

An examination of the lived experience of students passing through the eleven-plus grammar school selection process: An interpretation through a Bourdieuan lens.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis represents my own work

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my wife, Beth, for her unfailing support and to my children Alfie, Holly and Poppy for their patience.

Abstract

There are currently 153 grammar schools in England (Bolton, 2017). The option to attend a grammar school for secondary education is based on successfully passing the eleven-plus assessment. Government discourse when justifying the grammar school system has repeatedly highlighted the emancipatory nature of the selection process, citing increased opportunities for social mobility for those students from lower income households (Foster, Long, and Roberts 2016).

Research has shown that there are potential dangers of high stakes testing on young people in terms of their mental health and wellbeing (Hutchins, 2015). Based on a review of the literature on selective education in England, there is a lack of research that focusses on the emotional impact of the eleven-plus on the young people who are in a selective system. This study aims to obtain accurate information about the very emotional personal experiences of children moving through the selection process for secondary school. The 'draw, write and tell' technique is used in order to gather the data. 'Draw, write and tell' involves the child drawing or constructing a piece of art using another medium such as clay and creating a piece of artwork which illustrates their thoughts or feelings about a particular research topic. The child is also encouraged to write words around the work and openly discuss their work with their peers which assists in the accurate interpretation of the work.

The data obtained is from a sample of five students from a primary school based on the Wirral peninsula in the North West of England, this is a fully selective education authority.

Using the tools of Pierre Bourdieu as a sociological lens through which to explore the selection process, the aim of this research is to highlight the significant socio-economic disparity between students who attend grammar schools and those who do not. Through the careful analysis of the children's own narratives, many of Bourdieu's key themes including habitus, capital, fields, doxa and symbolic violence are applied to the existence of the eleven-plus and the reasons why students from deprived backgrounds are more likely to be unsuccessful in their endeavours to gain access to grammar schools. A clear emergent theme that comes from the analysis of the narratives within the context of the local data is that students who have access to capital in all its forms, are far more likely to pass the eleven-plus.

The study draws conclusions that support Bourdieu's assertion that education serves to maintain the status quo in society and that despite the potential damaging effects of the selection process on the self-esteem of the students, individuals continue to behave as their habitus would predict and many strive to be a part of a field that they deem superior. On this basis it is recommended that if government want to address the issue of social mobility then the focus should be on promoting educational quality in all comprehensive schools in order to make them a more attractive destination. Efforts in improving outcomes from the comprehensive education system may reduce the desire for students to go through the selection process, which creates high levels of stress and anxiety for many, as well as public feelings of failure for the majority.

The findings of the thesis suggest that whilst the selective education system does in fact largely maintain the status quo in society, the pressure experienced by students as they go through the selection process is largely dependent upon their socio-economic status and their familial habitus.

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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

There are 152 local education authorities (LEAs) in England, delivering secondary education predominantly through comprehensive schools. Of the 152 LEAs, 11 are completely ‘selective’, this means that they assess students in primary school based on their perceived academic ability and use this information in order to determine which secondary school they will attend. Of the approximately 3000 secondary schools in England, 153 are grammar schools (Bolton 2017). In a selective education authority, students who reach a predetermined level in an assessment called the eleven-plus have the option to attend a grammar school, those who do not reach the required level do not have the option to attend grammar school and so will usually attend the local comprehensive school (Wirral Education Authority, 2019)

I have worked as a secondary school physics teacher, specialist leader in education and assistant headteacher in three different local authorities in a variety of different schools. I have worked for Wirral Education Authority for approximately nine years in two different schools, and this is the LEA in which I live and send my three children to school. I do not currently work for Wirral LEA; I work in a secondary school in a neighbouring authority.

The Wirral is the only authority I have worked in which is selective and so uses the eleven-plus in order to determine which students will attend one of the four single sex grammar schools. Mainstream students in Wirral, as in all selective authorities, take the eleven-plus test in primary school at the beginning of year 6 when most of the students are 10 years old. If students reach a certain level in the test then they are considered to have, ‘passed’, they are then eligible to attend one of the grammar schools.

As a parent of two children who recently went through the eleven-plus process, and with another child of seven years who will take the test in the future, I became interested in the selective education system. My interest was sparked particularly by the experiences of my daughter as she journeyed through the eleven-plus process. My son had gone through the process a year earlier, he did not appear to find it overly burdensome. He was in hospital with pneumonia and came out of hospital in the morning to take the test before returning straight to hospital later on the same morning, as this was something he wanted to do. My son went on to pass the assessment and moved from the local primary school into the local single-sex grammar school. My daughter found the eleven-plus very stressful and the stress manifested itself in different ways including various methods of self-harm.

My wife is an educational psychologist and together we appreciate the potential dangers of high stakes testing on young people. For example, Hutchins found that high stakes testing is linked to greater feelings of failure in young people which can manifest in a variety of negative ways (Hutchins, 2015). Due to the findings of Hutchins research we made every effort to ensure that we never put pressure on either of our older children to pass the eleven-plus. Our daughter was informed that we would be happy for her not to take the eleven-plus assessments but she was adamant that she wanted to take the tests and go to the local grammar school if possible.

My daughter did not discuss her stress. My wife and I noticed that her demeanour became more subdued approximately eight months prior to taking the eleven-plus and we continued reassuring her and helping her in any way we could in order to better understand her situation, hoping that we may be able to find a way to help her more effectively.

One evening, I went into my daughter's bedroom; she was ten years old at the time, she was spending more time in her bedroom than she had done previously, we believed that this was normal as she got older. I had not noticed that she had also begun to wear long sleeves all of the time including in bed. That evening, I asked my daughter for a brush and she reached across her bed towards her dressing table, the loose sleeve of her top moved up her arm revealing very thin razor-like cuts across her wrist which continued all up her arm. I froze at that moment, standing still, completely shocked, having never considered that my little girl was having feelings which may lead her to harm herself.

Given that my wife has a doctorate in child psychology and that I have worked with teenagers professionally for over 17 years, we felt that we had somehow let our daughter down. We are very well placed in our careers to spot issues with young people and ensure that they are supported appropriately but, despite our familial context, she had still managed to harm herself and we only discovered the physical harm due to a chance encounter. Hutchins's work on high stakes testing clearly conveys that students in year 6 are vulnerable to self-harm as a consequence of the performative nature of the assessments, (Hutchins, 2015) however neither my wife or I considered that this may happen with our own daughter, naively believing that our familial support would negate such behaviours.

My wife and I intervened and sought professional help in order to better support our daughter who then moved to an alternative method of self-harm and instead began to lose weight at a dramatic rate. Again, we did not notice initially but now, far more aware, we noticed her

clothes were always loose and so we monitored what she ate. We now had a ten-year-old daughter who was giving her food away in school and implementing a variety of Machiavellian strategies at home in order to avoid eating. My wife and I noticed the self-harm of my daughter had simply manifested in a different way. We could see the daughter we both adored hurting herself, desperate to have control over an aspect of her life given the helplessness she felt elsewhere.

My daughter worked with a clinical psychologist in order to better understand her behaviours. My wife and I would meet with the psychologist, sometimes with my daughter, other times separately. It became clear very quickly that the major reason our daughter was self-harming was due to pressure she felt to pass the eleven-plus examination so that she might be able to attend the local grammar school. This was despite the best efforts of my wife and I to reassure her that the outcome of the eleven-plus assessment was irrelevant and that she did not need to take the assessment if she did not want to. Despite our best efforts to dismiss the eleven-plus assessment to our daughter, she felt enormous pressure to pass the assessment and a strong desire to go on to attend the grammar school; it appeared that this was the stimulation for her self-harm. My little girl was hurting inside and despite everything we did together, we could not prevent her from feeling very high levels of stress and anxiety. She was ten years old and along with my wife, I felt almost powerless to help her.

As a parent who finds out that their daughter has harmed herself due to the pressure of perceived high stakes testing at the age of ten, I wanted to learn more about the eleven-plus. In particular I wanted to explore how students feel as they pass through the assessment, as my daughter was one of 1735 students in Wirral who took the assessment that year (Appendix A) and the behaviours she exhibited are unfortunately far more common than one would hope and their prevalence continues to increase (Hutchins, 2015).

Much research has been done on the eleven-plus and the academic achievements of students who attend grammar schools in selective local education authorities compared with students who attend the local comprehensive school. For example, Gorard and Siddiqui (2018) highlight that outcomes for students attending grammar schools are no better than expected once socio-economic factors have been taken into consideration. Coldron, Willis and Wolstenholme (2009) analysed the availability of grammar school education in over 43 local education authorities and found that Trafford has the highest number of grammar school places with 39% of all secondary school places being at a grammar school, whereas, Wirral

education authority has 21% of all secondary school places in grammar schools. There is also significant research into the wider social implications of the selective education system. For example, Morris & Perry (2016) insist that issues around social segregation are a major concern. These issues and others surrounding the eleven-plus selection process will be addressed in more detail later in the thesis, however what the research highlighted was that there is almost no information pertaining to what the experience feels like for students as they pass through the assessment. I wanted to find out more about the emotional journey for students as they pass through the selection process and to identify if the experiences of my own children were in any way typical of wider Wirral society.

The eleven-plus appears to be deeply embedded into the local culture in Wirral. It is a frequent topic of conversation amongst the adult population and can be heard discussed on a daily basis in cafés, bars and even between complete strangers at supermarket checkouts. This is more prevalent at particular times of year depending upon the academic calendar but it is a topic of conversation which persists in the locality. The fascination with grammar school selection permeates the majority of middle-class areas in Wirral with parents discussing their child's likelihood of passing the assessment often very early in primary school at the age of six or seven. Anyone visiting the area immersing themselves into the culture would soon find themselves being told about children who had recently passed the assessment or about children whose parents feel are likely to pass it and go on to attend one of the local grammar schools. The conversation simply cannot be avoided in discussions about young people in particular Wirral localities.

One of the reasons for the keen interest in the eleven-plus and subsequent attendance at grammar school is the apparent social kudos that having a child at grammar school brings. I will discuss later why this to be people think it brings social kudos, however, it appears for many, having a child at grammar school can be an important aspect of the adult's socio-economic identity and a measure of their own success.

When my children went through the process, the familiar conversation which took place around me on an almost daily basis took on a new dimension. I found that the majority of the conversations people were having with me focused on the eleven-plus, both prior to my children's assessments and following them. The topic became completely inescapable, the only exceptions I ever witnessed were between adults when one would tell the other that they

simply did not want to discuss it. The manner in which these episodes occurred conveyed the depth of feeling that some people felt towards the eleven-plus and people asking about it.

The Wirral peninsula is 60 square miles and represents much of the socio-economic disparity in the UK in a small area. There is significant disparity between regions in the authority which are in very close proximity to one another. The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) combines several indicators concerning social, economic and housing data for all 326 local authorities in England. In order to analyse each of the local authorities in greater detail, the data is produced at Lower Super Output Area (LSOA's) level. There are several LSOA's in each local authority; 32,844 in total and 20 in Wirral. Of the 206 LSOA's in Wirral, 44 are ranked in the lowest 10% nationally, whilst 18% are ranked in the top 10% nationally. 20% of LSOA's in Wirral are in the bottom 3% nationally whilst 3% are in the top 3% nationally (Wirral Intelligence Service, 2015). This information illustrates that Wirral has significant disparity between LSOA's, however, overall, when all the 206 LSOA's are combined, Wirral ranks in the lowest 25% IMD nationally.

Having lived and worked in a variety of Wirral regions, some considered to be very deprived, others more affluent, I have experienced widely different attitudes towards secondary education in this selective authority.

In my personal experience, having children pass the eleven-plus and access a grammar school seems to be far more important to a greater number of parents in the more affluent regions of the Wirral than it does in more deprived regions. Wirral Education Authority data supports this assertion with almost all primary schools who enter students for the eleven-plus being located in the more affluent LSOA's in the authority (Wirral Intelligence Service, 2015 and Appendix B).

As I currently reside in a relatively affluent area with two of the four grammar schools within walking distance of where I live, I have found that the eleven-plus is a deep-rooted part of the local psyche. It is in this local context that my son and daughter passed through the eleven-plus selection process. This left permanent scars on my daughter.

Having lived and worked in this environment in an educational setting and experiencing two of my own children go through the eleven-plus selection process, I became interested in finding out more about selective education and the experiences of different children as they pass through the system, I believe that it has negatively impacted a significant number of

other children and their families in selective authorities and my daughter's experiences were unfortunately not unique.

As part of the EdD course, students are required to complete several module assignments prior to completing the final dissertation. I have found all the modules to be relevant in developing my knowledge and skills, each module teaching me something new in a variety of areas such as research methods, the history of education in Britain, and epistemology. It was whilst working on one of the modules, based on the case study of a girl I taught, that I was introduced to the work of Pierre Bourdieu. It was only when I understood the French philosopher and sociologist's work that I was able to interpret and better understand the girl's narrative and make sense of the barriers to her learning from a socio-economic perspective.

After studying the work of Pierre Bourdieu and applying this in an educational context, I began watching my own children go through the eleven-plus process through a different lens, informed by the work I had done. Watching my daughter embark on the process made me realise that this culture which surrounds us locally is potentially damaging. I began to ask students, parents and teachers about their experiences of the process and many of the experiences which were recounted were concerning in nature, as a father and as a teacher. It was evident that I was often hearing the worst examples of the experiences of individual students, but this frequent narrative made me want to find out more about what it is like to pass through the eleven-plus process and to use Bourdieu's tools in order to better understand the experiences of children. I also aimed to explore if the outcomes agree with Bourdieu's assertion that education serves to maintain the status quo in society (Bourdieu and Waquant, 2002).

1.2 Developing an approach

My current role is the assistant headteacher in charge of teaching and learning in a single sex independent all-girls school in Chester, a non-selective education authority. My previous role was in a specialist leader in education in a comprehensive school in Wirral, a selective authority. Prior to that I have worked in teacher, teacher trainer and middle leader positions in selective and non-selective authorities.

As I recently worked for Wirral LEA in a comprehensive school, I was able to discover first-hand information about the journey students experienced as they moved from primary into secondary school. All the students at the school had either not taken the eleven-plus assessment or they had not reached the level required to attend the grammar school and instead attended the comprehensive. I was immersed in a culture in which all of the students had not passed the eleven-plus and experienced first-hand the impact this had on the students.

As I have worked in several local Wirral schools, supporting teaching and learning, I have developed many professional working relationships with teachers in the majority of local schools, both selective and non-selective. I have also been fortunate to have worked in several local primary schools, organising cluster school activities and transition events. This has enabled me to also develop close professional links with a number of primary school teachers and headteachers throughout the authority.

It was when I considered all of the experiences I had gained as a consequence of being a parent, a student and working in different secondary school contexts that I researched the types of students who are most likely to attend grammar schools. I became aware of the significant socio-economic disparity between those students who attend grammar schools and those who do not. For example, whilst 13% of the secondary school population in England are eligible for free school meals, just 3% of the grammar school population are eligible (Andrews, Hutchinson and Johnes, 2016). Under a freedom of information request made to Wirral Education Authority, I was able to examine the number of students from each primary school in Wirral who had chosen to take the eleven-plus assessment and the number of students who had passed in the last five years. A pattern became evident immediately which illustrated very high numbers of students taking and frequently passing the assessment in primary schools located in highest ranking LSOA's in the borough, whilst there are frequently no students entering the assessment in schools in the lowest ranking LSOA's (Wirral Intelligence Service, 2015 and Kinsella, 2015).

In England, students with lower socio-economic backgrounds with the same Key Stage 2 examination data from primary school are far less likely to go on to attend a grammar school than their more affluent peers (Burgess, Crawford and Macmillan, 2017). It was then that I realised that there is a narrative which is enacted on an annual basis, which much of local Wirral society enables and encourages. I wanted to use my skills as a researcher and my role as parent and teacher to better understand the experiences of students as they pass through this socio-economically biased selection process.

1.3 Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to uncover the lived experiences of students as they pass through the eleven-plus selection process in order to explore their thoughts and feelings so that those who support children are aware of the issues facing them as they journey through the academic selection process.

In addition to exploring emotional health and wellbeing of our children in relation to selective education, the research also aims to explore their journey through a Bourdieuan lens so that the relative pressures on students and the opportunities they have are better understood and the reasons explored. Bourdieu asserts that education serves to maintain the status quo in society; the research aims to explore the extent to which this is true in selective education.

1.4 Research Question

The questions to examine in this thesis are: What is the lived experience of students as they pass through the process of grammar school selection? How does it feel for students as they prepare for and take the eleven-plus? How does it feel for students as they complete the eleven-plus and find out the results? To what extent does the analysis of the data agree with Bourdieu's argument that education serves to maintain the status quo?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1: An introduction to Pierre Bourdieu

Pierre Bourdieu was born in 1930 in southern France to a working-class family. He was widely considered to be one of the most influential sociologists in the world when he died in 2002. Bourdieu sought to better understand a variety of aspects of the social world and he has significantly influenced sociological thinking in a plethora of areas such as art, culture, media and education. His influence in sociology extends to research methodology and epistemology in social sciences (Rawolle and Lingard, 2008). Bourdieu was interested in how humans interact sociologically and what determines those interactions and the interplay between human freedom and constraints imposed and created by society.

One of the reasons Bourdieu has gained so much recognition is because he suggested methods to overcome and better understand some of the most burdensome issues in social science research. For example, he offered an insight into methods to better understand the debate over the primacy of structure or agency in shaping human behaviour. Rawolle and Lingard (2008) argue that from a broader perspective, Bourdieu builds on traditional social sciences as he rejects 'theoreticism' and 'methodologism', rather embracing empirical data and the epistemological and ontological issues relating to its collection.

The field, habitus and capital

In the twentieth century, structuralists such as Claude Levi Strauss argued that there were universal rigid rules to all societies that provide the foundation for all social life. Postmodernists and existentialists emphasised individual objective outlooks that cannot be precisely identified. Bourdieu argued that this is, "The absurd opposition of individual and society" (Bourdieu, 1990). He believed both perspectives to be necessary and that they must work together in some way. Whilst trying to reconcile this conundrum, Bourdieu arrived at the concept of 'habitus'. Habitus is an individual's socially acquired 'disposition' (Bourdieu, 1977). It describes the set of predispositions, inclinations and tendencies for social actors to behave in a particular way based on their previous experiences within the world.

For Bourdieu, arriving at the concept of habitus was pivotal in understanding human behaviour, Bourdieu states, "All of my thinking started from this point: how can behaviour be regulated without being the product of obedience to rules" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 65).

Habitus explains that our likelihood of behaving in a certain way depends on how we expect others to respond. It explains how the social world becomes objectified into a range of probabilities and expectations that make us more likely to choose certain actions rather than others, this will vary between individuals due to their previous experiences in the world.

Society is ordered in a particular way and our place in that society presupposes a range of options, some of which we might be likely to achieve. Bourdieu argues that there are ‘rules of the game’ which are not necessarily written. Life is about getting a feel for the game and there is a way in which social life is collectively orchestrated without being a product of the orchestrating action of a conductor. Habitus is the organising of the structures of social life which become embedded in an individual and which determine how an individual walks, talks and behaves in the world. Bourdieu calls this, ‘the subjective expectations of objective probability’ (Crossley, 2001, pp. 81-120). For example, Bourdieu argues that an individual will make frequently subconscious subjective decisions on how to achieve a particular goal based upon the objective probability of the likelihood of achieving the goal so that the goal is realistic, based on the individual’s habitus. The range of objective possibilities is what Bourdieu refers to as the field. An individual’s habitus, or set of dispositions and attributes as a consequence of being brought up in a particular environment will endow the individual with the skills to succeed in a particular field but not in another. It is understanding this objective reality that enables the social actors to make particular decisions and which will most likely lead to a successful outcome.

Much of an individual’s habitus comes from their early upbringing, much of it is transmitted from parent to child. Bourdieu states:

“In each of us, in varying proportions, there is part of yesterday’s man; it is yesterday’s man who inevitably predominates in us, since the present amounts to little compared with the long past in the course of which we were formed and from which we result” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72).

Bourdieu describes habitus as, “the system of modes of perception, of thinking, of appreciation and of action” that an individual possesses and utilises in all social situations (Bourdieu, 1971). The social situations oneself experiences, such as school or the work place, are described as fields.

Field

Situations in which the social actors interact are called fields. A field may be the workplace, a football stadium, a classroom or any place in which the actors interact or form a part of the group. Bourdieu defines the field:

“I define the field as a network, or configuration, of objective relations between positions objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose the occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation.” (Wacquant, 1989, p. 39)

Fields are the, “social arenas within which struggles or manoeuvres take place over specific resources or stakes and access to them” (Jenkins, 1992, p. 84).

Bourdieu argues that the individual’s habitus will ensure that the individual sets clear boundaries for what they can expect within the field (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 20). He also argues that as the field is constructed by the social actors, it is therefore altered by the habitus of the individuals from whom it is comprised. It is therefore evident that the field affects the habitus of the social actors within it and so provides them with a set of dispositions which enable them to effectively interact with a similar field, given their now broader habitus. For example, a teenage boy from an affluent upper-class background educated in an independent school develops his habitus as a consequence of residing in the field of the independent school, surrounded by similar students. If the boy moved into a different independent school with a similar cohort of students then he will fit into the field and be able to interact freely within it as his habitus enables him to do so. If the same boy was moved into a comprehensive school in an area of significant social deprivation then he may find that the habitus he has developed does not adequately equip him to interact as freely with the students in the new field as this field may value some different traits and characteristics which are not currently a part of the boy’s habitus. He may then feel, “like a fish out of water” (Bourdieu, 1992).

Bourdieu states that there are a variety of different fields and that each field has, “its dominant and its dominated, its struggle for usurpation or exclusion, its mechanisms of reproduction,” (Wacquant, 1989, p. 41). He suggests that each field adopts the traits of a ‘field of power’ (Jenkins, 1992, P. 86). Fields of power would be the dominant fields in that area, for example, the government. Another field, for example education, would operate within the field of government and would often emulate the ‘field of power’.

Bourdieu asserts that although socially constructed, the resources available within the field are conveyed as intrinsically legitimate in order to benefit specific individuals. The purpose for presenting resources in this manner is because the 'mode of production' is hidden (Marx, 1977, Eagleton, 1983). The field could be considered as a social tool which bestows relative value of various types of labour and access to such labour. "The existence of a field presupposes and, in its functioning, creates a belief on the part of participants in the legitimacy and value of the capital which is at stake on the field," (Jenkins, 1992, p. 85). Bourdieu's concepts of field and habitus resonate with many social scientists however they have also been considered to be too deterministic. Bourdieu however, believes that habitus is not static and that it can alter by 'awakening of consciousness and socio-analysis' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 116). This suggests that having an awareness may enable educators to better influence the outcome. Bernstein (2000), believes not only are ideologies and cultures reproduced in schools, he argues that schools produce such ideologies and cultures.

Bourdieu frequently uses the term, 'doxa,' when he is referring to fields. The doxa is the belief system of the field and encapsulates all that the field values and believes to be true. The value system of the field may indeed be arbitrary however the field values them in high regard. Conflict will exist within the field as the actors within the field determine what constitutes what Bourdieu refers to as, 'capital,' within the field.

Capital

For Bourdieu, there are different types of capital, Bourdieu regards as capital "the set of actually usable resources and powers" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 114). Bourdieu reasons that there are different types of capital which cannot more broadly generalised into one category.

One type of capital is economic which is concerned with an individual's ability to access financial resources. It is evident that financial capital enables access to a range of opportunities and experiences which are not available to those with insufficient financial capital, Bourdieu also realised the concept of social capital, which is acquired due to membership of a particular social group, organisation or family. Possession of such capital may enable the individual to access the collective capital available to the group. Social capital is frequently symbolic and depends upon the collective capital of the group and the individual's ability to access the available capital within the group. Bourdieu argues that for

the significant social capital to be gained by the individual, the group must have members who have invested large quantities of capital, economic or other types, making them valued and influential for the group. If the individual is to gain from group membership, they must also invest into the group and maintain relationships within the group. (Richardson, 1986).

Social capital is "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 286). The quantity of social capital available to an individual therefore depends on how many people the individual can gather in order to assist in facilitating the goal and the capital other forms of capital available to those individuals.

Symbolic capital is a fundamental part of Bourdieu's field theory. Bourdieu (1993) considered society to consist of spaces in which actors interacted in social fields (Swartz, 1997, p. 121). Examples of such fields may include schools or specific groups of students who unite due to a common set of skills valued by a field, such as a sports team. The position of the actors within the field is largely dependent upon their access to capital.

Bourdieu states, "Symbolic capital.....is nothing other than capital, of whatever kind, when it is perceived by an agent endowed with categories of perception arising from the incorporation of the structure of its distribution" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 238).

One form of capital in which there appears to a greater awareness of education is cultural capital. This form of capital is concerned with symbolic aspects of an individual and will include aspects of the person such as their posture, tastes, mannerisms, skills, and credentials in addition to acquisition of particular material belongings, which an individual may acquire as a consequence belonging to a particular social class. Individuals who have similar taste regarding material belongings or interests may experience greater social cohesion as a consequence of their similar traits, this may lead to a sense of collective social identity. Individuals may feel that they have a particular social identity, they are like 'a fish in water'. Bourdieu considers cultural capital to be a significant contributor towards social inequality, arguing that cultural capital enables the status quo in society to be maintained (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

Cultural capital can exist in an "objectified" form, this may be in the form of material goods which when acquired or consumed convey a certain degree of embodied cultural capital. "Embodied" cultural capital is formed from what is not consciously acquired and frequently

unconsciously "inherited". The acquisition of such capital requires time as it is usually inherited and gained as a consequence of residing in a familial environment which values particular cultures and traditions. It is for this reason that embodied cultural capital cannot be authentically acquired in a short period of time. Cultural capital also exists in "institutionalised" form, this may be in the form of a formally recognised award from a certified body. This acknowledges a level of competence in a particular area, for example, a qualification from a particular academic institution. (Bourdieu, 1986). What maintains this class divide in education is crucial for Bourdieu as, given the extent to which cultural capital is inherited, familial discourse has the potential to contribute significantly to cross generational social reproduction since, "the social conditions of its transmission and acquisition are more disguised than those of economic capital" (Bourdieu 1986, p. 245).

Symbolic violence

Bourdieu describes symbolic violence as, "violence which is exerted on a social agent with his or her complicity" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 167). He argues that there are a range of individuals and groups who deploy a variety of strategies in order to influence public opinion and therefore inform government policies. He believes that as a consequence of residing in the social world since birth, we develop ideas about the 'order of things,' which means people often unquestioningly accept social constructs assuming legitimacy. That is, we accept a variety of "postulates, axioms, which go without saying and require no inculcating" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2004, p. 273). An example of this is the curriculum in schools, which is arbitrary, however it is widely accepted that the subjects studied in the curriculum are in some way intrinsically superior. The process is legitimised by incorporating 'independently assessed' qualifications, which are defined in terms of an 'arbitrary cultural paradigm' (Jenkins, 1992, p. 112). The curriculum and the formal assessment process are important for Bourdieu as the design of the curriculum legitimises the success and failure of students as they journey through school. A student developing in a familial environment which values traditional subjects and embraces a culture similar to that in the school will develop a habitus which will then enable them to feel like a 'fish in water' when they attend school. This habitus may then endow the individual with the confidence that they will experience success in this familiar field and so have high aspirations. A student born into an environment which is less similar to the culture of the school may feel like a 'fish out of

water', as their habitus will make acquiring capital in the field more difficult. This would mean that students with a particular habitus are less likely to succeed academically in the school field without a greater level of effort. A student who is experiencing difficulties in their learning when they compare themselves to peers may of course react in a variety of ways, however, believing that they are academically deficient may contribute to a widening of this academic gap. The system in which they find themselves has continually legitimised the situation, created by groups it favours, and unquestioned by those it does not. Bourdieu believes that this education system enables the class divide to be maintained as it ensures cultural reproduction. Through a Bourdieuan lens, this research examines the experiences of students as they journey through the eleven-plus in Wirral, an area with significant social disparity.

Bourdieu and Selective Education in Wirral

There is a large disparity between children from different social classes attending grammar schools in England with more advantaged students taking the vast majority of places (Cribb et al, 2013). The Sutton trust has indicated that many primary school teachers do not consider grammar schools to be suitable for children from less affluent backgrounds (Cribb et al, 2013). Middle-class parents appear to intervene significantly and steer their children's school choices, favouring schools which provide the best educational outcomes and the greatest opportunities to go on to attend University (Francis, Archer, Hodgen, Pepper, Taylor and Travers, 2017). In contrast, working-class parents appear to intervene to a lesser extent in order to protect their children from feelings of failure and due to feelings of elitism in the grammar schools (Reay & Ball, 1997). As parents in less affluent families in selective education authorities are less likely to have attended grammar schools themselves, they are less likely to be able to identify sufficiently academically able children and also successfully navigate the secondary school selection process in order to achieve the best academic outcome for their children (Ball & Vincent, 1998).

Wirral is not a neutral geo-educational area and I believe that Bourdieu's tools provide an effective lens through which access to the grammar school education system in Wirral can be better understood. The habitus which develops in a young person as a consequence of interacting in the fields they reside in, enables them to feel able to interact and succeed in other, familiar fields, such as a grammar school. As the child's habitus is developed as a

consequence of the fields they reside in, they embody the history from which they emerged. For example, the familial field and the capital that resides in the family will greatly influence the child's habitus and their ability to access grammar school education. The support will usually include economic capital in the form of private tuition for the eleven-plus assessment in addition to more subtle support which will enable the young person to have a habitus which enables them to feel a sense of belonging in a grammar school. This is frequently in contrast to students from less affluent families who may feel that they do not belong in the grammar school (Cribb et al, 2013).

The data obtained under the freedom of information act from Wirral Borough Council (Appendix A) regarding the number of students who took the eleven-plus assessment and the number who have passed during the assessment between 2011 and 2014 highlights how students from a particular primary school will not take the assessment whilst the majority of students in other primary schools will successfully take the assessment. For example, there are 187 potential feeder primary schools, however 50% of all students attending grammar school from 2011 to 2014 in Wirral come from just 4% of the possible feeder primary schools. All students who successfully passed the eleven-plus assessment came from just 39 feeder primary schools, 21% of the total number of schools, (Appendix A). 95% of the 39 primary schools who send students to grammar schools are located in LSOA's which are ranked in the top 50% in the authority. The primary schools in the more affluent areas are more successful at sending students to grammar schools than schools who reside in LSOA's ranked below 50% (Kinsella, 2015). The data suggests a very strong correlation between the socio-economic status of the area in which the primary school is located and the likelihood of students attending the primary school going on to take the eleven-plus assessment.

The current conservative government supports the current grammar school system and Theresa May initially supported an expansion of the grammar school system in 2015. I will discuss this in detail later in the paper. The main justification for the expansion of the grammar school system which advocates use, is that grammar schools have the long-term capacity to aid social mobility (Ross and Hope, 2014). I will discuss this in more detail in section 2.3, however, the historical data on the Wirral does not support this assertion and in fact demonstrates that the opposite is true (Kinsella, 2015 and Appendix A). The socio-economic pattern between the relative successes of the different classes attending grammar schools in Wirral is not unique with a similar pattern emerging nationally. The national evidence shows that students from less affluent backgrounds are significantly less likely to

attend grammar schools in selective authorities (Cribb et al, 2013). The main argument extolled by proponents of the system is contradicted by the data and so appears at best to be naïve.

I would suggest that if the middle-class feeder primary schools are considered a field, then being a member of such a field will endow the actors with the habitus which enables them to more successfully navigate the challenges the eleven-plus assessment and subsequent attendance at grammar school entails. The primary schools who are successful at sending greater numbers of students to grammar schools are in more affluent areas and historically these schools do not change (Appendix B). The habitus of the individuals leaving the primary schools who are successful at sending large numbers of students to grammar schools embody the history of the school and so their habitus reflects this history and the prevailing habitus of all the stakeholders in the school, such as parents and teachers, both past and present.

The 4% of primary schools who are responsible for 50% of the students in grammar schools are all located in LSOA's ranked in the top 36% in Wirral with the exception of one independent school which is located in a LSOA considered to be one of the most deprived (Kinsella, 2015). Accessing one of the eight primary schools responsible for sending 50% of students to grammar school is an economic challenge for parents given that the schools are located in more affluent areas in which house prices are higher. This is echoed nationally with middle-class families purchasing property in areas which enables them to gain access to their preferred school (Reay, 2004).

It appears that access to the grammar schools in Wirral is dependent upon the primary school a student attends which is linked to the local area in which the house prices are higher than average for the local authority (Kinsella, 2015). This would suggest that more affluent families send their children to particular primary schools in selective authorities and these children have significantly increased opportunities to gain access to grammar schools which resonates with Bourdieu's notion that education serves to maintain the status quo. Accessing grammar schools becomes associated with the more affluent families and this group are able to navigate the arena successfully, while their offspring, having attended the grammar school are then better equipped to ensure that their children have the necessary skills in order to successfully navigate the system, supported significantly by their parents. The prevailing habitus of the primary schools and the families, informed by the success in the eleven-plus assessments informs their fields and therefore the habitus of the actors within the fields,

empowering the young people. I consider that passing the eleven-plus becomes a symbol of success which adds to the symbolic capital of the individual but also the wider family, as students who pass are likely to come from more affluent families. Passing the eleven-plus becomes very desirable outcome for many families as it is associated with the middle-classes due to their success in the assessments. It therefore bestows a level of symbolic capital on the successful students and their families.

Despite the wide gap between different social classes accessing grammar school education, there is support for the system in the local authority with proponents of the system frequently justifying its existence by highlighting the emancipatory nature of the selection process which ideologically aims to select the most academically able students regardless of their socio-economic context. The evidence does not suggest that students from deprived backgrounds are able to successfully gain access to the grammar schools and I would argue that this is symbolic violence being enacted upon a population who believe the ideology, possibly unaware of the disparity between the classes and their access to grammar school education.

I explore these arguments concerning Bourdieu's tools to interpret the eleven-plus and access to grammar school selection in greater detail further in the thesis.

2.2 Historical data on education in England

A history of selection in education

Towards the end of the second world war, the UK government passed the Education Act of 1944. This promised to provide all children with a free education. However, access to this education was inconsistent between groups. 1944 saw the emergence of a tripartite system of education in which selective grammar schools took students who were considered to be the most academically able, based on an assessment taken towards the end of primary school. Technical schools were designed to facilitate the needs of young people with a particular scientific or technical skillset, however, the majority of schools were known as secondary modern schools. Secondary modern schools were not able to offer all qualifications, particularly those which enabled access into University. These qualifications could only be taken in grammar schools. Families with high aspirations for their children and who wanted them to have University as an option in their future then favoured grammar schools above the other options for secondary education (Gillard, 2011).

Access to grammar school education was limited to those who passed the eleven-plus examination at the age of eleven. The test, based predominantly on arithmetic and English created winners and losers. Students who gained a mark over a particular number were able to attend the grammar school and those that did not would then attend the secondary modern school. This notion of ‘passing’ and ‘failing’ the test did little to promote social cohesion between the groups and indeed had a particularly negative impact on those who ‘failed’ the test. Jesson (2013) highlighted that the tripartite system in which there were those who passed and those who failed impacted heavily on the self-esteem of many students. This is an area that is explored further in chapter 5.

Twenty years after the act, in 1964, there were almost 4,000 secondary modern schools, almost 1,300 grammar schools, approximately 200 comprehensive schools and approximately 1,000 schools which were none of those mentioned. These included schools such as independent schools, special education schools and technical schools (Smith, 1966).

