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Education and Social Mobility: Leader and Learner Voices within the Prism of Perspectives

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Abstract

In this thesis I argue that the classic '*get good grades get a good job*' narrative of education's relationship with social mobility is a misappropriation and represents cruel optimism for most learners.

In policy, a contemporary education has been framed by the incumbent and successive governments as an emancipatory tool and therefore a premier conduit for social mobility in England. *In Theory*, a contemporary education is accused of primarily being a reproductive mechanism as educational outcomes possess symbolic power which legitimises class inequality as justly unequal thus presenting an apparition of meritocracy.

The aim of this thesis, then, was to understand better how secondary school leaders and learners understood social mobility and its seemingly dystopian relationship with education *in practice*. Using a social constructivist ontological perspective, semi-structured interviews with three head teachers and three semi-structured focus groups with 14 learners, the perceived role of education in the processes of social mobility were illuminated. Specific focus within the interpretive phenomenological analysis was how social, cultural and economic capital were *believed* to play out within the leader and learner's specific contexts.

Key findings noted that the head teachers overwhelmingly credited a contemporary education with being the single most important conduit for social mobility with a maintained class structure. Paradoxically, it was also conceded by all head teachers that inequality was systemically inbuilt and therefore education served, on the whole, to maintain not eradicate English class structures. Learners were almost absolute in the belief that outcomes of a contemporary education would deliver social mobility. They saw the accumulation of symbolic capital (formal qualifications) as almost a direct and assured exchange mechanism for accumulation of high levels of economic capital and thus a worthy pursuit. This symbolic capital to economic capital exchange mechanism was viewed as dichotomous in nature as dominant narratives centred around a lack of symbolic capital leading to destitution.

Finally, the learners perceived the labour market to be meritocratic and credentials were the legitimate, and unquestioned, currency with barely a mention of the importance of cultural or social capital when seeking employment. This was evidenced by their apparent

inability even to identify what may constitute as social and cultural capital and how they might be employed in the processes of social mobility.

I conclude by recommending that educational leaders do what they can to arm learners with an understanding of societal inequality and problematise any simplistic views that guarantee a learner will be socially mobile with only symbolic capital to employ. For this deeper understanding to occur, leaders and learners need not only an understanding of what social and cultural capital are but how they are an important and underappreciated part of the equation of converting symbolic into economic capital. Limitations of these conclusions are in line with the chosen qualitative research paradigm and further questions raised from this study centre around where the leaders and learners' beliefs stem from. An understanding of this may further assist the field of knowledge surrounding social mobility which has been accused of being so poorly understood. Given limited space at the top of society and myriad nuanced barriers needed to be overcome to get there; social mobility for *all* appears at best as oxymoronic as the cruel optimism it arguably represents.

*Nobody heard him, the dead man,
But still he lay moaning:
I was much further out than you thought
And not waving but drowning.*

*Poor chap, he always loved larking
And now he is dead
It must have been too cold for him his heart gave way,
They said.*

*Oh, no no no, it was too cold always
(Still the dead one lay moaning)
I was much too far out all my life
And not waving but drowning.*

Stevie Smith 1953.

*Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half-light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet:
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.*

William Butler Yeats 1899.

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I would like to thank the leaders and the year 10 learners that assisted me with my work at Ashdown Academy, Gapston School, Runborough school, Fannersfield Academy and Castlewood School. At each school I found enthusiastic leaders and learners who were very willing to give me their honest and frank opinions.

Finally I would like to acknowledge my local Grammar School where I grew up. I did not pass the entrance exam, as I was not coached as many of my peers were, which resulted in me being placed in a school of those who were left devoid of hope and ambition. In a twist of fate it was this disillusionment aged 11 that has been a driver for doing this doctorate many years later.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my nephew, Austin who was born on the very same day it was completed. You were born into more opportunity than you will ever realise, and more than your mum and I could have conceptualised let alone dreamed of. I look forward to meeting you soon.

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List of Abbreviations

A level	Advanced Level
AS	Advanced Subsidiary
A2	Final Year A Level Study
BERA	British Education Research Association
BIS	Department for Business, Skills and Innovation
DfE	Department for Education
EBacc	English Baccalaureate
FSM	Free School Meals
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HMSO	Her Majesties Stationary Office
HMC	Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference
IPA	Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
ISI	Independent School Inspectorate
OECD	Organisation for Economic co-operation and Development
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
SMC	Social Mobility Commission
SMCP	Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission
UK	United Kingdom

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1.0 Introduction

Education is considered to be an important vehicle through which social mobility can occur (DfE 2010a; SMCP 2015; DfE 2017a) as the level of qualifications a learner achieves in England, for example GCSEs, A levels and degrees, are a significant predictor of upward social mobility (Forrest et al 2011). Improved levels of social mobility were a key goal of the Conservative/Liberal coalition government (The Cabinet Office 2012) as rates of relative social mobility did not improve in the UK from the early 1970s to 2005 (Goldthorpe and Mills 2008). The incumbent Conservative Government confirmed progress on social mobility has stalled (The Prime Minister's Office 2015). When considering the relationship between socio-economic situation and achievement of credentials, the terms '*elitism*' and '*social engineering*' (SMCP 2014, p10) have been used. These succinctly describe the ability of education, and specifically the outcomes of a contemporary education, to reproduce inequalities of condition rather than allow individuals to transcend them (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Reay 2006; Nunn 2012; Mortimore 2014).

Restrictions on access to professions due to credential barriers increases economic rewards to individuals who possess the symbolic capital (for example GCSEs and A levels) required to be a member (Weeden 2002). This symbolic capital need not be credentials as it can simply be about the specific institution a learner attends (Tholen 2017). This phenomenon is known as social closure (Weber 1922). Muller (2015, p137) argues that social closure is more prevalent in recent times due to education being increasingly viewed as '*an antecedent of life course events and trajectories*'. This has been termed credential inflation (Bills and Brown 2011) due to the ever-increasing influence credentials, in the form of qualifications, have had on education over the past four decades (Barker 2011). A key proponent of social closure is the, arguably evermore realised, postmodern prediction whereby '*knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold*' so that '*knowledge ceases to be an end in itself*' (Lyotard 1984, p4-5). This has increased middle class families' capabilities to '*buy in*' educational advantage through tutoring and other extracurricular resources (Ball 2010). This propensity serves to problematise the persistent political narrative that education '*can play a vital role*' (DfE 2017a, p5) in increasing the chances of an individual being socially mobile in England. Paradoxically, the labour market may not be as meritocratic as is widely

internalised and is therefore accused of being, in practice, an important conspirator in the processes of 'symbolic closure'; the likelihood of symbolic capital to act much more of a barrier to mobility than a conduit (Tholen 2017).

If education is the social mobility panacea of our times, a climate of increasing social and symbolic closure and the marketisation of education is a diverging path from political rhetoric espoused by the Department of Education (DfE 2017a). One of many such examples of the political fusing of social mobility and education is Theresa May's first statement as Prime Minister. She focused on the comparable lack of working class male university uptake and the relative future career advantages of privately educated learners (The Prime Minister's Office 2016) whilst offering no solutions as to what the conduits for this proclivity were, or how they could be overcome. Her statement served to maintain social mobility's '*iconic place in contemporary British political discourse*' (Reay 2013, p662). It also supports the sentiment that politicians treat the processes of social mobility with a casual disregard for the complex social and cultural facets, favouring a focus on weaknesses in the education system as opposed to wider societal concerns (Hoskins and Barker 2014). This belief was further crystallised with the resignation of all four members of the incumbent Government's Social Mobility Commission in December 2017. The head of the commission, Alan Milburn, alleged that there was '*little hope of the current Government making the progress I believe is necessary to bring about a fairer Britain*' (Austin 2017, p1).

Doubt has also been cast on educational professionals' latent ability to overcome the entrenched inequality that exists within both society and the structure of the education system itself (Ball 2010, Goldthorpe 2012), in direct conflict with the belief of education policy makers (DfE 2017a). Education's role in facilitating social mobility may be diminished by the belief that '*schools appear only to have leverage on a small amount of attainment*' and '*we have to look elsewhere for the rest*' (Ball 2010, p157). When studies into the more nuanced areas of socialisation within family life and social reproduction are taken into account (Bourdieu 1990a; Lareau 2011; Reay 2017) home life appears to be a salient part of the '*elsewhere*' Ball (2010) was referring to and thus beyond education policy remit.

Epistemological issues surrounding the way government policy tends to handle the issue of social mobility have also been raised (Bertaux and Thompson 1997; Savage 2006). The Government's consistent use of quantitative metrics to study it has been criticised as resembling the '*observation of a carnival through a keyhole*' (Bertaux and Thompson 1997, p6). A prominent example is the Social Mobility Index which uses data sets to identify social mobility hot and cold spots (SMCP 2016) but offers little insight into barriers to social mobility for policy makers and professionals. By not illuminating the '*weaknesses and blind spots*' (Savage 2006, p300) the barriers to someone being socially mobile are still poorly understood (Hoskins and Barker 2014).

The ability of education to be a vehicle for social mobility *for the many* is then in doubt (see Mortimore 2014; Hoskins and Barker 2014, Payne 2017). Critics of the political focus on social mobility have discussed the phenomenon as being the wrong answer to the wrong problem and an example of politicians being determined to believe we have a problem that does not exist (Saunders 2012b, online). The implicit assumption from government rhetoric that increased social mobility is the answer to entrenched inequality within English society has also been strongly challenged at the societal level as '*a very inadequate sticking plaster over the gaping wound that social inequalities have become*' (Reay 2017, p3). On an individual level Reay's criticism of social mobility as a policy objective is even more derisive:

Social mobility rips working-class young people out of communities that need to hold onto them, and it rips valuable aspects of self out of the socially mobile themselves as they are forced to discard qualities and dispositions that do not accord with the dominant middle-class culture that is increasingly characterized by selfish individualism and hyper-competition (Reay 2013, p667).

Social mobility is, therefore, a complex and sometimes misunderstood phenomenon. A discordant and uneasy paradox has arisen in that social mobility policy, which I perceive to be individualist in nature (BIS 2011, p6), may be serving to legitimise the entrenched advantages of the few by placing the blame on failure to transcend class barriers on the individual and levels of accumulated symbolic capital alone.

The phenomenon being explored in this study is education's role within social mobility and this is where I locate this thesis. In short, I find that popular theoretical positions on

education's role in the processes of social mobility seek, in the main, to expose the political position as largely paradoxical. I therefore explored leader and learner voices from those engaged in the education system *themselves*. This will provide the *in practice* perspective to the debate that I have come to feel is so often lacking.

1.1 Theoretical lens and understanding of the educational field

I strongly adhere to the metaphor that the educational field is a '*prism of perspectives...ever changing depending on which direction it is experienced and viewed from*' and is shaped by three distinct pillars: policy, theory and practice (O'Grady and Cottle 2016, px). Political and theoretical perspectives are used to shape argument throughout this thesis with the field-work undertaken designed to illuminate how these influences are understood and internalised in practice. I believe ultimately informing practice is the overarching purpose of a Professional Doctorate thesis. An important note, however, is that this thesis does not attempt to analyse learner and leader perspectives through the lens of intersectionality which is '*focusing on the intersection of multiple systems of oppression*' (Romero 2018, p8). While accepted this is a very powerful tool when framing social justice issues I want to tell the story of individual learners and leaders from their own world viewpoints.

Intersectionality is to impart segmentation based on socio-economic characteristics thus homogenising their lived experience with preconceived ideas of how their injustice must be derived by the experiences of other people. To do this angle of enquiry justice this would also require a level of knowledge and potentially first-hand experience of the struggles of race, gender, sexuality and disability which this thesis cannot do justice to.

In making sense of practice, the thinking tools of Bourdieu were employed as much of his academic work can be related to unpicking the complex relationship education has with social mobility. He also concedes that his conceptual anthology is a collection of '*open concepts designed to guide empirical work*' (Bourdieu 1990b, p107) meaning they are not a rigid cohesive theory (Van de Werfhorst and Hofstede 2007). Foucault, among other philosophers, was considered and while I do not doubt there is relevance in that his work focuses on '*power relations embedded in social life*' and how '*the conduct of individuals and groups is directed [and] subject to government*' (Smart 2002, xv), I interpret his work much more about the critique of institutions as opposed to how individuals experience them in practice.

Bourdieu's work will provide a lens to assist in the interpretation and analysis of learners' experiences of social mobility in its natural setting as '*a theory for the dialectical analysis of practical life*' (Harker, Mahar and Wilkes 2010, p3). This succinctly describes the inevitability and perhaps essential nature of differing viewpoints on educational practice within this complex social field. I place specific attention on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital and symbolic violence. These ideas resonate so strongly with my own experiences within the field as a learner and a practitioner. The definitions in the following table provide an overview followed by a brief discussion of their spatial relatability and key criticisms.

Thinking tool	Explanation
Field	A metaphysical location which agents are stratified into their social positions. This position is gained via the jostling of an agents individual habitus with the rules of the field as well as the combination of social, economic and cultural capital they have to deploy (Bourdieu 1984)
Habitus	Transmitted through the home and broadly a set of attitudes and values (Bourdieu 1990). Dominant habitus is said to be that of the dominant middle and upper classes for which a positive attitude towards education is typical (Sullivan 2002).
Economic capital	The amount of money or assets that are easily converted to money an individual or family have access to (Bourdieu 1986).
Social capital	The total of potential resources that are linked to possession of a durable social network (Bourdieu 1986).
Cultural capital	Knowledge and intellectual skill that achieves the culture of the dominant classes (Bourdieu 1986). The closer to the culture of the dominant classes you are the more cultural capital you possess.
Symbolic capital	Generally unrecognised as capital but more as legitimate competence (Bourdieu 1986). An example is credentials such as A levels and degrees.
Symbolic violence	In this context, the use of symbolic capital to justify the social order and for dominated agents to accept it as fair (Bourdieu 1990a).

These concepts interact within Bourdieu's notion of class which is a '*competitive striving in which struggles for economic position and for status are connected as the differences between legitimate tastes and less legitimate ones*' (Bennett 2010, pxx). One instance of

how the concepts of capital can be operationalised in understanding class boundaries was Savage et al (2013) whose Great British Class Survey is discussed later.

Bourdieu theorised that a way legitimate tastes were produced and reproduced was transmission in many nuanced ways through the home, termed an actor's habitus (Bourdieu 1990). This class struggle between what is and is not legitimised then plays out within a field. In the case of this thesis it is each leader and learner's school acting as the institution of legitimation with its own collective institutional habitus which has been termed the '*silent curriculum*' (Blaxter and Hughes 2003, p6). It is understood that educational institutions with their

own history and practice develops an ethos which can be transmitted to its pupils. All those who belong to the institution, whether in the role of for example, pupil, parent or teacher, contribute to its habitus (Byrom 2009).

An educational institution, then, is the physical manifestation of Bourdieu's metaphysical notion of field. In its widest sense, however, the field is formal education as fields are not discrete and do overlap. Within the field of education actors '*compete with one another in a 'game' whose outcomes are determined by the volumes of economic, social and cultural capital they are able to accumulate as well as by the relative weighting of these different capitals*' (Bennett 2010, pxxi). Increasing credentialism would suggest that more than ever the outcome of a contemporary education, and therefore what learners are combining these to achieve, is legitimate competence or symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1986) examples are GCSEs and A levels which can then be deployed in the labour market. It is, therefore, possible to theorise that the more capital a learner has to employ and the more they have the ability to align their individual habitus to that of the institution the higher their chances of securing greater symbolic capital. For Bourdieu, education is predominantly a field that wields the tools of symbolic violence required for reproduction much more than emancipation (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977), '*while individuals do have agency, social institutions constrain the choices they can make*' (Romero 2018, p18).

Symbolic violence is an analysis of the processes of maintaining domination upon dominated agents within a given structure (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) and related to this field would be the use of symbolic capital to legitimise class structures as justly unfair and

'to impose a definition of the social world that is consistent with [the ruling classes] interests' (Bourdieu 1979, p80). This world view, which is focused on conflict with domination and dominated agents, has been criticised for being far too fatalistic or static, considering it is a thinking tool to understand dynamic and complex practice. By focusing on reproduction and almost ignoring any resistance or agency the theory has *'little faith in subordinate classes and groups and little hope in their ability or willingness to reconstruct the conditions under which they live, work and learn'* (Giroux 1983, p274). My personal experience of the field has been one that has been much more about being dominated and aligning to the dominant habitus than resistance. As Reay (2006 p304) proclaimed about education policy *'the more things change the more they stay the same'* and so this is why I give more weight to the domination rather than resistance viewpoint and view Bourdieu's focus on domination as pragmatic. Jenkins (2002) levies criticism at the core of Bourdieu's understanding of class. By using *'aggregate statistical data about individuals classified according to formal occupation [Bourdieu] imports into his research a somewhat impoverished understanding of class identity (as occupation)'* (Jenkins 2002, p88). He also writes that the use of *'routine classificatory categories'* such as those in the table above are *'particularly problematic as they are not, as it were, naturally occurring phenomena which present themselves for study in a direct and unproblematic fashion'* (Jenkins 2002, p176).

I accept the need for caution when utilising these classifications to help understand education's relationship with the processes of social mobility but also they will still be very useful in assisting the analysis to have direction and purpose. Aligned to my methods discussed later they fit with the double hermeneutic that will be central to analysis in that I will be interpreting how someone else interprets their world. The ability to make sense of this using these thinking tools is still a valid pursuit. Bourdieu's *'impoverished understanding of class identity'* (Jenkins 2002, p88) is consistent with rhetoric I have encountered in both academic and education policy documents and therefore I am constrained in my use of class more from work external. *'Bourdieu's work, then, despite all of its problems, remains worthy of our most serious attention'* (Jenkins 2002, p180).

1.2 Researcher positionality

First and foremost, I view myself as a teaching professional. I am a teacher in my eighth year teaching Business and Economics to learners aged 14 to 18 years old.

My interest in social mobility and credentials is primarily derived from my practice as a teacher in a predominantly traditional working class, ex-mining town for four years and then becoming a middle leader and also a live in assistant housemaster in a co-educational Head Masters Conference (HMC) independent day and boarding school. Equal to this is my own traditional working class upbringing as both my parents left school aged fifteen with no credentials and follow consumption patterns of typically working class cultural and social capital. Finally, my realisation of the requirement to modify my own world view as I have negotiated the English education system (Byrom 2010). A journey that was not smooth due, in part, to the more obvious financial issues stemming from my class reality but also to the much more nuanced deficiencies in my social and cultural capital.

I am a benefactor and proof that education *can* deliver social mobility in that I use my education every day to justify my occupational position. Whilst much has been gained materially, including large amounts of typically middle class mortgage debt, this continued drive to advance my social situation has had ironic consequences of becoming blissfully anti-social in many ways, which is a world away from the community I grew up in (Reay 2013). More and more I realise my monumental effort to transition into a perceived higher social status has had profound implications.

1.3 The research participants

For the purposes of my research, the young people involved will be referred to as learners. This is because in my research I see myself as exactly that. I learn from them, they learn from me and this aligns with my social constructivist ontological world view (Merrill 1991). The use of student or pupil for me has connotations of a relationship that is uneven or one sided and this is not what the ethos of my research is about. I cannot, however, be naïve to the inevitable power differences between myself and my participants therefore the impact of this was explored when selecting research tools. These tool are intended foster an appreciation that teachers and learners need each other and have to work as '*active*

partners' for learner voice based research methods to be worthwhile and successful (Fielding 2004, p307).

1.4 An understanding class and social mobility

Marx's classical social theory of class outlined conflict between two distinct classes: the dominant bourgeoisie and the dominated proletariat. What distinguishes these classes in Marxist theory is the extent to which they either control production and productive resources or are themselves the producers (Marx 1887). Weber, building on the work of Marx, divides workers into working and middle class on the basis of whether they hold formal credentials or have to sell their labour (Weber 1922). Needless to say occupational divides have now become *'increasingly blurred in today's more service-orientated economies'* (Rossiter 2012, p90).

A more modern notion is that class, and the relationship of which to education I explore throughout this thesis, is that it is no longer defined simply by occupation or economic capital accumulated but also social, cultural and symbolic capital possessed (Bourdieu 1986). It is proposed by some sociologists (Savage 2000; Skeggs 2004) that culture and patterns of consumption define class boundaries and it will be of interest to see whether learners in this thesis align use this lens or a more classical lens when discussing education's relationship with class barriers.

The meaning I prescribe to the term social mobility within education is, at the most basic level, the chances of working class children relative to the chances of middle class children (Saunders 2012a). I do not, however, have space in this thesis to fully explore my dissatisfaction with traditional working and middle class categorisation when unpicking the complexities of social mobility (Byrom 2009). Needless to say, this simplistic rhetoric is the popular discourse in policy and theory, so I will be referring to these terms well as attempting to update them somewhat in the contemporary narratives part of the literature discussion. It is also important to make the distinction here between absolute social mobility and relative social mobility. Absolute social mobility is when increased prosperity brings upward mobility for families at all points in the income distribution (O'grady and Cottle 2015). Relative mobility is the degree of social fluidity (Goldthorpe 2007) which is a *'measure of the relative chances of mobility of those born into different social classes*

regardless of how the class or occupational structure may change over time' (Brown 2013, p681). I interpret social mobility to be the latter as absolute mobility is not influenced at the level of the individual where as political rhetoric surrounding social mobility often is.

2.0 The Aim of This Thesis

This thesis represents phase three of my study (see conceptual framework below) and follows field work done with head teachers and learners in Holbrook (2017a) and Holbrook (2017b) respectively. The aim of this thesis is to primarily allow leader and learner voice to be heard in order to garner my participants' perspective on social mobility's relationship with education *in practice*. Of specific interest will be their understanding of the function of a contemporary education in the processes of social mobility (and indeed backwards mobility).

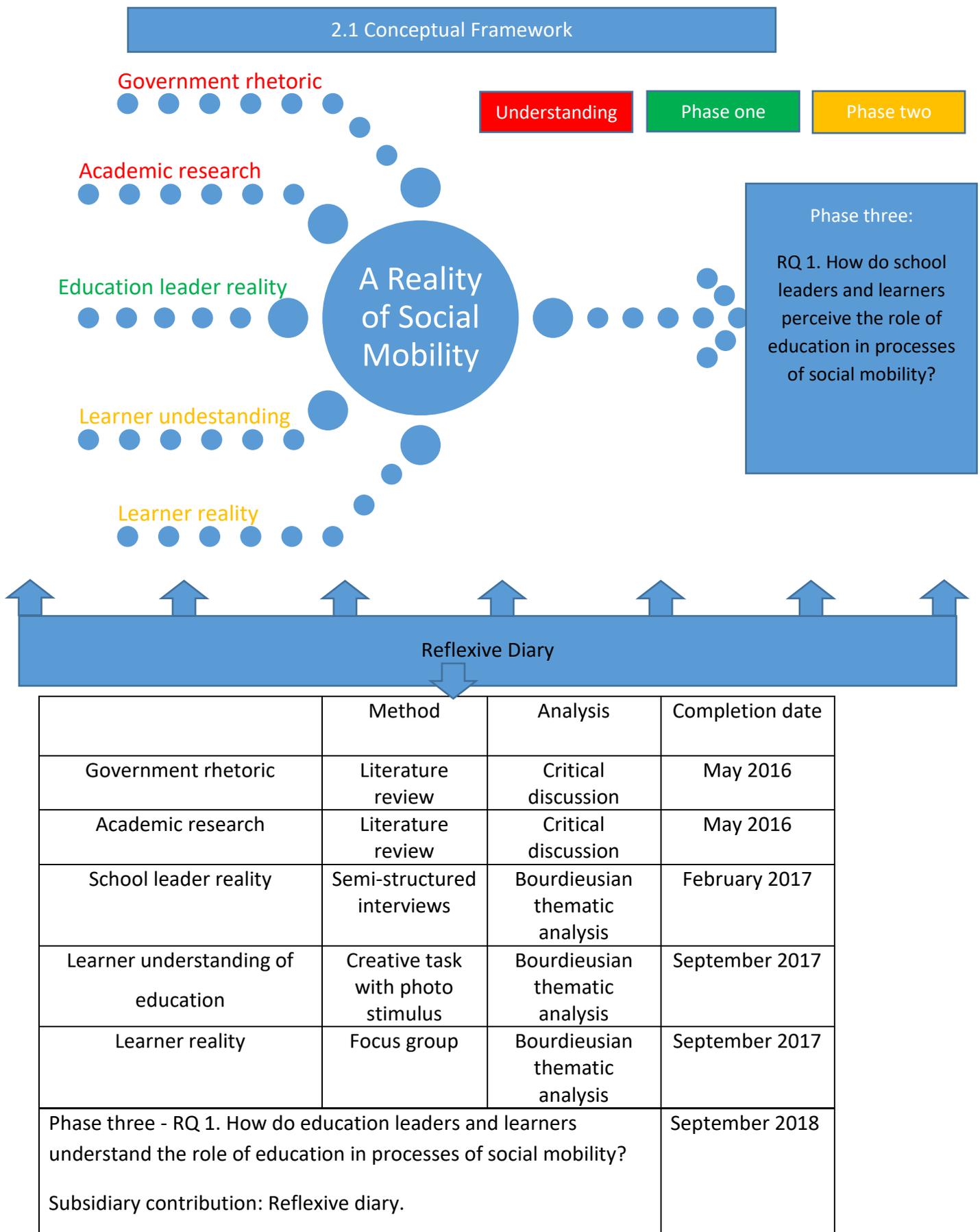
The following are the research questions of the overall study with this thesis answering RQ 1 as outlined in the conceptual framework below.

RQ 1. How do education leaders and learners understand the role of education in processes of social mobility?

The following subsidiary research questions were explored to inform RQ 1 during phase one and phase two respectively:

SRQ 1: To what extent is social mobility an agenda item for education leaders?

SRQ 2: What do learners understand about social mobility and education's relationship with it?



3.0 Contemporary Narratives from The Prism of Perspectives

By synthesising educational policy, theory and practice (O’Grady and Cottle 2016, px) I explore positions that allow the findings of this thesis to be located within and contrasted with dominant theoretical and socially constructed political narratives. These narratives become the areas of critical exploration within this section and centre on social mobility and how credentials are deployed within the labour market.

3.1 Social mobility and the English class system

Social class has been referred to as *‘a zombie that stalks English schools’* (Reay 2006, p288). This is mainly derived from the belief that educational policy has had virtually no impact on educational inequality which is helping to perpetuate social reproduction. Despite this, the DfE still frames class as something that, through education, can be transcended by all (DfE 2010a; DfE 2018) if you are the *‘right kind of self’* (Gillies 2005, p839). Classical class discourse is part of our history but is no longer fit for modern purposes (Trude 2008), yet social mobility in education is still viewed as the chances of working class children relative to the chances of middle class children (Saunders 2012a). It is, then, a source of frustration that overwhelmingly the literature *‘refers to a dichotomous relationship when comparing class relationships with education – that of the working and middle class’* (Byrom 2010, p8). Whilst my research is not about redefining the class system, several attempts have been made to better understand it with two discussed here (Goldthorpe 1980; Savage et al 2013). Drawing heavily on the classical notion that occupation best defines class (Marx 1887), Goldthorpe and Hope (1974, p134-143), ranked occupations into 36 different levels. From here they then created what became known as Goldthorpe’s class schema (Goldthorpe 1980) with seven social classes emerging winning praise as *‘the most influential conceptualization and operationalization of social class in European sociology’* (Evans 1992, p221). Keeping class within the confines of economic capital is a disservice to my theoretical lens and so I draw upon the Great British Class Survey (Savage et al, 2013) as an example of how social and cultural capital can be utilised when segmenting contemporary society on class lines. The Great British Class Survey was a web survey to explore the phenomenon of class and attracted an unusually high 161,400 responses. The rationale was around making up for Goldthorpe’s class schema’s inability to extricate social and cultural aspects of class

(Devine 1998). From this start point seven classifications emerged: elite, established middle class, technical middle class, new affluent workers, traditional working class, emergent service workers and precariat (see Appendix i). I concur the introduction of social and cultural capital into the contemporary class debate is a useful and timely one (Bradley 2013) and so I draw on these for classification of photos used and discussed in the methods section of this thesis. I fall short, however, of exchanging my understanding of class for the classifications outlined by Savage et al (2013). This is mainly due to the many criticisms this work has received. It has been labelled a Fiasco due to a flawed methodology in that, among many other criticisms, the emergent service worker classification centres around social and cultural capital that is more about stage in the lifecycle than social class (Mills 2013). Second to this is the way the working class are identified as a class that comes about simply for having a lack of what the authors define as culture (Bradley 2013). And that the chosen cultural forms, for example going to the opera, are very old-fashioned and thus out of step with the contemporary angle they were seeking (Bradley 2013).

