, by far experienced the least amount of agency over this process whilst those at Grand Hill Grammar experienced the greatest degree of freedom to choose. I was first made aware of these deep structural differences through my interviews with the young people. In Eagles Academy when discussing the motivations for studying a specific subject, the pupils often told me that they had no choice, particularly if two subjects they wanted to study appeared in the same 'block'. Thus I came to learn of the 'blocking system' whereby the subjects are already pre-assigned to timetable blocks meaning students must pick one subject from each block rather than being allowed to choose any two subjects. The table below presents the option structure provided within each institution:

⁷⁸Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) argue that the education system is organised around a hierarchy of knowledge, whereby some routes and subjects are positioned as inferior to others. They argue that this is an arbitrary arrangement which serves to legitimate and justify one group's domination through presenting their knowledge and culture as superior.

Table 14: GCSE (and BTEC) options by school

	Grand Hill Grammar	Einstein High School	Eagles Academy
Compulsory GCSEs	<i>All pupils take all of these</i>	<i>All pupils take all of these</i>	<i>All pupils take all of these</i>
	Maths English Language English Literature Biology Chemistry Physics	Maths English Language English Literature Science GCSE ⁷⁹	Maths English Language English Literature Science GCSE or BTEC ⁸⁰
Humanities	<i>Pupils select <u>at least 1</u></i>	<i>Not compulsory to select any</i>	<i>Pupils select <u>only 1</u></i>
	Geography History Philosophy, Ethics and Religion Business Studies Classical Civilisation Greek Latin - language and literature = 2 GCSEs	N/A – all listed below	Geography History
Languages	<i>Pupils select <u>at least 1</u></i>	<i>Pupils select <u>only 1</u></i>	<i>Pupils select <u>only 1</u></i>
	French German Russian Spanish	French German Spanish	French Spanish
Other Options	<i>Pupil select up to 2</i>	<i>Pupils select 3 subjects</i>	<i>Pupils select 1 from block A and 1 from block B</i>
	Art and Design: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fine Art • Fine Art with Textiles Computing Dance Design Technology: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electronic Products • Product Design Drama Food and Nutrition Music Physical Education	GCSEs: Art and Design Design Technology: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Technology • Product Design • Textiles Drama Geography History Music Photography Physical Education BTECs: Business Studies IT Practitioners Animal Care	Option block A GCSEs: Art Drama Product Design BTECs: Sport 1 Sport 2 ----- Option block B GCSEs: Art IT Music BTECs: Construction Health and Social Care 1 Health and Social Care 2

⁷⁹ Pupils who achieve level 6 or above in science at Key Stage 3 are offered to opportunity of studying biology, chemistry and physics as individual GCSEs

⁸⁰ Pupils were selected in year 8 to do either science BTEC or GCSE depending upon the schools perceptions of their 'ability level'.

As Table 14 demonstrates, there exist vast differences across the schools in terms of the GCSE options offered to the pupils. This can be seen in both the core compulsory subjects and the additional options. For example in Eagles Academy and Einstein High (with a few exceptions) all pupils take Science as a (double) GCSE whilst in Grand Hill Grammar all pupils take biology, chemistry and physics as three separate GCSEs⁸¹. Moreover in Eagles Academy young people are sorted by the teachers into either science GCSE or BTEC⁸² based on their perception of the student's science 'ability' level. This is problematic, not least because it is a powerful form of labelling which renders some 'less able' from a young age, but also because the BTEC is not as valuable on the credential marketplace as the GCSE (which itself is not as valuable as taking the three sciences individually). Thus it can serve to restrict options post-16 for some young people. During my interviewing I came across a year 11 student in Eagles Academy who wanted to be a midwife. She was predicted all B grades in her GCSEs which is above average for the school. When I asked her if there are any obstacles which she felt may get in the way of her becoming a midwife she said:

Kirsty Dunno really to be honest with you, I mean at the minute because I'm doing science at BTEC level...When I go into sixth form I have to re-do it at GCSE level and then do the Biology so that might be a problem, it might not I don't actually know about that one.

Jessie Ok and why are you doing Science BTEC not GCSE?

Kirsty To be honest I couldn't tell you.

Jessie No?

Kirsty No. Since year 9 I've been doing BTEC.

⁸¹ This is a significant distinction. Taking three individual sciences means that a pupil gains an extra GCSE and will have a more advanced knowledge base. It also means that if a pupil is stronger in one specific science and plans to pursue it at A Level, their grade in that subject will not be detrimentally affected by their performance in the other aspects of science. Taking the double award means an overall grade which is an average of the performance in all science subjects. Of course this can be beneficial if a pupil wants their average in the double award to be pulled up by a stronger subject. However the central point for this chapter is that young people in all schools are not equally offered the option in regards to type of science qualification undertaken.

⁸² BTECs are vocational based qualifications they are often listed as 'equivalents' to GCSEs, however they have continually been symbolically situated as inferior to 'traditional' academic routes and considered to be less rigorous (for further discussion see Harrison et al., 2015).

Jessie So they put you in that then did they? You didn't choose to?

Kirsty I didn't choose to no.

Jessie Ok and how do you feel about that?

Kirsty Well back then I didn't really know that it would affect what I wanted to do sort of thing but obviously now I've got to re-do it and it's like [sighs] great [said with heavily ironic tone].

Here it is evident that the practices of the school, in particular the decision making of professionals within the Academy, have served to restrict Kirsty's options such that she will now have to re-do science GCSE as the BTEC will not qualify her to study biology at A Level, something which she needs to become a midwife. This teacher-defined sorting of pupils into different levels of qualification is problematic, not least because it assumes 'ability' to be innate and fixed, but also because it heavily constrains development. Research has firmly established that teachers' perceptions of pupils' abilities are often influenced by their views of the young person's social class (or indeed gender or ethnicity) (Gillborn, 2006), further sounding the alarm for such practices as they are likely to encompass a level of teacher bias. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) stress the importance of the education system in reproducing social class hierarchies through disguising them as purely academic. They argue that the education system performs a 'hidden service' for some classes by: '...(C)oncealing social selection under the guise of technical selection and legitimating the reproduction of the social hierarchies by transmuted them into academic hierarchies' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990: 153). In this way Kirsty (and many others who are streamed into BTEC science) are positioned and located as being 'less academically able' students in regards to science. This forms the justification for them taking a form of qualification rendered less valuable and leaving less options open for them in their future. Thus we see that even within the compulsory subject of science, young people are unequally sorted by institutional practices in a hierarchy from BTEC to taking all three science GCSEs individually. This has powerful implications for their options post GCSE, indeed Cornish (2015) describes GCSEs and associated grades as having a 'gatekeeping function' to post-16 options.

This institutional sorting resonates not only with Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) theory of reproduction, but also with Bowles and Gintis (2011) classic work on the relations between the education system and the capitalist economy. They argue that the education system provides a sorting and legitimating mechanism for the unequal distribution of individuals

into different levels of the labour market. They discuss the way in which schools prepare young people from different class backgrounds in various ways through the transmitting and supporting of particular dispositions and skill sets of relevance for their perceived destination. They write:

Schooling fosters and rewards the development of certain capacities and the expression of certain needs, while thwarting and penalizing others. Through these institutional relationships, the education system tailors the self-concepts, aspirations, and social class identifications of individuals to the requirements of the social division of labor.

(Bowles and Gintis, 2011: 129)

It appears that today, 40 years on from the initial publication of this work, the education system is still performing a sorting mechanism, as it streams pupils into vocational qualifications deemed best suited for their 'ability'. Preparing some young people to enter into the labour market at a lower level than their peers on an academic track. What is interesting and unique about this situation, is that it is a particularly academic subject (science) (rather than a traditionally job-related subject) which has been adapted and morphed into a vocational variation which is presented as more adept for specific groups of students. Science BTEC thereby relegates pupils to lower tracks whilst all the while disguising itself as providing a symbolically legitimated highly academic form of education.

7.2.1. 'I'm really interested in languages so I chose Russian and Spanish'

Further inequalities can be seen across the schools in regards to the language and humanities subjects that pupils are offered and required to take (as demonstrated in Table 14). In Eagles Academy, in addition to the compulsory GCSEs, pupils must select one humanities subject; their choice is limited to either history or geography (but not both). Meanwhile in Einstein High students may opt for a humanities subject but they are *not required* to do so. In Grand Hill, similar to Eagles Academy, pupils *must* chose a humanities subject, however, their choice is not limited to one, and they are presented with many more subjects to choose from (geography; history; philosophy, ethics and religion; business studies; classical civilisation; Greek or Latin). A similar structure is in place for languages. In Eagles Academy and Einstein High pupils must choose only one language option. In Eagles Academy the choice is of either French or Spanish whilst Einstein High also offers German. In Grand Hill pupils have the same language choices as those at Einstein High

but in addition are offered Russian. The pupils in Grand Hill can take as many languages as they want, and some young people who I interviewed had indeed opted for more than one. In contrast any pupils with a particular passion for languages would not be supported at Eagles Academy or Einstein High as they are only allowed one language option. Many of the pupils at Grand Hill spoke about the importance of languages and some were planning to follow them through to A Level. This attitude towards language as a ‘useful’ subject appeared a lot whilst I was in Grand Hill. When attending a careers day where alumni were brought back into the school to give advice to the current students, I noted a focus on the importance of languages. This was not just in relation to GCSE or A Level subjects. During a panel discussion session the chair asked about how to make ones CV stand out and make an impression in interview. One of the alumni responded as follows:

Results are not enough; [you] need to show what else you have done. [They] want to know about you. Get noticed, passion, hobby, languages, music.

(Field Note, 21st November 2014)

Here languages appear to be part of a strategy to ensure pupils ‘get ahead’. Discussion around the importance of languages was not limited to Grand Hill, in Eagles Academy despite only being allowed one language option and being restricted to French or Spanish, I did note comments around the encouragement from professionals in the Academy towards languages. For example Charlotte a year 11 at Eagles Academy when discussing her thoughts around career possibilities told me:

[Careers Advisor] said if you can get a language you can literally do like any job because every job needs somebody with a language behind them really so I guess If I do languages there’s some sort of hope that I could do something.

(Charlotte, Year 11, Eagles Academy)

Here it is evident that Charlotte (following encouragement) believes that a language could be her ticket to a future with a secure job. Arguably Charlotte’s narrative echoes the collective habitus of her community which is characterised by lack of secure, stable work. As was seen in Chapter 3 a large proportion of parents in her school and local community are out of work and dependent upon the welfare state for support. In the classic *Ain’t No Makin’ It*, Jay MacLeod (1995) asserts that working-class young people construct their aspirations and expectations for the future partially influenced by the context of their parents and communities; what they see around them impacts how optimistic or pessimistic they are about their chances on the labour market. Charlotte, aware of the lack

of opportunities around her, attempts to find a pathway that provides some hope and security. The emphasis is on the need to secure *some form* of stable work. In contrast to this valuing of languages as a route to employment, one day whilst I was sitting in Eagles Academy having a cup of tea I started talking to a Spanish teacher about her struggle in regards to getting pupils enthusiastic about the subject. She told me that since it was not a core subject pupils were not under pressure to get above a C in it, yet at the same time they were required to take a language. Thus she said that she feels that Spanish gets neglected and finds it hard to engage the pupils. Unless they are particularly passionate about the subject it is perceived as unimportant. Whilst school discourse, following wider beliefs of the value and ‘usefulness’ of languages, tends to support the subject and as such pupils are required to study a language; in the micro interactions and everyday practices of the education system the incentives attached to studying languages do not hold enough weight to encourage young people to ‘care’ about them.

7.2.2. Option blocks that block options

Once students have their compulsory GCSEs in place and have selected from the languages and humanities they are then allowed to choose two more subjects (or three in Einstein High) from the option pool. It is at this point that the gravest inequality between the schools becomes apparent. In Eagles Academy, despite rhetoric around ‘choice’ and the emphasis on the importance of this choice by the Vice Principal, the pupils’ ‘choices’ are extremely limited from the outset. That is, due to the blocking system, they are required to choose one option from block A and one from block B. In practice what this means is, excluding the BTECs, the young people can choose art, drama or product design from block A and then art, music or IT from block B (see Table 14). During my interviews in Eagles Academy I came across a lot of young people who had been negatively affected by this system. Many had been forced into a trade-off whereby they ended up taking their least favourite subject in order to take a different subject of their choice. For example when I asked Charlotte, a year 11 pupil why she had chosen music, sport science, history and French, she said:

Charlotte ...I didn’t really pick sport science I chose health and social care but they didn’t give it to me they gave me sport science instead

Jessie Ok so why did you want to do health and social care?

Charlotte ...I don’t know we didn’t really have a lot of options...and you’re kind of like even though you don’t want to do something, even if you

don't really know much about it, it's kind of what's more appealing to you than the other thing and...Sport science was like the bottom one I don't really, I don't like it at all

Jessie So they just allocated you into that one, there wasn't a choice between any other ones?

Charlotte They told me afterwards it's because like health and social care and music are on like the same block so they're on at the same time so I couldn't have had both.

The above excerpt with Charlotte displays the way in which the blocking system disadvantages the young people in Eagles Academy by restricting and limiting their choices. The young people are often left with an undesired course, perhaps because it seems 'more appealing' than the rest. Additionally, this excerpt powerfully highlights the way in which young people in Eagles Academy often make these decisions without much information about the content of a specific subject. Another year 11 girl, Abigail, had also been restricted by the blocking system when I asked her why she had chosen the subjects she had (music, art, history and French) she said:

Abigail I chose music because I play Piano a lot and the only reason why I chose art was because, I didn't used to do art and music I used to do health and social and drama, but if I wanted to do music the only way I could do music was if I picked art as well so that was just, I had to do it.

Jessie Oh why was that?

Abigail Because I changed my courses half way through cos I just wa'nt feeling comfortable in it, it just weren't what I wanted to do at all, so they changed me but I had to do art.

Jessie So but why do they make you do art if you do music?

Abigail It's because umm it's in the slots that it's in, in the timetable.

Here we see that Abigail was not able to remain on her health and social care course when she tried to change drama to music as music and health and social care are scheduled at the same time. In this way the blocking system was not only impacting young people's choices at the outset but also preventing further flexibility at a later stage. In addition to the 'blocking system', there were further instances of Eagles Academy intervening in the

selection of subjects following young people's decisions. For example Holly another year 11 pupil told me about having one of her options switched, not because it clashed with another of her subjects but rather because the school felt she could 'do better' in a different subject, she told me:

Holly I wanted to do music but they changed it to drama.

Jessie Ok why did they do that?

Holly Because they thought I'd be better at drama than music.

Jessie So did they just change it?

Holly They gave me warning, they asked me if they could change it and I was like yeah ok.

It is interesting to note the way in which Holly appears compliant with the schools attempts to steer her in a certain direction. Though she indicates that the school *asked* her if she would switch (rather than merely moving her without her permission) she indicates a somewhat indifference to this, as she says she was like 'yeah ok'. This is similar to the way in which the pupils at Eagles Academy, in opposition to their peers in Grand Hill and Einstein High, demonstrated little resistance to the schools attempts to alter their career pathways (a phenomenon which will be discussed in the following chapter). These young people, possessing less recognised forms of cultural capital, have less power in this situation and feel less able to challenge the schools' advice. It is an institution they perceive to be authoritative possessing greater knowledge and insight than they themselves do.

Thus, as has been shown, in Eagles Academy, powerful institutional structures are in place which have an enormous impact upon which pathways are open for young people. This becomes even more prominent during the A Level options as will be discussed later. This kind of restriction upon choices was not prevalent in the other two schools. In Einstein High and Grand Hill the young people had a vast array of subjects to choose from and, in addition, had the freedom to select any combination regardless of timetabling. In Einstein High the pupils can choose from 11 GCSE subjects and 3 BTECs (see Table 14 for breakdown of subjects offered). In Grand Hill they can choose from 21 GCSEs (including the humanities); BTECs are not offered at all. In addition to this difference in the array of subjects young people are able to choose from, I noted an important distinction in the type of subjects offered

and the encouragement and supporting of particular pathways over others. The next section considers these issues and the classed signals these different subjects send off.

7.2.3. ‘They wanted something that shows intellect that’s why I do Latin’

Grand Hill’s emphasis on languages and the classics, appears to signal that the young people are likely to have an ‘abstract mastery’ (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979) and a high level of cultural capital. An excellent example of this is the option of ‘classical civilisation’ or ‘Latin’. Interestingly some of the pupils appeared to be distinctly aware of the value of this qualification, feeling that by studying it they demonstrate a particular form of intelligence. This sentiment is neatly captured in the title of this section which is a quote from Nile, a year 9 boy from Grand Hill Grammar. Melissa similarly signalled this when remarking that Latin ‘shows quite a lot’ when discussing her motivations for studying particular GCSEs:

I chose Latin because...not that many people have Latin it’s quite an odd one. It’s not that odd but I think it shows quite a lot and also our school does it as two GCSEs but you can take it as like 12 [instead of 11]...Cos the two GCSEs are basically the same as having it combined in one course, you’d have that much in one course, but the syllabus we do does it in two GCSEs so then you’re doing 12 which sounds like you’re doing lots of GCSEs which is exciting and I like Latin as well it comes quite easily.

(Melissa, Year 9, Grand Hill Grammar)

Melissa’s discussion also alludes to the fact that through doing Latin GCSE in Grand Hill, you are able to gain 12, rather than the typical 11 GCSEs. Whilst it is classified as two GCSEs (as you study both literature and language), pupils only have to use up one of their optional subjects rather than two when selecting it. Melissa’s comments also suggest that there is something valuable in the exclusivity that comes with studying something like Latin, as she says that ‘not many people have it’; suggesting that she feels it will help her to ‘stand out’. It is interesting to compare the subject of Latin GCSE with the option of construction BTEC offered at Eagles Academy. In contrast to the abstract mastery and immense cultural capital signalled by Latin, construction serves to further signal the development of practical mastery. In one sense it could be argued that the inclusion of subjects which are directly relevant to and based upon skills and knowledge forms

developed by young people from a working-class background is a positive and *inclusive* development of the curriculum which provides them with a place where they are less likely to experience disadvantage due to their social class background (Harrison et al., 2015). However, it is crucial to acknowledge that subjects such as construction are (arbitrarily) perceived to be of a lower academic standard and thus are not as valuable on the post-16 educational marketplace.

Whilst Latin is an extreme example of a subject which lends distinction to the dominant classes and construction is an obvious example of a practical (and working-class) form of education; there is a more subtle yet still powerful difference in regards to GCSEs versus BTECs regardless of subject. All BTECs offer a vocational based form of learning which sends signals about young people's social class background. Charlotte and Abigail in the excerpts above mention BTEC and GCSE subjects interchangeably when discussing their options. This left me wondering whether the pupils in Eagles Academy have any conception of the difference between a BTEC and a GCSE and whether this is of concern to them when making their choices. The various qualifications offered at Eagles Academy are all listed together in the options book as though they are straightforwardly equivalent. However as we saw earlier with Kirsty, the BTEC options are not always 'equivalent' and some young people end up having to re-do qualifications at GCSE level. To what extent are they aware of this? Hutchings and Archer (2001) found that young people's perceptions of vocational subjects appeared to be working in contradiction to their aims to widen access to university. They discuss how their participants rejected routes into university which were open to them as they felt that these vocational tracks would result in stigmatisation. Similarly, perceiving of the vocational route as of lower value, one year 11 Eagles Academy pupil Liam indicated an awareness of the hierarchy of qualifications when discussing his post-16 options and plans to take A Levels rather than BTECS:

Liam I wanna do A Levels. BTECs aren't really what I wanna do

Jessie Ok and why's that?

