An exploration of educational underachievement from the perspectives of teachers and white British working-class pupils in an urban Pupil Referral Unit.

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To Dele, my brother, gone but never forgotten.

To dad, mi o le gba gbe ife ti e ni si mi. Sun re baba mi.

Abstract

This small-scale qualitative study aims to explore the factors that contribute to the educational underachievement of white British working-class boys and girls. This exploration is informed by the perspectives of ten white British working-class pupils and five teachers based in an urban Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) in England. The PRU is based in a Local Authority where the educational performance of white British working-class (WBWC) pupils is of significant concern. All the pupils that participate in this study are in key stage 4 (ages 14 – 16), recorded on the school information management system as white British and in receipt of free school meals. Based on their levels of attendance and attainment all pupil-participants are categorised as unlikely to achieve five or more A*-C grades (including English and mathematics) at GCSE level or to progress on to any form of post-compulsory education.

This study is informed by Bourdieu's (1984) theories of field, habitus and cultural capital, which consider educational underachievement in working-class pupils as an outcome of class inequalities within the education system. Within this study, Bourdieu's (1984) concepts prove useful in teasing out and explaining the factors that contribute to the educational underachievement of many WBWC pupils. However, the findings (based on semi-structured one-to-one interviews with a group of WBWC pupils and their teachers) from this study challenge the notion of conflict free mediation when the institutional habitus of a school aligns with the habitus of white British working-class pupils. Following a discussion of the principal findings, this study suggests the reasons for the educational underachievement of many WBWC pupils cannot be attributed to a single factor. Rather, it concludes that the educational underachievement of many WBWC pupils is influenced by a complex amalgamation of a hidden curriculum, misrecognised aspirations, parental influences and negative perceptions of schooling and prospects which are all induced and shaped by social stratification.

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Glossary of Acronyms and Abbreviations

CRRE	Centre for Research in Race and Education
CSJ	Centre for Social Justice
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfE	Department for Education
DfES	Department for Education and Skills.
EBacc	English Baccalaureate
Ed.D.	Doctor of Education
FSM	Free School Meals
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GRT	Gypsy, Roma and Traveller
H.E	Higher Education
HCEC	House of Commons Education Committee
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
KS4	Key Stage Four (Years 10 and 11 in secondary school)
LA	Local Authority
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
Ofsted	Office of Standards in Education
PISA	Programme for International Pupil Assessment
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
SFR	Statistical First Review
WBWC	White British Working-class
WC	Wallace Centre
WWC	White Working-class
BLM	Black Lives Matter

QTS	Qualified Teacher Status
ONS	Office of National Statistics

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 Introduction

For many years educationalists and policy makers have discussed ways to improve societal and academic outcomes for underachieving pupils. During this period many studies and government reports (Bowe, 2015; Benskin, 2014; Howard, 2013; Graham, 2011; Swan, 1985; Scarr et al., 1983; Ramplon, 1981; McPherson, 1999; Gillborn and Gipps, 1996) focused heavily on the educational underachievement of Black African and Black Caribbean pupils. However, over the last decade and a half, concerns have increasingly shifted to the high level of educational underachievement in many white working-class pupils (WWC) pupils in England (DfE, 2017; Stokes et al., 2015; House of Commons Educational Committee, 2014; Strand, 2015; Demie and Lewis, 2014; Office of Standards in Education (Ofsted), 2013; Cassen and Kingdon, 2007; Raey, 2006; Evans 2006; Parsons et al., 2004). Whilst acknowledging that there are many 'achieving' (in terms of achieving 5 A* - C grades at General Certificate in Education – GCE and progression into university) WWC pupils, the overall objective of this thesis is to explore the factors that contribute to the educational underachievement of many WWC pupils in general and those that participated in this study in particular. This introduction will provide a rationale for this exploratory study, an outline of the research questions that will guide the exploration, an introduction to the conceptual framework and an overview of the complete thesis.

1.2 Rationale of the study

White working-class pupils have persistently been the lowest achievers in education at the age of 16 for any socio-economic class grouping in England (The Sutton Trust, 2016; House of Commons Education Committee - HCEC, 2014: Strand, 2014), the least likely of any group to study at university (after those from traveller backgrounds) (National Education Opportunity Network - NEON, 2019; Reay et al., 2010) and the most likely to find themselves disadvantaged in the labour market (Aoki et al., 2019; Treasury, 2015; Vignoles et al., 2011; Smith, 2015). These outcomes have been an ongoing cause for concern for schools, communities and policy makers in England since at least the 1950s (Whitty, 1985) but have recently been described as real and

pressing (Lewis and Demie, 2015). More specifically, based on current and past attainment data, the Local Authority (LA) where I work has identified many WWC pupils as consistently underperforming at GCSE level in comparison to their local and national peers. This underperformance is more evident amongst WWC pupils in the local PRU[1], which has a disproportionate number of WWC pupils (29% of pupils are White British) compared to the corresponding figure (9%) in local schools (Local Authority produced data). Due to their low performance in comparison to their peers, many WWC pupils have been identified as a target intervention group whose persistent underachievement, in line with the LA's strategic plan, needs to be explored and remedied. According to Brar (2016), the Professional Doctorate in Education (unlike the PhD) 'enables a form of inquiry that is ideally suited to practitioner scholars' such as myself, as it 'encourages us to study real world problems through an epistemological point of view and bring what we have learned back to practice for the improvement of practice' (pg.27). Thus, this Doctoral study undertakes the exploration required by the LA and offers recommendations to inform and shape local interventions to improve the educational outcomes of WWC pupils.

While I state that this study is driven by the low educational outcomes of many WBWC pupils and the duty of the LA to improve these outcomes, I also acknowledge that there is also much of 'me' in this Doctoral study. My employer agreed that the Professional Doctorate could aid my professional advancement, but the choice of LA 'problem' was mine. I began teaching in 1990 in a school in a 'deprived' part South East London. This school had a high proportion of black pupils from working class backgrounds with an enduring history of educational failure. The pupils were deemed lazy, unfocussed and were frequently spoken about by some teachers as if they were responsible for their inability to thrive or fit into the school environment. At the time, I believed the reason for what I perceived as injustice, was racism. However, on moving on to my next and subsequent teaching roles, also in deprived areas of London, I noticed similar educational outcomes in, and behaviours directed towards most pupils (regardless of race) from evidently poor backgrounds. After 19 years in teaching, I moved to my

[1] For the purpose of the study the pupil referral unit (PRU) where the research was conducted will be referred to as the Wallace Centre. This is to ensure confidentiality is upheld and the unit and research participants remain anonymous.

current school improvement role in the LA but my time in teaching left me feeling that something had to be done to improve the educational outcomes and experiences of pupils from working class backgrounds. This feeling led to an exploration of apprenticeships as an alternative route to success, in my masters' dissertation. It also led to my voluntary work which involves mentoring young people from working-class backgrounds and ultimately and almost subconsciously to this current Doctoral study of educational underachievement in white working-class pupils.

I will address my positionality in more detail in chapter five of this thesis, but at this point I feel the need to address the question I was asked by many friends and family when I told them about my Doctoral topic. I was frequently asked why I did not choose to investigate educational achievement in black working-class pupils. After all, I am of African heritage and black working-class children are also underperforming in comparison to their peers, so this should be my primary area of concern. I explained that black working-class children were not (at the time of the start of this thesis) on the LA's target intervention list. I also explained that I am much too close to the issue of underachievement in black working-class pupils. In giving this explanation, I remained mindful of Aguilar (1981), who tells his readers that such familiarity may narrow the perception of the researcher and impede the analysis of social and cultural structures and patterns under investigation. Interestingly, as I revisit this section many years after the conversations with friends and family and reflect on the knowledge I have gained and the findings in this study, I feel that the marginalisation, inequality and misrecognition many WBWC pupils face is not significantly different to the forms of discrimination faced by the Black British working-class pupils I was encouraged to research. However, whilst this is just a 'feeling' that is neither confirmed nor refuted in this study, in the climate of the Black Lives Matter (BLM[2]) movement that recently emerged following the death of George Floyd[3], this 'feeling' is heightened and is pertinent to the picture of white success and privilege I briefly discuss in chapter two.

[2] The Black Lives Matter movement began in 2013 following the acquittal of a white police officer in the fatal shooting of a black teenager in 2012. The movement gained international attention following the killing of a black man (George Floyd) by a white police officer in July 2020.
[3] George Floyd was a black man killed by white police officers in Minneapolis, USA.

1.3 Contribution to knowledge and professional practice

There are many studies that examine educational underachievement in WWC boys (Aoki et al., 2019; Stahl, 2018; Gangnon and Higham, 2017; Travers, 2016) and a few that examine the underachievement of WWC girls (Richards, 2018; Ringrose and Renold, 2012; Plummer, 2000). There is also significant research around the quality of PRUs (Tate and Greatbatch, 2017; Ofsted, 2016; Michael and Frederickson, 2013) and the way in which PRUs address the issue of reintegration to mainstream schools after exclusion (Timpson, 2019; Jalil and Morgan, 2017; Lawrence, 2011). However, in my review of relevant literature, I failed to identify any studies that explore educational underachievement in both WWC boys and girls within the context of a PRU. In that sense, this study is unique.

Although small in scale, the originality of this study lies within its location. This study explores the educational underachievement of a group of WBWC pupils based in a frequently over-looked area of education – pupil referral units. A critical examination of a wide range of literature on the underachievement of WBWC pupils reveals a number of factors which contribute to low educational outcomes of some of the children within this cohort. By exploring educational underachievement from the perspectives of a group of WBWC pupils and their teachers in a PRU, this study brings life to the factors revealed in the literature and gives the pupil-participants a voice to express their own understanding of underachievement, their experience of education and how this contributes to their educational performance. In doing so, this study aims to encourage alternative actions and new discussions that look beyond presumed deficits and facilitate change that may alter the way many WWC pupils are perceived and perceive themselves in education, thus contributing to both theory and professional practice.

1.4 The research questions

According to Kross and Giust (2019), quality questions are 'critical to provide accurate research and findings in qualitative research' (pg.27). Bryman (2016) advises that research questions can act as a useful guide for a researcher's literature search, the decisions they make around research design, what data to collect and how to analyse and write up the data. On the other hand, Robson (2011) suggests that 'having set

research questions can be constraining and advises that any initial questions should be provisional and allowed to evolve as the work proceeds' (pg. 59). Leaning on Robson's (2011) suggestion, during the research process, I reconsidered and revised two of my four initial research questions as they were no longer the guiding questions for my research. Upon further reading of literature, one of the four questions was removed, leaving three research questions that will 'draw the reader into the research with a focus on a topic of significance and at the same time functioning as lenses that are directed outward by the researcher to capture the nuances of the lives, experiences and perspectives' (Agee, 2009 pg.446) of a group of WWC pupil in the Wallace Centre.

In order to explore the educational underachievement of white working-class pupils, the following questions were posed:

1. What factors contribute to the educational underachievement of White Working-Class pupils?
2. How do the lived experiences of White British Working-Class pupils in a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) explain their educational underachievement?
3. To what extent does the nature of Pupil Referral Units facilitate or hinder the educational achievement of White British Working-class pupils?

1.5 The conceptual framework

A conceptual framework is 'the researcher's understanding of how the research problem will best be explored, the specific direction the research will have to take, and the relationship between the different variables in the study' (Grant and Osanloo, 2014 pg.16). A conceptual framework is also categorised by Miles & Huberman (1994) as a system 'which lays out the key factors, constructs or variables and presumes relationships among them' (pg. 440). Bourdieu's key sociological concepts of field, habitus and cultural capital provides the conceptual framework which will guide this exploration of educational underachievement in WBWC pupils. Bourdieu's (1984) view is that individuals come into social fields with different habitus and equipped with different forms of cultural capital. However, Bourdieu (1984) claims not all forms are equally valued in particular fields. The value attached to each type of cultural capital and habitus determines the degree to which an individual is successful within the said

field. Many scholars (Stahl, 2018; Barrett, 2017; Ingram, 2015; Burke, 2015; Archer and Francis, 2005) have utilised Bourdieu's (1984) concepts of field, habitus and cultural capital to analyse the way working-class children and young people interact with education. Adopting the same Bourdieusian lens to frame my research, will enable the consideration of how the different values assigned to middle and working classes permeates the education system to shape its structure, influence its practices (Reay, 2017) and contribute to the educational underachievement of a small sample of WBWC pupils in a PRU.

1.6 Overview of the structure of the thesis

Chapter one serves as an introduction to this thesis. Chapter one provides a rationale for the area of focus. This rationale explains how my research interest is driven by national and local concerns about the educational performance of WBWC pupils coupled with my personal concerns that stem from extensive experiences of teaching, mentoring and witnessing the poor educational outcomes (and sometimes life outcomes) of working-class children. Chapter one also provides an outline of the research questions and briefly describes the conceptual framework of the research, which draws on Bourdieu's (1984) key concepts of field, habitus and cultural capital. Chapter one concludes with an overview of the structure of the thesis.

Chapter two introduces Pupil Referral Units (PRU), class and educational underachievement in the context of this thesis. The white working-class pupils who participate in this study are being educated in an urban PRU. In England, a PRU is an alternative provision (AP) where children who do not want to or are not able to attend school are taught. This could be because they have been excluded (for a variety of different reasons), have a short or long-term illness, or are a new starter waiting for a mainstream school place (The Department for Education – DfE, 2014). Despite being a form of AP, PRUs are also seen as schools, but due to their different ethos Gutherson et al. (2011) believes they are better able to meet the needs of vulnerable children than mainstream schools. The claim Gutherson et al. (2011) make is integral to this study, but before this claim is explored and for the purpose of clarity, chapter provides an overview of the function, standard and outcomes of pupil referral units. Chapter two

also examines the concept of ‘class’. Class is a difficult concept as it conveys a range of meanings. According to Block (2016) ‘class’ is a convenient label in the social sciences for a number of dimensions. He says these include wealth, occupations, level of education, consumption patterns or symbolic behaviour. Despite the absence of a definitive definition, the concept of class is central to this study and is seen as ‘undeniably the largest determinant of how students engage with education’ (Stahl, 2012 pg.39). Therefore, a short exploration of ‘class’ and an outline of how ‘class’ is defined within this study is provided within this chapter. Within diverse England, ‘class’ becomes even more complicated than suggested by Williams (1976) as there are many differences emerging from within ethnic distinctions. The behaviours and educational achievement of pupils who come from working-class backgrounds differ within ethnicities, therefore, this chapter also examines the concept ‘white’ working-class with the view to ensuring that readers of this thesis have a clear understanding of who I refer to as ‘*white working-class pupils’* within this study. Many scholars (Smith, 2006; Gorard, 2000; Plewin, 1991) agree that a consensus on the definition of 'underachievement' is difficult to obtain. Despite this difficulty, a wide range of studies, policy makers, schools and even the media use the term ‘underachievement’ to describe the performance and outcomes of pupils who do not meet the national education benchmarks. At its close, chapter two provides clarity about the way in which this study understands and applies the notion of underachievement in relation to the performance of some WWC pupils.

Chapter three begins with a statistical account of the educational underachievement of WWC pupils at GCSE. In addition to highlighting the gap in achievement between many WWC pupils and their more affluent peers, this account also serves as a backdrop to this study. In consideration of the statistical account, chapter three then presents an examination of factors that may contribute to the educational underachievement of many WWC pupils. This examination begins with an interrogation of the long and enduring relationship between class and the underachievement of some WWC pupils (Francis, 2010). Despite evidence that a large number of WWC boys and girls are underachieving in education, there is a significant difference in the amount of research which focuses on the educational performance of many WWC boys in comparison to that of many WWC girls. This chapter also examines the reason

for this difference and explores gender as a contributory factor to the educational underachievement of some WWC pupils. Many WWC pupils aspire to progress into non-traditional pathways such as apprenticeships or other forms of employment or training immediately after school. This occupational preference is often equated to lack of or limited aspirations (Baker et al., 2014; Strand, 2014; Stahl, 2010). Chapter three explores the concept of aspirations and examines it as a factor which contributes to the educational underachievement in many WWC pupils. The role schools play in the exacerbation of social class inequalities in pupil achievement is much debated (e.g. Bourdieu, 1977; Reay, 2017, Watson, 2018). Therefore, chapter three ends with an exploration of the notion that schools are conduits used to pass along concepts and ideologies that support the privileged position of the middle-class and contribute to the educational underachievement of white working-class pupils.

In **chapter four***,* I critically examine the educational underachievement of white working-class pupils. I draw upon Bourdieu's (1984) concepts of field, habitus and capital - his 'thinking tools' - as a framework for understanding why many WWC pupil consistently achieve lower levels of educational outcomes than their middle-class peers. First, the concept of field highlights how education is seen as a large social field (within which sits pupil referral units and mainstream schools as smaller distinct fields) where the position of pupils in the field is legitimised by their understanding of what is seen as common-sense and natural practices in education. Second, habitus explains how most WWC parents transmit collective class-based attitudes and values to their children, who, in turn, take this habitus with them into the field of education - where it is carries less value than that of their middle-class peers. Third, cultural capital provides a route to understanding how the familiarity with the dominant culture in society and the awareness of and ability to use educated language impacts the probability of 'success' in education. Bourdieu is seen as one of the major thinkers of the twentieth century (Grenfell, 2014), however, as with all theoretical perspectives, Bourdieu's (1984) theories of habitus and capital have a number of limitations. With his notion of habitus, Bourdieu has been charged with 'removing the element of choice from the human experience and returning us to the iron cage' (Archer, 2007 cited in Thatcher et al., 2016 pg. 2). Bourdieu is also accused of lacking conceptual clarity in his explanation of which 'resources associated with the higher-class home constitute

cultural capital and how these resources are converted into educational credentials' (Sullivan 2002, pg.146). Bearing these limitations in mind, chapter four concludes with an examination of the degree to which Bourdieu's theories can 'really' explain educational underachievement in many WWC pupils.

Chapter five begins with an account of my positionality within this study and is followed with a justification for use of interviews as a data collection tool. Next, this chapter provides an overview of the participants who took part in the study and of the setting where the study took place. As an early researcher, it was not only important to test the selected methodology for gathering and interpreting data but also to assess my level of research skills in order to ascertain areas that would need to be developed to enable the successful completion of my research. As such, once ethical approval had been obtained, I carried out a pilot study. Details of the pilot and the lessons learned are recorded in chapter five. Chapter five also details the thematic analysis of pupil and teacher interview data and concludes with a presentation of the ethical considerations of the study.

Chapters six and seven present and discuss findings from the research data. Four main themes emerged from the thematic analysis described in chapter 4: Education Setting, Teaching and Learning, Social Class and Aspirations. The themes and their sub-sections emerged as a representation of out-of-school and in-school factors that influence the pupils' experience of education and their educational underachievement. These factors are not mutually exclusive, however, the research findings relating to out-of-school and in-school factors are presented separately in chapters six and seven and discussed in relation to the wealth of literature on educational underachievement and the conceptual framework presented in chapters three and four respectively.

Chapter eight is the final chapter of my thesis and begins with a reconsideration of Bourdieu's (1984) key concepts habitus, capital and field as a framework for understanding the educational experiences and perceptions of some WBWC pupils and explaining the relationship between their educational experiences and their

educational outcomes. Next, I revisit the three research questions I submitted at the beginning of this thesis. This revisit allows the presentation of the key arguments and is followed by an outline of the of the limitations of this thesis and a summary of the distinctive contributions made to research on white British working-class educational underachievement. Chapter eight also offers suggestions for further research and recommendations for practice addressed (primarily) to the LA where I work, mainstream and alternative provision schools, and researchers who may be interested in or concerned about the educational underachievement in a range of WWC pupils. Chapter eight concludes with a short reflection on an exhausting and emotional but also exciting, informative and fulfilling nine-year journey, that materialised in the form of this thesis.

Chapter 2 - Context: Pupil Referral Unit, Class and Educational Underachievement

2.1 Introduction

At the time this thesis was written, the group of WWC pupils who participated in this study were being educated in an urban PRU in England but had previously attended mainstream schools where they were described as underachievers and predicted to leave education with less than five passes at GCSE level. Some scholars (Thompson and Pennacchia, 2014; Gutherson et al., 2011; De Jong and Griffiths, 2006) believe that by dint of their nature, PRUs are more able to educate disengaged children and provide them with a second chance at educational 'success'. In order to ensure that my readers have a clear understanding of the nature of PRUs in England and how this differs from mainstream schools, I begin this chapter with an overview of the function, standard and outcomes of pupil referral units. The nature of PRUs are central to this thesis as are the notions of 'class', 'white working-class' and 'underachievement', however the definitions of class and underachievement are highly debated and inconsistently applied. As such, I recognise that my interpretations of 'class', 'white working-class' and 'underachievement' may differ to that of some authors, educators and policy makers. Therefore, for the purpose of clarity and to create a clear context for the reading of the following chapters, I use this second chapter as an introduction to these three background concepts and as a platform to discuss how they are defined and applied for the purpose of this study.

2.2 What are Pupil Referral Units (PRU)?

The pupils that participated in this study began their secondary education in mainstream schools and were excluded from these schools before they entered year 10 (age 15). Generally, there are several reasons why pupils are permanently excluded from school, but the most common reason is persistent disengagement (DfE, 2017; Ogg and Kalill, 2010). Literature on exclusions (Stamou et al., 2014; Mills and McGregor, 2014) describe two types of disengaged pupils: pupils who are disengaged from school but not from education and those who are generally disengaged. Stamou

et al. (2014) describe pupils who are disengaged from school but not from education as ‘those who are negative towards school, face challenges with school discipline and are likely to play truant, yet they have aspirations for continuing with education’ (n.p). On the other hand, pupils who are ‘generally disengaged’ often display poor behaviour, are persistently absent, are not achieving age related educational expectations and appear to have no interest in school or education generally. The pupils who participate in this study fall into the latter category. Most disengaged pupils are excluded to an Alternative Provision (AP), which according to Brown (2011), exists to ‘provide education to children of compulsory school age who, on account of illness, exclusion or for other reasons, are unable to attend mainstream school’ (pg.5). AP is mainly delivered in three types of institutions: Colleges of Further Education, Independent Providers and PRUs. Out of the three institutions listed, PRUs are the most common and accommodate the highest number of ‘generally disengaged’ pupils (McCluskey, et al., 2015). At the time of writing this thesis there were 400 PRUs in England which accommodate approximately 13,000 children (DfE, 2017) who had been either excluded or managed moved[4] from mainstream schools. The numbers of children excluded from schools fluctuate significantly each year – it was such fluctuation led to the introduction of PRUs in England described below.

The large number of pupils who were excluded during the 1995 – 1996 school year, brought about concerns regarding the suitability of mainstream schooling for certain pupils. Due to this increase in exclusions, local authorities utilised off-site units to provide education outside of mainstream schools for pupils with challenging behaviour (Topping, 1983). The low standards, expectations and outcomes of these offsite units led to them being labelled as ‘sin bins’ or storehouses for ‘dumping’ unwanted pupils (Ogg and Kalil, 2010). The 1996 Education Act stipulates that local authorities have a statutory duty to ensure all children out of mainstream school receive suitable education, therefore the offsite units were remodelled as PRUs, thus providing a way for local authorities to fulfil their responsibility to pupils educated outside of school. While PRU’s were introduced as a new type of school and an alternative education provider, there are a significant number of differences between both types of provision.

[4] A managed move is an agreement between schools, pupils and their parents for that pupil to change school under controlled circumstances

PRU's are relatively smaller in size and have pupils who are either on roll of mainstream school whilst attending a PRU on a part time basis or completely registered at a PRU. PRUs also differ in their purpose depending on the needs of the pupils or local authority that maintains them. Therefore, pupil referral units are not held to a particular standard of delivery or practice (Taylor, 2018). Overall, PRUs are generally be regarded as specialist education providers whose function is to educate children who do not thrive in mainstream school.

In general, the role of Pupil referral units, like mainstream schools, is to provide children with an education that meets their educational and aspirational needs. However, given that pupils at a PRU are twice as likely to be eligible for FSM than pupils in mainstream education (DfE, 2017) and are often from 'chaotic homes in which problems such as drinking, drug-taking, mental health issues, domestic violence and family breakdown are common' (Taylor, 2012 pg.4) education is provided in a more flexible, inclusive manner. For example, unlike mainstream schools, PRUs are not required to follow the national curriculum but must offer a flexible but broad and balanced curriculum which will enable them to provide an education that also considers each pupil's personal circumstances. In their exploration of the efficacy of AP, a number of authors (Tate and Greatbatch, 2017; McCluskey et al., 2015; Thomson and Pennacchia, 2015; Kendal et al., 2007) felt that the flexibility afforded to PRUs often has a positive impact on the social, and behavioural development of pupils who are educated in PRUs. Government literature maintains that outcomes in PRUs should be judged against mainstream academic performance measures (DfE, 2017), therefore, as Jalali & Morgan (2017) explain the improved social and behavioural outcomes associated with the flexible standards present in many PRUs are not formally recognised by the government or indeed by local authorities.

Although exempt from the national curriculum, PRUs are expected to replicate the educational opportunities afforded to pupils in mainstream and are also expected to support pupils to achieve the benchmarked number of qualifications at GCSE level. However, literature (DfE, 2018; Pirrie and Macleod 2009) has shown that the educational achievement of pupils educated outside mainstream education is much lower than that of their peers. In fact, the HCEC (2018) report that only '1% of children

in PRUs get five good GCSEs with English and maths' (pg.36), most fail to participate in post-16 education (Ofsted, 2017) and are more likely to become NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) (Tate and Greatbatch, 2017). The reasons for such low outcomes, particularly for many WWC pupils, is explored in more detail in this thesis, however, providers who gave evidence for the HCEC (2018) report, astutely point out that the reported outcomes do not highlight the non-academic successes made by pupils in PRU's or recognise the challenges pupils and PRUs must overcome to improve behaviours and academic success.

This study is interested in the educational underachievement of WWC pupils based in an urban PRU. There is a significant literature (Stahl, 2017; Reay, 2011; Strand, 2014; Vega et al., 2012; Hebert and Schreiber, 2010; Moore and Owens, 2008; Dunne and Gaxely, 2008) that examines educational underachievement in WWC pupils, but this literature does not always clarify their definition of 'class'. In instances where 'class' is defined, some scholars anchor their definition on non-economic concepts such as social and cultural resources. Some other scholars define 'class' based on the relationship of families to income-generating resources. For example, the use of 'working-class' to depict children whose parents have low levels of education, are unemployed, or are in low paid, unskilled or manual jobs. This economic depiction is also adopted by schools and policy makers who within their achievement statistics and reports base their working-class category on family eligibility for free school meals (FSM). It is clear there are varied definitions of class, therefore, in the next section, I will problematise the concept of 'class' by examining and exploring some definitions without looking for conclusive meaning. However, at the end of the section, I aim to offer a definition which will adequately describe 'class' and working-class in the context of this thesis.

2.3 What does class mean in the context of this thesis?

'Class' is a highly disputed and complicated concept. In fact, Wright (2003) believes that few concepts are more contested in sociological theory than the concept of 'class'. This may be because 'class' is mainly used to describe perceptions of social identity or division that are based on occupation, wealth and often education, giving the

expression upper, middle and working the appearance of logic and clarity. However, in truth, these terms reflect an invalidly simplified concept of class and its categorisations. As Bottero (2005 pg.9) identifies, 'class' as a term can be 'notoriously slippery', meaning different things to different individuals and to educational and political bodies.

Marx (1848) used the term 'class' to refer to a social group whose members share the same relationship to labour and the means of production. He theorised that all societies consist of two main classes: the ruling class and the subject class or the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, with the ownership of property being the basis of these class divisions. That is, as Ellis-Martin (2015) describes, 'those who owned the land (middle-class) and those who live by selling their labour to the owners (working-class)' (pg.36). At the centre of the Marxist construction of class analysis is the notion of conflict and power within class relations. Marx (1848) believed that the ruling class exploits and oppresses the subject class and argues that the resulting conflict over the appropriation of what is produced underlies the antagonistic relationship between the two classes. According to Kerbo (2017), it is Marx's emphasis on the importance of class conflict and his economic definition of class that divide social theorists in their analysis of class structure. As such, whilst many sociologists remain true to Marx's conceptualisation of class, others have taken steps to revise, refute or provide an alternative to his views. For example, Weber (2009, original 1947), like Marx, saw class in economic terms. Weber believed that the class position of groups and individuals in society derived from the economic order in these societies and thus defined 'class' as a group of individuals who share a similar position in a market economy and as a result, receive similar economic rewards. However, Weber (2019, original 1922)[5] extended his theory of 'class' beyond Marx's view to include a more culturally sensitive view of society introducing notions of honour, status, or prestige and more specifically, 'life chances' (Block, 2016; Stewart and Greenstein, 2015). Drawing on the work of Marx and Weber, Bourdieu (1984) recognised the importance of economic capital but rather than define class solely in material terms, sought to understand the workings of the social world from the realm of the cultural. Bourdieu (1984), whose key sociological concepts of capital, field and habitus are discussed in detail in chapter 4, theorised that

[5] Translated by Keith Tribe (2019)

‘class’ is shaped by an individual’s habitus and the accumulation, possession and transmission of economic, cultural, and social capitals from one generation to the next. Bourdieu (1984) uses his concept of habitus to explain class in terms of the regularities of behaviour and the composition of his three types of capital (economic, cultural, social) to define the ‘three-dimensional space called class’ (Swartz, 1997 pg. 97).