Government rhetoric is not yet taking the modern class reality into consideration when legislating to create more fluid class barriers and stick to an understanding where economic capital is still highly entrenched (DfE 2013). The DfE continues to discuss social mobility in terms of narrowing attainment gaps between '*disadvantaged*' learners and their peers (DfE 2013, p2). They refer to disadvantage exclusively as learners in receipt of a free school meal, eligibility for which depends upon whether the parents of a learner are in receipt of benefits such as income support, income based jobseeker's allowance or support under part six of the UK Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 (Styles 2008). Narrowing the gap policy discourse implies that the working class is one homogeneous group and uses a metric that measures, in part, those who are not in work to justify it:

White working class underachievement in education is real and persistent. Children who are eligible for free school meals are constantly the lowest performing group in the country (House of Commons Education Committee 2014, p3).

This statement in itself assuming that FSM learners and the working class experience the same class reality. This also assumes that the working class still exists in any great number, yet:

[The working class] *either become clients of the welfare state and become the underclass, or they become middle class* (Heffer 2011, cited Jones 2011, p7).

Historically, social class mattered and still matters to many high profile politicians. John Major, Conservative Prime Minister from 1990 to 1997, proclaimed that he would work towards making the UK a '*genuinely classless society*' (Major 1991, online). He was followed in his vision of a homogenous society by New Labour with their deputy leader proclaiming in 1997 '*we are all middle class now*' (Prescott 1997, online). In more recent times, as an example of why schools should be engines of social mobility Michael Gove, the then Secretary of State for Education explains '*Just 40 out of the 80,000 students who receive free school meals made it to Oxbridge*' (DfE 2010a, p6). He adds,

More children from an individual public school such as Winchester made it to those top universities than from the entire population of young people eligible for free school meals.

Gove presented the argument that success for poorer learners (in particular) is access to our country's top universities who are criticised themselves for being a barrier to social mobility (SMCP 2014). The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) illuminates just how few learners from poorer family backgrounds make it to Oxbridge. They report on this mainly utilising Goldthorpe's Class Schema (HRSA 2016, online). They found for the academic year 2014/2015 just 3.1% of the University of Oxford and 3.3% of the University of Cambridge's intake for 2014 came from what they describe as low participation neighbourhoods. In terms of socio-economic situation of parents, only 10.2% of the University of Cambridge and 10% of the University of Oxford's intake were learners whose parents have non-professional, semi-skilled or routine occupations (HSEA 2016, online). This, then, represents a stark contrast for discussion on social mobility and education, with the known complexities of what is at play here outside of the remit of educational policy (Ball 2010; Goldthorpe 2013). A large group of academics both in the fields of education (see Reay 2006; Hoskins and Barker 2014) and sociology (see Ball 2010; Goldthorpe 2013) are also frustrated with this as, while I have found no research that proclaims education does not have a role in facilitating social mobility, on the whole the feeling seems to be that education may not be the conduit through which social mobility can occur for all learners.

As well as misplaced expectations of education and its power to break down entrenched social barriers, government rhetoric on social mobility feels somehow out of step with modern social class dispositions. This refusal to take into account great economic shift in England could be contributing to the problematic relationship education policy has with social mobility. It can be argued that working versus middle class policy decisions are not doing justice to the much more stratified class system we now have (Savage et al 2013). Whilst I will not address this claim directly as I am concerned with how leaders and learners conceptualise social mobility, it still provides me with a lens for any academic or government assertion that does not take into account how class systems have changed. I add my voice to that of Reay (2006) in that class analysis within social mobility should reflect reality. While it is not for me to outline this reality here, I am satisfied to say it is no longer the classical plight of two homogenous groups of people in conflict - if it ever even was.

3.2 Credentialism and the outcome of a contemporary education.

Credentialism is the understanding that credentials such as GCSEs, A levels and degrees hold symbolic power manifested by the system in which they exist (Bills and Brown 2011).

Credentials have had an ever-increasing influence on education in the past four decades (Baker 2011) which has been termed credential inflation (Bills and Brown 2011). There is also a growing belief that education is viewed as a precursor that can effectively predict life chances and trajectories (Muller 2015) given that credentials are widely internalised as driving the labour market (Tholen 2017). To have grounds for comparison on relative value, educational outputs require mass standardisation, and this has been achieved in recent decades through the use of national curricula in compulsory schooling. Criticised for removing teacher agency (Shelton 2016) as well as testing learners to destruction (Claxton 2011), standardisation is required for credentials to hold symbolic power as legitimised in both (but not limited to) education and careers guidance policy (DfE 2017a; DfE 2017b).

Discussion of qualifications and success in the labour market is commonplace in policy as young people are encouraged to '*acquire the qualifications they need to succeed in the workplaces of the future*' (DfE 2017b, p3), to give just one such example. The use of this deterministic language demonstrates the conviction with which policy makers believe symbolic power is an appropriate device to stratify rewards at stake within an implied

meritocratic labour market. This filters into practice as an educational priority of the incumbent Conservative Government is learners acquiring GCSEs with more traditional academic subjects being prioritised (Muir 2011). The DfE (2015) outlined that all learners in England, apart from those with special educational needs, should work towards achieving the Ebacc, which is a suite of GCSEs in English, Maths, the Sciences, History or Geography and a language and was first introduced as performance measure in 2011 (DfE 2011). The mandate for the Ebacc was helping working class children *'to think they might be intellectually curious and capable of greatness'* (Gove 2014, online) but the EBacc has been criticised as it *'implies that general upper secondary education is for some learners and not for all'* (Hodgeson and Spours 2011, p9). Muir (2011) argues that the Ebacc also incentivises state maintained schools to focus their resources on middle class children who, on the whole, do better in academic tests. Contemporary statistics from the DfE show that 82% of learners in selective schools are studying towards the EBacc whereas in comprehensives it is 47% (DfE 2017c) laying bare the argument that *'exam arrangements have become more demanding under the Coalition government [2010-2015], in line with the traditional strengths of more affluent families'* (White 2014, p36). Hoskins and Barker (2014) explain that the belief the Government seem to hold is that a rigorous academic education will improve social mobility for everyone but the previous statistic may be an example of the elimination of working class learners who are either unable through institutional constraints or not as inclined to undertake the EBacc. Working class learners are forced to *'question...their constructed class-based habitus'* (Byrom and Lightfoot 2013, p814) and it may well be that many are self-eliminating from some of the EBacc subjects diminishing the value of the symbolic capital they will come to rely on in the labour market.

For social mobility to be based on meritocratic principles all learners would need the same chance of achieving credentials to acquire symbolic capital, but it has long been theorised (see Parkin 1974) that the dominant classes rely on the education system as a mode of social closure. Weeden (2002) found that social closure through the use of credentials serves not only to restrict but to raise the rewards of members of professions by restricting the labour supply or these professions. This may go some way to explaining why *'71% of senior judges'* and *'62% of senior armed forces officers'* are privately educated when only 7% of the school age population attend a private school (SMCP 2014, p10). This phenomenon

was investigated by the Social Mobility Commission (2017) who found, using data from the labour force survey, that a person is two and a half times more likely to go into a professional or managerial job if their parents are from this background compared to less advantaged backgrounds. This is a quantifiable manifestation of social reproduction supporting theory that a learner is much more likely to reproduce inequalities of condition than use education to transcend them (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Reay 2006; Nunn 2012; Mortimore 2014).

A theoretical perspective here, then, is that credentials are being increasingly designed to advantage affluent families and this is legitimised through the guise of increased rigor having the ability to improve social mobility for all. While high ability learners rarely fail to achieve credentials irrespective of their class origin, low ability middle class children sometimes exceed expectations based on predicted attainment (Saunders 2012a). There is now 'a vast [body of] *literature that documents how education is a key factor in class reproduction*' (Flemmen et al 2017, p1294). What is lacking somewhat in the literature is how learners within the field are coming to understand how credentials interact within the processes of social mobility. It is accepted that credentials matter for most in the pursuit of social mobility (SMCP 2014) but what is of interest to this thesis is whether or not there is evidence of learners and leaders misappropriating the purpose of credentials through focusing on the statistically rare times working class learners become socially mobile, rather than the extent *the chips are stacked against* working class learners.

Within the meritocratic construct, it can be argued that any inequality that is a product of differing levels of symbolic capital is legitimised so long as everyone has had an equal chance of achieving the credentials. A major criticism, however, arises from the fact that available credentials are what the dominant culture views as merit worthy and the extent to which everyone really *does* have an equal chance at achieving them is contestable:

Standardised tests can't measure initiative, creativity, imagination, conceptual thinking, curiosity, effort, irony, judgement, commitment, nuance, good will, ethical reflection, or a host of other valuable dispositions and attributes. What they can measure and count are isolated skills, specific facts and function, content knowledge, the least interesting and least significant aspects of learning

(Ayers 1993, p116).

Along with this criticism of what constitutes merit is how standardised tests may be covertly created with built-in prejudice. Tests in all subjects often contain content that requires knowledge and understanding that is more likely to be gathered outside of the classroom by learners from privileged backgrounds (Kohn 2000). Kohn (2000, p3) cynically also proclaims '*guess who can afford better test preparation*', a sentiment very much in step with Ball (2010, p159) who illuminates the modern-day phenomenon of being able to '*buy in*' educational advantage from the free market. I conclude this section by supporting the assertion that credentialism is, more than ever, stratifying the labour market which leads into the next enquiry in to how fair access to the opportunity to achieve credentials is.

3.3 Educational inequality and the processes of social mobility

By definition, inequality exists in the educational field if '*equality of learning opportunity*' (Cochran-Smith 2010, p13) does not. In other terms, not every child can win the race but rather they should have equal chance to strive to win it should they want to. Educational inequality has come to mean '*sensitivity of educational [attainment] to parental income*' (Blanden, Gregg and Machin 2003, p1) within the field, which is a narrow quantitative description the veracity of which is embraced by the Department for Education (DfE 2014b). In educational policy (see DfE 2014a; DfE 2016) the word disadvantage has therefore become synonymous with discourse surrounding the correlation between two quantitative metrics: a learner's parental income and the quantifiable aspect of credential attainment. The DfE (2013, p2) stated that '*a leading Government priority to narrow the attainment gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their peers*' but habitually use 'disadvantaged' to simply mean low levels of parental economic capital. This disadvantage is framed as the attainment gap (DfE 2014c): the percentage difference of learners achieving at least five A* to C GCSE grades including English and Maths who have received free school meals (FSM) in the previous six years to the current year and those who have not. This can be considered a useful variable to account for pupil attainment although flawed in that it does not take into account learners whose parents are eligible for but do not claim free school meals (Gorard 2012).

While the DfE and educational policy may have good intentions, an example in practice of education being unable to transcend entrenched disadvantage is the DfE's flagship policy to address educational inequality, and thus close the aforementioned attainment gap, pupil premium (DfE 2010). In the academic year 2015 pupil premium available for pupils aged from age 11 to 16 is a payment of £935 to schools per pupil who is receiving or who has received free school meals in the last six years from the current one (DfE 2015a). Since the incarnation of pupil premium in 2011, the DfE has evidenced that it has not (yet) been effective at closing the attainment gap:

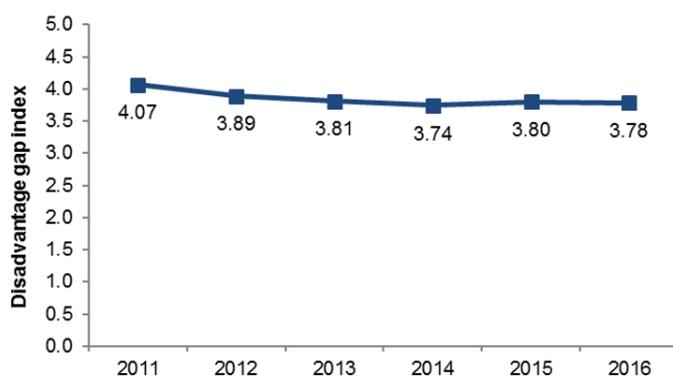


Figure 1 - Trends in the disadvantaged pupils' attainment gap index (DfE 2017d, p17)

Pupil premium has, so far, had little impact on the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers who are defined as those in receipt of a free school meal at some point in the last six years (DfE 2014b, p1). Figure 1 demonstrates a sideways trend. While there will be myriad nuanced reasons for this, it was found that one in three head teachers were using pupil premium funding to plug holes in their wider budget (The Sutton Trust 2017). This is one such demonstration of the inability of even well meaning government policy to overcome entrenched and complex social inequalities.

Figure 2, below, is further released data that shows how this attainment gap is then feeding into differing levels of uptake of higher education (university level education) between different school types. While the simple three school type breakdown can only lead to a blunt analysis, the findings are nevertheless useful providing the usual assumptions about the types of learners that attend the different types of school are upheld.

Progression rate to all HE

School/college type	Progressed to HE by age 19 in academic year					
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Independent	82%	87%	86%	85%	85%	85%
Selective state	89%	89%	90%	90%	90%	88%
Other state	68%	69%	68%	65%	63%	60%
Total state	69%	71%	70%	67%	66%	62%
All	71%	72%	72%	69%	67%	64%
Independent/ State Gap (pp)	13	16	16	18	19	23

Figure 2 – Progression into higher education by age 19 (DfE 2016, p11)

From the academic year 2008/2009 to 2013/2014 the percentage of pupils progressing into higher education from non-selective state funded schools has actually decreased nearly 12% from 68% to 60%. Further to this is how the independent/state gap has grown significantly from 13% to 23% demonstrating the increasing likelihood for an independent school learner to attend a higher education institution. To contextualise these statistics Figure 3 demonstrates that they occurred on a backdrop of falling numbers overall. This, then, means that it is likely that most of the decrease in numbers is coming from non-selective state school learners being eliminated.

Year	Undergraduate	Postgraduate	Total
2013/14	1,759,915	539,440	2,299,355
2012/13	1,803,755	536,715	2,340,470
2011/12	1,928,140	568,490	2,496,635
2010/11	1,913,940	589,070	2,503,010
2009/10	1,914,835	578,915	2,493,750
2008/09	1,860,425	537,160	2,397,585

Figure 3 - Numbers of students in higher education in the UK (Higher Education Statistics Agency 2017, online)

Nunn (2012, p104), then, has had his prophecy vindicated:

[Pupil premium] is unlikely to erode the degree of advantage/disadvantage that families are able to procure for their children, without regulating the degree of overall inequality in the system.

A further high-profile policy for closing the attainment gap has been academising schools, which is making schools independent of local authorities (DfE 2010b). A central aim of the academisation program is closing the attainment gap between rich and poor (Education Select Committee 2015) and yet by their own admission '*current evidence does not allow us to draw firm conclusions on whether academies are a positive force for change*' (Education Select Committee 2015, p23). This has been shown to be the case in high performing

academies where Barker and Hoskins (2017, p236) found there were very few signs that these academies have *'overcome family influences or reduced the effects of relative poverty'*.

Academisation and pupil premium has, on the whole, failed to make meaningful difference in closing the so called attainment gap and resulting disparities in higher education uptake. This is likely because both are not policies that seek to reduce inequality of condition associated with social class and remain in the relative comfort zone of educational policy (Goldthorpe 2012). Even if academisation and pupil premium were able to close the attainment gap, it is still believed that only moderate gains in social mobility are possible, the size of which would ultimately not offset the significant inequalities in access to job opportunities (Owens et al 2017).

In summary, my previous criticisms of educational policy's almost exclusive use of quantitative metrics is laid bare. Education policy has successfully convinced me that educational inequality exists, but I have read so little in policy that demonstrates a solid grasp of the levers on it and the proportional influence different facets of a learner's class reality seems to be having on it. It is, therefore, no surprise that a simplistic approach such as pupil premium is not closing the attainment gap. After all, *'inequalities happen in a complex and dynamic interplay of structures and processes crucially involving decisions, values and priorities'* (Ball 2010, p159) which may always be directly conflicting with politicians *'preferring simple, short-term solution to entrenched social and educational problems'* (Ball 2010, p159). Reflecting with a practical lens Richards (2018) conducted a comparative analysis of a typical working and middle class school. She found from talking to female working class learners that their parents lacked understanding of how to transfer aspiration into solid steps to achieve them. The learners themselves chose their GCSE option subjects based on if they liked the teacher as opposed to early CV building motivations and few *'appeared to consider anything that required them to study in a new environment or leave home to work'* (Richards 2018, p51). The opposite seemed to be true of the girls in a more middle class setting who had *'researched university course and career pathways, selected subjects relevant to these and sought additional activities to enhance their CVs to maximise success'* (Richards 2017, p51). Even at a superficial level of practice it seems clear that inequality far beyond just parental income plays an underappreciated part in processes

of social mobility. In a powerful yet nuanced capacity social and cultural influences are likely to be beyond the blunt instruments of pupil premium and academisation.

Goldthorpe (2012) analysed trajectories of people within different classes and concludes as Ball (2010) against what he calls the consensus that educational policy is the way to break down barriers to social mobility:

If the creation of a more fluid and open society is a serious goal, then politicians will need to move out of the relative comfort zone of educational policy and accept that measures will be required, of a kind sure to be strongly contested, that seek to reduce inequalities of condition, of which those associated with social class would appear the most fundamental.

After all:

*What can be achieved by educational policy has to be seen as constrained in two different ways: first, by the ability of the more advantaged parents always to use their superior economic resources as necessary in order to further their children's educational attainment and thus maintain their positional advantage; and second, by the fact that children from more advantaged backgrounds who do not do well educationally will still have resources and personal attributes that can serve to protect them against any serious *déclassement* (Goldthorpe 2012, p446).*

Political focus on social mobility does seem to serve as some distraction from issues of social justice that extend much further than the classroom. On this I agree with the sentiments of many frustrated academics (see Ball 2010; Goldthorpe 2012; Nunn 2012 and Reay 2017) in that educational policy does not, on the whole, hold the answers to a country of widespread social mobility. Understanding of educational inequality needs to be looked at again by policy makers as the simplistic correlation between parental income and academic achievement is failing to provide or illuminate education's role in the processes of social mobility.

3.4 Meritocracy, nepotism and the labour market

I frame meritocracy and nepotism as holding opposing positions here and discuss their relationship with a learner's ability to be socially mobile given their pursuit of credentials.

Allen (2011, p370) explains '*a perfected meritocracy is one where inequalities are precisely matched to abilities – it is a society where inequalities are justly unequal*'. A meritocratic education system, therefore, should underpin a meritocratic society (Young 1998) but the extent to which society and specifically the English labour market is meritocratic is contestable. Crucially, a meritocracy will simply legitimise inequality through more socially acceptable means. In a meritocracy, inequality would be based on the extent to which the individual has what a society deems merit worthy (or an individual's ability to secure advantage on whatever this is deemed to be). The major criticism, however, arises from how credentials in particular are what the dominant culture views as merit worthy (Nunn 2012) and the extent to which everyone really *does* have an equal chance at achieving them is far from being a given (Kohn 2000).

Young (1958) is credited with coining the term meritocracy and it is accepted that a meritocratic society is one that obeys the formula '*merit = ability + effort*' (Allen 2011, p368). To be meritocratic, Young asserted that only a combination of an individual's ability and effort should be able to secure advantage in any field. Within the educational field this can be interpreted as natural ability and the amount of effort a learner applies should lead to higher and more powerful forms of symbolic capital to employ in the field. A supporter of the notion that England is a meritocracy with social mobility fluidity is Saunders (1996, p3) who asserts '*the symbolism of monarchy and aristocracy blinds us to the reality of an open and achievement-oriented society jostling beyond the confines of the Royal Enclosure at Ascot*'. He declares that:

In modern Britain, if you are bright and committed, you are likely to succeed in the occupational system irrespective of where you start out from, and although things are not perfect and the playing field is not completely level, this means that our society is nevertheless remarkably open, and that we are much closer to achieving a meritocracy than pundits and public alike seem to suppose (Saunders 1996, p7).

I am inclined to relate to this statement as I count myself amongst his *bright and committed* and this meritocratic message does permeate throughout education policy: ‘*everyone can reach their potential, regardless of their background or where they live*’ (Greening 2017, online) is one of numerous examples. What is not reflected in this meritocratic ideal is how disadvantaged learners may need proportionately higher and sometimes unfeasible levels of *brightness and commitment* to succeed than their middle class peers. Saunders states in later work that ‘*circumstances of birth operated mainly to prevent less able, higher class children from falling, rather than to stop more able, lower class people from succeeding*’ (Saunders 2010, p3). A glass floor for wealthy learners seems acceptable to Saunders but it is the assertion that lower class learners are not held back from succeeding that I directly contest. Saunders leans towards intelligence being the differentiator between classes, which is a viewpoint I find discursive. Saunders (2010, p32) discusses how IQ has a high correlation to occupational prestige but the explicit assumption that IQ is the only way to measure intelligence is central to this narrative.

Below shows the percentage of the top 10% of achievers at the end of primary school that then fall out of the top 25% of achievers five years later at GCSE level:



Figure 4 – Comparison of underachievers from disadvantaged learners (FSM6) and their peers (Not FSM6). (Allen 2015, p1)

This is supported by an analysis of a 2015 national data set that found that:

Bright but poor pupils in England and Scotland (in the top 10% of achievement nationally, but the lowest quarter socio-economically) are substantially behind bright well-off pupils – a gap of around 2 years and 8 months (Jerrim 2017, p4).

The literature has already established that the labour market is stratified with ever expanding credentialism and so it is not such a far-removed idea that these poor but bright learners will feel the realities of symbolic closure. While I accept these quantitative

evaluations do not help in my ambition to illuminate barriers to social mobility, they do refute the idea that all disadvantaged learners need is to be *'bright and committed'* or even that wealthier learners are just simply more intelligent. It is this rhetoric that perpetuates the widely internalised narrative that the labour market is, indeed, meritocratic and is the assistance that symbolic domination requires to operate (Tholen 2017).

A conflicting viewpoint to a meritocratic labour market is that nepotism, which is *'kin-directed beneficence'* (Moore 1992, p361), and other forms bias such as individuals manoeuvring and strategising to create arguably undue advantage, is more prevalent than the perhaps more widely internalised ideals of meritocracy (Tholen 2017). It has been demonstrated (see Lin 2001; Cheung and Phillimore 2013) that interpersonal and informal durable networks, what Bourdieu (1986) termed social capital, are crucial not only to securing jobs but also learning about opportunities that exist. It has also been shown that the educational and class positions of parents directly affect their children's access to social capital which is especially the case when parents have strong ties through friends and relatives (Verhaeghe, Van der Bracht and Van de Putte 2015). This is due, in part, to the *'advantageous access to privileged information flows and resources'* (Pena-Lopez and Sanchez-Santos 2017, p1) that comes when individuals are part of a durable social network. Social capital being transmitted to offspring has been termed the *'social bank of mum and dad [which] sadly not all young people have the same access to'* (Milburn 2016, online). Perhaps a practical example of this playing out in the educational field is the increased ability for more wealthy learners to undertake unpaid internships which, given the increased number of learners having degrees, are increasingly used by employers to differentiate candidates (Owens et al 2017). It has also been shown that young people from poorer backgrounds are half as likely to find work experience through their parents (The Princes Trust 2016, online).

To conclude this section, I could not continue with my professional life if I held the belief that somehow poorer people are less intelligent. I therefore continue to align myself with Bourdieu in that inferior social status incubated by the social system, not a natural inability, contributes most heavily to class divides (Bourdieu 1974). The influence of nepotism, credentialism and other forms of bias are laid bare by the Social Mobility Commission who provide national datasets showing how:

Only one in six low paid workers in 2006 had managed to find a route out of low pay a decade later [and only] 6 per cent of doctors, 12 per cent of chief executives and 12 per cent of journalists are from working-class origins (SMC 2017, piii).

The extent to which learners are aware of how skewed the labour market is will be of interest and specifically how prepared they are for such a reality. When writing on his life's work Young reflected that *'nobody should be born with a silver spoon in their mouth. Or if he is, it should choke him'* (Young 1998, p377). I do wonder how my trajectory would have differed if I was fed with a silver rather than a yellow plastic spoon that came free inside a cereal packet.

3.5 Social mobility as a manifestation or apparition of social justice

Here I explore the extent to which the political pursuit of increased levels of social mobility is a social justice policy or can even be perceived as such.

Credentials or symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1986) are a socially acceptable tool to stratify a meritocratic labour market (Tholen 2017). However, there is evidence that policy makers consider the labour market to be far from meritocratic (The Prime Minister's Office 2016; Greening 2017). Even with the same qualifications, poorer learners achieve poorer career outcomes than their more affluent peers (SMC 2017), but there remains the persistent belief in policy that education is still key and the premier conduit for social mobility (DfE 2017a; DfE 2018). The extent to which social mobility policy is a social justice pursuit is, however, contested within different government departments leading to fragmented rhetoric (SMC 2017; DfE 2018). A rift has opened up between the Social Mobility Commission, Education Select Committee and the Department for Education which I consider to be regrettable given that *'Britain has a deep social mobility problem...that for this generation of young people in particular is getting worse not better'* (SMCP 2016, iii).

In December 2017 all four of the incumbent commissioners of the Social Mobility Commission resigned. The former chair of the commission, Alan Milburn, cited complete frustration at the commission's lack of ability to make progress on social mobility despite their work being central to the stated aims of the current Conservative Government (The Prime Minister's Office 2016). He explained that:

The truth about social mobility is that if you are going to make progress you need to pull a whole succession of levers and hopefully you should pull them in sync; on the labour market, on regional policy (Education Select Committee 2018, P10).

Upon reviewing the collapse of the Social Mobility Commission, the Education Select Committee concluded that sweeping changes were required to ensure the Social Mobility Commission could be effective under new leadership. These recommendations were very much a move towards social justice policy and were aligned more to the thinking of many academics (see Goldthorpe 2012; Nunn 2012; Reay 2013). The Education Select Committee showed support for potentially unpopular social justice policy to redress inequality of opportunity stemming from, in part, class reality. Recommendations were made by the Educational Select Committee to the DfE, who funds the commission, such as changing the name to the Social Justice Commission and that it should be given the power to publish social justice impact assessments (Education Select Committee 2018). This would have represented a meaningful policy shift away from social mobility and potentially a swing from an education focus and into wider societal issues. These recommendations were rejected by the DfE, however. Whilst conceding that social mobility cannot exist without social justice they rejected extra powers for the commission and moved to stop their concerted shift into social justice policy aims (DfE 2018). At the time of writing, the future makeup of the Social Mobility Commission was still unclear but, given the demands of the Education Select Committee, social justice as a policy objective within education was further investigated within the next section of this literature review.

An implicit benchmark of social justice is the belief that where a learner finishes in life is independent of where they start (Swift 2004). This disconnection aligns social justice to the principles of meritocracy outlined earlier, in that '*merit = ability + effort*' (Allen 2011, p368) and not the procurement of advantage through any other means. A branch of political philosophy labelled luck egalitarianism (Arneson, 2004), however, believes '*the essence of social justice is the moral imperative to improve the condition of people who suffer from simple bad luck*' (Arneson 2004, p1). Included in this sentiment is the bad luck of being born with less academic ability. This, then, calls into question the ease at which it is believed that stratification of rewards based on ability actually is a manifestation of social justice (Anderson 1999) as per the merit equation cited earlier. This is particularly disconcerting as

rewards in the labour market based on ability is a cornerstone of social mobility policy (SMC 2017; DfE 2018).

To unpack this further it has been theorised (Dworkin 1981) that luck and its relationship with equality can be divided into 'option luck' and 'brute luck'. Option luck, as Dworkin (1981) outlines, is the outcome of a calculated gamble whereas brute luck is outcomes based on choices or realities outside the control of an individual. If, then, social justice policy is policy that improves the condition of those who suffer bad luck as Arneson (2004) outlines. I then argue that of the two types of luck it is brute luck that social justice policy should target. In the educational field this may mean redressing the perceived ability balance as those born with lower levels of natural academic ability suffer from bad brute not option luck. While there is no space in this thesis to theorise on how this could be achieved or the extent this could ever be socially acceptable, suffice it to say if the role of ability is equalised somewhat through government intervention we are left with the following equation for the meritocratic pursuit of credentials: merit = effort. If credentials were attained in this way it could lead to policy that seeks to reduce inequalities of brute luck and moves out of the comfort zone of educational policy and is therefore likely to be strongly contested (Goldthorpe 2012). Reviewing the literature highlights that any attempt to shape education around this perceived socially just equation of meritocracy may not actually improve social mobility. What is merit worthy is decided by the dominant political class. Understanding what is merit worthy is problematic as political objectives can be subsumed beneath the pursuit of more obvious or socially acceptable pursuits such as social mobility (Nunn 2012). Themelis (2008, p428) argues that *'in contemporary class-ridden societies, the foremost benefit we can expect from meritocracy is controlled and legitimised inequalities'*. Therefore my position on social mobility, when treated by policy makers as a remedy for social justice, has not changed. I still align myself with the belief that social mobility is *'a very inadequate sticking plaster over the gaping wound that social inequalities have become'* (Reay 2017, p3) and thus, to link to the subtitle of this section, social mobility does feel like an apparition of social justice.

