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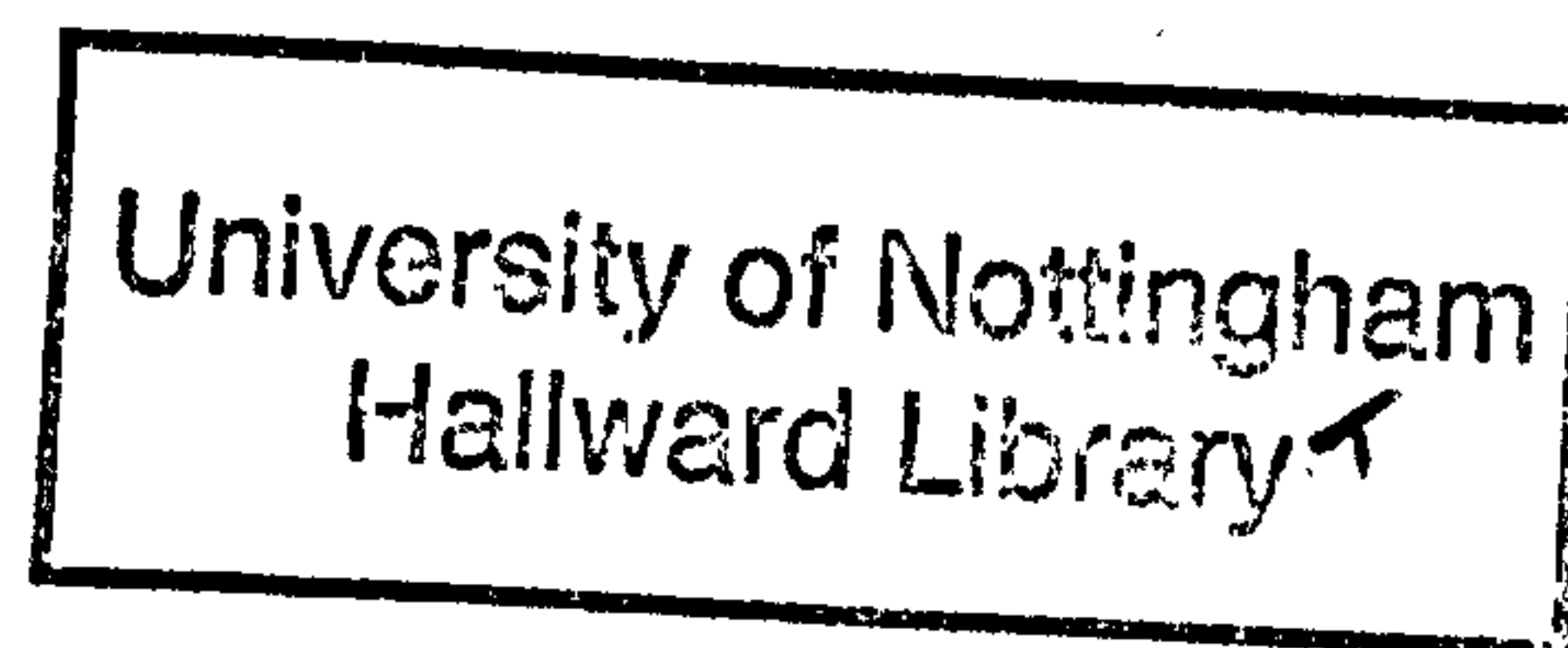
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**'The Dream of Social Flying': Social Class,  
Higher Education Choice and the  
Paradox of Widening Participation**



**By**

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Widening Participation in UK universities is currently a key political concern. Whilst the under-representation of particular groups has been a feature of higher education for many years, participation for groups identified by gender, ethnicity and disability has seen some improvement. However, the participation of students from low social class groups remains an issue.

Whilst there are a number of intervention programmes that seek to increase the numbers of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who do go on to higher education, in this thesis I work closely with a group of non-traditional students who participated in a Sutton Trust Summer School.

In attempting to understand the complexities of social class participation in HE and the perceptions of an HE hierarchy, I draw heavily from Bourdieu's notions of habitus and field.

The findings from this study raise numerous issues for intervention programmes such as the Sutton Trust. In presenting the findings, I explore three arenas of influence: habitus influenced by home context; habitus influenced by institutions such as school and the Sutton Trust and also the idea of living with a 'split' habitus – a habitus in tension.

Throughout the findings sections, I draw from the experiences of the young people to argue that their 'class' based practices align more closely with those of the middle classes and that their decision to go to university was made early on in their educational journeys.

Their pursuit of higher education with a particular focus on the types of HE institutions they were willing to consider, presents an interesting issue for those working in the widening participation arena. The students in this study were already equipped with the ability, knowledge and desire to apply to an elite institution prior to their Sutton Trust experience. I describe this position in terms of a 'trajectory interruption' where the expected trajectory of an

individual can be influenced by the numerous fields of which they are a part. I draw specifically from the notion of habitus to explain how their respective 'trajectory interruptions' occurred. The 'dream of social flying' (Bourdieu 1993: 2) places these students in particular positions within the educational field – positions that are conducive to any form of trajectory interruption.

## Publications and Conference Presentations List

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### **Publications:**

*Byrom, T., Thomson, P. and Gates, P., (2007): 'My school has been quite pushy about the Oxbridge thing': Voice and higher education choice. Improving Schools, 10 (1)*

*Gates, P., Coward, S. and Byrom, T. (2007): Young Participation in HE in Nottingham North. Bristol, HEFCE*

*Byrom, T. (2007): Children at the Margins: Supporting children, supporting schools (Book Review). Improving Schools, 10 (1)*

*Byrom, T. (2007): Making Modern Lives: Subjectivity, Schooling, and Social Change (Book Review). British Educational Research Journal, 32 (2)*

*Thomson P, Ellison, L, Byrom, T, and Bullman, D. (2007): Invisible Labour: home school relations and the front office. Gender and Education, 19 (2)*

*Thomson, P., Ellison, L., Byrom, T., Bullman, D., with Davies, L., (2004): An investigation into Queries that School Offices receive from Parents and Carers, DfES, ISBN:1 84478 309 X*

*Byrom, T. and Thomson, P., (forthcoming):*

*'Oxbridge isn't for me, but I don't want to go to a crummy little university': working class students and higher education choice (JAA - working on reviewer's comments)*

### **Presentations:**

Sept 2007: Trajectory 'Interruptions': The push and pull of habitus (*BERA: London*)

'I just needed someone to love me': The issue of Teenage Pregnancy in Nottingham City (*BERA: London*)

Dec 2006: 'Oxbridge isn't for me, but I don't want to go to a little crummy university': Social class, higher education choice and the paradox of widening participation (*SRHE: Brighton*)

Sept 2006: 'It feels like home': working class students and elite universities (*BERA: Warwick*)

- May 2006: Photos and memory boxes: useful exploratory tool or interpretive nightmare? (*Pupil Voice Conference: University of Nottingham*)
- April 2006: 'I don't want to go to a crummy little university': working class students and higher education choice (*AERA: San Francisco*)
- Sept 2005: 'Oxbridge isn't for me, but I don't want to go to a crummy little university': working class students and higher education choice (*BERA: Glamorgan*)
- Struggling with class (*BERA: Glamorgan*)
- Jan 2005: Involving Pupils, Parents and Communities in School Improvement: what difference does it make? (*ICSEI: Barcelona*)
- Sept 2004: Parental Involvement in Schools: A class issue? (*Conference: The University of Nottingham*)
- June 2003: The Emotional Costs of Education (*Conference: The University of Nottingham*)

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Of course, the students whose journeys are detailed in this study: I am completely humbled by your honesty and your willingness to participate. I thank you all and hope that your studies at university will provide you with all the things you dream of.

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<b>Table 1:</b>	Segmentation of 2005 Key Stage 4 Pupils
<b>Table 2:</b>	Socio-economic Classification Analytic Classes
<b>Table 3:</b>	Class Position of Students
<b>Table 4:</b>	Background Contexts of the Students
<b>Table 5:</b>	Data Collection Timetable
<b>Table 6:</b>	Student Groupings
<b>Table 7:</b>	Significance of Statements
<b>Table 8:</b>	Index of Multiple Deprivation Home Context
<b>Table 9:</b>	Family Contexts
<b>Table 10:</b>	Social classification of students
<b>Table 11:</b>	MOSAIC Analysis
<b>Table 12:</b>	Family Members who have been to University
<b>Table 13:</b>	Post-16 Institution Contexts
<b>Table 14:</b>	Range of GCSE and GNVQ Results
<b>Table 15:</b>	University Choices
<b>Table 16:</b>	University Position in League Tables 2007
<b>Table 17:</b>	AS and A2 Level Results

- Figure 1:** Visual Representation of my Journey
- Figure 2:** Process Involved in my Class Transition
- Figure 3:** Life as an Interrupted Trajectory
- Figure 4:** Logic in the Field of Education
- Figure 5:** Application and Acceptance Rates via UCAS for Students with 30+ A-Level Points: 2001
- Figure 6:** Average GCSE Points Score against Free School Meals (FSM)
- Figure 7:** Participation Rates in Higher Education by Social Class
- Figure 8:** Universities by Date of Foundation
- Figure 9:** Russell Group Shortfall from Participation Benchmark Figures
- Figure 10:** Process of Sample Selection
- Figure 11:** Conditions of existence, habitus and life-style
- Figure 12:** Complexity of Students' Journeys into HE
- Figure 13:** Grouping of Themes
- Figure 14:** Home and School Contexts of the Students
- Figure 15:** Comparison of Responses to Acceptance Letters (Erin: Journal August 10<sup>th</sup> 2005)
- Figure 16:** Tension in Habitus Adaptation: My story
- Figure 17:** Tension in Habitus Adaptation: Grace's Story
- Figure 18:** Tension in Habitus Adaptation: Eve's Story
- Figure 19:** Tension in Habitus Adaptation: Sophie's Story
- Figure 20:** Tension in Habitus Adaptation: Oscar's Story
- Figure 21:** Influences on University Choice
- Figure 22:** Home Context of Three Students
- Figure 23:** The Space of Social Positions and the Space of Lifestyles
- Figure 24:** Difference in Occupational Status between Students and their Parents
- Figure 25:** Determinants Impacting on Class Position

- Photo 1:** The University of Nottingham Campus
- Photo 2:** The Stepping-Stones
- Photo 3:** The Trent Building
- Photo 4:** The Importance of Space

A Level	Advanced Level
BERA	British Educational Research Association
CCAT	Cambridge College of Arts and Technology
DFEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
FE	Further Education
FEIs	Further Education Institutions
FSM	Free School Meals
GCSE	General Certificate of Education
HE	Higher Education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationery Office
IDACI	Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index
IMD	Index of Multiple Deprivation
LSOA	Lower Layer Super Output Area
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
NS-SEC	National Statistics Socio-economic Classification
O Level	Ordinary Level
OfSTED	Office for Standards in Education
ONS	Office of National Statistics
Oxbridge	Oxford and Cambridge Universities
PGCE	Post Graduate Certificate in Education
SATs	Standard Assessment Tests
SEU	Social Exclusion Unit
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UCAS	University Central Admissions System
UK	United Kingdom
Uni	University
WP	Widening Participation
YPR (H)	Young Participation Rate Higher Education Institutions

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<b>Abstract</b>		i
<b>List of Publications and Conference Presentations</b>		iii
<b>Acknowledgements</b>		v
<b>List of Tables</b>		vi
<b>List of Figures</b>		vii
<b>List of Photos</b>		viii
<b>List of Abbreviations</b>		ix
<b>Contents</b>		x
<b>Prologue:</b>	<b>Personal and Professional Context</b>	<b>1</b>
	My Journey	2
	Early Days	6
	Dipping my Toes in Middle Class Waters	9
	Life as an Interrupted Trajectory	14
	Understanding the Game	16
	Chapter Summary	19
<b>Chapter 1:</b>	<b>Theoretical Lens: Exploring Education</b>	<b>22</b>
	Study Focus	23
	The use of Bourdieu	24
	The Notion of Field	25
	The Logic of the Educational Field	28

	Evidence of Educational Inequality	31
	Understanding Continued Educational Inequality	34
	Habitus	34
	Breaking the Dichotomy of Agency-Structure	35
	Habitus and Educational Fit	37
	Playing the game	41
	School Choice	41
	University Choice: It's all about Distinction	43
	Chapter Summary	46
<b>Chapter 2:</b>	<b>Political Context</b>	<b>48</b>
	Political Backdrop	49
	Participation in What	52
	Barriers to Participation	55
	Understanding Widening Participation	56
	The Work of the Sutton Trust	58
	Issues with Intervention	59
	The Impact of Widening Participation Initiatives	62
	Chapter Summary	63
<b>Chapter 3:</b>	<b>Methodological Approach to Understanding Lived Experiences</b>	<b>64</b>
	Sample Selection	65
	Locating Widening Participation Students	66
	The Widening Participation Department	67
	Student Selection for Summer Schools	68
	Identifying with the Sample	70
	The Students	71
	Difficulties with the Sample	73

Understanding Human Action	76
Habitus as Method	78
Adopting a Phenomenological Hermeneutic Stance	79
The Life History Approach	83
Complexities of Life History Research	85
Understanding Habitus through Data Collection	87
Text-based Methods	88
Working with Interviews: Individual	89
Working with Interviews: Focus Groups	90
Working with Technology	92
Working with Technology: E-mail as On-going Dialogue	92
Working with technology: E-mail as a Tool for Organisation	93
Working with technology: E-mail as a Tool for Clarifying data	93
Exploring Primary Texts: Student Journals	94
Exploring Secondary texts: Official Documents	95
Visual Methods: Moving beyond Text	95
Moving Beyond Text: Photography	95
Moving Beyond Text: Memory Boxes	96
Issues of Validity and Reliability	97
Ethics	98
Carrying out the Fieldwork	99
Making Sense of the Students' Experiences	101
Linking of themes	101
Breakdown of Student responses	103
Constructing statements	104
Life History Summaries	104
SPSS Analysis	104
Chapter Summary	106

<b>Chapter 4:</b>	<b>Habitus: Influenced by home Context</b>	<b>107</b>
	Introduction	108
	Geographical Context: A Local based Habitus	108
	The Family: Habitus as Classed Based Practice	115
	Class Location	116
	The Socio-Demographics of the Students	118
	Family Attitudes to Higher Education	121
	Mathew	129
	Breaking Family Patterns of Access to HE	130
	Sophie	131
	James	135
	Mathew	136
	Grace	136
	Chapter Summary	137
<b>Chapter 5:</b>	<b>Habitus: Influenced by Institutions</b>	<b>139</b>
	Introduction	140
	Institutional Habitus Part I	140
	Schooling Experiences	141
	Primary Schooling	141
	Zara	142
	James	143
	Getting to the 'Right' Secondary School	146
	Eve	148
	Sophie	148
	Erin	149
	Varieties of Post-16 Contexts	151
	Sophie	152
	Keira	153
	Deciding to Stay	156
	Sayda	160
	Moving on but Not Away	161



	Institutional Habitus Part II: The Sutton Trust	163
	The Construction of University Choice	164
	Sophie	165
	Feeling Uneasy about Oxbridge	166
	Erin	167
	Keira	170
	Sophie	171
	Toby	172
	Mathew	173
	Chapter Summary	174
<b>Chapter 6:</b>	<b>Habitus: From Tension to Stability</b>	<b>176</b>
	Introduction	177
	Adaptation of the habitus	177
	Adaptation of the Habitus as a Gradual Process	178
	Grace	180
	Eve	182
	Sophie	184
	Oscar	186
	Living with a Secondary Habitus: Moments of Crisis	188
	Oscar	188
	Erin	189
	Living with a Secondary Habitus: Playing the Game	191
	Move 1: Understanding the Field	192
	Move 2: Finding out Information	194
	Move 3: Understanding Driving Forces	196
	Move 4: Ensuring Success	203
	Living with a Secondary Habitus: Unsettling Times	206
	Anna: Settling In	207
	Sally: Being Let In	208
	Toby: Feeling Isolated	209
	Grace: It all Feels Familiar	210
	Keira: Re-Inventing an Identity	211

	Understanding Social Difference	214
	Stability of Habitus: 'It Feels Like Home'	217
	Anna	218
	Sophie	221
	Zara	222
	Grace	223
	Chapter Summary	226
<b>Chapter 7:</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>228</b>
	Introduction	229
	What are the Experiences of Working Class Young People During and After their Progression into Higher Education?	229
	The Nature of Class	230
	Understanding Family background	234
	Responses to Schooling	235
	Adaptation of the Habitus	237
	What Role do Institutions Play in the Attraction and Retention of Such Students?	246
	Favourites in the System	246
	Intervention as a Trajectory Interruption	250
	The Reality of Settling In	255
	Contribution to Knowledge	257
	Policy Implications	259
	Directions for Further Study	261
	Chapter Summary	261
<b>Epilogue:</b>	<b>Reflections</b>	<b>262</b>
	Working Reflexively	263
	Personal Shifts	265
<b>References</b>		<b>268</b>

<b>Appendices</b>		<b>298</b>
Appendix 1:	Letter of Introduction	298
Appendix 2:	Information Leaflet 1	299
Appendix 3:	Study Flier	301
Appendix 4:	Parental Consent letter	303
Appendix 5:	Sutton Trust Summer School Journal Questions	305
Appendix 6:	Y13 Initial Questionnaire	308
Appendix 7:	Individual Interview Schedule	311
Appendix 8:	A2 Results Pro-Forma	313
Appendix 9:	Analytical Grid Example 1	314
Appendix 10:	Analytical Grid Example 2	319
Appendix 11:	Life History Summaries Example	332
Appendix 12:	Statement Construction from the Data	334
Appendix 13:	Cluster Analysis	338
Appendix 14:	Trajectory Interruptions	339

In this chapter I provide personal contextual information which acts as a backdrop to the entire thesis. In recognising that doctoral research is conducted within several 'contexts', I frame this study within my own personal and professional histories. I draw from events and experiences that combine to produce a story - albeit a partial one - of how I came to progress into higher education. I also recognise that the story presented here is done so through my 'lens', resulting in my interpretations and perspectives of the events.

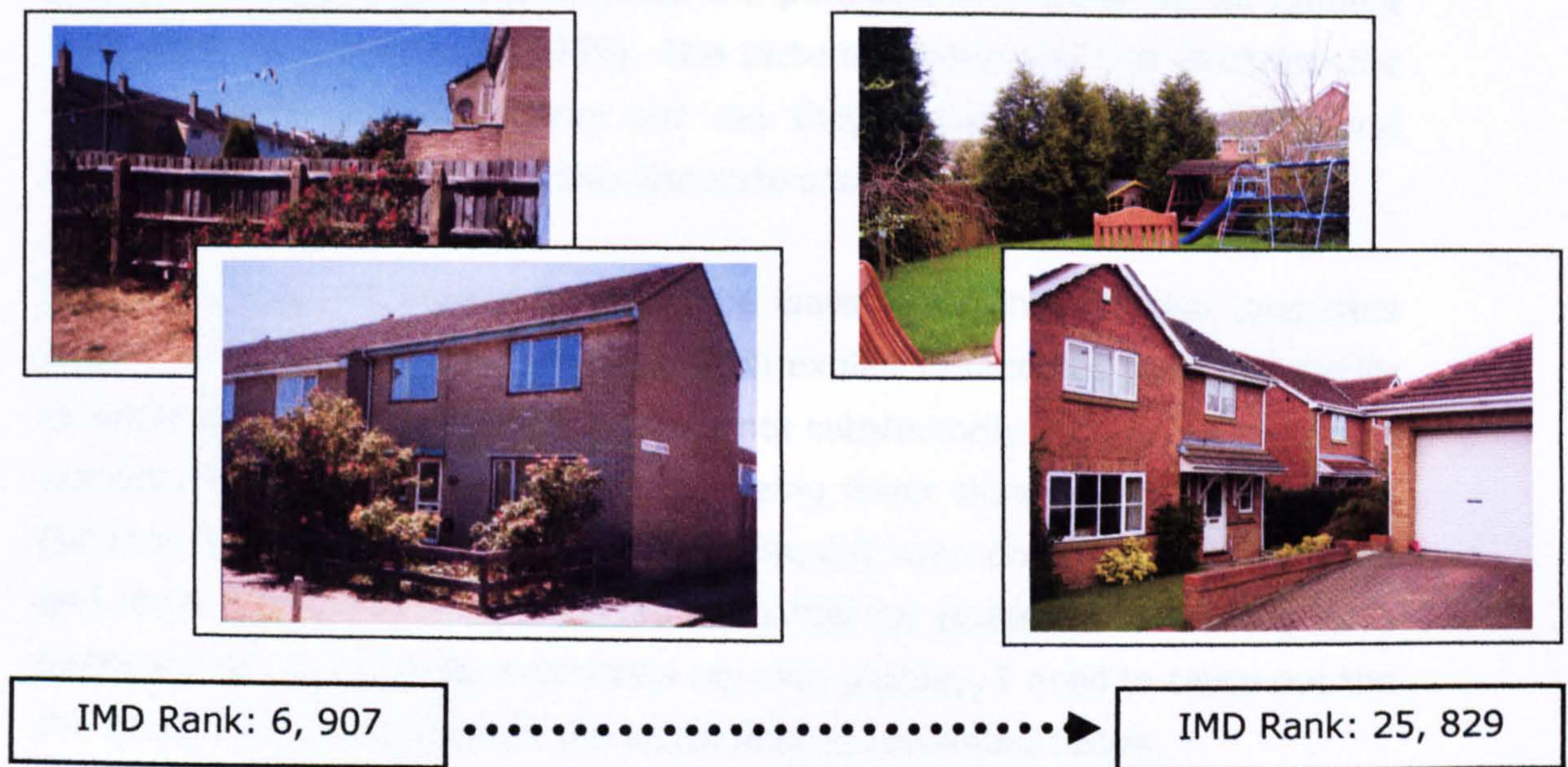
Although I provide the 'truth' as I view it, I am unable to substantiate the events through reference to other sources. In producing this account of my journey, I am interested in reflecting upon the influences, both social and institutional, that informed my thinking and decision making in relation to participation in higher education (HE).

**In all cultures, the family imprints its members with selfhood.  
Human experience of identity has two elements; a sense of  
belonging and a sense of being separate. The laboratory in which  
these ingredients are mixed and dispensed is the family, the matrix  
of identity  
(Minuchin 1977: 47)**

## **My Journey**

No-one in my family has ever been to college or university. Whilst this is also the case for a number of students, there is significant political interest in dealing with the issue. My own journey into higher education (HE) took place in the 1980s where there was a very different social and political context which shaped education policy. I present my story here in order to position myself within the research study, but also to illuminate the way in which institutions and social networks informed the decisions I made.

I begin this introduction to myself by visually presenting my 'social position'. This representation of my journey illustrates a partial account of the social transformation that has occurred and yet, beneath the surface of the two pictures presented here lies a complex life history – one which has been shaped and influenced by social interactions, political contexts and educational systems. The difference in the location and contexts of the two houses represents a journey that was possible primarily as a result of the education system. The use of a travelling metaphor features quite significantly in my story and is used to illustrate movement from one social position to another – from one type of existence to another or the 'distance' (Bourdieu 1998: 6) covered in my personal history.



**Figure 1:** Visual Representation of my Journey

Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) determine levels of deprivation on a number of measures including education, employment, crime and housing and are weighted to produce an overall rank index of multiple deprivation. The rank IMD scores used above represent data at the Lower Layer Super Output Area (LSOA), which provides information for relatively small areas comprising approximately 1200 households. The identification of a theoretical difference between the two locations is possible by using current IMD rank scores, however, the use of this data is done so with the caveat that it may not represent the levels of deprivation that existed during my time in my parental home (current IMD rank score: 6, 907). Although comparisons between social positions are problematic when using visual material such as that presented in Figure 1, I am struck by the density of housing in my former home. A recent visit there re-enforced this: I experienced the area as claustrophobic and could not identify myself as having belonged there. It would appear that with increased financial resources comes increased space, and for me, a different sense of identity.

Although Bourdieu states that 'spatial differences on paper are equivalent to social differences' (Bourdieu 1998: 6), when looking at the photographs above, it is evident that my journey from one social position to another has occurred. And yet, the partial story represented here is one of a change in

financial circumstances that enabled the purchase of a house in an affluent area (IMD rank score: 25, 829). The pictures above can not illustrate the difficult nature of that journey nor can they present the resultant hybrid nature of an existence where two disparate social worlds have combined.

Bourdieu's theories mainly focus on the ways in which education processes ensure social reproduction. This approach explains outcomes for the majority of working class young people but does not satisfactorily account for the small number of young people, identified as being fewer than one in five students (Connor, Dewson et al. 2001), including myself, who do go against the grain and move beyond what is expected or typical for people from working class backgrounds. In order to understand my own journey, I need to tease out the complexities that lay beneath the visual images presented above.

Bourdieu states that

... the goal of sociology is to uncover the most deeply buried structures of the different social worlds that make up the social universe, as well as the 'mechanisms' that tend to ensure their reproduction or transformation. (Bourdieu 1996: 1)

In presenting my 'story', I am attempting to uncover the mechanisms that ensured my personal 'transformation' (*ibid*: 1). I recount this story as a series of what I describe as 'trajectory interruptions', or the pushing and pulling of a class based habitus. I do this to re-enforce the complexity of my journey but also to acknowledge that my place at the University of Nottingham is not reflective of outcomes often associated with the working class.

In understanding my own journey as being constructed through 'trajectory interruptions', I accept that as a young working class child, a particular pathway through life would have been predicted or certain for me. As my mother worked in a factory and my father, who did not live with us, did not have any form of stable employment, my *expected* trajectory would have mirrored my parents' occupational status. This interpretation does not account for interventions, through education for example, or interactions outside of the

immediate family where opportunities to develop increased levels of cultural and social capital (Bourdieu 1997) can occur. Interactions outside of the family and home contexts can therefore be understood as 'interruptions': events and social interactions that made the movement between and within differing social fields (Bourdieu 1997) possible<sup>1</sup>. The main route out of poverty is believed to be education (Blyth 2001; DfES 2003) and my interactions within the field of education, as a form of 'trajectory interruption' was instrumental in influencing the decisions and choices I made.

Education, for many working class young people not only includes the issue of academic failure (Gillborn and Safia Mirza 2000), but is also associated with alienation (Skeggs 1997; Wentworth and Peterson 2001); a sense of occupying a social space that does not feel comfortable. Whilst this may be true for the majority, a small number of working class students successfully negotiate their way through education systems. In my story, I focus much more on my interactions within education, rather than social networks, as I believe education played a more significant role in my eventual social position. In my story, opportunities within the broader social field related to and occurred as a result of my experiences within the education field.

My experiences relate strongly to those of other individuals who have completed similar journeys and altered their projected social trajectory. They write evocatively about their own transformation process, often explicitly referring to periods of struggle and an awareness of the occupation of differing social spaces where the living out of different class related practices is evident (see for example, Rose 1989; Law 1995; Mahony and Zmroczek 1997; Reay 1997; Walkerdine, Lucey et al. 2001). Although the pictures above represent differing living contexts that I have experienced, they can not illustrate the experiences and struggles that occurred during movement from one class position to another. I now look in more detail at the journey I have made and draw from Bourdieu's theories of habitus and field to explain the complexities behind my own social transformation.

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<sup>1</sup> A more detailed explanation of Bourdieu's theories is provided in Chapter 1.



## **Early Days**

The work of Lareau (2003) identifies two types of class based child rearing approaches. She argues that working class parents place an emphasis on the 'accomplishment of natural growth' rather than the 'concerted cultivation' (Lareau 2003: 3) associated with the middle classes. My own experiences resonate with the stories she recounts. I enjoyed much autonomy from my mother (my mother and father divorced when I was five). I spent much of my childhood playing with other children from our street. My social position, as I understand it now, did not mean anything to me at the time. I knew we did not have access to the financial resources that many of my school friends enjoyed and this was a cause of frustration to me. However, I did not associate levels of economic capital with access to the form of capital Bourdieu describes as social (Bourdieu 1997). This is not unusual. A recent report published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation explored children's views of social difference. The research found that the children, who were recruited from two contrasting social backgrounds, 'did not identify themselves as poor or affluent', but instead used those terms 'to distinguish 'other' people from themselves' (Sutton, Smith et al. 2007: 9).

I do not remember any of the other children from our street talking about aspirations, particularly in relation to education. There was an unarticulated, unidentified acceptance that our lives constituted the 'natural order of things' (Webb, Schirato et al. 2002: 15) – that there was a pathway mapped out by our families' traditions. None of the older children had gone on to university and all of our parents were in low paid, low status occupations. At the age of 16, the older children from our street went on to work in local shops or factories – just as our parents had. Those outcomes were the class-based practices that bounded any aspirations that may have lurked beneath our expected trajectories. To 'aspire' in this context invariably meant to move away – to self-improve.

Wrapped in a social context that comprised freedom and yet also had limited movement beyond the confines of the estate boundaries, my early development was marked by its relative stability in social class terms. I mixed and socialized with other young people who were just like me. However, on

entry to school, it became clear to me that different rules were in operation and the freedom I enjoyed at home began to be replaced by expectations from within the institution of schooling – ways of behaving and speaking in particular.

My years at infant school were relatively uneventful. I remember playing in sand and water pits and having a particular fondness for the dressing up corner. One incident that does stick with me is one of 'failure'. Prior to the transition to junior school, all children had to go to the head teacher's office to undertake a form of assessment. There was no explanation given about its purpose. I performed four out of the five tests easily, but floundered on the last.

Although Bowl (2003) refers to negative experiences with education as being 'part of the process of transition' (Bowl 2003: 121), experiencing academic failure is much more than that. It relates to class position and becomes embodied - established as part of an individual's identity. The assessment of my 'ability' from that task had not only inscribed academic failure within me (I focused on the test that I had been unable to do), but determined my position into a particular class in the junior department. It functioned as a sorting mechanism or as Bourdieu states, it is the way in which the education 'system separates the holders of inherited cultural capital from those who lack it' (Bourdieu 1998: 20). There were many young people in my junior school who were holders of 'inherited capital': it was evident in the way they interacted with teachers and other pupils in the school. Within the classroom, groups were formed on the basis of academic ability and these extended into the playground. The 'posh' children who had been placed into a high achievement set stayed together and the 'naughty' children, who had been placed into a low achievement set, formed their groups. This left an unidentified middle group of which I was part – a working class child who had some aptitude for music.

There is a clear relationship between levels of cultural capital and academic attainment where 'differences of aptitude' are 'inseparable from social differences according to inherited [cultural] capital' (Bourdieu 1998: 20).

From this perspective, education acts primarily as a site of reproduction. Mechanisms through which working class children survive this primary function involve dynamic and complex interactions within the field. There are many ways in which working class young people are disadvantaged within the education system and I explore those in more detail in the next chapter. However, for the purposes of understanding inequality within education and despite the problems associated with classification schemes, it is useful to understand class in terms of the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC). Such schemes are used to direct social policy and help to 'explain variations in social behaviour and other social phenomena' (Office for National Statistics 2005). Thus in relation to education, much of the literature (e.g. Lawler 1999; Reay 2001; Archer and Leathwood 2003; Ball 2003) refers to a dichotomous relationship when comparing class relationships with education – that of the working and middle class. Identifying difference in ability (as narrowly measured within the school context) or attitude according to class is relatively straightforward. The process of understanding how such differences are developed is more problematic.

In understanding that young people can alter social position through educational attainment and progress, there must also be some acknowledgement that education systems can recognise difference. The primary school that I attended served a wide demographic area including a substantially sized council estate which suffered from high levels of deprivation and crime. It could be that in this context, I was identified as one of the 'better' pupils and therefore was given increased opportunities – opportunities that were not available to many other pupils in the school or the other young children who lived on my street. My first experiences of a 'trajectory interruption' came when I transferred to the Junior School. For example, I was the only pupil in my class and from my street to be offered instrumental tuition. Schools often detail the number of extra-curricular activities offered to pupils as a marketing strategy for attracting middle class pupils into the school. It could be that such a strategy was at play in my experience, although I have no evidence to support this idea.

## **Dipping my Toes in Middle Class Waters**

As a well-behaved pupil who had shown some musical aptitude on the recorder, I was 'rewarded' with the opportunity to learn the violin. I felt proud: singled out as 'different' as I carried the cumbersome case home. It was however, a symbolic representation of the existent clash between my family habitus (Bourdieu 1990a) and the habitat (Bourdieu 1999) of the schooling institution. It is also a conundrum within my story.

Bourdieu refers to habitus as a set of 'transposable dispositions' (Bourdieu 1977: 72) that drive particular class based practices. There was nothing in my immediate family history that would direct me towards learning a musical instrument. I have no recollection of why I accepted this opportunity. To do so set me apart. It is perhaps pertinent to reflect on the level of autonomy I enjoyed as a young child. I believe this to be a factor in understanding my decision to commence violin tuition. Although this would have not been possible without my mother's support, I presented it to her as a something I was doing rather than as a request. As a child who wanted to learn an instrument and had had the positive affirmation of teachers through their 'choice' of me as a 'good candidate' for music tuition, I set to work quickly. I practised regularly and moved through the examination grades at appropriate times.

I received free music tuition in school and this enabled me to continue with music tuition throughout my educational life. I did not appreciate the concomitant activities that came with playing an orchestral instrument, but I soon became part of a number of orchestras and string groups both within school and the county. Although I did not appreciate the social differences in terms of class position, even at the young age that I was, I felt a difference between myself and other orchestra members. I saw it in how they dressed, the fact that they were dropped off by their parents every week, the girls always had their hair in ponytails with a variety of hair clips and ribbons, and they exuded confidence. This is indicative of the way class is both lived and experienced. I knew I was different to the other girls and spent much of the time wishing that I did not have to go as each week served as a constant

reminder of what I did not have access to, despite the fact that I was a strong violin player and deserved to be there on that basis.

As a trajectory interruption, my experiences of music tuition and orchestra served as a form of intervention – it led to other experiences that went beyond my class based horizons. For example, I became interested in drama and attended a local drama group. This in turn enabled me to mix with more young people from different backgrounds to my own and seems to have been the catalyst which resulted in my eventual social transformation.

Giddens offers some insight into how individuals can break away from the constraints of social background

Although we are all influenced by the social contexts in which we find ourselves, none of us are simply determined in our behaviour by those contexts. We possess, and create, our own individuality. Our activities both structure - give shape to - the social world around us and at the same time are structured by that social world. (Giddens 1989: 6)

Thus, whilst I enjoyed numerous social interactions with the other children from our street, these experiences did not sit in isolation from other possible intervening factors that could shape my future direction. The combination of autonomy from my mother and the 'intervention' from primary school enabled me to create my own individuality as distinct from that of a family based habitus. There was a distinct difference in levels of 'intervention' between home and school. At home, my mother busied herself with work to provide for us and as a result, I enjoyed much freedom.

Participation in orchestras and other musical activities created further theoretical 'distance' (Bourdieu 1998: 6) between myself and my family in addition to the difference between myself and other young people from our street. Unknowingly, I was building a store of cultural capital that would contribute to my eventual position. I describe these times as 'moving towards middle class waters' because it adequately addresses the feelings of

discomfort I experienced at the time. 'Belonging' in either group was complicated as each interaction further confirmed my sense of isolation both at home and within the social groups that I mixed with. I began to spend more time with friends I had made through music and drama activities. As a consequence I straddled two different social worlds (Power, Edwards et al. 2003) and didn't feel at home in either.

Bourdieu reflects on the predictability of habitus and its dispositions to 'protect itself from crises and critical challenges by providing itself with a milieu to which it is as pre-adapted as possible' (Bourdieu 1990a: 61). The discomfort I felt was symbolic of the internal battle that occurred. I present my story as one of class transition; one in which social mobility has occurred. I assume that my primary habitus (Reed-Danahay 2005) was based on working class attitudes and characteristics. However, perhaps this understanding is too simplistic. The use of social categorisation systems that utilise parental occupation would support the case that I did come from a working class background. However, my class categorisation based on parental occupation could be concealing a more complex family context. My grandparents on my father's side were relatively wealthy. They owned a double fronted large detached property and their own business. They lost much of their money through a rogue deal in which they sold off other properties they owned at a price not reflective of their true value. My grandmother played the piano to a high standard. On my mother's side, the picture is completely different. She grew up in a children's home and never got to know who her parents were. The result of this complex family background could have produced a split habitus (or contradictory dispositions) - one that was ripe to respond to inculcation into the middle class world.

It is possible that habitus, rather than being linked to immediate family context only, can survive intergenerational 'blips'. For example, my grandparents on my father's side would have been categorised as middle class based on ONS categorisations. However, my father made some decisions which caused his own class categorisation to be working class. He was stubborn and did not return to his parents when they offered help. Instead he worked in numerous short term jobs, had limited economic resources and few

aspirations to change. As he did not live with us from a young age, his dispositions towards education and employment did not influence my own. As such, I was able to respond positively to interventions from educational practices that fed the dispositions that lay beneath my working class categorisation. It is possible to conceive of my habitus as latent middle class, or possibly as being part of an intermediate class (Ball and Vincent 2005), where through my engagement with instrumental tuition and subsequent access to differing social networks, I was able to disassociate myself from the class based habitus of other children in our neighbourhood and began the process of being different.

Moving on or away from others carries with it emotional risks: it points to disassociation with family members and neighbours. The process of becoming 'respectable' (Skeggs 1997) is viewed as integral to class identification:

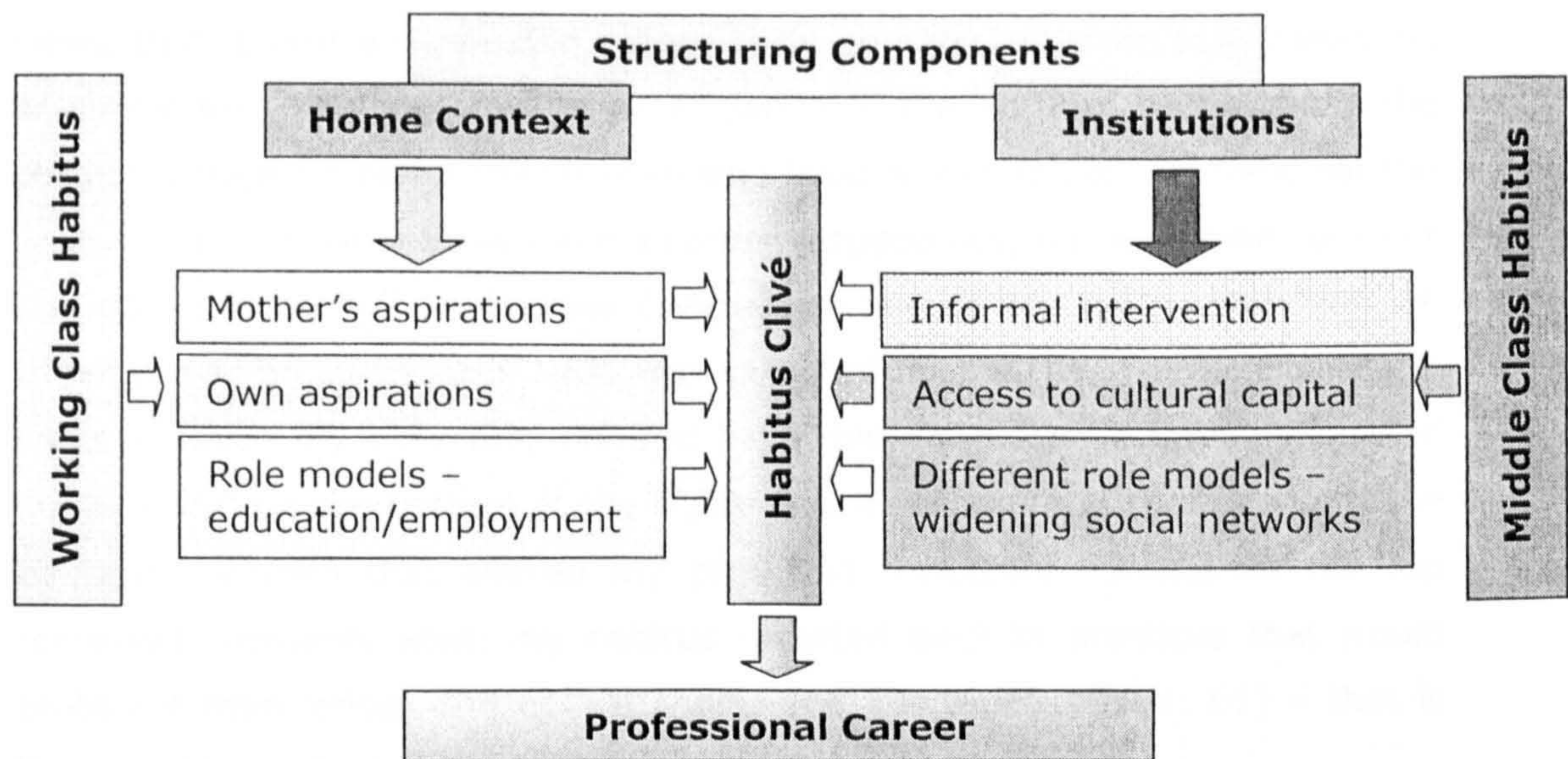
Respectability is one of the most ubiquitous signifiers of class. It informs how we speak, who we speak to, how we classify others, what we study and how we know who we are (or are not). (Skeggs 1997: 1)

My journey to becoming 'respectable' was through instrumental tuition and involvement with orchestras and choirs. Although there was a distance between myself and my family, the process of a change in habitus was imperceptible.

Bourdieu does allow for adaptation of the habitus in response to experience and context – the habitus as being 'variable from place to place and time to time' (Bourdieu 1990b: 9). However, the main body of his work focuses on the way in which habitus 'tends to favour experiences likely to reinforce it' (Bourdieu 1990a: 61).

The habitus adapts to context and this more flexible interpretation of the term makes more sense when applied to my trajectory. It is difficult to evaluate my mother's motives for allowing me to pursue instrumental tuition without considering the possibility that she held underlying and unarticulated

aspirations for my future. It is evident that my primary school had a critical role to play in shaping my future in providing an opportunity that was ordinarily restricted to pupils from backgrounds that are more privileged. However, my own aspirations, inadvertently and subconsciously directing my individual agency, allowed me to respond positively and consequently inputted into a chain of events that resulted in my eventual social class position as I illustrate in Figure 2.



**Figure 2:** Process Involved in my Class Transition

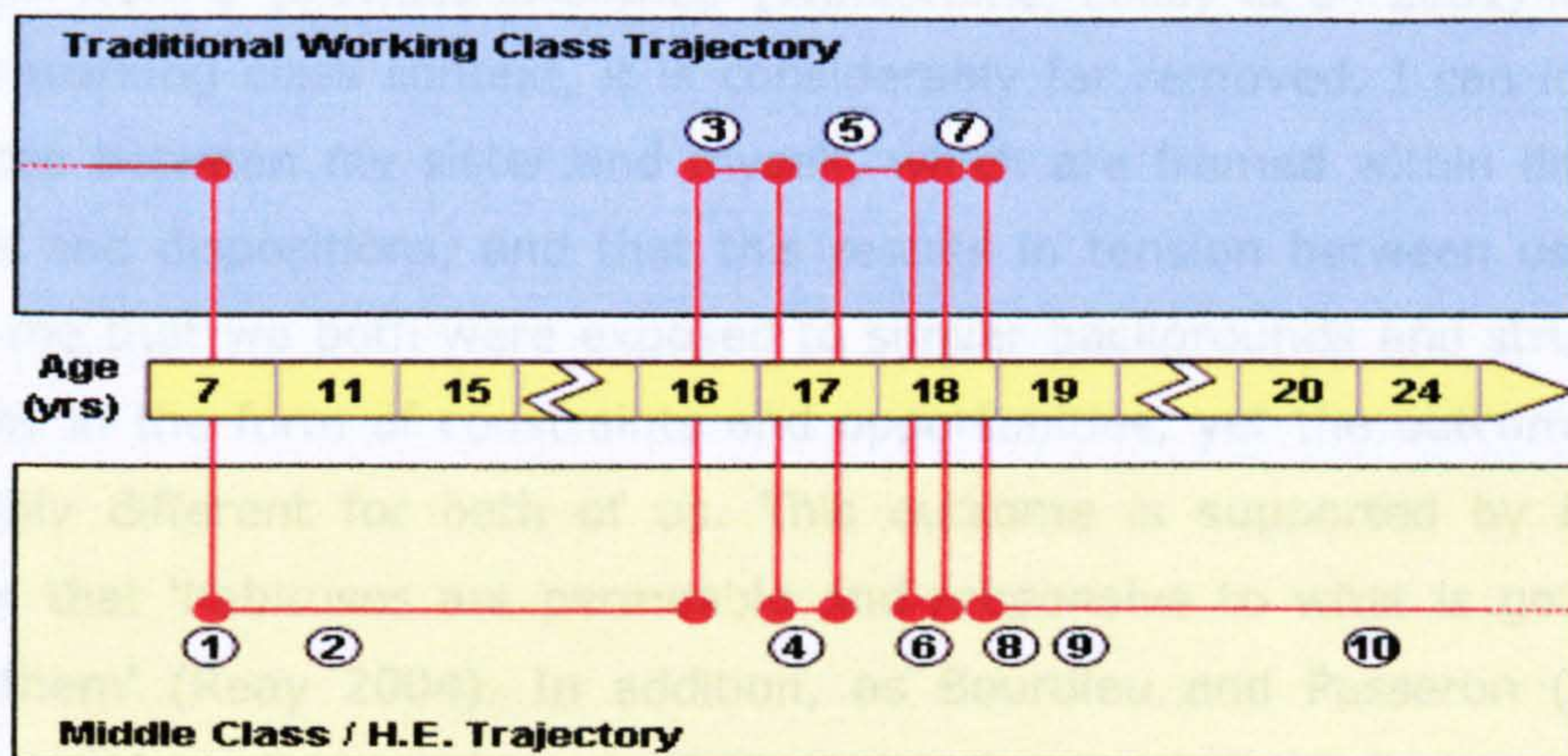
This figure usefully illustrates a complex journey. It demonstrates a number of structuring components that initially occurred at school level. It is also representative of emergent and dynamic relationships that exist between agents and the social fields in which they are positioned. Bourdieu considers the notion of 'field' to be 'dynamic' and where 'various potentialities exist' (Mahar, Harker et al. 1990). For my journey, the 'potentiality' occurred due to a combination of structuring influences and individual agency simultaneously working to redirect my projected trajectory. The field of education was critical in my movement away from a working class life. Its power and influence structured me in such a way that my working class habitus gradually diminished and adapted to incorporate middle class attitudes, values and dispositions.



The journey I have so far outlined reflects a positive uninterrupted process, normally associated with that of the middle class (Power, Edwards et al. 2003). However, that is not the case and I now turn to focus on the way in which my trajectory was 'interrupted'.

## Life as an Interrupted Trajectory

Suggesting that my trajectory occurred as a result of a series of 'interruptions' infers that it had an intended, consciously constructed trajectory based on linear models. This was not the case. Earlier in this section, I highlighted the predicted trajectories for the children who lived on our street. We were not the types of families who would have a career mapped out, nor would we consider staying on at school beyond the compulsory age of 16. Taking this 'normal' trajectory as an indicator of what was expected for me, I will demonstrate the ways in which my trajectory differed from this norm. The events (illustrated numerically) on the bottom of the figure below represent encounters with the education system that altered my predicted trajectory. Events on the top represent moments when my habitus reverted back to practices that would protect it from 'crises and critical challenges' (Bourdieu 1990a: 61) – that is they would maintain my working class status.



**Figure 3:** Life as an Interrupted Trajectory

This one-dimensional representation does not illustrate the social interactions that took place and the way in which I progressively adapted to the rules of the 'game' and the 'demands of the field' (Bourdieu 1990a: 66). However, it does show a period of heightened tension and uncertainty during the ages of

16 – 19. Those years represent periods of transition, perhaps where the discordant relationship between my primary and secondary habitus conflicted and competed for position. It makes sense to understand this tension in terms of tectonic plate movement during an earthquake – eventually a big shift occurs (I return to this figure in Chapter 6: *Habitus: From Tension to Stability*).

During my secondary school years, my teachers often went on strike over concerns about teacher salaries. Whilst I applauded their stance, I am convinced that the missed lessons contributed to my limited success at O Level. However, during the period of transition between the ages of 16 and 18, academic attainment became increasingly important to me as a way forward and out of the directionless path my life was taking. As Reay points out, for working class individuals, education is a tool for escaping or for self improvement or indeed a mixture of the two (Reay 2001). Ongoing integration into the field of education led me to understand that increased education qualifications could potentially secure an improved future than that experienced at home. I now believe this was the motivation behind my progression onto degree level and eventually to doctorate level study. My own journey is not complete in terms of where I would like to be, but in terms of separation from a 'previous existence' (Walkerline, Lucey et al. 2001) located within a working class context, it is considerably far removed. I can identify differences between my sister and myself, which are framed within differing attitudes and dispositions, and that this results in tension between us. It is clear to me that we both were exposed to similar backgrounds and structural influences in the form of constraints and opportunities, yet the outcome was remarkably different for both of us. This outcome is supported by Reay's assertion that 'habitus are permeable and responsive to what is going on around them' (Reay 2004). In addition, as Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) explain, working class students self-eliminate or are eliminated through the education system through the examination process. My sister used employment and teenage pregnancy as a form of 'escape' from the condition of home, but not the conditions of a working class existence. I watched her struggle to raise children in the same way as our mother had done and subconsciously decided that that was not what I desired from life. I got caught

up in 'the game' of education; however the journey was not as smooth as it could have been had I achieved better O Level results.

During my A Level courses, I had to decide what future path to take. I had no idea concerning the hierarchy of higher education institutions (the marketisation of education as we now know it was only in the process of being developed), neither did I appreciate that universities existed beyond the boundaries of my own experiences and knowledge. I did know about the reputations of both Oxford and Cambridge (Oxbridge) universities, but had no 'hot knowledge' (Ball and Vincent 1998) which would drive my university choices. I therefore decided to apply to Cambridge College of Arts and Technology (CCAT) to undertake my degree. I implicitly knew that Oxbridge wasn't for 'people like me' (Archer and Hutchings 2000). I associated Oxbridge students with the upper class and did not believe that I would ever 'fit' into such an institution either academically or socially. How I came to this conclusion is a mystery to me; I did not receive any careers guidance, which would have led me to this conclusion, nor did I have a group of friends with whom I discussed such matters. Other students on the A Level courses were also applying to institutions with 'polytechnic' in their titles, although there were a few who considered applying to universities. The distinction between university and polytechnic status was clear, although the academic and social implications of this divide were not evident to me at the time of applying for higher education courses.

I was participating in the game, but had not yet developed a 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu 1990a: 66) in which I could exercise any form of strategic decision making. Playing the game and being equipped to play the game are two separate issues and relate strongly to social class. I was superficially equipped to participate in higher education, but the inculcation of middle class attitudes and dispositions had not gone as far to allow full integration into the elite institutions within the system.

## **Understanding the Game**

I undertook my PGCE at an elite institution. At some point during my transition from CCAT to Goldsmith's College, I grew to understand the

differentiation and 'hierarchy of institutions' (Shattock 1996: 25). I recall vividly sitting in my first lecture and saying to myself, 'This is what a proper university is like'. I felt overwhelmed by the apparent decadence of the surroundings and the impressive stature of the main building. I did not feel out of place at Goldsmiths. However, the stigma attached to having completed my first degree at CCAT lingered for many years. I disassociated myself from CCAT, often referring to Goldsmiths as my HE experience when questioned. I did not experience 'shame about what [I] had before' (Walkerline 2003: 238) in terms of my home location because that could easily be hidden. My feelings of 'shame' connected more intrinsically to positioning within the field of education and the new social contexts in which I found myself as a professional teacher. I experienced this as an interloper – someone who was in a professional occupation, but who did not belong there. I came to teaching with the baggage of an interrupted trajectory and it was up to me to find a way of fitting in to this new context. I literally had to 'learn on the job'. I had to quickly learn and apply the 'rules' of the game (Bourdieu 1977).

As a new teacher and the only professional within my family, I existed on two borders of social life. I continued the process of inculcation into the middle class way of life and yet, recognised that this formed further divisions between my family and me. Going 'home' became tortuous. There were no social bonds to make any journey home a positive experience.

The game became clear. There was no going back. In order to 'fit' in my new social context, I would have to deny any attachment to CCAT, ensure that I was a successful teacher and equip myself further by increasing my academic credentials. This would 'prove' my ability to fit. During my time as a teacher, I did not refer to CCAT at all. I became a highly respected teacher and received a glowing OfSTED report in 1995. Yet, I continued to feel as though I had something to prove.

Playing the 'game' of education has led me to embark on this PhD study. It signifies a final step away from the home and school contexts that determined my formative years. I did not enjoy the benefits of widening participation through explicit interventions, but stumbled my way through the education

system to the unfamiliar social territory (Plummer 2000) of the middle classes. I know the rules of the game but may not always have the resources, or class based habitus, to know how to act in defining moments (Ball 2003: Chapter 1). In looking at my trajectory, I can only conclude that individual agency in the form of personal aspirations had a significant influence to my social trajectory. With this in mind, I am able to understand my own class transition as a complex interplay between habitus and field. My history is nothing more than a 'certain specification of the collective history of [my] group or class,...[and] may be seen as a *structural variant* of [the] class habitus...' (Bourdieu 1977: 86). That is to say, my life history is not typical for the majority of working class young people but may be typical of a minority.

During my experiences as a teacher, the education 'game' became more explicit. I soon became aware of teacher attitudes that positioned particular students as deficient – their attitudes and values not matching those of the institution (Plummer 2000). I provided such students with an opportunity to excel and included them in concerts where I could. I recognised that hidden beneath their quite tough exteriors, lay musical talents that contributed to their tentative inculcation into the system. I identified with these students and did all I could to support them in their personal struggles with the education system.

As a 'professional' within the field of education, I constantly wrestled with my identity as a teacher and my latent, but not suffocated working class habitus. There were many times when my approach to young people differed from that of my colleagues. Although this did not significantly worry me, it did serve as a constant reminder of my different social background. Although the move from an identity as a non-traditional student to that of a professional teacher seemed to be disconnected, in terms of pedagogy and curriculum knowledge I was comprehensively prepared. However, despite this preparation and my development of cultural capital, I continued to feel very much like a fish out of water for some time.

It is evident from my story that education played a significant role in my career trajectory. My journey into HE was not unproblematic and it took

numerous attempts before I finally settled and completed a course that was the first step in the process. One of the aspects of my story which contributes to the focus of this study is how young people make the journey to HE in the current educational climate. Whilst the political landscape is different to when I progressed through education, I am interested in discovering the mechanisms that enable young people, particularly those who come from non-traditional backgrounds, to progress within education.

## **Chapter Summary**

My account of my journey through the field of education illustrates how the acquirement of cultural capital through other fields (for example, social and artistic) can be mobilised in the field of education. I have illustrated how interactions with other social agents within a number of fields influenced my own decisions and educational trajectory. Whilst acknowledging that my primary habitus is based on working class dispositions, I also recognise that a secondary habitus developed that separated me out from others in my home location. I was not consciously aware of the game in education although I did find myself caught up in it. My story is one of relative success and yet this is not the case for the majority of working class young people. I turn to this issue in the next chapter by focusing in detail on the field of education.

Having established my own story, this thesis builds from a desire to understand how journeys into higher education are made now. In particular, I was interested in finding out what influences young people's choices and how they come to make the decisions they do about higher education. In looking at a small number of young people's journeys into HE, I wanted to find out how habitus can adapt to context, or rather how it is shaped by experiences within a number of fields: education, social and political. Before moving onto the next chapter, I detail the structure of the thesis.

**Chapter 1** details the field of education and its inherent logic which seeks to reproduce and produce social inequalities. I refer to Bourdieu's notions of field and habitus in detail to explain why, despite government intervention, the same class based outcomes persist. I explore habitus to illustrate the congruence that middle class young people experience within the field of

education and also illustrate how they continue to succeed within the field because of their knowledge and participation in the game.

In **Chapter 2** I look at the Widening Participation agenda and explore the ways in which intervention programmes attempt to dislodge the logic of the field. I refer specifically to the work of the Sutton Trust and highlight that such programmes are always going to be taken up within the logic of the field in which it is applied.

The methodology chapter (**Chapter 3**) details my epistemological and methodological approach to the study. I briefly discuss the way in which I understand human action and focus specifically on the habitus as a determinant of action. As habitus is primarily concerned with human action, I justify why I have chosen to adopt a phenomenological hermeneutic/interpretivist approach within the study. I provide details of the study including, sample, scope, methods and analytical approach.

**Chapter 4** is the first of three findings chapters in which I explore the extent to which the students identify with their home locations and the people they live near. I identify the range of the students' home contexts through analysis of ONS data which demonstrates that far from coming from disadvantaged areas, many of the students in this study lived in areas that were relatively affluent. Further analysis (MOSAIC) is conducted to reveal that higher social class groups are over represented within both the Sutton Trust Summer School cohort and within my sample. I argue that the local context influences the formation of a habitus and that through alignment with or disassociation from others in their home contexts the students came to make their decisions about going to university.

In this second findings chapter (**Chapter 5**), I outline the schooling contexts of each student to explore the idea that each schooling institution has its own ethos and culture contributing to an institutional habitus. I demonstrate how the expectations placed on each student varied according to their school contexts and highlight the ways in which the schools operated to privilege the students in this study. I show how their close alignment with the field of

education contributed to their success in securing places at leading universities in the UK. In addition, I focus on the Sutton Trust as an intervention programme and illustrate how the messages the students received within that week served to confirm their ideas about a university hierarchy.

This final findings chapter (**Chapter 6**) explores the idea of habitus adaptation and outlines the pull which can occur at various stages in an individual's educational journey. I reflect upon my own educational journey and highlight the critical moments which could have resulted in a pull in either direction: either towards a working class trajectory or a middle class trajectory. Although the students in this study experienced similar moments, I illustrate how they occurred at differing stages. In addition I focus upon their first term at university and outline the ways in which they began to identify with their new environment. I explore what they had to say about other students and the ways in which they identified with some and not with others. Although the students claim that their new environment 'feels like home', I suggest that belonging to an intermediate class leaves them 'homeless' where they can not completely identify with others in their new context (university) or with those that they have left behind.

**Chapter 7** reflects on the study and pulls together the main issues that have arisen. I raise questions concerning the students' educational experiences and reflect on their positioning within the field that made them susceptible to being selected out and offered differential treatment. I also reflect on their participation on the Sutton Trust Summer School and suggest that vetting procedures should be carefully applied in order to bring about substantive change within the educational field.

In the **Epilogue**, I reflect on the study and what I have learnt about myself throughout the process.



In this chapter, I set out the purpose of the study. I also outline the theoretical lens that enabled me to understand the historical pattern of educational inequality. I refer to Bourdieu's notion of field to explain how class based outcomes persist in education. I outline the particular logic of the educational field which positions young people according to class. I demonstrate how young people are simultaneously produced and reproduced through their interactions within the educational field and outline the processes within two sub-fields - schools and HE - to illustrate that success in education relies both on knowledge of and participation in the game. I draw upon Bourdieu's notion of habitus to illustrate the natural sense of fit that middle class young people have within the educational field.

**All those who have the potential to benefit from higher education should have the opportunity to do so. This is a fundamental principle which lies at the heart of building a more socially just society, because education is the best and most reliable route out of poverty and disadvantage.  
(DfES 2003: 68)**

## **Study Focus**

The focus of this study developed as a result of a desire to understand my own educational journey and from my experiences of teaching young people who come from disadvantaged backgrounds who also had the potential to benefit from higher education. The education landscape differs from when I was a pupil and the mechanisms (for example, free music tuition) that ensured my success are not now as widely available. However, as I shall highlight, there is much current attention being paid to the under representation of particular social groups within higher education. Statistics demonstrate that there are a small number of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who continue to make the journey into HE. However, what concerns me and motivates this study is the continued inequality of opportunity for working class students and the continued low participation rates of that group within HE. Building from existing literature and my own experiences within the field of education, this research is concerned with issues of social justice, and the role education plays in processes of social mobility. The questions that I seek to explore are an attempt to understand the processes involved as students deliberate and eventually enter HE. As such, I pose two main research questions for this study:

1. What are the experiences of working class young people during and after their progression into Higher Education?
2. What role do institutions play in the attraction and retention of such students?

In seeking to explore these two research questions, I refer to Bourdieu's notions of field, habitus and capital in relation to HE and understandings of social class. Although I have struggled to pull the two constructs of class and HE together because of the complexities surrounding class categorisation, in this chapter, I explore both class and education through a Bourdieuan lens. The notions of field and habitus seemed to clearly explain the ways in which education systems influence class based outcomes for young people and as such provide the theoretical lens through which I have understood my own journey and that of the students I detail later.

## **The Use of Bourdieu**

This study takes up a Bourdieuan analysis, like a number of other studies that explore the process of higher education choice (see for example, Reay 2001; Ball, Davies et al. 2002; Archer 2003; Bowl 2003; Brooks 2003; Power, Edwards et al. 2003). Although focused on higher education choice, this study also explores the interaction between institutions and individual agents – a focus of much of Bourdieu's work on the French education system. I utilise Bourdieu here, to explain the field of education and the ways in which the same class based outcomes continue to be reproduced.

Bourdieu's main concern was to develop a general theory of practice that went beyond the constraints of positivistic empirical study and in particular the 'irreconcilable perspectives of objectivism and subjectivism' (Mahar, Harker et al. 1990) - the dichotomies that had been so prevalent in previous sociological theory. In doing so, Bourdieu was attempting to develop a 'dialectical relationship between structure and agency' (Mahar, Harker et al. 1990) which facilitated understanding and could take account of 'the genesis of the person, and of social structures and groups' (Mahar, Harker et al. 1990).

Moving towards a more relational theoretical construct to understand social positions, Bourdieu recognised a 'series of breaks with Marxist theory' (Bourdieu 1985: 723). One of the 'breaks' that Bourdieu discusses is the move away from reducing the 'social field, a multi dimensional space, solely to the economic field...' (Bourdieu 1985: 723). This move away from previous theoretical perspectives (although Bourdieu does refer to and build on the

work of for example, Marx, Weber, Durkheim and Saussure) paves the way for a more multi dimensional sociological analysis. Analysis in which the 'social world can be represented as a space (with several dimensions)' and where 'agents and groups of agents are thus defined by their relative positions within that space' (Bourdieu 1985: 723 - 724).

In order to provide sociological explanations for class based practices, Bourdieu developed many theoretical concepts which facilitate understanding of education systems, including:

- Field
- Habitus
- Capital – economic, social, cultural and symbolic
- Distinction.

The work he carried out in relation to the French education system demonstrated how the above theoretical concepts interrelated to produce social reproduction. In order to understand these concepts in relation to this study, I begin by exploring the notion of field in relation to schools and higher education.

## **The Notion of Field**

The notion of field symbolises complex social relations and interactions – 'a configuration of relations between positions objectively defined...' (Bourdieu 1996: 72). There are many different fields, for example, education, politics, philosophy, religion and the social (Bourdieu 1985). Each field has its own logic, 'specific properties that are peculiar to that field' and 'invariant rules of functioning' (Bourdieu 1993: 72).

The structure of a field relates to the '*state* of the power relations among the agents or institutions engaged in the struggle' (Bourdieu 1993: 73). It is true to say that dynamic relationships between social actors are not equal and there exists a struggle in the social space in which individuals are positioned relatively to others. The distribution of power within fields is therefore unequal. This can be seen in the field of education for example where the

middle classes monopolise their dominant position in relation to education through, for example, school choice, which perpetuates social inequalities (Ball 2003).