Clearly society has become much more complex since Marx, Weber and Bourdieu - there has been a move from skilled manual labour to more service based employment and the working-class have shifted from a homogenous group to a large heterogeneous group (Beider, 2015). Despite the shift described by Beider (2015), the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SeC) appears to depict class as a product of occupation or economic capital and places the working-class in the lowest earning positions or in semi or completely standard jobs. There is an obvious tension between regarding ‘class’ as a material phenomenon related to wealth or earnings and in seeing ‘class’ as a cultural formation. For example, in 2000 Devine & Savage argued that the NS-SeC was too narrow and advocated for the incorporation of a culturalist perspective into the definition of ‘class’. In 2013, Mike Savage and a team of sociologists published the results of a two-year study which was designed to develop a more accurate understanding of the British class system. This study resulted in a new hierarchical model of seven identifiable groups (Fig. 1):

Elite	This is the most privileged group. They are set apart from other classes because of wealth. The elite are economically, socially and culturally the highest group.
Established middle class	This is the largest class group and second wealthiest grou. They are keen on highbrow activities and are also high on the cultural and social ladder.
Technical middle class	This is a small distinct group who have as much money as the established middle class but don’t know as many people or possess as much cultural capital.

New affluent workers	This is a relatively well-off group of young people who are socially and culturally active and aware.
Traditional working class	This group score low economically, socially and culturally but have reasonably high house values. On average, this group is the olderst in terms of age.
Emergent service workers	This is a new young urban group who are less well-off than their new affluent peers but are very social and cultural.
Precariat	This is the poorest, most deprived class who scored low economically, socially and culturally. This group is made up of those whose lives are characterised by unstable, low-earning jobs or unemployment. The term precariat is used in place of the 'underclass' label which has been used to describe the poor for many years.

Source: Great British Class Survey

Fig. 4: Britain's new social classes – The BBC's Great British Survey 2013

This model was based on the work of Bourdieu, who, as discussed above, argued that class differences could not be explained in wholly economic terms. However, unlike Bourdieu's orderly class classifications of the dominant class (or the bourgeoisie) and the working-class (or the les classes populaires), Figure 4 presents 'class' as a complicated untidy mix as it reveals that there are classes that have more economic capital than social and cultural capital and those that have considerable cultural capital but little economic capital. Savage et al (2015) claim that this model confirms 'the considerable fuzziness' of 'class' and it suggests that it is 'difficult to define coherent middle-class or working-class groups' (pg.172). Despite being 'intuitively attractive' and 'making sense to many people and journalists' (Savage et al., 2015 pg.173), many of researchers and policy makers still divide 'class' into neat categories of upper, middle and lower categories. In fact, this study explores the educational underachievement of white *working-class* pupils and as such evidences the continuing and widespread use of these terms. Despite my use of the term 'working-class', I do acknowledge that 'class' is a complicated construct, particularly so when it is discussed in conflicting terms of wealth and income, culture or indeed, a combination of both. However, whilst

I realise that class is a contested concept, I also acknowledge the influence Bourdieu has on this thesis. Therefore, within this study, I define 'class' in terms of the varied cultural expressions, countenances, practices and beliefs.

The relationship between 'class' and the educational underachievement of many WWC pupils is considered in more detail in chapter four, however, a very brief overview of some theorists' analysis of the relationship between class and educational underachievement is relevant at this point. Bourdieu (1984), like many theorists both before and after him, believe that the education system is not meritocratic but serves to create and perpetuate a middle- and upper-class hegemony in ideas, thus developing a system which is alien to many working-class children. The education system remains alien to working-class pupils due to what Bourdieu (1984) describes as cultural reproduction. Bourdieu (1984) argues that the key role of education is to reproduce the culture of the dominant class, which is considered the basis for knowledge and necessary for educational achievement. Traditional Marxists also see the education system as working in the interest of the dominant class, in that it reproduces and legitimises class inequality in education. Hill (2017) explains that many Marxists believe that 'school's formal curriculum and hidden curriculum are deliberately geared to failing most working-class children and to elevating middle- and upper-class children above them' (pg.9). Similarly, in his theory of class specific language, Bernstein (1962) argues that school's value and appreciate middle-class language and disregard working-class language, thus contributing to the reproduction of inequality in the education system and the educational underachievement of working-class pupils. All three theories largely see society as being made up of different classes and principally agree that the education system polarizes pupils according to their class and transmits social hierarchies as legitimate, so working-class pupils know their place and remain there.

At the start of this section, I stated that 'class' meant different things to different people. As with social class, people define and use the term working-class in different ways and with different intentions. Indeed, Demie and Lewis (2010) stated that everyone they spoke to during their study on *white working-class underachievement*, gave them 'different interpretations and understandings of the terminology' (pg.8). Nevertheless, I am aware that 'statements relating to the achievements of white working-class

children are almost always based on the exam results of children who are eligible for free school meals' (HCEC, 2014 pg.11). To qualify for free school meals (FSM) in England, 'a child must reside in a household where no one is employed or is not employed for more than 16 hours a week and receives a low income (defined relative to national standards) or with only limited capital assets' (Crawford, 2019 pg.429)[6]. FSM were introduced in England in 1944 to ensure children from poor homes had one nutritious meal a day. Whilst FSM remain a means by which children from poor families are provided with nutritious meals, eligibility for FSM soon became a tool used to 'compare the educational outcomes (e.g., attendance, attainment and progression) of socio-economically disadvantaged and advantaged learners' (Taylor, 2018 pg.32). Through this advancement in use, FSM became an economically and occupationally based class schema used as a proxy for poverty and/or working-class (Ilie et al., 2017; Kounali et al., 2008). The next section explores the viability of using FSM as a proxy for working-class in this study.

2.4 Free school meals as a proxy for poverty and working-class

FSM as an indicator of poverty and working-class appears to be an international concept. According to Taylor (2018), countries such as Sweden, Finland, the US, Japan and India use FSM as a useful tool for education research and for funding schools. Similarly, in England, the use of FSM data is widely prevalent in official estimates of educational underachievement as well as in education research reports (Choudry, 2018; Demie and McLean, 2015; Bukodi and Goldthorpe, 2012). In fact, despite arguing that FSM are an indicator of state dependency than of poverty or working-class, Gorard (2012), concedes that that the 'range, quality and usefulness of FSM figures has grown to be remarkable and the official data has been widely used both in isolation for secondary analysis and in combination with new datasets produced by primary research' (pg.1004). Indeed, Despite the 'usefulness' and frequent use of free school meals as a representation of working-class (Ilie et al., 2017; Demi & Lewis, 2014) and for poverty (Lupton and Obelenskaya, 2013; Connolly et al., 2014; Gillborn,

[6] Free school meal eligibility was extended temporarily in 2020 during the Coronavirus pandemic to include some children of groups who have no recourse to public funds (NRPF).

2009) in education research, there has been general criticism directed at the FSM usage.

The eligibility for FSM is seen as an imperfect proxy of poverty or worklessness (Taylor, 2018). One of the main reasons for this ‘imperfection’ is that FSM data overlooks pupils not who do not receive FSM but who may be ‘deprived’ or even ‘super-deprived’ (Gorard, 2012). For example, there are children who live in households where parents have low status occupations or are working part-time and are therefore not eligible for FSM (HECE, 2020; Kounali et al., 2008), but as Gorard (2012) says these children may be deprived’ or even ‘super-deprived’. In the same vein, Lord et al. (2013) claim that there are families who meet the threshold of eligibility for FSM but choose not to claim for dietary or cultural reasons. Jo (2013) believes feelings of shame or lack of worth also deter such families from claiming government benefits. Children from such families, whilst living in poverty, will not be included in school FSM data – thus making it a ‘coarse and unreliable’ indication of poor pupils in any school (Kounali et al., 2008 pg.5). Conversely, the Economic Policy Institute (EPI, 2013), describes FSM as a ‘good’ proxy for poverty, which, they claim, is in turn a ‘good’ proxy for working-class because ‘lower class families (similar to those in poverty) have lower parental literacy levels, poorer health, less stable housing, less access to quality early childhood experiences, less access to good after school programs and less ability to afford these even if they did have access’ (np). In their report on the *underachievement in education by WWC children*, the HCEC (2014) clearly attest to the fact that many education commentators, researchers and policy makers frequently use FSM as a shorthand for ‘working-class’.

Crawford (2019) sees FSM as a ‘dangerous proxy’ for working-class pupils and claims its use has ‘very real implications for public debate about race, class and education’ (pg.431). These ‘very real’ implications are evident in a report submitted by the Centre for Research in Race and Education (CRRE, 2014) to the HCEC (2014), which highlights ‘a mismatch between the proportion of children eligible for FSM and the proportion of adults who would self-define as working-class’ (n.p). The HCEC (2014 pg.8) show that in 2012/13, 15% of pupils at the end of key stage 4 were known to be eligible for FSM compared with 57% of British adults who defined themselves as

'working-class'. This means that, in 2012/13 using FSM as a proxy for working class, 85% of pupils were being characterised as middle class in comparison to 43% based on self-identification of working-classness. The discrepancy between the meaning of ‘working class’ in common usage as opposed to official statistics based on FSM, as Crawford (2019) claims, has real implications for debate. The mismatch between self-identification and data gives rise to the possibility that white working-class underachievement figures are ‘overblown’ (Havergal, 2019) and distorted, with pupils from the wider self-identified working-class group performing better (on average) than when FSM is applied as a proxy for working-class.

There is much literature (Taylor, 2018; Barrett, 2017; Ilie, 2017) that discusses the use of FSMs as a proxy for working class and/or poverty. For me, these discussions throw up issues about how ‘poverty’ is defined within the context of education and the impact poverty has on educational outcomes. A trawl of relevant literature revealed extensive debates around the notion of poverty in education (Brown, 2018; Gilbert, 2018) – these debates are beyond the remit of this study. However, Kidd (2018) urges her readers to view any data that assigns children into income groups such as FSMs with some suspicion. This author explains that there is a difference between situational poverty and generational poverty and this difference has a significant impact on the educational performance of working-class pupils. As, Tinson (2016) explains the poverty in many WBWC families is multi-generational whilst in many black and Asian families it is often situational, in that they may have come from middle class families in their countries of origin but in their journey to improve their status, experience episodes of poverty. These differences, according to Kidd (2018) create ‘different mindsets and circumstance’ (pg.233). That is, whilst many immigrant families are technically poor, they have a middle-class attitude towards education. Strand (2015) describes this as the immigrant paradigm. He says that many families who have recently moved to England put greater emphasis on education and even if they are poor make a lot of effort to attend parents’ evenings and ensure their children complete their homework. Conversely, the HCEC (2020) describe many WBWC families (especially those in the old mining towns) as those whose poverty is generational. These families are often stuck in a generational cycle of poverty which reproduces a lack of education and job stability. The notion of poverty is clearly complex and is very rarely defined in education

literature beyond the sphere of FSMs. The purpose of this chapter is to provide clarity and to create a clear context for the reading of the following chapters. Therefore, within this study, I acknowledge that it is entirely possible to be working-class and not in poverty just as it is possible to be poor and not working-class. However, within this study, I define children in poverty as those who ‘reside in a household where no one is employed or is not employed for more than 16 hours a week and receives a low income’ (Crawford, 2019 pg.429)[7] - that is, children who are eligible for FSMs.

Considering the level of concern indicated above at the use of FSM as an indicator for poverty and/or working-class, it is difficult to understand why schools, scholars and government officials continue to use it as a proxy measure. Taylor (2018) appears to provide an explanation with his claim that FSM data has provided significant inroads to the understanding of educational processes and continues to be used to effectively compare and predict educational achievement amongst pupils from different ethnicities, genders and social backgrounds. In addition, the HCEC (2014) report that in contrast to the less frequently produced ‘national datasets on education performance based on NS-SEC classifications of parental occupations (or self-perceptions of social class)’ FSM data is ‘readily available, has the advantage of being easy to conceptualise, and has been consistently collected for many years’ (pg.10). Therefore, many scholars (Barrett, 2017; Travers, 2016; Stahl, 2012) despite agreeing that eligibility for FSM is not an exact proxy for working-class (or indeed poverty), appear to favour ‘pragmatism over precision’ (HCEC, 2014) and continue to employ eligibility for FSM as a proxy for working-class in their study of educational underachievement in WWC pupils.

This introduction to the concept of ‘class’ has shown that ‘class’ conveys a range of meanings and is ‘particularly complex when it describes social division’ (Williams, 1976 pg.51). This complexity is evident in the way in which I define working-class within the context of this current study. Whilst Riley (2017) claims that Bourdieu fails to specify an ‘empirically tractable meaning of the term class’ (pg.92), Bourdieu (1984) clearly emphasises the need to understand the way the social field operates in the cultural

[7] Free school meal eligibility was extended temporarily in 2020 during the Coronavirus pandemic to include some children of groups who have no recourse to public funds (NRPF).

domain. That is, for Bourdieu, class is about dispositions or ways of being. Whilst I realise that class is a contested concept, I also acknowledge the influence Bourdieu has on this thesis. Therefore, within this study, I define 'class' in terms of varied cultural expressions, countenances, practices and beliefs which are frequently used to perpetuate unequal access to resources, status and opportunities in society and in education. Yet, in the context of this study, the position I take on working-class appears less cultural and more economic. Also for the purpose of this study and acknowledging the limitations associated with this position, I define the 'working-class' as families who are eligible for and claim free school meals - that is, as previously explained, families where no one is employed, or receives a low income or has limited capital assets. Thus, the working-class pupils at the centre of this study are pupils that are identified as being eligible for school meals. For me, as with the HCEC (2014) and other scholars cited above, this definition is more pragmatic than ideal.

The use of FSM data to define working-class contributes to the common impression of a homogenous group of economically poor individuals. The notion of homogeneity is extended to the '*white'* working-class who are often viewed as a harmonised 'underclass' (Murray, 1996 pg.34) and stereotyped as a culturally cohesive group of people who live in 'concentrated areas of poverty' (Bieder, 2015 pg.2) and raise children to have 'low aspirations and negative attitudes toward education' (HCEC, 2014 pg.28). These views are inaccurate as there are many studies that highlight individuals from WWC backgrounds who are 'successful' and pupils who 'achieve' in education (Barrett, 2017; Friedman, 2016; Travers, 2016, Reay, 2017; Ingram, 2009). Most discussions around working-class status are centred around notions of perpetual economic or cultural inequality, however differing definitions, views and perceptions of the white working-class, such as those cited above, cement Bottero's (2005) opinion that the coupling of white and working-class is particularly problematic. In the next section, I attempt to deconstruct the term 'white working-class' and present a clear picture of who I refer to as the white-working-class in the context of this study.

2.5 Who are the 'white working-class' in the context of this thesis?

As an African, a parent, a school governor and former teacher, I have frequently participated in conversations about the 'whiteness' of the English curriculum, and how the absence of black cultural references in the curriculum appears to play a large role in the underachievement of African and Caribbean pupils. Indeed, in his study '*why is my curriculum white'*, Peters (2015) describes the English curriculum as 'white', comprising of 'white ideas' by 'white authors' and 'resulting from colonialism that has normalized whiteness and made blackness invisible' (pg. 641). Terrelonge (2015) may have had this definition in mind when she asked the question: *why are WWC pupils still underachieving, despite being taught a curriculum primarily designed for white British children and predominantly delivered by white teachers? (pg.14).* For the many African and Caribbean parents I have spoken to over the years, '*White*' or *'whiteness'* tends to conjure up a picture of success and privilege – even more so in the wake of the re-emergence of the Black Live Matter (BLM) movement in 2020. To many of these parents 'Whiteness' protects from the structuring inequalities that they face and gives the impression that any success achieved is gained through merit alone. Thatcher (2016), appears to support this view with her claim that 'politics, education and the media are governed by white people. They (white people) have the power to act for all people and have done this for hundreds of years as white supremacy has shaped most of political and economic systems throughout history' (pg.89).

In the context of education Gillborn (2005) claims that white supremacy 'encodes a deep privileging of white students and the legitimization, defence and extension of Black inequity' (pg. 496). This quote not only appears to validate the views of the African and Caribbean parents I spoke to, but it also illustrates the privileges that come with 'whiteness'. It is important to note that not all white individuals benefit equally from white supremacy, but it is equally important to note that they do all benefit. This is an important distinction, but it is not within the scope of this thesis to explore beyond this point. Nevertheless, the answer to Terrelonge's question lies in the fact that the 'White' ethnic group in England is not homogenous. There are a variety of lived experiences and identities amongst white people and as such different groups of white pupils' view, access and value the curriculum in different ways and to different degrees with varying levels of success.

The differing levels of success in education appears to be associated with a demarcation in whiteness which is shaped by class and cultural practices. As Beider (2015) explains, once class is introduced into whiteness, it is no longer an amorphous category but one that is separated into distinct components. These distinct components are evident in the difference between the type of whiteness that is privileged, protected and acceptable and the more disadvantaged, illegitimate and unacceptable form of whiteness (Bhopal, 2018). The acceptable form of whiteness is often applied to those from middle-class backgrounds whose taste, language and education distinguish them from the 'unacceptable' whiteness associated with the white working-class. Some scholars suggest that the working-class whiteness has become 'dirty' (Skeggs, 2009), with many WWC children being described as 'Chavy' (Jones, 2016) and in line with political rhetoric, 'lazy and lacking in aspiration' (Choudry, 2018) - leaving them far out of Dyer's (2006) depiction of whiteness as a homogenous basis of power.

The way whiteness is deployed for working-class pupils is an important aspect to this study as it underscores the behaviours which Reay (2017) claims translates to class condescension and perpetuates educational inequalities. Reay's (2017) claim is best explained by Garner (2012), who asserts that there are 'grades of whiteness' (pg.446) within which the WWC shift in and out depending on the context, cultural and social discourse. It is this grading that allows the whiteness associated with working-class pupils to often be frequently constructed by many policy makers as having anti-educational attitudes, low academic abilities and even lower aspirations (Beider, 2015). This construction of the working-class pupil's whiteness directly contrasts with the whiteness of their more affluent peers who are seen to be automatically intellectually capable, easier to teach and more likely to 'succeed'. In depicting a 'respectable, cosmopolitan middle-class whiteness' against 'a retrogressive, static, working-class whiteness' (Preston, 2003), this 'moral economy of whiteness' (Garner, 2012) disrupts the concept of a homogenous group of white pupils described earlier and highlights the stereotypes and biases that contribute to inequality in education.

It would appear that white working-class in the context of this study is clear and easy to define: White working-class pupils are those who are eligible for FSM, display cultural expressions, practices and beliefs which contrast those of their middle class peers and are seen to be antithetical to educational achievement. This definition is based on the based on the above discussions and is in line with government data and education research. However, it is important for me to reiterate my recognition of the fact that not all working-class pupils access FSM and not all pupils on FSM are working class. The later fact has become more apparent in recent times as the Covid Pandemic has forced more families who do not consider themselves working class on to FSM. Crawford (2019) also sees FSM as a crude proxy for working class but accepts that published statements and research relating to the 'underachievement' of WBWC pupils are based on achievement data for white children receiving FSMs. However, Crawford (2019) describes the notion of WWC underachievement as a fallacy. This author believes that conversations which consider the educational underachievement of WWC pupils lends support to 'racially loaded and classist logics within political agendas' (pg.430). In explanation, Crawford (2019) cites Morley et al. (2017), who maintain that 'Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) children are frequently absent from official data and seem to disappear from view when policy-makers and scholars make claims about the 'white working-class' (pg.430). It is not within the remit of this thesis to dissect the marginalisation of GRT children, however, the point Crawford (2019) and Morley et al. (2017) make is significant.

The terms 'white working-class' or 'white pupils on FSMs' are frequently used in educational research, policy documents and government statistics, however it is not often clear which group of 'white' pupils are at the centre of these discussions and data. This lack of clarity, as Crawford (2019) indicates will often lead to misleading findings and inaccurate statistics in relation to the educational performances and outcomes of many WBWC pupils. recommendations at the end of the study. Therefore, it is important that this study clearly distinguishes which white ethnic group is at its centre. Going forward, to provide a clear context for the study, I replace the term WWC with the term 'White British Working-class' (WBWC) to refer to White British pupils who are eligible for free school meals.

Central to this thesis is the *perceived* educational underachievement of many WBWC pupils. I use the term perceived here because, like 'class', 'underachievement' means different things to different people. Within the next section, I explore the meaning of underachievement and determine how it is applied in this study.

2.6 What does educational underachievement mean in the context of this study?

The term 'underachievement' is broadly and loosely used in education policy and practice (Gorard and Smith, 2004). This wide use is evidenced in the plethora of studies and articles on underachievement in general (e.g. Hoffmann, 2018; Blandford, 2017; Banerjee, 2017; Crozier, 2017; Wong, 2016) and amongst WWC pupils in particular (e.g. Crawford, 2019; Simmons and Smyth, 2018; Travers, 2017; Strand, 2014, 2017; Lewis and Demie, 2015; Evans, 2006). Despite the abundance of literature on the concept of underachievement, there remains a lack of agreement on its definition and application (Siegle, 2018; Gorard, 2000; Plewis, 1991). However, in the field of education, 'underachievement' is mainly defined as a failure to *successfully* achieve benchmarked *academic* outcomes (Wong, 2015; Nunn, 2014; Gorard and See, 2013; Hawkins et al., 2007; Gillborn and Mizra, 2000; West and Pennell, 2003). Notwithstanding the regular use of this definition, there is a degree of contention around the use of the term 'success' and the focus on academic outcomes. The reservations around the use of a definition of underachievement which centres on 'successful academic' performance is explored below.

Defining underachievement as a failure to *successfully* achieve benchmarked *academic* outcomes fails to recognise that the notion of 'success' is multidimensional and relative and cannot be restricted to evidence of academic ability or ability to perform well in tests or examinations. To begin with, York, Gibson and Rankin (2015) describe 'success' as being ambiguous due to its inherently perspectival nature (pg.1). These scholars explain that success is viewed differently by different people depending on a range of factors (e.g. goals, social background and ethnicity). Some working-class parents may, for example, view progression onto an apprenticeship programme as significant success, whereas, on the other hand, some parents from white middle-class backgrounds (and indeed some schools) might view such an outcome or such pathways as evidence of underachievement. This is probably why Siegle (2018)

suggests that underachievement is 'in the eye of the beholder' (pg. 286), accordingly, success can be said to be based on what the 'beholder' values. Siegle's suggestion is described in the educational context by Harrell and Holcroft (2012), who maintain that pupil success should be determined by the goals and personal situation of each individual pupil. For example, under the umbrella of Harrell and Holcroft's (2012) depiction of pupil success, a pupil whose grades improve from a grade 2[8] to a grade 4 would not be considered any less 'successful' than the pupil who moves from a grade 6 to a grade 9. Indeed, neither would a pupil who struggles with academic tests but is a keen and committed musician or sports person. This premise is particularly true when the 'improvement' takes the pupil closer to their educational, personal and occupational aspirations.

The relationship between aspirations and educational underachievement is explored in detail in chapter three, but it is important to note that Peterson (2001) maintains that pupils are only 'underachieving' when their performance limits their aspirations. I accept Peterson's (2001) point of view but given that achievement in England is measured by grades from standard academic tests and examinations, the opportunity to gauge performance in non-academic areas is absent. Consequently, any progress towards occupational aspirations or development in alternative areas is not recognised as success or achievement – irrespective of a pupil's aspirations, personal preferences or innate talents.

It appears that a rigidly academic measure of achievement is not only a concern in the context of the English education system. A longitudinal study on inclusive education and outcomes by a Canadian education group (People for Education, 2013) suggested a shift away from a focus on pure academic outcomes as a measurement of achievement towards what the group described as '21st century skills'[9] (pg.38). These skills, it is believed, will prepare pupils for future employment but will also encourage a more flexible and comprehensive form of measuring and describing achievement. This belief was reinforced by Kashefpakdel et al. (2018) who report that some employers

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[8] From in 2017 GCSEs have been gradually reformed to be graded 9 to 1, rather than A* to G. Grade 9 is the highest grade, set above the previous A*, Grade 4 will be known as a standard pass and Grade 5 a strong pass (comparable to a high C and low B on the past grading system). The new GCSE number grades are also used to report assessment outcomes of all pupils from year 7 onwards
[9] See Binkley et al. (2012 pg. 71) for a full definition of 21st century skills.

and teachers in Britain see these skills as being equally, if not more, important than academic qualifications. Erskine (2016) equally questions the limiting nature of measuring achievement solely by academic outcomes and suggests that the determination of 'successful' achievement, especially at KS4, should be based on 'individual pupil circumstance, ability and career goals' rather than an 'ability to memorise and regurgitate information' with university as an ultimate goal (pg.2). That is, for 'achievement' in education to be a meaningful and inclusive term, it must expand beyond a narrow academic focus to become a more flexible, wide ranging and accommodating descriptor. In this sense, scholars such as Fong and Krause (2014), Smith (2014) and Portsmouth and Caswell (1988) advocate for a definition of achievement which accommodates personal and psychological factors, measures '*potential*' and considers a range of other contextual variables. Whilst these suggested definitions encourage a move away from measuring underachievement against sole academic outcomes, the use of the term 'potential' renders them problematic.

Writers such as Snyder and Linnenbrink-Garcia (2013) and Landis and Reschly (2013) describe underachievement as a failure of pupils to achieve their educational potential. Defining underachievement in terms of 'failure to meet educational potential' may allow for a more individualised measurement of achievement. However, I assume that in order to accurately determine educational potential, educators will need to have a complete oversight, understanding and acknowledgment of the preferences, abilities, backgrounds and aspirations of individual pupils. It is questionable whether educators contemplate many of (or indeed any) of these factors before gauging or awarding achievement status based on pupil 'potential'. This, therefore, renders the use of the term 'potential' to determine educational achievement problematic. It appears that the notion of educational 'potential' (similar to the notion of success) rests heavily on the projected ability of pupils to meet set academic goals, which, according to Gillies (2008), masks ideological assumptions which concern 'socially constructed, culturally, subjective and relative sensitive matters' (pg.1). As a result, Gillies (2008) claims:

> *'the notion of achieving potential could be dismissed as an idealist fantasy, a conception of human possibility which fails to factor in key environmental, social, cultural, personal, psychological, conscious, unconscious, planned and accidental factors' (pg. 7).*

Gillies (2008) proceeds to claim that the term underachievement is:

> *'… a subjective term, dependent on profound issues of values, culture and lifestyle choices. To accuse, or label someone as underachieving seems to be a subjective value-judgement, monologic and grossly presumptuous' (p.8).*

It is possible that Smith (2005) had similar thoughts as she feels the term 'underachievement' has 'probably outlived its usefulness' and maintains that the variations in its use has led to 'multiple meanings that sometimes disguise the true nature of patterns of learning' (pg.8). Similarly, a little over fifteen years before Smith's claim, Plewis (1991) identified what he claims to be 'good arguments for dropping underachievement from the educational researchers' lexicon, and either replacing it by other less problematic and more precise terms or abandoning the concept altogether' (pg.384). I found Plewis' (1991) suggestion to replace the term 'underachievement' appealing as I felt, when used in education, the term 'underachievement' emphasised what a pupil has failed to accomplish as opposed to highlighting instances of progress in areas which the education system do not value or recognise. In my search for a replacement term, I encountered the work of Reis and McCoach (2000), who suggest a replacement term should completely and distinctly recognise that the construct of achievement differs from individual to individual or culture to culture. Smith (2005) also believes that any alternative term used should allow for a fairer more rational consideration of socioeconomic factors and the nature and impact of the school system on pupil achievement without reference to academic qualifications. However, despite an in-depth trawl of achievement literature, an actual replacement term that incorporates these suggestions remains elusive.

The discussion presented thus far demonstrates that rather than being a straightforward concept, the notion of educational 'underachievement' is fraught with inconsistency and sometimes fervent contentions. I believe the prominent definitions of underachievement fail to acknowledge or respect the progress of pupils who cannot or prefer not to fully and exclusively engage in pure academic learning. I also believe that educational achievement is, in a broader sense, something which should

transcend academic achievement. As explained above, an alternative term remains evasive. To ensure 'underachievement' remains aligned with the wider used and known academic and political vocabulary around pupil outcomes and progression, I lean on practicality instead of preference in my use of the term 'underachievement'. Thus, in the context of this study, the term 'underachievement' is used to describe the absent or low academic outcomes of WBWC pupils in school.