During the middle of the 1960s, the political climate changed, recognising that the ‘tripartite’ system was not providing the same opportunities to all and that it was wrong for the futures of so many young people to be determined at the age of ten (Flint & Peim, 2012). In 1964 during their peak, there were over 700,000 students attending grammar school in the UK (Bolton, 2017). Following the change in political discourse, the numbers of grammar schools

began to fall throughout the remaining 1960s and 1970s with the closure of grammar schools reaching almost 90 per year throughout the 1970s (Bolton, 2017).

The aim of free education for all was designed to be a fair state endeavour with equal opportunities of access to all young people based on their ability and suitability for the different educational institutions. This was to ensure the most effective outcomes in employment given their particular skillset (Ware, 2017). Unfortunately, access to grammar schools from the outset was associated with social division and privilege. Students with higher levels of cultural capital were more able to navigate the system and gain access to grammar school education and students

from less affluent families appeared to have a significantly reduced likelihood of gaining access. Thus, educational opportunity was not only difficult for the more socio-economically deprived classes to access, but their access was also heavily dependent upon where a child was located geographically in England. This continues to be the case today (Jerrim and Sims, 2019).

The meritocratic political ideology holds that resources such as education provision are provided to individuals based on their innate academic ability and work ethic rather than their heredity or economic capital. This was not realised in the grammar school system from its incarnation in 1944 and the socio-economic disparity between the classes continues to be a barrier to equal and fair access to grammar schools in selective authorities today.

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment from 1997 until 2004, Mr David Blunkett, stated that there would be no increase in selection in secondary education. Government policy at the time prevented the creation of new grammar schools in England, but it did not prevent existing schools from expanding. Selection at age 11 years was, however, permitted to remain in local education authorities which already practised selective education and a grammar school system.

In England there are currently 163 grammar schools, each with an average of approximately 1,000 students, this makes up just 5% of the secondary school population in England. Comprehensive schools account for almost 90% of the secondary school population with independent schools and other schools teaching the remaining 5% (Bolton, 2017).

Although the then Secretary of State and Education had stated there would be no increase in selective secondary school education, the number of students attending the 163 grammar

schools in England has continued to rise every year since early 1990s. As recently as 2015, the Education Secretary, Nicky Morgan, permitted Weald Grammar School in Kent permission to build a new school in a neighbouring town 10 miles away, insisting that the school was an ‘annexe’ to the current school and stating the government’s position on the issue had not altered (Adams and Nardelli, 2015).

The UK prime minister from 2016 to 2019, Theresa May, who passed the eleven-plus and attended grammar school, was an advocate of the selective grammar school system. Mrs May insisted that grammar schools promote social mobility by providing a high-quality education to those who work hard and are eligible to attend based on merit rather than their finances (Theresa May, 2016). Theresa May highlighted her desire to remove the ban on the creation of new grammar schools but due to a snap election in 2017, which saw her majority diminish, she dropped her controversial plans; however, she remains an advocate of the system.

Current government policy in England does permit the removal of grammar schools from a local authority if the people in the local authority wish to retain the selective system. No local authority has selected to remove any of their grammar schools since the 1980’s (Bolton, 2017). In fact, the opposite is true and so it is evident that Theresa May’s ideas regarding grammar schools are shared by many in English society. At their peak in the early 1960s, almost 25% of students were accessing grammar school education, gaining what was considered to be a superior level of academic education. The belief was that this selection was based solely on their ability to pass the eleven-plus, not on their background or socio-economic status (Jesson, 2013).

Present day league tables highlight the virtues of grammar school education by consistently demonstrating excellent outcomes for the students who attend them (Levačić and Marsh, 2007). The league table data is based on numerous statistics including the number of students gaining the highest GCSE and A-level grades in addition to a value-added measure which determines how much additional progress a student has made as a consequence of attending a particular educational institution. Gorard and Siddiqui, (2018) insist that as average academic outcomes for graduates of grammar schools are higher than those from comprehensive schools, it is clear why many proponents of the system may consider the standard of education to be superior. However, they argue that this over simplistic analysis assumes that the results are solely due to the secondary school attended, rather than the nature of the selected students. Ware (2017) believes that grammar schools adapt much of their behaviour

in order to align themselves as much as possible with the independent sector. It is this and the superior performance of students attending grammar schools which serves to maintain the belief in areas of society that grammar schools are superior to comprehensive schools. What this does not highlight is that in a typical selective authority today, approximately only 20% of the students would be able to access grammar school education. In Wirral less than half of the students making the transition from primary to secondary school opt to take the eleven-plus assessment. Of those that choose to take the assessment, less than half achieve the required grade. This normally equates to approximately 21% of the cohort of students in Wirral (Appendix A, 2015). In 2015, almost 3800 students made the transition from primary to secondary school in Wirral however less than 1600 selected to take the eleven-plus assessment, just 42% of the cohort. Of the approximately 1600 opting to take the assessment, less than 700 reached the required grade and 'passed', going on to attend grammar school (Appendix B).

An interesting aspect of the Wirral data from a Bourdieuan perspective is that the majority, approximately 58%, of students did not choose to take the eleven-plus assessment and so bypassed the option of attending a secondary grammar school. As highlighted previously, Bourdieu refers to the field as the range of objective possibilities available to the individual as a consequence of their habitus. The Wirral eleven-plus entry data, when combined with the LSOA data about the areas from which students who go on to attend the grammar schools come, suggests that for many students, perhaps the majority, they or those around them do not consider grammar school education appropriate. I suggest that the eleven-plus entry data combined with the LSOA data reinforces the argument that many such students have not acquired the habitus which enables them to feel that they can thrive in the grammar school field and so lack the capacity to attend grammar school. I believe that given the stark socio-economic divide between groups, that this is symbolic violence being enacted upon the children and their families, legitimised by the primary education system.

Out of the 1587 students who opted to take the eleven-plus assessment in 2015, 677 reached the required grade (Appendix B). This is approximately 43% of the students who took the test. This data illustrates that 910 students, 57% of those taking the assessment, experienced failing the eleven-plus, most at the age of ten. It could be argued that whilst many of those who chose not to take the assessment may have experienced negative feelings and feelings of inadequacy, the majority who took the test 'failed' it and so, I would suggest, many will have

experienced significant negative emotions as a consequence of the failure given the social gravitas passing the assessment has locally.

Accessing Grammar Schools

Underpinning the grammar school philosophy is the belief that intelligence is fixed and that it can be accurately measured. A later discredited psychologist, Cyril Burt, promoted intelligence quotient (IQ) tests throughout the 1930s and 1940s, advocating their use in measuring the amount of fixed intelligence an individual had (Chitty, 2007).

The purpose of the eleven-plus assessment was to measure the intelligence of a student at the age of 11 years and to select students for whom a diverse and rigorous academic curriculum might be more appropriate. It was envisaged that these students would have a high probability of later attending University and so take on the more leadership roles in future society. It can be argued that identifying students based on their measured intelligence at 11 years rather than their socio-economic status, does in fact address the issue of socio-economic disparity in accessing higher levels of education. The opportunities appear to be offered to students solely based on their academic ability and not their socio-economic context. Whilst I am not a proponent of the selective education system, I would suggest that this ideology, if applied successfully, would in fact enable a greater level of social mobility and improve the UK economy by providing a greater pool from which employers in all sectors might select their workforce.

Less than ten years following the Education act, the political discourse slowly began to change as, despite the design of the system, as Floud, Halsey and Martin (1953) identified, the process of selection was in fact not meeting its initial objective. Floud et al (1953) had identified that there was a discrepancy between different groups of students attending secondary modern schools and grammar schools. They found that students from more socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds were significantly less likely to gain access to grammar school education when compared with their more affluent counterparts. Floud et al (1953) also identified that students could be taught how to pass the eleven-plus and that coaching could greatly increase the chances of an individual passing the test. Questioning Burt's assumption, instead suggesting that the concept of intelligence was in fact not fixed nor measurable using a predetermined test, Floud et al (1953) identified early on in their research that the opportunities afforded to those who 'failed' to gain access to grammar

schools were diminished as a consequence of the selective education system and that the feelings of failure caused by ‘failing’ in the selective education system were detrimental to their wellbeing. I consider the work of Floud et al (1953) to be equally relevant in modern day society in selective authorities despite it being over sixty years old.

Department for Education (DfE) data (2012) highlighted that almost 70% of students educated in grammar schools gained a C grade or better at GCSE in their English Baccalaureate subjects. By comparison, this figure was less than 15% in comprehensive schools in England. A-level examination performance reported by the DfE demonstrates that 28% of grammar school students gain 3 or more A grades at A-level; this compares to 10% in comprehensive schools (Gorard and Siddiqui, 2018).

I would argue that this data is overly simplistic as it does not illustrate the level of the students as they moved into the school. Value-added data provided in league tables attempts to address this issue by measuring the impact of the school on the child’s progress. It takes a baseline assessment of students who must take a test, the results of which are compared nationally and estimated grades are predicted for a student with percentage confidence intervals in order to convey the statistical range. ‘Value-added’ is a term used to describe the what score remains after the student’s baseline ability is accounted for. This is frequently also referred to as the residual score (Leckie and Goldstein, 2019). The most recent tool used by the UK government to measure the ‘value added’, or residual score, is Progress 8 which uses key stage 2 data from students before they go to primary school and then analyses effectively eight of the students GCSE results. This exercise is completed for all state educated students nationally and an average score is obtained. Individuals are then compared to this score and they will obtain a positive or negative residual score when compared to national data. Schools are judged and compared using Progress 8 data (DfE, 2018) for accountability purposes and it also serves as a tool which enables more effective parent and pupil choice. Schools who are ‘underperforming’ can expect a greater level of scrutiny by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). Hunt (2015) clearly demonstrated that more affluent students make better progress throughout secondary school education, not as a consequence of the selection process but across all local authority areas. It is clear that schools with students who are more socio-economically advantaged will achieve better outcomes, regardless of their level of provision and resources. Progress 8 does not consider the socio-economic context of the school’s cohort and so I would argue that using Progress 8 as a measure of school effectiveness is unfair and favours the grammar schools. I would suggest that in some

circumstances individuals may accept that outcomes from grammar schools can be explained by their academically more able student population, however, government data in league tables includes Progress 8 which claims to solely measure progress from a baseline assessment. This published resource which is designed to inform parents and pupils about their school choices perpetuates the notion that a grammar school education is superior to a comprehensive education. School league table data from 2018 illustrates that the top four schools in Wirral are all selective schools, three of them grammar schools (DfE, 2019). It is noteworthy that Progress 8 measures progress throughout key stages three and four when students are aged between 11 and 16 years. When league table data is interrogated in order to determine progress in key stage five, when students are aged between 17 and 18, there is no grammar school in the top seven schools in Wirral and only one grammar school with a positive residual score, the remaining three grammar schools all fall 'below average' nationally and are ranked in the bottom 50% in Wirral (DfE, 2019)

The Sutton Trust (2013) clearly demonstrate that whilst outcomes from grammar schools are greater than non-selective schools in selective authorities, the differences between the students was evident in primary school, before the students had attended the grammar school (Sutton Trust, 2013). Atkinson, Greg and McConnell (2006) have highlighted that grammar schools do indeed facilitate better outcomes for students however Levacic et al (2007) highlight that the negative academic impact on the vast majority of students attending the comprehensive schools in selective education authorities outweighs the much smaller positive outcome for the minority of students. I would also argue that publishing the current data on schools gives a skewed perspective about the relative successes of grammar schools. However, given the socio-economic ideology extolled by the Prime Minister, Theresa May, and the historic context, it clear why many people favour the selective education system.

When reflecting on the results achieved by grammar schools, the emancipatory ideology and the romantic historical context, it is evident why parts of society are passionate about their role and possible future expansion. I would argue however, that this overly simplistic analysis seems to underestimate the negative role that grammar schools may have on the students who fail to reach the required level, a measure which is not standardised across selective local authorities. There has been very little work done in this area and this is an area in which is explored in chapters 4 and 5.

2.3 The Grammar schools and social mobility

Free school meals (FSM) are frequently used as a crude indicator of social deprivation. The Sutton Trust found that in 2013, fewer than 3% of grammar school students were eligible for FSM. Nationally, the figure is almost 19% of pupils eligible for FSM.

The Sutton Trust (2013) also identified that students who gained high key stage two (KS2) statutory assessment tests (SATs) results over a given level were 26% more likely to go on to attend the grammar school than equally able students who were eligible for FSM. I would suggest that if the purpose of selective education is to provide excellent educational opportunities for those for whom it is suitable, regardless of socio-economic status, then there should be no gap in attendance given the academic measures are equal.

The Sutton Trust (2013) also found nationally that students who attend feeder primary schools in areas of significant deprivation are significantly less likely to go on to attend a grammar school than their equally academically able counterparts in more affluent feeder primary schools (Cribb et al, 2013).

One of the most frequently stated reasons proponents of the grammar school system utilise in their argument for the promotion of grammar schools is that the system is emancipatory in nature. That is that students from poor socio-economic backgrounds have access to what is historically considered to be a more academic education. In this way it is argued that grammar schools offer a level of social mobility, providing access to a superior quality of education, not based on economic capital, but rather the academic ability of a student at the age of 10 or 11 years old. Despite this narrative persisting for decades in parts of society, the evidence suggests that the grammar school system does in fact serve to maintain the status quo in society and offers little to facilitate social mobility as proponents of the system frequently suggest (Burgess 2017).

Accessing a grammar school is significantly skewed by socio-economic status (SES). Burgess (2017) states that, “of the most deprived families living in selective areas, 6% attend a grammar school. (Burgess, 2017, p. 4). The most recent analysis of grammar school cohorts and SES extends beyond free school meal analysis and considers families along a continuous spectrum of SES. This greater level of analysis enables economic statisticians to determine attendance at grammar school probability depending upon parental income on a sliding scale instead of the rather blunt tool of using free school meal data.

Andrews (2016) established that only 3% of grammar school students nationally are eligible for free school meals (FSM) and this has been frequently used as a blunt measure of SES. This compares to 13% FSM in non-selective schools. Andrews (2016) suggests that this data is to be expected given the gap in attainment at age 11 based on key stage 2 assessment data, however the disparity continues when we take only students of equal ability using key stage 2 data and determine their likelihood of attending a grammar school.

85% of the population are not eligible for free school meals and so a greater level of analysis is necessary in order to better understand access to grammar schools and SES. One group of families are identified as, 'Just About Managing,' (JAM) families. For the SES analysis, the JAM families are identified as those in the 20th to 40th percentile on the SES scale. In this group of non-FSM students, only 12% attended a grammar school (Burgess, 2017). The percentage of students who attend the grammar school in selective authorities increases approximately linearly up to the 80% percentile in which there is a 40% attendance at grammar school. The percentage attending grammar school then increases almost exponentially with over 80% of students attending grammar school in selective authorities for those on the 90th percentile of SES and above.

The data highlights that there is a very strong correlation between accessing a grammar school education and socio-economic status and so I would argue that a selective education offers little to those who are socio-economically deprived and instead seems to maintain the status quo as Bourdieu suggests. Of course, it could be argued that students from wealthier families have better access to resources and may be experiencing higher levels of literacy and numeracy in their formative years and that this is the reason for their academic success when they pass through the selection process. The parents of such children also have access to tutoring in order to ensure that students are well prepared for the eleven-plus assessment. These well-rehearsed and legitimate arguments may explain the different outcomes for students; however, they do not justify the Prime Minister, Theresa May's justification for expanding the role of academic selection focusing solely on social mobility (Burgess 2017). It appears that the government policy aims to prioritise the maintenance of an environment which maintains the values and cultural practices of the economically more privileged and that this includes excluding access to less affluent members of society. The vehicle through which the system is legitimised is an externally validated test but the SES data clearly illustrates that the test is only assessing the familial habitus and capital of an individual, rather than some discrete measure of natural intelligence it purports to.

Ware (2017) suggests that there are only four possible reasons why any government would advocate a path of secondary school selection. The first three reasons relate to the rationing of education and the provision of a skilled labour force; however, these are not applicable to this thesis in an English education system. The fourth reason for advocating secondary school selection is to increase social mobility. This justification for the creation and continuation of the selective education system is well rehearsed and indeed appears to be frequently reiterated by politicians supportive of the system. The argument for enhancing social mobility appears to presume that mobility is always upward. During the period between 1907 and 1979 there were significant changes in the workforce and the number of opportunities for upward social mobility increased. However today, any significant changes in the upward social mobility of individuals would be socially and economically disruptive (Ware, 2017). This suggests that there are a fixed number of superior positions in society and if an individual is to become socially upwardly mobile, then another individual must become downwardly mobile given the fixed number of positions in society. I would assert that in order to maintain support for the grammar school system, there must be individuals from less affluent backgrounds who are successful in navigating the eleven-plus and subsequent access to grammar school, if not then the most disadvantaged would be openly excluded which would cause political unrest. I would also argue that whilst the assessment legitimises the division in secondary school based on 'ability', there is a strong desire in the more affluent families to ensure that their offspring gain access to the limited number of superior positions, otherwise due to the fixed number of such positions, they would become downwardly mobile. To ensure that the system continues, society must witness upwardly mobile individuals. However, Ware states that, "The May agenda for selection is not to transform the huge imbalance in the social composition in the surviving grammar schools" (Ware, 2017). Rather it is to "ensure that the most disadvantaged are not excluded". From a Bourdieuan perspective this is symbolic violence being enacted upon the socially deprived in society which is legitimised using a test. This means that the social actors are duped into believing that intelligence is firstly fixed and measurable and that this tool is an impartial method of obtaining this fixed intelligence quotient. The less affluent families who are engaging in the selective education process believe in the emancipatory nature of the process. The transparent system is conveying that all students have equal access when in fact grammar school education is a resource which is denied to the majority of less affluent families. I would also assert that whilst more socio economically advantaged families desire that their offspring are

able to access the more senior roles in a society. This is in fact not beneficial to society as the pool from which the roles are chosen is diminished as a consequence of selective education.

Furthermore, given that there are significantly greater numbers of students who do not pass the eleven plus in selective authorities than those who pass, I would suggest that the net effect on an entire cohort of young people in a selective authority would be negative, especially given the public division of the groups.

Outcomes from Grammar Schools

Atkinson, Gregg and McConnell (2006) used National Pupil Database (NPD) for England and Wales and found that in selective authorities, students who attend grammar schools perform better in GCSE and A-Level examinations than similar students from non-selective authorities and so it could be argued that grammar schools enable the most able students to make more progress than they would have otherwise in a non-selective authority. Atkinson et al (2006) also used the same data to illustrate that students from non-selective authorities outperform similar students from selective authorities who do not have access to grammar schools. Despite therefore grammar schools possibly offering a higher standard of education to those who pass the eleven-plus in selective authorities, this benefit is lost to a greater extent by the number of students who do not pass the eleven plus and have worse outcomes than their similar non-selective counterparts. For example, Atkinson et al (2006) suggest that the average grammar school student will finish four grade points higher at GCSE than they would have done if they had gone to a comprehensive school in the same selective authority. This is equivalent to improving by one GCSE grade in four GCSEs. Students educated in a comprehensive school in a selective authority would likely gain one grade lower than they would have done in a comprehensive school in a non-selective authority.

By considering the significant benefits to those attending the grammar school and the smaller disadvantage to those who do not attend and by analysing the numbers of students who are affected, Atkinson et al (2006) argue that there is no overall impact on the attainment of the total cohort in a selective authority when they are viewed as a whole entity. They acknowledge that for the minority of students who gain access to grammar schools, the academic outcomes are likely to be largely positive with a significant measurable impact however these relative gains are made to the detriment of the majority of the students in a selective authority who lose out in some way as a consequence of the selective system.

Atkinson et al (2006) also emphasise that this is a simplistic analysis which does not adequately consider the minority of socio-economically deprived students who do gain access to grammar school education but for whom the social barriers to their success are high.

The Preserve of the Middle Class

The Sutton Trust (2013) research found similar issues relating to socio-economic barriers as Atkinson et al (2006) research which I believe also resonates with the work of Pierre Bourdieu and his notion of habitus. The Sutton Trust (2013) researchers found that there are very strong feelings held by many disadvantaged families who consider grammar schools to be the preserve of the middle class. They are not basing their opinions on any notion of ability, but rather feelings of elitism. This in turn establishes barriers which are based on perceptions of cultural and economic capital. In addition, researchers concluded that almost all students attending the grammar school had paid for a form of tuition in order to better prepare for the eleven-plus assessments, this clearly illustrates an additional argument for why there are so few FSM students in grammar schools as economic capital would have prevented disadvantaged students from accessing such an expensive resource (Cribb, 2013).

Sites of Social and Cultural Reproduction

Flint and Peim (2012, p. 147) state that, "schools operate as sites and agents of cultural and social reproduction." They believe that whilst significant attention and effort focuses on the issue, in fact the socio-economic status quo continues in school and that, "certain groups are fated to fail." Flint et al (2012, p. 148) acknowledge that there is a, "discourse of ability" in education, demonstrating that this discourse emerged generations ago and remains in modern education systems.

Flint and Peim (2012) argue that being able to accurately measure the intelligence of an individual is pivotal in local education policy. This would enable LEAs to provide equitable access to grammar school education which is not dependent upon students' access to capital, however determining intelligence is complex. The 11-plus uses a variety of assessments which are designed to quantitatively measure an element of intelligence, however, it can be argued that this 'discourse of ability' is not valid due to it being a completely objective measure. Children are not consistent in their academic performance and may vary widely

from one assessment to the next. Cicourel and Kitsuse (1971) have found that the sociocultural traits of an individual will impact significantly on their academic achievements in school. They note particular traits, which include posture, class, gait, and speech patterns. They consider that teachers' labelling contributes to the educational outcomes, suggesting that teachers interpret the personal traits of the individual students and determine their social class based on this 'evidence'. Teachers then have a biased opinion of students' ability to succeed, as a consequence of their social class and it is believed that once this process occurs, it is very difficult to alter. I would argue that as students are frequently academically banded in primary schools, the children may be prepared and advised by their teachers differently for the 11-plus, depending upon their academic set in school. As Flint and Peim (2012, p.151) state, "there is a powerful and negative component of social construction at work in this process of discrimination..... the decisive consequence of directing 'appropriate' knowledge towards 'appropriate' pupils, sealing educational fates."

The Family

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argue that the inherent bias in the school system is designed to automatically favour the dominant culture, arguing that access to cultural capital provides the individual student with the tools necessary in order to successfully operate within the field, gaining greater symbolic capital from the field which later enables acquisition of economic capital. Bourdieu and Passeron argue the maintenance of the system depends upon symbolic violence, that it is, "the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002, p. 167). I agree with many of Bourdieu's assertions for the majority of students. A student raised in an environment rich in cultural capital may develop a habitus which then better enables them to access the capital available in the field of education. Drawing on this capital, the student would then likely grow and achieve academic success and gain additional capital. The offspring of the individual will then grow in an environment rich in cultural capital and they will also find themselves with a habitus which successfully enables them to feel 'like a fish in water' in the field of education, gaining much from it as a consequence of habitus derived from their familial environment. Bourdieu defines habitus as "a structuring structure, which organises practices and the perception of practices." (Bourdieu, P. 1984, p. 170). For example, if a child grows up in a family environment with high levels of cultural capital then this will greatly influence how

they develop. The child's interests, opinions, speech patterns and demeanour will reflect their environment. These "durable dispositions" gained during their formative years are due to the environment in which they reside and grow. The habitus they develop enables them to excel in particular environments in which they are like a 'fish in water.' However, students without this habitus may find achieving success in the same field more challenging, feeling instead like, 'a fish out of water'.

The School

Willis (1979) performed a large research project in Hammertown school in which academic failure was common. He concluded that the school favoured certain traits in the students, it had specific values which it considered beneficial for learners to embody. Willis argues that students unknowingly assess their likelihood of achieving success in the field, actively resisting, exerting agency, if they feel that they cannot experience success in the field. Clearly exerting such agency condemns these students to academic failure and so they will not gain the capital the field has to offer. As Willis (1977, p.1) states, "working class kids get working class jobs." Bourdieu believes that within the school field students interact, subconsciously conveying and drawing on their individual habitus. When the habitus of the majority align closely then the individuals may feel they belong and embrace the field. However, when the habitus of an individual does not closely align with the majority, they may remove themselves from the field as much as possible.

Cribb (2013) in a Sutton Trust Report highlights that for many academically able students born into disadvantaged families, there is no desire to take the 11-plus, despite such students having a very high chance of passing the assessment and gaining access to grammar school. Parents of these children frequently highlight elitism, suggesting that their children would not 'fit in' if they attended a grammar school. When considering Bourdieu's field and habitus, it is clear why, despite much work being done to address the social issues in education, grammar schools and the selection process actually contribute to social division and further entrench the issue. This is because there will be far greater numbers of students from affluent families with particular habitus attending the grammar schools and, as Bourdieu suggests, the habitus of the agents influences the field itself so that the field will convey its valuing of particular forms of capital. I would argue that this further disenfranchises those from more disadvantaged backgrounds, making them less likely to attend and also confirming and

consolidating the social setting of the grammar school in society, making it a less attractive destination for socially disadvantaged students.

Tutoring

There are several local companies and individuals who provide various forms of tutoring in order to prepare children for the eleven-plus assessment and increase their chances of 'passing' the test. Utilising the services of these companies and individuals requires a certain level of economic capital from the parents. It would also be essential that parents valued the grammar school education in order for them to dedicate financial resources towards improving their child's likelihood of 'passing'. Government policy favours grammar schools due to their ability to offer high quality education to any student who is capable of passing the eleven-plus, regardless of their social state, to promote social mobility. I would suggest that the financial disparity between different social groups favours the more privileged, including access to grammar schools and contributes to maintaining the status quo.

The Selection Process

Students in Wirral, as in all selective authorities, take the eleven-plus. The assessments differ slightly between local education authorities as there are two different examination boards. Previously the most common assessment was designed and administered by GL Assessment and they continue to administer the assessment in Dorset, Kent, Lancashire & Cumbria, Lincolnshire, Medway and Wiltshire. The other examination board was developed by the Centre for Evaluation & Monitoring at the University of Durham (CEM). This eleven-plus was designed in response to the argument from many parents and schools that the eleven-plus assessment was transparent and that students could be taught how to pass the test. Selective authorities which use the CEM assessment include Berkshire, Bexley, Birmingham, Buckinghamshire, Devon, Gloucestershire, Shropshire, Walsall, Warwickshire, Wolverhampton and Wirral. The remaining selective authorities, use a combination of both assessments.

The CEM assessment has been designed by Durham University in order to be, ‘tutor proof’, containing questions on literacy, numeracy and non-verbal reasoning. It is designed to assess "natural ability" and address issues relating to intense coaching (Millar, 2016).

Close analysis of the most recent cohort of students clearly illustrates that the CEM eleven-plus assessment administered in Wirral does not address issues of tutoring. Millar (2016) argues, based on the government's Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI), that strong socio-economic bias remains. CEM has recently removed the claims that their eleven-plus assessment can in fact assess, “natural” ability. Research continues at the University in order to design an assessment which no longer favours more affluent students (Millar, 2016).

Parents of students who are considering taking the eleven-plus must ensure that they apply to the local authority by the end of May when their child is in year 5. Students then take the eleven-plus assessment in the September when they return to school in year 6 and results are given to parents approximately one month later at the end of October. This information then enables parents to apply for the appropriate secondary school places (Wirral, 2019)

On the day of the assessment, students in year 6 will complete two mostly multiple-choice assessments under strict time conditions. Each paper is approximately 50 minutes long and instructions are provided on an audio soundtrack. There is a short break between the tests which comprised of questions in mathematics, English and verbal reasoning questions. The assessments are completed on an answer grid which is machine readable for quick marking and results (Wirral, 2019).

Wirral education authority permits primary schools to give students a practice eleven-plus assessment paper prior to taking the real assessment, however, it is not permissible for primary schools to prepare students for the eleven-plus directly. There is a ban in the majority of local authorities for all schools, including independent schools on tutoring students for the eleven-plus assessment. Neil Roskilly, CEO of the Independent Schools Association, believes that, given parents are already paying for independent education, they should be able to offer support and guidance in passing the eleven-plus assessment without the additional cost of private tutoring (Busby, 2018). The newspaper article also highlights his support for maintained schools to be allowed to offer support for the eleven-plus assessment as they might for any other assessment. If all schools did offer this support then it may go some way

towards redressing the imbalance, as more socio-economically deprived students, who currently gain very little support, would get more support from school. There is however, a counter-argument that this detracts from the curriculum learning and that teaching to an arbitrary assessment cannot be justified in a school which should be following the National Curriculum.

2.4 Testing at 10 years old

High stakes testing

An important aspect of this research is to explore the impact taking the eleven-plus assessment has on the mental health and wellbeing of students as they pass through the selection process. Issues which will be explored relate to students experiencing stress and anxiety as a consequence of the process and many children's' experience of 'failure'. These issues will be contextualised in relation to recent research focusing on the wellbeing of children in the UK.

"The Good Childhood Report" 2015, published by The Children's Society looks at how children feel and how they perceive their own lives. The 2015 report highlights children in England ranking relatively poorly in self-image and experience of school. It also highlights between 5% and 10% of children having low levels of subjective wellbeing. Consistent with previous reports, the most recent report suggests that subjective wellbeing reduces in children between the age of 10 and 14 and that there is a correlation between subjective wellbeing and poor mental health.

MacDonald (2001) identified that high levels of anxiety in children can be attributed to testing as a consequence of perceived parent's expectations. MacDonald (2001, p.92) states "surveys show that anxiety and concern surrounding educational evaluation, and tests in particular, is considerable." MacDonald's research resonates with the eleven-plus as I would argue that this test can directly impact parents and children, arguably to a larger extent than any other test they will take before their GCSE's or possibly A-levels.

MacDonald's (2001) research does not consider the eleven-plus and the selective education system, however it does focus on the detrimental impact which high stakes testing can have on children. MacDonald (2001, p. 98) concludes; "fear of exams and test situations is widespread and appears to be becoming more prevalent, possibly due to the increasing frequency of testing and importance placed on testing within education systems. Secondly, test anxiety has a detrimental effect on test performance and, although correlations between test anxiety and exam performance are modest, its influence on the number of children passing or failing an exam is potentially considerable."

The result of the eleven-plus is a public matter for the students as although results are given out to parents on the same day, students will ask one another about the results of the assessment and their secondary school destination. Students are limited to the extent to which they can provide false information as their school destination is very public and so students are publicly exposed. I would also argue that, due to the outcome of the eleven-plus assessment and local perception, the test is considered by some to have a life altering significance. It is clear why for many students, passing the assessment is considered a priority. As this high stakes assessment takes place during a particularly vulnerable time in a child's life when "The Goodchild Report" highlights students are more likely to experience low subjective wellbeing. I would argue that this is another reason why the selection process system should be reconsidered.

2.5 Social identity theory

Carol Dweck (1999) argues that students who consider academic ability to be fixed will interpret failing a test as an indicator of their own inadequacy and will have very negative emotions regarding the failing of an assessment. These feelings will impact negatively on their self-perception and self-esteem. It can be argued that 'failing' the eleven-plus at age 10 could negatively impact on a child's emotional wellbeing and influence their ability to reach their future academic potential due to impacting their self-belief.

The students who are taking the eleven-plus assessment are going through a transition to secondary school. This is a pivotal period for a student in a selective authority such as Wirral as the outcome of the assessment will determine which secondary school they attend. Due to the very high levels of symbolic capital associated with attending the grammar schools in Wirral, for many, the outcome of the assessment will form a large part of their social identity. Stets and Burke (2000) suggests that when we consider social identity theory, the self is assumed to be reflexive in nature, that is the self can appreciate itself as an object and therefore classify and categorise itself. This study aims to critically examine this concept in the context of the children's narratives about the eleven-plus assessment process in the Wirral. The process of being reflexive in order to categorise oneself is known as, 'self-categorisation' (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher and Wetherell, 1987). It is through understanding the categories to which one belongs that an identity is formed by an individual and hence a social identity - an identity as a function of belonging to a particular group (Stets and Burke, 2000). The families of the students who are embarking on the eleven-plus assessment and the students themselves all continuously go through a frequently subconscious process of self-categorisation. If a child passes the eleven-plus assessment then this pivotal moment in their development will impact significantly on their self-categorisation, they will become part of the group of students who passed the eleven-plus assessment. A significant aspect of their self-identity is externally validated and the desired symbolic capital gained. This is also applicable to the parents of students who pass the eleven-plus and conversely also the students who do not pass and their families.

Hogg and Abrams (1988) consider the social group to comprise individuals of a similar social category or to hold a similar set of beliefs or abilities. Individuals who do not have the traits or characteristics of the individuals in the group are considered to be the out-group. Hogg and Abrams (1988) also argue that there are two main processes taking place when an individual

becomes part of a social group. In the first, 'self-categorisation,' an individual will accentuate the traits and behavioural norms associated with the social group as they compare themselves with the group and consider themselves reflexively, whilst simultaneously considering the individuals within the group and the traits they possess. The second process, 'social comparison', is when the individual selects particular traits based on their self-categorisation in order to accentuate those traits and behaviours which will result in enhancing the outcomes for oneself in the group. This process is known as the accentuation effect and involves the individual aligning themselves more closely with the characteristics associated with the group. The result of this process has a positive impact on the self-esteem of the individual belonging to the group. This means individuals in the group will consider the characteristics of the group positively and the characteristics of the out-group negatively (Hogg and Abrams 1988). This process is evident in the children's discussion in this study. This resonates with Bourdieu's concept of field and habitus as social actors in a particular field will each have a particular habitus and, in the context of a field such as the grammar school, the processes of self-categorisation and social comparison will result in a cohort who will each develop a habitus which more resembles other members in the group, often to the exclusion of others. The comprehensive school field will have actors who also become part of a social group and this field will value particular traits and characteristics differently than the grammar school field who are considered, 'other'. I would suggest that the difference between the different secondary school settings is compounded as a result of the social interactions in the respective fields. I examine this further in chapter 5 within the context of the five children in the Wirral school. As there is a very strong correlation between economic capital and the students at grammar school, this will influence what the grammar school field values and hence the habitus of the individuals residing in that field. For many students and their families, this will increase their desire to reach the required level in order to attend the school. The accentuated differences between the cohorts of students attending grammar schools and comprehensives, as a consequence of the interactions in the fields and the processes described by social identity theory, will increase social division and contribute to a greater feeling of, 'other'.

Nesdale (2001) argues that individuals will naturally desire to belong to groups which are considered to be superior as a way to increase their own self-esteem. This means they will treat individuals in the group positively and demonstrate favouritism towards them. Conversely, members of the group are likely to discriminate against individuals who are part

of the out-group, particularly if this group is considered to be inferior in some way. This provides a significant incentive for students and their families to ensure that they gain access to grammar schools as, in addition to providing an academically superior education, they may also increase the self-esteem of the individuals gaining access whilst simultaneously placing a significant divide between themselves as ‘winners’ and those considered ‘losers’.

Burke and Reitzes, (1991) suggest that as an individual is a member of numerous social categories and so they will embody a unique self-concept. Despite this uniqueness, individuals in a given social group context will behave in a manner which is expected by the group and conform to their expected role within that group. Indeed, it is the social group which will predominantly guide the individuals’ behaviour whilst they are in the group. Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje (1997) found that belonging to a group is very important to an individual’s self-esteem. They found that belonging to the group and having an identity within the group is so important for human behaviour that this is far preferable to leaving the group, even if the status of the group is low. They also found that groups with strong social identities had very high levels of concurrence when making group decisions. This means that individuals in a group in addition to adopting many of the common characteristics of the group, will also value membership of said group regardless of whether it is considered superior or inferior.