Much of Bourdieu's work centres on the field of education and the ways in which structural inequalities play out within educational processes to not only *produce* and *reproduce* wider social inequality, but also *reflect* structural relations in society. Importantly, the relationship between individuals and the field and with others within the field, re-enforces the importance of what Bourdieu terms as a 'multi-dimensional space of positions' (Bourdieu 1985: 724) – or where people are distributed within particular fields. Position within a field is dependent on how individuals value the prize (or stakes) which is influenced by whether they have been 'shaped to enter that field' (Bourdieu 1993: 73) and are at ease within it. Congruence within the field of education is visible within middle class attitudes and dispositions where academic success and the pursuit of higher education are typical outcomes. Working class young people are unable to fully participate in the game of education as they are not 'in possession of the statutory and technical competence which is necessary for participation' (Bourdieu 1998: 4). Thus the field of education acts as a social filter; through educational processes, working class individuals are progressively eliminated, unless they self-eliminate through for example truancy and poor examination results (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977).

The relational emphasis found in Bourdieu's work is also pertinent to understanding how fields function. In each field there are struggles for position with dominant position holders attempting to defend their positions from newcomers to the field (Bourdieu 1993). However, such struggles only come into play when 'newcomers' value the profits at stake in the same way as those who have been 'shaped to enter that field' (Bourdieu 1993: 72). In that sense field can be understood as a set of social relations where there is constant struggle 'for the harmonising of dispositions' (Bourdieu 1984: 110) or indeed tension for those considered not to be 'shaped to enter the field'.

However, Bourdieu does acknowledge that the notion of 'field' is an 'arbitrary social construct ... whose arbitrariness and artificiality are underlined by

everything that defines its autonomy' (Bourdieu 1990a: 67). That is, the 'explicit and specific rules' (Bourdieu 1990a: 67), that produce the inherent 'logic' of the field, contribute to the functioning of the field. Individuals are social actors, who embody 'structuring structures' (Bourdieu 1977) and perpetuate the functioning of a specific field. Thus whilst fields maintain relative harmony due to the structural constraints inherent within them, there is some flexibility where individuals are concerned. Individuals '... *do do*, much more often than if they were behaving randomly, 'the only thing to do'' (Bourdieu 1990: 11) which is determined by their position in social space and the operationalisation of their class-based habitus.

Although position within a field is a critical component of the theoretical approach to my work, it can not be used in isolation from Bourdieu's other tools. The interrelationship between habitus and field, for example, is central to understanding how young people position themselves in relation to HE institutions and has some bearing on the choices they consequently make. A detailed look at the field of education, for example, illustrates how differing class based practices are lived out as 'struggles' in relation to both the way in which education is structured and also in the notion of choice.

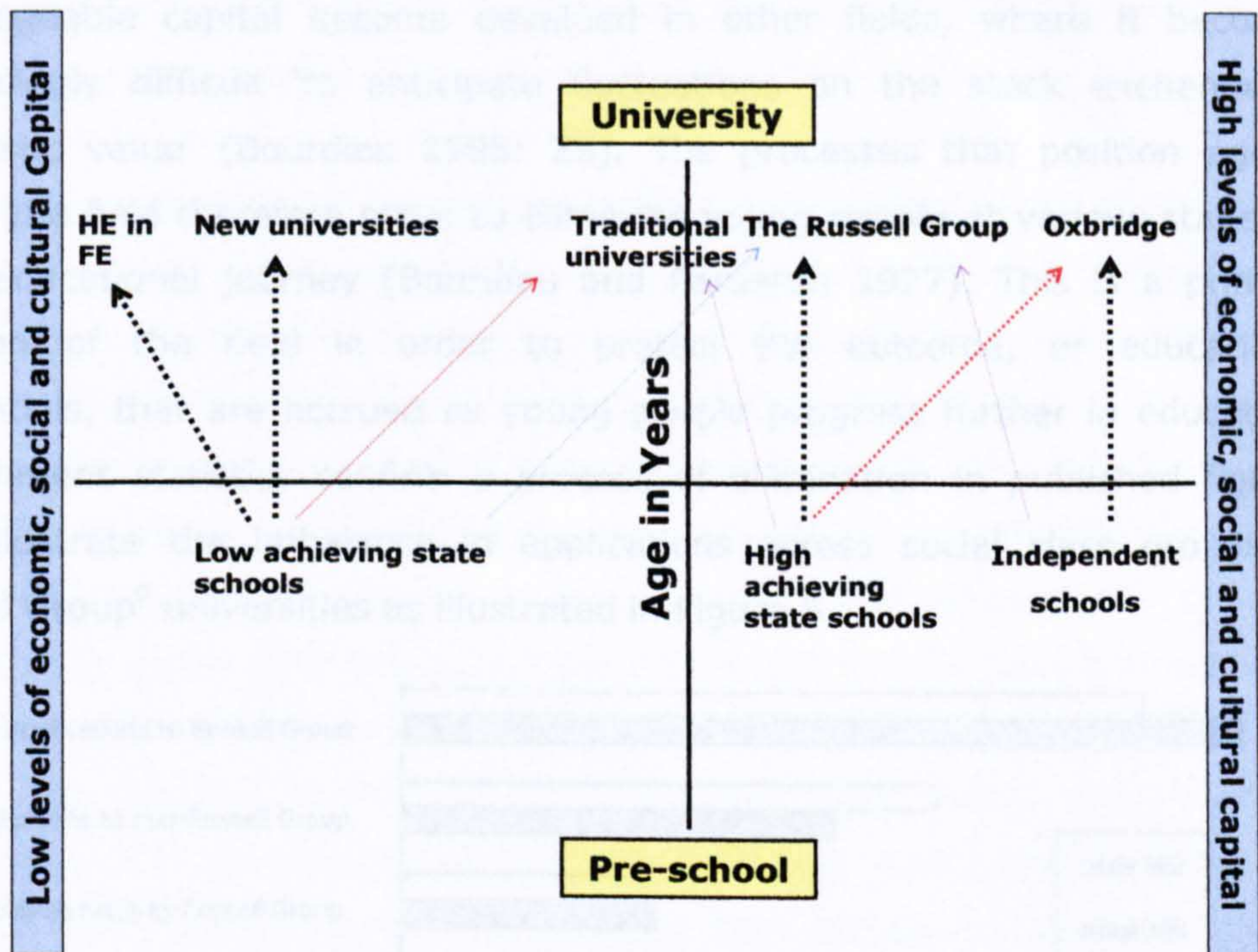
As a theoretical and analytical tool, field offers much to my thesis in terms of understanding the underlying structural inequalities within education. It allows exploration of the extent to which social agents or in the case of my study, students are structured by, and how they contribute to the structuring of, educational processes. Thus the interplay between individuals and institutions and how much agency young people have when making choices about higher education is central to this study.

The focus of the next section is to highlight the ways in which the educational field contributes to wider social inequality. In identifying the struggles and stakes that perpetuate the field's functioning I focus on the inherent logic that is evident within education.

## **The Logic of the Educational field**

Education is widely understood to bring about improved life conditions and as being a way out of poverty and disadvantage (Blyth 2001; DfES 2003). The focus on increasing the numbers of young people who go to university is intended to ensure increased opportunities for all young people. However statistics demonstrate that young people from middle class backgrounds continue to take up more HE places and that 'the social class gap in entry to higher education remains unacceptably wide' (DfES 2003: 8). The under-representation of working class students in HE is a complex issue and is a manifestation of class based outcomes within the compulsory sector. Important to this study is an understanding of the location of the students within a system that continues to produce inequitable outcomes according to social class. Although Further Education (FE) is fast becoming a feature of higher education, I do not deal with that in this study. For the purposes of this study and in order to make sense of Bourdieu's notion of field, I focus on two sub-fields within the field of education: schooling and HE. I do this to illustrate how class based outcomes continue to be reproduced, that is, how young people end up where they do through the 'logic' of the educational field.

Each field has its own set of internal rules – the systems and processes that contribute to both its functioning and its logic (Bourdieu 1990b; Lareau and McNamara Horvat 1999). The 'logic' of the education field is primarily concerned with the production of inequality. This happens in a number of ways but particularly through the vertical and horizontal structure of the education system as illustrated in Figure 4.

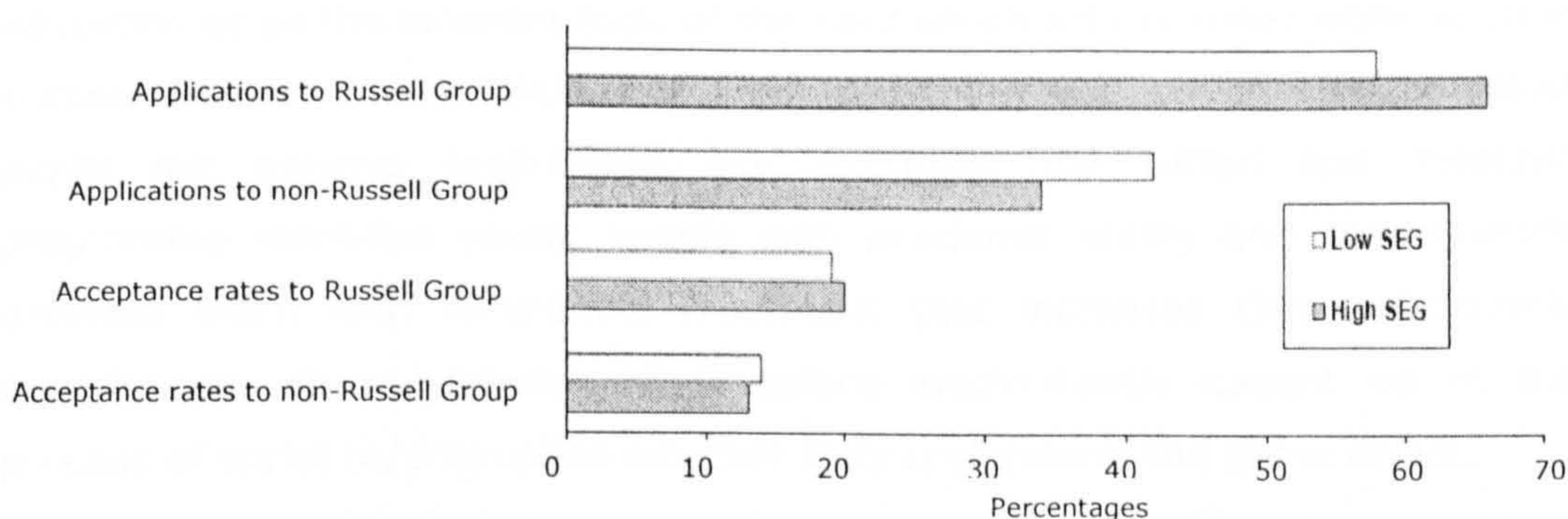


**Figure 4:** Logic in the Field of Education

The horizontal axis represents position within both schools and higher education and the ways in which young people are distributed within the field based on levels of economic, social and cultural capital. The figure usefully illustrates possible levels of differentiated access to HE and indicates that, those who enter the field further along to the right of the horizontal axis may have an increased chance of entering elite HE institutions – they possess the right type of cultural capital that is valued within such institutions. The figure also illustrates that some young people (represented by the red arrows) from low achieving state schools may be able to make the transition along the horizontal axis into institutions that are valued more highly within the field, although based on the logic within the field, these numbers would be small. The blue arrow is used to illustrate that very few young people from low achieving state schools make it into Russell Group universities. In addition, the purple arrows highlight that small numbers of young people, who have attended either high achieving state schools or independent schools, may enter HE institutions that move them along to the left of the horizontal axis representing downward mobility, although this type of shift occurs less frequently than upward mobility (Machin 1998). However, if more young people stay in education longer, educational qualifications as a form of



exchangeable capital become devalued in other fields, where it becomes increasingly difficult 'to anticipate fluctuations on the stock exchange of scholastic value' (Bourdieu 1998: 25). The processes that position agents within the field therefore serve to eliminate young people at various stages in their educational journey (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). This is a primary function of the field in order to protect the outcome, or educational credentials, that are accrued as young people progress further in education. Government statistics confirm a process of elimination in published figures that illustrate the imbalance in applications across social class groups to Russell Group<sup>2</sup> universities as illustrated in Figure 5.



**Figure 5:** Application and Acceptance Rates via UCAS for Students with 30+ A-Level Points: 2001  
(Source: DfES 2006)

These statistics are important when dealing with issues of social justice and contributes to understanding of how the educational field contributes to social reproduction. Attending an elite HE institution carries more weight in other fields such as the economic field, where Russell Group universities have the highest economic returns (DfES 2006). Figure 5 also illustrates that there are a small number of young people from low social class groups who do successfully move through the field and obtain the academic credentials necessary to enter elite HE institutions. This is a clear indication of how the

<sup>2</sup> Russell Group Universities include: University of Birmingham, University of Bristol, University of Cambridge, Cardiff University, University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, University of Leeds, University of Liverpool, University of Manchester, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, University of Nottingham, University of Oxford, University of Sheffield, University of Southampton, University of Warwick, Imperial College, King's College London, London School of Economics and University College London.

educational field is involved in the simultaneous reproduction and production of class based outcomes.

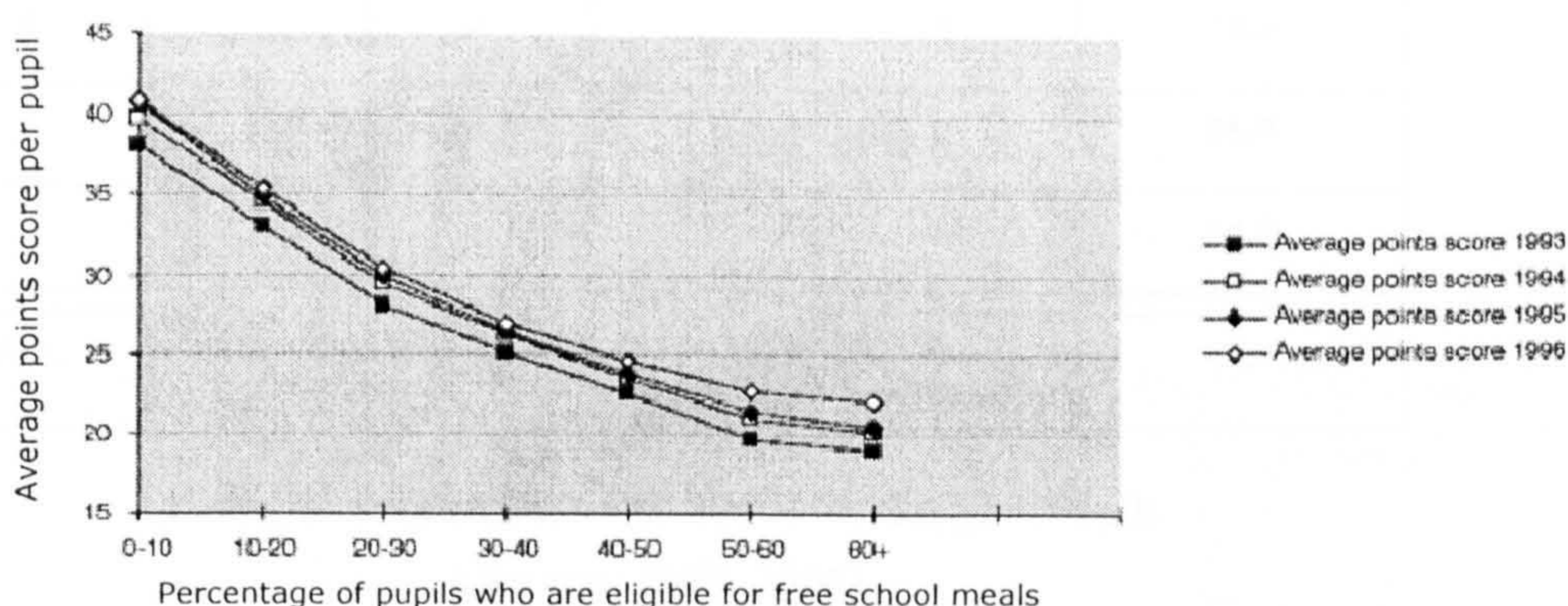
In addition to the HE sector, schools function as a primary stage of the social filtering process, despite the broad intention that education should offer an 'excellent education' for all young people 'whatever their background and wherever they live' (DfES 2005: 7). In practice this intention is not met. Based on educational outcome and subsequent progression into HE, there are marked differences between social class groups. Such differences can be understood as either working class attitudes and dispositions towards education or as the inherent logic of the field which acts to deter working class success (Archer 2003). Within the field, particular practices that act to select pupils out become legitimised. For example, the Gifted and Talented programme identifies young people with academic ability and consequently provides them with differential treatment that increases their educational experiences. Young people are therefore inadvertently caught up in the process of social re/production whether they understand the game or not.

Students from disadvantaged backgrounds face many barriers to HE participation including finance (Hutchings 2003), aspirations (McNicol 2004), family background (Connor, Dewson et al. 2001) and social and cultural factors (Woodrow, Foong-Lee et al. 1998). Despite very real contextual factors that deter many young people from HE participation, the current political emphasis is on individual responsibility rather than on institutional factors that act as barriers (Burke 2002). Inequality is not purely experienced within home contexts; it is also evident within education systems.

## **Evidence of Educational Inequality**

There are many forms of educational inequality evident between social class groups, including access to resources (Braham and Sherratt 2002), quality of teaching (Darling-Hammond 1997), parental involvement (Pilling 1990; Feinstein and Symons 1997; Reay 1998; Leathwood and Hutchings 2003) and pupil attainment (Savage 2000; DfES 2003; Power, Edwards et al. 2003; Georg 2004).

Since its election in 1997, the Labour Government has directed much attention to improving standards in all schools and yet statistics illustrate that working class young people continue to achieve fewer GCSEs at A\* - C level than their middle class peers (DfES 2006). Reasons behind such outcomes are explained as a mixture of family background (other social factors), individual characteristics and educational factors although evidence suggests that 'the former two groups of factors are the most significant drivers of attainment gaps' (DfES 2006: 34). Attainment is one of the main barriers to HE participation (DfES 2003) and it is well recorded that schools serving disadvantaged areas perform less well than those in more affluent areas. For example, average GCSE points scores between 1993 – and 1996 indicate that in schools where there are higher percentages of pupils who access free school meals, attainment is lower (HMSO 1998) as illustrated in Figure 6.



**Figure 6:** Average GCSE Points Score against Free School Meals (FSM)

(Source: <http://www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/ofsted/seced/chart-28.htm>)

In addition, based on social class measures, although the gap in attainment has narrowed, there was still a 24% point difference between young people from non-manual and manual worker backgrounds in 2003 (DfES 2006). Although family background is often deemed to contribute to academic attainment, other variables also combine to provide a contextualised educational experience for young people. Recent government statistics further demonstrate that young people who are in receipt of free school meals (FSM), attend a deprived school<sup>3</sup> and who live in a deprived area have the lowest

<sup>3</sup> Schools with high proportions of FSM pupils (>30% of pupils receive FSM).

levels of academic attainment<sup>4</sup>. Table 1 also illustrates that over 50% of pupils who do not face such conditions achieve five or more A\* - C grades at GCSE.

Segment	Attributes			% of Total Cohort	% Achieving 5+ A*-C GCSEs: 2005 (including English & Maths)
	FSM	In a Deprived School <sup>(1)</sup>	From a Deprived Area <sup>(2)</sup>		
1	✓	✓	✓	3	17.2
2	✓	✓		2	19.5
3	✓		✓	2	17.6
4	✓			6	21.7
5		✓	✓	3	23.9
6		✓		5	31.2
7			✓	5	28.9
8				74	51.1
ALL				100 (n=578,663)	44.1

**Table 1:** Segmentation of 2005 Key Stage 4 Pupils  
(Source: DfES 2006)

Policy discourses have often framed working class under-achievement within personal failure attributed to a lack of motivation, aspiration, ability and the possession of inappropriate attitudes (Archer and Leathwood 2003). Little serious consideration has been given to the ways in which working class cultures are pathologised within educational practice and as a consequence, their levels of intelligence negated (Morley 1997: 109).

Although evidence supports the notion that the majority of working class young people fail at school, as evidenced through the statistics provided here, the potential for all young people to succeed within education is primarily based on their interaction with the field – an interaction that is based on

<sup>4</sup> Most deprived Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) postcodes (>45% of children in postcode are in families in receipt of benefits).

internal truths within the field. Educational inequality can therefore be understood as both dependent on dynamic relations within the field and institutional based. I address these issues by exploring the notion of habitus and how the logic of the game is played and understood differently by working and middle class groups. I do this to explore the possible reasons behind continued educational inequality.

## **Understanding Continued Educational Inequality**

The issue of educational inequality is complex. Although government statistics focus primarily on educational qualifications, there is an inherent logic within the field of education that is primarily concerned with filtering people out or selecting those who deserve to progress. Educational attainment is the main filter that operates within the field – it permits or prohibits further educational progression. The focus placed upon attainment which facilitates education progression produces a doxa (Bourdieu 1977) in which the notions of merit and ability are widely accepted without question. Within educational and political fields, they result in a form of doxic misrecognition as accurate markers of educational competence. Educational progression is therefore limited to those who believe they can do it and have the evidence in the form of certification, to demonstrate that they can. However, the process of elimination can succeed only if interactions of young people as they move through the field position them negatively in relation to the purposes of education. This is dependent on both habitus and how the game is played.

## **Habitus**

Habitus is largely understood to relate to an individual's position in social space (Bourdieu 1990b). It is both past and present – an embodied history that has been shaped by and shapes practice. It is the mechanism through which decisions and choices are made, not as 'mechanical action' (Bourdieu 1977: 73), but more comparable to intuitive reaction. Habitus works in conjunction with capital and field and facilitates understanding of re/production.

Habitus is strongly located within understandings of social class although class boundaries and categorizations are not as clear or illuminative as they could

be. This is particularly pertinent for understanding habitus and the way in which habitus can adapt to context. It is evident from my own story and in some literature that 'more or less identical habitus can generate widely different outcomes' (Lawler 2004: 112). That is, despite the focus on habitus as being mainly applicable to groups, the limited homogeneity within social classes leads to increased flexibility in interpretation of the term. For example, whilst the majority of working class young people do not progress into elite HE institutions, a small minority do. Thus, although the concept is often applied to social class groups in understanding collective practices, it can also be used to understand individual practice (Bourdieu 1990b).

Habitus is context dependent and is largely determined by family background which in turn 'underlies the structuring of school experiences' (Bourdieu 1977: 87). Habitus can therefore be understood as an iterative process. It is both structured by and structures the social space in which it is both a part and a function. The capacity of an individual to either conserve or transform a social space through the acquisition of educational qualifications for example, largely depends on the resources, or levels of capital that they have through their initial social position or have acquired. Bourdieu's approach to understanding this issue focused on understanding position: the way in which individuals are positioned within the field, and how the position is either maintained or transformed. I now turn to explain the way in which habitus can be understood to tackle the dichotomy of agency-structure and how the application of habitus to understanding human action can account for the complexities and irregularities of a life history.

## **Breaking the Dichotomy of Agency-Structure**

A major challenge for modern sociologists, is to break down the 'cultural logic' that 'understands the social world in terms of dichotomy and opposition and has little room for complexity' (Ladson-Billings 2003: 7). Bourdieu utilises the notion of habitus to move sociological inquiry into more in-depth understandings of the way in which social agents both position themselves and are positioned within fields. He not only viewed habitus as a tool for getting at the crux of understanding social action but he also saw it as a way of addressing problems he associated with the fixed nature of binary

interpretations of human action: the 'impasse of objectivism and subjectivism' (King 2000: 417). Writing in 1988, Bourdieu states,

As I have tried to demonstrate throughout most of my work, I believe that true scientific theory and practice must overcome this opposition by integrating into a single model the analysis of the experience of social agents and the analysis of the objective structures that make this experience possible...In other words, these two moments, the subjectivist and the objectivist, stand in dialectical relationship. It is this dialectic of objectivity and subjectivity that the concept of *habitus* is designed to capture and encapsulate. (Bourdieu 1988: 782)

Bourdieu makes it clear that the experiences of social agents are context driven through 'objective structures'. Habitus is a product of history, structured by context and also a generator of histories. Thus habitus is understood as being

...systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without in any way being the product of obedience to rules... (Bourdieu 1977: 72)

The use of habitus as a tool for understanding the process of going to university for working class young people would suggest that there is an element of determinism (action as both regulated and regular) within their trajectories. There are, as evidenced in the literature (see for example, Wedge and Prosser 1973; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Plummer 2000), predictably different life trajectories according to class. However, what I understand from Bourdieu's work on habitus is that its development or transformation can be influenced by experience. On this basis, actions are never completely predictable but they are made in response to the context within which action is required.

Action is not the mere carrying out of a rule, or obedience to a rule...In the most complex games....they put into action the incorporated principles of a generative habitus...I am talking about dispositions *acquired through experience*, thus variable from place to place and time to time. (Bourdieu 1990b: 9)

Therefore, habitus has to be understood as both a *product* and *producer* of history. In exploring this aspect of habitus within this study, I am keen to discover the influences that shaped the students' respective habituses and the extent to which their decisions concerning education can be historically and contextually 'situated' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983) in order to locate the habitus, although possibly not being reflective of a homogenised social class group. That is, although some literature tends to identify class based educational outcomes by utilising Office of National Statistics (ONS) classification systems, the focus of this study is on individual experiences. Beck (1992) identifies this issue:

The attachment of people to a 'social class'...has nevertheless become weaker. It has much less influence on their actions. They develop ways of life that tend to become individualised. (Beck 1992: 92)

Although there is a clash between working class and middle class cultures in relation to education, it is not as evident within the compulsory education sector as all young people are required to go to school. However, through the on-going process of elimination and selecting out of young people, working class young people who progress into HE often talk about a lack of fit – a clash between their habitus and the habitat of the university. I now explore this issue to determine the ways in which opportunities within education are driven by social class.

## **Habitus and Educational Fit**

Changes to the HE landscape have resulted in a system that reflects wider social inequalities: middle class students continue to secure places in



traditional universities and working class students tend to apply to post-1992 institutions (Archer and Hutchings 2000). In relation to the logic within the field, and as I have outlined above this is an appropriate outcome. However, that does not mean that it is socially just.

Explanations of the limited number of working class students in elite HE institutions centre on issues, or a doxa of ability: as working class young people often achieve lower A Level grades their lack of progression into HE is therefore justified. This does not account for the 3, 000 young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who do achieve the grades to enter an elite HE institution, but who choose not to (The Sutton Trust 2004). Although habitus is argued to be the most contested of Bourdieu's theoretical concepts (Reay 2004), it does go some way in explaining the lack of fit, or clash, between a working class habitus and the field of education.

There is a sense in the argument of 'fit' that some students belong in HE and others do not – that the class based habituses of some young people are pre-destined to feel comfortable in educational settings. As dominant members of society, or being 'born into a position that is distinguished positively' (Bourdieu 1990: 11) students who go to Oxford University, for example, are 'immediately adjusted to the immanent demands of the game' (Bourdieu 1990: 11). They do not need to transform themselves as they already hold the appropriate levels of cultural capital to establish an immediate fit. They merely need to

... be what they are in order to be what they have to be, that is, naturally distinguished from those who are obliged to strive for distinction. (Bourdieu 1990: 11)

This is very different from the experiences of many working class young people who struggle to position themselves both socially and academically within the HE sector. The narratives of working class academics illustrate how problematic the experience can be (see Rose 1989; Holloway 1997; Parr 1997; Reynolds 1997; Skeggs 1997; Reay 2001). In addition, there is a body of research that also explores the experiences of a wider group of non-

traditional students that also highlights experiences of a lack of fit (for example, McGivney 1990; Reay 1997; Lawler 1999; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Wentworth and Peterson 2001; Bowl 2003; Lucey, Melody et al. 2003; McNicol 2004).

The process of elimination and the ability of young people to get involved in the game are dependent on class background. Social class background equips young people to know how to act in what Ball calls 'defining moments' (Ball 2003) with one such defining moment being university choice. Although progressions through the field of education is relatively unproblematic for middle class young people, deciding to pursue HE is an unfamiliar experience for many working class young people. In order to reach the point at which progressing onto university is an inevitable outcome, working class young people have to adapt to the rules of the education game and become conversant with its particular doxa. In a Bourdieuan analysis, such an outcome requires habitus transformation or the acceptance that people from the same class background may have 'more than one identifiable habitus' (Nash 1999: 178).

Whilst the clash between the habitus of working class individuals and education is homogenised in much of the literature (see for example, Bourdieu 1990; Lawler 1999; Archer 2003), the perspective that there is more than one identifiable habitus within a class connects more closely with individual action than it does with general collective practice. Nash's notion of a *general* habitus, with its close links to statistical modes of reproduction, infers that working class academic success is a matter of chance (Nash 1999). The notion of a *specific* habitus in transforming the discordant relationship into a harmonious one is important to this study. The 'specific' habitus, although loosely based on class connections, facilitates understanding of class relationships with education that do not appear to correlate with traditional understandings of the term.

This perspective of habitus thus facilitates understanding of differing class dispositions and concurs with Bourdieu and Wacquant. Writing in 1992, they state that although habitus is a product of history, it is

... an *open system of dispositions* that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures. (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 133)

Reed-Danahay (2005) argues for both a primary and secondary habitus, where the primary habitus is constructed within families and the secondary habitus becomes inculcated through schooling experiences. The idea that a habitus is dynamic and constantly emerging is applicable to young people whose primary habitus is not built around middle class experiences. However, pertinent to the debate on habitus is the idea that individuals are always members of multiple fields. Thus, resources acquired through one field can be mobilised within others which makes sense in relation to my own social movement. The middle class habitus, made up of dispositions, competences, strategies and capital, that was emerging through my involvement with music became mobilised within the field of education.

The interpretation of habitus, as a more fluid notion includes a sense of caution:

...most people are statistically bound to encounter circumstances that tend to agree with those that originally fashioned their habitus. (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 133)

So, whilst I acknowledge that habitus can adapt to individual context and experience, I am aware that certain class based actions or practices are inevitable (Bourdieu 1977). That is, the majority of working class individuals experience a clash between their habitus and the field of education whilst a small minority enjoys relationships that are more positive. The reasons why this is the case are complex and it is therefore important to consider ways in which the education game operates in order to understand how class based outcomes continue to privilege young people from middle class backgrounds.

## **Playing the Game**

Involvement in the game and playing the game are two different components of class based educational experiences. It could be argued that all young people are involved in the educational game because they all participate in compulsory education. However, because of the unequal distribution of capital across the social class groups, the game is played differently. This is particularly evident in the processes of school and university choice.

## **School Choice**

The experiences of working class young people in schools has been influenced by the ways in which the middle classes monopolise the system and therefore manage and control the educational game (e.g. Ball and Vincent 1998; Ball 2003). For example, much has been written about the ways in which middle class families benefit from educational markets through the process of school choice (Ball, Bowe et al. 1996; Reay and Ball 1998; Lauder and Hughes 1999; Ball 2003). Middle class parents construct working class young people as 'what is to be avoided' (Reay and Ball 1997: 90) when considering schools for their own children. In practice, the process of choice whilst intending to be equitable, results in the construction of schools that are class orientated where those more densely populated by working class young people struggle to achieve the same academic outcomes (as illustrated in the above statistics). School choice is only positive where choices can be made and this is particularly problematic for working class families as

[i]n the new educational era, growing numbers of comprehensives, particularly those that are successful in the educational marketplace, are becoming increasingly inaccessible to working-class pupils. (Reay and Ball 1997: 91)

School choice, as a manifestation of a game in education, is therefore unequally experienced. The inference of personal agency in the process clouds the fact that choice in this instance is a 'marker of economic privilege' (Reay and Lucey 2003: 121) and thus social class. Exercising school choice is indicative of participation in the game – it reflects understanding of and

compliance with the inherent values within education or misrecognition of the prominent doxa that feature in educational discourses, for example the doxa of meritocracy and individual effort.

The process of school choice requires parents to understand differences between schools. The publication of examination results, which show differences in attainment between schools serving communities with high levels of deprivation compared to those located in more affluent areas (OfSTED 1998; Thrupp 1999) contribute to parental understandings of school position. In the game, securing a place in a school perceived to be good is a class-based practice. Parents with access to 'hot knowledge' (Ball and Vincent 1998), actively seek out their information either through politically legitimated league tables or through information that is 'socially embedded in networks and localities' (Ball and Vincent 1998: 377). Thus children are reliant on the knowledge and actions of their parents in the process of school choice.

Educational choice, in the sense that choices can be made, for the middle classes has two strands. Firstly, the pragmatics of choosing a school which could result in middle class parents literally 'buying in' to the independent sector, believing a better 'service' will be provided. Secondly, re-locating into the catchment area of a school perceived as offering 'better' educational provision - or otherwise manipulating the system and managing the game. Reay (1998) asserts that the ability to make such choices and perform what are essentially acts to compensate for perceived failings within state education, requires material and educational resources disproportionately located within middle class families. Children least likely to contribute to exam performance attract fewer resources, which contributes to a continued cycle of educational failure for disadvantaged groups (Braham and Sherratt 2002). This 'failure' is available for public scrutiny through published league tables and contributes to some parents' decisions about which school to send their children to. Whilst middle class parents do have a monopoly on school choice, recent research has illustrated that some working class parents also exercise their right to choose a school for their child by moving them to schools away from their immediate geographical location (Gates, Coward and Byrom 2007). Identified as 'cross border flow', this rejection of local secondary schools in

favour of schools in other areas is illustrative of class based attitudes towards education, but not of those normally associated with working class individuals. Such movement away from practices normally identified within social class groups leads to increased uncertainty over class categorisations.

Ball and Vincent (1998) identify three parental approaches to school choice: skilled/privileged, semi-skilled and disconnected choosers. These categories correlate to social position and effectively contribute to the continuation of educational inequality. The stake in this particular game reflects parents' ambitions and aspirations for their children. Middle class parents, who identify more closely as 'skilled/privileged choosers', have access to the types of capital (social, cultural and economic) which enable them to make particular choices within the field.

Thus an increased focus on habitus and the way in which habitus is context dependent, is important in understanding not only processes of school choice, but also how working class transitions to HE are made. Whilst the process of school choice is important and can determine academic attainment, the process of HE choice illustrates further class based inequalities.

### **University Choice: It's all about Distinction**

The reputations of post-1992 institutions have improved since their formation although they have failed to acquire the same perceived status as traditional universities (Archer 2003; Leathwood 2006; McNay 2006). Post-1992 universities, for example, attract students with lower A2 Level grades than traditional universities. They have, as a consequence, become associated with working class individuals and therefore contribute to perceptions that consider traditional universities as the 'preserve of the elite' (Bowl 2003: 145). Whilst there is a lack of academic fit, a lack of social fit has also been identified (Wilcox, Winn et al. 2005). Students establish a sense of 'otherness' in which they establish their own position in social space in relation to others (Bourdieu 1998). The social *space* or distance between individuals represents, in Bourdieuan terms, levels of capital (Bourdieu 1998) and along with habitus, are the fundamental tools for existing and participating in the 'game'.

University choice is yet another stage in a complex educational game where young people can be selected out.

Acceptance of the rules of the game and acquiring a 'practical sense' for 'adjustment to the demands of the field' (Bourdieu 1990a: 66), requires a shift in habitus for working class students. They must embrace the values inherent within the field in order to occupy their space with any degree of certainty. Being able to choose a university is an act of consumption, but in the game of education, it is important to choose the right institution. This mirrors the process of choice within the compulsory sector where, as I have illustrated above, obtaining the right credentials becomes an important component of managing the educational game.

University choice is a complex process in which there is much at stake. Going to university involves much more of an emotional and psychological shift for working class students. Although students are perceived as active consumers within a higher education market (Naidoo and Jamieson 2005), the process of choice is not equal across social groups. In effect, 'classed capitals and dispositions engage with classed policy regimes' (Ball 2003: 4) with inequitable results.

University choice is associated with individual identity, reflecting both social status and academic ability. The ability to choose high status institutions reflects much more than previous educational experience: it is indicative of wider social and structural inequalities and class based practices. The act of consumption, closely linked to a strategy of distinction has a particular logic that is class related (Bourdieu 1986). Determined by the habitus, university choice,

... brings about a unique integration, dominated by the earliest experiences, of the experiences statistically common to members of the same class. (Bourdieu 1990a: 60)

Bourdieu recognises that in practising distinction, a 'social hierarchy of the consumers' is produced which 'predisposes tastes to function as markers of

'class" (Bourdieu 1986: 1). The practice of consumption brings with it a code to be deciphered. Anyone who 'lacks the specific code feels lost in a chaos of sounds and rhythms, colours and lines, without rhyme or reason' (Bourdieu 1986: 2). In relation to the middle class, working classes are 'discursively constituted as an unknowing, uncritical, tasteless mass from which the middle classes draw their distinctions' (Reay 2001: 335). There is no place for working class consumption patterns to be considered legitimate. Instead, consumption patterns of the dominant classes are normalised through persistent consumption practices and as such legitimated through their dominant position in the field.

Although specifically related to the consumption of cultural goods in the form of art, music, drama etc., strategies of distinction are equally applicable to both school and university choice, particularly in the sense of markers of class. Making the right choice is important in the game: both the social and the educational game. The choices that people make are 'predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences' (Bourdieu 1986: 7).

As I have already outlined, the relationship between working class groups and education is problematic. Coupled with the dominant position held by the middle classes whose tastes are legitimated and normalised through wider social structures, but particularly through education, cultural consumption practices of working class groups will always be viewed as deficient. The dispositions and competences required to make the right choices are not distributed evenly across the social groups (Bourdieu 1986: 228).

In the UK higher education context, the process of choosing a university can be interpreted as a strategy of distinction. Although Bourdieu (1986) uses this notion in relation to class based consumption patterns, it can also be equally applicable to the process of university choice. Particular universities are viewed by students as more favourable due to their histories and reputations which results in a hierarchy of institutions (Shattock 1996). The implications of this to university choice is that middle class students will engage with the strategy of distinction and chose elite institutions and working class students



and other under-represented groups within the system, experiencing a lack of fit, will be deterred from doing so. This has been seen in much of the literature on university choice (see for example, Archer and Hutchings 2000; Reay, Davies et al. 2001; Ball, Davies et al. 2002), with the majority of working class students 'choosing' post-1992 institutions.

Ball, Davies et al. (2002) believe that 'university choice is a choice of lifestyle and a matter of taste' (53) and this fits with the notion that university choice is a 'strategy of distinction'. However, with the massification of UK higher education, and the increase in the number of universities and courses, the once completely elitist system is in danger of losing its previously held status. This point is emphasised by Bourdieu,

It follows from what has been said that a simple upward displacement of the structure of the class distribution of an asset or practice (i.e., a virtually identical increase in the proportion of possessors in each class) has the effect of diminishing its rarity and distinctive value and threatening the distinction of the older possessors. (Bourdieu 1986: 229)

Working class success goes against regularities within the field or the logic that acts as a social filter. Regularities within the field ensure that the field maintains its autonomy. However, not all working class young people take up their rightful position within the field. A small minority do succeed within education. Young people from backgrounds that are normally swiftly eliminated from education at the age of 16, who do go onto HE are an appropriate group to study as they may offer insights into how the educational game can be played successfully.

## **Chapter Summary**

The process of going to HE can be understood as a complex journey influenced by the interaction of individual young people within the field and with others within the field. The role of teachers is to select young people out by identifying those who have the ability to progress further. This identification

often relies on academic performance in which the doxa of ability is misrecognised to the advantage of those with increased volumes of cultural capital – the middle classes. The logic inherent within education is based on an internal set of accepted truths and is also influenced by demands from other fields, particularly from the economic field. Education therefore performs a function to talent spot within both the compulsory and post compulsory sectors. Although this chapter has identified the complexities behind education as a site of reproduction, there are a number of strategies that attempt to increase working class HE participation rates. I explore some of these in the next chapter.

This chapter explores the current political context in relation to higher education and the focus that has been placed on widening participation. It outlines the nature of participation and illustrates the continued under-representation of particular social groups. I draw attention to the numerous strategies that attempt to increase the participation rates of working class students in HE and also outline the fact that leading HE institutions in the United Kingdom (UK) fail to meet their benchmark figures in terms of class participation.

**Universities are a vital gateway to opportunity and fulfilment for young people so it is crucial that they continue to make real and sustained improvements in access. The social class gap among those entering higher education is unacceptably wide. Those from the top three social classes are almost three times as likely to enter higher education as those from the bottom three.**

**(DfES 2003: 17)**

## **Political Backdrop**

Since the election of a Labour Government in 1997, and the establishment of the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), much attention has been directed towards marginalized social groups. In particular, a focus has been placed on the role that education plays in moving people out of poverty. As a consequence, widening participation in UK universities has been placed firmly on the government's political agenda (UCAS 2002; Patiniotis and Holdsworth 2005). Such explicit intervention strategies, whilst coupled with both economic and social concerns (Action on Access 2003; DfES 2003), are attempts to redress the imbalance of university applications according to social class. As a targeted group, the majority of students from the lower social class groups have consistently resisted intervention programmes, thus making HE participation of such students an intransigent problem for politicians. Recent history shows, 'the social class gap among those entering university remains too wide' (DfES 2003). Given their historic lack of participation in UK universities, students from lower social class groups have been identified as 'under-represented', therefore making them the focus of many interventions both in the compulsory and post-compulsory education sectors. This is evidenced through, for example, the setting up of Education Action Zones, Excellence in Cities programmes and the work of Aimhigher and Connexions.

The transformation of the post-compulsory education sector, particularly since 1992, has resulted in a mass expansion of available higher education institutions and courses. Important to this study is the move towards increased massification (Trow 1973; Ainley 1994; Gibbons 1998; Palfreyman

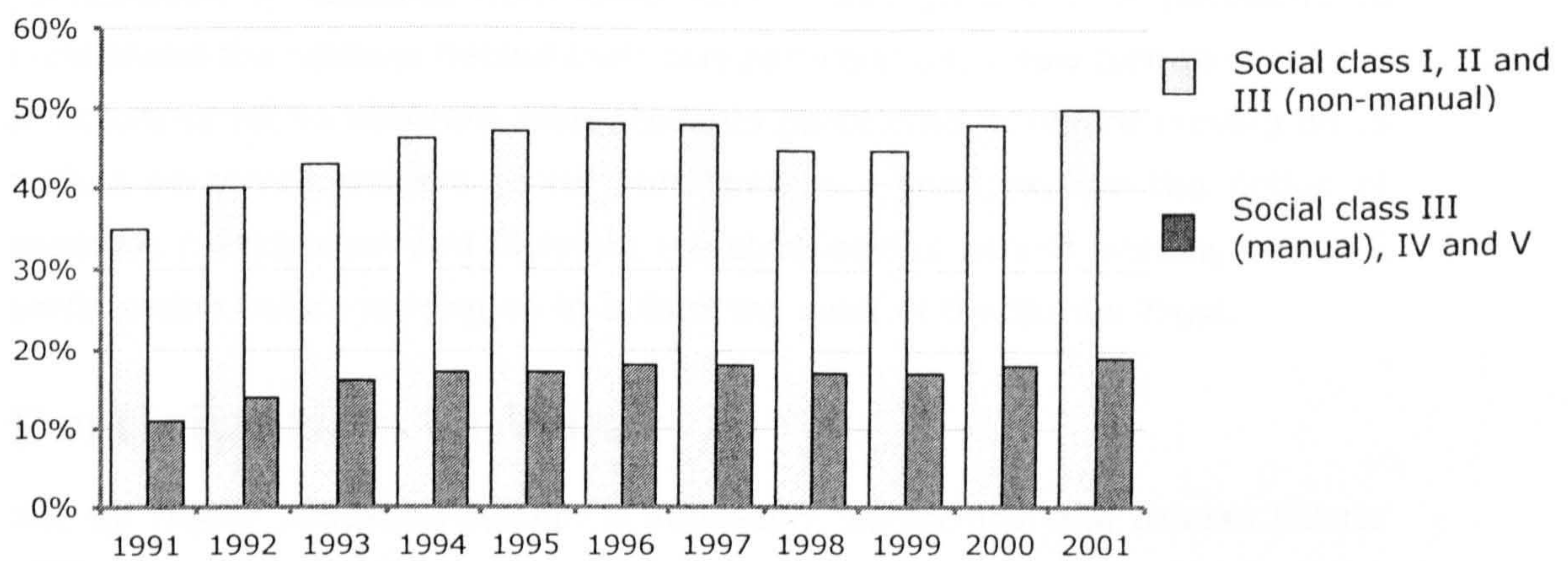
2001) within universities rather than higher education as a whole and in particular the impact of the 1992 Education Reform Act (1992). This Act sought to dismantle the differentiation between traditional universities and the polytechnics by allowing polytechnics to apply for university status. It is important to this study for the following reasons:

- students who attended polytechnics were mainly from low socio-economic groups
- despite the establishment of a uniform system in name, the social class distribution across the higher education sector remains an issue
- perceptions of a 'hierarchy of institutions' (Shattock 1996: 25) remains, with traditional universities perceived as better in status
- the middle classes have continued to monopolise the market share of higher education.

Accusations of élitism directed towards traditional universities have forced such institutions to re-consider their admissions systems to ensure a more fair and transparent system (DfES 2004). However, the historic issue of low participation rates from the working class is one component of a more complex problem. This thesis will build from the premise that education systems are inherently inequitable, privileging middle class values and attitudes (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Lynch and O'Riordan 1998; Archer 2003; Power, Edwards et al. 2003).

Although there has been much debate about what constitutes a 'typical' student in an ever-expanding higher education system, *under-represented* or *non-traditional* groups are identified as those from lower social class groups, students who do not possess traditionally accepted qualifications (for example, A Levels) for entry to HE, disabled students and those from minority ethnic groups (HEFCE 2004). This thesis takes as its focus the under representation of students from low social class groups as it is this group that represents my own journey and positioning within HE. In addition, current political attention on widening participation fits with the focus of the study.

Much recent attention to the HE sector has placed participation rates according to class, under scrutiny. Figure 7 illustrates the trend in participation rates over ten years (between 1991 and 2001) and clearly identifies the disparity between higher and lower social class groups. All figures produced in this section are based on those produced by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). As such the participation rates refer to cohorts rather than year of entry with the measure of participation being based on (YPR (H) - the Young Participation Rate (HEIs)). This measure includes students who are studying at higher education institutions and courses franchised to Further Education Institutions (FEIs) which may distort the figures when considering university participation rates.



**Figure 7:** Participation Rates in Higher Education by Social Class  
(Source: DfES 2005)

It is not possible to provide more up to date data from the DfES web-site as 'unfortunately, the statistics on participation rates by social class had to be removed from the website because they were no longer being updated' (Trends.Feedback@dfes.gsi.gov.uk 2006).

Whilst the number of young people entering higher education has expanded, young people from lower social class groups have not had equal access to leading institutions despite having appropriate academic qualifications. This issue has been highlighted through the work of the Sutton Trust in particular where it has been argued that the numbers affected amount to approximately 3, 000 students each academic year (The Sutton Trust 2004). Whilst Sir Peter

Lampl (founder and chairman of the Sutton Trust) considers this to be a huge waste of potential he does not go as far as to lay the blame at university admissions procedures or possible discrimination. He considers the issue to be embedded within patterns of applications with students from lower social class groups 'setting their sights lower' (The Sutton Trust 2004: 4). As I detailed in Chapter 1, this is connected to habitus and the notion of fit.

The widening participation agenda is therefore addressing a number of interrelated concerns including fair access, increasing the numbers of non-traditional students within higher education and wider political concerns such as social justice and economic stability. In order to improve rates of participation of students from lower social class groups, it is necessary to understand the reasons behind their non-participation. I now turn to detail the structure of HE to illustrate what students participate in before moving on to outline perceived barriers to HE participation. I then explore the notion of widening participation and highlight the complexities behind working class HE participation before moving on to outline the work of the Sutton Trust.

## **Participation in What**

The UK higher education system is noticeably hierarchical and diverse (Watts 1972; Shattock 1996) despite political moves to create a non-binary mass system (Pedley 1977). Numerous years of expansion has resulted in limited change in student composition (Lewis 2002; McNay 2006) within elite institutions in particular. These two issues lie at the heart of widening participation. Whilst HE expansion is to be celebrated for encouraging increasing numbers of young people from lower social class groups into HE, questions remain concerning both their distribution across the sector (Tight 2007) and their experiences of HE itself.

Anderson (1992) states that education 'inevitably reflects and partly transmits the inequalities of the society in which it is embedded' (Anderson 1992: 60). In the stratified HE system this certainly appears to be the case. Oxbridge, with its 'brand image' determined largely by its history (Palfreyman 2001) has always 'occupied a special and dominating position in the structure of British university life' (Halsey 1996: 64). This view is perpetuated through published

league tables which persistently place Oxbridge at the top of performance tables (see for example, <http://image.guardian.co.uk/sys-files/Education/documents/2007/05/24/thisone.xls>). The criteria involved in ranking institutions are available for students to scrutinise to determine which university to apply to. However, such methods of differentiation lead to tensions and fragmentations of the system (McNay 2006) where Oxbridge is clearly 'differentiated from all other institutions of higher learning' (Halsey 1996: 64).

Student consumerism is evident in the process of university choice, and universities that

... are in the upper levels of the hierarchy with high levels of academic, reputational and financial capital are likely to draw on superior resources to engage in practices intent on conserving the academic principles structuring the field of education, thereby maintaining their dominant position. (Naidoo and Jamieson 2005)

Prior information about a university's position within the field is an important component in the process of student choice (Gilchrist, Phillips et al. 2003). Many young people rely on performance tables to deliver accurate details of university performance. Although students may not access information about research grants when making their university choices, other published tables indicate that universities positioned highly in the league tables also attract increased levels of research funding (see for example [http://www.hesa.ac.uk/dox/performanceIndicators/0405/r1\\_0405.xls](http://www.hesa.ac.uk/dox/performanceIndicators/0405/r1_0405.xls)).

Distinction within the field of education seems to be correlated to both a university's tradition and the way in which the educational market functions generally. Whilst Oxbridge enjoys success through reputation, the same can also be said of other pre-1992 universities. Tight (2007) offers a useful guide to universities by date of foundation and reproduced in Figure 8.



Pre-1990	Cambridge, Durham, London <sup>5</sup> , Manchester, Oxford
1900	Birmingham
1903	Liverpool
1904	Leeds
1905	Sheffield
1909	Bristol
1926	Reading
1948	Nottingham
1952	Southampton
1954	Hull
1955	Exeter, UMIST <sup>6</sup>
1957	Leicester
1958	Sussex
1960	East Anglia, York
1961	Essex, Kent, Lancaster, Warwick
1962	Keele
1963	Newcastle
1966	Aston, Bath, Bradford, Brunel, City, Loughborough, Surrey
1967	Salford
1969	Cranfield, Open
1983	Buckingham <sup>7</sup>
1992	Anglia Ruskin, Bournemouth, Brighton, Central England, Central Lancashire, Coventry, De Montford, Derby, East London, Greenwich, Hertfordshire, Huddersfield, Kingston, Leeds Metropolitan, Lincoln, Liverpool John Moores, London Guildhall <sup>8</sup> , London Metropolitan, London South Bank, Manchester metropolitan, Middlesex, Northumbria, Nottingham Trent, Oxford Brookes, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Sheffield Hallam, Staffordshire, Sunderland, Teeside, Thames Valley, West of England, Westminster, Wolverhampton
1993	University of the Arts London, Luton
2001	Gloucestershire
2005	Bath Spa, Bolton, Canterbury Christ church, Chester, Chichester, Liverpool hope, Northampton, Roehampton, Southampton Solent, Winchester, Worcester
2006	Edge Hill

**Figure 8: Universities by Date of Foundation**

*(Source: Tight 2007)*

<sup>5</sup> The separate component parts of The University of London are not listed here

<sup>6</sup> UMIST re-amalgamated with The University of Manchester in 2004

<sup>7</sup> The only private based university in England

<sup>8</sup> Merged with London Metropolitan University in 2002

The chronology of HE development shows a relatively slow pace of change until 1992 when many of the new universities emerged following the recommendations proposed by Dearing (1992). HESA data illustrate that post-1992 institutions attract the majority of their students from lower social class groups<sup>9</sup>. There are many reasons why this is the case as I outlined in Chapter 1 when exploring the notion of fit. However, the diversified nature of HE clouds an important issue for the widening participation agenda – that of *non-participation*.

## **Barriers to Participation**

Reasons why young people choose not to participate in HE are complex. Depending on which source is used, 'barriers' to participation take different forms. From a party political perspective, the issue concerns individual aspiration, application and attainment (DfES 2003) – working class young people lack aspirations, do not achieve well at school and therefore do not progress into HE. From this perspective, individual young people are to blame for their lack of educational progression thus devolving responsibility away from the State. However, research indicates that the barriers to participation are not self-imposed and are in fact symptomatic of social injustices or institutional cultures (Archer 2003) that operate within the education system, where there is limited understanding of working class cultures (Reay 1997). Working class young people do not 'give up' on education; rather they are forced to negotiate 'opportunities [within the field] which are open and those which are not' (Lynch and O'Riordan 1998: 474). The doors to HE may not be open to many working class young people because the barriers to participation may be too overwhelming for them to even consider the possibility of going.

Whilst the complexities of the education system play a role in determining educational outcomes for individuals, research has also outlined the perspectives of working class young people on barriers to participation. For example, Connor, Dewson et al. (2001) found that the main discouraging factors centred on employment and financial issues. A recent survey (Brennan, Duaso et al. 2005) supports these perspectives by suggesting that non-

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<sup>9</sup> See [http://www.hesa.ac.uk/dox/performanceIndicators/0405/t1a\\_0405.xls](http://www.hesa.ac.uk/dox/performanceIndicators/0405/t1a_0405.xls) for further details.

traditional students' university experiences were compromised by their need to find term-time employment. This not only impacted upon the amount of time they had to study but also on the amount of time they had available to form social networks. It is interesting to note that whilst Government policy promotes the level of financial help that is available to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, young people continue to be concerned about student finance and accruing high levels of debt (Hutchings 2003).

Although finance is of concern to non-traditional students, other issues also influence the decision on whether to go to HE. These include, worries about the academic pressures and workload, concerns about not meeting the academic requirements, the application process, other personal issues such as child care and the possible threat to class identity (Connor, Dewson et al. 2001; Gilchrist, Phillips et al. 2003). With this backdrop of complexity, the widening participation agenda has much work to do if it is to be successful in reaching the Government's target of increasing the participation rates of 18 – 30 year olds by 2010. I now turn to the idea of widening participation and outline its role in increasing the numbers of working class students in HE.

## **Understanding Widening Participation**

Attempts to increase numbers of students from lower social class groups entering HE are primarily embedded within concerns about social justice (The Social Exclusion Unit 1999). Much has been written about the personal gains, including financial success, that are possible from accessing HE courses (Connor, Dewson et al. 2001; Archer 2003; Perna 2003; Directgov Undated). Despite the arguments, mainly emanating from Government policy, that promote the wider benefits of learning, historical patterns of participation demonstrate that few young people from lower social class groups enter HE compared with young people from higher social class groups (Anderson 1992; Palfreyman 2001; Gilchrist, Phillips et al. 2003; Ross 2003).

The chronology of HE offers a partial explanation for the low participation of students from low social class groups. The original function of a university was to provide an education for the social elite (Finegold, Keep et al. 1992) and

although small numbers of working class students have always entered HE, they are a minority when compared with the total student composition.

To participate is to take part (HEFCE 2005) and although widening participation programmes facilitate non-traditional students' first steps to university, little attention has been paid to their experiences whilst at university. The concept of 'widening participation' is therefore not entirely unproblematic. There are two main issues surrounding the notion of widening participation: how participation rates are measured (HEFCE 2005) and the impact that going to HE may have on working class young people. As Reay (2003) states,

The recent emphasis on widening participation and access to higher education assumes a uniformly positive process, yet the reality, particularly for working-class students, is often confusing and fraught with difficulties. (Reay 2003: 301)

Although Reay's claim is in relation to mature working class women and their HE experiences, other non-traditional students have also referred to their HE experiences in negative ways, particularly in relation to their understanding of their identities (see for example, Mahony and Zmroczek 1997; Reay 1997; Reynolds 1997; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Wentworth and Peterson 2001; Bowl 2003). Whilst widening participation is generally viewed as a positive step towards increased social equity, the notion of fit or the extent to which an individual is adaptable to their new context is often referred to. Lawler pays attention to this issue and suggests that although non-traditional students may 'be able to 'pass' as middle class', there is a 'continual reminder that the habitus claimed is not one which can be fully inhabited' (Lawler 1999: 17). The implications of this could be far reaching and as some research indicates, there is a higher non-completion of studies rate associated with young people from lower social class groups (Coffield and Vignoles 1998; Ishitani 2003; Hill 2004), which contributes to their under-representation within HE. However, non-completion of HE courses is one aspect of a more complex problem – encouraging students to go to university is the first step within a multi-dimensional issue. The Widening Participation agenda incorporates the work of

Aimhigher and the Sutton Trust which are positioned to address centuries of inequality within HE. Both Aimhigher and the Sutton Trust work closely with HE institutions and provide non-traditional students with experiences of university. Of the 16 activities listed by the National Audit Office (2002) and pertinent to this study, is the use of summer schools to provide Year 11 and 12 pupils a taster of university life. The Sutton Trust Summer School is one such event.

## **The Work of the Sutton Trust**

The Sutton Trust was set up in 1997 and has as its key aims the intention to 'support innovative projects that provide educational opportunities for young people from non-privileged backgrounds' and '...to encourage able pupils from non-privileged backgrounds to take the first step in gaining access to top class universities, which is to make an application' (Lampl 2005). The Summer Schools take place in five research intensive universities (Oxford, Cambridge, Nottingham, Bristol and St Andrews) and all costs are incurred by the Sutton Trust.

It is perhaps too early to establish whether such initiatives are in fact encouraging applications from working class students and whether the Sutton Trust has had the desired impact on increasing the participation of students from 'non-privileged' backgrounds (there is currently a review of the work of the Sutton Trust being undertaken by Liz Thomas and Rob Jones to mark its tenth year). However, initial reports (e.g. Edmonds, Archer et al. 2003) that evaluate the success of such programmes do suggest that attending summer schools such as the Sutton Trust has been a 'turning point' (Smith 2005) for young people. They have been considered as instrumental in a student's decision to go to university and have acted as a demystifying process in which students can establish whether they will fit into university life (Smith 2005). On the back of the summer school programmes, reports suggest that there has been an increase in participation rates from deprived areas (Garner 2005), although these figures must be treated with caution because the increases cited in the report do not account for neighbourhood boundary changes following 1997. The percentage increases also look more impressive because the numbers participating are working from a low base.

There are three stages in the recruitment and selection procedures for the Sutton Trust. Firstly, teachers identify appropriate students (those who meet the criteria of 5 GCSE grades at A\* - C and first in the family to go to HE) within schools and provide them with information and an application form. That is, students who are perceived to be the ones who would benefit the most from the programme and who meet the criteria are selected out through the school system. Secondly, completed application forms are sent to the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) who sift through applications and then pass these on to participating universities. Finally, applications are passed through to lecturers who choose which students they feel would benefit from the Summer School. What is hoped for is that all the students attending the summer school will be from non-privileged backgrounds and will be the first in their families to go to university. Research jointly commissioned by the DfES and the Sutton Trust has found this to be the case (Edmonds, Archer et al. 2003), although such research focuses on pupils from FE rather than state schools.

Whilst primarily a positive experience for students and universities, issues of retention have arisen where some students did not turn up to take up their allocated place (Edmonds, Archer et al. 2003). Although this could be theorised as working class attitudes to education and their class based habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) there is as yet no empirical evidence to explore this issue further.

With the large sums of money involved in widening participation initiatives, it is not surprising that there should be a requirement to measure success of intervention initiatives in a market driven, accountability based society. I now turn to the measures of success and outline how elite universities have missed their benchmark targets in attracting students from lower social groups.

## **Issues with Intervention**

Widening participation initiatives have largely focused on groups considered to be under-represented within HE (Greenbank 2006), with low social class groups being identified as a particular issue. The identification of individuals as being part of a class group based upon statistical measures and particular

forms of class categorisation can be misleading. For example, Government policy initiatives are based upon data produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), which categorises individuals based on employment: occupation type and employment status. From 2001, the newly introduced National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) intended to cover the entire adult population (previous schemes did not include the unemployed or those who had never worked) as illustrated in Table 2.

<b>The National Statistics Socio-economic Classification Analytic Classes</b>		
1	Higher managerial and professional occupations	
	1.1	Large employers and higher managerial occupations
	1.2	Higher professional occupations
2	Lower managerial and professional occupations	
3	Intermediate occupations	
4	Small employers and own account workers	
5	Lower supervisory and technical occupations	
6	Semi-routine occupations	
7	Routine occupations	
8	Never worked and long-term unemployed	

**Table 2:** Socio-economic Classification Analytic Classes<sup>10</sup>

Large scale statistical data often utilises male occupational status only and the data that underpins much policy direction is therefore flawed. A focus on income as a measure ignores the social and cultural differences that can exist both between and within social class groups. There is therefore an inherent difficulty associated with classification systems – social groups are not wholly homogenous in nature and yet classification by its very nature seeks to homogenise (Sørensen 2000).

Crompton and Scott (2000) argue issues surrounding social class lie primarily with understanding definitions. They consider, with others (e.g. Crompton

<sup>10</sup> Source: Office for National Statistics. (2005). "The National Statistics Socio-economic Classification." Retrieved 26th January 2005, from [http://www.statistics.gov.uk/methods\\_quality/ns\\_sec/default.asp](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/methods_quality/ns_sec/default.asp).

1993; Milner 1999; Anthias 2001; Devine and Savage 2005), additional forms of social inequalities, such as race and gender and the role that such factors can contribute in both understanding social inequalities and class classification systems. A social class position or identity does not therefore sit in isolation; there is a correlation between class position and gender and ethnicity (Anthias 2001). Such complex positioning occurs as a result of individual choices, but more importantly structural constraints within which individuals live. Parental occupation in isolation is therefore not adequate in illuminating the hybrid and complex structural and social factors constituting social class. This method of analysis, which only accounts for male occupation, has been criticised by many (see for example, Crompton 1993; Bourke 1994; Rose and O'Reilly 1997; Crompton 2000; Devine and Savage 2000).