2.7 Conclusion

The notion of class is central to this study. There is an abundance of literature that explores and explains 'class', but because there are several complex and inconsistent definitions of 'class', many of which are 'wrapped up in myths and ambiguity', this abundance failed to produce an agreed definition (Watson, 2018 pg.23). The complexity associated with defining 'class' reflected clearly in the process of defining white working-class. This section briefly explored the concept of whiteness and determined that class has a way of demarcating whiteness, leading to the construction of working-class whiteness as extreme and the antithesis to educational success, and middle-class whiteness as ordinary and deserving of academic success (Lawler, 2012; Bowles and Gintis, 2002). Having determined that white pupils are not a homogenous group, I examined the use of FSM as a descriptor for children from low-income or working-class families. I agree with Ilie et al. (2017) that FSM is an inexact proxy for working-class. However, like Gorard (2012), I feel FSM data is more readily available to schools than information on parental income or occupation, therefore, for the purpose of this study, I pragmatically adopted FSM as a proxy for working-class. Additionally, in order to ensure readers are clear that this study focuses on the performance of White British working-class pupils and not that of all white working-class pupils (Irish, Gypsy, Roma, Traveller and 'other white' - HCEC, 2014), the term WWC was replaced with WBWC.

In my trawl of literature, I was unable to locate a basic and definitive definition of underachievement but found the general perception of underachievement to be rigidly wedded to low academic performance and oblivious to what the Thorndike (1963) describes as the range of background and contextual variables that influence

achievement. I believe ‘achievement’ should reflect progress in both the academic and non-academic aspects of education. However, within this study, for reasons previously stated, I define educational underachievement as the absence of or low academic outcomes.

The next chapter begins with a statistical overview of the educational underachievement of WBWC pupils and is followed by a critical interrogation of the relationship between the educational underachievement of many WBWC pupils and their class and gender. Banerjee (2017) points to a range of other ‘personal factors’ that may contribute to educational underachievement in WBWC pupils. Therefore, the next chapter also considers the impact of pupil aspirations and familial expectations on the educational performance of WBWC pupils. In addition, in the 2014 report on *the underachievement in education by WBWC pupils*, the HCEC suggested school practices and locations as contributory factors to the underachievement of WBWC pupils. Therefore, the last factor explored in chapter three will focus on the examination of a range of school related factors that contribute to educational underachievement in many WBWC pupils.

Chapter 3 - White British Working-Class Educational Underachievement

3.1 Introduction

The educational underachievement of White British Working-class (WBWC) pupils has been described as ‘complex, compelling and critical’ (Reay, 2013) and continues to be a matter of concern for both policy makers (DfE, 2016; Education Policy Institute, 2017; House of Commons Education Committee – HoCEC, 2014; DfE, 2013) and educationalists (Travers, 2017; Stahl, 2017; Stokes et al., 2015) in England. Located within these concerns, this chapter presents and critically examines the wide range of literature that has tried to explain the reasons why many WBWC pupils underachieve in education. These ‘reasons’ are examined under four main headings: social class, gender, educational and occupational aspirations and school related factors. It is to be noted that these factors, due to their far-reaching nature may often overlap to produce a complex web of relationships that shape WBWC educational underachievement.

3.2 A statistical overview of White British Working-Class educational underachievement

Since the early 2000’s a range of government reports in England (Education Policy Institute, 2017; Ofsted, 2016; DfES, 2006;) and scholarly papers (Garrett, 2017; 2015; Lewis and Demie, 2015; Cassen and Kingdon 2007; Reay, 2006; Evans, 2006; Parsons et al., 2004) have reported an increased prevalence in the levels of educational underachievement in many WBWC pupils. Despite extensive research by academics (e.g. Stahl, 2017; Reay, 2011; Strand, 2014; Vega et al., 2012; Hebert and Schreiber, 2010; Moore and Owens, 2008; Dunne and Gaxely, 2008) and the introduction of a range of initiatives by schools (Demie and Lewis, 2015, 2014) to improve educational outcomes, Ofsted (2014) claim that many WBWC pupils continue to display ‘stubbornly low outcomes that show little sign of improvement’ (pg.1). Tables 1.1 and 1.2 below highlight the ‘stubbornly low’ GCSE outcomes of many WBWC pupils over the last 15 years. The tables indicate that the educational performance of WBWC pupils has not been stagnant and also illustrate continuous improvement in GCSE

outcomes. Table 1.1 shows that the percentage of WBWC pupils who achieved 5 or more GCSE grades A*-C including English and mathematics increased by almost 15% in-between 2007 and 2013. Whilst this figure is encouraging, academic outcomes for all other FSM pupils from other major ethnic groups also improved during this period, thus the achievement gap between WBWC pupils and their peers remained significantly present. Table 1.2 further highligts the low GCSE outcomes of many WBWC pupils in comparison to their peers over a two-year period. These outcomes are reflected in terms of average attainment 8 scores which a total pupil attainment 8 score divided by the number of pupils in a group or school. Attainment 8 itself is calculated by totaling pupil points for eight subjects and dividing the results by 10. Pupils who take less than eight subjects get a '0' score for each 'missing' subject.

Table 1.1: Achievement of 5 or more GCSE grades A*-C including English and mathematics for FSM pupils, 2004, 2007, 2010 and 2013

5 or more GCSE grades A* - C including English and Maths (%)				
	2004	2007	2010	2013
White British	14.1	17.4	25.3	32.3
Mixed White and Black Caribbean	13.7	19.4	30.0	37.5
Black Caribbean	13.9	24.2	33.1	42.2
White Other	20.1	26.7	37.0	43.8
Pakistani	22.5	29.5	40.6	46.8
Black African	19.1	29.2	42.1	51.4
Bangladeshi	29.3	36.4	50.3	59.2
Indian	35.3	41.9	55.0	61.5
Chinese	55.4	60.7	68.4	76.8

Revised from Strand (2015)

Table 1.2: Average attainment 8 score per FSM pupil by ethnic group, 2016 and 2017

Average attainment 8 score per pupil		
	2016	2017
White British	36.3	32.1
Mixed White and Black Caribbean	38.5	32.7
Black Caribbean	40.1	35.2
White Other	43.0	39.8
Pakistani	43.9	40.8
Black African	46.0	42.1
Bangladeshi	49.5	46.3
Indian	49.3	46.5
Chinese	59.0	58.0

Source: Data taken from the relevant Statistical First Release (DfE 2017 and 2018)

As indicated at the start of this chapter, the persistent educational underachievement of WBWC pupils has been the focus of policy makers and academics for almost two decades. The outcomes of this focus appear to confirm the ideology that there is no simple individual explanation why WBWC pupils continue to be the lowest achieving group based on all main indicators of attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 (KS4) (DfE, 2017). In fact, Reay (2009) describes WBWC educational underachievement as 'far more complex than either any cultural deficit analysis or failing school thesis allows' (pg.23). Bearing the statements made by DfE (2017) and Reay (2009) in mind, this chapter presents and critically examines the literature that has attempted to explain why many WBWC pupils underachieve in comparison to their peers from similar or more affluent backgrounds.

3.3 Factors related to the educational underachievement of White British Working-Class pupils.

3.3.1 Social class

In the previous chapter, I provided a summary of the concept of 'class'. I use this summary as a foundation for the exploration of social class as a contributory factor to educational underachievement in many WBWC pupils. I chose 'class' as the first (and main) factor due to the perceived, indirect, and sometimes evident way it impacts other factors (gender, educational and occupational aspirations and school related factors) to influence educational underachievement in a number of WBWC pupils. Before I begin this exploration, I must register my awareness that many critical race theorists would disagree with my consideration of 'class' as a main contributor to the educational underachievement of many WBWC pupils.

Many scholars (e.g. Snoussi and Mompelat, 2019; Bhopal, 2018; Demie and McLean, 2017; Gillborn and Kirton, 2000) highlight the way in which 'whiteness' operates as a form of privilege in society and how it is embedded in schools, universities and media as being the dominant identity. These scholars argue that the racial inequalities and the discrimination non-white pupils face serve as the key factor to the educational underachievement and low transition of black and ethnic minority pupils to further and

higher education in England. Indeed, Snoussi and Mompelat's (2019) report shows that black pupils believe they must work 'twice as hard to get half as far'. As a black woman I can identify with this belief, however, I also believe this to be even more particular to black working-class individuals than their middle-class peers. A report by the National Union of Students (NUS) (2011) found that many black pupils felt let down by the education system. These pupils cited a curriculum they could not relate to, biased marking and a lack of role models that left them feeling marginalised and rejected. These feelings described by the black pupils in the NUS report mirror the feelings described by the WBWC pupils who participated in this study. Whilst the NUS report does not indicate whether the pupils in their report are from middle-class backgrounds (or not), I am inclined to argue that black pupils from working-class backgrounds, similar to some WBWC pupils, experience education in less positive and accommodating ways than their more affluent peers. In fact, Egan (2010) claims the 'influence of 'class' on achievement is three times more powerful than race' (pg.75). I am by no means underplaying the presence or impact of racism or racial inequality in education or the impact this has on educational outcomes (for me this is an impossibility). I am, however, setting the scene for the consideration of social class as the 'strongest predictor of educational underachievement in the UK' (Perry and Francis, 2010 pg.2).

The conviction in Perry and Francis (2010) claim is evident, however there are some scholars who claim that 'class' is no longer relevant and has no place in educational research. For example, Kirby (2013) maintains that the perception that 'class' is outdated and Beck (2004) describes 'class' as a 'zombie category which embodies nineteenth-century horizons of experience' (pg.49). In fact, almost 25 years ago Pakulski and Waters (1996) out rightly declared that 'class' is dead. These claims are noted, but as previously indicated, like a range of other scholars (Rogaly and Taylor, 2016; Savage et al., 2015; Ball, 2008; Reay, 2006), I believe that 'class' is alive, significant and apparent and remains vital to the understanding, exposure and critique of the production and reproduction of inequalities in education.

According to McCulloch (1998) the association between class and educational performance has been present since the inception of mass education, which

Humphries (1981) claims emerged from the desire for 'class control' (pg.2). Referencing the history of education, Reay (2006) appears to buttress Humphries' (1981) claim. Reay (2006) argues that the Elementary Education Act of 1870, which required all working-class children to attend compulsory education was 'created by the dominant classes to police and control the working-classes rather than educate them' (pg. 293). This position does not appear to have changed. In her study of *Inequality, Education and the Working-classes*, Reay (2017) convincingly argues that the education system has 'never been fair' (pg.43), in that, what she describes as 'the stark hierarchical divide between middle and working-classes' has 'persisted throughout the history of the English education system' and 'is still one that educates individuals according to their class background' (pg.175). The divide described by Reay (2017) is evident in the work of several scholars (Gilbert, 2018; Travers, 2016; Reay and Vincent, 2016; Parsons and Hallam, 2014; Stahl, 2012; Demie and Lewis, 2010; Evans, 2006) who concede that a pupil's social class has a direct impact on their educational achievement. Most of the scholars who make this claim do not share their definition of class but most definitions in school education studies are based on parental income, that is, in the form of eligibility for FSM. Therefore, in the next section I identify and categorise 'class' by parental income.

Poverty (measured by eligibility for FSM) is described by Demie and Lewis (2010) as playing a 'major role in the underachievement of WBWC pupils' (pg.42) and as a 'hidden barrier that policy makers are not comfortable to discuss' (pg.62). However, in the same year as Demie and Lewis' (2010) study, Michael Gove[10] gave a speech about his concerns regarding the 'yawning gap' between the attainment of poor children and their richer peers. In this speech Gove claimed that 'rich, thick kids do better in education than poor, clever children'[11]. Whilst Gove's language is not particularly civil, his point is clear and is reflected in the robust corpus of research-based evidence (Rutkowski et al., 2018; Morrish, 2018; Kapinga, 2014; Ball, 2013; Ofsted, 2013; Altschul, 2012; Walker and Zhu, 2011; Perry and Francis 2010; Cassen and Kingdon, 2007) that highlights a strong link between poverty and educational underachievement in working-class pupils.

[10] Michael Gove was the Secretary of State for the Coalition Government (2010 – 2014)
[11] Extracted from Michael Gove's address to Members of Parliament reported in the Guardian (2010)

The work of Baars et al. (2016) indicates that the effects of poverty are apparent at age five when WBWC pupils begin school, with the achievement gap between them and their more affluent peers widening throughout compulsory education. Lareau (2003) attributes the performance gap between poor pupils and their more affluent peers to classed parental practices. In her book *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life,* Lareau (2003) explained that middle-class parents actively foster the development of their children's skills, interests, and behaviours right from an early age. The younger children from the high or middle income families described in Lareau's (2003) study spent most of their time outside school participating in structured activities such as music classes, whilst the older children benefited from the direct purchase of additional tuition or the access to opportunities and activities such as cultural or educational trips to places such as museums, art galleries or sites of historical significance. The Centre for Social Justice - CSJ (2013) report that 'affluent middle-class children are two and a half times as likely to have a computer, over four times as likely to have more than 200 books in the home and are significantly more likely to borrow books from a public library' (pg.42). The possession of these resources and access to such opportunities have been evidenced by literature (e.g. Herjit, 2010) to have a positive impact on the educational performance of WBWC pupils. In contrast, Lareau's (2003) study found that many working-class parents, who were financially struggling, saw themselves as mainly responsible for providing for the physical needs of their children, such as clothing and food. Additionally, unlike their more affluent peers, many of the poor children in Lareau's study spent their leisure time playing informally and watching television as their parents did not have the financial resources (and many also lacked the inclination) to invest in the extracurricular activities that would positively impact their educational performance.

Class, determined by parental income, is seen by Travers (2016) as having a significant impact on school choice. For example, Reay (2017) tells her readers that education for the middle and upper classes has always been predicated on their income. Reay's statement can be explained by Jones (2016) who describes how parents on a high income send their children to private, fee paying schools, where they are taught in smaller classes and have access to better trained teachers and better resources. This privilege means middle class children are not only more likely to perform better in education, but will probably who get more prestigious, high paying

jobs when they leave education. In fact, Jones (2016) is insistent that affluent middle-class parents look beyond schooling to the work futures of their children when choosing schools. Jones (2016) claims affluent parents insightfully use their wealth to 'buy their offspring a guaranteed place at the top table' (pg.171), thus simultaneously reproducing social inequalities and perpetuating educational disparities.

The relationship between level of income and educational outcomes can be direct as evidenced by Jones (2016) and Lareau (2003) or indirect as shown in Demie and Lewis' (2014) study on *raising achievement in white working-class pupils*. In Demie and Lewis' (2014) study, the first concern many WBWC parents mentioned was a lack of suitable housing. Demie and Lewis (2014) report that the parents in their study were living in social housing where 'overcrowding at home resulted in a lack of space to do homework or study' (pg.9) and found the parents had no employment and therefore 'little chance to extricate themselves from the environment' leading to 'general feelings of hopelessness' (pg.10). According to Wrigley (2014), HCEC (2014) and Demie and Lewis (2014), a shortage of money and these feelings of hopelessness frequently have a destabilising effect on family life. These authors are clear that for many WBWC pupils, poverty often affects their confidence and self-esteem, exacerbates a sense of losing out and leads to higher rates of absence from school - all which in turn, leads to disengagement and educational underachievement. However, the literature reviewed is not clear on why some white British pupils in poverty achieve whilst others do not[12]. What is also not clear is why poor working-class pupils from other ethnic backgrounds perform better than white British pupils from low-income families, at GCSE level[13]. The point I make with these statements is that whilst poverty evidently limits access to opportunities and exacerbates conditions that are not conducive to learning, poverty or low parental income alone cannot sufficiently explain what causes or contributes to educational underachievement in many WBWC pupils.

Indeed, there are writers (Wheeler, 2017; Vincent, 2010) that acknowledge that parental income substantially influences the outcomes of children but argue that parental levels of education have a more significant impact on the educational

[12] See Gilbert (2018); Ingram (2018); Reay (2017) and Barrett (2017) for reports of educational 'success' in WBWC children and young people.
[13] See Demie and McLean (2017) and Shah, Dwyer and Modood (2010) for educational underachievement in black Caribbean and young British Pakistani pupils.

engagement and achievement of working-class children. Similarly, the CSJ (2013) claims that parental education has a ‘positive effect on children’s outcomes evident at age four, which continues to be visible up to and including the high stakes exams taken at age 16’, and, ‘the higher a parent’s educational attainment the more likely it is to have a positive effect on their child’s schooling’ (pg.42). The claim made by the CSJ (2013) is in line with Bourdieu’s (1997) assertion that ‘a very pronounced correlation may be observed between academic success and the family’s cultural capital measured by the academic level of the forbears over two generations on both sides of the family...’ (pg. 497). The claims made by the CSJ (2013) and Bourdieu (1997) appear to clarify that, as a contributory factor, parental education influences the educational performance of their children. There are several studies that explain this influence. Van de Werfhorst and Hofstede (2007), in particular, believe that highly educated parents will be more familiar with the education system and more convinced of the benefits of higher education. Therefore, they will be more likely to encourage their children to do well in school by assisting with their homework and creating a positive learning environment in the home. Parents with higher levels of education also tend to have a heightened sense of confidence to engage with schools and schooling. In fact, Brar (2016) also explains that the parents who are university educated, see themselves on ‘more of an equal footing with teachers. They viewed their relationship as one of partnership and felt comfortable taking a more active role in the shape and outcomes of their children’s education’ (pg110). In contrast, Lareau (1987) felt that less educated parents from the working-class community felt subordinate to teachers, whom they deemed to be experts. This author claims that working-class parents prefer to defer many of the educational decisions about their children to the teacher and are unable to provide the educational support that is required for them to attain achievement outcomes similar to those of their more affluent peers.

The ‘notoriously slippery’ (Bottero, 2005) definition of class was discussed in the previous chapter. Within this study, I define class in terms of varied cultural expressions, countenances, practices and beliefs, however, as I previously stated, ‘class’ is defined in different ways and means different things to different individuals and educational and political bodies. Block (2016) explained that ‘Class’ is often determined by income (as is evident in the widespread use of FSM as a proxy for working-class), level of education and occupation. Using parental income and parental

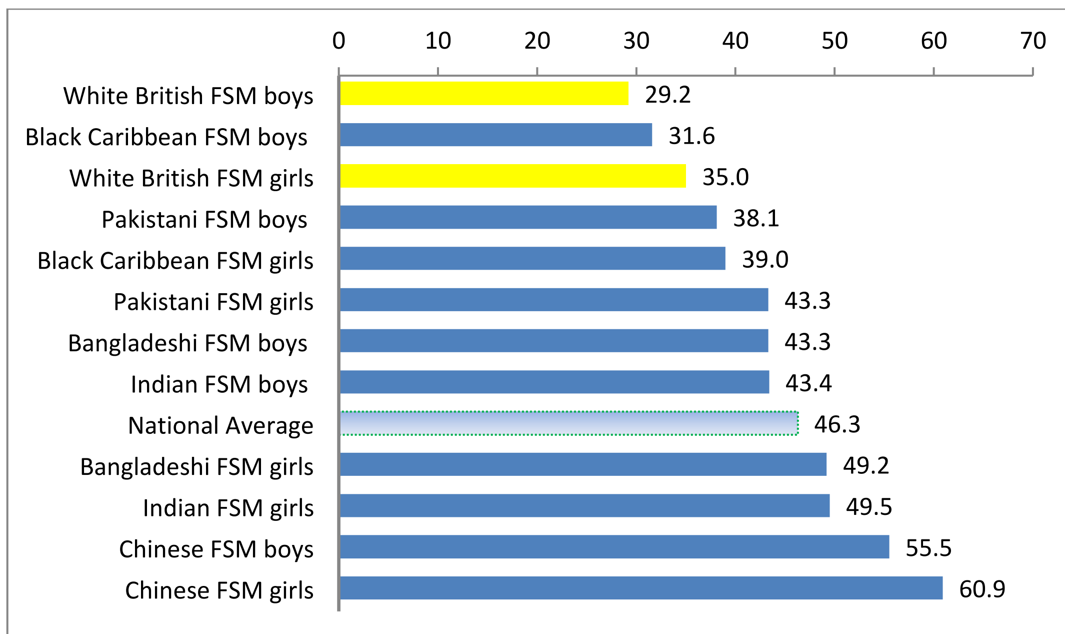
education as an indicator of 'class', this section examined the the impact of 'class' on the educational underachievement of WBWC pupils. However, there is much literature that centres the notion of class around the possession of 'critical knowledge of culture' (Bourdieu, 1984). According to Watson (2018), 'a critical knowledge of culture is a represented as cultural capital' which is seen as the skills and knowledge that a pupil can draw on to give them an advantage in education. The way in which cultural capital impacts educational experiences and outcomes is discussed in the next chapter. Nevertheless, whether measured in terms of parental income, level of education or a critical knowledge of culture, Morrish (2018) is adamant that social class is not 'an educational or pedagogical phenomenon and all talk of it should be banished from the staffroom'. In this statement, Morrish (2018) implies that the notion of 'class' has no place in school and should have no impact on how, where or what pupils learn. In fact, Morrish (2018) says that teachers and schools should 'employ only one lens' which allow them to 'see, treat and educate all pupils in a fair and just way' (pg.265). Morrish' (2018) suggestion is ideal and seems to be a system that will ensure equality and impartiality within the English education system. Yet, Reay (2017) and Block (2017) argue that the English education is and always has been class divided and as such see 'class' as an ever-present key mediating factor for access to and performance in education.

In identifying the role class plays in the educational underachievement of working-class pupils, Reay (2017) makes it clear that classed based inequalities, such as those discussed in this section, do not affect all working-class pupils in the same way and maintains that class is always (to varying degrees) mediated by gender and race. At the start of this chapter, I fleetingly considered the way in which class intersects with race to contribute to lower outcomes for black working-class pupils compared to their peers from the same race. Due to word constraints, I am unable to revisit this factor but in the light of the recent re-emergence of BLM movement, I feel it would be an interesting topic for a researcher to pick up. In the next section, I examine gender as a factor that contributes to the educational underachievement of many WBWC pupils.

3.3.2 Gender

The notion that all girls achieve better than all boys - not only at GCSE but throughout compulsory education (SFR, 2018; Stokes et al., 2015; DfE, 2016) has been a part of an ongoing conversation in educational research. In fact, the Education Policy Institute (EPI, 2019) report that in 2019, 5.4 per cent of all grades handed out to girls were a grade 9, compared to 3.9 per cent for boys. However, Smith (2007) suggests the reality is not so clear cut. A closer in-depth exploration of achievement data shows the gender gap is complicated by issues relating to social class, ethnicity and other complex interactions between individual characteristics and education (Schoon & Eccles 2014). Despite evidence that girls are more academically successful than boys at GCSE (Pinket and Roberts, 2019), Graph 1 below shows that, in 2017, many Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi working-class boys performed below the national average at GCSE level, however, they still outperformed WBWC girls at the same level.

Graph 1: Average Attainment 8[14] score for FSM eligible pupils in state funded schools by gender in England (2017)



Source: Key stage 4 attainment data (2018) Statistical First Release

[14] The average attainment 8 score is attainment 8 is published at school level. The average attainment 8 score is calculated by adding up all the pupils' sttainment 8s and then dividing by the number of pupils

Despite the complex web of gendered, classed and ethnicized educational underachievement, it is clear from the data in Graph 1 that WBWC boys are the lowest achievers in education at the age of 16 in England. These outcomes have prompted a substantial amount of research into the educational underachievement of WBWC boys (e.g. Travers, 2017; Stahl, 2017; Terrelonge, 2015; Stokes et al., 2015; McDowell, 2011; Gillborn, 2010; Gillborn and Kirton, 2000; Jackson, 1998). Whilst there is a similarly substantial amount of studies and policy reports concentrating on educational underachievement in all groups of females (Ringrose 2015; Jones and Myhill 2004; Jones 2005), an in-depth trawl of literature revealed an infinitesimal number focusing on WBWC girls in schools in particular. The limited research on the educational performance of WBWC girls is of concern, particularly because at the launch of the 2013 Ofsted report (*Unseen children: access and achievement 20 years on),* Michael Wilshaw[15] pointed out that the problem of underachievement in WBWC children was not limited to boys. He stressed that:

> *'underachievement in WWC pupils is not a gender issue so we should stop talking about WWC boys as if they are the only challenge' (pg. 4), and 'If we don't crack the problem of low achievement by 'poor' white boys and girls, then we won't solve the underachievement problem overall (pg. 5)'.*

Similarly, Plummer (2000) warned that

> *'in ignoring the educational failure of white working-class girls, we ignore the problems that underline their behaviour and manifest themselves in behaviour patterns such as self-exclusion, depression and teenage pregnancies (p vii)'.*

And more recently, Choudry (2018) informed her readers that PISA (Programme for International Pupil Assessment) results for some subjects show that 'WWC girls do worse than the WWC boys' and as such there is 'no need to separate WWC as a group into WWC boys versus WWC girls' (pg.311) Thus, whilst acknowledging WBWC boys as the lowest achieving group, within this section, I seek to explore if and how 'gender' contributes to the educational underachievement in many WBWC boys *and* girls.

[15] Michael Wilshaw was the Chief Inspector of Schools in England and Head of Ofsted from 2012 – 2016.

3.3.2.1 Examining underachievement in white British working-class boys

In 2019, the EPI determined that 45% of non-FSM pupils went to university compared to 26% of their FSM peers and to 13% of WBWC boys (pg.45). This alarming figure is lower than the figure for children in care and even lower than children who speak English as a second language (Coughlan, 2020). The underachievement of many WBWC boys in England (measured by GCSE outcomes and entry to higher education) is documented as being persistent and unrelenting (Gilbert and Gilbert, 2018; Stahl, 2017; Strand, 2014; Gillborn, 2010, Epstein, 1998; Willis, 1977)[16]. The consistent underachievement of a large number of WBWC boys is perceived by academics and policy makers as a genuine problem. It appears that the focus on this 'problem' has been amplified to the extent that it has led to widespread moral panic (Smith, 2010), not only around the educational performance but also the 'future life chances' of many WWC boys (Tucker, 2010 pg.107). This panic has contributed to the substantial literature around the possible causes of underachievement in WBWC boys, which I now explore.

According to Smith (2005), most WBWC boys are often portrayed as victims of educational policies and practices. One main area of victimisation is claimed to be the 'feminised' education system. The idea that WBWC boys are victims of a feminised education system has been discussed in a number of studies (e.g. Gilbert and Gilbert, 2017; Stahl, 2017; Terrelonge, 2015; Hoff-Sommers, 2013; Carrington and McPhee, 2008; Mac an Ghaill, 1996). The definition of a 'feminised' system differs from scholar to scholar; however, the overall perception can be gathered from Jones and Myhill (2004) who describe the education system as:

> *'an alien environment where the 'ethos, learning styles and testing procedures which favour female strengths and preferences' take precedence over their needs' (pg.548).*

Sousa (2011) further claims that:

[16] Graph 1 pictures WWC boys as the lowest performing group in 2017, with an average attainment 8 score of 29.2, which is 17.1 points below the national average and 5.8 points below WWC girls.

> *‘classrooms are more fit to the learning preferences of girls, where long periods of sitting and verbal-emotive activities are more prominent, not accommodating the more impulsive, kinesthetic spatially oriented learning preference of WWC boys’ (pg.5)*

In response to the above scholars, I join Coffield et al. (2004) and Riener and Willinham (2010) in the contention that there is no credible evidence which supports the notion that gendered learning styles or perceived gendered strengths in particular subjects exist. The contributions of these writers contradict the argument of WBWC boys being disadvantaged by feminised subjects and teaching styles. Indeed, it would be expected that if such gendered divisions existed within the learning environment all boys, not just WBWC boys would be impacted - thus leading to persistent underachievement in *all* boys. However, there are a number of scholars who provide explanations for the way in which different groups of boys perform within a ‘feminised’ learning environment. Travers (2017), for example, illustrates how the WBWC ‘cultures of hegemonic masculinity’ frequently work to ‘displace any pro-school sentiments the boys may have and depress their educational achievement’ (pg.36). Beadle (2018) describes the sense of masculinity most WBWC boys possess as being developed against ‘the backdrop of a culture that espouses boxing instead of education as being one of the permitted ways out of the ghetto’ (pg.279). Evans (2006) also describes how WBWC boys are ‘toughened up’ and taught to be ‘men’ by not showing vulnerability or displaying any signs of emotional fragility. It is this ‘toughening up’ that results in many WBWC boys being ‘culturally conditioned not to ask for the help they often so desperately need and as such fall behind and never catch up’ (Beadle, 2018).

According to Smith (2005) the WBWC tough manly identity manifests in behaviours that rebuff any tasks or pursuits that appear feminine. The desire to reject any behaviour or any affiliation with anything that is considered effeminate appeared to be the catalyst for the exaggerated macho identity and laddish behaviour described in the Willis’ (1977) landmark ethnographic study of schooling and culture. For example, the boys in Willis’ (1977) study considered education as something for girls or ‘cissies’ and manual labour as being the ‘real thing’. These boys conflate education with the social inferiority of all things feminine and see reading books as a sign of being either workshy or gay. Willis’ (1977) demonstrates how some WBWC boys seek to validate their masculinity and reject all things feminine by having a ‘laff’ and resisting or rejecting

education, rejecting boys they call ‘ear oles’,[17] engaging in risky and physically challenging behaviour such as vandalism, fighting and engaging in illegal labour. Whilst Willis’ study took place in 1977, literature (Stahl, 2018; Collins, 2016; Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2012) shows that many years after Willis’ study many WBWC boys continue to exhibit such responses to education and as such continue to have similar outcomes as those who participated in Willis’ (1977) study.