Self-esteem

Self-esteem is the worth or dignity that one ascribes to oneself. It involves being conscious of what you are responsible for and what you must ensure is done if you are to maintain a particular level of self-dignity. Self-dignity is essential in order to maintain a position in society and feelings of self-worth (Jacoby, 2003). The self-esteem of a ten-year-old student can be fragile in nature and can depend largely on external verification, for example, passing or ‘failing’ the eleven-plus assessment. Whilst a student can take measures in order to increase their chances of a successful outcome, ultimately, the student cannot control the questions they get in the assessment or their ability to answer them successfully on a given day. The students are not in complete control of the selection process outcome and hence self-esteem being bestowed or denied. This is precarious process with perceived high stakes for many candidates who have a certain amount of capital and a particular habitus. The students’ future capital and habitus may depend on a particular outcome in the high stakes

test as it may confirm their position in the field and consolidate their habitus, whilst endowing them with high levels of symbolic cultural capital which they can utilise in order to gain economic capital later in life.

Jacoby (2003) argues that self-esteem is about more than the individual. It encapsulates everything we hold dear as group members, this includes family, nations, friends, partners and even religion. As previously discussed, our self-esteem is partly a product of group membership. But our self-esteem is also influenced by the behaviour of different groups we belong to and our adherence to the value structures which exist within the group.

Psychologist Carl Rogers (Thorne, 1992), believed that the personality of an individual is composed of the real self and the ideal self. The real self is an honest reflection of who the individual is at a given moment in time. The ideal self is the person that the individual would like to be. It is the ideal version of themselves, created by them as a consequence of their lived experiences in a society in the world.

Cross & Markus, (1991) argue that an individual's ideal self acts as a motivator which encourages particular behaviours which are more likely to move them towards the trajectory they consider to be ideal. It also acts as a system which prevents particular behaviours which might distance an individual from their ideal self. Ideal self is linked to self-esteem as the individual is creating the values, ideals and standards for themselves that they consider to be ideal, and they are constantly assessing their progress towards the ideal. If they deviate far from their ideal self and can see no simple way to begin returning towards their ideal then this will impact negatively on their self-esteem.

Cashmore and Goodnow (1986) describe the transmission of values, ideals and standards across generations as internalisation. This process describes the slow transfer of parental and society standards as these are internalised by the child and become values they too embody as they grow. There have been numerous studies which suggest a link between adolescent's ideal self and their perceived parental ideals (Keating, 2004; Moretti & Higgins, 1999).

When an individual's life moves along the trajectory associated with the self-constructed ideal self, this will have a positive impact on the self-esteem of the individual. When the ideal self seems to be dramatically different from the current trajectory, negative feelings can begin to permeate, leading to low self-esteem and possibly feelings of shame, exacerbated by the public nature of the results.

Students from all socio-economic backgrounds are vulnerable to this potentially damaging experience although those from more affluent backgrounds have more experience of tutoring and so may experience greater feelings of control. From a Bourdieuan perspective, the students from more affluent backgrounds will generally have a habitus which is more able to deal with the experience due to the greater number of opportunities for tutoring which will familiarise the students with the types of questions. However, I would also argue that for many such students whose habitus and fields are socially advantaged, there is significant pressure to pass in order to maintain their self-esteem, consolidate their habitus and secure their place in the fields they wish to reside in. For example, when Keating (2004) makes the link between an adolescents' ideal self and their perceived parental ideals, the student is forming their ideal self as a consequence of reflecting on their familial habitus. For students with parents who may have attended grammar school, there will be intrinsic pressure on such students regardless of any external pressure applied to the student. As the eleven-plus assessment is a pivotal aspect of the self-constructed trajectory associated with the students' ideal self, should they fail to gain access to a grammar school, the gap between their real self and ideal self would become so significant that their self-esteem would suffer negative consequences with no real opportunity to return to the original trajectory. It could be argued that more affluent students have an ideal self which correlates so closely with their parents that they are motivated in additional ways to succeed in the eleven-plus assessment, as 'failing' the test would alter significantly alter their real self in addition to their level of capital.

Shame

Jacoby (2003) highlights the difference between shame and guilt. Guilt, he advises, is potentially redeemable, there is a possibility of making amends, whereas feelings of shame can never hope to be redeemed. Jacoby states that when an individual experiences shame, he or she is helpless, "This 'posture of humility' takes the wind out of the opponent's sails, allowing him no response but pity." (Jacoby, 2003 p. 3). Feelings of shame live on in an individual's memory for many years, John Keats wrote, 'the unluckiest hours in our life are those in which we remember the past blushing—if we are immortal this is what hell must be like" (Hultberg, 1988, p.115).

It is evident that shame is a toxic emotion. However, Izard (1977), argues that from a biologically evolutionary perspective, shame serves a purpose in that we will endeavour to not do that which brings about shame on ourselves and that this has in the interest of social order. I would argue that this resonates with the work of Hogg and Abrams (1988) on self-categorisation and social groups in that acts which bring about feelings of shame would be unhelpful to the individual as a member of the group as those acts are establishing feelings of shame within the context of a social group. Jacoby states, “shame acts as a powerful inducement toward social adaptation, as it is often triggered by awkward self-consciousness and fear of criticism. Shame’s function is thus highly complex, serving the interests of both individuality and conformity” (Jacoby, 2003, p.21) Jacoby goes on to state that, “I may be too ashamed to express my dissenting opinion in a group for fear of being ... rejected” (Jacoby, 2003,

p.22). The concept of shame is relevant to the focus of this study as the participants are encouraged to discuss underlying emotional states as they pass through the assessment process.

Case, Pippitt and Lewis (2018) believe that the emotion of shame has three distinct contributors; the shame-inducing event, how vulnerable the individual suffering the shame is and the social context, with each potentially adding more negative emotion. They suggest that shame makes an individual perceive themselves to be insufficient or flawed in some way and that these frequently forcefully guarded emotions about the self are intrinsic, deep and enduring.

Tangney, Miller, Flicker and Barlow (1996) argue that issues relating to low self-esteem, such as the respect one has for oneself, low self-efficacy, and one’s belief in one’s ability to accomplish something, are frequently precursors to the more hazardous emotion, shame. Harper & Hoopes (1990) consider shame to have the potential to permeate an individual’s identity so that they may perceive themselves to be flawed or a failure. This resonates with Carol Dweck’s work on fixed mindsets. Harper and Hoopes argue that the feelings of shame can lead to changes in the behaviour of individuals experiencing the emotion such as hiding, being submissive, concealing or attacking in order to alleviate the powerful emotion.

Mandler (1975) argues that shame stems from the devaluation of the self and that it is felt most intensely when it is social in nature. Lewis (1986) argues that intense feelings of shame induce panic, rendering the individual incapable of rational thought, frequently inducing

involuntary defensive reactions which evolved from the bodies need for a fast response. Shame is frequently considered by psychologists to be the fear of being exposed and judged negatively by others and consider that shame is not possible without anxiety (Lewis,1986).

I believe that students from a familial and primary school field in which key members have all been successful in passing the eleven-plus assessment will feel pressure to pass the assessment and validate their place within the field. As there is only one opportunity to take the eleven-plus and given the transparent nature of the results, I believe that such students are vulnerable to feelings of shame. I also believe that more commonly, students from socio-economically deprived backgrounds without parents or friends who have passed the eleven-plus will feel less vulnerability to potential feelings of shame should they fail to reach the required mark, which they are less likely to do.

As students are developing their habitus as they grow, I believe that students from more affluent backgrounds might better understand the nuances surrounding capital and its acquisition. This is likely due to their family placing value on specific traits and efforts, possibly conveying how these may benefit their future. A consequence of such students having an awareness of capital and its ability to enable access to certain resources within specific fields is that they will place significant pressure on themselves in order to achieve a positive outcome in the eleven-plus assessment in order to have their habitus externally validated and prevent future feelings of shame. The risk of failure could be potentially very high for some young people from more affluent backgrounds due to this intrinsic pressure. This is in addition to the extrinsic pressure felt as a consequence of the family allocating resources in order to support the child in achieving the desired outcome in the eleven plus assessment.

Chapter 3: Methodology and methods.

Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to uncover the lived experiences and explore the thoughts and feelings of young people as they pass through the eleven-plus selection process. In order to ensure any findings are valid, it is essential that data is gathered responsibly and that methods for gathering and processing data are carefully considered. This chapter will illustrate how ethical considerations are adhered to and how the research is designed to ensure that the voices of the children are accurately conveyed.

3.1 Accessing the views of young people

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989) recognises that children should be protected and be given rights of participation. I would argue that as selective education processes impact on children directly, then it is important that we explore the journey from their perspective so that we may better facilitate their needs and care for their mental health as young vulnerable people in our society.

Given that the UNCRC was ratified by the UK in 1991, some 18 years ago, it appears that there has been very little work done in exploring the views of young people when they go through the eleven-plus selection process. The majority of data are statistical and appear to be concerned with socio-economic contexts, social mobility and academic value added by grammar schools.

Qualitatively accessing the views of young people can be challenging for several reasons. It is important that the data gathered is valid, this means that the researcher must check that their interpretation of the data is accurate. This validation process is essential in order to ensure that the child's narrative is correctly recorded.

As an adult researcher, I am immersed in the research with children. This carries several implications for instance, my position as researcher may make the students alter their narratives in order to say what they consider to be 'correct'. It is important that issues relating to my location in the research are addressed in order to acknowledge and minimise my impact on the data in order to maintain its integrity and validity.

As the children convey their narrative, there is also an issue relating to hermeneutics. The children will be relaying their thoughts and opinions using the language which is available to them. It will be their interpretation of the events and their feelings. I will be interpreting their interpretation; therefore, this exercise is a double hermeneutic. Care must be taken to ensure that my interpretation of their interpretation is clarified in order to ensure that the data is valid.

3.2 Write, draw, show and tell groups.

An individual's age should have little bearing on their capacity to have a 'voice', particularly when the issues being discussed relate directly to them. The concept of voice is not only about children talking but must include non-verbal methods of communication so that children are better able to convey their thoughts, feelings and perspectives (Thomson, 2008).

Historically, the majority of research relating to children drew on data provided by associated adults who provided insights into the child's opinion; the children themselves were not participants of the research. The issue with this method of data collection is that this may not elucidate what is meaningful to the child but rather what is considered important through the familiar adult's lens (Angell and Angell 2013).

Researchers appreciate the limitations of research where the child has no direct voice and so different methods have been explored which aim to capture the voice of the child and analyse their viewpoint in recognition that the children have the capacity to offer greater insight into issues which relate to themselves (Carter and Ford, 2013). Much of the sociological research relating to children relies on personal accounts, offering unique insights into a situation on the basis that data from the perspective of the child is essential in order to draw valid conclusions.

Working with children does, however, provide the researcher with a number of issues which make research involving children more complex than it may be with adults. For example, researchers need to be guided by the fundamental rights of the child (United Nations, 1989). There are also ethical issues which relate more to protecting children who are part of research. For a researcher, however, one of the most difficult issues to overcome is gaining an accurate insight into the thoughts and opinions of the child (Carter and Ford, 2013).

This research explores the eleven-plus journey through the child's lens. It is therefore important to ensure that data gathered accurately reflects the thoughts and feelings of the children. Punch (2002) argues that children have not yet developed the cognitive capacity to accurately interpret research questions, one reason being that their language style may be unfamiliar to the researchers. Punch also suggests that the issues regarding the interpretation of language are mutual. Punch (2002) also identifies problems in ascertaining children's real perspectives and ideas as children are frequently less able to formulate informative responses as an adult is capable of doing. They are also likely to convey what they think the researcher would like them to say. Due to the nature of collecting useful, purposeful data from children,

Punch advises the researcher to deploy more creative methods for data collection, such as 'Draw and Write' as they provide potential means of negating the issues discussed.

Wetton (1999) first used the 'Draw and Write' technique in 1972 as she wanted to accurately articulate the thoughts and feelings of children and she believed that this method was superior to more traditional methods of questioning. 'Draw and Write' has since been used successfully with students due to its ability to gain an insight into the thoughts and feelings of students, offering them time to reflect and recall at a pace they choose, giving them opportunity to formulate opinions and reflect on a variety of phenomena. The technique has been implemented inconsistently since 1972, but the method is consistent in that it requires the child to create artwork using a medium of their choice with a focus on the area of research. The child is also asked to also use words in the artwork in order to convey their thoughts, this also aids in the accurate interpretation of the artwork. The method uses a form which is familiar to children and enables them to focus on their creativity whilst conveying thoughts and emotions. Students are always given sufficient time to complete the task, enabling them to modify the process as they consider different aspects of the question. 'Draw and Write' has been acknowledged for its capacity to enable students to spend time on the artwork in an unthreatening manner which students are able to guide. It is also better able to deal with complex, frequently sensitive issues at a pace which is more comfortable to the child. Backett-Milburn and McKie (1999) argue that 'Draw and Write' is often done with groups of students working together simultaneously and that this simply leads the group to convey the dominant discourse of the subject in question. They also acknowledge that despite this issue with using 'Draw and Write' to research in groups, it can be very useful and rewarding for the researcher when considering social perceptions. As social perception is an important aspect of this particular research, I believe that elements of 'Draw and Write' is beneficial to this study.

Backett-Milburn and McKie (1999) believe that interpretation of the artwork is the main limitation of 'Draw and Write' as adults are interpreting the artwork through their own lens and so may make significant mistakes when interpreting the work. This may include issues such as taking the meaning of a particular aspect too literally or overly focusing on a particular aspect of the artwork unnecessarily, often to the detriment of another aspect of the work. This subjective nature of the analysis has the potential to negate the positive reasons for using this method of data collection. For this reason, I will be incorporating a modified

version of the technique which is designed to provide the virtues of the 'Draw and Write' technique whilst reducing the issue of misinterpretation by the researcher.

Angell and Angell (2013) effectively utilised a 'Draw, Write and Tell' technique which addresses some of the methodological issues raised in 'Draw and Tell'. The modified data collection technique allows the student to use their own words in order to explain each aspect of their artwork. The researcher then repeats back to the student what they are saying and if they are unsure, the researcher should then be explicit in asking questions, clarifying what the child means in order to ensure that the adult does not misinterpret the work. The researcher should also encourage the child to elaborate on their account of the work and ask them to talk about aspects the researcher does not clearly comprehend.

The aim of this research is to gather clear and accurate data regarding the personal and frequently emotional journey of the students as they pass through the selective education process. The 'Draw, Write and Tell' technique was used and the data gathered from a small sample of five students from a local primary school. The small number of students enabled each student to spend the required time reflecting and developing their thoughts and ideas, ensuring that each student is afforded the opportunity to clearly convey their opinions. Clough and Nutbrown (2007) suggest that data collection done in this manner is of benefit as students will feel more comfortable with their peers and that group discussions will emerge in this environment which help the students to recall particular events and also provide additional data for the researcher.

During the research, the students were asked to consider their thoughts and feelings prior to taking the eleven-plus assessment. This exercise was completed and interpreted prior to students taking the assessment as it was important that I captured these emotions at the time and not at some time after the event when reflections on a situation may be different. The same students returned to the research after they had gained their results from the eleven-plus assessment and were aware of which secondary school they would be going on to attend. They then completed additional research regarding their thoughts and feelings now they were at the end of the selection process.

Angell and Angell (2013) suggest that the researcher must take care when asking questions to students as they can be perceived to be too complex and difficult to interpret and understand. For example, the researcher should give open instructions, such as, 'create a piece of art using any medium you like to demonstrate your thoughts and feelings about the upcoming eleven-

plus', may lead students to become confused and provide little useful data. In order to prevent wasting this research opportunity, it is important that the researcher has prepared for students failing to accurately interpret large open-ended questions. A planned strategy for children not responding well to the question is to provide other stimulus in order for them to better access the activity and participate. For example, when completing the research, I asked students if they could draw an animal to help them convey their thoughts and feelings in the artwork. When presenting, the children then focused on the animal in order to convey their thoughts and feelings, indicating why they had chosen this particular animal. It was used as a tool to facilitate the child engaging with the activity and removing barriers which were preventing them from adequately contributing. This activity was only intended to be used with children who required additional stimulus in order to begin creating the artwork. All the research took place in the primary school in order to ensure that the children were in their familiar environment, surrounded by people they knew and trusted so that they were comfortable in conveying their thoughts and feelings.

The Draw, Write and Tell technique can be altered depending on the purpose of the research and it can be analysed using different techniques. Thematic analysis is used in order to interpret the data and convey the narrative of the children (Braun and Clarke, 2006). A thematic analysis of the data gave me the flexibility to look deeply into the data using this inductive approach, I was able to review transcripts and artwork along with my notes on the non-verbal communication between the students in order to identify the emergent themes. Analysis was consistently driven by the data, ensuring that my findings best represented the voices of the children and not my own interests or ideas.

Reflexivity is a prerequisite of qualitative research and so it was essential that I was ever aware of where I was located and my personal involvement in the study. I was ever mindful of my presence and the influence it may have had on the outcome of the study (Holloway and Wheeler 2010). As a researcher who is immersed in the selective culture of secondary education on a daily basis both professionally and personally, it gives me the advantage of being able to understand the subtle nuances in the language the students use in order to describe their thoughts and feelings about the topic. As I was the facilitator of the study, I utilised a variety of strategies in order to ensure that students were freely able to convey their thoughts and ideas with as little intervention from me, the researcher, as possible. Subsequent analysis of the data was based on the data, however, as a reflexive researcher, I acknowledge that my interpretation of the data is also shadowed by my own experiences of the world.

3.3 Ethical considerations

Before approaching the students to research their thoughts and feelings, I met with the head teacher of the local primary school so that he could ask me about the research, how I intended to gather the data and how it would be subsequently analysed and reported. Through the head teacher I contacted parents in order to gain informed consent and ensure that they too were clear how the data would be collected, interpreted analysed and reported. It was essential that British Education Research Association (BERA) 2011, guidelines were meticulously adhered to, in particular Articles 3 and 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 3 ensures that research is done with the best interests of the child given paramount importance. Article 12 ensures that children are given the opportunity to freely express their own views and should be allowed to give their own consent to take part in the study.

BERA guidelines were clearly conveyed to all participants and stakeholders, ensuring that all parties were aware of their rights to withdraw from the research at any point should they wish to do so. Children who contributed to the research were also given the opportunity to reflect on my interpretation of their data in order to ensure that they were happy that it was an accurate reflection of their opinion. They were also given the opportunity to retract any aspect of the data that they had contributed towards. All students were clear that their contributions were anonymous, including the name of the school. Through the school, students are also to be given a copy of the final report should they wish to read it.

As the researcher, liaising with the head teacher, I requested a familiar adult be present in the room at all times, believing that this would assist students in feeling comfortable with me as researcher and also to assist should any of the students feel emotional discomfort. If a student did become uncomfortable then it was clear that they had the right to withdraw, something I would have insisted they do. Article 3 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child insists the needs of the child are paramount and as such, are given priority over the research due to concern for the child's emotional health and wellbeing. I was clear with the students, parents and teachers at the school that if I, as researcher, felt that any of the students were suffering as a consequence of the research then I would ensure that they no longer took part and that they received support with the issues raised.

As evidenced by my own daughter's experiences, the eleven-plus is potentially an emotive topic. I ensured that the environment for the research was comfortable and well-resourced

with art materials and that a familiar adult was present. It was important to ensure that all children felt relaxed and comfortable for the research. I was aware that students may experience feelings of anxiety and stress prior to taking the eleven-plus assessment, but I was also identifying and prioritising students in the second phase of the research who had failed to gain the required grade in the assessment and so not able to access grammar school. These are a particularly vulnerable group. For this reason, I planned to delay the second part of the research until six weeks after students received their results, this would afford them the time to reflect on the outcome and come to terms with it and also give them time to reflect if they no longer wanted to take part in the research. Based on the experiences shared with my daughter and her friends and their parents, I felt that it was important that some time passed prior to the second part of the research, as children can be very emotional immediately following the results, but giving them time enables the collection of thoughtful, rich data.

3.4 Research design

Pilot Study

I approached a local primary school in order to perform a pilot study with Year 5 students prior to them taking the eleven-plus. The pilot study was aimed at accessing the views of the students prior to taking the assessment but I ensured that all the students, teachers and parents were aware that there would be no follow up interviews after the students gained their results. The purpose of the pilot was to inform the real study so that necessary changes could be made.

I selected the local primary school as over 90% of the students were aiming to take the eleven-plus assessment and because there were no links to the school in which I intended to compete the real study. I was certain that I did not want to do the pilot study in the same school as the students may gain an insight into the structure of the session and then consider their responses prior to the event, possibly with another individual, and this would have impacted negatively on the validity of the data.

During the first study I worked with a group of six students, three boys and three girls, all due to take the eleven-plus assessment within two months. I completed several basic familiarisation exercises in which the students learned about me as the researcher and I learned facts about them. Once the atmosphere was conducive to talking openly and freely, I asked the students to think about their thoughts and feelings as they were about to embark on the journey of the selection process. Following the guidance of Clough and Nutbrown (2007), I asked the students to draw something which represented their thoughts and feelings as they embarked on their journey. I gained very little data for an extended period of time before utilising guidance from Angell and Angell (2013), which had suggested using something to focus the drawing on. All the students found creating an open piece of art to be very difficult, but once they were told to create an animal, real or imagined, which illustrates their thoughts and feelings, the data began to flow freely.

Once all the students had completed their drawings, we went around the group, each student presenting their work to the rest of the group. I found that although the art provided some data, it was of little benefit when compared to the conversations which took place. The children talked freely and openly, conveying their thoughts and feelings to one another and interrupting one another politely so that they could convey their own opinions on different aspects of the presentation. As Angell, Alexander and Hunt (2014) suggests, I ensured that I

clarified what the students said in order to ensure that my interpretation of their narrative was correct. The exercise took over 90 minutes and provided a lot of useful data which conveyed a clear impression of the thoughts and feelings that the students were experiencing as they were about to embark on the selection process.

Whilst I was listening to the results of the pilot study interview and identifying key emergent themes, I found that I was talking too much and asking too many questions. I had become so relaxed in their presence and they in mine, that the conversations flowed freely and frequently rather than simply gaining clarification that I had correctly interpreted a particular point; I was occasionally offering opinions or thoughts on aspects of the selection process. None of these were in any way contentious or disrupting the children's narratives however, there were some instances where I believed my interventions were reducing the validity of the data.

I was pleased when I shared the data with the students and that when I summarised the key emergent themes and returned to the school with a brief summary of my findings, the children agreed with what I had found and all of them appeared to be pleased that their voices had been heard and interpreted correctly.

Main Study Modifications

Following the initial pilot study, I ensured that I was well prepared to offer the students options on regarding what to draw in the real study, this was any animal, real or imagined, and I pre-empted all of the questions the pilot group had asked in order to make the process as efficient as possible.

As the researcher, I altered the way I interacted with the students in order to ensure that I offered no opinions whatsoever on the eleven-plus, grammar schools or my own context. This was important in order to ensure that the students did not try to say what they believed I wanted them to say.

For the main study, I also ensured that the other adult in the room was not sitting looking at the students but rather sitting away from the students, conveying the impression that they were disinterested. This was due to the pilot study in which the other adult in the room conveyed their own opinion, which was not useful and also provided an audience for the students which was also detrimental to the validity of the data.

Main Study

Adhering to the methodological points raised by Punch (2002) and Clough and Nutbrown (2007) and the experience of gathering the pilot data, I chose to work with a group of six students for the actual study, finding that that number had worked well with the initial group. When I arrived to begin the real study, a student had asked to leave the research group that morning due to the level of emotion they felt regarding the eleven-plus. The child's mother had kindly waited to meet me and she explained how her child was very nervous about the eleven-plus and that despite them agreeing to being part of the research at an earlier date, they had discussed it again the night before and the mother had suggested that the child withdrew from the study. This was of course, not an issue as the right of the child to withdraw was made clear to all the participants when they agreed to partake in the study. The mother felt that the child was struggling emotionally with the pressure the assessment was creating and she feared that the child may not pass. She felt that discussing the process might make it more difficult to deal with, particularly the post-results follow up interviews. I reassured the mother that it was of course not an issue and I continued with a group of 5 students who all confirmed they were pleased to be taking part in the study.

The headteacher had been working to ensure that I gained a variety of students selected randomly. However, unlike in the original pilot school, many of the initial chosen sample declined to take part and so the headteacher was required to go back to the year group a number of times before he found six students who were willing to take part in the research and whose parents were also happy for them to take part. One later withdrew; however, I would argue that it was very pertinent that there were so many children in the school who did not want to be a part of the research or whose parents did not want them to be a part of it. The headteacher spoke to several of the parents who did not want their children to take part so that I might include this in part of my findings.

After completing the familiarisation tasks which develop the students' confidence to talk openly in my presence, I informed the students about the format of the session, ensuring that they were all happy to continue. I asked them to draw a picture of an animal or plant which, real or imagined, illustrated how they felt as they approached the eleven-plus selection process.

The students asked fewer questions than the pilot study as my guidance was more specific and they began the task enthusiastically. The students were encouraged to talk openly whilst constructing their work before they would complete the work and then present and discuss to the rest of the group.

Mindful of the recordings of the pilot study, I took care not convey any personal thoughts or feelings and to simply listen and gain clarification on what the children were stating during their presentations and subsequent conversations. The data was rich and flowed freely from the students. However, as the researcher, I was surprised by some of the views held by these young people, many of whom were using language to describe phenomenon which sounded as if it was spoken directly from an adult. Examples of this can be found in the transcripts (Appendix C) and are explored further in chapters 4 and 5.

Transcripts of the conversations with the students and photographs of the students' work were analysed in accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006) procedures for thematic analysis in qualitative studies. The sound recording of the students was listened to and transcribed whilst reviewing the artwork produced by the students. The transcript was then re-read several times, twice with the recording being played simultaneously in order to ensure that the essence of the messages conveyed by the students was interpreted as accurately as possible. The data was then manually coded in order for it to be analysed and sorted into groups. Once the data was arranged into groups, larger themes emerged due to the linking of particular groups of data from which the themes emerged. The six emerging themes were then taken and defined. An overview of the themes is given in this chapter with a brief description and examples taken from the transcript. These themes are subsequently analysed from a Bourdieuan perspective in chapter 5.

Chapter 4: Findings and Brief Discussion

As highlighted in chapter 3, transcripts from the conversations were coded so that themes could be identified. Several themes emerged during the process and these have been arranged into six broad themes which aim to encapsulate the student's narrative.

For each of the themes, I outline the findings for each student and then evidence this with quotes from each student individually in order to explain my findings. Every student in the study made a contribution to each of the themes which is why I have chosen to include each of the student's narratives in each of the emergent themes. This gives each of the students a voice in each of the themes.

In chapter 5, I then examine each of the six emergent themes through a Bourdieuan lens in order to better understand their social context. This chapter aims to explore the origins of the themes and their impact on students.

Themes

4.1 Tutoring

All of the students talked about tutoring frequently for a variety of reasons. All students who passed the eleven-plus had a tutor, some had files and folders and kept a record of questions they found difficult so that they could practise in their spare time. All students in the group believed that the test cannot be passed without some form of tutoring, as they believed that school does not adequately prepare them for the eleven-plus assessment. This was because some of the topics assessed during the eleven-plus are not taught in school until after the eleven-plus assessment takes place. The students were unanimous in this belief, however the theme of tutoring was also used by the students in a more nuanced manner, providing everyone with a tool through which they could openly discuss passing and failing, citing reasons which were external to the individual. This seemed to depersonalise the eleven-plus assessment and provided an excuse for failing, which all students could then use as a vehicle to discuss the eleven-plus, whilst not making claims about the academic ability of one another.

Jacob

Tutoring appeared to be considered a priority by certain families and less so by others. The lack of tutoring in the case of Jacob appeared to be as a consequence of lack of financial capital and due to the familial attitude, namely they did not appear to consider it a worthwhile expense:

“Yes it is useful but it’s too expensive and my mum thinks that there are loads more important things that we need to get..... no-one from my family has ever taken the eleven-plus and we don’t really see the point, my Dad went to Woody and he thinks I’ll fit in there.” (Jacob)

There may of course be several reasons for this, it may be that the family have more important priorities and lack of money is an issue, however, it does appear that tutoring is of little interest to the family. The family’s attitude towards tutoring may be influenced by the perceived likelihood of their child passing the assessment in addition to factors such as habitus, no-one from the particular family has ever passed the eleven-plus and so there appears to be little interest in working hard in order to pass the eleven-plus in order to gain access to a school in which their child may not fit in.

Jacob had obtained some example eleven-plus questions from his friends and he had an app on his phone which he has downloaded in order to practice some of the questions. Jacob had not used the app with any regularity but had used it occasionally as a familiarisation exercise. He had gone through the questions briefly with the friend who gave them to him but other than that, he had not had any formal tutoring:

“I’ve only had some practice papers from my mate and I’ve got an app on my phone, I’ve never had tutoring..... I’ve not really done much on the app and I haven’t done the papers.” (Jacob)

Jacob did not achieve the required mark in order to gain access to the grammar school. Jacob understood that he was unlikely to pass, given that he had no tutoring. The fact that Jacob failed to pass the eleven-plus is discussed freely and openly as being due to the fact that he was not tutored. This appears to externalise the issue and remove responsibility from Jacob which appears to remove any suggestion that he is less academically able than anyone else in the group. Jacob agreed with this assumption and spoke freely about not passing as a consequence of having not been tutored. Whilst Jacob accepted why he did not pass the eleven-plus as he and those around him depersonalised it, he does convey however, using predominantly non-verbal methods of communication, that he was not completely happy with

the result which separates him from many of his friends. The language he used when describing his situation was loaded with blame that he could not be tutored and that he was powerless in determining his future outcomes:

“Tutoring makes a massive difference, even if you’re quite clever, if you haven’t been tutored then it’s really hard to pass. You might be well cleverer than loads of people who passed but they had a tutor, so it’s kind of not fair anyway..... I couldn’t have a tutor but if I did have a tutor then I think I would have probably passed but I didn’t have chance to practice.” Jacob

This insight from Jacob illustrates the emphasis students place on tutoring and acknowledges elements of social disparity which contribute to the system which he clearly considers to be discriminatory.

Thea

For some families, passing the eleven-plus seemed to be of paramount importance. For one family, their child had been tutored rather intensively for over two years prior to taking the assessment. For that particular child, failing the eleven-plus would have been very difficult to overcome emotionally; their parents had informed them that if they did fail then they would be sent to an independent school rather than attend the local comprehensive school. The parents suggested that the payment for the tutoring was a very small price when compared to the cost of sending their child to an independent school for seven years:

“I started nearly a year ago [tutoring] and I go once a week but loads more in the holidays. It really helps me a lot, I’ve learned new things on it and I find that it challenges me more.... they (family) want me to do well and they don’t mind spending money on it as it’s much cheaper than it would be if they sent me to the private school.” Thea

When viewed in this way, it is clear why many of the parents who value the grammar school education are willing to pay for the tuition in order to increase the possibility of their child gaining access to the grammar school. This particular family also had significant social pressures due to their wider family and friends, with school selection clearly a regular source of conversation, and the child conveyed that, although their parents were incredibly

supportive, they understood that their parents would find their failure to pass the eleven-plus very difficult to share with others:

“I’ve added my eleven-plus tutoring folder as it shows that I’m, well I mean it shows that I have been kind of practising for it..... I need to practice as all my cousins have passed and I mean it would be really embarrassing for my family if I failed.” Thea

Thea openly conveyed that she comes from an affluent family and that she enjoys learning. She was clear about her expectations as a learner and she was confident that she knows what she wants from school. She has been given plenty of information regarding comprehensive and grammar school education and she was certain that she would fit into the grammar school setting. She did not believe that she would be happy in a comprehensive school:

“I really enjoyed going to the tutor’s in Bebington and I enjoyed doing the lessons and stuff but I wasn’t as keen on school because I just thought it was too easy all we do is the same all the time. It was really useful going to the tutor because I went for eight months and I learned ratio and algebra, we are only starting to cover those topics this year in school and so it was really useful, I wouldn’t have understood those topics if I hadn’t been tutored before the test.”

“We spend loads of time abroad, we’re going to New Zealand this summer for three weeks, I’ve been to Australia a few times.”

“I mean, I’m not saying anything bad about comprehensive schools and they are suitable for loads of people but just not me, I mean I just wouldn’t fit in, those sort of schools just don’t suit me..... those schools are for students who needs additional support, I want to learn more quickly and be stretched so that I can go to a good University, not that comprehensives aren’t good or anything.” Thea

Thea had strong feelings about what was right for her and she appreciated the potential financial cost to her family of sending her to an independent school and the emotional stress she believed they would suffer as a consequence of telling immediate family if she did not pass. As a result of this, Thea put significant pressure on herself to do well. She worked closely with the tutor, seeing the tutor usually twice weekly in the final year with extra sessions in the holidays. She used a folder of questions which the tutor would mark and together they identified particular areas which required attention. Thea was a motivated

student who utilised all the resources at her disposal to ensure that she achieved the outcome she desired:

“I mean it would be really expensive to go to private school and grammar schools are basically like free private schools..... comprehensive schools are good and everything but they have problems with behaviour and stuff, I just wouldn’t like to go to a comprehensive school, they just aren’t for me.”

“I work really hard to make sure that I pass the eleven-plus, I mean I am clever and everything but everyone needs a tutor and I just want to make sure that I pass and don’t waste my parent’s money.” Thea

Thea did pass the eleven-plus and gained a place at the local grammar school. When asked about the tutoring following the results, her attitude had not changed. She held the different schools in the same regard and openly conveyed that the test was very difficult and that passing it would not have been possible without the tutoring:

“Well loads of professional tutors have said that there’s no way anyone would have passed that if they didn’t get tutored and hadn’t done any practice for it..... it was much harder than I thought it was going to be, I wasn’t sure if I’d passed or not, I was so happy when I found out that I’d passed.” Thea

“I started nearly a year ago and I go once a week. I really helps me a lot, I’ve learned new things on it and I find that it challenges me more” (Thea).

“I found that last year at school I wasn’t really being challenged enough and that’s why I didn’t really enjoy it.” (Thea).

Hannah

The sample group contained children from a wide variety of socio-economic backgrounds, one of the students who was tutored experienced guilt as a consequence of her parents having to pay for tutoring; the cost was relatively high in comparison to the family’s disposable income. This particular family did not have large sums of money at their disposal in order to assist their child in gaining access to the grammar school, however it is clear that missing out on other non-essentials was considered a worthwhile sacrifice in order to increase their child’s probability of accessing the grammar school. The level of sacrifice made by the

family in which there were also younger siblings, made the student convey feelings of guilt and also a strong desire to pass, much of it appearing to stem from the sacrifices made by the family.

“Tutoring is really expensive and having a tutor means that we can’t have some other things and I feel really bad about that.... It’s really important that I pass as I would feel bad on my family after they have spent so much money to help me get into grammar school.”