Liam Because I don't think people look very highly on BTECs and in school the only people that take BTECs are the lower sets...I don't do BTECs I'm not in the lower sets and I don't think I should do BTECs in college

Interestingly other young people in Eagles Academy were far less aware of this difference and indeed many of them (in particular the girls) seemed to place enormous value in the health and social care BTEC option. They all felt it was an extremely 'useful' qualification

to have and one which they saw as transferable across industries as it teaches you about 'people' which they saw as a crucial skill for most jobs. For example, when I asked Kirsty why she had chosen the subjects she had, she said:

Kirsty Because I know that it can get you to the nursing and midwifery route but then I know that it can sort of open up a lot of other things as well just in case sommat goes wrong

Jessie Mhm, which ones do you mean all of them or?

Kirsty Well yeah really cos like health and social is well people and everything and you know how they're developed and all that and you can do most things with that

It is interesting to consider the value placed on this BTEC by some young people in Eagles Academy whilst also viewing it critically in relation to the history of the rise and fall of GCSE and 'equivalents' and what this means for the symbolic value of the subject. Vocational forms of education have historically been primarily undertaken and valued by working-class communities (Willis, 1977; Hollands, 1990; Hodgkinson et al., 1996). Bowles and Gintis (2011) argue that vocational education represents the most powerful form of stratification, with working-class people being streamed into such routes which have continually been positioned as of less academic worth than courses based on abstract and theoretical learning. Phil Brown, writing almost 30 years ago about the vocationalisation of working-class education described it as 'a policy which attempts to legitimate the provision of a socially appropriate training, rather than a socially 'just' education for large numbers of working-class pupils' (Brown, 1987: 128). In a somewhat liberating, progressive move, the labour government in the early 2000s broadened the curriculum enabling alternatives to GCSEs to be recognised and valuable, signalled by their inclusion in headline league table figures (Harrison et al., 2015). However, by the late 2000s people become critical of these GCSE alternatives arguing that they allowed schools to 'game' league tables.

In 2011, the coalition government commissioned the Wolf review which was damning of vocational qualifications arguing that they were 'short-changing' too many young people (Wolf, 2011: 44). Following this they began a major roll back and tightening of the curriculum proposing that by 2014 very few GCSE alternatives would count in the league tables (for a comprehensive overview of the history of vocational subjects see Harrison et al., 2015). Thus it appears that there has been a shift over time in what the system promotes as valuable and legitimate forms of knowledge, implemented through

government policy. Whilst arguments in favour of this roll back assert that working-class young people *need* access to ‘proper academic’ forms of knowledge; this policy also represents a recasting of working-class forms of knowledge as inferior or ‘lacking in academic rigour’. Despite Kirsty and others believing in the value of health and social care, due to policy directions, it remains of less value on the educational marketplace than a GCSE, and crucially the pupils at times appear unaware of this distinction. Notably, the year 11 pupils in Eagles Academy would have made their year 8 options in 2012 under a context of an enhanced, flexible curriculum which supported vocational BTEC options; however, upon completion in 2015 these qualifications had become devalued due to the change in policy. Whilst not all of the BTECs offered at Eagles Academy were removed from league tables by 2014, indeed health and social care is one which withstood the cutback, the point remains that as the legitimacy of the BTEC is questioned all BTECs become devalued.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990: 158) discuss the way in which class inequality is manifested in education through the ‘organization and functioning of the school system’ as it establishes, through its practices, an (arbitrary) hierarchy of disciplines. With the most abstract (and thus inculcated from a young age in the dominant classes through their abstract mastery) being valued more highly than those more concrete (which working-class pupils are more likely to select due to their strength in practical mastery). In this way they argue that the system ‘retranslates inequalities in social level into inequalities in academic level’ (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990: 158). Thus the class structure is reproduced through ‘misrecognition’ as subjects which the dominant classes have a head start in developing become legitimated as superior forms of knowledge, whilst at the same time, the subjects which the working-classes strengths lie are devalued. The education system further perpetuates this hierarchy as the different types of schools, segregated by social class, teach different subjects which are recognised and valued differently outside of the school gates. The next section considers the ways in which the array and type of A Level options presented to young people– similar to GCSEs - are vastly unequal across the three schools.

7.3. A Levels

The inequalities noted regarding GCSE ‘choices’ re-emerged with respect of A Level options. The Einstein High pupils appeared to benefit from being able to select from the most A Level subjects (35), closely followed by Grand Hill Grammar who offer 32 options. The Eagles Academy pupils, by far, had the fewest options (22), and once more the options are arranged in a blocking system. This is partially related to the size of their sixth form.

Table 15 documents the subjects offered at A Level in each school:

Table 15: A Level options by school

Grand Hill Grammar	Einstein High	Eagles Academy			
<i>Pupils select any combination</i>	<i>Pupils select any combination</i>	<i>Pupils select one subject per block</i>			
		Block 1	Block 2	Block 3	Block 4
Art: Fine Art Art: Theatre Design Biology Business Studies Classical Civilisation Chemistry Computing Critical Thinking Dance DT: Product Design DT: Systems and Control Theatre Studies Economics English Language English Literature French Geography German Greek History: Medieval & Early Modern History: American & Modern World IT Latin Mathematics Further Mathematics Music Sports Studies Physics Psychology Religious Studies Russian Spanish	Art: Fine Art Biology Business Studies Classical Civilisation Chemistry Computing Dance DT: Product Design Drama and Theatre Studies Economics English Language English Literature English Lit & Lang Film Studies Food Technology French Geography German Government & Politics History: Ancient History: 20th Century IT Mathematics Further Mathematics Media Studies Music Music Technology Physical Education Photography Physics Psychology Religious Studies Spanish Sociology Textiles	Art & Design Computing Drama French History Mathematics	Chemistry English Geography Sociology	Biology Technology Media Music Spanish	Business Studies PE Physics RE & Philosophy Textiles
		(6)	(5)	(5)	(6)
Total (32)	Total (35)	Total (22)			

In addition to variations in the number of subjects on offer, similar to the case with GCSEs, there appeared to be vast differences in young people's freedom to choose

particular combinations. Grand Hill are very clear on their website that their timetables are ‘constructed around student choices’, meaning that their pupils are able to opt for *any* combination of subjects listed in Table 15. They specify that ‘it is very rare for a student to be unable to study all of their first choice subjects.’ Einstein High also adopts this choice structure. However, in Eagles Academy, as can be seen in Table 15, A Level subjects (similar to GCSEs) are arranged into blocks. This is problematic for young people as it often restricts which subjects they can study, which in turn can have drastic implications for which university or career routes are open or closed to them. It also means that they are often forced to take subjects that they are not particularly interested in. For example, when I asked Holly, a year 11 girl at Eagles Academy why she had chosen computing, photography, music production and business she said:

Holly I picked music production cos there was nothing else in that column I wanted, cos you get four columns and you could only do one in each column and it’s either computing, no IT Applied BTEC but then I wouldn’t be able to do photography and I really wanted to do photography so I had to do computing

Jessie Ok and what about business why did you choose that?

Holly Because there was nothing else in that column that I wanted to do

Holly spoke about wanting to do creative writing, something not offered at Eagles Academy and told me that she had also applied to the local sixth form college as they offer it as an option. Other students similarly came across problems where they wanted to study a particular subject that was not offered by the school, as Kirsty another year 11 girl told me:

I wanted to do psychology but this school doesn’t offer that, I have asked about it but that one can’t be arranged cos they can’t bring someone in or something.

(Kirsty, Year 11, Eagles Academy)

Whilst these young people could theoretically (and in some cases do) go elsewhere to study these subjects, due to their location (on the outskirts of the city) their options are relatively limited in terms of where they can go. Many spoke of wanting to stay at the school as it was familiar and they felt a sense of security within it. Arguably, their horizons for action were being structured by what they knew; they had limited opportunities to experience and

learn about educational provisions outside of their school. Hodgson and Spours (2013) argue that ‘local learning ecologies’ constructed by networks of educational provisions, pathways and opportunities in a particular locale powerfully influence young people’s horizons for action. They describe two contrasting systems ‘low opportunity progression equilibria’ and ‘high opportunity progression eco-systems’ either limiting or advancing young people’s education and employment trajectories. James and Unwin (2016) provide a practical example of this in action, documenting the problematic process by which some disadvantaged small schools attempt to hold on to their pupils, encouraging them to remain in their sixth form rather than progressing to the local (large) FE college which is actually best equipped to deal with their needs and provide them with a better form of education. If it is in the school’s (financial) interest to keep pupils, then pupils may not be informed of options which are perhaps in *their* best interest. Indeed during my time in Eagles Academy I encountered similar situations where young people were being encouraged to remain in the school’s sixth form when it did not offer them as much opportunity as the local sixth form college. For example Jake had told me that professionals within the school wanted him to remain there, however as I will go on to discuss, going to the local sixth-form college would have enabled him to follow the academic path he desired, a path which was blocked at Eagles Academy⁸³. Notwithstanding these issues of the incentives and subsequent pressure from schools placed on pupils to remain, or the self-selection of pupils onto a ‘safe’ route, in theory, all young people *are* free to opt for alternative educational provisions if their school does not offer what they want to study. What is of importance to this chapter, and indeed this thesis, is the extent to which the schools’ internal provisions themselves differ. It is interesting to compare Holly and Kirsty’s stories of institutional restriction around A Level choices with a year 11 girl from Einstein High, Victoria:

Jessie Ok so what are you thinking about doing after your GCSEs, are you thinking about going on to A Levels?

⁸³ Jake’s story (as told in Chapter 5) presents an interesting example here. The teachers appeared to be undecided as to whether Jake would benefit from moving to the sixth form college or not. Thus some of the motivations for attempting to persuade him to remain related to their perception of what was best for him. However it is also true that Jake was likely to positively contribute to the school’s league table position, as such the school with its limited, small sixth form, desperate to expand, had an incentive to keep him. What is interesting and problematic is that Jake was not given any say about what would be best for him. He continued to feel that a fresh start in a new environment would benefit him, teachers remained sceptical and pushed him towards the ‘safe option’ of remaining in the school.

Victoria Yeah I think realistically I probably will do A Levels but I've been talking to my parents recently and I dunno because they don't do all the subjects which I'm interested in here, so for instance history of art they don't do here and I know they do it at [private boarding school] but I'm not going to go to [private boarding school] cos it's like a boarding school [laughs]...yeah my parents were like if you wanted to do history of art you could always do home schooled history of art and then only do 2 or 3 in school

Jessie Would that mean that they would be teaching you?

Victoria No I'd have like a tutor.

Victoria appears to have an enhanced freedom to choose from an array of subjects not even offered at her school- or any school for that matter- due to her parents' financial ability to pay for a private tutor for her, something which is not an option for the Eagles Academy pupils. In addition to having a limited choice set with regards to A Level options in Eagles Academy, similar to the situation with GCSEs there is a stark inequality in relation to the *type* of subject offered and the degree to which these are valued by universities. Grand Hill and Einstein High offer more of the subjects deemed to be 'useful' than at Eagles Academy. The careers advisor at Grand Hill Grammar informed me that the A Levels they offer are generally the ones that the Russell Group universities like. In Einstein High they offer an English course called 'Cambridge Pre-U'. This is a new qualification developed by Cambridge University. According to their website:

Cambridge Pre-U is a new post-16 qualification that prepares learners with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed at university. It promotes independent and self-directed learning in preparation for undergraduate study.

(Cambridge University, 2015: Online)

Some of the young people were floating the idea of taking the subject but told me that they had heard it was a lot of work, but generally felt that it was a worthwhile subject as it was run by Cambridge thus it was likely to be valuable:

Victoria There's like three English options or like four but I'm only kind of deciding between the three: English language, English literature and English Pre-U.

Jessie What is English Pre-U I haven't heard of it?

Victoria Basically they, it's like this new thing they've introduced I think maybe last year or like a few years ago and it's like English Pre-University and it's run by like Cambridge or something I think...It's basically, I'm not too sure but I think it's just more respected if you were going to university and it's more I dunno it's a harder type of English I suppose...I really wanna go to one of the American Universities so if I was gonna go try and get in on like a scholarship or whatever probably just like English Lit or like Pre-U would probably be better and definitely Pre-University would definitely be more respected to get in cos it's like run by Cambridge University.

It is interesting that the symbolic value attached to Cambridge carries so much weight that it would convince a young person to opt to study a version of English constructed by the university themselves, rather than the traditionally established subject. Vicky Boliver (2015) systematically analysed data on universities in the UK to consider the extent to which, despite the reforms of 1992 which dismantled the binary HE system, there still exists a disparity between institutions in terms of: research activity, financial resources, selectivity, student body mix and teaching quality. She found that indeed universities remain differentiated along all of these axes except for teaching quality. She argued that whilst the Russell Group universities could not be said to be any different to the rest of the 'old' traditional universities, Oxford and Cambridge constitute a unique and distinctive elite level in the hierarchy. It is thus problematic that the Pre-U, produced and implemented by an 'elite' institution and thus clearly holding more weight on the university marketplace, is only offered in Einstein High but not Eagles Academy. Arguably, as the education system has expanded and more and more working-class young people gain the necessary GCSE qualifications to enable them to undertake academic pathways, the middle classes have to further distinguish themselves in order to maintain and reproduce their class position (Devine, 2004). It is possible to conceive of the Cambridge Pre-U as one such route which has been established. As the dominant class determines the rules of the game, they are best equipped to keep up with and adapt to its changing nature (Bourdieu, 1996). Whilst none of the young people I spoke to at Grand Hill mentioned the Cambridge Pre-U, I did note that according to their website they allow their students the option of taking the Pre-U assessment for many of the subjects they teach (not just English). In addition to the differential offering of subjects seen to directly facilitate access to university and in particular elite universities, as will be demonstrated in the remainder of this chapter, there exist

distinct inequalities in the extent to which each school's careers service guided the young people towards understanding 'the package' of A Levels and the importance of certain 'facilitating' subjects over others.

7.3.1. 'I'm usually talking to them about the importance of the package'

The careers advisors in Einstein High and Grand Hill appeared to be paramount to the knowledge of the value of A Level options and indeed advice on which ones to take. In Einstein High for example the young people tended to see the careers advisor's main role to be one of advising and supporting them with regards to their GCSE and A Level choices. In Grand Hill the careers advisor emphasised spending a lot of time talking to the young people about 'the package' of A Levels, considering how their subject choices look together and which ones will leave them with the most options open. When discussing the *Informed Choices* documents constructed by the Russell Group Grand Hill's careers advisor says:

Yeah it's very useful. It's not really an issue in this school because typically the A Levels we're offering are pretty much the A Levels which Russell Group Universities like ... But you know I mean most universities if they have any requirements at all it's usually of two, it's never more than that occasionally at a Medical School but usually it's a requirement of two you know it's maths and physics or biology and chemistry, or something of that sort so I'm usually talking to them about *the importance of the package you know and how it works as a group and whether it looks like a good combination that will leave plenty of doors open*. So I'm kind of trying to get that balance between...I don't want them to choose subjects just because somebody thinks they look good, you know I do want them to choose subjects because they love it because they have a, you know, a love of learning. They want to do those subjects but they can also see it as a useful combination and I would make them aware of certain things like 'look if you are serious about economics at a top university it's probably best to do maths with it if you can, if you hate maths well let's talk about that but you know if you're good at maths that would be my advice put maths with it'.

(Careers Advisor, Grand Hill Grammar)

These practises of the careers advisor at Grand Hill can be understood as a form of institutional concerted cultivation, whereby professionals in the institution are actively building upon the advantages young people are afforded at home through further

cultivating and packaging them such that they appear to the outside world to be objectively defined superior quality candidates. The young people I interviewed at Grand Hill appeared to have internalised these messages and their narratives illustrated a tacit awareness of ‘the package’ as they told me about the importance they placed on the specific A Level combination. For example, when I asked one year 11, Harry, why he had chosen the specific subjects he had, he said:

Well mainly just to do engineering I mean all engineering courses ask for maths, that’s the only common theme but most of them ask for further maths and physics as well, it’s usually maths, physics is what they ask for...further maths as well and...DT is listed as an additional helpful subject and plus I just really enjoy DT so there’ll be that and then geography is slightly related I mean it depends what field of engineering you want to go into but certainly for civil engineering something like that then geography would be helpful for that as well.

(Harry, Year 11, Grand Hill Grammar)

Here Harry is clear on how all of his A Level choices tie nicely together to create a package for doing some form of engineering. In contrast, at Eagles Academy, the careers advisor told me that he rarely used the *Informed Choices* document, not least because his pupils were unlikely to apply to such elite institutions; but also, as I was told, it does not take into consideration the student and their specific ‘ability’:

Careers Advisor It’s a difficult one because taken out of context it’s not always helpful for the students or the parents cos they’ll just read you know for whatever, to enter physics you’ll need these facilitating subjects, you need this that and the other but it doesn’t put it into any context for them so whilst it’s very useful it’s also a little bit dangerous I feel, in the wrong hands

Jessie Ok so what type of context do you mean?

Careers Advisor The context of looking at the student holistically, so for example if to get onto a physics degree it said that they must have maths and maybe further maths in for example A Levels, one has to be mindful as to how suitable those subjects would be for the student, if the student was, if their strength wasn’t in maths or their interest wasn’t in maths or indeed do they appreciate whether they actually need to have a physics degree or not for what they want to go into then it can be. It’s a very quick fix but it’s not always

the right fix to say oh for physics you need maths and further maths oh well that's what you're gonna do then off you go... it might not be appropriate or suitable for them.

Here we come to understand that within Grand Hill horizons were being broadened whilst in Eagles Academy the careers service often began by narrowing horizons to a starting point of what is a likely possibility for their students. Arguably, the careers advisor in Eagles Academy is engaged in direct work upon the habitus. Through 'looking at the student holistically' he is working to ensure that their aspirations are suitable for 'someone like them'; that their habitus is attuned to the field. This discussion is picked up in the next chapter which explores in greater depth the process through which the different careers advisors 'work' on aspirations; for now it is important to understand this as part of the structures of inequality existing in each school which serve to differentiate young people and their CVs when applying to university. Without an understanding of 'the package' and its role in 'keeping options open', the pupils in Eagles Academy tended to use their four A Level options in a distinctly different way. Whilst they similarly made carefully thought through choices which attempted to keep various career routes open, this was done through taking a fourth subject irrelevant to the 'package' but useful as a 'back up'. That is, they tended to see their A Levels as an opportunity to develop a range of different knowledge and skills which would be useful in different contexts. For example when I probed Jake a year 11 from Eagles Academy, on whether he had established any plan-B to becoming an architect he said:

Well I've been told in sixth form I get four subjects and I was thinking I could use three of them for architecture and one of them for something quite different, I wouldn't mind teaching, I wouldn't mind being a, teaching something practical like sport, or science I really enjoy science.

(Jake, Year 11, Eagles Academy)

Jake goes on to tell me that he is hoping to take maths, physics, product design and sport – which would be his 'back up' subject. Despite Jake's plan to apply for those subjects in the school's sixth form, I later learned that this would not be an option for him as physics and product design are in the same column; blocking any would-be architects in Eagles Academy from building an optimum A Level 'package'.