The behaviours described above have led to the present day WBWC boy being perceived as loutish apathetic, feral, violent, abusive, antischoolish and lacking in aspiration and ambition (Jones 2016, Stahl, 2015; House of Commons, 2014; Tucker, 2010). These descriptions appear stereotypical and exaggerated but will undoubtedly have a negative impact on the educational outcomes of the many WBWC boys who display these behaviours. However, scholars such as Stahl (2014) reject the image of a homogenous group of ‘macho’, manual labour focused WBWC boys. The boys in Stahl’s (2014) study appear not to conform to the stereotypical indifference towards learning and supposed lack of aspiration by rejecting overt laddish behaviours and acknowledging the impact of their tastes and preferences on the way in which they are perceived in education. As such, Stahl (2014) describes the identity of WBWC boys as being ‘fragmented, complex and nuanced’ (pg.20) with the ability to ‘adopt different identities in different contexts’ (pg.23). This means that most WBWC boys can act independently and make their own choices with regards to their educational engagement.

This fluidity described by Stahl (2014) is evidenced in studies (Barrett, 2017; Ingram, 2009; Travers, 2017) where many WBWC boys, despite social barriers, engage with learning and ‘succeed’ in education. Whilst these successes do not negate the data that evidences WBWC boys as the lowest achieving group at GCSE, the successes do bring a refreshing break from the educational literature and policy documents that appear to repeatedly point to and blame the behaviours of many WBWC boys for their underachievement. Reay (2006) encourages her readers to look to the education system for explanations for the educational underachievement in many WBWC boys. Indeed, Connell (1989) argues that the physical aggression often displayed by WBWC boys is a response to their experience of rejection in school. Similarly, Mac an Ghail

[17] ear oles depict boys who are interested in education

(1994) believe that the laddish behaviours of some WBWC boys, in actuality, serves as a 'safety net against anxiety and in educational contexts' (pg.98) According to Reay (2017), the anti-school behaviours exhibited by some WBWC boys occur because they see certain aspects of education as 'pointless, irrelevant and not in line with their aspirations and overall feel uncomfortable and out of place in an education system does not belong to them' (pg.76). It is very probable that such feelings contribute to the inability or refusal of many WBWC boys to engage with learning or education and their consequential educational underachievement.

3.3.2.2 Acknowledging underachievement in white working-class girls

As demonstrated in the previous section, a significant number of studies have emerged in response to the heightened concern around underachievement of many WBWC boys. Some writers (Stokes et al., 2015; Cobbett, 2014; Francis, 2010; Francis and Skelton, 2005) argue that this contemporary preoccupation with the underachievement of WBWC boys highlights the marginalization of some WBWC girls and illuminates the impression that their educational outcomes are tangential to that of boys. In a clear rejection of the impression that the underachievement of WBWC boys is more pressing than that of WBWC girls, Wilshaw (2014) points out that 'poor, low-income white British girls are doing very badly and are of equal concern as WBWC boys (pg.4)'. Below, I explore the reasons why some WBWC girls 'do badly' in education and consider if these reasons differ to those of their male peers.

The work of Skelton et al. (2007) around gender and achievement identifies a long list of explanations for the achievement gap between genders. According to Perry and Francis (2010), the main explanation emerging from their studies is that 'young people's gender constructions encourage them to adopt particular behaviours, some of which are less conducive to learning' (pg.29). As with their male counterparts, some WBWC girls present behaviours which are deemed 'wrong' within the middle-class school culture (Connolly and Healy, 2004; Renold, 2005). Based on her findings from her longitudinal study (located in a former mining community in England) on the education of WBWC girls, Richards (2018) explains that in order to 'succeed' in education, WBWC girls were required to meet an 'ever expanding set of expectations that often generate tension between academic achievement and social identity'

(pg.18). For many WBWC girls, this entailed what Butler (1990) described as ‘girling’. ‘Girling’ involved downplaying their academic ability and lowering their expectations as they internalised their peers’ expectations to be popular with the boys, fashionable and sociable (Hinkleman, 2013; Cobbett, 2014). Archer et al. (2007) provide an example of this behaviour in their study of WBWC girls and their post 16 aspirations. Archer et al. (2007) describe how a group of WBWC girls report how they are ‘frequently chastised for not having the ‘correct’ appearance and were regularly punished for wearing ‘too much’ or the ‘wrong sort’ of jewellery, dis-allowed items of clothing, and for a raft of other issues concerning their hair and make-up’ (pg.169). The reports were made with pride as their ‘performances’ brought ‘peer status and approval’ for the girls and served ‘as a means for generating capital and exercising agency in their everyday lives’ (Archer et al., 2007 pg.168). These expressions of identity may serve as a means of generating capital, but they are contradictory because they encourage conflict with the educational system and play into the formation and reinforcement of classed stereotypes.

Indeed, within an ‘education system that is class divided’ (Reay, 2017 pg.154), the femininity of many WBWC girls is read (through her appearance) as being sexual and excessive in contrast to middle-class femininity which is veiled as ‘demure’, passive and consistent with a conception of the ‘innocent school girl’ who is ready and able to be educated (Walkerdine, 1990 pg.16). Thus, to become ‘educationally successful’, many WBWC girls will need to transform into ‘proper girls’ who exhibit ‘middle-class, socially valued version of femininity’ (Archer et al., 2007 pg.176). This version of femininity is that which is rewarded symbolically through praise from teachers and educationally through improved educational achievement.

It would appear, from the contributions of the above scholars, that many WBWC girls are predestined to ‘fail’, either as a result of societal and familial expectations or, like many WBWC boys, as a result of their perceived anti-school behaviours. However, also similar to their male counterparts, there is evidence of educational success in many WBWC girls. In an attempt to explain these successes, Corbett (2014) and Kessler et al. (1985) imply that the achievement of many WBWC girls is largely influenced by their protest against middle-class femininity and refusal to be subordinated by exhibiting ‘behaviour that was quite like the boys’ or ‘exaggerated

masculinity'. This section has highlighted the fact that displays of WBWC masculinity are adversative to educational success, therefore this explanation is not valid. Any behaviour exhibited by some WBWC girls which does not conform to those expected and valued within the education system will be misrecognised as resistant to rules and rejected by the same system. Underachievement in WBWC girls is under researched and where their educational performance is discussed, most WBWC girls are often portrayed as lacking academic aspirations, stereotypically sexual in appearance or defiantly masculine in behaviour. Indeed, Reay (2009) describes most WBWC girls as being marginalised and neglected in both society and education and maintains that the restrictions and limitations imposed by society and education are key contributory factors to their low educational outcomes as opposed to their behaviour and appearance.

I acknowledge the tendency for literature to see a causative link between WBWC boys and underachievement and further recognise the way in which this tendency fuels the failure to adequately acknowledge the situation of many WBWC girls. However, whilst I believe there is a need for additional research into the educational underachievement of some WBWC girls in comparison to their male peers, I also share Smith's (2010) belief that it is time to 'move away from the traditional binary notion of boy versus girl to 'a model that includes the assessment of other variables that may have a more profound effect on an individual's learning' (pg.90). Another such 'variable' frequently cited in many studies and policy texts that examine or report the educational underachievement of many WBWC pupils is the perceived low or lack of aspirations held by many WBWC pupils. The next section examines underachievement literature that questions, contests or confirms the negative constructs of WBWC pupil aspirations and the degree to which aspirations (or lack of) contribute to the educational underachievement of this group of pupils.

3.3.3 Pupil educational and occupational aspirations

The correlation between aspirations and underachievement in many WBWC pupils has been the subject of a substantial amount of educational research (Gilbert 2018; Reay, 2017; Hoskins, 2016; Berrington et al. 2016; Khattab 2015; Rolfe 2015; Keddie 2015; Stahl 2014; Archer et al., 2014; Duggall et al. 2014; Cummings et al. 2012; Beal and

Crockett, 2010; Strand and Wilson 2008). This research confirms that the correlation between aspirations and underachievement is complex. However, there is a belief, particularly amongst policy makers, that the differential rates of educational underachievement and low progression rates into further and higher education are due to a poverty of aspirations amongst most working-class pupils.

I find the frequently used term 'poverty of aspirations' is problematic for two main reasons. First, poverty of aspiration as a concept places all responsibility for the supposed deficiency of aspiration on to WBWC children and their parents, rather than considering the structural factors that may limit 'what they perceive to be possible' or misrecognise their preferences and choices (Bowers-Brown, 2014). Second, I believe aspirations often differ between genders, socioeconomic and cultural groups and therefore, the process of aspiring is 'relational, felt, embodied process, replete with classed desires and fantasies, defences and aversions, feelings of fear, shame and guilt, excitement and desire' (Allen, 2013 quoted in Stahl, 2018). Having said this, some scholars (e.g. Crawford and Greaves, 2015; Strand, 2011; Modood, 2004) and government officials such as Amanda Spielman[18] firmly believe that many WBWC pupils underachieve because 'they lack aspiration and drive'[19]. Therefore, this section briefly discusses the notion of aspirations before examining the relationship between aspirations and educational outcomes in WBWC pupils.

In their chapter on *Aspirations and imagined futures: the im/possibilities for Britain's young working-class*, Roberts and Evans (2012) compare the concept of aspiration to the notion of doxa. These writers tell their readers that:

> *'The discourse of 'aspiration' amounts to what Bourdieu calls doxa- a taken for granted assumption, the common sense approach, one which is seemingly embraced and understood by political parties of all persuasions and ingrained*

[18] Amanda Spielman was HM Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills at the time this thesis was written.
[19] Extract from Amanda Spielman's speech at the Wellington Festival of Education, delivered 21st June 2018

into wider public consciousness as being an incontrovertible self-evident truth' (Pg.72).

Thus, it is assumed that all pupils should possess (without deviation) what are considered by policy makers, schools and society as normal and ideal aspirations. However, as pupils in schools in England clearly differ in terms of ethnicity, social class, gender, tastes, dreams, areas of interest etc., it should be expected that their aspirations should also differ. As such, I believe any characterisation of aspiration should be inclusive, reflect strong desires, and 'future orientated' (Hart, 2016 pg.326). My view of aspirations is similar to that of Quaglia and Cobb (1996) who believe:

> *'a pupil's ability to identify and set goals for the future, while being inspired in the present to work toward those goals'* (pg.130)

and to Kintrea, et al. (2011) who see aspirations as:

> *'a summary of the various desires and ambitions held by young people about their futures' which may centre on 'lifestyle or self-fulfilment or revolve around roles in the family or community (such as performing a caring or leadership function'* (p.12).

The definitions above are in direct conflict with policy discourse in England (HEFCE, 2003; DfES, 2003, 2006) and many academic studies (Bowers-Brown et al., 2019; Harrison and Waller, 2018; Hart, 2012) which assiduously correlate aspirations with a desire to enter into university and achievement with attaining the qualifications necessary to gain access to university. This narrow and linear focus on higher education (H.E) as the perfect and normal aspiration is based on a middle-class model of ideal. The legitimization of entry to higher education leads to the symbolic violence in the misrecognition of the aspirations of many WBWC pupils. I describe this as an act of violence because of the manner in which the focus on H.E leads to the subordination of pupils who have alternative aspirations and as symbolic in the sense that the subordination is achieved indirectly and without coercion. The normalisation of H.E aspirations excludes and marginalizes other forms of aspiration (Roberts and Evans, 2013) and deems any deviation from the university trajectory as underachievement and a reflection of a poverty of aspiration. This is particularly pertinent for many WBWC pupils whose aspirations are a construct of what is familiar

to them. Fuller (2008) explains that 'class' is highly influential in the shaping and influencing of a pupil's aspirations as it imposes its 'own boundaries and horizons which can be viewed as for themselves' (pg.6). As Hoskins (2016) and Reay et al. (2005) have shown, the aspirations of many WBWC pupils are frequently determined by their family circumstances and in particular, their parents' occupations which do not always require higher qualifications.

Many WBWC are aware that H.E is considered the embodiment of educational achievement and is able to 'open doors' to 'success'. However, for many, barriers such as lack of confidence (Yates et al., 2011), 'limited understanding of the middle-class workings of the education system' (Reay, 2005 pg.114) and fear of academic and social failure (Stahl, 2014) are often too challenging to face or overcome. These constraints are rarely taken into consideration in the discussions around the low-educational aspirations of WBWC pupils. Bowers-Brown et al. (2019), for example, claim that 'regardless of individual structural conditions, material circumstances or starting location, education can provide the same opportunities for all to succeed (success here is construed as entry to H.E.) if only they have the desire to do so' (pg.207). In this statement, I believe Bowers-Brown et al. (2019) imply that the low aspirations and subsequent underachievement of many WBWC pupils is a matter of choice. As indicated above, pupils do not construct their aspirations in isolation from their situations (Bourdieu, 1990). That is, families and communities also have a crucial effect on perceptions of what is an acceptable or expected aspiration (Halsey et al.,1980 and Cummings et al., 2012). Whilst, the notion of high aspirations appears to be tightly wedded to 'good' academic outcomes and progression to university, Travers (2016) maintains that most WBWC pupils have high aspirations, however, in many, these aspirations are linked to immediate occupational goals.

A range of studies (Brown et al., 2015; Stokes et al., 2015; Gale et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2011; Demie and Lewis, 2011) indicate that the occupational aspirations of many WBWC pupils often reflect family vocations, are based on a cultural fit or correlate with or ARE influenced by the expectations of parents or grandparents[20]. For example, Archer et al. (2013) record 'Wayne' saying, 'he wanted to become a mechanic like his

[20] Moulton et al. (2017) argue that grandparents may influence the level of education the grandchild receives and demonstrate the value of certain types of work.

father' and Charlie aspiring to 'work in a shop, like her mother' (pg.70). In their longitudinal study of education attitudes and aspirations, Kintrea et al. (2011) also found that some WBWC boys and girls in Nottingham were interested in what they described as 'traditional roles' and from the age of 13 expressed aspirations for trade and care occupations respectively. The aspirations of these WBWC pupils were clear and personal, however they did not see schooling as instrumental to their aspirations and as such did not engage very much in education and left school with very few or no GCSE qualifications. Thus, despite having and achieving their clear occupational goals these pupils would be recorded and reported amongst the underachieving white working-class pupils.

In some instances, the occupational aspirations of some WBWC pupils are not as self-motivated as those described above. For some WBWC young people, parental and community approval is important and often has a significant influence on aspirations. This is highlighted in a longitudinal study carried out by Richards (2017) on the aspirations and academic self-confidence of eighty-nine WBWC girls in the UK. Richards' (2017) study found that many of the WBWC girls failed to realise their dream careers because:

> '*they were worried about letting down their families – especially where their choices challenged community expectations of early marriage, motherhood and local employment' (pg.37).*

Richard (2017) found this occurrence was especially particular to the WBWC girls who had 'aspired to career paths that required university study and employment mobility - such as accountants, architects and lawyers' (pg.38). These girls had mostly altered their plans as they advanced through secondary school, achieved lower and fewer qualifications than predicted (and, I presume less than they were able) and took up local jobs near their families and within their communities. In these instances, the WBWC girls had what would be termed by policy makers, high aspirations; however, these aspirations were impacted by community expectations and their educational performances and outcomes 'lowered' to reflect and meet these expectations.

Determining the relationship between the aspirations of many WBWC pupils and their educational underachievement is far from straightforward. This is because, similar to

the concept of achievement, the notion of high (and indeed low) aspirations differ amongst scholars, policy makers, families and indeed the pupils themselves. As a researcher, educator and parent, I do not regard university as a higher aspirational goal neither do I regard occupational goals as a lower aspirational choice, however, as I said at the start of this chapter, aspirations should reflect strong desires, be personal and ‘future oriented’ (Hart, 2016 pg.326). Given that the education system assumes that all pupils aspire to achieve a range of academic qualifications and progress to university, any WBWC pupil who aspires differently or fails to meet such outcomes is deemed an underachiever. Nevertheless, Brown (2014) argues that it is far too easy to relate WBWC educational underachievement to ‘low’ or ‘absent’ aspirations and maintains that an alternative and more complex set of explanations must exist.

In addition to considering social class, gender and aspirations as factors which contribute to educational underachievement in many WBWC pupils, underachievement literature encourages the consideration of other factors that stem from within the school. These factors include high rates of absence and exclusion (HCEC, 2014), teacher bias (Harris, 2017; Alcott, 2017), the relevance and suitability of the curriculum (Henderson et al., 2018; Reay, 2013; Cline et al., 2002) and the type and location of the school attended (Duggall et al. 2014; Ofsted 2013). In the next section I limit my exploration to two factors which feature more prominently in the studies reviewed for this thesis: the national curriculum and the type of school.

3.3.4 School related factors

The gap in achievement between many WBWC pupils and their more affluent peers exists at age five and widens throughout compulsory education (Baars et al., 2016 pg.17). Policy texts will argue that most WBWC pupils, through their cultural deficit, wrong sort of attitude and low aspirations are to blame[21] for this gap in achievement. However, many scholars (Stahl, 2015; Nuttal and Doherty, 2014; Demie and Lewis, 2010; Ball, 2003; Duffield, 1998) reject the argument that many WBWC pupils are responsible for their underachievement and contend that the education system plays an active and deep set role in the educational performance of this group of pupils. The

[21] See Smith and Wrigley (2013): *Living on the edge: Rethinking Poverty, Class and Schooling* for a more detailed account of the ‘blame the victim’ discussion.

contentions of these scholars can be summarised in the work of Reay (2017) who maintains that the educational system in England is a 'classist system', which has never been 'just' and 'operates as an enormous academic sieve, sorting out the educational winners from losers in a crude and often brutal process that prioritises and rewards upper and middle-class qualities and resources' (pg.26). The 'sorting' described by Reay (2017) is particularly evident in the new 'richer, more ambitious' (Ofsted, 2015; Sullivan et al., 2018) national curriculum in England which was 'developed on knowledge and learning experienced by the middle-class' (Blanford, 2017). It is also clearly obvious in the ever-widening achievement gap between children in high and low status schools (Burgess et al., 2017; Reardon, 2011). This section examines impact of the English national curriculum and the type of school attended on the educational outcomes of WBWC pupils.

3.3.4.1 The impact of 'curriculum' on the educational underachievement of White British working-class pupils

For many years, 'curriculum' has been a much debated factor within research on the educational underachievement of many WBWC pupils (Sullivan et al., 2018; Henderson et al., 2018; Blanford, 2017; Dorling, 2015; Brown, 2015; Demie and Lewis, 2010; Pring, 1972; Simon, 1976; Young, 1999). Despite the plethora of discussions which centre on the relationship between 'curriculum' and WBWC underachievement, there is little consensus amongst education specialists on the meaning of 'curriculum' (Sullivan et al., 2018). Indeed, a trawl of literature revealed a wide variety of definitions of curriculum. These definitions ranged from Newby's (in Johnson et al., 2007 pg.22) rather concerning description of 'a blue print for what *we want* children to become', to the more inclusive designation of 'all the learning which is planned and guided by the school, whether it is carried on in groups or individually, inside or outside the school' (Kerr, 1968, quoted in Kelly, 1983 pg.10). However, the use of Young's (2014) flexible description of 'curriculum' as a 'structure offering constraints *(on what young people can learn)* and possibilities *(how they can progress in and from their learning)*[22] (pg. 8)', appears to be the most useful basis for the investigation into the relationship

[22] Emphasis in italics and brackets belong to the author: Young (2014)

between the underachievement of many WBWC pupils and the curriculum offered in schools in England.

At the centre of many of the studies cited above, are strong views regarding the fairness and relevance of the English national curriculum for most WBWC pupils. The English national curriculum provides a framework of 'core knowledge' around which schools are expected to develop their curriculum. The definition of knowledge in itself is a clear step towards symbolic violence. In terms of the curriculum, 'core knowledge' is overly academic, unstimulating and irrelevant to many WBWC pupils (McGregor and Mills 2014; Thompson 2014) and is seen to have been deliberately selected to promote and preserve the status of the middle-classes at the expense of working-class pupils, all the while 'being cloaked as natural, normal and inclusive' (Apple, 2004 pg.146). Blanford (2017) appears to agree as she maintains that:

> *'the national curriculum in England has been developed on knowledge and learning experienced by the middle-classes resulting in a curriculum that is not socially and culturally relevant for a large number of WBWC pupils and presents more barriers than opportunities' (pg.127).*

The precision in Blandford's (2017) thoughts can be clearly evidenced in the new English national curriculum introduced under the Conservative – Liberal Democrat coalition. The new curriculum which compiles 'gold standard'[23] (DFE, 2015), rigorous and heavily academic qualifications, appears to promulgate the middle-class values of a government which largely comprises of middle-class academically successful individuals who promote, introduce and support the same type of curriculum that was offered in the schools they attended. At the point of introducing the new national curriculum the English government claimed that it would give pupils in state schools access to the same education as their peers in private schools. The policy makers of this era also claimed that the new curriculum would match curricula used in the world's most successful school systems (DfE, 2013), thus enabling *all* English pupils to acquire

[23] Gold standard refers to a curriculum and qualification frame originally devised in the 1950s.

the knowledge required to ‘succeed’ in the modern world. However, by focusing on knowledge, overlooking skills and in failing to acknowledge that most successful school systems are built on middle-class values, policy makers reveal the extent to which they do not value or misrecognise the needs, interests and aspirations of many WBWC pupils and perpetuate education as the legitimate preserve of the middle-class.

In response to the widespread concerns that the 2014 reformed curriculum would expand the already wide achievement gap between working-class and middle-class pupils, Michael Gove claimed that he had made it his ‘personal crusade’ to eradicate the inequalities within education. Unfortunately, whilst he may have had the best intentions, some changes that were promoted as positive steps towards addressing unequal outcomes, sharpened the image of a misinformed, elitist education system. For example, in order to tackle some of the cultural gaps within the curriculum, policy makers recommended that all secondary pupils study a range of ‘high-quality, intellectually challenging, and substantial whole texts’ in detail (DfE, 2014). These must include at least one play by Shakespeare, at least one 19th-century novel, a selection of poetry since 1789 and fiction or drama from the British Isles from 1914 onwards (DfE, 2014). Whilst the suggested texts are written by British authors, they fail to reflect the background of WBWC pupils and to use the words of Brar (2016), leave most WBWC pupils ‘faced with a curriculum that does not understand them and one which they do not understand either’ (pg.69). Many WBWC families and scholars and educators have raised concerns about the middle-class nature of the curriculum, the introduction of texts from the British Isles from 1914 does very little to sway those concerns. It is because of concerns such as this that I believe that all children and young people – pupils and students – should be able to see their cultural and social backgrounds in all levels of the curriculum at all levels.

Literature such as Brown et al. (2015) and Demie and Lewis (2014) attribute the educational underachievement of some WBWC pupils to the sense of marginalisation that comes from the limited focus on WBWC culture in the curriculum. From another point of view, Reay (2017) suggests many WBWC pupils do not ‘succeed’ in education because the ‘subjects and activities they prefer and enjoy have little status and

recognition within the current education system' (pg.65). Whilst Reay is not specific about which subjects and activities many WBWC pupils 'prefer and enjoy', Brown et al. (2015) claim that WBWC pupils' favour vocational subjects over academic subjects as these subjects are closely related to their occupational aspirations. The stereotypic claim of Brown et al. (2015) may stem from Willis' (1997) landmark study which concludes that working-class culture is built on a repertoire of practical knowledge, life experiences and street wisdom which prepares children for the world of work. Willis' (1997) picture of WBWC pupils' educational preferences and aspirations feeds into the ideological and political distinctions made between mental and manual labour, the subsequent contrast between 'academic' and 'vocational' and the respective suitability for middle and working-class individuals which is greatly entrenched in the English education system. The notion that vocational learning is more suited to working-class pupils is so embedded in the system that all attempts to upgrade vocational qualifications to have equal parity with academic qualifications have and will fail because as Tomlinson (2005) claims, the British middle-classes have never seen vocational qualifications such as BTECs as appropriate for their own offspring. In fact, twenty years after Willis' study, and over ten years after Tomlinson's claim, vocational subjects still have a lower status, lack recognition and according to Reay (2017 pg.65) are 'stereotyped and devalued as education that is desired by and more suitable to working-class children'.

The reports of an education system that does not value or recognise the preferences and aspirations of many WBWC pupils appear to be validated by the actions of policy makers. Despite considerations that most WBWC pupils rely more on and excel better in vocational subjects than academic subjects at Key Stage 4, Wolf's (2011) review of vocational education led to '66% of schools significantly reducing their vocational offer '(Muir, 2013 pg.3). In 2014, the DfE acknowledged that Wolf's review of vocational education (2011) had a larger impact on WBWC pupils than all other pupils from similar and more affluent groups. This claim is based on statistics that show '58.3% of pupils achieved the expected 5 A* - C grades (including English and mathematics) at GCSE, however, this fell to 54.8 percent when Wolf reforms were applied to the data' (DfE, 2014 pg.22). That is almost '5 percent of WBWC pupils relied on non-Wolf qualifications to achieve the expected level in comparison to 3 percent of all other

pupils and 4 percent of all other FSM eligible pupils' (DfE, 2014, pg.15). Whilst, there has been further 'reforms' to the curriculum (for example, the English Baccalaureate[24] subjects will be compulsory in England for all pupils from 2020), there has been no improvement on the offer of vocational subjects. In fact, only a limited range of vocational qualifications with significantly reduced values were deemed suitable by the policy makers to form part of the 'reformed' curriculum, thus further reducing choice and contributing to the demotivation, disengagement and educational underachievement of many WBWC pupils.

Whilst she acknowledges the rigidity of the English national curriculum, Francis (2014) warns of the real danger in assuming that most WBWC pupils are mainly interested in vocational qualifications and that the reduction or removal of these qualifications from the curriculum automatically constrains their educational achievement. This author argues for the secondary curriculum to contain sufficient flex for most WBWC pupils to pursue subjects for which they have a passion whilst also offering what Solomon and Rogers (2002) describe as 'interventions around self-efficacy and motivation'. Solomon and Rogers (2002) believe such interventions will address issues of inequality in educational outcomes by boosting confidence, raising awareness of achievable academic pathways and subsequently contributing to more positive educational outcomes in many WBWC pupils. The introduction and delivery of such interventions are the responsibility of the schools WBWC pupils attend. However, Ball (2010) tells his readers that schools are increasingly the wrong place to look if anything is to be done about class inequalities in education. This is because, as Reay (2017) claims 'the English education system is profoundly unjust' (pg.74) and the 'class system dictates the nature and remit of schools' where the educational experiences of children are 'appropriate to their station in life' (pg.30). The next section explores Reay's (2017) claim in relation to the impact of the type of school attended and the educational outcomes of many WBWC pupils.

[24] The English Baccalaureate is a set of subjects at GCSE: English language and literature, maths, the sciences, geography or history and a language. Secondary schools are measured on the number of pupils that take GCSEs in these core subjects. Schools are also measured on how well their pupils do in these subjects.

3.3.4.2 The impact of the type of school attended on the educational underachievement of White British working-class pupils

In 1965, Eliot claimed that the function of schooling is to ‘preserve the class and select the elite’ (pg.83). Since Eliot’s (1965) claim, a significant degree of noteworthy research (e.g. Bourdieu Passeron,1977; Dumont and Ready, 2020; Jennings et al., 2015) has focused on the relationship between class and educational underachievement. It appears that much of this research echoes Eliot’s (1965) claim and reaffirms the notion that schools are key drivers of educational disparities through the replication of the deep social divides evident in society. Reay (2017) claims that the dominant class in England has ‘always used schooling to secure control over subordinate groups’ (pg.30) and citing Johnson (1976), Reay (2017) explains that from the conception of state -supported working class education, schools that working class pupils attended were different in every conceivable way from those attended by their wealthier peers. In a move to address such disparities in provision and opportunity, the tripartite system was introduced to the education system in England in 1944. Under this system, pupils were allocated to grammar, secondary technical or secondary modern schools based on their performance in an exam at the age of 11. The rhetoric at the time was that grammar schools would address educational inequality by catering for the most academically able regardless of class, ethnicity or gender. According to Hasley et al. (1980) this ‘levelling of the field’ did not happen then and it was not happening when they carried out their research 40 years after the introduction of the system. The subtle but significant forms of discrimination remain present in grammar schools (Burges et al., 2017; Todd, 2015) but are now evident in free school and academies where Jones (2016) says ‘things’ have been made much worse for many WBWC pupils by more polarisation and the added unfair distribution of resources.