Bourdieu attempts to address this issue through the use of correspondence analysis in which he draws a parallel between occupational status and consumption patterns (Bourdieu 1986). He identifies class-based practices as constrained by an individual's social conditions, including for example, access to resources, and levels of the various types of capital

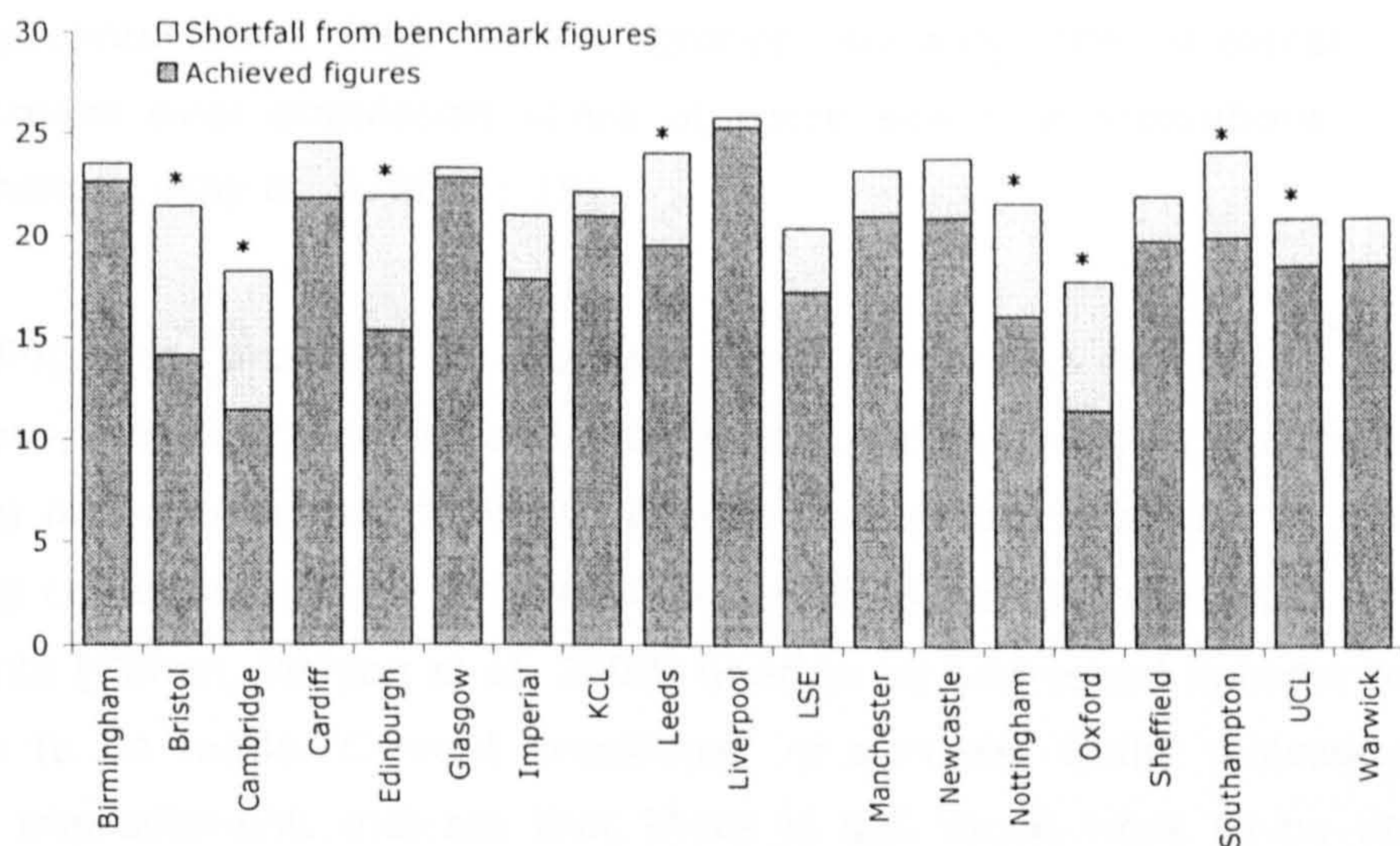
... the dominant class constitutes a relatively autonomous space whose structure is defined by the distribution of economic and cultural capital among its members, each class fraction being characterized by a certain configuration of this distribution to which there corresponds a certain life-style, through the mediation of the habitus;... (Bourdieu 1986: 260)

For Bourdieu, habitus is the key to understanding social positions and positioning. Built from previous experiences, habitus drives individual action and can be used to identify differences between individuals and their position in social space. The notion of habitus and the way in which a habitus can adapt to context may contribute to increased knowledge of how young people make decisions about their futures. Until this understanding and knowledge is in place, it is unlikely that the current trends in participation will change.



## The Impact of Widening Participation Initiatives

Performance Indicators have been established by HE funding bodies (e.g. HEFCE) to measure the nature and performance of the higher education sector in the UK (HESA 2005). The Performance Indicators published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) indicate that benchmarks for widening participation are not being met by many of the elite institutions as illustrated in Figure 9.



**Figure 9:** Russell Group Shortfall from Participation Benchmark Figures  
(Source: Adapted from HESA 2005)

This graph clearly indicates that the most elite institutions in the UK are failing to attract sufficient numbers of working class students to meet their benchmark figures. This trend is considered significant by HEFCE (illustrated by \*) in eight of the universities of which Oxford and Cambridge are two. This could be explained by the ways in which class based practices drive particular actions and as I indicated above, working class students are disproportionately represented in post-1992 universities. I have argued above that this is indicative of a clash between a working class habitus and the habitat of elite institutions. In addition, Bourdieu (1990) states that through

... the systematic 'choices' it makes among the places, events and people that might be frequented, the *habitus* tends to protect itself from crises and critical challenges by providing

itself with a milieu to which it is as pre-adapted as possible...  
(Bourdieu 1990a: 61)

This offers a possible explanation for the shortfall found above and as argued throughout this section. Increasing the numbers of working class students in elite universities is not an easy task and as Thomas et al., consider

There is also an apparent 'institutional type' effect with applicants from high status groups showing the greatest increase over population share at more selective institutions.  
(Thomas, May et al. 2005: 15)

In tackling the problem of working class under-representation in elite institutions, we must look beneath the figures and deconstruct the process of schooling and educational choice to ensure an equitable system. In addition, the living conditions of low socio-economic groups, so often negated in policy documents (Cohen, Manion et al. 2000) need to be addressed in order for real progress to be made. Current 'measures' of success, whilst indicating that there is improvement, indicate that there is still much work to be done in securing places for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in HE.

## **Chapter Summary**

Whilst intervention programmes are generally viewed to be positive, they are a feature of the way in which the political field attempts to modify the field of education. Although they are founded on principles of social justice, they contribute to the logic of the educational field in which young people become selected out and treated differently. I now move on to describe the students who participated in this study who were involved in the Sutton Trust Summer School, before moving on to detail the methodologies used.

Methodological Approach to Understanding Lived Experiences

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This chapter details the students in the sample and the reasons for their inclusion in the study. I then outline the methods used to gather the stories of the young people involved. This involves exploration of the way in which knowledge of experience can be obtained. With that in mind I provide an overview of the epistemological orientation utilised in this study. Bourdieu's theoretical ideas are referred to in reference to the applicability of the methods used. I also outline previous examples of research that seek to extrapolate individual stories through the use of creative means. I refer to the way in which the methods contributed to my understanding of the students' educational experiences. I focus on the way in which the methods employed contributed to a positive relationship between the students and myself and argue that in recounting my own story I am as involved in this research as they are and that by its nature, this type of research can never be context free. I also provide an overview of the analytical processes involved in understanding the students' journeys.

**As we write about lives, we bring the world of others into our texts. We create differences, oppositions, and presences which allow us to maintain the illusion that we have captured the 'real' experiences of 'real' people. In fact, we create the persons we write about, just as they create themselves when they engage in storytelling practices.**

**(Denzin 1989: 82)**

## **Sample Selection**

The study focused on a group of students who were thinking about university and who participated on a Sutton Trust Summer School. They are therefore representative of a small sub-section of the types of students who access widening participation programmes, such as those detailed in the previous chapter. I first detail the students involved before moving on to describe the methods and analytical techniques employed within the study.

Sampling in qualitative research has been identified as being problematic (Berk 1983). Many concerns centre on sample bias and internal and external validity, and I will explore the extent to which these are potential causes of concern to this study.

For qualitative research to offer findings that are robust there is a need to identify an appropriate sample based on the aims of the research (Coyne 1997). In order to do this, there are several stages that need to be considered including research questions, epistemological underpinnings, access and time frame of the study (Coyne 1997). This study, although situated within a wide body of research that highlights issues concerning university choice, is also located within the Government's agenda of Widening Participation. Its fundamental aim is to gain insights into the factors and life events that influence students as they progress through education. In particular, I was interested in the motivations that result in the decision to go to university, including any involvement in explicit intervention strategies. I was not interested in generalisability, but deeper situated understandings which might inform further study and add to existing work. With that in mind, the sample

was selected on the basis of how it met the purposes of the study: a purposeful and theoretically rich sample (Morse 1991; Coyne 1997).

In establishing the need for a purposeful sample, I approached the Widening Participation Department at The University of Nottingham to enquire whether access to a potential sample would be both permitted and practicable (Cohen, Manion et al. 2000) and also whether there would be any opportunities to become involved in any of their programmes in order to invite some students to participate in my study. This site was chosen because it was convenient and happened to be representative of an elite, research intensive university. My interest in such an institution was framed by other research that identifies traditional universities as unfamiliar places for non-traditional students (see for example, Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Connor, Dewson et al. 2001; Archer 2003; Archer and Leathwood 2003). The Sutton Trust also run Summer School programmes in four other research intensive universities, namely; Oxford, Bristol, Cambridge and St Andrews.

I was invited to two summer schools that took place in the summer of 2004: HEFCE (for Year 11 students) and The Sutton Trust (for Year 12 students). Although I did not know which universities the students would eventually apply to at the time of the sample selection, I wanted to understand how their experiences of education generally and that of the Sutton Trust week informed their university choices. In addition, and more widely I was interested in finding out how their respective background contexts influenced their decisions. The Sutton Trust therefore offered access to an opportunistic sample (Patton 1990) which appeared to meet the aims of the research.

## **Locating Widening Participation Students**

In approaching the Widening Participation Department and gaining access to students who had attended the Sutton Trust week, I made assumptions concerning their social demographics that would eventually be unfounded. I had intended to 'find' students who had similar backgrounds to my own through contacts with local secondary schools and sixth form centres. Given the low HE participation rates found in Nottingham North (HEFCE 2005; Gates 2007), I thought that this area would provide me with a suitable sample. I

made some assumptions concerning the types of students in Nottingham North based on my experience and knowledge of the area. Such assumptions were based upon statistical measures that identify low parental employment and income, high levels of crime, poor health and low academic achievement as being issues within the Nottingham North constituency (Source: ONS). Such assumptions can be held up to further scrutiny through the positioning of Nottingham North schools in league tables which demonstrate poor levels of academic achievement over many years.

Contact had been made to schools serving Nottingham North through earlier MA work on parental involvement. However, the initial focus of my study was changing from parental involvement to the experiences of the students in the process of going to university and I felt this warranted a different approach to the selection of students. The study was no longer focussing purely on individual stories of educational trajectories, but was instead moving towards including an understanding of the structuring principles at work in both schools and post-16 educational institutions that could alter the projected (that is established from examination attainment) educational trajectory of working class students. As schools in Nottingham North are 11 – 16 only, the students at such schools would not have fulfilled the aims of the project.

As part of a possible structuring process, I began to turn towards exploring intervention strategies embedded within the widening participation agenda as strong influencing factors on student HE choice, but also how students end up attending such programmes. The study therefore became more closely centred on how students constructed their university choices given their experiences within educational institutions and family backgrounds. With that in mind, I approached the Widening Participation Department at The University of Nottingham.

## **The Widening Participation Department**

Underpinning the work of the Widening Participation Department at The University of Nottingham is a national drive to increase the numbers of under-represented groups who go to university.

The Widening Participation (WP) Team at The University of Nottingham delivers a range of activities targeted at local schools, colleges and community groups. The target schools are likely to include high numbers of learners from groups under-represented in HE. As part of a strategy to increase the numbers from under-represented groups at The University of Nottingham, the WP Team maintain a high profile in the chosen schools in the hope that a regular presence will raise the aspirations of the students and help them to make an application to university (The University of Nottingham 2006).

The activities are targeted to two groups: pre-16 and post-16 students. The work with pre-16 students focuses mainly on aspiration raising activities and predominantly takes place in schools.

The post-16 work is focused on a particular group of students who are considered to have 'high potential' (The University of Nottingham 2006) and who could benefit from the experience of HE. This process of selection is often carried out within schools where students are placed into cohorts: for example the Aimhigher or Gifted and Talented cohorts. Activities largely take place on the university campus and The Sutton Trust Summer School is one such activity.

## **Student Selection for Summer Schools**

The students are selected to participate on the summer schools on the basis of an application form submitted to participating universities, in this case, The University of Nottingham. Whilst this appears straightforward as a selection procedure, it is not without problems. Application forms are initially sent through to schools and teachers are responsible for identifying the pupils who meet the criteria for attending the summer schools. How teachers identify the students invariably will differ between institutions demonstrating the influencing and structuring factors from within a students' institution. Selection processes could be more reflective of teacher perceptions of students rather than student attitudes and aspirations. Implications to this research project are that before I met the students, there had already been a selection process, which had eliminated certain students. Whilst this could affect the research findings, I had to deal with the students that had made it through the

initial filter although I had expected that the students accepted on to the Sutton Trust would fit the characteristics I required.

The remit of WP at the University of Nottingham is to broaden the 'range of students who attend university so that they are representative of the home population' (The University of Nottingham 2006). Students currently under-represented at the University of Nottingham for example, include:

- people from lower socio-economic groups, including mature learners
- people living in deprived geographical areas, including deprived rural areas
- people whose family has no experience of HE
- people from schools and colleges without a strong history of progression to HE.

(The University of Nottingham 2006)

In conjunction with the above list of under-represented groups and on looking at the Sutton Trust web-site and finding that the chairman of the Sutton Trust, Sir Peter Lampl, expects that students from specific backgrounds will be selected to participate I remained positive that the students would be suitable for the purposes of this study. The intention of the Sutton Trust is to encourage young people without family traditions of HE to consider applying, but going on the summer school is not a precursor to an 'award' of a university place,

We have used social data in selecting applicants for our Summer Schools - e.g. whether or not their parents had a higher education - though the purpose is to encourage promising youngsters from unpromising backgrounds to seek university places, not to award them. (Lampl 2005)

Armed with the knowledge that the students met the criteria for my research (that is they were from low socio-economic backgrounds and would be the first in their families to consider HE, as my own trajectory and history had



been) and that they provided a type of 'purposive' (Cohen, Manion et al. 2000) sample, I began to put together a small presentation introducing my research and my own details to students participating on both HEFCE and Sutton Trust Summer Schools.

## **Identifying with the Sample**

In order to encourage students to participate in my study I gave a presentation to students at both the HEFCE and Sutton Trust summer schools based at the University of Nottingham in the summer of 2004. For this, I made the decision to tell them my own story, highlighting my background and the fact that I was the first in my family to go on to HE. Although slightly risky, I felt that I could not invite students to take part in my study without giving them something of myself. I felt that the relationship between the students and me should be an open and honest one from the start and I wanted to enter the research process with the relationship between myself and the students as equal as it could possibly be given the context (that is a research project) of future interactions with them. I realised that in any future contact with the students there would be an imbalance in the power relationships, but thought that this could be in part negated through my own honesty. As Cohen, Manion and Morrison state,

There would have to be a relationship between the interviewer and interviewee that transcended the research, that promoted a bond of friendship, a feeling of togetherness... (Cohen, Manion et al. 2000: 268)

I did not want to influence the way in which they approached the research but I was mindful of the fact that in listening to my story they would begin to think about their own (Munro 1998). As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) point out, the key to understanding others is through ourselves.

At the end of the presentation, I handed out a number of documents:

- a letter of introduction (Appendix 1)
- information about the study leaflet (Appendix 2)

- study flier (Appendix 3)
- parental letter of consent (Appendix 4)
- self- addressed envelope.

In addition, each student completed a Sutton Trust Journal (Appendix 5) of their week, which was constructed by the Widening Participation team as part of their on-going evaluative processes, in consultation with me. Students were invited to complete their contact details on the back of the journal if they were interested in participating in my research. The journals were completed throughout the week and collected on the day I gave the presentation. Out of the 72 students who were involved in the Sutton Trust summer school, 35 completed their details. After a follow up e-mail to each student, 16 decided that they wished to participate with my research. In addition, students were also invited to complete an additional survey, which asked more in-depth questions on their thoughts about university (Appendix 6).

I received responses from three students who had taken part in the HEFCE summer school and followed their interest up with an e-mail. After showing initial interest, these students did not wish to continue further with the study.

Although essentially a sample of convenience (Wellington 2000), the focus on Year 12 students enabled me to access information on university choice as the students were going through the process of applying to university in addition to their first term's experience thus offering an element of longitudinal investigation to the study.

## **The Students**

Sixteen students volunteered to take part in my study. They came from a variety of school contexts and family backgrounds. The focus on habitus within the study enables me to explore the contextual background of the students. Statistical measures based on ONS social class classifications are often used when detailing student participation rates. Table 3 illustrates the class categorisation of the students in this study. In this analysis, I use the pre-2001 occupation scheme to establish the social class categories. The numeric

symbols more commonly associate with distinct social class categories than those introduced post-2001.

<b>Class Categorisation</b>	<b>Classification</b>	<b>Numbers of Students</b>
Middle Class	II	2
Skilled Working Class	IIIN	5
Working Class	IIIM	4
Working Class	IV	2
Working Class	V	3

**Table 3:** Class Position of Students

The sample therefore offered an opportunity to explore the notion of habitus across five distinct class categories. Whilst acknowledging the complexities of class analysis, grouping the students in this way provided a tool for understanding the ways in which a habitus can adapt to context. Further insight into the students' backgrounds comprised gathering information on their family background, and school and post-16 education experiences. In introducing the students here, I have consolidated their background contexts, as Table 4 shows.

<b>School/Home Context</b>	<b>Numbers of Students</b>
Attended a school 6 <sup>th</sup> form	9
Attended a 6 <sup>th</sup> form college	2
Attended a tertiary college	2
Attended a single sex school 6 <sup>th</sup> form	3
Parents provided explicit support	10
Parents provided implicit support	6
Close family members have been to university	7
Other family members have been to university	7

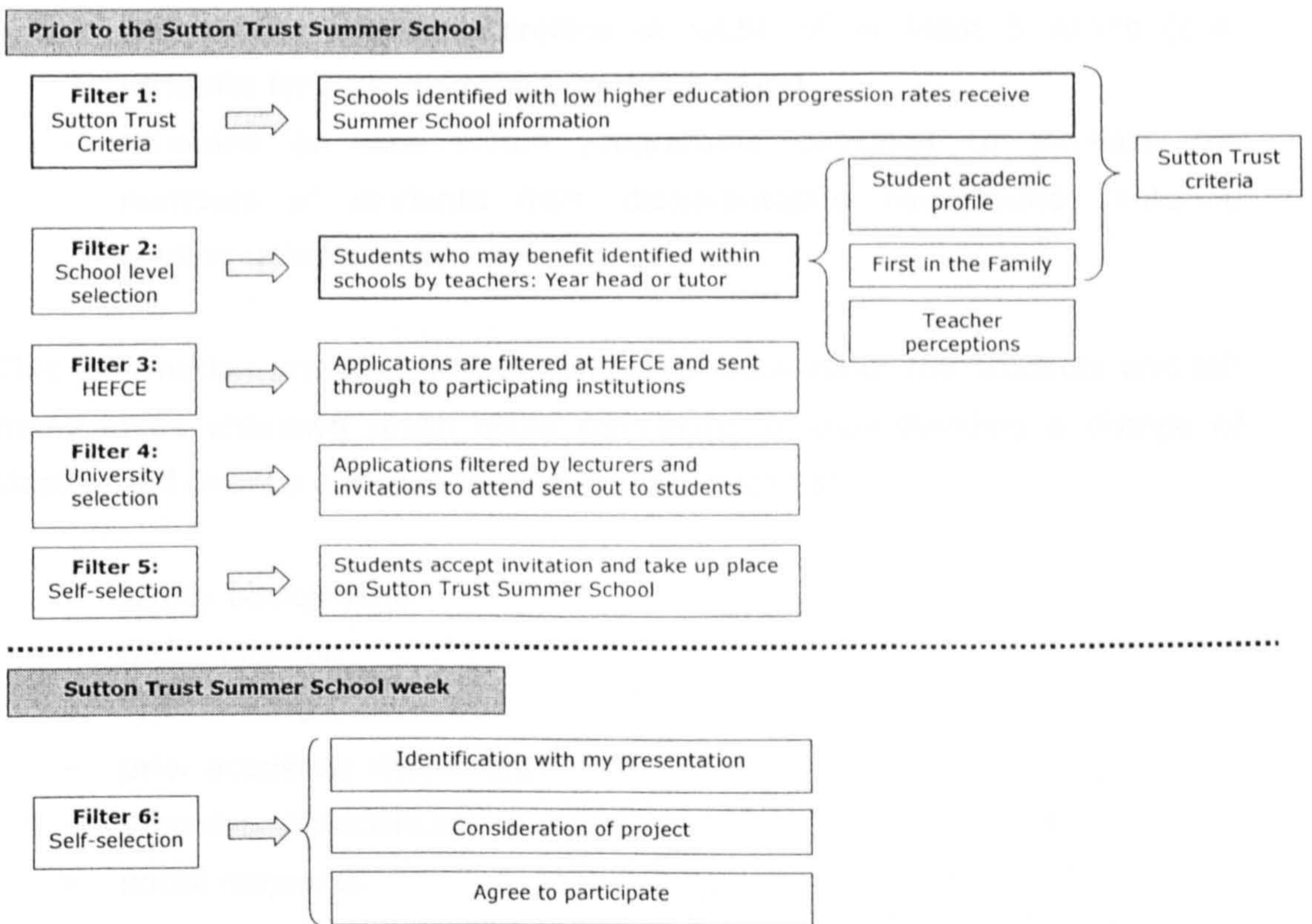
**Table 4:** Background Contexts of the Students

I have focused on their schools and families in order to highlight the differing contexts that have informed the students' educational experiences (further

Interrogation and discussion of the background contexts will appear in Chapters 4 and 5: *Habitus: Influenced by Home Context and Habitus: Influenced by Institutions*). In line with the work of Reay et al. (2005) I have placed the schools into 'types'; this facilitates later analysis of the influence of institutional habitus on student trajectory. In terms of their 'representativeness' (Cohen, Manion et al. 2000), they are a small number of students mainly from low socio-economic backgrounds who, through educational success considered applying to university. Whilst the sample size was small, I considered the numbers appropriate for conducting an in-depth and detailed investigation. They offered an interesting focus of study in that they are from low socio-economic backgrounds with the majority having parents in working class occupations.

### **Difficulties with the Sample**

Although the students are representative of a wider group of young people who participate on Summer School programmes and other widening participation programmes, they are both small in number and have already been through numerous filtering processes prior to involvement in this research study. For example, one of the pre-requisites of securing a place at the Sutton Trust Summer School is GCSE qualifications: students must possess at least five A\* - C grades. This fact alone would deter many students who could identify as non-traditional as the study in Nottingham North demonstrated (and which I have referred to above). The process of securing involvement at the Summer School comprised intervention by teachers, NFER, university widening participation staff and lecturers as illustrated in Figure 10.



**Figure 10: Process of Sample Selection**

Whilst the students could identify as non-traditional, they are not representative of a broad group of traditionally non-traditional students – they are a sub-section of that group. In approaching students that had already been through external filtering processes, I acknowledged that the sample would reflect other subjectivities operating at the level of schools and families. In addition, academics within The University of Nottingham had also played a part in deciding which students would be admitted on to the scheme. The selection process was therefore complex and relied on both the students' academic profile and the decisions of school teachers and university academics. My invitation to the students to participate in the research was therefore part of an already complex selection process.

Although the students were a disparate group in terms of their respective backgrounds and educational experiences, the pre-requisites set by the Sutton Trust homogenised them as a group, namely they:

- were entering their final year of A Level study

- had similar academic profiles at GCSE of at least 5 A/A\*s (pre-requisite for attending the Summer School)
- attended an intervention programme designed to increase the numbers of students from disadvantaged backgrounds entering leading universities.

This information provided limited contextual data about the students and left many areas unknown which could contribute to understanding a change of class based habitus and institutional factors, such as:

- family background
- home location
- type of school attended
- prior academic attainment
- schooling experiences
- social networks
- involvement in culturally rich activities.

In selecting the students on the basis of their Sutton Trust participation, I wanted to not only gain information on the influence of that week, but gain understanding of other contributing factors which led them to choose HE as an option.

From detailing the students in the study, I now move to describe how I worked with them to understand their educational journeys. In earlier chapters, I outlined my understanding and interpretation of Bourdieu's main theoretical ideas of habitus, field, distinction, reproduction and capital in relation to my own experiences and the field of education. In this chapter, I focus on habitus in more detail to re-enforce its importance in the study of human experiences. Bourdieu's theoretical ideas are interrelated and as such, during the process of exploring the student's experiences, I expect to be able to identify the ways in which class based practices relate to these theoretical ideas (e.g. habitus, field, capital, reproduction and distinction). In addition, consideration of these ideas ensures that I continue to be mindful of my own position in relation to the study. This study is not context free and I bring to it

a particular habitus that has gradually emerged and continues to emerge as middle class. As a result, the way in which I view the social world is very much influenced by my experiences.

## **Understanding Human Action**

A purpose of qualitative research is to uncover and understand human action and to

... uncover the most deeply buried structures of the different social worlds that make up the social universe, as well as the 'mechanisms' that tend to ensure their reproduction or transformation. (Bourdieu 1996: 1)

Approaches to understanding human action have varied and changed over a period of time (Bryman 2001). Sociologists have been concerned to 'come to grips with their environment' and to 'understand the nature of the phenomena it presents to their senses' (Cohen, Manion et al. 2000: 3) for a long time. And yet, there has been much debate as to the best way of gaining such understanding. Initial approaches used to explore human action were based on positivistic scientific reasoning (Cohen, Manion et al. 2000). Explanations of human action through such methods are believed to have a 'firm basis in fact' (Cohen, Manion et al. 2000: 3) and contribute to arguments that promote and value quantitative methods above qualitative methods (Cohen, Manion et al. 2000). Applying a quantitative approach, with its underlying epistemological beliefs in laws of prediction, control and measurement (Laverty 2003) to a study which focuses on understanding experiences is inappropriate. Indeed, much research into the experiences of first generation students, as I have indicated in the previous chapters, has relied on qualitative based approaches. Creswell (1998) views qualitative research as an 'intricate fabric composed of minute threads, many colours, different textures, and various blends of material' where the fabric 'is not explained easily or simply' (Creswell 1998: 13). Thus, complexities that influence decisions and choices that people consciously or subconsciously make are better uncovered through methods that address the multi-dimensional nature of human life.

This study explored students' understandings and perceptions of their *experiences* as they entered the process of applying to university and of their first term as undergraduate students. It required methods that illuminated the process of a life trajectory complete with constraints, opportunities presented, influences, critical moments and outcomes, that is, the 'intricate fabric' as identified by Creswell (1998) and noted above. Important to this study, were the mechanisms that played a part in transforming the educational trajectories of the students with the final outcome of applying to elite HE institutions. In particular, I required methods that comprised a longitudinal element which facilitated in-depth knowledge of the students' experiences in order that the two main research questions posed in Chapter 1 could be addressed.

Human action is a complex hybrid of opportunities, constraints and responses that takes place within a variety of fields: social, education and political in the case of this study. Understanding the complexities that lie behind each individual life story and subsequent social trajectory thus required a multi-dimensional approach. The approach must be able to look beneath simplistic considerations that separate out or attempt to privilege actions (or the agency) of individuals above the contexts (or the structures that determine action) within which decisions are made or vice versa. Bourdieu addressed this issue through his notion of habitus (Bourdieu 1990a). There is a significant body of literature that utilises habitus as a tool through which class based educational experiences can be understood. For example, school choice (Reay and Lucey 2000), HE choice (Archer 2003), differing capacities to play the educational game (Bowl 2003), the possibility that habitus can adapt (Brooks 2003), the influence of an institutional habitus in decision making (Reay, David et al. 2005) and the influence of institutional habitus on student retention (Thomas 2002).

However, the notion of habitus has predominantly been used to understand inequalities within education that continue to produce unequal outcomes according to class (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bourdieu 1990a; Bourdieu 1998). Participation rates within HE, as being reflective of unequal outcomes are collated and regularly scrutinised through HEFCE and the ONS. Although such data usefully illustrate the disproportionate numbers of students who

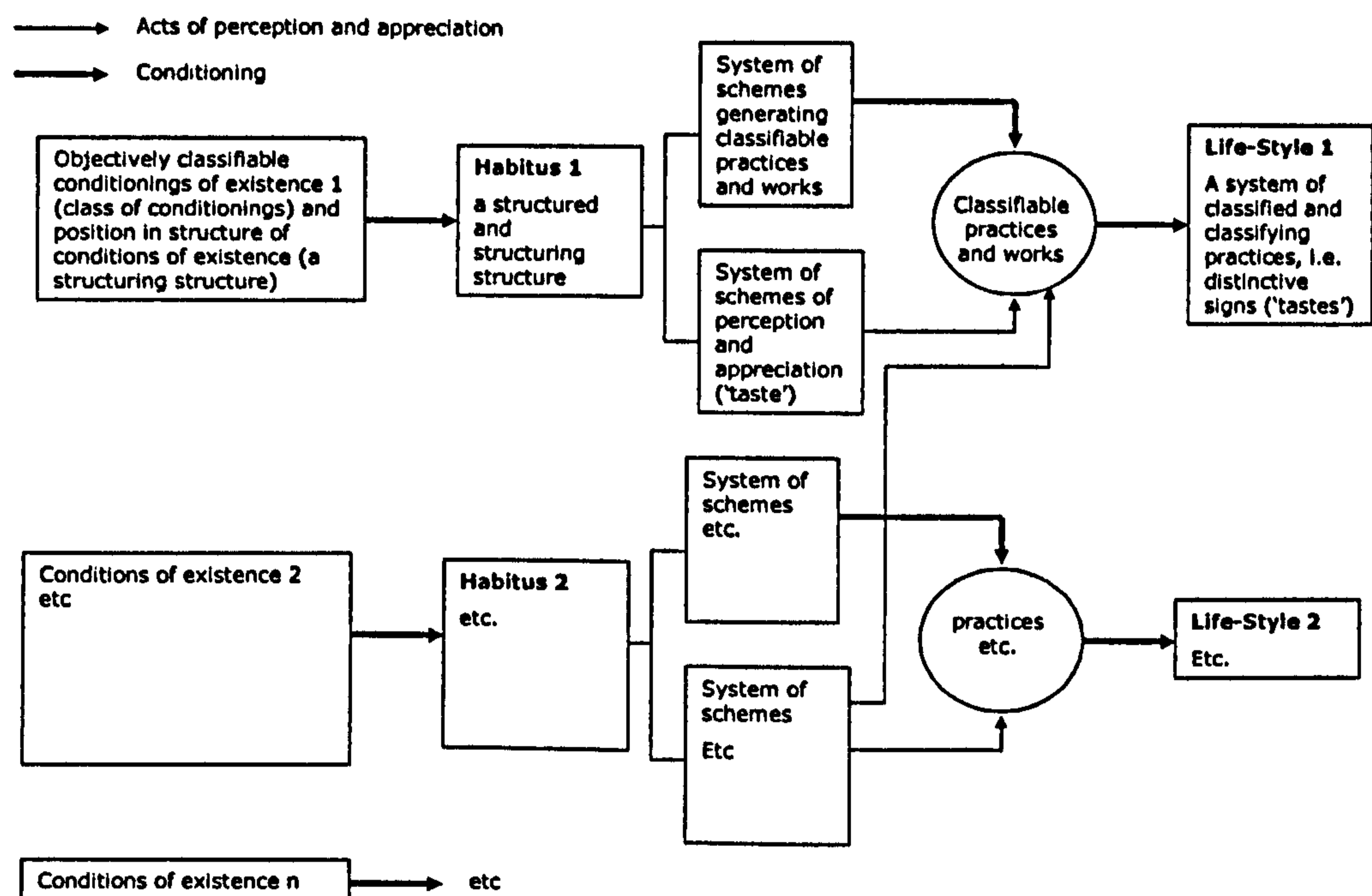


come from working class backgrounds, they do little to facilitate understanding of the complexities behind the figures. In order to fully understand low rates of HE participation of students from low social class groups, it is necessary to understand the contexts within which they live – the institutional and family based habitus that drive their decisions and practices. In this study therefore, habitus is the main tool or method, through which the students' individual experiences are understood.

## **Habitus as Method**

A focus on habitus as a method for understanding the students' experiences 'enables individual trajectories to be studied' as 'habitus has a history and discloses the traces of its origins in practice' (Nash 1999: 176). Whilst I focus on individual experiences in this study, I am unable to view such experiences as being isolated from the contexts of which they are a product. That is, through understanding the contextualised and historical backgrounds of the students, it is possible to 'locate' their habituses. Therefore, the extent to which the students identify with other family members or view themselves as being different could suggest a change in habitus – one that has moved away from the primary experiences that informed its development.

The practical manifestation of habitus can therefore be identified as choices and decisions made and an incorporation of the context within which such choices and decision are carried out. Returning to Creswell's understanding of qualitative research as an 'intricate fabric', how then is it possible to uncover the richness of detail that is beneath individual actions? The use of habitus as a main insight into why humans act in the ways that they do enabled me to focus on the ways in which the students in this study responded to their respective contexts. I appreciate that the moves they made or strategies they used to succeed in education are reflective of a class-based habitus, but also indicative of what Bourdieu terms 'conditions of existence' (Bourdieu 1986: 170). That is, the contextualised lived experiences that shape and influence decisions made. Figure 11 illustrates the way in which habitus influences decisions through systems of perception and appreciation or through conditioning.



**Figure 11:** Conditions of existence, habitus and life-style  
 Source: (Bourdieu 1986: 171)

Important to this study are processes of perception and appreciation that can alter the stability of a primary habitus. The result this has on students' decisions concerning HE institution and future career could indicate a preference for a particular life-style far removed from that experienced at home. I was interested in exploring experiences that influenced the students until they reached the point where they knew that they would be going to university. In addition, I also wanted to look at the way in which they settled at their respective HE institutions to uncover the complexity that lies behind habitus transformation. This research focus placed me in a particular research paradigm with its own constituent methodological approaches. I now turn to and detail the epistemological orientation of the work to highlight why a phenomenological hermeneutic approach is used in this study.

## Adopting a Phenomenological Hermeneutic Stance

Phenomenology is primarily concerned with exploring lived experiences (Lavery 2003). In this approach, an emphasis is placed on locating contextual

influences that contribute to experience (Laverty 2003) and therefore firmly situates the individual within the social world they inhabit. Hermeneutic phenomenology progresses this approach to include *understanding* and *making meaning* of experiences within the situated context (Laverty 2003). In Bourdieuan terms, the situated nature of experience is determined by the interaction of habitus and field. Meaning can be found by understanding the history of the habitus and the way in which actions have been regulated by position within the various social fields; positions that are determined by the distribution of the various forms of capital. Experience of the social world and action determined by the habitus is 'situated' within many complex interactions both historical and social (Bourdieu 1977: 95).

Much of the literature on higher education focuses on the 'situated' nature of working class experiences within education. It observes that the identity of working class individuals in relation to higher education in particular is frequently constructed as 'other' (see for example, Archer 2003; Leathwood and O'Connell 2003) and where 'academia has rarely developed complex understandings of working-class people' (Reay 1997: 18). Approaches to understanding working class relationships with education have built from eliciting the opinions of students at particular points in their educational careers. These include, school pupils, such as work undertaken on school choice (e.g. Ball 2003; Power, Edwards et al. 2003), higher education choice that focuses on a range of under-represented groups (e.g. Ball, Davies et al. 2002; Archer 2003; Bowl 2003; Brooks 2003; Reay 2003; Reay, David et al. 2005), mature students returning to study (Bowl 2003) and retrospective personal narrative based accounts (Rose 1989; e.g. Law 1995; Reynolds 1997; Walsh 1997). These studies have much in common. Firstly they identify the situated positions of working class students and their difficulties in progressing through education. They also point to the importance of such work in focusing on the experiences of working class students from the students' perspectives. It is through their personal accounts that insight into the classed nature of educational experience can be identified.

Understanding the situated nature of the habitus and the influence this has on working class university choice required a reciprocal meaning making process

between myself and the students involved in the study. This involved personal understanding of my own life history and the meaning I attributed to my own social trajectory in addition to facilitating the students to share their experiences. Research can not be value free (Bryman 2001) and in adopting an hermeneutic phenomenological approach I am aware that my own background and experiences influence how I view the social world. Of importance to this study, is the meaning the students attributed to their experiences of education. The most powerful accounts that detail working class experiences of education, in my opinion, are those that build from the words of the students themselves. Through their words, it is possible to gain a first hand account of how educational constraints and inequalities are experienced. In addition it is possible to identify the factors that contribute to working class successes. The stories I eventually present will invariably reflect my own biases and interpretations. My own experiences can not be omitted from both my approach to and understandings of the students' experiences. In addition, 'all research is in one way or another autobiographical or else the avoidance of autobiography' (Reay 1998: 2). This is why I began this thesis with my own story.

Bourdieu reflected upon his own experiences in education detailing his feelings of being an 'outsider' within the academy (Reed-Danahay 2005: 24). Although recognising autobiography as a valuable research tool, Bourdieu insisted that his self-reflections were a justifiable contribution to the 'sociology of science' (Bourdieu 1990b: 8). It is problematic to separate knowledge gained through purely autobiographical means (e.g. life history) and that which is gained through for example interviews. Whatever form is used to access information concerning experience, life stories emerge. That is to say, multiple methods may contribute to a more complete 'life history' being produced. This study, whilst being situated within a narrative paradigm, relies heavily on the understandings that the students place on their experiences. Life history work is considered to be the only 'authentic means of understanding how motives and practices reflect the intimate intersection of institutional and individual experience...' (Dhunpath 2000: 544). Thus, this methodological approach facilitates exploration of shifts in habitus by recognising the importance of contextualised experiences. However, it is important to note that the data

collected will invariably provide partial insights into the lives of the students heavily influenced by their own interpretations and understandings of experiences.

In adopting an hermeneutic phenomenological stance, my understanding of working class higher education choice will be influenced by many factors associated with understanding the various fields involved (social, educational and political), including my own experiences of the field of education - although my experiences of going to HE, occurred at a time when the political and educational landscapes were different to those experienced by the students in this study. Gaining insight into the life stories of others enables a form of self-positioning to take place - a way in which the experiences of the students can be compared with my own, but also how any meaning can be attributed to those experiences. Bourdieu recognised that in telling his autobiography there was the possibility of highlighting 'collective histories' (Reed-Danahay 2005: 25), and that his experiences could be analogous with someone from a similar background or habitus. The utilisation of a phenomenological hermeneutic approach, which focuses on an interpretive model for understanding action, will facilitate exploration of individual perspectives of a complex process. It promotes human interaction as a main approach for accessing lived experiences of people. It is therefore appropriate to this study in the sense of understanding the students' emotional journeys to HE.

Research that seeks to uncover such experiences has mainly utilised qualitative methods to understand the inequalities that persist in the education system. Whilst a range of methods are used, interviews (both one-to-one and focus group) feature as the main source of data collection (e.g. Bourke 1994; Reay 1998; Bamber and Tett 1999; Bourdieu 1999; Archer 2003; Bland 2004; Brooks 2004). Other methods that are frequently used within research are personal narrative based accounts of experiences (e.g. Rose 1989; Reissman 1993; Hatch and Wisniewski 1995; Hey 1997; Holloway 1997; Mahony and Zmroczek 1997; Reay 1997; Reynolds 1997; Skeggs 1997; Walsh 1997; Auerbach 2002) and ethnographic approaches (Barnard 1990; Bourdieu 1999). The methods utilised in existing research indicate a commitment to

gaining access to individuals' experiences as they wish to recount the information. Qualitative research therefore differs philosophically to quantitative based approaches.

A fundamental assumption of the qualitative research paradigm is that a profound understanding of the world can be gained through conversation and observation in natural settings rather than through experimental manipulation under artificial conditions. (Anderson 1998: 119)

This study is therefore embedded within a phenomenological hermeneutic stance, which places understanding of individual experience firmly within the situated context of its occurrence. Through the collection of partial life histories that also focus on educational trajectories, it is possible to obtain a sense of the way in which individuals negotiate the complexities of the educational field.

## **The Life History Approach**

Life history is often used within qualitative based research to explore the experiences of individuals in their own words. It provides opportunities to explain a life course through story telling and moves away from previous traditions of empirical study that involved more scientific and positivist modes of investigation (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 20). Whilst narrative approaches achieve similar outcomes, life history takes such research one step further by placing 'narrative accounts and interpretations in a broader context - personal, historical, social, institutional, and/or political' (Hatch and Wisniewski 1995: 116). Thus, through the process of story telling, life history research takes understanding of social life beyond the immediate life of an individual,

Life history and narrative offer exciting alternatives for connecting the lives and stories of individuals to the understanding of larger human and social phenomena. (Reed-Danahay 2005)

Life history paves the way to understanding some of the issues identified above, such as action as situated and being determined by contextual constraints and opportunities. A personal life history provides much information on habitus, as the story told will expose both the individual's engagement with the social world and the context within which such interactions take place. That is, the interpretations of the students can be understood as being 'windows into the inner life of the person' (Denzin 1989: 14) facilitating insight into the complexities of social life.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) reflect upon both the complexity of the situated nature in which research takes place, but also on the way in which stories feature in the every day lives of people. For them, people live their lives narratively and as a consequence recount experiences through the telling of stories. This view is shared by Atkinson who states, 'telling the stories of our lives is so basic to our nature that we are largely unaware of its importance' (Atkinson 2002: 121).

According to Atkinson (2002), life story interviewing has evolved from other qualitative based research approaches and yet 'stands alone' as a method for in-depth study of individual lives. However, there is an additional dimension within narrative based approaches which point towards internal meaning-making for both the researcher and those telling their stories.

It is a collaboration between researcher and participants over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social. (Reed-Danahay 2005: 35)

It is evident that at the heart of narrative based research there exists a relationship between the research and the participants. This relationship is not context free and is bound by the nature of the inquiry. For this study, I wanted to gain some understanding of a chronology of critical moments and yet

appreciated that 'the transition from youth to adulthood is increasingly non-linear and heterogeneous' (Thomson, Bell et al. 2002: 335). Whilst people may live their lives narratively, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state, there are many issues that surround this form of data collection. For example, the stories told within an interview context are both representations and interpretations of previous events that may or may not be accurate. The method therefore, despite reflecting the innate ways in which people reflect upon their experiences, does have some limitations.

## **Complexities of Life History Research**

The use of life history as a methodological approach assumes that stories will appear as part of a linear, self-reflective account of experience. This is problematic in many respects. Firstly, attempts to construct coherent, neat and linear life stories do not reflect the complexities of human experiences. Bourdieu reflected on this when recounting his own experience in the light of theories concerning social class reproduction. He did not come to disclose his earlier memories until much later in his career, thus emphasising his reluctance to produce an account based on a linear model (Bourdieu 1990a: 26). What Bourdieu is identifying in his use of life story, is the complexity of experiences and that life for most people does not unfold in typical predictable ways. His own life trajectory was as he acknowledges, a mixture of chance and habitus (e.g. Schön 1983; Bright 1996; Ghaye and Ghaye 1998; Clarke and Chambers 1999) and owes much to the responses he made to opportunities presented.

I don't have to tell you that the many things that have played a determining part in my 'intellectual path' happened by chance. My own contribution, doubtless linked to my habitus, consisted essentially in making the most of them, to the best of my abilities. (I think, for example, that I seized on a great number of opportunities that many people would have let go). (Bourdieu 1990b: 26)

Secondly, the ability of an individual to present a life story depends on their capacity for self-reflection. Self-reflection in this sense relates to story



making: building a narrative of the self which portrays an individual's experiences. This type of self-reflection is different to that found in professional development literatures, which focus on reflection as a tool for improvement of practice (Bruner 1987: 12). At the heart of Bourdieu's work is the notion of the reflexive self: the ability or capacity to understand and make meaning from personal experiences. The construction of a narrative goes some way in facilitating understanding of personal experience; of interweaving fiction and fact where 'autobiographies and biographies are only fictional statements with varying degrees of 'truth' about 'real' lives' (Denzin 1989: 25). However, although there are problems associated with life history, in the sense that accounts rarely appear as complete coherent representations of a life and are stories as told through the lens of an individual, they do offer opportunities for researchers to gain insight into human experiences.

An issue in life history research is the fact that the producer of the story is both the narrator and the central figure of the story (Mahar, Harker et al. 1990). The story produced is not only one perspective of events, but also subject to filtering processes as it is being told. Bruner (1987) and Hatch and Wisniewski (1995) refer to this as 'continuing interpretation and reinterpretation' of experience. Therefore, although the stories produced, are likely to be filtered accounts of individual lives, go some way in providing useful information of the process of higher education choice.

The act of story telling is aligned closely with the concept of self to such an extent that it becomes difficult to separate our identities from the stories we tell (e.g. Goodson and Sikes 2001). In that sense, we present a partial reality: we create a version of ourselves and of our lives through the stories we tell. As a presentation of self, producing a narrative enables individuals to construct their identities within a specific frame, relating themselves and events in their lives to others and differing contexts (Hardy 1977; Gubrium and Holstein 1997).

Some believe that within everyone, there is a 'story to tell' (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 2). The process of producing a narrative enables an individual to give life and meaning to their experiences (Clough 2002). Others believe

that through the production of life stories, it is possible to access the ways 'humans experience the world' (Kvale 1996: 1). Life history therefore operates within a phenomenological approach to qualitative investigation. It provides the vehicle through which the lived experiences of individuals can be explored. Narrative accounts produced as stories, can provide the means through which the 'truth' of an experience can unfold (Kvale 1996).

However, concerns surrounding the depth of information produced within a life history, led me to consider other methods that can combine and contribute to a richer explanation of the social reality faced by the students in this study. They contributed to the development of a creative narrative in which all information gathered is collated and reproduced to identify similarities and differences within the students' trajectories. Essentially, within this study narrative functioned as a form in which to obtain the educational biographies and partial life histories of the students and was supported by other qualitative based approaches which facilitated connections between both the oral and written production of data (Roberts 2002).

I have so far put forward the notion, that autobiography in the form of either personal life stories or interviews is equally useful in generating data, but also referred to the idea that habitus can be used as a method. In order to understand habitus, particular forms of data are required.

## **Understanding Habitus through Data Collection**

Bourdieu approached empirical study to understand and highlight the complexities of human action by dismantling previous traditions that privileged the use of positivistic methods. His method of 'generative structuralism' (Mahar, Harker et al. 1990: 3) was used to take account of the 'genesis of the person, and of social structures and groups' (e.g. Giroux 1983). In this approach, Bourdieu was suggesting a more relational approach to the study of social life and believed his ideas could provide a theory for the 'dialectical analysis of practical life' (Reay 2004). This approach, although complex, reflected Bourdieu's belief that social reality itself was complex and as such required tools that could fully explain that complexity.

As I have identified in Chapter 1 (*Theoretical Lens: Exploring Education*), habitus is a complex notion that is used to understand differing class based practices. Although research highlights different class based experiences in relation to education, little has been done to explore the way in which habitus may respond to context and the resultant influences on young people's decisions about HE. The type of data required to understand the students' journeys reflect the overall aim of the study: namely to understand the students' experiences prior and post entry to HE and also to explore the role that institutions play in their journeys. The type of data that is needed to understand habitus and possible shifts in habitus are as follows:

- insight into context including family background
- schooling context to explore institutional habitus
- understanding of social networks and the influence this has on social and cultural capital acquisition
- influencing factors when critical decisions were made.

The methods therefore reflect the need for rich data – data which would illuminate the process involved in making the journey into HE. The research process was viewed as iterative with methods being developed (either introduced or excluded) as an on-going process throughout the research in response to data collected. This was particularly the case for the use of visual methods and I provide an explanation of this later in this section. The types of methods used are separated into three categories: text-based, documentary and visual. I now take each of these in turn and explain how they were useful in collating the data required to answer the main research questions.

## **Text-Based Methods**

During this research a number of text-based methods were used including both oral and written. The following text-based methods were used:

- interview
- e-mail communications
- journals.

These primary data sources were used to access the words of the students directly. I now detail the ways in which these methods contributed to the study.

## **Working with Interviews: Individual**

Interviews are frequently used in small scale research. Critical to effective interviewing is the relationship between interviewer and interviewee. Establishing a rapport and a feeling of trust with an interviewee is considered important (Cohen, Manion et al. 2000). I wanted to establish a positive relationship between myself and the students and began this process by introducing my 'story' to them at the initial stage of recruitment. I hoped levels of tension inevitably created within the research context could be reduced by the time of the interview.

Although there is a possibility of distortion (Armstrong 1987), the life history approach does shift the focus of the interview onto the students' experiences as they recollect them and from their point of view (Cohen, Manion et al. 2000). Silverman (2001) refers to interviewing with the use of metaphor – traveller – which I found helpful in guiding the nature of the interaction. I therefore wandered through the issues of the study with the students in order to gain their insights into and understanding of their experiences. In approaching the interviews in this way, I was able to keep my influence to a minimum.

One-to-one interviews were conducted in two phases: pre and post entry to university. Initial interviews sought to gain understanding of the students themselves; their background, motivations, and thoughts on education. To guide the conversations I made use of a semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix 7) which gave me the flexibility to pursue interesting issues as they arose during the interviews. In addition, in keeping with the idea of building narratives that focused on the idea of an educational biography, the questions that I prepared intended to guide the students through the telling of events and interactions that had informed their decision making.

Second phase interviews were used to gather information on the students' first term at university. These interviews were unstructured to the extent that two main questions were posed:

- tell me about your time at university so far
- tell me a bit more about your Sutton Trust experience.

Related questions explored how each student was settling in at university and whether their experience was meeting with their expectations of university life. I was particularly keen to explore their interactions with other students to identify the extent to which their primary habitus adapted to the new context of university life – the way in which they identified with other students and the institutional habitus of the university.

Interviewing the students individually helped me to understand the nature of their respective journeys into HE. However, focus group research provides useful opportunities to 'tap into the jointly constructed discourse of the young people' (Hutchings 2003: 99).

## **Working with Interviews: Focus Groups**

The use of focus groups as a component of data collection is growing in its use within educational research (Kitzinger and Barbour 1999: 5). They differ from group interviews, as the focus is on the interaction within the group and their discussion of the themes presented by the researcher (Baker and Hinton 1999). In particular, the focus group interview enables individuals to develop a shared identity and context within which the opinions of others can be considered when formulating a response (Gaskell 2000).

Focus groups are useful for 'exploring people's experiences, opinions, wishes and concerns' (Kitzinger and Barbour 1999) and contribute to the narrative framework in which contextual understanding is important. With that in mind the focus group discussions centred on the following themes: family, education, hobbies, friends, choice (post-16 study institution) and also choice of university. The themes were constructed from understanding of the literatures on higher education choice and social class. Combined with a wish

to explore the contexts that contributed to the students' educational trajectories, the themes were also used to contribute to theoretical considerations. These included those of habitus and capital as outlined above. The focus groups were therefore used as a means to access their thoughts about university, but also to gain information that could provide initial insight into the complexities of their decisions.

All students involved in the study were invited to participate in the focus group discussions. Of the sixteen, seven attended on the day. The students were divided into two groups comprising three and four members respectively. Concerns with the use of focus group have identified power relationships within the group as potentially problematic (Kitzinger and Barbour 1999). Although I took the role of facilitator (Creswell 1998) within the focus groups, I made it clear to the students that I was interested in their ideas and opinions and wanted to elicit their stories; what the process of going to university was like for them. I adopted a 'persona' (Schaefer and Dillman 1998) to facilitate participation. This persona had been developed from initial stages in the research through my presentation at the Sutton Trust Summer School and e-mail communications prior to the focus group taking place.

The possibility of unequal contributions is an issue within focus group research (Smithson 2000). Although, at times I had to be mindful that some students were making more contributions than others, I re-directed conversations to those who were saying little in order to gain their insights and experiences. I did this to ensure that they did not feel excluded, and also to address the imbalance of contributions within the group. Other direct involvement included moving the discussion on when the students appeared to have run out of things to say on particular themes and direct questioning where I felt that further clarifications were needed.

All interviews were recorded onto audio tape and were fully transcribed. Field notes were also recorded after each interview so that my initial thoughts and observations were recorded.

## **Working with Technology**

Developments in modern technology have paved the way for increased use of non-traditional methods of social inquiry, including the use of e-mail (Kitzinger and Barbour 1999). This method brought many positive features to the study, but importantly it facilitated on-going communications that existed outside of the normal constraints of formal research methods. E-mail has been used to conduct large scale survey research (Aranda and Street 2001) although that was not my intention for its use within this study. The use of e-mail within this study served three purposes which I now outline.

### **Working with Technology: E-Mail as On-Going Dialogue**

E-mail provided relatively straightforward access to the students. At the beginning of the research process I indicated to the students that this method would be used as a form of data collection. It created the opportunity for on-going dialogue between myself and the students outside of more established methods such as interviews. Consistent use of e-mail throughout the research process enabled me to break down the barriers that can exist between a researcher and those being researched (Cohen, Manion et al. 2000). As a research tool, it proved extremely useful in following up issues from other data collection methods. Queries or clarifications could be addressed through the use of e-mail.

The use of e-mail also provided opportunities for the students to articulate their concerns, anxieties or successes as they occurred. I had made it clear to the students from the beginning that I was interested in how they were progressing and that I was prepared to offer advice with university applications. During the process of applying to university, for example, some students sought help and guidance from me when completing their personal statements. In that sense the on-going dialogical nature of e-mail contributed to the further development of trust that developed as the research went on.

## **Working with Technology: E-Mail as a Tool for Organisation**

Using e-mail operated on a practical level. Setting dates for interviews was completed through the use of e-mail. Although this seems to be a trivial point, it contributed to the ease with which the interview process was organised. Students were able to attach copies of their school or college timetables to their communications with me in order that mutually convenient times could be arranged. I believe this contributed to the way in which relationships developed. Through this method I was hoping to convey to the students that their lives were important: I didn't want to interrupt their studies when conducting interviews and I wanted them to feel in control of the process.

E-mail was also used to conduct two second phase interviews when it became clear that a visit to the students' home or school was problematic. An interview time was booked in advance and the 'interviews' were conducted via e-mail. The data collected resembled that which could be collected in a 'normal' face-to-face interview, but the interaction was not as intimate.

## **Working with Technology: E-Mail as a Tool for Clarifying Data**

The most beneficial aspect of using e-mails was the opportunity it provided for clarifying issues with students. Following the focus group and one-one interviews, I was able to pose further questions to the students. The use of e-mail in this way contributed to the co-construction of data (Bryman 2001). The students acted as co-authors in the process of meaning making and direct access to their thoughts and feelings through the use of e-mail reduced the influence of my own position and views of the world on the data (Morse and Richards 2002).

Although the methods described above provided many opportunities to gain access to the students' understandings of their experiences, I also utilised journal writing as a method to gain further depth to the information the students provided.



## **Exploring Primary Texts: Student Journals**

According to Bryman (2001), journals have been used much more by historians than social researchers although they have been used in qualitative research (Bryman 2001). Two forms of journals were produced during this study; generic structured journals completed during the Sutton Trust Summer School (Appendix 5) and individual reflective journals completed during the students' A Level studies.

The Sutton Trust journals were structured and performed two functions: an evaluation of the Sutton Trust week and an opportunity for the students to record their thoughts during that week. The journal was co-constructed by the Widening Participation Department based at the University of Nottingham and myself. It contained questions that the Widening Participation team were interested in and contributed to their own internal evaluations of the week. In addition, questions were also posed that enabled me to obtain information on their initial thoughts of university life. It acted as a 'structured observation' (Mason 2005) in the sense that students were guided through the questions on a daily basis by the student helpers attending the week. Although primarily structured to meet evaluation needs of the Widening Participation Department the questions were designed to illicit the opinions and feelings of the students and were therefore as open-ended as possible.

The journals accessed in this study were produced with the research in mind. Students were also asked to reflect on their journey to higher education and record their thoughts and feelings during that process in the form of a free text diary (Bryman 2001). Students were encouraged to add entries when they experienced an event they considered important to their journey to higher education.

In addition, students were invited to complete a qualitative based survey which encouraged them to write down their initial thoughts about going to university (Appendix 6).

Again, this method was contributing to the building of a creative narrative. Any uncertainties or questions stemming from the journals were posed either during follow-up interviews or e-mail communications.

## **Exploring Secondary Texts: Official Documents**

The methods outlined above concerned primary data sources: the words of the students themselves. Secondary text-based sources were used to support and contribute to the development of the creative narrative. They included school OfSTED reports, teacher reports about the students where available and the Neighbourhood Statistics web-site. Such sources provided further contextual information on the home and school contexts within which the students lived.

In addition to text based methods, I made use of visual methods. Such methods have been used by researchers when attempting to explore the meaning that young children place on their educational experiences (e.g. Cappello 2005). The use of such methods in this study generated discussion and added further depth to the data collected through text.

## **Visual Methods: Moving Beyond Text**

Visual research methods are well developed research tools within visual anthropology and ethnography but used infrequently outside those disciplines (Mason 2005). Their use in educational research is however gaining in momentum (Prosser 2000).

The use of visual methods within this research was undertaken to enhance the data collected through text-based methods. The two methods utilised were photography and memory boxes.

### **Moving Beyond Text: Photography**

Photography is the most obvious manifestation of a recent growth in interest in visual research methods (Carson, Pearson et al. 2005). The justification of the use of photography as a data collection tool stems from the idea that words can sometimes be inadequate in presenting a true picture of social

experience (Carson, Pearson et al. 2005). We exist in a world where visual images are increasingly central to cognitive processes (Carson, Pearson et al. 2005). Visual images portray meaning and are often used with representation theories within social science (Stevens, Abowd et al. 2003). The use of photography within this study was to gather more in-depth information on the students' experiences and contexts and to provide students with the opportunity to find other means of expression when words were inadequate. Photography captures a moment of social reality and 'fixes' it in time (Frohlich and Murphy 2000) and yet is framed within the moment of its production. A photograph can not portray the 'truth' of the moment, but can contribute to understanding experiences through the interpretation that is provided with it. Students were issued with disposable cameras both prior to entering university and once they had commenced their courses. During first phase data collection they were asked to take photos of their home locations and any other place or person that they considered important in their journey to HE. Similarly, on arrival at university, they were asked to take pictures that illustrated their sense of 'feeling at home' within the context of their chosen university.

The photos taken by the students were reflected upon during subsequent interviews to illicit their meaning and focus on how they may contribute to their narrative of their journey to higher education and their new environment. This was particularly the case when exploring the notion of 'fit'.

### **Moving beyond Text: Memory boxes**

The use of memory boxes to support data elicited through other collection methods as identified above performs two functions. It both contributes to the building up of personal narratives and also provides a vehicle through which memories can be stored and preserved (Bryman 2001). The process of producing a memory box within a research context provided the students with the opportunity to consider carefully the items that they placed into them. The cognitive processes at play would work on many levels but would primarily focus on the story that was unfolding during their narratives. Attaching stories to the items placed in the box offered the students the opportunity to attribute

meaning to those items. Again, the items placed in the boxes were discussed during follow up interviews.

I now briefly turn towards issues of validity and argue that the methods utilised were fit for purpose and met the specific aims of this research project.

## **Issues of Validity and Reliability**

Issues of validity and reliability are normally associated within a quantitative research paradigm (O'Leary 2004). Whilst these issues are not pertinent to a study embedded within a qualitative approach, there are certain considerations which need to be made in order to present a study that has credibility. Throughout this study I have outlined my own position to the work: I come from a disadvantaged background which influences the lens through which I see and understand the experiences of the students. In that sense, I have made my subjective position transparent (O'Leary 2004), although at the point of data analysis must ensure that my own experiences do not taint the way in which I present the stories of the students.

In exploring the students' stories through a partial life history approach, I acknowledge that as the students explain their anxieties, frustrations and excitement about university choice they may only be revealing partial truths (O'Leary 2004). This does not negate their experiences, but in utilising the methodologies described above, I hope to tease out the complexities of their educational journeys through a consistent approach, thus ensuring dependability, credibility and validity.

Meaning making is a subjective process and the students in this study present 16 different experiences that led them to choose elite HE institutions. In drawing out the way in which this process occurred with a focus on an emerging and adapting habitus, I am utilising partial biographies. The research therefore offers a systematic approach to narrative building, but also acknowledges the limitations offered through the use of such methods.

## **Ethics**

Prior to working with the young people, the methodological approach was discussed at length with my two supervisors based at The University of Nottingham. The research was carried out in conjunction with the guidelines set by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) which are also adopted within the School of Education at The University of Nottingham. The guidelines can be found on the School of Education website:

<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/education/information-for-students/research-ethics>.

Informed consent is a main feature of research (Anderson 1998; Burns 2000; Cohen, Manion et al. 2000). In order to carry out the research I needed to ensure that personnel within the Widening Participation Department at The University of Nottingham understood the main objectives of the research. Permission was first sought from them to approach students who participated on the Summer School. Following my presentation to students at the Summer School, which detailed the project aims and purposes, various information leaflets, including a consent form intended for their parents, were given out. Students were invited to take these away. Those who wished to participate had time to reflect on the information provided and had been instructed to return the signed consent form to me in a pre-paid envelope.

Prior to commencing the interviews, students were reminded that they could withdraw from the study at any time and that they could decline to answer any questions they felt uncomfortable with. In addition, at the commencement of their undergraduate courses, students were asked to complete a pro-forma (Appendix 8) detailing their A2 level results and indicating whether they wished to continue participating in the research.

The students involved were assured of their anonymity and were provided with an opportunity to choose a pseudonym by which they would be referred to in any academic papers and also the thesis itself.

## **Carrying out the Fieldwork**

The study was conducted over a period of 18 months in three phases as illustrated in Table 5. Students who did not participate in the focus group were interviewed in their sixth form or college. Phase 3 follow up interviews, with 11 students who wished to continue in the study, were either conducted at the students' chosen university or via e-mail. During May and June 2005 I exchanged little communication with the students as they were taking their A2 examinations. Some students chose to continue writing in journals during this time.

Research Activity		Month: From July 2004 – December 2005																	
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
<b>Phase 1:</b> Introduced myself and the study to students through Sutton Trust Summer School and asked for volunteers to participate		↑																	
Accessed journals completed whilst at the Sutton Trust Summer School	↑																		
Initial e-mail asking students to confirm their interest in the study	↑																		
Students recorded initial thoughts about university via e-mail			↑																
<b>Phase 2:</b> Focus group and individual interviews with all 16 students							↑												
Students complete journals and take photos of home locations																			↑
School/sixth form/college OfSTED reports accessed and analysed													↑						
Post code data was collated and analysed for rank IMD score												↑							
Students complete pro-forma examination result and university destination sheet																		↑	
<b>Phase 3:</b> Second interviews with students who wished to continue with the study – includes discussion of photos																			↑

**Table 5:** Data Collection Timetable

## **Making Sense of the Students' Experiences**

I begin this section by detailing the analytical approaches used. Analysis comprised four stages: linking of themes, breakdown of student responses into grids, constructing statements, SPSS analysis. Content analysis was used as a framework for working with the data.

### **Linking of Themes**

Initial analysis comprised a conceptual and theoretical linking of the main themes as informed by the literature that framed my interactions with the students (illustrated in Figure 12). This type of analytical approach is used within business problem solving approaches and appeared to be applicable to the complexity of the issues surrounding journeys into HE. Labelled an 'interrelationship digraph', it takes as a central idea that logical or sequential links can be found among related factors. It also allows for multidirectional rather than linear thinking to be used (Mizuno 1988; Brassard 1989). It accounts for complexity of relationships between a series of factors, as each factor can be connected to many others, showing that they have an influence on each one. Once the links between all the factors have been established, they are then counted and the factors with the highest number of connections are normally considered to be the most important factors.

After establishing where the possible links could be made, each theme was explored to see how they influenced each other. The arrows represent the direction of influence.