In addition to the inequality in advice and guidance in regards to the package of A Levels, I noted a distinct difference in the way in which 'facilitating subjects' were promoted in the

different schools. Facilitating subjects are subjects which according to the Russell Group universities are ‘required more often than others’ (Russell Group, 2015: 26) in terms of degree course entry criteria. Additionally they are viewed favourably by the Russell Group institutions regardless of which course a student is applying to study at university. The *Informed Choices* document provided by the Russell Group advises students to take at least two facilitating subjects if they are unsure which degree they want to study, stating that: ‘Taking two facilitating subjects will also keep a wide range of degree courses and career options open to you’ (Russell Group, 2015: 29). Sciences, for example are all considered to be facilitating subjects. As is evident through the compulsory subjects in the UK curriculum, science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) is becoming a popular area and one that is seen as crucial for facilitating many careers. As was discussed in Chapter 4, In contrast to Eagles Academy’s specialist status of ‘enterprise and skills’, Einstein High is a specialist ‘Science Academy’, legitimating its reputation as that of high academic excellence. Pupils often spoke about the intense science push in the school telling me that a lot of pupils follow the medical pathway after leaving, as such the school targeted resources and events into science based activities. This focus on science was also evident in Grand Hill. These young people told me about how when making A Level choices the school advised them to ‘try and get a science in there’. Other pupils seemed to perceive of science and maths subjects leading more directly to a career than the humanities/arts subjects:

Humanities I’m ok at them but I just don’t really see a career path using them and I need, it’s useful having maths, physics and chemistry but that’s the sort of area I’m going into so if I didn’t have that it would make it more difficult so yeah.

(Max, Year 11, Grand Hill Grammar)

The young people in Grand Hill seemed to be aware of the way in which doing a science subject would enable them to keep various options open. For example one young boy, Nile who, despite being in year 9, had already thought about what he might do at A Level. Nile told me that he wanted to work in the civil service or some professional role that involves working with people. He was particularly interested in studying what he described as ‘wordy’ subjects, such as history and English, telling me that maths is not his strong point. However when discussing his plans for A Levels he said:

I’m thinking I might do chemistry because...If I did decide to do medicine I would still have that option open with chemistry and I do quite like it and mainly biology because then I have a balance of science and humanities.

(Nile, Year 9, Grand Hill Grammar)

Archer et al., (2014) found a distinct class difference in regards to aspirations for careers in science and medicine, with working-class pupils being less likely to aspire to this than their middle-class peers. They also discuss the importance of the family and the school in shaping aspirations in this manner. My findings complement this in an interestingly way as I noted that in Eagles Academy, there was less discussion about science as a useful subject for future careers and indeed many were taking BTEC science which renders a career in science more difficult to achieve as the BTEC does not lead directly to the A Level. Furthermore as was evidenced in Chapter 4, many of the parents at Grand Hill Grammar and Einstein High were in the medical or scientific industry compared to very few of the parents at Eagles Academy. Those from Grand Hill and Einstein High then, were in a privileged position in regards to knowledge and support from school and home with understanding the value and options available through the scientific route.

As was mentioned above, in Eagles Academy, in contrast to discussions around taking a science to 'keep options open', young people tended to opt for a fourth subject which was likely to help them in a completely different career route as a back-up plan. Furthermore rather than using the careers advisor to provide them with information around A Level options, the young people I spoke to in Eagles Academy often told me about other sources they were using to acquire this information. For example, when I asked Liam what he thought were the steps needed to get into accounting (the career he wanted) he said:

Well I think you have to. Well I've picked accountancy at [local sixth form college] it's where I wanna go and I've picked economics, maths and business cos they're 4 thing but umm my friend spoke to an accountant and he said it's best to not go down the accountancy route to go down like maths and maybe like a maths degree could get me accountancy or accountancy could and business are the three things I think I'll need but I'm gonna ring up an accountancy firm and ask more about it so its direct from the mouth but I'm not really sure, I've picked accounting and I'm gonna do it as an A Level but if it doesn't go as well as I want then well I don't know.

(Liam, Year 11, Eagles Academy)

Liam appeared to be relying on hearsay for understanding the best A Level combination for getting into university to study maths (something he wanted to do and saw as a route to accountancy). However, interestingly he was also aware of this and perceived it to be

problematic as this information was potentially unreliable. Thus, rather than seeking advice from the careers advisor he plans to ‘ring up an accountancy firm’. Following my interview with Liam I often spoke to him in school and made an effort to bring him information around this route. I discovered that he had never seen or heard of the *Informed Choices* document, something which would have given him a lot of detailed information about ‘useful’ ‘facilitating subjects’ for the degree he was interested in. On my last day in the school I brought my partner in who had himself done a maths degree at a Russell Group university to talk to Liam about his options, something which he appreciated enormously. Following this he told me that ‘no one in the school had ever given him that much information about accountancy’. Thus it seems that the schools offer different types and levels of support around the decision making process at A Levels. In the following chapter this issue will be explored further as I consider the different ways in which the careers advisors ‘work’ on aspirations.

7.4. Conclusion

The different types of curriculum give very unequal chances of entering higher education. It follows that working-class children pay the price of their access to secondary education by relegation into institutions and school careers which entice them with the false pretences of apparent homogeneity only to ensnare them in a truncated educational destiny.

(Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990: 158)

Whilst Bourdieu and Passeron were writing about the French education system, which was arguably more truncated than the contemporary British education system, this chapter has demonstrated that young people are still facing inequality in schools in regards to the curriculum. As has been shown through the differences in the subjects offered and restrictions imposed by blocking systems, young people are faced with quite different option sets depending upon the institutional context. Rather than meritocratically providing all young people with equal opportunities, schools appear to be sorting young people into different tracks and positions (Bowles and Gintis, 2011). This is important because when these pupils leave school and write a CV, they become measured according to a particular standardised benchmark whereby their educational successes or failures are taken as indicators of their individual ‘intelligence’. However, as this thesis demonstrates young people’s chances of building the necessary and ‘valuable’ credentials are *not* equal. Working-class pupils in disadvantaged schools appear to be affected by these institutional

structures and practices in multiple ways. First in regards to the limited options they are given for GCSE and A Level and indeed the blocking systems which serve to further restrict possibilities. Secondly the subjects offered in their school may well hold less ‘value’ than subjects offered at different schools. Thirdly, they are more or less ‘clued up’ as to the specific usefulness of these different subjects, thus making them more or less able to make an ‘informed choice’ about which subjects to study and how different combinations will help them in their future career plans. There is a distinct difference between ‘keeping options open’ through taking vastly different subjects and keeping options open by taking facilitating subjects. And this difference is one which has drastic implications for young people in their attempts to gain places at university. This chapter thus makes a case for universities to take into consideration the differences in options offered to young people, rather than merely taking their qualifications at face value. For example, rather than being taken to signal the high calibre of a student, Latin could perhaps be better understood as a marker of having attended a private school where it was offered as an option. We need to challenge the differential and arbitrary value attached to particular subjects and understand them as markers of class privilege rather than intelligence.

Chapter 8: Institutional Concerted Cultivation and the Leashing of Aspirations

8.1. Introduction: Challenging the Common Conception of Education

We all have a responsibility to educate the next generation of informed citizens, introducing them to the best that has been thought and said, and instilling in them a love of knowledge and culture for their own sake. But education is also about the practical business of ensuring that young people receive the preparation they need to secure a good job and a fulfilling career, and have the resilience and moral character to overcome challenges and succeed.

(Nick Gibb, Conservative MP, Schools Minister, 2015)

In England, the political and public consensus around education and schooling suggests that all schools hold the same vision of the purpose of education and, through their practices, attempt to educate young people in the same way aiming for the same outcomes. Despite the diversification of education along a market logic seemingly aiming to increase 'choice', schools remain controlled and governed by a specific set of powerful individuals and institutions whereby inequality is perpetually and structurally reproduced (Courtney, 2015; Wilkins, 2016). Whilst some schools are allowed to maintain a degree of flexibility to deviate from the national curriculum, in the main young people remain measured in a standardised way across the board. Arguably the assertion that schools are 'supposed to be' doing the same thing is evidenced through Ofsted's 'common inspection framework' which they claim 'introduces a common set of judgements across a range of types of provision, underpinned by consistent criteria for reaching those judgements' (Ofsted, 2015: 5). This framework problematically attempts to hold all schools accountable to the same criteria despite the fact that they may differ in terms of their educational goals and may be working under different contexts with different pupils and problems. This neglect of context can be seen clearly when considering Ofsted's approach to measuring and assessing pupil progress within schools. From 2006 to 2012 they progressively employed a measure of 'contextual value-added' which included in the statistical model a pupil's background demographics. However in 2012 they reverted back to the traditional 'value-added' model which simply considers the schools impact upon a pupil's progress using only their previous attainment

and a median benchmark of national attainment (Courtney, 2016). Courtney (2016) argues that this is a form of ‘post-panopticism’ implemented through Ofsted inspection frameworks which is about demonstrating authority and exposing the inadequacy of schools serving disadvantaged communities, not about improving education. He writes: ‘Post-panopticism structurally and purposively accords less agency to (those serving) the disadvantaged, which it conceals through its reliance on seemingly value-free quantitative data’ (Courtney, 2016: 636). In the 2010 White Paper, Michael Gove stated:

Education allows individuals to choose a fulfilling job, to shape the society around them, to enrich their inner life. It allows us all to become authors of our own life stories.

(DfE, 2010: 6)

In the same way that Ofsted does not afford all schools the same level of agency; education does not afford all young people the same degree of control over their lives. The system and its associated practices remain deeply stratified by social class. As was demonstrated in the previous chapter, educational institutions are characterised by deeply entrenched structures of inequality which serve to provide some an advantage over others. This chapter draws the analysis of this thesis to a close through building upon the arguments of the previous two and contributing towards an alternative understanding of the education system, one which acknowledges that different schools are in fact doing different things. The task at hand, which, on the face of it, may appear to have a similar objective, may be conceived and implemented differently in different institutions for different purposes.

This chapter begins by engaging with some of the ethnographic data collected throughout the research by way of understanding the distinct circumstances through which young people begin their educational journeys. I explore the way in which some bodies experience greater regulation and restriction whilst others are afforded greater agency and freedom. In this way I begin to connect the schools’ practices to those of parents and consider this in line with Annette Lareau’s (2011) seminal text *Unequal Childhoods*. In unpacking the spaces of the schools I also consider the subtly different messages of meritocracy and aspiration sent off by each institution. The second section of this chapter, through drawing primarily from data collected during observation of a careers event at Grand Hill Grammar, demonstrates the practices of institutional concerted cultivation in action. Following this I consider the question of what happens when aspirations are raised (as was demonstrated in Chapter 6) but opportunity structures remain unequal (as demonstrated in Chapter 7). As will be shown, the careers advisors, as they work to re-orient and re-align aspirations, play a

central role in intervening to sweep up the resultant mess of the contradictory messages sent out by policy makers. Whilst all careers advisors engage in aspiration work, the form this work takes is notably different in each of the schools. Finally this chapter considers the emotional and affective experience of aspiration work (Brown, 2011), exploring the different and classed ways in which young people internalise the meritocratic messages inherent in their interactions with the careers advisors.

8.2. Socio-Spatially Embedded Practices and Meritocratic Messages

When I arrived for my meeting [at Grand Hill Grammar] I was immediately taken by the schools grandness and peacefulness. The building was beautiful, very old looking but extremely well kept (not falling down at all rather sparkly and clean)...I could hear beautiful songs echoing through to the reception, it sounded like the children were in some sort of assembly close to me, I was later to learn that they were in fact upstairs but the layout of the school meant that the sound travelled down through the open doorway and stone stairs into the reception...I was struck by the emotions I faced as I sat there thinking back to my own experience of schooling, feelings of envy yet also reminiscing on the chaos of my school in contrast to the orderliness of this one; kids fighting in the corridors and running away from teachers trying to escape lessons. It felt almost as though the environment [here] was very adult; watching pupils walking around without being questioned on why they were in the corridor I felt that they were trusted and treated like adults. It felt more like a university than a school.

(Field Note, 11th March 2014)

Grand Hill, is, as it sounds, a grand and ancient structure sitting at the top of a hill in a wealthy part of the city. The school is symbolic of a deep history of privilege and wealth. Whilst it is clearly an exclusive school, the building feels very open and inviting; anyone can walk in at any time. This could be interpreted as an attempt to display to the public the school's grandeur and status. Nevertheless it is also symbolic of the agency and control granted to the children who are free to move around as they please. Additionally, it serves to inculcate within them a sense of entitlement to exist in such a grand and adult environment. Some staff only areas have digital locks on the doors but other than that children are able to wander around as they wish and I often saw this occurring. Einstein

High on the other hand is housed in a modern and innovative structure that seems to be testing the boundaries between what constitutes inside and outside, having a brick walkway and a glass ceiling. In order to gain access to Einstein High you must have a card or buzz through to the reception to be let in. Nevertheless, once in the main door, the rest of the school (excluding the staff only area) is not locked. There is a one-way walking system in operation in the corridors and the school has an air of efficiency and organisation.

Eagles Academy has a different feel to the other schools. It is also housed in a modern building, designed by a famous architect and incorporates funky paintwork and bright colours. However, it feels the most like a prison. When I first visited the school I was surprised to see that they were using protected glass at the entrance, this was evident as it distorted the view into the reception. All the doors in the school were usually locked, even once in the reception area you were unable to enter the school without being let in with a card. It was not clear if they were trying to keep people in or out (or both). Eagles Academy is built in a shape similar to the traditional Panopticon model as based on the prison, with classroom blocks surrounding a central playground area. Foucault (1991) discussed this in his theory of 'biopower' as an effective means of surveillance en masse through visibility. The panoptic model enables the efficient controlling of pupils in the school as a body rather than as individual bodies. During break times pupils are shepherded into the central playground and all surrounding corridors are locked⁸⁴. At the end of the day the pupils filter through the main hall where they must pass through a long line of teachers who closely inspect them, fishing out anyone on the detention list. Eagles Academy is the only school in my sample which does not have a school bell, sending a message that pupils must take responsibility for ensuring they are on time to lessons. Interestingly, whilst this lack of bell seemingly lends itself to providing the pupils with more agency, it also provides the teachers with more control as they are responsible for letting the pupils leave the classroom; not the bell. Arguably the manner in which Eagles Academy is structured and managed bears some troubling resemblances to the 'total institution' as described by Goffman (1961) in his influential work *Asylums*. Goffman argues that total institutions are 'forcing houses for changing persons; each is a natural experiment on what can be done to the self' (Goffman, 1961: 22). Unlike the characteristic total institution, Eagles Academy does release young people for the night. Nevertheless during the day pupils appear under a strict militarised regime imposed by the school's

⁸⁴ They are also allowed into the main hall to have lunch but are not allowed into other blocks.

authority, are locked in and are in a sense being constructed in a particular manner by this institution.

These differences in the physical architecture and interlinking distinct practices of the three schools can have a big impact upon young people's belief in their own agency. This can be usefully connected to the distinctions Lareau (2011) draws between the different parenting practices of the middle and working classes in America. She argues that the middle classes, through an emphasis on negotiation and conversation, teach their children a sense of entitlement and self-importance which translates into agency when interacting with authoritative institutions. In contrast the working-class parents' emphasis is on a hierarchical discipline structure whereby children do as they are told with no room for negotiation. This educates them along a more restrictive framework whereby they develop a sense of constraint when interacting with authority figures. The schools in my research appear to be picking up where the parents left off, further enhancing middle-class young people's freedom and entitlement whilst restricting these for working-class pupils.

In addition to the contrasting physical spaces, Grand Hill Grammar, Einstein High and Eagles Academy exist in distinct symbolic spaces. Each school serves different communities with varying amounts of economic, cultural and social capital. Symbolic domination can be seen occurring inside these institutions as young people become positioned by their 'ability'. The concept of ability as noticed and measured by schools is widely (and often unquestionably) accepted as legitimate. People tend to buy into notions of innate ability, trusting schools to successfully measure this. Arguably the forms of ability being measured are merely forms of knowledge and skills legitimised by the dominant in society (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). The ability to *display* forms of ability recognised as superior is strongly related to social class background, yet the belief in a neutral and natural form of ability serves the interest of the dominant classes as it contributes to the reproduction of their privilege. The notion of fixed ability is central to the meritocratic beliefs held by the teachers in all of the schools. Each one sends out messages about their pupils which are tied up with notions of meritocracy and aspiration; however the specific way in which the pupils in each school are framed by the institution differs in subtle ways.

In Grand Hill, the pupils are discursively constructed as bright, talented, creative, able and hardworking young people. This framework is legitimised through them sitting an entry exam to gain a place in the school and the strong GCSE and A Level results subsequently attained (see Chapter 4). A teacher in Grand Hill described her year 7 pupils to me as an 'engaging and enthusiastic group'. During interviews with the pupils I learnt of their hectic

schedules beyond school, somewhat resonant of the middle classes in Lareau's (2011) study. Their evenings and weekends included spending extensive time on homework and organised activities. Crucially, the construction of the 'bright', 'talented' and 'hardworking' student remained disconnected from any discussion of economic capital. The young people's ability to display these skill sets were not viewed as related to their families ability to utilise their resources to support their children's education. Shamus Khan argues that the elites of today exist within a meritocratic framework whereby they become constructed as worthy and deserving of their position in the school due to their exceptional talents (Khan, 2013). Through the discourse of meritocracy and ability, the Grand Hill Grammar pupils' dominant positions become legitimated through their interaction with the educational institution.

Einstein High has a reputation across the city for being a highly rigorous and academic state school. Concurrently their pupils are also understood as being naturally bright. During a lunch break in the staff room I overheard a discussion between teachers where they commented that the majority of pupils in the school are very intelligent and those who are not able to keep up really struggle. She further suggested those pupils would be better off attending a different state school close by as they would then be at the top of the year rather than the bottom. Here again it appears that the teachers are calling upon a fixed notion of ability when describing their pupils, this is important for how they subsequently position and interact with their students. On Einstein High's website the head teacher is quoted saying: '[our students'] outstanding achievements are the result of their hard work'; directly engaging with the meritocratic, individualist discourse of educational success.

In Eagles Academy the teachers and professionals appeared to be aware that their pupils come from 'troubled backgrounds' and issues of poverty and difficult home circumstances often cropped up in discussions. However, simultaneously, the school and its sponsors powerfully assert through the messages sent out that class does not matter. Structural inequality, poverty and barriers to learning and achieving are not publicly present. The discourse is very much about 'everyone can achieve whatever they want if they work hard'. As such the pupils are continually encouraged to 'aim high', something fostered by their sponsorship from the local elite university and local successful business people. The pupils are often presented as 'aspirational', as was mentioned in Chapters 3 and 6; during a year 11 assembly the head of year encouraged the pupils to participate in my research in order to demonstrate their strong aspirations. Nevertheless, working in direct contradiction to this framework of the hard working aspirational student is the notion of fixed ability. Students at Eagles Academy are positioned by staff as unable to surpass a particular grade barrier

due to ability. The constant monitoring and surveying of their progress serves to construct them as a particular type of student and they are often put into categories such as a 5A*-C student or not. The careers advisor described the different types of students in the school including: those who work extremely hard but are unable to reach a specific outcome as they are not quite bright enough and those who are naturally gifted and bright but who do not work hard enough so are also destined to fail to achieve academic success.