Amidst concerns about inequality of opportunity in schools, in 2002, the New Labour government[25] opened academies with the promise that they would serve as a means of improving achievement in ‘poorer’ pupils in England. Six years after the introduction of academies, the Coalition Government introduced a new model of academies known as free schools, which were going to ‘expand choice and improve outcomes for the less well off’ (Green et al., 2015). Academies and Free schools were founded on the

[25] Government from 1997 - 2010

principles of ‘autonomy-driven improvement’ and independence from LA control (Morris, 2016) and therefore are able to operate with separate admissions procedures. Ferrari and Green (2013) indicate that the freedoms given to free schools and academies were to ensure they are equally and easily accessible to ‘disadvantaged’ pupils. In this sense, it can be perceived that these new schools should provide an alternative for the many WBWC pupils that were likely to be taught by less experienced, less qualified teachers (Kalogrides and Loeb, 2013) and in ‘ghettoised in underfunded, understaffed, low status schools’ (Gerwitz et al., 1995 pg.164). However, research (West and Wolfe, 2018; Allen, 2015; Francis and Wong, 2013) has found that instead of the anticipated improvement in school choice, inclusivity and educational achievement, the autonomy given to free schools and academies has resulted in the rise of ‘selectiveness, social stratification, segregation and educational inequality’ (Gardiner, 2017). Government bodies and literature (Morris, 2016; Stokes, 2014) have evidenced that academies and free schools (in particular) have become socially exclusive in that they have been found to ‘cream off more privileged pupils’ (National Audit Office, 2017) and favour middle-class pupils over their working-class peers. These actions leave many WBWC with no choice than to attend underperforming schools with less-qualified teachers and poorer educational facilities (Massey and Fischer, 2006) thus exacerbating inequality and perpetuating the educational underachievement in this group of pupils.

It is important to note that not all maintained schools (which are not academies, free or grammar schools) are of low quality and not all WBWC pupils underachieve when they attend schools other than academies and free schools. Indeed, there is evidence that many WBWC are ‘successful’ in mainstream schools (Barrett, 2017), but there is also significant evidence to show that many WBWC pupils see themselves as having no place and value within school (Francis and Wong, 2013) and as a result often become increasingly de-motivated and disengaged from education (Mayer, 2001). These feelings frequently lead to negative behaviours such as perpetual absence, which in turn, commonly result in exclusion from school (HCEC, 2014) to an alternative provision (AP) setting.

As described in chapter one, PRUs are a type of school and accommodate the highest numbers of pupils within AP. According to the 2015 – 2016 SFR data (DfE, 2017 pg.6),

there are 400 PRUs in England, which accommodate approximately 13,000 children of which 70.9% were of WBWC background (categorised by FSM). A common view amongst families and indeed some schools is that PRUs are ‘dumping grounds for pupils that schools have given up on’ (Ogg and Kaill, 2010), settings where many pupils come from chaotic, drinking and drug-taking homes (Taylor, 2012) and who are ‘more likely to be recruited into gangs, exposed to criminal activity or leave with no formal qualifications’ (Timpson 2019 pg.104). In spite of these views, PRUs are seen by some scholars as being better able to meet pupil’s individual academic, social and emotional needs (McGregor et al., 2015; Smith and Thomson, 2014). Indeed, as of January 2018, 79% of PRUs achieved a rating of ‘outstanding’ or ‘good’ (DfE, 2018) and there is some evidence (Tate and Greatbatch, 2017) that some pupils achieve better outcomes when placed in PRUs than they were predicted when in mainstream school. However, it would appear that the negative view of PRU’s has become Doxa. That is, this view is ‘ingrained into wider public consciousness as being an incontrovertible self-evident truth’ (Roberts and Evans, 2012 pg.72). This is problematic for many WBWC pupils who already see themselves as ‘stupid, rubbish, no good and as if they count for nothing’ (Reay, 2017 pg.77). These pupils leave mainstream school burdened with a negative view of their abilities and the stigma of exclusion to arrive at an institution that are described as ‘sin bins’ or ‘storehouses for dumping unwanted pupils’ (Ogg and Kalil, 2010). The emotional and social instability that this can bring is often overlooked in PRUs but can result in self-fulfilling prophecies where many WBWC pupils internalise the doxa attached to the PRU (and to them) and behave or respond accordingly. This study shows that many WBWC pupils are vocal about their negative experience of mainstream education but hide their feelings about exclusion to the PRU under a veener of pride or aggression. Having said that, this study also shows that many WBWC pupils, despite the negative narrative around PRUs feel a sense of belonging which they did not have in mainstream school. Malcolm (2015) believes the primacy of a flexible curriculum is integral to this sense of belonging and the improved experience of WBWC pupils in PRUs.

Pupil referral units are not obliged to deliver the national curriculum in its entirety, but must teach what is described as a broad and balanced curriculum – which often includes vocational or work-related learning programmes that are tailored to meet the personal and social needs and career aspirations of pupils (DfE, 2012). The efficacy

of having freedom over the curriculum offer is evident in Meo and Parker's (2004) study on PRUs and educational practices. Meo and Parker (2004) found that a flexible curriculum offer leads to positive learning outcomes, raises self-esteem, promotes and engenders trusting relationships, modifies behaviour and improves social skills. Therefore, at a PRU, some WBWC will be more likely to thrive in the ways that Meo and Parker (2004) describe and subsequently develop an attitude to learning that facilitates educational achievement.

Within this section, I have explored the relationship between different types of schools and the educational experience and outcomes of many WBWC pupils. I have evidenced that the schools which attract the most funding, are able to employ more experienced teachers and have access to better resources and facilities, are mostly attended by pupils from middle-class families. Pupil referral units are shown to be more flexible and inclusive than mainstream schools and able to respond to the challenges that accompany poverty and antischool behaviours exhibited by many WBWC pupils. Thus, the type of school a WBWC pupil attends has a clear influence on their educational performance. However, my trawl of underachievement literature revealed significant variations in WBWC educational outcomes across the country regardless of the school attended. According to a report produced by the DfE (2016), most WBWC pupils in schools based in deprived coastal areas with mainly white populations perform significantly lower than WBWC pupils in other areas in the country. Belfield and Sibieta (2017) claim this difference in performance is the outcome of a 'flaw in the English school system' which sees schools in predominantly working-class coastal towns receive less funding for resources than schools in more affluent areas.

To highlight the point above, I refer to the HCEC (2014) who draw attention to the fact that most WBWC pupils in London (both in well-off areas like Kensington and Chelsea and poorer areas such as Tower Hamlets) perform significantly better than most WBWC pupils in cities like Nottingham and rural areas like Herefordshire. I also point to a report produced by the DfE (2017 pg.36) which shows the proportion of WBWC pupils reaching the KS4 benchmark as less than 13% in Peterborough and the equivalent in Lambeth (London) as almost 50% during the same period. Due to practical constraints, I cannot provide a comprehensive review of WBWC educational outcomes in schools across geographical locations in England but I do recognise that,

whilst educational underachievement is evidently prevalent in many WBWC pupils, the degree of underachievement varies from location to location as it does between different types of school.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined a wide range of literature on educational underachievement in WBWC pupils. This literature identified class as central to discussions around the educational underachievement of many WBWC pupils. Whilst there is a disproportionate amount of studies that focus solely on the underachievement of WBWC boys, overall, the literature reviewed reveals consistent underachievement in many WBWC girls *and* boys, who according to the English education system both exhibit behaviours which are antithetical to learning and contribute to educational 'failure'. Over the years, policy makers have attributed the gap in achievement between WBWC pupils and their peers to a 'lack' or 'poverty' of aspirations among WBWC pupils. This chapter has shown that there are some WBWC pupils who have 'high' aspirations in the political sense of progression to H.E., but it has also shown that many other WBWC pupils, also have high aspirations but these are more geared towards occupational outcomes. The failure to recognise these alternative 'high' aspirations contributes to the notion of and actual educational underachievement in many WBWC pupils.

In this chapter I also present a number of studies that evidence a significant relationship between school related factors and the educational achievement of many WBWC pupils. For example, as Demie and Lewis (2015) confirm, the new academically challenging national curriculum fails to recognise, reflect or meet the needs of many WBWC pupils, leaving them feeling marginalised, undervalued and unable to 'achieve'. The literature reviewed within this chapter also suggests that most WBWC pupils attend poorer performing, less resourced schools in mainly deprived areas. An examination of PRUs as a 'type of school' offered a more positive outlook with the ability to deliver a more flexible and personal curriculum which may meet the aspirational and educational needs of many WBWC pupils and therefore prompt better educational and behavioral outcomes in this group of pupils.

There are many scholars and policy makers who believe that the English education system is meritocratic. I do not agree with this belief. I believe symbolic violence is very powerful within the education system where many working class pupils accept the doxic expectation that all pupils can achieve highly academic qualifications, and failure to do so lies in the pupil themselves as opposed to wider societal structures. I also believe the system creates more barriers than opportunities by failing to acknowledge that far from having a 'poverty' of aspirations, many WBWC pupils value education but just not in the format it is presented to them. Having said this, it is important at this point to note that some of the literature reviewed in this chapter often portrays WBWC pupils as an educationally underachieving homogeneous group. This is clearly an inaccurate conception, however, studies that focus on the 'success' of WBWC pupils at GCSE level are markedly limited. This has led me to believe that, to some degree, educational research itself is guilty of inscribing educational 'failure' rather than 'success' to many WBWC pupils working at GCSE level.

The larger message within this chapter is that many WBWC pupils are subject to and constrained by inequalities in the education system that reflects inequality in society. Considering the factors discussed in this chapter, it is difficult to understand how many WBWC pupils rise above the inequalities they face in school to achieve in education. The next chapter provides a conceptual framework for understanding educational underachievement in WBWC pupils, it also offers explanations for the many who 'achieve' against the odds.

Chapter 4 - Conceptual Framework

4.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter evidenced that the persistent achievement gap (The Sutton Trust, 2016; House of Commons Education Committee - HCEC, 2014: Strand, 2014) that exists between many WBWC pupils and their more affluent peers cannot be sufficiently explained by a single factor but by a range of factors through which the concomitant concept of class inequality runs smoothly and consistently. Bourdieu (1984) is a noteworthy sociologist who developed key sociological concepts of field, habitus and cultural capital to aid his ability to understand, explain and disclose classed inequalities at different layers of society. Bourdieu (1977, 1984) refers to these key concepts as his 'thinking tools'. This description is apt as Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and cultural capital serve as an open, 'iterative framework' (Thatcher et al., 2015) which allows researchers to think through social issues such as the unrelenting educational underachievement of many WBWC pupils. Therefore, in this chapter, I use Bourdieu's (1984) concepts of field, habitus and cultural capital - his thinking tools – as a conceptual framework for understanding and explaining why many WBWC pupils underperform in comparison to their middle-class peers.

Many Doctoral studies (Barrett, 2017; Terrelonge, 2015; Burnell, 2013; Stahl, 2012; Travers, 2011; Aubby, 2010; Plummer, 1997; Reay, 1995) employed Bourdieu's (1984) concepts of habitus and field and capital to demonstrate how pupils from different social classes experience education. However, Reay (2004) advises care against using Bourdieu's concepts to 'merely add gravitas to academic pieces' (pg.11) without a full understanding and appreciation of the usefulness of these concepts. This may easily be done as I often found Bourdieu's works often difficult to comprehend, especially as he repeatedly compresses several ideas into single, long and complex sentences. Therefore, I consulted the works of several notable scholars (e.g. James, 2016; Thatcher et al., 2015; Murphy and Cost, 2016; Ingram, 2015; McDowell, 2011; Lareau, 2008; Archer et al., 2007) in order to further understand Bourdieu's work, but also to compare and in some cases challenge the interpretations of Bourdieu applied to this piece of research.

I begin this chapter with a description of the struggle for power and influence in schools (fields) and an examination of the way in which the upbringing and social location (habitus) of many WBWC pupils fuels the need for this struggle. This examination is followed by a consideration of the value of knowledge within the 'playground'. I am mindful that, as Stahl (2012 pg.74) states 'all theoretical perspectives have limitations and Bourdieu's theoretical framework is no exception'. Therefore, within this chapter, I also include a consideration of the drawbacks of Bourdieu's thinking tools in relation to understanding WBWC educational underachievement. I conclude this chapter with an overall summary which pulls together a picture of how societal and educational inequalities impact WBWC educational underachievement.

4.2 Using Bourdieu's thinking tools to understand educational underachievement in White British Working-Class pupils

For Bourdieu (1984), education is one of the main institutions in which the power of class can most readily be observed - most particularly in terms of differences in the educational achievement of pupils from different class backgrounds. In England, for example, where achievement is predominantly measured by entry into H.E, words of Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) certify the powerful impact of class on educational pathways and choices:

> *The chances of entering higher education can be seen as the product of a selection process, which throughout the school system is applied with very unequal severity, depending on the pupil's social origin. In fact, for the most disadvantaged classes, it is purely and simply a matter of elimination (pg.2).*

Whilst Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) statement focuses on H.E., the inequality it reflects provides a helpful introduction to the difficulties faced by many WBWC pupils as they ''navigate an education system where their culture, practises, knowledge, tastes and dispositions are constantly and arbitrarily denigrated' (Abrahams, 2016 pg.18). The discussions in the following section provide descriptions of Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and capital and explores how these concepts work in an interdependent way to explain the difficulties and inequalities many WBWC pupils face in education and how this impacts their educational outcomes.

4.2.1 The field of struggles

Field is one of the key thinking tools in Bourdieu's conceptual toolbox. Field refers to the 'social space where interactions, transactions and events occur' (Bourdieu, 2005 pg.148) or a 'social universe with its own laws of functioning' (Bourdieu 1993, p.14). Jenkins (2002) explains field as:

> *'a structured system of social positions – occupied either by individuals or institutions – the nature of which defines the situation for their occupants ….. It is also a system of forces which exist between these positions; a field is structured internally in terms of power relations…. The existence of a field presupposes and, in its functioning, creates a belief on the part of participants in the legitimacy and value of the capital which is at stake in the field. This legitimate interest in the field is produced by the same historical processes which produce the field itself (pg.85)'.*

In this respect, education can be described as a distinct field of practice (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). However, to enter and remain in this field of practice requires a force of determination. Indeed, Thompson (2008) suggests that by using the term *le champ,* Bourdieu's intention was for the concept of field to denote a battlefield as opposed to using the term *le pre* which also signifies a field but offers images of a peaceful and tranquil environment. For this reason, Thatcher et al. (2015) believe that:

> *'field should be understood as a site of competition and aggression in which an individual or group is required to negotiate and their ability to manoeuvre is influenced by habitus and capital' (pg.3).*

The constant conflict and battle for position described by Thatcher et al. (2015) is seen in schools, where 'established agents seek to preserve their power' and 'challengers strive to overtake them' (Swartz, 1997). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, schools in England are sub-fields where the battle between pupils who are familiar with the unwritten rules that are necessary to survive and those who are not, are played out and often won.

Whilst I have denoted schools as sub-fields within the larger field of education, it is important to note that not all fields are alike. Edgerton and Roberts (2014) describe fields as 'relational in nature and characterized by their own particular regulative principles' (pg.165). That is, each field has its own unique unwritten rules. Bourdieu (1977) describes these rules as Doxa. Within the context of this study, PRU schooling can be conceived as a field dissimilar to mainstream schooling with its own regulative principles and each demanding an understanding of different doxa. For example, PRUs offer a degree of institutional informality (Meo and Parker, 2006), and as such are inherently flexible, offering a choice about 'what to learn' and 'how and when to engage' in learning (Malcolm, 2015 pg.132). On the other hand, as Hawkins' (2011 pg. 75) describes, mainstream schools are more formal in nature with the physical environment described as 'restrictive', the social environment as 'oppressive' and the curriculum as 'rigid'.

Each field has its own set of rules and whilst inferred, pupils must understand and conform to these rules in order to 'succeed' or hold key positions within the field. However, the ability to comprehend these rules is not easily acquired, because they are a set of common assumptions, values, understandings and unquestioned opinions that develop overtime. In other words, doxa is 'a representation of a form of tacit knowledge that individuals of different social classes acquire during childhood, which unconsciously influences their perceptions and understanding of each field' (Brar, 2016 pg.61). Given that such rules are unspoken, unwritten and internalised they become 'what is taken for granted, to the reality that goes unanimously unquestioned because it lies beyond the notion of enquiry' (Grenfell, 2008 pg.120). This explanation suggests that the experience or understanding of the rules within a field are not actively considered, they are matter of fact or as Bourdieu (1977 pg.167) explains 'that which goes without saying because it comes without saying'. Central to this study is the gap in educational achievement between many WBWC pupils and their more affluent middle-class peers. Deer (2008) believes the success of middle-class pupils can be attributed their 'pre-reflexive intuitive knowledge', which ensures they are attuned and responsive to doxa and allows them to move seamlessly between and within fields (pg.120). In this case, middle-class children enter the education system with an awareness and comfortability that is absent in many WBWC pupils whose knowledge

of the system is limited or even absent. Indeed, Reay (2017 pg.184) claims that 'the working class have 'routinely been set up to fail throughout the entire history of English state schooling so that their more privileged class 'others' can succeed'.

The 'struggle for the preservation of power' (Mills, 2008 pg.86) in education can be illustrated in the introduction of a national curriculum that acts as a filter that sifts pupils from different backgrounds. For example, the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects will be compulsory in England for all pupils from 2020, with educational achievement being measured against progress across eight subjects favoured within the English Baccalaureate[26]. Evident within this reform is the clear emphasis on traditional academic subjects and the limited scope of vocational qualifications with substantially diminished value. Reay (2017) and Kintrea (2011) claim that vocational subjects are enjoyed by and are more relevant to the aspirations of working-class pupils. As such, by creating a curriculum that majorly accommodates middle-class pupils and devalues the vocational subjects which many working-class pupils 'excel at' (Reay, 2017 pg.65) the education system produces an 'education for leadership and an education for followership' (Apple, 2004 pg.72), thus ensuring the middle-class retain the upper hand in the struggle for preservation. In this sense, the education system (field) is a vehicle by which power relations of the larger society are reproduced and the dominant position of the middle-class is upheld and legitimated within schools. The various ways in which the education system contrives to maintain this structure of domination is known as symbolic violence.

Symbolic violence can be found in 'every power which manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force' (Bourdieu, 1977 pg. 4). Symbolic violence is also known as 'soft violence' which 'functions largely within various forms of discrimination' (Brar pg.65). With regards to this study, symbolic violence describes processes within schools where the cultural values of WBWC pupils are marginalised with respect to the prevailing middle-

[26] The English Baccalaureate is a set of subjects at GCSE: English language and literature, maths, the sciences, geography or history and a language. Secondary schools are measured on the number of pupils that take GCSEs and how well they do in these core subjects.

class values of the school (Brown, 2018) and is believed to be natural without any dispute from the pupils. That is, symbolic violence is only 'exerted with the collaboration of those who undergo it because they help to construct it as such' (Bourdieu, 2000 pg.171). Within the context of education, these definitions give the impression of the 'voluntary servitude' (Bowers-Brown, 2014) of working-class families, however, Bourdieu and Passeron, (1977) explain that schools have the power to build a representation of reality and to impose it as a legitimate definition of reality by obscuring the powerful and dominating associations which lie at its very foundation. I have already established that the English national curriculum is one that accommodates middle-class pupils and marginalizes working-class pupils. Many scholars (Nairz- Wirth et al., 2017; Bowers-Brown, 2014; Dunning-Lozano, 2014; Najuma, 2011; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) perceive the imposition of dominant forms of knowledge through a largely academic curriculum as an enactment of symbolic violence on working-class pupils. Chetty (2018) describes how symbolic violence occurs in subtle and pernicious ways in schools. For example when some WBWC pupils hear the rhetoric that 'English, Mathematics and Science are the building blocks of education' and are 'essential for our country is to compete in the global economy' (DfE, 2013 pg.3), they automatically accept this as truth and consequently see and internalise their own curriculum choices and aspirations as inferior and worthless. This internalisation operates at an unconscious level but manifests in behaviours and beliefs that negatively impact their educational performance and outcomes.

This section identifies ways in which middle-class pupils are geared to 'achieve' or 'succeed' in education because of their understanding or knowledge of the unspoken rules in the field. The concept of field also paves the way for an exploration of Bourdieu's (1984) concepts of habitus and capital and the possible ways in which they may explain the educational underachievement of many WBWC pupils. The concept of fields is closely linked to the concept of habitus. In fact, Bourdieu (2000) regards habitus as the 'feel for the game' and field as 'the game itself' (pg.151). With regards to the field of education, habitus comprises of the crucial ways of being which very often influence educational experiences and outcomes. Therefore, in the next section I introduce the concept of habitus and examine the way in which habitus creates and

maintains social inequalities within schools to influence different educational outcomes in pupils from different social classes.

4.2.2 Habitus and white British working-class pupils' position in the field

Habitus is a key concept to emerge from Bourdieu's box of thinking tools. Bourdieu (1977) employs the concept of habitus to elucidate how internalised behaviours, values, habits and attitudes impact the educational performance and outcomes of working-class pupils. These behaviours and values are derived from the class based experiences of socialisation in family, community and friendship groups and as such Bourdieu (1977) defines habitus as 'a subjective but not individual system of internalised structure, scheme of perception, conception and actions common to all members of the same group or class' (pg.86). Habitus is also explained by Ellis-Martin (2015) as an:

> *'acquired set of dispositions of thought, behaviour and taste, shaped by the choices individuals make and blended with the experiences of their interactions with others, and their responses to their environment – which ultimately determines who they are and how they respond' (pg. 53).*

In short, habitus is created through a social, rather than individual process and includes the required behaviour and attitudes that enable existence and success within a field. In the context of my research, 'habitus' provides WBWC pupils with a view of the world and where they stand within it (Dumais, 2002), places limits on what many WBWC pupils think they can and cannot do, what they should or should not do, and according to Bourdieu (1992), who succeeds and who does not. This explanation allows parallels to be drawn between the concept of habitus and the educational and occupational aspirations of many WBWC pupils.

In the previous chapter, I discussed the belief that WBWC pupils lack or have low aspirations. Within this discussion, I argued that most WBWC pupils' do not lack or have low aspirations, but that many have clear, fixed and high aspirations. However, most of these aspirations do not match the middle-class ideology of educational or indeed occupational aspirations. Whilst I would prefer to believe that the aspirations of

most WBWC pupils stem from areas of interest and are based on hopes for the future, Stahl (2014) argues that these aspirations are not constructed in isolation from their situations. Indeed, Bourdieu explains:

> *'Only in imaginary experience (in the folk tale, for example), which neutralizes the sense of social realities, does the social world take the form of a universe of possibles equally possible for any possible subject'* (Bourdieu, 1990 pg.64).

In other words, the aspirations of many WBWC pupils reflect expectations related to their social origins or the need to gravitate towards occupations that align with habitus (Grenfell, 2008). Habitus is seen by Reay et al. (2005) as 'a rich interlacing of past and present' (pg.36) and, like genes, naturally compelling 'an individual to deal with the present and anticipate the future based on past experiences' (Swartz, 1997 pg.104). These past experiences are not necessarily those of the pupils, but experiences which they have unconsciously been passed on to them through via family and community relationships. Therefore, in their aspirations, most WBWC pupils' understanding of 'what might be normal, appropriate and desirable is shaped by their habitus which is constituted by their social locations' (Archer et al., 2010, pg.93). For many WBWC pupils, what constitutes as 'normal and appropriate' aspirations are at odds with the middle-class view of educational aspirations: entry to university. In his book on the *demonization of the working-class*, Jones (2016) tells the story of Liam, a WBWC young man who grew up on the edges of Greater Manchester in the 1990's. Liam's father worked in a factory and his mother in various 'low paid jobs'. Liam claimed that the idea of university was not even within the realms of his imagination he said:

> *'I literally did not know what university was until age sixteen. University, to be honest, was kind of where posh people go... It's not what we do; it's just not on the radar' (Jones, 2016 pg.174).*

My study showed that some WBWC share Liam's opinion that H.E. is for 'posh people' (Brown, 2018 pg.52) and 'not for the likes of us' (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990, p.157). Reay et al. (2005) explained that responses, such as Liam's, are 'circumscribed by an internalised framework which makes some possibilities inconceivable, others improbable and a limited range acceptable' (pg.27). Connolly (2004) also explain that:

‘the experience working-class children gain through their family and friends provide the parameters for their worldview. It tends to shape the way they think and forms the boundaries within which they make decisions. ‘What they know’, then, is that everyone leaves school at 16 and finds work locally or attempts to make a living in other ways’. (Pg.85).

Liam’s example and Connolly’s contribution outlined above highlights the way in which, for many WBWC pupils, higher education (as a symbol of achievement) is not part of ‘the totality of general dispositions acquired through practical experience in the field’ (Moi 1991, pg.1021). These general dispositions - habitus - are deep rooted in individual socialization (Swartz, 1997) and is instinctively formed and replicated, ‘without any deliberate pursuit of coherence and without any conscious concentration’ (Bourdieu, 1984, pg.170). The descriptions of habitus give the impression that many WBWC pupils, for example, lack choice and that their educational underachievement is preordained, fixed and predictable due to their social origins. Sullivan (2002) appears to have the same thought as she argues that Bourdieu’s (1984) notion of habitus leaves no place for individual agency or even individual consciousness. Bourdieu (1990) was acutely aware of the criticisms around the deterministic nature of his concept habitus and in response to his critics, claims that ‘habitus can be changed by changed circumstances’ as it carries with it the seeds of new responses that allow it to ‘rebuff, resist and possibly transcend social and economic conditions’ (pg.84). Bourdieu (1990) also writes that:

‘habitus is a kind of transforming machine that leads us to reproduce the social conditions of our own production, but in a relatively unpredictable way, in such a way that one cannot move simply and mechanically from knowledge of the conditions of production to knowledge of the products’ (pg.87).

I understand Bourdieu’s quote to mean that in contrast to ‘a pure structuralist perspective that would imply that people behave like robots that are programmed to act in accordance with structured patterns’ (Walther, 2014 pg.7), people are free to make their choices from whatever range of alternatives made available to them. However, I also sense that he remains clear that there are limits to what an agent can do due to their social origins. Indeed, Stahl (2013) points out that habitus allows ‘for agency and choice but also recognizes that choices are restricted by socio-economic

positioning and that habitus predisposes individuals towards certain ways of behaving' (pg.667). Using a metaphor of a fork, Grenfell (2008) further explains the notion of choice. He says:

> *'our habitus determines that we are faced with at any moment a variety of possible forks in that path, or choices of actions, but at the same time which of these choices are available to us and which we do not see as possible are as a result of our past journey, for experiences have helped shape our vision' (pg.52).*

Grenfell's (2008) explanation is pertinent to understanding the persistent educational underachievement in many WBWC pupils. This is because the meritocratic view of educational success suggests that many WBWC pupils have a 'choice' in whether they achieve or not, as this view advocates that educational 'achievement' is attained by individual talent and hard work (Clegg, 2011). However, Ball et al. (2002) argue that pupils' choices cannot be isolated from their context and as such their individual agency is heavily restricted by the structures of the education system. An example here would be the limits placed on working-class pupil choice which stems from the introduction of academies 'who flout admission rules by selecting pupils from more privileged families' (Reay, 2017 pg.49) and of a national curriculum 'based on knowledge and learning experienced by middle-class people, rather than a world that all pupils can identify' (Blanford 2017). The responses from the WBWC pupils who participated in this study, highlight the frustration that appears as a result of their restricted agency and the feelings of marginalisation that evidently contribute to their disengagement and the subsequent educational underachievement.

Liam's story in Jones (2016) and the work of Willis (1977), Stahl (2012) and Bourdieu (1990) show that many individuals exclude themselves from certain practices that they consider beyond their reach due to the cultural grouping to which they belong. As discussed above, this may explain why many WBWC pupils do not aspire to college or university. However, Bourdieu (1993) appears to step back from his notion of a collective habitus and claims that 'habitus differs to the extent that the details of individuals' social trajectories diverge from one another' (pg.46). Thus, in relation to my study, different WBWC pupils may have different educational outcomes because their habitus can be adapted or modified (Reay et al., 2009). The work of scholars such

as Barrett (2017), Travers (2017), Bland (2004) and Reay (2001) explores the experiences of educationally ‘successful’ WBWC young people and evidences how habitus can be altered when individuals encounter situations that cause them to change the way they live. Reay et al. (2009) explain that the ‘successes’ of such pupils are the consequence of a ‘permeable habitus' which is responsive to what is going on around it and is ‘continually modified with an individual’s encounter with the outside world’ (pg.105). Thus, the notion of permeable habitus implies that, despite being linked to individual history, habitus can be changed and therefore the supposed predetermined educational outcomes of WBWC pupils can also change.