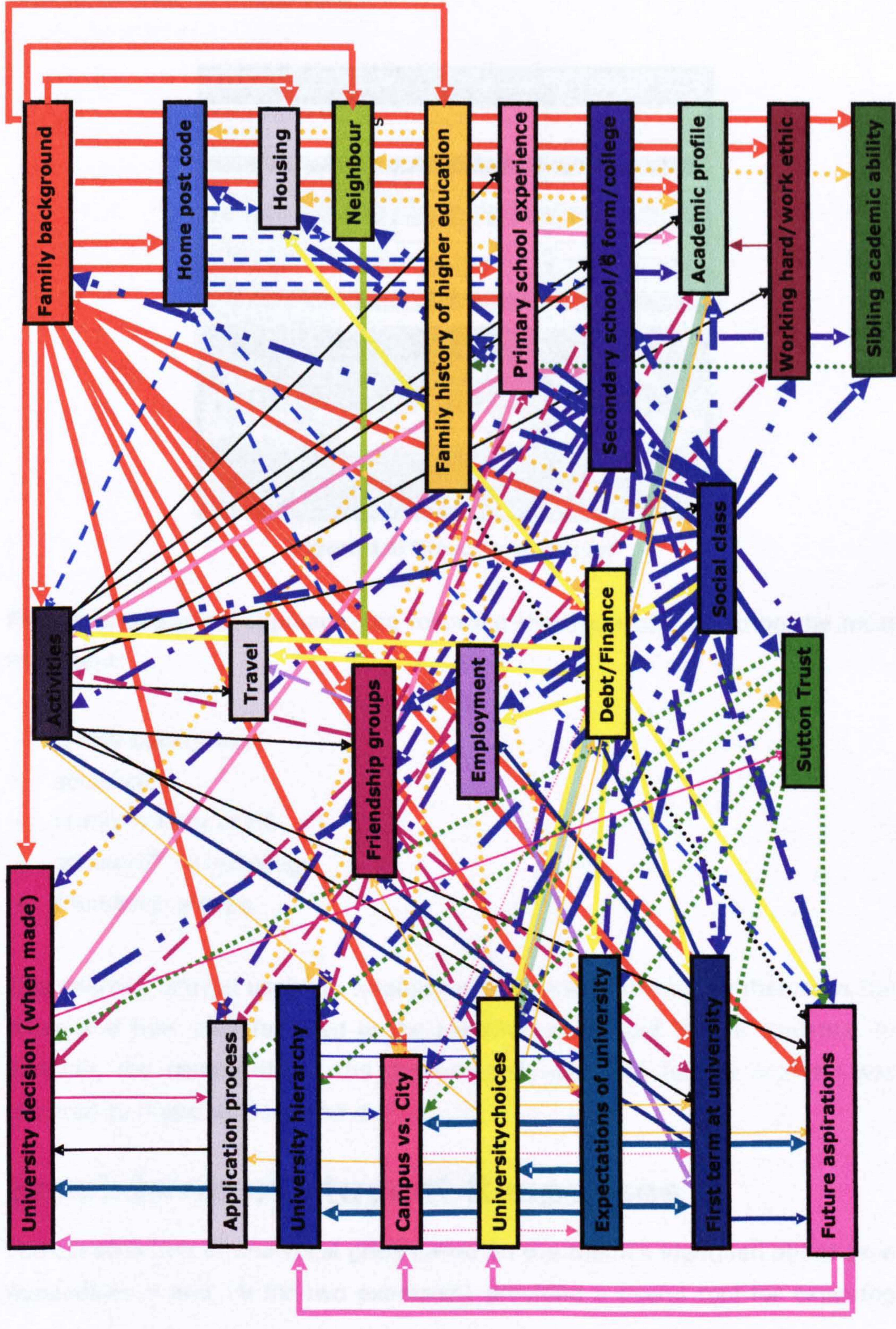


Figure 12: Complexity of Students' Journeys into HE

In order to explore the themes which had the most influence on the students' university choices, I counted the number of arrows that pointed towards and away from each theme as illustrated in Figure 13. This helped me prioritise the themes in order of importance.

Influencing Factor	In	Out
<b>Family background</b>	1	21
Home post code	2	7
Housing	5	0
Neighbours	3	1
<b>Family history of higher education</b>	3	16
Primary school experience	6	5
<b>School/6<sup>th</sup> form/College</b>	6	12
<b>Academic profile</b>	8	1
Working hard/work ethic	4	0
Sibling academic ability	4	1
<b>Activities</b>	9	9
Travel	4	0
<b>Friendship groups</b>	9	12
Employment	4	1
<b>Debt/Finance</b>	5	9
<b>Social class</b>	3	21
<b>Sutton Trust</b>	4	8
<b>University decision</b>	10	3
<b>Application process</b>	8	1
University hierarchy	6	4
Campus vs. City	7	3
<b>University choices</b>	10	8
<b>Expectations of university</b>	10	6
<b>First term at university</b>	11	3
<b>Future aspirations</b>	11	4

**Figure 13:** Grouping of Themes

From this analytical approach, the following themes appeared to be the most important:

- family background
- social class
- family history of HE
- school/6<sup>th</sup> form/college
- friendship groups.

This exercise proved useful in establishing the links between the themes in the study and how they featured in the experiences as told by the students. In addition, the complexity of the diagram indicated that further analysis was required to make sense of the stories.

## **Breakdown of Student Responses**

The construction of analytical grids based on the themes identified above (see Appendices 9 and 10 for two examples) provided a useful tool for exploring

the data and to get an overall understanding of the emerging stories. However, further analysis was still required in order to achieve increased depth and understanding of the students' trajectories.

## **Constructing statements**

A further breakdown of the data was used to consider whether a student typology could be identified. In order to do this, I constructed a number of statements that were either direct quotes from the data or summaries of consistently made comments (Appendix 11). I then went through the data and identified where the students had made comments that matched the statements. Although this was useful in exploring the data, the complexity of the data did not easily facilitate any grouping of the students. I then turned to other forms of data analysis to consider the way in which the experiences of the students could be understood.

## **Life History Summaries**

All information from each student was further subjected to scrutiny to identify the key moments in their trajectories (Appendix 12). Each trajectory was then explored to see where the habitus had faced a potential moment of 'crisis' (Bourdieu 1990a). This information formed the basis of understanding how the students in this study made their respective journeys into HE.

## **SPSS Analysis**

Whilst SPSS is usually used for quantitative data analysis, its purpose here was to aid understanding of the students' experiences. It was used in three stages including clustering of the students into groups, further cluster analysis to group the statements, and Mann-Whitney test to ascertain which statements were significant.

Following the first stage of analysis, the students were clustered into two groups as illustrated in Table 6. The groupings are not representative of similarities in context or schooling experiences. They represent similarities in the types of comments that feature in the list of statements.

Group 1	Group 2
Anna	Eve
Erin	Grace
Keira	James
Lucy	Joanne
Matthew	Sally
Oscar	Sayda
Sophie	Sophie
Tim	Toby

**Table 6:** Student Groupings

Cluster analysis resulted in 10 statement groupings (Appendix 13). These clusters were then analysed to consider whether any statements were answered significantly differently across the two groups of students. From this analysis four statements were found to be significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) with a further five statements being on the border of significance as detailed in Table 7 below.

Significant Statements
Social circumstances of the school/6 <sup>th</sup> form is average or above
The secondary school/6 <sup>th</sup> form serves a socially deprived area
Social class is important even though it shouldn't be
Social class is outdated but still matters
Border Significant Statements
Top universities attract students from the middle/upper class
At least one of my parents are in professional occupations
I missed home at first
There is a wide diversity of people at university
It feels like home

**Table 7:** Significance of Statements

The data was then used to address the questions posed at the beginning of this thesis to explore the experiences of working class students as they went through the process of applying to and entering higher education. A particular focus was placed in the notion of habitus – how it was informed through the home context, institutions and how it adapted to change.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has briefly detailed the students who participated in the study. I have illustrated how they are representative of a group of non-traditional students who participated in an intervention programme. I then explored the methodological approaches used and focused on the role of habitus in generating data. I also outlined the analytical process which served to understand how these students came to make the journey into HE. In the next three chapters I detail the findings in an attempt to draw out the complexities of each student's journey.

In this chapter, I explore the extent to which the students identify with their home locations and the people they live near. Based on their postcodes, I utilise both ONS and MOSAIC analysis to explore the home locations of the students. I illustrate that many of the students live in relatively affluent areas. I argue that the local context influences the formation of a habitus and that through alignment with or disassociation from others in their home contexts, the students came to make their decisions about going to university.

## **Introduction**

There is much literature that highlights intergenerational patterns of social disadvantage (e.g. Wedge and Prosser 1973; Bradbury, Garde et al. 1986; Dearden, Machin et al. 1997; Machin 1998; Tett and Crowther 1998; Lupton 2001; Deacon 2003). Within a Bourdieuan framework, such patterns are explained by social position within the various fields and in particular by the ways in which educational structures and systems reproduce wider social inequalities which are also reflective of social position (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), reproduction in society exists in practice because there is limited wide-spread movement between social positions even though 'agents always possess an objective element of freedom which they may or may not exploit' (Bourdieu, 2005: 130). Changing class position is potentially where the 'element of freedom' Bourdieu highlights comes in to play.

With that in mind, in this section of the findings, I will draw out the local contexts of the students to outline the ways in which habitus as an 'embodied history' (Bourdieu 1990a: 56) is influenced by locality either positively or negatively. I first turn to the students' families and present their family contexts to highlight how their decisions and choices reflect either similarities with, or can be interpreted as a move away from, family traditions. I then move to explore the ways in which their family habitus contributed to their positive positioning within education to illustrate how the students were prepared for their educational experiences.

### **Geographical Context: A Local Based Habitus**

Habitus, as I outlined in Chapter 1, is understood as being the underlying mechanism that drives individual action; it is 'a spontaneity without consciousness or will...' (Bourdieu 1990a: 56). With that in mind, I am using the notion of habitus to understand patterns of social behaviour within geographical areas, as evidenced through for example, educational qualifications, employment rates and levels of crime. Although this approach

can provide some pointers towards understanding the composition of local communities, it does not allow for individual difference. In exploring the notion of a local based habitus and its potential to influence patterns of social behaviour, I do so with the following caveat: for habitus to affect local patterns of social behaviour, it relies on individuals being involved or associated with other members of the community. That is, identifying oneself as part of a social collective. Where differences are identified, it brings into question the extent to which an individual is influenced by others in their locality. Jenkins addresses this issue in *Social Identity* (2004: 90).

Social identity is the constitution in social practice of the intermingling, and inseparable, themes of human similarity and difference. Collective social identities emphasise, - construct, even - similarity.

What this suggests is that given close physical proximity, people may identify with and therefore understand themselves as belonging to the social group around them. The reverse could also be true - individuals may be physically close to each other, but not emotionally or socially close. That is, they may not identify closely with the people around them. For example, they may have different aspirations or engage in different social activities. The extent to which young people identify with 'place' is therefore important - it could influence the decisions and choices they make.

Bourdieu considers the dimensions of economic and cultural capital to be a key factor in the distribution of individuals within social space (Bourdieu 1998). In addition,

It follows that all agents are located in this space in such a way that the closer they are to one another in those two dimensions, the more they have in common; and the more remote they are from one another, the less they have in common. (Bourdieu 1998: 6)



The idea that economic and cultural capital leads to closer social alignment between individuals is important to this study. From this, it is possible to conclude that the experiences of groups positioned in the same local area will be similar in terms of their access to economic capital and as a result, their capacity to develop levels of cultural capital. In turn, the development of cultural capital contributes to increased levels of social capital; for example, through the social connections made through participation in culturally rich activities.

In looking more closely at the geographical contexts of the students, I looked particularly for factors that would either point towards positive or negative attitudes towards schooling as reflected by the percentage of adults with no qualifications and those with level 4/5 qualifications (these measures are used by the ONS to calculate rank scores in deprivation in local communities). In addition, overall rank scores of multiple deprivation would also provide a partial picture of the background context in which each student lives.

The home contexts of the students varied considerably. After entering their home postcodes into a web data base<sup>11</sup> the CENSUS data detailed levels of deprivation of each student's home location based on many factors (e.g. education, crime, housing). Similarly to measures used by the ONS, I used data at the level of Lower Layer Super Output Area as this is designed to draw boundaries around similar areas. Although there can still be some variance within the communities within such geographical boundaries, there is less diversity than with other measures.

In using this approach I was particularly interested in the Index of Multiple Deprivation. This provided me with a numeric scale which facilitated comparisons between students' backgrounds and also the levels of academic qualifications of the adult population in the area. I believed these two factors would provide important contextual information and facilitate some understanding of whether the students were situated in areas where further academic study was the norm or whether they were going against the grain of what was typical. Such contextual information proved useful in positioning

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<sup>11</sup> (<http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk>)

students relationally within their home context and within a wider social context. However, this type of analysis treats individuals as part of an homogenised group and in practice, this may not reflect individual difference or those who feel that they do not identify closely in their attitudes and practices with others who live around them.

In exploring the issue of background, I had expected that the students in this study would fit with preconceived assumptions I held; that they would come from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, this was not the case for all students. Instead of features of deprivation as outlined in the literature, I found the home contexts of the students to be both stable and financially comfortable in many cases. For example, from a political perspective, areas that are in the bottom 20%, based on rank IMD measures would be considered in need of government intervention. This has been seen in some disadvantaged communities in the UK through regeneration programmes. Based on this approach, a rank score of 6496.4 or below would identify an area as deprived. There are only two students who would live in contexts that would fit the profile required for such schemes – Mathew and Saskia. In addition, very few came from areas where there were high levels of unemployment and low academic qualifications – features that are also used to calculate rank IMD scores. Overall rank scores of multiple deprivation for each student's home location also demonstrated that many of the students lived in areas with low levels of deprivation as illustrated in Table 8 below.

Name	Rank Score: Index of Multiple Deprivation: Home <sup>12</sup>
Mathew	158
Saskia <sup>13</sup>	2, 392
Sayda	9, 363
Sophie	10, 678
James	13, 945
Tim	18, 252
Eve	19, 445
Oscar	20, 269
Joanne	20, 697
Lucy	23, 538
Grace	24, 416
Anna	25, 213
Erin	25, 721
Keira	26, 792
Zara	29, 634
Sally	31, 226
Toby	32, 470

**Table 8:** Index of Multiple Deprivation Home Context

The table provides some limited information on the background context of the students. Mathew clearly comes from an area which has been identified as one of the most deprived LSOA with an Index of Multiple Deprivation rank of 158. Other rank score indices of deprivation for his area also demonstrate high levels of social deprivation (e.g. employment, 43; income, 115; education and skills, 158). Mathew's place in this sample is therefore substantiated by his home context. Throughout his childhood, Mathew grew up in an area where few young people progressed in education post-16, GCSE results were consistently below national averages, many adults had low academic

<sup>12</sup> 1 = Most deprived LSOA (Lower Super Output Area); 32, 482 = Least deprived LSOA

<sup>13</sup> Saskia declined to participate further in the research project after initial communications and is therefore not included in subsequent analyses

credentials, and where there were high levels of unemployment (Source: ONS).

Bourdieu's notion of capital suggests the potential for Mathew to extend his horizons and cultivate social networks is limited. The cultural and social distance that Mathew has to travel to access the types of cultural, economic and social capital that are valued by those who hold power, requires considerable movement towards a nucleus where he is very much on the periphery. Mathew meets the criteria of a 'typical' widening participation student well. His non-privileged background is indicative of a student who could be considered as 'making it' against the odds.

The IMD rank score of each student identifies whether there are high levels of unemployment, low academic attainment levels and low levels of income in a specific geographical location. For many of the students in this study, their home location or social space, illustrated moderately high levels of employment activity and income. In Bourdieuan terms, because the 'spatial distances on paper' (Bourdieu 1998: 6), which represent social positioning, are theoretically similar for many of the students (that is through their access to economic and cultural capital, they are positioned in close proximity to each other within social space) their approaches to education should reflect similar attitudes. If we look at those students in this study living in the top 30% (those with low levels of deprivation) for example, we find that the opposite from Mathew's context is true: these students live in areas where GCSE results have been relatively high over a period of time, many young people progress into HE, the majority of adults have level 4 or 5 qualifications and there are low levels of unemployment.

Identifying oneself as 'different' from those around you has implications; to feel cognitively and socially different is to set oneself apart. We have already seen for Mathew, the distance between himself and the majority of young people living close by was great. When asked about his immediate community he talks about one specific family and focuses on how they do not fit in.

*There's one family – they are really noisy and have lots of parties and things. They do their own thing. They don't really fit in. They seem different. (Mathew: Interview)*

Although Mathew identifies the family as 'different' he does not provide any further detail about this perceived difference. Zara, Sally, Toby, Keira, Lucy and Grace are surrounded by adults in professional occupations. Their local based habitus therefore is more conducive to the development of positive attitudes towards education and to value the discourses that promote the benefits of education as a route to good employment opportunities.

It is the group in the middle that offers an interesting theoretical dilemma. For Oscar, Joanne, Tim, Eve, James and Sophie, their local based habitus is constructed out of a myriad of disparate experiences. Although they live in areas that are not classified as deprived, they do see some people whose social conditions concern them. James, for example, talks of people who are 'not like him' in his area; people with whom he chooses not to socialise. He worried that this made him a 'snob', but James did reflect on why he chose not to mix with that group. He shared similar interests and academic aspirations with the friends that he had. He also recognized that the types of activities he enjoyed, and in particular his desire to do well at school was not shared by the individuals he disassociated himself from. James had already set his mind on university and did not intend that aspiration to be affected by socialising with groups of young people who 'just hung around on the streets'. In positioning himself as 'different', James is making a shift away from the social position of many of his peers although he does not have access to the types of economic capital that would position him in other dimensions within social space as outlined by Bourdieu (1998).

Erin also recognizes social difference between herself and those around her and positions herself as different.

*I find my town rather depressing - it is basically a dying market town. More and more shops are closing and more and more estate agencies are opening up. The people who live here are generally*

*either simple country folk or London/Essex overspill people. Many of the people who live here have lived here all their life and everyone seems to be connected in some way! (Erin: E-Mail)*

Erin's perceptions of the people who live locally to her feed her desire to get away. She is keen to go to university because she doesn't want to end up like the 'simple country folk' who have no aspirations or future goals.

If we look more closely at the family contexts of each student apart from Mathew, we see how they are not representative of the characteristics and local based profiles that would contribute to negative attitudes towards education.

## **The Family: Habitus as Classed Based Practice**

If Bourdieu's notion of habitus as an embodied social history is reflective of family traditions, attitudes and dispositions, then the students in this study, theoretically at least, should identify with the attitudes and dispositions of their parents. It is here that notions of class can be understood through practices and attitudes that bring about similarities between individuals.

The family backgrounds of the students were varied. In designing the study I had assumed that the students would mostly come from single parent families or would have parents in low paid employment or both. The majority of students came from family contexts in which there were two parents and two incomes. Although this is not a reliable indicator of increased levels of economic capital - it is possible to have two incomes from poorly paid employment, as is the case for Lucy - insight into parental employment status does provide some understanding of the financial stability of the respective students' families. In addition, Matt's family context is such that although he lives with both parents, their economic status is affected by his mother's health; she is registered disabled and his father is her main carer. Other families that were affected by low incomes were those who lived with one parent and where the occupation was low paid. The students who came from single parent families are detailed in Table 9.

Student	Family Context
Tim	Lives with his mother and has limited contact with his father
Sayda	Lives with her mother who is a secretary
Sally	Lives with her mother who is a secretary
Eve	Mother died when she was young. Lives with her father who works in a dry cleaning shop

**Table 9:** Family Contexts

As occupational status is often used to identify the social position of individuals, I referred to such classification measures to gain some insight into their social class positioning. I did this to explore the extent to which they fitted a profile of a 'widening participation' student and thus the extent to which their participation on the Sutton Trust Summer School was appropriate. Given the literature that highlights differences between working class and middle class relationships to education (e.g. Burn 2001; Archer 2003), I wanted to consider the ways in which the students in this study were more closely located towards middle class practices than they were towards working class practices.

I now turn to the issue of classification, and provide an overview of the social class positioning of the students.

### **Class Location**

In order to obtain an understanding of where the individuals in the study are positioned in terms of class, their father's occupational status was considered alongside existing class classifications based on occupation schemes (Office for National Statistics 2001). Although acknowledging the problems associated with class classification systems, this exercise usefully indicates the numbers of students within the study who would be classified as working class by traditional classification markers. Findings of some published research (Archer and Hutchings 2000; Reay 2001; Wentworth and Peterson 2001; Archer 2003; Bowl 2003) suggests that students from working class backgrounds would be expected to apply to less prestigious universities if they were to apply at all.

The table below (Table 10) demonstrates that the young people involved largely come from backgrounds that would be classified as working class.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Father Occupation</b>	<b>Mother Occupation</b>	<b>Social Class*</b>
Erin	Vicar	Nursery Nurse	II (MC)
Oscar	Business	Librarian	II (MC)
Toby	Quality Manager	Nurse	IIIN (SWC)
Anna	Structural Engineer	Playgroup worker	IIIN (SWC)
Sally	(Owns Lorry Company)	Secretary	IIIN (SWC)
Sayda	(Shop Manager)	Secretary	IIIN (SWC)
Josie	Technical Sales	Medical Secretary	IIIN (SWC)
Tim	Self employed	Manager	IIIN (SWC)
Keira	RAF	Bank Clerk	IIIN (SWC)
Zara	Brick Layer	Clerical Assistant	IIIM (WC)
Grace	Plumber	Waitress	IIIM (WC)
Sophie	Shop Assistant	Housewife	IV (WC)
James	Stores Man	Housewife	IV (WC)
Lucy	City Council (temp)	City Council (temp)	V (WC)
Eve	Dry Cleaner	Died	V (WC)
Matt	Carer	Registered Disabled	V (WC)

\* MC = Middle Class; SWC = Skilled Working Class; WC = Working Class

**Table 10:** Social classification of students

Socio-economic classifications are intended to 'explain variations in social behaviour and other social phenomena' (Office for National Statistics 2005: 9). As a crude measure, such classification systems offered me an approximate indication of the social class position of the students. The literature on class relationships with education illustrates that educational trajectories are not as predictable as those of the middle classes (see for example, Ball 2003; Power, Edwards et al. 2003; Leathwood 2006). Analysis of the students' social backgrounds, although indicating they were largely working class does not sufficiently illustrate how or why they were successful in their journeys to university. The extent to which their experiences of the intervention



programme influenced their educational trajectories will be explored later in this section.

The social classification of the students does not provide sufficient detail to explain why their trajectories should differ from that normally associated with the working classes. One of the problems associated with class classification systems, is the homogenisation of individuals into groups. Although this serves a purpose for the allocation of resources (e.g. health care), such systems offer only a one-dimensional view of social practice. They do not allow for close inspection of attitudes and dispositions or the possibility of class fractions or degrees of class.

## **The Socio-Demographics of the Students**

One of the intriguing questions that I faced during this study concerned the representative nature of the sample – the extent to which they were different or similar to other students who attended the Sutton Trust Summer School in 2004. MOSAIC analysis claims to offer a 'rich picture of UK consumers in terms of their socio-demographics, lifestyles, culture and behaviour' (Experian 2007). MOSAIC analysis enabled me to explore the students' profiles in two ways:

- the extent to which they were representative of the 2004 Sutton Trust cohort
- the extent to which they were representative of the general population.

I was keen to explore these issues to more fully understand the types of students who were allocated places on the Summer School and whether they fitted the profile of a disadvantaged student.

MOSAIC analysis classifies consumers into 61 types aggregated into 11 groups based on a range of data obtained through the use of 400 variables (Experian 2007). The main data sources used include: demographics (household demographics; population movement; health; background and beliefs), socio-economics and consumption (occupation; industry; employment status;

qualifications; socio-economic status; cars and transport; product and media), financial measures (directorships; shareholdings; bad debt; credit behaviour), property characteristics (housing age; second residences; amenities; tenure; building), property value (council tax band; property value; property sales) and location (accessibility; rurality; urbanization; islands)<sup>14</sup>.

This analysis clearly illustrates that the higher social groups are over-represented in both the Summer School cohort and in the sample who participated in my study (see Table 11). This finding further illustrates the difficulties that are faced when tackling the under-representation of lower social class groups in HE.

<b>MOSAIC Group</b>	<b>Percentage of Households in England</b>	<b>Percentage in Summer School Cohort</b>	<b>Percentage in Sample</b>
Symbols of Success	9.62	15.65	18.75
Happy Families	10.76	17.87	12.5
Suburban Comfort	15.10	25	18.75
Ties of Community	16.04	30.37	12.5
Urban Intelligence	7.19	1.79	6.25
Welfare Borderline	6.43	1.79	6.25
Municipal Dependency	6.71	1.79	0
Blue Collar Enterprise	11.01	3.58	6.25
Twilight Subsistence	3.88	0	0
Grey perspectives	7.88	3.58	0
Rural isolation	5.39	1.79	0

**Table 11:** MOSAIC Analysis

<sup>14</sup> The MOSAIC UK groups and types, with full descriptions can be viewed in full by visiting the following web-site:

<http://www.nomadplus.org.uk/newreportsxml.asp?report=Community%20and%20Living&sub=Mo saic>.

The notion of habitus is useful here, as although it predominantly accounts for practices of groups, it allows for individual variation. That is, the degrees of variance that exist between individuals that would influence for example, differing educational outcomes. The habitus functions as a 'generative and unifying principle' and accounts for the 'unity of style' (Bourdieu 1998: 8) of individuals or social class groups. However, Bourdieu is insistent that despite similarities of social position, the operationalisation of the habitus does not lead to identical outcomes or choices; 'distinctions are not identical' (Bourdieu 1998: 8). From this, the social class classification of the students' parent/s becomes inadequate in providing useful insights into the actions of the students in this study. It is necessary to look beyond the one dimensional measures of employment and income to understand why these students, the majority of whom were classified as working class, made the journey into elite higher education institutions.

If habitus is intergenerational, then the students would reflect attitudes and dispositions similar to those of their parents resulting in an identifiable class based habitus. The extent to which habitus is developed and transformed across generations requires further scrutiny because understanding class and social transition needs some analysis of the shift in an individual's habitus.

This section has outlined the class categorization of the students by focusing on the occupational status of their parents. The problems associated with social class categorisation schemes are complex. I referred to such problems mainly in terms of homogenisation where individuals are grouped according to a set of criteria, frequently the father's occupation. Whilst individuals may live in close proximity to one another, they may have differing aspirations and attitudes. Although MOSAIC analysis, categorises households into groups, it does offer some flexibility within the groupings to allow for 'types' – and possibly differing dispositions and attitudes. To some extent such attitudes are developed through interactions with educational institutions, but there is also some influence from attitudes within the family unit. I now explore this to highlight how the students in this study were supported in their decision to progress in to higher education.

## **Family Attitudes to Higher Education**

The 'inevitability' of the students' entry to university commenced at an early age in most cases, with many claiming they had always wanted to go. Where the decision to go was made later (e.g. Grace, Joanne and Toby) all of those students had decided that they would go to university by the time of their GCSE studies – although Grace made her decision to go to HE near the end of Year 11. They had developed the aspirations to go and claim that this was as a result of encouraging teachers, Standard Attainment Tests (SATs) results and supportive parents. The one exception to this was Sayda who had some trouble convincing her parents that going to university was a good idea,

*At first my mum wasn't too keen on me going to uni, I think this is because she never and she is concerned about the debt and me moving away. At first she didn't think that me doing my A-Levels was a good thing but when she realised it was what I wanted to do supported me fully. She is still not keen on me going to uni but I know will support me in my decision. For me there has never been another option. (Sayda: E-mail)*

For Sayda, the difficulties she experienced when convincing her parents that going to university was a good idea, also extended to choice of career. They seemed to be placing numerous emotional and psychological barriers in her way, thus making her journey into HE fraught with tension. Sayda really wanted to become a nurse.

*I want to do a degree in nursing as it combines an interesting career and environment with traditional academic work. This has proven to be a problem accepting with everyone around me. My dad who I don't live with and my friend can't understand why I want to become a nurse all of them saying that I am better than that, that I could do better, my dad wishing that I would think about medical school. My mum though supportive of my choice of career really would like me to find another way of entering it a way other than uni. (Sayda: E-mail)*

Sayda was caught in a difficult situation; she wanted to go to university and although her parents expressed their support, they found alternative ways of conveying their unease. This could be reflective of tension within the family habitus where one member is shifting away from the dimensions that unify them and position them in close proximity. Sayda is being pulled in two directions by her parents with her mother wanting her to go for a vocational route and her father believing she was 'better than that' and should be considering careers that have a perceived higher status. Sayda's father had wanted to progress further in education but did not have the opportunity to do so: he left school at 16 without any formal qualifications. He had aspirations for Sayda who felt that he wanted her to do better than he had and to take the opportunities that were presented to her. Sayda chose to continue with her choice of nursing and ultimately ended up at the University of Nottingham.

The notion of being 'better than that', whatever 'that' means for the respective students featured in many of their narratives and the interview data. This was particularly the case for students who felt that they wanted better opportunities than their parents. Although Erin, Oscar and Tim had parents who had achieved degrees or were doing post-graduate qualifications, the other thirteen came from backgrounds where their parents had had no experience of higher education themselves. This did not prevent those parents from supporting their child's decision to go to university. Lucy, Grace and Joanne during a focus group discussion, stated that they had developed a perception that their future opportunities would be restricted without a university education. They had based this opinion on their parents' experiences. Lucy's parents in particular, who had temporary seasonal occupations with a local council, had been actively encouraging her to go to university so that she would not end up in the types of jobs they had. Despite the fact that few of the parents of the students had been to university, higher education was viewed positively. Perceptions that the result of university would be a 'better job' and 'more money' (Oscar, Tim, Toby and Erin: Focus Group) featured highly in many of the students' narratives.

Support from parents was often commented on positively. The students said that they felt the balance of their parents' input was about right. They were supportive without being too involved, allowing the students to feel autonomous in the process of choosing a university. It could be that the students' autonomy was indicative of increased levels of support within their sixth form colleges, where teachers took on the role of advisor/mentor. This contrasts with earlier moments in the students' educational histories where their parents were responsible for choosing an appropriate secondary school. In line with political rhetoric, choosing a good school for your child is an act of a 'good' parent (Ball, Bowe et al. 1996; Goldhaber 1999). Sayda, for example, attended a school that was two bus journeys away from home. Her parents opted out of the local school which they thought had a bad reputation and instead sent her to a school that performed well in the league tables. Similar stories were recounted by Eve, Lucy, Oscar (who eventually went to an independent school) and Sophie. At the transition point between primary and secondary school the students lacked the level of autonomy they reported having during the process of choosing a university.

Their increased autonomy is perhaps also reflective of a shift in habitus: the students informed or discussed their ideas about HE with their parents following their own information seeking. Although many of the parents implicitly and explicitly supported their children through the process of choosing a university, there was a sense in which they sat on the sidelines observing their children making the transition from home to university. Zara, for example, often left her parents out of the process, preferring instead to inform them of her decisions or discuss possible courses with them. She felt the need to be in control and didn't feel that they had either the experience or knowledge to significantly input into her decision making process. Zara stated that often she did different things to other family members and that they did not do 'family things' at the weekends (Zara: Interview 1). Although Zara did not say that her family were not close, but she did report that they spent little time together. In this context, it is unsurprising that Zara was left to her own devices to choose an appropriate institution. Her parents may have felt that they had little to contribute to Zara's decisions but wanted to support her in the way they knew how – by listening when Zara approached them.

*Yeah, they listen to me, but I just get all the information and then talk my ideas through with them. I've been collecting prospectuses for ages, so...they kind of know about it a bit. My mum even bought the Times so I could look at the league tables... I do talk to them about it all...I get most of my advice from my tutor. (Zara: Interview)*

This feeling expressed by Zara was also reflected upon by other students during focus group discussions. They recognised that they were about to enter unfamiliar territory (Plummer 2000) not only to themselves but also to their families. Zara recognises the deficiencies in the backgrounds of her parents through the use of words such as 'better'. She felt that her parents want her to get a good job which is 'one of the higher paid ones'. There is a sense that Zara's parents were implicitly driving her decisions through demonstrating interest in and appreciation for the perceived benefits of education. And yet, Zara maintained a distance between her parents and herself by controlling the information she discussed with them. She made the decision concerning which universities to explore and then informed her parents about that decision. She did not feel the need to include them in any discussions about her choices. This could be indicative of the development of teenagers as they seek to become increasingly more autonomous and independent from their parents (Montemayor 1994; Spear and Kulbok 2004). On the other hand, Zara's position could reflect an emerging habitus which differs from that of her parents. This was achieved mainly through learning musical instruments and participating in a number of ensembles which widened her social circles beyond the small community within which she lived. Her position in the social space was being redefined primarily through her relationship with education, but also through her access to and enjoyment of culturally rich activities. Zara's position in social space could be identified by plotting her musical activities and projected career path onto the matrix that Bourdieu utilises to identify the space of social positions and the space of lifestyles (see Bourdieu 1998: 5). Given the occupations of her father and mother (bricklayer and clerical assistant respectively), Zara would occupy a different social space on paper, than her parents.

The extent to which the students involved their parents in the process of choosing a university varied, but Oscar, whose mother was a graduate herself, felt that he was 'being forced' to go to university (Oscar: Focus Group). He entered into the process believing a degree would enhance his job prospects as this had been the consistent message he received at home. He had a number of career options in mind including architecture, mechanical engineering or physiotherapy. But his most important goal was prospective earnings: Oscar stated that he 'would like to earn a salary of around £50,000 per year' (Oscar: Focus Group). For Oscar, the investment in full-time education at university level had to bring about significant rewards.

Of the students identified above, there is a sense that Sayda and Zara were negotiating the unfamiliar terrain of higher education alone. They sought out the courses and universities and relayed that information to their parents. For Oscar, the process was different. He had access to the types of knowledge, through his mother's experiences, that would make his move to university more concordant with his family habitus. In addition, Oscar had developed further insight into university life by visiting a friend who had gone the year this research commenced.

Based on how Mathew, Oscar, Sayda and Zara reported their experiences of choosing a university, three types of parental attitude appeared to be evident:

- **Explicitly involved:** evidenced through positive measures for example, attending open days, listening to anxieties, advising on subject or through more oppressive means where students felt they had no choice but to apply to university
- **Implicitly supportive:** evidenced through listening but not actively involved in the process of application or attending open days
- **Reluctantly supportive:** evidenced through contradictory statements reflecting parental anxieties, but recognising the importance the student placed on going to university.



These descriptions also seemed to fit with what the other 12 students said about their parents. Whilst the above categories are relatively simplistic and of course do not reflect the complexities behind why parents should fall into one category or another, they are useful in looking at parental attitudes towards the prospect of their child progressing on to HE. Their responses could not only reflect attitudes towards university, but could be symptomatic of inner feelings concerning the 'loss' of their child as 'each enters a new stage in a more separate life course' (Goldscheider and Goldscheider 1989: 87) and perhaps also a move away in class and disposition terms. Whilst a split from the residential home is considered 'normal and appropriate' (Goldscheider and Goldscheider 1989: 87), leaving home to go to university is not a 'normal' transition for many of these families.

Literature highlights that there is an inevitability surrounding middle class progression to university (e.g. Power, Edwards et al. 2003). This is in part due to family experiences of education. Information or the type of 'hot' knowledge Ball and Vincent (1998) refer to when exploring school choice, which I consider applicable to university choice, is limited in families where there is no previous experience of HE. Despite the fact that very few of the parents had attended university themselves, this did not deter them from either supporting the decisions of their children, nor did it prevent them from actively encouraging them to go. In that sense, the students appeared to come from families where attitudes towards education 'proved less unfavourable than that experienced by the great majority of their peers' (Bourdieu, Passeron et al. 1994: 42). As already established, the attitudes towards education were expressed in terms of betterment; the parents wanted their children to achieve more than they had - to have increased opportunities and secure jobs that had secure futures. This is clearly articulated by Sally, who during her first interview acknowledged that going to university would enhance her employment chances, but she is also reluctant to openly negate her mother's work. Explaining the reasons why her mum was in a low paid job Sally could reflect back to the context in which her mum was forced to make certain decisions. In this section of her interview she indicates the intergenerational mobility that is occurring,

**Sally:** *She did all of like the equivalent of the GCSEs and then her mum made her leave school so she didn't get to do her A Levels or go to university because her mum was in like quite a poor financial state*

**TB:** Has she ever talked to you about that? Not going to university?

**Sally:** *She has told me, like don't sort of end up like me, and get the best out of your education and things*

**TB:** What do you feel when she says 'don't end up like me'?

**Sally:** *Well I don't think she's in that bad a state, but I want to do better*

**TB:** Better in what way?

**Sally:** *Getting a better job than her and*

**TB:** What does getting a better job mean?

**Sally:** *Doing something with a bit like more status and more money*

*(Sally: Interview 1)*

How these attitudes were developed may in part be due to wider family experiences of university. Sally's cousins, of whom 8 had been to university, may have contributed to her mother's perceptions concerning the benefits of HE. This in turn, may have led to her own desires concerning her children and her aspirations for them to do well and have the opportunities that she herself had missed out on. Sally's sister had just completed a teacher training course at the time of the interview with Sally. There is a sense in which the families in this study had some understanding or perception that going to university would result in better employment opportunities on graduation. Having

experienced academic success from an early age the students in this study were well placed to progress further and their families did not deter them from doing so. Their family habitus was 'less unfavourable' (Bourdieu, Passeron et al. 1994: 42) towards education and this contributed to intergenerational habitus shift.

However, whilst many of the parents of the students in this study had not been to university themselves, they did have other family members who had as illustrated in Table 12. This may also have contributed to the positive attitudes displayed towards education that were existent within each family.

<b>Student</b>	<b>Family Member who had been to University</b>
Mathew	Cousin, but was unsure
Sayda	None
Sophie	Cousin
James	Brother
Tim	Mother
Eve	Cousin
Oscar	Mother
Joanne	Cousin
Lucy	Sister
Grace	Cousin
Anna	Uncle
Erin	Brother; father educated to degree level
Keira	Sister
Zara	None
Sally	Sister; 8 cousins
Toby	Mother

**Table 12:** Family Members who have been to University

Of the fourteen students who had family members, such as cousins or uncles, who had been to university, they rarely had opportunities to discuss university with them. Often the students reflected upon the distance that existed between their own family unit and that of the wider family. The distance was

geographical in many instances, but also emotional following a family rift which was the case for Mathew.

## **Mathew**

Mathew raised this issue in interview and believed that his entry to university would enable him to 'sort out' (Mathew: Interview 1) the family rift sometime in the future. He couldn't express why this would be the case, but associated going to university with betterment and increased status. This, he believed, would be valued within his family and his opinions would therefore 'count' as being important. Mathew reported that his parents were supportive of him going to university, but he felt constrained by his home context.

His mother, being disabled, required full-time care and support and this was mainly provided by Mathew's father. However, Mathew felt that he was needed at home to provide some respite for his father. With this in mind, Mathew applied to universities close to home, including an FE college that offers HE courses in his home town. He had the ability to go to any leading university, including Cambridge. He self-selected away from Cambridge believing that 'it wouldn't be right for me' (Mathew: Interview). The emotional and psychological distance that Mathew would potentially travel to go to Cambridge would be immense. His home location, as identified above, was in an area with high levels of multiple deprivation according to the ONS calculations. Through his history of academic success he had positioned himself in line with more middle class practices and yet was not completely comfortable with the idea of entering a leading university. He eventually accepted a place at the institution closest to his home - a college that does not feature in published league tables. Mathew had always wanted to attend his local college - he knew that he would 'fit' socially there. During Interview he referred to other universities such as The University of Nottingham and Lancaster University as being places where he would not feel comfortable, where 'they just didn't feel right' (Mathew: Interview). The shift in habitus for Mathew was such that going to HE felt safe, but going beyond the boundaries of his geographical area was a step too far.

Mathew's experience of HE would be compromised by his living context – he intended to continue living at home and share in the care of his mother as he had always done. Although his achievements in going on to HE are commendable, in choosing the institution he did, literature suggests that his 'certified form' (Bourdieu 1986: 291) of cultural capital would have less market exchange value than if he had studied at a more reputable institution (Salter and Tapper 1994). If this perception holds up to scrutiny, universities are in a position in which they 'define the context in which much individual social mobility takes place' (Salter and Tapper 1994: 5). In a Bourdieuan sense, Mathew, although he had travelled some distance in going to HE at all, had created little distance between his social beginnings and the social position he would occupy once at college. He had not transgressed, in a Bourdieuan sense, the 'social limits which reflect spatial distances' (Bourdieu 1998: 10). As outlined above, many of the students came from families where their parents had not been to university. They are breaking the traditions for their immediate family and I now explore the ways in which that process occurred.

## **Breaking Family Patterns of Access to HE**

In exploring family traditions and the factors that contribute to intergenerational social exclusion, it is first pertinent to outline the 'patterns' that are being broken. I am focusing on two 'patterns': family history of higher education and social class status. In doing so, I am outlining the ways in which these students are going against the grain of what is historically typical in their family, but also for similarly categorised peers.

Three of the students (Erin, Oscar and Tim) had parents who had been to university. The students from these families were therefore following a precedent already set. Of the remaining thirteen, three had older brothers or sisters who had been or who were currently at university. The tradition had already been broken in those cases, but the students in this study were still identified as 'first generation' students in policy terms. Five students had relatives within the wider family who had been, although the extent to which their experiences of HE could count as breaking a family tradition is debatable. Their experiences could not be passed across or down generations as the

families did not connect with each other – students often commented on limited or no contact with wider family members. The remaining two students had no family members who had been to university.

The decision to go to university for these students was constructed within a complex myriad of emotional and psychological processes (Lucey, Melody et al. 2003). For the two students who had no family history of HE, they recounted many instances where they felt confused, ambivalent, disappointed or anxious. Coupled with these intense emotions were also feelings of anticipation and excitement.

*Well, it's all a cycle. I get excited, then a bit worried, then get scared and then get excited. (Zara: Interview 1)*

Even for the students who had wider family members who had been, the anticipation of going to university conjures up intense emotions as illustrated by Eve's comment,

*I think it, sometimes it's all a bit, it's like a bit scary, because I don't really know anyone who's been to university before, but I'm like really excited about it as well, because it's a new experience so...(Eve: Interview 1)*

Eve is talking about mixed emotions – she is both scared and excited about going to university. She is also indicating that she has no-one to turn to for advice: 'I don't really know anyone who's been to university'. There is a sense in which Eve is struggling with the limited knowledge that she has about university but at the same time is also looking forward to the 'new experience' it will offer.

## **Sophie**

Sophie presents a different background context. Her parents moved to Britain from Lebanon because they wanted both Sophie and her brother to have access to what they perceived as a good quality education.

*Neither of them came from university. I think they stopped at what's equivalent to us, because they did their qualifications in Lebanon, and equivalent to us, they probably stopped at GCSE, probably first year of GCSE. So they didn't have an academic background and it was kind of, that's why they moved here, to kind of give me a chance to have that, to go to university. (Sophie: Interview 1)*

Their desire to ensure their children had a good education extended to their choice of school. Living in a relatively deprived area of London with poor achieving local schools, Sophie's parents searched for single sex Catholic schools for Sophie and her brother. Despite the implications this had for travel (both schools were some distance from the family home), Sophie's parents secured places in two schools that had good academic reputations. Sophie believes they did this as part of a strategic move to ensure their children had the best opportunities and that would eventually lead to university entrance for both – to give their children the chance that they never had. They had developed understanding and an appreciation, or a 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu 1990a: 66) of what a good education could bring for their children. These attitudes were then passed on to their children whose position in the field of education was such that academic success naturally followed.

Despite her parents' humble beginnings and low socio-economic status, Sophie had inherited differing attitudes and dispositions than those normally associated with working class groups. The family habitus was not one of antipathy towards education, but one which embraced it as a tool for entering the workforce in a more privileged position. Sophie had vivid memories of her mother supporting her academic endeavours through regular contact with her teachers, taking her to the local library to borrow books and insisting that homework was completed on time.

In Bourdieuan terms, their developing habitus or 'dispositions acquired through experience' (Bourdieu 1990b: 9) were responding to differing contexts or 'objective structures' (Bourdieu 1990b: 14) than had previously been experienced. Although Bourdieu argues that agents do 'the only thing to do'

(Bourdieu 1990: 11), for Sophie, her decision to go to university was primarily structured by the influences of her parents. This would infer that some form of rational reasoning had taken place – and Sophie’s parents certainly appeared to base their judgments on acceptance of the discourses surrounding the benefits of education.

When exploring this more closely, what was the ‘only thing to do’ for Sophie? The pressure she felt under to apply to university came from many sources: the ethos of her school which encouraged students to aim higher and had a well co-ordinated Gifted and Talented programme; school teachers who discussed HE options with her and had constantly encouraged her throughout her time in the school; parents who had moved from Lebanon to provide what they perceived as a better education; peers who all worked hard and entered into informal competitions with each other to complete work on time and get high marks; her brother who frustrates Sophie with his academic abilities, in particular his ability to remember information quickly, in comparison with hers.

*He’s extremely bright. He’s in the Gifted and Talented Academy as well. What really frustrates me about him is that he just looks at something, he’ll look at something, this really annoys me. He’ll look at something and he’ll absorb 70% of it without looking at it again... (Sophie: Interview 1)*

Sophie’s perception of her brother’s academic abilities leads to the conclusion that the developing dispositions had been inculcated further down the family. They had been taken up by both Sophie and her brother. However, Sophie does provide some insight into earlier dispositions that may have reflected a different habitus.

*I was so different to how I was now. When I was in primary school, I was always in trouble, always in trouble. I remember I was the loud mouth of the class. It was unbelievable... (Sophie: Interview 1)*



Sophie clearly identifies her mother's role in her younger years, doing all she could to support the learning of her two children. Sophie considered herself as rebellious, but couldn't explain the reasons for this.

*I really, you know I can't remember. I don't know. I was just so ungrateful. I look back now and think how my mum sat me down and made sure I did my homework and kind of you know gave me help, although she didn't even have a good education herself. She gave me what she could and kind of made sure I was a member of whatever libraries were around and sent me to things, you know, always made sure I saw the films of you know whatever, you know she was really, really, always good to me and I kind of took that for granted. (Sophie: Interview 1)*

The actions of Sophie's mother clearly introduced Sophie to cultural experiences that she otherwise may not have accessed. In developing increased levels of cultural capital and having the shock of academic failure at the end of primary school, Sophie was well positioned to be responsive to the demands of secondary school. The convergence of this transition with the ethos of her all girls' Catholic secondary school seemed to give Sophie the impetus she needed to succeed.

It was at this illuminating point that the efforts of her parents seemed to be rewarded. Sophie found herself caught up in the game and was willing to make the investment required to succeed (Bourdieu 1990b).

I have focused on Sophie's story because it demonstrates how the habitus has the potential to amend, or adapt to changing contexts or that it is 'variable from place to place and time to time' (Bourdieu 1990b: 9). There was a definite shift in Sophie's approach to education. Although capable in academic terms (in the narrow sense of being able to achieve in line with curriculum demands) her failure at Year 6 SATs left a long lasting impression to the extent that Sophie applied pressure on herself to succeed. She felt isolated from the other children in her Year 7 maths group and felt that she didn't belong there. This sense of not belonging was experienced on two levels: both

social and academic. She knew that the pupils in the bottom sets had different aspirations to her own and felt compelled to work her way up from the bottom set, which through her positioning in that set she had experienced as 'failure'.

## **James**

James' recount of his primary school days contrasts with that of Sophie. He recognised that particular attitudes led to success and positioned himself in line with the types of pupils teachers like. This is what James had to say about his primary school experience.

*I was a really hard working pupil throughout my five years, achieving high marks throughout, and being the sort of well behaved hard working pupil that teachers like. (James: E-mail Interview)*

Closer examination of James' family history provides some information on why and how these dispositions were developed. James was 'brought up in a practising Christian family' (James: E-mail Interview) and he recognises that this may have had 'some effect' (James: E-mail) on his behaviour. His friends were also Christians and he spent much of his spare time socialising with them. He believed their influence in his life 'helped me to stay fixed on the 'straight and narrow'' (James: E-mail). In addition, whilst his parents had had a number of misfortunes concerning redundancy and poor health in the case of James' father, his mother had shown signs of academic ability whilst at school. According to James, she had been

*...a high achiever and was put up a year in grammar school, and trained to be an accountant, although she stopped being an accountant when she became pregnant with my brother, and has since been a house wife. (James: E-mail Interview)*

Although James' mother had not returned to the work force, James felt that she valued the importance of education and had passed this attitude on to both James and his brother. James felt motivated by his mother to work hard at school – she always asked him about his homework and supported him in

completing it. James felt strongly that she was the driving force behind his decision to go to university to the extent that

*I always thought that I would go to university, no questions, and always just assumed I would just do A Levels and then go to university, no questions. (James: E-mail Interview)*

James experienced much support from his parents. Despite their issues with money, James' parents had been instrumental in his academic pathways, encouraging him to do well and ensuring that he completed his homework tasks. The family habitus was congruent with that of the field and James felt secure and comfortable in the education environment.

## **Mathew**

Of the other students, their attitudes towards education were supported by their families. Although in the case of Mathew, his parents knew little about higher education, they were still able to support his application to HE. However, Mathew found their presence at university open days as 'embarrassing' (Mathew: Interview 1). He felt uncomfortable by his mother's particular needs (she was in a wheelchair and required frequent visits to the toilet) and wished that he had gone alone. Whether the discomfort felt by Mathew was truly indicative of the way he felt about his mother's condition or whether it was illustrative of deeper emotional reactions to unfamiliar environments is unclear. Mathew was extremely non-communicative in interview and it was extremely difficult getting him to respond in any depth to any of the questions. I did not feel that I could press him on this issue. Mathew could have been internalising his discomfort. He was the only student to enter an Institute of Further and Higher Education rather than a Redbrick or Russell Group university.

## **Grace**

Grace too hints at issues of unfamiliarity with university in her family. Although supporting her decision to go to university, the thought had not entered their minds and it was down to Grace to bring the issue up.

*Yeah, they're like really behind me which is really nice and they basically say whatever I want to do is all good. I don't know if they expected me to go to uni, I don't know what they expected me to do, I don't know, but I was talking to my mum before and she said she's like behind whatever I want to do but I don't think she would have brought up coming to university if I hadn't have done, I don't know. (Grace: Interview 2)*

There is a sense in Grace's story that she is 'doing it alone'. Her family are supportive of her decision to go to university, but would have supported her in anything she had decided to do. There seems to be limited knowledge within the family of what Grace could have done – she does not know what they expected her to do. It could be that future aspirations did not feature significantly in discussions she had with her parents. The discussion with her mum about university only occurred because Grace had first brought it up.

The stories presented by the students illustrated many 'breakings' with family traditions. Most of the HE 'first timers' were entering university with explicit support from their parents. The move away was therefore not one which dismantled family relationships, but more of a gradual and protracted dispersing. Many contributing factors influenced the students' decisions to go to university. As identified above, this desire was primarily driven by the desire to earn more money and have more opportunities than their parents. In the cases of Sally and Sophie, their parents were highly instrumental in driving them to go to university.

## **Chapter Summary**

The findings presented in this chapter refer to the background contexts of the students in the study. I have outlined the disparate contexts of each student and argued that in some cases, going to university is reflective of wider social patterns within a locality; that is, the students may not be following their parents' pathways through education, but they are influenced by what they see occurring around them. In addition, I have outlined the ways in which

individual families have influenced the students' choices and progression routes. In doing so, I have highlighted those cases where going to university has caused some angst within the family. I have also focused on a family habitus that is 'less unfavourable' (Bourdieu, Passeron et al. 1994: 42) towards education and which influenced the decisions that the students made. It is important to consider the family habitus, not in isolation, but as a part of wider social interactions and structures that influence choices and decision-making. I now turn to the role of institutions and focus on schools and the Sutton Trust and highlight the influence of institutional habituses in directing student choices.

In this chapter, I outline the schooling contexts of each student to explore the idea that each respective institution has its own ethos and culture contributing to an institutional habitus. I demonstrate how the expectations placed on each student varied according to their post-16 contexts and highlight the ways in which the particular practices within each institution privileged the students in this study. I show how their close alignment with the field of education contributed to their success in securing places at leading universities in the UK. I also focus on the Sutton Trust and illustrate how the messages the students received within that week served to confirm their ideas about a university hierarchy and the importance they placed on reaching for the top.

## **Introduction**

For Bourdieu, it is clear that education is predominantly a site of reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). They argue that systems and structures in the field of education work to position people according to the levels of cultural, social and economic capital they possess. In this chapter, I will outline the way institutional habituses influence student choice. I will also highlight the ways in which political structures and discourses have been played out in the students' choice of school, but also in their university choices. I also demonstrate the role of the Sutton Trust in the students' university choices.

## **Institutional Habitus Part I**

An institutional habitus is based on the idea that an institution, with its own history and practices develops an ethos which can be transmitted to its pupils. All those who 'belong' to the institution, whether in the role of for example, pupil, parent or teacher, contribute to its habitus. In addition to the local based institutional habitus developed within a school, it is also informed by political discourses that shape the way in which curricula are developed and delivered. Reay et al (2006: 37) point out that an institutional habitus comprises 'curriculum offer, organisational practices' and the 'less tangible but equally important cultural and expressive characteristics'. The expressive characteristics constitute an 'embodied cultural capital' (ibid) which is

... embodied in the collectivity of students, in their dress, demeanour and stances. They are also often embodied in buildings, trophies, rituals, performances and in the school staff (their histories and qualifications). (Reay, David et al. 2005: 37)

I explored the contexts within each school to identify whether the institutional habitus was such that it could act as an 'intervening variable' (ibid: 35) in the educational choices and decisions of the students in this study. For an institution to influence choices and decisions there must be two factors at play:

- the students must value and relate to the ethos of the institution

- the attitudes and dispositions of the student must match those of the school.

I now turn to the schooling experiences of the students to outline the ways in which the first encounter with educational institutions can mould young people and influence the types of decisions they make. In addition, I focus on the ways in which the students experienced schooling in terms of a social and academic fit.

## **Schooling Experiences**

Two of the statements from analysis presented earlier (Chapter 3) relate to the types of school that the students attended: either they were in areas which served deprived communities, or the social circumstances of the schools were average or above. The social circumstances of each school were identified from OfSTED reports and I also explored whether going to university was a typical outcome within each of the students' respective schools/6<sup>th</sup> forms. This approach is derived from other research on the influence of school effect (Smith and Tomlinson 1989) or 'institutional habitus' (Reay, David et al. 2005: 35) on pupil trajectory. I therefore posed the following question; to what extent was the context of the student's school/6<sup>th</sup> form acting as an 'intervening variable' (Reay, David et al. 2005: 35) in their educational trajectories? In addition, I acknowledged that the students' 6<sup>th</sup> form experiences came after many years of compulsory schooling. With that in mind, I also asked the students to reflect on their primary school experiences to explore the foundations of their schooling experiences. I did this to understand the point at which the shift in habitus for these students occurred - whether their educational trajectories could be indicative of such a shift in habitus.

### **Primary Schooling**

The students had diverse school experiences and I will provide information that explores the tensions and excitements of their schooling experiences to illustrate how their journey to higher education became inevitable. In terms of their primary school experiences, the students focused on two factors: their academic success or relationships with teachers. All of the students



commented on how positive their primary school experiences were. This was, in the main, due to their academic successes and how they felt 'special' because they were permitted to tackle extended work based on their academic abilities.

## **Zara**

Although many of the students reflected upon the emphasis on play during their primary school experiences, they also recognised the beginnings of being separated out; physically placed on tables with similarly able children. Such positioning sent messages to the students that they were in some way special. They recounted many examples of academic success at primary school level. Keira, Zara, Anna, Sophie, James and Joanne could all remember being placed on tables with other 'clever' children who worked hard. Zara sums this up well. She remembers being placed in ability tables and being 'rewarded' for her academic ability by having access to extra workbooks which were not available to less able young children.

***Zara:** I loved the maths workbooks. You just raided the boxes.... There was a group of about five of us who were the cleverest who got to do the workbooks.*

***TB:** How did that make you feel?*

***Zara:** I don't know. I suppose I was just proud at that time.*

***TB:** You say that there was a group of five of you who were the cleverest. How did you know that you were the cleverest?*

***Zara:** Because we got the extra work books, and reading books....I think they did it in ability groups; tables for certain subjects like English, maths and Science. (Zara: interview 1)*

Zara identifies her 'cleverness' at an early age and how this was rewarded within the school system: Zara, along with her friends, were provided with extra work books. She felt proud of this recognition of her ability.

## **James**

James also reflected on his experience and recognised that he did well because he behaved in appropriate ways,

*I was just a normal child at primary school, my parents ensured that I always worked hard, and I was well behaved and got on well.*

*(James: Interview 1)*

It is interesting that James uses the term 'normal' to describe himself when he was at primary school. He knew that he 'fitted' into the education system; he was 'well behaved and got on well'. James positioned himself with similarly minded children who also valued education and behaved well; friends that would stay with him throughout his schooling years. Power et al. (2003) consider this issue and reflect upon the 'relative invisibility of the middle class' (3) within education. This is due to their close alignment with the values of education. As these values are not shared by the working classes, all attitudes that do not match up to those of the normalised (Power, Edwards et al. 2003; Lawler 2004) middle classes, are pathologised and rendered as deficient (Lawler 1999; Ball 2003).

James, in describing himself as well behaved and 'normal' is getting at the heart of schooling processes. His behaviour ensured a close fit with the behavioural expectations of the school. His compliance to the implicit conditions within the schooling system is reflective of a habitus that is congruent to that of the middle class. As 'action is not the mere carrying out of a rule, or obedience to a rule' (Bourdieu 1990b: 9), James' habitus, in behaving well and in accordance to rules and regulations, is demonstrating a 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu 1990b: 9) in Bourdieuan terms. A feel for the game that enabled him to 'make distinctions between what is...right and what is wrong...' (Bourdieu 1998b: 8). Such compliance is relatively easy to explain in James' case: his family went to Church and had embraced a Christian ethos

within everything they did. James himself recognised that this had contributed to his good behaviour, which is liked by teachers. In addition, this is the first indication that we get from James that both his parents influenced his attitudes to school work. James normally referred to his mother as being instrumental in his academic progress – she was the one who encouraged him to complete his homework. In referring to both parents here we can see the way in which family expectations are concordant with those of the school – work hard and behave well.

Many of the students recalled the pressure of their SATs exams although Oscar did not recall taking SATs. Primary school experiences for Grace and Joanne focused on SATs which were 'big' in both their schools. Sophie expressed that she had really liked it at primary school despite her slight blip in under performing at the Year 6 SATs. She reflected nostalgically on her time at primary school.

*It was just more fun. There wasn't pressure on you for exams. You know now you have, there's SATs, I think that's what they're called, but it didn't seem like we were doing exams then and like the things you're learning about, especially in history and geography and things are kind of interesting and interested me then and you haven't got like the pressure on you to have to know it for an exam at the end, it's just like for the pleasure of being at school. (Sophie: Interview)*

It is through the students' primary school experiences that we get a glimpse of structural and contextual changes which are different from those in existence when their parents were at school. The students in this study had opportunities to extend their learning and Zara in particular enjoyed the freedom of choice that comes with academic ability; she was free to choose which maths workbooks she wanted because the teacher could trust her to work. Zara's attitudes pleased her teacher and she reaped the benefits of her positive disposition towards school.

Zara, is of course, not alone in this. Erin also displayed positive attitudes towards school to avoid displeasing any of her teachers. She wanted to fit in with the traditions and expectations of the institution and displayed a habitus which enabled her to do this by conforming to the rules and regulations evident within her school. Rather than experiencing teacher anger, Erin did everything within her power and abilities to ensure that she stayed on the right side of them.

*My teacher's were big influences on me and I really looked up to many of my teachers. I was quite a worry-pot of a child and would worry about things a great deal. I hated being told off by any of my teachers - it made me really upset if I was ever told off! (Erin: E-mail)*

All of the students with the exceptions of Sophie and Keira enjoyed positive relationships with teachers and achieved well in primary school. Sophie admitted that she had 'always been in trouble' in primary school and that her mother had been extremely disappointed with her Year 6 SATs results. Her mother's reaction was partly influenced by her daughter not achieving to her ability but also reflective of the personal sacrifices she had made to ensure that her children got a good education; they had moved from Lebanon. Sophie never forgot her mother's reaction to her disappointing SATs results and I will return to this when I explore the students' secondary school experiences.

Keira's disappointing SATs results were, in her opinion, caused by the frequent moves that she had made whilst at primary school as a result of her father being in the armed forces. She claimed that this had been highly disruptive and that she must have covered The Romans 'at least seven times' (Keira: Interview 1). It is unclear whether this is Keira's own opinion or that of her parents; one of the justifications for her parents' choice of secondary school for her was connected to the number of primary school moves that had been made.

In the narratives of the students, there is a sense in which they already identified themselves with other well behaved and academically successful

children at primary school. They worked hard and the teachers appeared to like them. They disapproved of children who messed around and were disruptive. Their reflections do not come across as children who were conditioned or instructed to act in certain ways – they did this naturally. Their family habitus was such that their attitudes towards school were positive and this was reflected in their achievements. They did well because their parents not only supported them but consistently told them about the benefits of a good education. These messages were internalised by the students and they began to see education as either a way of betterment as in the cases of Zara, Sally, James, Mathew, Anna or as a means of obtaining increased employment opportunities and salary as in the case of Oscar and Tim. Although there is a very real sense in which going to university would be a personal achievement, for many of the students it is a family based investment with many financial sacrifices being made along the way.

Through their primary school experiences, the students in this study continued to develop increased levels of confidence about their academic abilities. This was continually re-enforced through regular assessments in which they did well. They had established friendships with similarly minded young children and shared positive attitudes towards school and education generally. These attitudes were also evident through the process of choosing a secondary school. Through their secondary school choices we gain insights into how wider political discourses operate within and are accepted by families.

### **Getting to the 'Right' Secondary School**

Schools are 'complex, contradictory, sometimes incoherent organisations...' (Ball 1997: 317). The search for a 'good' school is a complex process, including emotional, psychological and physical shifts. Although many pupils expect to and do attend their local school, this is not the case for some who move out of their immediate location to secure a place at a perceived 'better' school. It is documented that working class children tend to lead localised lives (Healy 2006). The data in this study demonstrates that the students, in their search for a good school, were prepared to cross social and county or city boundaries.

The students in this study were keen to find a good secondary school: one in which they could achieve well, meet their aspirations and therefore move further along in their journey to good careers. Although what constitutes a good school is potentially viewed differently by various groups (e.g. parents, policy makers) the students along with their parents opted to consult league tables to identify a 'good' school. Although league tables are criticised on a number of levels (Bowden 2000; Gillborn and Youdell 2000; West and Pennell 2000), the students in this study described how their school choices were born out in relation to such information. This is reflected in what Sayda said about her choice of school.

*My mum didn't want me to go to Highfield, it's rubbish. They don't get good exam results, so we applied to Beckford and took a chance..... It's a long way from where I live but it was the best place for me to go to (Sayda: E-mail)*

In stating that Beckford is the 'best place' for her, Sayda is separating herself out from the other young people in her local area: it is good enough for them, but it would not be right for Sayda. She eventually secured a place at a school some distance, both geographically and socially, away from her home location.

Many of the students' parents ensured their child secured a place at other popular, high achieving schools. This was certainly the case for Sayda, Sophie, Eve and Keira. Sophie and Eve attended single sex schools that placed a high focus on academic achievement. Eve's school was described by OfSTED as heavily oversubscribed and where a 'high proportion' of its students go onto university. Eve's place at this high achieving school was based on an appeal lodged by her father who wanted her to go to a good school. When asked why her father had done that, Eve stated that her father wanted the 'best' opportunities for her and these were more likely in the single sex school, because of its academic focus, than in the local poor performing secondary school.

## **Eve**

Eve found the first few weeks of secondary school unsettling as most of her friends from primary school had gone on to the local secondary school. She faced a 40 minute bus journey each way to and from school. Although she viewed this positively and as a small sacrifice given the reputation of the school she was going to, it was the social isolation she felt that made her question the decision both she and her father had made. She questioned the point of going to a school where she felt out of place and where she had difficulties forming friendships. She describes her first two years as being 'very lonely and difficult' but talks more about how she felt when the situation changed following a school trip.

*I went on a geography field trip and for the first couple of days I was mainly going around on my own, yeah and then on the third day we had to work in groups and I ended up working with some girls who are now still my friends.....I think this turned things around for me. I think I have been happier here since then (Eve: Interview)*

When I asked Eve to talk about why she had found it so difficult in the first two years, she described many of the other girls as being 'snobbish and bitchy'. Despite its focus on high academic achievement there were girls at Eve's school who did not value education in the same way as Eve and Eve found herself at the end of their negative comments. Eve felt bullied by them because they teased her about her academic abilities and her size. It was not until Year 9, following a Geography field trip that Eve found herself amongst other pupils who had the same attitudes towards school and who accepted her for who she was.