Spohrer (2015) argues that schools, guided by the political climate, send out distinct messages to their pupils about what counts as a legitimate form of aspiration and success: 'The discourse of aspiration provides schools and young people with knowledge about what it means to be aspirational (and non-aspirational) and with subject positions about how to become and experience oneself as an aspirational (or non-aspirational) person' (: 3). In all of my fieldwork schools aspirational messages were directed at the young people in terms of resilience and overcoming obstacles. However interestingly the details of how this message was distributed varied. I gained a glimpse into the workings of this in Grand Hill and Eagles Academy through attending assemblies which happened to be focussed on this issue. In both schools a *YouTube* clip was utilised as a tool to illustrate the point, however the videos differed in slight but crucial ways. In Eagles Academy the teacher showed the pupils a clip from *The X Factor* (a talent contest) where a person had made it onto the show despite having been a disfigured orphan who was left for dead as a baby. Meanwhile in Grand Hill they were shown a clip of a hurdle race where one of the runners, as he reaches each hurdle, does not jump over them but rather crashes straight through them and keeps going. There is a clear affinity with the predominant social class background of the pupils in each school. The message in Eagles Academy is that you should not let your background hold you back whereas in Grand Hill the message appears to be that you are going to come across hurdles but just keep going in whatever way you see fit, it does not have to be the conventional way, be creative and think outside the box.

The socio-spatially embedded practices and meritocratic messages explicit in each school crucially feed into professional perceptions of the pupils. As more and more young people are encouraged to be 'aspirational', yet it is believed that only a specific subset of those have the innate ability and motivation to reach their goals combined with a lack of opportunities for highly skilled professional workers in an already socially congested labour market (Brown, 2013), something has to give. The careers advisors in the schools populated by the dominant (in particular Grand Hill Grammar) appear to be picking up where the parents left off, utilising all their resources as best they can through engaging in a form of 'distinction-work' that I call institutional concerted cultivation; working to ensure

their pupils are recognised as bright, talented and hardworking. Ensuring they ‘stand out from the crowd’ and subsequently secure dominant positions when they leave school, justified on the meritocratic basis that they deserve it due to their ability and hard work. Meanwhile for the careers advisors working from within the context of immense disadvantage, with less symbolic power and material resources, this results in work to ‘leash aspirations’, to reduce them to something more ‘realistic’ for the type of students they are dealing with. The rest of this chapter unpacks these different practices of the careers advisors in schools.

8.3. Institutional Concerted Cultivation: ‘It’s about trying to get round the systems’

Discussion between parents and children are a hallmark of middle-class childrearing... Organised activities, established and controlled by mothers and fathers, dominate the lives of middle-class children... by making certain their children have these and other experiences, middle-class parents engage in a process of concerted cultivation. From this, a robust sense of entitlement takes root in the children. This sense of entitlement plays an especially important role in institutional settings, where middle-class children learn to question adults and address them as relative equals.

(Lareau, 2011: 1-2)

Lareau (2011: 1) eloquently describes the way in which middle-class parents see themselves as ‘developing’ their children through ‘cultivating’ their particular talents ‘in a concerted fashion’. In this thesis I am arguing that in addition to the concerted cultivation middle-class parents engage in to give their children a head start, some institutions can be seen to be functioning in a similar manner, actively working to cultivate their pupils with the dispositions needed to take up dominant positions in society. The work of institutional concerted cultivation, as observed in the course of this doctoral thesis, was particularly exemplified in the practices and structures of the careers service. As such it is important to begin this section by describing the distinctiveness of Grand Hill’s provisions over the other schools. Unlike many state funded schools, Eagles Academy employed a full time careers advisor who was provided with a private office. However it was small, understated and located within the school library. This office contained a number of prospectuses for colleges and universities. In Einstein High, the careers advisor was contracted in, worked out of random rooms allocated each day and tended to rely on the internet for information

rather than printed documents. In Grand Hill, the careers advisor was distinctly located within a large 'careers service' room. This room was filled with university and careers advice and guidance booklets including one on how to write a personal statement, a folder with the destinations, names and contact details of alumni and a number of university prospectuses. The room had a coffee table and comfortable seating area. It reminded me of my own university careers service. The careers advisor had a desk located in a private office like area in a corner of the centre. However the office had low walls and no door so anyone in the careers room would hear any meeting taking place. This demonstrates the importance afforded to the pupils in Grand Hill; the careers advisor is positioned as always available for them with no restrictions in place.

We began to see a glimpse of the active concerted cultivation of the Grand Hill Grammar pupils in Chapter 7 through the work undertaken by the careers advisor to 'package' pupils to ensure they 'keep all the options open'. This can be observed in greater detail through careers events set up with the specific purpose of engaging in institutional concerted cultivation. These included the careers advisor bringing in carefully selected alumni who could be of direct help to a number of current pupils. During my visit to the careers centre I met one of these, an ex-pupil who was now studying law at Oxford University. He had come in to have a meeting with a small group of sixth formers who were also applying to study law at the university to give them detailed insider tips and support. In addition to these smaller activities the careers advisor organised a large-scale annual event for the whole sixth form which consisted of 'successful' alumni giving talks and providing small workshops. On the 21st November 2014 I attended one such event at Grand Hill where they had brought in 40 alumni from various employment sectors. I was intrigued by the decision of which industries to include in the programme. Pupils were able to attend three workshops out of the possible ten which were listed as follows in their booklets:

- 1) Engineering, science, IT
- 2) Investment banking, finance
- 3) Accountancy, tax, audit
- 4) Journalism, public relations, broadcasting
- 5) Medicine and healthcare
- 6) Property related, architecture
- 7) Law, civil service, police
- 8) Film, theatre, art
- 9) Business start-ups, self-employment, small business
- 10) Management, business, recruitment, human resources

On the surface, this list illustrates the powerful connections the school has with people in dominant positions in certain employment sectors, many of which symbolise high levels of economic and cultural capital (see Figure 11 for a sample of the alumni's occupations). In addition, the inclusion of these specific industries serves to highlight the particular notion of 'success' or 'aspiration' acceptable within the school. Spohrer (2015) documented a similar process by which the school in her research sought to make visible particular icons of 'success' through a 'hall of fame' alongside drawing on particular alumni who provided active real life examples of people who had 'made it' in the way that they wished to promote. In terms of considering the messages sent out by the selecting of particular ex-pupils to return to the school I was struck by the contrast between Grand Hill and Eagles Academy's strategies. One day during a visit to Eagles Academy I was eating lunch with a teacher and he called over a pupil to enquire about her brother who had recently been excluded and sent to a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). He told her that he wanted to bring the ex-pupil back in to talk to the current pupils about how horrible it is in a PRU in an attempt to dissuade them from misbehaving. The message Eagles Academy was sending off here was one of discipline and punishment, the most central concern of the school appeared to be behaviour, rather than enhancing career horizons⁸⁵.

To return to Grand Hill, the careers event served to provide young people with useful insight into specific industries but it also worked as a powerful form of concerted cultivation. Throughout the day young people were schooled in how to 'get noticed' and 'stand out', how to behave and make contacts. In a sense the school was cultivating a particular type of confident entitled middle-class habitus. The event crucially served to enable the pupils to establish useful contacts with alumni in leading positions in their professions. The director of the sixth form introduced the day by commenting that the purpose of the event was for the sixth formers to 'network' with alumni. Figure 11 provides a sample of the occupations of the alumni attending the event.

Figure 11: Sample occupations of Grand Hill alumni

Actuary; Analyst; Barrister; Business Owner; Chartered Accountant; Consultant; Consultant Neurologist; Director; Doctor; Engineering Consultant; Film Director; Healthcare Consultant; Managing Director; Producer; Professor; Senior Lecturer; Solicitor

⁸⁵ Eagles Academy would be unable to draw upon such a wealth of contacts as Grand Hill because few of their pupils follow a path to university and professional jobs. During my time in the school I actively attempted to balance this out and organise events for the pupils with contacts in relevant industries, something which fell through during the turmoil of leaving the field (see Chapter 5).

It is important to note that the day was not only an opportunity to make contacts but was also, in a sense, a practice run for how to network; the pupils were learning *how* to establish social capital for themselves. They were encouraged to confidently approach relevant alumni and ask for work experience placements or other opportunities. One alumnus commented that ‘it is an important skill to have the confidence to network’. Following the first panel session, the chair, who was also an alumnus, encouraged the Grand Hill pupils to ask questions to the panel as he told them that ‘this is how you get noticed’:

When you are in a room full of people in large meetings you need to be the one to stick your hand up and have a question. Don’t worry if you don’t have anything to ask- find something to ask...Come on guys one of you be brave you might *get yourself noticed* and one of the [alumni] might give you some work experience.

(Grand Hill Alumnus, Field Note, 21st November 2014)

In line with the perceived importance of asking a question even ‘if you don’t have anything to ask’, Grand Hill provided the pupils with a detailed list of potential questions to ask the alumni (see Appendix X). Annette Lareau (2011: 6) describes the process which took place in middle-class family settings where ‘middle-class children were trained in the “rules of the game” which govern interactions with institutional representatives’. Grand Hill Grammar appeared to be building upon this training by further inculcating a tacit awareness of the networking game, of how to ‘get yourself noticed’. During the coffee break I was talking to one of the alumni momentarily but he was sharply snatched away from me as one of the pupils wanted to talk to him. It became clear to me that the careers advisor was carefully moving around ensuring that pupils were matched to relevant alumni who could help them. In addition to cultivating a sense of entitlement towards building relationships with people in powerful positions, the pupils were urged throughout the day to find ways to make themselves ‘stand out’ from the crowd. This sentiment resonates directly with UCAS’ advice on how to construct a personal statement, as mentioned in Chapter 2. Discussions of standing out focussed on the need to demonstrate that you are a ‘well rounded person’. The idea of being a ‘well rounded person’ alluded to having something more than top marks. It was about participating in extra-curricular activities- in particular those which Annette Lareau (2011) described as part of a middle-class parenting strategy of concerted cultivation. The alumni mentioned participating in music, sport and art. They also seemed to have a tacit understanding that even these activities alone do not enable you to ‘stand

out'. Many also stressed the importance of doing something *else* which shows you are 'interesting' and have 'initiative'. Another facet of standing out was the careful strategic use of work experience and it appeared that central to securing this was contacts. One alumnus interestingly commented:

There are more opportunities [for work experience] at university, but if you can get one the summer before university you will really *stand out*. You should phone, not just send your CV. It will get lost. Phone and ask to have a coffee with someone. It's about *trying to get round the systems*.

(Grand Hill Alumnus, Field Note, 21st November 2014)

This quote is fascinating, not only is the alumnus schooling them in an entitled disposition involving confidently approaching important people and asking to 'have a coffee with someone' with the aim of securing work experience. He also stresses that 'it's about trying to get round the systems'. In contrast to the 'blocking system' discussed in Chapter 7 in place at Eagles Academy, here we observe the functioning of an 'un-blocking system'. Grand Hill Grammar appears to be attempting to 'un-block' pathways for their pupils. One of the ways in which pupils are encouraged and able to subvert 'the systems', is through the use of a contact to secure a work experience placement rather than going through the formal route. This was a major theme of the day; the following quotes illustrate the extent of this:

It's all about contacts! I only had one formal interview ever which was to secure a graduate job, since then it's been all on contacts. Use contacts they are absolutely crucial, use the people in this room, [careers advisor] can give you contacts, use your parents contacts.

(Grand Hill Alumnus, Field Note, 21st November 2014)

Use your [Grand Hill] networks- if you phone any one of us up and say "I'm from [Grand Hill Grammar] can I have some work experience" most likely they answer will be "YES". Use your clubs, use your parents clubs. Use [careers advisor], [careers advisor] is the most connected person.

(Grand Hill Alumnus, Field Note, 21st November 2014)

There appeared to be a quite explicit collusion to 'look after your own', an unwritten rule to favour those who share your connection and thus the alumni serve as a powerful source of social capital for the pupils. This can be extended to consideration of the ease with which I

was granted access to the school; through an alumnus. The use of contacts to secure work experience was a theme which emerged during my interviews with the young people at Grand Hill as well. One year 11 boy Harry, told me that he was considering applying for a work experience scheme run by a big company that the school has 'links with'. Despite the competitive nature he is unconcerned that he has missed the deadline as he has a landscape of alternative opportunities available to him through a more informal route:

Cos I'm so late applying I probably won't get it, so there's a few places I could go I could, you know bully family friends again to get me in or go to others places. I mean several of the sixth formers who came in to talk to us about what they did say that they'd used [alumni from the school] to get places cos obviously there's a thousand people a year coming through the school so the probability that there's someone in your field willing to take you on is quite high so I could do that or I could just possibly go to my dad's work cos I mean yeah. Or friends dad's work cos a few of my friends parents are engineers and things like that...The other option is cos my mum's a Violin teacher and one of her pupils parents works in the fuel systems department in engineering, and then our neighbour who's just a few doors up the street he's got a PhD and he works in the flight physics department.

(Harry, Year 11, Grand Hill)

As can be seen in Harry's quote, the young people in Grand Hill have a tacit awareness of the rules of the game, he has internalised the messages sent from the school about networking to secure work experience and is not concerned about following the official routes. In contrast to the immense opportunity structure which exists in Grand Hill for organising work experience, in Eagles Academy, despite being sponsored by an elite university and a group of successful business people, they often struggle to get people to come in to talk or provide work experience opportunities, as the careers advisor tells me:

In practice it's sometimes very good and sometimes very frustrating because there's an expectation of well what do you mean you can't get someone in at a law firm? We've got [Guild members] in law firms get it sorted. You know it's. The [Guild of Commerce] aren't. They talk a very good game in meetings and they're very well meaning don't get me wrong and they've put a lot of resources into the academy and I think they half fund my post, so I've got a lot of respect for what they do but sometimes the basic things of you know "can

you give me a contact in your organisation that I can contact to organise work experience?” doesn't seem to happen.

(Careers Advisor, Eagles Academy)

During my time at Eagles Academy I did not come across any careers events of the sort described at Grand Hill, however one day I did encounter an interesting event which had been organised by the school's sponsor *The Guild of Commerce*. As I was told by the careers advisor, the event was a bit like Dragons Den, all year 10 pupils were required to attend and to design a product and present it to a panel. The careers advisor seemed uncomfortable about the whole thing, and had played no part in the organisation of the day. He told me that many of the pupils struggle with having the confidence to present a product but are forced to at least stand up and say their name, if nothing else. Arguably, this event *did* seek to cultivate a particular type of person. However, that person was not a middle-class agent confidently moving towards taking up dominant positions in the labour market, the person Eagles Academy were cultivating was an entrepreneur. The discourse around entrepreneurship is very much in line with the meritocratic individualistic narrative. This day posed an interesting contrast to the careers day at Grand Hill whereby young people were supplied with extensive networks offering work experience and a step up into a particular industry. Rather Eagles Academy's event worked with the idea that 'anyone can make it if they work hard enough'. Hard work and talent then are a replacement for contacts and opportunities. In contrast to the powerful way in which Grand Hill are able to utilise their institutional position and knowledge to cultivate a dominant habitus, Eagles Academy, in a context of low opportunities coupled with high aspirations are left to cultivate a disposition towards failure. They must ensure the pupils are prepared to achieve lower than they aspire to. The Dragons Den type event appeared to function in line with this by preparing young people for rejection. They must present their idea and be willing to accept negative judgments and humiliation. Through this they learn to try and potentially fail without giving up.

8.4. Aim Lower: Doing the aspiration work

The automatic effects of the conditionings imposed by the conditions of existence are added to by the directly educative interventions of the family, the peer group and the agents of the educational system (assessments, advice,

injunctions, recommendations) which expressly aim to favour the adjustment of aspirations to objective chances, needs to possibilities, the anticipation and acceptance of the limits, both visible and invisible, explicit and tacit. By discouraging aspirations oriented to unattainable goals, which are thereby defined as illegitimate pretensions, these calls to order tend to underline or anticipate the sanctions of necessity and to orient aspirations towards more realistic goals, more compatible with the chances inscribed in the position occupied.

(Bourdieu, 2006: 217)

Despite political rhetoric of the need to ‘raise aspirations’ in disadvantaged communities, the careers advisor in Eagles Academy told me that students rarely aim too low. This corroborates the interviews I conducted with the pupils themselves where the majority held relatively high aspirations (see Chapter 6). Rather I was told that the pupils in Eagles Academy were often aiming too high for their ability level. Thus the careers advisor engages in an enormous amount of ‘aspiration work’, where, as Bourdieu (2006: 217) argues, they intervene to ‘orient aspirations towards more realistic goals, more compatible with the chances inscribed in the position occupied’:

In the past some students when I’m talking to them about uni would automatically say they want to apply [to Oxbridge] because they would have no concept as to the entry criteria. And because staff are constantly boosting them up in terms of “you’re gonna go to uni you’re gonna be fantastic you’re gonna get wonderful results” which is, I can see why they do it, [but] it got to a stage a couple of years ago I would suggest where the students expectations of their abilities were way higher than where they really were. So I had to sort of, we had to sort of dampen that down a little bit with them, and that seems to be, the students now the ones that I’ve seen for this year’s year 13 are a lot more aware as to their level and are tempering their aspirations accordingly.

(Careers Advisor, Eagles Academy)

This quote illustrates the problems of a system which takes as its focus individualistic cultural solutions to structural problems. The young people in Eagles Academy’s chances of achieving their goals are drastically lower than the other two schools discussed due to poverty and disadvantage. Nevertheless, as the careers advisor highlights, the teachers in the school tend to focus on ‘boosting the kids up’ in terms of encouraging them to aim

higher, believing that anything is possible, not taking into account their structural position. Thus the careers advisor is left to re-align aspirations to likely outcomes in an attempt to ensure all pupils secure a 'destination'. It is possible to connect these practices to American interactionist theories around 'cooling out' (Goffman, 1952; Clark, 1960). These theories focus on the specific psychological processes involved in 'cooling out' individuals such that they come to terms with a failure or a loss. Whilst the careers advisor's practices could be cited as a form of cooling out, my analysis takes this point further through considering more than just the *process* and its effect on the individuals themselves. Rather my analysis centralises the way in which these practices serve to maintain or reinvent structures of class inequality. Following probing, the careers advisor provided a detailed account of the specific practice of dampening aspirations engaged in:

Well the most appropriate way from a professional point of view is to get a student to come to that realisation themselves. So we would go through [presenting scenario of one to one session] 'what subjects are you studying? What are your grades? What do you think you're gonna realistically get?' alright '3 Cs.' 'Right so where do you want to go?' 'I want to go to Cambridge to study English' Right ok... get up the website (so it's not me telling them)... get up the website right Cambridge 'what do you need to get in?' 'Ah I need 2 As and an A*.' 'Right so what did you say you're gonna get?' '3 Cs'. 'What does it say you need?' '2 As and an A*'. So I say 'so what do you think your chances are of getting in then?' 'Well there aren't any chances of getting in then are there?' 'I would tend to agree with you, however there's loads of other places you could look at, so let's have a look at some of those'.