4.0 Methodology

At a superficial level, a methodology is '*how the toolkit of research methods is brought together*' (Newby 2010, p51) but this section of the thesis is more an activity of '*choosing, reflecting upon, evaluating and justifying methods used*' (Wellington 2000, p22). Before outlining these, it is necessary to explain my ontological and epistemological position:

Embedded in commitments to particular versions of the world (an ontology) and ways of knowing that world (an epistemology) [and thus] no method is self-validating, separate from an epistemology and an ontology
(Usher and Scott 1996, p13).

It is therefore not possible to complete meaningful educational research without struggling with the nature of knowledge in general and its different forms in particular (Pring 2015). There are different paradigms of how to look for and make knowledge claims but I want to be careful not to create false dualisms between the major paradigms (Pring 2015). I believe that the purpose of my research is to generate knowledge to inform professional practice not to simply realise, perfectly, one method or another (Ercikan and Roth 2006). Also, as a full time teaching professional and part time researching professional I need to be pragmatic and become somewhat of a bricoleur. This asserts that I aim to primarily use the '*means at hand*' and '*instruments [at my] disposition around me*' (Derrida 1978, p285) and that I '*think beyond the confines of the existing categories of research design*' (Thomas 2009, p143). This does not mean I want to create new methods of investigation but just believe that some of these polarising dichotomies do not always reflect the reality of professional practice (Ercikan and Roth 2006). I appreciate the need to engage with these, however, but have used language that purposefully places my position on somewhat of a spectrum of agreement.

4.1 Ontology, epistemology and the quantitative versus qualitative paradigm

Ontology in educational research exists to help '*understand there are different ways of viewing the world – of viewing what there is to study*' (Thomas 2009, p86) Ontology is a branch of metaphysics that is the study of what exists (Effingham 2013) and an important ontological distinction in educational research is which paradigm the researcher claims as

their world view (see Appendix ii). I believe this to be about what schema of predetermined assumptions I have about what reality is. In this respect I view myself overwhelmingly as constructivist in my world view. This is because I hold fast the assumptions that knowledge is constructed from experience, reality is personal and thus there is no shared reality and meaning is negotiated from multiple perspectives (Merrill 1991). The starting point for my research is:

[The] *assumption that knowledge, no matter how it may be defined, is in the heads of persons, and that the thinking subject has no alternative but to construct what he or she knows on the basis of his or her own experience. What we make of experience constitutes the only world we consciously live in* (Von Glasersfeld 1995, p1).

This world view does not, however, mean that social interaction cannot shape and influence this reality (Von Glaserfeld 1995) hence my motivation to be an educator. This proposition is really at the heart of what I am researching as my research questions clearly demonstrates I am not interested in 'truth' or what objectivist researchers may define as truth (see Appendix ii). I wish, instead, to be '*more explanatory, more discursive and more probing of the assumptions and meanings for individuals*' (Creswell 2012, p430). Outlining my researcher positionality earlier in my study would be somewhat superfluous to an objectivist ontological stance but important as a constructivist as I wish to portray an appreciation that we automatically filter and select what we see using our socially learned frameworks which themselves are subject to change (Werhane et al 2011). In addition to this, in an educational setting it may be seen that events can almost never be captured objectively ontologically speaking. Crotty (1998) explains constructivism very much as taking into account that all of us have unique experiences and that we cannot deny that cultural experience has influenced this. Crucially, Crotty explains that social constructivists are inclined to believe that our individual way of making sense of the world is just as valid as anybody else's view. I believe this attribute to be very important as I am going to hear what school leaders and learners are saying without dismissing their view point as it may not necessary align with my beliefs. Bragg (2001) supports this assertion as she highlights the importance of hearing outlying voices in pedagogic research. Fielding (2004) adds further weight to this discussion, articulating that too often researchers dismiss voices that seem too strident or those who employ language or ideas that we may at first find offensive. The

fact we automatically filter and select information we see using our own socially learned frameworks in the constructivist paradigm has drawn criticism however. Campbell, Whitehead and Finkelstein (2009) outline how this may lead to pattern recognition where the researcher distorts what is being observed in the present into what has occurred in past situations and experiences because they have been there before. This highlights the importance of using my researcher persona not my teacher persona when analysing phenomena as a blurred line is more likely to lead to '*loyalty tugs*', '*behavioural claims*' and '*identification dilemmas*' (Brannick and Coghlan 2007, p70). I intend to gather from educational leaders and learners a slice of lived experience which, ultimately, will be transmitted by their socially constructed narratives and interpreted through my own.

4.1.1 Epistemology

After justifying my world view it is then necessary to investigate the origin, nature, methods and limits of human knowledge (Hofer and Pintrich 1997) which constitute an epistemology. The nature of knowledge is imperative as it is important to scrutinise claims to knowledge in both my own and other people's research findings (Thomas 2009).

Taking this into consideration as a researching professional I believe myself to be overwhelmingly interpretivist (see Appendix ii). This is because of my inability and unwillingness to separate my professional interests from my research and my appreciation that reality is a human construct (Wellington 2000, p16). I have a tightly held belief that the objectivity and removal-of-self required to be positivist in such a sphere of complex human interaction would be somewhat of a fallacy. Being interpretivist (or anti-positivist) requires the researcher to reject the traditional scientific method somewhat (see Appendix iii) and appreciate that '*people do strange, unpredictable things, gather themselves in peculiar ways, act irrationally, learn and change*' (Thomas 2009, p85). The obligation to generate general theories using the traditional scientific method is problematic when dealing with the complex interactions of an educational setting with so many externalities influencing them. As such, I will not be pursuing generality with this research, hence not starting out with a hypothesis. This does, however, give rise to a major criticism of interpretivist research in that there can be a lack of scalability as findings may not be generalised to other situations (Mack 2010). On the differences between the positivist and interpretivist approaches Mack

(2010, p9) asserts that *'the positivist researcher seeks to explain social phenomena [whereas] the interpretivist researcher seeks to understand social phenomena'* and it is beyond the superficiality of explanation I want to venture. Anecdotally, I have been trained to believe that explaining is a low level metacognitive skill whereas to understand something including its limitations, applications and temporal facets requires a much deeper appreciation of the concept under scrutiny. While interpretivist approaches can also leave room for large amounts of bias from the researcher (Dudovskiy 2016), I reject that this is necessarily the case if these biases are appreciated, recognised and their potential influences on findings are considered. Giddens (1977, p3) mused that positivism *'has today become more of a term of abuse than a technical term in philosophy'* and while it is beyond the focus of my project to debate, for me the interpretivist paradigm is more appropriate for the study of social mobility within an educational setting.

The design frame for my research has a postmodernist feel. This is, in its simplest sense, the held belief that there *'is no one way of understanding things and no one way of doing enquiry'* (Thomas 2009, p141). This perspective argues against grand narratives and large scale theoretical systems and focuses on social constructive nature of people and reality (Alvesson and Deetz 1996). Koertge (1998) has criticised this premise as misleading in research especially from transforming findings into pedagogic practice. She criticises what she sees as a watering down of science and is frustrated at how scientific findings using postmodernist approaches are not being criticised nearly enough. This may be the case for scientific applications, but this study is rooted in professional practice in a highly politicised field and, as such, I cannot deny the *'impossibility of separating political power from processes of knowledge production'* (Hendrickson and McKelvey 2002 p7294). As a consequence, research design for postmodernists tends to *'stress narrative/fiction/rhetoric as central to the research process'* (Alvesson and Deetz 1996, p193). I use the term post-modernist *feel* as I have used research tools that are pre-existing, such as semi-structured interviews and photo elicitation, but I have combined them in ways not often seen to assist in the gathering of narratives from leaders and learners. I have also, in earlier sections of this study, outlined my frustration with policy over relying on quantitative research to draw conclusions within the educational field I am, therefore, sacrificing scalability in order to highlight lived experience.

4.1.2 Qualitative versus quantitative paradigm

My understanding of the qualitative paradigm is drawn from Denzin and Lincoln;

Qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting, attempt to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

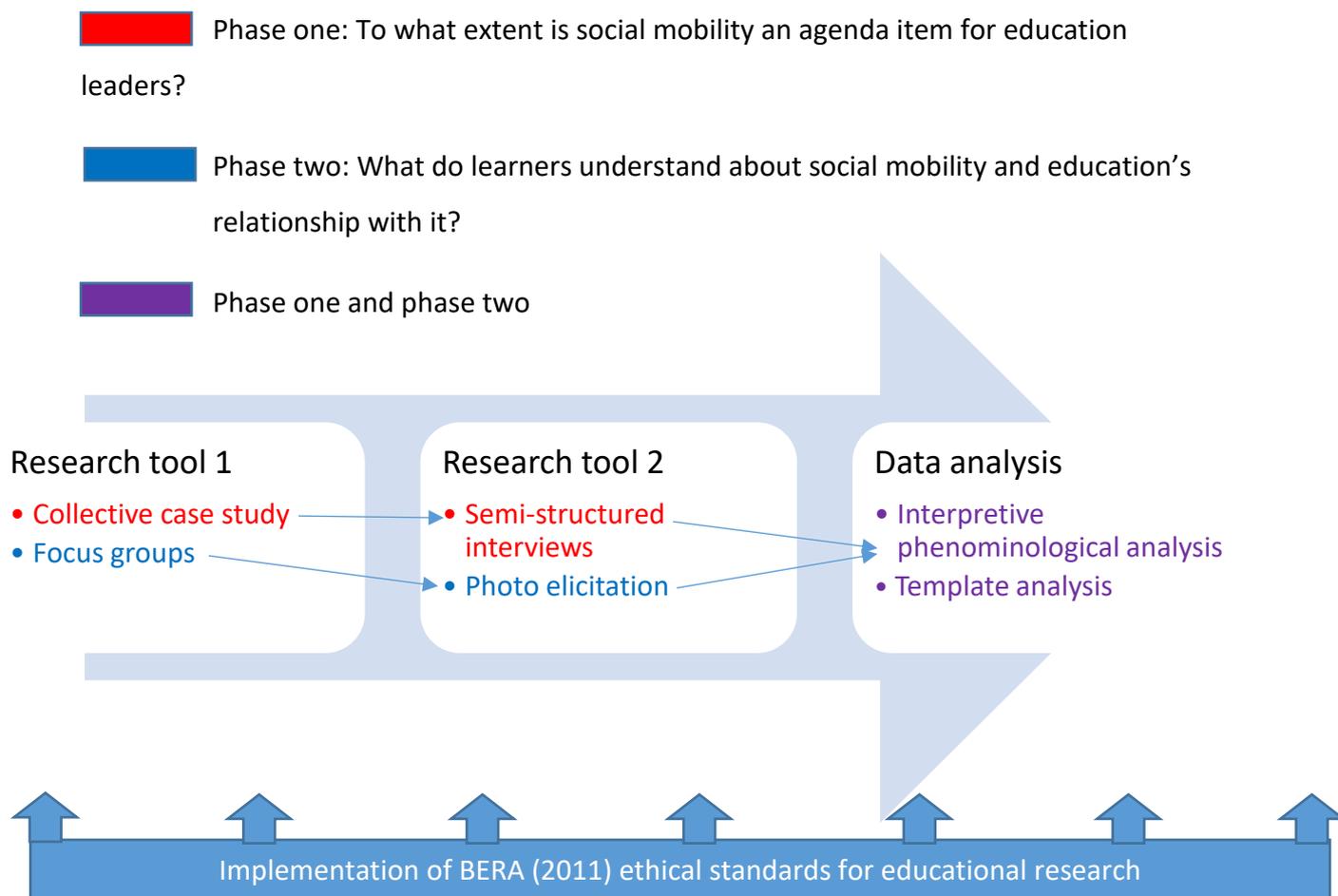
(Denzin and Lincoln 1994, p2)

Based on my interpretivist ontological preconceptions, constructivist epistemological world view and postmodernist feel to my approach to research it then follows that my research will be conducted mainly within the qualitative paradigm as outlined in Denzin and Lincoln (1994). I accept that placing my research at either end of the extremes of this dichotomy may not allow for my research question to be answered fully (Ercikan and Roth 2006) so numerical data also features. Elements of quantitative and qualitative analysis can be compatible as long as the differing underlying assumptions and ground rules are appreciated (Thomas 2009). Wellington (2000, p18) states '*most methods in educational research will yield both qualitative and quantitative data*'. Furthermore, Creswell suggests that '*qualitative research is best suited to address a research problem in which you do not know the variables and need to explore*' (Creswell 2012, p16). This situation best reflects the nature of my research questions and, for me, social mobility represents '*the central phenomenon*' (Creswell 2012, p16) that is often present in qualitative research. Finally, I agree with Bassey (1999, ix), due to the complexity of educational institutions and experiences, any research that expresses findings in mathematical terms only is unlikely to be '*sophisticated enough to sufficiently accommodate and account for the myriad differences that are involved*'.

5.0 Methods

Much thought was put into selecting and justifying appropriate methods that would allow my research to be true to my methodological stand point that I have outlined. The first part of this process was studying Wellington (2000) to understand better the perceived benefits and drawbacks of popular research methods in educational research (see Appendix iv). I also compared and contrasted thinking on these methods, and others, with other academic works concerned with educational research design (see Bassey 1999; Thomas 2009; Creswell 2012). Secondly, I have ensured at all stages that I have adhered to BERA (2011) and demonstrate this throughout the next sections.

Below is a diagram showing the collection methods/tools and analytical techniques used to answer SRQ 1 and 2. It is the synthesis of these that will form the answer for RQ 1: how do education leaders and learners understand the role of education in processes of social mobility?



As outlined above, the ethical standards for educational research BERA (2011) are woven throughout the rest of this thesis. It is therefore prudent to mention at this point that full consent was given by the Nottingham Trent University Ethical Committee to conduct this research (see Appendix v).

5.1 Phase one research tools

In order to answer SQ 1 I undertook a collective case study as it allows researchers to study phenomena within their real-world contexts (Baxter and Jack 2008) with real-world context being '*one of the most important sources of case study evidence*' (Yin 2014, p110). Being collective means there is more than one case, which is useful when examining a '*phenomenon, population or general condition*' (Stake 2000, p437). Also, this method has the ability to increase trustworthiness (Patton 1990; Yin 2003) by offering opportunities for theme triangulation (Wellington 2000) which may substantiate the claim that phenomena are not isolated. As with phase two, each participant will be given the right to withdraw at any point without the need to give a reason. This will be reiterated before each episode of field work with participants and will be on all written communication where appropriate. Learners will receive no reward, monetary or otherwise, for their participation (BERA 2011).

The context is drawn from five schools discussed by three research participants. There was a head teacher of a state-maintained school, the executive head teacher of three schools in an academy chain and the head teacher of an independent co-educational day and boarding school. The sample size and contrast in contexts arose from the need to provide in-depth understanding (Creswell 2012). Also the small sample size, five cases from three research participants, may prevent phase one becoming a '*massive unreadable document*' (Yin 2014, p21) especially bearing in mind the thesis word count. The cases studies I have selected are not atypical and therefore it will not be an intrinsic case study, where the cases are investigated as they have specific merit in themselves (Stake 2000).

The sample were invited to provide insight into a theme (Creswell 2012) and in my case this is how educational professionals perceive social mobility. My sampling method was purposeful in that the sample was chosen with the aim of accessing information about schools that provided contrasting experiences to help me achieve the aim of my study and answer the research questions (Patton 2002). It follows that all methods that did not fit into

the qualitative social constructivist paradigm were rejected. This was because I could not, based on my world view, fully adhere to their differing underlying assumptions and ground rules (Thomas 2009). The most obvious alternative choice may have been conducting a focus group. I appreciate the '*synergy of the group...can add to the depth of insight*' Wellington (2000, p124) but I was more concerned with the content of the speech of the individual within their context. Researchers using focus groups are usually at least as interested in the interactions between participants (Hartas 2010, p233). Second to this is the logistical issue of getting busy professionals together at one time in one venue but I did, however, utilise focus groups as a method in phase two where I had much more convenient access to groups of learners and was more interested in their interactions.

Yin (2014, p106) outlines six sources of evidence in case studies: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation and physical artefacts. As there are no specific methods that must be used to create case study research, I selected what I felt was both practical and appropriate (Bassey 1999). I utilised interviews and, to a lesser extent, documentation such as background data on the schools to better understand the important contextual facets of discussed phenomena. My understanding of interviews as a method is derived from Kvale in that they are '*where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and the interviewee*' (Kvale 2007, p1). I drew heavily on Kvale (1996) to understand the limitations, pitfalls and power dynamics that must be considered when using this tool. Specifically, I used semi-structured interviews to allow me to gain a better insight into how participants attribute meaning to their worlds in social interaction (Grindsted 2005). When honing rhetorical skill Roulston (2010) was drawn on, specifically in how to utilise open questions and follow up with open probes to ensure depth. I rejected structured interviews as they are most commonly used for hypothesis testing and deductive analysis (Roulston 2010, p15) or to verify or quantify opinions (Grindsted 2005) and would be conflicting with my outlined methodological approach. Equally, unstructured interviews were rejected as these are appropriate to ethnographic interviewing where there is not necessarily a central phenomenon being investigated (Roulston 2010, p15). I was aware how narratives that surface within ethnography can be powerful within story-making in particular (Clapham and Vickers 2016), but as I wanted a cross section of experience, ethnographic research tools were thought to generate far too

much data. I was more interested in multiple experiences than a deeper understanding of one experience as is often the case with ethnographic research.

5.1.1 Selecting and piloting interview questions

I purposefully created interview questions that would allow me to be able to theme answers in terms of Bourdieu's theory on capital within fields (Bourdieu 1986), although I did not discuss reasoning for my questions with research participants. Using these questions, I performed pilot interviews with two teaching colleagues and asked afterwards for their feedback on the questions asked (see Appendix vi). The data gathered in the pilot is not reported in that it, in itself, was not meaningful but the experience was (Secomb and Smith 2011). The pilot was used to test and refine the questions (Yin 2014) and was also an opportunity to practice open questions and open probes (Roulston 2010) to help assist me to gain greater depth of response.

5.2 Phase two research tools

The context within which this question was answered was drawn from three state sponsored academies where a focus group was undertaken in each.

As with the head teacher interviews, different contexts had the ability to increase trustworthiness (Patton 1990; Yin 2003) by offering opportunities for theme triangulation (Wellington 2000) which may substantiate the claim that phenomena are, at least, not isolated. The small sample size was 14 learners in three schools and as per the voluntary informed consent required from parents when children are research participants (BERA 2011) Appendix vii is a copy of the letter sent out by schools to parents to ensure fully informed consent for their child to take part in the research. Further to this is Appendix viii which is an excerpt from the beginning script I read to learners before each focus group. My sampling method was purposeful in that the schools were chosen with the aim of accessing contrasting experiences to help me answer the research questions (Patton 2002). The focus group size of four learners was selected as it was enough learners to allow for synergy within the group to potentially provide depth and insight (Wellington 2000) but not too many as more than six has been said to lead to data saturation where little new information surfaces (Morgan 1996). Also, as I had the goal of getting a more in-depth understanding of

what learners had to say, smaller focus groups meant more time per learner to express their opinions and understanding (Morgan 1998). Six learners were in the focus group at Ashdown Academy as this was simply the number of learners that were provided and I felt no need to turn two away. The only prerequisite I gave schools was that the learners they selected were to be mixed ability.

It then follows that all methods that did not fit into the qualitative social constructivist paradigm were rejected. This was, again, because I could not, based on my world view, fully adhere to their differing underlying assumptions and ground rules (Thomas 2009). The most obvious alternative choice may have been conducting semi-structured interviews as I did with head teachers in phase one. I appreciate the semi-structured interview method's ability to gain insight into how participants attribute meaning to their worlds in social interaction (Grindsted 2005) but the power imbalance as a researcher interviewing learners was not acceptable. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) outline how, in an interview, power exertion need not be intentional but is inevitable as it is the interviewer who sets the stage and holds superior knowledge in the exchange. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) does also concede that power should not necessary be removed from research methods, but I do feel a method that can reduce the likelihood of learners simply telling me what they think I want to hear should be sought. I rejected structured and unstructured interviews as per the same reasoning explained in the phase one research tools section earlier.

I wanted to minimise my role in the group discussion as much as possible as researchers using focus groups are usually at least as interested in the interactions between participants (Hartas 2010). Along with going to the schools dressed casually, I felt focus groups and the group dynamic would reduce the asymmetry of power which is vital for meaningful data in my study.

5.2.1 Photo elicitation

Deploying photos during an interview has been defined as photo elicitation (Harper 2002) and can complement the discussion and provide a more '*holistic understanding of participants' worlds*' (Keegan 2008, p619), a facet in keeping with the importance of context to phenomenological research. Perhaps a more important propensity, given the previously discussed issue of power imbalances, is how visual methods are thought to reduce power

imbalances between researchers and participants (Pink 2001; Hurworth 2003) likely due, as I found, from their ability to shift discussion away from the researcher to between research participants. Two methods of deployment were considered: having participants as photographers can help generate new themes from their world view and provide high levels of engagement in the research project (Klob 2008) but as the central phenomenon (education's relationship with social mobility) has been established *a priori* and to prevent analysis lacking direction (King 1998) photographs as stimuli was thus preferred. Collier and Collier (1986) reported how they found pictures to be the enabler of longer and more comprehensive interviews however key criticisms of the approach have centred around the increased cost to the researcher of using them along with increased complexities of transcribing (Meo 2010). Transcribing actions were problematic but I did, where possible, confirm actions in speech to the dictaphone. I provided the participants with 75 images which were coded into five groups (low, medium low, medium, medium high and high) each with three sub-groups. Each sub-group contained five images that represent, in Bourdieusian terms, economic, social and cultural capital. This resulted in employing 75 pictures depicting five differing levels of social, economic and cultural capital in five different ways within each capital grouping. It is an important note at this stage that the learners were not asked to categorise these images (Hall et al. 2007) they were just offered an opportunity to use them if they so wished to help explain their thoughts. I did not claim that participants interpreted them as I do but they have been chosen as salient representations of the various capital put forward by Savage et al (2013) in the Great British Class Survey and the images and codes can be viewed in Appendix ix. Along with the number of images used was a consideration that I must take into account the amount of variation in the images (Rose 2001) and in this case a continuum of capital was required. Rose (2001, p59) describes coding images used in research as '*a crucial stage*' to induce rigour in the analysis of how they are interpreted by participants (Slater 1998). To ensure rigour in analysis I have followed the recommendations of Rose (2001) in that my categories, as far as possible, did not overlap and every aspect of the image must fit into one category. The images must also be enlightening so that interpretation can be analytically interesting.

5.2.1 Piloting focus groups

Before undertaking the field work I performed a pilot focus group with four year 10 learners I personally teach (see Appendix x). As per phase one the data gathered was not useful but testing the research tool was (Secomb and Smith 2011).

5.3 Data analysis

The Data Protection Act (1998) will be upheld at all times which, in my thesis, manifested itself in the following ways (BERA 2011):

All data collected was used fairly and lawfully. It was only used for the specific purpose of answering my research questions in a way that is adequate, relevant and not excessive. This data will also not be held any longer that is necessary which I deem to be my completion of the course and publication of my thesis. This will be explained to participants.

All participants were made aware that their personal data and research responses were fully anonymous (unless a child discloses illegal or harmful information where I am duty bound to report this). A de-brief was also sent to parents and participants thanking them for their co-operation and briefly explaining conclusions or learning that has come from their phase of the research. This mainly stems from my desire to leave a lasting positive impression of educational researchers on my participants. Data was kept safe, was always password protected and so was the hard drive it was stored on.

The overarching method of data analysis for both phases of the field work was Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). In this thesis the phenomenon being uncovered was how leaders and learners viewed education's role in the processes of social mobility:

The aim of IPA is to explore in detail individual personal and lived experience and to examine how participants are making sense of their personal and social world...A double hermeneutic is involved...The participant is trying to make sense of his/her world and the researcher is trying to make sense of how the participant is trying to make sense of his/her world (Lyons and Coyle 2007, p34).

Figure 5, below, demonstrates why this paradigm was chosen as all key elements are very much core to how I am collecting, analysing and making sense of what leaders and learners explain are their experiences. Of specific interest is that participants are experts about their experiences and this core to what I believe about leaders and learners and their experience of their education.

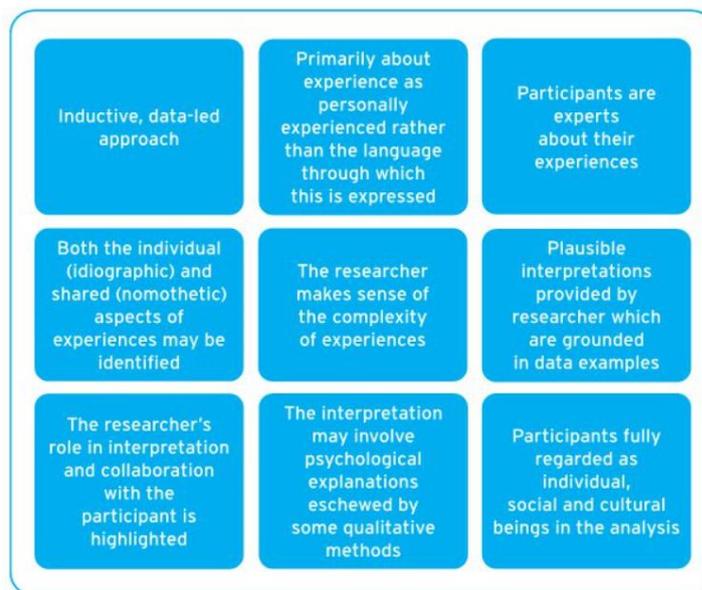


Figure 5 – Key elements of interpretative phenomenological analysis (Howitt 2010, p274)

A six-step approach to IPA outlined by Howitt (2013, p348) was employed in order to expose dominant themes in the discourse for both phase one and phase two:

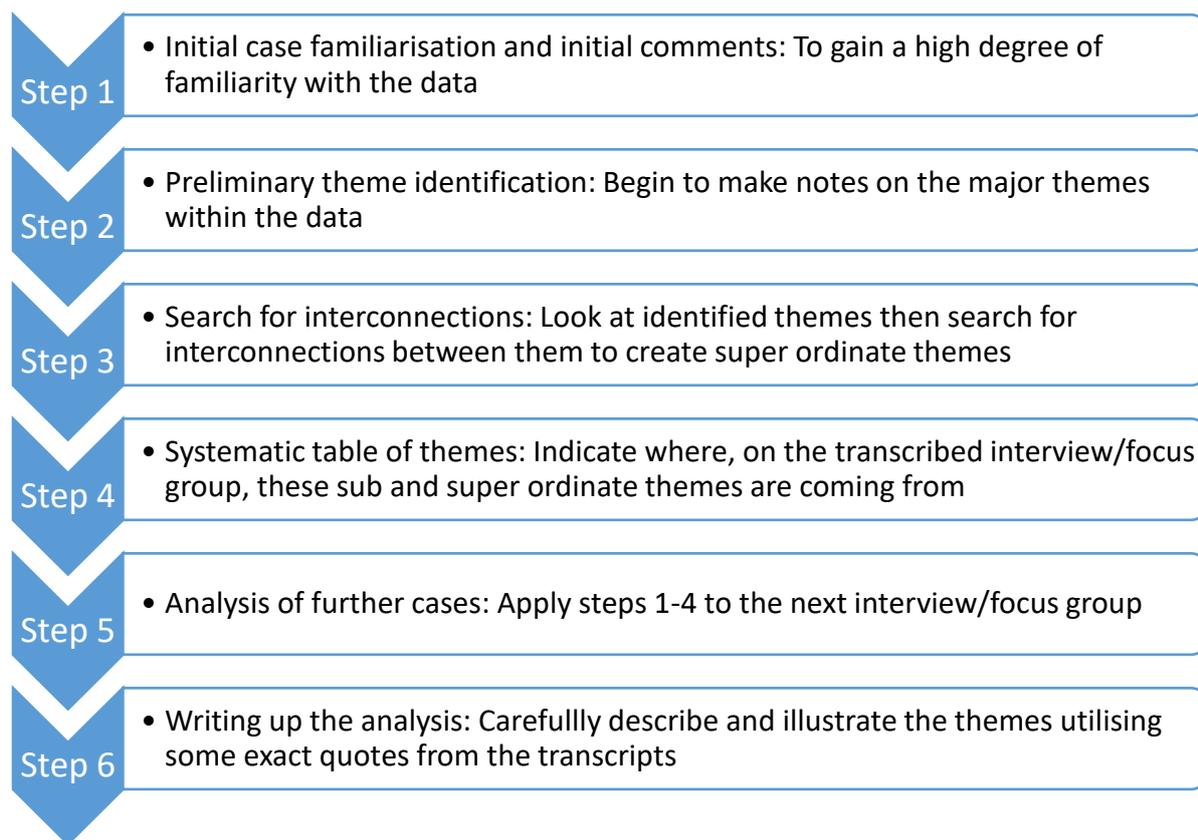


Figure 6 – Steps to IPA adapted from Howitt (2013, p348-352)

In the methodology section of this thesis I alluded to the research having a post-modernist *feel* as there are times in my findings where a template analysis was carried out as part of the IPA which is not usually conducted. This is where *'the themes...may be developed a priori of the data analysis'* (Howitt 2013, p354) which is a vital facet, in that I would like to view the data I have collected through a Bourdieurian theoretical lens. Applying a template can also assist in preventing the analysis *'lacking any clear direction and [the researcher] feeling overwhelmed by the mass of rich, complex data'* (King 1998, p122). For both the IPA and therefore the template analysis of pre-decided themes, a fairly rudimentary three column approach was taken as outlined in Saldana (2011, p17). This basically consisted of writing the raw interview transcript in column one, combing this for preliminary codes in column two and finally creating a final code in column three as explained in the steps to IPA discussed above (see Appendix xi). These final codes were then placed under an umbrella statement that then aimed to answer the question taking into account the opinions of all head teachers and learners. As per my methodological approach and methods utilised, findings are discussed in a very qualitative manner. Frequently, short extracts of text are

utilised verbatim to illuminate the phenomenon being discussed. The reader is invited to see the double hermeneutic in action as I interpret what the learners *themselves* interpret about education, social mobility and surrounding themes. This I believe to be a central pillar of IPA.