The student also conveyed feelings of guilt which were due to her experiencing a privileged position relative to others in her peer group;

“I mean Woodchurch [a local comprehensive school] is not the worst school.... I do feel kinda bad that I have a tutor and it helps me as some people can’t afford one but that’s what it’s like isn’t it?” Hannah

Hannah believes that having a tutor has significantly increased her likelihood of passing the eleven-plus assessment, but she is clearly uncomfortable highlighting this in the presence of some students who have not accessed this resource. However, she acknowledges the difference that tutoring has had on her confidence:

“Well I’ve written ‘confident’ as before I had tutoring, I wasn’t confident at all but now I’ve had it, I feel much more confident because it’s helped me a lot with some things.” Hannah

Hannah did pass the eleven-plus and she was very careful when selecting language to describe gaining access into a grammar school. Hannah awkwardly illustrated that as she had an increased likelihood of passing, based on her tutoring experiences and parental support, her outcomes were more likely to be positive when compared to some other students who were not as fortunate. Hannah appeared to find this difficult to discuss and demonstrates feelings of guilt as a consequence of her supported success:

“....Erm and scared because if I don’t pass then I won’t be able to go to a grammar school and I’m scared that I won’t be able to get a job that there won’t be like a good choice of jobs if I don’t go to a grammar school..... I am more likely to pass as I have done lots of practice tests with my tutor and they are going much better now, they were really hard at first.”

“Going to Woodchurch would be ok, I’d rather go to the grammar school and I mean, I am lucky to have a tutor but Woodchurch is still ok.” Hannah

It is evident from Hannah’s contributions that she feels pressure to pass the eleven-plus partly due to the sacrifices made by her family in supporting her endeavours. It is also clear that she favours attending grammar school as she reluctantly acknowledges their superiority whilst conveying guilt that she is aware that her destiny of choice is not an option for many of her friends.

Fiona

Fiona’s relationship with tutoring is rather complex. In the first interview, Fiona played down the amount that she is tutored. Initially she suggested that she had seen a tutor on a small number of occasions but this narrative was interrupted by another student who had witnessed Fiona attending the same tutor for a year. Fiona then recounted her experiences of tutoring differently in light of the public evidence and acknowledged that she had been tutored for almost a year:

“I don’t have a tutor so there’s less chance of me being able to pass the eleven-plus.”

Fiona

“I’ve seen you at the same tutors as me, I’ve seen you going all year.” Thea

“Oh yes, well I mean I do go sometimes, well sort of once a week I suppose.” Fiona

Fiona was not confident in passing the eleven-plus, she was clear that the tutoring is useful and that it has taught her a great deal, however she was still finding the mathematical elements of the practice assessments very difficult and this is something she is targeting with her tutor. Fiona was clear that her parents do not want her to attend the local comprehensive school if she does not pass the eleven-plus. However, they cannot afford independent education so Fiona would take the entrance examination to a local Catholic school which, if she passes, will be her school of choice should she fail to gain the required mark in the assessment:

“I do go to see a tutor and we have done practise tests but it’s always time which stops me doing well, that’s why I’m really nervous. The questions are a little bit hard but the time makes me really nervous.”

“They want me to go to the grammar school and so do I. I really don’t want to go to Woody [Woodchurch – the local comprehensive school], I just think I won’t be as happy there and I won’t fit in..... I’m going to take the Upton entrance exam in case I don’t pass the grammar school so I will try and go there if I fail.” Fiona

Following the results of the eleven-plus, Fiona did not reach the required standard to attend the grammar school. However, she did pass the entrance examination to the local Catholic school and so she would not be going to the local comprehensive school the following year, rather the Catholic school. When Fiona was asked about tutoring, following the results of the eleven-plus, Fiona insisted that she had never been tutored. She wholeheartedly agreed with the fact that it is impossible to pass the eleven-plus without tutoring and insisted that had she been tutored then she might have passed but given that she had not been tutored, there was little chance of her passing:

“I passed the Upton by two which I wasn’t expecting to pass by two marks but I didn’t get tutored for it [the eleven-plus] so that’s why so I’m going to go for Upton Convent.... It’s impossible to pass it [the eleven-plus] without a tutor and I didn’t have a tutor.” Fiona

“I might have passed if I had, had a tutor.” Fiona

“Yes, you definitely would have passed if you had a tutor as you’re really clever.”

Thea

Fiona clearly felt a lot of pressure to pass the eleven-plus and she uses tutoring as a way to excuse her ‘failure’. It is interesting that her peers, despite knowing she is being dishonest, agree with her that she would have passed if she had been tutored. Fiona engaged with tutoring as she considered academic and social stakes to be high and tutoring offered the best way to ensure her success in the assessment.

Mark

In the first interview, Mark had a pragmatic attitude towards the eleven-plus. Mark would attend the local comprehensive school if he did not pass the eleven-plus. Mark was prepared for this scenario but he and his family were working hard to avoid it if possible. Mark had been tutored in preparation for the eleven-plus examination for just over a year prior to the

assessment. The once weekly sessions followed by consolidation activities at home had given Mark more confidence in the practice papers and he was regularly scoring well in the mock examinations:

“It’s scary but I have been going to my tutor for a year and she has really helped me with the types of questions..... if I fail then I’ll just go to Woody but I’m still trying to pass and go to Calday [One of the boys grammar schools].” Mark

Mark was a particularly popular student with many friends. He was convinced that a specific number of his friends would not pass the eleven-plus and certain that others would not as their parents had decided not to enter them at all. Mark also had a number of friends who he was confident would pass the eleven-plus and then go on to attend the local grammar school. Mark was able to consider the comprehensive school education in a far more positive light than the majority of the other students in the group. He believed that he could pass the eleven-plus as he had gained an insight into how to pass from his tutor and he had worked hard in order to address the issues which blighted his progress. Mark believed passing was within reach but appeared less afraid of failure than most other students:

“My Dad says that if I don’t pass then I’ll just be with my other mates who play footy and stuff and I’m really good at footy and they don’t really play footy in Calday so I’ll be able to play footy if I go to Woody.” Mark

“I think that I can pass as I have learned loads from the tutor and I have extra homework from her..... I’d like to go to Calday with my other mates, I would prefer Calday but I’m not bothered if I have to go to Woody, I think I’ll be fine wherever.” Mark

Mark did gain a mark which was over the threshold and so was eligible to attend the local grammar school. When discussing his achievements during the meeting following the results, Mark did convey the extent to which he was worrying about the examination and his strength of emotion, something he had managed to hide the first time we met. When he discussed tutoring, he agreed that he would not have passed had he not worked hard with the tutor. He was pleased that a large number of his closest friends had also passed:

“I passed, I came out of school and my mum was waiting for me with a big smile, she told me that I had passed and I just cried, then my mum cried. We both cried for ages, we were so happy that I’d passed.” Mark

“There’s no way that I’d have passed without a tutor, there were loads of things on it that we haven’t done yet in school, I wouldn’t have an idea what to do without my tutor.” Mark

Mark’s engagement with tutoring clearly enabled him to access grammar school education. Without the tutoring, it is clear that Mark would not have achieved this academic goal. Prior to taking the assessment Mark was able to hide his true emotions and conveyed a relaxed demeanour regarding the outcome. After the assessment, his highly emotional response conveyed the true depth of his feelings regarding the outcome. It is worth considering that other students may have hid their true emotions in a similar manner.

4.2 Solitary burden, social pressure and high stakes.

All of the students stated that they were scared prior to taking the eleven-plus assessment and prior to receiving their results. This emotion was consistently felt by all those interviewed, however exploring the source of this fear led to a discovery that the students feel alone in this journey despite the best supporting intentions of those around them. It seems that students believed that ultimately all of the pressure was on their shoulders and that no-one could share this burden; they even found it hard sharing the pressure with peers given that they too were going through the same process. All the students were aware of the stakes of the assessment and that it would alter the course of their lives. The students revealed quite a stark contrast between how they perceived the grammar and the comprehensive schools. Given that the students were completely immersed in this culture of selective education and how they believed it would impact their futures, it is clear why students consider the stakes to be high.

Adding to the solitary burden of the high-stakes assessment is social pressure which manifests itself differently in all the students. Those students who seemed more defeatist about not passing appeared to feel this least. Those students who appeared to have a greater desire to pass and considered they had a good chance, seemed to feel a significant weight of combined social and intrinsic pressure.

Thea

Thea was given a very high level of support from her family. She was aware of the wider family pressure that her parents felt and their reluctance to inform others if she did not pass the eleven-plus. The immediate family worked hard to ensure that Thea realised that she was supported by both her parents and that this support was unconditional. They assured her that she would go on to attend one of the best schools regardless of her performance in the eleven-plus assessment and so Thea was completely confident that she would go on to reach her potential in the future:

“She said, ‘just do your best.’ My mum and dad are really supportive, they just keep telling me to do my best.” Thea

“They won’t let me go to a comprehensive school as, I mean they’re fine for some people, but I mean I just wouldn’t fit in, I should go somewhere where people actually want to learn.” Thea

Thea believed that the majority of her close friends would pass the eleven-plus and that they would be going on to attend the local grammar school, this increased the pressure on Thea who publicly and passionately extolled the virtues of a grammar school education whilst simultaneously ridiculing the local comprehensive schools on a variety of grounds. Thea believed the type of education to be completely different in the two types of school and openly worked hard to avoid failing the eleven-plus selection process:

“The kids in grammar schools want to learn and get good jobs in the future but in other schools like Woodchurch, the kids like throw chairs and stuff and disrupt your learning. I like learning and I should be with other people who are clever and like learning.” Thea

“I think most of my really close friends will pass, they all have tutors and they are all really clever.” Thea

Thea’s attitude towards passing the eleven-plus did little to emotionally support many of the other participants in the research as she insisted that failing would simply mean attending an independent school, an option not available to anyone else in the group. Thea’s public attitude also significantly increased the pressure on Thea to pass. Thea had worked hard with a tutor for two years, all her friends and family knew this to be the case and so the pressure on her to pass was substantial. Thea felt this pressure and worried about the people she considered she would be letting down if she were unable to pass the eleven-plus assessment. This was a strong driving force for Thea to work hard on practice eleven-plus papers. Thea was aware that the burden of the assessment could not be shared, and that she would have to pass through the assessment alone. The solitary burden of the eleven-plus assessment caused Thea very high levels of fear; she used the word, ‘scared’ frequently, second only to the word, ‘tutor’:

“It is really scary, I mean I’ve had a tutor for like two years and it costs loads so I really want to pass so that it’s not a big waste of money for my parents. it is scary as it’s all you, no-one else can do it for you, at the end of the day, it’s you who has to do the paper and there’s nothing anyone can do to help you once you’re doing it.”

Thea

“I really want to pass, I am frightened but I’m also excited to do the test as I’m getting really good at the practice tests now.” Thea

“Well to start off with I did the waves because like when it’s stormy these show that the eleven-plus makes me nervous because I feel like I’m going to drown or something, I know it sounds really horrible but it just makes me feel nervous and then I did a flamingo as it also makes me quite excited and it’s my favourite animal so for example when I went to the zoo and there was a new one, I was quite excited.” Thea

“And then I did Count Olaf because he really scares me and I don’t know why but the eleven-plus does as well.” Thea

The ‘scary’ element of the eleven-plus assessment and the nervousness it caused Thea contributed to the pressure she felt. Thea considered herself to be academically very able and so this combined with the expectations of the family motivated Thea to work hard practising the eleven-plus assessments.

“I think it’s just and I’m not going to change my mind about it but I think the pressure is because I want to do well because I want to go to like a good school. I know it sounds a bit mean but like a good school, what I mean by a good school is a good school for me.” Thea

“I’ve added my eleven-plus tutoring folder as it shows that I’m, well I mean it shows that I have been kind of practising for it.” Thea

Jacob

Jacob understood the implications of not passing the eleven-plus and that this would dictate the direction of his future path, but Jacob appeared to experience no pressure from home. The pressure one can experience from home is not necessarily direct. Indeed, in the group, it seems that the pressure was usually self-inflicted as a consequence of wanting to achieve something to make parents proud or so they could share their news with friends. Jacob conveyed little emotion regarding the pressure from home. Instead he insisted that as no-one in his family had passed before and that no-one in their social circle of family and friends was very interested in the eleven-plus and so he felt under no pressure to succeed. When Jacob

had asked his mother to enter him for the eleven-plus, she had questioned his reasoning and wondered why he might want to go through the exercise:

“No-one in my family has passed and no-one’s bothered if I go to grammar school or not, they think like that I probably won’t like it there as it’s full of stuck up people..... some of my mates mum’s and dad’s really want them to pass but mine aren’t bothered.” Jacob

“She [mum] doesn’t get why I want to take the test. Most of my mates aren’t doing it but I want to have a go as you know, it can make a big difference to getting jobs and stuff.” Jacob

It is evident that despite the lack of extrinsic factors at home influencing the pressure Jacob felt, he was under some pressure to pass and that he would like to pass, one reason being that he would like to be acknowledged as an able student and have options for his future. He was also part of a social group in which he believed some of his friends would pass, he wanted to pass so that he could be considered an equal. It was also clear that he wanted to pass as he asked to be entered:

“Some of my mates will pass and they can go, I think it would be good to be able to go if I wanted to as it does help you in the future.” Jacob

“The people who pass think that they’re cleverer than everyone else and I think that I could pass but I probably won’t.” Jacob

Although Jacob wanted to pass the eleven-plus, he had resigned himself to accepting that a positive outcome was unlikely prior to taking the test and so I believe the pressure on Jacob was less than it was for many of the other students.

Hannah

Hannah felt pressure to pass the eleven-plus due to the sacrifices that her parents had made in order to increase her chances of succeeding by paying for a tutor. Hannah frequently said that she was worried about failing the eleven-plus. She had confused emotions about tests; she expressed concern about her inability to reach her potential in the tests due to their binary nature. She also believed her future trajectory depended on two tests and feeling unwell on one of those days might alter the course of her life:

“I am a bit scared and worried because I would really like to go the grammar school. My mum and dad pay every week for my tutor and so I really want to pass more.”

Hannah

“I always have to whisper to myself and I can’t in a test. If I don’t get it straight away and if there’s a couple of questions that I’m stuck on then I usually get quite frustrated as there isn’t much time and you have to pick a box. I’m worried but I am also excited and a bit confident.” Hannah

Hannah believed that she would not fit into a comprehensive school. She was determined that she should not attend one, particularly a mixed school, preferring instead to be taught in a single sex environment. Hannah believed that her mother is academically very able and values education highly. Her mother had suggested that all the non-selective schools are not good schools, including single sex comprehensives. All the grammar schools are single sex, which Hannah believed to be superior. Hannah’s mother would not discuss with Hannah that she may not pass the eleven-plus as she did not believe this to be a concern. This absolute confidence in her child’s academic ability appeared to have an unintended consequence of causing pressure on Hannah, who was very afraid of not passing the eleven-plus and therefore not accessing what her mother considered to be high quality single sex grammar school education:

“She says that I will pass and that we don’t need to worry about what to do if I don’t, she thinks I’m as clever as is.” Hannah

“She wants me to go to a grammar school or Upton if I don’t pass so I’m taking the Upton test as well. My mum thinks mixed schools are not good for learning. she also thinks the girl’s comprehensive schools like Prenton [All girls comprehensive school] aren’t that good so she doesn’t want me to go to one of those either.” Hannah

Hannah was also concerned that she was born in December and so she was relatively old in her year group at school. The students were all aware that as the test is, ‘age standardised,’ taking into account their age in months, additional marks are awarded to the younger students. Older students seemed to view this as a disadvantage for them, and as an unfair advantage for being young. Often younger students will convey the opinion that it is they who are disadvantaged by being young. Due to Hannah’s birthday being in the first quarter of

the academic year, she argued that she was disadvantaged when compared to her peers who may be awarded additional age-related marks. Age standardising does occur when assessment boards transfer raw scores into eleven-plus scores and so there will be a difference between two students who gain identical raw scores in an eleven-plus assessment if they are different ages, but the effect is relatively small. This is something which added to Hannah's concern over achieving a sufficiently high pass mark:

“My birthday is in December so I don't get anything!” Hannah

“I mean it's not fair as like I'd get loads of extra points for nothing if my birthday was like in July or something.... It makes it even harder for me to pass than it is for loads of other people, I think that you get extra if you're a boy as well.” Hannah

It is worthy of note that many students believe that, 'sex standardisation' occurs due to the rate at which boys develop compared to girls. This is not true as it would contravene the Sex Discrimination Act, 2010.

Hannah had felt under pressure to perform during the eleven-plus assessments as she considered herself to be in a privileged position having regular access to a tutor and a family who considered accessing a grammar school education to be a worthwhile investment. Completely supported by her parents who reiterated how proud they were regardless of the outcome, Hannah felt under pressure:

“I was really worried about that, there is someone in my close family and they are like quite judgemental and like erm like, I won't say anyone but erm, they....., they....., don't really....., sort of, I don't know, it's quite hard to explain, but they would make me and my mum feel ashamed if I didn't pass.”

And so, I was very worried because I had revised a lot for it and everyone knew that and because some of my family are judgemental.” Hannah

Hannah clearly conveys the burden she feels as a consequence of wider familial pressure, indicating how 'judgemental' she considers certain members of her family to be. I would argue that it is potentially damaging to young people to experience this pressure and potential humiliation, especially at such a young age.

Fiona

Fiona continually conveyed the impression that she was scared. Fiona used the word throughout the first session indicating that the questions are hard. For Fiona, the stakes were high. She did not want to attend the local comprehensive school and she wanted to stay with her friends, most of whom she believed would pass the eleven-plus. Fiona was worried that she may have a minor friendship concern on the day of the assessments and that this would completely diminish her capacity to succeed in any assessment:

“Maybe on the day I won’t feel up to tests and like I don’t do as well as I should normally like I don’t know, another day I could and that makes me scared in case I’m not up to the test on that day....I get quite scared in case I have an argument..... ‘cos when you have arguments you get really nervous.” Fiona

Fiona’s greatest concern leading up to the assessment was time as she was concerned that her processing speed is low. She was quick to point out that she can do the questions but that it often takes her much longer than the time she has available:

“I don’t like time. You have to do it really quickly. I do go to see a tutor and we have done practise tests but it’s always time which stops me doing well, that’s why I’m really nervous. The questions are a little bit hard but the time makes me really nervous.” Fiona

Fiona was very nervous about the upcoming assessment and she was trying hard to develop her confidence. She recalled her mother trying to help her by making her believe in herself as the power of positive thought will enhance her ability in the assessment:

“I should just think of myself passing the test and believe in myself.... I have to do the test on my own.” Fiona

Fiona seemed to lack confidence in her ability and she was already preparing those around her for failure. She had deployed a variety of coping strategies in order to deal with the feelings of failure, but for Fiona, this assessment which she regarded as pivotal in her future, was very important. The pressure came from wanting to deliver for her family who paid for the tuition, from her social group and wanting to remain a part of it, and also her dislike of the comprehensive schools which she viewed as not good enough for her:

“I don’t have a tutor so there’s less chance of me being able to pass the eleven-plus.”
Fiona

“I want to pass as most of my friends will probably pass and I want to stay with them.” Fiona

“I might not pass if I get nervous or because of time, I am clever enough but you have to do it on one day.” Fiona

Fiona was very nervous about the upcoming assessment. The feedback she was getting from parents and friends was not helping her to deal with the worries she was having and she was panicking as a consequence. She was also particularly concerned about her age as she was the oldest student, born in September and so would gain no additional allowance during the age standardisation process:

“I won’t get any extra points as I’m the oldest, it’s not fair, everyone else gets an advantage.” Fiona

“My mum wants me to believe in myself more but I think I need to do more practising so I can get faster but the questions are hard.” Fiona

In the extracts from Fiona, it is clear that she is very nervous about the process and the outcome, as she wants to stay with her friends. She demonstrates her frustration with the system which she highlights as being unfair due to the nature of age standardisation. Throughout the conversations, Fiona is suggesting legitimate external reasons which may be able to explain her not passing the assessment and she is clear that none of these relate to her own ability.

Mark

Prior to taking the assessment, Mark conveyed that he would be very happy if he passed the eleven-plus assessment but a little unhappy if he did not. Mark was clear which comprehensive school he would prefer to attend if he did not gain a sufficiently high mark in the eleven-plus and he tried to be positive about this outcome, illustrating the aspects he would find favourable, such as football.

Mark was clear about wanting to pass the eleven-plus as he preferred the grammar school. However, he did not seem to have the feelings of guilt associated with tutoring, which many of the other students exhibit. Mark was aware that his parents were supportive and would be proud whatever the outcome assuming that he did his best and made best use of the

resources the parents had made available, such as the tutor. The student did not seem to consider the financial aspect of the tutoring and it was clear that he was aware of the support from home:

“My mum’s not bothered about getting me a tutor, everyone who wants to pass has got a tutor and it wouldn’t be fair if I didn’t have a tutor..... she doesn’t mind if I fail..... my mum says that she’s really proud of me whatever as long as I do my best.”

Mark

One of the main sources of pressure appeared to be coming from the social circles in which the student would likely move depending upon the outcome of the assessment. Mark had heard stories about older students who have almost passed and failed by a small amount. These students were considered to be well behaved students who contributed positively to their local communities. However, upon attending the local comprehensive schools, they became friends with different people and they were negatively influenced and that this has had a negative impact on those around them. Mark had a very positive relationship with his mother and he held her in very high regard. This student did not want to disappoint his mother, but much of the reason seemed to be the feeling that he may change socially and that this may impact negatively on his mother and family. This appeared to be a major consideration for Mark:

“My mum’s friend has a son and he was a really good boy like me in year 6 but after he failed and went to Ridgeway [A local comprehensive school] he got in with some bad kids and started smoking and robbing and stuff and his mum was really upset..... that wouldn’t have happened if he had gone to the grammar school.” Mark

“I want to pass to make my mum proud of me and so I hang around with people who don’t smoke and stuff like that.” Mark

It is noteworthy that the majority of the students in the group concurred with Mark, relating to friendship groups impacting negatively in comprehensive schools. The only exception was Jacob who did not disagree but instead offered no opinion. It is interesting to note the source of this information in the transcripts is frequently attributed parents. As the researcher who has worked in two comprehensive secondary schools in Wirral, it is frustrating to hear the narratives which I do not consider to be representative of comprehensive education in Wirral. It is not my role in this context to inform the students of my experiences but rather to listen and interpret their opinions. I do feel however that these misconceptions around

comprehensive education in Wirral must be challenged in order to alleviate some of the burden primary school students experience.

4.3 Fitting in, Social Identity and Shame.

A major theme which emerged is that of fitting in and social identity. The social identity of the students appears to be largely determined as a consequence of their performance in the eleven-plus assessment. This strongly resonates with the themes referred to earlier in the thesis such as shame.

Thea

Thea was a part of a group who considered themselves to be academically superior in the context of the school. Thea vehemently believed that all or most of her friends would pass the eleven-plus assessment and go on to attend the local grammar school as all of her close friends had a tutor. Thea was very open and honest about this group and she pragmatically conceded that if any of the group did not pass the eleven-plus then they may keep in contact briefly but that realistically, they would no longer remain part of the group or even maintain friendships within a few months of beginning secondary school. Thea believed that she was an integral part of the group and I would suggest that it forms a significant part of Thea's identity:

“I did have a best friend, it's not that I don't have friends but they haven't passed. It is only me, (Hannah), *** and *** who have passed and so we need to be friends more now..... I'll keep in touch with my other friends for a bit but realistically, we won't keep in touch after a while, we'll have new friends like us.” [Thea]

Thea was clear that if she did not pass the eleven-plus then she would go to an independent school in which she would not know anyone else. Given what Thea had said, I believe that Thea was aware that failing to pass the eleven-plus would have the effect of ceasing her membership of the current social group and breaking her friendships within it. Thea viewed this as the inevitable consequence of attending different schools:

“I did have a best friend, it's not that I don't have friends but they haven't passed. It is only me, Hannah, *** and *** who have passed and so we need to be friends more now.” Thea

Passing the eleven-plus is clearly an essential part of Thea's social identity. In the context of the current school, the student was acutely aware that she is considered, 'able.' The student believed that she was held in high regard by certain other individuals as a consequence of her academic ability. This, 'ability,' appeared to be an integral part of the student's identity and a significant part of who she is. The student clearly believed that she is on an academic trajectory and due to the relative affluence of her family, she had another option other than independent school if she did not reach the required grade in the eleven-plus assessment:

"I mean I'm not being big headed or anything but I am clever, everyone would say so..... I know that I should pass the eleven-plus and there's no way I could ever go to one of the comprehensive schools." Thea

"I am going to do well in secondary school and go on to a good University. You can't really do that if you go to a comprehensive school." Thea

The student was working very hard in order to ensure that she passed the eleven-plus, having spent more time than anyone else in the group on identifying and targeting specific areas in need of development. The student was very negative about comprehensive schools and freely discussed the advantages of attending a grammar school. The student's very public position and the family discourse made Thea very motivated to succeed in the eleven-plus assessment. The student suggested that she would be very embarrassed if she were to, 'fail,' and she felt that she would have a great deal to lose if she did not reach the required grade in the assessment. The public humiliation the particular student believed they would suffer as a consequence of, 'failure' is something that this Fiona found frightening and she would do everything she could in order to prevent it. She worked hard outside of her weekly tutor session in order to make best use of the resource and she was supported by her parents with any extra support she required or if she required additional tutor time:

"I mean I would feel so ashamed if I failed..... I'd be like really embarrassed." Thea

"... 'cos behaviour is really bad and like the people don't want to learn..... the teachers aren't as good in the comprehensive schools, the best teachers are in the grammar schools." Thea

"I mean, I am clever so I should pass..... it's just where I should be going." Thea

The comments made by Thea convey beliefs held about substandard education in comprehensive schools in Wirral. This does little to support peers and indeed contributes to the negative feelings of pressure felt by so many young people. Thea was clear that passing the assessment was an important part of her social identity. It is noteworthy that Thea's opinions about the outcome of the assessment relate to her acquisition of social capital. This is something I will explore further in chapter 5.

Hannah

Hannah, similar to Thea, identified closely with a group of students who were considered amongst the most, 'able', in the year group. Membership of this group comprised a significant part of the student's identity and it was important for the student that she continued to be a part of the group. The student did not seem to believe that she had the required attributes to thrive successfully in a comprehensive school and she was, 'scared' that she may, 'fail' the eleven-plus. The student had invested heavily in passing the eleven-plus assessment and had been tutored for almost two years. The student's familial discourse valued academia highly and attending grammar school was part of her desired future identity. The pressure, which she considered to be self-imposed, came from the expectations of the family, membership of the academic friendship group and because she believed that her disposition would suit a grammar school:

"I am really scared in case I don't pass as my family all passed and I know that I won't fit in if I don't get into the grammar school." Hannah

"..no, no-one puts pressure on me, there is a lot of pressure but it comes from me. I want my parents to be proud of me..... I want to have the same friends and not have to leave them." Hannah

She was concerned that she would suffer from bullying and lack of stimulation and sufficient academic challenge in a comprehensive school. She appeared to have a clear indication of who she is and who she would like to be in her future world. Hannah's self-esteem depended on her social identity which was heavily dependent upon the symbolic capital gained as a consequence of succeeding in the eleven-plus assessment:

"There's loads of bullying and fighting in the other schools (comprehensive schools) and I'd probably get bullied or something because I want to learn." Hannah

“I’d probably get bored like ‘Thea’ as the work might be too slow.” Hannah

“It matters lots for me to get into grammar school so that everyone knows that I am good enough to go there. I want people to know that I am good enough.” Hannah

Hannah clearly conveyed fear of, ‘failure,’ which she suggested is based on numerous factors, such as the expectations of others. The public nature of the results seemed to be a significant concern for Hannah due to the potential feelings of shame which would result from failure to gain access to a grammar school:

“I am really scared in case I don’t get in..... everyone knows how you did, and next year you wear the uniform which tells everyone what school you go to it kind of tells everyone like on the bus or whatever if you passed the eleven-plus or not.” Hannah

“I felt like a cat but I knew that I would get really embarrassed if I didn’t pass. I would be even more embarrassed if I didn’t pass because I did have tutoring but I would also feel quite sheepish as it would be really awkward telling people if I didn’t pass as I had revised and stuff.” Hannah

It is evident from Hannah’s comments that she feels significant pressure due to the transparent nature of the outcome of the assessment. Also, having been tutored means that she feels additional pressure and that all this pressure is on her. She is clear that passing the assessment is an important part of her social identity and that she would experience feelings of shame if she had been unable to pass the assessment.

Jacob

Many of Jacob’s friends took the eleven-plus, although some chose not apply to take the assessment. It appeared that Jacob did not feel under considerable pressure to pass due to the limited expectations of parents and friends.

Jacob chose to take the assessment, however, the student did not convey the impression that his social identity was linked to passing the eleven-plus to the extent of others in the group. Prior to taking the assessment, his identity was aligned with a group of students, many of whom did not consider themselves capable of passing the assessment, and as a consequence, he appeared less concerned about passing the eleven-plus from a social context perspective. It

was clear that he would like to pass but it appeared that this was aspirational and the student did not consider this the most likely outcome. This was apparently typical of his social group:

“I mean lots of my mates are taking it but most of them aren’t bothering for some reason..... they probably wouldn’t pass anyway but they’re not bothered.” Jacob

“It would be good to pass as it shows everyone that you can do it and it like gives you the sort of choice of which school you want to go to.” Jacob

The desire to pass seemed to be partly as a response to other students who were driven to succeed. Jacob would have felt more positive about himself if he did pass the assessment, but he was doing very little in order to achieve this goal. Public discussions around, ‘passing’ and ‘failing’ the eleven-plus made Jacob’s demeanour become more subdued and conveyed inferiority to those around him who he considered are not like him:

“I’d like to pass to show everyone like that I can do it and I’m just as good.” Jacob

“I’ve looked at some of the questions on the website (the app) but I haven’t really done much, no.” Jacob

Jacob and all his group of close friends did not pass the eleven-plus and following the results, the student remained closely aligned to the same group of people and went on to attend the local comprehensive school with the same group of friends:

“None of my friends passed it, we’re all going to Woody together so that’s good, I’m glad that we’re staying together as I’ll have mates and stuff when I get there.” Jacob

It is interesting that although Jacob suggests that he would have liked to have passed the eleven-plus as it would have demonstrated to the world that he is academically able. He conveys the that he experienced little or no shame in sharing the outcome. I would suggest that this is due to his familial context and friendship groups. Passing was not considered a part of his social identity and none of his peers passed so he continues to fit in with his social group and so the experience is likely less emotionally disruptive than it was for others in the group.

Fiona

Fiona regarded the eleven-plus as a pivotal moment in her life. For this student, the transition into a particular secondary school was important socially and a part of her identity.

The student was surrounded by friends, the majority of whom she considered to be more intelligent. Fiona aligned closely with her group of friends and the student was nervous about the outcome of the assessment. She conveyed low levels of confidence in passing the assessment:

“I mean I’m not clever.” Fiona

“You are clever.” Thea

“Yes you are clever.” Hannah

“Well yes I am clever but all my friends are like really clever and they will all pass, I might not if I have an argument or something..... and time is really bad.” Hannah

“Like all my best friends will probably go to West Kirby (Grammar school) and I’ll be on my own and I don’t want that.” Fiona

The reason the student appeared to be particularly nervous was because she was convinced that most of her friends would go on to attend grammar school and that she would lose her identity as part of the group, going on to attend a different school instead. She believed that she would not fit in, in such a school and she was frightened at the prospect of losing her friends and feeling embarrassed if she failed when her friends passed, particularly in relation to some of her family members:

“I’ll feel like a bit ashamed if I don’t pass as these will (referring to two of her close friends in the group, students T and H). I wouldn’t fit in in Woody and we wouldn’t be friends anymore.” Fiona

Fiona considered that she was on the lower end academically of her friendship group and she saw a divide between the group and the majority of other students who would go on to attend the local comprehensive school. Fiona aligned closely with the group she considered to be the most academic and, as a consequence, she saw a clear divide between herself and the, ‘other’ group. As she was vocal about the divide, believing that she could not possibly fit into the comprehensive education system, she was adding to the pressure she felt in order to pass:

“I would hate it if I don’t pass, I’m not friends with those (referring to the group of students she considers will be attending the comprehensive school), all my mates are

really clever and will probably go to West Kirby. I just don't want to go to Woody but I am really worried about my friends." Fiona

Fiona was very clear about what she wanted for her future and so there was self-imposed pressure to pass. Fiona also felt significant pressure from close friends who currently had good relationships with her, seeing each other frequently outside of school. Fiona was aware that these relationships would deteriorate rapidly should the students have different outcomes from the eleven-plus assessment:

"I mean yes, we would keep in touch for a bit, texting and stuff but then they'll make new friends and like never see each other." Fiona

Fiona was also experiencing significant pressure due to her family who were clear that they did not want her to attend a comprehensive school. This was because her parents believed that the most academic students are, 'creamed off' into grammar schools, leaving the rest behind in comprehensive schools in which they believed the standard of education to be inferior. Whilst Fiona was clear that family did not put pressure on her to pass the assessment, it was clear that she felt a significant amount of pressure due to her parents' opinions of the education system in Wirral and their desired outcome for their daughter:

"All the clever kids go to the grammar schools which are sort of miles better and all the kids who aren't as clever go to the other schools, I don't want to go to one of those, they're not as good..... my mum told me." Fiona

Fiona did not manage to reach the required mark in the eleven-plus and took the entrance examination for the single sex girls' Catholic school. Fiona did manage to gain a place at the Catholic school. A close friend of Fiona who was a part of her social group also failed to gain a place in a grammar school but did pass the entrance examination for the single sex Catholic school and so Fiona felt positive as she was not going to attend the local comprehensive school and she had a friend who would be joining her in the Catholic school:

"It was good as ***** failed as well and she passed the Upton test so we're going to Upton together." Fiona

Due to the way in which Fiona had portrayed comprehensive schools in Wirral, it would have been very difficult for Fiona to go on to attend one. Not attending a comprehensive school is clearly part of her identity. One of her other major fears about the process was losing friendship groups and so it is positive that this solitary experience is shared with another

student with whom Fiona began to build a relationship. Fiona passing the entrance examination for another selective school was clearly very important for Fiona as it provided more evidence for her academic ability and maintained the academic narrative. This, combined with 'lack of tutoring', 'age discrimination' and 'time' assisted Fiona in explaining her outcome in the eleven-plus assessment.

Mark

Mark was clear that he hoped to pass the eleven-plus. He had been working hard in order to pass the assessment and he was rather frightened that he may not gain the required mark. Mark believed that his future would be closely aligned with his friendship group and he was clear that he wanted to have friends who will act responsibly in future and not influence his behaviour or wellbeing negatively:

“I am really scared and frightened in case I don't pass.... I want to go to like a good school.” Mark

“You do things that your friends are doing, like if they're doing something not that good then you might do it as well because they are like sort of making you, as you do stuff with your mates but that might get you into trouble.” Mark

Mark believed that comprehensive schools have far greater numbers of students who behave poorly in class and who are more likely to exhibit mischievous behaviours outside of school. Mark is a popular student with many friends and he was aware that whatever the outcome of the assessment, his membership of a group would impact on his own behaviour and ability to learn. He considered himself to be at a juncture in his life in which one path would lead to higher quality outcomes in terms of academia and friends, the other would lead to a different set of outcomes. Fiona was, however, careful not to dismiss the group of students who attended the comprehensive school, instead he emphasised their abilities in sports such as football, which are not valued as highly in the grammar schools:

“The kids at Woody are really good at footy and stuff and I really like footy..... they don't really do footy at Calday [Grammar school], they do other things like cricket and rugby, I don't like them.” Mark

“How you do in the test kind of decides which mates you’re going to have in big school so it’s really important that you do your best.” Mark

Mark is a sporty child who considered himself to be rather academic. He had a clear idea of what he wanted for his future identity which he hoped would be located in a grammar school, however he lacked confidence in his ability to pass the eleven-plus assessment and he tried to identify the positive characteristics of comprehensive schools. Mark has a large number of friends and he categorised them into those he believed will pass the eleven-plus assessment and those he believed will not pass or who have neglected to enter the examination. Whilst the group he believed would be attending the comprehensive school is far larger, he wanted to be part of the smaller group he considered may pass the assessment as he favoured their qualities for future success:

“Most of my mates won’t be going to Calday as most of them aren’t taking it anyway (the eleven-plus assessment) so it would be fine to go to Woody. I would like to pass it though as a few of my mates will probably pass and I’d like to go with them to Calday if they pass, not on my own, but if they go as Calday is like better.” Mark

For Mark, fitting with his friendship group is clearly very important. He wants to attend the grammar school as long as some of his friends also go on to attend. It is clearly a desired element of his social identity although I would argue that some of this is due to misconceptions he has regarding the types of students who attend comprehensive schools.