(Careers Advisor, Eagles Academy)

This description relates to a one-to-one meeting focussed on university choice. A similar process is described by the careers advisor for when students are aiming for careers perceived to be 'above their ability level'. Here the careers advisor is calling upon a fixed notion of ability, locating the students as being unable to follow a particular path in life as they are prohibited by a lack of intelligence. As has been mentioned, the tendency to display what is arbitrarily considered 'high ability' is related to social class. In this way the education system is fulfilling a reproductive effect as it relegates the working-class children to lower ranking careers due to conceptions of their fixed (lower) ability. Bourdieu writes of the way in which this process of alignment of hopes with objective position in social space contributes powerfully to ensuring the reproduction of the existing social order:

The ‘causality of the probable’ which tends to favour the adjustment of expectations to chances is no doubt one of the most powerful factors of conservation of the established order...It ensures the unconditional submission of the dominated to the established order that is implied in the doxic relation to the world, an immediate adherence which puts the most intolerable conditions of existence (from the point of view of a habitus constituted in other conditions) beyond questioning and challenge.

(Bourdieu, 2006: 231)

Thus the careers advisor’s actions could be interpreted as part of the re-alignment of a habitus developed within a dominated position in social space to its natural order whereby expectations are aligned with objective chances. Interestingly, this type of aspiration work appeared to be taking place in all of the schools. However there were important distinctions between the type of work which was taking place and indeed the responses to this. In Grand Hill the careers advisor told me that they *never* see any pupils aspiring too low but do at times have some aspiring too high. However the degree of dampening that needs to be done in this case is far less dramatic than in Eagles Academy. Rather than re-aligning pupils aspirations such that they consider an alternative career direction or alternative options to A Levels, in Grand Hill, the careers advisor told me about ‘encouraging’ students to consider having one lower ranking university out of the five choices UCAS permit:

I look at the predicted grades and then...so they’ve got 5 choices as you know then I would say to them, I would have a discussion with them about you know why those choices and would they possibly consider changing one of them so basically I would discuss it with the individual when the UCAS form comes to me and potentially say well they might want to change one of them and yeah so it’s about a discussion with the individual about that and usually they’ll say “oh perhaps you’re right maybe I should change one of them”. You know the kind of student who’s got Durham, UCL, Oxbridge and you’re going [makes sceptical concerned noise, smiles through gritted teeth] depending on the subject and where...so it can happen, not that often, but they’ll be a few a year that I’ll probably have that conversation with and say I think I’d probably recommend you change even if it’s only one of these choice change one at least.

(Careers Advisor, Grand Hill Grammar)

In contrast to the scenario at Eagles Academy whereby the careers advisor discusses trying to get the pupil to come to the realisation *themselves* (which is of course a fallacy as he is behind the realisation); here it is presented as more democratic. The above quote captures an interesting moment; the careers advisor begins by commenting: ‘I would say to them’ which is quickly corrected to ‘I would have a discussion with them’, framing it as a mutual exchange. Arguably this relates to the way in which the pupils in Grand Hill, due to their cultural capital and advantaged position are afforded greater respect within the education system and thus treated more like equals in their relations with the school. This may also be related to the fact that it is a private school and as such their parents are paying for their education, which itself likely affords them power in relation to the institution (Roker, 1993). Another interesting difference to be noted between this scenario and that of Eagles Academy is in regards to the reason for the need to lower such aspirations. At Grand Hill the careers advisor discusses this in terms of the enhanced competition of these institutions rather than as about the ability level of the students:

If you’re applying for English and you’re only applying to Durham, Edinburgh, UCL, Oxbridge you know you’re starting to think well hang on you kind of run the risk of getting no offers here because it’s so competitive you know so would you consider changing one or two of them.

(Careers Advisor, Grand Hill Grammar)

Here, in line with the schools approach to its pupils, they are not framed as ‘lacking’ in ability, rather the problem as it is perceived by the careers advisor lies within the competitive nature of HE. This quote demonstrates the powerful way in which the careers advisor understands and perceives the game and, in response, for the purpose of play, gets right behind the students, lending them the full benefit of their knowledge, experiences and position in the field such that the pupils experience a more powerful location themselves. This tacit feel for the game together with an awareness of ‘the package’, described in the previous chapter, enables Grand Hill’s careers advisor to ensure the pupils ‘get ahead’. Grand Hill, due to its immense opportunity structures coupled with parental support and resources are able to successfully continue the concerted cultivation middle-class young people experience at home. As was discussed in the previous section, through institutional concerted cultivation, the careers advisor’s practices further enable the pupils at Grand Hill to take up dominant positions in society.

In a similar vein to Eagles Academy, Einstein High’s careers advisor drew upon hierarchical notions of ability when discussing attempts to lead some students towards

considering vocational routes. I was told that not all students are up for making the leap from GCSE to A-Level:

One of the options that I feel is overlooked in a lot of schools...particularly maybe in a school where it's a high achieving school, is the apprenticeship option, you know it's always about A Levels, you know it's A Levels, A Levels, A Levels, a lot of young people are not able to achieve at A Level, they're not able to flourish, there's quite a high drop-out rate...[so] I focus on those groups of young people that probably would be better doing an apprenticeship but are just following the crowd unseen sitting at the back of the classes. They need to come in here and I need to say to them "it's not just about being a plasterer or a hairdresser you know you can work for the [local newspaper], you can work in a bank, you know there's other options"...So it's the youngsters that are probably not gonna get Bs and As, they might be the kind of boundary C graders who might not be suitable for A Levels especially as A Levels are getting harder in the reforms so it's that middle range group who should be looking at other options...they're quite obvious when you meet them they have a certain skill set they're often the ones that you know either are working really hard and still getting C and you know they're gonna struggle at A Level or they're not working and they're getting C/D borderline, they're not gonna make the grade but they're just putting their sixth form and on results day they're in tears and they've got nowhere to go.

(Careers Advisor, Einstein High)

Interestingly the careers advisor here attempts to disconnect the notion of an apprenticeship from presumably negative connotations of working-class jobs such as plasterer or hairdresser, commenting that there are 'other options'. Here the careers advisor appears to maintain a hierarchical notion of aspiration where it is necessary to continue to encourage those pupils considered to have a lower academic ability to still aim for middle-class jobs but to consider an alternative opportunity for a route in. The vocational route then becomes discursively reconstructed as a middle-class one too. Moreover, similar to Eagles Academy, the careers advisor at Einstein High seems to position students on a continuum in terms of ability and hard work- if either one is lacking the student is perceived as not A Level material.

Whilst I did not find any instances of careers advisors in any of my fieldwork sites working to raise aspirations, I noted an interesting moment in the interview with the careers advisor

at Einstein High who, being ‘contracted in’, also works at other schools and began talking about pupils in other (more deprived) schools ‘under aspiring’. Here the careers advisor describes the work undertaken to ‘raise aspirations’⁸⁶:

I challenge the nursery nurses a lot...a lot of girls I find will undersell themselves you know but whereas boys will think they’re better than they are but the girls you know I’ve met a lot of girls that are happy to consider childcare when they’re gonna get the grades, they could do infant school teaching they could be a reception teacher and have all the status and all the money...but they won’t make the leap “oh I can’t work in a classroom I haven’t got the”...they would be happy to work in a nursery where they *will* get bored they *will* be on minimal wages...they’re not making that next leap into a profession, even though childcare is a profession there is a ceiling whereas they’re not making the leap to something else I see it a lot and childcare is one that stands out.

(Careers Advisor, Einstein High)

The careers advisor's work seems to adhere to the problematic notion implicit in policy that some (working-class) aspirations are inferior to middle-class aspirations (Brown, 2011; Roberts and Evans, 2012). That in fact the pupil should not be aspiring to be a ‘carer’ but rather a ‘teacher’. When I probed further on the strategies employed to manage this situation, the careers advisor described continually challenging pupils which has recently resulted in one pupil declining further work:

I’ve got a couple of girls that I’ve worked with and I’ve challenged one who’s getting really good predicted GCSE grades, challenged her to think about the next stage...she doesn’t wanna see me anymore and...well I know she doesn’t, she’s not said anything but she’s seeing the careers co-ordinator rather than me and I know she’s just put in a form for childcare.

(Careers Advisor, Einstein High)

⁸⁶ In the excerpt which follows, the careers advisor is also alluding to girls being more likely to under-aspire. This is an interesting point; it is not something I found in the course of my research. However as discussed in Chapter 6, aspirations were clearly gendered, and women were aspiring to careers of ‘lower status’ as traditionally female dominated careers have tended to be subordinated in comparison to male sectors.

Spohrer (2015) argued that the majority of pupils in her research bought into the dominant framework of success and aspiration; however she noted a minority who, in a similar vein to the pupil described above, pushed back against this, challenging these hierarchies and asserting their agency to aspire for a particular (denigrated) job as they had a passion for it. Instead of continually subjugating working-class aspirations, particularly when there are not enough middle-class jobs, we should be fighting for them to be given the same symbolic recognition as those of the dominant.

8.5. Internalising Notions of (In)Ability

As has been demonstrated, the schools tended to differ in the degree to which dampening of aspirations was necessary and the form such work took. Interestingly, my analysis also shed light on the difference in the way in which this aspiration work was received, internalised and negotiated by the pupils of the three schools (and their parents). In Grand Hill Grammar, the careers advisor did not discuss this issue and in addition refused my request to observe one-to-one sessions with the pupils meaning I was unable to observe their response in action. However I noted an interesting moment in an interview with a year 11 boy at Grand Hill, Harry who discusses his parents' advice overriding the schools in regards to his decision making.

Jessie Ok and what A Levels are you taking?

Harry Well I've been advised to take maths, maths, physics, DT or indeed I should say I've been advised to take further maths as part of four subjects because in [Teacher's] words, doing five subjects is unnecessary in the extreme even for Oxford or Cambridge but my parents disagree so I'm doing geography as well.

Similarly in Einstein High, it was noted that at times the pupils did not always heed the careers advice given. The careers advisor told me about this, sharing a scenario where a young person refused to take on board the advice given:

I had a boy walk out once because he's not gonna be able to do computing A Level and he was getting all angry with me...I said I'll e-mail the computer lecturer...Spoke to dad and we all knew he wasn't going to get a B in maths, he wasn't up to it and they were gonna say no, but they do [argue] you know, so. Quite a few kids here are very eloquent, very articulate and they will argue and

they will appeal whereas you wouldn't get that in an inner city school cos they don't have those sort of skills.

(Careers Advisor, Einstein High)

Arguably the confidence which the young people in Einstein High and Grand Hill express through challenging the authority of the school connects to the 'sense of entitlement' in interactions with authoritative institutions inculcated by the middle-class parenting strategy of concerted cultivation Lareau (2011). In line with the above comment from the careers advisor at Einstein High that pupils in 'inner city schools' would not argue in these situations, my data uncovered the way in which the dampening of aspirations in Eagles Academy was powerfully internalised and taken on board by the pupils without argument. In contrast to the refusal of my request at Grand Hill, I *was* invited to observe some one-to-ones with an 'academically able' and a 'less academically able' student. The latter case was a year 11 girl, Hannah, who wanted to be a vet. She was, as she told us, most likely going to get all Cs in her GCSEs including English, maths and science (although the careers advisor continually probed to check this, as she was borderline D on some of them). The careers advisor described her to me in a similar vein to the description from the careers advisor at Einstein High of a student more aligned to the vocational route. I was informed that she is a very hard working student who is working at full capacity and just hitting these grades so the careers advisor felt she would be unable to cope with the demands of A Levels. Hannah had already had a one to one session but had been brought back into the office to run through everything again. This was partly for my benefit but also, I was told, it was likely that she had forgotten everything discussed in the previous one-to-one so it was necessary to ensure it had all sunk in. Throughout the session the careers advisor tried to reinforce the route of veterinary nurse, reminding Hannah that veterinary was too hard for her and that she could consider an animal care course or the veterinary nursing route.

Careers Advisor How difficult did we say it was to get onto [a vets course] at uni?

Hannah You did say it was difficult because apparently the leap from GCSE to A Level is too high for me

Careers Advisor And do you remember agreeing with that?

Hannah Yeah

The careers advisor re-enforces this a few times in the session to make sure it has sunk in as at times Hannah continued to discuss the veterinary university course, thinking that doing an animal care or veterinary nursing course at college would prepare her for a veterinary course at university:

Careers Advisor So what did we say about you doing A Levels?

Hannah The jump would be too difficult for me

Careers Advisor Yeah you got it?

Hannah Yeah

Careers Advisor Fantastic

At the end of the session the careers advisor concludes with some damage limitation attempting to ensure Hannah does not feel bad about herself and her abilities:

Careers Advisor Ok just to finish off and make sense of it all, I think that the Vet is a good idea but probably for you a little bit

Hannah Too high

Careers Advisor Yeah and you know everybody that I've ever come across I can always think of a job that I think is too high for them including myself I can think of bloomin' loads for me, so it's not, it shouldn't be seen as a failure yeah it's just the way it is, but there's loads of other jobs that you could do with animals that we've just gone through that are *equally important* which would more suit your skills and personality, you got it?

Through this conclusion, the careers advisor cements Hannah's pathway; calling upon the notion of fixed ability through comments such as 'it's just the way it is'. The careers advisor seems to suggest that it is not Hannah's personal failure (i.e. she has worked as hard as she can), rather she is just not able enough for this route- it is how she is programmed. This excerpt demonstrates the way in which young people are being cultivated to come to terms with failure, Hannah internalises a sense of herself as 'not good enough' as she finishes the careers advisor's sentence, agreeing that a veterinary route is 'too high' for her. Bourdieu (2006) argues that the conditions of domination require that the dominated buy into it and are thus complicit in their domination. There is a difference in the relative positions of power of the young people in each school in relation to the institution. The pupils in Einstein High and Grand Hill Grammar occupy a dominant position in social space and

are thus more able to exert power and challenge the advice given to them by the careers advisors. Meanwhile the pupils and parents in Eagles Academy occupy a dominated position in social space and are thus less empowered to respond and challenge the school. This group then appear to internalise the belief that they are not good enough and thus enable the conditions of their domination.

This internalisation of a lowering of aspirations was not necessarily always felt in a conscious way. It is interesting to note that when interviewing the young people in Eagles Academy, I did not pick up much discussion of a lowering of aspiration due to a lack of belief in their abilities. Rather what I found was many-particularly the year 11's- had established back up plans for if they failed. This could be because the pupils whose aspirations were being 'worked on' were not part of my sample. It could also be related to timing; I started interviewing the year 11 pupils early on in the academic year so they may not have had a one-to-one session with the careers advisor yet. However, if we understand expressions of aspirations as context specific and as serving a distinct purpose (St Clair and Benjamin, 2011), then it is possible to deduce that perhaps the young people, aware of the need to have 'high aspirations', felt unable to verbalise their true feelings of certain futures as unobtainable. Rather deferring to maintaining a high goal with a concrete 'realistic' back up plan. Alternatively it could also indicate that this shifting of aspirations happens somewhat unconsciously. Aspirations were not always fixed and consistent, some told me about other careers which they had 'used to' want to do but had now 'changed their mind', even once probed it was often not clear why this change had happened with some saying that they just did not want to do that anymore. This shifting is captured nicely in this excerpt from an interview with a year 11 girl at Eagles Academy:

Jessie Do you have any idea of any jobs that interest you that you might want to be doing?

Charlotte Umm at first it was like social work but then I thought that's too complicated like I can't do that's too kind of too... I dunno I can't remember I've just kind of gone off the idea of being it.

Whilst this may not be a conscious process it might still be guiding their actions. The unconscious absorption of this discourse is potentially aimed for. For example it is worth looking back at the comment from the careers advisor at Eagles Academy who strives to get the students to realise *themselves* that they are not quite at the right level. This is an extremely cruel and powerful form of symbolic violence, as the young people must realise and thus believe *themselves* that they are not worthy. Arguably this difference in the extent to

which young people attempt to challenge the institutional construction of them as lacking ability is related to the confidence or entitlement they feel they have to middle-class careers (Abrahams, 2016). Similarly it maps onto the extent to which they have developed a *sense of entitlement* or a *sense of restraint* during their childhood (Lareau, 2011), something which is further enhanced by the physical and symbolic spaces and practices of the schools they occupy.

8.6. Conclusion

I think the expectations coming from somewhere else is we have a system where you can achieve anything, but there are windows so there are definite groups of people where they're over aspirational more than others and I've seen that a lot.

(Careers Advisor, Einstein High)

This chapter has highlighted the outcomes of a system where many young people are highly aspirational whilst there are a limited number of highly skilled jobs to be filled (Brown, 2013). In 1987 Phil Brown wrote:

The mismatch between educational and occupational opportunities which has existed in the post-war period, has successfully been accommodated due to the production of social identities among working class youth which has limited their demand for education.

(Brown, 1987: 111)

As my analysis has demonstrated, this is no longer the case. Working class people are demanding education and hoping that this will lead them to a 'brighter future' with 'good jobs'. As was seen in Chapter 7, despite high aspirations young people are faced with inequality in schools in relation to opportunity structures which 'block' or 'un-block' pathways. This chapter has highlighted that in addition to this institutional sorting, there exists vast inequalities in regards to the practices of inculcation in schools which further serve to enable some young people to get ahead over others. As has been shown through a case study of the intensive careers support provided in Grand Hill, schools engage in a practice of institutional concerted cultivation, working to actively cultivate the dispositions necessary to secure access to top jobs. In contrast, without the immense resources of Grand Hill and working within a vastly different context, Eagles Academy is left to cultivate a disposition compatible with failure.

In response to a noted phenomenon of ‘over-aspiration’ and a competitive marketplace, all three of the schools engaged in forms of ‘aspiration work’. However the degree of severity of this work varied considerably across the institutions. At Grand Hill Grammar, dampening aspirations often meant encouraging a student to consider altering one of the five UCAS options to a less ‘competitive’ university. Meanwhile at Eagles Academy this dampening tended to be more brutal and required a student to reconsider a career aspiration or indeed realise that they were not quite Oxbridge material. Another important difference between the schools related to the responses of the pupils to the careers advisors. The young people who occupied a more dominant and powerful position in relation to the education system and professionals within it (the Grand Hill Grammar and Einstein High pupils) were more able to confidently mobilise their voices - along with their parents - to reject the discourse being imposed upon them and disregard the advice of the school. Meanwhile the pupils at Eagles Academy occupying a dominated position in social space appeared to internalise the messages that they were not quite good enough for certain roles or routes. I have argued that this is a form of symbolic violence as the dominated are made to buy into their domination thereby solidifying their oppression.

Whilst dampening aspirations is a difficult and uncomfortable task for all involved, it is especially problematic in schools such as Eagles Academy. It illustrates a stark and shocking inconsistency in political rhetoric as these establishments are continually pressured to ‘raise aspirations’. However without the means or tools to support young people to realistically be able to achieve such goals, the schools are left to respond to this contradiction and in this case it is done through the careful but painful dampening of aspirations. Gavin Brown argues: ‘Just as aspirations are an affective orientation to the future, work to raise young people’s aspirations also works on an affective level. There is undoubtedly an emotional risk involved in such work’ (Brown, 2011: 20). There is also deep emotional risk involved in dampening young people’s aspiration, this thesis has only touched upon this issue as it was not the sole focus; nevertheless this is an area which clearly warrants further research. Diane Reay powerfully refers to the discourse of raising aspiration as an ‘ideological whip’ used to beat the working classes (Reay, 2012b: 9). This chapter has further demonstrated the cruelty of such a whip as young people struggle against the odds to achieve in education whilst being told to aim higher but then being beaten back down and told to aim lower when they do.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

You've got to get out there and find people, win them over, get them to raise aspirations, get them to think they can get all the way to the top.