## **Sophie**

Sophie's mother was instrumental in her obtaining a place in the single sex Catholic school. Sophie remembers visiting 'at least' four secondary schools with her mother. During their search for the 'best' school, Sophie's mother had liked the strictness of it and thought that this school would bring her daughter 'into line' so that she could achieve her full potential. Sophie knew that her

school was located in an area which has relatively high levels of deprivation and she describes it as 'a light in the darkness kind of thing' (*Sophie: Interview 1*). She felt privileged to be there and spent time on a Saturday 'giving something back' by helping other young people in the area with maths and English.

For Sophie, there is some guilt attached to her schooling: she is pleased that she attends a high achieving school but realises that her 'out of catchment' place may have resulted in someone who lived locally not gaining a place at the school. Perhaps it is this that contributes to Sophie's attitudes to her school. It did not take her long to conform to the expectations and norms of the school, thus moving her away from the behaviours she displayed at primary school. In addition, Sophie was exposed to the harsh consequences of her disappointing examination results by being placed in the bottom set for maths, which she was extremely embarrassed about. This experience, in addition to the focus that the school placed on academic achievement and discipline, worked positively for Sophie. She was determined to improve in maths and set herself the target of moving up to the top set which she eventually achieved. However, it is the legacy of being placed at the 'bottom' which left a mark on Sophie: she viewed it as a place where she never wanted to go to again. Although the school was a high achieving school, she claims that there were pupils at the school who did not work hard or were not particularly engaged with their education. She describes the other pupils in the bottom set as 'wasters who just want to see their schooling out' (*Sophie: Interview 1*). Being identified alongside these pupils troubled Sophie and this contributed to her rapid movement out of that set and eventually into the top set.

## **Erin**

Whilst Eve, Sophie, Sayda and Keira attended schools that were a good distance away from their home locations, the other students went to their local secondary school. For most of them this decision was based on convenience and reputation as most of the students lived in areas where the local school performed relatively well. Erin chose her local school as she thought it would



be the best place for her despite the fact that she identified some weaknesses with it.

*It was a good school for me – even though I had a few problems with the school over the years. I had the chance of going to an apparently better school a bit further away from me but I chose this school and I am very happy in my choice. I have achieved well here. If you work hard - you'll do well at this school. It has its problems as does any establishment but it is a good place. It has a wide range of students at the school with different abilities and from different backgrounds. The school is sometimes not the best organised or the best at communicating within itself. But the teaching is good on the whole and you will be encouraged in your studies. Many of the local kids come to this school, and if you work hard you'll do well. Some holes in the system - but if you come with the right attitude and want to study then it's a good place.  
(Erin: E-mail)*

In this interview excerpt Erin is identifying herself as different from many of the other pupils who attended her school. In describing the school as 'good for me' Erin acknowledges that it may not be as good for other young people or disassociating herself from the alternative secondary school. As someone who worked hard, it was easy for the school to identify Erin as different and she was eventually selected to apply to Oxbridge. She enjoyed being at a school where there were pupils from many different backgrounds and with different academic abilities. She also acknowledges that she has done well because she worked hard. The school, it seems, works well with pupils who fit into its particular ethos.

School context is often referred to as influential in determining outcomes for young people. This can be identified as the 'school effect' (e.g. Smith and Tomlinson 1989) or 'institutional habitus' (e.g. Reay, David et al. 2005). The result of this focus identifies the ways in which schools perpetuate and inadvertently validate social and educational inequalities. Whilst the students' parents were instrumental in deciding which school would be the most

appropriate at the age of 11, the students themselves had more involvement in the process of choosing a sixth form - a choice is still being made in not deciding to opt away from the local school. Whilst the foundations for study had been set during Years 7 – 11 the contexts of the students' post-16 institutions were also instrumental in their respective journeys into HE.

I now turn to the post-16 institutions in more detail to outline the ways in which the institutional habituses influenced the students' university choices.

## Varieties of Post-16 Contexts

The students came from a variety of institutions as illustrated in Table 13.

Name	School background
Erin	Comprehensive College (Specialist status for technology) AS/A2: 92% (23% high grades A – B)
Toby	Boys Community Comprehensive 11 – 18 (6 <sup>th</sup> form consortium) AS/A2: Average points score 14.0 (2 or more A Levels)
Anna	Comprehensive (6 <sup>th</sup> form consortium) No data for AS/A2 levels due to formation of 6 <sup>th</sup> form consortium
Sally	Comprehensive Community College 11 – 18 (Specialist Language College) 50% go onto higher education AS/A2: Average 15.4% (2 or more A Levels)
Joanne	Tertiary College High level of social deprivation in the school population as evidenced through free school meals numbers AS/A2: Pass rates in line with national averages
Tim	6 <sup>th</sup> form college 16 – 18 In an area with high levels of social and academic deprivation AS: 91% (41% high grades); A2: 96% (49% high grades A - B)
Lucy	Comprehensive 11 – 18 Below average socio economic profile AS/A2: Average points score 20.6 (2 or more A Levels)
Keira	Community Comprehensive 11 – 18 (Has boarding facility)

	AS/A2: Average points score 14.0 (2 or more A Levels)
Zara	Foundation Comprehensive 13 – 18 Majority of Y11 pupils go into the sixth form AS/A2: 84.8% (27.1% high grades A – B)
Grace	Comprehensive school 11 – 18 Over half of students go onto higher education AS/A2: Average points score 243.6
Sophie	Girls' Catholic School 11 – 18 Programmes in place to encourage students to raise their aspirations AS/A2: Average points score 14.6 (2 or more A Levels)
James	Tertiary College Main site located in a prosperous area AS/A2: 88% (58% high grades A – C)
Eve	Voluntary aided girls' comprehensive school 75% go onto university AS/A2: Average points score 17.5 (2 or more A Levels)
Matt	Voluntary controlled C of E Comprehensive 11 – 18 Socio economic context is below average AS/A2: 81.3% (10.8% high grades A - B)
Sayda	Mixed Comprehensive Community School 13 – 18 Frequent reviews of student progress AS/A2: 95% (34% high grades)
Oscar	6 <sup>th</sup> form college 16 – 18 In an area with high levels of social and academic deprivation AS: 91% (41% high grades); A2: 96% (49% high grades A - B)

**Table 13: Post-16 Institution Contexts**

## **Sophie**

The structures in place in some post-16 institutions contributed to an ethos of success. In Sophie's school sixth form for example, pupils were streamed or set according to ability and this in turn contributed to the institutional habitus driving some pupils to succeed. Sophie chose to stay on at her school and both responded to and recognised the influence that this had on her own levels of motivation to succeed,

*...when I started off in this school, I know this going way way back, but in year 7, I was like in the second top, we have tutor sets, I was in the second top tutor set, but within those we also had subject sets, so for example, for maths I was in the lowest tutor set for maths, but in tutor set I was second top and I wasn't happy about that. I wasn't happy at all. So, I kind of worked my way up from bottom maths set all the way up to the top, so that's what I mean about reaching your potential, not just accepting this is it, this is my, I'm just going to do A Levels and leave it at that. (Sophie: interview)*

Sophie did not identify with other children in the low ability maths set. She described them as 'wasters'. She was in that particular set because she had not worked sufficiently hard in primary school and could not identify with the other pupils who did not share her general enthusiasm for education.

Sophie's school ensured that the ethos of success was inculcated into its pupils from Year 7 by making the success of older pupils evident through the hearsay of other pupils,

*...when you come here and you see that there are girls who are higher than you, who are in year 10 and 11 and you know, you kind of see, especially I heard about success as well. There was this one girl in particular who got, I think it was 12 As and A\*s in her GCSEs and I was hearing about that since year 7, you know, because from year 7 you work your way up and the end result would be you know, working towards your GCSEs and I kind of heard about her..... And I thought 'I'm going to try that, I'm going to try to get up there' and I just did. (Sophie: interview)*

## **Keira**

Keira also reflects on the way in which her school influences pupil achievement and success. She depicts a school in which students are expected to be self motivated and seek help should they need it,

*GCSE and A Level results are always up there in the top five or six in the county. It's a good school. I'm not lying that there's parts of it that are less wonderful. I think you can do really well here if you're determined to do well or you really need help. People in the middle who could go, sort of, who could work really well or sway in to the bottom and waste two years, I think they suffer slightly, because it is a large school and there are big classes... unless you say 'I need help', it's not really identified..., but a lot of it, it's a case of, unless you come to me, there's not a lot I can do about it.*  
*(Keira: interview)*

In this context, Keira is one of the lucky ones: she was determined to succeed and positioned herself with like-minded pupils. She appreciated the work required and applied herself in line with the school's habitus to ensure her entry to university. She also acknowledged the internal support mechanisms – those who required help should seek it out. In this school, Keira was identified as a pupil who could progress further in the same way that Erin was in her school. She received extra attention from teachers at times, including informal conversations in corridors that checked the status and progress of assignments, chats after lessons and tutorials. Keira reported that she felt really supported in the school and that she was being 'gently nudged' in the direction of university.

Throughout their primary and secondary schooling the students in this study present a group of young people who matched the ethos of their respective institutions. They fitted in and did well because they identified with the messages that were presented to them about achieving and moving on. There was a sense that the happy days of primary school were replaced by the hard edge of competition at secondary school. All the students, with the exceptions of Sophie who had under-achieved in her Year 6 SATs, and Oscar who had been to a school where SATs had not been taken, entered their secondary schools with a good academic record. The success they achieved at primary school was mirrored in their success at GCSE level as I illustrate in Table 14.

Student Name	Number of GCSE/GNVQ Passes and Grades						GNVQ
	A*	A	B	C	D	E	
Mathew	1	6	1	1			Merit
Sayda	5	4	1				
Sophie	9	5					
James	5	4	2				
Tim	4	4	2				
Eve	5	5					
Oscar	3	5	3				
Joanne	5	5	1	1			
Lucy	4	1	4	1			
Grace	5	4	2				
Anna	5	4	1	1			
Erin	3	5	1	1			Merit
Keira	4	4	2	1			
Zara	6	6					
Sally	4	5	1				
Toby	4	2	3	1	1		

**Table 14:** Range of GCSE and GNVQ Results

The above table illustrates that these students achieved well at GCSE level. Some were exceeding their family history of academic achievement and were also moving beyond what is normally achieved by working class groups (Kelly and Balch 1971; Erickson 1987). School effect (Smith and Tomlinson 1989) has been identified as an important factor in the achievements and eventual trajectories of working class students and it appears that this is the case for these students. They were committed to the ethos of the school because their parents' aspirations for them combined with their own aspirations which facilitated their success in their respective schools.

Armed with the academic profile as identified above, the students then considered their next steps on their educational journeys. There was no ambiguity concerning their next step. All sixteen knew that they would be moving on to AS and A2 level study. Their choices of where to study at AS and

then A Level reflected many of the issues concerning school/6<sup>th</sup> form choice identified in the literature (see for example, Gorard 1999; Reay and Lucey 2000). I now move onto outline how the students 'chose' to study in their respective school 6<sup>th</sup> forms or colleges of further education (FE).

## **Deciding to Stay**

Eve's decision to stay at her school for AS and A2 study, reflected issues raised by many of the other students: a sense of familiarity with the institution, teachers and the subjects offered.

*Eve: I did consider going to other places, but, I just really wanted to come here because like again everyone knows each other and like you get good referencing. It's just easier than moving really.*

*TB: What was it about moving that you thought would be tricky?*

*Eve: Well it would have been a bit scary and also because there wasn't really much point going anywhere else, because this is like the best 6<sup>th</sup> form in the area as well, well one of the best, so, and it offered all my courses. (Eve: Interview 1)*

The reluctance to move to another institution was strategically considered across the sample. Although knowing friends was an important issue, the fact that teachers had knowledge of the students featured highly in their decision making processes. They could rely on good references being put on UCAS application forms and because of the levels of familiarity the students believed this would work to their advantage. The 'logic of their practices' (Bourdieu 1990b: 50) was embedded within institutional expectations and what the students believed would help them on their way to HE.

Of the students that decided to move, pragmatic reasons influenced their decisions. Joanne, James, Oscar, Tim and Lucy all moved Institution for post-16 study. Joanne, for example, moved to an FE college because it was

convenient for her mum to drop her off and collect her whilst travelling to and from work. James had to move because his school catered for Years 7 -11 only. Oscar and Tim were both attracted to a sixth form college that has an excellent reputation for academic success. Lucy moved because she had been frustrated with the quality of teaching in her secondary school and therefore moved to another school which had a sixth form with a perceived better reputation.

The schools/6<sup>th</sup> forms/FE colleges that the students attended played a large role in the eventual educational trajectories of the students. The institutions' respective histories influenced how HE was constructed and talked about between staff and students, but also between students themselves. Particular HE institutions were 'favoured' in some schools and 6<sup>th</sup> form colleges. For example, Sally was told to apply only to institutions that began with 'The University of .....' rather than '.....university' (Sally: Interview). In her school 6<sup>th</sup> form Redbrick or Russell Group universities were viewed more positively than post-1992 institutions and this message was played out in the choices that Sally made, but also in the choices her friends made. Although the majority of students chose their 6<sup>th</sup> forms because it played a part in a longer term strategy, Grace was the only student who claimed that she had ended up at her school by 'accident' (Grace: Focus Group Interview). Bourdieu would argue that no choice occurs by chance, despite his own reflection that choices he made occurred as a combination of habitus and chance (Reed-Danahay 2005). Described as a 'good school' by OfSTED, Grace went there due to its close proximity to home and the fact that the teachers would know her. Grace claimed that she went into the 6<sup>th</sup> form with no clear idea of what she wanted to do as her interview for progression into the school's 6<sup>th</sup> form suggests.

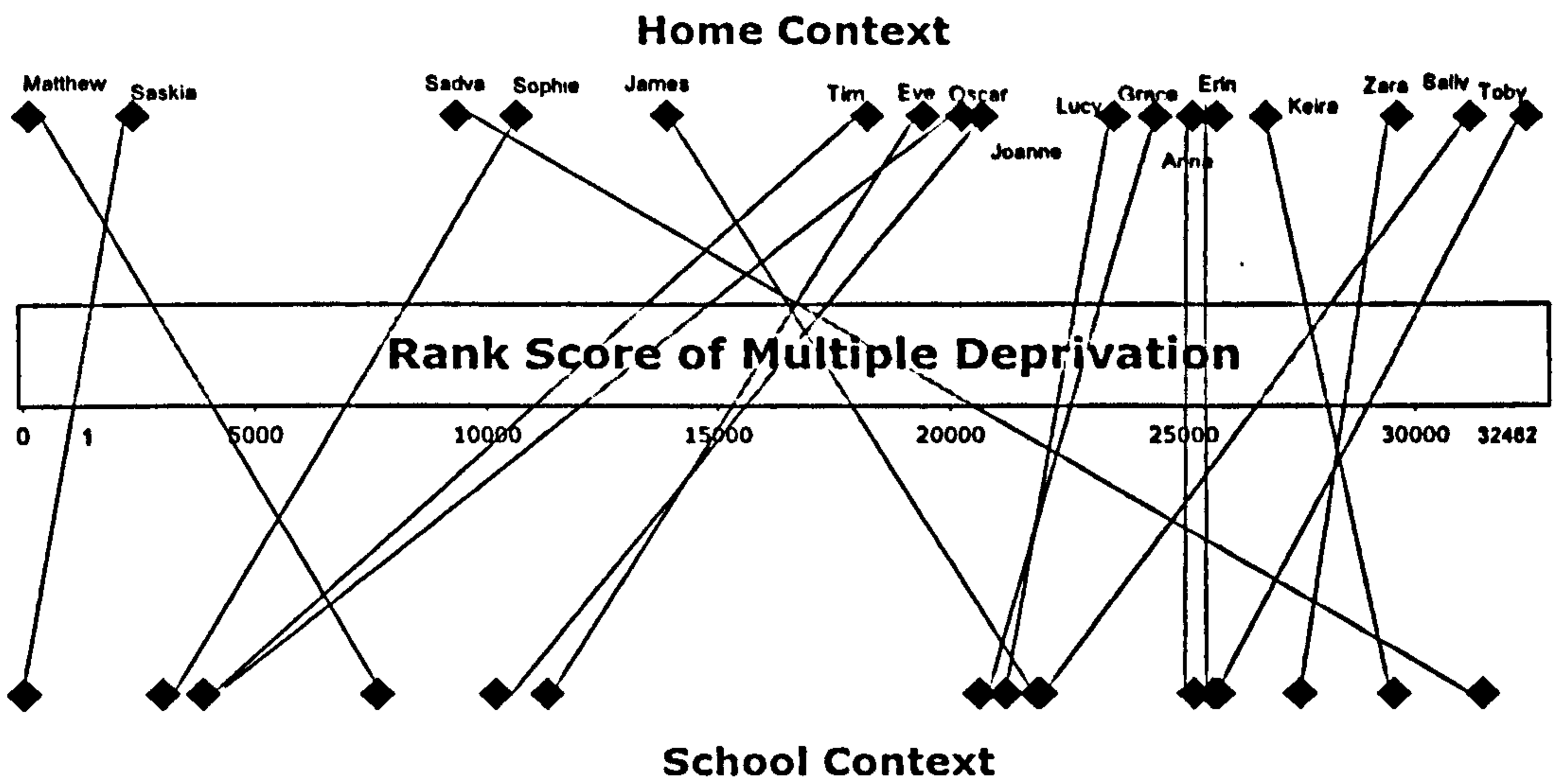
*It was really strange because I'm like, I don't know, I had never really thought about it when I was growing up and then it was like I think it was for the 6<sup>th</sup> form interview I got questioned on why I wasn't going to uni, but the actual thing about it was that I had never thought about it in the first place if that makes sense so then that was only when I started to question whether I actually did*



*want to go and whether it was kind of feasible for me to go and stuff. (Grace: Interview 2)*

Grace's story hints at a different progression to that of the other students. If the school is taken as an intervening principle, then the intervention can be clearly seen at this point. Prior to her 6<sup>th</sup> form interview, Grace had not really considered university. This position is in line with many accounts of working class career trajectories; there is no conscious career mapping or considered pathway. It is perhaps through Grace's account that we can see the potential of trajectory limitations of a life bounded by class location (Wright 1997). Grace only began to consider the possibility of pursuing education further at the point of an interview at the end of Year 11. This experience is unusual within this group of students and is not recounted in any of the other students' accounts.

As an intervention, the post-16 institutions that the students attended did their respective jobs well. All the students in this study, with the exceptions of Erin, Oscar and Tim, were first generation students. Their choices of school or college reflected their desires to achieve well and with good examination results the students knew that they could go to any university they wanted to. When comparing the home location with that of the school, an interesting pattern emerges as I illustrate in Figure 14 below. This visually represents the differing locations, as identified by the rank score of Multiple Deprivation for each post code (home and school) between the home location and that of the students' post-16 institutions. It shows the relative distance that each student travelled in terms of a number of factors, e.g. levels of unemployment, crime, health, education – the categories used to calculate the IMD rank score.



**Figure 14:** Home and School Contexts of the Students

The figure usefully illustrates that many of the students attended institutions that were similarly ranked in IMD measures to their home locations, such as Toby, Sally, Zara, Keira, Erin, Anna Grace and Lucy. It also demonstrates where there is significant theoretical distance such as in the cases of Oscar, Tim, Eve, James, Sophie, Sayda and Matt. The apparent backwards move for Oscar, Tim, Sophie and Eve is easily explained – the post-16 institutions that they went to are highly performing institutions positioned in socially deprived communities. Oscar and Tim attended a sixth form college which sends a high percentage of its students to Oxbridge which appealed to both students. Sophie and Eve decided to stay in their school sixth forms – both single sex institutions which achieve high academic results.

The students who had opted to stay in their school 6<sup>th</sup> form for their A Level studies became at home within the system – their attitudes and behaviours reflecting the particular logic of the respective institutions (Bourdieu and Passeron 1994). That is, they had become embedded within their own institutional ethos which was supporting them in their desire to progress onto HE.

## Sayda

Sayda's choice of school is particularly worthy of note. If on this simplistic diagram, 'spatial distances on paper are equivalent to social distances' (Bourdieu 1998: 6), then Sayda is travelling a large distance 'away' from her home location and possibly her family habitus. Closer inspection of her school context indicates that not only is it in an area with low levels of multiple deprivation, but the internal monitoring systems of pupil progress are extensive (as identified in its 2001 OfSTED report). Sayda secured a place in the school by parental appeal in Year 7. She stayed in the school 6<sup>th</sup> form as it was the best school in the area and she felt that she would benefit from an education there – that the focus on monitoring pupil progress would facilitate her examination success. Of the students in this study, Sayda is the only one to have experienced problems with her parents – her mother did not want her to go to university and her father believed her choice of course (nursing) was beneath her. The extent to which these mixed messages mirrored differences between her home location and school context is worthy of exploration. Sayda 'travelled' the furthest as identified on the graph in Figure 14. There are distinct differences between the 'norm' for young people in her home location to that of the students she mixes with at school. At school, all the systems and practices prepare students for elite forms of HE and Sayda acknowledges this.

*I know I should apply for a good university – everyone says that I should. I really really want to do nursing but my dad and my friends tell me I'm better than that. But universities like Manchester and Nottingham offer nursing and they're good universities aren't they? (Sayda: Interview)*

Sayda was expressing doubt about her knowledge of the university hierarchy – not knowing whether Manchester and Nottingham were good universities. It appeared that Sayda was attempting to reconcile her father's disappointment at her subject choice with the fact that she would be attending a reputable university. She felt under pressure to apply to reputable universities and her choice of course, although frowned upon particularly by her friends and her dad, was what she really wanted to do. There is a sense in which Sayda is

being pushed into particular institutions and she goes along with that, but she is not prepared to compromise her choice of course.

For many students choosing their school 6<sup>th</sup> form was perceived as part of a natural journey through education. However,, for Tim, Oscar, Joanne, and Lucy, a move into a different institution for their 6<sup>th</sup> form studies was necessary.

### **Moving On but Not Away**

James and Joanne were forced to consider a change of institution as their secondary schools only comprised Years 7 – 11. Both decided that they would enter FE colleges they identified as having good reputations. For James, this involved a one hour bus journey each way and although he did find this a little frustrating at times, he enjoyed socializing with his friends during the journey time. Joanne chose an FE college that was fairly close to her home but had the added incentive that the route was part of her mother's journey to work. Joanne was able to travel with her mother both to and from college. Although both James and Joanne chose their FE institutions based on OfSTED reports and were encouraged by the positive portrayal of their institutions, they both talked about groups of students who did not share their attitudes to work. They did not identify with such students and in fact their choice of course ensured that they did not come into close social contact with them either. Both James and Joanne acknowledged differences between themselves and such students who they believed to be on more vocational based courses. There was a seriousness about their approach to post-16 studies; they both knew that they needed good A Level results in order to get to good universities. They did not allow themselves to be distracted from this.

Oscar, Tim and Lucy chose to go to different institutions for different reasons. For Tim, he had been through a private secondary school and had become increasingly frustrated with the limited opportunities to develop social networks with other pupils. He reported feeling out of place at such an institution and did not and indeed financially, could not share in their hobbies. He described feeling isolated from his peer group socially. As a result of his increased social isolation, during Year 11 he decided to apply for a high

achieving 6<sup>th</sup> form college close to home. He reflected on this change of institution, and although recognising the influence his old school had had in developing his confidence, he felt more at home in his new institution. He had developed a good group of friends and was much more socially comfortable than he had been.

Tim and Lucy had moved institutions as they had been frustrated with the teaching in their previous institutions. They identified serious weaknesses and felt that had they stayed, their thoughts about going to university would have been affected. They both chose high achieving 6<sup>th</sup> forms, with Tim attending the same institution as Oscar.

Throughout their educational experiences, all of the students in this study described other students who did not share the same ideas about education as they did. For Sophie, it came as a relief when she found herself in the 6<sup>th</sup> form where she was surrounded by people who worked hard and encouraged her to work hard. This is particularly pertinent for Sophie as she had not forgotten being placed in the bottom set in maths and the types of attitudes towards education she experienced from other young people in that set. Sophie talks negatively about such students and this is repeated within the stories of all 16 students. They identified other young people who did not share the same values and dispositions as they have. For them, going to institutions where such young people also went was a slight irritation, but something that was endured until they entered post-16 education.

Many of the institutions above recorded good examination results at A2 level during the time of this study. It was clear to the students in this study that their next step was higher education and they received much guidance in the process of applying to university. In some institutions, such as those attended by Erin, Matt and Lucy, the high level of guidance was not mirrored for students taking more vocational pathways. During interview, they commented on the lack of advice that was available for students who wished to pursue vocational routes into HE. Joanne also reported this, despite the fact that her institution offered both academic and vocational subjects as part of its curriculum. In institutions that had built their tradition on experiences of high

applications to university and which had a stronger academic tradition, such as those attended by Sophie, Eve, Toby and Sayda, students reported that there was no advice for vocational routes into HE. It could be that they did not notice such advice being available as it did not apply to them, or it could be indicative of problems with the type of advice that students receive when considering alternative routes to HE.

All 16 students talked about their choice of post-16 institutions in positive ways; they had deliberately applied to these school sixth forms and colleges knowing that they would benefit in some way. Although this was predominantly expressed as familiarity with the systems and teachers, there were also other forms of intervention which the students acknowledged had played a part in their journeys. Overt forms of intervention included being a part of a Gifted and Talented cohort and thus benefiting from for example, access to university open days and visiting speakers and also the invitation to apply for the Sutton Trust Summer School. I now focus on the Sutton Trust as a form of intervention and outline the ways in which the students' experiences of the week informed their ideas about university.

## **Institutional Habitus Part II: The Sutton Trust**

The primary aim of the Sutton Trust as outlined in Chapter 3, is to '...encourage able pupils from non-privileged backgrounds to take the first step in gaining access to top class universities, which is to make an application' (Lampl 2005). In setting its objective to focus on helping students from non-privileged backgrounds to make an application to university, there is a sense in which the Sutton Trust must believe that the students who participate in the summer schools need increased levels of guidance and intervention to make this step possible. For the students in this study however, the Sutton Trust was 'preaching to the converted' (Jenkins 2002: 108) in the sense that, although their family backgrounds were non-traditional in university terms, they already had university high on their personal agendas prior to their Sutton Trust experience. The main issues for the students which they hoped to resolve during the week centred on:

- which university to apply to
- which course to study
- the ability to make friends
- the ability to cope academically.

I now turn to the way in which the Sutton Trust contributed to the students' decision-making about their university choices.

## **The Construction of University Choice**

A clear theme that emerged from the students' narratives about their Sutton Trust week was the way in which their university choices were re-enforced. All were considering elite institutions and they felt this was focused on during sessions where university applications were discussed. Sally for example, remembers a discussion with other summer school participants who were talking about their choices and the reaction of others around her.

*One girl said that she was applying to Durham and I looked around and saw that everyone was nodding...I think someone said something like 'that's good, isn't that a really good university?' and everyone agreeing that it was. It made me remember what my teacher had said about the 'university of..' stuff and it was then that I knew, I just knew that I should apply to universities with good reputations...I would have felt stupid applying to newer universities. (Sally: Interview)*

Sally's ideas about what constitutes a good university are revealing. For her, it matters which university she goes to as it has implications to what she believes about herself – if she went to a post-1992 institution, she would have felt stupid. The perceived HE hierarchy did play an important role in Sally's construction of university choice.

Sally was not the only student who experienced this. Oscar described post-1992 institutions as 'little crummy universities' (*Oscar: Focus Group*) and although all the other students in the focus group had laughed at this, they all agreed that the Sutton Trust had emphasised traditional universities during

sessions on application processes. It seemed that messages the students received in their school or college contexts were the same as messages from the Sutton Trust. Tim admitted that he had not really paid that much attention to which universities he would be applying to because he 'knew' that they would be good ones. Tim's mother had been to university and was doing an MA degree at the time of this study and Tim had had many discussions with his mother about university and which ones he should be considering.

It was evident from what the students said about the Sutton Trust Summer School that they were using the week to confirm their university choices. In addition, they focused on gaining experiences that would help them understand what university would be like: how they would cope or how they would make friends or establishing an academic and social fit.

## **Sophie**

For many of the students, their week at the University of Nottingham had provided useful information and experiences which could be used as they made their minds up. For many, the week had served to demystify university not only in academic terms but also in social terms,

*I imagined university, before I went on these Summer Schools and open days and things, I imagined kind of university was kind of the really clever clogs and I would kind of, coming from my background I'd kind of, feel a bit kind of, I wouldn't fit in, I wouldn't get things as quickly as everyone else, but then going and having spoken to those students at open days and having gone to the Summer School I think that everyone is just the same, you know where ever you've come from, and I realised as well that although some people have come from you know, private schools, I had actually achieved better grades than them at GCSE and I was kind of like 'oh that's quite encouraging actually' so, I could achieve the same as they could. (Sophie: interview)*

In this interview excerpt we gain knowledge of how Sophie has constructed her identity in relation to other students. It could be that her experience of



having been placed in the bottom maths set had been internalised and that she felt that her position in that set was actually a true reflection of her abilities. She identified two issues that would stop her fitting in at university: her academic ability and her background. Sophie developed an understanding of university students who are clever and come from more privileged backgrounds than her own, and prior to the Sutton Trust, this had been bothering her. She comes to the realization that even though some were more privileged and had attended private schools, her GCSE grades were at least comparable or better than those of others. This relational aspect of finding the perfect 'fit' was also considered during the Sutton Trust week,

*...when I went to Nottingham Summer School, I met kind of people who were just like me so I thought it's not just for the clever clogs, I can get there too. (Sophie: interview)*

The interesting point here is that Sophie is one of the 'clever clogs' having achieved 9 A\*s and 5 As at GCSE and yet, she positions herself as less able than those who are capable of going to university. For Sophie, the Sutton Trust experience had given her increased levels of confidence and she realised that she could apply to any institution including Oxbridge. Although many of the students talked about university choice and had identified what they perceived as good ones, the university that caused the most tension and contentious issues for the sample was Oxbridge.

## **Feeling Uneasy about Oxbridge**

Students had mixed feelings concerning Oxbridge. They would have liked to go because to them, it offered the 'ultimate top' (Sophie: interview) in terms of university. Yet, whilst the students were searching for reputable universities, Oxbridge was a social 'step too far'. Some considered Oxbridge because they were encouraged to do so by their teachers, although this was not always experienced positively,

*My school has been quite pushy about the Oxbridge thing. They want you to apply to make you look good and to make them look*

*good. It annoys me how they only care about themselves. (Erin: video)*

## **Erin**

Erin recounts a particularly problematic experience in which school expectations placed upon her were 'too much'. She felt uncomfortable applying to Oxbridge, but did so to make her teachers happy. She felt obliged to 'give something back' because of the help she had received in achieving academically. The pressure placed on Erin can be understood within a market based education system. The school would look good to prospective parents in school marketing information if they were seen to be sending students onto reputable universities such as Oxbridge. Erin was one of a small number of students within her school who were eligible to go to Oxbridge even though she had significant reservations about it.

Of the three students who applied for places at Oxbridge, Erin was the only one to be offered a place. Her response to this directly contrasted with her responses to other acceptance letters she received and her interview experiences at universities that she felt more at home in. She had always expressed a particular interest in The University of Manchester. She experienced months of anxiety as she struggled to make her final decision about which university to go to. She knew that Cambridge offered a unique university experience as all the information she had read about it suggested that this was the case. However, after attending open days and interviews at both institutions, she felt that she was better suited for The University of Manchester. Her anxiety was raised even further when she received acceptance letters from both places. Her response to the Manchester letter directly contrasted with that of Cambridge which appeared much more sobering; knowing that the decision she would make would not be easy as illustrated in Figure 15.

<p>Manchester acceptance letter. This was along with Cambridge the university I wanted an offer from the most and was happy when I received one even though I had to wait a while.</p>	<p>Cambridge acceptance letter. I cannot deny I was very shocked and excited when I received this. I felt very proud but in a way it made the decision making process much harder as I never expected to receive an offer from Cambridge and I realised I would have to think long and hard about whether I really want to go to this place.</p>
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**Figure 15:** Comparison of Responses to Acceptance Letters (Erin: Journal August 10<sup>th</sup> 2005)

Erin had always been excited about Manchester University. She talked enthusiastically about it during focus group discussions. Erin's thoughts centred on Cambridge University being beyond her – she had not been expecting an offer of a place. Having been offered a place disproved what she thought about her ability to get in and also raised questions about the type of student experience she would have there. During the focus group discussion, Erin had commented upon what she perceived to be the tense nature of academic life at Oxbridge where there are 'fewer weeks to get all the work done' (Erin: Focus Group). In addition, she was attracted to the social mix of students at Manchester which she believed would be more balanced than at Cambridge. This is reflective of the same reasons she gave for her choice of school at the age of 11 – she had wanted to be in a school with a wider mix of young people from a variety of backgrounds. This ideology seemed to be playing out again during the process of university choice.

In her journal, Erin reveals her inner tension when confirming her university choices. There are a number of factors that lead her to place Cambridge as her first choice, yet she feels that Manchester University would be the best place for her,

*Final uni choice – firm acceptance – Cambridge. Insurance – Manchester. This was in fact the easy way, in effect I did not decide – I decided to let my results decide. I felt I was under pressure from my school to go to Cambridge but I came to the conclusion that I should just do my best and what will be will be. Now the more I think about [it], I actually really want to go to Manchester so I think that subconsciously I perhaps am not working my hardest or am willing to let myself get an A and two Bs so I can go to Manchester. Who knows! I think the probability is that I will end up at Manchester – I think it will be best for me – but if it ends up that my grades signify I am good enough to go to Cambridge and it will be the best place for me then so be it. (But I think I do really want to go to Manchester). (Erin: Journal)*

Erin did do some work towards her A2 exams, and achieved 3 A grades and a B. One of the A grades was in General Studies which did not count towards the required grades for Cambridge. Although in effect Erin achieved 2 As and a B, which are good grades, she could have achieved 3 As. Erin was pleased with her results and was delighted that they secured her a place at Manchester University. Although Erin had known throughout the application process that her preferred choice of university was Manchester, she had felt disempowered within her sixth form context to express this to her teachers. As a student with the potential to secure a place at Oxbridge, Erin had felt under immense pressure from her teachers to go there. In her own way she had manipulated the system to ensure she got her own choice of institution.

The tension expressed in Erin's journal was also found in the focus group discussion concerning Oxbridge with Tim, Oscar, Toby and Erin. They had firm ideas of what would constitute a typical Oxbridge student: 'high success at A2 level (at least three As), intelligent, motivated, dedicated, conscientious, mainly from a private school background, rich, people who get on with teachers (talk at the end of lessons), passionate about subject, not that good socially' (Tim, Oscar, Toby and Erin: Focus Group). The students believed such factors created a distance between themselves and Oxbridge to the extent

that despite the perceived privileges attached to studying there, all four were reluctant to seriously consider attending.

## **Keira**

Pressure from teachers and schools placed on students to apply to Oxbridge were not the only frustrations experienced. Keira explained how she had attended a similar week to the Sutton Trust at Oxford University and explained how she had felt during that time. She clearly expresses a feeling of difference between her own position and that of the Oxbridge students,

*I spent a week there, because they sent us from here. The Oxford University sort of invited a group from each school in the area and I made some really good friends and it was nice but I just sat there and thought you cocky little git and that all the time. The lecturers and the students were walking around, they would say 'oh what school are you from?' and I was like 'I go to Wellington' and they're like 'Wellington?' and I'm like 'yeah'. It's just the attitude of the people there was very stereotypical of Oxbridge really. (Keira: interview)*

When asked what she thought a 'stereotypical' Oxbridge student would be like, she further highlighted her perceptions of difference between Oxbridge students and her own social positioning, stressing her idea that Oxbridge students somehow exist in an insular and privileged world, far removed from her own experiences,

*Up their own arse really to put it so bluntly. They are, I believe them to be, the ones I've seen and the ones I've met, so wrapped up in their own importance almost, 'that I'm at Oxbridge, therefore I'm amazing' that they ought to realise that there's other things going on outside of them. (Keira: interview)*

This negative view of Oxbridge was expressed as vehemently by other students, although some did experience open days positively.

## **Sophie**

Sophie 'wasn't sold' on Oxford but had applied to Cambridge. She was interested in matching her grades with the university with the best reputation for her subject.

*... I like Cambridge, I applied for Cambridge. I went there for an open day and I spoke to a few of the lecturers and they were a bit barmy like me, so I thought why not? And also the English, you know, they're top in English so I thought why not? (Sophie: interview)*

She also expressed similar perceived differences of Oxbridge students to those of Keira, but did not find this problematic.

*... you know, what do you need to get into Cambridge, what they want and what they like. When I went there I did speak to a few of the applicants and they did seem like really well spoken, but they weren't at all, you know, kind of stuck up or anything. They were very well spoken and very outgoing. (Sophie: interview)*

In reflecting upon her experiences at Cambridge, Sophie focused more on aspects of the institution that could potentially have affected her 'fit' within the institution – the lecturers were 'barmy' and other applicants were not 'stuck up'. During her visit, Sophie had worked out that she could fit into the institution – it had not been as alienating as she had previously thought.

The pain of rejection from Oxbridge was experienced acutely by Anna and Sophie. The experience had been made more difficult for Sophie to bear because she had not identified significant discrepancies between their own social positioning and that of 'typical' Oxbridge students. She could not understand why she had not been offered a place.

*I got feedback from Cambridge as to why they didn't accept me and they said I basically flopped the interview.....Tina that was so unfair. I didn't have sufficient interview practice because the Oxbridge mentor was ill since September and so my English teachers tried but nothing they said to me came up in the interview! I felt a bit let down but oh well at least I've got Nottingham which is great. (Sophie: e-mail)*

The angst that came about concerning applications to Oxbridge reflected the students' understandings of the institution as the 'best'. Although they tussled with the problems they associated with Oxbridge (e.g. the lack of social and academic fit), there was a sense that just being at Oxbridge would compensate for such difficulties. Sally for example would have compromised her course for a place at Oxbridge had she thought that she would have fitted in. There were other instances where students had toyed with the idea of applying to Oxbridge but were deterred from doing so due to their school.

## **Toby**

Toby for example, had wanted to go to Oxbridge but the specific practices within his school context were such that students had to be 'invited' to apply. He detailed how students were *invited* to apply to Oxbridge and he had not been selected as one of the few. Indeed, he felt there was a cloud of mystery hanging over the Oxbridge issue; he couldn't understand how it was that some students got to be invited to apply, while others didn't.

*I don't know why to be quite honest with you. I'm quite upset about that. Certainly I know some were expected to apply to Oxbridge, so one of my friends who's actually here now, he was apparently, he didn't actually tell me, but my mum's his mum's friend, he was expected to apply. (Toby: Interview 2)*

Toby did not understand his friend's silence, or his teacher's reluctance to 'invite' him to apply. Although he admits he 'could have done it anyway' (Toby: Interview 2) he implies that his choice of university was somewhat out of his control.

Toby lacked the confidence to question his teachers as to why he wasn't invited to apply, but his experience shows some insights in to the way schools and teachers act as gatekeepers to the HE system (Byrom, Thomson and Gates, 2007). For these students, the messages that were provided through school were reiterated during the Sutton Trust week. The students found themselves in the game where *which* university mattered. Although they were attempting to find the best academic and social fit they had narrowed their choices down to consider only elite institutions.

## **Mathew**

There is one exception to this; Mathew. Mathew acknowledged the benefits of going to a top university.

*To me, going to a top university would make me realise that admissions officers believe that I have an overwhelming amount of potential that their university wants and requires...a top university to me, is a university that has high expectations and a very good reputation that is well known throughout the country. (Mathew: E-mail)*

However, Mathew mainly applied to institutions that featured relatively low in league tables with one exception; Leicester (positioned 19 in the Times league tables at the time of this study). Mathew did not want to go to Oxbridge – he did not think that he would fit in and they did not offer the course that he was interested in. When asked whether he would opt for an alternative course, Mathew said that he would not; he was keen on his subject and he 'knew' that Oxbridge was not for him. The 'logic' of Mathew's choice of institution is embedded within his home context and the social distance he has travelled in order to get to HE. His aspirations are bounded by his mother's dependency. Mathew takes his caring role seriously and demonstrates huge attachment to his family – he reports wanting to sort out a family rift that has been on-going for many years. In attending the local FE college, Mathew is protecting his habitus from possible 'crises and critical challenges' (Bourdieu 1990a: 61). He understands the local area and knows



that he will fit into this institution well. It could also be that he recognises his ability to shine or to appear different within this HE context – just as he had done whilst at school.

In trying to find the best 'fit' students reflected on social and academic concerns. Their Sutton Trust experience helped them to develop understanding of how they might be positioned in terms of both. Although theoretically capable of attending an elite university, prior to the Sutton Trust week, many still had reservations concerning their ability to cope with the demands of academic work once at university. Their perceptions had been informed by many factors including the position of the university in league tables and their awareness of how the university was viewed in the wider community. There was a sense that they might not be 'up to it'; that they would not fit with the reputation/traditions of the university. This view was altered by their summer school week in many cases. Although the students considered Oxbridge a step too far, they did reveal a desire to attend a top university; they had in-depth knowledge of the hierarchy of higher education and the implications of their place of study to their future employment prospects.

## **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I have focused on the educational experiences of the students and outlined the ways in which their schools, post-16 institutions and Sutton Trust experiences worked to inform their choices of university. I have also highlighted that Oxbridge stands out as a particular issue given the reputation and traditions associated with that institution and the way in which students discounted Oxbridge as an option. In highlighting these experiences, I have demonstrated how the students in this study had 'moved' in social terms from the positions of their families, reflecting a shift in class based habitus. Although the shift for some of the students is less remarkable than for others, there is evidence to suggest that for the majority of these students, there were moments which contributed to their educational journeys; either a chance comment made by a teacher or their disassociation with other young people who they perceived to behave in ways that they did not like. In the next chapter, I focus on the resultant change in habitus by looking at the key

moments or incidents which led to the students making the decisions they did. I also refer to the idea of an intermediate class to offer an explanation as to why these students overcame the barriers to HE that their parents had faced. In tracking the students through their first term at university I detail how they settled into their university environments.

This chapter explores the idea of habitus adaptation and outlines the pull which can occur at various stages in an individual's educational journey. I reflect upon my own educational journey and highlight the critical moments which could have resulted in a pull in either direction: either towards a working class trajectory or a middle class trajectory. Although the students in this study experienced similar moments, I illustrate how they occurred at differing stages. I also track the students through their first term at university and outline the ways in which they began to identify with their new environment. I explore what they had to say about other students and how they identified with some and not with others. I also examine what the students mean when they claim their new environment 'feels like home'.

## **Introduction**

This findings chapter builds from the previous two chapters which identified the ways in which a habitus is formed and developed through an individual's home location and the people who live there and the institutions in which they are a part (e.g. school). This chapter focuses particularly on the idea of a habitus 'in crisis' and looks at critical moments in the students' stories where there was potential for conflict between what would normally be expected from a young person from a working class background to achieve and a change in their educational directions through academic success. Whilst the students in this study present 16 'cases' there are many similarities in their journeys which I will draw out to support the argument that their involvement in the Sutton Trust Summer School was at best, part of a strategic plan to enable them to progress to elite UK higher education institutions. I refer specifically to the stories of Grace and Eve who illustrate the ways in which inculcation into the values within the field of education can occur at differing moments during an educational journey. In addition, I refer to Sophie and Oscar's stories as examples where progressing in education was a family expectation. In the case of Sophie I demonstrate how her experiences of schooling processes contributed to her perceptions of others and as a result defined her own social positioning.

## **Adaptation of the Habitus**

Habitus as indicative of class based practices is usually used to understand the attitudes and dispositions of groups of people. Traditional social classifications used by government agencies that theoretically group people assume that those living in close proximity to each other will share common characteristics. Whilst this could be true in relation to levels of economic capital, this theoretical approach does not account for the idea that individuals have distinct family histories that may not mirror those of the people around them. In addition, much of the sociological literature that focuses on homogenized working class attitudes to education compare such attitudes to those of the middle class (Plummer 2000; Reay and Lucey 2000; Archer 2003; Ball 2003; Power, Edwards et al. 2003: 60; Reay, David et al. 2005). Bourdieu argues that an individual's habitus is 'embodied history' (Bourdieu 1990a: 56), it

therefore makes sense to me to explore habitus as a malleable, adaptable and regulating internal force; it can adapt both to context and subsequently change with the caveat that it does not stray too far from its class roots. Bourdieu emphasises this aspect of the habitus

Early experiences have particular weight because the *habitus* tends to secure its own consistency and its defence against change through the selection it makes within new information by rejecting information capable of calling into question its accumulated information, if exposed to it accidentally or by force, and especially by avoiding exposure to such information. (Bourdieu 1990a: 60 - 61)

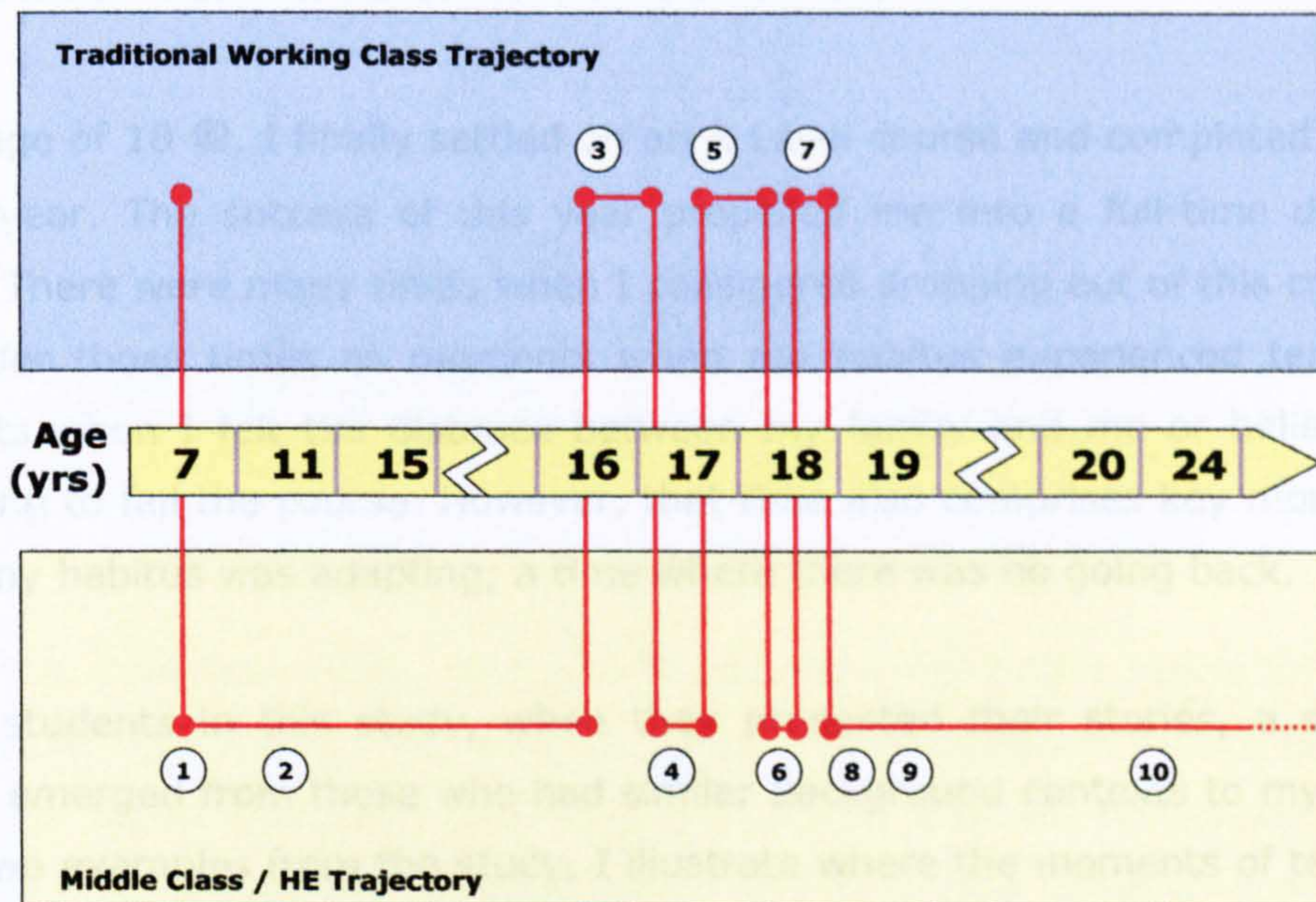
Whilst this approach to understanding human action is criticised as being overly deterministic (Giroux 1983), I argue that the students in this study did not call into question their habitus, but drifted into differing social spaces than those experienced by their parents and thus experienced some transformation (Bourdieu 1977) of their primary habitus (Reed-Danahay 2005). This was achieved as a result of academic success and their participation in a variety of culturally rich activities.

In this section, I present 'moments' in my own story and those of the students to argue that when the habitus is presented with events or situations which could challenge its stability, it responds by either protecting itself as Bourdieu would suggest (Bourdieu 1990a), or adapts and realigns in order to 'fit' into a new context through a gradual process of alignment or adaptation (Bland 2004); it is not instantaneous and in fact occurs over a period of time.

## **Adaptation of the Habitus as a Gradual Process**

My own journey to higher education, as I outlined in the Prologue, was not straightforward. I return to the figure I presented in that chapter to focus on the strategies I used to protect my habitus from 'crisis' (Bourdieu 1990a: 61). The figure is based on the assumption that 'typical' class based educational trajectories exist and this appears to be supported in literature (HEFCE 2005). The comparison I make between middle class and working class educational

trajectories concerns the ease with which the majority of middle class young people progress through each stage of education. They benefit from access to good schools (Reay and Lucey 2000; Ball 2003), educational success (Gillborn and Youdell 2000; Plummer 2000) and high levels of parental support and interest in education (Crozier 2000). The critical moments in my journey to HE occurred between the ages of 16 and 18 as illustrated in Figure 16.



**Figure 16:** Tension in Habitus Adaptation: My Story

For example, ③ represents academic 'failure' at O Level. The number of O Levels I achieved fell far below any predictions the teachers made and also were not indicative of the high performing pupil I had been up until that point. I consider this failure, not as a deliberate or conscious attempt to protect my habitus from crisis, but as an inevitable outcome of other complex family issues that were occurring at the time. Although O-level failure would have sent me on to a different pathway, I commenced a course of two A-levels and two O-levels at my school's sixth form. The next three years, ④, ⑤ and ⑥ represent moments of 'crisis' where I commenced a number of A-level courses but dropped out and returned to full-time employment in a newsagent's shop. It is during those years that there was much internal deliberation. I was never fully satisfied working in a shop and felt 'pulled' back in to education. This 'pull' could be explained by my early introduction to music tuition and the resultant access to culturally rich activities this had provided.

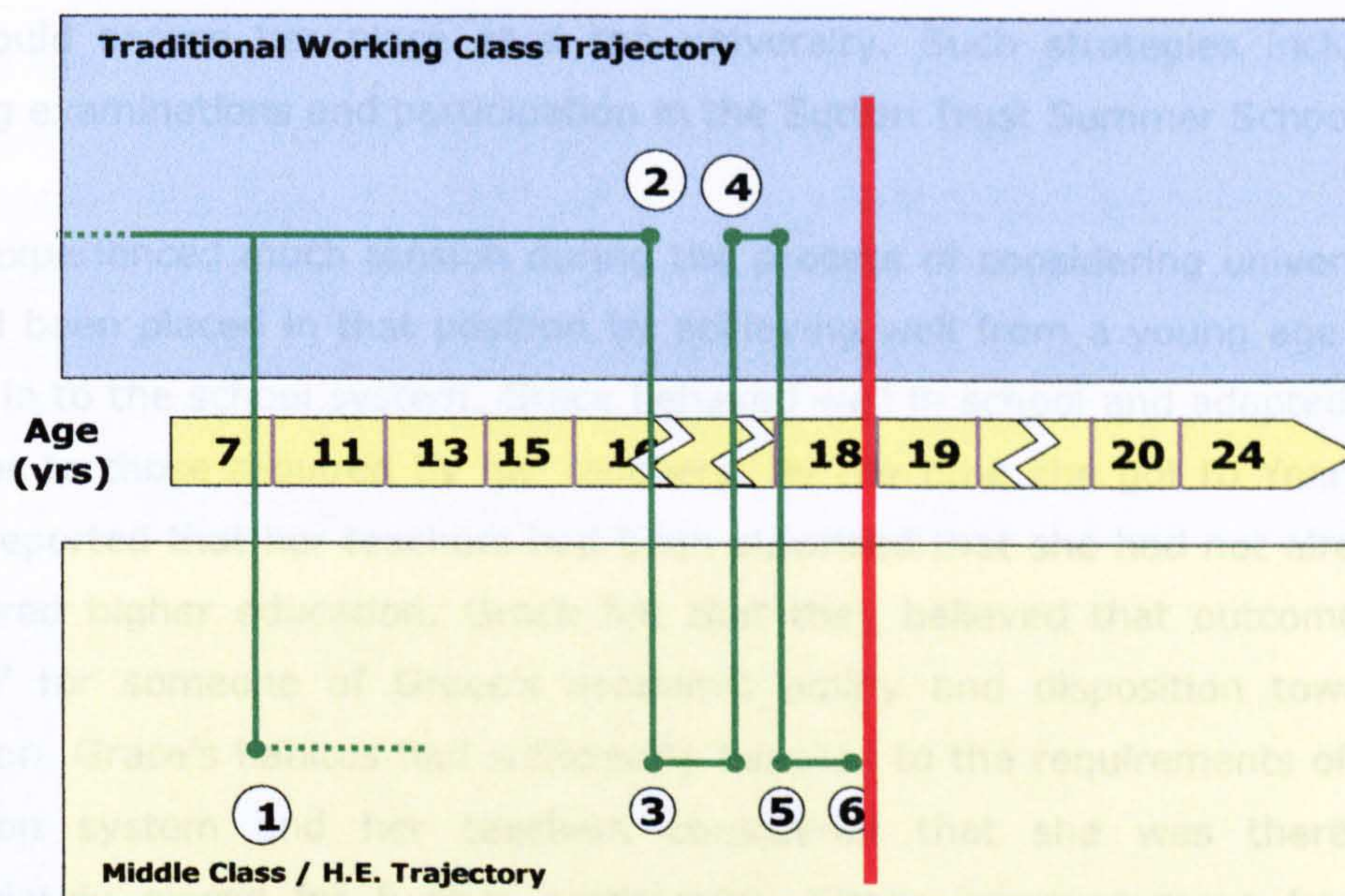
Each number on the diagrams represents a 'pull' towards the direction of a particular trajectory, either middle or working class. This provides a visual representation of moments in my journey where tension between my original, or primary (Reed-Danahay 2005) habitus, and my emerging secondary habitus existed. It demonstrates a period of particular tension between 16 and 18, when the direction of my future was unclear. Also, it also illustrates the stage at which those tensions were resolved: ⑧ and ⑨.

At the age of 18 ⑥, I finally settled on an A Level course and completed them in one year. The success of this year propelled me into a full-time degree course. There were many times when I considered dropping out of this course. I consider those times as moments when my habitus experienced tension; moments when I felt the distance between my family and me or believed I was going to fail the course. However, that time also comprises key moments where my habitus was adapting; a time where there was no going back.

Of the students in this study, when they presented their stories, a similar pattern emerged from those who had similar background contexts to my own. Using two examples from the study, I illustrate where the moments of tension occurred. I use the stories of Grace and Eve as illustrations of how inculcation into the field of education altered their trajectories.

## **Grace**

Grace experienced moments of tension at a similar time as I did (Figure 17). In her story, there are no shifts until the age of 16 ② at which point she was forced by her teachers to consider her future options. Despite achieving well at SATs ① Grace had no desire to go to higher education, although she also did not know what possible alternatives there would be. She had considered working full-time in a shop where she had worked part time for a number of years. There was no potential crisis for Grace's habitus, as she had not considered any pathway that would contradict its stability. Although Grace had achieved well at primary school the implications of this to her future was not fully appreciated by Grace until she went to her interview for entry to the sixth form ③.



**Figure 17:** Tension in Habitus Adaptation: Grace's Story

During this interview, Grace was questioned about her future aspirations and in particular why she did not want to go to higher education. Grace had not considered higher education prior to this interview and was concerned about the issue of debt that she believed would be linked with going to university. The tension for Grace centred on weighing up the potential benefits of HE and the financial implications this would have on her parents. In addition, Grace had never considered HE and felt pressurised into making decisions about her future that she had given little serious thought to previously. To secure her place in the sixth form, which Grace described as 'having time to make my mind up', Grace told her teachers that she was thinking about university despite her own reservations at the time. Her primary habitus was acting with 'a spontaneity without consciousness or will...' (Bourdieu 1990a: 56) and was pulling Grace in one direction, but also acting as a conduit for change; pulling Grace closer towards a shift in habitus through closer alignment to the field of education.

As Grace was a high achieving pupil within her school, she was directed towards types of careers advice that put going to university as a natural progression after A Levels. Grace started to think more seriously about university as an option and during Year 12 began to consider the strategies



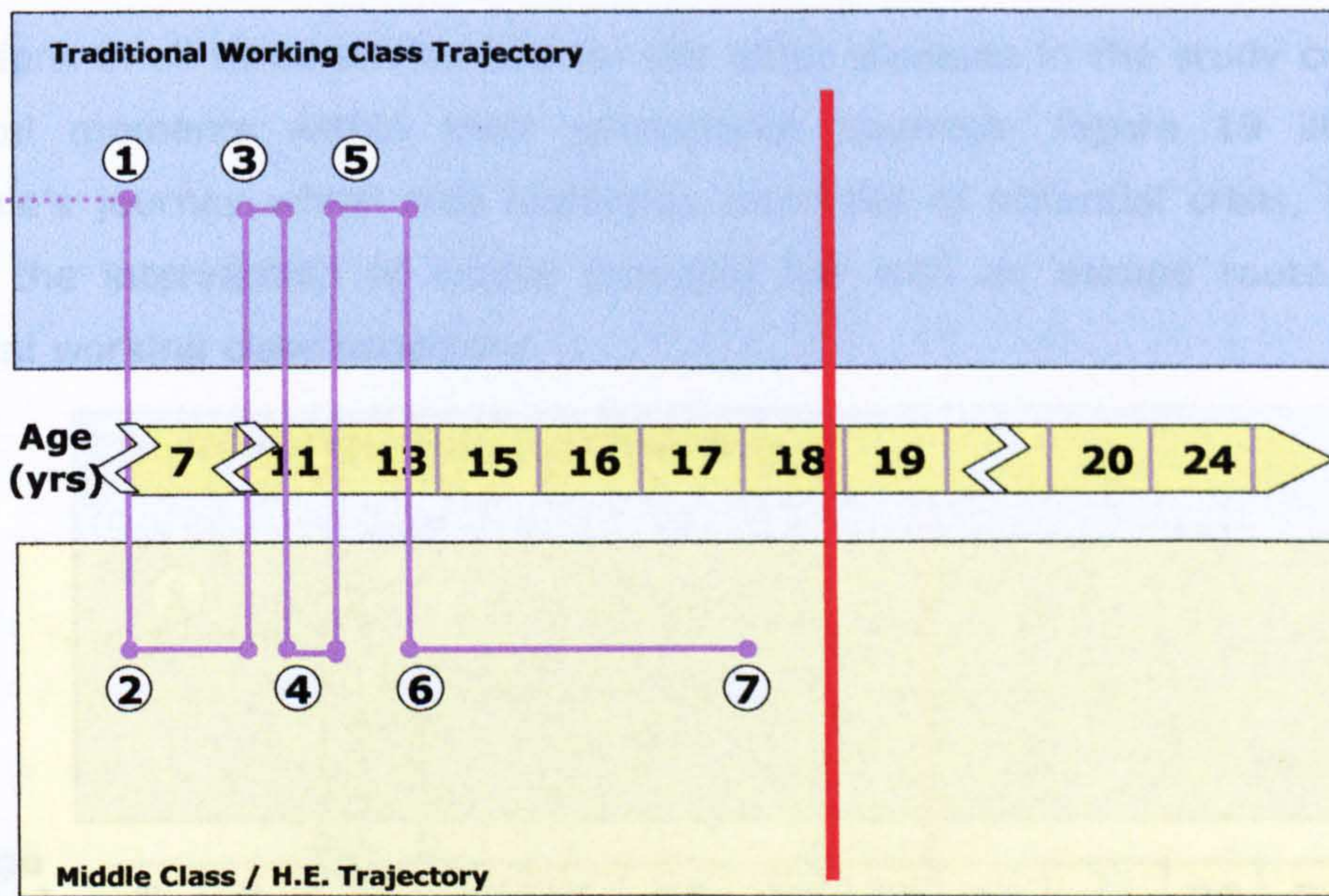
that would secure her place at a top university. Such strategies included retaking examinations and participation in the Sutton Trust Summer School.

Grace experienced much tension during the process of considering university, but had been placed in that position by achieving well from a young age and 'fitting' in to the school system. Grace behaved well in school and adapted her attitudes to those required by her teachers. By the time she got to Year 11, Grace reported that her teachers had been surprised that she had not already considered higher education. Grace felt that they believed that outcome as 'natural' for someone of Grace's academic ability and disposition towards education. Grace's habitus had sufficiently adapted to the requirements of the education system and her teachers considered that she was therefore appropriately placed for further progression. Grace however came from a family with no prior history of higher education participation and where financial constraints dominated family life. Although 'ready' for university on one level, Grace was not prepared for the tension she experienced as she negotiated with her parents about going to university. Despite being supportive of her decision, concerns were raised about finance and Grace knew that she would have to fund university herself by continuing with part time employment; something she felt resentful about.

## **Eve**

Eve presents a different journey into HE than that presented by my story and Grace's story (Figure 18). Although Eve's background is working class, the death of her mother at an early age ① resulted in closer connections with school ②; 'teachers were supportive and kind' (Eve: Interview). During this time Eve commenced instrumental lessons which gave her opportunities to mix with young people who came from what Eve perceived to be wealthier backgrounds. She stopped playing instruments at 11 when she commenced secondary school and also found that she had few friends at her new school ③. She secured a place at this high achieving single sex school after her father appealed against the LA's decision to offer a place at a local secondary school where 'the rough children go' (Eve: Interview). At the time I interviewed her, although Eve was pleased that she had gone to the school, she did hint at long periods of isolation where she could not seem to find a

group of friends with whom she had much in common. This situation changed during a field trip where Eve was placed into a group of four girls to work with for the week. This was a turning point for Eve as the friendships made during that week remained throughout her time at the school ⑥. Although Eve recognized that her new group of friends had different levels of economic capital at their disposal, they all shared the same aspirations for their future; to go to university and get a good job.