An important distinction, however, is that phase one and phase two were analysed separately and while synthesised to answer RQ 1, the six phase steps of IPA were followed individually for both sets of data and then again to answer RQ 1. In line with ethical considerations outlined in BERA (2011, p7) the participants and schools remain anonymous and, as such, pseudonyms have been used throughout the rest of this thesis.

Head teachers:

Name	Role	School	School type	Inspection rating
John	Head Teacher	Gapston School	State maintained local authority	Good (Ofsted)
Simon	Executive Head Teacher	Runborough School Fannersfield Academy Ashdown Academy	State maintained academy	Outstanding (Ofsted) Inadequate (Ofsted) Inadequate (Ofsted)
Chris	Head Teacher	Castlewood School	Independent	Good (ISI)

Learners:

Learners	School	School type	Inspection rating
A, B C, D	Runborough School	State maintained local authority	Outstanding (Ofsted)
E, F, G, H	Fannersfield Academy	State maintained academy	Inadequate (Ofsted)
I, J, K, L, M, N	Ashdown Academy	State maintained academy	Inadequate (Ofsted)

Documentation detailing the wider context of each of the cases, as judged through inspection reports, can be viewed in Appendix xii.

6.0 Findings and Discussion

Before deconstructing the findings into the various research questions and subsidiary questions as per step six required for successful IPA (Howitt 2013, p348-352) there were transcendent themes that permeated discussions so strongly that they could be described as the lens that both the leaders and learners were using to construct their understanding of education's role within the processes of social mobility. Justification of these lenses can be read within the discussion of the findings.

Lens on social class:

While leaders and learners were not asked to pontificate on their beliefs around class directly, it became very clear that for all in the study their understanding, or lens, was a very classical economic one as outlined earlier in this thesis. Despite occupational divides becoming '*increasingly blurred in today's more service-orientated economies*' (Rossiter 2012, p90) they still overwhelmingly discussed social mobility in economic terms rather than the more contemporary notion of levels of alternate capital such as social, cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1986) dividing class lines. What was not clear was whether the pursuit of economic capital was believed to be the way of acquiring increased levels of other types of capital but I felt this unlikely. This is because the learners did not even identify differing capital and didn't once cite these as the outcome of a contemporary education.

Lens on meritocracy:

Again a classical lens was deployed by leaders and learners which followed the '*merit = ability + effort*' (Allen 2011, p368) equation where symbolic capital represents, in some combination, both effort and ability e.g. merit = symbolic capital within the educational field. There was a large divergence between their world view on how valuable this equation was for relative social mobility, however. Leaders discussed structural inequalities within the education system as powerful barriers to relative mobility which could be attributed to their helicopter view of the system. Learners, however, casted very little doubt that the meritocratic ideal would be upheld within what they believed to be a meritocratic labour market where symbolic capital directly represented the combination of effort and ability which would lead them to merit. What is discussed in this findings section is the very

interesting tension that seemed to arise from the leaders' world views on educational inequality and how this didn't translate into practice as could be expected. Within their headteacher role they all seemed to perpetuate the classical meritocratic worldview of education's relationship with social mobility disregarding all they understood about inequality with surprising ease.

As phase one and two were conducted as separate pieces of research, their findings are analysed separately here also. After the answers to their subsidiary questions are given, phase three of this thesis is the synthesis of all that has been learned to ultimately answer RQ 1: How do education leaders and learners understand the role of education in processes of social mobility?

6.1 Phase one findings and discussion - SRQ 1: To what extent is social mobility an agenda item for education leaders?

In order to provide the wider contexts required to realise IPA fully I have employed two precursory questions here to assist in the answering of SRQ 1:

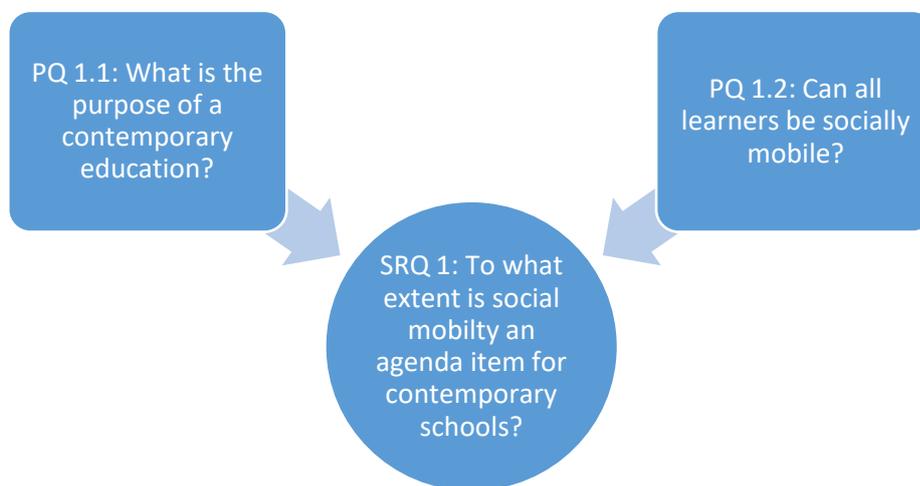
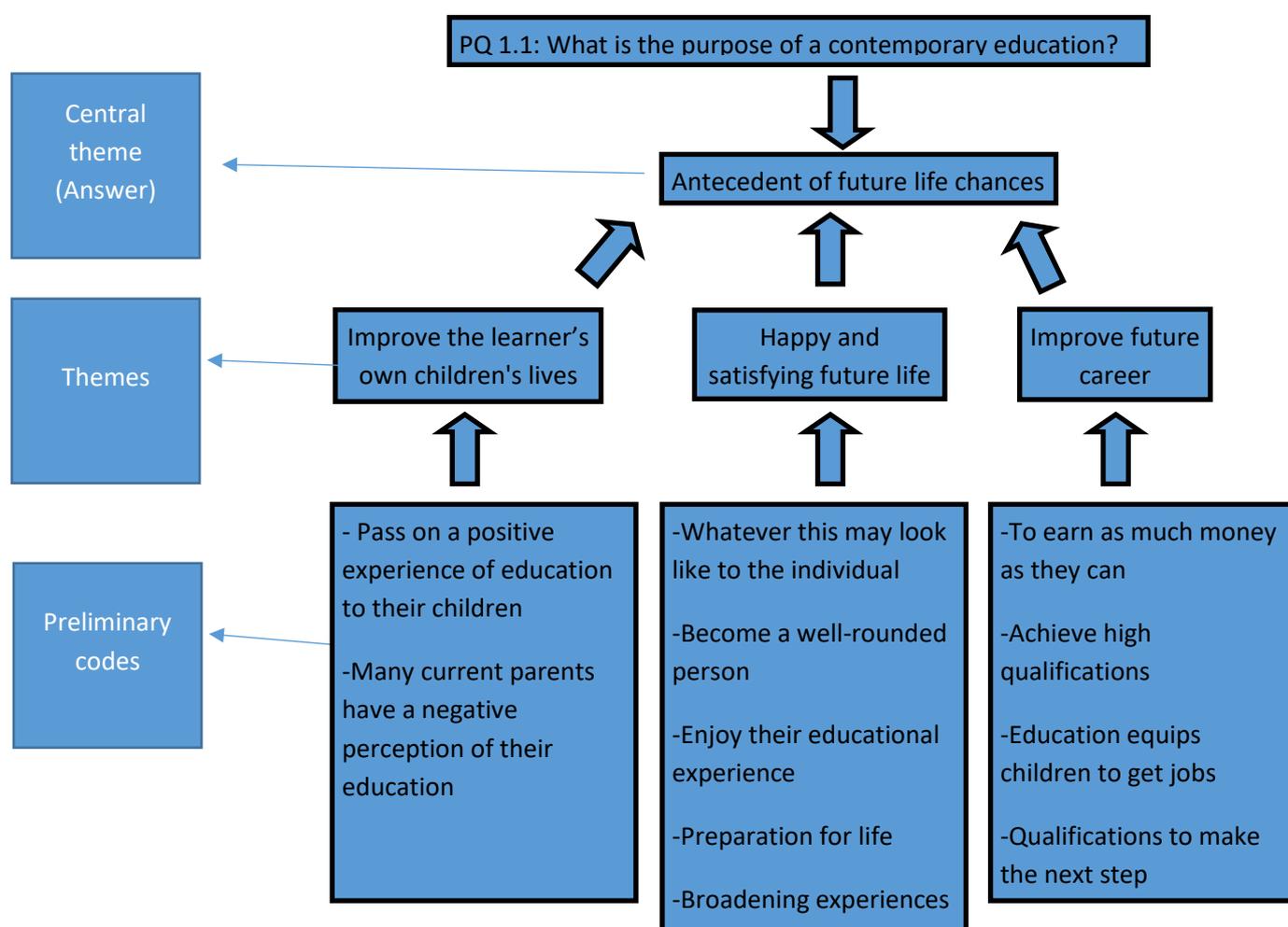


Figure 7 - Precursory questions leading to SRQ 1 for phase one

6.1.1 Findings and discussion for PQ 1.1

The first question I asked during the semi-structured interviews was about what John, Simon and Chris considered the purpose of a contemporary education was. This question was designed to engage them from the outset and make clear the location of my interests (Kvale 1996). I also felt it prudent to understand the context in which the phenomenon of social mobility is based given the methodological underpinnings outlined earlier (Crotty 1998) and to explore the lens they use to view the field.



As can be gathered from the themes and then central theme that links them, the purpose of a contemporary education is interpreted by interviewed head teachers as a conduit for social mobility in ways that draw strong parallels to Government rhetoric (The Prime Minister's Office 2016) as a justification for this lens. There is an appreciation that education *can* deliver real social change for *an individual* that is located even beyond that individual and into their future children:

...They leave school having a positive experience and therefore are able to talk to their own kids about it...I want them to enjoy it rather than what happens now in education where you have got quite negative parents who probably remember education as I do: The teachers playing darts and snooker in the staff room and saying don't come near the door until the end of lunch (John).

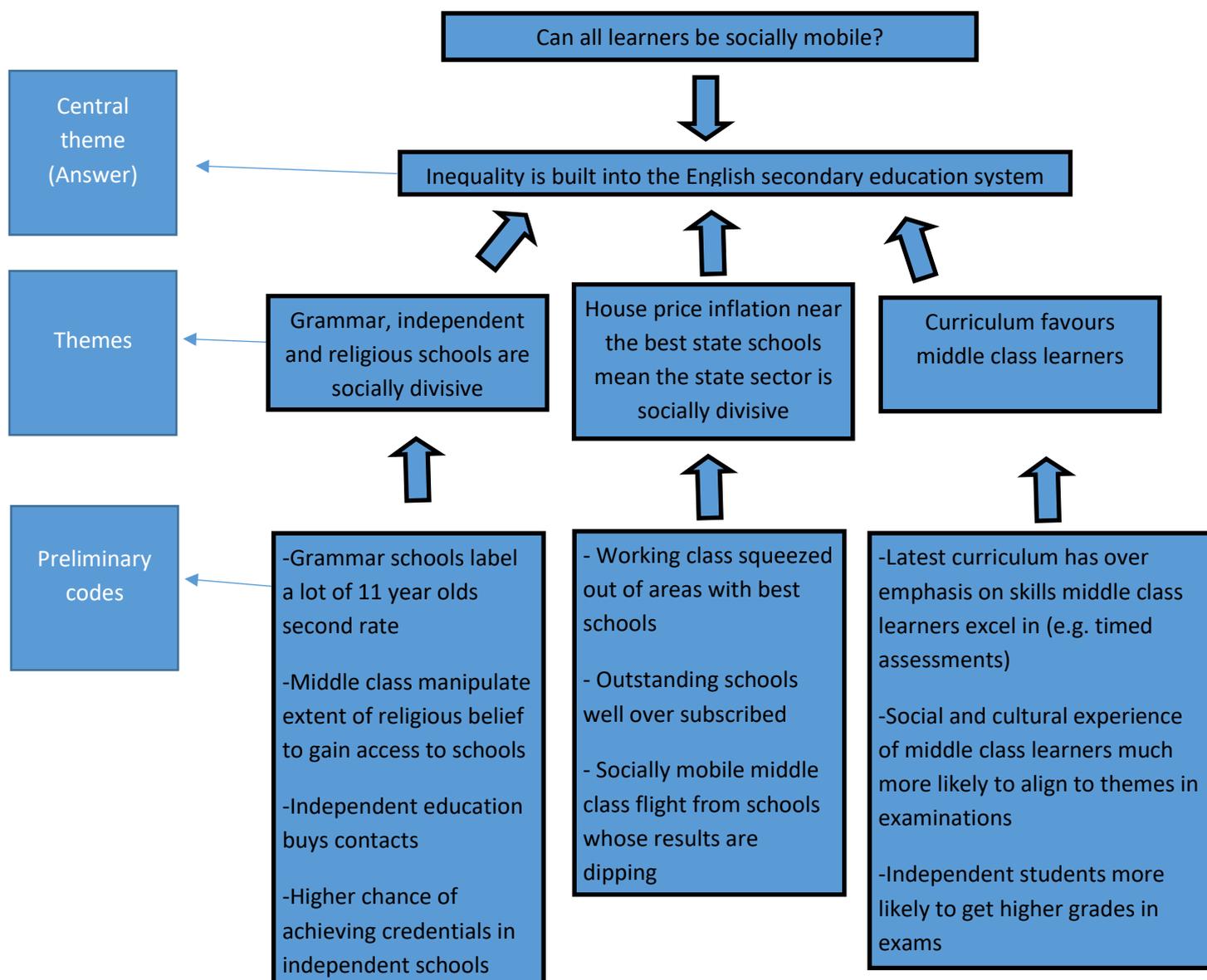
John explains here how habitus is '*continually re-structured by individuals' encounters with the outside world'* (DiMaggio 1979 cited Reay 2004, p434) and specifically how giving students fond memories might go some way to breaking down the '*us and them'* rhetoric John felt many parents currently harboured for school. John believes schools have the ability at least to contribute towards restructuring individual habitus but the time taken to achieve this is likely to be longer than a head teacher's tenure or even a specific government.

The other main theme here was a somewhat strong appreciation of how the symbolic power credentials serve to structure the labour market and thus coveted economic capital. It is also John's belief that his learners were complicit in understanding that:

...If they can grasp this set of qualifications are going to mean that they go on and buy themselves a Ferrari, for example, then they have got a kind of path through life (John).

John has a typically meritocratic view and again draws similarities to government rhetoric (Prime Minister's Office 2016). The overarching phenomenon I then unpick to answer this question is that the perceived purpose of a contemporary education is very much about it being an antecedent to future life chances (Muller 2015). The interesting temporal facet here, and what is missing from all head teachers, was any discussion of the benefits of education in the present for learners. A promise of a better future in an abstract tomorrow may not be motivation enough for learners who have a predisposition towards the enjoyment of the present.

6.1.2 Findings and discussion for PQ 1.2:



The head teachers did discuss social mobility from a relative not absolute point of view despite not being directly prompted to discuss it in terms of one or the other. Their rhetoric as interpreted below did centre around social fluidity or lack thereof in this section in particular. When asked and probed on this question the educational leaders made clear that they believe that educational inequality was widespread in the system and proceeded to give me many examples where they felt the system was actually set up to perpetuate inequalities (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). Their view seemed to diverge strongly from discussed government rhetoric on the purpose of a contemporary education (DfE 2010) and

against the lens they purported to view the field with. The first theme that re-occurred in different guises was the overt inequality between different providers of education in England; this is something all the senior leaders commented on. Simon, the head of an Ofsted outstanding school who had taken on leadership of two inadequate schools, was particularly passionate about this. Simon asserted that:

I couldn't go into the private sector; it does my head in. The whole thing. I think in terms of why we don't get much social mobility it's because the 7% the 8% can buy an education that buys contacts, that buys access to families who have got contacts and you get embroiled in this. It's not the quality of teaching they go for it is because of the contacts and the access to another world that they see emerging from that (Simon).

In this phrase alone he refers to 'contacts' three times which very much brings to the fore that Simon feels fees are not necessarily buying access to higher levels of symbolic capital but are gaining access to higher levels of social capital through access to a '*durable network*' Bourdieu (1986, p88) implying that this is potentially of higher importance. In discussing a different form of inequality Simon explained about two schools in a local town. One, a well-respected Church of England school and a struggling academy as he saw it. The Church of England school is oversubscribed so he playfully quipped that '*I tell you what, that church in Huckalsfield must be so full on a Sunday...It's not*'. Indicating that cultural factors were powerful in accessing better schools and tools employed by arguably socially mobile parents who have a '*feel for the game*' and thus can '*appropriate the specific profits at stake in the game*' (Bourdieu 1993, p88).

Chris, head of Castlewood independent school fully accepted that increased capital (cultural, social and economic) enjoyed by the average student at his school does lead to increased chances of achieving higher levels of symbolic capital from qualifications.

let's say someone who comes into a school like this with smaller class sizes, with aspirational parental background and with other kids who are in the same milieu. Are they destined to get better qualifications because of that, therefore is it skewing social mobility? I think statistics would say probably yes (Chris).

As stated earlier, Jerrim et al (2017) concluded there was a 44% higher chance of independent school pupils being in university aged 20 and it is likely this increased ability to

acquire the symbolic capital that drives this statistic. Chris did offer a solution, however, in that:

I do believe, and many independent heads wouldn't say this, I totally support universities that do have flex in their admissions procedure according to social deprivation and other such statistics. I think that is sensible and entirely appropriate; how easy it is to apply though I am not sure (Chris).

Chris believes that positive discrimination is required to fix inequalities of condition in very much the same way luck egalitarians align social justice with policies that seek to redress inequalities arising from bad brute luck (Arneson 2004). He takes the onus away from schools and school level intervention and perceives that the wider social and cultural experience will have an inevitable impact that schools, with policies such as pupil premium (DfE 2014b) cannot remedy. Interestingly, he points to the fact that other heads of independent schools may not be quite so forthcoming about any policy that may be seen as diluting their inbuilt advantages.

It is worth highlighting that access to social capital and increasing cultural capital was not a feature in the state sector head's perception of a contemporary education whereas Chris spent almost half the time on this question discussing '*the extra-curricular*', '*leadership opportunities*', '*meeting interesting people opportunities*', '*going on interesting trips type opportunities*' and students '*broadening their experiences as a preparation for life*'. While it could be argued increased economic capital can help Chris make this possible for his learners, I do not accept that increasing social and cultural experience of learners has to increase costs on schools necessarily. Simon put it succinctly, however, when discussing why students are not taught social etiquette (for example elocution) in the state sector after he identified the way learners speak as a major barrier to social mobility: '*We are not judged on it*' he proclaimed in a conciliatory tone that summed up how strongly he seemed to feel about not truly being in charge of directing his own curriculum. Simon has to stick to a strict inspection framework. Chris, however, may be better able to build more social and cultural opportunity as parents of independent school students may value this side more than just an academic result.

It seems, then, these head teachers may be perpetuating '*cruel optimism*' (Berlant 2011, p1), by presenting an apparition of meritocracy to learners where '*inequalities are justly unequal*' (Allen 2011, p370) John explained:

Just this morning we had a millionaire local business man in talking to year nine boys about his kind of rags to riches story and how important education is to try and sell that story to the students (John).

It is this apparition of meritocracy through the promise of social mobility that may be the vital mechanism required for Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence, a way of conceptualising the maintaining of domination upon dominated agents within a given structure (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). In an educational context symbolic violence is concerned with the relationship between education and social reproduction (O'Grady and Atkin, 2006) and is described as '*gentle, invisible violence, unrecognised as such...chosen as much as undergone*' (Bourdieu 1990a, p127). Social agents who are dominant require those who are not to perceive the social order as fair or at least to not question it. If a learner's educational experience is influential in how learners perceive social mobility (the extent to which was explored in phase two of this thesis) it then follows that learners would likely have little grounds to question the meritocratic pre-disposition perpetuated by the heads in my study. In practice this could be an example of the education system perpetuating rather than addressing educational inequality (Mortimore 2014) as the promise of social mobility through ability and effort alone and ignoring the social, cultural and economic capital needed may legitimise educational inequality. No actual violence has to take place to perpetuate this inequality as it is embedded into the very fabric of action and structures (Kauppi and Madsen 2013).

Social mobility was not questioned by any head teacher as to the extent that it is a worthy goal of a contemporary education but the negative effects on communities were mentioned by Simon in that '*the students who you change the lives of tend to move away so they don't become parents in that community*'. What Simon perceives is a practical example of a major criticism of social mobility as '*social mobility rips working-class young people out of communities that need to hold onto them*' (Reay 2013, p667).

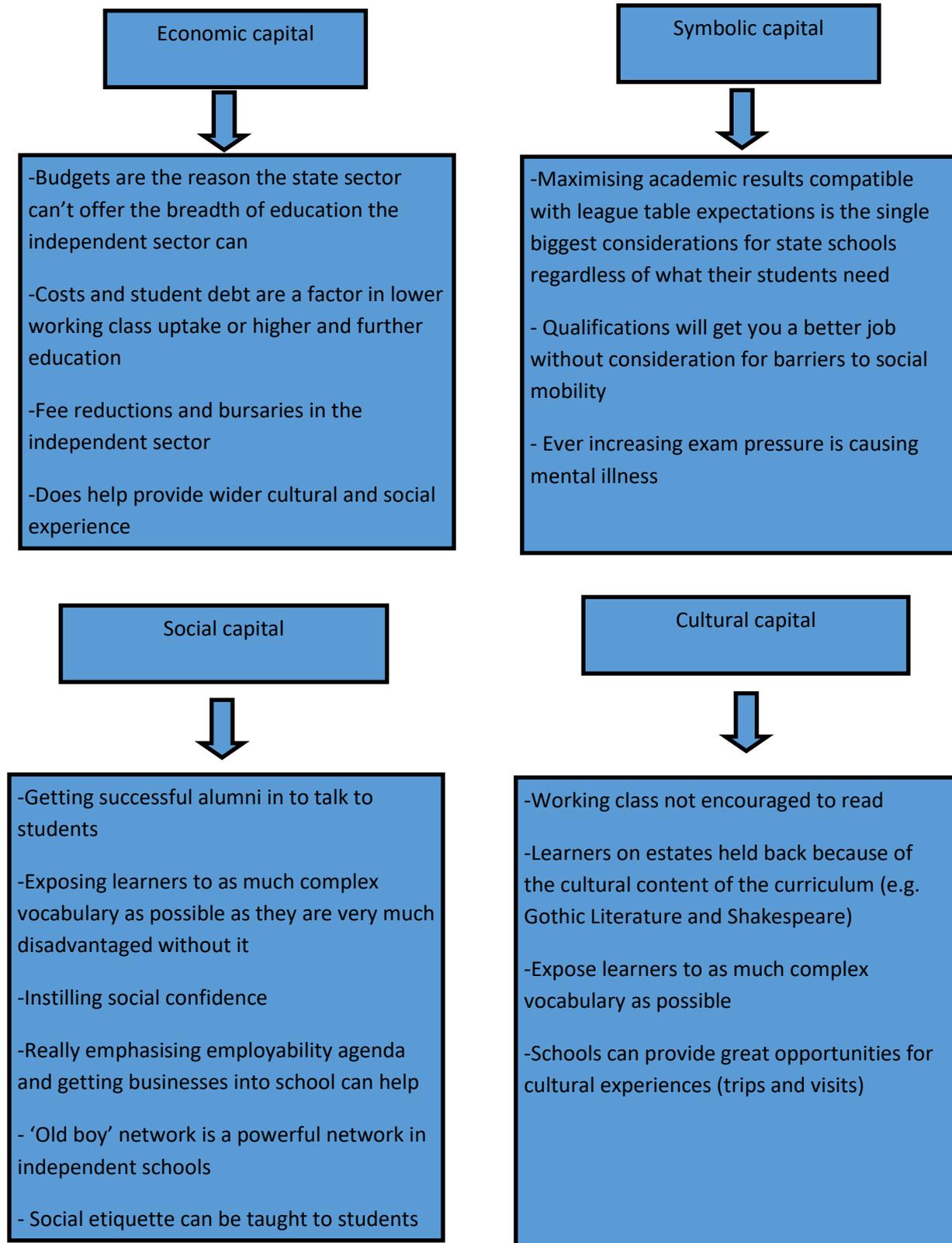
I conclude that the head teachers interviewed do not believe that all students can be socially mobile and seem to be uneasy about the relationship between what they think education should do in theory and what it does do for most in practice. I do not doubt that these educational leaders believe their rhetoric around education being a conduit for social mobility and they all truly want what they think is best for learners in their care. What is paradoxical, however, is that with very little extra scratching on the surface of this seemingly pre-programmed disposition, the heads appreciated that, in practice, educational inequality existed to prevent the very goals they aimed for in most cases. To some extent, in their position as head teacher they have the latent ability and personal understanding to arm learners with a *'feel for the game'* and represent the institution so understand the rules to allow learners to *'appropriate the specific profits at stake in the game'* (Bourdieu 1993, p88) and yet they appear to be choosing not to. What is not clear from the interviews is why the head teachers were so willing to disregard what they know about educational inequality from their helicopter view of the field to perpetuate meritocratic ideals they, themselves admitted, are likely not the case for the majority of learners. There could be several justifications, for example they are reproducing the deeply internalised viewpoint they were taught in their formative years, political pressure from policy but also the school inspection regime and even external pressure from parents and other stakeholders. This was, perhaps naively, an unexpected tension that is worthy of further study in future research and has actually become a key finding of this thesis.

6.1.3 Findings and discussion for SQ 1

Now understanding that there is a disconnect between what head teachers would like an education to do and what it may actually do, I aimed to understand whether social mobility was even an agenda item in contemporary schools and to further attempt to justify the head teachers dual lens on the field. I then completed a template analysis of the interview scripts to understand the extent to which the leaders I interviewed believed that social mobility was something they could play a role in facilitating. The assumption for this to be true would be that they felt that in-school action was effective in helping students to become socially mobile (or potentially even had the power to overcome incumbent educational inequality). To help understand the extent to which this was believed I dichotomised my findings as *'internal influences on social mobility'* and *'external influences*

on social mobility' under Bourdieu's theories of capital. This dichotomy was not initially planned or aimed for but was an obvious split that emerged during the IPA and one that would help unpick the complexities arising from the duality of views that emerged from the first subsidiary research question.

6.1.3.1 Internal influences on social mobility



Firstly, social mobility for individual learners did not seem to feature as a very obvious goal directly for these head teachers. This may be because their understanding, as discussed, was that academic results would almost automatically lead to it and maybe it was therefore not worthy of being a consideration in its own right. Whilst it has been shown that academic achievement is a strong predictor of upwards social mobility (Forrest et al 2011), they believe in social mobility but also believe (or feel powerless to control many of the nuanced influences on it) that qualifications will deliver social mobility.