(David Cameron cited in BBC, 2013)

Amidst a climate of intensive aspiration raising policies sit three schools, each one largely housing young people from different social class backgrounds, yet each one equally full to the brim of pupils bursting with aspirations, hopes and dreams for a 'brighter future'. These schools, however, do not equally enable any possible future for any possible student. Through their unique resources (material and symbolic), structures and practices these different schools work to distinguish some young people from the rest. Thus, in response to the quote above, I would pose the question to David Cameron: 'and then what?' What is the outcome of encouraging a generation of young people to 'think they can get all the way to the top' without investing material resources in them, without ensuring that they *all* have the tools to fulfil these aspirations? This thesis has engaged with this question as it sought to investigate the experiences of young people in three contrasting schools as they envisioned their futures in the context of a deep political rhetoric around aiming high yet unequally armed with the opportunities to see their dreams come to fruition. How did they construct their 'aspirations' in line with such discourses? How did they experience school systems which 'block' (or indeed 'un-block') certain pathways? And finally how did the institutions respond to the contradiction inherent in the policy agenda; how do you manage aspirations when everyone wants a ticket for the same future but only limited seats are available on the train?

This thesis makes an original contribution to the literature in the sociology of education by unpacking the contemporary ways in which the English secondary education system reproduces social class inequalities through its structures and practices. It does this in a number of ways. Firstly it has contributed to the literature on aspirations by paying attention to the ways in which aspirations and habitus are constructed in different contexts and at different stages. Secondly it has demonstrated the powerful ways in which institutional structures and practices intervene and interact with young people's agency further restricting disadvantaged young people's 'choices' and career pathways. Thirdly it has highlighted the way in which different aspirations, upon interaction with institutions, are 'worked on' in different ways which serve to enable some young people's futures whilst restricting others.

There is not the space in this conclusion to cover everything that has been discussed thus far, rather I wish to draw out and weave together some central issues which emerged as key findings. I will begin by returning to my original research questions in order to tie together the three analysis chapters previously presented, highlighting the central and original arguments of each. Following this I will provide some recommendations for policy and practice and consider some limitations of the thesis, pointing towards the scope for future research.

9.1. Returning to the Research Questions

This thesis set out to explore the following research questions:

1. To what extent are social class variations in young people's aspirations and expectations of continuing significance?
2. In what ways do young people's knowledge and perceptions of university and its purpose vary by social class background?
3. How do schools shape horizons for action? To what extent do they differ?
4. What are the specific structures and practices within educational institutions today that serve to produce disadvantage or privilege with regards to young people's trajectories?

This section returns to each of these questions individually in order to weave together and summarise the main body of analysis.

9.1.1. To what extent are social class variations in young people's aspirations and expectations of continuing significance?

The literature on young people's aspirations and expectations is wide ranging and has usefully informed the backbone of this thesis (see Chapter 2). However one issue appears unresolved in the literature, that is, the extent to which aspirations are actually structured by social class. Do young people from working-class backgrounds have 'lower' aspirations than their middle-class peers? And does this matter? Some research has argued that social class background is intricately tied to the construction of certain futures as 'out of reach' or 'not for the likes of us' through the workings of the habitus which, they argue, subsequently impacts upon aspirations (or horizons for action) (Hodkinson et al., 1996; Hutchings and Archer, 2001; Reay et al., 2001; Archer and Yamashita, 2003; Reay et al., 2005; Archer et al., 2007). Meanwhile other research has challenged the deficit model which depicts working-class young people as 'lacking' in aspiration, concluding that disadvantaged young people have extremely high aspirations, far higher than could be supported by the

UK labour market (Rose and Baird, 2013; St Clair et al., 2013; Archer et al., 2014). This has led some to question the usefulness of Bourdieu's theories for understanding aspirations (Baker, 2014). Bourdieu's theoretical toolkit can help us understand why some young people 'aim lower' but may not be well equipped to answer questions related to why young people are aspiring for destinations far higher than their origin. Why is it that their habitus is not restricting their aspirations?

Through the unique methodological approach I employed in this thesis, interviewing young people at different stages of education, I was able to observe aspirations in construction across various schooling contexts. As was demonstrated in Chapter 6, my findings suggest that young people's aspirations and expectations for the future *do* vary by social class. However this variation was not of the sorts assumed in policy (that disadvantaged young people are 'lacking' aspiration), quite the contrary. Whilst the majority of young people from all schools in my research 'aspired' for university, interestingly it was the Eagles Academy pupils who seemed the most certain of this desire. They conceived of this as the only route to securing a stable future, whereas for the Grand Hill and Einstein High pupils, university was viewed as one of a myriad of optional routes. Despite a strong desire to attend university, the Eagles Academy pupils appeared to be less confident in their chances of fulfilling this aspiration- indicating a distinct difference in relation to 'expectations'. Additionally I found that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (the Eagles Academy pupils) were more likely to have a fixed form of occupational 'aspiration' and were the most able to name a specific career they wished to pursue from a young age. Their more advantaged peers on the other hand (in both Grand Hill Grammar and Einstein High) often remained vague as to the specific role they anticipated undertaking, naming an industry or at times being unable to even imagine a future self.

Through my analysis I have argued that a Bourdieusian theoretical framework can provide useful tools to explore the inequalities produced through variations in aspirations. Bourdieu's notion of habitus can help us to unpack the subtle ways in which aspirations are developed in different contexts and how the construction of a middle-class habitus today involves the adoption of a form of strategic uncertainty, imbued with 'choice' and 'options'. My findings suggest that disadvantaged young people unrestricted by their 'dominated' habitus appear able to 'aim high' and imagine a future where they may move into an occupational field which differs to that of their origin. However, arguably the rules of the game have changed; today the goal is not to 'aim high' but rather to have a 'flexible' notion of the future (Allatt, 1993). This is important because, whilst on the surface it may appear that all young people are 'aiming high' in some form or another; my research demonstrates

the subtle yet powerful ways in which variations in the form aspirations take may reproduce social class inequalities. This was made clear in my research through the notion of ‘keeping the options open’. The Eagles Academy pupils attempted to do this through taking a variety of subjects to ensure a ‘back up’ route. Meanwhile for the Grand Hill and Einstein High pupils, encouraged and supported by parents and school practices, ‘keeping the options open’ meant taking facilitating subjects and developing a ‘well rounded’ package. This distinction in the form aspirations appear to take on is only the tip of the iceberg. If all young people were to be strategically supported in regards to developing a flexible and valued ‘package’, it would not, on its own level the playing field. As will be shown, taken alongside the other central findings of this research this point contributes to a stark picture of inequality in the English education system today.

9.1.2. In what ways do young people’s knowledge and perceptions of university and its purpose vary by social class background?

In the 2011 White Paper which preceded the raising of the cap on university tuition fees, the government asserted that what was needed to ‘widen participation’ and ‘raise aspirations’ for university was greater ‘information’ for young people in schools (BIS, 2011). Is there an ‘information gap’? Do young people from disadvantaged communities ‘lack’ information about university? Does this lack of information feed into their aspirations? Would providing more information lead more young people towards a HE path? As was discussed in Chapter 6, my findings suggest that the young people in all schools held similar beliefs in the value and purpose of a university education. The more disadvantaged young people (those at Eagles Academy) aspired to attend for largely similar reasons as their more advantaged peers (from Einstein High and Grand Hill Grammar). Their motivations for attending university were often related to ‘getting a good job’ but they also cited reasons in regards to the wider social and cultural experiences provided by HE. Interestingly despite narrating similar personal motivations, the young people in all schools appeared to have a class lens in relation to the vignettes, making assumptions about the characters’ motivations based on information about their class origin.

My research findings suggest that the information provided by the careers advisors was crucial to young people’s awareness of university options and funding systems. This was particularly important for the young people in Eagles Academy who were the least familiar with the university field. These young people relied heavily on their school to inform them about university as the majority (74%) reported that they knew no one or only one or two people who were at or had been to university and very few had ever visited a university

campus. Some young people at Eagles Academy told me that they had been worried about how they would be able to afford university but that the careers advisor had reassured them and explained the student loan system to them. Whilst this support was greatly received by the pupils it is important to highlight some limitations. Schemes which attempt to widen participation through taking young people onto university campuses were running in Eagles Academy and whilst some benefitted from them, others were disappointed that they were excluded (something that was also found by Baxter et al., 2007) or were unable to fulfil the requirement to ‘make their own way’ to the university.

My research also highlights an inequality across the schools in terms of the implementation of the careers service work. This will be elaborated upon below when considering the third research question but for now it is important to highlight that the extent to which schools discussed subject options with young people, drawing upon the Russell Group’s *Informed Choices* document, varied depending upon the careers advisors’ perceptions of the ‘type’ of young person they were working with. I came across young people in Eagles Academy who had never heard of the document but when presented with it found it to be helpful in guiding them with subject choices. Furthermore my research highlights that young people who were not conforming to the rigid discipline regime imposed by Eagles Academy but were still understood to be ‘bright’ often lacked information around their options (see for example Chapter 5). Overall, the perception that widening participation is to be achieved through the provision of information, advice and guidance is misguided. My findings suggest that physical and social proximity to university is central. The young people at Grand Hill Grammar for example benefitted immensely from their location being next to an elite university. They were also more familiar with the university context due to extensive networks of family and friends who had experience of HE coupled with informal trips to elite institutions and dinner table discussions about university experiences. Whilst Eagles Academy was ‘sponsored’ by the local elite university; this fact did not appear to have the same effect. The school is located on the other side of the city and as the careers advisor told me, contextualised offers were not enough to help their pupils achieve places. This symbolic sponsorship did not afford the Eagles Academy pupils the same benefits that the more casual, informal and subtle workings of social capital did for the pupils at Grand Hill Grammar and Einstein High.

9.1.3. How do schools shape horizons for action? To what extent do they differ?

Frequent failures play an important role in gradually bringing a student's aspirations into line with his or her probable career opportunities. By the time most students terminate schooling, they have been put down enough to convince them of their inability to succeed at the next highest level. Through competition, success and defeat in the classroom, students are reconciled to their social positions.

(Bowles and Gintis, 2011: 106)

Here Bowles and Gintis (2011) eloquently describe the way in which the schooling system impacts pupils' conceptions of themselves and confidence in their academic ability which subsequently affects their horizons for action- what kind of future they are able to imagine for themselves. Bourdieu (2006) similarly describes the way in which educational interventions work to ensure aspirations are in line with objective chances. My research has paid attention to the intricate ways in which schools may impact upon the habitus or horizons for action of their pupils. I have uniquely explored this through the angle of the careers service provision and practices in each institution. As is demonstrated in Chapter 8, my findings highlight a distinct difference in how the careers advisors in each school 'work' on aspirations and in so doing influence pupils conceptions of the possible for them. I have argued that in Grand Hill Grammar the careers service appears to pick up where the parents left off, working to inculcate within their pupils a particular disposition toward success. Influenced by the work of Annette Lareau (2011), I have called this practise *institutional concerted cultivation*. Through drawing in particular upon my experience of observing a careers event at Grand Hill Grammar, Chapter 8 demonstrates these practices in action as the careers advisor and alumni attempt to educate their pupils in the dispositions necessary to subvert the rigid systems; ensuring they are able to gain access to desired careers. Meanwhile in Eagles Academy I observed as a careers advisor engaged in an intensive process of realignment of the habitus through dampening aspirations. As I have shown, this form of aspiration work was being undertaken in all of the schools, however it was most brutal and psychologically impactful in Eagles Academy where pupils, lacking the middle-class confidence of their Grand Hill and Einstein High peers, were ill equipped to challenge the dominant voice of the institution and left to internalise feelings of inferiority and inability.

Schools were also shaping horizons for action through the differential opportunity structures within them. The subject options presented to young people at GCSE and A Level were different in each school which led to different doors being opened or closed, thus impacting upon their perceptions of the routes available to them. This will be discussed in more depth in the next section when responding to research question four.

9.1.4. What are the specific structures and practices within educational institutions today that serve to produce disadvantage or privilege with regards to young people's trajectories?

By integrating new generations into the social order, the schools are constrained to justify and reproduce inequality rather than correct it.

(Bowles and Gintis, 2011: 102)

In a sense this research question draws all the others together through its focus on the way in which the education system overall serves to reproduce inequality. In addition though, it introduces a key element not discussed yet, that of structures. As was highlighted in Chapter 7, my research uncovered immense inequality in the opportunity structures working inside each school. Initially this was noted in relation to the differences in the options for science at GCSE with pupils in Eagles Academy being moved onto a BTEC pathway if a teacher deemed them to be of low ability. Meanwhile the Grand Hill Grammar pupils (alongside some from Einstein High) were able to take biology, chemistry and physics GCSEs rather than being restricted to the combined science pathway. In addition to the inequalities noted in the compulsory subjects, in Grand Hill and Einstein High the pupils benefitted from a wide range of GCSE and A Level options which in turn granted them weight when applying to university. In contrast, in Eagles Academy the pupils were restricted by a 'blocking system' which forced them to make choices from a restricted set of subjects, structured around a pre-constructed fixed timetable. This challenges the conception of 'choice' implicit in political rhetoric around widening participation which, as mentioned above, asserts that young people merely need better information, advice and guidance at key transition points. Powerful, fixed structures are in place in schools which surround the choice making process, closing down doors before young people even make that all important 'choice'. Previous research tells us that young people's decision making processes take place within a complex interplay of the internal structures of the habitus alongside perceptions of opportunities on the labour market (Hodkinson et al., 1996; Ball et al., 2002; Archer and Yamashita, 2003; Reay et al., 2005; Archer et al., 2007). My research

builds upon this by demonstrating that structural realities in schools also restrict young people's choices, further perpetuating inequality as some young people benefit from a greater landscape of choice due to the school they find themselves in.

In addition to the limits (or freedoms) afforded to subject choices, my research documents an immense inequality in the support provided with regards to constructing a 'package' which is deemed attractive to universities. This is in respect of A Level combinations including 'facilitating subjects', but also in respect of the additional elements to the CV such as having undertaken valuable forms of work experience or having participated in symbolically recognised forms of extra-curricular activities. Overall then, the three schools were operating within vastly different contexts and in turn deeply embedded structures and practices were at work which resulted in the reproduction of privilege or disadvantage for young people as they moved through the schooling system; aiming high and hoping for a university education and a 'good job'.

9.2. Recommendations

As has been discussed, my research findings document the intricate processes which serve to reproduce inequality in the English education system today. Whilst it is necessary to consider the possible ways to better this system, it is important to begin by briefly considering the wider context in order to locate this thesis and its findings within the broader entrenched structures and mechanisms of inequality and understand how they serve to construct and maintain the micro system of educational inequality. We might begin by questioning the whole premise behind the conception of the purpose of education as a common good for the whole of society. Taking for example the massification of HE, why do we believe this is a good thing? Whose interest does it serve? Phil Brown and colleagues (2011) important work challenges the common assumption that a highly educated population and highly skilled workforce will lead to greater social justice through global and economic competitiveness. Arguably the entire education system is functioning from within a capitalist framework and as such, serves the interest of the dominant or, to take this argument back to its Marxist roots, the Bourgeoisie (Marx and Engels, 1998). Education necessarily provides the fuel for the capitalist machine and as such rather than being a liberating force; it is inevitably imbued with structures and practices which maintain the status quo.

My research raises important questions in relation to this; where do schools fit within the system? What are they doing and in whose interests? The schools in this thesis were

working within the context of a restrictive framework centred on assessments and outcomes constructed around notions of ability which reflect the values and norms of the dominant in society. Schools and pupils are thus compared across a narrow benchmark whereby some, due to their advantaged location in the field, are better able to compete and succeed. Schools Minister Nick Gibb, in a speech delivered to the Sutton Trust commented that: ‘A welcome consensus has begun to emerge that schools can - and must - be engines of social mobility’ (2016). But how can education compensate for inequality in society when the mechanisms underlying the route to educational success are founded upon inequality itself? In order to resolve the deeply embedded structures of inequity within education we need to rethink and redesign the whole capitalist economy; equalising not just outcomes, but also starting points for all children. Whilst this is a call for a radical shift in society, on a practical level there remain smaller ways in which our current system may be improved. As such the remainder of this section will offer some specific concrete recommendations for ways to address and respond to the issues raised in this thesis such that we can work towards creating a more equitable education system.

My first recommendation is that schools work to remove their ‘blocking systems’. As blocking systems are only imposed in some schools this creates a hidden inequality, as some young people are presented with a more restricted set of options. Timetables should be constructed around student choices not the other way around. This is clearly possible as two schools in my research did not impose such a structure. This may relate to school resources (including number of pupils on roll) and their ability to tailor the timetable around student choice; however it is important that resources are directed to this area. Government funding should be directed at ensuring all schools are able to operate without blocking systems.

Secondly and linked to the above recommendation, university admissions tutors should take account of the inequalities in options presented to young people. They must view the CV and academic portfolio in line with the institution the applicant had previously attended. Young people’s subject choices must be understood in relation to the options they were presented with such that, for example, Latin or classical civilisation are recognised as markers of a privileged form of education rather than an inherent form of intelligence. Equally, the fact that a student may not possess the right and desirable ‘package’ of subjects may be a reflection of the lack of knowledge or of restrictions imposed upon their choices which rendered certain subject combinations an impossibility.

Thirdly schools need to re-consider the streaming of pupils into BTEC science from year 8 based on teacher perception of 'ability'. This can be psychologically painful for young people and can serve to restrict their options post-16 as the BTEC is not as symbolically valued as the GCSE. Pupils perceived to be struggling in science should be given extra support rather than discarded as 'not GCSE material'. Additionally, the government should work to ensure that the BTEC qualification enables students to progress at the same rate as those on the GCSE such that taking science BTEC affords young people the same opportunities as their peers who completed the GCSE.

Fourthly, government funding should be redirected from programmes and initiatives aimed at 'raising aspirations' through changing attitudes and cultures. My research alongside a mass of previous evidence demonstrates that many young people already have high aspirations. The discourse of 'raising aspirations' denigrates those working-class young people aspiring to follow in their parents' footsteps. Resources must instead be targeted towards helping young people fulfil their aspirations by providing opportunities.

My fifth recommendation is that widening participation activities target a broader range of pupils. It was clear through my time at Eagles Academy that the same group of pupils tended to receive all the targeted support. Many other pupils aspire to attend university but if they are not deemed to be 'the brightest' they are not invited to participate in these trips. Linked to this these schemes must be carefully thought through so as not to exclude the exact pupils they explicitly aim to target. If young people living in marginalised communities, isolated from universities are expected to make their own way to the campuses, inevitably many will be unable to participate.

Linked to the previous recommendation, my sixth is that 'naughty' children must be given access to the same resources as their better behaved peers. Careers advice, guidance and support should not overlook pupils who do not conform to the schools discipline regime. These should not be seen as rewards. Being taken to visit a university campus must be something that all pupils can access not just the better-behaved ones. Furthermore schools must seek to rebalance the support versus discipline response to behaviour, making support the starting point for children who misbehave.

Finally, it is important not to overlook the positive, despite the limitations of the work undertaken by the careers office, the young people in Eagles Academy quite clearly benefitted from having a full time qualified careers advisor on site. As is argued by Archer et al. (2014) good careers provisions in schools can be key to equalising opportunities.

More schools serving disadvantaged communities should follow this lead and ensure they have this facility.