Despite the findings from many working-class studies which suggest that habitus can be modified, Bourdieu (1984) insists that working-class habitus is less adaptable to change than middle-class habitus. He maintains that due to how deeply working-class habitus is ingrained in individuals, those that have ascended the social ladder still retain their original habitus. In such situations, Bowl (2003) suggests that the old habitus never really goes away, rather than changing, the practices from the new habitus overlay the old. I believe this overlay will always only be temporary, with the old habitus constantly fighting to return to the surface. Bowl (2003) describes this ‘fight’ as a habitus clash or conflict. Returning to Jones’ (2016) story about Liam from the edges of Greater Manchester, it appears that Liam ‘changed his habitus’ by gaining admission to university in his mid-twenties and ‘successfully’ graduating with a degree. However, Liam told Jones (2016) that he constantly suffered from an ‘imposter syndrome’ – a sense that he did not deserve to be there and would be found out at any moment (Jones, 2016). The dissonance Liam felt by entering a field where he felt he did not belong was an outcome of his new habitus clashing with the old. Connell et al. (1982) also explain the dilemma ‘habitus conflict’ brings about. These scholars recount the predicament facing one working class pupil, who, in order to achieve educational success, was compelled to disconnect from the family and friend relationships that built and contributed to his feeling of oneness. Simmons and Smyth (2018) describe this disconnect as an act of ‘cultural suicide’. Simmons and Smyth (2018) likeness of this type of disconnect to suicide is appropriate, as Stahl (2016) explains how ‘being yourself is consistently valued in WBWC culture and adopting what is perceived to be a false identity is completely detested’ (pg.671). It appears that ‘cultural suicide’ or

feelings of being an ‘imposter’ are the unfortunate prerequisites for educational ‘success’ for WBWC pupils. In fact, Bourdieu (1992) says of himself:

> *‘to be able to live in a world that is not mine, I must try and understand two things: what it means to have an academic mind and - how such is created - and at the same time what is lost in acquiring it’ (pg.117).*

As Bourdieu (1992) describes, for WBWC pupils to ascend to a place where they do not belong but aspire to be, they must be prepared to simultaneously occupy clashing worlds that engender a disruption between their familiar habitus and the freshly established habitus that is associated with a middle-class world of education.

4.2.3 Understanding the value of knowledge, taste and language within the playground

In the introduction to Bourdieu’s concept of field, it was highlighted that he considered field as that which represents a playground where certain rules apply (Bourdieu, 1972) and where agents need to possess a specific amount of knowledge or resources to enter, remain or succeed within this playground. The value placed on this knowledge is referred to as capital. According to Brar (2016), capital is Bourdieu’s ‘most immediately accessible theoretical concept, because he employs an economic metaphor to clarify abstract social factors, such as beliefs, ideas, and habits, by assigning a quasi-monetary value to them’ (pg.54). Capital can be seen to symbolise a ‘struggle for power’ (Palmer, 2001) in which those who have the preferred type of capital have clear advantage over those who do not. Whilst Swartz (1997) argues that the desirability and value placed on a particular type of capital depends upon the field, Bourdieu (1984) explains that the capitals present within any given field are transferrable, that is, they can be exchanged for other types of capital which can contribute to achievement within the said field. Bourdieu specifies three generic types of capital: economic, social and cultural capital. In the next two sections, I briefly introduce the concepts of economic and social capital before examining the relationship between educational achievement and the possession and value of cultural capital.

4.2.3.1 Economic Capital

The concept of economic capital describes material assets, such as jewellery and buildings, that are 'immediately and directly convertible into money' (Bourdieu, 1986 pg.242). More simplistically, Watson (2018) defines economic capital as the 'sum of assets that an individual has' (pg. 19). In relation to education, economic capital increases a pupils' prospect of educational achievement through access to private tuition and engagement with paid extra-curricular activities such as visits to art galleries and museums. In sum, economic capital is a key resource for buying privilege and according to Bourdieu (1997 pg.54), is at the basis of all other types of capital. These 'other' types of capital (social and cultural capital), described by Bourdieu (1997) as 'transformed and disguised' forms of economic capital are discussed in the sections below.

4.2.3.2 Social Capital

The link between economic and social capital is clear - being in possession of a substantial amount of economic capital puts an individual in a strong position to accumulate social capital. According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) social capital is:

> *'the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (pg.119).*

The networks described by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) are expressions of power relations which these authors believe are designed to discriminate against the more disadvantaged members of society. In the field of education, these social networks are not only used by professional middle-class parents to aid and encourage the 'success' of their child in education, they are also a means by which inequality in education and society is perpetuated. One of the ways in which this is done was made clear in Jones' (2016) examination of '*rigged society'* where Rachel Johnson[27] pointed out that the

[27] Rachel Johnson is an English journalist and sister of the UK Prime Minister (2019 -)

‘middle classes are sailing into jobs and taking all the glittering prizes as a result of their contacts and peer group’ (pg.170). Ms. Johnson proceeded to state that:

> *‘all middle-class parents do is go around sorting out jobs and work experience for their offspring with their mates… they never lose out…. If you look at how they work systems…. the state education system, they are the ones who are going to win because they’re prepared to put in everything (Jones, 2010 pg.170)*

The amount of social capital a pupil’s family possesses is clearly determined by the relationships they have and groups with which they are associated. In this sense, it would appear that many WBWC pupils are excluded from certain networks or social relationships which provide positive pictures of education and encourage relationships that will support, foster and guide towards ‘success’ within education. Social capital may therefore be best summed up by the maxim: ‘it's not what you know, it's who you know.’ Having said this, Savage (2000) insists that Bourdieu’s (1984) concept of social capital underestimated the ability of individuals from working-class backgrounds to access social capital. I am inclined to agree, as social boundaries in contemporary England are much more permeable than they were during Bourdieu’s working life. My current study shows that many of my pupil-participants have friends and family in the trades through which they can ‘access jobs’ and ‘sort out work experience’. The contention is the value the education system places on the type of work experience and occupations a pupil has access to – that is, the pedigree of ‘who they know’.

4.2.3.3 Cultural Capital

In relation to the aims of this this study of educational underachievement in WBWC pupils, cultural capital emerges as Bourdieu’s (1986) most valuable form of capital. This is because cultural capital is:

> *‘a theoretical hypothesis which made it possible to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from different social classes by*

relating academic success to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes and class fractions' (Bourdieu, 1986 pg.243)

Here, Bourdieu is claiming that, for many, educational underachievement is a function of their cultural capital. Although Bourdieu's definition of cultural capital is somewhat vague (Sullivan, 2002), he generally sees cultural capital in terms of levels of familiarity with the dominant culture within a society. In the context of education, Henry et al. (1998) describe cultural capital as the understanding and belief that:

'the expected behaviours, language competencies, explicit and implicit values, knowledge, attitudes to and relationships with academic culture required for success in school are all competencies which one class brings with them to school' (pg.233).

In the above statement, Henry et al. (1998) imply that it is the cultural capital of 'one class' that embodies all the competencies required for 'success' in education. This 'one class' is the dominant middle-class. According to Mills (2008), the education system 'assumes middle-class culture, attitudes and values in all its pupils' (pg.84). This assumption made by the education system is not valid as not only does the possession of cultural capital vary with social class, the value of cultural capital also varies from field to field. However, the lack of familiarity with the dominant culture in education makes it very difficult for many working-class pupils to educationally achieve. Bourdieu (1977) explains that:

'by doing away with giving explicitly to everyone what it implicitly demands of everyone, the educational system demands of everyone alike that they have what it does not give. This consists mainly of linguistic and cultural competence and that relationship of familiarity with culture which can only be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture' (pg.494).

Before I further explore how linguistic and cultural competence may impact educational underachievement in many WBWC pupils, I briefly examine Bourdieu's three variants of cultural capital.

First, objectified cultural capital makes reference to cultural objects such as 'pictures, books, dictionaries, machines, instruments etc.' (Bourdieu, 1986 pg.243). Second,

institutionalised cultural capital refers to the way cultural capital is measured. institutionalised cultural capital can be objectified in the form of educational qualifications which 'confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value' (Bourdieu, 2011 pg.88). Third, embodied cultural capital, which is possibly the most important form of cultural capital as far as educational inequalities and underachievement is concerned. Bourdieu (1997) equates embodied cultural capital with habitus and explains that it refers to the 'dispositions of the mind and body' (Bourdieu, 1986 pg.23). That is, it represents behaviours, skills and knowledge that are accumulated (often unconsciously) overtime but cannot be 'transmitted instantaneously or directly'. An example of such embodied cultural capital is the use of language or linguistic expressions (James, 2017) or as Bourdieu (1977) puts it: educated language.

Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural capital relates to the resources an individual has at their disposal that enables them to succeed where others may fail. In this sense, Bourdieu's work has close parallels with the work of Bernstein (1961, 1973, 1977). Bernstein (1973) describes his work as complementary to the work of Bourdieu, in that Bourdieu offers explanations about the 'structure of reproduction' whilst he (Bernstein) he explicates the 'process of transmission' (pg.14). Bernstein (1961) claims there are two distinct varieties of language use in society - the elaborated code and the restricted code. It is Bernstein's (1973) belief that these distinctions of language can sufficiently account for the poor performance of working-class pupils in schools. The reason for Bernstein's belief becomes apparent when he describes an *elaborated* code as the formal and sophisticated speech that is favoured by the education system. Bernstein (1973) claims that schools are 'necessarily concerned with the transmission and development of universalistic orders of meaning' (pg.221). Since schools place such emphasis and importance on language and speech as medium of learning and communication, working-class pupils are placed at a disadvantage educationally because of their failure or inability to reproduce an elaborated code and their use of *restricted* codes. According to Bernstein (1961) these restricted codes are a kind of shorthand speech, which, for example, is heard in the 'non-elite vernacular code that has emerged from the working-class communities of the East End of London' and 'features elements of Cockney[28] and items from the linguistic repertoires of working-

[28] The dialect of English associated with traditional white working-class East Enders (Preece, 2014)

class migrant communities who reside in the East End of London' (Preece, 2015 pg.4). Such forms of speech are often seen as cultural markers or a badge of identity and are spoken with pride, however, because they often signify an individual's position in a field, they are also frequently used to discriminate. This is evident in education where in contrast to the elaborated code of their middle-class peers, the language and accent of many WBWC pupils and their inability to decode class-specific readings and communications places them as outsiders and contribute to their disengagement and subsequent underachievement. This is another form of symbolic violence, where the preferences and practices of the middle class are applied and imposed on members of other classes (Weininger, 2005), such that the preferences of one social class are ignored while the preferences and practices of another social class are valued and legitimized.

Bernstein's (1961) work has caused some criticism. For example, Gaine and George (1999) claim Bernstein's distinctions between the middle class and working class are over simplified and the he lacks evidence to support his ideas around elaborated and restricted codes. Gaine and George (1999) also suggest that 'times have changed' and whilst there may have been a homogenous working class in the 1960's, the British class structure has changed to a more fluid, multidimensional construction which acknowledges and appreciates diversity of speech. I agree with Gaine and George (1999) that it is far too simplistic to assume that the working class have one speech pattern, however, I am inclined to disagree with their suggestion that 'times have changed' as the responses of the pupils and teachers who participated in this study highlight the negative impact 'restricted codes' have on pupils ability to access the curriculum effectively and their subsequent educational outcomes.

Seventeen years after Gaine and George (1999) wrote their criticisms, Friedman (2016) describes how the production (or not) of certain social codes can distract from an individual's ability to fit into a field. Friedman (2016) says working-class accents and speech patterns present barriers which are routed in judgments about class identity. He gives the example of working-class actors who are given minor or stereotypical roles because they lack the nationally appreciated received pronunciation. In order to secure main roles many WBWC actors are advised to 'tone down their accents'. A participant in Friedman's (2016) study explained that he would have to 'mock' or 'deny'

his heritage in order to secure work, which he outrightly refused to do – this resulted in a lack of success in his acting career. I liken Friedman's (2016) participant's situation to that of many WBWC pupils who's inherited 'expressiveness' or/and non-standard linguistic style is misrecognised and penalized within the system (Swartz, 1997). Whilst Bernstein (1971) clearly suggests that class differences in speech patterns are related to educational achievement, he also clearly states that 'one code is not better than another' and points out that 'each code possesses its own aesthetic, its own possibilities' (pg.135). Bernstein's (1961) ideas highlight how education places different values on cultural capital and assumes working-class pupils do not possess the necessary cultural capital to succeed in education.

4.3 Can Bourdieu 'really' explain educational underachievement?

As this chapter has indicated, several researchers have used a Bourdieu's (1984) concepts of field, habitus and capital as a framework for their studies. As with all theoretical perspectives, Bourdieu's theory presents several shortcomings and inconsistencies. To begin with, working-class habitus is seen as being integral to the understanding of the perpetual educational underachievement in many WBWC pupils. However, Jenkins (1992, quoted in Lashley, 2017 pg. 31) argues that the 'concept of habitus in academic pursuit is nebulous as it makes gross assumptions that students' academic desire is a result of social construction, rather than individual agency'. In his work, Bourdieu appears to have a single focus on the 'failures' and underachievement of the working-class and does not adequately explain how a large number of working-class pupils are able to 'successfully' complete secondary school and transition into university. In this vein, Bourdieu's notion of habitus seems rigid, he does not account for what Reay et al. (2009) describe as a permeable habitus, nor does he acknowledge the possibility of working-class individuals obtaining the cultural capital required to (or appear to) move into a different social class.

In his application of the concept of field, Bourdieu is criticised for his 'preoccupation with struggles rather than instances of co-operation and integration' that occurs in fields (James, 2017 pg.43). In his study on working-class pupils' educational success, Bland (2004) demonstrates how some teachers stood out as positive role models, demonstrating co-operation, care and understanding behaviours that were in 'marked

contrast to the apparently unaccepting habitus' of schools (pg.8). The teacher's interventions with the working-class pupils in Bland's study appeared to initiate a change or adaptation of their habitus and they became integrated within the field. Similarly, the concept of social capital focuses on the exclusion of the working-class and prevention of social mobility (Swartz, 1997). By portraying social divisions as static, Bourdieu fails to consider the possibility of probable interaction between social classes. The example given above and the consideration that middle-class parents may share 'networks' with parents from working-class backgrounds opens Bourdieu's concept of social capital to criticism.

In the context of education, cultural capital is considered to be Bourdieu's (1984) most valuable form of capital. However, Lareau and Weininger (2003) argue that Bourdieu's work appears to limit cultural capital to a mere discussion around 'knowledge of or competence with highbrow cultural activities' (pg.597). These authors highlight the need for the understanding of cultural capital that includes a wider range of skills and abilities, particularly those that would support social or vocational success. Holmes (2017) agrees and suggests the need for a wider conceptualisation of capital, as he feels it will 'enable an analysis of capital that acknowledges other skills such as increased confidence, improved self-esteem and new technical skills' (pg.38). Whilst, I understand and appreciate the criticisms of Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural capital, I am also very much aware that the type of cultural capital desired and valued in education is deeply ingrained in the system and in the roots of society. As Bourdieu (1984) imagined, education is a 'mechanism for consolidating social separation' (Grenfell, 2008 pg.29) and as the education system is controlled by the dominate class, this remains legitimised and unlikely to change.

Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital serve as an appropriate conceptual framework for this thesis, however, Savage et al. (2015) advises caution about relying too closely on Bourdieu's concept 'today' (pg.101). He encourages the awareness that 'things have changed' since Bourdieu's criticism of 'elitist' culture. For example, entry to many national museums are free, the proliferation of media devices has made nearly all cultural forms more accessible and there has been a great increase of influential and successful people who identify as working-class and would be deemed to have little or no cultural capital in the way that Bourdieu describes. In addition, particular to

education, cultural capital leans heavily on the premise that H.E qualifications convert to an increased cultural capital, which in turn can convert to greater economic capital. This, as observed, does not easily translate into the current social world as it fails to take into consideration those who own large amounts of social and economic capital (Alan Sugar[29] for example) who are from working-class backgrounds and do not possess higher qualifications. Neither does it give account for the growing number of university graduates who are without employment and depend on state benefits for survival.[30] Nevertheless, Savage's (2015) caution is noted.

It is equally noted that Savage et al. (2015) also says that legitimate culture 'goes hand in hand with a sense of entitlement and authority' and those who are 'steeped in this culture are better placed to understand their school curriculum and are trained in the skills of abstraction, which might help them get better qualifications which can also be a platform for more successful careers' (pg.97). The comments made by Savage et al. (2015) strengthens the notion that certain cultures or habitus generate social and educational advantage and in turn justifies the use of Bourdieu's conceptual framework as the core around which this thesis of woven and a window into the concept of inequality and underachievement in WBWC pupils.

4.4 Conclusion

Bourdieu's (1984) thinking tools (field, habitus and capital) have contributed in no small terms to the understanding of how the education system perpetuates and legitimises class inequalities. Indeed, Bourdieu 'wrote 37 books and over 400 articles' (Wacquant, 2007 pg.263) which were principally concerned with the dynamics of power in society (Thatcher et al., 2017). Bourdieu's work has achieved wide influence in the academic field where it has been engaged with, developed and extended by many academics (Kinsella et al., 2019; Byrd, 2019; Niati, 2018; Ingram, 2018; Thatcher et al., 2016). Given the sheer volume, and as mentioned earlier in this chapter, his very complex style of writing, I used the work of these academics as a sounding board, where the decision (partly based on their application and use of the theory) to use Bourdieu's key

[29] Growing up Alan Sugar and his siblings lived with his parents in a council flat in Hackney. Lord Sugar left school at 16 to sell electrical goods out of a van. In 2019, Alan Sugar was worth £1.3 billion.

[30] Higher Education Statistics Agency (June 2020) shows that in 2017/2018 the proportion of graduates unemployed 15 months after graduation was almost 10% at some institutions.

concepts of field, habitus and capital as a blueprint for this thesis was considered, reconsidered and made.

Within this chapter, the concepts of field, habitus and capital are explored under separate headings, however the way they interconnect is apparent. In fact, in *Distinction* (1986 pg.101), Bourdieu presents a formula that highlights this interrelationship: [(Habitus) (Capital)] + Field = Practice. That is, practice is a consequence of interconnections between habitus and capital within a field. For Bourdieu, practice signifies social practice, which for the purpose of this study is likened to educational underachievement. Thus, by contextualising the education system as a field and cultural capital as 'the currency that is used within the field' (Lashley, 2017 pg.28), this chapter sheds some light on the persistent educational underachievement in many WBWC pupils. This chapter has identified that the cultural capital valued within schools favours middle-class pupils, therefore, with the middle-class habitus they bring into the field, middle-class pupils take to education as 'a fish in water' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992 pg.127). In contrast, the working-class pupils are predisposed to a certain habitus and possess a type of cultural capital which is not valued equally to the cultural capital or the habitus that middle-class pupils bring into the field of education. Thus, many WBWC pupils end up in a struggle within a field where they do not know the rules and where their only chance of success is to learn the rules of the game, allow the new habitus to lay over the old or completely change their habitus and commit what Simmons and Smyth (2018) describe as cultural suicide. These options will allow WBWC pupils to move seamlessly within and between fields but with a continuing awareness that they are as a 'fish out of water' – educationally achieving but not fitting in.

This chapter has shown how Bourdieu's (1984) concepts of field, habitus and capital can explain inequality in education and the underachievement of many WBWC pupils. However, I am keen to avoid what Hey (2003) describes as superficial usage of Bourdieu's thinking tools. Particularly as Thatcher et al. (2016 pg.4) explain that 'one of Bourdieu's main emphases on his theoretical framework was that it was not simply reified but researchers should demonstrate relevance of his concepts through empirical inquiry' (pg.4). McKenzie (2016), also explains that Bourdieu wanted his tools

to be used through social examination of the world. Therefore, in this study, I will move beyond the general use of Bourdieu's (1984) thinking tools and 'put Bourdieu to work' by creatively and flexibly using these tools to understand the lived educational experiences and perceptions of my WBWC pupil-participants. The next chapter provides an overview of the methodology and methods I employed to capture these lived experiences and perceptions and to provide an understanding how these experiences impact the educational underachievement of some WBWC pupils.

Chapter 5 - Methodology and Methods

5.1 Introduction

Literature (Simmons and Ward, 2020) and government statistics (DfE, 2017) show that white British working-class pupils persistently achieve the lowest grades at GCSE of any main ethnic group (Simmons and Ward, 2020; Lewis and Demie, 2015; Cassen and Kingdon, 2007). I am keen to gain an understanding of this issue for both professional and personal reasons. As explained in chapter one, the underachievement of many WBWC pupils is an ongoing concern in the LA where I work and is at the forefront of my target intervention work and a key performance indicator in the LA strategic plan. In addition, whilst I cannot claim to be working-class or of White British origin, I am deeply aware of what is feels like to be a 'fish out of water'. I explain the significance of this awareness later in this section, but it is important to point out that whilst presented separately, my personal and professional reasons for undertaking this piece of research are not entirely exclusive. That is, my background, personal experience, educational trajectory, voluntary work and my career amalgamate to inform my interest in the educational journeys of 'non-traditional' learners and indeed, this piece of research.

Within this chapter, I describe the methodology and methods used to complete my study. I begin this chapter with an outline of my positionality and the personal significance of this study. Next, I give a summary of the pilot study and the lessons learned from it and then I proceed to focus on the process of data collection and analysis. The chapter ends with a review of the ethical considerations that were central to the design and conducting this research.

5.2 My position within the research

The term 'positionality' describes the way in which a researcher views themselves and others and these views along with their values are considered with regards to the research process and outputs (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013). Through continuous reflection on my positionality during this research process it became clear that my biography, how and where I position myself, where I am socially positioned and the

beliefs which inform my understanding of the world have direct significance for my research and preferred choice of methodologies, methods and paradigms (Wellington et al., 2005). The assumptions held by any researcher are coloured by their class, religion, gender, principles, views, and race. However, some scholars (Creswell, 2013; Robson, 2011) agree that some views and assumptions held are neither fixed, static or immutable, they are dependent upon the circumstances, conditions and experiences particular to the time the research occurs. The summary provided below reflects my positionality at the time of carrying out and writing my thesis.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), choices of investigative areas made by researchers are based on their values and beliefs. Upon reflection, it has become clear how my 'habitus' and professional experiences have impacted on my research interest and the questions asked within. Savin-Badin and Major (2013) advise researchers to locate themselves in relation to the subject in order to accomplish positionality. I am conscious that my opinions and attitudes towards issues of discrimination, culture, class and education cannot be divorced from my knowledge of my father's life experiences and my own personal experiences of growing up as a black child in 1960's and 70's England. My father grew up in a rural area of Nigeria in relative poverty but in his early thirties moved to England and become a relatively 'successful' chemical engineer. Therefore, despite growing up in a 'financially comfortable' household, I did not consider myself middle-class. I often think it was more a case of 'could not' as opposed to 'did not', as it was clear to me at the time (and indeed now too) that it took more than financial security to be considered 'middle-class'. This is something that I remain aware of and has always contributed to my sense of 'otherness', as has the fact that I grew up being one of a handful of black pupils during my school years in the East of England. Being a clear 'minority', particularly at a young age, in an environment that highlighted and devalued my 'difference' led to feelings of being as 'a fish out of water'. Despite my achievements in education, employment and in my family life, these feelings remain, leading to self-doubt and thoughts of inadequacy (often referred to as imposter syndrome). It is from such experiences and perspectives that my identity, personality and beliefs developed, making me acutely sensitive to what I perceive as discrimination, injustice or inequality and has contributed to the way in which this piece of research was designed and carried out.

Clearly, 'research cannot be disembodied' (Sikes and Goodson, 2003, p32). Therefore, I acknowledge the possibility that my values, my social background and my perspective of social injustice will impact my thinking about the struggles of many WBWC pupil in the education system. I accept that my research cannot be value free and as such ensured that I 'turned a critical gaze' (Finlay and Gough, 2013 pg.3) towards myself throughout the research process. This process is described as reflexivity and involves the process of questioning my assumptions and beliefs. I will return to the concept of reflexivity after I provide an insight into my ontological and epistemological position.

5.3 My ontology, epistemology and paradigm

Positionality also describes an individual's world view which stems from their ontological and epistemological beliefs. Simply put, ontology is the study of 'being' and is concerned with the nature of reality, or the study of reality (Creswell, 2013). Ontology, according to Blaikie (2004) is the study of 'claims and assumptions that are made about the nature of social reality, claims about what exists, what it looks like, what units make it up and how these units interact with each other' (pg.59). One aim of this thesis is to determine how the lived experiences of a group of WBWC pupils could highlight the factors that contribute educational underachievement. Through the interview process, the WBWC pupils participating in this study have the opportunity to voice their views and perceptions. I believe that whilst the participants may share common characteristics (e.g. race, ethnicity, social class) each would have unique experiences and express different accounts of their subjective realities. Thus, my ontological position is that, no matter how diverse, all perspectives, experiences and interpretations shared through these varied voices, are meaningful properties that will be valuable and useful in answering the research questions posited in this thesis.

Within my research, I am required to make connections between my ontological stance and my epistemological assumptions – the way in which I develop valid knowledge. Epistemology can be described as the 'nature of the relationship between the knower and the would-be knower and what can be known' (Guba and Lincoln, 1998 pg.201). According to Cohen et al. (2017) epistemology is concerned with the nature, forms, possibilities and limitations of knowledge. Simply put, epistemology is about 'how we know, what we know' (Crotty, 1998 pg.8). I am aware that the kind of epistemological

assumptions I hold about knowledge deeply influences how I uncover knowledge of social behaviour (Cohen et al., 2017). That is, my epistemological assumptions significantly impact the decisions I make about the kind of method I use in my research. I see the knowledge WBWC pupils hold as personal, subjective and unique and as such believe the best way to gather such knowledge is by accessing and preserving detailed interpretations of the truth according to each WBWC pupil I interview. Together, my ontological and epistemological assumptions which I set out above make up my research paradigm.

A paradigm is a set of beliefs that 'represent a distillation of what we think about the world (but cannot prove)' (Guba and Lincoln, 1985 pg.15). These beliefs or world view act as a guide to research. Therefore, in line with my world view, I adopt the interpretive paradigm for this research. The main undertaking of the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The interpretive paradigm holds firmly to the theory that research can never be objectively observed from the outside. Therefore, given that I am seeking to understand educational achievement, I recognise my role as a researcher is to make every effort to 'understand, explain, and demystify social reality through the eyes' of my WBWC pupils (Cohen et al., 2017). According to Prasad (2018), 'human interaction is the starting point for developing knowledge about a social world' (pg.13), therefore the shared knowledge of the lived experiences, views and feeling of the participants in this study are instrumental in understanding factors that contribute to their educational outcomes. Nevertheless, I thought it important to consider an alternative approach to develop an understanding of the world in which WBWC pupils live and learn.

Positivism is often described as the scientific method of observation which focuses purely on gathering 'facts' that are subsequently measured empirically. Several authors (e.g. Mertens, 2005; Babbie, 1998; Donaldson, 1996; Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2015) believe positivism can also be applied to some areas of social research. However, I am very clear in my belief that all experiences and occurrences can be studied, translated and understood in different ways with realities being dependant on the intersubjectivity between people (Burgess et al., 2006). Due to this belief and the need to elicit findings about what some WBWC pupils think, feel and perceive, a positivist stance would be limiting and adverse to my ontological views.

Chapters three and four of my thesis highlight the inequality that is at the centre of the education system in England. According to Swartz (1997), Bourdieu saw the education system as ‘the principal institution controlling the allocation of status and privilege in contemporary societies’ (pg.189). Within education this control takes place through a hidden curriculum (Bowles and Gintis, 2002) which awards pupils differently on the basis of their cultural backgrounds ensuring that the dominant middle-class maintain their position and the WBWC know their place on the achievement scale. Despite the clear role that the education system plays in the reproduction of the forms of inequality that contribute to educational underachievement in working-class pupils, chapters three and four also brought to light an education and political system that attributes the low educational outcomes of many WBWC to their own ‘failure’ to act conscientiously with in relation to to their own education (Charlesworth, 2000). As Reay (2017) adamantly contends, it appears that many WBWC pupils have ‘not had a fair chance in education’ (pg.185). The aim of my research is to use the experiences of a group of WBWC pupils to highlight and develop a clearer understanding of the inequalities described above with a view to providing recommendations with the intention to bring about change for this group of pupils and ensure they finally get a fair chance in education.

This type of research which is particularly concerned with revealing issues tied to privilege, power, oppression and inequality so that they might be challenged and changed is described by Harvey (2011) as critical research. Sarantakos (2005) explains that critical researchers see the world as being ‘divided and in constant tension, dominated by the powerful, who oppress the people and use the state and its institutions as tools to achieve their purpose’ (pg.51). In an educational context, Griffiths (2009) describes critical research as that which aims at ‘understanding, uncovering, illuminating, and/or transforming how educational aims, dilemmas, tensions and hopes are related to social divisions and power differentials’ (np). It is probably due to the desire to both understand and change situations that scholars (e.g. Willis, 1997; Reay, 1995; Stahl, 2012) who focus on inequality and white-working class children and young people adopt a critical approach to their work. Similarly, given the focus of this study and my desire for social change for dominated and marginalised young people, I would describe myself as a critical researcher.