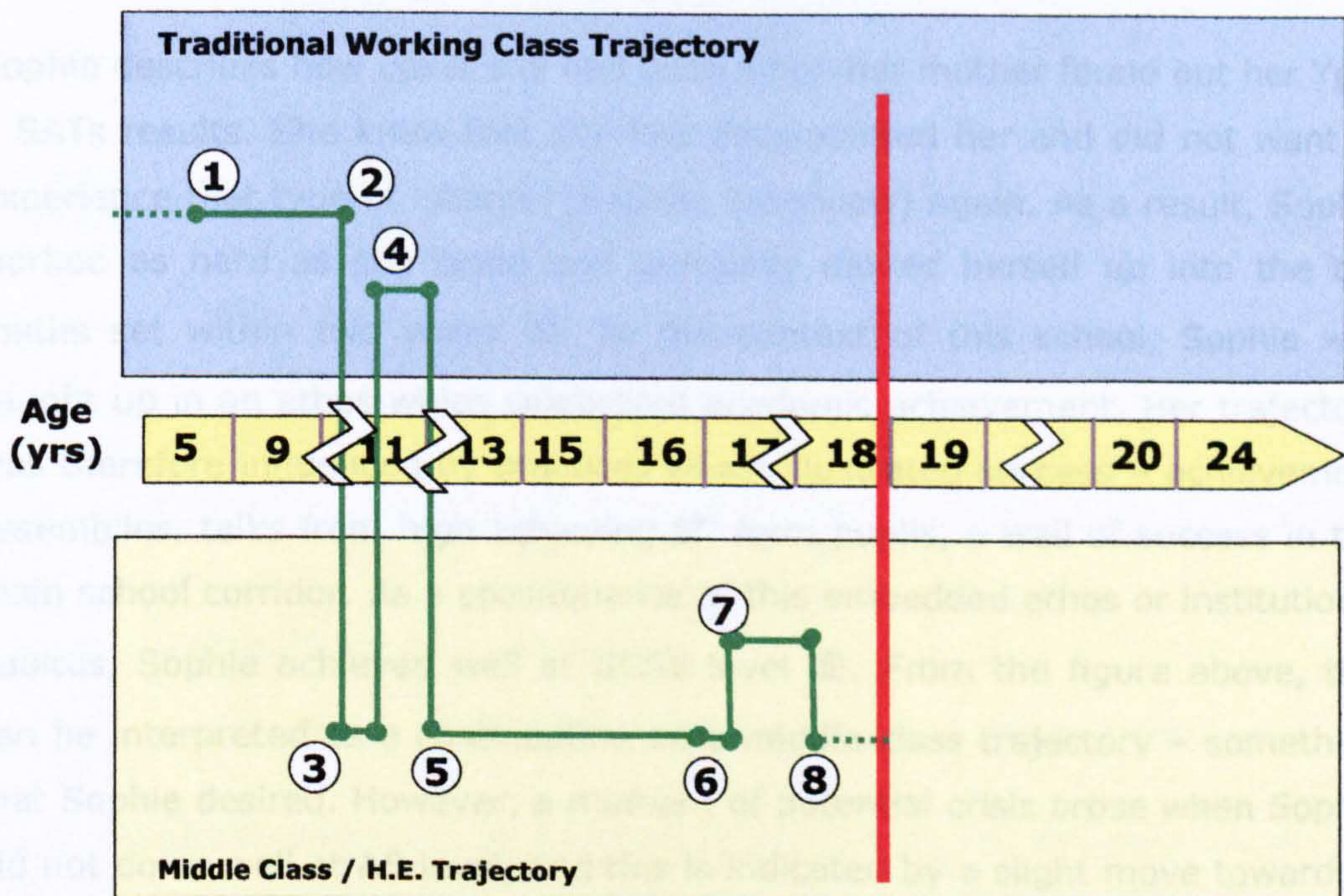
**Figure 18:** Tension in Habitus Adaptation: Eve's Story

In Eve's case, the tension in her habitus emerged more from life situations such as the death of her mother and the impact that this had on the family's finances. For myself and Grace, there seemed to be more internal connections with a working class habitus than in the case of Eve. It is perhaps through the significant event of her mother dying, that Eve is brought unwittingly into the middle class domain through education; she reflects on close relationships with teachers who acted like a mother to her. In acting like a mother, they guided her through education and pointed her towards university as a possible option from an early age. Eve struggled in her journey, not with the decision to go to university, but in finding a group of friends who also want to go. Eve presented a case of someone who did not appear to be struggling with an internal conflict or 'crisis', but more an external crisis of social alignment;

trying to fit with similar minded young people. For Eve, the adaptation of her habitus occurred earlier than for Grace and me. Eve knew that she wanted to go to university whereas Grace had not made that decision until the end of Year 12. I did not 'decide' to go on to a degree course as part of a strategic career plan; I stayed at the college where I had completed my A Levels because I had no idea of what I wanted to do.

## Sophie

Tensions in all three stories and for the other students in the study centre on critical moments within their educational journeys. Figure 19 illustrates Sophie's journey which also highlights moments of potential crisis, but also how the intervention of school provided her with an escape route from a typical working class trajectory.



**Figure 19:** Tension in Habitus Adaptation: Sophie's Story

Sophie comes from a working class background – her father works in a dry cleaning shop and her mother does not work. She attended a local primary school which was in a deprived area ①. In this school, Sophie was identified as one of the 'brighter' children, but performed badly at the end of Year 6 ②.

At this point, her mother intervened and was instrumental in securing her a place in a high achieving secondary school ③. Although Sophie claimed to feel privileged in attending this school, her achievements at Year 6 had placed her in the bottom set for maths in this new context ④. She felt surrounded by young people with whom she had nothing in common and was determined to move up and away from that particular set. She felt uncomfortable in that set and disassociated herself from the attitudes and aspirations of the other young people in it. As a form of 'distinction' (Bourdieu 1986) Sophie recognised that she wanted better for herself than what she predicted would happen to the other girls in the set. She described them as 'wasters' and as people who 'wouldn't amount to much'. Her disassociation with the young people in the bottom set is indicative of her own aspirations and those her mother had for her and also her emerging habitus which positioned her differently to them.

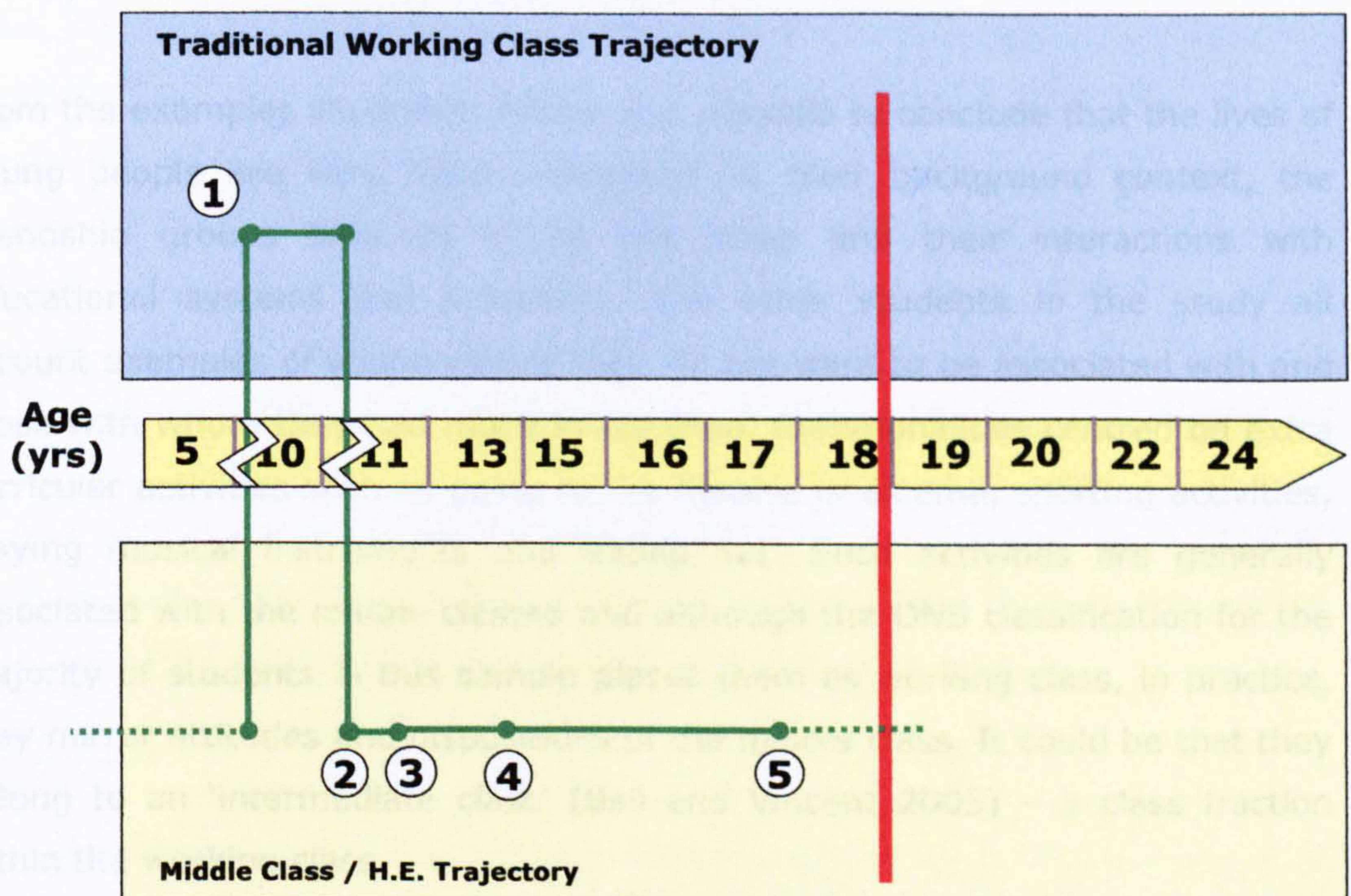
Sophie describes how upset she had been when her mother found out her Year 6 SATs results. She knew that she had disappointed her and did not want to experience that type of 'shame' (Sophie: Interview) again. As a result, Sophie worked as hard as she could and gradually moved herself up into the top maths set within two years ⑤. In the context of this school, Sophie was caught up in an ethos which celebrated academic achievement. Her trajectory was therefore influenced by practices which illustrated success – achievement assemblies, talks from high achieving 6<sup>th</sup> form pupils, a wall of success in the main school corridor. As a consequence of this embedded ethos or institutional habitus, Sophie achieved well at GCSE level ⑥. From the figure above, this can be interpreted as a continuation on a middle class trajectory – something that Sophie desired. However, a moment of potential crisis arose when Sophie did not do as well at AS level, and this is indicated by a slight move towards a working class trajectory ⑦. The current examination system that allows the re-taking of AS modules, acted as a form of intervention to correct this minor blip ⑧.

I describe Sophie's initial achievement at AS as a minor blip because the grades that she received would have been accepted at many universities. However, Sophie did not want to attend 'any university', she had set her mind

on a top ranking university. Sophie re-took the modules she had performed badly in and as a consequence achieved grades that secured her place at The University of Nottingham – her second choice university after Cambridge.

## Oscar

Oscar's trajectory pattern is the opposite to those of Eve, Grace and Sophie. Oscar has a background that is middle class and based on what the literature says about middle class children, his route through education should have been problem free. However, as Figure 20 illustrates, this was not the case.



**Figure 20:** Tension in Habitus Adaptation: Oscar's Story

Oscar describes undiagnosed dyslexia as prohibiting his progress within the state system ①. After being moved into private schooling ② and having dyslexia diagnosed ③, he developed in confidence and rather than being perceived by teachers as a 'naughty boy' he achieved well at both GCSE and at A2 level - ④ and ⑤ respectively. For Oscar however, the 'crisis' in the adaptation of his habitus centred on social positioning. He felt that he did not belong with the pupils at private school and when he considered post-16 education he moved to a high achieving sixth form college which attracted its students from a wide catchment area.

For Oscar, the tension arose when he was under performing. At the time I spoke with Oscar his mother was studying for an MA and it became clear that there was always a family expectation on him to go to university. Being predisposed to go to HE, tensions arose when Oscar was not only 'failing' at school, but also getting into trouble. His mother feared that her son would not achieve his potential and intervened in order to get him the education, results and future that she had planned for him. Oscar, like many of the students in this study had 'always known that [he] would go to university' (Oscar: Focus Group).

From the examples illustrated above, it is possible to conclude that the lives of young people are very much influenced by their background context, the friendship groups they do or do not make and their interactions with educational systems and processes. The other students in the study all recount examples of young people they did not want to be associated with and those with whom they had much in common. Commonalities centred on extra curricular activities such as going to the theatre or cinema, sporting activities, playing musical instruments and eating out. Such activities are generally associated with the middle classes and although the ONS classification for the majority of students in this sample places them as working class, in practice, they mirror attitudes and dispositions of the middle class. It could be that they belong to an 'intermediate class' (Ball and Vincent 2005) – a class fraction within the working class.

The trajectories of the other students in the study illustrate similar patterns to those presented above (Appendix 14) – where there are blips at particular points in their journeys. Such blips often occur after SATs or other examination results as these would be the factors that would prohibit future progression in education. The pull of a middle class lifestyle is the motivating factor which drives the students to succeed. With such a strong force in operation, the habituses of the students gradually shifted to facilitate re-positioning within the social field.

## **Living with a Secondary Habitus: Moments of Crisis**

The complexities of understanding how the students came to make the decisions they did about university, centre on the extent to which an individual's habitus can be identified as part of an homogenised class group. As I have demonstrated above the students in this study did not fit with traditional understandings of working class attitudes and dispositions towards education. Based on their parents' social class classification the majority of them are categorised as working class (see Chapter 4). However, through what I understand of the students' parents, their home locations and what the students have said about their decision making, I believe that they fall into three categories: middle class, intermediate class and working class. Through these categorisations, I am able to understand the extent to which their initial class based habitus was responding to their social and educational experiences and the ways in which it was relational in its construction. Understanding social class in relational terms results in accepting 'fuzzy boundaries' (Archer 2003:19) where movement between class positions is not clear and is also fraught with complexity. For the two students (Erin and Oscar) in the middle class category, their progression into HE is not surprising despite some of the difficulties they experienced during their schooling experiences.

### **Oscar**

As I identified above, Oscar believed that his difficulties in Years 7 and 8 at secondary school were as a result of undiagnosed dyslexia. He regained his confidence at a private school when he finally had his 'problem' identified. He then progressed successfully through education and finally secured a place at The University of Nottingham. The 'crisis' for Oscar's habitus was inverted from how it is normally understood. Much literature points towards a crisis in habitus following upward social mobility. The threat of downward mobility following Oscar's low achievement and disruptive behaviour caused his mother to take action. She is herself a university graduate and her reaction to Oscar's experiences demonstrate the type of middle class mobilisation which secures advantage that is often referred to in literature (Reay and Lucey 2000; Ball 2003: 6; Power, Edwards et al. 2003; Devine 2004).

Oscar felt attracted to leading universities despite his experiences of interacting with young people who came from more advantaged circumstances than his own. He knew there would be students at university who were similar to those he had attempted to get away from when moving back into the state system for sixth form study. However, Oscar placed much importance on going to universities that he perceived as being 'good'.

*I don't want to go to a little crummy university. I think I would be wasted there...that sounds awful, but I mean that the tutors will be better at older universities, the facilities, everything, everything will be better. (Oscar: Focus Group)*

When asked what a 'little crummy university' was, Oscar reflected not only on what he perceived the institutions to be like, but on the types of students who would go there: 'not up to much'. Oscar's fleeting experience of educational failure and isolation had shaped his opinions of what people who fail and disrupt lessons are like. He had 'been there' and had subsequently disassociated himself from those he viewed as 'wasters'.

## **Erin**

Whilst Erin has 'always' known that she would go to university, and this was a family expectation for her, there is a sense in her story where, like Oscar, she could have faced a habitus in crisis. Although Erin could have applied to a high performing secondary school which was outside her catchment area, she opted to attend her local school. Her local school is described by OfSTED as comprising pupils and students 'from the full range of socio-economic background[s]' and 'in an area of deprivation with some incomes just above the eligibility line' (OfSTED, 2004). In this context, Erin came into contact with a disparate range of young people with differing attitudes and abilities. When describing her school, Erin alludes to the difficulties that she had there and continually re-enforces the idea that at this particular school success is possible 'if you work hard' as I outlined in Chapter 5.

It seems through Erin's story, that she has disassociated herself from other young people who attended her school. The emphasis she places on her



schooling experiences centres upon the fact that she did well due to her own aspirations and family habitus and there is a sense in which she is reflecting on the fact that many others did not. The problems Erin refers to relate to times when she did not feel that the school was effectively supporting her educational progress and the level of disruption that other pupils caused in lessons. In that sense her class based habitus was under threat – she was expecting to go to university, as her father had and the ‘series of chronologically ordered determinations’ (Bourdieu 1990a: 60) that would secure her educational progression were being affected by what she describes as ‘poor teaching’ and ‘poor communication within the school’ (Erin: Focus Group). In order to deal with this ‘crisis’, Erin resorted to working in increasing isolation and putting in extra hours of work in her own time to compensate for her school context.

Erin also reflects on the town where she lived and her thoughts on how other people seem to live in an insular world where there is limited movement out of the area or the aspirations to do so. When she describes the people who live near her as ‘either simple country folk or London/Essex overspill people’, she does not come across as judgmental. She positions herself in relation to others and in doing so, situates herself as different both academically and socially – and illustrates the theoretical spatial difference that exists ‘on paper’ (Bourdieu 1998: 6).

Oscar and Erin illustrate two examples where education operates as a ‘protection against [possible] downward mobility’ (Beck 1992: 94). They illustrate how education has the potential to avert potential crises for habituses when there is a possible threat to its stability. Categorised as middle class, both Oscar and Erin reflect reproduction in action despite the critical moments where their habituses had to self-protect.

Many of the other students, with the exception of Matt, could belong to an ‘intermediate’ class as described above. That is not to say that there is ambiguity in their class position, more that they stand isolated from patterns of behaviour and attitudes that are normally associated with the working class. Based on their parents’ class categorisation, the students identify as working

class, but the extent to which they live out working class lives is minimal. Although I have demonstrated that they responded positively within their respective schooling experiences, that is not the only arena where their class differences surfaced. In the next section I will outline other ways in which the students differed from those around them and further demonstrate how these students did not fit with traditional notions of a working class, particularly in relation to university choice and the strategies they used to secure places at leading universities.

## **Living with a Secondary Habitus: Playing the Game**

With the exceptions of Oscar and Erin, all the other students were either categorised as skilled working class or working class, based on parental occupation. Such categorisation is limited in the sense that occupational status does not account for variations within class groups. Although literature highlights differences between middle class and working class attitudes to education, those differences are based on a binary distinction between the two classes where middle class practices are privileged within political discourses. In this section, I draw attention to the ways in which the 'working class' students better fit the profile of an intermediate class where their attitudes, practices and aspirations mirror those of the middle class. I illustrate their acceptance of political discourses, where education is very much viewed as a route out of poverty and as instrumental to an individual's social inclusion (Blyth 2001; DfES 2003).

Bourdieu states that a 'feel for the game' is what 'enables an infinite number of 'moves' to be made' (Bourdieu 1990b: 9). Mediated by the habitus, individuals instinctively know what moves should be made. Being caught up in the game requires understanding of the inherent rules within the game but is not 'the mere carrying out of a rule, or obedience to a rule...' (Bourdieu 1990b: 9). The students in this study demonstrated an awareness of the rules of the educational game in three ways, namely they:

- identified what made them different to other pupils in their schools
- knew that hard work was required in order to be successful

- understood that certain actions and practices would earn them teacher support and approval.

Their understanding of the above equipped them to play the game successfully. Using the stories of Anna, Zara, James, Toby, Sophie and Sally, which effectively demonstrate how life 'in the middle' is played out in terms of choices and decisions, I will outline how their 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu 1990a: 66) enabled them to draw upon a number of strategies to ensure successful applications at leading UK universities. In doing so, I focus on the following aspects of their progressions into university: the consultation of league tables, re-taking exams and familiarisation with university campuses. I refer to this process as a number of 'moves' or strategies that demonstrate the extent to which the students established a feel for the game.

### **Move 1: Understanding the Field**

The students in this study had clear and fixed ideas of the status of universities. Despite not having access to the type of experienced-based knowledge that can be passed down through generations, they appreciated that particular institutions had better reputations than others, with Redbrick and Russell Group universities being at the top. Their perceptions of a university hierarchy placed Oxbridge at the very top – beyond the scope of what many of them could possibly aim for. Their understanding of the HE field comprised both position of universities, but also the types of students that would be attracted to the different institutions.

For example, the perceptions Of Oxbridge that Lucy, Joanne and Grace had developed resulted in their views that it is elitist and that they would not fit in. When asked why they felt this, they explained that typical Oxbridge students are 'really clever, confident, rich/have money, family history of university, public school background, upper class, clear career path, different background, and better than 'me'' (Lucy, Joanne, Grace: Focus Group). Because of this, they felt that they would be 'looked down upon' and that they 'wouldn't be good enough in terms of grades and social connections' (Lucy, Joanne, Grace: Focus Group). For these three students, there were therefore sections of the

HE field which they did not consider because they perceived a lack of social and academic fit between themselves and the institutions.

Conversely, the students also discounted institutions that are placed low down in league tables such as those published by The Times or The Guardian. Their thoughts about post-1992 institutions also seemed to centre on the issues of academic and social fit. Lucy, Joanne and Gemma talked about how newer universities seemed to go for a 'hard sell' in their prospectuses. It was thought that new universities needed more time to develop their reputations and the focus of their prospectuses was on what the student life would be like. There were more student quotes and pictures of students in these types of prospectuses. It was also found that they tended to be more persuasive – although all three students felt that the newer universities 'were not for me' (Focus Group).

Anna struggled with this idea about the HE system. Although she appreciated that her predicted grades were likely to get her into one of the 'better' institutions, she found it difficult to talk about students who would go to other types of universities.

*... the best universities are going to ask for the higher grades and if they're somewhere that's asking for just three Cs then that's the right place for some people, but in my view it's kind of wasted if I go there, when I could go somewhere that is one of the best places in the country, I may as well go there. (Anna: Interview)*

When asked to clarify what 'some people' meant, Anna really struggled. She did not want to appear 'snobby' but appeared to know that within the HE field she would be one of the privileged choosers based on her academic credentials.

*I don't mean that some universities are worse than others and that some people are worse than others because they haven't got high grades. I just mean that different courses are right for different people and different universities are right for different people. I*

*mean if you are getting Cs at A Level then, then the course that are requiring As to get in is going to be too high A Level for you. (Anna: Interview)*

Anna, along with Sophie, Lucy, Grace, Toby and Keira also referred to perceived status of subject choices. They commented on their choice of A2 level subjects, explaining that they had all dropped courses that they enjoyed because they did not feel that they would benefit them during the process of applying to university. This was particularly the case for those who were considering Oxbridge. For example, both Sophie and Anna dropped Art at the end of Year 12, because they believed that it would not be looked upon favourably by Oxbridge admissions tutors.

*And like it was really hard to choose and I thought well Art is probably going to, the other three are probably more, better for getting me into university. (Anna: Interview)*

The students were therefore differentiating segments within the HE field in terms of its hierarchically organised structure both institutionally and academically. However, during the process of applying to university students drew upon a range of sources to help them work out which institutions would offer them the best fit both academically and socially.

## **Move 2: Finding out Information**

Literature highlights the importance of university open days to student decision making as it is through these experiences that they develop perceptions about and consider their degree of congruency with the institution (Price, Matzdorf et al. 2003). For the students in this study, open days were seen as critical in that process due to their status as first generation students. It is important to note that the universities the students attended had already been through a sifting process where many factors concerning university life had been considered, for example, course offered, quality of library facilities, reputation, availability of accommodation and proximity to a major city and travel networks. Open days were very much viewed as a final part of a natural process of university selection.

The students in this study had all attended university open days and the focus of much of their information seeking was framed by the question of whether they would fit academically and socially. Although their understanding of what university life would be like was minimal and partially based on their Sutton Trust experiences, they used open days to further inform their choices.

Whilst the students commented favourably about their experiences of open days, it was often the relatively insignificant things that contributed to the students' negative perceptions about a university, such as poor organisation of parking facilities, or not being shown where the toilets were. Anna recalls going to one university and was immediately put off because they did not show her the Halls of Residence. This issue also featured in Zara's and Sophie's experiences.

It was during open days that many of the students who were considering Oxbridge were deterred from making an application. Sally for example sums up the experiences of many of the students. She found the experience of attending an open day at Oxford daunting and had felt uncomfortable when being shown round by existing students.

*I don't know what it was, I just felt, I just felt like it wasn't for me. The other students were ok, but I didn't really have much to say to them. They asked me lots of questions about where I was from and stuff and, I don't know, I just got the feeling that I wouldn't be happy there. (Sally: Interview)*

The feeling that there would not be a social fit was re-iterated by many students and I have highlighted this in Chapter 5. The majority of the students placed The University of Nottingham as their first choice university. They had all had a positive experience during the Sutton Trust week and had got to know the campus and geographical area. During interview many of them reflected on this experience and stated that when they had attended open days at other institutions they had been looking for universities like Nottingham; a large green campus, close to a city, excellent facilities and nice

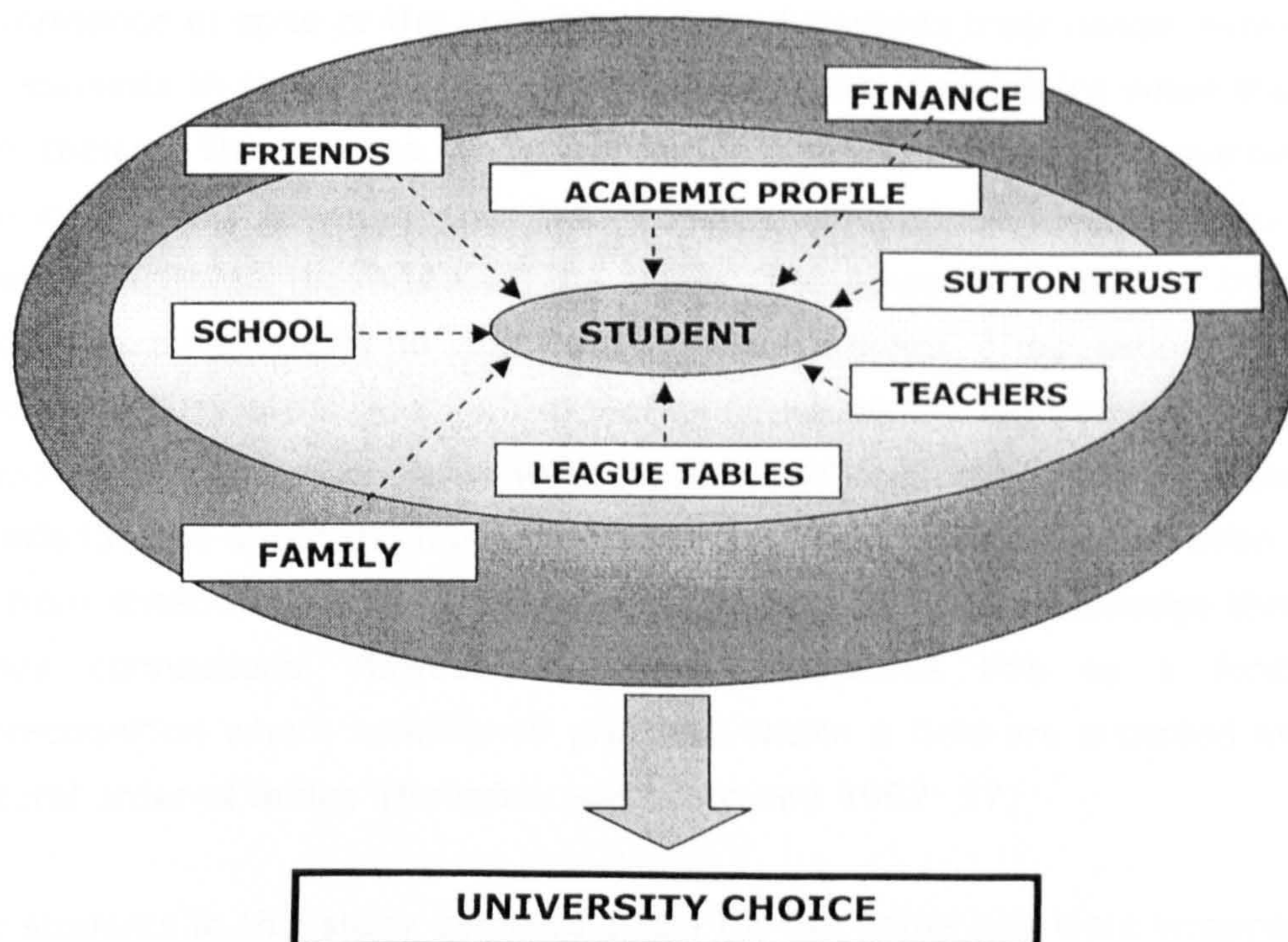
buildings. These conditions would enable them to experience student life to the full as Tim states.

*You need somewhere that's good – somewhere that has got a decent campus and is close to a main city...you also need good facilities, you know like libraries and stuff...somewhere that has a bit of history, you know older buildings, a bit of character. The new universities just don't have that do they? (Tim: Focus Group)*

Many of the traditional Redbrick universities meet this profile and it is perhaps not surprising that the students were drawn to such institutions given their developing knowledge of the field.

### **Move 3: Understanding Driving Forces**

University choice is not an isolated event where students are free to choose any institution they think they will enjoy – there are numerous influences that drive their thinking and decisions. When considering which universities to apply to, students had many primary driving forces that emerged from the field itself, but also secondary driving forces that came from for example family, friends and the consideration of finance as illustrated in Figure 21.



**Figure 21:** Influences on University Choice

However, some influencing factors are more critical to the process of choice than others. Factors that strongly influence decisions are represented within the middle circle and cover pragmatic issues (academic profile), school effect (school/sixth form; teachers), externally accepted indicators of university performance (league tables) and specific intervention programmes (in the case of this study, the Sutton Trust Summer School). There are also other factors that influence decision-making (issues of finance, family and friends), yet for the students in this study, they were relatively peripheral to their constructions of university choice.

For these students the strength of influence from (e.g. structural driving forces) and within (e.g. school habitus, teachers, league tables) the field played an important role in their decision-making. The influences from and within the field can be identified as league tables, the school context (institutional habitus), teachers, academic profile of the student and the Sutton Trust Summer School. The students' attitudes towards education confirmed and legitimated practices within the field. For example, league tables were viewed as an accurate measure of both university and school



performance in spite of the criticisms directed towards their usage. However, the students in this study all reported referring to such tables when making their choices. This process, whilst further legitimating the use of league tables, also contributes to arguments that position universities hierarchically. The students believed the 'truth' of the tables that placed Oxbridge at the top, followed by Redbrick and Russell Group universities. Their actions appear rational as they are in line with expectations within the field but may also be reflective of their unfamiliarity with the field. Although the students appeared knowledgeable about the university hierarchy, their knowledge had been built up from external sources – they did not have first hand knowledge through family connections. However, Bourdieu recognises this as a form of misrecognition where established practices within a field are accepted as the 'natural order of things' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 27).

The students in this study acquired a feel for the game and were wrapped up in processes that perpetuate social inequalities.

Action guided by a 'feel for the game' has all the appearances of the rational action that an impartial observer, endowed with all the necessary information and capable of mastering it rationally, would deduce. And yet it is not based on reason. (Bourdieu 1990b: 11)

The students were responding to internal and external driving forces – the need to find a place that reflected their academic abilities and satisfied their aspirations to attend a well respected university. All of the students consulted league tables (either The Times or The Guardian) and were advised to do so within their schools. The consultation of league tables, is therefore understood by students as a natural part of university selection despite the inherent issues that surround their publication (Bowden 2000; West and Pennell 2000; Eccles 2002; Jobbins 2002).

Although there are problems associated with league tables, the students did refer to them and found them useful in deciding where to apply as Zara states.

*I found some other universities late in the day that did the course that I wanted to do...I applied to them because they were sort of higher up in the league table than the others that I had got and didn't like so much. (Zara: Interview)*

However, league tables caused some confusion for the students. During a focus group discussion, Tim said that he had found difficulties in identifying which universities were at the top of the tables due to 'drastic differences' in their league table position depending on which paper was referred to. Grace also struggled with the 'drastic differences' in position.

*The choice of university was made more difficult due to the rating that is given to each university that I had no real idea about until the application process started and I started to talk to people about their choice of university. (Grace: Video/Individual)*

It was clear that the students accepted the notion of a hierarchy within the field and that some universities have a 'better range of resources and a better quality of teaching' (Matt: e-mail) than others and that this would be reflected in their position within published tables. Many of the students looked for both the university ranking and the ranking of their particular subject which was particularly important for Toby.

*I picked them really, I don't know, I looked at the league tables, I looked at the subject tables. I did a lot of research into them just to decide which ones would be best for me... (Toby: Video/Individual)*

Toby also expresses further insight into the complexity involved in university choice. Not only does he struggle with the idea of a 'top' university, he also acknowledges the emotional confusion that determines university choice. When asked what he thought a top university was, he replied

Generally thought of the ones that achieve highest in league tables, but depends on your view. One of the factors to me is, is the top place I can go, but then I guess you get the question of 'what defines the top place you can go?', somewhere where I like, and will feel comfortable...(Toby: E-Mail)

The majority of students applied to universities placed highly in the league tables (The Times) as demonstrated in Table 15.

Times League Table Position: 2004	University		Students who applied
	1	Cambridge	Sophie; Erin; Anna
	2	Oxford	
	3	LSE	James
	4	Imperial College	
	5	Warwick	Sophie; Eve; Toby
	6	St Andrews	
	7	York	Toby
	8	UCL	Sophie
	9	Nottingham	Sally; Keira; Sophie; Eve; Anna; Oscar; Tim; Toby; James; Lucy; Grace; Joanne; Erin; Sayda
	10	Bath	Toby
	11	Southampton	Eve; Toby; Sayda
	12	Bristol	James
	13	Durham	Zara
	14	SOAS	
	15	Lancaster	Zara
	16	Edinburgh	
	17	Manchester	Keira; Tim; Joanne; Erin; Sayda
	18	East Anglia	Keira
	19	Leicester	Matthew; Tim
	20	Sheffield	Sally; Anna; Joanne
	21	King's College	Sophie
	22	UMIST	
	23	Leeds	Tim; Joanne; Erin; Sayda
	24	Newcastle	
25	Birmingham	Keira; Eve; James; Erin	

**Table 15:** University Choices

In 2004, at the time when the students in this study were making their university choices, no post-1992 institutions featured in the top 25 according to The Times League Table. Students found league tables confusing as universities were positioned differently depending on which resource used. A

comparison of the leading 25 universities in the current Guardian and The Times league tables supports this, as illustrated in Table 16.

<b>The Guardian</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>The Times</b>
Oxford	1	Oxford
Cambridge	2	Cambridge
Imperial College	3	Imperial College
St Andrews	4	LSE
UCL	5	St Andrews
LSE	6	UCL
Edinburgh	7	Warwick
Warwick	8	Bristol
Bath	9	Durham
Loughborough	10	King's College
SOAS	11	Bath
King's College	12	Loughborough
Southampton	13	Edinburgh
Bristol	14	Southampton
York	15	Aston
Manchester	16	York
Durham	17	Exeter
Birmingham	18	SOAS
Nottingham	19	Nottingham
Leeds	20	East Anglia
Leicester	21	Leicester
Cardiff	22	Sheffield
Lancaster	23	Newcastle
Sussex	24	Royal Holloway
Surrey	25	Reading

**Table 16:** University Position in League Tables 2007

(Sources: <http://extras.timesonline.co.uk/gug/gooduniversityguide.php> and <http://image.guardian.co.uk/sys-files/Education/documents/2007/05/24/thisone.xls> – accessed 26/10/07)

The reverse is also true: universities positioned in the bottom 25 are all post-1992 institutions, including universities established as recently as 2006 (Edge Hill). League table position sent out a clear message to the students – the higher up a university, the more assured they were of its quality.

The reasons for the students' choices were not only framed by their intensive research into league position. Identified as academically able, these students often felt obliged or under pressure to apply to particular universities. The school context in the application process was therefore extremely important for a number of reasons. As outlined in Chapter 5, the school through the teachers' opinions and what is said to students, has some influence on how students construct their understanding of the HE field. In addition, social networks and opportunities provided within schools enabled the students in this study to mix with like minded young people: those who were both academically successful and had aspirations to go to university. Brooks (2003) argues that whilst families have a strong influence on young people's conceptualisations of the HE sector, friends and peers play an important role in informing what constitutes a feasible choice.

For the students in this study, their understanding of the hierarchy that exists within HE was confirmed through such networks. Zara for example, was considering The University of Durham as her first choice and Hertfordshire as an insurance choice. Her preference was for Durham as she felt that this choice not only reflected her abilities, but would provide increased opportunities within the employment market on graduation. In addition, this choice was deemed more appropriate by her friends.

*I think employers will be more impressed because they think graduates from top universities are better taught, more likely to do well and motivated to work. When I have spoken to people about university (adults and friends) they have all said 'Wow, Durham is a good university, I suppose you want to go there the most?' and when I mention Hertfordshire, say 'That's an old polytechnic isn't it?' then change the subject. This attitude has made me feel I should go to a top university. (Zara: E-Mail)*

Zara also consulted numerous league tables to consider her choices. She accepted that they offered a true representation of ranking and did not question their authenticity or reliability. This could be linked to a lack of 'hot knowledge' (Ball and Vincent 1998: 377), as no-one in Zara's family had been to university, and a reliance on 'cold knowledge' (Ball and Vincent 1998) in the form of prospectuses and league tables.

The students' consultation of league tables demonstrated an awareness of the structure of HE and fed into their perceptions of what constituted a 'good' university. Although there was an element of distinction (Bourdieu 1986) at play as they considered each university in relation to others, there was a sense in the stories of the students that they were attempting to find the best 'fit' both academically and socially. As I highlighted in Chapter 5, this resulted in many of them discounting Oxbridge which in many of their minds and perceptions was the 'ultimate top' (Sophie: Interview). Armed with this understanding of the structure of the field of HE and where going to a leading university mattered, the students exploited changes in the examination system to secure their places. I now turn to the strategies they used in relation to the examination system and focus on their justifications for re-taking examinations.

#### **Move 4: Ensuring Success**

For many students taking examinations causes stress and anxiety (McDonald 2001). The students in this study were no exception. They all reported feeling anxious about exams because of the importance they held in securing university places. The students in this study enjoyed a history of academic success which started at an early age for those who went to nursery. For Zara, being positioned as one of the 'cleverest' ones in primary school had much to do with her developing confidence in her abilities, which she was later able to build upon at secondary and post-16 level study. She found herself in a system that appeared to support and encourage the more able children. What Zara does not make clear is how much time she spent working independently on workbooks and as a consequence of her cleverness, how much teacher input she missed. From her story and the stories of Anna and Eve, it would be

relatively easy to conclude that they received little teacher input due to their natural ability. They suggest that they were left to 'get on with it' and required little in the way of teacher support. For all of the students in this study, academic success came regularly and easily. Even though Sophie was disappointed with her year 6 SATs results, her understanding of 'failure' is achieving in line with expectations for her age. For her ability, it was expected that she would achieve higher levels than she actually did, but she had in fact passed her SATs well. All the students in this study have achieved well and the table below (Table 17) illustrates their performance at both AS and A2 level.

Name	AS Level Results	A2 Level Results
Erin	A; A; A; B; B	A; A; A; B
Toby	A; B; B	A; A; A
Anna	A; A; A; B	A; A; A
Sally	A; A; B; B	A; A; B
Joanne	A; A; B; B	A; A; A
Tim	A; A; B; B	A; A; B
Lucy	B; B; B; B; C	B; B; C
Keira	A; A; A; B; C	B; B; C
Zara	A; A; B; B; C	A; A; A
Grace	A; A; B; B; C	A; B; B; C
Sophie	A; A; B; C	A; A; B; C
James	A; B; C; D	A; A; B
Eve	B; B; C; C	B; B; B
Matt	A; A; A; B	A; A; B; B
Sayda	A; B; B; C	A; A; A; B
Oscar	A; B; B; B	A; B; B

**Table 17:** AS and A2 Level Results

Contextually, some of these results are more surprising than others. Matt for example went to a school where very few pupils stay on to study in the 6<sup>th</sup> form, low student retention and also where few enter higher education. He could be said to have 'beaten the odds'. With academic profiles such as those

identified above, these students were well placed to apply to some of the most prestigious universities in the UK.

It is not by chance that the students achieved this set of results. It is partially through their family habitus that they enjoyed positive relationships within school, but also their drive and aspirations to do better, to go beyond what their parents had achieved. This drive and aspiration led the students to 'leave nothing to chance' (Sophie: Interview). Given their understanding of the structure of HE and their desire to secure places at reputable universities, many of the students mobilized their knowledge of the examination system by re-taking AS modules.

Toby for example, achieved an A and two Bs at AS level; results that left him slightly disappointed.

*Yeah, yeah, I was a bit disappointed but I knew that I could do some of the modules again in Year 13 so I wasn't that bothered. I only missed the A in Maths by a few marks so I knew that I could sort that out. I need As to go to Nottingham, I think, so I will take the modules again. (Toby: Interview)*

Toby, like many of the other students has highlighted the way in which students can use the system to their advantage. He had chosen his preferred university prior to examination and was therefore trying to perform to the requirements of that specific institution. Joanne, who also achieved two As and two Bs at AS level also reflected on this issue.

*I will re-take modules because I want to get to Nottingham. I've heard that they get so many applications for each place. If I have Bs on my form that might mean, it might, yeah mean that I don't get offered a place. Also, I think that tutors will probably think that you will cope on the course if you get good grades. (Joanne: Interview)*



In Joanne's justification for re-taking modules, she refers to the competition that surrounds entry to leading universities. She is prepared to put herself through the anxiety of examination re-take not only to make herself more marketable on paper, but to demonstrate that she is capable of doing the course. 'Good' grades to the students in this study equated to A grades. Those that achieved Bs and Cs expressed disappointment in themselves, but as they had secured places at their first choice universities, they 'accepted' the grades they achieved. Sophie was 'gutted' with the B and C that she achieved despite the fact that she had also achieved two As.

In understanding the relative position of universities and using the examination system to their advantage, the students gained much insight into the way in which they could negotiate through the field of HE. By the time the students made their application to HE, they had gained much knowledge about individual universities through consulting league tables, reading prospectuses, attending open days and by listening to their teachers, parents and friends. In the case of Nottingham in particular, the week they experienced also contributed to not only the perceptions that they formed of its standing within the HE market but also on whether it offered a sufficient academic and social fit. I now turn to the first term of life at university for the students and illustrate the ways in which their expectations of what university would be like were either met or not met and also explore the ways in which their sense of being at 'home' distanced them from their home locations.

## **Living with a Secondary Habitus: Unsettling Times**

This section focuses, in detail, on the first term experiences of twelve students, eight of whom entered the University of Nottingham in September 2005. Of the remaining twelve students, their HE destinations were as follows: Exeter University, Reading University, Durham University and Grimsby College. Two students did not want to continue with the research once they got to university and two took a year out but did communicate regularly with me.

In following the students during their respective first term university experience, I wanted to explore their integration into higher education and in particular, facilitate their reflection on differences between their first term at university and the Sutton Trust Summer School week.

The process of leaving home is an important part of the process of the 'transition to adult life' (Buck and Scott 1993: 863). Whilst the students in this study were entering a phase of transition from the family home, they did not perceive their entry to university as a final move away. However, despite the close links that they still enjoyed with their families, the move to university reflected a life change and as such required a period of adjustment. I now describe that process and reflect upon the students initial experiences whilst at university.

### **Anna: Settling In**

After initial periods of uncertainty and anxiety, the students enjoyed their first term at university. This was particularly the case for the eight students who came to the University of Nottingham. One of the main issues students cited as an anxiety, and which influenced their decision to go on the Sutton Trust Summer School, was their capacity to make friends. Bourdieu (1990) describes the unique difficulties involved in establishing position within social fields where 'belief' is an 'inherent part of belonging' (Bourdieu 1990a: 67). Anna reflects upon this during a follow up interview in her first term. She illuminates the complex process of forming friendships and the fluidity of groupings as the students attempted to gravitate towards similarly minded people.

*Yeah, it was a bit weird, because I started off hanging around more with some of the girls and then, and now I'm with different people. And everyone, at one point I kind of felt that I was in-between. Do you know how people, like sort of get into their little groups, and I thought that to start with I had a lot in common with and then they just seemed a bit, sort of, I don't know what it was, but I didn't seem to be getting on with them that well. So I went to go with the other people and they had already made their little group, they had*

*already sort of got to know each other and I felt a bit like on the outside. (Anna: Interview 2)*

In Anna's account we get the sense of position seeking – Anna knows she has little in common with some of the students in her block and she attempts to re-position herself to find a more comfortable space. Bourdieu states that 'people are located in a social space, ... they aren't just anywhere, in other words interchangeable...' (Bourdieu 1990b: 50). There is an element of determinism in this statement – positions in social place are determined by many factors including family history and context. Perhaps this is what Anna is experiencing. People 'aren't just anywhere' in the social space, they occupy positions according to their volume of the respective forms of capital. Anna is therefore demonstrating how this positioning occurs in practice. In searching for friendship groups Anna is entering a process of self-definition in relation to others, but also defining 'others' to ensure a good social 'fit'.

In establishing a social fit, Anna recognised that the students in her block did not share the same types of attitudes as she did. She reflected upon this and was reluctant to say what she really felt at the risk of sounding 'nasty' (Anna: Interview 2). However, she recognised that although she did not feel able to form friendship groups with them, she felt that it was still early days and her opinions of the other students could change.

*I just felt uncomfortable and I just didn't feel that I would ever get that close to them. But over the course of the year, maybe I will, I will have to see, you know. (Anna: Interview 2)*

### **Sally: Being Let In**

Sally describes a similar experience, although her situation is slightly different to Anna's as she lives in halls off campus. She feels that this has contributed to feelings of isolation and believed the students who lived on campus had a more positive experience initially. Her perception was that they had increased opportunities and had formed friendship groups more quickly than she had. She felt excluded from the process of friendship forming and described the groups on main campus as 'cliquey' to the extent that they 'didn't want to mix'

or 'hang around' (Sally: Interview 2) with Sally and the few friends she had made. However, Sally also found that friendship groups formed in the first few weeks went through a transitory stage,

*I don't know why they were like that but it seems strange like now that they're like splitting up again and they will let you in so I don't know why it was like that. (Sally: Interview 2)*

Interestingly, but perhaps not unsurprisingly, Sally recounts her initial experiences as a passive participant. She is on the periphery of the groups waiting for others to 'let' her in. Her confidence within the new environment has become overshadowed by feelings of insecurity.

### **Toby: Feeling Isolated**

Like Sally, Toby also reflects upon the difficulties he has had in establishing friends.

*It's been OK, it's kind of been more up than down. I don't know really. I've made lots of friends but no like good friends, it kind of like upset me in the first few weeks but it's ok now. It's fine, it's quite nice, there are a few people I hang around with. (Toby: Interview 2)*

Toby understands the process of settling in and he expected to feel unsettled by it. His reference to 'up' and 'down' emotions reflects his experience of spending time with friends, but also having moments when he was alone which he struggled with.

*... at other times you can just have like at lunch breaks nobody will talk with you and nobody will sit with you, but that's the way it goes, it's kind of the way it can be at times. (Toby: Interview 2)*

The isolation he felt affected his confidence in the same way as Sally described. He found himself missing 'home', but not the parental home. When

he articulated the separation, he felt from home, he did not express this in terms of his family, but more in terms of friends that he had left behind.

*... it doesn't bother me being away from home particularly. A lot of people say 'oh I'm homesick', but to be honest I haven't got homesickness, but I probably miss home and people but I kind of like know that there's not really anyone there except my family, because all of my friends have gone to university. (Toby: Interview 2)*

There are a number of interpretations of this. Either Toby is reflecting upon the distance he feels from his family (he has increased levels of cultural capital), or he knows that his family are a 'constant' in his life. Within a Bourdieuan framework, I understand this as spatial and social distance. Toby, having gone to university has moved beyond the boundaries of his family. The distance Toby has created is reflective of an emerging social distance between himself and his family. His increased levels of cultural and social capital, as developed through his participation in tennis at county level, have facilitated his movement away. As Toby develops increased independence from his family and coupled with the acquirement of educational credentials, his position in social space alters and is further removed from that of his family. It is not the form of 'disconnection from [his] family and cultural backgrounds' Wentworth and Peterson (2001: 10) identify when describing the first term's university experiences of four first generation students. Nor is it the type of 'dislocation' identified by Walkerdine et al. (2001) when describing social mobility. Toby is describing a more subtle social and cultural dispersion. The process of social mobility is occurring and the ultimate 'shift' in class identity could occur when he enters a profession far removed from that of his parents.

### **Grace: It all Feels Familiar**

The first term at university for all the students was full of complex negotiations in which the students attempted to find their respective 'place' in their new environment. The students referred to above express this time as being full of anxious moments in which they felt alone at times. Other students, although they lived through similar anxieties had a more positive

experience. I draw upon the case of Grace who describes the process of making friends in positive terms, in direct contrast with the experiences of Toby, Sally and Anna.

*They're really nice. It's really cool because even though I've only been there a few weeks, you really feel like you've known people for like months or years or whatever. It's really good. (Grace: Interview 2)*

Grace struggles to explain why the other students seem so familiar.

*I don't know they just, I don't know, it's just really weird. It's like when you meet people and you feel like you've known them before kind of thing, or that you might have known them for ages. I don't know, not so much sharing interests because we're all like into different things and stuff, but we all kind of click and get on. (Grace: Interview 2)*

Grace had a different first few weeks at university. She enjoyed meeting new people and thrived on hearing about all the differing backgrounds and experiences that other students described. There was no self-doubt in her narrative – no anxious moments that unsettled her.

### **Keira: Re-Inventing an Identity**

Keira also had a positive first term whilst at university although her journal reveals a complex picture of positioning and establishing of the self.

*I've had some thoughts about the different kinds of people and friendship groups that I have even at university. I think that it may come from a need on my part to fall into the role of being who people need or want me to be. (Keira: Journal)*

Keira identifies, through her reflections, that she is occupying multiple spaces – spaces in which she can be different things to different people. She provides

examples of three different social groups and situations, which bring out three 'different' Keiras. Rather than finding the process of *self-positioning* in relation to others problematic, Keira is experiencing establishment of *self-identity* an issue, as the following quote illustrates,

*The only thing is, I'm not quite sure which one is me yet. (Keira: Journal)*

Keira no longer has the same levels of confidence she had during our first meeting. Instead, she is using the experience of going to university as a time in which she can self-invent or as she states, 'reinvent' (Keira: Journal) herself. She does not know which one of the three identities she has presented to the other students is 'real', yet she has identified differences between herself and students from the three disparate groups. It could also be that she is struggling to find an identity that fits with the practices and traditions of the university. In using the term 'real', Keira is suggesting a fixed identity can be discovered. However, identities are not fixed – they respond to context and change over time (Woodward 2000). Keira has entered a 'space of differences' (Bourdieu 1998: 12) in which she has to negotiate her position and identity relationally. Her actions differ depending on which particular group she is socialising with at any time. As Lareau states,

Practice in the field of interaction is shaped by multiple, interacting forces, including the rules governing the field and the relative position of players in the field. (Lareau and McNamara Horvat 1999: 39)

Keira has found herself in a new situation that is unfamiliar to her. In reinventing herself, she is adapting to the demands of the field and what she understands the role of a student to be. She has entered HE with many assumptions and the idea that she must 'fall into the role of being who people need or want [her] to be' (Keira: Journal). The experiences at university, particularly her interactions with others, are the determining factors in the development of her student identity.

The five different types of experiences referred to above indicate how the students settled into university life. The strategies they used and experiences they drew upon to help them during the initial few weeks helped them to make new friends and cope with the academic demands being placed on them. One common issue across the sample centred on how they compared themselves with other students – the extent to which they identified with them. All 10 students who had agreed to continue with the research during their first term at university commented on differences between themselves and other students in terms of economic capital. They felt that other students had more disposable amounts of money and seemed to spend more freely. Sophie was reminded that her own economic situation was far removed from the other students in her hall and that this compromised the number of times she went out with them.

Other identified differences concerned academic ability and background. The students in this study felt that other students who had come from more privileged backgrounds were more confident – they were able to speak up in tutorials and did not hold back from expressing an opinion. Joanne described one student in her tutorial group as ‘very self assured’ – perhaps something that Joanne aspired to be like.

During the first few weeks the students settled in to their new environment in different ways as exemplified by the examples provided above. Anna described her position as ‘in between’ where she tried to establish a position in the social space and within the HE field. Sally describes a process where her own agency in the process is limited – she waited to be let into social groups. Toby expressed isolation – he was unhappy with other students in his block and sat on his own during lunchtimes. He felt lonely during the first few weeks and although he has now made some friends he does not feel that they are ‘good’ friends. This could be indicative of the social distance where his habitus is struggling to adapt to the new environment. Keira attempted to re-create her identity. She felt that she had to be someone different depending on which group of students she was with. This could be explained by the notion of a habitus clivé (as explained in the Prologue), where opposing forces are competing to establish a more stable habitus. These experiences were not



uncommon and were also referred to by Zara, James, Eve, Sophie and Joanne. Grace and Mathew were exceptions to this and talked about their first few weeks in positive terms.

Grace felt at ease with her new friends. She talks excitedly about getting to know people from different types of background and she does not feel intimidated by this. Rather than being a source of tension, as is the case for the other students mentioned above, Grace looks at the experiences of other students positively.

*... it just comes up in conversations and stuff and my room mate, is, she's like from a private school and stuff, she lives in London and one of the other girls on my floor, she's like taken a year out and stuff and she's been working. I think she's like sponsored by a company or something and then she's come back to uni. So it's like really nice, because there's like loads of different people and stuff and another girl who I know from downstairs, she went travelling, so everybody's got like different things that they've been doing over the past few years, so it's good. (Grace: Interview 2)*

One of the main issues for first generation students is establishing a sense of social and academic fit. Where these are not easily established, the drop out rate for such students is higher than for students with a family history of HE (Ishitani 2003; Wilcox, Winn et al. 2005). I now turn to the ways in which the students identified and experienced social differences.

## **Understanding Social Difference**

In analysis, two of the statements concerning social class were identified as significant namely:

- social class is important even though it shouldn't be
- social class is outdated but still matters.

During the first term, the students appeared to be experiencing differences in class related practices – in particular, the confidence middle class students

displayed during tutorials, their assured nature in social groups and their capacity to spend money without really thinking about it.

This issue was particularly problematic for Sophie. Financial concerns could be the issue that impacts Sophie's sense of belonging as it contradicted her previous way of life.

*Well at home, like if I said to my friends, like guys I've got no money to go out today, they were like yeah Soph, but these guys here they're just like spend, spend, spend and it's like guys, we're students now, we've got to budget. I don't know if they've taken out loans or anything. I do find that they're from slighter higher, they have more money basically. (Sophie: Interview 2)*

Sophie stops herself from saying that they are from a 'slightly higher' social class group, preferring to identify the difference as variations in amounts of economic capital. Sayer (2003) believes that class is an embarrassing issue for many people because social class raises questions about both economical and ethical worth. Other literatures points to the same discomfort surrounding class identification (see for example, Bourdieu 1993; Reay 1997; Skeggs 1997; Reay 1998) and it could be that Sophie is experiencing the same type of discomfort here.

Toby experienced similar difficulties and could not easily identify why he did with the other students from his hall.

*Yeah, they're good people but they're not the kind of people I would necessarily go out with like everyday, or regularly. (Toby: Interview 2)*

He identified social differences, recognising quickly that he had very little in common with them – they are not the type of people Toby would normally identify with. Anna also recognised that other students had different approaches to university life, perhaps reflecting notions of more traditional students, who work and play hard.

*Well, I still like get along with them and it was just like actually being around with them all the time. They just seemed to be always going on about 'oh he's cute' and things like that and then I met some of the other girls in my block and they're more like, they want to go out and stuff, but they also want to do some work and just, I don't know. (Anna: Interview 2)*

The students referred to here clearly contended with differences in social background and differences in approaches to university life. In struggling to work out their own position, they seemed to look towards the students who were doing things differently to them: students who appeared more at home in tutorials and were frequently getting involved in social activities.

The students in this study appear to have entered university with a different set of expectations. They placed much importance on studying hard and conserving money. They expressed the need to work hard and to do their best, even if this compromised their social activities. They were mindful of the fact that they appeared to have less expendable income than other students. Zara did not mind that this was the case. She commented that she had always been 'tight' with money and that the pressure to go out did not bother her. She had befriended another student who claimed to be a first generation student and they preferred to stay in and watch DVDs together to conserve their finances.

The social differences experienced in terms of economic restrictions, also represented lifestyle decisions. The students in this study reported a history of being careful with money – saving for important purchases and for university. Sophie's account infers that the students she encountered were frivolous with their finances, and used their economic resources to enjoy student life to the full. They were able to spend what seemed like vast sums of money to Sophie on entertainment, with the assurance that their parents may finance any future shortfall. This type of luxury was not available to the students in this study.

Despite these social differences the students reported having a positive first term at university. Although reflective of a period of transition, the students describe a complex process in which the unfamiliar becomes familiar and vice versa – or the beginnings of a ‘slow process of autonomisation’ within the social field (Bourdieu 1990a: 67). This feeling was often described as ‘feeling at home’ and I now turn to this issue to deconstruct the ways in which the students understood their process of transition.

## **Stability of Habitus: ‘It Feels Like Home’**

Of all the experiences during the first term, I was most surprised when the students described university as ‘home’. I could not decipher any meaning or establish why they could so easily move from one context to another with such apparent ease. For example, Grace was incredibly positive about her experiences and had stated in interview that university was more like home than home was. Zara had described how difficult it had been when she had visited home and that it did not feel like home anymore. Sally felt that she had been a ‘guest’ when she had visited home.

I began to reflect on my own notions of what constituted ‘home’ and attempted to overlay my own experiences onto theirs. However disparate our respective journeys, there are similarities and I can remember feeling at ‘home’ after I moved away from my mother’s house. The move away constituted much more than a change in physical location: the move away also became representative of emotional and psychological shifts.

As literature identifies, and as I have illustrated throughout this thesis, working class students often experience higher education negatively. Incongruence between the habitat of the university and the habitus of the individual accounts primarily for this lack of ‘fit’. When Zara, Joanne, Sally, Grace, James, Eve and Keira claimed that their new environment ‘felt like home’, they were establishing a sense of ‘place’ on emotional, physical and psychological levels: habitus as both embodied and cognitive (Hillier and Rooksby 2005). Their struggle to identify with some of the other students is indicative of a complex social process. Habitus is providing the mechanism through which they can identify their own position and the position of others.

Toby and Anna struggled with this aspect of finding one's 'place' on a social level. It is as if they are seeing things for the first time: Identifying disparate social differences that they had not encountered in their previous educational contexts.

However, despite the identification of differing social backgrounds, the students claimed that they were 'at home'. Anna for example, states

*It feels, now it feels like normal to be here, this is like home for the moment... I don't know. It's that kind of feeling that you know that you haven't been here for that long but you feel that you have.  
(Anna: Interview 2)*

She was unable to explain why this was the case. The fact that Anna felt that it was 'normal' and 'like home for the moment', is particularly interesting as Anna missed home considerably more than any of the other students.

Stedman (2003: 671), claims that a focus on the social has negated the important contribution of the physical environment to 'place meanings and attachment'. When asked what made university 'feel like home' the students were unable to articulate exactly what it was that contributed to their sense of comfort. As a result, I asked the students to take photos of aspects of the university that made it 'feel like home'. The range of photos varied, but there was some consistency across the sample. The students who came to The University of Nottingham all took pictures of the campus.

## **Anna**

Anna, for example, took the following photos during one of her 'regular' Sunday walks around the campus.



**Photo 1:** The University of Nottingham Campus

This photo illustrates much more than the physical environment of the university. When Anna took this, she understood the tree lined walkways as providing 'space'. For Anna, 'space' and 'place' become entwined during her Sunday walks. She enjoyed the sense of freedom she felt when walking around the campus. On her solitary walks, the incongruence of her social habitus was forgotten. Instead, she was able to establish a sense of place through the physical environment.

*I really like walking through the trees, it's kind of, it kind of lets me take time out to think and stuff. I don't spend a long time there, but I, oh I don't know, it's just that when I'm there I can forget about everything else, you know. (Anna: Interview 2)*

The next photo offers more information on the contribution the environment made to Anna's sense of place. She took the photo on one of her walks and

describes it as important because it helps her recognise that she is on a 'new journey' and that university is a 'stepping stone' onto other things.



**Photo 2:** The Stepping-Stones

When asked why this photo had made the university 'feel like home' Anna referred to stages in her life.

*It's like, when I was at home, I knew there would come a time to move, to move away onto something new and here it's just the same – it's like a stepping stone onto something else, but it's also the start of a new journey – you can't quite see the end of the stones, so there's stuff that you don't know...(Anna: Interview 2)*

This part of the campus reflected journey and movement to Anna. The stepping-stones symbolised transition. She knew that at the end of a degree

she would move beyond what her parents had achieved. Her emerging sense of self and her sense of place contributed to the transformations in her habitus. The new context, within which she was finding her place, was playing a role in the process of habitus adjustment. For Anna, the social adjustment was a step too far, and she was still finding her place in that milieu. The physical environment provided her with a sense of place: during her walks, she was able to feel quite comfortable and her habitus remained unchallenged – she can ‘forget about everything else’. This could relate to the difficulties she had experienced in the first few weeks of term where she had struggled to form friendship groups and had felt like she wasn’t coping with the academic demands being placed upon her.

## **Sophie**

The Trent Building featured in many of the students’ photos. When asked why, they focused on its stature. The building represented tradition, reflecting high status education and something of which they wanted to be a part.



**Photo 3:** The Trent Building



Sophie took the photo above as it reminded her on a daily basis of the journey she had made. The sense of space that she captures in this photo is far removed from her experiences at home – she lived in a flat in a large city. Sophie felt that the building reflected status and she felt privileged to be studying at a university that appeared so grand. She reflected on this during our second interview

*It's like every time I look at it, it just seems so unreal – it's like I'm not really here, but I am here kind of thing. I can't explain it.  
(Sophie: Interview 2)*

The Trent Building, because of its 'traditional look' (Oscar: Focus Group), acted as a constant reminder to many of the students that they had 'made it' to a reputable university and that this was representative of the progress they had made. In their Sutton Trust Summer School journals, ten of the students commented on this feature of the university and the sense of 'space' and how much 'green' there was. This was particularly the case for Sophie and Eve who had lived in densely populated areas prior to going to university.

During focus group discussions and interviews all of the students cited that being on a campus was an important factor, with the exceptions of Mathew who had no preference, and Erin who wanted to be in a city. The notion of a campus university and all it has to offer in the sense of a 'community feel' featured highly in many of the students' narratives. Not only did a campus university represent prestige, it also offered the students a sense of community – a sense of belonging somewhere.

## **Zara**

All twelve students who continued through to the last phase of the research described feeling at home whilst at university. Conversely, those who had been home for weekend visits stated that they had felt some unease when returning to their parental homes. For Zara, a visit home re-enforced her feelings of comfort at university, when compared with the sense of unfamiliarity she experienced at her previous 'home'.

*It was really strange. I walked in my room and I was just like, 'it's not my room'. It was home, but it wasn't quite home anymore. This [university] is home, I feel really and when I got back I was like 'yes, it's so good to be back'. (Zara: Interview 2)*

Her sense of place as established through her emerging and developing habitus made university feel more like home than her parental home. The shift in habitus had been accomplished. This feeling was emphasised by the sense of unfamiliarity she experienced when she visited her family.

*Lots of things were very familiar and I just did them out of habit but then other things, it was like new things I noticed, it was like 'oh when did you get that' or they mentioned something and I didn't know what they were talking about because I missed something. I didn't really mind, it's just moving on really. (Zara: Interview 2)*

Zara recognises that she is 'moving on' but does not go as far to say, or indeed can not say that she is moving social class. She views her independence whilst at university as an aspect of growing up and as a natural part of moving away from home. Whilst remaining pragmatic about her distance from her family, her views on home and family life are not unsurprising. In our first meeting, Zara identified differences between herself and the rest of her family. She claimed to have differing attitudes towards education and also existed fairly independently from them. Zara was one of the few students who did not actively seek to involve her parents fully in the process of university choice. Armed with a feel for the game and knowing its constituent rules and practices had facilitated Zara's early academic success – an occurrence that contributed to her habitus evolving away from that of her parents from an early age and thus adapting to its new context (Bourdieu 1990b).

## **Grace**

Grace also experienced a visit home as 'strange'. She reflected upon the way she felt when visiting her family home for the first time since leaving.