9.3. Limitations

Despite the rich data generated by my research there are of course limitations to the project. The first of these relate to the absence of an analysis of issues of race and ethnicity. Crucial research has pointed to the ways in which race and ethnicity structure young people's aspirations, educational experiences, outcomes and chances of gaining access to university (Archer, 2008; Gillborn, 2008; Archer et al., 2014; Boliver, 2016). As discussed in Chapter 3 this was something I had hoped to cover in my thesis initially targeting an ethnically diverse school but was unsuccessful in gaining access. It is important to point out that whilst my sample is mainly white, this is still a racial/ethnic group and as such it could have been possible to have a discussion of whiteness. However this thesis is of a comparative nature, as such I felt this would not be possible without considering how whiteness works in relation to other ethnicities. Gillborn (2008; 2010) argues that focussing on the white working-class serves to mask the inequalities of race in education and contributes to a reinforcement of white supremacy. He highlights that whilst official statistics tell us that poor white boys achieve the lowest levels of attainment, a lack of consideration of *all* white versus Black pupils masks the fact that white pupils overall outperform their Black counterparts. It is not my intention in this thesis to contribute towards this troubling discursive construction and I wish to acknowledge that whilst I have discussed the distinctive ways in which the pupils in Eagles Academy were disadvantaged by their class location, they maintain an advantaged position in terms of their race.

Gender was also a factor which was largely left undiscussed in this thesis, whilst I consciously sampled equal numbers of boys and girls, issues around gender did not jump out to me in the analysis process. This may have been due to the design/focus of the project, perhaps gender was not a key element impacting upon young people's aspirations⁸⁷ and opportunities. However it could have also been related to the fact that I am particularly attuned to class related inequality rather than gender.

⁸⁷ Whilst my analysis demonstrated a gendered element to aspirations in terms of the type of careers young people aspired to, it is interesting to note that girls were not aspiring to get married and become housewives. Some of them envisioned and spoke about a future with partners and children but similar to the boys, they also aspired to attend university and have a career.

Another limitation to this research lies with the lack of data from parents. When interviewing young people I asked them to reflect on their parents' perceptions of their 'aspirations'. As such, whilst parents did feature in the discussion, interviewing them directly would have added a rich layer of data in relation to the context from which young people construct their narratives around the future. During my fieldwork in Eagles Academy I became particularly interested in speaking to parents after attending parents evening and observing their interactions with the school. This inclusion though would have been beyond the scope of a doctoral research thesis as my sample size was already relatively ambitious for such a project.

Whilst I explicitly chose to exclude sixth form pupils (in years 12 or 13) (see Chapter 3), it is a potential limitation. I initially felt that those pupils, having already self-selected onto an academic pathway would be the least likely to be put off by the tuition fees. However, whilst volunteering in the A Level Sociology classroom at Eagles Academy I spoke to some pupils about my research and I recall one girl telling me that she was really worried about how she would finance university and felt that the fees were a deterrent. As such it is a possibility that the fear of the fees becomes more prominent as young people get closer to reaching university. Prior to that, they face far greater barriers than the fees such as GCSE results. For this reason the research could have been usefully expanded to include sixth form pupils to shed light on their perceptions of the future.

I also feel that this thesis has been limited by the relatively weaker ethnographic data from Einstein High. This project did not begin as an ethnography, however when conducting research in schools it is impossible to ignore all the day to day fascinating things which take place. Through volunteering in Eagles Academy I collected a lot of ethnographic field notes and similarly by attending events and being welcomed into staff areas in Grand Hill I was able to gain this level of insight. Unfortunately due to the efficient nature of Einstein High and therefore the highly managed and constrained nature of my visits, I was unable to capture these things. If I had more ethnographic insights into the functioning of Einstein High, my comparative analysis would have been strengthened. As it stands Einstein High may have been drawn upon in the thesis less, though I have made an active effort to give equal space to discussing the pupils' responses in all schools.

Finally, whilst the above limitations are of a somewhat practical and empirical nature it is important to briefly discuss the limitations of the theorising, analysis and conclusions of this thesis. The first relates to the almost exclusive use of Bourdieu. Arguably, as discussed above this has rendered the issue of race largely invisible in the thesis- it is possible that

adopting a different theoretical position may have brought these issues more to the fore. Another limitation and implication of using Bourdieu's theory is that it has arguably led me to a very pessimistic conclusion in relation to the reproduction of inequality in education and limited scope for social change (James, 2015a). Nevertheless this thesis does offer various specific recommendations to go some way to reducing the practices which enable the reproduction of inequality (see section 9.2). Secondly it is important to consider the nuance and complexities in the concept and idea of social class and social class reproduction. Whilst I have tended to discuss social class as a binary category, class is far more complex than this. At the same time, the fact of this complexity limits but does not invalidate use of the 'binary' categories for a particular form of analysis. What matters here is that we recognise the complexity to frame our understanding. For example, time plays an important role in the constructions of particular social classes, what it means to belong to one social class may not be the same in the next generation. Or again, the transformation of the economy over time may result in occupational groupings moving up or down the class scale. Thus it is difficult to neatly isolate factors of class and class reproduction. That being said, this thesis has focussed on reproduction as about the reproduction of privilege or disadvantage, and for this I would argue that Bourdieu is extremely helpful. Bourdieusian theory can help us to understand such a process as whilst the indicators of a particular social class may have changed, those in an advantaged position in social space are more able to adapt to the changing rules of the game and in this way maintain and reproduce their privileged positions. This is something that I have argued in this thesis, particularly in relation to habitus and aspiration construction.

9.4. Future Research

The issue of careers advisors dampening aspirations is one which warrants future research in order to understand the depth and scope of this phenomenon. Future research could focus specifically on the work conducted by careers advisors on aspirations in a range of disadvantaged academy schools across the country. In particular future research could usefully explore the extent to which this aspiration work varies across different ethnic groups. Secondly, whilst this thesis found little evidence that the increased tuition fees were acting as a deterrent for disadvantaged young people (or indeed any young people), as discussed, this finding could be largely related to sampling issues in regards to the year groups targeted and also in relation to which pupils volunteered to be interviewed. It is important that this area continues to be investigated, particularly in light of the evidence

from the DfE (2016c) of the drop in the percentage of university entrants from state schools.

9.5. Concluding Words

As was aforementioned, the dominant political and public discourse around ‘improving’ schools and results implies that all schools must be capable of solving inequality through enabling all children to achieve their ‘potential’. However, there is an echoing silence around the inequalities manifest and entrenched in the everyday practices of schools. This thesis has contributed to disrupting such a silence by demonstrating how schools reproduce inequality as an ‘everyday matter’. I will now conclude on the next page with a poem inspired by this thesis.

Inequality

Penetrating the system. Unnoticed? Unchallenged? Unresolved?

Like a leaking tap it keeps dripping. Unstoppable?

A wave of strength holding onto it like an undercurrent in a rocky sea

The education system transforms structural poverty into matters of talent and ability

I can see the children

Methodically constructing aspirations

Restrictive frameworks dictate the acceptable, the respectable

What can I aim for? Hope for?

Run

Run faster

Institutions intervene

Blocking or unblocking pathways

Sifting, sorting and streaming

Directing, moulding and cultivating

The game is rigged

Playing field is bumpy, uneven

The system reproducing itself

Inequality

~Poem by Jessie Abrahams~

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Appendices

Appendix I: Questionnaire



Questionnaire

Date: _____

School: _____ Year: _____

Maths Set: _____ Science Set: _____ English Set: _____



This is a survey about people going to University, thank you for taking the time to fill it in. Please remember this is not a test and there are no right or wrong answers, I just want to know what you think. The answers you give will not be connected with your name. You can leave anything blank if you don't know or prefer not to say. If you have any questions at all please feel free to ask! ☺

Part A: Questions about University

1. How likely do you think it is that you will go to University? *(Please tick one of these)*

Definitely Won't	Unlikely	Not Sure	Likely	Definitely Will
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. How much is your answer based on each of the factors below? *(Please tick)*

	Not at all	A little bit	Some	A lot	Completely
The cost of university	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My future career plans	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
What my family/friends think	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student lifestyle	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

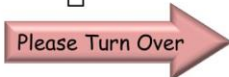
3. Please write in the space below anything else you want to say about whether you're going to go to university or not:

4. Not including your parents/carers and teachers how many people do you know who are at or have been to university? *(Please tick)*

None	1-2	3-5	6-8	9 or More
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. Do you think any of your friends are planning on going to university? *(Please tick)*

None	A few	Most of them	All of them	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Part B: Questions about you

1. Please tick the box that best describes you:

- Female
- Male

2. Please tell me about the house you live in most of the time *(If you split your time equally between two houses please tick two boxes)*

- We own the house or pay a mortgage
- We rent it from a landlord
- We rent it from the council or a housing association
- I live with a foster family or in a children's home
- I don't know
- Other, please describe: _____

3. Please complete the table about the parent(s) or carer(s) that you live with in the house mentioned above:

Relation to you (e.g mum, dad, carer)	Are they working? (Yes, No)	If they are working, what is their job?	Did they go to university? (Yes, No, Don't know)

4. Do you get free school meals?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Thank you for completing my survey!

I am looking for some volunteers to take part in the next stage of my research. The information sheet you were given with this questionnaire explains more about the next stage.

If you would like to volunteer please tick below and fill in your name, Thanks ☺

- I would like to volunteer and my name is _____

Appendix II: Research Information Sheets and Consent Forms

Appendix II.I: Pupil Information Sheet and Consent form



Information Sheet for Pupils in years 7, 9 & 11

Thank you for completing my questionnaire which was the first stage of a research project I am doing at Cardiff University. The research is about young peoples' hopes and plans for the future and what they think about university. You are now being invited to take part in the second stage of the study. Before you decide whether to agree to this it is important that you understand what it's about and have the chance to ask questions. So please read this information sheet carefully. If you are happy to be involved in this next stage please write your name at the end of the survey before giving it to your teacher so that I know who you are. My name is Jessie Abrahams and you can contact me or my supervisors at any time if you have any questions. Our contact information is on the back of this sheet.

What will the next stage involve?

If you're in year 7 the next stage will involve speaking to me as part of a group with some of your peers (including doing a fun creative activity) and then having a one to one chat with me afterwards. If you're in year 9 or 11, we will be skipping the group stage and just having a one to one chat. This will all take place during school times.

What if I don't know about university or what I want to do in the future?

That's fine! Most people don't have any definite ideas about what they want to do in the future, I still want to speak to you and find out what you think.

Why should I take part?

The government often make decisions about young people without speaking them; this is a chance to have your opinions heard through a piece of research

What if I change my mind?

That's ok, even if you say yes at the beginning you don't have to continue with the research you can change your mind at any time and you don't have to tell me why.

What if I don't want to take part in the next step but don't mind filling in the survey?

That is absolutely fine, you don't have to volunteer for the next stage, just add your name at the bottom of the survey if you do want to and leave it blank if you don't.

Contact Information

Jessie Abrahams - Research Student at Cardiff University

e-mail address: abrahamsjj@cardiff.ac.uk

Phone number: [Number]

Professor David James - Academic Supervisor at Cardiff University

e-mail address: JamesDR2@cardiff.ac.uk

Dr Sin Yi Cheung - Academic Supervisor at Cardiff University

e-mail address: CheungSY@cardiff.ac.uk



Consent form for Pupils in years 7, 9 & 11

	Please Tick
I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet and have had a chance to ask Jessie questions. She has answered any questions I have.	
I understand that being part of this research is not part of my school work and that I don't have to do it if I don't want to.	
I understand that I can change my mind about being in the research at any time without giving a reason.	
I agree to be part of the research and be interviewed by Jessie.	

Signature _____ Date _____

Name _____

Appendix II.II: Careers Advisor Information Sheet and Consent Form



Information Sheet for Careers Advisors

You are being invited to take part in a piece of research I am doing as part of my studies at Cardiff University. Before you decide whether to agree to this it is important that you understand what it's about and have the chance to ask questions. So please read the below and if you are happy to be involved please sign the consent form

What is the research about?

My PhD is exploring young people's perceptions of university and the tuition fees in an attempt to consider whether the increased fees are putting them off of applying. I am hoping to interview careers advisors to understand the role they have within schools and also what their role is in supporting young people's career decisions.

What will it involve?

With your consent I would like to interview you for roughly ½ hour – 1 hour to discuss these issues. The topics we will cover include your role and tasks within the school, your experiences of targets and daily pressures and your experience of working with the students- what form this takes and how you deal with certain situations. I will record the discussion and transcribe it. Once transcribed, it will be made completely anonymous, neither you nor the school will be identifiable and the audio file will be deleted.

What if I change my mind?

That's fine, you have the right to change your mind and withdraw your data at any time as long as it is no later than 6 months prior to me completing my thesis.

Thanks for taking the time to read this, please let me know if you have any questions. If you think of one later you can contact me or either of my supervisors using the below contact details:

Contact Information

Jessie Abrahams – Research Student at Cardiff University

e-mail address: abrahamsjj@cardiff.ac.uk

Phone number: [Number]

Professor David James – Academic Supervisor at Cardiff University

e-mail address: JamesDR2@cardiff.ac.uk

Dr Sin Yi Cheung - Academic Supervisor at Cardiff University

e-mail address: CheungSY@cardiff.ac.uk



Consent form for Careers Advisors

	Please Tick
I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet and have had a chance to ask Jessie questions. She has answered any questions I have.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my participation is voluntary and I have the right to change my mind and withdraw my data at any time without giving a reason (given that it is in advance of 6 months before Jessie submits her thesis).	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to be part of the research and be interviewed by Jessie.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Signature _____ Date _____

Name _____



Parent/Carer Information Sheet

Dear Parent/Carer

My name is Jessica Abrahams; I am a PhD student at Cardiff University and am going to be doing some research in your child's school over this academic year (2014/15). I am writing to you to explain the project and ask for consent for your child to participate in it. The below box provides some information about what is involved in the study.

What is the research about?

The aim of the study is to find out what young people know and think about university and the cost of it and how this feeds into their future aspirations/plans.

What does the research involve?

I will be holding one to one interviews that will last roughly an hour during school time. These will be audio recorded and then typed up.

What will be done with the information?

The information collected from your child will be made anonymous, all names and identifying information will be removed. There will be no way of linking the research to the school or the specific young people involved. The views of your child will be used in my doctoral research and be published in academic journals and books.

This research is being funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. It is being undertaken with the supervision of two senior researchers at the University and has the approval of Cardiff University School of Social Sciences Ethics Committee. I have clearance from the Criminal Records Bureau to work with children.

If you would like further information about the study, you can contact me at any time on [Number] or by e-mail at abrahamsjj@cardiff.ac.uk. You can also contact my supervisors: Professor David James (JamesDR2@cardiff.ac.uk) and Dr Sin Yi Cheung (CheungSY@cardiff.ac.uk).

Thank you for taking the time to read this, I hope that you will be happy for your child to participate in this important piece of research. If you do then please complete the consent form and return it to your child's school.

Parent/Carer Consent Form

Name of child _____

	Please Tick
I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and if relevant have had them answered adequately.	
I understand that my child is free to withdraw from the project if he/she wants at any point without providing a reason.	
I give consent for him/her to take part in the study.	

Signature _____ Date _____

Name [Please print] _____

Appendix III: Interview Schedules

Appendix III.I: Pupil Interview Schedule

Prep/Introductions

Introduce myself and the research/ Explain interview process including reminding them of questionnaire that I will be referring to/ Consent forms

Background Info

Cultural, Economic and Social Capital – Ok so I want to start by getting to know a little bit about you, so just tell me a bit about where you live and who you live with. [probe from questionnaire answers to part B- e.g. what jobs parents do more detail]

What do you like to do in your free time, when you're not in school? [probe- any hobbies, ECA's]

Future (career) aspirations/ plans/ routes to reaching them

Option 1 –

Plasticine models- Could you make a model that represents who you are now and one that represents how you imagine yourself when you are about 25? It doesn't have to be an actual person it can be metaphorical [maybe need to explain]

Probe for below

Option 2-

How they see themselves in the future

– **What do you think you might be doing when you are 25 years old?**

Probes:

- What would you **like** to be doing?/ Is this what you would like to be doing or what you think you will most likely be doing?
- If no job mentioned above probe for this e.g. 'Ok and what about jobs?' jobs that interest them, why no ideas?

Their perceptions of their parents views on this

-What would your parents say if I asked them?

Probes:

- Do they know your plans? What do they think of your plans? Do they have plans for you?

Mobility/future family/ partner plans

-Where do you think you'll be living and who do you think you'll be living with (when you are 25)?

Whether they know what they need to do to become (x)

– **What do people have to do to become (x)** [skip if no jobs mentioned]

What are their plans for and post GCSE

- *What GCSE's do you think you might take? What do you think you might do after your GCSE's?*

University/fees

Their knowledge and perceptions of HE and the tuition fees – Vignette

- *Ok so I have some little stories to share with you and ask you some questions about [Refer to Vignette sheet] [Probes for vignette- Are some universities better than others?]*

Their own relationship to HE - [probe questionnaire answers to part A- their plans to attend university or not and reasons for this; who they know who has been to HE]

Their perceptions of schools advice and info re university

- *Has there been anything in school on going to university?*

Probes:

- *If no: has there been anything in school about jobs?*
 - *If yes probe as relevant (what they thought about it/what they got out of it)*
-

Debt

Ok so I have a sheet here with some pictures which represent different ways people borrow money for things and I am going to ask you some questions about what you think about that.

Their familiarity and perceptions of each debt

- *So first of all I just want to know if you have heard of any of these things?*

Probes

- *Which ones they do/don't know about 'Ok so could you just talk me through each of the ones you have heard of and tell me what you know about them'?*
 - *Ok and are they different in any ways?*
-

Whether they anticipate taking on these forms of debt in the future

- *Do you recon you might borrow money in any of these ways in the future at all?*

Ok, is there anything else you want to say about anything we have discussed or anything about university?

THANK YOU

Appendix III.II: Careers Advisor Interview Schedule

What I want to find out - how much they understand the fee system, what their perceptions are of this, where they are guiding their students and whether they offer different advice to different types of students)

Careers Advisor Interview

1. Tasks/Role

- Ok I just want to find out a bit about what your role is within the school and what you do day to day so could you just talk me through that please? [either ask this as an open question and probe for below or just ask each of the below questions]

*(Probe- what do you do day to day? What events do you/the school run? Anything else that falls into their job description (or outside of it)? Do you have any contact with parents (if yes how much and what type of contact). What year groups do you work with and in what ways? **Do you give advice or just information** to your students and parents? Do you provide help with personal statements (and what kind of help)?*

- Do you have any partnerships with any industry and or universities? (if yes- what does this mean in practise- does this have implications for the events you run/ advice offered etc)?
- Have you seen this (and do you use it)? [informed choices doc]

2. Targets/ Time pressures

- So I am aware that it is a very tough time right now for everyone with lots of cuts being made to save money in schools, government and businesses, so I just want to know about any pressures you might be under (time wise or anything else)?
- What do you see as the biggest problem facing you in your job?
- Ok thanks and can you tell me about the targets that you have if any?
(Probe- what are they and who sets them school/govt)
- I am aware that when the government increased the tuition fees a they instructed schools to provide advice and guidance to their pupils from a younger age (year 9) what do you think about this? Does this have any implications for you and your job?

3. Students

Ok so now I just want to ask you a few questions about your work with the students

- What sort of proportion of your students would you say apply to university? What type of institutions do they apply to? Do they get accepted? Where do the rest of the students who don't apply or get into uni tend to end up?
- How do you deal with students who are in your opinion aspiring too low?
- And what about those who are aspiring too high?
- To what extent do you feel that your students are put off by the tuition fees for university? (If applicable) how do you deal with this? Do you think they should be (put off)?
- What do you think of the new fee system?
- Do you think it's worth going to university in this current climate?
- What do you think about your students post-graduation prospects?