If Runborough school doesn't get 80% 5 A to C with English and Maths it is done for. Fannersfield, if it doesn't go above 40% this year, huge pressure. Ashdown academy, it has got to be in the 60s and growing (Simon).*

Simon uses the phrase 'it is done for', 'huge pressure' and 'has got to be' to add a sense of jeopardy. By strongly attaching the very continued existence and survival of these institutions to their measurable quantitative academic performance Simon presses, in arguably the strongest of terms, that academic results matter to his organisation above all else. The inspection and accountability regime therefore seems to strongly influence his world view despite having more than just a feeling that this is not best for the learners in his care. The rhetorical question of whether Simon could have got to his occupational position without this being the single biggest consideration also influences the fervent manner with which he discusses its importance. Second to this he did also, however, place a very strong case forward that employability (which in my view requires a combination of all four types of capital) was the key to social mobility or at least given constraints of educational inequality is something he felt he could successfully influence:

Qualifications matter short term for us but long term, for society, it matters far more that we are creating people who are employable. That is a bigger deal for me and that will be my last few years grinding on about that (Simon).

When asked a direct question, John explained that in documents such as the college improvement plan '*social mobility is not included directly at all and I suppose it sits underneath it all but it is not something we would include*'.

When focusing on internal influences to social mobility, it became somewhat clear that the independent head and the state sector heads viewed how this works in practice and their school's role in it quite differently. I do not intend this study to become comparative

between the sectors but the most interesting insights I gleamed here are from this comparison. The state school heads were much more likely to discuss the various types of capital in terms of what they couldn't control and examples of educational inequality, however Chris spent much more time confidently explaining the much wider cultural and social experience he was able to give his learners and even downplayed the importance of academic achievement.

I believe government league tables are fundamentally flawed as it is putting all the emphasis in the wrong area and I think it is a very great shame I really do. An education is so much more than what you get at GCSE (Chris).

He gave many practical examples of how social and cultural capital in his institution play out in helping his learners be socially mobile. One such social example was how he discussed the importance of the alumni network called the 'Old Castolians'. This was still termed the 'old boys network' more than 40 years after the school became co-educational which demonstrates the importance of its historical roots. Chris explained that '*the old boy network is a powerful network...Old Castolian doctors, for example, are delighted to come back to the school and speak. We use them for the benefit of the pupils*'. Chris also explained there was an economic benefit in that Old Castolians are used for fundraising. Again, this is an example of learners having access to a '*durable network*' (Bourdieu 1986, p88) which could be called upon later in life to assist with social closure (Weber 1922) and ensure learners can reap increased rewards from each other's social capital. In terms of cultural capital Chris explained how he personally prepares his prefects to host events for alumni and other external bodies:

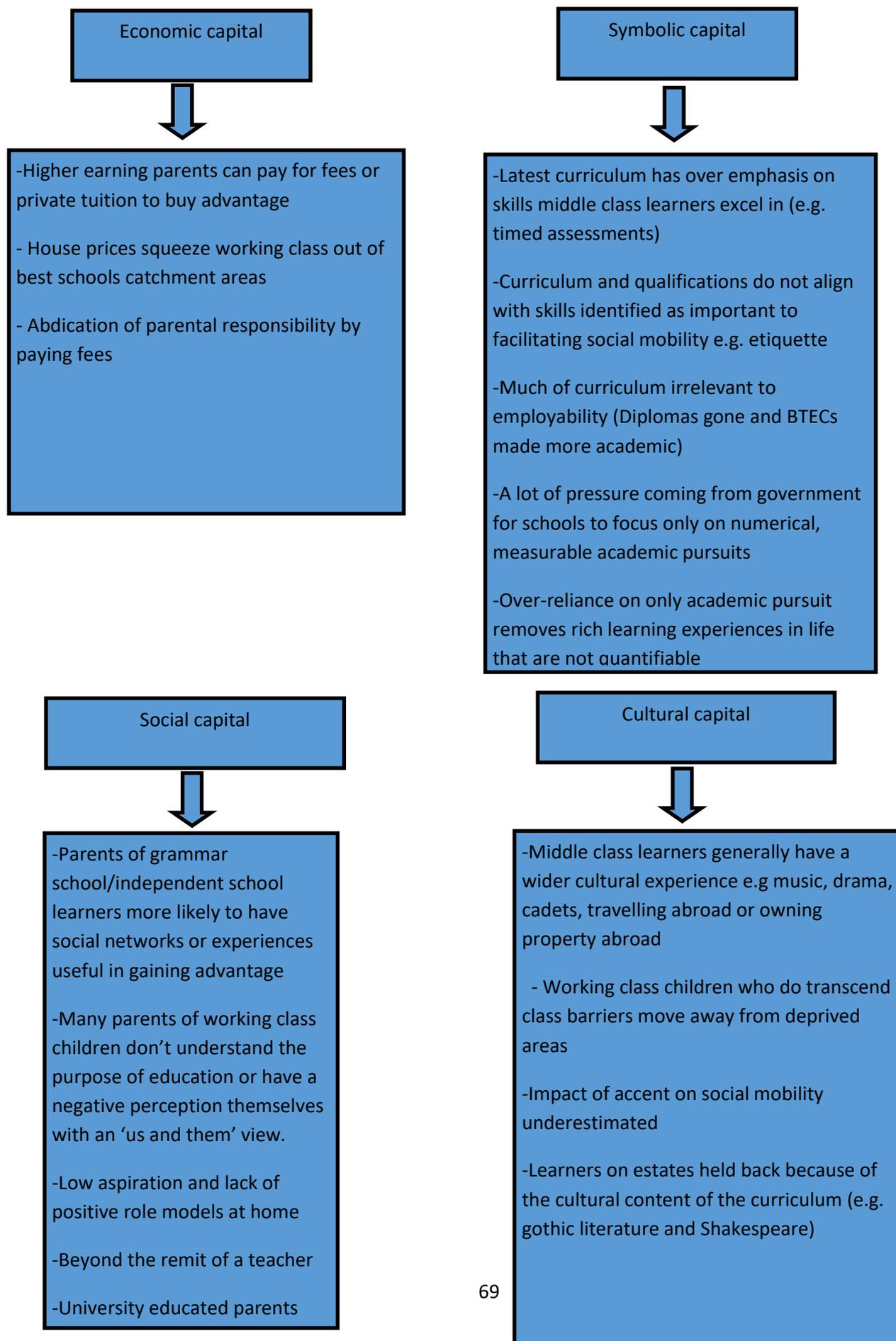
I have had a chat with my head of school and senior prefects on how to host, how to thank the prefects, teachers and catering staff. This is a skill that teach them they can't just turn up and drink (Chris).

Increased opportunities to internalise what is arguably the habitus of the dominant classes may be serving to '*reproduce the social conditions of our own production*' (Bourdieu 1993, p87). Learners are being taught here skills that are not measurable, not on any league table but will become most vital when networking and boosting individual levels of social and cultural capital. Chris has explained just one practical example of him teaching his students

'personal attributes that can serve to protect them against any serious déclassement'
(Goldthorpe 2012, p446).

In this section I conclude that the heads in my research do believe they have the ability to influence the trajectory of learners and therefore to some extent, though not directly, social mobility concerns do exist in the background of what these contemporary schools are trying to achieve. The main theme here seemed to be that the state schools concentrated much more on symbolic capital as a means to be socially mobile while the independent school head was much more likely to discuss the importance of social and cultural capital which did fit with his understanding of a contemporary education discussed earlier. Of course, I do not argue that the state sector cannot deliver opportunities to increase social and cultural capital of learners if schools so which to focus on this. What I argue is that the state school heads did not consider social and cultural capital to be so important to social mobility instead focusing on credentials, the symbolic capital that is accused of creating social closure (Weeden 2002) and justifying inequalities through symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). I will now consider how these head teachers placed their ability to affect the social mobility of learners within the wider context of the education system and the English socially constructed class system.

6.1.3.2 External influences on social mobility



All the head teachers interviewed placed emphasis on what they believed were barriers to social mobility that they felt powerless to change for the learners in their care. Whilst head teachers did discuss economic inequalities, as per the DfE's constant focus (DfE 2015; DfE 2017a), the most interesting relationship was how they believed social and cultural capital transmitted through the home had real implications on a learner's ability to achieve symbolic capital. In their experience this manifested itself in two main ways: 1. the way success criteria for achieving credentials were believed to be skewed to those students who already had entrenched advantage and 2. the access a young person may have to role models that live the values prized by the pursuit of symbolic capital. Just one anecdote that shows unequal chance of success in credentials in action was when Simon observed a French lesson in both his Ofsted outstanding school in an established middle class catchment, Runborough school and his Ofsted inadequate school serving a large deprived community, Fannersfield Academy:

I was in a year 7 French class at Fannerfield and I said "has anybody been to France?" No arms went up. I came back here to Runborough later that morning and went into a year 7 languages lesson and said, has anyone been to France? Three quarters of the class. Four students kept their hand up and one said "We've got a property in France sir, near Boudeaux" you know, totally different world (Simon).

Here Simon implies that success in French is much more likely for the students at Runborough. With arguably higher levels of cultural capital through experience of language immersion in France along with increased social capital of the students having friends who own property in France they have more of what ultimately the examinations will demand of candidates. Success in a French GCSE is more likely for those who have had increased exposure to native speakers and acts as just one practical example of how what is valued by the examination system favours disproportionately those who already have entrenched advantage (Hodgeson and Spoures 2011). When applying this to the new English GCSE subject matter, Simon stated from his perception of working class boys compared to his own children who enjoyed a comfortable middle class upbringing:

They look at the idea of doing Gothic Literature, Gothic Literature? What's the point of that they are going to think. They can't go home to their mum and dad and talk about gothic literature. My daughters might have done though (Simon).

Again, this demonstrates in practice how much more likely it is for those with a middle class cultural experience to take an interest in styles of literature and maybe contribute to the development of the very knowledge learners need to pass formal exams.

In terms of role models and thus social capital all head teachers believed this had a large influence on the attainment of symbolic capital and the ambition that goes with this.

At school we might be talking to them about being able enough to be a doctor or a dentist as they are going to get 3 A's at A level and at home they might be saying "you would be a good plumber"...Lack of role models in their local community is a huge barrier to their success (John).

A further story offered by Simon:

I would go to football matches with my dad and support Wigan Athletic and we'd go to non-league matches all around the north west and I'd get a book out and he would say "put that book down". I didn't think anything of it at the time; I thought he just wanted to chat but actually, he didn't like me being seen reading (Simon).

Both John and Simon demonstrate how the 'socially advantaged and disadvantaged play out attitudes of cultural superiority and inferiority' (Reay 2006, p436) through habitus that is transmitted through the home. John frequently discussed this 'us and them culture' that he perceived parents to have and here he hints towards parents of students at his school accepting the role of the culturally inferior. This then manifests itself in what the parents believe their children are also worth which, at times, can be detached from what the school thinks they are capable of. Simon described a typical working class scenario but disrupts it with a typical middle class propensity to read literature; he quickly realised at a young age that these two worlds cannot co-exist easily and no doubt in his childhood had to make 'impossible choices' between 'popularity among the peer group and a successful learner identity' (Reay 2006, p301), the kind his learners face daily.

In this section I conclude that external influences appear to be not only more frustrating to the head teachers but also in many ways more powerful at acting as barriers to social mobility. I also saw in action what I term a "feedback loop", whereby success in the written style GCSE exams is more likely for students who have gathered the social and cultural capital required without this being made an explicit element that is being assessed. This is only one example of many I could have illuminated from my interviews and it contributes

towards my increasing understanding of why simple school level interventions such as pupil premium have not closed the attainment gap (Ball 2010).

6.1.4 Conclusions for phase one

This phase of the research aimed to answer the subsidiary research question I set out to investigate: To what extent is social mobility an agenda item for contemporary schools? Evidence from the interviews demonstrate, as far as the limitations of my research paradigm allow, that social mobility is neither an agenda item nor is it something that is explicitly aimed for by the head teachers I interviewed. This is not to say that head teachers did not appreciate that they do have a role in helping to facilitate it. They did value it as an important function of a contemporary education despite, on the whole, not informing learners about how problematic the rags to riches discourse can be, bearing in mind myriad external barriers to social mobility that seem to exist. For the state-maintained head teachers specifically, pressure to get learners through standardised assessments for league tables and keeping Ofsted from the door seemed to be more important than the much more nuanced appreciation for the function of the symbolic capital they are an active partner in creating. In terms of justifying their world view it felt that the head teachers were not dismissing educational inequality but had, perhaps unconsciously, decided that weighing down the hopes of learners with this version of reality may not be conducive to maximising quantitative outcomes. Improving these reign supreme as a function of all 5 schools in this thesis as if these slide a school can be '*done for*' (Simon) regardless of what else they are able to achieve.

6.2 Phase two findings and discussion - SRQ 2: What do learners understand about social mobility and education's relationship with it?

As a precursor to understanding SRQ 2 I have incorporated precursory question one (PQ 2.1) which remains the same from phase one to allow leader and learner views to be contrasted in the phase three synthesis. The research methods will, however, represent a contrast as the focus groups and photo elicitation were designed to me much more learner friendly and power diluting than one to one semi-structured interviews.

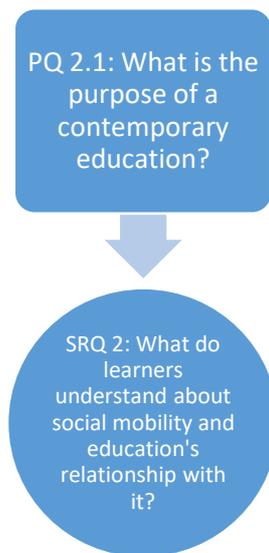


Figure 8 - Precursory question leading to answering SRQ 2 for phase two

6.2.1 Findings and discussion for PQ 2.1

PQ 2.1 was investigated using photo elicitation and the work produced by each focus group can be viewed below:

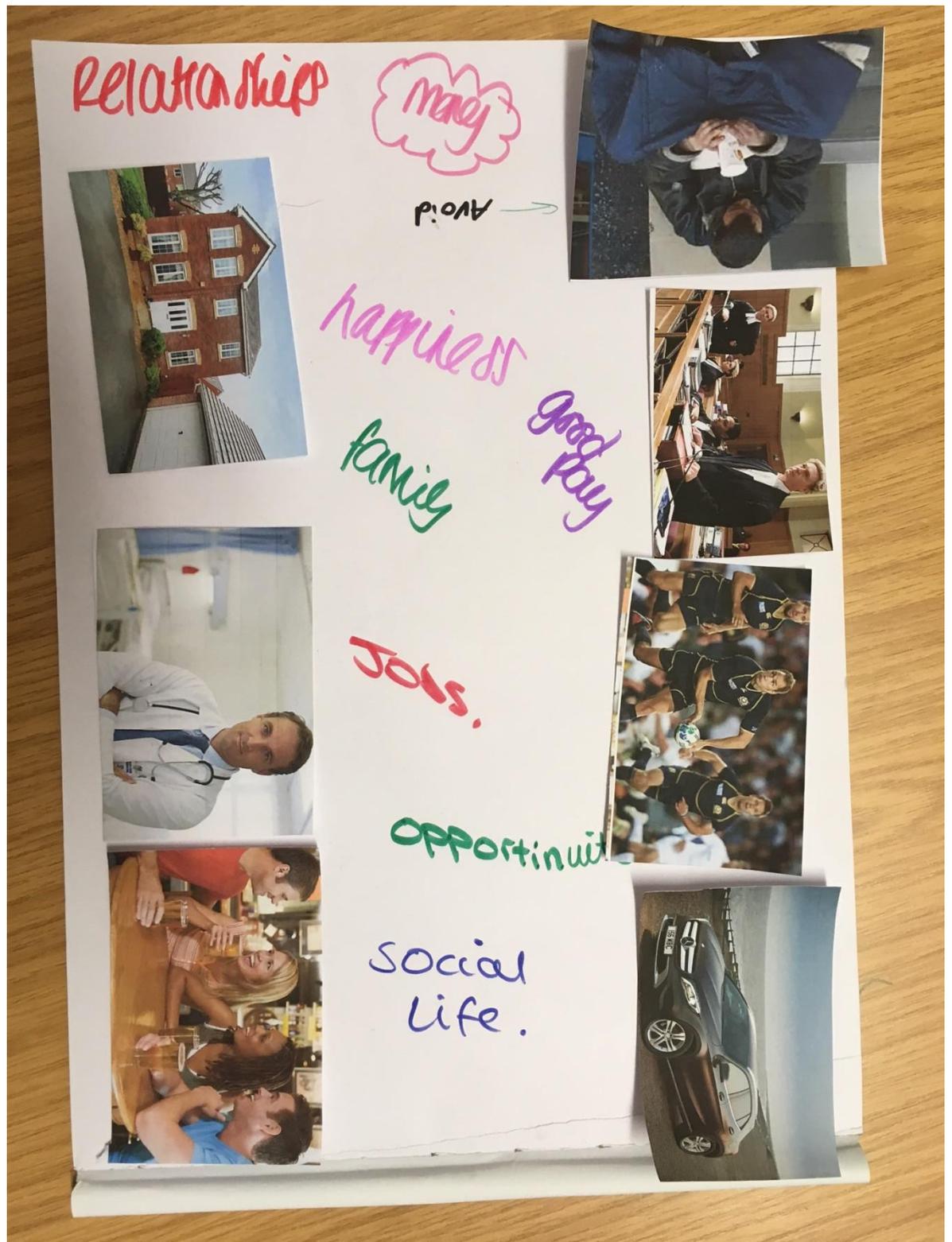


Figure 9 - What is the purpose of an education? Created by student A, B, C and D at Runborough Academy

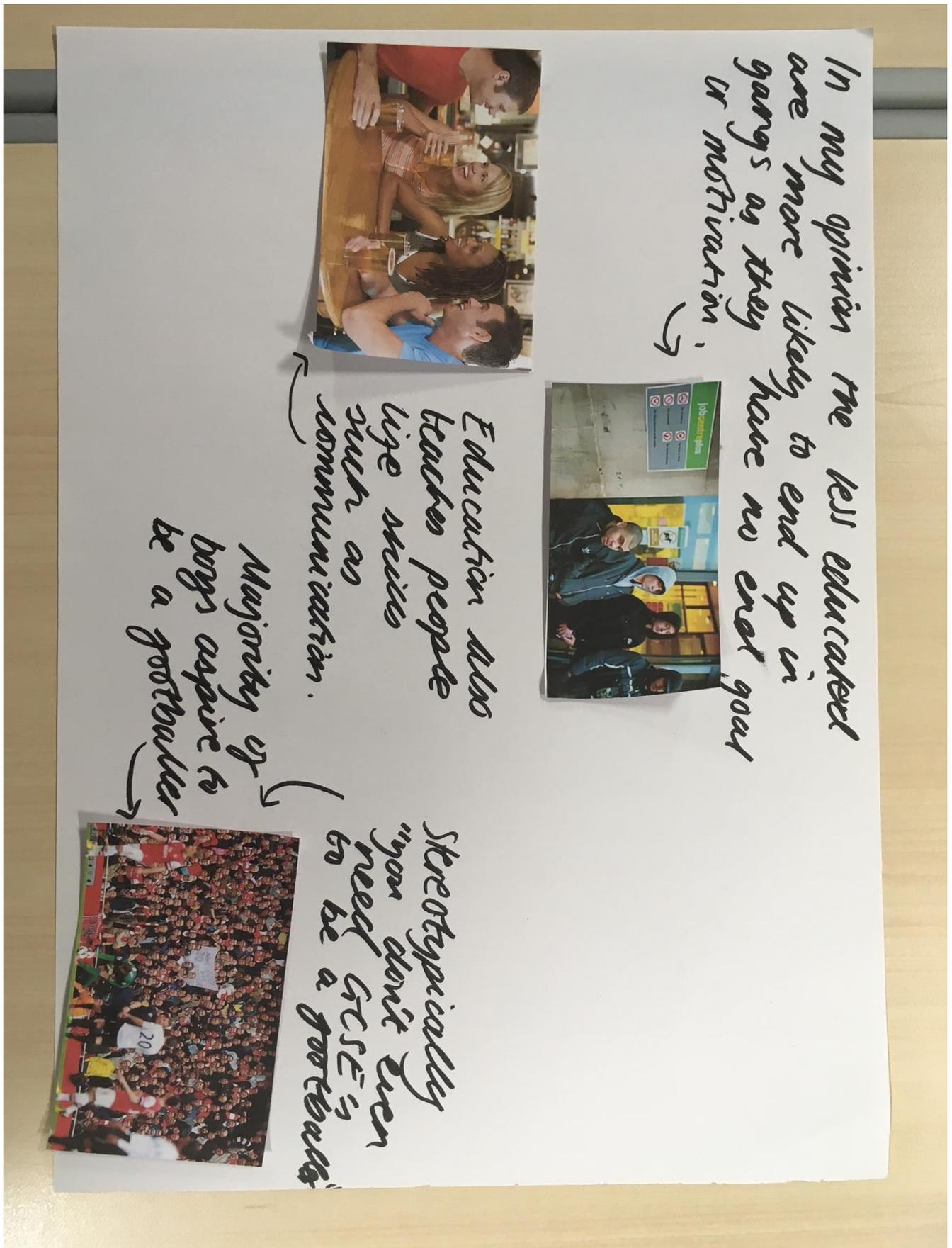


Figure 11 - What is the purpose of an education? Created by student I, J, K, L, M, N at Ashdown Academy (1 of 3)

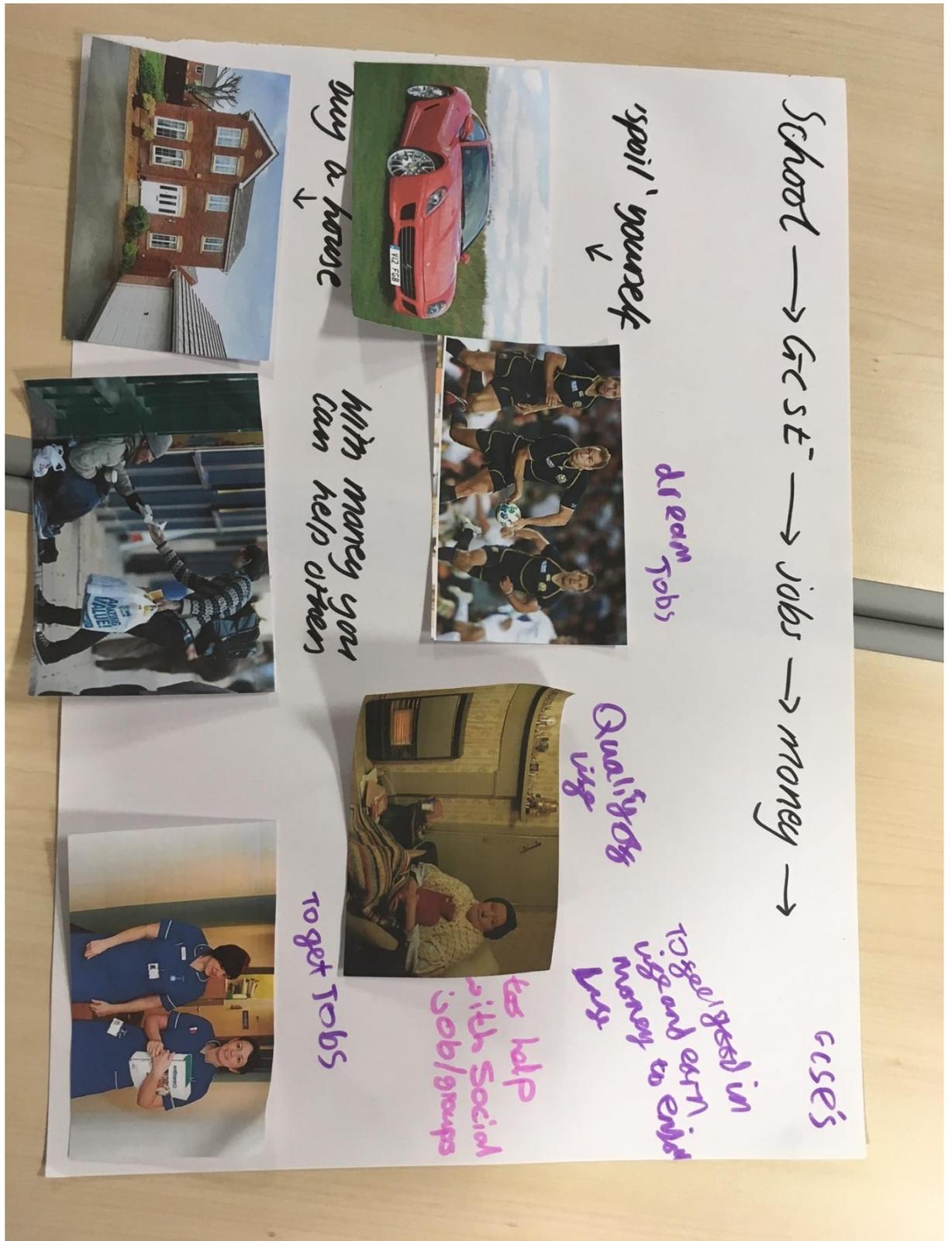


Figure 12 - What is the purpose of an education? Created by student I, J, K, L, M, N at Ashdown Academy (2 of 3)

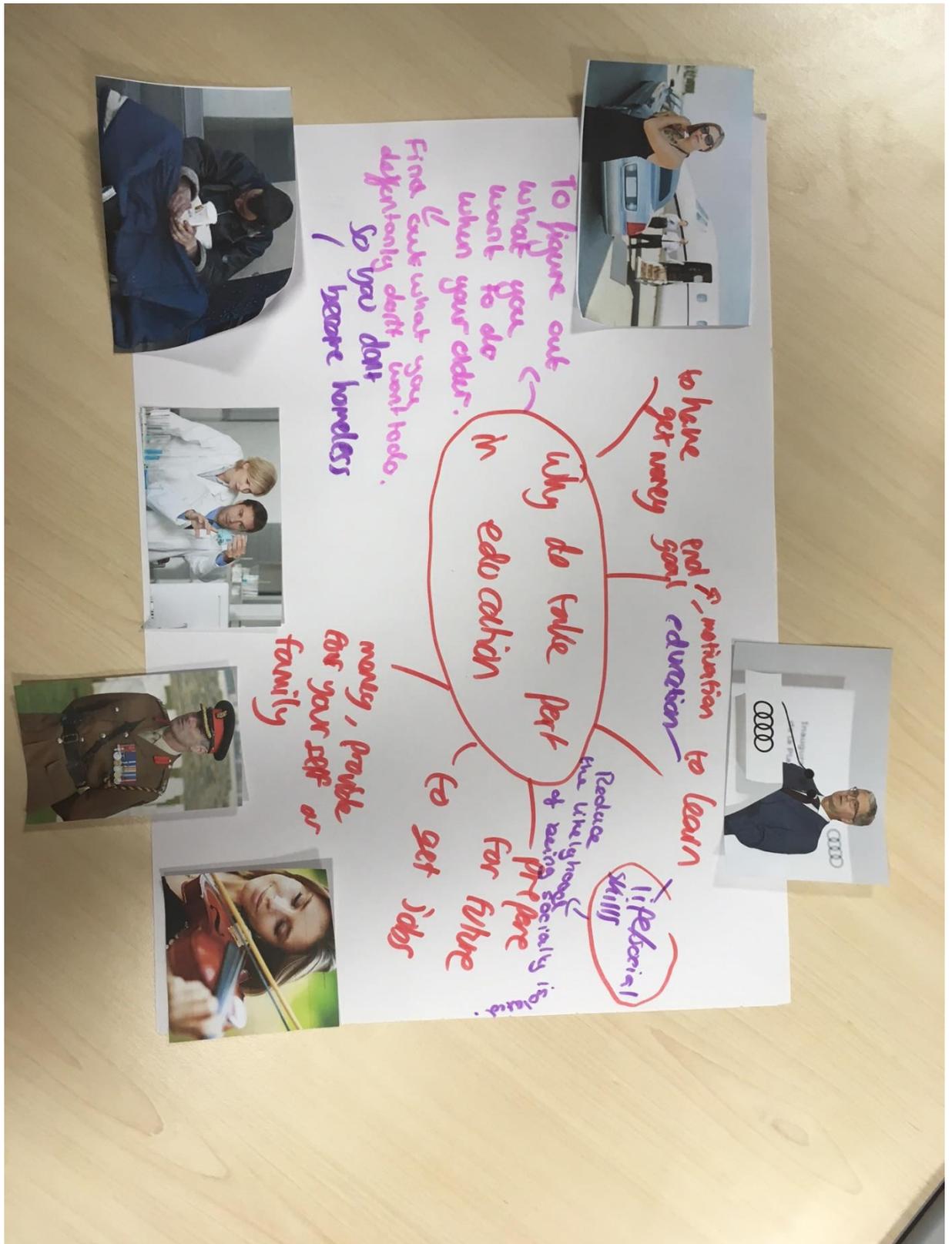


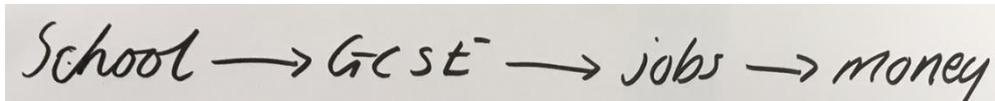
Figure 13 - What is the purpose of an education? Created by student I, J, K, L, M, N at Ashdown Academy (3 of 3)

From immersing myself in the data, including multiple listens to the recorded focus groups, reflecting on the created figures and re-reading the transcripts three major themes surfaced.