4.4 Belittling the ‘other’.

Prior to taking the eleven-plus assessment, all students spoke using some derogatory terms about the school which is the opposite to the one they expected to attend. Students would frequently speak negatively about the ‘other’ then become more mindful of their surroundings and become more polite, however, possibly due to the ages of the students, their opinions about the ‘other’ schools were frequently spoken seemingly without considering the feelings of those around them.

Thea

Prior to taking the assessment, Thea believed that she would pass the eleven-plus assessment and if she did not achieve this outcome, then she would attend an independent school. She spoke in a very adult manner, clearly conveying her thoughts and feelings about comprehensive education, insisting that the learning environment would not be challenging for her. She spoke about comprehensive schools as if they were unsafe environments, believing that violence was prevalent in such schools and that all of the students required additional learning support:

“If I’m honest, I would not fit in at all like at Woodchurch [non-selective] and stuff, I would have to, I know this sounds really weird but I can’t concentrate with boys around very well and because I’m not very tolerant and I get frustrated when they can’t do the work.” Thea

“like they need more support with their learning and stuff... I need to be challenged more or I’ll just get bored and not learn.” Thea

“Kids like throw chairs and stuff there.” Thea

Thea believed that she could never fit into the comprehensive school system as she is an, ‘able’ student who would find the experience tedious and as it would prevent her from accessing appropriate University education in the future. It simply could never be an option for Thea to attend a grammar school:

“Yes, I think people who failed get a bit upset because they think oh no, I’m not clever and I can’t go to a good school that I want to go to. That’s what I think, I’m not saying everyone but I do know that some people say that.” Thea

“I just wouldn’t fit in there [referring to the comprehensive school].” Thea

That's because he wasn't being challenged enough [referring to an older student who she considered to be academically able who then performed less well when he attended comprehensive school]." Thea

Thea frequently conveyed that grammar schools were superior to comprehensive schools in a group in which she believed that many people may not pass the assessment. The perceived divide between the secondary schools seems to be as a consequence of stories predominantly from parents and friends:

"I mean it's like fine for them they might like it but it's just not for me, I want to go to a good school and they're not good schools." Thea

"my mum said, the kids all smoke and stuff outside the school." Thea

"I have heard that Prenton [single sex comprehensive school] is quite bad, I won't say that to anyone outside but that's just what I've heard and what my mum said to me but we are very similar so I don't know. It's just that I don't think it would push me as well, yeah academically as well. I don't really fit in very well with comprehensive schools because I find that I really like a challenge and it wouldn't challenge me as much and I'm like, 'I'm gonna fail the eleven-plus and like my mum's like, no you won't'. 'Cos she was quite clever and I think I am." Thea

"if you fail, I have a feeling that some people think they aren't clever because they have failed. Well I'm not saying that if you fail then you're not clever, I mean that's what some people sometimes do think about people who fail." Thea

Thea is determined to attend a grammar school and due to her socio-economic context, she was aware that she would attend an independent school if she did not pass the eleven-plus assessment. This means that Thea can be particularly scathing about comprehensive schools as she knows that she will not attend one. She epitomises the disparity by stating that comprehensive schools are not good schools whilst also saying that 'it is fine for them'. This is a divisive comment which suggests a two-tier education system in Wirral.

Hannah

Hannah appeared to be more aware of her surroundings than most of the other students. The students around the table spoke kindly of one another and their overwhelmingly positive and

open attitude towards the research was commendable, however, as the researcher I was very surprised by their openness when discussing the schools which they were hoping not to attend. I was surprised because some of their peers sitting alongside them would be going on to attend such schools and so it surprised me that they would speak about such institutions frequently in such a derogatory manner.

Hannah appeared to be very socially aware of the context in which the research took place and while she did speak candidly and conveyed her thoughts and feelings clearly, she appeared rather embarrassed to do so, given that some of her peers may be attending the schools she stated she would not wish to attend:

“No-one gets killed in the eleven-plus. I think that people who failed feel really upset and a bit embarrassed..... there are 99 children in our year group and there were lots that didn't take it, actually ten children passed.” Hannah

“Some children don't have a tutor and don't get to practice.... Before tutoring I wouldn't have found the eleven-plus possible. It was so hard and I wouldn't have known what a lot of it meant but after tutoring I did. I made up a song, 5A – A in brackets, B, C, divided by four equals and then before I would have thought what is that? But after tutoring I am like, I know what that means.” Hannah

Hannah believed that attending a grammar school was the only way to gain meaningful employment in the future and gain access to University. Like Thea, Hannah believed that behavioural issues are common in comprehensive schools and she feared that she would be unable to learn in such an environment, which would not be addressing the academic needs of students such as herself:

“I think that it is really important to go to a grammar school if you are able to as that helps you go to university and get a good job in the future.... You can't really do that if you go to the comprehension school as you don't get to learn as well 'cos of the boys and gangs and stuff.” Hannah

“if I don't pass then I won't be able to go to a grammar school and I'm scared that I won't be able to get a job that there won't be like a good choice of jobs if I don't go to a grammar school.” Hannah

Hannah however does not go as far as Thea when belittling the comprehensive schools in the Wirral, suggesting that there are worse schools in other LEAs:

“Woodchurch is not the worst school.” Hannah

Whilst Hannah is more polite about the two-tier education system than Thea, Hannah’s comments are similar as she is clearly stating that grammar schools are the only possible preparation for a university education. She also insists that comprehensive education could not facilitate good future employment prospects. Following receiving the results, as with Thea, she speaks more negatively about comprehensive education, it’s academic credentials and the behaviour of the students.

Fiona

Fiona was determined not to attend a comprehensive school for reasons referred to earlier, most notably parents and friendship groups. Fiona believed that the academic ability of the students in comprehensive schools is lower than average, she did not consider herself to fit into this category and so she distanced herself from comprehensive schools:

“My cousin went to Ridgeway [a comprehensive school] and he was really clever and then he went down, he went backwards.” Fiona

“I’m not really like them [comprehensive school students], they are like lower ability and I’m not low ability I don’t think.” Fiona

Fiona believed that there is greater academic support for students attending comprehensive schools but that they are more focused on topics such as gardening or farming, rather than academic subjects which will facilitate access to University in the future. It is true that a local 11-16 comprehensive school, in which I have previously worked, has an extensive autism support base and a field of alpacas, however they do follow the same curriculum as the grammar schools:

“They do focus on other stuff which is really good, like the farm and stuff instead of maths and subjects like that..... and that might be boring for some people but it’s important if you want to go to University when you’re older.” Fiona

Fiona had the opinion that students in comprehensive schools do not take an interest in their education. She was clear that education is a means to future success and so she considered students who attend comprehensive schools to have low aspirations and are therefore, ‘not like her’:

“they are not as bothered about learning as people in grammar schools and so they won’t be pushed as much by the teachers.... they won’t get as good jobs when they finish, they’ll work in Sainsbury’s and jobs like Macdonald’s and stuff.” Fiona

Fiona was very negative about comprehensive schools throughout the research and this continued after she gained a place in a selective school. She believes that comprehensive schools cannot offer the quality of education necessary to obtain purposeful future employment. As a researcher it is frustrating to witness misconceptions regarding not being able to gain employment or attend university if educated in a comprehensive school, however, this is the perception of the students in the study.

Jacob

Jacob was not optimistic about passing the eleven-plus and he believed that his future destination would likely be the local comprehensive school. It was clear that Jacob was in a difficult position during the session as people around him also considered this to be the case and they constantly insulted the school he was likely to attend. Jacob did belittle the grammar schools and supported the comprehensive schools, however, he was very careful in managing this as he applied to take the eleven-plus assessment which clearly implied a desire to attend the grammar school. Despite this dichotomy, Jacob did talk about grammar school students as being, ‘posh’, suggesting that they have very high self-esteem, believing themselves to be superior. Jacob’s statements may well have been influenced by the barrage of negative comments made by some other students towards the comprehensive schools:

“the kids in grammar school are well posher, they think they’re better than everyone else and act like they’re amazing.” Jacob

“other schools are just as good, in loads of ways they’re better because you can do more sports and not stupid sports like cricket.” Jacob

Jacob also drew a clear divide between the different educational establishments in terms of the sports offered. He aligned himself with the sports offered at comprehensive schools, suggesting that those offered by grammar schools, such as rugby and cricket, are not popular sports:

“they are really different..... I mean, I’d much rather play footy and stuff like that than cricket and rugby which I don’t really like.” Jacob

Jacob did not believe he was going to pass the eleven-plus assessment and his results were not surprising to him. Throughout the study, Jacob aligned himself more closely with the comprehensive schools and so he spoke negatively about them. Jacob suggested the sports were not appropriate and that the students are ‘posh’. He is highlighting his perceived differences between the different educational institutions and highlighting the negatives about the ‘other’.

Mark

Mark clearly favoured attending the grammar school but he knew that he would have a majority of friends who would certainly be attending the comprehensive school, none of whom were in the group and so none of whom can be offended by his comments:

“I would prefer to go to the grammar school, yes that’s really important to me but I wouldn’t really say that to my mates.” Mark

Mark’s opinions and experiences, like the majority of the children, were largely based on things that they had heard from adults and older students. Mark was clear that the stories he conveyed were from other people, but that they informed his opinions of the different schools. Mark believed that issues relating to smoking, drinking and drugs are far more prevalent in the comprehensive schools than in the grammar schools:

“She says that there are like loads of drugs and smoking and drinking and bad things in the other schools, like comprehensive schools, but that you don’t get that in Calday [Grammar] as they want to learn and do well.” Mark

He believed that there would be significant social pressure in order to, ‘fit in’ if he attended a comprehensive school and that these influences would be overwhelmingly negative. Mark was frightened at the prospect of dealing with the social pressures of refusing alcohol despite many of his peer group accepting the social implications of this. Mark did agree with Thea that students in comprehensive schools require more learning support as they are, ‘less clever’, but he agreed with Jacob that the sports offered in comprehensive schools are more appropriate to his interests:

“I will miss footy and stuff, I do really like footy but they probably still do footy at Calday.” Mark

“It would be scary at Woody as if all your mates are doing something which could get you into trouble, like drinking, then you would feel as if you would need to, to stay friends with them all or you could have no mates.” Mark

Mark and a small number of his friends passed the eleven-plus assessment. The majority of his friends did not pass and so most of his close friends will be attending the comprehensive school. Mark is negative regarding the academic challenge available in comprehensive schools and the behaviour of the students however he is far less negative than others in the group. This may be because, unlike the girls in the group, Mark aims to maintain his friendships with his friends who are going on to attend comprehensive school.

4.5 Coping strategies

All of the students have developed strategies in order to better cope with failing the eleven-plus assessment. It appears that such strategies are less important for students for whom the expectation of passing the eleven-plus is low. For those students for whom the stakes are socially constructed to be higher, the coping mechanism seem better embedded, particularly where they consider their probability of passing to be lower.

Thea

Thea was in a privileged position due to the relative affluence of her family. She was the clearest of all the students about her desired destiny and she was scathing about comprehensive education. Thea was confident in her ability but also worried as socially she had a lot to lose, pragmatically believing that failing the eleven-plus would result in complete isolation from her social group. Thea was clear that if she failed to gain a place in a grammar school then she would accept the loss of her social identity and attend a fee-paying independent school in which she would make new friends:

“I’ll go to the private school if I don’t pass as there’s just no way I could fit in, in a comprehensive school, it’s just not for me.” Thea

“My mum said that if I didn’t pass then I should just tell everyone that I did but that I’ve like chosen to go to private school, I really did pass though, I passed Upton as well.” Thea

Thea’s socio-economic context means that she has support in developing her coping strategies if she had failed the assessment. Thea had intended to tell everyone that she had passed and then go on to attend an independent school. This gave Thea a great deal of confidence when discussing issues around the eleven-plus assessment as she was less vulnerable than the majority of students taking the assessment.

Hannah

Hannah conveyed her intelligence in her current primary setting, insisting that she was academically very able. Hannah suggested that those close to her were aware of her ability and that if she did not succeed then it would be due to unforeseen circumstances, such as illness:

“I mean they know that I am clever and that I should pass but if I wasn’t well then I might not but that’s ‘cos I’m not well or something like that.” Hannah

Hannah took the entrance examination for Upton High School (selective Catholic school) in case that she did not pass the eleven-plus and gain access into the grammar school. This was important for Hannah as, given her families perspective of the comprehensive schools, she had a strong desire to attend an alternative school:

“I passed..... I passed the Upton entrance exam as well but I didn’t need that.... I would have gone there if I didn’t pass the eleven-plus.” Hannah

“If I didn’t pass the eleven-plus but I did get into Upton then I was going to pretend that I had passed as I would feel embarrassed.... I know I wouldn’t need to but I would.” Hannah

“My best friend is going to a different school and I’m really, really upset about that.” Hannah

“Yes, you’ve been friends for years.” Thea

“We will still keep in touch but I think our parents are sad as they know we won’t see much of each other and we’ll make new friends.... our mums won’t see each other as much.” Hannah

In a similar manner to Thea, Hannah was aiming to tell lies to those around her if she failed and gained access to a different selective school. This coping mechanism was due to her feeling ‘embarrassed’ if she did not pass. Whilst I acknowledge why Hannah and Thea may wish to misinform those around them if they failed, I cannot agree with an education system which places young children into such a position where they feel this is the only option.

Fiona

Fiona was uncertain in her ability to gain access into a grammar school and she pre-empted, ‘failure’ frequently, offering excuses long before taking the assessment. She explained that she is an emotional student whose academic ability can be significantly impeded by negative emotions caused by unpleasant interactions with peers. Fiona explained how the issue of insufficient time in the assessment is likely to prevent her from passing the test. She was clear

that she is able to complete the questions without issues, however, lack of time frequently prevents her from doing so:

“I mean I can always do the questions, it’s just time, time is an issue for me.” Fiona

I was born in September and everyone else is going to get 5 points added on and I’m not going to ‘cos..... I feel like I could actually do with the five points added on... it’s not fair as it makes me less likely to pass than my friends even if we get the same marks in the test.” Fiona

“on the day I won’t feel up to tests and like I don’t do as well as I should normally like I don’t know, another day I could and that makes me scared in case I’m not up to the test on that day.... I get quite scared in case I have an argument..... ‘cos when you have arguments you get really nervous.” Fiona

Fiona found it necessary to lie about tutoring. In the first session, Fiona denied having ever been tutored, when Thea stated that she had seen her at the tutor’s house, Fiona then agreed that she had in fact been tutored. As stated earlier, tutoring is used by the students as a means through which passing and failing can be externalised and so be separated from the individual. During the session following the results of the eleven-plus, Fiona denied having ever been tutored. This was despite having stated the opposite in the interview prior to taking the assessment. Students around Fiona were clearly aware of the change in narrative but they all agreed with Fiona, insisting that she would have passed, had she been tutored, despite knowing that she had been:

“I didn’t pass the eleven-plus but I did pass the Upton Convent entrance exam, the eleven-plus was harder than I thought and impossible without a tutor as many of the questions had not been covered in school when it was taken.” Fiona

“I passed the Upton by two which I wasn’t expecting to pass by two marks but I didn’t get tutored for it (eleven-plus) so that’s why so I’m going to go for Upton Convent.” Fiona

“You would have passed if you had, had a tutor.” Thea

“Yes you would.” Hannah

“I was alright really, it wasn’t really a big deal to me. I think if it was a big deal though and I didn’t pass then I would be a lot disappointed and maybe a bit upset but knowing that I knew I probably wouldn’t pass, I was upset but I would have been more upset if I thought like that I was going to pass.” Fiona

Fiona did not gain access to a grammar school however she did pass the entrance examination to the Catholic school. Fiona described how this entrance examination was as difficult as the eleven-plus assessment and she described her level of success in this arena. She stated that she failed the eleven-plus assessment by, ‘two marks.’ During all my earlier research, I found this statement to be very common in those who had not passed, with almost every student failing to gain entry into the grammar school stating that they had ‘failed by one mark.’ This of course may be true, but statistically it is unlikely. It would appear that this is a mechanism used to explain the perceived ‘failure’ although it may actually be driven by parents as it is parents who inform the students. I have no evidence if the statements are in fact false and from where they arise:

“After the exam I felt that it was unfair as I didn’t have a tutor but really good that I only failed by two points. I am disappointed about not passing and very nervous about which school I am going to now.” Fiona

“My mum was like, find out who passed and who didn’t.” Fiona

“Well you weren’t the only one who didn’t pass, most people didn’t pass. There are only four girls in the whole year who did pass so not passing is normal.” Thea

Following the results of the eleven-plus assessment and subsequently gaining a place at the catholic school with one of her friends, Fiona has begun to invest far more heavily in this relationship to the detriment of others in her social group. This was despite her not leaving primary school for another nine months:

“My mum’s been dead worked up, looking if people passed and if they only passed by a few points.” Fiona

“I’m really sad because ***** (Her best friend) has passed the eleven-plus and she doesn’t look or act that clever but she really is. She’s going to go to the grammar

school and she's getting mates with some other girls who are going to West Kirby. I reckon it's just because she'll need mates when she goes there." Fiona

Fiona had developed a number of coping strategies to deal with failure prior to taking the eleven-plus assessment. Although the deception was not around misinforming others of the outcome as Thea and Hannah had suggested. Fiona's was concerned with not having been tutored. I have previously highlighted that the coping mechanisms for the other girls involved providing false information and Fiona's narrative also misinforms those around her. This is additional evidence that students are feeling that they need to lie in order to cope with failure.

Mark

Mark maintained very good friendships with all his friends as they went through the selection process so that he would have a successful transition into secondary school. Mark worked hard to pass the assessment but appeared accepting of his fate, seemingly content that he would attend the comprehensive school if he did not gain the required mark.

On the day of the results, Mark's mother came to school to collect him, she informed him that he had passed, upon hearing the news, he started to cry, unable to control his emotions. He had felt pressure to pass and he had not openly conveyed his thoughts and feelings on the issue but when he heard the result, he momentarily lost his ability to hide his feelings. It seems that he was heavily emotionally invested in the results of the assessment, the level of dedication and commitment to preparation prior to the assessment conveyed this, however he did not necessarily convey this in conversations. It seems that his calm exterior was a coping mechanism in case he failed to gain access to grammar school:

"I passed, I came out of school and my mum was waiting for me with a big smile, she told me that I had passed and I just cried, then my mum cried. We both cried for ages, we were so happy that I'd passed." Mark

"I'm really lucky 'cos 6 boys passed the eleven-plus and we are all really good mates. We were good mates before the test and we still are so that's good 'cos we can stick together in Calday." Mark

It does not appear that Mark told any lies regarding the outcome of the eleven-plus assessment however it is interesting how his attitude towards failure changed after he passed.

After the results, he conveyed how much he was emotionally invested in passing the assessment, something he had managed to hide during the first conversations. I would suggest that Mark was intending to cope with the failure by pretending to be less invested in the outcome than he really was.

Jacob

Prior to taking the eleven-plus assessment, Jacob did not have the same pressure that other students appeared to experience. Jacob conveyed that he may not fit into the grammar school due to the 'posh,' kids and the lack of girls, as a strategy to mitigate against 'failing' to pass the eleven-plus.

As there was very little pressure for Jacob to pass and all his friends failed to gain a place in the grammar school, Jacob simply extolled the virtues of comprehensive schools in the session following the results. He referred to sports being superior in comprehensive schools and that support with learning was available to students who may benefit from it. He also suggested that the students in comprehensive schools would be similar to him. Jacob conveyed less anxiety than the other students when discussing the outcome of the eleven-plus assessment, this probably due to the reduced pressure experienced by Jacob:

“tutoring makes a massive difference, even if you’re quite clever, if you haven’t been tutored then it’s really hard to pass. You might be well cleverer than loads of people who passed but they had a tutor, so it’s kind of not fair anyway.” Jacob

“the kids in grammar school are well posher.... other schools are just as good, in loads of ways they’re better because you can do more sports.” Jacob

Jacob copes with failure by highlighting that he was not tutored. This externalises the 'failure' and removes any personal responsibility which maintains his academic narrative. He also explains that this is a desirable outcome, highlighting sports and less 'posh' students.

4.6 Fortunate to have the eleven-plus

At the end of the second session, following the students gaining their results for the eleven-plus, I asked the students to convey their thoughts and feelings about the eleven-plus. I was surprised to find that all the students to differing degrees believe that they are lucky to live in Wirral as they have the selective education system.

Thea

Thea believed that the selective education system is a very good idea as it provides additional academic support to those students who require it and it provides a very academic education for more able students. She likened the grammar schools to free independent schools:

“Well I think that we’re really lucky to have the eleven-plus where we live because we live in the Wirral ‘cos there’s lots of very good schools like Calday [grammar], West Kirby [grammar], Wirral grammar for boys, Wirral grammar for girls, St Anselm’s [selective catholic] and Upton Convent [selective catholic].” Thea

“I would say that the eleven-plus, kind of like wars, wars are terrible and kill so many people but they do it for a good reason. Like the eleven-plus is like, yes, wars are a bit more extreme but I think it’s a good thing because you work hard, you learn new things and you get to a school which you would like to go to and which will help you to get what you want in life, but if you fail, I have a feeling that some people think they aren’t clever because they have failed. Well I’m not saying that if you fail then you’re not clever, I mean that’s what some people sometimes do think about people who fail.” Thea

“I mean they are the really good schools, they are free but they are like private schools so we are really lucky here.” Thea

“I would say to Theresa May that I think the eleven-plus is a good thing because people can go to a grammar school and get more challenging work, people who don’t pass the eleven-plus aren’t stupid, they may find grammar school work too challenging and get stressed.” Thea

Hannah

Hannah agreed with Thea in that she agreed that grammar schools are a good idea due to the reasons suggested by Thea. The difference however, which no other student refers to, is that Hannah acknowledged that she likes the selective education system as she passed the eleven-plus and will be going on to attend a grammar school. She believed that she would not feel this way if she had failed the eleven-plus. Hannah appeared to experience guilt and a level of discomfort as she suddenly spoke quietly, adding that the system has, ‘winners’ and, ‘losers’ and that she likes the selective system as she was a, ‘winner’:

“There are 99 children in our year group and there were lots that didn’t take it, actually ten children passed.” Hannah

“Yes, there is a problem that some people might not pass the eleven-plus by one mark but they might be really clever but they wouldn’t get challenged enough and they would not do as well in the comprehension school and then they should really go to a grammar school when they show that they are good enough.” Hannah

“If I didn’t pass then I would still agree with the eleven-plus as if I didn’t and I said no then I’d be a little, I’d feel a bit selfish just because of me but there might be other people whose families are, mine are quite supportive but there’s just a couple of people, but some families might be really, really supportive with everything erm and they might just say, Oh well and erm if the person didn’t pass they might say, oh well it doesn’t matter you’ll be fine wherever you go anyway, so I might feel a bit selfish if I, if they don’t have the eleven-plus anymore.” Hannah

Fiona

Fiona had a very complex relationship with the eleven-plus assessment, dismissing comprehensive school education and aligning herself with an academic group of friends. Following the results of the eleven-plus she found that she and one other friend were going on to attend the local Catholic school, despite not being a Catholic. She considered herself to be able but sometimes having a lower processing speed than her peers. The selective system had completely altered her future friendship group but despite this, Fiona believed that students in Wirral are very fortunate to have the eleven-plus and grammar school education, despite not being able to access such a school:

“it’s a good idea to have the eleven-plus because those who are talented have a great chance but I do disagree as it doesn’t give those who aren’t as clever a chance to go to the school and get better as some people get more cleverer as they get older but it will be too late then.” Fiona

“It is a good idea though because those kids that don’t really care about school can go to those schools that give them the sort of education that they need. Like Ridgeway, you don’t need to pass an exam to go to Ridgeway and the kids that go there don’t really care about their education.” Fiona

Mark

Mark also believed that students in Wirral are fortunate to have the eleven-plus and the grammar school system. He considered comprehensive schools to be more able to support students who require additional support with their learning. He also believed that grammar schools, with their better teachers, are more able to teach academic students so that they can go on to University:

“I don’t think it matters if you pass or not. For example, you might fail the eleven-plus and get a good job like the guy who played James Bond.” Mark

“You mean Daniel Craig.” Thea

“Yes, he failed the eleven-plus.” Mark

“I mean it is really good [the eleven-plus] ‘cos the children who need support can get it in those schools and the children who want to go to University can have the best teachers if they pass.” Mark

Jacob

Despite Jacob not passing the eleven-plus, he did not disagree with the selective education system. He was far less enthusiastic than the other students but he agreed that the system is good and that it works. Jacob believed that most students can pass with a tutor and he was unhappy at the unequal access to tutors, which the students have experienced as they have passed through the process. It was clear that Jacob was prevented from accessing the

professional guidance of a tutor. Jacob, like Fiona, who also did not reach the required mark in the assessment mentioned how students learn at different rates and so the time students are assessed may not be suitable to all students:

“tutoring makes a massive difference, even if you’re quite clever, if you haven’t been tutored then it’s really hard to pass. You might be well cleverer than loads of people who passed but they had a tutor, so it’s kind of not fair anyway.” Jacob

“I’m quite glad that we have it but some people do get cleverer and learn differently but they have the test when they’re 11 but they might get more clever later on but they can’t change school.” Jacob

All of the students convey their support for the selective education system with the exception of Jacob who was not tutored. Jacob does not disagree with the grammar school system however he also does not describe any of the benefits. All other students in the group are clear about their support for the eleven-plus even if they did not pass. The collective opinion of the remaining students suggests that they believe comprehensive schools are there to provide high levels of differentiation and support to students who find academic learning difficult. They all suggest that the selective education system ensures that the most able are sufficiently academically challenged in an environment which is conducive to learning. It is evident that the same students consider the learning to be inferior in comprehensive schools due to very poor behaviour and delinquent students.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to illustrate the themes which emerged during the thematic analysis and to provide an insight into the thoughts and feelings of each of the children in the study.

The six themes which were explored were; tutoring, solitary burden and pressure, social identity and shame, belittling the ‘other’, coping strategies and feeling fortunate to live in a selective authority.

All the students believe that it is not possible to pass the eleven-plus without a tutor and tutoring is used as a mechanism to explain not passing the assessment. Pressure is felt by all of the students albeit to a different extent. The pressure felt by the students comes from a

variety of sources. As the assessment is taken by each student individually, the pressure is frequently perceived as a solitary burden as no one can take the assessment for them. For example, Thea stated, “it is scary as it’s all you, no-one else can do it for you.” All of the students in the study relate their personal outcome in the assessment to their personal identity and belonging to a particular social group. Almost all of the students would feel shame if they were unable to pass the assessment, I would argue that this emotion is felt so strongly that many of the group would misguide others about a negative outcome as a coping strategy.

Despite all the students in the sample going through an emotional journey which is so significant that the majority are prepared to misinform family and friends about the outcome. All of the students feel fortunate to reside in a selective education authority and they compound the distinction between the different secondary school destinations by belittling the ‘other’ school which they hope not to attend.

This chapter has presented the findings in the themes that emerged throughout the thematic analysis process. The following chapter looks at each of these themes in detail and how they relate to the work of Bourdieu and some of his key concepts such as habitus, field, capital and symbolic violence as presented in chapter 2.

Chapter 5

Putting the findings into a context

In order to interpret and analyse the emergent themes through a Bourdieuan lens, I have taken many of Bourdieu's most significant tools and applied them to the emergent themes. This is to contextualise the themes in order to better understand the journey of students as they pass through the academic selection process in the wider socially constructed context.

I will consider the field, Bourdieu's metaphor for representing sites of cultural practice, and explore how objective hierarchies within fields lead to a particular discourse. I will explore how the actors within the field determine what constitutes capital in the field and how this influences their subsequent behaviour. Where applicable, I will include analysis of Bourdieu's fields in the emergent themes.

Throughout the chapter, I will use Bourdieu's concept of habitus in order to better explain how social actors develop their dispositions and attitudes in a field and apply this to each emergent theme.

Bourdieu's concept of capital, particularly economic capital, will be explored in relation to the emergent themes throughout the chapter in order to better understand how these emergent themes are formed by, and also influence the social world. I will consider cultural capital which is associated with culturally authorised tastes, attributes and skills, economic capital, which is concerned with an individual's relative affluence and symbolic capital such as level of education.

In order to explain the emergent themes, I will also draw on Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence. This is violence exerted on individuals in a symbolic manner, such as being denied resources or being limited in terms of realistic aspirations.

Throughout this chapter I will use the tools highlighted above and some other Bourdieuan tools such as misrecognition and doxa in order to better understand the lived experience of the students as they pass through the eleven-plus assessment process.

5.1 Bourdieu - Tuition

As previously highlighted in chapter 2.1, there are different fields and an individual's set of skills and dispositions enable them to gain from a field and contribute towards it. The students who are about to take the eleven-plus are members of different social and familial fields and their habitus is influenced by their experiences in these fields. The students are currently experiencing the same field, which is the primary school that they attend. Students who are about to take the eleven-plus are going to move into a different field, one is the grammar school, the other, the comprehensive. The evidence from the transcripts suggests that the students and their parents believe that these two fields value different things and that the habitus of the individuals in the different educational settings are somehow different. For example, when Thea discussed comprehensive schools, she stated, "I mean I just wouldn't fit it." Whereas when Jacob discussed comprehensive schools he stated, "My Dad went to Woody and he thinks I'll fit in there." These findings are not surprising given the research literature, which illustrates that there is a perception, particularly in more affluent families, that in a selective education authority, grammar school education is the best platform from which to progress onto university education (Reay, 2004). The belief that grammar schools are the only route to university education is held by many students. For example, when Thea was describing her need to be tutored, one of the reasons she gave was, "so that I can go to a good University." Hannah also suggested that the reason for her family spending money on tutoring was because, "that helps you go to university".

Students are unanimous in believing that passing the eleven-plus is not achievable without some form of tutoring. For example, Jacob states, "Tutoring makes a massive difference," and Thea stated, "I am clever and everything but everyone needs a tutor." I would argue, based on the students' accounts, that those who come from a field in the home in which passing the eleven-plus is considered a priority, have a significant advantage over those students who come from fields in which grammar school education is not a priority. For example when Jacob stated, "It's too expensive and my mum thinks that there are loads more important things that we need to get." This illustrates that the familial field he belongs to does not value the symbolic capital to the same extent as some other families in the group. For example, Hannah acknowledged that her family prioritised her tutoring at the expense of other things in the household by saying, "They have spent so much money to help me get into grammar school." She also later highlighted that the cost of tutoring may have prevented them from having holidays. In the instances where the familial field values high quality

education and sees this as a pathway to success, then the familial field endows the individual student with the required economic capital in order to increase their likelihood of passing the eleven-plus and gaining the advantages they believe the grammar schools bestow. The familial fields are relatively powerless in ensuring that their offspring pass the eleven-plus, but they do provide them with certain advantages. The first advantage is that, regardless of household income, familial fields who appear to value attending grammar school with relative importance will prioritise household resources in order to give their offspring the advantage of tuition. The second advantage in passing the eleven-plus assessment such students have, is that that familial habitus which has been formed as a consequence in existing in this familial field for so much of their lives has given them a set of values and beliefs which will influence the effort they give to different activities. As the familial habitus places significance on high quality education then these children who have been immersed in this environment are more likely to value that which their familial field values and appreciate the potential capital benefits associated with the grammar school education. I believe that these students have a greater chance of passing the eleven-plus as they will treat the assessment and the path it enables very seriously and will work hard to gain access to the grammar school, viewing education as a key indicator of future success. More affluent familial fields seem to value and therefore aspire for their offspring to have a grammar school education (Francis et al., 2017) and also allocate their resources towards their own or their offspring's endeavours which may enhance their future prospects. The habitus which develops as a consequence of growing and learning in a familial field which extols the virtues of high-quality education is in contrast to those students from familial fields who do not value education and see other, frequently riskier, routes to future financial success and security. An interesting example of this was when Mark highlighted that, "...you might fail the eleven-plus and get a good job like the guy who played James Bond." This resonates with Bourdieu's notion of symbolic domination in which the dominated classes accept the conditions which may be objectively judged intolerable which 'helps to reproduce the conditions of the oppression.' (Bourdieu, 2000 p. 217).

The field which is the grammar school will influence the actors within the field and alter what Bourdieu refers to as their bodily hexis, that is, their attitudes and dispositions resulting from their place in the field (Webb, Schirato and Danaher, 2002). Bourdieu also refers to a concept known as 'doxa', this is the set of values and discourses which the field considers to be

fundamental. The ‘doxic attitude’, being unconscious submission to the discourse of the field, involves adhering to conditions which may be arbitrary (Webb et al, 2002).

I would suggest that when parents and students in Wirral are experiencing the world and they come across certain grammar school students, the students may exhibit the bodily hexis associated with attending grammar school. They may have a doxic attitude towards the educational values the grammar school extols, which in turn makes the student appear to be interested in learning and all that education can offer; the habitus aligning with the field of which it is now part. Parents with a similar habitus will identify easily with the bodily hexis of the grammar school students, this may also be true of their children, and so investing in tutoring in order to increase the likelihood of gaining access to grammar school education would be a priority for such parents.

Bourdieu states that, ‘every field has its struggle for usurpation or exclusion, its mechanisms of reproduction.’ Tuition is an example of this, almost desperate endeavour, by parents to prevent their children and possibly themselves from being excluded from this field. It is an example of ‘playing by the unwritten rules of the game.’

Evidence from the transcripts suggests that where the familial field invests the necessary economic capital in tutoring to enhance the likelihood of their child gaining access to grammar school, along with additional pressure as a consequence of residing in such a field, can put considerable pressure on some children to pass the eleven-plus assessment. For example, when relating tutoring to economic capital, Thea stated, “I just want to make sure that I pass and don’t waste my parent’s money.” This statement was almost mirrored by Hannah who stated, “I would feel bad on my family after they have spent so much money to help me get into grammar school.” This is in contrast to students who do not have access to tutoring and for whom the familial field may have different expectations and priorities. For example, Jacob stated, “I’ve never had tutoring,” and he also conveyed far less external pressure to pass the assessment.

Millar (2016) clearly demonstrates how the majority of students who access grammar school education have been tutored and how despite continued efforts to make the eleven-plus ‘tutor-proof’, this has not currently been achieved. Professor Robert Coe, of Durham University has been integral in the work on creating a ‘tutor-proof’ eleven-plus assessment. Millar stated, “I wouldn’t support the expansion of grammars on the grounds of social mobility.” (Millar, 2016, p. 3). These ideas are supported by the experiences of the students

in the sample. For example, Thea stated, “Well loads of professional tutors have said that there’s no way anyone would have passed that if they didn’t get tutored.” This comment is reiterated many times throughout the transcripts by all of the students in the group, for example Mark stated, “I wouldn’t have an idea what to do without my tutor.”