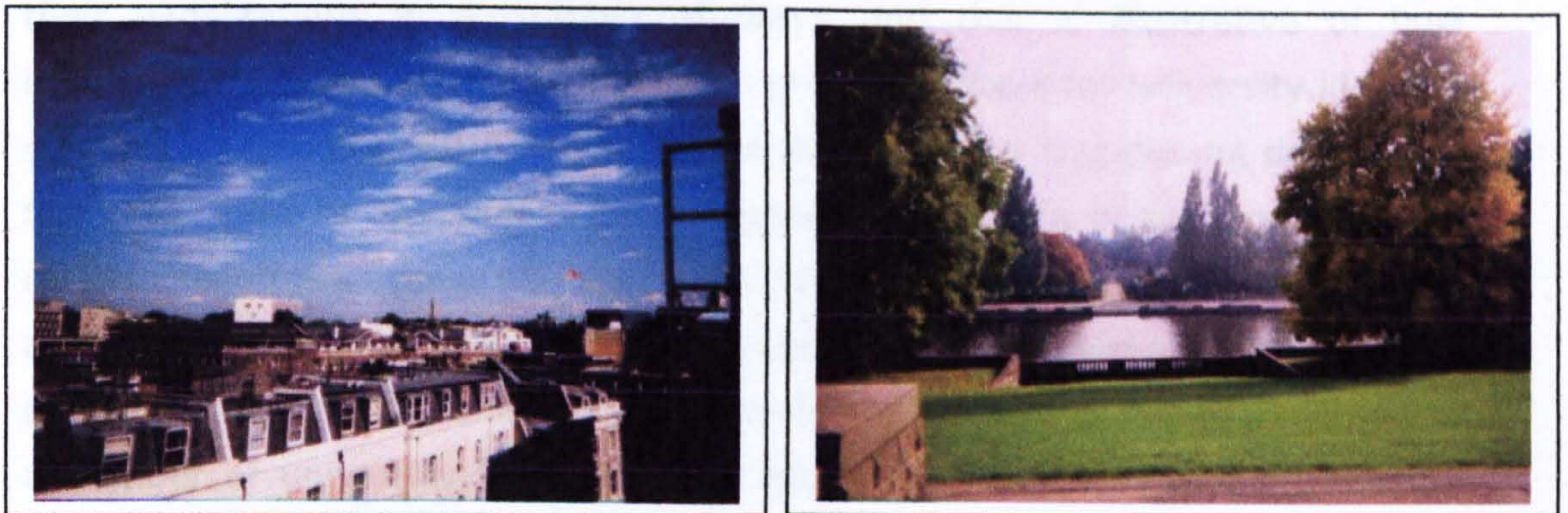
**Grace:**... *it was like a bit weird because obviously I had moved out of home so it was a bit kind of strange and then I went back home last weekend because I work still at weekends, so I stayed over Saturday night with my family and that seemed weird because, I was kind of glad to come back to university because it was really strange being at home but living outside, like living out of a bag. It was really weird so kind of, it does feel at home here*

**TB:** *How does that make you feel?*

**Grace:** *I don't know, it feels like I've, like I've kind of moved on but like, yeah, kind of moved out properly which is a bit strange.  
(Grace: Interview 2)*

Anna, Zara and Gemma provide useful insights into the emotional separation that occurs when young people leave home. Sophie too felt like she was at home at university, but focused much more on her individual space in addition to the wider context of the university campus. She had not yet made the emotional separation from home and thought that this may occur later as she settled in more to the ways of university life and became accustomed to other students' attitudes and behaviours.

Moving away from the family home had been an important issue for Sophie. When she described her family context, she expressed frustration at the limitations of her home. She described feeling 'cramped' and she took the following photos to illustrate how important being outside the family home was.



**Photo 4:** The Importance of Space

She enjoyed the feeling of space that she felt when looking out of her bedroom window, even though the view was of a built-up landscape. She was able to see beyond the confines of her room and perhaps this signified a desire to move beyond the constraints of her family home context. Sophie had commented upon how cramped the family home had been with little space for her to study. Although Sophie was frustrated by her family home, attachment to it may still have been strong, in particular because Sophie was unsettled within the social groups she had formed during her first few weeks at university. Sophie felt that she needed to bring things into her room at university that personalised it in some way in order to make it feel more like home. She had compared her room to that of a nearby student and felt that hers was lacking in some way. Despite her thoughts that 'home is where you make it', Sophie recognised that she needed to bring some of the 'old' into the 'new' to make her transition into university life less disconcerting. In addition, her thoughts that home could be 'where you make it' suggests a lack of attachment to place, that is, you can easily feel established and at home wherever you go. For Sophie, although she enjoyed the physical environment and was in the process of finding her social position within the university, her attitudes towards transition focused on immediate confines. It was in her room where she was able to create a sense of place.

Feeling at home was primarily experienced in relation to personal space and developing friends. The twelve students who I met with during their first term were still in the process of settling into their university lives when I met them. Overall, they had all settled well after initial periods of self-doubt and anxiousness. Their experiences of the first term at university had matched

their expectations in a number of ways and this is illustrative of how influential the Sutton Trust week was in preparing them for university life. The diversity of the other students surprised them and yet this did not deter them from their goal of obtaining a good degree. The process of self-positioning in relation to others appears in literature (see, Walkerdine, Lucey et al. 2001) and the students in this study were continually re-positioning themselves during their first term. University felt like home because they had experienced a number of university 'tasters'. They had been inculcated into the system academically and were managing to find their way socially – in spite of occasional set backs.

This picture is different to traditional working class relationships with education and suggests that these students identify more closely with an intermediate class as outlined above. In addition, given their gradual movement and closer alignment with the field of education, their participation on the Sutton Trust Summer School raises issues concerning the direction of intervention strategies and who is able to access them. These students represent a group of young people with aspirations and family contexts through which they were able to make the necessary steps in order to fulfill their ambitions. They had formed the desire to go to university from a young age and with or without the Sutton Trust, would have done so. They feel at home in their 'new' environment. This is not a tale of production, although in Mathew's case, it could be argued that his is a limited form of production. This thesis presents a story of reproduction – reflecting processes and methods within education that potentially exclude working class young people from its benefits.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has focused on habitus by exploring the possible ways in which a habitus can adapt to context. Using my own story and that of Grace, Eve, Oscar and Sophie, I have demonstrated how education played a major role in that adaptation and the tension or pull that can occur as a result of interactions within the field of education. Positions within the field can be altered through the adaptation of the habitus and this is evident in my own story and the stories of the students in this study. I illustrated how the

students, with the exception of Mathew, adapted to the demands of the field of education and the strategies they employed to secure places at leading UK institutions. I also explored the students' first term at university to illustrate how the students had settled into their new environments. In doing so, I hinted at the idea that they felt more at home at university than they had done so in their home location, thus reflecting congruence within the field of education and differences between them and their families. I now move onto discuss the findings in more detail and raise some concerns about the impact of intervention programmes.

In this chapter, I return to the main research questions and reflect on how they have been addressed within the study. I outline how this study contributes to the body of literature on widening participation and also that which utilises Bourdieu as a theoretical framework for understanding educational inequalities.

## **Introduction**

This thesis began by outlining my own story and the way in which my journey to HE occurred. I also outlined the current political focus on widening participation in UK universities. I clarified the types of social groups that have historically been under-represented in universities and provided the context through which improvement for some groups (e.g. gender, ethnicity) has occurred. I explored all such issues through a Bourdieuan lens.

Two main research questions were posed in this study:

- What are the experiences of working class young people during and after their progression into Higher Education?
- What role do institutions play in the attraction and retention of such students?

In addition, I have a reflexive component to the research in which I address the following sub-questions:

- what can the specific sample in this study tell us about journeys into HE?
- are there any implications to policy from this study?

I now take each of the main questions in turn and detail how they have been addressed before moving onto to explore the sub-questions.

## **What are the Experiences of Working Class Young People During and After their Progression into Higher Education?**

This study set out to explore the journeys into HE of a group of working class young people; young people who had participated in an aspiration raising intervention programme. As such, the stories presented are not reflective of all working class young people. In exploring the educational experiences of a group of students as they progressed into higher education, a number of issues were raised. These concerned:



- the nature of class
- the family background of each student
- how the students responded to their schooling contexts
- what happens to young people as they respond to their schooling experiences.

I take each of these in turn to outline how young people make the journey into higher education.

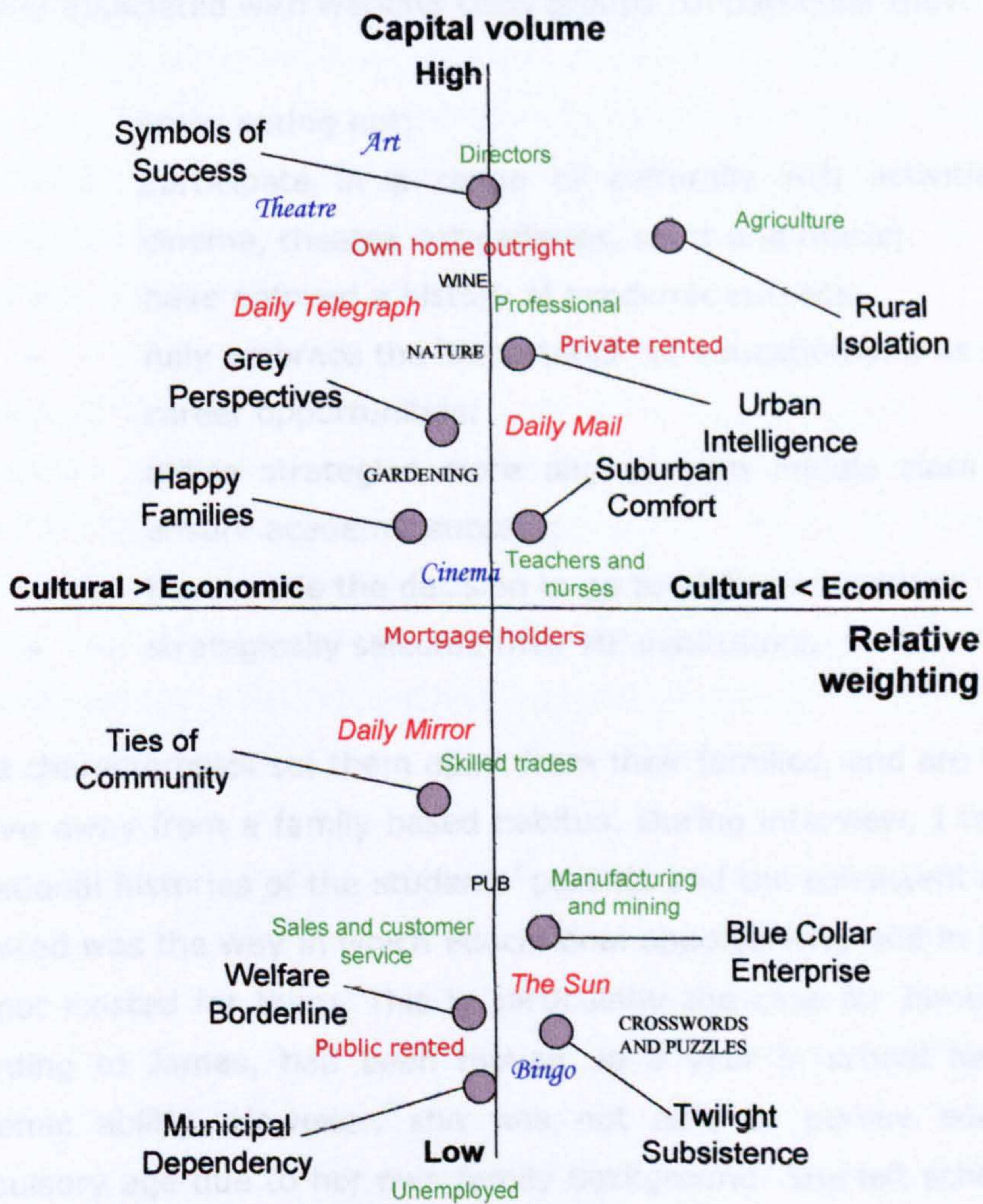
## **The Nature of Class**

One of the main issues that surfaced within this study was the question of class – the extent the students were representative of disadvantaged groups or could be categorised as ‘working class’ proved to be a complex problem. Debates about class, in particular how class structures can be understood often feature in literature (see, Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bourdieu 1986; Marshall, Rose et al. 1988; Scase 1992; Mahony and Zmroczek 1997; Rose and O'Reilly 1997; Skeggs 1997; Skeggs 1997; Reid 1998; Milner 1999; Crompton 2000; Crompton and Scott 2000; Devine and Savage 2000; Savage 2000; Roberts 2001; Skeggs 2004). The homogenisation of individuals into groups has been criticised (Bourke, 1994; Rose, 1997; Adonis, 1998) and as Crompton (2006) identifies, the distinction between economic and cultural accounts of class reproduction is often overlooked in ‘abstract’ (*Ibid*: 659) notions of class.

In abstract notions of class, one particular aspect of the social world is used to understand social class: economic factors. For instance, class classification systems in the UK rely on employment status as a measure of social class and separate it out from other aspects of the social world which may ‘co-exist with it’ (Sayer 2005: 72). The students in this study were categorised on the basis of their parents’ occupational status and this proved to be an inadequate measure of their own social positioning. This measurement can not account for individual aspirations or differences between individuals from the same family. Whilst ‘members of the working class are more likely to come from working class backgrounds... their children are often upwardly mobile’ (Savage 2000: 83). Movement and the aspiration to move from one social position to another

were found in this study. Many of the students reported that they wanted more than their parents had – with ‘more’ equating to increased financial resources that would bring about improved life conditions.

Bourdieu gets at the heart of this issue by claiming each individual system of dispositions can be viewed as a structural variant of a group or class habitus which importantly express the ‘difference between trajectories and positions inside or outside the class’ (Bourdieu 1977: 86). For Bourdieu, such similarities and differences can be identified according to the positioning of individuals. I have adapted the work of Bourdieu to relate the conceptual framework to the current context in the UK, as illustrated in Figure 23. The ‘spatial differences on paper’ are representative of and ‘equivalent to social differences’ (Bourdieu 1998: 6).



**Figure 23:** The Space of social Positions and the Space of Lifestyles  
(Adapted from Bourdieu 1998: 6)

This figure usefully illustrates the expected concomitant activities associated with high levels of economic capital – the capacity to engage in culturally ‘rich’ activities. Sense can therefore be made of the students’ experiences - they act as individuals, but are loosely tied to a social group through their class based habitus and the levels of resources at their disposal. Differences between themselves and their respective families can be understood as a shift in habitus which has occurred as a result of interactions within a number of fields – social and educational being just two.

A focus on habitus is fundamental to understanding the students’ experiences and helps to move towards more sociological interpretations of social class. Whilst they are categorised as mainly working class through their parents’ occupational status, their own dispositions and attitudes are not those normally associated with working class groups. In particular they:

- enjoy eating out;
- participate in a range of culturally rich activities including, cinema, theatre, art galleries, sport and music;
- have enjoyed a history of academic success;
- fully embrace the ‘importance’ of education and its role in future career opportunities;
- utilise strategies more aligned with middle class practices to ensure academic success;
- have made the decision to go to higher education;
- strategically selected their HE institutions.

These characteristics set them apart from their families, and are suggestive of a move away from a family based habitus. During interview, I teased out the educational histories of the students’ parents and the consistent message that appeared was the way in which educational opportunities and in particular HE, had not existed for them. This is particularly the case for James’ mum who, according to James, had been moved up a year in school because of her academic ability. However, she was not able to pursue education post-compulsory age due to her own family background. She left school to work in a bank immediately when she reached the statutory leaving age. Later, she

had aspirations to study again, but shelved these when she became a mother. The aspirations his mother had for her own education and for James appears in other stories across the sample. All the students comment on the idea that they want to do 'better' than their parents had and importantly that they had the opportunity to do so.

The idea of social movement from one position to another therefore needs to be deconstructed to establish exactly what the nature of the movement is. Material outcomes present only one partial account of complex life histories, and this factor drove the students' desire to go to university. Movement of social position takes place within complex interactions in which alternative position taking and making are possible. Bourdieu emphasises the limited possibility of movement away from inherited social positions: a stance that has been criticised for being overly deterministic (Giroux 1983). However, Bourdieu does not completely dismiss the possibility of movement away from and between social positions (indeed, this was his own life experience) – he is clear that particular dynamics in operation within separate fields can influence an individual's position - a theme that is also taken up by Lareau and McNamara (1999: 50).

Theories of social *reproduction* do account for contextual constraints and possibilities within a variety of fields but also embrace the idea that social *movement* between positions can occur. Position taking is dependent on the situated nature of the interactions that take place from 'moment to moment' (Lareau and McNamara Horvat 1999: 50). The students' 'dream of social flying' (Bourdieu 1993:2) could only be realised through numerous interactions within a variety of fields.

The students in this study were from a variety of backgrounds and although some were theoretically positioned in the same social class group, there were many differences between them. Classification systems that seek to homogenise people into identifiable groups are therefore limited in offering insights into individual experiences. As such, blanket policies that are designed to improve conditions for a working class 'group' may not do so. This is particularly the case for widening participation initiatives. Although intended to

raise aspirations of working class young people, research has found that the middle classes benefit the most from such programmes (Henry 2002). It is therefore pertinent to consider the family background in more detail of students who may be considered for widening participation interventions.

## **Understanding Family background**

Although school effect has been recognised as an important factor in educational outcomes (e.g. Cassen and Kingdon 2007; Hirsch 2007), family background, including the academic level of parents (e.g. E Del Rey and M Del Mar Racionera 2002) has also been referred to as having a direct effect on a child's academic attainment (see for example, Scarr and Weinberg 1978; Astone and McLanahan 1991; K van Eijck 1997; E Del Rey and M Del Mar Racionera 2002). Others cite parental involvement in schools as influential to educational outcomes (e.g. Jowett, Baginsky et al. 1991; Hallgarten 2000; Hanafin and Lynch 2002). Research has also found strong links between social deprivation in the home location and poor academic attainment (e.g. Garner and Raudenbush 1991; Barnes, Belsky et al. 2006; Powis, David et al. 2007). Such influences do not occur in isolation – they are situated and constructed within social networks.

It is through the family and its networks that an individual's habitus develops – a history that becomes embodied and acted out through class based practices (Bourdieu 1977). The cultural and social capitals existent within a family group inform and structure the habitus, which 'acquired in the family underlies the structuring of school experiences' (Bourdieu 1977: 87). Whilst the habitus structures and restructures experiences, interactions between individuals within the field of education are important to this study – the extent to which the habitus is 'pre-adapted' (Bourdieu 1990a: 61) to or influenced by schooling practices.

From what the students in this study have said, it is evident their family based habituses were positively aligned to education. This is illustrated through what they had to say about the levels of encouragement they received. This was particularly the case for Sophie whose mother seemed extremely dominant not only in helping her with her studies where she could, but also in the

process of choosing the right school. There seemed to be high levels of emotional input into the decision - Sophie knew that she was being given opportunities her parents had never had and she had felt guilty for not rewarding them with high levels of achievement in Year 6. Sophie lived in an area that ranked 10,080 on the Index of Multiple Deprivation and yet attended a school which was in a more deprived area. Sophie described it as a 'little light in the darkness kind of thing' (Sophie: Interview) and recognised that the school was instrumental in her social movement away from that of her family.

Although many of the students in this study lived in relatively affluent areas as indicated in Chapter 4 (*Habitus: Influenced by Home Context*), their unfamiliarity with the process of applying to university reflects a family history that lacked such opportunities. A detailed exploration of the students' respective backgrounds reveals parents who wanted their children to succeed and young people who wanted to do well. In this context, the support from their respective families enabled them to succeed within education and yet it is clear that there were other motivating factors that drove the students' aspirations. Although they did not talk about their parents' occupations in derogatory ways, there is a sense in which they knew they were moving on and beyond the class based horizons that informed their childhoods. The students identified with the notion of poverty, even if they had not experienced it themselves and this knowledge drove their decision to progress onto HE. Their 'dream of social flying' reflected a 'perfect expression of an uncomfortable position in the social world' (Bourdieu 1993: 2) and paved the way for their positive experiences of school.

## **Responses to Schooling**

Middle class advantage is evident within schooling - its curriculum and ideological basis reflect the unequal distribution of the various forms of capital (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bourdieu and Passeron 1994). Capital(s) acquirement provides individuals with the tools for successful participation in the game. What is clear in this study is students who negotiate successfully through education enter into a process of habitus transformation from an early age. In conjunction with the efforts of key teachers and the effect of a positive

institutional habitus, students who are more disposed towards education will be able to benefit. In order to address and 'rectify' the clash between a working class habitus and the habitat of universities (as I outlined in Chapter 2: *Theoretical Lens: Explaining Higher Education*), much input is required to establish a perfect 'fit'. This preparation points to the complexities that lay beneath the process of going to HE and emerges as a manifestation of dynamic interactive processes between individual students, their peers, their home contexts and schools.

The students in this study understood their journeys to HE within this complex web of relations. They talked about discussions with friends who knew more about university and the passive and yet supportive role of their parents during the process of their decision to go to university. For some, there was an expectation that they would go to university and they understood this pressure in the context of wider political discourses that promote continuing with education as a positive step post-compulsory schooling. However, they said they did not see their journeys as isolated from the work of their teachers and the contexts of their respective schools.

It is clear from many of the students' stories that their teachers were influential in guiding them through the requirements for a successful university application – a process that actually began in primary school. Academic attainment became an important pursuit for the students. This was in part due to the effect early academic success had on their confidence levels and sense of identity/ies, where academic success became an indicator that the students were different and better. Zara, for example remembers being given extra maths workbooks which had made her feel special. In this context, the students' habituses adapted to the demands of educational performativity, where achieving well becomes celebrated and an indicator of a good pupil and school (Goldstein and Thomas 1996). In a market based education system, where examination results are an indicator of a good school, it is not surprising that those who demonstrate an affinity with such aims are selected out and offered differential treatment. For many students in this study, this was the case. They had been offered opportunities through Gifted and Talented programmes and were invited to participate in a number of widening

participation activities as a reward for their academic ability. Identifying academically able students and sending them off to leading universities also has positive benefits for schools – it would enhance the reputation of the school in marketing information which might result in increased numbers of middle class families opting to send their child to the school.

During secondary school and their post-16 educational experiences, the students built on their earlier successes. They identified the exchangeable value of academic credentials within the HE market place and ensured that they secured places in leading institutions by focusing on achieving the best A Level grades they could. In many cases, this included having to re-take AS modules. Whilst this caused those that took re-takes some anxiety, this was viewed as a necessary step, not only to secure such a place, but also to secure advantage in the employment market on graduation.

This thesis has outlined the difficult experiences that the majority of working class young people have with the education system (Chapters 1 and 2). Much of the literature used within this thesis identifies the nature of those experiences, some of which focuses on the reproductive nature of education. This study built from such literature and explored how the habitus can adapt to context and the possible moments where 'pulls' towards a different trajectory can occur.

## **Adaptation of the Habitus**

Bourdieu argued that the habitus

...tends to secure its own consistency and its defence against change through the selection it makes within new information by rejecting information capable of calling into question its accumulated information. (Bourdieu 1990a: 61)

I found that the students in this study were pre-adapted to the influence of their schooling contexts and therefore did not face the types of potential 'crises and critical challenges' (Bourdieu 1990a: 61) that would disturb its constancy. However, as exemplified in Grace's story, her decision to go to



university occurred at a late stage in her educational journey. It was not until she was prompted to consider this as an option during her interview for a place in the school sixth form that she gave it some thought. Prior to this Grace had no clear idea of possible employment routes and seemed to be coasting towards a 'career' in retail.

There were definite 'pulls' away from this: her family context in which she experienced much autonomy in decision making; her teachers at school who identified her as academically able; and her latent desire to do something with her life. In that sense, Grace was receptive to the forms of intervention that she experienced, because she had no firm idea about where she wanted to be or what she wanted to do. The 'accumulated information' through the school institution had more influence over her decision making processes than did that experienced through the family. The interview for sixth form can therefore be understood as a 'trajectory interruption'.

The students in the study that came from families whose parents were in middle class occupations (according to the NES-S system), also faced trajectory interruptions. I found similarities in their stories which could account for possible interruptions to their educational trajectories. For example, Oscar had a difficult time whilst at primary school. He experienced a number of fixed term exclusions because of his disruptive behaviour. He claimed that his state primary school failed to identify his dyslexia problem and that this was only picked up when he was transferred to a high performing (based on examination results), fee-paying independent school. Whilst there, his academic potential was discovered following the support he received for his then acknowledged difficulties. Oscar was angered by this, and he revealed that things may have been remarkably different had he stayed in his first primary school. He understood his transfer to an independent school as placing him back onto the trajectory that his middle class background would have predicted – the crisis had been averted and he was now back on the middle class track.

Education, given its strong associations with the accrual of cultural capital in particular, is a site of reproduction and exclusion or as Beck states

'protection against downward mobility' (Beck 1992: 94). Bourdieu explains how this happens by focusing on both the distance or discordance between the habitus and the field, but also by looking at the practices of those whose habitus is considered to be distant from the field. In particular those who do not possess the appropriate forms of capital that are legitimated through schooling practices (Lareau 1987; Lareau and McNamara Horvat 1999; Reay 2001). Bourdieu and Passeron posit the hierarchy of academic achievement as a determinant of social hierarchies (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). It follows that as young people move through the system and accrue academic qualifications, they establish a better sense of fit with schooling processes. The market value attached to educational qualifications perpetuate the logic of the education system as there is no viable alternative,

This is why the school system is most successful in imposing recognition of the value of itself and its classifications when its action is applied to social classes or class fractions who are unable to counterpose to it any rival principle of hierarchy. (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977: 147)

As there is no other 'rival principle of hierarchy' other mechanisms of reproduction such as exclusion and selection come into play, for example through the examination process. Bourdieu and Passeron consider the examination process to conceal 'social selection under the guise of technical selection' (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977: 153). Although perceived to be based on meritocratic principles, with all pupils being offered the same chances of success, examinations perform the function of a social filter. Bourdieu and Wacquant refer to this perception as 'misrecognition' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992): as accepting the idea that education operates as a form of meritocracy which conceals the reality of underlying inequalities within that field. The field of education privileges middle class children who, through their familial background, possess the 'right' dispositions and capitals to be successful within the education field.

... children who have inherited particular kinds of behaviours, languages and dispositions are already privileged in schooling,

which is built on that capital and seeks to build more.... (And the reverse is also true, children who do not possess such advantages are educationally disadvantaged). (Thomson 2005: 742)

Thus, 'meritocracy' in schools operates in limited ways and for certain types of young people, with certain types of capital and habituses. Whilst the students do not possess economic capital, they pursued a range of activities to ensure they possessed the right forms of cultural capital – capital that would privilege them throughout their schooling experiences. The 'moments' where this occurred have been identified in previous chapters. However, understanding why this is the case for a small number of working class young people is a complex issue.

Bourdieu and Passeron take a critical stance towards research that attempts to explain working class academic failure or elimination in terms of 'lack of motivation' (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977: 154). They further point out that statistical analyses conceal 'the functioning and functions of the educational system as an agency of selection [and] elimination' (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977: 154). Bourdieu's work generally (and that which he undertook with Passeron), demonstrates that structures within education can prohibit success and progression for working class young people. In eliminating themselves from education, working class students experience a process in which they demarcate themselves or are demarcated as different from middle class students. Only working class students who have the aspirations and capacity to succeed within the constraints of a middle class field are undaunted by the selection and elimination process: they find a way of fitting in by aligning their primary habitus to the habitat and influences of schooling.

One interpretation of the students' class positioning is therefore that they were working class, but have undergone transformation through adaptation of the habitus. Another possible interpretation is that they were part of an intermediate class (Ball and Vincent 2005) and were on the periphery of both working and middle class categorisation. If they are understood to belong to an intermediate class, this would adequately explain why their educational

experiences differ significantly from other similarly categorised young people often reported on in literature. It would also explain their predisposition to culturally rich activities and their pursuit of a place in a leading university where they believed that they would fit both socially and academically.

Theoretically, this approach to understanding the social positioning of the students is a move away from other literatures that work with Bourdieu. The analytical approach in this study accounts for movement from one social position to another by identifying moments in a young person's educational journey which are catalysts for such social mobility. It clearly illustrates how an individual's habitus finds stability through adapting to context and where 'their [the students'] attitudes and behaviour will continue to express the particular logic of its [educations'] operations' (Bourdieu 1994: 13).

As outlined above, education is primarily a site of social class reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). The process through which this occurs has been identified by for example, the examination system (Gillborn and Youdell 2000), the curriculum and associated language used (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977), setting (Boaler 2005), the capacity of middle class groups to monopolise education through choice processes (Reay and Lucey 2000; Ball 2003) and the 'failure' of working class young people to take advantage of the meritocratic principles of education (Gillborn and Youdell 2000). Political rhetoric views education as the main route out of poverty and disadvantage (Blyth 2001; DfES 2003); a social and educational passport into improved living conditions. As Archer and Hutchings argue,

In short, the benefits of having a degree were constructed as an almost mythical ticket to social mobility and a good life. (Archer and Hutchings 2000: 565)

Responsibility is placed onto individuals to contribute economically within society. Educational policies of the government support this aim:

Learning is the key to prosperity - for each of us as individuals, as well as for the nation as a whole. Investment in human

capital will be the foundation of success in the knowledge-based global economy of the twenty-first century. (DfEE 1998: Foreword)

Such policies are legitimated through school processes that privilege middle class approaches to education and discount working class ambivalence; middle class families are in a position in which their attitudes towards education are more in line with those of ministers. As Ball states,

...in developed societies around the world, education policies are primarily aimed at satisfying the concerns and interests of the middle class. (Ball 2003: 25)

Whilst middle class pupils enjoy a relatively straightforward journey through education, this is not the case for working class pupils who experience many barriers to progressing in education (Adonis and Pollard 1998; Archer 2003). The possibility of moving from one class to another is restricted to those with academic ability, through for example, meritocratic principles operating in education. Those with a 'family atmosphere which has proved less unfavourable' (Bourdieu, Passeron et al. 1994: 42) towards education benefit more from its systems than do the majority of working class families.

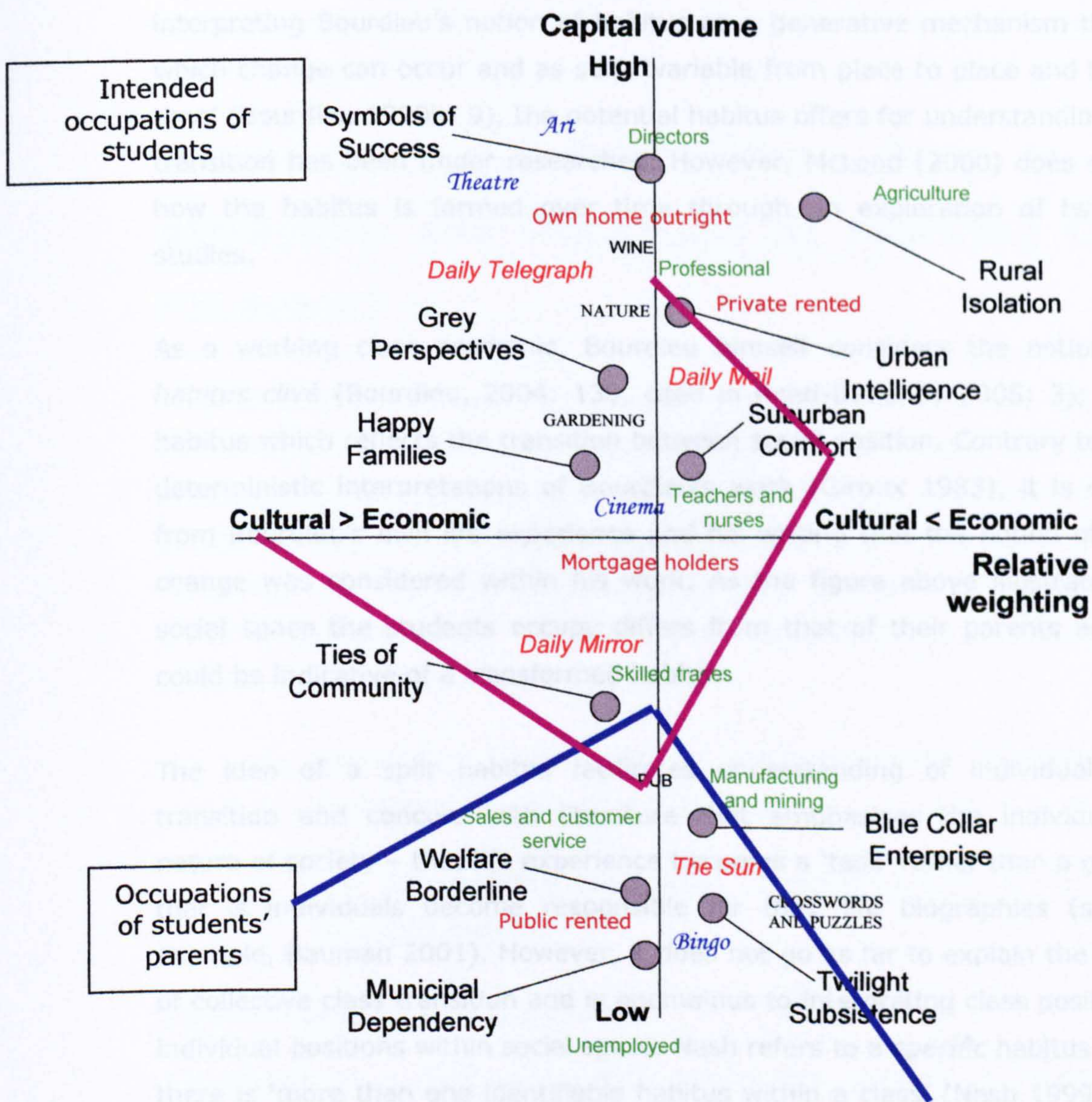
Little attention has been paid to successful working class young people who do manage to succeed within education and the processes that contribute to their success. Some of the literature on class transition comprises retrospective personal accounts that focus on painful aspects of a complex journey in which class transition is experienced negatively (see for example, Rose 1989; Gardner 1993; Langston 1993; Reay 1997). Education for many working class individuals is viewed as either a means of escape (Overall 1995), self improvement or a mixture of the two (Reay 2001). In addition, educational success 'is not about the valorization of working classness but its erasure' (Reay 2001: 334). That is, within the field of education, success is dependent on close alignment to its embedded practices, values and principles.

It is clear in the above accounts that class transition is experienced as 'not fitting in' or as existing in the 'enemy camp of academia' (Langston 1993: 60) and this may be reflective of the discordant relationship between an individual habitus and the habitat of an educational context. Class transition here can be seen as an emotional experience: a process that produces a social position in which tension is experienced or '...the feeling of *being torn* that comes from experiencing success as failure or, better still, as transgression.' (Bourdieu 1999: 510).

Mobility from one social position to another is more often associated with upward movement, as Sayer and Fisher (1997) state, a working class identity is not something that is 'aspired to' (60). It is evident in the literature that the transition from working class to middle class is to be encouraged through education and yet this position negates the value of cultural differences between the different classes. In addition, it is a form of oppression in which

[t]rying to get people from disadvantaged groups to be 'more like us' is usually a sign of supremacy at work, carrying the implicit message that 'our way' is better. (Goodman 2001: 19)

Taking further Bourdieu's ideas of positions within social space as a key determinant of understanding social class, it is important also to consider other components of class transition. Movement away from a position in social space is determined by changes to the distribution of various forms of capital which also results in shifts in emotional states as identified in the personal narratives mentioned above. Class transition is therefore a complex process through the mediation of the habitus in which the social, emotional and economic progressively interact to produce an altered position in social space. Based on actual occupations and intended occupations, this transformation can be clearly seen between the students in this study and their parents as I illustrate in Figure 24 below.



**Figure 24:** Difference in Occupational Status between Students and their Parents

(Adapted from Bourdieu 1998: 6)

However, as Walkerdine et al., (2001) identify, class transition is almost a mythical process as class is embedded, 'performed, marked, [and] written on minds and bodies' (Walkerdine, Lucey et al. 2001: 215). Class transition is

therefore problematic in the sense that it can never be fully complete. In interpreting Bourdieu's notion of habitus as a generative mechanism through which change can occur and as such 'variable from place to place and time to time' (Bourdieu 1990b: 9), the potential habitus offers for understanding class transition has been under researched. However, McLeod (2000) does explore how the habitus is formed over time through an exploration of two case studies.

As a working class academic, Bourdieu himself considers the notion of a *habitus clivé* (Bourdieu, 2004: 130, cited in Reed-Danahay 2005: 3); a split habitus which reflects the transition between social position. Contrary to many deterministic interpretations of Bourdieu's work (Giroux 1983), it is evident from Bourdieu's own life experience and his writing that the notion of social change was considered within his work. As the figure above illustrates, the social space the students occupy differs from that of their parents and this could be indicative of a transformed habitus.

The idea of a split habitus facilitates understanding of individual class transition and concurs with literature that emphasises the individualised nature of society – that life experience becomes a 'task' rather than a given – that is individuals become responsible for their life biographies (see for example, Bauman 2001). However, it does not go as far to explain the notion of collective class transition and is anomalous to interpreting class position as individual positions within social space. Nash refers to a *specific* habitus where there is 'more than one identifiable habitus within a class' (Nash 1999: 178) which partially accounts for different social positions being possible. For collective class transition to occur, in a Bourdieuan sense, there have to be patterns of behaviour which are 'statistically common to members of the same class' (Bourdieu 1990a: 60). Therefore, the condition in which transition occurs has to be similar for more individuals from the same social class position in order for a collective class transition to occur.

Whilst this section has highlighted the difficulties associated with class transition and focused on the negative components of class labelling, there is also a positive outcome for class identification through appropriate allocation



of resources or intervention strategies. I now turn to specifically address the role that institutions have in moving young people beyond their class based horizons.

## **What Role do Institutions Play in the Attraction and Retention of Working Class Students?**

It is difficult to address this question without considering the discourses surrounding education, for example: ability; assessment for learning; meritocracy; lifelong learning; widening participation; consumerism; fairer access. I found that the students in this study were captured within such discourses and subjected to experiences that strongly reflected a market driven education system – both in the compulsory and post-compulsory sectors. This occurred in two ways:

- the way in which teachers encouraged and supported their academic development and progress
- how the students constructed an understanding of the higher education system.

### **Favourites in the System**

I found that the students in this study experienced schooling as 'products' and 'producers' of the educational discourses listed above. Many of them were identified as different to other students in their schools. Government policy supports such students in their educational endeavours by structuring the system in such a way that those who are able to crack the code of schooling and willingly enter into the game (Bourdieu and Passeron 1994), are more likely to reap the rewards. It is easy for teachers to deal with students who enter the game willingly – they are captive higher education 'fodder' waiting to be provided with the requisite credentials to move onto the next stage of education.

Policies that focus on individual attainment and outcomes deflect attention from social responsibility. If there is educational failure, it is the 'fault' of the individual concerned. Working class young people are 'discursively constituted as an unknowing, uncritical, tasteless mass from which the middle classes draw their distinctions' (Reay 2001: 335). The students in this study were aware of others who did not match their academic profiles who they identified as 'others'. Sophie found it extremely uncomfortable when she was placed in the lowest maths set on entry to Year 7. She could not identify with other pupils in that group and set herself the task of a rapid exit, which she achieved through hard work and determination. Sophie's discomfort reflected her own sense of emerging identity and habitus transformation. She did not want to be 'pulled' in the direction of academic failure nor did she want her identity to be linked to others in that group. Woodward (2000) claims that identity is relational and in Sophie's case, she identified more closely with pupils in her other subject sets – students who like her, placed a high value on academic attainment.

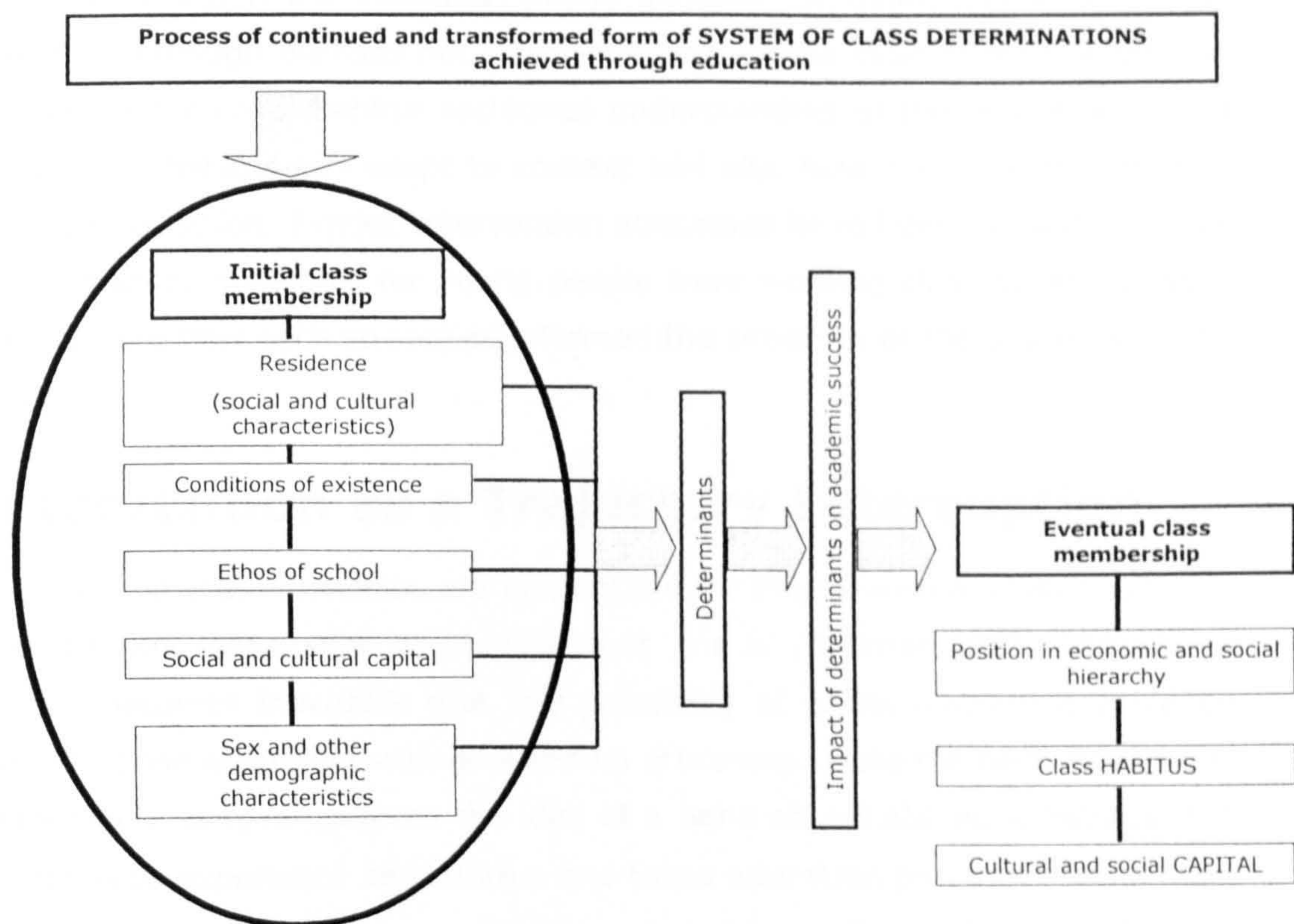
The students in this study attended schools which supported their aspirations to move onto higher education. The processes and systems at play appeared to direct pupils in that direction. Sayda for example, attended a high achieving school some distance from her family home. The OfSTED report for this school praises its thorough and rigorous assessment processes - processes which frequently highlighted any deviation from predicted academic scores. In this context, Sayda was tracked throughout her secondary school experience to ensure that she did not let herself, or her school down.

Positions within the field of education are based on class relations and this is reflected primarily by examination performance. How young people, in particular those from working class backgrounds become positioned, according to Bourdieu and Passeron is through a progressive process of self-elimination:

...most of those excluded from studying at the various levels of education eliminate themselves before being examined, and...the proportion of those whose elimination is thus masked by the selection overtly carried out differs according to social class. (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977: 153)

Examinations are structured to exclude, but also to include: those with the appropriate form of technical competence, or habitus closely aligned with the requirements of the field perform well with the opposite also being true (e.g. Burgess 1986; Reay 2001; Archer, Hutchings et al. 2003). The focus of government attention has been placed on working class academic failure rather than the principles at work, or the structures that contribute to its making. In this sense, the poor academic performance of the majority of working class pupils is considered to be of their own making. They are discursively constructed as academic failures who lack aspirations (Gillborn and Youdell 2000; DfES 2003) and are therefore continually at risk of elimination from education.

The 'school effect' (Smith and Tomlinson 1989; Bourdieu 1996) was a clear determining component in the students' choices and strategies. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) highlight the process of school effect through all sectors and stages of education and refer to it as 'The Educational Career and its System of Determinations' (255). Figure 25 represents this process in condensed form, taking the main ideas from *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, it usefully denotes the way in which interactions between the school, student and the acquirement of the various forms of capital can influence an individual's outcomes.



**Figure 25:** Determinants Impacting on Class Position (adapted from Bourdieu and Passeron 1977)

Figure 25 also indicates that progression in education is more complex than academic success alone. Although the determinants that make academic success possible contribute to a school 'effect', they are also part of a complex interaction between habitus and the various forms of capital. Students who succeed in education do so as a result of their dispositions towards learning and the way in which education systems support their progress. The students in this study, through a process of selection aligned themselves closely with other academically able pupils. This effectively meant that a subliminal process of elimination occurred. Anna, for example, refers to friends who went on to college to study more vocational subjects who she did not see anymore. This is indicative of a growing social and academic separation and the educational and social priming that was taking place. These students had a different pathway mapped out for them – their teachers expected them to go to university and they also desired this. There was sufficient preparation

undertaken within the students' school contexts to make this academically possible, although perhaps not in social terms as the case of Matt illustrates. Bourdieu's notion of habitus facilitates understanding of the way in which an individual's habitus can adapt to context and also how it can be transformed through education. Explicit intervention strategies have been utilised to act as compensatory measures for young people from working class backgrounds. I now explore how such strategies informed the progress of the students in this study.

## **Intervention as a Trajectory Interruption**

It is claimed that individuals are responsible for their eventual class position – that they are responsible, to become what 'one is' (Bauman 2001: 144). If so, it then becomes *inevitable* that any possibility of social mobility is achieved through close alignment with educational processes. I use the term 'inevitable' deliberately as it re-enforces the idea of a generative habitus: a habitus that responds to experience and context and takes education processes as its main form of 'input'. This interpretation of habitus allows for flexibility in understanding class transition both across and within social groups.

Although reproduction across generations does occur ... the dynamic character of the social world means that it will not occur perfectly: for example, more or less identical habitus can generate widely different outcomes. (Lawler 2004: 112)

This stance on habitus has particular relevance when I consider the way in which my own social trajectory differed from that of my sister as I outlined in Chapter 1 (*Prologue*). My own experience informs me that class transition is possible through education and that due to linear models of progression, there comes a point within the process that further progress does become *inevitable*. Literature on this issue is clear that progression for the two social groups is experienced differently where middle classes see moving onto university as a natural progression (Green 1969; Parr 1997; Power, Edwards et al. 2003). For many of the students in this study, the sense of inevitability featured highly in their stories. They claimed that they had always wanted to go to university and their experience of the Sutton Trust confirmed that. It is

their participation on an intervention programme that intends to raise the aspirations of working class young people that raises some important questions about access and participation.

It was suggested to me that this particular group of students did not go through normal recruitment procedures (personal communication), but it is impossible within the scope of this study to explore this issue. I am left with the vexed position of claiming that this group of students, as part of an intermediate or aspirational working class group, strategically used their knowledge of the education system to their advantage thus reducing the number of places available to students who would have benefited the most from the programme. Although this is one possible interpretation of the data, the stories presented clearly illustrate the process involved in social mobility.

As I illustrated in Chapter 1 (*Theoretical lens: Exploring Education*), working class young people have problematic relationships with education and this influences the numbers who go onto higher education. With the political drive to increase their participation, many intervention initiatives (e.g. Aimhigher, Excellence in Cities, Education Action Zones, curriculum reforms) have been introduced by Government policy. Such interventions send a clear message: education is the route to life improvement and enhanced employment opportunities. In the construction of working class young people as 'educational problems and failures' (Archer and Leathwood 2003: 228) intervention strategies perform compensatory measures for 'deficiencies' of home background that extend beyond education. Sure Start for example, is a 'radical cross-departmental strategy to raise the physical, social, emotional and intellectual status of young children through improved services' (Glass 1999: 257). Parallel programmes in the US (e.g. Head Start) have successfully improved the life chances of many young children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Currie 2001; Reynolds, Temple et al. 2001). Intervention can thus serve as a positive strategy for addressing inequalities existent in the material conditions across social groups. But, this is dependent on the focus of the work reaching those most in need of it and also whether the gap between the social classes narrows or not.

Education or the value of education lies at the centre of intervention programmes. As detailed in Chapter 1 (*Theoretical Lens: Exploring Education*), education is a key route out of poverty (Blyth 2001) and reduces dependency on the state (Cassidy 2006). The types of intervention required vary. Sure Start aims to intervene in many areas of family life – the physical, social, emotional and intellectual through early intervention programmes. Nothing is untouched. The deficiencies in a working class habitus are not a cause of celebration. Within government policy they are the very target of intervention where

Working class capital has always been signified as deficient: They do not know the right things, they do not value the right things, they do not want the right things. (Lawler 1999: 11)

Early intervention that attempts to inculcate middle class dispositions into working class consciousness, leads onto more specific targeting through education. The Sutton Trust is one possible intervention amongst many. The success of such programmes depends on the types of students that participate. The criteria for attending the summer school programme includes the achievement of five or more A\* - C grades at GCSE (The Sutton Trust 2007) which may act as a barrier to many working class young people. A recent HEFCE funded project which investigated four cities with some of the lowest HE participation rates, identified that achieving such grades is problematic for young people living in deprived communities (Reed, Gates et al. 2007). The report also highlights high levels of disengagement with education and limited aspirations which are deeply embedded within the cultures of the specific communities of which they are a part. School-aged young people in such communities struggle with many areas of school life and often have differing priorities than academic attainment. Although such pupils are most likely to benefit from interventions such as the Sutton Trust Summer School, they are the least likely to be offered a place due to the academic requirements alone.

Many of the students in this study attended schools where there was an expectation that the majority of students would progress further in education.

Although Erin is perhaps an exception to this, her experience of feeling pressure to apply to Oxbridge resulted in her voice being lost in the process of university application (Byrom, Thomson et al. 2007). However, even with the difficulties Erin experienced, she too 'knew' that she would go on to higher education. For her it was a matter of *which* institution she should choose. By the time of the Sutton Trust Summer School all the students in this study had considered HE as their next logical step towards professional careers. This raises the question of who participates on such Summer Schools and whether they attract the young people they intend to help.

In posing this question, I lead onto the degree to which intervention programmes meet their objectives. As a working class habitus is incongruent with school institutions, it is unlikely that the majority of working class students would participate in programmes such as the Sutton Trust. An emerging secondary habitus, is more receptive to interventions than a 'pure' working class habitus. A process of inculcation into education and acceptance of education's worth as a 'mythical ticket to social mobility and a good life' (Archer and Hutchings 2000: 565) is required in order to be responsive to such interventions. Or they would need to possess the 'dispositions objectively compatible' (Bourdieu 1990a: 54) with the aims of the intervention programme. Although the students in this study did benefit from their Sutton Trust experience, the week did not present a significant 'interruption' of their respective habituses. This had occurred at earlier stages in their journeys.

For the students in this study, their experience of class and the adaptation of their habituses are aided by the accountability of schools and strong external influencing factors: factors that ensure academic success for disadvantaged students. Whilst many intervention strategies fail to address the structural inequalities persistent in education, the students in this study benefited from the political focus on improving schools. Their academic success has enabled them to 'fit' into the system thus reducing the distance between a working class habitus and the requirements of a middle class field. In becoming more like their middle class peers, they attract the types of intervention that historically was directed towards more privileged groups (for a discussion on educational inequalities see for example, Plummer, 2000).



The students understood their respective journeys into HE as a natural progression from their earlier educational experiences. They did not reflect the experiences of the majority of working class students often found in the literature and as illustrated in this thesis, but are representative of a small minority who do go onto HE. They considered their journeys to match the journeys of other more privileged students, but with the following caveats:

- they know that they will face and have faced financial hardship
- they experienced frustrations when exam results were not as expected, but importantly knew how to rectify this
- they appreciate that their future living conditions may be better than that of their parents – they expect to have access to more economic capital
- they understand that in going to university, they are marked as different within their families.

The final stage in their journeys that I explored was their first term at university.

## **The Reality of Settling In**

Two things intrigued me about the students' first term experiences: their claim that it felt like 'home' and their comments about other students. All 12 of the students who participated throughout the study described their university as feeling like 'home'. This feeling affirmed the preparation they had received through school had been successful: they had been ready for the move. However, they found it difficult to deconstruct and make meaning out of their sense of comfort in their new environment. When asked to explain how they experienced a sense of being at home, they commented on the way in which they had settled, how they were coping with academic life, and importantly how they had felt dislocated from their previous homes. This was particularly the case for Zara who had felt out of place when she had visited home – it seemed familiar, but she did not feel that she belonged there. Her experience had re-enforced the distance she had felt from her family when she had been living at home. Closer examination of Zara's trajectory reveals that through intervention of school, she was placed on a middle class journey from an early age. The spatial difference on paper was being lived out as she gradually grew further apart from her family. When at university, she had befriended similarly minded students in her new environment. This helped her to settle in quickly, but also confirmed her 'place' within a leading university and possibly a new social context.

Toby had a troubled time settling in. He cited two reasons for this: his accommodation being in a male hall and the fact that he found the academic work too easy. This acted as a reminder to Toby that he had wanted to apply to Oxbridge but had not been invited to do so by his school. He had been disappointed to learn that some of the students on his course had been offered places through the clearing process with lower grades than he had been required to obtain. Toby, felt he had been let down. He believed that the standard of the lectures accommodated young people with lower grades and as a consequence was being 'held back'.

I was struck by how the students positioned themselves in relation to other students. I was expecting that they would identify significant social differences between themselves and others. On reflection, this was perhaps naïve given the over-representation of the higher social groups within the sample. However, over the time that I got to know the students, I grew accustomed to their stories of anxiety about university. They continually linked their lack of knowledge about the process of applying and about university itself with their limited family background of HE. In addition, making friends featured high on their list of worries.

Sophie was the only student to comment explicitly on social differences – she had befriended a student who was extremely wealthy which had served as a reminder of her own limited resources and possibly a background which could not be exposed in this context. Walkerdine (2003) refers to feelings of discomfort during the process of social mobility and it could be that Sophie

... was very caught up with an understanding of the issue of upward mobility and the terrifying invitation to belong in a new place, which was simultaneously an invitation to feel shame about what one had before... (Walkerdine 2003: 238)

The manifestation of social difference was experienced through economic capital. Sophie stated that she had been shocked by how much money was at the disposal of some students and their capacity to spend large amounts of money. It seemed to expose the very real distance between her social background and what she perceived to be theirs. Sophie was straddling two social worlds and did not feel entirely comfortable in each. This gets at the heart of what Bourdieu describes as success as 'transgression' (Bourdieu 1999: 510).

For these students class as a term did not feature in their discourse, yet it seemed to be there, in their understanding of difference. They preferred to consider individuals' backgrounds and predominantly focus on economic capital as a means of identifying differences between individuals. They appreciated that some have more privileged upbringings as reflected in the way they speak and their opportunities. However, the students in this study

did not view themselves as disadvantaged and in this sense, class for these students was a relational notion based on their perceptions of others.

The point at which the students in this study became adapted to their new contexts varied. Matt had moved the least amount of distance by attending a local FE college which offered HE courses. He seemed to be thriving in this context and was achieving the equivalent of 'Firsts' in his assessments. This contrasted with the experiences of some of the students who seemed to be struggling a little with the academic demands of a leading institution. Eve for example, claimed that she would have to 'pull her socks up' at the end of Year 1. She felt that she had not been working as hard as she should have been and had been distracted from doing her work. The 'distraction' had been the fear of failing. Eve went to see her tutor for some guidance on how to get back on track.

Researchers (Ishitani 2003; Wilcox, Winn et al. 2005) highlight that working class young people are more likely to drop out from HE. The students in this study had no intention of doing so. Although they were experiencing some difficulties during their first term at university, the issues they faced did not affect any commitment to completing their studies. The 'dream of social flying' (Bourdieu 1993: 2) was the main motivation for staying and enduring the difficult times.

Whilst this section has identified the key issues that arose during the study, namely the complexities of class categorisation and the experiences of the students as they prepared to go to university, I now detail how this thesis contributes to the wider literature on university choice.

## **Contribution to Knowledge**

This study builds from and contributes to a number of literatures:

- working class under-representation in HE
- widening participation
- that which utilises Bourdieu as a method for understanding social practice

- the complexities of social class.

It specifically deals with the nature of how educational journeys are made into HE, by focusing on the way in which a habitus adapts to context. More specifically, the study explores the notion of moments where the habitus is 'pulled' or 'pushed' towards either a typical working class or middle class trajectory. I have understood this process as a 'trajectory interruption'.

The students' school experiences influenced their educational journeys – the ethos within the school being extremely important. For Erin, this was particularly the case. She was identified as one student who would be able to make an application to Oxbridge and was provided with numerous opportunities that ensured that route was taken. Keira talked about more subtle interventions through informal chats with teachers – chats which increased her confidence. Interventions could therefore be identified as both formal and informal. Whilst the students report a number of interventions that had guided them through their school lives, the Sutton Trust Summer School was cited as being the catalyst for their final decisions. It is worthy of note that this Summer School occurs in the summer prior to Year 13 – the time when decisions about university are made. Many of the students talked about how the campus at The University of Nottingham had influenced their final choice of university. Whilst this is an objective of the Sutton Trust, which seeks to increase the numbers of working class young people who enter leading universities, the types of students who are eligible for the programme may reflect a very small sub-section of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. As the MOSAIC analysis presented in Chapter 4 illustrates, the higher social groups are over-represented within the entire sample.

Policy agendas attribute the lack of working class HE participation on a number of factors:

- working class individuals have limited aspirations
- schools are 'failing' working class young people
- there is limited information about students who access Intervention programmes
- there is limited information about selection process involved in intervention programmes.

This study illustrates the processes involved and highlights some problems associated with selection procedures for one particular cohort. The students in this study appear to have benefited from their Sutton Trust experience, but it did not influence their decisions about whether to go to university – that decision had already been made. In addition, the students in this study accessed more than one intervention programme, thus making it difficult to identify which particular intervention works.

This study raises many questions that have policy implications.

## **Policy Implications**

One of the issues this study raised concerned recruitment processes for the Sutton Trust.

The student demographics of leading universities and in particular Russell Group universities continually illustrate an imbalance between higher and lower social class groups. Amidst arguments of 'dumbing down', leading universities have continually attracted students with the highest A Level grades. Progress in education is too often based upon measures that do not account for student potential. Policy intervention could compel universities to allocate places to students who do not meet such exacting requirement, but who may have the *potential* to succeed.

The over-representation of higher social groups on the Sutton Trust programme during 2004 raises some concerns. For widening participation to have the desired impact, more rigorous selection procedures need to be in place. This is also true of how schools intervene in the educational journeys of

young people – Aimhigher and Gifted and Talented cohorts should also be subjected to increased levels of scrutiny.

In 2004, when this study commenced, there was limited attention paid to the school contexts of students. Following a meeting I had with the Head of Widening Participation at the Sutton Trust and the Head of Widening Participation at The University of Nottingham, some changes have been made to the list of characteristics that define eligible students. Priority is now given to students who meet the following:

- will be the first generation in their families to attend university;
- parents/carers in non-professional occupations;
- attend state schools or colleges that have virtually no history of sending pupils to the university over the last two years;
- attend state schools or colleges with a low overall A Level point score;
- are plausible applicants for university places. The standard requirement is usually 5 A/A\*s at GCSE or above;
- are taking relevant subjects for the course to be studied;
- attend state schools with a high proportion of free school meals and/or in inner city areas;
- attend state schools with a low proportion of the sixth form going on to higher education.

(The Sutton Trust, 2007)

In that sense, the findings from this study have already had some impact on policy at The Sutton Trust. However, there continues to be many questions remaining and I now detail some possible areas for further investigation.

## **Directions for Further Study**

Habitus is a complex notion which seeks to explain class based practices. The decisions people make are often based on internal mechanisms which act unconsciously (Bourdieu 1990a). For widening participation to have an impact upon the lives of young people from disadvantaged communities, more information is needed about the backgrounds of such young people and the possible 'moments' when intervention could interrupt an expected trajectory. With that in mind, I suggest two areas worthy of further study:

- an in-depth, longitudinal study of educational trajectories to explore the notion of habitus at moments of transition or potential crisis
- an exploration of the specific role of intervention programmes in the process of HE choice – e.g. if they work, why they work, what happens, how do student perspectives change.

## **Chapter Summary**

Young people make their decisions about HE based on a number of complex interactions mediated through educational processes. The habitus is instrumental in them positioning themselves and identifying an appropriate institution and also deals with moments of potential crisis by moving towards a trajectory that best reflects the emerging habitus. The next chapter offers my reflections on carrying out the PhD study.



In this chapter, I reflect upon my experiences as a PhD student and explore what I came to learn about myself during the process.

**... it also seemed impossible for that life to exist in the same world as this one...The place was as familiar as breath but as far from his life now as the moon.**

**(Edwards 2005: 262 and 283)**

## **Working Reflexively**

One of the major challenges this PhD study posed to me personally was the reconciliation of theory and practice – theorising why people do the things they do. I felt very strongly that decisions people make are influenced by many factors – a complexity which moved me away from rational explanations of action. Moving away from theoretical approaches that consider action to be the mere 'obedience to rules' (Bourdieu 1977: 72), I appreciated the need for a theoretical approach that could account for individual experiences and the way in which such experiences are context bound.

The work of Bourdieu appeared to meet this aim. I can recollect reading *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) and being transfixed by the explanations it provided of class based experiences in education. It was as if the words reflected my own experiences and I finally gained insight into the reasons why I had not achieved as well as I could have at O Level. At times I found myself feeling angry at what seemed to be the imperceptible but very real constraints that had influenced my own educational journey. The more I read Bourdieu, the more I made sense of my own background. I began to view my experiences differently: rather than viewing my time at C.C.A.T as an embarrassment, I began to view it more positively reconciling my shame of having attended a low status HE institution with the idea that I had actually achieved a great deal in getting there in the first place.

I found Bourdieu's work extremely useful in helping me to understand the students' journeys into HE. The notions of field, capital and habitus were particularly valuable in exploring how young people are selected out and offered differential treatment within schools. This seemed to mirror my own experience of being offered music tuition whilst at primary school.

Whilst much of Bourdieu's work focuses on *reproduction* I was particularly interested in seeing how his theories would enable me to understand movement from one social position to another. The notion of habitus helped me to do this. Building from the idea that habitus is both a product and producer of history, I was able to look at the students' lives in much detail. In particular, I was able to identify moments in their stories where a predicted trajectory had been *interrupted*. From this, I was able to explore the points at which a primary habitus was shifting towards a secondary habitus.

Whilst habitus was a useful concept to work with, the interrelating notions of field and capital, along with habitus, helped to explain how the students were influenced by their respective contexts (the home, the social and school), but also how they experienced agency in the decisions they made. It was fascinating to see how their stories unravelled to expose the complexities of how education practices can influence the educational journeys of young people. Working with them and understanding their stories from a Bourdieuan perspective allowed me to gain insights into social action complete with structural constraints.

Working with Bourdieu was not entirely positive. At times, I found it extremely difficult to get at the heart of what Bourdieu wrote, given the complexity of the language used. My primary habitus was reluctant to accept that I could successfully decipher the meaning of the texts, and yet I found the words speaking clearly to me at the same time. I understand this as a resistance to a shift in habitus. Having spent the entire time during my PhD study accepting my working class background, I wanted to linger on the achievements I had made where I could focus on my position in a Russell Group university and what that meant.

## Personal Shifts

As I reflect back on my own journey I do so with the added knowledge that working on this thesis has brought. Although I had a sense that the journey I had made had created distance between me and my family, I did not fully appreciate how my success within education represented the gap that was already in existence. I turn to my grand-parents on my father's side to understand how my own aspirations were part of a complex family history.