6.2.1.1 Theme one: Access to economic capital functioning as an emancipatory tool.

The learners overwhelmingly (but not exclusively as is discussed later) framed their understanding of education in terms of its ability to be a conduit for accessing economic capital and in the context of their backgrounds be an emancipatory tool. Not just average economic capital but very high levels of economic capital, the kind of which could be attributed to the top one percent of households in England. When focusing on economic capital the learners seemed to dichotomise outcomes in that the likelihood was education would either make you very wealthy or without a formal education you risked becoming incredibly poor.

In terms of the purpose of an education the largest group of pictures utilised were ones that I interpret to be depicting differing levels of economic capital such as poverty or big houses and fast cars.



School → GCSE → jobs → money

Figure 14 - Excerpt from the work of students from Ashdown Academy

What was particularly interesting was the extent to which students employed pictures from the highest strata of economic capital or what they perceived goes hand in hand with high levels of economic capital to articulate what the purpose of an education was.

This attachment of the pursuit of economic capital to the purpose of an education is also demonstrated in the text used by learners to explain their thoughts. 'get money', 'good pay', 'provide for your family', 'earn money to enjoy life', 'get jobs' are all used alongside the pictures to demonstrate a connection, in the opinion of the learners, between their education and its ability to increase economic capital. Further strengthening this is that pictures of various professions I intended to represent various levels of social capital and 'who you know' (Savage et al 2013) were actually employed by learners to also represent access to economic capital.

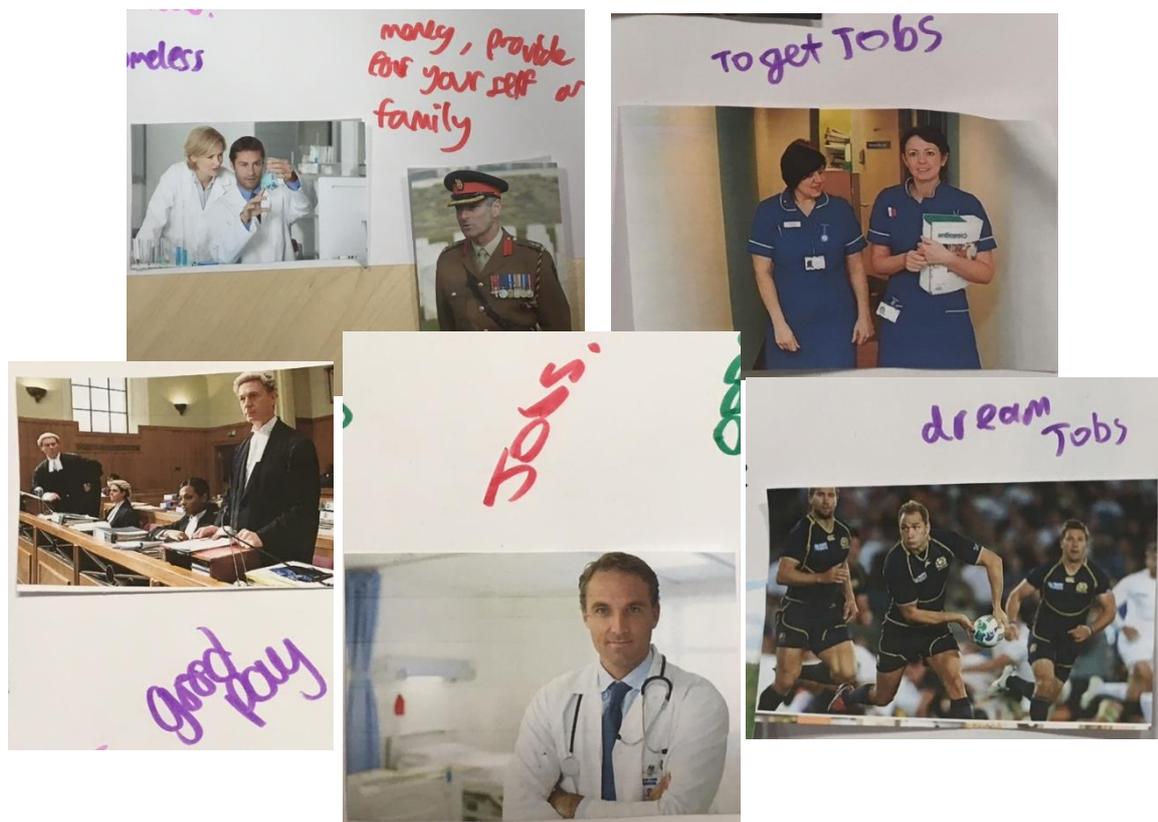


Figure 15 – Employment as access to economic capital

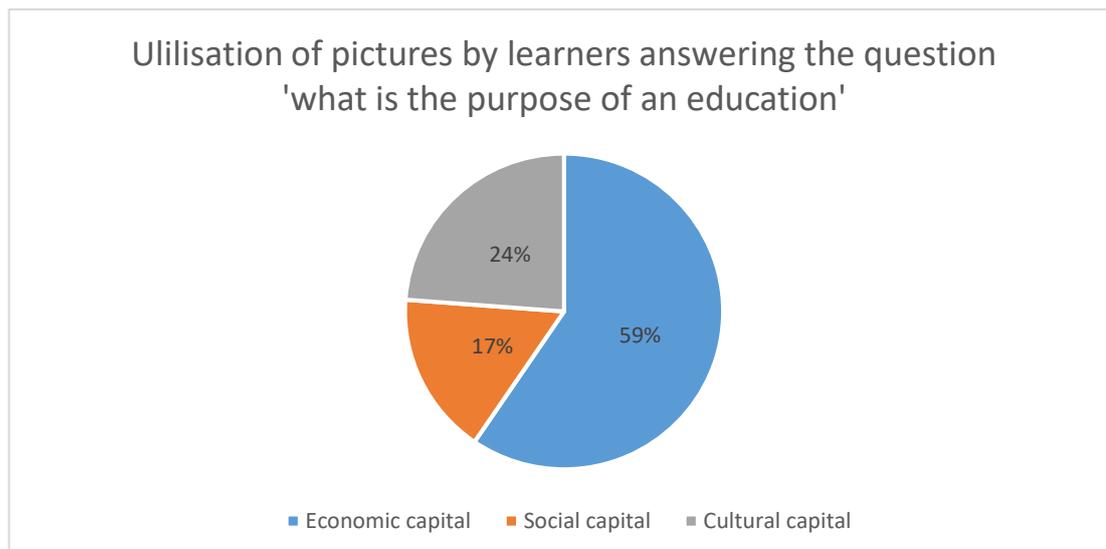


Figure 16– Percentage of economic capital pictures used adjusted where interpretation is clarified with text

Emerging from these images, then, is that the purpose of an education is to assist the learners in attaining economic capital in future years. As demonstrated above, I do not think students interpreted pictures of social capital as I had intended on the whole. This, in itself, could demonstrate how they did not interpret pictures of professionals as access to durable networks (Bourdieu 1986) but rather perceived them in the individualistic sense of their ability to increase economic capital for people in these professions. I very much interpret that these learners viewed education as an emancipatory tool (DfE 2010a) with the power to make a person homeless or achieve very high levels of economic capital. Learner E explained that: *'If you don't have an education it like closes loads of doors for you and limits you'*. This does not claim that education is the only pre-requisite to accessing opportunity but does claim that without it you have a much smaller chance. Learner G followed this up with an exchange with Learner E:

I feel like doors are closed to begin with and for anyone to actually earn their place in society and find themselves as a person they, themselves, need to open those doors (Learner G).

Basically, education is the key (Learner E).

Learner G is high ability and predicted targets of six and above in all subjects (Grade B and above equivalents). She attends Fannersfield Academy which is an inadequate school according to Ofsted and is from a background of low economic capital. You can see here how her context has shaped this dialectic. She believes that success is derived from being

the right kind of self (Gillies 2005) and that, for people like her, the default setting for opportunity is a closed door until, via individualistic means, education is used to prise one open. This is spoken by a girl who feels, for her, that there is no glass floor akin to what has been said exists for middle class learners to protect them against any serious *déclassement* (Goldthorpe 2012). It is down to her to earn a place in society as opposed to being given one and she views education as the conduit for this. The following were more responses by learners to the purpose of an education:

Just to get a job to be fair; if I had the chance to not come to school I wouldn't (Learner D).

So you can get a good car (Learner B).

To be able to afford [points to picture of mansion and sports car] you need to get a good job so you have to get good grades like A levels and stuff (Learner A).

Learners seemed to select images that lie on the extremes of the capital continuums they had available to them. Interestingly no 'medium' (3 graded) images of economic capital were employed at all. Learners seem to be taking an 'all or nothing' approach to the perceived power of their education. No middle ground or simply satisfactory economic capital (for example an average house or car) was attributed to reasons for becoming educated. This is succinctly demonstrated in Figure 9. Here the learners at Fannersfield Academy (Ofsted Inadequate school) view education not just as an emancipatory tool but as also possessing the power to cause serious implications if one is not achieved by an individual. They utilise a closed and open door metaphor to demonstrate their education's power to open the door of opportunity to high level examples of all three types of capital. Perhaps more powerful is their belief that a lack of education will lead to some very low-level outcomes such as homelessness and unemployment. A further example of this almost dichotomous and hollowed-out power of education is given in Figure 7. Again, education has the power to *save* learners. In this instance from gang life, a salient issue in this age group:

The less educated are more likely to end up in gangs as they have no end goal or motivation (Learner K).

6.2.1.2 Theme two: Education as an investment in an abstract future

Most learners perceived the benefits of being educated only to be activated in future years like an investment. This excerpt is a discussion between learners while they were creating Figure 9:

To get GCSEs (Learner J).

To get jobs (Learner M).

Yeah to get ready for you to get money to provide for your family (Learner J).

To prepare for the future (Learner L).

Yeah cos like everyone needs a job (Learner N).

Even in this short exchange it can be seen that education is framed as both an emancipatory tool (DfE 2010a) and also very much something that is not needed now but is needed in the future. It therefore is viewed by these learners as an antecedent to *future* life chances (Muller 2015).

I suppose if you couldn't get education then you couldn't get qualifications and college and you couldn't get further education and then it might be hard to get jobs (Learner M).

Yeah, you have got to go through the education system to be able to do what you want later on in life (Learner A).

Here Learner M attributes credentials as having a structuring nature within the labour market. He, again, emphasises that the value of an education is triggered 'at the next stage' in the future; so without an education there is no college, with no college there is no university and perceived good jobs become much harder to attain. Learner A is adamant beyond doubt that to have choice in your actions later in life you have got to go through the education system. No other route to the future is in existence within her reality.

6.2.1.3 Theme three: Education as an individual pursuit in cruel optimism

Not exclusively, but overwhelmingly, learners had strong underlying assumptions that the pursuit of an education was an exercise that was individualistic in nature and ultimate influence over their level of future success lies with them. This means the implications on

variation of outcomes, such as credentials, are justly unequal (Allen 2011) and, as such, education as a structuring force in the labour market was justified. After creating their collage around what is the purpose of an education I asked each focus group what the potential barriers might be to achieve the high levels of capital they outlined.

In this exchange, Learner L fails to identify any barriers that are not in the control of the individual. He focuses instead on grades as the main barrier which had shown to be the case in practice (SMCP 2014):

The main principle is grades. Morally it will be make sure every child does what they want to do but here deep inside the head teacher is going 'you need to get good grades'; that is it (Learner L).

I think every child starts off with the possibility of being able [to attain big houses and high paid jobs] it is just how that child evolves and how their mindset is created. Like if they are going to strive for something for example if they look at the first hurdle and say I'm not going to jump that hurdle then that is when they start to move a bit further down the ladder (Learner L).

By internalising responsibility for 'moving down the ladder' Learner L seems not aware of the complex social and cultural facets that play out in the labour market and instead focuses on the education system as opposed to wider societal concerns (Hoskins and Barker 2014). This is understandable given the limited understanding learner L is likely to have of the labour market but raises questions about the extent to which he is being prepared for its reality. It does, however, demonstrate the strength the meritocratic narrative for intrinsic motivation.

In the English education system where, arguably, 'equality of learning opportunity' (Cochran-Smith 2010, p13) is unjustly unequal, 'Cruel optimism' (Berlant 2011, p1) has been demonstrated by learners around the theme of education and meritocracy:

You have the potential to do anything as long as you are willing to work hard for it (Learner H).

With an education, you can end up like this. This is the final destination [points to the CEO of Audi]'... 'I don't think it matters where you come from, particularly in this country it just matters how hard you work and if you get the right mindset I think you can achieve anything (Learner L).

The way I was raised then anything is possible you can do anything no matter where you start from you can go from a window cleaner to Barak Obama (Learner G).

But if you want to then you could have the big house and car if you really wanted to (Learner M).

There was a strong feeling in all three focus groups that an individual (in a state school such as these learners) has the power to carve their own way to the top through education and hard work. While this is the case for a minority it is also the case that, in just one example, 17% of top doctors are from non-selective state schools despite 88% of all learners being educated in these schools (Sutton Trust 2016, online). Learner K and learner H are mid-ability students with grand ambitions:

Well I wanted to be a lawyer but I have changed my mind I'd quiet like to be a surgeon because I enjoy science (Learner K).

I am thinking like pharmacist and stuff as I do enjoy like chemistry (Learner H).

Through enjoying science, Learner K and H feel success in their education is enough to help them realise these careers. This, as previous discussed statements, maintains the idea that these learners do fervently believe education is the legitimate currency of a meritocratic labour market. Learners K and H did not even conceive that maybe their educational attainment will more than likely socially close (Weber 1922) them from these opportunities. While I would never seek to remove hope from a learner:

I mean, everything is possible, but the odds are not in your favour (Learner G).

6.2.1.4 Conclusions for PQ 2.1

When attempting to answer this question I would say the participants in my study felt, on the whole, that it was an investment in credentials that they believe are the biggest conduit for success in an abstract future. This conduit is believed to be the biggest contributor to accessing high levels of economic capital once learners enter the labour market. This tendency was, by some margin, the most discussed and framed to be almost deterministic within their definition of success. This felt very much the realisation of predictions made nearly 35 years ago that knowledge:

Will be consumed in order to be valorised into a new production: in both cases, the goal is exchange. Knowledge ceases to be an end in itself; it loses its use value (Lyotard 1984, p5-6).

Attaining symbolic capital to exchange for economic capital is, for these learners, an individualistic pursuit hardly influenced by anyone or anything else. A construct where failure can be catastrophic but yet justified by the present-self being vastly responsible for outcomes of the future-self. There appeared to be no glass floor or glass ceiling for these learners providing education is the emancipatory tool they hope it is. In a meritocratic country that may seem fair, but herein lies the problem.

6.2.2 Findings and discussion for SQ 2

IPA was employed using a template analysis to answer SQ 2, as outlined in the methods section of this thesis. The themes that were selected '*a priori of the data analysis*' (Howitt 2013, p354) and to structure the analysis were Bourdieu's thinking tools of habitus, capital (divided into economic, social, cultural and symbolic) and symbolic violence outlined briefly in Figure 17 below. For this figure I have simply added one more point thickness to the arrows for each time a specific tool is mentioned as important in the processes of social mobility by the learners. I have also indicated, using the dichotomy outlined by the learners, how they believe backwards and forwards mobility may play out. As can be evidenced from the data, symbolic capital was vastly prioritised by learners with the habitus of the home and economic capital of less importance. Other forms of capital were barely considered in the processes of social mobility. Interestingly learners were much more likely to discuss forward rather than backwards mobility when discussing education's relationship with social mobility adding weight to their belief of its emancipatory function. The very notion that education could actually be a tool of symbolic violence was not even considered which may not be surprising given the nature of this theoretical position.

The extent to which the various Bourdieusian thinking tools were utilised by learner focus groups to conceptualise the processes of social mobility and education's relationship with it

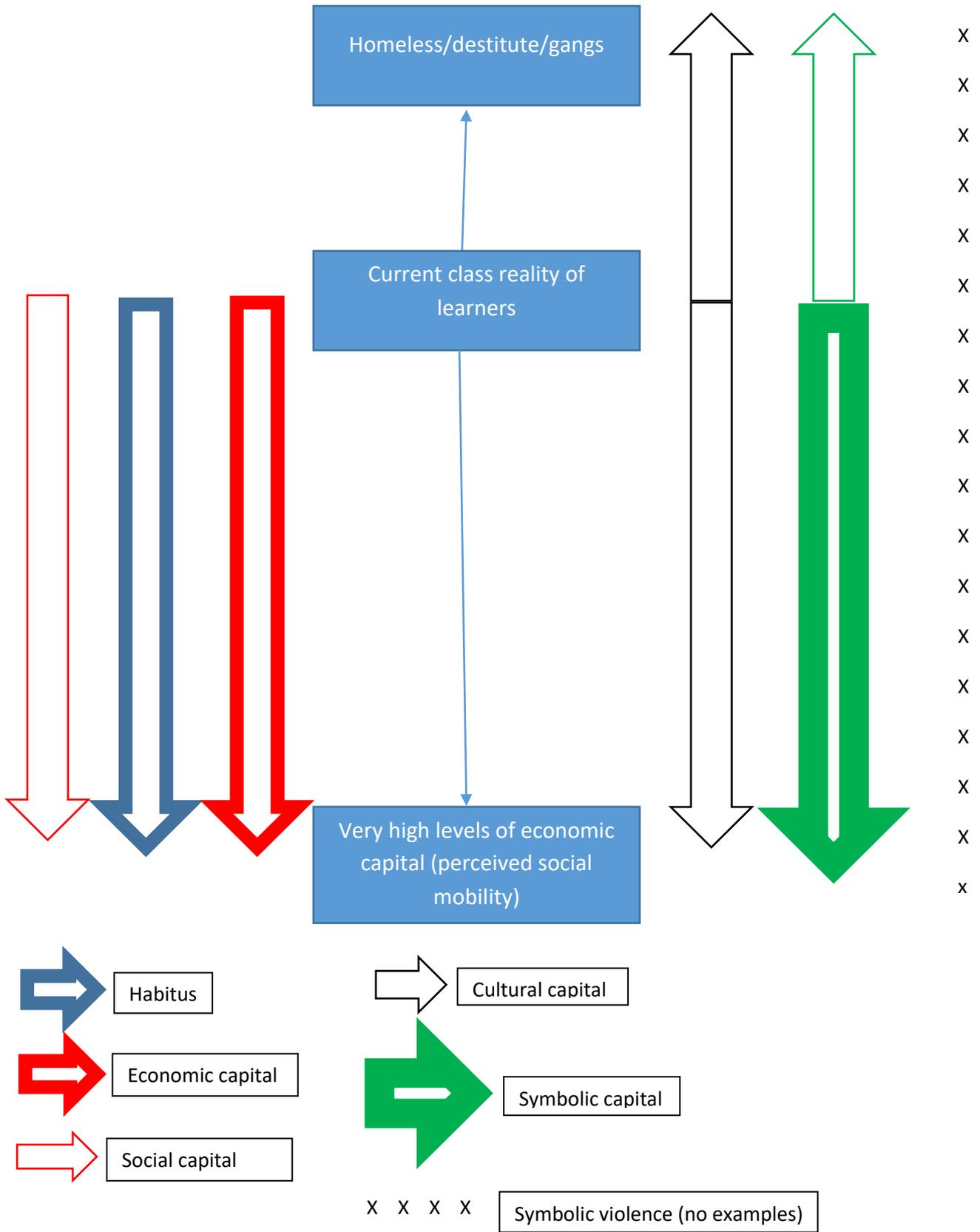


Figure 17 - Influences on social mobility

6.2.2.1 Symbolic capital as convertible to economic capital

Symbolic capital is 'degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity or honour and is founded on a dialectic of knowledge and recognition' (Bourdieu 1993, p7) which I interpret to be credentials in the educational field. The participants in my study discussed symbolic capital as the premier tool a contemporary education generates that the learners believe is very powerful in facilitating social mobility. This belief is very much in line with the increased influence credentials have had in the past four decades (Baker 2011) and how credentials are increasingly structuring the labour market (Bills and Brown 2011). The learners discussed symbolic capital as directly convertible into the ability to earn higher levels of economic capital and thus, from their understanding, be socially mobile. When asked in the focus groups to discuss barriers from where they were now to where they want to be the learners mainly discussed the attainment of credentials.

Like GCSEs, going to A levels and Universities with that qualification you can have whatever job you want to and I think it is an open door if you get the qualifications (learner H).

The ability of credentials to deliver a great future is trusted explicitly by Learner H so much so that her language is deterministic in tone. The use of *you can* have whatever job you want and *it is* an open door imply no understanding of any other barrier that might exist to Learner H's social mobility. Second to this is the acceptance that the door is only open *if* you get the qualifications vindicating symbolic capital as a fair and just way to stratify job opportunity.

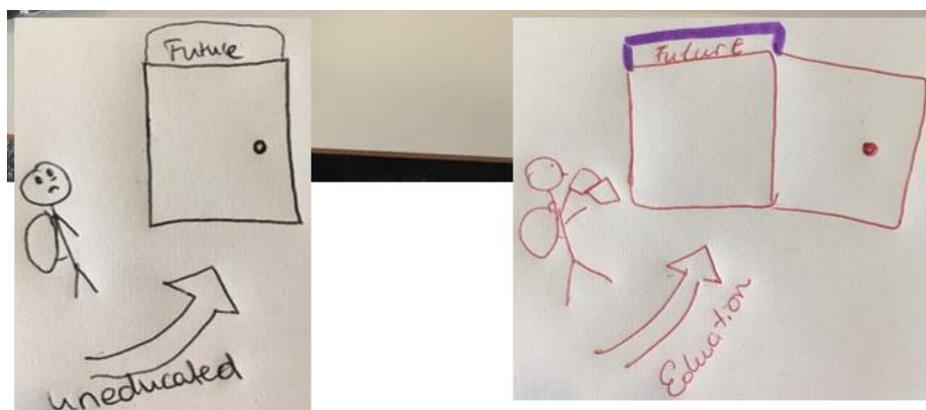


Figure 18 - Excerpt from the work of students from Fannersfield academy

This understanding is in line with a classic meritocratic rhetoric in that the learners are presenting a picture where *'inequalities are precisely matched to abilities – it is a society where inequalities are justly unequal'* (Allen 2011, p370).

Learner L is a high ability and confident learner and demonstrates here how he feels his pursuit of symbolic capital can be converted into economic capital. He also implies a continuum of value within symbolic capital which he believes has differing worth within the labour market. This is demonstrated by his ambition to attend a Russell Group university, an organisation that *'represents 24 leading UK universities'* (Russell Group 2017, online).

I want to go to university and if I don't get the grades I want I am not going to be able to go to a Russell Group university and I want to go to one of those. Like even when you go to a job interview it stays around with you (Learner L).

When asked why he specifically wanted to attend a Russell group university he explains that,

I want to go to the best. I want to put on my CV that I went to a Russell group university (Learner L).

Learner L understands the symbolic and thus intangible power of symbolic capital and demonstrates the necessity to accumulate it, the CV being the primary tool for this. For Learner L, the CV it is also the channel for exchanging perceived higher level symbolic capital for increased economic capital as he intends to deploy it in job interviews. Interestingly, he is conditioned to believe a Russell group university is the *best* type of university. While that is debatable, the vast over representation of Russell group graduates in the top professions, and thus increased symbolic power of credentials acquired from these institutions, is not (SMCP 2014). He is able, at least six years before he reaches the labour market, to navigate the higher education market tactically to seek increased symbolic power that could likely allude many other of his peers.

6.2.2.2 Economic capital as convertible to symbolic capital

Whilst all learners seemed to accept and deem fair that symbolic capital should be used to structure the labour market and thus regulate access to economic capital, not all learners thought they all had the same chance to achieve it. Some simplistic comparisons were drawn by some of the learners across the different sectors of education. Economic capital

was described as a device to access increased chances of achieving higher levels of symbolic capital:

It will be easier for rich people because they can buy better schools which means they get better education so for poor people it's harder (Learner J).

And you can get tutoring I suppose if you are struggling if you are richer (Learner M).

The learners outline a popular discourse in both theoretical and political spheres. The idea that learners do better academically *because* increased levels of economic capital can often be converted into higher levels of symbolic capital (see figure 2 and 3). Another action of economic capital, according to Learner A, is its ability to act as a barrier:

Like when you leave school so basically like university so obviously it costs a lot so if you haven't got the money you are not going to be able to get the best opportunities (Learner A).

Economic capital, in the processes of social mobility, is credited with the ability to increase the chance of achieving symbolic capital but also the ability to reduce competition by those whose families are less able to support learners through higher education. It seems, then, a perpetual relationship exists according to these learners. Increased economic capital leads to increased levels of symbolic capital, which in turn leads to access to higher levels of economic capital and thus entrenched advantage is fashioned and social mobility down the generations is impaired. This can be explained as a capital feedback loop as it is befitting of a system generating perpetual advantage, or in Bourdieusian terms simply reproduction in practice.

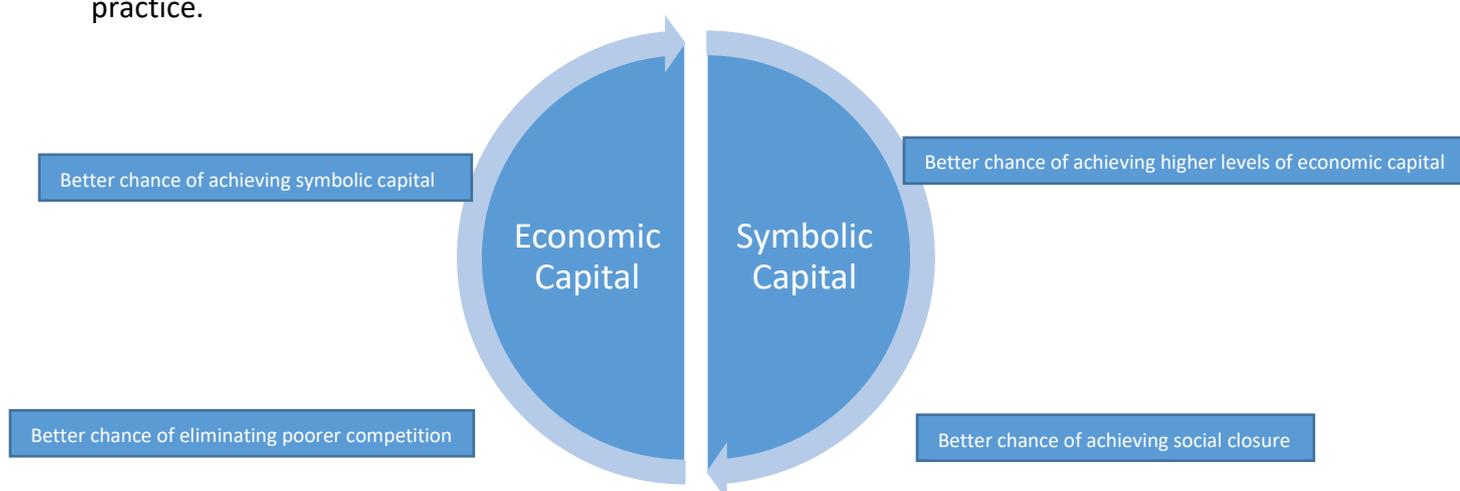


Figure 19 – Feedback loop between economic capital and symbolic capital

6.2.2.3 Social and cultural capital's role in the processes of social mobility

Social and cultural capital are upheld as important influences on social mobility in theory (Bourdieu 1977; 1990) and yet in my study they were barely mentioned (see Figure 15). When they were mentioned, they were not framed as being useful within the processes of social mobility. There was one notable exception however:

I think some people get easier opportunities than others. A lot of the time it is like who you know who your parents know. You get some people who are already rich and their parents know all these other rich people that can give their kids opportunities which doesn't really happen for the rest of us (Learner C).

Learner C identifies a key criticism of the failure of poorer learners to be socially mobile in the literature (SMCP 2014, SMC 2017) and in the theory surrounding the processes of social mobility (Bourdieu 1986; Owens et al 2017). The propensity for 'rich people' to have increased social capital via durable social networks means this advantage can also be passed to their children. One such example of this is access to good quality unpaid internships (Owens et al 2017). Interestingly, Learner C did not go on to quantify what he meant by this statement or give examples. His above statement does, however, link this social network to the processes of social reproduction, which is the tendency for young people to replicate the social and cultural position within society as that of their parents (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) contrary to the ideals of social mobility. Mostly, though, learners did not see any value, intangible or otherwise, in social networks or the *who you know* mentality. Learner A even believed that providing you work hard you do not need other people at all:

I think if you work for yourself and you work hard enough then you don't need other people to link you to things I think you should do it independently (Learner A).