Ware (2017) insists that the May agenda for selection is not at all concerned with transforming the significant imbalance in social composition within grammar schools; the only requirement is that selection is based on ‘merit’ and so the most disadvantaged are not explicitly excluded from the system which favours the affluent. This is another example by which the ‘disinterested’ government maintains the status quo in society utilising an externally validated measurement of ‘merit’ which appears to be transparent and so maintains the symbolic violence being enacted upon a disadvantaged majority.

The students in the sample make a clear distinction between the different secondary schools, for example, Hannah stated, “That there won’t be like a good choice of jobs if I don’t go to a grammar school.” This perceived difference is experienced by all the students in the group. I believe that tutoring is used as a tool by families with more economic capital as a mechanism to ensure their offspring have the greatest opportunities. The narrative that there is a difference between the secondary schools is reinforced as the socio-economic status of the students who attend is distinctly different and this is a consequence of some families having the necessary capital to enhance their own child’s chance of gaining access. Based on SES data presented earlier in chapter 2.3, it is access to capital which appears to be the best predictor of a child gaining access to grammar school education, one of the major mechanisms in this socio-economic disparity is tutoring. As the selective education system is designed to be meritocratic, I can see no reason why it should not be dismantled in light of the evidence which highlights that tutoring offers such a clear advantage to the more affluent families.

5.2 Bourdieu - Solitary Burden and Pressure

When the familial field, in particular the home, places a significant emphasis on high-quality education and increasing future opportunities through learning, a significant pressure can be created for students from these fields to pass the eleven-plus. This is despite the large quantity of evidence in the transcripts of student conversations suggesting that it is in fact unintentional and that the familial fields are very supportive, aiming to remove pressure from the students whenever possible. The pressure from the familial field appears to manifest in different ways. Firstly, the older members of the immediate familial fields, frequently the mother or father, will themselves have been a product of a field and this older field may have romanticised perspectives of the selection process and they may inadvertently, while extolling the virtues of grammar school education, put pressure on the children. This was evidenced several times in the transcripts, for example, when Mark was discussing the friends he would have if he attended the grammar school, he stated, “I want to pass to make my mum proud of me and so I hang around with people who don’t smoke.” Secondly, the wider familial field, including aunts, uncles, cousins, adult friends and their children will each have a habitus as a consequence of growing and living in the world. If the experiences of the wider familial field are positive regarding eleven-plus selection then the wider field will likely value the selection process and the perceived success that gaining access to grammar school facilitates. This was also evidenced several times in the transcripts, for example when Fiona discussed the implications for failing the assessment, she referred to her wider family insisting that, “...they would make me and my mum feel ashamed if I didn’t pass.”

Conversations in the home, which take place around the young students throughout their development, lead many to feel pressure to pass the assessment as they will likely want to gain that which these fields value, however arbitrary and socially constructed. I would also argue that the young students themselves will have a habitus which values education as a means of ensuring success in the future and so they desire to pass the eleven-plus assessment for their own future needs. This was clear throughout the transcripts with all of the students in the sample frequently referring to future opportunities changing as a consequence of attending a grammar school. Jacob, who was less invested in the assessment process than the other students in the study accepted, “...it can make a big difference to getting jobs and stuff.” Students who do not have the same experiences growing up may develop in a familial field which values resources other than a formal education as a way to succeed in future. Members of such fields may not discuss the selection process until it is imminent as they may

feel that they are excluded from the system, not having experiences of grammar school which resonates with the metaphorical Bourdieuan concept of ‘a fish out of water.’ An example of this in the study was Jacob stating, “She [mum] doesn’t get why I want to take the test.” The familial field may have opinions of the grammar school field which do not resonate with their members experiences of education and so they may consider that their own habitus is not suited to success within that field and so demonstrate little value in passing the eleven-plus. This was evident in the study when Jacob referred to the opinions of his family, “No-one in my family has passed and no-one’s bothered if I go to grammar school or not. They think like that I probably won’t like it there, as it’s full of stuck up people.” I would argue that although these experiences lie on a continuum, for students growing up in a field in which passing the eleven-plus has low value, there is significantly less pressure from the familial field to pass the assessment, although there may be pressure due to interactions with peers at school. This pressure was tangible throughout the study as all of the students in the group related academic intelligence to passing the eleven-plus, for example Thea stated, “I like learning and I should be with other people who are clever and like learning.” Whilst this may lead to an increased likelihood of feeling inadequate as a consequence of failing, there is less pressure to pass and so these feelings may be suffered to a lesser extent than for those students who have significant pressure and investment, yet despite this, do not gain access to a grammar school.

Bourdieu uses the term, ‘pedagogic action’, to refer to what I consider is taking place in this situation (Webb et al 2002). The local society, including the primary school and possibly the familial field, are conveying to the children that this is the system in which their secondary school options are decided. This is essential as the system in which they find themselves is in fact arbitrary and not natural or necessary. This requires the system to be demonstrated to the students, making it appear to be the ‘natural order of things.’ All of the students in the study accept the selective education system and they all refer to it as necessary as it caters for the individual needs of the students. For example, Fiona believes grammar schools give, “...those who are talented a great chance,” and Mark believes in comprehensive schools, “...cos the children who need support can get it in those schools.”

Whilst I have argued that symbolic violence is constantly being enacted upon the socio-economically deprived population through misrecognition, I would also suggest that symbolic violence is experienced by the students from some familial fields in which passing the eleven-plus assessment is celebrated. For example, Fiona’s mum promised, “...that if I

passed then I could get a cat.” Fiona did not pass and so was not eligible for this reward. The pedagogic action which ensures that children are aware of the ‘doxa’ also ensures that such students are aware of their desired place in the social structure of society which places them under pressure to ensure that they achieve the desired outcome in the eleven-plus assessment, thereby externally validating their habitus and obtaining significant symbolic capital. An example of this in the study is when Thea stated, “I know that I should pass the eleven-plus and there’s no way I could ever go to one of the comprehensive schools.” Earlier, Thea had indicated her mum’s feelings regarding the comprehensive schools stating, “My mum said, the kids all smoke and stuff outside the school.” Thea also stated, “I’m gonna fail the 11+ and like my mum’s like, no you won’t.” These comments from Thea are mirrored by other students in the group and indicate how the parent’s perceptions of the different schools are imparted to their children which indirectly adds to the pressure they experience.

The pressure most of the students feel as they pass through the selection process appears closely related to their expectations. In fact, some students choose not to take the assessment. This behaviour can be related back to Bourdieu’s argument that an individual’s habitus will endow him or her with the skills to succeed in a particular field. I would suggest that the familial field which created them and their habitus gives them the ability to create what Carl Rogers (1980) referred to as, the ‘ideal self’. The ideal self is formed as a consequence of the habitus and understanding of the fields that the particular habitus can effectively access and what they can realistically begin to gain from the field. When a student with a habitus which highly values grammar school education is faced with the eleven-plus, it is very important to the student that they maintain their cultural trajectory towards their ‘ideal self.’ Bourdieu asserts that much of an individual’s habitus comes from their early upbringing, it is transmitted from parent to child and I would argue that for most, the eleven-plus is the most pivotal moment in their lives when they may deviate from their desired path. Students will have experienced small deviations from their preconceived notions of what they wish to become, however the eleven-plus is an external measure of their ‘ability.’ As the test could create a significant disparity between the student’s ideal-self and their ‘actual-self,’ there is a source of significant risk to the individual and so they will experience the emotions they frequently referred to, such as being ‘scared’ and ‘frightened.’ This highlights the high stakes element of assessment for selective purposes at such a young age, as Hutchins (2015) reports.

Evidence from the students in the transcripts, suggests that the pressure they experience differs depending upon the expectations of those around them and the value these significant others place on education. For example, when Mark discusses failing with his father, “My Dad says that if I don’t pass then I’ll just be with my other mates who play footy and stuff,” which suggests that his father is placing less emphasis on passing the assessment and is providing a level of reassurance to his son regarding the outcome. Some other students, for example, Fiona, felt different familial pressures stating, “My mum’s been dead worked up, looking if people passed.” This was in response to Fiona’s ‘failure,’ I imagine that this experience was challenging for Fiona given her mother’s significant interest in the outcomes of her peers. As highlighted previously, parents with a greater desire for their children to pass the eleven-plus will support them in doing so and that this support can lead to feelings of pressure as many students may feel a sense of guilt if they fail. Passing through the selection process is arguably an isolating experience in which an individual may feel exposed and I consider this solitary burden to be challenging and frightening for a significant number of ten-year-old children. The transcripts frequently convey students being encouraged to lie about the outcome of the assessment if it is disappointing; I believe being told to lie about your performance in an assessment if it is perceived to be inadequate by an influential other may increase feelings of solitary burden and pressure on the child. There are several instances of this throughout the transcripts, for example, when Hannah discussed the prospect of failing the assessment, she stated, “I was going to pretend that I had passed as I would feel embarrassed about it.” Another instance was Thea stating that, “My mum said that if I didn’t pass then I should just tell everyone that I did.” When an influential other, such as a parent, is telling a child to mislead others regarding their academic performance, it can be argued that this acknowledges the ‘failure’ as something which the child should be ashamed to accurately convey to others. Whilst the supportive parents have the sole aim of supporting their children, their advice to misinform peers given a disappointing assessment result may in fact confirm the student’s opinion that they have ‘failed’ and that they do have something to in fact feel shame over, which may indeed add to their feelings of pressure and isolation. It is clear that the aim of parents is to support their children in dealing with the potential consequences of failure. However, I would argue that this deception leads to potential feelings of shame and given that the majority of students taking the assessment do not pass, it is potentially negatively impacting on a very large number of students in Wirral each year.

5.3 Bourdieu - Social Identity, Self-Esteem and Shame

As previously highlighted, the habitus of the students is likely to be due to their familial fields. If they consider the fields in which they belong to value success in the selective education process then they may believe that their position in the field is somewhat dependent upon their success in the eleven-plus assessment, as this is what the field values. As the student approaches the eleven-plus, their eligibility to be a part of a field which they believe to be superior, is being externally assessed and they are exposed to the deterministic nature of the assessment and all that goes with the outcome. They consider their position in the field to be dependent upon their success in the eleven-plus assessment and as the measure is based on a single opportunity to overcome something that they cannot evade, stress levels increase and students are fearful that they may not perform as well as they might hope. This was evident throughout the study, for example, Hannah stated, “I am really scared in case I don’t pass as my family all passed.” When discussing failing the eleven-plus and parental support, Thea stated, “I mean I would feel so ashamed if I failed..... I’d be like really embarrassed.” There may also be an unspoken element of pressure coming from the parents’ desire to remain a member of a particular social group. This membership requires the investment of social capital in the form of their child going to grammar school. The symbolic capital of belonging to the same school system unites the actors in a way that could not be maintained should their child not attend the grammar school. Research undertaken by Kindermann, McCollam & Gibson (1996) found that peer groups do in fact promote motivational socialisation with students’ levels of engagement in learning being predicted accurately by their peer group membership. Students with peers who are less motivated will themselves become less motivated to learn and vice versa. Belonging to a group who are motivated to learn and be academically successful, for students from fields placing high value on educational achievements, will be very important for their social identity and self-esteem. This was highlighted throughout the study by all the students, for example when Thea was referring to comprehensive schools, she stated, “Behaviour is really bad and like the people don’t want to learn.” This was similar to a comment made by Hannah who suggested, “I’d probably get bullied or something because I want to learn.” It is assumed by everyone in the study that there are greater numbers of students who are more motivated to learn in the grammar schools which puts additional pressure on students from particular, largely more affluent, fields to be a part of the grammar school system.

As discussed previously, a student's self-esteem is partly dependent upon their membership in a particular group. For certain individuals for whom the field of the grammar school constitutes the only favourable option, due to the way it legitimates the symbolic capital transferred by the parent, their self-esteem is closely related to their ability to pass the assessment.

In my opinion, one of the most toxic and damaging elements of the eleven-plus is the public nature of the experience. As previously discussed in chapter 4.3, shame is considered to be comprised of three aspects, one of the most significant being the social context of the event which causes the emotion, (Jacoby 2003). I believe that the public nature of the event means that there is little opportunity for students to escape from their plight and so this adds to their stress and social anxiety. This social pressure is unavoidable due to the public nature of the results and future educational setting. Publicly being considered to have failed the eleven-plus in specific contexts, particularly for those where the familial field values grammar schools, will arguably result in a student experiencing shame, particularly if the outcome was dramatically different from that which the student anticipated. These issues were highlighted throughout the study, for example when Thea referred to her uniform as a 'badge' which effectively told the public whether you had passed the eleven-plus or not. Fiona also suggested that there are, "...other people in the family who will make my mum feel bad if I fail." I would argue that having knowledge of family members who will make your parents 'feel bad' as a consequence of your failure in an assessment would contribute significantly to feelings of shame. Concerns about potential feelings of shame will arguably cause feelings of anxiety and stress leading up to the assessments. The public nature of the failure and the feelings of shame are referred to frequently throughout the transcripts used in the study. The students are clearly aware that they cannot avoid sharing the outcome of the assessment and they all believe that they will be judged. An example of this was when Hannah spoke about a member of her family stating that, "They are like quite judgemental." This feeling of being judged was common throughout the study.

Students receive their results in October of year 6, this is nine months before they will leave to go to secondary school. A major theme highlighted by all the students was their membership of a group which permeates all of their thoughts and feelings. Once students gained their results and discovered their secondary school destinations, the different groups of students began to change as students moved from one social group into another, altering their, 'cultural trajectories,' (Webb et al, 2002). The movement from one social group into

another is driven by the necessity to ensure an effective transition into secondary school, however, it could be argued that this altering of actors within the fields as friendships are re-aligned actually has the unintended consequence of impacting negatively on the self-esteem and self-efficacy of the students. This was evident in the second half of the study after the students had obtained their results, for example, Fiona was 'really sad' as her best friend had passed the eleven-plus and was now becoming friends with different girls who had also passed the assessment. This behaviour was recognised by all the group with Thea also commenting that specific students were, "making new friends now, who have passed the eleven-plus, so that they can all go to West Kirby together." Kindermann et al, (1996) suggest that members of peer groups encourage one another to become similar in their level of academic motivation and that students with friends with less motivation will impact them negatively. As the groups re-align and new fields of actors emerge, each with discretely different attitudes towards secondary education and eleven-plus success, it may result in many students having lower self-esteem and self-efficacy. I would argue that the selective education system which leads to feelings of isolation and low self-esteem in young children has no place in a modern progressive society which should promote the emotional wellbeing of young people.

5.4 Bourdieu – Belittling the ‘other’

In the transcripts, almost all of the students belittled the school they believed they would not be attending before taking the assessment. This occurred again following their results. In some cases, the belittling of the other school type was scathing, suggestive of comprehensive schools being full of ill mannered, poorly behaved students who frequently required high levels of support with their learning. Students who were going on to attend grammar school, or who would not attend comprehensive school using alternative methods, were far more derogatory about comprehensive schools than those going to comprehensive school were about grammar schools. For example, when talking about comprehensive schools, Fiona stated, “Kids that go there don’t really care about their education.” She later relayed a conversation with her aunty who described her son’s negative experience with pupil behaviour whilst attending a comprehensive school stating, “...his mum says that that wouldn’t have happened if he’d gone to the grammar school.”

Students convey their thoughts and feelings about these schools as if they have experienced them directly, when of course, they have not. The majority of their information appears to come from their familial fields as most of the students use very adult language and attribute much of their knowledge to the adults around them at home. Those who are investing in tutoring prior to taking the assessment are generally more negative about the other schools. This increases noticeably following the results of the eleven-plus when they ‘passed’. Following the results, students appeared more negative about, ‘the other,’ than they had previously; this was true for all the students to varying degrees. I would suggest that familial fields which extol the virtues of a grammar school education are assisting in the development of the students’ habitus. The student then goes on to pass the eleven-plus and gains external validity that they are suitable to be educated in the grammar school. In the context of the primary school, the school represents a field and it caters for all the individual needs of children in the local area. When students leave this field, they have preconceived ideas about the school they are going on to attend. The field of the grammar school has a social identity which is widely considered to be more academic, while the comprehensive school is considered by many to be less academic (Skipper and Douglas, 2016). This is illustrated throughout the study, one comment from Thea was particularly interesting when she stated, “The teachers aren’t as good in the comprehensive schools, the best teachers are in the grammar schools.” There are several other issues which divide opinions, such as sport and socio-economic factors. For example, Jacob described the grammar school students as “too

posh.” This may be another instance of the ‘fish out of water’ concept, where the student believes that the field of the grammar school is unfamiliar and that they would struggle to interact within this field.

An issue surrounding field and habitus and the belittling of others became evident as the students began to establish new friendship groups clearly along the lines of future destination post primary school. Evidence from the second transcript suggests that this friendship transition apparently happens very quickly after students gain their eleven-plus results. The habitus of the students who are going to grammar school may frequently be similar but after external validation that they are suitable members of the field of the grammar school, they view others who share this status in a positive manner (Kindermann et al, 1996). An example of this in the study was when Thea passed the assessment and then stated, “I’ll keep in touch with my other friends for a bit but realistically, we won’t keep in touch after a while, we’ll have new friends like us.” There are other psychological reasons for aligning oneself with students who will be going on to attend the same secondary school, as this will aid a more effective transition. This is clear in the transcripts, for example when Fiona talks about realigning of friendship groups before going to secondary school, she states, “I reckon it’s just because she’ll need mates when she goes there.”

Students who passed the eleven-plus were publicly impolite about the schools that students would attend if they had not passed, for example when discussing students who failed to pass the eleven-plus, Thea stated, “Well I’m not saying that if you fail then you’re not clever, I mean that’s what some people sometimes do think about people who fail.” This may be because of feelings of superiority and students now aligning themselves with the values they associate with their new field. The impact this has on the wellbeing of the students who have not passed cannot be beneficial, in fact it surprised me, as the researcher, how those who passed were socially able to speak in such a way about the other schools whilst sitting next to students who had not passed, or chosen not to take, the eleven-plus assessment. When describing students who had chosen not to take the assessment, Hannah suggested that not taking the assessment was because, “They weren’t going to pass and so they don’t have to deal with failing because that makes them feel, well, you know, a bit stupid.” Students who were going to attend the different schools, such as comprehensive schools, aligned themselves with similar students who had the same future destination, insisting that this was the most appropriate destination for them. Students highlighted characteristics such as sports, for example, football, which most students in the group associated with the comprehensive

schools as the sport of choice for those students. There are examples of this throughout the transcripts, particularly from the two boys. In one conversation about the local comprehensive school, Mark stated, “The kids at Woody are really good at footy,” and Jacob also stated, “I’d much rather play footy and stuff like that than cricket and rugby.”

For Bourdieu, social reproduction takes place through the habitus. It is appreciable why students who have passed the eleven-plus assessment may feel relieved given the pressure they have experienced due to their respective familial fields. A student who has passed the assessment has been externally verified as belonging to the ‘knowledge class’ and so their position within the field is consolidated and social reproduction has succeeded, entitling them to continue their cultural trajectory. Whilst ‘successful’ students in the transcripts always use tutoring as a means of depersonalising the ‘failure’ of their peers, they are clear that the diet on offer in comprehensive schools is less rich than that on offer in the grammar schools. This is clearly conveyed by almost all students in the study, an interesting example of this is when Thea suggested, “The kids in grammar schools want to learn and get good jobs in the future but in other schools like Woodchurch, the kids like throw chairs and stuff and disrupt your learning so you can’t learn.” Given that the students felt this way suggests that, as parents, they will ensure that their offspring are given every opportunity to ensure that this privilege and social division is cemented for generations to come. I would argue that dismantling this stratified and hierarchical system would aid in reducing the social division which has persisted for decades.

5.5 Bourdieu - Coping Strategies

Some of the students leading up to and following the results of the eleven-plus employed different coping strategies so that they might better deal with feelings of failure. Some of the students conveyed the impression that they had little or no tutoring as this gave them the socially acceptable mechanism through which to describe their 'failure,' it removed culpability from the students as their reason for perceived failure is made legitimate and no longer personal. One of the students was being dishonest and was tutored prior to taking the eleven-plus for over a year, yet she stated that she had no tutoring. When her friend relayed that this was in fact not true, she admitted she was tutored however, following the results in which she did not meet the required level, she again vehemently denied having ever been tutored. This was a narrative her peers were happy to agree to, aware that she was using a socially accepted way to deal with her emotions. I would argue that a field which puts a child into a situation in which they are forced to misrepresent themselves in order to limit the damage to their self-esteem is questionable, especially given the current climate in which levels poor levels of mental health and wellbeing are being experienced by ever greater numbers of children (Weare, 2013).

The transcripts convey that some students were encouraged by their families to misguide others about the outcome of the eleven-plus assessment if it was not positive. This was only applicable in situations when the student would have gone on to attend either an independent or religious school with academic selection as the true nature of the outcome of the assessment would not necessarily be transparent. For students in which failing to gain a place in a grammar school would result in attending a place in the local comprehensive school, there was no advice provided by parents to ensure that they misguided those around them, this appears to be because there would be no way to maintain the deception due to the school the students would go on to attend.

I would assert that in addition to aiming to ensure that the students have reduced levels of shame associated with 'failing' to pass the eleven-plus assessment, the socio-economically advantaged parents who encouraged their children to misinform those around them were also doing so in order to maintain the cultural trajectory of their children and themselves. As habitus always 'makes a virtue out of necessity,' these decisions are not made uninfluenced by the habitus of the stakeholders (Bourdieu, 1990). As the habitus is always constituted in moments of practice, when the set of dispositions meets a particular problem, understanding

the 'feel for the game', which is effectively managing the potentially disruptive 'failure' to pass the eleven-plus will result in an alternative option which it can be suggested by stakeholders was the genuine favoured option without altering the cultural trajectory of the child or their family. For example, every member of Hannah's family had passed the eleven-plus and she felt significant pressure from the wider family, with her parent's consent, if she failed, she was, "...going to pretend that I had passed as I would feel embarrassed about it." This was only possible as she would have gone on to attend a Catholic school rather than the comprehensive school. This is similar to Thea's situation as she was also encouraged to misinform people if she failed to pass stating, "My mum said that if I didn't pass then I should just tell everyone that I did but that I've like chosen to go to private school." It is interesting to note that of the students who did not reach the required grade in the eleven-plus assessment, when they convey the outcome to their peers, it is very common for students to convey that they 'failed' by one or two marks. In the main study, two students did not reach the required mark and they both suggested they had missed by one or two marks. Whilst this may of course be true in these cases, this may be a mechanism used by children and their parents in order to limit feelings of inadequacy.

One of the outcomes of the selective education system in Wirral is that children and their families develop strategies in order to mitigate against the potential damage that failure may cause. Most of the strategies highlighted in the study involve students being dishonest about their access to tutors or indeed the outcome of the assessment. I feel that as adults, it our responsibility to create a society in which young people can flourish and feel safe. If young children are placed in a situation in which lying is the preferred option when discussing their academic ability, which we should be celebrating, then I believe as adults we have failed in creating an education system which caters for the needs of all children.

5.6 Bourdieu - Fortunate to have the eleven-plus

All students who passed agreed that the eleven-plus is a very positive thing and that they consider themselves to be 'lucky' to reside in Wirral where they have the selective education system, after they gained the results. Hannah indicated that as she passed then does think it is a good idea but if she failed then she acknowledged that she would not like the eleven-plus and the selective education system. Hannah had a tutor for a year prior to taking the eleven-plus and both her parents hold academic education roles. Hannah appeared to be more aware of the misrecognition of social agents occurring, often with their own complicity, and the way in which the system was being legitimised through the eleven-plus assessment. She favoured the system when she was one of the 21% who gained a place at grammar school but acknowledged that she would not favour the system if she found herself in the bottom 79%, clearly accepting that their options were less advantageous than hers now she had passed. The students' habitus, whilst not solely a product of class, it is significantly impacted by class affiliations and so her habitus embodied what she would consider to be a grammar school student. If she failed to gain a place in the grammar school then she would have considered herself a 'fish out of water' in the comprehensive education system, she stated, "I know that I won't fit in if I don't get into the grammar school." But she would also experience negative emotions as a consequence of failing to have her position in the field externally verified and so her cultural trajectory would alter from that she may have anticipated. I would also argue that as a consequence of her access to capital, she is aware of the advantages such capital can bestow and so she may have a greater appreciation of what the consequences of failing to gain such capital for herself may have on her future prospects. For example, during the first conversation she stated, "Go to a grammar school if you are able to, as that helps you go to university and get a good job in the future."

When asked about the selective education system in Wirral during the second meeting after students had obtained their results, the voices of those who passed dominated the conversations regarding the virtues of a selective education system. The three students who passed all spoke about the positive aspects of the system, most notably that comprehensive schools offer higher levels of academic support for the less able students and offer more challenging work for more academic students, delivered by higher quality teachers. Fiona did not pass the eleven plus but instead passed the assessment in order to gain a place in the local selective Catholic school. She remained a partial advocate of the system, suggesting, "It's a good idea to have the eleven-plus because those who are talented have a great chance."

However, Fiona now also acknowledged that, “It doesn’t give those who aren’t as clever a chance to go to the school.” Jacob did not offer many comments relating to his feelings on the selective education system after receiving his results. He was the only student in the study going on to attend a comprehensive school. Both students who did not pass had less to say about the system but they all continued their support for the selective education system to varying degrees although this may be partly due to the actors in the arena at the time of the research, the majority of whom had passed. The students in all cases had already begun to highlight the positive elements of their prospective fields and aligned the accentuated aspects to their own habitus. This would resonate with the qualities of the different fields, and it was unsurprising that the students were broadly in agreement with the system which continues to divide them. This resonates starkly with Bourdieu’s assertion that systems that are designed by those it favours and are rarely questioned by those it does not, another example of symbolic violence being enacted upon the population with their complicity.

Having researched the SES data and learning that the largest determinant of whether or not a student will access grammar school education is their socio-economic status, I find it frustrating how students are so supportive of the system which frequently divides them. There are of course many reasons for this and this group of students is not representative of the school cohort, however, given the divisive nature of the process and the emotional impact it has on students, it is surprising that the system has so much support from the students in the group.

5.7 SES Data and the Emergent Themes.

Familial fields with high levels of economic capital can effectively use their capital in order to increase the opportunities for their children, this is evident when students are tutored for long periods, often more frequently than once weekly. For example, Thea's parents ensured that she had full days dedicated to being tutored, "My mum and dad booked me into some extra tutoring days," and Hannah was doing, "...about four or five practice tests a week." Thea also stated that, "People started getting tutored in year 4." There are many reasons for parents encouraging their child to have tutoring. As grammar school education statistically leads to better outcomes for students, this rewards those students with symbolic capital in the form of qualifications which they can later exchange for economic capital (Gorard, 2018).

The SES data clearly demonstrates the direct correlation between familial economic capital and attendance at grammar school. The prime minister, at the time of writing, Theresa May, frequently talks about her belief that grammar schools contribute to social mobility. However, recent SES data does not suggest that this is the case (Burgess et al, 2017).

A familial field which has historically had high levels of economic capital is likely to also have high levels of cultural capital. This can be evident in the habitus of the members of the field, as they will value particular aspects of culture which others may not appreciate (Webb et al, 2002). Cultural capital is evident in the way a person walks, talks and moves within the world. Formal learning confers significant cultural capital when compared to other forms of learning (Webb et al, 2002). As the cultural capital of knowledge is inequitably distributed in selective authorities, favouring the more affluent families (Burgess et al, 2017), this form of capital becomes a symbol of social privilege and something to which individuals concerned with demonstrating their capital will likely concern themselves with, as it plays an essential role in the reproduction of dominant social relations and structures (Webb et al, 2002).

As economic capital leads to increased attendance at grammar school and increased potential for offspring to gain more economic capital, it can be argued that this historic economic capital will lead to these familial fields experiencing high levels of cultural capital. As the children existing in such familial fields have a habitus which is informed by the field, it is likely that when they go on to attend grammar school that the grammar school in turn will be shaped as a product of the habitus of the individual students from which the field is comprised. As these students are likely to have higher levels of cultural capital, the field of the grammar school will value higher levels of cultural capital and assist in ensuring that

participants in the field are endowed with greater cultural capital as a consequence of residing in the field. This would suggest that students completing a grammar school education would likely have higher levels of economic, cultural and symbolic capital when they left. As the SES data suggests that the cycle of access to grammar school repeats, it can be assumed that these higher levels of capital will be associated with a grammar school education. This notion is directly supportive of Bourdieu's argument that education serves to maintain the status quo with children who occupy privileged positions within the social class hierarchy typically ascending to elevated positions in society, whilst children with greater levels of social deprivation remain in dominated roles later in life (Webb et al, 2002).

Aspirational families who want to ensure that they have high levels of social mobility, and who associate the capital associated with grammar schools as beneficial for their children's future, may want to invest in tuition in order to increase the likelihood of their child attending the grammar school. One issue which seems to stem from the perceived levels of capital in the grammar schools is that many parents view their child accessing a grammar school as socially advantageous for themselves as adults. Affluent families with high access to capital are statistically far more likely to have children attending grammar schools and so an association between children at grammar schools and familial capital emerges. This link, unsurprisingly, encourages some families to consider their child's attendance in a grammar school as a status symbol, or form of social capital, which undoubtedly increases the pressure on the students to pass eleven-plus and promote further division between students.

By contrast, disadvantaged families, who do not have the levels of capital associated with the grammar school, and who may consider their field cannot provide their children with a habitus which is able to function successfully in a grammar school setting, frequently view the grammar schools as elite. For these schools are 'not for the likes of us', as the students would be like 'fish out of water'. Instead, they ensure that their offspring are endowed with a habitus which enables them to function successfully in a comprehensive education, which is statistically likely to be more similar to that which they themselves have attended a generation ago.

Past Prime Minister, Theresa May's support of grammar schools is based on perceived ideas about social mobility. The SES data suggests that selective education does not impact social mobility for reasons highlighted in chapter 3. Aspiring families may allocate resources to influence their child's likelihood of gaining access to a grammar school as they may desire

their children to be upwardly mobile in future. Bourdieu refers to becoming socially mobile as a, 'cleft habitus' (Reay, 2014), an experience in which the actor straddles two different habitus - the first they may be leaving behind, the second the newer habitus formed as a consequence of being a part of an, 'elite' field as they become more socially mobile. May's support of grammar schools should ensure that the socio-economically disadvantaged are not excluded (Ware, 2017) in order to ensure the prevailing 'doxa', solely based on the transparent externally validated cognitive assessment which is the eleven-plus remains unquestioned. This research found that whilst the students who passed the assessment simultaneously straddled both worlds prior to 'passing' the assessment, they quickly confirmed their 'elite' position, having little regard for those navigating the 'other' field.

Ware (2017) argues that in England since the 1980's, social structures have remained fixed. That is that, say, there are a fixed number of senior roles in society and a fixed number of lower positions in the workplace. He asserts that pursuing social mobility aggressively would be socially disruptive due to the nature of the English economy which cannot create more senior roles in society. I would argue, therefore, that if an actor becomes upwardly mobile and there are limited places, there must be another actor who is downwardly mobile to maintain the economic equilibrium. If Bourdieu is correct in his assertion that education serves to maintain the status quo in society (Bourdieu et al, 2002) as the SES data confirms, then more affluent families must ensure that they invest heavily in tutoring in order to ensure that their offspring do not become downwardly mobile. From their privileged position, it is clear why such families will ensure their children are tutored in order to maintain their hierarchy in society and so maintain the status quo.

It can be argued that those students who have a habitus which is formed in a familial field rich in all three forms of capital, may feel additional, albeit significantly supported, pressure to pass the eleven-plus and go on to attend a grammar school. Such schools are frequently considered to encompass many of the qualities of independent schools, without any of the financial cost. I would assert that given the perception that grammar schools are rich in various forms of capital, students from such privileged backgrounds would have a desire to attend such institutions due an intrinsic desire to be around people they consider to be like them. The opposite might be true of such students when they consider attending a comprehensive school where they may believe that their capital will not permit them to access the resources that a particular field holds in high regard. This desire to be with other people, who may have access to similar capital and may want to access the capital within the

field of the grammar school, would all put significant pressure on certain individuals to pass the assessment, especially given their negative perceptions of comprehensive schools. This highlights the essence of the sociological concept that Bourdieu was interested in; the interplay between human freedom and constraints imposed and created by society.

One could argue that if an individual accentuates the qualities which better align them to the qualities the field values, then if there is a distinction between different fields, it is clear why students may speak negatively about the field in which they will not become a member. A student with high levels of capital will want to align themselves with a field which they consider to value and enrich such capital. Conversely, students with little capital and a habitus which has qualities favoured in a different field will see the high capital field as inaccessible and not appropriate to their habitus. For affluent students who pass the eleven-plus then, it is clear that due to their capital, that they would feel, 'like a fish in water,' in the grammar school. What is not clear, however, is why they denigrate the comprehensive schools so publicly, especially given that the large majority of their peers, approximately 90% in the research group, will be going on to attend one. Perhaps this was due to feelings of superiority, encouraged by a stratified and hierarchical system.

For socio-economically deprived students who did not pass the eleven-plus then the evidence from the transcripts suggested that they were experiencing feelings of dissatisfaction, frequently compounded by the comments made by some students who had passed the assessment. I would argue that as they are becoming members of a different field which they consider to have different values and cultures, these feelings cause them to identify with the perceived characteristics the field values but highlight the differences between the elusive other elusive field and the one they will likely become a part of. Such students seem to highlight the issues with the field of the grammar school, identifying reasons why they would not fit in, however they appear to do this with a less powerful voice. I would argue that they are forced into this position as taking the eleven-plus suggests that the grammar school was in fact the desired destination for their secondary education. There are of course students who took the eleven-plus whilst frequently stating that they would not attend the grammar school whatever the outcome, however these voices seem to be disregarded by peers. As the majority of students do take the eleven-plus, I would suggest that they would like to consider themselves as having a suitable habitus and capital which is valued by the field and indeed gain access to the capital within the field. However, when the results of the eleven-plus assessment prevent this path then students reconsider the virtues of the different fields. This

process enables such students to identify reasons why their habitus may not identify with the field of the grammar schools and the forms of capital they contain. I would suggest that as many such students have suffered as a consequence of the selection process, identifying issues with the grammar school they have failed to gain access to is an unsurprising response to their situation.

All the students who passed the eleven-plus felt fortunate to live in a selective education authority. All the students believed the eleven-plus was a good idea but those who passed particularly believed this to be true. From the perspective of those who passed the eleven-plus, the SES data suggests that they are statistically more likely to have higher levels of economic capital and so in many cases also cultural capital. A system which provides such a clear distinction between fields is of course useful to students who identify strongly with the advantaged group. Students who have access to capital are far more likely to pass the eleven-plus, mainly due to the capital they already have, this then bestows them with very high levels of symbolic capital, simply by passing the eleven-plus, five years before they are due to take any formal examinations.