I have described this research as a qualitative study rooted within an interpretive paradigm; however, I have also introduced myself as a critical researcher. I was unaware how I would proceed without divorcing one approach from the other, however, I found the solution in the work of Tilley (2019), who explains that in order to:

> *'explore the complex issues that educators and educational authorities face to provide a socially just education for all students, educational researchers need to conduct qualitative research situated within an interpretivist paradigm and informed by critical theoretical perspectives' (pg.156).*

Furthermore, Burnell (2013) explains that the critical research paradigm is 'a step further from interpretivism, not content at interpreting the social world, the critical researcher aims to change it' (pg.91). Given that in addition to obtaining and interpreting the views of the participants in my research, I am also keen to use the knowledge gained to effect change for those WBWC pupils who have been systematically disadvantaged in education and society, I would say my research straddles the interpretive and the critical research paradigms.

5.4 Reflexivity

Upon my return to the concept of reflexivity, I make note of Sultana (2009) who advises of the importance of paying attention to reflexivity and the power relations that are characteristic of most research processes. Cohen et al. (2017) see reflexivity as a central component of qualitative research which requires an explicit self-assessment by the researcher about their positions and the way in which their positions may influence the design, implementation and explanation of the research data findings. My positionality sheds light on who I am (my personal background, beliefs, values and professional loyalties) and how this may affect the way in which I conduct, view and interpret my research. Reflexivity, in turn, is central to the research process, and involves a looking back at 'one's own knowing practices' (Charlesworth, 2000 pg.31). Reflexivity explains how I ensured that I critically examined and reflected on the knowledge of who I am at every step of the study in order to consider and reduce any potential prejudice.

Throughout this study, I remained aware that I was central to the collection and interpretation of data and how my thoughts, feelings, experiences, gender, racial and cultural background may influence the research. For example, I was aware that being a black African, middle-class woman who is significantly older than the 16-year-old WBWC participants could potentially influence the way in which the participants receive me or respond to any questions I asked. This became acutely apparent on two occasions during the interview process. First, when I asked a pupil about his future aspirations and he told me there was *'nothing to look forward to because all the blacks have taken all the good jobs',* and second, when I asked a pupil if 'class' made a difference to the way he was seen or treated at school, he replied *'what would you know'*. Whilst there is little I can do about my personal attributes, I made sure that I remained acutely aware of the manner in which I asked questions, was sensitive to both verbal and non-verbal responses, and respectful and understanding of pupil's views even when their responses appeared to be verging on rude or offensive.

Also, at the forefront of my awareness was my professional relationship with the PRU. Mercer (2007) describes the researcher who shares a particular characteristic with the researched as an insider, and anyone not sharing that particular characteristic as an outsider. I do not work at the Wallace Centre, however, the fact that I conduct the head teacher's performance management, carry out reviews and teacher observations within the centre may cause me to be regarded by some as an insider. Qualitative researchers (e.g. Thompson and Gunter, 2010; Dwyer and Buckle, 2009) have engaged in extensive debates about the advantages and disadvantages of being an 'inside' or 'outside' researcher. The word limit on this thesis will not allow an in-depth consideration of each argument but in summary there are the opposing views that researchers who are not from the communities they study can be neutral, detached observers (Merton, 1972) or that insider researchers are unable to clearly analyse areas in which they have an involvement. Nevertheless, Kerstetter (2012) tells his readers that 'recent research has attempted to move beyond a strict outsider/insider dichotomy to emphasize the relative nature of researchers' identities and social positions, depending on the specific research context' (pg.100). Indeed, Crossley et al. (2016) argue that the boundary between the inside and outside is less easy to draw as the identities of researchers can be multiple, flexible and changeable. For this piece of work, I cannot position myself as an insider nor an outsider, I am an outsider to the

pupils but an insider to the teachers. I can, however, position myself so that I am aware of any potential prejudice, make it known to readers and take all steps to limit its impact on my research.

5.5 The pilot study

Pilot studies are small scale studies that are used to evaluate the efficacy of research instruments that will later be used in a larger study and are described by Kim (2010) as being essential for the efficacy of the main studies that follow. Pilot studies help early researchers to be 'better informed and prepared to face the challenges that are likely to arise and more confident in the instruments to be used for data collection in the substantive study' (Malmqvist et al., 2019 pg.1). The reality of the words of Malmqvist et al. (2019) in relation to my study became evident in the pilot study as described below.

Considering the vulnerability and hard to reach nature of the pupils in the Wallace centre, I hoped that pilot interviews would highlight questions that were unsuitable, ambiguous or too complex. The interview questions were piloted on only four WBWC pupils in year 11 at the Wallace Centre. According to Frey (2018), the sample size of a pilot study only 'needs to be large enough to provide meaningful information about the aspects that are being assessed for feasibility' (pg.2), therefore, the number of pupils, though low, were sufficient for the purpose of the pilot study. Teachers were also to be interviewed in the actual study but were not included in the pilot. This was because there were only a few teachers who work directly with the selected group of pupils and it would have been be illogical to interview them twice using the same or similar questions. The pilot interviews were conducted at the same location where interviews in the main study would be held. When requesting a space to conduct interviews, I had stressed that it should in a location that is familiar to the pupils, convenient and easily accessible to both participant and researcher. It was also important that there would not be any interruptions which might undermine the confidentiality promised to the pupils, impact the interviews or reduce the clarity of the recording of the conversations.

During each interview pupils seemed willing to communicate; however, often non-verbal behaviours speak much louder than words. I noted that three of the four pupils began fidgeting and their responses became shorter and less detailed (and sometimes monosyllabic) as the interview progressed. I attributed this to the fact that the initial questions were shorter and less convoluted. At the start of the interviews, I had provided each participant with an estimate of how long the interview would take. This turned out to be an almost accurate estimation for one participant but others either asked to leave before the end of the questions or finished the interview well before the estimated time. In my desire to 'get answers to my questions', I had failed to take into consideration that the participants may not be as interested in the area of research as I was and may become bored with the process. Kim (2010) is clear that one purpose of a pilot study is to identify and modify questions so that they become broad enough for interviewees to narrate their experiences in a way that will aid researchers to acquire the data they need. Therefore, at the end of each interview, I asked each participant how they found the questions and if any were difficult to answer. While it was clear that a review of the questions was necessary, all the pupils said the process was 'alright'. Nevertheless, I refined the wording and length of the interview questions and the expected timing of the interviews themselves.

The advantage of carrying out a pilot study became very clear. Blaxter et al. (1996) warned that 'things never quite work as envisaged, even when they have been done many times before; they have a nasty habit of turning out very differently than expected' (pg.122). The pilot revealed some pertinent issues not only within the interview questions but also around processes. The pilot gave a forewarning of the lack of understanding of the ultimate need for privacy during the interview process. The room allocated for interviews had a glass wall, which was useful as this serves as a safety reassurance for both participants and the researcher. However, the room appeared to be used to store written resources, therefore, despite the notice on the door, staff continued to come in and out during the interview process. When staff came in pupils would stop talking or change the subject and would often find it difficult to pick up their train of thought when the member of staff left. It is unknown how much this affected the depth or honesty of the responses; however, it was a valuable lesson learned. This issue was discussed with both the headteacher and centre manager in a later meeting

and reassurances were given that a private room would be given, and staff reminded of the need for complete confidentiality and respect for the process.

I felt the pilot would provide a suitable opportunity to ‘practice’ analysing data. I began this process by transcribing the interview recordings. Reissman (1993) explains that the process of transcribing interview recordings can be a very time consuming, frustrating and at times boring activity. However, Braun and Clarke (2006) believe the transcription process ‘informs the early stages of analysis’ and enables the researcher to ‘develop a far more thorough understanding of the data’ (pg.8). Lapadat and Lindsey (1999) also made clear the benefits of personally transcribing interview data. These authors suggest the concentration needed to transcribe data may enable the close reading and interpretation skills needed to analyse the data. However, upon transcribing the interviews carried out in the pilot, I realised, the process was more time consuming than anticipated. Given my wide-ranging work and personal commitments, I decided to employ the services of a professional to undertake the transcription of the interview data collected for the main study. After making this decision, I resolved to read and re-read the transcriptions until I made sense of the data myself.

5.6 Participants and Sampling Framework

The PRU at the centre of this study is spread over several sites and caters for pupils in Key Stage 1 to 4 (5 – 16 year olds) who are ill and require individual or hospital tuition, are without school places or have been permanently excluded or are at risk of permanent exclusion from their mainstream schools. The largest number of pupils comes from those who have been excluded from mainstream school. The numbers of pupils fluctuate during each year but at the time the interviews for this study were carried out there were just under 180 pupils at the PRU in context. The PRU data showed that the percentage of pupils registered as being eligible for FSM was above average and there were almost three times as many boys as girls. White British pupils formed the second largest ethnic group in the PRU.

Participant samples in this study included WBWC pupils in between the ages of 14 and 16 and teachers at the PRU described above. These participants were selected using a non-probability sampling technique. A core characteristic of non-probability sampling

technique is that 'samples are based on the subjective judgement of the researcher rather than random selection' (Lund and Lund, 2012 n.p) There are several types of non-probability sampling techniques – the participants in this study were selected using purposive sampling which aims to ensure that participants selected are relevant to the research questions that are being posed. Within qualitative research all perspectives are worthy of study, therefore, I initially considered seeking the views of parents of WBWC pupils at the PRU. However, I decided against interviewing parents as they may have had negative experiences of education which could influence their responses about their children's education and dilute the understanding of the factors that impact the educational performance of the participants themselves.

5.6.1 Pupil Sample

A sample of eighteen pupils was chosen from the population of KS4 (14-16-year olds) pupils in the Wallace Centre using a non-probability selection technique (Robson, 2011). The sample did not represent all KS4 pupils but as discussed above, was chosen based on who will best provide answers to the research questions within this study. I requested from the headteacher a list of pupils in KS4 who were white, British, working-class, working below target and/or predicted to achieve less than the benchmark 5 A*- C grades. It is essential to note that, like Stahl (2014), I recognized that there are essential difficulties with identifying the working-class status of the pupil-participants. I am aware that there is 'no single scale of social class categories that is universally recognised' and that 'the categories are multiple and difficult to interpret' (Gillborn, 2009 pg.21). However, as explained in chapter one, for the purpose of this study, I adopt free school meal eligibility as a proxy for working-class. Thus, the pupils were also selected according to their FSM status.

The headteacher presented a list of 18 pupils, however, two were later expelled and one had begun serving a custodial sentence in a Youth Offender Institution (YOI). A total of fifteen WBWC pupils were invited to participate in the study, however, only 12 returned the consent forms and a further two did not turn up on the day scheduled for their interview. I made several attempts to set up further interviews, but the pupils were continuously absent or unavailable. Most of the pupils at the PRU had a history of challenging behaviour or disengagement (a term which covers long term or frequent

absenteeism). The absence of some of the pupils was therefore always a possibility, although I questioned how much of the unavailability was (despite consent) related to a reluctance to participate in the interview process.

Table 3: Biographical description of the pupil participants in this study

Participant	Gender	Ethnicity	Eligible for free school meals	Programme or course at the Pupil Referral Unit
Gill	F	White	Yes	Hospitality
Jenny	F	White	Yes	Hair and Beauty
James	M	White	Yes	Hospitality
Brian	M	White	Yes	Motor Mechanics
Chloe	F	White	Yes	Motor Mechanics
Mark	M	White	Yes	Construction
Steve	M	White	Yes	Hospitality
Greg	M	White	Yes	Construction
Jake	M	White	Yes	Motor Mechanics
Sharon	F	White	Yes	Hospitality

The names above are pseudonyms for the protection of the pupils' identity. All other descriptions are true.

As can be seen from table 3 above, only, ten out of the fifteen pupils invited took part in the interview process. I was concerned that the reduced size of the sample would weaken my data. However, advice written by noted qualitative methodologists (e.g. Guest et al., 2009; Adler and Adler, 2012; Morse, 2000) indicates that for a qualitative study such as this – where the population can be hard to access - between six and twelve participants are considered adequate. A methods review by Baker and Edwards (2012) record contributions from early career researchers (Ben Baumberg, University of Kent and Linda Sandino, University of the Arts) which suggest that the acceptable number of interviewees 'depends' on a wide range of aspects. Flick (2008) suggests the research question is 'one aspect and the accessibility of potential interviewees another' (pg.27). Aspects such as funding, theoretical perspective, academic discipline, or research ethics committee requirements were also considered as important aspects that may determine the 'acceptable' number or participants. Another

early career reflection provided by Tracy Jenson (Newcastle University) warned against believing the phrase 'more always means better, more valid and more robust' and against pre-emptively assuming gathering copious amounts of data will ward off any imagined criticism from readers of the final thesis.

The contributions from the above researchers allayed my concerns as did the work of some seasoned academics who used small-scale studies to explore large-scale practices such as classed inequality in education. A key example is Willis' (1977) landmark ethnographic study of twelve working-class schoolboys in the British Midlands. Despite his small sample, Willis' (1977) study initiated the perception that working-class boys can produce a gendered and classed culture that leads them into working-class jobs and according to Dolby et al. (2004), Willis' (1977) study is one of the most cited sociological texts in education studies. With a similarly small sample of sixteen schoolboys in Belfast, Ingram (2009) discussed and contributed to the theory of institutional habitus, whilst Fuller (2008) used a core sample of twenty-five students to carry out a study which highlights the effect of social class on student aspirations. As is apt, these studies emphasise the importance of the quality of the study over the quantity of participants. Thus, I ensured I took close notice of the lessons I learned through the pilot so that my participants felt as comfortable as possible to share their stories with me in an open a detailed way. Upon reflection, it appears my initial fears were unfounded as the data produced from the interviews with ten pupils turned out to provide rich and deep insights into their perceptions and experiences.

5.6.2 Teacher Sample

In order to provide a range of views, five teachers formed the teachers' sample. This was a small purposive sample. The only criterion used to select the sample of teachers was that they had to be directly involved in the teaching, learning and development of the pupil-participants. Teachers were briefed about the nature and purpose of the research before being asked to confirm if they were willing to participate. Those that agreed were later given a copy of the information sheet and consent form (appendices A and B). Prior to the start of the interviews, teachers were reassured of the confidential nature of the interviews and encouraged to ask any questions or voice any concerns. All interviews were held in a small classroom that had been made available for the

process. The interviews were tabled to last approximately 45 minutes, the times varied for each interview, with the longest being 50 minutes and the shortest 30 minutes.

Table 2: Teacher Demographics

Teacher	Previously taught in mainstream	Subjects taught at the PRU	Gender	Ethnicity
Teacher 1	Yes	Hospitality	Female	Black
Teacher 2	Yes	Construction	Male	White
Teacher 3	No	Construction	Male	White
Teacher 4	Yes	Motor Vehicles	Male	White
Teacher 5	No	Hospitality	Female	White

Table 2 above outlines the demographics of the teachers who participated in this study. Each teacher, regardless of the subject they teach has regular contact with the pupils and is familiar with their educational and personal journey and aspirations.

The overall sample for this study was small as it was made up of five teachers and ten pupils. It is important for me to state that with such a small sample, I am not in a position (neither was it my intention) to generalise this research. My aim in this piece of research is to gain in-depth understanding of educational underachievement in some WBWC pupils from the perspective of a group of WBWC pupils and teachers in a PRU, thus elucidating the particular and specific (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2007). Therefore, I cannot and do not purport that the findings of this study represents the position of all white British working-class pupils in England. Whilst I state that the knowledge I offer in this piece of research is contextual and situated, my aim is that this knowledge provides an insight into how social inequalities are reproduced in education and the large part these inequalities play in the educational underachievement of many WBWC pupils.

5.7 Method of data collection

Recent and historical literature and government statistics have evidenced the ongoing educational underachievement of many WBWC pupils in comparison to their more affluent peers. In this study, I explore this issue through the voice of such pupils and their teachers in an inner London PRU. Kumar (2019) advises that if an individual is

‘interested in studying values, beliefs, understandings, perceptions and meanings’ a qualitative research methodology would be more appropriate (pg.171). Unlike quantitative research methods which gather data in an objective, conclusive and numerical form, qualitative methods enable the researcher to develop an understanding of the social reality of individuals, groups and cultures (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). In fact, Holloway (1997) says that qualitative methods are valuable in their ability to bring the voices of participants to life. Critical research is not tied to any single research method but is sympathetic towards methods that allow the social world to be seen from the viewpoint of those that are marginalized (Tilley, 2019). Thus, while I am aware of other methods of data collection (e.g. observation, questionnaires and surveys), I chose interviews as a method to capture data that will provide answers to the reasons why many WBWC pupils underachieve in education.

Interviews are powerful instruments which enable the researcher ‘to understand the meanings that everyday activities hold for people’ (Marshall and Rossman, 2006, pg.102). Interviews take several forms. They may be completely structured, unstructured or fall somewhere in-between both forms. Given that my aim is to gain comprehensive data about the pupils’ experiences of education and educational underachievement, I felt a tightly structured, quantitative interview technique would not be appropriate. Whilst Hitchock and Hughes (2016) claim unstructured interviews are widely used in education research and specifically identify them as being valuable in highlighting both staff and pupil experiences of the school and curriculum change, I felt this method would also be inappropriate for this study. This is because, as evidenced in the pilot I carried out for this current study, many WBWC pupils in the PRU require a little more direction than the unstructured interview offers. This is because (also evidenced in the pilot) they may either provide minimal information through monosyllabic responses or at the other extreme go so far off point that there is a total diversion from the actual issue. Having said that, I felt it important that I give the pupils enough time to ‘discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express situations from their own point of view’ (Cohen et al., 2017, pg.299). As a result I decided to carry out semi-structured interviews as this approach combines structure and flexibility to provide a platform from which the experiences of some WBWC pupils in education can be shared and explored.

Literature (e.g. Kvale, 2009; Klenke, 2008; Hitchcock, 1995) identifies semi-structured interviews as those which tend to be more favoured by educational researchers. In particular, a large number of scholars (e.g. Wyness and Lang, 2016; Stahl, 2016; Keddie, 2015; Strand, 2014; McCluskey et al., 2014; Pillay et al., 2013; Mainwaring and Hallam, 2010; Pirrie et al., 2011; Reay, 2001) have been seen to favour the use of semi-structured interviews to gather data in their research into the relationship between educational underachievement and class. These scholars may have used semi-structured interviews in their studies because they provide participants with the opportunity to 'discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view' (Cohen, et al. 2017 pg.349). Also relevant to this study is the fact that the flexibility of this method may allow participants to bring up factors or issues that had not been expected. For example, in a study of pupil attitudes to vocational education, Cullingford (2004) relied on a series of semi-structured interviews to determine the effects of school influence on the forming of attitudes and opinions of young people. This method afforded participants the opportunity to reveal information and elaborate on their subjective experiences that were of importance to them but had not been considered significant by the researcher. The semi-structured interview adequately enables the researcher to interpret participant experiences from their standpoint and using their own words and expressions. Thus, this method is considered suitable for the collection of qualitative data that is required to explain educational underachievement in many WBWC pupils.

As described above semi-structured interviews have been frequently used in qualitative educational underachievement. However, it must be noted they do not come without their challenges. Interviews in general require co-operation and honesty but as Maguire (2008) points out, participants are not always willing to share the information that the interviewer is seeking, and as such may provide insincere responses. This was a possibility in my study as questions relating to class, poverty and parental levels of education and occupational status may be sensitive for some pupils and for others may be an opportunity to misrepresent their circumstances in order to 'look better'. Whilst I cannot provide any certainties that all responses to my interview questions were honest, I can confirm that most pupils fully cooperated and provided in-depth responses to my interview questions. In addition, Robson (2011), Bell and Waters

(2018) and Wilkinson and Birmingham (2003) advise researchers that using interviews to gather data is notoriously time consuming. This is particularly so because transcribing interviews is a lengthy process with a one-hour interview typically taking an experienced transcriber seven hours to type up (Kvale, 1996). The pilot undertaken for this current study revealed the advice of the above scholars to be justified. The transcription process was very time consuming and as such I made the decision to employ the services of a professional to transcribe the data collected for the main study.

The interviews carried out in this study were audio taped. This was to ensure that participant's accounts were reported verbatim. Literature (Opdenakker, 2006; Sullivan, 2010) explains that an audio record provides a true narration of the interview and enables the researcher to pay full attention to the interview process. On the other hand, as Czerniawski (2007) confirms, audio taping interviews can sometimes make interviewees nervous. As such, I made sure the participants were informed in advance and reminded at the interview that their conversations were being recorded. I told them what would happen to the recording and reassured them of the utmost confidentiality. All the participants were willing to be recorded and none exhibited any nervousness or discomfort. As indicated above, the interviews were later transcribed by a professional in the intelligent verbatim style, which 'omits the 'erms' and 'ahs' of speech' (Burnell, 2013 pg.98). Whilst I knew that I did not have the time to personally transcribe all my interviews, I had an element of concern around handing the work over to a another individual (even though he was a professional transcriber). This was because literature (Robson, 2011; Braun and Clarke, 2006) made it clear that the ability of a researcher to be fully embedded with the data involves many hours of careful and repeated listening. Therefore, I was concerned the use of a professional will somewhat impact the sense I made of the data. My concerns were unjustified as by reading and re-reading the transcripts whilst listening to the recordings allowed me to thoroughly familiarise myself with the data. This process also gave me the opportunity to check the transcription for accuracy as there is always a possibility of human error during the transcription process. My check only revealed two errors', and these were on the same word which was misheard as something similar. Whilst these errors would not alter the data or the meaning and understanding it offers, these errors were corrected as it is important that the words of the participants are reported as accurately as possible.

5.8 The data analysis process

As a new researcher, I entered my design stage with a rudimentary awareness of data analysis. However, I was aware that the process of analysis involves 'making sense of the data in terms of the participants' definitions of the situation' and that any method I chose to 'make sense' of my data must abide by the 'principle of fitness for purpose' (Cohen et al., 2017, pg.522). The difficulty in deciding which method of analysis is fit for purpose lies in the fact that:

> *'there is no one kind of qualitative data analysis, but rather a variety of approaches, related to the different perspectives and purposes of researchers. To distinguish and assess these different perspectives fully would be a formidable and perhaps rather fruitless task, particularly as the boundaries between different approaches and their relation to what researchers actually do when analysing data is far from clear' (Dey, 1993 pg.1)*

In order to understand the way in which the pupil's lived experiences may explain their educational underachievement, I required a method that reflected my epistemological position (Robson, 2011) and would enable me to interpret, explain and understand the data that emerged from the interviews. I considered content analysis (which describes the process of categorizing, clarifying and summarizing data (Dudovskiy, 2018)) as a method of data analysis because it has frequently been used as a qualitative analytic method in education research. It also has an unobtrusive approach to data and provides 'insight into complex models of human thought and language use' (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005, pg.6). However, content analysis tends to 'quantify qualitative data through a statistical analysis of elements of the data' (Boyatzis, 1998 pg.161), thus giving it the appearance of being 'all about making valid, replicable and objective inferences' (Prasad, 2008 pg.175). Content analysis also appears to be too liberal to draw out meaning inferences about the experiences implied in a study as its aims to 'describe data as an abstract interpretation' (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005, pg.6). Given that this is a qualitative study and I am interested in the meaning and context of my participants words, as opposed to the frequency in which they occurred in the interviews, I decided not to use content analysis as a method of data analysis.

I eventually chose to use Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis as a method to analyse the data collected within this study. Thematic analysis is similar to content analysis - they both include searching for patterns within data (Wilkinson, 2000). However, where content analysis focuses on surface information in the data, thematic analysis can potentially provide 'a rich and detailed yet complex account of data' (Braun and Clarke, 2006 pg.6).

The next section introduces Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis and outlines the steps I took to analyse the data that emerged from my interviews with the participants who took part in this study.

5.8.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a flexible research tool and is described by Roulston (2001) as one of the most widely used qualitative analysis methods in the social sciences. Before I provide the details of my process of analysis, it is important to note that there are different orientations within thematic analysis. Thematic analysis can be used in an inductive, data driven, 'bottom up' way, where codes and themes emerge upon analytical interaction with the data, or in a deductive, theory driven, 'top down' way whereby the analysis starts with pre-existing codes (Robson, 2011). Guest et al. (2012) emphasise the importance of choosing an approach that is governed by the primary analytic purpose – which in the case of my study is to explore, identify and explain the reasons why many WBWC pupils underachieve in education. Therefore, I determined that an inductive approach was more suited to my research because I wanted the codes and themes to emerge organically from the content of the data.

Whilst the themes were 'data driven' it is also important to acknowledge the active part I played in the discovery of these themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasize that 'researchers cannot free themselves from their theoretical and epistemological commitments' – that is, 'data is not coded in a vacuum' (pg.12). Thus, throughout the process I remained mindful that my ethical standpoint, research values, knowledge and presumptions will unavoidably influence the process of identifying and reporting of

themes. Additionally, during the process of analysis, it became apparent that many of the emerging themes and sub-themes could be identified in the educational underachievement literature I had read. Whilst it was not my initial aim to use a deductive approach, I found myself using pre-existing theories, opinions and concepts to illuminate my findings.

The process of analysis was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6 phases of thematic analysis:

Phase 1: Familiarising myself with the data

All the interviews were recorded on a digital Dictaphone. As explained earlier in this section, I employed the services of a professional to undertake the transcription of the interview data. Once the transcripts were returned, the first step I took was to read and re-read the transcripts in order to ensure that I was familiar with the data. I also listened to the recordings several times. During the process of reading each transcript, I highlighted words and phrases that I felt were of interest and important to my research. Braun and Clarke (2006) separate the familiarisation and initial coding phases; however, I felt there was no clear demarcation between the reading process and the point where I began to recognize frequently used words or phrases.

Phase 2: Generating initial codes

According to Saldana (2013), 'a code is a word, phrase or sentence that represents aspects of a data or captures the essence or features of a data' (pg.17). Phase 2 is the point where interesting features of the data (explicit or underlying) should be coded in a 'systematic fashion across the entire data set' (Braun and Clarke, 2006 pg.87). There are several coding programmes available[31], however, I opted to code manually as I believed this would heighten my familiarity with the data. During this phase, I continued to highlight words or sentences that interviewees had repeated or indeed anything I felt was important to my study. All the initial ideas that emerged from this process were recorded on each transcript. As with the first stage, I felt that there was considerable overlap between phase 2 and 3. Maguire and Delahunt (2017) explain that this overlap is common with small data sets and does not negatively interfere with the process of analysis.

[31] See Kelle (2004) for discussions on computer assisted analysis for qualitative analysis.

Phase 3: Searching for themes

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), this phase 'involves sorting the different codes into potential themes and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes' (pg.19). At this point, I had a lengthy list of codes from which I selected those I thought were important or linked and began sorting them into broad themes. Some codes easily came together to become a theme, such as the several codes that related to pupil-participants feelings about their working-class background - the respect their background commands, their opinions of how they are seen in education and society and the way in which their parents and other relatives view education – which were collated into a theme called social class. On the other hand, some codes combined to form over-lapping themes. For example, there were several codes that related to my pupil-participant's feelings about their previous and current place of education, which were collated into separate themes of Pupil Referral Unit and Mainstream School. During this phase I noted that some codes and themes were not as 'significant' as they initially appeared and as such were either removed or downgraded to a sub-theme. The outcome was an initial thematic map (Appendix E) which showed six main themes and several sub-themes.

Phase 4: Reviewing themes

This phase consists of two levels. I completed the first level by re-reading all the extracts that are related to the codes in each theme to ensure that there were no contradictions and the data formed a coherent pattern. It was during this phase that I realized that the data extracts in the behaviours and feelings theme could fit into multiple themes. I therefore split the codes into other themes where they fit better. Additionally, there were a few codes that related to the views of pupils and teachers on pupils' attitudes and perceptions towards school, learning and subject offer or choice. I initially split these codes in-between three different themes (mainstream school, PRU and vocational learning. Maguire and Delahunt (2017) write that themes should be coherent and distinct from each other; therefore, I reworked these themes to develop a new 'learning in school' theme, thus ensuring that my themes 'adequately capture the contours of the coded data' (Braun and Clarke, 2006 pg.21). The developed thematic map can be seen in appendix F.

I then moved on to level two. Here Braun and Clarke (2006) explain the importance of multiple readings of the data to confirm that the themes align with the data. Following an iterative process of going backwards and forwards between themes and codes, it became clear that *mainstream school* and *Pupil Referral Unit* could be merged into a single theme (Education Setting) without reducing the sense of what the data was conveying. Through this review process, I developed the right number of themes and integrated/ merged some sub-themes to produce a thematic map that meaningfully captured and told a coherent story about my data.
Appendix G shows the reviewed thematic map.