This belief is in line with what was found for SQ 1 in that learners were optimistic and trusted in meritocratic processes. Within the processes of social mobility, Learner A is demonstrating cruel optimism when considering the power of social reproduction (SMC 2017). As well as this, she implies that social mobility is an individualistic pursuit which is a property described as damaging for the working class individual (Reay 2013).

While accepting, to some extent, that school was about building bonds with other learners, the participants in my study did not discuss these relationships as building social networks which may be a conduit for future social mobility.

I think there are kind of two reasons [for school] its education and friends (Learner M).

Cos you make friends, you learn to like build bonds with other people (Learner A).

It was also discussed by learners at Ashdown Academy how little the school system actually values personality traits that may be useful within the social processes of social mobility later in life. Below is a discussion about confidence between myself and Learners N, M and L:

I think if you are more confident you are more likely to try and get the higher paid jobs. If you are more shy you won't speak out. Like in school the confident ones sort of run things while the quiet ones just kind of sit there and let things happen even if they like want to do something (Learner N).

What recognition or grades do you get in school for being confident? (Researcher).

Nothing (Learner L).

But you have just said it is an important part of getting the higher paid jobs. Why aren't you graded in it? (Researcher).

I think when it comes down to grades, confidence helps but is confidence part of a grade? Obviously you don't get a grade in confidence (Learner L).

Why? (Researcher).

Errrrr don't know (Learner L)

Because in school they don't grade you for any of like your personality or your skills it's all about how intelligent you are, well how THEY base intelligence (Learner M).

By stating that *obviously* you do not get a grade in confidence demonstrates how abstract Learner L thinks that concept to be yet, just before, it had been outlined that confidence may be important in the processes of social mobility. He is then unable to offer a reason why a grade for confidence is not given, implying he has not even questioned why desirable traits in the labour market are not measured and graded. Learner M confirms the narrow nature of the valued curriculum and is cynical about whether it does actually measure

intelligence. The same doubts are raised by academics who have argued credentials are more about ensuring value is placed on what more affluent families have traditionally been stronger in (White 2014). Also, perhaps more cynically, what more affluent families can more easily buy in advantage for from the market (Ball 2010).

6.2.2.4 Symbolic violence's absence from the focus groups

In an educational context, symbolic violence is concerned with the relationship between education and social reproduction (O'Grady and Atkin, 2006). It is described as a '*gentle, invisible violence, unrecognised as such...chosen as much as undergone*' (Bourdieu 1990a, p127). Social agents who are dominant require those who are not to perceive the social order as fair or at least to not question it. Symbolic violence acts by imposing dominant perspectives with the ultimate aim of them becoming universal (Richardson 2011) and symbolic, rather than physical power, is used to achieve this (Cattani et al, 2014). By this virtue, it is not surprising that none of the learners felt that symbolic capital was an instrument of symbolic violence. Examples that could be interpreted as symbolic violence occurring in practice were discussed, however, even if the learners did not conceptualise them as such:

Learner E is a high ability learner who has, in recent years, moved with his parents from a poor African nation. He talked using colloquialisms in a way that made me think assimilating with local ethnic minority learners was important to him. He is a strong supporter of education (and the symbolic capital it created) throughout the focus group:

If you don't have an education it like closes loads of doors for you and limits you...Basically education is the key...We appreciate why we need it. Like we already said it opens doors...For jobs you need the grade because like having a grade means you are capable to do the job (Learner E).

In a different line of enquiry, we were discussing barriers to social mobility and Learner E reflected on the experience of his own parents in England:

When you have got your education in Africa and you have like graduated from university basically their certificates are worthless here. They were educated as they are smart people but because their certificate is useless here they can't do anything (Learner E).

Symbolic capital as *the key* to the labour market is upheld as fair and worthy by Learner E in the first statement but yet later in the same focus group he now outlines how this social construct is having very significant negative consequences for his parents and thus by proxy his own life. He outlines an anti-meritocratic reality where symbolic capital acts as a tool of social closure (Weeden 2002) preventing his parents competing *on merit* with others (Allen 2011). This, then, has the paradoxical effect of adjusting his home-based habitus to support symbolic capital ever more strongly rather than treat it with distain or spend time questioning it. Learner E's parents have '*formed optimistic attachments to the very power structures that have oppressed [them]*' (Reay 2017, p1):

You are foreign basically means your parents pushing you to do well to study or anything else because they make you see why you need what school offers you... because if you are foreign you have to work double as hard as someone that is native to the country to get what you want (Learner E).

While the intricacies of inequality of ethnic background are beyond the scope of my thesis I felt this example best demonstrated symbolic violence in practice. Race is a protected characteristic, in that it can never be grounds for discrimination (Equality Act 2010). This being the case, the symbolic power of credentials has facilitated legal but yet very blatant discrimination that is acceptable to both the dominated and wider society. Symbolic power, then is '*unrecognised*' as what it actually is and thus is an '*invisible violence*' which, evidenced by the home-based support for credentials Learner E reports, is '*chosen as much as undergone*' (Bourdieu 1990a, p127).

6.2.2.5 The influence of Habitus

Attitudes and values transmitted through the home or habitus (Bourdieu 1990a) were considered by participants of my study to play a role in the processes of social mobility. Interestingly they did not conceptualise this in terms of transferred social and cultural capital but simply as increased encouragement to attain symbolic capital. The role of habitus was also diminished when compared to the effort of an individual.

Learner M was reflecting on a journey from growing up with low levels of economic capital to attaining high levels when she is older:

I do think with education you can get from there to there but say if you were too poor and your family weren't supportive enough and you don't have education it might be a lot harder but I think if you know what you want then it doesn't matter (Learner M).

There are a lot of themes here. She concedes that a combination of low economic capital and a habitus that is not supportive of education can make the journey of social mobility a lot harder. This is aligned with ethnographic research (see Evans 2007; Lareau 2011) and data assessing impact of government policies (see DfE 2015) but attached to her statement is ever-present cruel optimism. Learner M is prepared to brush aside the often insurmountable barriers of learned home culture and low economic capital providing you are the right kind of self (Gillies 2005) which may actually be what *she* is hoping *she* is. This has echoes of political social mobility rhetoric where education can help anyone succeed (The Prime Minister's Office 2016, online) and is an example of the rag to riches rhetoric Reay (2013, p662) problematizes as '*largely a figment of imagination brought to life in policy and political rhetoric*'.

In a very similar vein to Learner M, Learner G seeks to minimise the impact of habitus when compared to the level of individualistic effort in terms of a person *pushing themselves hard*.

You know how family pushes you to get an education but it is also up to you very much I mean if your parents are really well educated they want you to be very well educated and you do get those grades what happens from then on is up to you and even people who don't have those grades or don't have the opportunities, if they push themselves hard enough they can accomplish everything. So I think it is up to the person more than it is up to the parents...Mindset and the way you are being raised because if your parents raise you the way I was raised then anything is possible (Learner G).

Here, however, there is also an appreciation of social reproduction in practice. Learner G believes that it is more likely if your parents are educated they will want this for their children and it is this social reproduction (SMC 2017) that contributes to the capital feedback loop outlined earlier. The extent to which cruel optimism is, in fact, a protection mechanism for these learners is not known as detailed knowledge of the context of each learner is also not known. I do wonder whether these learners are reflecting on their relatively disadvantaged habitus and placing all hope in *themselves* to achieve what maybe their parents did not. A feat only made harder by their school's inadequate rating from

Ofsted and educations inability to overcome inequalities in job opportunity (Owens et al 2017).

My parents encourage me and it helps me a lot to like work the best I think encouragement is a big deal as even if you know education will lead you to a good future you might sometimes like give up (Learner H).

Again, we see deterministic language asserting that education *will* lead to a good future and again the perceived positive home habitus has a part to play in this. This is another example of habitus supporting the pursuit of symbolic capital but offering little in boosting social and cultural capital that may be instrumental in the processes of social mobility. While Learner H's home life might support social and cultural capital accumulation she doesn't see this as a function of habitus.

6.2.2.6 Conclusions from SQ 2

Utilising the discussions for PQ 2.1 and the further analysis for SQ 2 I believe, all considered, this diagram gives an overview of what the participants in my study believed is education's relationship with social mobility:

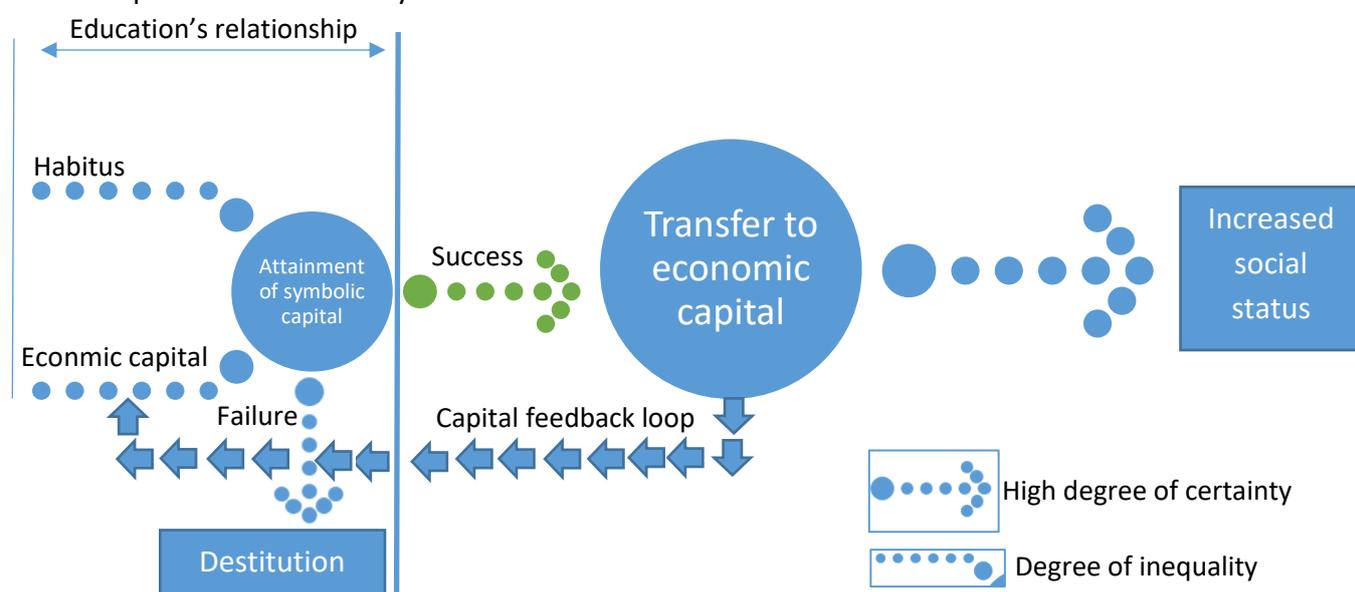


Figure 20 – Learner understanding of social mobility

By utilising what was overwhelmingly the most popular narratives in my study this figure exposes a very simple and certain path towards increased social status and thus social mobility. With a home life that encourages your school life and economic capital to assist you are able to attain symbolic capital. The chances of achieving higher levels of symbolic

capital hinge on the amount of capital invested and the extent to which this pursuit is supported at home. Importantly though, according to these learners, low support and economic capital is not grounds to prevent someone achieving if they work hard - it is ultimately down to the individual. This, in summary, is what learners believed education's role in social mobility is. From this point, apply the symbolic capital to a perceived meritocratic labour market and those with higher grades get the better jobs. This was accepted as fair and something worth investing years of the learner's youth pursuing. As mentioned in the conclusion for PQ 2.1, destitution or increased social status are the ultimate outcomes as there was no glass floor or glass ceiling that the learners identified as theirs was a very stratified understanding. This overview, then, builds on earlier conclusions where the purpose of a contemporary education was primarily outlined by the participants in my study as an investment in credentials that they believe are the biggest conduit for success in an abstract future.

In conclusion, the evidence from the data demonstrates that the learners in phase two of this thesis understand education's role in social mobility to be very much in line with popular political discourse (Prime Minister's Office 2016; DfE 2018) in that it is believed to be the ultimate conduit for social mobility. What paints a depressing picture, however, is how little these learners understood the role of any other influencer on social mobility and how cruelly optimistic their world view may be given all that has been discussed so far in the complex and nuanced world of climbing social status.

6.3 Response to RQ 1

Using all data analysis prior to this section and some previously unutilised insights that formed part of the IPA I have answered RQ 1 here: How do education leaders and learners understand the role of education in processes of social mobility? I have arranged this into sub-questions and have attempted to be definitive where possible by focusing on where the opinions of leaders and learners appear to converge. As per my methodological discussion earlier, leader and learner voices are treated as equal and simply different viewpoints from the prism of perspectives when answering the research question disregarding their position in the social hierarchy.

6.3.1 Symbolic capital as the legitimised currency of a meritocratic labour market

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given that credentials are increasingly structuring the labour market (Bills and Brown 2011; Tholen 2017), no participants challenged the idea that the main outcome of an education was the symbolic capital generated by the system. Narratives surrounding the importance of symbolic capital were strongly internalised by the participants in this thesis:

I always talk to the kids about getting the best qualifications you can so that you can earn as much money as you possibly can (John).

If you couldn't get education then you couldn't get qualifications and college and you couldn't get further ones and then it might be hard to get jobs (Learner M).

I don't want to beat people up by trying to get them through exams – we do it because we have to – but that shouldn't be the purpose of it (Simon).

[in a boarding school in the south west of England of Chris's previous employment]
The parents' absolute expectation would be that their children would do well academically and go on to university and then get a good job; it was very rare that there was any other world vision at all (Chris).

For jobs you need the grade because like having a grade means you are capable to do the job (Learner E).

As can be seen from this small cross section of quotes, leaders and learners are complicit in placing the pursuit of symbolic capital at the very centre of a contemporary educational experience and this is a worthy pursuit as the labour market is perceived to be meritocratic which is the narrative of government policy (DfE 2018). It was argued by Tholen (2017) that

learners assuming meritocratic ideals drive the labour market was an important aid for symbolic closure, the tendency for symbolic capital to function more as a barrier than conduit for social mobility. No participants in my research conceived that the labour market could be anything but meritocratic, and they had ample chance and space to put these beliefs forward. This may explain how strongly they believed in symbolic capital as the appropriate differentiator and yet many participants were able to discuss factors that made the chances of a learner achieving symbolic capital as profoundly unequal.

Type of employment is still a large indicator of social class as differing professions allow access to differing levels of economic, social and cultural capital (savage et al 2013). The narrative very much rehearsed by participants was the feedback loop I outlined earlier:

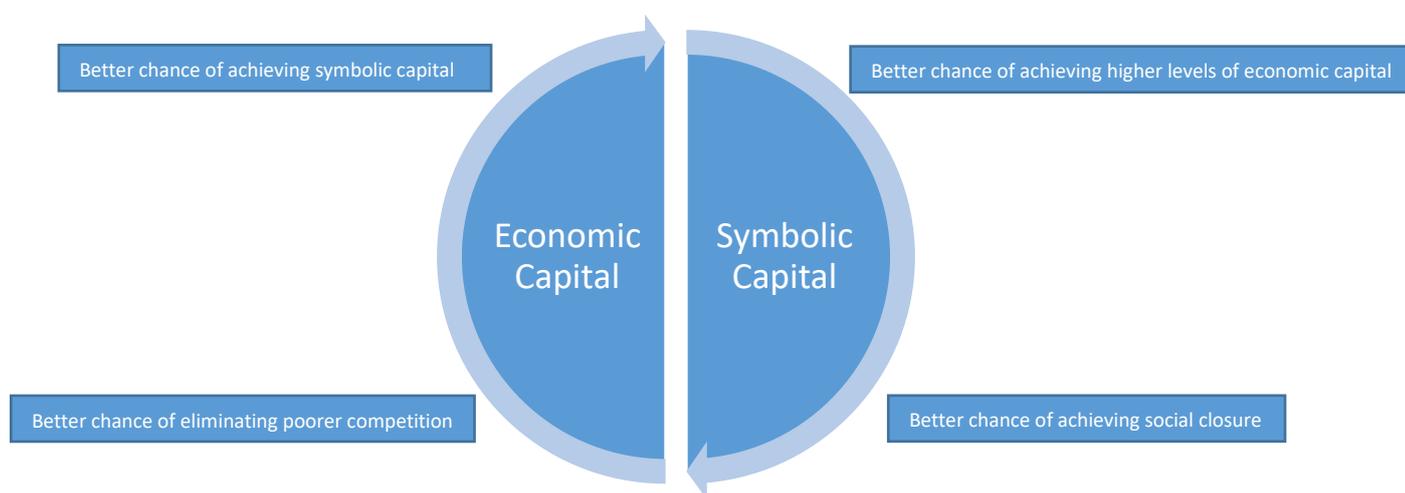


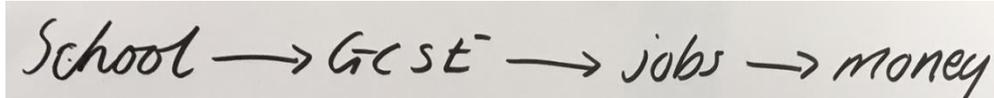
Figure 19 – Feedback loop between economic capital and symbolic capital

If a learner can achieve higher levels of symbolic capital (e.g. higher grades at GCSE and A level) they will, without question, be able to transfer this into higher levels of economic capital in the labour market. This perpetuates down generations as those with higher economic capital and a positive habitus towards education gained from this transaction will give their offspring a better chance of achieving even higher levels of symbolic capital and so on.

Like GCSEs, going to A levels and Universities with that qualification you can have whatever job you want to and I think it is an open door if you get the qualifications (Learner H).

...If they can grasp this set of qualifications are going to mean that they go on and buy themselves a Ferrari, for example, then they have got a kind of path through life (John).

So you can get a job in the future so you can pay for food and water (Learner A).



The image shows a handwritten sequence of words connected by arrows: 'School' → 'GCSE' → 'jobs' → 'money'. The text is written in a cursive, black ink on a light-colored background.

Figure 14 - Excerpt from the work of students from Ashdown Academy

The promise of material goods and a lifestyle perceived as better than the learners current position is likely a very tempting prospect. It is not so far removed to classify these beliefs are cruel optimism (Berlant 2011) and reflect more what they hope will occur rather than what empirical evidence suggests is much more likely the case (SMC 2017). Finding that educational leaders in my research are complicit in this cruel optimism is more troubling as they all discussed, as previously shown in this thesis, that the chance of learners achieving symbolic capital itself is wholly unequal and is somewhat detached from the meritocratic ideal of effort + ability = merit (Young 1958).

6.3.2 The factors that affect a learner's ability to achieve symbolic capital

A notable absence when discussing what influences a learner's ability to achieve symbolic capital was the perceived IQ or 'natural ability' of a learner as believed by Saunders (2010). Also, largely absent was any mention from learners of the importance of social and cultural capital. The two salient factors identified by the leaders and learners were levels of economic capital and the influence of habitus.

6.3.2.1 Economic Capital

Leaders and learners reflected on similar themes here which were largely centralised around the ability to buy in advantage from the market (Ball 2010) when pursuing the symbolic power arising from symbolic capital.

People pay loads of money [for houses in the catchment area] to get their kids into the West Brightsham catchment area, traditionally the old grammar school, the kudos! (Simon).

So like if your going to a posh school then it is almost guaranteed for you to come out with GCSEs like higher than a B or As but if you go to like a state school then the chances for you getting them good GCSEs is dramatically lower (Learner E).

It will be easier for rich people because they can buy better schools which means they get better education so for poor people it's harder (Learner J).

So [my daughter's] school are not doing what they should be doing in my opinion and she is not getting a good enough deal at this moment in time but as a high earning parent I am not worried because I know I would be able to sort it. Whereas if I wasn't a high earning parent then, you know, it will be left totally to chance (John).

Even if we got the same grades as them rich kids they can say..."I went to this school" like a famous private school people are just going to think that they are cleverer and just better and are going to want to employ them more if that school has like a reputation for being good (Learner C).

The participants who discussed economic capital and the pursuit of symbolic capital discussed them in direct relatable terms. There was a direct relationship between having increased levels of economic capital and increased chance of attaining higher levels of symbolic capital. This demonstrates in practice what the government believe in policy (Prime Minister's Office 2016; DfE 2018) and academics believe in theory (Ball 2010; Goldthorpe 2012; Reay 2013). I do conclude here that the well documented educational inequality in England (SMCP 2015) is believed by my participants to hold a large sway on the attainment of symbolic capital which is a factor far beyond the ability of educators to redress.

6.3.2.2 Habitus

A further area beyond the control of educators is the habitus transmitted through the home of learners. There was plentiful evidence from both learners and leaders that they believed the transmission of attitudes towards education through the home contributed to social reproduction (Bourdieu 1990a; Lareau 2011; Reay 2017).

It is easy if you have parents behind you, you've got kids who know the point of education they have seen people who have been successful in education and got better careers, actually it is easy to run a school like that and get outstanding (Simon).

You know how family pushes you to get an education...I mean if your parents are really well educated they want you to be very well educated (Learner G).

If you have two university educated professional people that, then, is the expectation of their child. I have seen this in a negative way when they have expectations of a child that are unfortunately unrealistic (Chris).

Or you could be distracted by other stuff, so obviously if you have got stuff going on at home you might be more focused on that than your education (Learner M).

Households with high income families who have positive role models, those children in that household are going to get a different experience than the parents where one is a cleaner and one is a bin man if you like (John).

Those leaders and learners who discussed habitus were quite unanimous that it played an important role in improving the chances of attaining symbolic capital. This was internalised as the chances of attaining symbolic capital are higher if the parents of the learners have and have benefited from symbolic capital themselves or if homelife is more settled. This mirrors quantitative studies given by the Social Mobility Commission (SMC 2017).

6.3.3 Symbolic capital as a legitimised stratification tool

As has been discussed at length in this thesis, the level of educational inequality (Cochran-Smith 2010), vastly differing access to economic capital (SMC 2017) and very different values that form habitus (Lareau 2011; Reay 2017) could all form the kind of brute luck that social justice policies should seek to redress (Arneson 2004). This is because these factors are all out of the control of the individual learner and permeate into all areas of wider socialisation. It is of great interest to unpicking education's relationship with social mobility that symbolic capital, a type of capital so intrinsically linked with the '*gaping wound that social inequalities have become*' (Reay 2017, p3) should be internalised by my participants as the unquestioned tool for allocating profits at stake in the labour market and thus position (at least economically speaking) in a class ridden society.

I just know I need to do well so I can get a good job (Learner C).

[qualifications are] *An indication of ability, which is no bad thing actually, and you have to differentiate somehow and that is one way of differentiating ability...the way we are set up in this country you need qualifications to go to the next step (Chris)*

The independent school head teacher, Chris, gives one such example of how symbolic capital is the legitimate and unquestioned differentiator. This seems to stem from the belief that what a learner achieves *is* an indication of ability in the meritocratic construct. The previous parts of this thesis, however, have shown factors that may mean that symbolic capital may not be as closely correlated to ability as most participants believed. The following is an interaction between learner D, a low achieving learner academically speaking, and myself about how to become a well-paid CEO of a company:

Like you start off on a low like level and you push yourself and work your way up (Learner D).

If you wanted to do that D do you think you could do it? (Researcher).

Yeah if I tried I reckon I could yeah (Learner D).

How are you going to do it? (Researcher).

Errrrrr good GCSE grades for a start (Learner D).

Previous to this conversation Learner D had proclaimed that *'if I had the chance to not come to school I wouldn't'* demonstrating his cynicism for the pursuit of symbolic capital and yet he still believes the way to become a CEO starts with GCSEs. It is likely that Learner D will not achieve a good set of GCSE results and maybe just as likely he will accept his resulting place in the labour market without complaint despite believing he could be a CEO.

6.3.4 Cruel optimism and symbolic violence

After some probing, the head teachers in phase one did go on to show some understanding of the role social and cultural capital (and specifically inequalities within them) has within the processes of social mobility but, with similar probing the learners in phase two did not. The learners seemed mostly oblivious towards the need to be the right kind of self (Gillies 2005). Bourdieu argued that in any field, capital is required to *'appropriate the specific profits at stake in the game'* (Bourdieu 1993, p88) in that holding capital of any of the kinds has the specific ability to produce profits for those that hold it (Bourdieu 1986). The learners in my study, who were mixed ability students from non-selective state schools, appear not only to be lacking in social and cultural capital by definition of their social context but also

lacking in an understanding of how these play out *in practice*. They failed to identify what they look like, how to employ them and the extent to which social and cultural capital may be an even bigger conduit for social mobility than symbolic capital. This makes sense when considering a short excerpt that was not included earlier in phase one between me and the executive head of all the schools I visited for phase two:

Tell me Simon, when you come to London will you be changing your accent? Imagine 22 being hit with that! Horrendous! But I think we under-estimate the impact of accent on social mobility (Simon).

If you are identifying this as a barrier, and I personally believe that as well, what part of the curriculum is dedicated to etiquette of language? (Researcher).

It isn't is it. We are not judged on it...I thought we are wasting the time of a lot of these children and now here we are 30 years later and we are still doing largely the same curriculum. In fact, it has been made even more academic and even more knowledge based and it is even more irrelevant because the world has changed enormously, so what are we doing? (Simon).

Schools are not judged on the cultural aspects of a learner's assimilation into adult society and, in not doing so, allows symbolic violence and the apparition of meritocracy to occur. Those learners who, through habitus and class reality, have access to higher levels of social and cultural capital can, in turn, convert these into increased opportunity in the labour market. So much so, that when learners from working class backgrounds do (rarely) make it into the top professions they face a pay gap of 17% or £6800 a year compared to those learners from professional backgrounds (SMC 2017). Interestingly, Simon questions the very motivation for the more academic and knowledge-based curriculum showing he does not believe government rhetoric on improving standards for all and more likely aligning with academics who argue this is about improving chances of middle class learners (Muir 2011; White 2014).

How do education leaders and learners understand the role of education in processes of social mobility?

Education, according to my participants and most specifically the learners, was boiled down to a really quite saddening transaction. Their years in a tolerated institution were traded for symbolic capital to employ in some abstract future in an abstract labour market. A vision of

education akin to the belief that education is becoming more and more about packaging knowledge in order to be sold and is no longer a worthy pursuit in itself (Lyotard 1984). Learners had space to discuss countless other motivations for becoming educated but were adamant on a really narrow definition. For both learners and leaders, education's role in the processes of social mobility was focused on the generation of symbolic capital to then exchange for proportionate economic capital in the labour market. The accumulation of economic capital is what constitutes becoming upwardly mobile not becoming more cultured or improving social networks, as Savage et al (2013) outlined are important markers in a more modern definition of class. When linking the outcomes of a contemporary education to social mobility, learners had a very dichotomous view that high symbolic capital would lead to extremely high economic capital and low/no symbolic capital will lead to an inevitable destitution. The understanding from all participants, then, was that education, or this narrow definition of becoming educated, really was the engine of what they defined as social mobility and so was the unquestioned device to stratify the labour market acting as the meritocratic tool required for inequalities to be justly unequal (Allen 2011).

What has become much more interesting to me now, however, is what was not said or not appreciated by the participants in my thesis. There were so many seemingly gaping inconstancies that everyone was complicit in perpetuating: No one questioned the appropriateness of symbolic capital as a premier lever on social mobility whilst both learners and leaders identified that different economic capital and habitus led to very different chances of achieving it. The head teachers even went as far as discussing educational inequality in various guises and still symbolic capital went unquestioned. No one questioned the phenomenon of social mobility or even if it was a worthy policy in that it implies the working class is something to be escaped. No learners queried how meritocratic the labour market actually is and there was only one mention of the seemingly obvious importance of durable social networks to gain employment or how cultural capital is required for socialisation into different professional fields. No one even conceived that symbolic capital could be more likely to incarcerate rather than emancipate them as functioning as a factor vital of social closure and thus symbolic violence.

I therefore, as many academics before me (see Ball 2010; Goldthorpe 2012; Reay 2013), believe that it is time to arm learners with strategies more akin to reality as opposed to a fairy tale rags to riches interpretation:

By doing away with giving explicitly to everyone what it implicitly demands of everyone, the education system demands of everyone alike that they have what it does not give (Bourdieu 1977, p494).

The profession really needs to start problematising the rags to riches narrative and I will certainly be making it my mission to do just that through journals, conferences and public speaking starting at the BERA Annual Conference 2018. I started this work with the noble aim of better understanding social mobility to help socially disadvantaged learners. I believed in it and what it stood for. I finish with a cynical belief that social mobility for *all* appears at best as oxymoronic as the cruel optimism it arguably represents.

7.0 Final conclusion, limitations and implications for practice

7.1 Conclusion

I believe that this thesis has contributed many unique insights into the social mobility debate and, as per the rationale of the Professional Doctorate qualification, they are firmly rooted in practice and in their intended context.