In the primary school used for this research, there are 76 students in the focus year group, almost 90% of whom took the eleven-plus assessment, however only 16% of the entire year group passed the assessment in the year of the study, this is approximately average for the school. It could be argued that the grammar school is the destination of choice for the majority, despite the fact that relatively few are destined to pass the eleven-plus and gain access. I would argue that the majority of students would like the opportunity to access the capital that the grammar school enables and they are positive about having the opportunity, even though they are possibly not aware of the wider contributory factors which influence the likelihood of passing. The students' perception is that access to the grammar school is based on how, 'clever' they are and if they have tutoring. This is clear throughout the study, for example when discusses her friends passing the assessment she states, "I am clever but all my friends are like really clever and they will all pass." The word clever is used by all students in the sample when describing accessing grammar school. All students also equate passing the eleven-plus to tutoring, for example Fiona also suggested, "I think if I'd been tutored then I might have had a chance of passing it." They do not seem to be aware that other sociological factors impact on their ability to access grammar school education. This is surprising given that the students frequently convey that they consider the grammar school students to be 'posh,' which suggests a perception of the workings of cultural capital, yet they do not seem

to make the explicit correlation that being 'posh' must then somehow increase an individual's chances of gaining access. This is due to the perception that the system is indeed fair and based solely on a student's academic ability. An interesting aspect of this argument is that during the study, students openly discussed, and in some cases, highlighted socio-economic inequalities in the group. For example, Thea actively discussed topics which conveyed her socio-economic context. One example was when she discussed foreign holidays without being asked, "We spend loads of time abroad, we're going to New Zealand this summer for three weeks, I've been to Australia a few times." Thea also talks about being able to attend a private school if she fails the eleven-plus and states, "I mean it would be really expensive to go to private school." She understands her position of relative affluence and knows that this gives her an unfair advantage, "I have a tutor and it helps me as some people can't afford one but that's what it's like isn't it?" I would argue that although Thea makes the point very clearly in the study, all the students understand that there is a link between economic capital and accessing grammar school education. For example, when Jacob refers to tutoring, he insists, "It's too expensive." I would argue that when referring to selective education, government policy refers to social mobility and a meritocracy, however, the perception of students and their lived experience in this study does not entirely correlate with this policy.

For the majority who do not gain the grade required to access the grammar school, it is difficult for them to then argue against the system, which one might perceive as subjugating them. They are complicit in their own subjugation by agreeing with the system, believing that it will facilitate social mobility, when in fact the SES data makes it clear that the opposite is in fact true. People are of course free to remove themselves from the selective education system and all the distress is caused if they wish. However, doing so, means that they have no option but to attend a comprehensive school.

6.0 Final Thoughts

Students in this study all agree that passing the eleven-plus assessment is not possible without tutoring. There are of course a number of psychological and sociological reasons for this behaviour such as not wanting to potentially humiliate another student or cause greater levels of stress in what they are aware is already a high stress environment. Councils in fully selective education authorities do not permit primary schools to prepare students for the eleven-plus assessment, which is consistent with government philosophy that access to grammar school is based on academic ability, regardless of social class, and not dependent upon where a child attends school. An independent reporter for the BBC went around ten independent schools in one selective education authority and found that nine of the schools were regularly preparing students for the eleven-plus assessment, a pattern which is replicated in many comprehensive primary schools (Busby, 2018). I assert that, whilst specific comprehensive primary schools and many independent primary schools are preparing students for the eleven-plus assessment, likely due to parental expectations, this exacerbates the socio-economic divide as less affluent children are not getting eleven-plus preparation in schools and they are also unlikely to obtain this outside of school through a private tutor. Privileged students are likely to benefit from guidance in school and almost certainly benefit outside of school through a private tutor.

Literature from local grammar schools suggests that students should not be tutored for the eleven-plus assessment but rather that they take part in familiarisation exercises so that they are familiar with the types of questions they will face (Wirral, 2018). I would argue that this is due to the small number of students who are taught intensively for several years how to pass the eleven-plus, a process known locally as, 'hot housing.' When asked, teachers in some local grammar schools have suggested that this makes the children unhappy when they gain a place at the grammar schools, as these students find it difficult to maintain the academic standards expected from them and maintain the pace of learning. I would argue, that this disingenuous advice and guidance from schools is a form of symbolic violence. It is what Bourdieu refers to as, 'pedagogic action' (Webb et al, 2002). The school are teaching the parents and carers that there should be no need for tutoring and of course philosophically this is true. However, students who are not tutored are less likely to pass the eleven-plus assessment (Sutton Trust, 2013). If a parent or carer takes the information as it is conveyed and does not have their child tutored then they are complicit in their own subjugation. Bourdieu refers to this acceptance of this legitimised social order as, 'misrecognition' (Webb

et al, 2002). I would argue that this 'institutionalised education' is flawed, as more affluent social classes are accessing tutoring and so it is important that people are made more aware of how different social groups are accessing grammar schools. An argument which is frequently used to reduce the disparity between the social classes and their access to grammar schools is that all primary schools should prepare students for the eleven-plus assessment (Wheeler, 2017). Whilst I agree that this is a step towards fairer access, there remains a number of issues which would require addressing, such as the provision of private tutors which are inaccessible to less affluent children. Primary school teachers may legitimately argue that there should be no need to spend curriculum time teaching children skills which may enable them to succeed in such an arbitrary test while running the risk that those who do would likely bestow the advantage disproportionately towards students who they felt would be better suited towards a grammar school education (Webb, 2002). There are of course a large number of other barriers to equitable access such as the familial discourse, which may not provide more deprived children with the necessary language to be able to thrive in an educational setting (Sadovnik, 1991). Such language conveys information in a particular way which is well aligned with the more affluent families; it is, 'like a foreign language which certain students have already mastered.' (Webb, 2002, p. 114).

Given that the data presented in the thesis conveys that the selective education process can be very damaging to the mental health and wellbeing of young people. I would suggest that focusing on equitable access, whilst preferable to the current situation, it is not the desired trajectory for secondary school provision in Wirral. I believe that a more ambitious approach is necessary which offers equal education provision for all students regardless of economic context.

The familial field may exert symbolic violence on the children within the field. The arbitrariness of the educational hierarchies is hidden and presented as necessary. This is an unintentional consequence of symbolic violence being executed on the parents. Parents frequently accept the system as legitimate, highlighting the hierarchical nature of the system and the role the actor might take in this socially constructed hierarchy. The child in the more affluent familial field will then utilise the tutor in order to ensure that they take their place in society and 'reproduce' the social order. Capital conferred through formal education is increasingly important in the West due to governments viewing education as a vehicle for reducing social disadvantage. This means that educational qualifications are a pre-requisite

for success in an increasing number of fields so there is increased competition for the available cultural capital (Webb, 2002).

A selective education system is frequently justified in terms of offering social mobility. In a period of slow economic growth and relative stagnation over a significant period, there is little room for the middle classes to expand. I would argue that given the current economic trajectory of the West, if there is to be social mobility enabling parts of the population to be upwardly mobile, then there must then be downward mobility for other individuals - given that there are only so many middle-class roles in society. Given this scenario and that fields with high access to capital want to ensure that members of the field maintain and indeed expand on the capital available to them, it is evident that such fields will use their capital in order to maximise the potential of their members, for example, their children. I would argue that those without capital are less able to successfully navigate the selective system for the benefit of their children and so are disadvantaged as they are less aware of the unwritten 'rules of the game' and how to ensure that their children are more likely to succeed in an arena which is unfamiliar. I believe that this makes the selection process unfair for the majority of students who, according to SES data, have a smaller chance of passing and so a greater chance of feeling inadequate due to a system which legitimises their failure as if it is the student who is somehow deficient. Throughout this research, the students extolled the virtues of the selective authority in which they reside, suggesting that they had the opportunity to access what they consider to be essentially a, 'free private school.' The students consider the assessment and its purpose as a positive. Their academic success or failure is legitimised by a system, the design of which is flawed in several ways. One glaring flaw is that if it were solely based on 'fixed measurable intelligence' at the age of 10, then one would expect less disparity between social classes. A further point would be that if intelligence is indeed fixed, why are young people repeatedly cognitively assessed over the course of their formal education? This would suggest that intelligence is not fixed. Also, despite recent efforts by the University of Durham to create a, 'tutor-proof,' eleven-plus assessment, the lead professor has stated that grammar schools should not be expanded in order to promote social mobility as a 'tutor-proof' test has so far eluded them (Millar, 2016).

I would argue that for those students who do not gain the grade in their eleven-plus assessment required to attend grammar school, that their subjugation is legitimised by the selection process which leads them to believe that they are less academically able. As the system appears to offer identical opportunities to all students, they are less likely to disagree

and act to change the system as young adults, believing instead that their position in the world is a fair reflection of their academic ability. I believe that this is symbolic violence, exacted upon a population who are also complicit in their subjugation. This resonates with Bourdieu's assertion as education is maintaining the status quo in society.

Although the sample used in the study consisted of just five students, the preliminary research using six students had very similar outcomes. It would be beneficial for future research to study a larger group in order to better explore their thoughts and feelings as they pass through the eleven-plus selection process in order to discover the extent to which the findings are generalisable.

I would suggest that current government policy, which is largely supportive of grammar school education, uses the argument that it promotes social mobility as a justification for this position. As stated in the thesis, based on the data, I would agree with Bourdieu's assertion that education does in fact serve to maintain the socio-economic status quo in society and so I do not believe that selective education offers a solution due to arguments highlighted throughout this thesis. I believe that if government want to address the issue of social mobility then they could focus on promoting educational quality in all comprehensive schools in order to make them a more attractive destination. Efforts in improving outcomes from comprehensive education may reduce the desire for students to go through the selection process, which as I have illustrated creates high levels of stress and anxiety for many, as well as feelings of failure for the majority. Whilst 'setting,' putting students in classes based on academic ability, takes place in many secondary schools in a variety of subjects, I consider that this internal segregation has less impact on the mental health and wellbeing of the students as it would be subject specific and less public.

Another area in which the government might focus is socio-economic inequality. Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) argue that it is not educational opportunity which creates the class divide but rather the opposite. Taking international data, they found that educational outcomes for all students are increased when the society is more financially equal. The study found that a greater discrepancy in economic wealth leads to reduced educational outcomes for students. The study also found that the biggest influence on educational attainment is family background, so if the UK government focused on reducing economic disparity then educational outcomes would likely improve for all students.

It appears from the students' narratives and the review of literature that there is frequently a greater expectation for students from more affluent families to pass the eleven-plus than their less affluent peers, this resonates with Bourdieu's work on symbolic domination, 'the subjective hope of profit tends to be adjusted to the objective probability of profit' (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 216), indicating that those with the least capital tend to be less ambitious than their peers.

I have illustrated that selective secondary education can be damaging to individuals for a number of reasons including those who go on to attend grammar schools and those who attend the comprehensive schools. My experience however, in non-selective education authorities is that selection is taking place inside the majority of schools. Many schools nationally set students according to ability in specific subjects, such as mathematics, and teachers are grouping students according to different measures, for example, the type of additional needs they have. This categorising of students and subsequent groupings in most schools may lead to division within an inclusive comprehensive school in a non-selective education authority. Further research into this area may provide a greater insight into the extent to which this internal division contributes to the emotional stress suffered by students and if there is a relationship between these internal groupings and socio-economic background. However, as the nature of the division is less public and often subject specific, this selective system is likely to be less emotionally disruptive for students when compared to academic selection for entry into grammar schools in selective authorities.

Education is a very important field as, through its capacity to confer cultural capital, it has the capability to be an effective mechanism to facilitate significant social change, particularly given the need for such capital in an increasing number of roles in Western society. The distribution of this capital however, is not equitable as schools and the school system function to reproduce social inequalities, largely dominated by the ruling 'disinterested' classes (Webb, 2002). Access to grammar school education, and the overt segregation it causes, is an explicit example of the privileged utilising the available capital in order to ensure that they continue to occupy particular elevated roles in society. This continues to make a grammar school education a marker of prestige and social privilege, given the relationship between the capital of those who attend and those who do not. The grammar school students who are then learning within the same field, develop a habitus which conveys natural dispositions towards learning and academic success. This adds to the distinction between the schools, making the grammar school the only option for many, frequently affluent, families. This study has found

that within this social context, students for whom attending grammar school is ‘the only option,’ often due to the familial field, will experience high levels of stress and anxiety when passing through the selective education process. This is due to feelings of potential shame should they ‘fail’ and, whilst this pressure is not intentionally imposed by their supportive families, there is significant pressure experienced by such students. The research found that those who are less invested in gaining access to grammar school may experience stress but to a lesser extent, but experience negative feelings about themselves nonetheless. The system is maintained through pedagogic action which conveys to the students that grammar school selection is a natural process which provides a tailored education, specific to the needs of the individual; this symbolic violence is exerted on all students. Some will experience this violence as pressure due to the perception that their capital should endow them with a place in the grammar school field whilst others may feel that their subjugation is legitimised through the assessment process, what Bourdieu refers to as ‘misrecognition.’ The fact that some students from deprived backgrounds do indeed pass the eleven-plus and go on to attend grammar schools maintains the illusion that access is in fact fair which of course perpetuates the ‘doxic attitude.’

I embarked on this research due to the experiences of my daughter. I have learned a great deal about why she experienced heightened levels of anxiety as a consequence of passing through the eleven-plus assessment, which her brother had passed a year earlier. Her familial field is dominated by what Bourdieu refers to as, ‘intellectual workers,’ which, despite the best interests of the familial field, will have placed an intrinsic expectation on my daughter that she should pass the assessment. My daughter was tutored once weekly for the assessment for approximately eight months leading up to it. She is indeed a typical student emerging from a field in which the value gained from academic cultural capital is recognised and valued, this placed pressure on my daughter which she experienced in isolation, not disclosing these feelings until her self-harm was discovered. Her plight was not uncommon and could be argued, appears to be rather typical given the findings of the research. Given the ever-increasing levels of mental health issues in schools, and based on the research findings, I can see no justification for the continuation of selective education given that navigating this path is potentially harmful to our children. The findings also indicate that this harm is felt to a greater extent by those in elevated social positions, yet it is people in such positions who enable the system to maintain the status quo, despite their own offspring potentially suffering disproportionately as a consequence of the selection process.

Using Bourdieu's tools, I have demonstrated that equitable access to education is not possible in a selective education authority and that the social context of the eleven-plus assessment makes it a very challenging time for many children and their families. Indeed, I have shown that access to grammar school education is dependent upon a child's socio-economic context. I have demonstrated how the subterfuge is achieved using misrecognition and symbolic violence so that many social actors appear convinced by the meritocracy. If the UK government wishes to address the wellbeing of young people and offer equal education provision for all students then I believe efforts to create a 'tutor proof' assessment are irrelevant as there is no need for such a tool. In selective LEA's, there is more disparity in the educational outcomes from the grammar school and comprehensive school cohorts than different schools in non-selective authorities, but when the total cohort is considered, outcomes are equal in selective and non-selective authorities. This illustrates that the selective process perpetuates and entrenches social division. When we consider this alongside the findings of Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) who demonstrate that educational outcomes for all students are improved when there is less income inequality, it is clear that the selective education system does not promote social mobility, but rather impedes it. Lucas stated, 'The socioeconomically advantaged seek out whatever qualitative differences there are at that level and use their advantages to secure quantitatively similar but qualitatively better education' (Lucas, 2001, p. 1652). Given that more socio-economically advantaged families will likely achieve better outcomes for their children using whatever means are available, there can be no justification for this outmoded and regressive system of education which only serves to address the needs of the affluent few and maintain the socio-economic status quo in this selective education authority.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Freedom of Information (FOI) Request from Wirral Council.

Number of students taking the eleven-plus assessment.

	Entry Year		
	2015	2016	2017
Wirral schools only			
Sat test	1587	1478	1501
Met - Female	347	316	344
Met - Male	330	348	370

Pupils attending Wirral schools only, school at time of test - includes private and special schools. Excludes pupils in home education.

"Met" includes pupils reaching the standard and those deemed to have reached the standard by the Independent Assessment Board

Includes initial and late tests.

Non-faith selection test only.

Information correct as at 31/08/2018

The number of students who have sat the 11 plus by gender

Gender	Year			
	2014	2013	2012	2011
F	878	867	738	813
M	857	769	802	723
Total	1735	1636	1540	1536

Total number of students who passed in each year by gender

Gender	Year			
	2014	2013	2012	2011
F	396	399	402	405
M	412	373	410	377
Total	808	772	812	782

Non-Catholic grammar tests only

Includes main and late tests.

Information produced 24th March 2015

Appendix B – Freedom of Information (FOI) Request from Wirral Council.

Feeder Primary School Information.

School Name	2014 Sat	2014 Met	2013 sat	2013 met	2012 sat	2012 met	2011 sat	2011 met
Acresfield Community Primary School	*	*					*	*
Aintree Davenhill Primary School			*	0				
Aughton Town Green Primary School			*	0				
Avalon School	7	6	9	6	9	9	9	8
Barlows Primary School			*	*				
Barnston Primary School	6	6	16	6	19	8	8	*
Bedford Drive Primary School	8	*	*	0	*	*	6	*
Belgrave Primary School	*	*	*	*	*	*		
Bidston Avenue Primary School	8	*	*	*	11	7	*	0
Bidston Village C/E Primary School	*	0	*	*	*	0	*	0
Birkenhead Preparatory School	12	6	*	*	*	*	8	6
Bishop Wilson CE Primary School	*	0	*	*	*	*	*	*
Black Horse Hill Junior School	11	7	9	*	11	*	16	7
Blacklow Brow Primary School			*	0				
Bodnant Junior School					*	*		
Borthyn V.C. Primary School	*	*						
Brackenwood Junior School	15	7	22	9	23	6	21	14
British International School Phuket							*	0
Brookdale Primary School	9	*	9	6	6	6	9	*
Brookhurst Primary School	7	*	9	*	8	*	12	*
Brookside Primary School			*	0				
Bwlchgwyn C. P. School							*	0
Calverley Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School	*	0						
Cambridge Road Community Primary School			*	0				
Capenhurst CE Primary School	*	*	*	*			*	*
Castleway Primary School	*	0	*	*	*	*		
Cathcart Street Primary School	*	0	*	0				
Chester Blue Coat CE Primary School	*	*	*	*	*	0		
Childer Thornton Primary School	7	*	6	*	*	0	*	0
Christ Church C/E Primary School (Birken	*	0	*	0	*	0	*	0
Christ Church C/E Primary School (Moreto	11	*	11	6	6	*	13	*
Christ The King Catholic Primary School	21	11	15	*	19	*	16	*
Church Drive Primary School	14	8	11	*	8	*	*	*
Cole Street Primary School							*	0
Cornist Park C.P. School	*	0						
Cults Primary School			*	0				
Dawpool C/E Primary School	12	8	12	*	7	*	9	*
Devonshire Park Primary School	*	0	*	*	7	*	6	0
Eastway Primary School	*	*	*	0	*	*	*	0
Egremont Primary School	*	0	*	0	*	*		
Ellesmere Port Christ Church CE Primary	*	0						
Elton Primary School	*	*						
Ewloe Green C.P. School	*	0						
Fairfield Preparatory School					*	*		
Fairholme Prep School	*	0	*	*	*	*	*	0
Fender Primary School					*	0		
Firs School	*	*	*	*	7	*	*	*
Florence Melly Community Primary School							*	*
Four-Forest Bilingual International School			*	0				

Gayton Primary School	16	11	16	15	19	14	16	13
Gilbrook School							*	0
Greasby Junior School	17	11	19	13	19	12	19	8
Great Meols Primary School	17	7	19	9	30	11	18	9
Greenleas Primary School	17	6	10	*	6	*	7	*
Grove Street Primary School	7	0	*	*	*	0	*	*
Grovesend Primary School			*	*				
Guilden Sutton CE Primary School	*	*			*	*		
Hammond School	*	*			*	0		
Heswall Primary School	13	6	6	*	8	6	9	*
Heygarth Primary School	9	0	7	*	6	*	*	0
Higher Bebington Junior School	42	29	31	25	45	33	41	29
Hillside Primary School	*	*	*	*	*	0	*	*
Holy Spirit Catholic and CE Aided Primar	*	0	*	*			*	0
Holy Trinity Catholic Primary School			*	0				
Hoylake Holy Trinity C/E Primary School	*	*	9	*	12	*	*	*
Hydesville Tower School			*	0				
Irby Primary School	8	*	7	*	10	*	*	*
J H Godwin Primary School							*	0
Kings School (Chester)	*	*	*	*	*	0	*	*
Kingsmead School (Primary)	*	0	*	*	*	*	*	*
Kingsway Primary School	*	0			*	0	*	0
Ladymount Catholic Primary School	12	6	15	7	17	14	9	*
Lingham Primary School	*	0	*	*	*	*	*	0
Liscard Primary School	10	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Lister Junior School	*	*						
Little Sutton CE Primary School	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Lixwm Primary School	*	0					*	0
Manor Primary School					*	0		
Meadow Primary School	*	*						
Mendell Primary School	*	0	*	0	*	0	*	0
Mersey Park Primary School	*	0	*	*	*	0	7	*
Merton House School							*	*
Mickle Trafford Village School	*	*	*	0	*	*		
Mill View Primary School	*	*	*	0	*	*		
Millfields CE Primary School	*	0	*	0	*	0	*	0
Moore Primary School							*	*
Mount Primary School	8	*	6	*	*	*	*	0
Neston Primary School	*	0					*	*
New Brighton Primary School	7	*	7	*	*	*	*	*
Newton Primary School	*	*	*	*			*	0
Oldfield Primary School	*	*					*	*
Our Lady and St Edwards Catholic Primary			*	*	*	0		
Our Lady Immaculate Catholic Primary Sch	*	*						
Our Lady of Pity Catholic Primary School	32	19	21	16	26	15	26	10
Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Primar	*	*	8	*	*	*	*	*
Our Ladys Bishop Eton Catholic Primary S					*	0		
Overchurch Junior School	15	*	15	*	14	8	12	*
Overleigh St Marys CE Primary School	*	*			*	*		
Park Primary School	*	*	*	*	*	0	*	*
Parkgate Primary School	9	*	8	*	6	*	10	7
Parklands Community Primary School							*	*
Pensby Primary School	8	*	*	0	10	*	*	0
Portland Primary School	*	*	*	0			*	*
Poulton Lancelyn Primary School	22	11	29	11	27	16	24	14

Prenton Preparatory School	9	9	*	*	*	*	7	*
Prenton Primary School	15	7	16	8	7	*	10	*
Raeburn Primary School	17	12	18	7	16	7	19	10
Rector Drew V.A. School							*	*
Redcourt St Anselms School	13	6	12	9	17	9	22	17
Rhes-Y-Cae Controlled Primary School							*	0
Rice Lane Junior School							*	0
Rivacre Valley Primary School	*	0						
Riverside Primary School			*	0	*	*		
Rock Ferry Primary School	*	*	*	0	*	0	*	*
Rossmore School	*	*	*	*			*	0
Runnymede St Edwards School			*	0				
Rydal Penrhos	*	*						
Sacred Heart (Liverpool) Catholic Primar	*	0						
Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School	11	*	7	*	*	*	*	*
Saighton CE Primary School			*	0				
Saltney Ferry C.P. School							*	*
Sandbrook Primary School	*	*	*	0	*	*		
Saughall All Saints Church of England Pr	*	*	*	*	*	*		
Sharjah English School							*	*
Somerville Primary School	*	0	*	0	*	0	*	0
St Albans Catholic Primary School	7	*	*	*			*	*
St Andrews C/E Primary School	*	*	10	*	*	*	13	*
St Andrews School (Rochester)							*	*
St Annes Catholic Primary School	*	0	*	0	*	*	*	*
St Bertelines CE Primary School					*	*		
St Bernards Catholic Primary School	*	*						
St Bridgets C/E Primary School	30	18	31	25	27	18	25	19
St Georges Primary School	18	*	20	13	26	19	11	6
St Gerards School Trust					*	*		
St Johns Catholic Junior School	7	*	*	*	*	0	*	0
St Josephs Catholic Primary School (Birk	16	*	13	8	6	*	8	*
St Josephs Catholic Primary School (Upto	10	6	6	*	6	*	6	*
St Josephs Catholic Primary School (Wall	*	0	*	0				
St Joseph's RC Primary School					*	0		
St Mary of the Angels Catholic Primary S	*	*			*	*		
St Mary's R.C. Primary School (Flint)					*	0		
St Michael and All Angels Catholic Prima	*	*	*	0	*	0	*	0
St Oswalds CE Aided Primary School (Ches	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
St Peter and St Paul Catholic Primary Sc	*	0	*	0	*	*	*	*
St Peters C/E Primary School	17	9	20	13	14	12	15	9
St Peters Catholic Primary School	*	0	*	0	*	0	*	*
St Saviours C/E Primary School	8	*	11	7	16	9	10	8
St Saviours Catholic Primary School (E.	*	0			*	0		
St Thomas of Canterbury Blue Coat CE Jun							*	*
St Werburghs & St Columbas Catholic Prim	*	*	*	*				
St Werburghs Catholic Primary School	*	0	*	*	*	0	*	*
St Winefrides Catholic Primary School	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Stanton Road Primary School	9	6	9	7	19	10	9	*
Sutton Green Primary School	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	0
Tarporley CE Primary School	*	*			*	*		
The Priory Parish C/E Primary School	*	0	*	0	6	0	*	*
The Rackham CE Primary School							*	0
Thingwall Primary School	8	*	6	*	11	9	12	7
Thornton Hough Primary School	*	*	6	6	9	7	10	10

Townfield Primary School	12	*	8	*	8	*	*	*
Trelawnyd Primary School	*	0						
Upton Heath CE Primary School	*	*	*	*	7	*	*	*
Upton Westlea Primary School	*	*						
Ven. Edward Morgan R.C. Primary School					*	*		
Well Lane Primary School	*	0						
West Kirby Primary School	8	*	11	*	*	*	12	8
Westbrook Old Hall Primary School	*	*	*	*				
Whitby Heath Primary School	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Whitegate C/E Primary School					*	0		
Willaston CE Primary School	10	*	7	*	9	*	13	9
William Stockton Community School					*	0		
Wolverham Primary and Nursery School					*	0	*	*
Woodchurch C/E Primary School	*	0	*	*	*	0		
Woodchurch Road Primary School	10	*	7	*	13	*	6	*
Woodfall Primary School	10	9	6	*	7	*	12	8
Woodlands Primary School	*	0	*	0	8	0	*	*
Woodlands Primary School (E. Port)	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Woodslee Primary School	14	*	11	*	*	0	*	*
Woolston CE Primary School	*	0						
Ysgol Bryn Coch C.P.							*	*
Ysgol Bryn Gwalia C.P.							*	0
Ysgol Cae Top					*	0		
Ysgol Derwen			*	*				
Ysgol Frongoch					*	*		
Ysgol Owen Jones C.P.	*	*						
Ysgol Pen y Bryn	*	0						
Ysgol Y Castell	*	*						

Appendix C – Transcripts 1 and 2

Transcript 1

Following introduction which consisted of introducing myself, everyone introducing themselves stating something they are proud of and something they are looking forward to, we then drew a flower with our non-dominant hand.

All students gave their names and stated something about themselves. Thea stated: We go on holiday loads, I've seen most of the world because we spend loads of time abroad, we're going to New Zealand this summer for three weeks, I've been to Australia a few times and all round there, I think we're going with friends this time.

ME: With everything we do this morning, there is no right or wrong, we are free to agree or disagree, everything we say is completely fine and it is in confidence in this room.

What do we know about the eleven-plus?

Thea: It is a test that lets you like get into a grammar school that you might want to go to.

Hannah: Well I think that it is usually, well I think there are different ones for different schools. You do not have to take the eleven-plus if you don't want to go to a grammar school. If you wanted to go to Woodchurch then you wouldn't have to take it

Jacob: It's a test that lets you see if you're good enough to get into a grammar school but you don't have to do it if you don't want to.

Mark: Say if you want to get into a grammar school then you would have to take the eleven-plus 'cos it gives you better jobs in the future

ME: The eleven-plus is something which you will all be doing in the future. I want to find out what it is like for a child to go through this experience and what I want to do is to tell your story and explain what this feels like from your perspective.

I'm going to ask you to create something to help you to describe it.

Think about what it feels like to be going through this experience and create a piece of art in using any of the materials in front of you.

Think carefully about what it feels to be going through this and create a piece of art in 15-20 minutes. I'm then going to ask you to describe to us all why you have drawn what you have and what the different bits mean.

Fiona: Would it be abstract?

ME: It can be anything you like. The main point is for you to think about it and describe why you've done what you have done.

You could draw an animal, real or unreal which describes how you feel, you can write words on the art. You could create a model; it is entirely up to you.

Thea: Can I draw me in the eleven-plus exam?

ME: Whatever you like. You have this thing coming up and I want you to draw something which helps you to express your feelings about what this is like from your perspective.

Remember there is no right and no wrong. You do not need to agree, just know that whatever you say is really valuable to me as I want to share your story with other people. All of your opinions are equally important.

Do you think you can do that?

ALL: Yes

ME: Great, take a minute to think then you can have 15-20 minutes to do it.

Thea: Can I use more than one sheet of paper?

ME: Yes

Hannah: Are we allowed to use plasticine on paper if we draw something as well?

ME: Yes of course. Let me show you all the materials we have. (Demonstrated)

Please take care with the sharpies, everything else washes off but these don't.

Thea: Is it ok if I use plasticine and that (points to paper and sharpies)

ME: Yes of course it is.

Fiona: Can I use different colours and do a key for the emotions?

ME: Yes of course.

QUIET whilst they completed the task

ME: If I start with you is that OK?

Thea: Yes

ME: Ok, lift it up so that we can all see it. I'm going to ask you to talk us through your art and explain why you've done what you have done. Is that alright?

Thea: Yes

Well to start off with I did the waves because like when it's stormy these show that the eleven-plus makes me nervous because I feel like I'm going to drown or something, I know it sounds really horrible but it just makes me feel nervous and then I did a flamingo as it also makes me quite excited and it's my favourite animal so for example when I went to the zoo and there was a new one, I was quite excited.

I've added my eleven-plus tutoring folder as it shows that I'm, well I mean it shows that I have been kind of practising for it, I practise a lot, I do at least five tests a week. I need to practice as all my cousins have passed and I mean it would be really embarrassing for my family if I failed

And then I did Count Olaf because he really scares me and I don't know why but the eleven-plus does as well.

ME: Tell me about the tutoring.

Thea: I started nearly a year ago and I go once a week but loads more in the holidays. I really helps me a lot, I've learned new things on it and I find that it challenges me more than school does, I'm not challenged enough at school anymore, they want me to do well and they don't mind spending money on it as it's much cheaper than it would be if they sent me to the private school.

ME: Do you do it on your own with the tutor?

Thea: No, there are two boys as well as me in the class. But erm yes, there's just us three and we do it for an hour.

Thea: I really enjoyed going to the tutor's in Bebington and I enjoyed doing the lessons and stuff but I wasn't as keen on school because I just thought it was too easy all we do is the same all the time. It was really useful going to the tutor because I went for eight months and I learned ratio and algebra, we are only starting to cover those topics this year in school and so

it was really useful, I wouldn't have understood those topics if I hadn't been tutored before the test."

Thea: I work really hard to make sure that I pass the eleven-plus, I mean I am clever and everything but everyone needs a tutor and I just want to make sure that I pass and don't waste my parent's money.

Hannah: Tutoring is really expensive and having a tutor means that we can't have some other things and I feel really bad about that as we could maybe go on holidays and stuff like that so it's really important that I pass as I would feel bad on my family after they have spent so much money to help me get into grammar school.

Fiona: I don't have a tutor so there's less chance of me being able to pass the eleven-plus

Thea: I've seen you at the same tutors as me, I've seen you going all year.

Fiona: Oh yes, well I mean I do go sometimes, well sort of once a week I suppose.

Fiona: I do go to see a tutor and we have done practise tests but it's always time which stops me doing well, that's why I'm really nervous. The questions are a little bit hard but the time makes me really nervous.

Thea: I mean, it is really scary, I mean I've had a tutor for like two years and it costs loads so I really want to pass so that it's not a big waste of money for my parents as that would make me feel like really bad. It is scary as it's all you, no-one else can do it for you, at the end of the day, it's you who has to do the paper and there's nothing anyone can do to help you once you're doing it, that's what really scares me, it's like the pressure and stuff, not from my mum but it's like from inside me.

ME: So, Count Olaf shows that you're scared and the flamingo shows that you're excited. Tell us more about why you have those feelings.

Thea: I will be really excited if I pass because it shows how good you are and I will be really proud of myself and I will get to go to the school that I want to go to so it'll make me feel quite excited.

Thea: I really want to pass, I am frightened but I'm also excited to do the test as I'm getting really good at the practice tests now.

ME: Thank you T, I will come back to you again later. Right, M, can I do yours' next please?

Mark: Yes, what one shall I do first? (He's done two)

ME: It's entirely up to you.

Mark: Ok, I'll do this one first.

Erm. I failed doing a snake. I done a snake because it can be scary sometimes and I fell a bit scared and worried because you don't know what's going to happen.

Erm, on the other one it's like the opposite, I try to imagine that the eleven-plus is like a normal test but harder.

ME: How does that make you feel?

Mark: I'm a bit worried, I would be excited like Thea if I pass but I won't be excited if I don't pass.

Mark: I've had a tutor as well and is has helped loads.

Mark: It's scary but I have been going to my tutor for a year and she has really helped me with the types of questions that you get on the eleven-plus as they're not really like the stuff that we do in school but if I fail then I'll just go to Woody but I'm still trying to pass and go to Calday.

Mark: I think that I can pass as I have learned loads from the tutor and I have extra homework from her which I do most nights as I'd like to go to Calday with my other mates, I would prefer Calday but I'm not bothered if I have to go to Woody, I think I'll be fine wherever.

ME: And how do you feel about that?

Mark: My mum's not bothered about getting me a tutor, everyone who wants to pass has got a tutor and it wouldn't be fair if I didn't have a tutor 'cos everyone's got one but it's ok, she doesn't put pressure on me or anything, she doesn't mind if I fail, she's fine with that, my mum says that she's really proud of me whatever as long as I do my best.

Mark: My Dad says that if I don't pass then I'll just be with my other mates who play footy and stuff and I'm really good at footy and they don't really play footy in Calday so I'll be able to play footy if I go to Woody.

ME: Thank you M, is there anything else you want to talk about?

Mark: My mum's friend has a son and he was a really good boy like me in year 6 but after he failed and went to Ridgeway, he got in with some bad kids and started smoking and robbing and stuff and his mum was really upset and stuff and she was really sad and she kept saying that wouldn't have happened if he had gone to the grammar school.

Mark: I want to pass to make my mum proud of me and so I hang around with people who don't smoke and stuff like that.

ME: That's great Mark, thank you, is there anything else you would like to add?

Mark: I am really scared and frightened in case I don't pass, I think I want to go to like a good school. How you do in the test kind of decides which mates you're going to have in big school so it's really important that you do your best. Most of my mates won't be going to Calday as most of them aren't taking it anyway so it would be fine to go to Woody. I would like to pass it though as a few of my mates will probably pass and I'd like to go with them to Calday if they pass, not on my own, but if they go as Calday is like better.

Mark: The kids at Woody are really good at footy and stuff and I really like footy and I'm really good, they don't really do footy at Calday, they do other things like cricket and rugby, I don't like them.

Mark: My mum worries about me failing, she says that there are like loads of drugs and smoking and drinking and bad things in the other schools, like comprehensive schools, but that you don't get that in Calday as they want to learn and do well. I get worried about failing and going to Woody sometimes as you do things that your friends are doing, like if they're doing something not that good then you might do it as well because they are like sort of making you, as you do stuff with your mates but that might get you into trouble. It would be scary at Woody as if all your mates are doing something which could get you into trouble, like drinking, then you would feel as if you would need to, to stay friends with them all or you could have no mates. That won't happen if you go to Calday but it probably will if you're at Woody.