My father had the opportunity to remain as part of a middle class and yet did not choose to do so. It would appear that the failings in his relationship with his parents were too significant for him to turn to them when he needed help. As a result, his own class based habitus reflected two competing messages: education is important and family structures are not. The second part of this competing message paved the way for my own inculcation into the field of education. As a result of my parents' divorce, I experienced much autonomy as a child and did not have to account for how I spent my time. My 'family' structure was similar to those identified by Lareau (2003) where I developed the requisite skills for survival and also for entertaining myself. On reflection, I was lucky to have been provided with an escape from a working class existence in the form of instrumental tuition as it led to involvement in a different social world than that experienced by my family and peers. My ability to produce my own entertainment and fill my time led me to spend much time away from my mother's home.

My pathway through education was not as straightforward as those of the students in this study. Rather than developing an identity as an academic, mine was more centred on failure. As I progressed through education and in particular as I went through a period of dropping out of numerous courses, I am not entirely convinced that this was entirely my own choosing. I understand now how academic failure can become internalised and inform identity. I believed that I would fail at A Level and self-eliminated from a number of courses in order to avoid facing further humiliation which I believed would occur. Coupled with the uncertainty of where my future was going, the years between 16 and 19 proved particularly difficult. I can now understand this tension as competing pulls within my habitus: one which favoured low

skilled, low paid employment as this was evident within my immediate family and the other which was directing me towards an alternative route.

In becoming a professional teacher I 'out classed' my family. This has resulted in difficult relationships and I fully identify with other professionals who have articulated this. It is true to say that there is 'no going back' and visits to the town where I grew up become increasingly difficult. I have no ties there now since my mother died many years ago. However, I did take my children to visit her grave recently and they wanted to see the house where I had grown up and the schools that I went to. During that visit, I had to conceal my own feelings of how I perceived the area that I had enjoyed so much as a child. It seemed so claustrophobic and run down – each row of houses being in such close proximity to the other and in need of repair. I was also struck by how little space there was which is in direct contrast with where I live now.

Undertaking this PhD in a sense is a kick back to my teachers who 'wrote me off' during my fourth and fifth years at school (now Year 10 and 11). They did not provide the support that I required to ensure academic success, despite the fact that I had been placed in top sets. It would appear that my social class position impacted on my educational outcomes at that time. My mother was told by my Head of Year that 'if I didn't pull my socks up, I would fail' on one occasion. It was seen as my responsibility. Although this came to fruition at O Level, I am not convinced that the grades I achieved reflected my true abilities. I can not help but wonder how things could have been different had I been at school now: whether I would have been identified within an Aimhigher or Gifted and Talented cohort. Coming to the end of a PhD study is an interesting experience – it raises the same questions and worries that I had during my A Level studies. The fear of failure is deeply embedded and difficult to remove even though I have been academically successful at both an MA in Educational Management and an MA in Research Methods. And yet, there is a sense in which there is no going back. There is no possible return to my previous existence even if I wanted there to be. The social distance I have travelled is too far to make a return possible. It could be that the final evidence needed to prove my *potential* is interrelated with a sense of

uncertainty of what it means to my identity – and where my own personal 'dream of social flying' has reached its conclusion.

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Letter of Introduction



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Dean of the Faculty of Education and  
Head of School  
Dr Carol Hall

4<sup>th</sup> July 2004

Hi

My name is Tina Byrom and I am a research student at The University of Nottingham, based in the School of Education. Before doing this, I was a secondary school teacher for 12 years.

My research is about young people who may be the first in their family to consider university. I am interested in the decisions you face/make when thinking about and applying to go to university. I have attached some more details to this letter to give you further information.

If you feel that you have anything to contribute to this study (thoughts/opinions) and would like to take part, please complete the attached form, providing your contact details and hand it to one of the student helpers who will then pass your details on to me. I will then contact you during the summer or early in September.

Have a good summer holiday and thanks for reading this!

Tina



Tina Byron  
Research Student  
The University of Nottingham

**Project Length:**  
The research project will last for two years, although participation in it will not be that long. All timings of sample involvement will be negotiated with you. It is anticipated that individuals will be needed for two/three interviews over the course of the year and that they will complete a journal/diary tracking their thoughts/feelings on your transition into Higher Education.  
All work will contribute to the research project, which will be submitted in September 2006.

**Effects:**  
I will be working within The University of Nottingham's Code of Practice for the Conduct of Research and the identities of all individuals will remain anonymous and confidential.

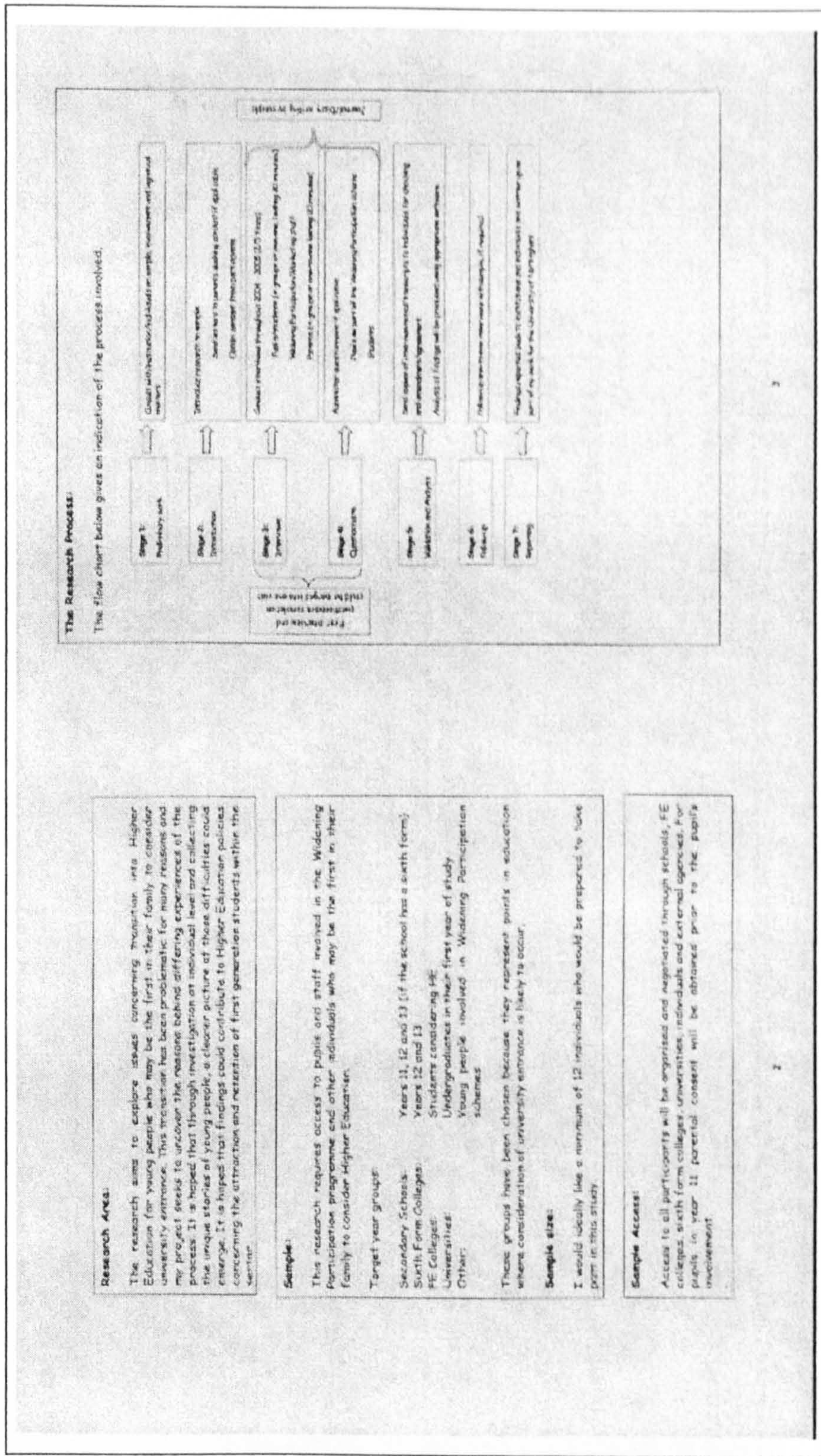
**Next Step:**  
If you feel that you would like to be involved in this project, please contact me on 07939 261 951 or [t.byrone@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:t.byrone@nottingham.ac.uk) to arrange a convenient time to discuss and organise your involvement.  
Many thanks again for your interest, and I very much look forward to hearing from you.

**Background Information:**  
The purpose of this booklet is to provide you with further information concerning my research project. I hope you will find it useful and interesting.  
I have an up-to-date police check form which I am happy to provide you with a copy.  
My two supervisors, based at the University of Nottingham are called Dr Peter Gales and Prof. Pat Thomson. They can also be contacted to confirm the details provided in this booklet or 0115 9515 151 (main switchboard).  
Should you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.  
I look forward to hearing from you.

1

# Appendix 2

## Information leaflet 1: Pages 2 and 3



Please tear this section off and pass it to a student helper.



Which one?  
How do I decide?



If you would like more information, contact me  
on: [textb4@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:textb4@nottingham.ac.uk)

## Thinking of Going to University?

A research project by Tina Byrom.





**The research...**

I am interested in the decisions you make about going to university. I would like to get to know your thoughts on some or all of the following:

- > A level studying
- > The application process
- > Current thoughts on university
- > The Sutton Trust week
- > Friends
- > Family

What previous students have said about this project:

*'I wanted to get involved because I was interested in learning about myself.'*

*'The interview day at The University of Nottingham was great fun.'*

*'It was good to meet up again with friends I had made at the university.'*

**What it will involve...**

Your involvement will take place between September and December 2005. I will contact you early in September to talk about how you would like to get involved. Last year, students were involved by some or all of the activities listed below:

- > Sending regular e-mails
- > One-to-one interviews in their school/college 6<sup>th</sup> form
- > Group interview day at The University of Nottingham
- > Taking photos
- > Writing journals/diaries
- > Making a video

If you decide to get involved in my study, you may choose to take part in some or all of the above activities.

**The formal bits...**

I will need your contact details so that I can contact you early in September. I may need to write to your parents asking for their permission so that you can take part in this research project.

Please complete your details:


Name\*:

E-mail:

Address:

Phone

\* All names are changed in the project so that you can not be identified.



Tel: 07939 261 951  
E-mail: textb4@nottingham.ac.uk

22nd July 2004

Dear Parent/Carer

My name is Tina Byrom and I am a research student at the University of Nottingham. I have previously taught in schools for 13 years. My research project is about the process involved for young people when considering university and how they feel about going. Your child has expressed an interest in becoming involved and this letter outlines the nature of the project and to seek your permission for your child's involvement. I would be grateful if you would sign the attached slip at the bottom of this letter and return it to me in the pre-paid envelope.

Your child's involvement in the project would involve some or all of the following activities: questionnaire completion, interview and journal/diary writing. This will take place during the next academic year (2004 – 2005). My project will then be written up during 2005 – 2006. I am hoping that any conclusions reached would be useful to Higher Education institutions in both the attraction and retention of students who are the first in their families to go to university.

I will be following the University of Nottingham's guide on research and this will mean that no individuals will be identified within my project. All information gathered would be confidential.

If you would like to talk with me about this project please use the above contact details. I would be happy to answer any questions you

may have. My two supervisors, based at the University of Nottingham are called Peter Gates and Pat Thomson. They can also be contacted to confirm the above details on 0115 9515 151 (main switchboard).

I do hope that your child will be able to get involved with this project and I look forward to hearing from you.

Many thanks for you consideration,

Tina Byrom



Name of Child:.....

***I do give my permission for my child to be involved in the research project outlined above and I would like you to contact me on:***

Telephone Number:.....

E-mail:.....

Address:.....

.....

.....  
(Please only complete details of your preferred method of contact)

**Parent Signature**.....

Parent Name (Block Capitals).....

Date.....

## Sutton Trust Summer School Journal Questions

**Sunday**

What made you decide to apply for a place on the Sutton Trust Summer School at The University of Nottingham?

What did you hope to gain from the Summer School before you arrived

When you arrived at the Summer School on Sunday, how were you feeling?

What were your first impressions of The University of Nottingham when you arrived?

Was there anything in particular that helped you feel at ease, or maybe even made you feel uncomfortable on your first day?

Do you have anything to add about Sunday?

**Monday**

Monday morning was your first academic session. What did you expect it to be like?

How did it differ from what you expected?

What did you enjoy the most, or the least about the academic sessions?

How did you feel about having to get to know a new group of students for your academic sessions, when you had just started to get to know your tutor groups?

Do you have anything to add about Monday?

**Tuesday**

How were you feeling about the Summer School by Tuesday?

Was the Summer School living up to your expectations?

Tuesday afternoon gave you an opportunity to take part in a range of activities. What did you learn about team work and communication as part of the session you chose?

What were you enjoying the most about the Summer School?

Were there aspects of the Summer School you weren't enjoying? If so, what were they?

Do you have anything to add about Tuesday?

### **Wednesday**

By Wednesday, did you feel that the Summer School had helped you to make any decisions about whether you would want to go to University and/or what you might like to study?

Was this different to how you felt at the beginning of the week? If so, how?

How do you feel about the way you were being treated by student helpers and staff on the Summer School?

What did you gain from attending the Careers session on Wednesday afternoon? Did you find it useful/interesting?

Do you have anything to add about Wednesday?

### **Thursday**

Thursday morning was the last academic session. What do you think you've gained from these sessions during the week?

What did you learn about teaching and learning styles at University level? Is it different to what you expected?

How did you find working on the group project in Thursday? Was it easy to work as a team with your new team-mates?

What would you say your role was within this team? Why?

Do you have anything to add about Thursday?

### **Friday**

Coming towards the end of the week, do you feel that the Summer School has been a worthwhile experience? In what ways?

How do you feel about the rules and regulations that were in place during the Summer School? Were they fair, for a group of students of your age group?

Do you feel as though you've had a chance for personal development during the week? Please tell us in what ways, if you would like to.

Do you feel as though the week has taught you anything about yourself, your personality, how you feel about your future?

The celebration dinner and party on Friday was an opportunity to celebrate getting through the week. How do you feel about what you've achieved this week?

If you would like to volunteer to be tracked throughout the next year or so, please fill in your name and contact details below. This would involve being contacted from time to time to see how you're doing and to find out more about the decisions you've made. This will help use determine how successful the Summer schools we run are, and will also give us the opportunity to see how you are getting on!

Name .....

Address .....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Email .....

Thank you!

**This questionnaire concerns your potential or definite interest in attending University. This questionnaire will be treated in confidence. Your name is placed at the top for identification purposes only and will be removed later should you wish to take part in my research project.**

**If you do not wish to take part in the project at a later date, your questionnaire will be destroyed. If you would like to take part in this research project, please provide contact details below (e-mail). Many thanks for your time.**

## Summer School

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Post code</b>	

**1. Are you interested in going to University?**

Yes

No

**2. What are your current thoughts on going to University?**

**3. What would put you off going to University?**

**4. What do you think you would gain from going to University?**

**5. Would you be the first member of your immediate family to go to University?**

Yes

No



**6. Could you briefly describe your experience of post-16 education (e.g. good bits, bad bits, academic, personal)**

**7. Who would influence you the most in choosing whether to go to University?**

<b>Friends</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Mum</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Boyfriend</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Parents</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Dad</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Girlfriend</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Teachers</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Other (please state)</b>		<input type="checkbox"/>	
.....					

**8. Could you describe how your family feel about the prospect of you going to University?**

**9. Please add any other comments**

**I do wish to take part in the research and my e-mail address is:**

## Individual Interview Schedule

<b>Self</b>	
Tell me about yourself:	What do you like doing? Hobbies Interests Employment
Tell me about your friends	Who What interests do you share?
<b>Home Context</b>	
Tell me about where you live	Family Type of housing How long lived there
If you made a film about your neighbourhood, what would you put into it?	Perception of context Important features of context
Tell me about your family	Parents/carers Brothers/sisters
What do your parents do?	Occupation
<b>School Life</b>	
Can you tell me about your primary school experience?	Academic background School experience Influences
Describe your school where you are now	Type of school School 6 <sup>th</sup> form/college?
If you were talking to a newspaper reporter what do you think they would think about your school	Perceptions of school Relationship to community
What influenced your decision to go there?	Choice?
Were there alternative options for you?	
What subjects do you do?	Favourite subjects

	Why chosen Successes Weaknesses Struggles Strengths
How did you do at GCSE and AS level?	Results Perception of success How do grades fit with predictions?
What makes you want to do A Levels?	Influence for academic success
Are you involved in any activities (music, drama, sport) in school?	Types of activities
How do you think your teachers would describe you?	Teacher perception
<b>University</b>	
What are your thoughts about university?	Which institutions are being considered and why? What do you imagine university to be like?
Have you applied to campus based universities?	Type of university Reasons for choice
Do you know anyone who has been to university? What do they say about it?	Input into own thoughts on university
Have any other family members been to university?	Family academic context
Are there any people who are influencing your decision to go to university?	Whose aspirations?
Why do you want to go to university?	
Describe your experience of the Sutton Trust Summer School	How was the experience? How did the experience contribute to your ideas about university?
Describe your experience of applying to enter university	(Perceptions of process involved) Prospectus information? Attendance at open days?
<b>Future</b>	
What do you see yourself doing in the future?	Aspirations

Name	
------	--

Subject	Grade	Accepted University

**Involvement:**

I am happy to continue being involved until December

**Placing a tick in the box indicates that you DO wish to continue being involved**

**Research Activities:**

- Journal/diary writing
- One-to-one interview once settled at university (I would visit you)
- Group interview (once settled) at the University of Nottingham
- Email
- Telephone chat
- Taking photos of your university (I will supply a camera)
- Putting together a 'memory box' (I will explain this: it could be fun!!)

**In placing a tick in a box, you are indicating that you do NOT wish to take part in that particular research method**

## Analytical Grid Example 1: Family Background, Family History of HE and Post Code

Name	Family Background	Family History of HE	Home Post code
Anna	<p>Mother: playgroup worker: O Levels            Father: Engineer: O Levels, design course at college, A Level maths P/T didn't take the exam            Sister: 15            Has close relationships with gran, granddad and two aunts who 'live up the road' on her mother's side and a gran who also lives nearby on her father's side  <i>'If my parents weren't so supportive of my ideas about this I think I may have been influenced against going to university to some extent.'</i> (E-mail)</p>	Uncle who she sees very rarely	<p>50.5% achieved 5 or more GCSEs            8.95% of people have level 4/5 education qualifications            25, 213/32, 482 Indices of Multiple Deprivation</p>
Erin	<p>Step Mother: house wife (Mother died in 1997: nursery nurse)            Father: Vicar (GCSEs, A Levels, degree, theological college)            Brother: 12 years older: had been to university</p>	Brother who is 12 years older than she is.	<p>57.3% pupils achieve 5 or more GCSEs            15.5% adults have level 4/5 educational qualifications            25, 721/32, 482 Indices of Multiple Deprivation</p>
Eve	<p>Mother: died when Eve was six            Father: dry cleaner            Sister: 15 – managing, about the same academic ability</p>	Cousin but not close	<p>46.2% pupils achieve 5 or more GCSEs            29.91% adults have level 4/5 educational qualifications            19, 445/32, 482 Indices of Multiple Deprivation</p>

Name	Family background	Family History of HE	Home Post Code
Grace	<p>Mother: Waitress  Father: Plumber  Sister: younger  Developed a perception that opportunities would be restricted without a university education. This was based on parental experience (Focus group)</p>	Cousin but not close	<p>53.6% pupils achieve 5 or more GCSEs  24.43% adults have level 4/5 educational qualifications  24, 416/32, 482 Indices of Multiple Deprivation</p>
James	<p>Mother: housewife; describes her as a 'high achiever' in school as she was 'put up a year' (narrative) but left to become a mother and housewife  Father: stores-man (many years of unemployment due to work related injuries)  Brother: older</p>	Brother: currently in second year of degree course at Exeter	<p>54.7% pupils achieve 5 or more GCSEs  A* - C  16.45% adults have level 4/5 educational qualifications  13, 945/32, 482 Indices of Multiple Deprivation</p>
Joanne	<p>Mother: Secretary  Father: Technical sales  Sister: younger, still at school</p>	Cousin: Not close	<p>51% pupils achieve 5 or more GCSEs A* - C  22.37% adults have level 4/5 educational qualifications  20, 697/32, 482 Indices of Multiple Deprivation</p>
Keira	<p>Mother: Bank clerk: O Levels  Father: RAF: <i>GCE in metal work GCSE in English, Maths, Science and an A Level in geography (Interview)</i>  Sister: older: completed A Levels – B, C, D grades about to start a Nursing and Midwifery course at the University of West England</p>	Sister has just commenced a nursing course at the University of West England	<p>50.5% pupils achieve 5 or more GCSEs  11.96% adults have level 4/5 educational qualifications  26, 792/32, 482 Indices of Multiple Deprivation</p>

Name	Family background	Family History of HE	Home Post Code
Lucy	<p>Mother: Left school early; no formal qualifications</p> <p>Father: Left school early; no formal qualifications</p> <p>Both work for the city council seasonal work doing for example traffic surveys</p> <p>Sister: older</p> <p>Supportive of decision to go to university recognising the value in the employment market following graduation</p> <p>Before her sister went to university 'university wasn't really a word in our family's vocab' (E-mail)</p>	<p>Sister: Attended university: now works part time as a waitress and as a cleaner</p>	<p>47.4% pupils achieve 5 or more GCSEs A* - C</p> <p>19.61% adults have level 4/5 educational qualifications</p> <p>23, 538/32, 482 Indices of Multiple Deprivation</p>
Mathew	<p>Mother: registered disabled</p> <p>Father: Mother's carer</p> <p>Sister: 15 (younger)</p> <p>Lends his mother money sometimes from his EMA and savings</p>	<p>'I'm not sure because we don't really, I think there was a rift in the family a few years ago that I don't really know about. I think there was one who went to university. I think it was my cousin.'</p> <p>(Interview)</p> <p>Mother: degree</p>	<p>39.2% pupils gain 5 or more A - C GCSE</p> <p>4.39% adults have level 4/5 educational qualifications</p> <p>158/32, 482 Index of Multiple Deprivation</p>
Oscar	<p>Mother: Librarian</p> <p>Father: Labourer</p> <p>No siblings</p> <p>Feels forced into university application</p> <p>Feel that going to university is a 'natural progression'</p>		<p>38% pupils achieve 5 or more GCSEs</p> <p>35.95% adults have level 4/5 educational qualifications</p> <p>20, 269/32, 482 Indices of Multiple Deprivation</p>

Name	Family background	Family History of HE	Home Post Code
Sally	Mother: Secretary: GCSE equivalent Father: Mechanic: GCSE equivalent followed by GNVQ Sister 1: Teacher Sister 2: Student	Sister and 8 cousins	51% pupils achieve 5 or more GCSEs 16.78% adults have level 4/5 educational qualifications 31, 226/32, 482 Indices of Multiple Deprivation
Sayda	Mother: GCE level Dad: Doesn't live with dad	None	54.9% pupils achieve 5 or more GCSEs 10.23% adults have level 4/5 educational qualifications 9, 363/32, 482 Indices of Multiple Deprivation
Sophie	Mother: house wife (GCSE equivalent) Father: Shop assistant (GCSE equivalent) Brother: 15 (Gifted and Talented Academy; 'extremely bright')	Cousin	43.9% pupils achieve 5 or more GCSEs 57.07% adults have level 4/5 educational qualifications 10, 678/32, 482 Indices of Multiple Deprivation
Toby	Mother: Nurse Father: Quality Manager Sister: Age 13 Family supportive of decision to go to university Values opinions of parents who accompanied him on open days	Cousin: although the family is not close	58.4% pupils achieve 5 or more GCSEs 34.27% adults have level 4/5 educational qualifications 32, 470/32, 482 Indices of Multiple Deprivation



Name	Family background	Family History of HE	Home Post Code
Tim	<p>Mother: Manager of Probation Training  Father: 'Absent'  No siblings  Feel that going to university is a 'natural progression'  Mother supportive of decision to go to university and he values her opinion on choice of universities and choice of subject</p>	<p>Mother: degree and currently doing an MA</p>	<p>47% pupils achieve 5 or more GCSEs  15.49% adults have level 4/5 educational qualifications  18, 252/32, 482 Indices of Multiple Deprivation</p>
Zara	<p>Mother: Clerical assistant  Father: Brick layer  Sister: younger, still at school  They are working class in jobs they don't really like and I think they want me to have better and I want better as well, so I'm doing it for me and also happen to be pleasing my parents too. (Narrative)</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>51.2% pupils achieve 5 or more GCSEs  19.01% adults have level 4/5 educational qualifications  29, 634/32, 482 Indices of Multiple Deprivation</p>

Analytical Grid Example 2: primary School, Secondary/6<sup>th</sup> Form and Activities

Name	Primary School	Secondary/6 <sup>th</sup> Form School	Activities
Anna	'I really liked it at primary school.' (Interview)	<p>Large comprehensive: 1210 pupils            Three schools make up the combined 6<sup>th</sup> form: 325 students            Oversubscribed and popular with parents            Catchment area large and suffers some social deprivation            Numbers of free school meals: average            14% pupils SEN            Good school            Stayed in the 6<sup>th</sup> form: subjects and the proximity to home</p>	<p>Involved in music and drama when in Middle School: Royal Albert Hall performance            Brownies            Enjoyed reading            Guitar lessons            Millennium Volunteers            Cinema            Eating out: e.g. Old Orleans            Helps out at old primary school            Listening to Y9 pupils read</p>
Erin	<p>Couldn't remember much about primary school although memories centred around 'play' and encouraging teachers (Focus group)</p>	<p>Comprehensive college holding specialist status for technology since 2002            981 pupils            Pupils come from full range of socio-economic background            Free school meals just below average            College is in an area of deprivation with some incomes just above the eligibility line            Small number of pupils in care            Attainment on entry is below average            Statemented pupils above average            Recognised for adding value            AS/A2: 92% (23% high grades A - B)</p>	<p>Plays the piano up to grade 7 and now teaches it.            Also plays drums.            Attends a local church and plays drums in services            Cinema            Eating out            Dancing            Walking</p>

Name	Primary School	Secondary/6 <sup>th</sup> Form School	Activities
Eve	Doesn't remember much apart from it being fun Teachers were nice and helped her through the death of her mother and her nan	Stayed on at school 6 <sup>th</sup> form for familiarity reasons Voluntary aided girls' comprehensive school with 730 pupils SEN less than national average Free school meals in line with national average Social circumstances of surrounding area is average Over subscribed heavily Beacon school Provides a very good education with some outstanding features Range of ethnic backgrounds High proportion go onto university Admitted on appeal: friends were going to school; ones closer to home weren't as good	Swimming Help out in Chemistry lab each week Yoga Clubbing Shopping Cinema Eat out: Pizza Hut
Grace	High focus on SATs Can remember influential teachers	Comprehensive school Oversubscribed Free school meals: average Few ethnic minority children SEN below average Technology College for 8 years Very good school Standards above average Uncertain of her future options and went to her school 6 <sup>th</sup> form 'by accident'. Attending 6 <sup>th</sup> form was an opportunity to spend more time thinking about her future and to make decisions at a later date. Also travel posed some restrictions in terms of choice (Focus group)	Sign language course Spent little time socialising: worked hard Playing piano Art

Name	Primary School	Secondary/6 <sup>th</sup> Form School	Activities
James	Local village primary school 'I was just a normal child at primary school' (Narrative)	<p>21, 934/32, 482 Index of Multiple Deprivation Tertiary College with many sites College has grown rapidly Range of curriculum subjects and also offers foundation and access to HE courses 1999/2000 – enrolled 6, 713 students 74% students were 16 – 18 1% from minority ethnic backgrounds Mission statement: 'seek to provide excellence in its education and training provision .....and to be a centre for exceptional development in selected areas of activity.' (OfSTED) Very effective college (OfSTED) Quality of teaching and the achievements of students are outstanding in seven out of the 12 curriculum areas inspected and good in the other five areas. Students are well supported academically and personally. The range of courses meets the needs of the local community. 'The overall achievements of the college's adult students are satisfactory, but are well below those of students aged 16 – 18.' (OfSTED) Strengths: outstanding pass rate on many courses; good retention rates for students aged 16 – 18; effective teaching and learning in all curriculum areas; strong leadership and management; excellent equipment and accommodation; rigorous and fair assessment of students' work; effective guidance, enrolment, induction and tutorial support for full-time students; wide range of courses and enrichment activities; well organised and effective work based learning (OfSTED) No other 6<sup>th</sup> forms in schools in area where he lives (Answer to interview questions)</p>	<p>Cycling Cornet: played in various school groups and in a local silver band (playing solo cornet) Piano Practising Christian: Church and youth group activities Current affairs Cinema Drama productions at school</p>

Name	Primary School	Secondary/6 <sup>th</sup> Form School	Activities
Joanne	<p>Big focus on SATs Remembers influential teachers Academically successful (Focus group)</p>	<p>ST5 2 DF Borough has some serious pockets of deprivation Tertiary College Wide range of community work, university access programmes and adult education Proportion of 16 year olds staying on in full-time education is relatively low: 67.5% Close co-operation between schools and colleges in the area to encourage participation and improve the staying on rate College is effective Students are well motivated and the standard of their behaviour is high Quality of teaching and standards of academic achievement are good in 9 out 13 curriculum areas Work-based learning provision in business, engineering and hairdressing and beauty therapy is unsatisfactory Strengths: high pass rate on advanced level courses, much good teaching, good specialist resources, effective monitoring of students' progress, productive local partnerships, thorough pre-entry guidance and effective admissions processes, good personal and tutorial support, good financial management, effective leadership and management (OfSTED) Chose a 6<sup>th</sup> form college out of two (her school did not have a 6<sup>th</sup> form). Final decision was based on subject choice and proximity to mum's work (could travel with mum) (Focus group) 10, 186/32, 482 Index of Multiple Deprivation (Neighbourhood Statistics)</p>	<p>Expressed the fact that she had little time to spend on hobbies and interests with much of their time dedicated to studying (Focus group) Plays the flute and participates in orchestras Has taken exams and has lessons through school</p>

Name	Primary School	Secondary/6 <sup>th</sup> Form School	Activities
Keira	<p>I didn't really like primary school. I just thought they were being really patronising</p> <p>In what way?</p> <p>They'd just sort of like 'oh we're going to colour in now' and I think OK...yeah. I'm saying that as a geography student!</p> <p>So you didn't find it particularly challenging?</p> <p>No</p> <p>You can remember not feeling challenged?</p> <p>Yeah, I always remember sitting there thinking, well the moving around, you know those topics that you always do at primary school? Everyone does the Romans, everyone does the Egyptians and the amount of times I moved around, I think I did the Romans and the Egyptians about 15 times</p>	<p>School and Community College 11 - 18</p> <p>Very few students are from ethnic minority backgrounds</p> <p>One of only a few state schools to have boarding provision: most boarders are from families serving in the armed forces</p> <p>EAL high but almost all are fluent English speakers</p> <p>Students' attainment on entry is above average</p> <p>SEN below average</p> <p>Stated mented students broadly average</p> <p>Socio-economic circumstances of the students is generally above average</p> <p>'The school provides a satisfactory standard of education and is clearly improving.' (Ofsted)</p> <p>Results at A Level below the national average</p> <p>'...some students embark on A Level courses for which they are either not suited or not adequately qualified in terms of their GCSE results. These students sometimes fail to gain a qualification at the end of the course' (Ofsted)</p> <p>Careers advice limited and students are not fully prepared for the next phase of their lives</p> <p>There is no coherent system for monitoring achievements, work experience, careers education or the role of tutors</p> <p>Boarders have sensible rules and are well cared for in a 'family-like atmosphere' (Ofsted)</p> <p>AS/A2: Average points score 14.0 (2 or more A Levels)</p>	<p>Hockey</p> <p>Netball</p> <p>Debating society, we did this thing called MUNGA (interview)</p> <p>Qualified life guard</p> <p>Going to the pub</p> <p>Parties</p> <p>Drinking</p>

Name	Primary School	Secondary/6 <sup>th</sup> Form School	Activities
Lucy	<p>Was not big on SATs and therefore didn't take any</p> <p>Could remember encouraging and helpful teachers (Focus group)</p>	<p>11 - 18 mixed comprehensive</p> <p>Below average socio-economic profile</p> <p>12.4 % eligible for free school meals</p> <p>4% come from ethnic minorities</p> <p>2.6% pupils come from families where English is an additional language</p> <p>13.6% SEN register</p> <p>Pupils attainment is just below average overall</p> <p>Good school which is increasing in confidence and effectiveness</p> <p>Teaching is good</p> <p>Pupils achieve well in relation to their attainment on entry</p> <p>At the end of KS4 standards are above national averages and at the end of 6<sup>th</sup> form are well above course averages</p> <p>Good leadership</p> <p>Celebrates high achievement</p> <p>Pupils have good attitudes and high standards of behaviour</p> <p>High quality monitoring of academic achievement (OfSTED)</p> <p>Decided not to go to her school 6<sup>th</sup> form for the following reasons; perceived as not good enough, subjects clashed, didn't want to be in the same place for 7 years (unfamiliar was a challenge) and the issue of travel</p>	<p>Found it hard to develop hobbies due to coursework pressure and the desire for good grades</p> <p>Spanish course</p> <p>ASDAN Award scheme</p> <p>6<sup>th</sup> form council</p> <p>Help at charity events and open days</p> <p>Theatre</p> <p>Cinema</p> <p>Reading</p>

Name	Primary School	Secondary/6 <sup>th</sup> Form School	Activities
Mathew	<p>Attended many primary schools due to family moving two/three times            Experience was unsettling and Mathew found it difficult to leave friends behind and didn't make new ones easily</p>	<p>Voluntary controlled C of E 11 - 18            Comprehensive School            Split site            1414 students; 95 in 6<sup>th</sup> form            5% move to other schools before the end of Y11 or join it after the beginning of Y7            Socio-economic context is below average            Standards on entry are well below the national average            Numbers of students from homes where English is an additional language is very low            Proportion of students on free school meals is above national average            SEN above national average and those stated also above national average            SEN: social, emotional, behavioural, specific or moderate learning difficulties, autistic            Business and Enterprise College status            Awards: School's Achievement Award, Basic Skills Quality Mark, Investors in People and Healthy Schools            International School status for its involvement in international projects            6<sup>th</sup> form courses: AS and A2 examination and vocational qualifications            6<sup>th</sup> form teaching groups are small and therefore some courses are run in partnership with another local school to ensure financial viability            Some students take part in the Young Enterprise Scheme (OfSTED)            Struggled to believe in academic ability with many periods of self doubt</p>	<p>School newspaper            Organised and maintains the school's international pen-pal system            Computers</p>



Name	Primary School	Secondary/6 <sup>th</sup> Form School	Activities
Oscar	<p>SATs: did not do SATs in his school            Couldn't remember much about primary school although memories centred around 'play' and encouraging teachers (Focus group discussion)            Oscar describes a difficult experience of early education with his dyslexia not being picked up until he had gone into the private system much later. This causes him anger and resentment. (Video/individual)</p>	<p>6<sup>th</sup> form college 16 - 18            In an area with high levels of social and academic deprivation (3, 872/32, 482 Index of multiple deprivation) (ONS)            Lowest level of HE participation in the country            49.38% 16 - 74 year olds have no qualifications (ONS)            6.25% 16 - 74 year olds have qualification level 4/5 (ONS)            Offers AS and A2 levels based on Curriculum 2000            15% from minority backgrounds - higher percentage than that of Nottingham itself            Recruits form schools (70) across the region            Evening programme provided in partnership with a local College of Further Education            80% of students go on to HE            AS 91% (41% high grades); A2: 96% (49% high grades A - B) (Ofsted Report)            Moved to this college after completing secondary education in a private school. He expressed feelings of not fitting in to that system and found it difficult to make friends. He was much more relaxed at this particular college where he found more students like himself (Video/individual)</p>	<p>Basketball (member of college team)            Participates in competitions            Martial arts            Cinema            Drinking</p>
Sally	<p>Can you tell me about your primary school experience? What you remember about it?   <i>I went to school in Blackberry , two schools in Blackberry which were really nice schools because it's like a little village school there really</i>             What did you like about that?</p>	<p>Comprehensive Community College 11 - 18 (Specialist Language College)            Bigger than most secondary schools            Significantly more boys than girls in years 7 - 11            Free school meals broadly in line with the national average            12 pupils speak English as an additional language            Attainment of pupils when they join in year 7 is average            18.5% pupils SEN register: similar to the national figure</p>	<p>Dancing            Has won many awards for dancing and performed in local theatres            Selected group dancing: We choreographed and performed jazz, ballet, and contemporary dances. (Narrative)            Millennium Volunteers            Helps out in school</p>

39 pupils have statements

*That everyone knew each other there, and also like all the teachers were really nice and the school was a nice environment to be in like when you went and visited other schools they never seemed as nice as our school and that pleased, they had loads of clubs you could join like after school. I got involved in quite a lot of the music clubs, so I was in the choir, the recorder club and the ocarina club and things and we did shows and plays and things*

*My year 3 teacher. I remember quite a lot. It was her first year teaching and she was just really nice and I got on with her really well and the other year 3 teacher was the music teacher and like even now if I see her in the street she'll stop and talk to me for like hours and it's just really nice that they remember you and the, that care and they're always asking how you are and things  
(Interview)*

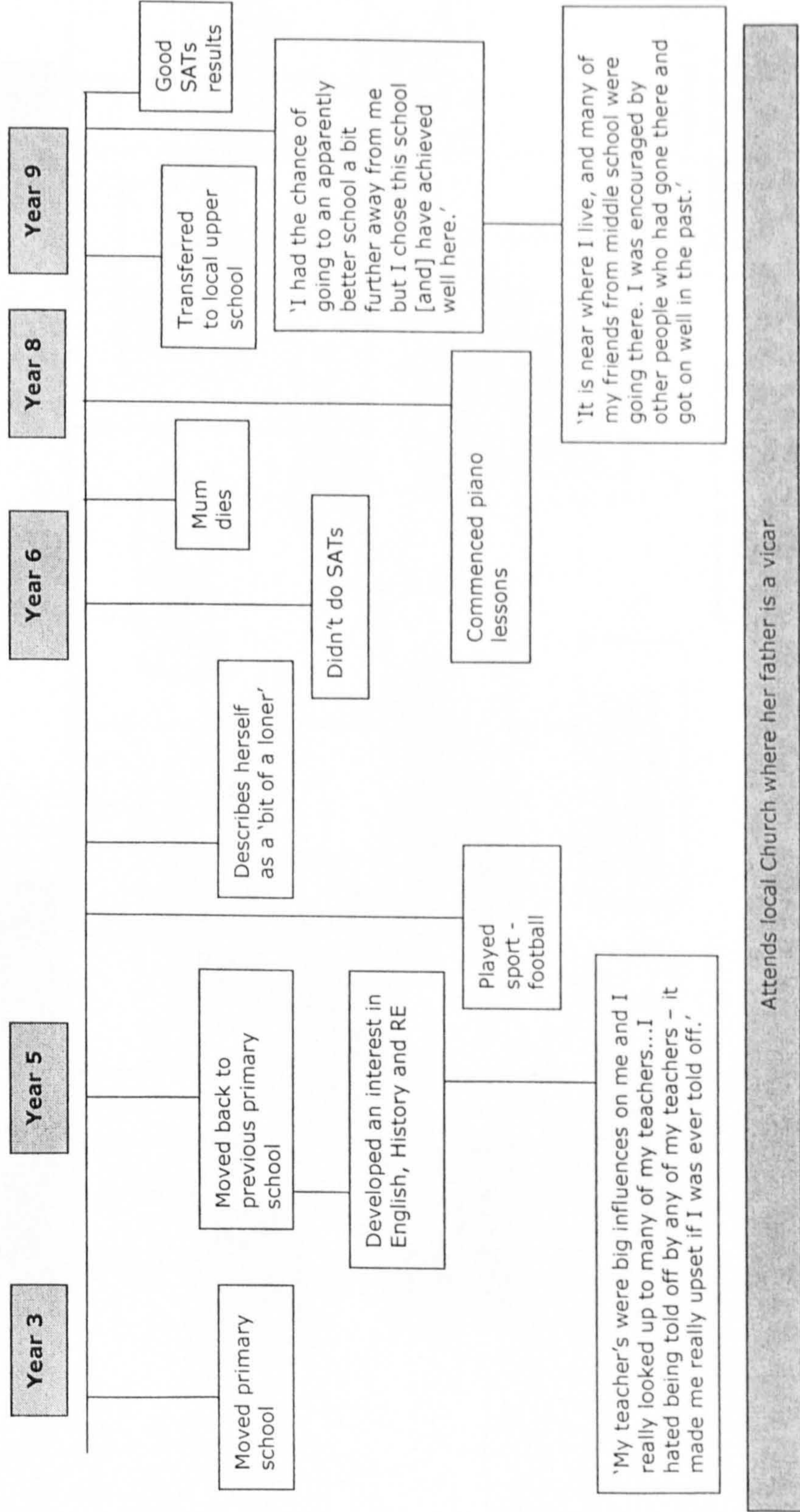
		Met her closest friend at primary school and is still close friends with her now, 15 years on (Narrative)	
<b>Name</b>	<b>Primary School</b>	<b>Secondary/6<sup>th</sup> Form School</b>	<b>Activities</b>
Sayda	Liked primary school	<p>Mixed Comprehensive Community School 13 - 18 (Specialist Technology Status)            Charter mark and IiP awards            Results for GCSE and AS/A2 level are above average            Standards are above average in 6<sup>th</sup> form            All 6<sup>th</sup> form students are issued with a laptop with wireless internet access            Larger than average 6<sup>th</sup> form            Majority of pupils are white British with few from other ethnic groups            Proportion of EAL is low and all are fluent in English            Standards on entry to 6<sup>th</sup> form are average            Good quality of teaching            SEN register: below average numbers as are statemented pupils            Socio economic circumstances of the local area are above average            Frequent reviews of student progress            'I am fortunate to have gone to a school that encourages its pupils to achieve their best in every aspect of life.' (E-mail)            AS/A2: 95% (34% high grades)</p>	Parties Dancing
Sophie	Always in trouble (interview) Experienced failure at the end of primary school, I did not get the grades that I was predicted (interview)	<p>Girls Catholic School            Aided status following GM            Specialist Language College: since 1997            Pupils come from range of ethnic backgrounds            Higher than average free school meals            School is very effective: standards have risen consistently over past 14 years            GCSE results well above national average</p>	Street dance Jazz dance Martial Arts Teaching younger children Swimming Cinema Eating out: Burger King Theatre

		Has 'significantly enhanced the life opportunities of the pupils.' Always working towards targets Knew they did summer schools in the 6 <sup>th</sup> form so stayed on for that and the issue of familiarity 'light in the darkness kind of thing' (interview)	Art galleries Museums Art
<b>Name</b>	<b>Primary School</b>	<b>Secondary/6<sup>th</sup> Form School</b>	<b>Activities</b>
Toby	Can remember much of primary school being about 'play' Remembers encouraging teachers SATs were a 'big deal' in primary school	Boys Community Comprehensive 11 – 18 (6 <sup>th</sup> form consortium) AS/A2: Average points score 18.6 (2 or more A Levels) Oversubscribed Attainment on entry is well above the national average Pupils come from a wide catchment area which includes wards which have a higher than national percentage of high social class households Less than 5% free school meals (below national average) Percentage of EAL high, but all are fluent in English 50 Pakistani/Indian pupils but few other minority ethnic pupils SEN and statemented pupils below national average '[Cavendish] is a most effective and very good school with many impressive features.' (Ofsted) Above average AS/A2 results Well above average GCSE results Offers AS/A2 levels and limited GNVQ courses (Business) GNVQ Science, Psychology and Spanish offered at other schools within the consortium Once at secondary school, Tim thought that going to university would be a 'natural progression'	Mainly sports: Tennis which he plays competitively at a local club Enjoys swimming Running Going to the gym Used to play football Cinema Walking Drinking

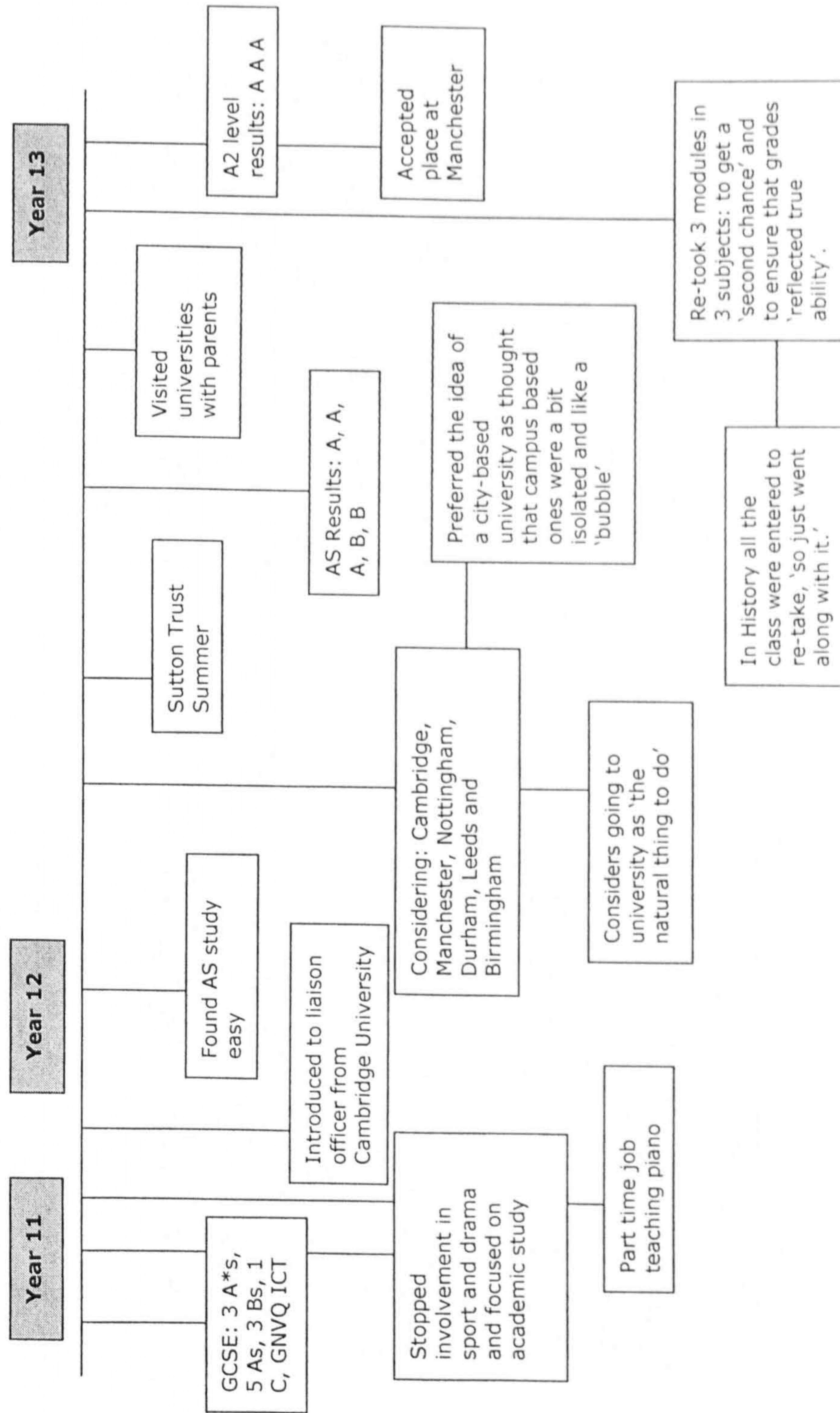
Name	Primary School	Secondary/6 <sup>th</sup> Form School	Activities
Tim	<p>SATs: big thing in primary school            Couldn't remember much about primary school although memories centred around 'play' and encouraging teachers (Focus group discussion)            Experience was slightly marred by problems with dyslexia</p>	<p>6<sup>th</sup> form college 16 - 18            In an area with high levels of social and academic deprivation (3, 872/32, 482 Index of multiple deprivation) (ONS)            Lowest level of HE participation in the country 49.38% 16 - 74 year olds have no qualifications (ONS)            6.25% 16 - 74 year olds have qualification level 4/5 (ONS)            Offers AS and A2 levels based on Curriculum 2000            15% from minority backgrounds - higher percentage than that of Nottingham itself            Recruits form schools (70) across the region            Evening programme provided in partnership with a local College of Further Education            80% of students go on to HE            AS 91% (41% high grades); A2: 96% (49% high grades A - B) (OfSTED Report)</p>	<p>Mountain biking            Break dancing            Drinking Parties            Cinema            Walking</p>
Zara	<p>Positive experience of primary school:            Can you tell me about your primary school experience?  <i>It was great!</i>            Did you enjoy it?  <i>Yeah</i>            Why was it great?  <i>It was loads of fun. You don't actually work</i>            What can you remember about it? What can you remember doing?  <i>Loads. I suppose doing all the art work and everything stands out, and</i></p>	<p>Foundation Comprehensive 13 - 18            School is larger than average with a large 6<sup>th</sup> form            Majority of students stay on to the 6<sup>th</sup> form and some come in from outside the school            6<sup>th</sup> form is part of a consortium but most activities are on site            Oversubscribed            Comprehensive intake            Attainment on entry is above average            SEN numbers below average, but statemented pupils' numbers average            EAL above average but all are fluent English</p>	<p>Piano up to grade 5            Recorders            Choir            Cinema            Eating out</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin-top: 10px;"> <p>Not involved in these anymore - wanted to spend more time socialising with friends</p> </div>

	<p><i>PE. I loved the maths workbooks. You just raided the boxes.... There was a group of about five of us who were the cleverest who got to do the workbooks</i></p>	<p>speakers Diverse range of ethnic groups although 90% are white, 4% Indian heritage and a range of others Free school meals below average Artsmark, Beacon status and IIP awards Part of an independent-state school partnership 'This is an effective school that gives its students a good quality of education.' (OfSTED) GCSE results well above average AS/A2 results in previous years well above average but in 2003 above average AS/A2: 84.8% (27.1% high grades A - B)</p>
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Appendix 11  
Life History Summaries Example: Erin



Appendix 11  
 Life History Summaries Example: Erin





Appendix 12  
Statement Construction from the Data

Theme	Sub-Themes	A	E	E	G	J	J	K	L	M	O	S	S	S	T	T	Z
		n	r	v	r	a	a	e	u	a	s	a	a	a	o	o	a
		n	e	e	a	n	n	r	c	t	c	i	i	i	b	b	r
		a	r	v	c	a	a	e	y	h	h	d	d	d	y	y	a
		n	e	e	e	n	n	r	e	e	e	e	e	e	e	e	e
School experience	I had a positive experience of primary school																
	I can't remember much about primary school																
	I was bored at primary school																
	I was always in trouble at primary school																
	Secondary school described as good/effective by OfSTED																
	Social circumstances of the school/6 <sup>th</sup> form is average or above																
	The secondary school/6 <sup>th</sup> form serves a socially deprived area																
	Large numbers from my school go to university																
	My teachers were encouraging																
	My primary school wasn't really into SATs																
	My primary school placed high focus on SATs																
	I got high grades in my GCSEs																
	I did as expected or better in my A2 exams																
I re-took AS modules to ensure high grades at A2																	
Choice	I chose my 6 <sup>th</sup> form because of its reputation																
	I chose my school 6 <sup>th</sup> form because of familiarity/proximity to home																
	I would like to go to a campus based university																
	I would prefer a city based university																
	Going to an elite/top university is important																
	I considered Oxbridge																
	My teachers encouraged me to apply to Oxbridge																
	I applied to Oxbridge																
	I didn't think I would fit in at Oxbridge																
	Oxbridge did not offer my course																







	Cluster	Number of Cases	2	Total	Mean	Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Asymp.	Sig. (2-tailed)	Exact Sig. (2-tailed)
I had a positive experience of primary school	0.38	0.13	0.28	24	80	1.1180			0.2838	0.4418 NS	
I can't remember much about primary school	0.38	0.38	0.31	28	84	-0.6772			0.0016	0.7309 NS	
I was bored at primary school	0.00	0.25	0.13	24	80	-1.4839			0.1432	0.4418 NS	
I was always in trouble at primary school	0.00	0.13	0.08	28	84	-1.0000			0.3173	0.7309 NS	
Secondary school described as good/better by OXTEU	1.00	0.83	0.81	20	88	-1.0000			0.0000	0.7309 NS	
Social circumstances of the school/6th form is average or above	0.75	0.13	0.44	12	88	-2.4789			0.0147	0.0049 P<0.05	
Secondary school/6th form serves a socially deprived area	0.13	0.08	0.60	8	84	-2.9347			0.0029	0.0104 P<0.05	
Large numbers from my school go to university	0.13	0.38	0.75	74	80	-1.1180			0.2838	0.4418 NS	
My teachers were encouraging	0.63	0.50	0.58	28	84	-0.4880			0.6268	0.7309 NS	
My primary school went really into SATs	0.00	0.13	0.08	28	84	-1.0000			0.3173	0.7309 NS	
My primary school placed a high focus on SATs	0.38	0.00	0.19	20	88	-1.8809			0.0626	0.2346 NS	
I got high grades in my GCSEs	1.00	1.00	1.00	32	88	0.0000			1.0000	1.0000 NS	
I did as expected or better in my A2 exams	0.68	0.88	0.88	32	88	0.0000			1.0000	1.0000 NS	
I re-took A2 modules to ensure high grades at A2	0.63	0.75	0.68	28	84	-0.6222			0.6016	0.7309 NS	
I chose my 6th form because of its reputation	0.38	0.63	0.80	24	80	-0.9882			0.3229	0.4418 NS	
I chose my school 6th form because of secondary/tertiary to home	0.63	0.38	0.80	24	80	-0.9882			0.3229	0.4418 NS	
I would like to go to a campus based university	1.00	0.75	0.68	24	80	-1.4839			0.1432	0.4418 NS	
I would prefer a city based university	0.00	0.13	0.08	28	84	-1.0000			0.3173	0.7309 NS	
Going to an elite/university is important	1.00	1.00	1.00	32	88	0.0000			1.0000	1.0000 NS	
I considered Oxbridge	0.88	0.88	0.88	32	88	0.0000			1.0000	1.0000 NS	
My teachers encouraged me to apply to Oxbridge	0.63	0.88	0.75	24	80	-1.1180			0.2838	0.4418 NS	
I applied to Oxbridge	0.00	0.38	0.19	20	88	-1.8809			0.0626	0.2346 NS	
I didn't think I would fit Oxbridge	0.63	0.40	0.68	28	84	-0.6222			0.5311	0.7309 NS	
Oxbridge did not offer my course	0.13	0.13	0.13	32	88	0.0000			1.0000	1.0000 NS	
I don't like the term social class	0.38	0.75	0.58	20	88	-1.4839			0.1432	0.4418 NS	
Social class definitions are no longer applicable	0.25	0.50	0.38	24	88	-1.0000			0.3173	0.4418 NS	
Students who go to Oxbridge are different	0.60	0.88	0.88	28	88	-1.4839			0.1432	0.2346 NS	
Social class is important even though it shouldn't be	0.00	0.63	0.31	12	88	-2.8112			0.0050	0.0379 P<0.05	
I find it difficult to label people	0.38	0.75	0.58	20	88	-1.4839			0.1432	0.2346 NS	
There are types of people who do similar things	0.80	0.50	0.50	32	88	0.0000			1.0000	1.0000 NS	
Social class differences do exist	0.88	1.00	0.94	28	84	-1.0000			0.3173	0.7309 NS	
Backgrounds should not be reported when going to university	0.80	0.83	0.88	28	84	-0.4880			0.6268	0.7309 NS	
Differences between people are about money	0.63	0.63	0.63	32	88	0.0000			1.0000	1.0000 NS	
Social class is outdated but still matters	0.00	0.63	0.31	12	88	-2.8112			0.0050	0.0379 P<0.05	
A person's background shapes who they are	0.25	0.25	0.25	32	88	0.0000			1.0000	1.0000 NS	
Most people who go to university will be well off	0.80	0.75	0.63	24	80	1.0000			0.3173	0.4418 NS	
Social class is linked to educational qualifications	0.25	0.80	0.38	24	80	1.0000			0.3173	0.4418 NS	
Top universities attract students from middle/upper class	0.13	0.63	0.38	16	82	2.0000			0.0468	0.1049 Borderline	
Social class definitions give people an identity	0.38	0.75	0.68	20	88	-1.4839			0.1432	0.2346 NS	
Going to university alters a person's social class	0.13	0.00	0.08	28	84	-1.0000			0.3173	0.7309 NS	
Higher social groups have more privileges	0.13	0.80	0.31	20	88	-1.8809			0.1172	0.2346 NS	
Lower social groups have to work harder for success	0.00	0.50	0.25	16	82	-2.7381			0.0067	0.0168 NS	
I enjoy and participate in 'cultural rich' activities	0.88	0.88	0.88	32	88	0.0000			1.0000	1.0000 NS	
I have friends who enjoy the same activities as me	1.00	1.00	1.00	32	88	0.0000			1.0000	1.0000 NS	
Most of my friends are going to university	1.00	0.75	0.68	24	80	-1.4839			0.1432	0.4418 NS	
Some of my friends went to college instead of 6th form	0.00	0.13	0.08	28	84	-1.0000			0.3173	0.7309 NS	
I find it difficult to make new friends	0.00	0.13	0.08	28	84	-1.0000			0.3173	0.7309 NS	
My friends are academically able	0.80	0.83	0.88	28	84	-0.4880			0.6268	0.7309 NS	
My parents have low educational qualifications	0.88	0.80	0.88	20	88	-1.8809			0.1172	0.2346 NS	
My parents returned to study	0.13	0.50	0.31	20	88	-1.8809			0.1172	0.2346 NS	
I received explicit support from parents	0.80	0.25	0.38	24	88	-1.0000			0.3173	0.4418 NS	
I live with both parents	0.75	0.88	0.81	28	84	-0.6222			0.5311	0.7309 NS	
All family members of my parents are in a professional occupation	0.00	0.80	0.25	18	82	2.7381			0.0067	0.1049 Borderline	
I received explicit support from parents	0.63	0.75	0.68	28	84	-0.6222			0.6016	0.7309 NS	
I am academically more capable than my sister/brother	0.80	0.38	0.44	28	84	-0.4880			0.6268	0.7309 NS	
My brother/sister is more able than me/about the same	0.13	0.13	0.13	32	88	0.0000			1.0000	1.0000 NS	
I am a first generation student	1.00	1.00	1.00	32	88	0.0000			1.0000	1.0000 NS	
I have close family members who have been to university	0.25	0.83	0.44	20	88	-1.4839			0.1432	0.2346 NS	
I have other relatives who have been to university	0.80	0.38	0.44	28	84	-0.4880			0.6268	0.7309 NS	
I live in a semi detached house/bungalow/apartment/flat	0.88	0.80	0.88	20	88	-1.8809			0.1172	0.2346 NS	
I live in a detached house	0.13	0.80	0.11	20	88	-1.4839			0.1432	0.2346 NS	
We get on well with our neighbours	0.25	0.13	0.11	28	84	-0.6772			0.4968	0.7309 NS	
We don't really know our neighbours	0.25	0.50	0.38	24	88	-1.0000			0.3173	0.4418 NS	
People achieving 5 or more GCSE's is above 50%	0.75	0.50	0.63	24	88	-1.0000			0.3173	0.4418 NS	
Adults achieving level A/AS qualifications is below 20%	0.38	0.75	0.58	20	88	-1.4839			0.1432	0.2346 NS	
I have to work to save for university	1.00	0.75	0.68	24	88	-1.4839			0.1432	0.2346 NS	
I do not have a part time job	0.88	0.75	0.81	24	88	-1.4839			0.1432	0.2346 NS	
I found the process stressful due to lack of knowledge	0.63	0.90	0.68	28	84	-0.6222			0.5311	0.7309 NS	
I found the process straightforward	0.38	0.80	0.44	28	84	-0.6222			0.5311	0.7309 NS	
I received help from teachers	1.00	1.00	1.00	32	88	0.0000			1.0000	1.0000 NS	
I decided to go to university at an early age	0.75	0.88	0.81	28	84	-0.6222			0.5311	0.7309 NS	
I decided to go to university recently	0.25	0.13	0.19	28	84	-0.6772			0.4968	0.7309 NS	
I have applied to pre 1992 institutions only	0.75	0.75	0.75	32	88	0.0000			1.0000	1.0000 NS	
I have applied to both pre and post 1992 universities	0.25	0.25	0.25	32	88	0.0000			1.0000	1.0000 NS	
I enjoyed the Sutton Trust	1.00	1.00	1.00	32	88	0.0000			1.0000	1.0000 NS	
I identified with other students	0.50	0.50	0.50	32	88	0.0000			1.0000	1.0000 NS	
The week made me feel better about going to university	1.00	1.00	1.00	32	88	0.0000			1.0000	1.0000 NS	
The week confirmed my decision to go to university	1.00	1.00	1.00	32	88	0.0000			1.0000	1.0000 NS	
The Sutton Trust week was my first experience of university	0.50	0.13	0.31	20	88	-1.8809			0.1172	0.2346 NS	
I have attended other university summer schools	0.38	0.75	0.68	20	88	-1.4839			0.1432	0.2346 NS	
I wanted to find out what university would be like	1.00	1.00	1.00	32	88	0.0000			1.0000	1.0000 NS	
I think university will be hard work	0.63	0.75	0.68	28	84	-0.6222			0.5311	0.7309 NS	
I believe there will be a wide social mix of people	0.25	0.63	0.44	20	88	-1.4839			0.1432	0.2346 NS	
I will have to get a part time job to finance university	0.80	0.13	0.31	20	88	-1.8809			0.1172	0.2346 NS	
I think I will get into debt	0.80	0.80	0.80	20	88	-1.8809			0.1172	0.2346 NS	
I was scared at first	0.38	0.13	0.25	24	88	-1.1180			0.2838	0.4418 NS	
I am settling in well now	0.75	0.38	0.58	20	88	-1.4839			0.1432	0.2346 NS	
I received homes at first	0.63	0.00	0.25	16	82	-2.7381			0.0067	0.1049 Borderline	
There is a wide diversity of people at university	0.75	0.25	0.50	16	82	-1.8809			0.1172	0.2346 NS	
I enjoy the campus	0.50	0.25	0.38	24	88	-1.0000			0.3173	0.4418 NS	
I have made some nice friends	0.63	0.38	0.60	24	88	-0.6222			0.5311	0.7309 NS	
I feel like home	0.88	0.38	0.63	16	82	-2.0000			0.0468	0.1049 Borderline	
I felt strange when I went home	0.38	0.13	0.25	24	88	-1.1180			0.2838	0.4418 NS	
I found it difficult to make friends	0.25	0.00	0.12	24	88	-1.4839			0.1432	0.2346 NS	
I am enjoying my course	0.75	0.50	0.63	24	88	-1.0000			0.3173	0.4418 NS	
My course isn't quite what I expected	0.13	0.00	0.08	28	84	-1.0000			0.3173	0.7309 NS	
I am keeping up with academic demands	0.88	0.80	0.88	20	88	-1.8809			0.1172	0.2346 NS	
I am taking a gap year	0.00	0.13	0.08	28	84	-1.0000			0.3173	0.7309 NS	
I have a career in mind	0.50	0.80	0.60	32	88	0.0000			1.0000	1.0000 NS	
I have no idea at the moment/undecided	0.25	0.13	0.19	28	84	-0.6772			0.4968	0.7309 NS	
I would like to see lots of money	0.25	0.38	0.31	28	84	-0.6222			0.6016	0.7309 NS	
I would like to be successful	0.75	0.63	0.68	28	84	-0.6222			0.6016	0.7309 NS	
I get thinking about it	0.80										

Trajectory Interruptions