The main insight was just how willing at a very conscious level the headteachers were in being complicit in the reproductive rather than the potential transformative institutional habitus of their schools. I demonstrated that they did have the knowledge or 'helicopter view' required to understand the field but explicitly chose to not arm learners with what they knew to be the case around nepotism, meritocracy and the state of inequality within the system. This was also married with the finding that increasing social mobility was not a discrete aim of any of the head teachers. Unsurprisingly then, was how little learners knew about deploying social and cultural capital to the extent where they were not even a consideration.

The individual habitus and understanding of learners in this thesis, in relation to the conclusion above, lacked the practical predispositions arguably required to be as upwardly socially mobile as most of the learners thought they would be. Their collective trust in an almost perfectly meritocratic labour market and their belief of an assured exchange mechanism between symbolic and economic capital seemed to be, at least heavily, influenced by institutional habitus. They internalised this habitus to be transformative as espoused, but not exclusively, from the head teachers. Further to this was how entrenched beliefs around the power of the individual were, sometimes as far as disregarding durable social networks at all. These narratives serve to ensure reproduction not transformation and represent tools of symbolic violence. Through institutional habitus concentrating on cruel optimism by prioritising rhetoric around the emancipatory power of hard work and determination, the opportunity of incubating a pragmatic understanding of the field is diminished.

7.2 Limitations

There are some important limitations to the discussions I have had about the data collected and how I have analysed it. Most of these arise from the chosen paradigm but there are also areas where I could have improved its execution.

The intention of this study was always to engage with leader and learner voice on social mobility, and so in no way do I seek to imply that what the leaders and learners in my study said can be extrapolated into a theory for the whole education system. What is does represent is how *I* have interpreted how *they* view social mobility *in practice*. As a '*double hermeneutic is involved*' (Lyons and Coyle 2007, p34), I cannot claim that they have reported an object truth and as I have interpreted this with my own lens this is further appreciated. I have also realised just how much influence my personal world view and constructed reality has upon how I view the interview data. Only I would have made the conclusions I have from the data and therefore it cannot be replicated by others which, for some, raises questions of validity and reliability (Golsworthy and Coyle 2001) but this does not betray my methodological appreciations that my role as a researcher would be one that is '*interactive and dynamic*' (Brocki and Wearden 2014, p31). I also purposefully used some extracts verbatim so the reader can make their own judgements on my analysis to show what I have seen is there to be seen.

I have purposely avoided analysis and conclusions that indicate knowledge claims around intersectionality. Specifically this is about education inequality and how this may intersect and interplay with various other forms of inequality based on the protected characteristics of the Equality Act (2010). While I did have learners of various races, genders and socio-economic backgrounds, I feel this thesis found common ground between them in how they are (successfully or unsuccessfully) navigating the educational field and thus their future chances of social mobility. This negated the need to segment a small sample and try to justify their world view by being sympathetic to experiences I feel I could do justice to with such a word count and the need to understand the interplay of so many nuanced social interactions. Arguably a lack of insights here is a limitation of this thesis.

I was not quite prepared for the sheer amount of data that would be created from a relatively small sample size when utilising the semi-structured interview and focus group

tools. While I still think three head teacher interviews and three focus groups in three different schools did allow for increased trustworthiness as I could show themes were not isolated (Patton 1990; Yin 2003). I did notice that some really interesting chains of thought were discussed, but via the typical restraints of the focus group research tool, one learner explaining themselves in detail was not possible. This leads me to think a narrative enquiry from one learner over multiple semi-structured interviews could have yielded a deeper understanding of the themes I was investigating. Or perhaps that as a follow up to the focus groups when learners with seemingly interesting narratives were discovered. I do not claim to have reached data saturation with these sample sizes but a crude analogy here is the classic how *long is a piece of string* juxtaposition. I could have continued and gathered more and more data but knowing my word limit and that of the interest of my reader I am confident adding more focus groups would not have added proportionately more insights.

I could not realise totally the conditions for analysis that Rose (2001) outlined when using the photo elicitation method in my focus groups. This was because pictures were not perceived by learners of being in discrete categories as intended and thus had meanings that overlapped. This was specifically demonstrated with how students used pictures denoting social and cultural capital. Their understanding of the economic capital pictures was, however, as intended. I did appreciate learners' interpretations in my analysis section and still feel the pictures were valuable stimuli for conversations within the focus groups.

I started this phase of my study assuming I had narrowed my focus down to a manageable size and that both phases would yield much more pin pointed conclusions but, on reflection, I could have written this study multiple times over about how habitus economic, social, symbolic capital and symbolic violence are represented in processes of social mobility. What I did succeed in doing is showing, in practice, different examples of various factors at work and I could have reported much more than I could fit into the analysis section of this study. There were many interesting questions that have arisen from my work that I believe would make really good further studies so that the barriers to social mobility may be a little less poorly understood (Hoskins and Barker, 2014).

7.3 Implications for practice

What is of interest to me as an insider within the education field is where learners are getting their understanding of social mobility from. My thesis did not cover this and it would add to this work if it were better understood which actors in the system have most sway when it comes to how learners make sense of their individual realities. Is it leaders as may have been implied by this thesis, or could it be home or wider society? Second to this is further investigating the large deficiencies in what leaders and, to a larger extent, learners understand about how social and cultural capital play out in the processes of social mobility. My literature review showed quite comprehensively that they are important yet they were very much under represented by my participants. Again, as an educator, I am always interested in how learners might change given knowledge. I cannot help but wonder if I did a series of lessons on capital, habitus and symbolic violence would any learner think differently about their social mobility strategy? To garner opinions before and after may very well demonstrate some very interesting improvements in how prepared learners are for the apparent reality of the labour market and the employment of various capital. Finally, as I am not claiming data saturation, I could use the same tools and take them to different institutions with different contexts add more weight that these are not isolated phenomena.

Overall, the findings of this thesis have led me to believe that much more research should be done to understand, in practice, how social and cultural capital are convertible to economic capital within the labour market. To build on this study I would repeat the methods and methodology but potentially focus on just social or cultural capital. This is because I have come to the belief that a lot of what social mobility relies on is within the realms of this kind of capital and the learners lack of understanding may well be the ignorance required for widespread symbolic violence to be taking place.

In terms of practice, I really do feel that I have been privileged to understand social mobility better from the point of view of leaders and learners. I hope, as parts of my study and future work are published, to do all I can to break down and problematise the rags to riches story of education. I want educators to understand the reality and form pedagogy that helps to break down advantage outside of the relative comfort zone of 'get grades get a better

job'. As I do believe educators do want the best future for their pupils, I am confident that with a deeper understanding of the levers on social mobility that I have outlined in this thesis they could develop curricula and experiences to support their learners.

It has also become clear from doing this research that I am a qualitative researcher who will be focused on giving learners and practitioners a voice into the future. Challenging learners' preconceptions can only help them form their own values and render the take-for-granted, problematic. It also empowers them: it is my hope that the learners in my study felt listened to, felt appreciated but most importantly they felt that they were equal partners.

I finish with an anecdote generated on this research journey that leads me to believe my thesis can change practice. John, the head of Gapston school, proudly discussed in his interview how he got a millionaire in to talk to his year nine boys about aspiration. When emailing him to crosscheck his themes, I discussed how this represented cruel optimism and that he should instead do assemblies on his own inspirational journey to headship. A few weeks before the deadline for this study a friend who works at Gapston school waxed lyrically about engaging assemblies the head was doing with all years. Apparently, he was sharing his struggles with abject poverty, growing up as the son of a miner during the miners' strikes and how he made it to where he did. His message was about resilience and how the road to success was hard fought where capital of various kinds were employed at each stage. I smiled gently and enjoyed the feeling that I may have helped influence a head teacher become the role model the learners in his ex-mining community need so badly by his own admission.

7.4 Final comments

Nobody says there should be some sort of Stalin paradise but what we are saying is equalise it out a little bit and as a result give people some hope. But unless the economic system changes I don't think there is much hope for anything else changing really (Simon).

I have become more disappointed that I feel I have found, in research and practice, that social mobility is not what I thought it was (or more likely what I came to understand it was from the political ideal projected onto me by educators, my parents and wider society since I was young). I believed that promoting it was what disadvantaged learners needed to

champion their cause but, given limited space at the top of society and the numerous nuanced barriers needed to be overcome to get there, social mobility is starting to represent more cruel optimism than beacon of hope.

I starting off this doctoral journey feeling like an imposter (Kamler and Thompson 2006) and engaged in a personal struggle with the demands of a professional doctorate due to my unequal strengths at this level of education (Bourdieu 1993). I now feel I have taken a tangible step towards better understanding the habitus of the dominant culture within the field (Sullivan 2002). What is interesting for me is how I have clearly built on and combined capital to substantiate this judgement: the cultural capital of my improved ability '*to understand and use educated language*' (Sullivan 2002 p145), the social capital I have mobilised through fruitful and dependable relationships with my supervisors and other academics (Bourdieu 1986) and the not unsubstantial economic capital I have employed to pay course fees (Bourdieu 1986). I am, through employing capital within the field, experiencing the ability of education to be a transformative tool and feel very much at the beginning, not the end, of my journey and must now dedicate my spare time to widening the profession's understanding of social mobility by unpicking the complexities of it.

I have heard loud and clear the hopes, beliefs and experiences of school leaders and learners as they grapple with one of the big questions from the '*prism of perspectives*' (O'Grady and Cottle 2016, px).

Finally, in the fitting words of Learner E after his focus group:



I feel intelligent now; I feel like I have just attended
university!

I feel like a philosopher!

(Learner E)



In loving memory of Sheila Gale. I did it Grandma.

32788 words

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Appendices

Appendix i – a schema of contemporary class (Savage et al 2013)

	% GfK	% GBCS	Description
Elite	6	22	Very high economic capital (especially savings), high social capital, very high highbrow cultural capital
Established middle class	25	43	High economic capital, high status of mean contacts, high highbrow and emerging cultural capital
Technical middle class	6	10	High economic capital, very high mean social contacts, but relatively few contacts reported, moderate cultural capital
New affluent workers	15	6	Moderately good economic capital, moderately poor mean score of social contacts, though high range, moderate highbrow but good emerging cultural capital
Traditional working class	14	2	Moderately poor economic capital, though with reasonable house price, few social contacts, low highbrow and emerging cultural capital
Emergent service workers	19	17	Moderately poor economic capital, though with reasonable household income, moderate social contacts, high emerging (but low highbrow) cultural capital
Precariat	15	<1	Poor economic capital, and the lowest scores on every other criterion

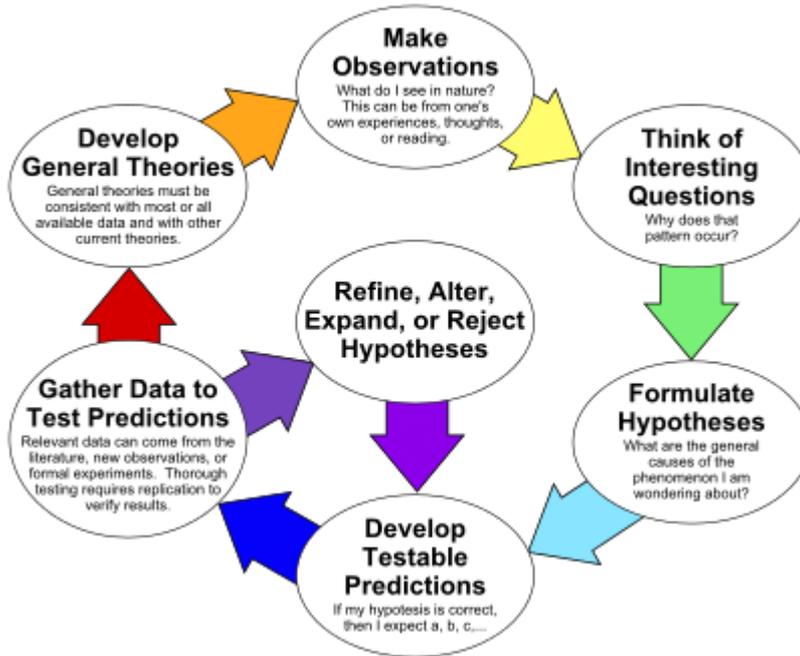
Appendix ii – (Milman 2010, online)

The Major Paradigms

Descriptive	Positivism	Post-Positivism	Interpretivism	Critical Theory	Pragmatism
Synonym	Verify	Predict	Understand/ Interpret	Emancipate	Dialectic
Ontology What is Real?	Objectivist; findings=truth, realism	Modified objectivist; findings probably true, transcendental realism	Local, relative, co-constructed realities, subjective objectivity, relativism	Historical/virtual realism shaped by outside forces, material subjectivity	Constructed, based on world we live in and explanations that produce the best desired outcomes
Epistemology What is True?	the only knowledge is scientific knowledge – which is truth, reality is apprehensible	Findings approximate truth, reality is never fully apprehended	Co-created multiple realities and truths	Findings are based on values, local examples of truth	Objective and subjective points of view
Methodology How do I examine what is real?	Quantitative – Primarily Experimental, quasi- experimental	Usually Quantitative – Experimental with threats to validity, Qualitative (e.g., Case study)	Often Qualitative and/or Quantitative	Usually Qualitative, but also quantitative	Qualitative & Quantitative
Milman, 2010					4

Appendix iii – (Garland 2015, Online)

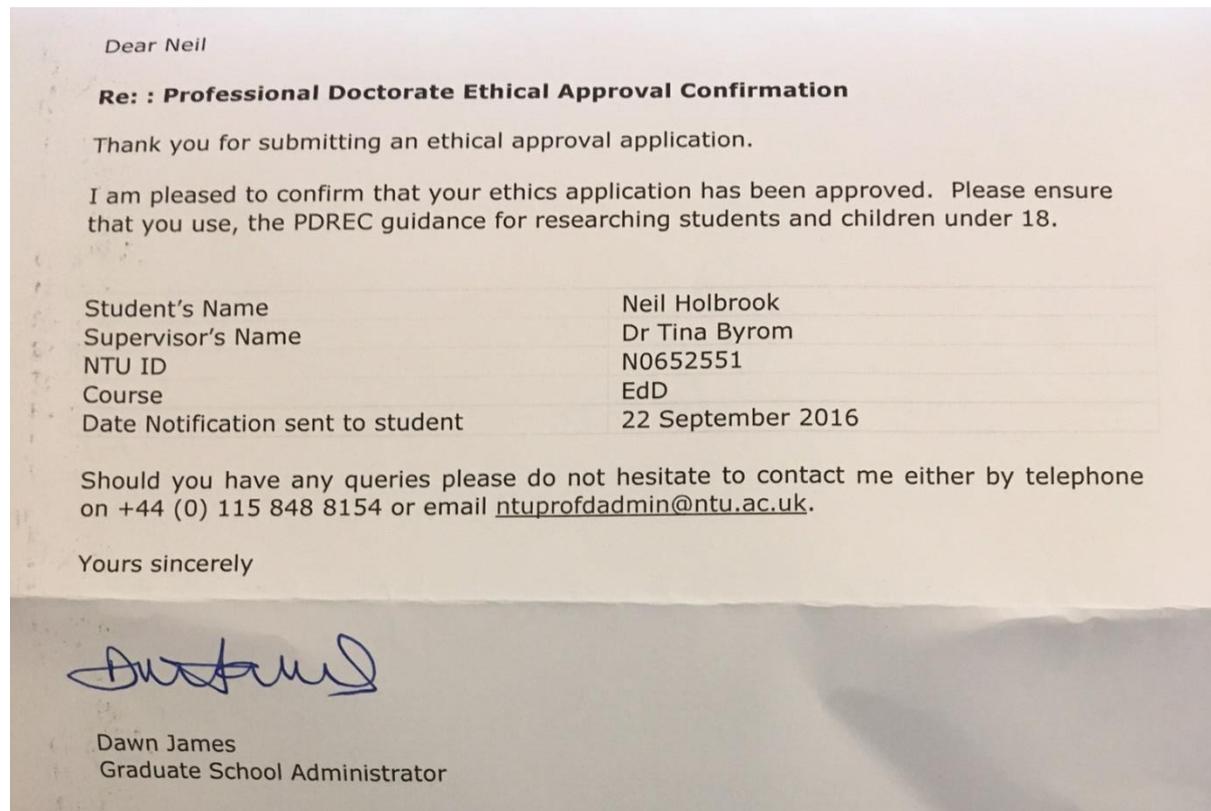
The Scientific Method as an Ongoing Process



Appendix iv -Research tools adapted from Wellington (2000 p71-127).

Method	Main Advantages	Main disadvantages
Interviewing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -can be enjoyable and allows us to study people's behaviour -can take either structured, semi-structured or non-structured form giving more or less influence to the key informant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -not enough or too much rapport can result in bias -the questions used can themselves skew the data if they are for example loaded or restrictive -ambiguity can result from unstructured interviews limiting the validity of data
Case studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -can be illustrative and expose hidden issues -can be attention holding and strong on reality -can be illuminating/insightful to broad issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -case studies are often not replicable which can limit usefulness on a larger scale -they may not be representative -they are often not repeatable
Survey research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -helps identify facts about issues raised -offers a wider picture or an overview -answers questions such as what? Where? When? How? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -may contribute little to developing a hypothesis or shaping theory -causal relationships can rarely if ever be proved by survey method -can be complex to design a survey that offers truly unbiased responses due to design and sample.
Documentary research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -typically divided into primary and secondary sources -useful focus for a historical study -forms an excellent means of triangulation -can be extremely efficient, cost effective and productive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -access to documents may be difficult to gain -ethical issues need to be considered for any sensitive data as per the Data Protection Act (1998) -the researcher effect can cause bias
The Delphi method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -centres around collecting opinions from a group of experts covering a wide range of experience -offers anonymity to experts so they may be more inclined to deviate from cautious institutional positions -it is relatively inexpensive to organise and administer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -vulnerable as it operates without theory -it is designed to produce consensus irrespective of historical truth
Focus Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - good for giving insights of an exploratory kind -can be used as a self-contained, stand-alone way of collecting data -the synergy of the group and the interaction of its members can add depth or insight 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -issues with members can limit the usefulness e.g. no shows, over dominant members, over quiet members, poor meeting places -lower propensity to divulge sensitive or confidential information than with one on one interviews

Appendix v –Clearance to research from the Nottingham Trent University ethical committee.



Appendix vi – Pilot interviews and subsequent question adjustments.

Questions used in pilot interview	Feedback received	Questions used in semi-structured interviews
<p>What do you understand of social mobility?</p> <p>Is social mobility or similar themes something that is discussed or included in your long term planning documents (college improvement plan) etc</p> <p>Can you explain the biggest challenges you think young people in your care face that prevent them from being socially mobile e.g. moving from a working class background into a middle class background over their life time</p> <p>What, in your opinion is the functions of qualifications? E.g. GCSEs and A levels?</p> <p>What relationship do you think the wealth of parents has with education?</p>	<p><i>A bit of a cold start (need to build rapport). Change order of questions – maybe general question about education to locate interview in the field.</i></p> <p><i>Closed question. Develop open probe.</i></p> <p><i>Good open question that has hierarchy of importance built in</i></p> <p><i>Ok but may need to clarify 'function'</i></p> <p><i>Good. May have to open probe for specific examples</i></p>	<p>For you, what is the purpose of a contemporary education?</p> <p>What do you understand of social mobility?</p> <p>In what ways if any do you think the issue of social mobility inform your long term planning documents (College improvement plan) open probe: You mentioned.....</p> <p>Why do students undertake qualifications? E.g. GCSEs and A levels?</p> <p>What relationship do you think the wealth of parents has with education? Open probe: Can you tell me more about.....</p> <p>To what extent do you think social networks plays a role in social mobility (e.g. the who</p>

<p>To what extent do you think social networks plays a role in social mobility (e.g. the who you know not what you know side of things)</p>	<p><i>Use of example helpful</i></p>	<p>you know not what you know side of things)</p> <p>Can you outline your views on the overall fairness of the education system in England.</p>
<p>Is the education system fair in England?</p>	<p><i>May, again, yield closed answer. Bias question? Most likely to lead to negative answer</i></p>	<p>How much influence can schools have on the social mobility of the many? Open Probe: You mentioned</p>
<p>To what extent you think cultural issues play a role in social mobility (e.g. the cultural experiences of a learner such as attitudes towards school transmitted though home life or wider cultural experiences e.g. the arts/music/travel)</p>	<p><i>Good question. Example again is helpful. May restrict answer but worth it to keep the answer within my understanding of cultural capital</i></p>	<p>How far do you feel schools are responsible for the alleged lack of social mobility in England? Open Probe: Describe a specific example.....</p>
<p>In your opinion is social mobility in England (or the infamous lack of it) the responsibility of the school system or do we have to look elsewhere?</p>	<p><i>Really loaded question. Focus on the extent to which leaders feel their influence can make a difference</i></p>	

Appendix vii – Letter to parents in order to comply with BERA (2011, p5-8)

NTU Doctoral School

Dawn James
 Doctoral School Administrator
 Nottingham Trent University Doctoral School
 Burton Street - Chaucer 4711
 Nottingham NG1 4BU
 Tel: +44(0) 115 848 8154
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 Email: ntuprofdadmin@ntu.ac.uk

Dear Parent/guardian.

My name is Neil Holbrook and I am a postgraduate researcher at Nottingham Trent University. Your son/daughter has been selected by their school to be involved in a focus group where their opinions on the purpose of education will be sought. Full permission has been granted by the leadership of your son/daughter's school for this to take place.

My research is very much about student voice. I am trying to find out what Y10 students in Nottinghamshire think the purpose of an education is and will be doing this in small group focus groups at your son/daughter's school. Students will have a simple task to undertake and we will have a discussion.

Your son/daughter has the right to withdraw at any point without the need to give a reason and their contribution will be anonymised along with the school's details so it will not be possible to identify them when the research is published.

All data collected in the focus groups will only be used for the specific purpose of answering my research question. The data will also be held securely in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998).

Please could you sign the form below to indicate that you are happy to give your consent for your son/daughter to take part in this research.

Thank you,

Neil Holbrook

.....

Please delete as appropriate:

I give/do not give my permission for.....to take part in this research project.

Signed..... Date.....

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NTU DOCTORAL SCHOOL
 NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY 

Appendix viii – excerpt of script read to learners before commencing the focus groups

What I am researching:

What do young people think the purpose of education is?

I am doing this research in 2 other schools and I need your participation as you are the age group I am most interested in.

If at any point you no longer want to take part just let me know and you don't need to give a reason. You will be free to return to your lesson and anything you have said to this point will not be used.

I am a researcher not a teacher and everything you say will be anonymous and you will not be judged in anyway. I cannot, however, promise confidentiality if you discuss something that I feel places your wellbeing in danger.

All data collected will be used fairly and lawfully and only be used to answer my specific research questions. I will keep your data no longer than it will take to complete my thesis.

You, your school and your parents have previously indicated your willingness to be a participant in this research, is there anyone at this stage that does not want to proceed?

Appendix ix – Pictures used and their corresponding number value. The copyrights for these images are not owned by me but are used under the ‘fair dealing’ categorisation as they are used in a non-commercial educational setting and does not affect the market for the original work.

Economic Capital low (EC1)





Economic capital low medium (EC2)







Economic capital medium (EC3)





Economic capital medium high (EC4)







Economic capital high (EC5)







Social capital low (SC1)







Social capital low medium (SC2)





Social Capital medium (SC3)







Social capital medium high (SC4)





Social capital high (SC5)





Cultural capital low (CC1)







Cultural capital low medium (CC2)





Cultural capital medium (CC3)







Cultural capital Medium High (CC4)







Cultural capital High (CC5)







Appendix x – Pilot focus group and subsequent approach adjustments. (after ethical statement read out about consent and how data will be used)

Salient questions used in pilot focus group	Reflections
<p>I want you to use the pictures, paper and pens however you want to create a piece of research. Do whatever you want to answer this question:</p> <p>To you, what is the purpose of an education?</p> <p>Looking at what you have created, can everyone achieve this?</p> <p>What might stop you getting from here to here *Points to pictures of poverty and wealth*</p> <p>How important is an education to achieve this *points to high economic, cultural and social capital*</p> <p>Can all learners go from here to here *Points to low economic capital and high economic capital</p>	<p>Students were quite hesitant and seemed glance more at each other initially. A few questions needed before this to 'ease them in'. Also, not all students could see all the pictures. Early on get students to just spend some time looking through the pictures and maybe just discussing anything that catches their eye.</p> <p>This was a good question and because we were using the work the learners created did spark good conversation where students talked to each other rather than through me which is what I had intended</p> <p>Students struggled to give much discussion for this. It may be that they didn't really understand what the question or could be quite revealing in they actually can't identify any barriers.</p> <p>Again, this didn't lead to a great deal of discussion but the use of pictures did help to re-shape the question around the piece of work they had created</p> <p>This is a bit of a closed question. It needs opening up to get better discussion. Maybe personalise it and discuss the trajectory they are aiming for.</p>

Appendix xii – Inspection reports for the three schools discussed in the study.

Ofsted report for Runborough School (Ofsted 2016).

Inspection dates		
Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Outstanding
Achievement of pupils		1
Quality of teaching		1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		1
Leadership and management		1

- [redacted] is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- It converted to become an academy in August 2012. Its predecessor school, of the same name, was judged good at its last inspection in 2009.
- Most students are of White British heritage. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is well below the national average.
- The proportion of students known to be entitled to support through the pupil premium (additional government funding for children who are looked after by the local authority, those from armed services families and students known to be eligible for free school meals) is well below the national average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs who are supported at school action is below average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well-below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- It uses alternative places for a very few students to learn away from school and presently there is only one student on such a programme.
- The school is led by an executive headteacher, and by a head of school who oversees its day-to-day running.
- The school is supporting another local secondary school, which is in challenging circumstances.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that students are able to move forward even more confidently in their learning by making sure that marking is always consistent within and between subjects in informing students very regularly what they have achieved in lessons, what to do next and that teachers check their advice has been taken.
- Increase the effectiveness of leaders at all levels by making each individually responsible for following the best practice in the school, in checking students' performance and the quality of teaching systematically, in order to sustain and build further on their levels of achievement.

Ofsted report for Fannersfield academy, formally Fannersfield School during this inspection (Ofsted 2016).

Inspection dates		
Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good 2
	This inspection:	Inadequate 4
Achievement of pupils	Inadequate	4
Quality of teaching	Inadequate	4
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Inadequate	4
Leadership and management	Inadequate	4

- This is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. It has a technology specialist status.
- Most students come from a White British heritage, with around 8% of students from several minority ethnic backgrounds, which is much lower than average.
- The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is much lower than average. Apart from those who are new arrivals to the country and to the school, no other students are at an early stage of speaking English.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium, which is additional funding given to schools for certain groups, such as looked after children and those known to be eligible for free school meals, is much higher than average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is high. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also high.
- A very small number of students in Years 10 and 11 attend Central College in Nottingham for part of the week.
- The school does not meet the government's current floor standard, which set the minimum expectations for students' achievement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that it is at least good by:
 - eradicating inadequate teaching quickly
 - planning lessons which use information about students' abilities accurately so that work is set at the right level, particularly for the most-able students and boys
 - focusing on raising standards of students' literacy and mathematical skills
 - using adults more effectively to support students who have special educational needs
 - giving students time to work independently and to think for themselves
 - making sure that teachers' marking is consistently effective in all subjects, showing how students can improve their work, and ensuring that they act on the comments made
 - making teachers more accountable for the quality of their teaching and the progress of their students.

Ofsted report for Ashdown Academy (Ofsted 2016)

Inspection dates		
Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Inadequate
Achievement of pupils		Inadequate 4
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement 3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement 3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement 3

- [redacted] is a very large secondary school based on a split-site campus on the [redacted]. It has a large sixth form.
- The school converted to an academy in September 2011. When its predecessor school, [redacted] was last inspected by Ofsted it was judged to be good.
- There have been many staff changes this year. The majority of English teachers are new and some teachers of mathematics are new.
- The proportion of students supported by the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for those in the care of the local authority, known to be eligible for free school meals or for other reasons, is lower than average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs who are supported through school action is above average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is lower than average.
- A small number of students in Years 10 and 11 study work-related courses at [redacted].
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and raise achievement, particularly in English and mathematics, by ensuring that:
 - the differing needs of individual students are met more effectively
 - teachers in all lessons provide challenging activities that demonstrate higher expectations for all students, and particularly the most able
 - all teachers regularly check students' understanding so that misconceptions are corrected and timely support is offered to those who need it most
 - positive attitudes to learning are encouraged consistently.
- Use pupil premium funding more effectively to close the gap in achievement between these and other students.
- Improve behaviour by successfully addressing low-level disruption in lessons, so that positive attitudes to learning are consistent.
- Improve leadership and management by regularly reviewing the academy's performance more critically, leading to areas of concern being addressed quickly.