ME: Thank you Mark, so you would prefer to go to the grammar school?

Mark: I would prefer to go to the grammar school, yes that's really important to me but I wouldn't really say that to my mates

ME: Thanks M, we'll come back to you later.

ME: F, are you ready?

Fiona: Yes

ME: Great, make sure we can all see your work.

Fiona: I did a border of blue 'cos like blue reminds me of feeling a bit cold and nervous. Then I did this in the middle (a cat-horse) as I'm nervous, scared and excited. The cat tries to make me feel confident as I want to feel confident and cats are confident like lions. Then I did a horse as they can be a bit nervous and then I've done some kind of flowers which look really calm but scary.

ME: Great thanks, F. Tell us more about why you have these feelings.

Fiona: Time, I don't like time. You have to do it really quickly. I do go to see a tutor and we have done practise tests but it's always time which stops me doing well, that's why I'm really nervous. The questions are a little bit hard but the time makes me really nervous.

Thea: Timing is quite hard I think as well. It's not fair, it should be about if you can answer the questions or not.

ME: Why are you scared?

Fiona: Maybe on the day I won't feel up to tests and like I don't do as well as I should normally like I don't know, another day I could and that makes me scared in case I'm not up to the test on that day.

Thea: I'm a bit scared 'cos I think well, I'm nervous because I think that as well 'cos erm I'm really nervous in case I fail but my mum said to me that if you're nervous then you're more likely to fail because you're basically saying to yourself, 'I can't do it'. And I'm always worrying what if I do this, what if I do that?

Fiona: I get quite scared in case I have an argument.

ME: An argument?

Fiona: On that day. 'Cos when you have arguments you get really nervous.

Jacob: Yes

Thea: Yes

Fiona: Yes, when you have any test it's going to be a bit creepy. My mum and dad well they want me to go to the grammar school and so do I. I really don't want to go to Woody, I just think I won't be as happy there and I won't fit in because I'm not really you know well sort of like them, not that there's anything wrong with Woody or anything. I'm going to take the Upton entrance exam in case I don't pass the grammar school so I will try and go there if I fail.

Thea: I think it's just and I'm not going to change my mind about it but I think the pressure is because I want to do well because I want to go to like a good school. I know it sounds a bit mean but like a good school, what I mean by a good school is a good school for me.

ME: So you put the pressure on yourself?

Thea: Yes

Fiona: Yes I put all the pressure on myself

Mark: Yes

Jacob: Yes I think so.

Fiona: I might not pass if I get nervous or because of time, I am clever enough but you have to do it on one day. My mum wants me to believe in myself more but I think I need to do more practising so I can get faster but the questions are hard and I want to pass as most of my friends will probably pass and I want to stay with them. Like all my best friends will probably go to West Kirby and I'll be on my own and I don't want that. Like my mum keeps saying that I should just think of myself passing the test and believe in myself and think about that but it is really scary as I have to do the test on my own like everyone else.

Fiona: I'll feel like a bit ashamed if I don't pass as these will {referring to two of her close friends in the group}. I wouldn't fit in in Woody and we wouldn't be friends anymore.

ME: So can you tell me about that, with friends?

Fiona: I would hate it if I don't pass, I'm not friends with those {referring to comprehensive students}, all my mates are really clever and will probably go to West Kirby. I just don't

want to go to Woody but I am really worried about my friends. I mean yes, we would keep in touch for a bit, texting and stuff but then they'll make new friends and like never see each other.

Fiona: All the clever kids go to the grammar schools which are sort of miles better and all the kids who aren't as clever go to the other schools, I don't want to go to one of those, they're not as good and you won't get as good jobs and stuff, my mum told me.

ME: Great thank you. Right Hannah, could you talk us through your picture please?

Hannah: It's very hard to do, the face is very bad. It's supposed to be a deer.

Hannah: Because deers are, they are my favourite animal and erm it's erm, I, I, don't know why but if like a see a film on or something erm or in real life even if I see like a deer drinking from something then I always feel like safer and less nervous for some reason so they're like calming.

And deers are quite scared at the tiniest things and I'm, I'm quite a bit scared of the eleven-plus erm so yes.

And a chick 'cos it makes me feel happy.

On the flower, I've done each petal as a feeling in a different colour because whenever I think of a feeling, I think of a colour that goes with it.

Thea: Oh yes, I do that as well.

Hannah: Excitement is blue, scared is red, nervousness is orange, happiness is blue, confidence is yellow, oh I've done that one twice. Oh sorry, there's also confusion because I get really confused in tests.

ME: Tell us more about these feelings on the flower if you don't mind.

Hannah: Well I've written worry as I'm quite worried about the test in case I come to a question and I can't, I've forgotten how to do it and I'm really worried if I don't pass the test.

Thea: This is what my mum said to me, if you're stuck on a question and it's quite hard then don't waste your time on that question that you can't do and finish it and put a little star by it and like finish the test and like remember where the star is so like when you're looking through, you have another chance to do the question again and see if you can do it, maybe sometimes you just forget how to do it and you'll like remember later on in the test.

ME: Thanks Thea, that sounds like good advice.

So Hannah, tell me more about these feelings.

Hannah: Well, well I'm quite excited because erm, I, I'm really excited to pass. If I do pass. I'm really excited to go to a grammar school because I want to go to West Kirby (grammar school).

Thea: I do too.

Hannah: Erm and scared because if I don't pass then I won't be able to go to a grammar school and I'm scared that I won't be able to get a job that there won't be like a good choice of jobs if I don't go to a grammar school.

Hannah: Student I'm kind of happy to do it as I actually like tests.

Thea: So do I. I mean, I'm not saying anything bad about comprehensive schools and they are suitable for loads of people but just not me, I mean I just wouldn't fit in, those sort of schools just don't suit me, I'm not being mean or anything but those schools are for students who needs additional support, I want to learn more quickly and be stretched so that I can go to a good University, not that comprehensives aren't good or anything but some people might say that.

Hannah: I'm very nervous it's kind of the same as worry.

I also have confusion. I still don't know a lot about it and there might be a lot of questions I'm confused on and I don't know the whole, erm what to do sort of.

Well I've written confident as before I had tutoring, I wasn't confident at all but now I've had it, I feel much more confident because it's helped me a lot with some things.

I get frustrated when, well, I don't know why but when it's really quiet I always want to like I just feel lonely and frustrated when everyone's quiet for some reason.

Thea: So do I, I don't know why, I think it's because when it's quiet I talk to myself.

Hannah: I always have to whisper to myself and I can't in a test. If I don't get it straight away and if there's a couple of questions that I'm stuck on then I usually get quite frustrated as there isn't much time and you have to pick a box and you can't go back once they've gone on to the next page. I'm worried but I am also excited and a bit confident.

Thea: That's like me.

Hannah: I am a bit scared and worried because I would really like to go the grammar school, my mum and dad pay every week for my tutor and so I really want to pass more. She says that I will pass and that we don't need to worry about what to do if I don't, she thinks I'm as clever as she is.

Thea: She wants me to go to a grammar school or Upton if I don't pass so I'm taking the Upton test as well. My mum thinks mixed schools are not good for learning as boys are like erm, well they can be erm sometimes a bit un-mature, she also thinks the girl's comprehensive schools like Pensby aren't that good so she doesn't want me to go to one of those either.

ME: Thank you so much for that so is there anything else you'd like to add:

Thea: Well I think that we're really lucky to have the eleven-plus where we live because we live in the Wirral 'cos there's lots of very good schools like Calday, West Kirby, Wirral grammar for boys, Wirral grammar for girls, St Anselm's and Upton Convent.

ME: What about the schools which are not grammar schools? Do you have any thoughts about those?

Thea: If I'm honest, I would not fit in at all like at Woodchurch (non-selective) and stuff, I would have to, I know this sounds really weird but I can't concentrate with boys around very well and because I'm not very tolerant and I get frustrated when they can't do the work.

I would not like to go to a normal comprehensive school.

ME: What about Prenton, that is an all-girls comprehensive school.

I have heard that Prenton is quite bad, I won't say that to anyone outside but that's just what I've heard and what my mum said to me but we are very similar so I don't know. It's just that I don't think it would push me as well, yeah academically as well. I don't really fit in very well with comprehensive schools because I find that I really like a challenge and it wouldn't challenge me as much and I'm like, 'I'm gonna fail the eleven-plus and like my mum's like, no you won't'. Cos she was quite clever and I think I am but.....

ME: That's very interesting thank you.

Thea: I mean it would be really expensive to go to private school and grammar schools are basically like free private schools, the education is just as good, well I think it is, that's what I've heard, like comprehensive schools are good and everything but they have problems with

behaviour and stuff, I just wouldn't like to go to a comprehensive school, they just aren't for me

Anyone else?

M: If I pass the eleven-plus then I'd be really happy to go to Caldby but I think that if I don't pass then I'd be ok to go to Woodchurch

Hannah: I mean Woodchurch is not the worst school, there are loads worse schools. I do feel kinda bad that I have a tutor and it helps me as some people can't afford one but that's what it's like isn't it? Going to Woodchurch would be ok, I'd rather go to the grammar school and I mean, I am lucky to have a tutor but Woodchurch is still ok.

Thea: No, it's not, it's just that it's not for me. My sister's friend has autism and it's like really good there for that and so she's gonna go there..... 'cos of her autism.

Hannah: They do focus on other stuff which is really good, like the farm and stuff instead of maths and subjects like that which are more sort of erm academic and that might be boring for some people but it's important if you want to go to University when you're older.

Thea: I'll go to the private school if I don't pass as there's just no way I could fit in, in a comprehensive school, it's just not for me.

Fiona: They are not as bothered about learning as people in grammar schools and so they won't be pushed as much by the teachers as much as they are in grammar school and they won't get as good jobs when they finish, they'll work in Sainsbury's and jobs like Macdonald's and stuff. I'm not really like them, they are like lower ability and I'm not low ability I don't think.

Thea: Like they need more support with their learning and stuff which is fine for them but I need to be challenged more or I'll just get bored and not learn. Kids like throw chairs and stuff there, I just wouldn't fit in there. I mean it's like fine for them they might like it but it's just not for me, I want to go to a good school and they're not good schools.

Jacob: Other schools are just as good, in loads of ways they're better because you can do more sports and not stupid sports like cricket. They are really different and do things all weird I mean, I'd much rather play footy and stuff like that than cricket and rugby which I don't really like.

Mark: Footy is my favourite.

Jacob: The kids in grammar school are well posher, they think they're better than everyone else and act like they're amazing.

Hannah: I think that it is really important to go to a grammar school if you are able to as that helps you go to university and get a good job in the future as you can get good GCSE's and stuff. You can't really do that if you go to the comprehension school as you don't get to learn as well 'cos of the boys and gangs and stuff.

Jacob: The people who pass think that they're cleverer than everyone else and I think that I could pass but I probably won't.

Fiona: I was born in September and everyone else is going to get 5 points added on and I'm not going to 'cos {pause} I feel like I could actually do with the five points added on, I need them, it's not fair as it makes me less likely to pass than my friends even if we get the same marks in the test.

ME: Where did you hear that?

Thea: If you're born before the New Year then you don't get points added on. But for me, I'm going to get like 10 or 15, I can't remember.

Hannah: My birthday is in December so I don't get anything. I mean it's not fair as like I'd get loads of extra points for nothing if my birthday was like in July or something and I don't see why. It makes it even harder for me to pass than it is for loads of other people, I think that you get extra if you're a boy as well.

Fiona: I think it was my mum who told me I'm not sure.

Even though I was born in September, I feel like other people are cleverer than me.

Thea: They are not.

Fiona: I feel like I could actually do with the five points added on 'cos like

Thea: You are clever

Fiona: Well yes ok but I won't get any extra points as I'm the oldest, it's not fair, everyone else gets an advantage.

ME: Thank you so much F, that's really interesting thank you.

Jacob: Are you happy to talk us through your thoughts?

Jacob: I've done it sort of like this. This part shows the teeth so that shows that it's scary and I'm a bit scared but I still want to do it 'cos it's not really that scary, it's just a test. You see it looks friendly with it's face but it can hurt you as well, it depends on how you are.

ME: Ok J, that's great, can you tell us a bit more about your thoughts and feelings?

Jacob: No-one in my family has passed and no-one's bothered if I go to grammar school or not, they think like that I probably won't like it there as it's full of stuck up people and people who think they're ace, some of my mates mum's and dad's really want them to pass but mine aren't bothered.

Jacob: Some of my mates will pass and they can go, I think it would be good to be able to go if I wanted to as it does help you in the future but my mum, she doesn't get why I want to take the test, most of my mates aren't doing it but I want to have a go as you know, it can make a big difference to getting jobs and stuff.

Jacob: I mean lots of my mates are taking it but most of them aren't bothering for some reason, I don't know why, they probably wouldn't pass anyway but they're not bothered. It would be good to pass as it shows everyone that you can do it and it like gives you the sort of choice of which school you want to go to, I'd like to pass to show everyone like that I can do it and I'm just as good as they are.

Thea: I mean you are clever aren't you J?

Fiona: I mean I'm not clever.

Hannah: Yes, you are clever

Fiona: You haven't had a tutor have you?

Jacob: No. I've looked at some of the questions on the website but I haven't really done much, no. I haven't had a tutor or anything.

Thea: What have you done?

Jacob: I've only had some practice papers from my mate and I've got an app on my phone, I've never had tutoring for erm {long pause} I've not really done much on the app and I haven't done the papers.

Thea: Tutoring is really useful J.

Jacob: Yes it is useful but it's too expensive and my mum thinks that there are loads more important things that we need to get with our money, no-one from my family has ever taken the eleven-plus and we don't really see the point, my Dad went to Woody and he thinks I'll fit in there, especially with the sports and stuff.

Hannah: Well I've written confident as before I had tutoring, I wasn't confident at all but now I've had it, I feel much more confident because it's helped me a lot with some things.

Thea: I think most of my really close friends will pass, they all have tutors and they are all really clever. It not fair as some children don't have a tutor and don't get to practice and that's not because they're not clever.

Jacob: No they might be cleverer but it is like more school as well so I don't mind really.

ME: Thank you so much J, is there anything else that you'd like to add?

Jacob: Nah, not really, it's just a test really, I'll just sort of erm think of it erm like any other school test and do my best I suppose.

ME: Ok J, that's great, thank you so much for sharing your thoughts. Is there anything else that anyone would like to say about their thoughts and feelings as they think about taking the eleven-plus?

Thea: I mean, I am clever so I should pass the eleven-plus and go to West Kirby, it's just where I should be going.

Hannah: I am really scared in case I don't pass as my family all passed and I know that I won't fit in if I don't get into the grammar school.

Thea: I mean I'm not being big headed or anything but I am clever, everyone would say so, that I am clever I mean, I know that I should pass the eleven-plus and there's no way I could ever go to one of the comprehensive schools. The kids in grammar schools want to learn and get good jobs in the future but in other schools like Woodchurch, the kids like throw chairs and stuff and disrupt your learning so you can't learn. I like learning and I should be with others people who are clever and like learning.

Thea: I am going to do well in secondary school and go on to a good University, you can't really do that if you go to a comprehensive school. I mean I would feel so ashamed if I failed the eleven-plus, I'd be like really embarrassed.

Hannah: Erm and scared because if I don't pass then I won't be able to go to a grammar school and I'm scared that I won't be able to get a job that there won't be like a good choice of jobs if I don't go to a grammar school as I won't learn as much and I am more likely to pass as I have done lots of practice tests with my tutor and they are going much better now, they were really hard at first.

Thea: Yes, they are much easier now.

Fiona: Yes but I don't think I'm as good.

Thea: I don't want to go to the other schools 'cos behaviour is really bad and like the people don't want to learn in Woodchurch and Ridgeway and stuff and the teachers aren't as good in the comprehensive schools, the best teachers are in the grammar schools.

Thea: I am really scared in case I don't get in, it would be a bit embarrassing as everyone knows how you did, and next year you wear the uniform which tells everyone what school you go to it kind of tells everyone like on the bus or whatever if you passed the eleven-plus or not.

Thea: My mum said, the kids all smoke and stuff outside the school.

Hannah: There's loads of bullying and fighting in the other schools and I'd probably get bullied or something because I want to learn.

Hannah: It matter lots for me to get into grammar school so that everyone knows that I am good enough to go there, I want people to know that I am good enough I'd probably get bored like T as the work might be too slow if I go to a different school.

Mark: Don't you think that's it's like a lot of pressure though, to pass?

Hannah: No, no-one puts pressure on me, there is a lot of pressure but it comes from me. I want my parents to be proud of me that's all and to get in, I want to have the same friends and not have to leave them if I don't get in.

Thea: There's no pressure, it's all from me as well, I mean, they won't let me go to a comprehensive school as, I mean they're fine for some people, but I mean I just wouldn't fit in, I should go somewhere where people actually want to learn. She said, 'just do your best,' my mum and dad are really supportive, they just keep telling me to do my best.

Fiona: I don't get pressure from my mum and dad, I do from other people in the family who will make my mum feel bad if I fail.

Hannah: I know what you mean – but you are clever.

Fiona: Well yes I am clever but all my friends are like really clever and they will all pass, I might not if I have an argument or something and it can make me nervous and time is really bad.

Hannah: I mean they know that I am clever and that I should pass but if I wasn't well then I might not but that's 'cos I'm not well or something like that.

Transcript 2

ME: Hello again to all of you, I hope you are all ok. Thank you for meeting up with me again to help me, we can get started in a moment.

Thea: It was way harder than I thought it was going to be.

Hannah: Some of it was quite easy, but some of them were really hard.

Thea: Yes, I passed though and I was like, how did I pass?

Hannah: I passed as well.

Thea: My mum said, you passed T and I was like well oh my gosh. And I got a really high mark and I did the Upton Convent entrance exam and I did well in that so I would have gone to Upton if I didn't pass the eleven-plus but I'm glad that I got to go to West Kirby.

Fiona: I passed the Upton by two which I wasn't expecting to pass by two marks but I didn't get tutored for it so that's why so I'm going to go for Upton Convent with Woodchurch as a second choice.

Thea: I'm going for West Kirby then Wirral grammar.

Hannah: I also passed the Upton but I've put West Kirby Grammar first as well.

Jacob: I failed by one mark but I'm fine with it.

Mark: I passed the eleven-plus so I've put Caldby down.

ME: We are going to do a similar thing to last time if that is ok, this time we are going to draw something which shows how it feels now you have gone through the eleven-plus and how it feels having done it and got your results.

Thea: I found that last year at school I wasn't really being challenged enough and that's why I didn't really enjoy it. I really enjoyed going to the tutor's in Bebington and I enjoyed doing the lessons and stuff but I wasn't as keen on school because I just thought it was too easy all we do is the same all the time. It was really useful going to the last tutor because I went for eight months and I learned ratio and algebra, we are only starting to cover those topics this year in school and so it was really useful, I wouldn't have understood those topics if I hadn't been tutored before the test.

ME: Ok

Thea: Oh and percentages, I found it really helpful for that as well.

ME: Ok

Mark: I had a tutor and it really helped.

Hannah: Yes you had the same one as me, the one in Hoylake opposite the pet shop.

Fiona: I only had one session.

Thea: Some people started getting tutored in year 4. I would not have passed without doing it as there's loads of stuff that I learned there.

Fiona: I think if I'd been tutored then I might have had a chance of passing it. I missed loads out on the eleven-plus

Thea: How many marks off were you?

Fiona: Two

Thea: Oh you would have definitely passed if you'd got a tutor.

Thea: Well loads of professional tutors have said that there's no way anyone would have passed that if they didn't get tutored and hadn't done any practice for it's like impossible without a tutor, it was much harder than I thought it was going to be, I wasn't sure if I'd passed or not, I was so happy when I found out that I'd passed"

Mark: My best mate got tutored and he was two marks off.

Hannah: I did about four or five practice tests a week.

Thea: Same

Hannah: And I got a desk installed in my room. To help with it.

Fiona: My mum said that if I passed then I could get a cat as a present for doing well.

Thea: A cat?

Fiona: No, a cat, but I'm not sure if I'm getting it or not as I didn't pass the eleven-plus but I did pass the Upton one so I'm not sure. I have a younger sister so I've put Woodchurch as my second choice after Upton because my sister's not that clever and if I'm in Woody then she

has a better chance of getting in. My mum's been dead worked up, looking if people passed and if they only passed by a few points.

Thea: Schools don't care how many marks you've got as long as you've passed then that's all they really care about. Oh and some care if you're catholic or not, I'm not catholic.

Fiona: I'm really sad because ***** {Her best friend} has passed the eleven-plus and she doesn't look or act that clever but she really is. She's going to go to the grammar school and she's getting mates with some other girls who are going to West Kirby. I reckon it's just because she'll need mates when she goes there.

Thea: Yes ***** is the same, ***** is making new friends now who have passed the eleven-plus so that they can all go to West Kirby together. I feel really sorry for *****.

ME: While you continue to work on the activity, feel free to talk about your experiences of going through the selection process, the eleven-plus.

Thea: We all talked about it the day after we got our results. We were like, oh my gosh, I want to go to this school or that one.

Fiona: We didn't have a big chat about it, we just asked did you pass or did you fail?

Thea: Yes, I just said it to like everyone. I had a whole script about it from my mum. Did you pass? And if they said like, no, then you say oh well, it's meant to be.

Fiona: My mum was like, find out who passed and who didn't.

Thea: Well you weren't the only one who didn't pass, most people didn't pass. There are only four girls in the whole year who did pass so not passing is normal.

Hannah: My best friend is going to a different school and I'm really, really upset about that.

Thea: Yes, you've been friends for years.

Hannah: We will still keep in touch but I think our parents are sad as they know we won't see much of each other and we'll make new friends.

Thea: Yes 'cos you live really close.

Hannah: Yes and our mum's won't see each other as much.

Fiona: Will I keep in touch with *****? I think we'll probably text each other, at first anyway.

Thea: I think you possibly will

Fiona: I don't know

Thea: I did have a best friend, it's not that I don't have friends but they haven't passed. It is only me, (Hannah), *** and *** who have passed and so we need to be friends more now, we will need to sort of like stick together more. I'll keep in touch with my other friends for a bit but realistically, we won't keep in touch after a while, we'll have new friends like us.

Mark: I'm really lucky 'cos 6 boys passed the eleven-plus and we are all really good mates. We were good mates before the test and we still are so that's good 'cos we can stick together in Caldly.

Thea: Most prime ministers went to Grammar schools.

Mark: I don't think it matters if you pass or not. For example, you might fail the eleven-plus and get a good job like the guy who played James Bond.

Thea: You mean Daniel Craig

Mark: Yes, he failed the eleven-plus

Jacob: Did he?

Thea: My mum and dad say what's meant to be is meant to be and you'll do well no matter where you go. Well 'cos erm they said 'cos I work hard, well as long as you do work hard then you'll have a good job and you'll get what you want in life. Not in a spoilt way but you'll get a good job and a nice house.

Hannah: Do you think we should have the eleven-plus then?

Thea: I would say that the eleven-plus, kind of like wars, wars are terrible and kill so many people but they do it for a good reason. Like the eleven-plus is like, yes, wars are a bit more extreme but I think it's a good thing because you work hard, you learn new things and you get to a school which you would like to go to and which will help you to get what you want in life, but if you fail, I have a feeling that some people think they aren't clever because they have failed. Well I'm not saying that if you fail then you're not clever, I mean that's what some people sometimes do think about people who fail.

Hannah: No-one gets killed in the eleven-plus. I think that people who failed feel really upset and a bit embarrassed.

Thea: Yes, I think people who failed get a bit upset because they think oh no, I'm not clever and I can't go to a good school that I want to go to. That's what I think, I'm not saying everyone but I do know that some people say that.

Hannah: There are 99 children in our year group and there were lots that didn't take it, actually ten children passed"

Thea: They just didn't bother.

Hannah: I think that's because they thought they weren't going to pass and so they don't have to deal with failing because that makes them feel, well, you know, a bit stupid.

Fiona: I wasn't expecting to pass or anything, I just wanted to give it a go.

Jacob: Yes like me, I only just missed it, I could appeal but I don't see the point 'cos none of my friends passed it, we're all going to Woody together so that's good, I'm glad that we're staying together as I'll have mates and stuff when I get there. I wouldn't have had any mates in Calday so I'm glad I never passed.

Mark: There's no way that I'd have passed without a tutor, there were loads of things on it that we haven't done yet in school, I wouldn't have an idea what to do without my tutor.

Fiona: I might have passed if I had, had a tutor.

Thea: Yes you definitely would have passed if you had a tutor as you're really clever.

Fiona: I passed the Upton by two which I wasn't expecting to pass by two marks but I didn't get tutored for it so that's why so I'm going to go for Upton Convent as it's really good there. It's impossible to pass it without a tutor and I didn't have a tutor.

Thea: You would have passed if you had, had a tutor

Hannah: Yes you would.

Fiona: I mean I can always do the questions, it's just time, time is an issue for me.

Mark: I passed, I came out of school and my mum was waiting for me with a big smile, she told me that I had passed and I just cried, then my mum cried. We both cried for ages, we were so happy that I'd passed. {There was quite a long pause after Mark said this}

ME: Yes

Fiona: It wasn't like a big deal to me, it was just like a normal school test. It was good as ***** failed as well and she passed the Upton test so we're going to Upton together.

Thea: That's what I said to myself, but I said to my friend, right, you're really clever so you have a go at doing this, the eleven-plus, it would be brilliant because you could get into a grammar school. I'm not saying comprehensive schools are bad but erm she said, well I don't want to do it because I'll fail and then I'll get really disappointed because that'll make me feel really dumb. And I said, well, you never know because you could pass because you are a clever girl and I wouldn't be surprised if you passed and she said well no, I'll get really upset and I said, well it's an exam and you're not the only one who would have failed because.

Mark: I will miss footy and stuff, I do really like footy but they probably still do footy at Calday.

Thea: My mum said that if I didn't pass then I should just tell everyone that I did but that I've like chosen to go to private school, I really did pass though, I passed Upton as well.

Hannah: I passed the eleven-plus, I passed the Upton entrance exam as well but I didn't need that really anymore but I would have gone there if I didn't pass the eleven-plus. If I didn't pass the eleven-plus but I did get into Upton then I was going to pretend that I had passed as I would feel embarrassed about it. I know I wouldn't need to but I would.

Fiona: I mean I felt a bit disappointed that I didn't pass but I kind of didn't expect to.

Thea: Because all that matters is you've tried hard.

Jacob: Tutoring makes a massive difference, even if you're quite clever, if you haven't been tutored then it's really hard to pass. You might be well cleverer than loads of people who passed but they had a tutor, so it's kind of not fair anyway. {Pause} I couldn't have a tutor but if I did have a tutor then I think I would have probably passed but I didn't have chance to practice.

Thea: But everyone needs to just have a go or they will miss out on a huge opportunity.

Hannah: But not if it's going to make them feel less good about themselves.

Fiona: I was alright really, it wasn't really a big deal to me. I think if it was a big deal though and I didn't pass then I would be a lot disappointed and maybe a bit upset but knowing that I knew I probably wouldn't pass, I was upset but I would have been more upset if I thought like that I was going to pass.

Fiona: V**** was upset that she didn't pass

Thea: I don't think she was that upset, I don't think she really expected to pass

Fiona: Do you think P***** did?

Thea: No, but P**** didn't get tutored, she said that she'd fail anyway as her mum couldn't afford a tutor.

Fiona: Oh, I see, I thought she'd quit.

Thea: No, she wanted to, she got some stuff from the internet but she didn't have a tutor as she couldn't afford it, which is really sad really.

STAFF MEMBER ENTERS ROOM AND OFFERS EVERYONE A DRINK.

EVERYONE POLITELY REFUSES THE REQUEST.

STAFF MEMBER LEAVES THE ROOM.

ME: Ok, this work looks great, don't worry if you haven't quite finished. We have five more minutes to finish off and then I'm going to ask you to go over what you have done and why.

Mark: I've split it into four sections.

1 – Before taking the test

2 – The day of the test.

3 - After

4 – The day that I found out if I passed or failed

For before, I was very scared but I went to a tutor and they helped me out a lot. If I did not go to my tutor then I probably wouldn't of passed as I learned things like BODMAS and BIDMAS and I found that like very helpful as it was things we hadn't done in school.

On the day – on the way to school on the day of the test, my mum said just do your best and so I just did that. Some questions were really hard but others were easy.

I was so glad that it was over but I was so glad that I did it because most of my friends passed with me.

On the day I found out, I saw my mum and I ran to her because I was so happy.

I think the eleven-plus is a good idea because it separates the people who need an extra bit of help for work that is too hard for them from people that might not need help and this helps them to reach what they can do more quickly. I mean it is really good 'cos the children who need support can get it in those schools and the children who want to go to University can have the best teachers if they pass.

ME: Thank you M

Fiona: Ok, can I go next as I'm all finished.

ME: Of course F

Fiona: Before the exam I felt nervous, excited and scared. I was very nervous about the exam.

I feel scared about leaving some of my friends who have passed, my 2 BFFs have passed and I will really miss them.

I didn't pass the eleven-plus but I did pass the Upton Convent entrance exam, the eleven-plus was harder than I thought and impossible without a tutor as many of the questions had not been covered in school when it was taken.

ME: Do you agree with the eleven-plus?

Fiona: I do a bit because it's a good idea to have the eleven-plus because those who are talented have a great chance but I do disagree as it doesn't give those who aren't as clever a chance to go to the school and get better as some people get more cleverer as they get older but it will be too late then.

It is a good idea though because those kids that don't really care about school can go to those schools that give them the sort of education that they need. Like Ridgeway, you don't need to pass an exam to go to Ridgeway and the kids that go there don't really care about their education.

Thea: I agree

Fiona: But then again, there are some good people who do care about their education who do go there.

Fiona: But like my cousin, he went there and he came out with like not as good results as he found it really hard to concentrate with the type of people around him. He was a really good boy in primary school and only just failed the eleven-plus and he ended up smoking and

everything as he got in with more naughty people but his mum says that that wouldn't have happened if he'd gone to the grammar school. He might have done more well in his exams and not smoked if he'd gone there.

Hannah: I put that erm at the start of the test I thought erm, what do I do? And then at the end of the test I thought, I don't know what I'm going to get and everything and so I was very scared and nervous at the start of the test. At the end I felt excited and worried and scared as there was a lot going on emotionally and stuff if I didn't pass the test.

Mark: Before tutoring I wouldn't have found the eleven-plus possible. It was so hard and I wouldn't have known what a lot of it meant but after tutoring I did. I made up a song, $5A - A$ in brackets, B, C, divided by four equals and then before I would have thought what is that? But after tutoring I am like, I know what that means.

Thea: I don't know what it is.

Hannah: Tutoring made an awful lot of difference.

Thea: Yes, I agree with that.

Hannah: I mainly had tutoring in maths as I wasn't very confident in maths with my maths and so I needed help with that.

Thea: Same

Hannah: At first I felt like a snail like I was behind everyone else because I was like really slow but afterwards I felt like a cat but I knew that I would get really embarrassed if I didn't pass. I would be even more embarrassed if I didn't pass because I did have tutoring but I would also feel quite sheepish as it would be really awkward telling people if I didn't pass as I had revised and stuff.

Hannah: I was really worried about that, there is someone in my close family and they are like quite judgemental and like erm like, I won't say anyone but erm, they...., they...., don't really...., sort of, I don't know, it's quite hard to explain, but they would make me and my mum feel ashamed if I didn't pass.

And so, I was very worried because I had revised a lot for it and everyone knew that and because some of my family are judgemental.

I do think that we should have the eleven-plus and grammar schools because they separate people who are really clever and people who might need a lot of help with their work. The eleven-plus shows who can do what and it gives people a chance to shows what they are made of.

I do think though that some people learn at different rates and they might learn quickly when they are 10 and slow down later and others might be slower when they are 10 but get really clever when they are like 14.

Fiona: My cousin went to Ridgeway and he was really clever and then he went down, he went backwards.

Thea: That's because he wasn't being challenged enough.

Hannah: Yes, there is a problem that some people might not pass the eleven-plus by one mark but they might be really clever but they wouldn't get challenged enough and they would not do as well in the comprehension school and then they should really go to a grammar school when they show that they are good enough.

Hannah: If I didn't pass then I would still agree with the eleven-plus as if I didn't and I said no then I'd be a little, I'd feel a bit selfish just because of me but there might be other people whose families are, mine are quite supportive but there's just a couple of people, but some families might be really, really supportive with everything erm and they might just say, Oh well and erm if the person didn't pass they might say, oh well it doesn't matter you'll be fine wherever you go anyway, so I might feel a bit selfish if I, if they don't have the eleven-plus anymore but people, their families are like.....

Fiona: But some mums and dads are like, you have to pass and if you don't pass then like erm. Well parents like that then their kids are under pressure.

Hannah: My family are really, really supportive but like erm there are a couple of people who are in my family and family friends who I would feel really uncomfortable telling that I didn't pass.

Fiona: I told my mum that the eleven-plus was really hard because you could only go back to the answers on that section, you couldn't go back to the section before, at the start, that's what put me off, that put me under pressure a lot and I'm not like that good with time and I like hate time.

Thea: I hate time, it's not a good thing

Fiona: And like I didn't even finish like one section, even if I did, I couldn't like go back to the ones I'd missed because you had to like do the ones in the section, that's all you're allowed. I'm like surprised I failed by just two, I thought I'd only get like 20. I hardly did any.

Thea: I know but like you did good.

Fiona: I literally hardly did any questions.

Thea: It was February when I started tutoring. I really enjoyed tutoring because at school I wasn't being challenged enough, I learned new things and I was being challenged more.

Thea: I went to Every Lesson Counts in Bebington and I really enjoyed it, my tutor was really nice. When the summer holidays started, I started to get really stressed so my mum and dad booked me into some extra tutoring days. I found they really helped me and I go less stressed, my dad got some maths books to help too. On the morning of the exam I was feeling quite calm, halfway through the exam, I started to feel quite stressed, we had a break and I felt quite relieved as I found out that I wasn't the only one who found it quite hard.

Thea: After the exam, I thought I had failed and it made me feel a bit sick.

Thea: On the results day, when I was on my way home my mum said that she knew my results and that she'd put it on Facebook. I she would not tell me over the phone how I had done but I felt a little happier as I knew that she wouldn't put it on Facebook that I had failed.

Thea: When I saw her and I found out I had passed, I was ecstatic. My mum's friend was there and she had bought me a present for passing and I was really grateful. The next day, my mum took me to a salon to get my hair and nails done for passing the test, which I enjoyed. I felt really proud for passing the eleven-plus after working hard and trying to do all of the work.

Thea: I would say to Theresa May that I think the eleven-plus is a good thing because people can go to a grammar school and get more challenging work, people who don't pass the eleven-plus aren't stupid, they may find grammar school work too challenging and get stressed. I'm quite glad that we have it but some people do get cleverer and learn differently but they have the test when they're 11 but they might get more clever later on but they can't

change school, I mean they are the really good schools, they are free but they are like private schools so we are really lucky here.

Thea: My parents say that you will do well wherever you go as long as you work hard, people should be allowed to go to the most suitable school for them.

ME: Well ok, is there anything else that anyone would like to add?

Thea: No

Fiona: No

Jacob: No

ME: Ok well thank you so much for helping me with my research, so that I can better understand what it feels like to go through the eleven-plus process. You have been great.