Appendix IV: Sample Vignette⁸⁸

Notes: Each vignette was shown (and read) to participants followed by the questions listed below each excerpt. Vignettes were all administered in the below order.

Amy is 18 years old and lives at home in [local city] with her mum and dad. Amy's dad has a disability that prevents him from working and her mum works part time as a cleaner on a low wage so the family doesn't have much money. Amy has just started an English degree at the [local Russell Group University]. She also works at the weekends at Asda.

- 1) Why do you think Amy is going to university?
- 2) How do you think Amy found out about university?
- 3) How much do you think Amy has to pay to go to university?
- 4) How do you think Amy is paying for university?
- 5) What do you think about Amy's decision to go to university and to study English

Jade is 18 years old and has just started [local post 1992 University] studying Law. Her parents both live in [local city] but she decided to move out and is now living in university accommodation (halls of residence). Jade's mother is a Head Teacher and father is a Doctor. She doesn't have a Saturday job but is planning to do some voluntary work in the summer to get some work experience.

- 1) Why do you think Jade is going to university?
- 2) How do you think Jade found out about university?
- 3) How much do you think Jade has to pay to go to university?
- 4) How do you think Jade is paying for university?
- 5) What do you think about Jade's decision to go to university and to study Law?
- 6) Why do you think Amy chose to live at home whilst at university and Jade chose to live in halls of residence?

⁸⁸ Amy and Jade vignettes are included here as a sample. For the male alternatives Amy was changed to Aaron and Jade was renamed Joseph. All other details remain the same across the male/female vignettes.

It turns out that it's going to cost Jade £9,000 per year in tuition fees to go to university. She doesn't have to pay that money up front though; instead she can borrow the money from 'Student Finance England' to pay for this. She can also borrow more money from them if he wants to (up to £5,500 per year), which she could use to help with her living costs.

Amy's course costs the same as Jade's (£9,000 per year) but because her parents don't earn much money the [local Russell Group University] will only charge her £3,500 per year. Like Jade, Amy can also borrow money from 'Student Finance England' so that she doesn't have to pay the £3,500 upfront. Because of her family's low income, Amy will also get £3,354 per year from the government which she won't have to pay back ever. If Amy needs more than this to live on she can borrow a bit more, but she is not able to borrow as much as Jade because she gets this £3,354.

7) What do you think about Amy and Jade's decisions now?

Appendix V: Debt Sheet

Mortgage



Credit Cards



Bright House



Student Loan



Car Finance



Pay Day Loan



Appendix VI: Parental SOC2010 Occupational Groups

Appendix VI.I: Mothers SOC2010 Occupational Groups Table

Table 16: Mothers SOC2010 sub-major and unit groups by school

	Grand Hill Grammar	Einstein High	Eagles Academy
Corporate Managers and Directors			
Chief executives and senior officials	0.6		
Financial managers and directors	1.1	0.4	
Marketing and sales directors	0.6		
Human resource managers and directors	0.6		
Financial institution managers and directors		0.4	
Total	2.9	0.9	
Other Managers and Proprietors			
Restaurant and catering establishment managers and proprietors	0.6	0.4	
Publicans and managers of licensed premises	0.6		1.1
Leisure and sports managers	0.6	0.4	
Health care practice managers	0.6	1.3	
Property, housing and estate managers	1.1		
Total	3.4	2.2	1.1
Science, Research, Engineering and Technology Professionals			
Chemical scientists		0.9	
Biological scientists and biochemists	1.1	0.4	
Natural and social science professionals N.E.C.		0.4	
Civil Engineers	0.6	0.4	
Engineering professionals N.E.C.	0.6	1.3	
IT specialist managers		0.9	
Programmers and software development professionals		0.9	

	Information technology and telecommunications professionals N.E.C.	0.6	0.9	
	Total	2.9	6.2	
Health Professionals				
	Medical practitioners	15.5	9.3	
	Psychologists	1.1	1.3	
	Pharmacists	1.1		
	Ophthalmic opticians		1.3	
	Dental practitioners	2.3	0.9	
	Medical radiographers	1.1	0.4	
	Health professionals N.E.C.	0.6		
	Physiotherapists'	1.7	1.3	
	Speech and language therapists		0.9	
	Therapy professionals N.E.C.		0.4	
	Nurses	4.0	7.0	1.1
	Midwives		0.4	
	Total	27.6	23.3	1.1
Teaching and Educational Professionals				
	Higher education teaching professionals	2.9	1.8	
	Secondary education teaching professionals	9.8	18.9	4.5
	Primary and nursery education teaching professionals	0.6		
	Senior professionals of educational establishments		2.2	
	Teaching and other educational professionals N.E.C	1.1	1.3	
	Total	14.4	24.2	4.5
Business, Media and Public Service Professionals				
	Barristers and judges	3.4	3.1	
	Solicitors		0.4	
	Legal professionals N.E.C.	5.7	3.5	
	Chartered and certified accountants	2.3		

Management consultants and business analysts	3.4	0.4	
Business and financial project management professionals	0.6		
Actuaries, economists and statisticians		0.4	
Architects	0.6	0.4	
Town planning officers	0.6		
Chartered surveyors			1.1
Social workers	0.6	1.8	
Clergy		0.4	
Archivists and curators		0.4	
Journalists, newspaper and periodical editors	0.6	1.8	
Total	17.8	12.8	1.1
Science, Engineering and Technology Associate			
Laboratory technicians		0.4	
IT operations technicians	0.6	0.4	
Total	0.6	0.9	
Health and Social Care Associate Professionals			
Health associate professionals N.E.C.		0.4	
Youth and community workers			1.1
Child and early years officers		0.4	
Counsellors		0.4	
Total		1.3	1.1
Protective Service Occupations			
Police officers	0.6		
Total	0.6		
Cultural, Media and Sports Occupations			
Artists	1.1	1.8	
Authors, writers and translators	0.6	0.4	
Musicians	0.6		
Arts officers, producers and directors	2.9	2.2	

	Product, clothing and related designers	0.6		
	Sports coaches, instructors and officials	1.1		
	Fitness instructors	1.1	0.9	
	Total	8.0	5.3	
Business and Public Service Associate Professionals				
	Finance and investment analysts and advisers		0.9	
	Business sales executives		0.4	
	Marketing associate professionals	2.3	1.3	
	Estate agents and auctioneers	0.6	0.9	
	Sales accounts and business development managers	0.6	0.4	
	Public services associate professionals	1.1	0.9	
	Human resources and industrial relations officers		0.4	
	Total	4.6	5.3	
Administrative Occupations				
	National government administrative occupations	1.1		
	Book-keepers, payroll managers and wages clerks	1.1	0.4	2.2
	Bank and post office clerks			1.1
	Financial administrative occupations N.E.C.		0.9	2.2
	Other administrative occupations N.E.C.	0.6	1.3	
	Total	2.9	2.6	5.6
Secretarial and Related Occupations				
	Medical secretaries	0.6		
	Legal secretaries		0.4	
	School secretaries	0.6	0.4	
	Personal assistants and other secretaries		0.4	
	Receptionists	1.7	1.8	3.4
	Total	2.9	3.1	3.4
Agricultural and Related Trades				

	Gardeners and landscape gardeners		1.3	
	Total		1.3	
Skilled Metal, Electrical and Electronic Trades				
	IT engineers		0.4	
	Total		0.4	
Skilled Construction and Building Trades				
	Carpenters and joiners			1.1
	Total			1.1
Textiles, Printing and Other Skilled Trades				
	Chefs	0.6	0.4	1.1
	Catering and bar managers	0.6		1.1
	Glass and ceramics makers, decorators and finishers		0.4	
	Other skilled trades N.E.C.	0.6	0.4	
	Total	1.7	1.3	2.2
Caring Personal Service Occupations				
	Nursery nurses and assistants	0.6	1.3	
	Childminders and related occupations		1.8	1.1
	Teaching assistants	1.7	0.9	1.1
	Educational support assistants	0.6	0.4	1.1
	Nursing auxiliaries and assistants	0.6		
	Care workers and home carers	0.6	0.9	19.1
	Total	4.0	5.3	22.5
Leisure, Travel and Related Personal Service Occupations				
	Travel agents	1.1		
	Hairdressers and barbers	0.6	0.9	5.6
	Beauticians and related occupations	1.1	0.4	
	Total	2.9	1.3	5.6
Sales Occupations				
	Sales and retail assistants	1.1	0.9	7.9
	Retail cashiers and check-out operators			7.9

	Merchandisers and window dressers	1.1		
	Sales related occupations N.E.C.	0.6	0.4	2.2
	Total	2.9	1.3	18.0
Customer Service Occupations				
	Call and contact centre occupations		0.4	
	Total		0.4	
Transport and Mobile Machine Drivers and Operatives				
	Van drivers			1.1
	Rail transport operatives			1.1
	Other drivers and transport operatives N.E.C.			1.1
	Total			3.4
Elementary Administration and Service Occupations				
	Cleaners and domestics			13.5
	School midday and crossing patrol occupations			5.6
	Elementary security occupations N.E.C.			1.1
	Elementary storage occupations		0.4	
	Kitchen and catering assistants			3.4
	Bar staff			4.5
	Other elementary services occupations N.E.C.			1.1
	Total		0.4	29.2
Total Count N=100%		174	227	89

Notes: (%) have been rounded. Unit group totals do not add up to major sub-group totals due to rounding. Those 'not working' have been excluded from the calculations.

Appendix VI.II: Fathers SOC2010 Occupational Groups Table

Table 17: Fathers SOC2010 sub-major and unit groups by school

	Grand Hill Grammar	Einstein High	Eagles Academy
Corporate Managers and Directors			
Chief executives and senior officials		1.3	
Elected officers and representatives		0.4	
Production managers and directors in construction		0.4	
Financial managers and directors	2.6	3.1	
Marketing and sales directors	1.0		
Human resource managers and directors	1.0	1.3	
Information technology and telecommunications directors		0.4	
Functional managers and directors N.E.C.	0.5	0.9	
Managers and directors in storage and warehousing			2.6
Officers in armed forces	1.0	1.3	1.3
Managers and directors in retail and wholesale		0.4	1.3
Total	6.2	9.6	5.1
Other Managers and Proprietors			
Hotel and accommodation managers and proprietors	0.5		
Restaurant and catering establishment managers and proprietors	0.5	0.9	
Property, housing and estate managers	1.0		
Shopkeepers and proprietors – wholesale and retail	0.5		1.3
Managers and proprietors in other services N.E.C.	0.5	0.9	
Total	3.1	1.7	1.3
Science, Research, Engineering and Technology Professionals			

Biological scientists and biochemists	0.5		
Physical scientists	0.5		
Natural and social science professionals N.E.C.	0.5	0.9	
Civil Engineers	2.1	0.9	
Mechanical engineers	0.5	0.9	
Electrical engineers		0.4	
Design and development engineers		0.4	
Production and process engineers		0.4	
Engineering professionals N.E.C.	3.1	5.6	1.3
IT specialist managers	0.5	3.5	
IT business analysts, architects and systems designers		0.9	
Programmers and software development professionals	2.1	1.7	
Web design and development professionals	0.5	0.4	
Information technology and telecommunications professionals N.E.C.	2.6	0.9	
Total	12.9	17.0	1.3
Health Professionals			
Medical practitioners	13.9	5.7	1.3
Psychologists		2.2	
Pharmacists		0.4	
Dental practitioners	2.1		
Physiotherapists'		0.4	
Therapy professionals N.E.C.	0.5		
Nurses		0.9	
Total	16.5	9.6	1.3
Teaching and Educational Professionals			
Higher education teaching professionals	4.1	5.2	
Secondary education teaching professionals	3.1	5.7	
Senior professionals of educational establishments	0.5	1.7	

	Teaching and other educational professionals N.E.C,		0.4	
	Total	7.7	13.1	
Business, Media and Public Service Professionals				
	Barristers and judges	1.0	1.3	
	Solicitors	1.0	0.9	
	Legal professionals N.E.C.	5.7	3.9	
	Chartered and certified accountants	6.7	0.9	
	Management consultants and business analysts	4.6	3.5	
	Business and financial project management professionals	3.1	0.9	
	Actuaries, economists and statisticians	0.5	0.4	
	Architects	1.5	1.3	
	Quantity surveyors	0.5		
	Chartered surveyors	2.6	1.7	
	Social workers		0.4	
	Clergy	1.0	0.9	
	Quality assurance and regulatory professionals	0.5		
	Journalists, newspaper and periodical editors	0.5	1.7	
	Total	29.4	17.9	
Science, Engineering and Technology Associate				
	Science, engineering and production technicians N.E.C.			2.6
	IT operations TECHNICIANS	0.5	3.5	
	IT user support technicians	0.5	0.4	
	Total	1.0	3.9	2.6
Health and Social Care Associate Professionals				
	Child and early years officers		0.4	
	Counsellors	0.5		
	Total	0.5	0.4	

Protective Service Occupations			
Fire service officers (watch manager and below)		0.4	
Prison service officers (below principal officer)			2.6
Protective service associate professionals N.E.C.		0.4	
Total		0.9	2.6
Cultural, Media and Sports Occupations			
Authors, writers and translators	0.5	1.3	
Musicians		1.3	
Arts officers, producers and directors	3.6	2.2	
Graphic designers		1.7	
Product, clothing and related designers	0.5	0.4	1.3
Total	4.6	7.0	1.3
Business and Public Service Associate Professionals			
Aircraft pilots and flight engineers	2.1	1.3	
Brokers	0.5	0.9	
Finance and investment analysts and advisers	0.5		
Taxation experts	0.5		
Business and related associate professionals N.E.C.	0.5		
Business sales executives	1.0	0.4	
Estate agents and auctioneers	0.5	0.9	
Sales accounts and business development managers	2.6	1.3	
Public services associate professionals		0.9	
Human resources and industrial relations officers	0.5		
Careers advisers and vocational guidance specialists		0.4	
Total	8.8	6.1	
Administrative Occupations			

National government administrative occupations	0.5		1.3
Book-keepers, payroll managers and wages clerks	0.5		
Total	1.0		1.3
Secretarial and Related Occupations			
Medical secretaries	0.5		
Total	0.5		
Agricultural and Related Trades			
Gardeners and landscape gardeners		0.9	
Total		0.9	
Skilled Metal, Electrical and Electronic Trades			
Metal working production and maintenance fitters			9.0
Vehicle body builders and repairers			2.6
Vehicle paint technicians			1.3
Electricians and electrical fitters		1.3	1.3
Total		1.3	14.1
Skilled Construction and Building Trades			
Roofers, roof tilers and slaters			1.3
Plumbers and heating and ventilating engineers		0.9	2.6
Carpenters and joiners			1.3
Glaziers, window fabricators and fitters		0.4	
Construction and building trades N.E.C.	3.1	3.5	9.0
Plasterers			1.3
Painters and decorators		0.4	2.6
Construction and building trades supervisors			1.3
Total	3.1	5.2	19.2
Textiles, Printing and Other Skilled Trades			
Chefs		1.3	2.6
Catering and bar managers			1.3
Other skilled trades N.E.C.	0.5		

	Total	0.5	1.3	3.8
Caring Personal Service Occupations				
	Educational support assistants		0.4	
	Care workers and home carers		0.4	1.3
	Total		0.9	1.3
Leisure, Travel and Related Personal Service Occupations				
	Hairdressers and barbers	0.5		
	Caretakers			3.8
	Total	0.5		3.8
Sales Occupations				
	Sales and retail assistants			1.3
	Retail cashiers and check-out operators			1.3
	Sales related occupations N.E.C.	0.5	0.4	1.3
	Total	0.5	0.4	3.8
Process, Plant and Machine Operatives				
	Chemical and related process operatives			1.3
	Energy plant operatives	0.5		
	Scaffolders, staggers and riggers			1.3
	Total	0.5		2.6
Transport and Mobile Machine Drivers and Operatives				
	Large goods vehicle drivers	0.5		6.4
	Van drivers	0.5	0.9	6.4
	Bus and coach drivers			2.6
	Taxi and cab drivers and chauffeurs	1.5	0.4	
	Driving instructors			1.3
	Rail transport operatives			1.3
	Total	2.6	1.3	17.9
Elementary Trades and Related Occupations				
	Elementary construction occupations		0.4	1.3
	Elementary process plant occupations N.E.C.		0.4	1.3

	Postal workers, mail sorters, messengers and couriers			2.6
	Total		0.9	2.6
Elementary Administration and Service Occupations				
	Window cleaners			1.3
	Cleaners and domestics			1.3
	Launderers, dry cleaners and pressers		0.4	
	Refuse and salvage occupations			2.6
	Security guards and related occupations			2.6
	Elementary security occupations N.E.C.			1.3
	Elementary storage occupations			2.6
	Total		0.4	14.1
Total Count N = 100%		194	229	78

Notes: (%) have been rounded. Unit group totals do not add up to major sub-group totals due to rounding. Those 'not working' have been excluded from the calculations.

Appendix IX: Summary Table of School Demographics

	Grand Hill Grammar	Einstein High	Eagles Academy
School Status	Independent School	Academy - Converter Mainstream	Academy-Sponsor Led
% achieving 5A*-C GCSE (or equivalent) including English and maths in 2015 (average for England 54%)	99 (70 A/A*)	87	48
FSM 2014 (%)	NA	4	40
SEN 2014 (%)	NA	5	18
IMD Rank (LSOA)	Top 30%	Top 30%	Bottom 5%
IDACI Rank (LSOA)	0.07	0.06	0.62
% Mothers NS-SEC 1-3	72	78	9
% Fathers NS-SEC 1-3	88	86	12
% Mothers 'not working'	20	12	52
% Father 'not working'	2	1	30
% of Mothers reported to have attended University	74	70	9
% of Fathers reported to have attended University	75	75	12
% Parents who own their home	91	89	29

Appendix X: Grand Hill Grammar Careers Event Question Sheet

CAREERS EVENT (21.11.14)

L6 – some points to ponder and questions to consider:

- Please can you give us more detail about what you actually do.
- Is Higher Education really worth it?
- What about alternatives – what experience do you have that encourages us to consider those?
- What do you feel university life really gave you?
- Looking back would you have made different university choices?
- Does your company recruit from any particular universities?
- Would having a first degree from a European university be seen as positive or even an advantage by employers in the UK?
- Do any of you have any experience of studying abroad?
- Looking back over your career to date do you feel you have always made wise decisions?
- How did you get your first job on graduation?
- What contacts have been the most helpful?
- How has social media affected the way you work?
- What tips can you offer on CVs and interviews?
- Is any work experience better than none?
- What place does luck or chance play?
- How did you continue to develop skills in your workplace?
- What would you value highly in your work place?
- Can travel enhance job prospects?
- What about languages?
- Can you identify any skills shortages in your sector? Would developing these enhance our job prospects?
- Extra curricular activities – how significant are they to employers?

Other things to consider, question or discuss:

- Salaries.
- Sciences vs Arts.
- Post graduate study.
- Internships – exactly what are they?
- Working abroad.
- The position of women in the work place/equal opportunities.
- Self employment.
- Job applications – searching for jobs.
- Lifestyle – the impact a career choice has.

pto to make your notes