Phase 5: Defining and naming themes

It is during this phase that Braun and Clarke (2006) say the researcher should 'define and further refine' in order to identify the 'essence of what each theme is about (as well as the themes overall) and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures' (pg.22). Research shows that most pupils from WBWC families are more likely to underachieve in education than their middle-class peers. Many researchers (e.g. Reay, 2017; Travers, 2017; Stahl, 2014; Demie and Lewis, 2011; Ingram, 2009; Reay, 2009) argue that a pupil's class background has a significant effect on their educational achievement. Contrarily, Rutter et al. (2011) believes that schools have a greater propensity to make a difference in the educational underachievement of pupils. I believe it is difficult to make a clear division between the 'outside factors' described by Reay (2009) and the 'inside factors' described by Rutter et al. (2011). However, I also believe that this 'divide' brings clarity and comprehension to the four themes laid out in the final thematic map. Thus, the final thematic map (Appendix H) stresses the divide described above, whilst also highlighting how in-school and out-of-school factors impact each other to influence educational underachievement in many WBWC pupils.

Phase 6: Producing the report

This final phase involves the 'selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of these selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature and producing a scholarly report of the analysis' (Braun and Clarke, 2006 pg.35). The next two chapters of this thesis present a concise and coherent analytical report and discussion on the findings from the data as guided.

5.10 Ethical Considerations

This research was designed and conducted following the ethical guidelines provided by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) ensuring the study was undertaken in a manner that would safeguard the privacy, and self-esteem of the pupils who participated in the study. As required, ethical approval for this research was sought and obtained from the University of East London Research Ethics Committee (Appendix C).

Pupils who participated in this research were of school age and possessed a range of vulnerabilities. Therefore, it was imperative that particular care was taken to ensure pupils and teachers were completely aware of what the research involved, how it will be used, to whom it will be reported and why their participation was necessary. Voluntary informed consent was obtained from both pupils and staff prior to the start of the research. BERA (2018) stresses consent needed to be secured without duress as such the participants were informed of their right to refuse to participate before the start of the interviews. In addition, within the request for consent there was the reassurance that participants could withdraw from the research at any point during the interview process without any repercussions.

All participants were given participant information sheets and consent forms and were given the opportunity to ask questions about the research process. All pupil-participants were advised to speak to the headteacher of the Wallace Centre if they had any additional questions or concerns that they either forgot or did not wish to ask or share at the time we met. Majority of the pupil-participants appeared to be at ease with the interview process. However, during the interviews I monitored their body language for any signs of distress or discomfort with the view to ensuring that I would promptly act to either put them at ease or terminate the interview if necessary.

Researchers planning to interview children below the age of 16 are required to seek parental consent and if within school environment, consent from other gatekeepers must also be sought. The need to acquire consent from a number of gatekeepers has been criticized by Danby and Farrell (2004) for being too adult centred. This argument cannot be explored further in this thesis due to the limited word count; yet, it is one

which I deem important. I considered the probable impact on my research if pupils were willing to participate but parents had refused consent. The pupils who participated in this research were 15 -16-year olds with a clear view and perspective of their lived experiences. I completely believe in a pupil's right to be heard and the utmost relevance of pupil voice, but I also firmly believe in the need to safeguard their wellbeing and uphold their privacy. Whilst not written for researchers in England, I believe the Australian national ethics guidelines (2007, pg.56) seem to provide an answer. The guidelines state that 'an ethical review body may approve research to which only the young person consents if it is satisfied that he or she are mature enough to understand and consent and not vulnerable through immaturity in ways that would warrant additional consent from a parent or guardian' (np). Nevertheless, I received parental consent for pupils who agreed to participate in my study of the educational underachievement in many WBWC pupils.

Confidentiality was discussed with all participants. All participants were given the assurance that their responses would be kept confidential. However, it was explained that if an issue which contravenes policies of safety, is illegal in nature or suggests the pupil is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm (NSPCC, 2010) comes to light, the confidentiality agreement will be waved, and the necessary authorities informed.

5.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed my positionality and outlined the qualitative methodology I used to complete this study. I decided on a qualitative approach because it is typified by its interest in how an individual unravels and understands their social world. A thematic analysis of the data from semi-structured interviews held with ten pupils and five teachers produced four main themes: Educational Setting, Teaching and Learning, Social Class and Aspirations

Chapters six and seven each examine two of the above four main themes. Each chapter culminates with a discussion of the findings resulting from pupil and teacher qualitative data.

Chapter 6 - In-School Factors: Findings and Discussion

6.1 Introduction

In analysing the qualitative interview data from pupils and teachers[32], four themes emerged. This chapter begins with an examination of two (Education Setting and Curriculum and Teaching) of these themes and culminates with a discussion of my findings. In chapter three, we saw how the education system operates as ‘an enormous academic sorting out the educational winners from the losers’ (Reay, 2017 pg.26). Literature has shown that the sifting described by Reay (2017) is enabled through hidden curriculum (Bowles and Gintis, 2002). Whilst the hidden curriculum is unwritten and unacknowledged, it is usually enacted through a range of ‘in-school factors’ (Shapira-Lischinsky, 2018) or factors which fall ‘within the school’s nexus of control’ (Bertolini et al., 2012). The two themes and their associated sub-themes that emerged from the data encapsulate the significance of teacher relationships, school climate, teaching practices and a flexible curriculum on the educational underachievement of many WBWC pupils. These themes and their subthemes are examined below.

6.2. Theme 1: Education Setting

‘Education setting’ emerged as a significant theme because nearly all pupil-participants made repeated reference to how the *‘prison like’* environment and ‘*disrespectful’* and ‘*judgy*’ teachers in their previous mainstream school, negatively impacted their attitude towards school and their engagement with education. In contrast, most pupil-participants saw the Wallace Centre (WC) as a more ‘*relaxed’* environment staffed by more amenable teachers. Thus, this section will examine ‘education setting’ under two sub themes: teacher relationship with pupils and school climate.

[32] I did not make any amendments or corrections to the spelling and grammar in data excerpts used in chapters 6 and 7. This was to ensure that the utterances of the participants and their meanings were accurately portrayed and understood.

6.2.1 Sub-theme 1.1: Teacher relationships with pupils

A positive teacher-pupil relationship emerged from the data as an important factor that influences school engagement and attendance in WBWC pupils. In responding to the questions: '*Are there any differences between your experience at your previous school and the Wallace Centre'* and '*would you say your teachers have had a big influence on the way you engage with education?*' there was high consensus amongst the pupil-participants that teachers in mainstream schools did not like them and frequently looked for an opportunity to '*have a go'*. Greg felt teachers made their dislike of him very clear. He believes this was especially because he is '*white'* and seemingly '*dumb*'. Greg explained that '*teachers, especially them Asian lot, couldn't stand me…..didn't give a fuck if I was learning or not… cos I am white and they think I'm dumb'*. James echoed Greg's views when talking about his mainstream schoolteachers:

> *'They thought they're better than me, was always having a go about my hair and my shoes, everything, you get me?'….. 'one teacher, Mr A, yeah, he always shouting in my face and dissing my work, yeah.. no respect, you get me?*' (James)

Brian also commented on his negative relationship with his previous head of year:

> *He was a dick, ahh man sorry. He hated me from the start. He called my dad in nearly every week… most of the time I hadn't done anything, he always had an excuse to give me a punishment. He hates all white boys but lets the girls and blacks off. Can't stand the man….. I was so made up when I got out of there… yeah. Best thing.'* (Brian)

Chloe went to the same mainstream school and was in the same year group as Brian and had a similarly negative relationship with the school's headteacher. Chloe told me that:

> *I really hated my head of year.. he was racist and snobby. Didn't like anyone who wasn't rich and smart. He really didn't like Brian (laugh), he thought he was a wasteman. We really wanted out …it's not just him … they're all the same…they only like the clever ones.. or the blacks'* (Chloe)

Like James, Steve also felt regularly '*dissed*'. He told me that some teachers '*were only interested in the posh geeks, whenever we get stuff wrong, they shout so*

everyone can hear and you feel bad'. In fact, at some point during their interviews all the pupils in my study referred to the way in which they felt their mainstream teachers had '*disrespected*' them or made them feel '*bad*'. This was either by shouting, making disparaging comments about their appearance, ability or future prospects. Accounts from my pupil-participants show that shouting, for them, represents a lack of respect and reinforces their feelings (evident in the above utterances) of being of less value than their peers from different ethnic or more affluent backgrounds. Responses from Chloe and James highlight how they felt their mainstream teachers were '*snobby*' and felt they were '*better than us'*, whilst Steve's comments expose his 'anger' at the way in which his mainstream teachers made him feel as if he *'shouldn't be there'* because he '*isn't good enough'*.

When I asked the pupil-participants if they thought teachers had an influence on the way they engage with education, in particular, Steve and James expressed how being shouted at largely contributed to their reluctance to attend the classes of the teachers that regularly shouted at them. A further three pupil-participants said some teachers in their previous school made them *'hate'* going in to school or *'hate'* going to their lessons and as such they found ways to escape school and class:

> *'I really hated that Mr A. He got on to me for everything. I knew that Mr A would send me home if I came without the right uniform so I was always wearing the wrong shoes or would dye my hair a funny colour (laugh)'* (James)
>
> *'I couldn't hack Miss X, she was really horrible, rude and just didn't like me. I think she was jealous of me. I had her twice a week so I just wouldn't go in when I had her. Hated her lessons and hated her more… She didn't want me there so.. yeah* (Gill)
>
> *'Oh my days, you have no idea. Have you heard Miss Y's voice? (makes whining nasal sound and laughs). I hate all of it. I used to dream about her going on about how bad I am and how bad my work is'* (Chloe)

The above three quotes show that the relationship between mainstream teachers and many WBWC pupils is largely unconstructive and has a negative influence on their level of attendance, engagement with learning and subsequent educational outcomes.

Contrastingly, most of my pupil-participants described positive relationships with teachers at the Wallace Centre resulting in improved attendance and engagement in education. For example, in contrast to the pupil-participants views of *'screw faced'* mainstream teachers, teachers at the Wallace Centre were described as *'fun'*, *'easy'* and able to *'have a laugh'*. Whilst in agreement with other pupil-participants that these behaviours resulted in more positive teacher-pupil relationships, two pupils were critical of the these '*easy*' behaviours:

> *'the teachers in my old school was always shouting at me and didn't give a toss, but this lot are just fake, they're always smiling and let you get away with everything. That's alright, it makes my life easy but I know they just want us to get through the day without any beef. They don't really care if you don't come to class and fail or anything like that. Just like the others….none of em care, so why should I? … I'm not gonna pass anything here… defo'* (Jenny)

Sharon also told me that she was:

> *'not really happy to be honest.. it feels nice here the teachers are alright, they are friendly and don't really stress that much and aren't too bothered, but that's not going to help me. They don't push at all. Smiley face isn't going to help me pass. Really…..That's for wasters really…it's embarrassing'* (Sharon)

Jenny and Sharon are highlighting what they see as a lack of interest on the part of the PRU teachers. Both pupil-participants felt that the relaxed and approachable behaviours of teachers at the WC reflected their lack of care and was not in their best interest as they believe a '*not pushing*' friendly attitude will '*not help*' their educational outcomes. The feelings of Jenny and Sharon are inconsistent with those identified in the studies of Tate et al. (2017), Pennacchia (2016) and Michael and Frederickson (2013) which describe positive and less hierarchical teacher-pupil relationships as key practices that have proven to be effective in facilitating an increase achievement for pupils in PRUs. As in the case of many PRUs, the duality of establishing caring supportive relationships with WBWC pupils who mostly arrive at the PRU carrying the burden of a history of negative school experiences, whilst also enforcing the discipline required to 'succeed' in education remains challenging.

Before I present the next sub-theme, I return to the earlier statements from four WBWC pupil-participants who understood some mainstream teacher's negative behaviours to be based on their dislike of white pupils. The above pupil responses indicated clear perceptions of differential treatment from the teachers based on their race. The repeated occurrence of race in the participants responses was unexpected. This was partly because my review of educational underachievement literature (summarised in chapter three) found many studies that focus on the effect of racial bias on the achievement of black and ethnic minority pupils (Wallace, 2017; Gillborn, 2016; McLean, 2017; Crozier, 2005; Troyna, 1984) but none on the impact of what is described as inverted or reversed racism (Halse, 2017 and Van Dijk, 1992) on the educational outcomes of WBWC pupils. This is not to say that the perceptions of the pupil-participants are unfounded or to diminish the impact of these perceptions on their experience of school. In fact, whilst not a re-occurring response from many participants the notion of race frequently appeared in Chloe's responses about her experience in mainstream school and her relationship with her peers:

> *'We didn't have beef with them' (Chloe)*
>
> 'Who?' *(TS)*
>
> *'The black kids, I just didn't want to be friends with 'em, but there were loads in my old school. I really didn't like it… or them. Everything was about them. We had loads of arguments in that black month. I always got the blame.'* (Chloe)

I had not anticipated the directness of Chloe's response and found myself almost wanting to take the conversation further down the path of exploring her attitude to black people such as myself and examining how this impacts her relationship with her teachers and peers in school. During this study, I remained steadfastly mindful that 'reflexive practice should constitute a process of recognizing the difference your differences make' (Reay, 1996 pg.443), however, utterances such as Chloe's made me deliberate whether I could ignore what I perceived as racism and be truly reflexive. Indeed, it is almost impossible to quantitatively measure what Rhodes (1994) refers to as 'race of interviewer effects' and I do not know how/if Chloe's or similar negative

statements from other pupil-participants about their black peers influenced my research. However, my positionality has been clearly stated and like Travers (2017), I embrace this occurrence as one of my experiences of being a researcher.

6.2.2 Sub-theme 1.2: School climate

For majority of the pupil-participants, the disciplinary practices of each institution are important factors that impact their engagement with education. Most of the pupil-participants felt mainstream schools were overly harsh, especially when it came to '*kids who just don't get it'* (James). When asked about the main challenges he faced at school, Mark told me that he '*was always in the wrong… nothing I did was right.. I got sent home for every little thing…. I nearly got excluded for breathing'.* The criticisms about the disciplinary practices in mainstream schools were also articulated by other pupils. For example, Chloe told me that she felt '*suffocated by the rules'*. She explained:

> *they (mainstream school) had rules for everything… like everything. Especially my hair, homework, even whistling……. I remember one time I got to school about 15 minutes late and it was a madness. It kicked off and I got sent back home. (Chloe)*

Greg also said:

> *'Ahhh, man… the thing I hated most was that uniform, the blazer was proper naff, just made you feel like you was in the army or something. I never wore the blazer…..Just really hated it… they (teachers) were always like, tuck in your shirt, do up your button. I never did that either …. It worked out good though cos I kept getting sent out of class' (Greg)*

The pupil responses above show that many of the pupil-participants had difficulty complying with the rules in mainstream school. The responses indicate that this difficulty led to repeated punishments such being sent back home or temporary removal from the classroom. In response to my request for a description of 'behaviours that contribute to the educational underachievement of WBWC pupils', Teacher 2

claimed that the pupils' '*refusal to obey the rules'* whilst in mainstream school was '*a deliberate act to get out of lessons and school'.* This teacher explained that:

> *'those children (WBWC) cannot survive in mainstream education. They don't deal well with boundaries…they don't actually deal well with anything school wise and kick off at the slightest perceived slight….. we know what we are getting so we are prepared and have a much different, more tolerant and understanding behaviour policy…. It is hard work without the strict rules but it works…. Most of the time' (Teacher 2)*

In response to the same question, Teacher 3 stated that:

> '*most of the white children are here because of their continuous refusal to obey the rules at school. They wouldn't attend, start fights… everything the school asked them not to do, they did… I am not sure why. They're only marginally better here but better'* (Teacher 3)

Some teachers informed me that they feel the continuous disregard for the rules in mainstream school were a rouse to get out of lessons. However, the pupil-participant's responses indicate that they were reacting to rules which, in their opinion, targeted them personally, felt unfamiliar, irrelevant and difficult to conform to. On the other hand, as the quotations below show, the pupil-participants found the rules at the Wallace Centre to be flexible and accommodating and responded with improved attendance and more positive feelings about their education, ability and self.

> *'they understand stuff better here (WC). I don't get stressed for being late…and can wear what I like ….yeah, they get it. Life.' (Chloe)*

> *'We ain't got a uniform here, the teachers dress like us…you feel grown up like.. Feel better about yourself … don't really feel like a poor loser' (Greg)*

> *'I don't think no one is out for you here, you get me, everywhere is just calm, you don't feel like you're in prison, you can be yourself, you get me,…… I don't even mind coming, it's calm, no one is getting on me'* (James)

The findings above draw this study back to the work of Bourdieu. According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) when '*habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it finds itself as a fish in water, it does not feel the weight of the water and takes the world about itself for granted'* (pg.127). Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1992) words explain the pupil-participants response to the climate in the PRU – they had encountered a social situation where they felt they fit and were at ease. At the Wallace Centre the pupils were like a 'fish in water' their habitus matches the field. The opposite is also true. The pupil-participants were 'as a fish out of water' (Reay, 2006) in mainstream school due to the misalliance of their habitus and the social field – which often results in conflict, dissension, educational disengagement and consequent underachievement.

6.3 Theme 2: Curriculum and Teaching

The range and relevance of the curriculum and the way this is taught emerged from the data analysed as factors which contribute to the educational underachievement of many WBWC pupils. This theme did not come as a surprise as a considerable amount of the working-class underachievement studies reviewed in chapter two cited the curriculum as a significant factor in the unproductive way in which working-class pupils' access and fair in education. In chapter two, I discussed Peters' (2015) notion of a 'white curriculum' and the perceptions that this 'white curriculum contributes to the educational underachievement of black pupils in England. The value of this theme is that it allows us to examine the relationship between the curriculum and educational underachievement specifically and directly from the perspectives of a group of WBWC and their teachers. In this section the theme 'curriculum and teaching' is examined under two sub themes: subjects and programmes with pupils and classroom experience

6.3.1 Sub-theme 2.1: Subjects and programmes

In response to some of my questions about school, subjects, learning and achievement the pupil-participants were unanimous in the view that the subjects and programmes available to them impacted their educational performance. As expressed below, the

pupils believed many of the subjects they were '*made to do'* in mainstream school were of little or no relevance to them:

> '*Did you do geography in the old days? What the hell am I gonna do with a qualification in Geography. I told the teacher she was having a laugh, she said I have to do it but I never went back'* (Chloe)
>
> *'My teachers knew me back then. There was no way. I was like, what the fuck? What the fuck do I need to learn French for?'* (Greg)
>
> *'Why does everything have to be compulsory, that's it isn't it? Yeah, why? Kids in private schools get to choose you know?.. stuff they like.. we just get shafted with boring stuff' (Jake)*
>
> *'Secondary school shouldn't be a must. Primary is fine but in secondary you should be able to choose what you want to do. Like work or play football or some music'. (Brian)*

These quotations contribute to wider literature (Watson, 2018; Blanford, 2017; Reay, 2017, Demie and Lewis, 2015) examined in chapter three of this study which contends that for many WBWC pupils, the curriculum is irrelevant and uninspiring and a persistent contributory factor to their educational underachievement. The responses from the pupil-participants imply that they want to learn but had limited '*choice*' in the subjects they studied in mainstream school. They believe they should not be '*made to do'* subjects they feel are of no relevance to them. Henderson et al. (2018) suggest the introduction of a greater degree of choice into the curriculum, particularly at age 14, may improve the low educational outcomes of many working-class pupils. Reay (2017) also agrees there needs to be greater room for choice in the 'reformed' curriculum, particularly as she claims that it is overly academic and fails to recognise or value the subjects many working-class pupils excel at. However, policy makers would argue that through the inclusion of three 'high-value' vocational qualifications in the performance tables, schools are encouraged to offer a 'broad and balanced' KS4 curriculum which will enables pupils to access a range of non-academic subjects in line with their preferences and aspirations. It is for this reason that teacher four believes that WBWC pupils do have 'choice' within the curriculum but 'just don't want to learn':

> *'I taught in mainstream for a long time before I came here. It might be more classroom based but there is nothing wrong with the national curriculum. There are BTEC's on offer aren't there? It's just many of the white kids, the working class as you call them, just don't want to learn, vocational or not. Plain and simple. No matter where you put them and what you teach them, they will always find a reason not to engage'*. (Teacher four)

As teacher four made clear, her response regarding curriculum offer was based on previous experience at mainstream school. The details of the teacher-participants previous teaching experience were not collected for this study, however, Abrahams (2018) reports clear disparities with regards to the range of GCSE subjects and in the amount and quality of information advice and guidance made available to pupils in different schools. This scholar explains that some schools provide 'a wide landscape of opportunities' whilst 'others are left to work within timetable blocking systems which restrict subject options' (pg.169). Therefore, whilst teacher four probably taught in a school that supported pupil agency, not all schools do, leading to the feelings of frustration and marginalisation that the pupil-participants describe.

Unlike in mainstream schooling, the curriculum offer in PRUs is inherently flexible. As discussed in chapters two and three, it is not compulsory for PRUs to cover the whole of the national curriculum, however they are expected to provide a broad and balanced curriculum that includes core GCSEs and a range of vocational qualifications but also provides access to work experience and employability skills (DfE, 2012). Therefore, the pupil-participants at the Wallace centre had access to a range of vocational and academic subjects and courses from which they could choose freely. Meo and Parker (2004) found such freedom over the curriculum raises self-esteem, engenders trusting relationships, modifies behaviour and subsequently, leads to positive learning outcomes. I was keen to see if this was the case for my pupil-participants. When I asked the pupil-participants about their curriculum at the Wallace centre, they said:

> *'Do you know what? I really don't like school but the course I am doing is a little bit okay. I get to do stuff outside. I am the only girl but I am not doing too bad you know. I like the car bits but hate coming back in…Don't think I'd do it for work though but yeah.' (Chloe)*

'We do loads of group work in construction. I like it here and the stuff we do outdoors, yep… sometimes I can't wait to go and sometimes I want to stay' (Greg).

'We went on a trip round some hotels last week. It was great, we put everything we saw in our folders and bosh all done' (Gill)

'I am not gonna do it when I leave here but it's alright. In school the only thing that gets you out of the classroom is P.E and detention' (Jenny)

The utterances of these pupil-participants indicate, as Reay (2017) suggested, they prefer vocational subjects and lessons that allow them to learn in a more experiential manner. Jenny, Greg and Gill freely informed me that they *liked* or *didn't really mind* the work that their practical lessons required. Greg, talked about how he enjoys talking and working in groups. He said he '*likes talking about what he thinks'* and hearing '*what other kids think'* and '*mashing it all together*'. Greg, also felt that the opportunity to learn in this way didn't '*happen enough in class'* as most of the time we *'just sit there listening to the teacher chatting air'.*

The types of programmes and subjects that make up the curriculum are evidently important to the way in which many WBWC pupils engage with education, but Greg's contribution highlights the way teachers deliver the content of the curriculum as equally as important. The relationship between the pedagogical practices of teachers and the educational performance of some WBWC pupils is significant and is examined under sub-theme 2.2 below. However, whilst some of the participants conceded that they '*enjoyed*' and '*happily did'* the various activities and vocational curriculum at the Wallace Centre, they did not believe that this alternative curriculum would make a difference to their educational outcomes or aspirations. Therefore, it would appear that teacher four may be accurate in his assessment that the pupil-participants '*just do not want to learn*'. In his perception of Jenny, teacher three, provides a similar outlook as teacher four. Teacher three told me that:

'*Jenny claimed she really wants to be a hairdresser; she is now on the hairdressing programme but just refuses to put in the work. She only wants to*

do the hands on, fun bits and nothing else. It is exhausting. It is very difficult to continuously find ways to stimulate or engage pupils who have no particular interest in learning and no plans to continue in education' (Teacher three)

Teacher one has a different view to teacher three. She does not believe that the pupil-participants '*just do not want to learn*' and explains that:

'The pupils here weren't engaging with the standard curriculum and they seemed to like it that way. Some people learn by reading, some people by their hands. There is nothing wrong with that. Some people need that different pathway to be given at an earlier stage. Some of these children would have excelled if they were pushed in that direction earlier. They need that confidence and reassurance both in and out of the school. Perhaps if it wasn't seen as a failed path.' (Teacher one)

In her response, this teacher appears to reinforce the notion that the 'standard' curriculum plays a contributory role in the underachievement of many WBWC pupils. However, she also implies that vocational pathways are seen as having lower, less valued status to academic pathways. Tomlison (2005) believes this lack of parity is and will remain present in the education system because the English middle-classes who dominate the system see vocational education as a diminishing factor, as unworthy of the time and energy of their own children. Teacher one also implies that the educational needs and preferences of some WBWC pupils have been ignored and devalued to the point where they lack confidence in their ability and consequently do not put any effort into learning. Hirschy and Wilson (2002) believe that teachers can 'turn around' such situations by developing opportunities and creative teaching methods in the classroom to reassure and build self-esteem in working-class pupils. The next sub-theme presented in this chapter speaks to Hirschy and Wilson's (2002) belief and outlines the pupil-participant's experiences in the classroom and the impact of this has on their educational engagement.

6.3.2 Sub-theme 2.2: Classroom experience

The second sub-theme to emerge from the data is the pupils' experience within the classroom. From the analysis of the data, it emerged that the pupil-participants felt

most mainstream teachers were oblivious to their learning needs and focused mainly on pupils who were *'doing alright'*. As expressed below, my pupil-participants recounted their negative experiences in mainstream classrooms and described how their reactions to these experiences impacted their attendance and learning. For example, Gill and Chloe indicated that the way they were taught in mainstream school did not motivate them as the lessons were '*boring'* and *'dead'*, as a result they often sought ways to avoid classes or completely stopped going:

> *'Gheez, I remember them days. I'd sit in Miss X's lesson and be thinking up ways to get out of there quick. It was sooo boring. She didn't care, I wasn't going to make her look good. She went on and on. All she did was chat. I'll never go into another science lesson as long as I live'. (Gill)*

> *'Sooooooo boring. Sometimes, I just wanted to kill myself … it was that dead. I just stopped going…then I got into trouble for not going'* (Chloe)

The revelations of the pupil-participants in sub-theme 2.1 show that the subjects they were '*made to'* study in mainstream school were of no relevance or interest to them. Therefore, it can be considered that the reports of *'dead'* lessons and '*boring'* teaching may be a reaction to their lack of interest as opposed to the teaching strategies employed within the classroom. However, it can also be considered that the methods and techniques adopted by the teachers were class focused and did not sufficiently engage or meet the needs of many of their WBWC pupils. Dunne and Gazeley (2008) maintain that teachers often modify their teaching strategies based on social class identifications. For example, in her ethnographical study of curricular and pedagogical practices, Anyon (1980) found that when teaching working-class pupils, 'teachers rarely explain why the work is being assigned, how it might connect to other assignments, or what the idea is that lies behind the procedure or gives it coherence and perhaps meaning or significance' (pg.324). This scholar also discovered that, in contrast, teachers encourage and support middle-class pupils to 'get the right answer' - they provide clear directions and base most of their lessons on textbooks which are mainly not made available for the working-class pupil. Behaviours such as those described by Anyon (1980) give credence to the pupil responses that suggest that most teachers held preconceived ideas about the ability or aspirations of the WBWC

participants and paid no attention to them or their needs in the classroom because they did not expect them to pass. For instance, Greg told me that:

> *'teachers never cared about if we were catching up or getting it. they'd ignore us when we asked for help and if we asked again we'd get kicked out for being rude. A lot of them thought we'd never pass anyway…..This didn't happen to the other kids. Just us white lot'.* (Greg)

James also said:

> *'Fam, all we did is copy from the board and get told to shut up… we were just bums on seat, it's not like they thought we were gonna get any qualifications and stuff. Miss XXX, said it. They think we are all lazy and stuff' (James)*

Some scholars (Sudkamp et al., 2014 and Chamberlain, 2010) argue that teachers maintain daily interactions with pupils and are therefore cognisant of what pupils 'know and can do'. This argument appears to imply that, the expectations of failure described by James and Greg are based on the teacher's knowledge of what their (James and Greg) WBWC pupils 'can do'. Early writers (Rist,1970 and Jackson, 1968) explained how social class mediates teachers' expectations and more recently, scholars (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000) indicate that working-class pupils are at greater risk of exposure to reduced teacher expectations than their middle-class peers. According to Brar (2010) these reduced expectations considerably impact self-esteem and significantly contribute to the experiences of classrooms as 'places of routine everyday humiliations and slights where they feel stupid, rubbish, no good and as if they count for nothing' (Reay, 2017 pg.77) for many WBWC pupils. These experiences contribute to the strong resentment many WBWC pupils feel towards education and their subsequent disaffection and disengagement.

Chloe and Sharon also responded negatively about the ways in which the lessons were delivered in mainstream school, the teacher's classroom manner (at least reportedly towards the WBWC pupils) and the way it made them feel about lessons and learning:

> *'Was just too much unnecessary stuff. I couldn't bear it I couldn't focus. It was pages and pages of stuuuuuff. I mean it's not that much better here but at least we get to go out and do practical stuff and that's our class. Mr W isn't stiff. He*

gets that we don't know stuff so he teaches us different. Like with the bolts and stuff. Last week we did a hangman game for a test, so we can show we know what things go. It wasn't bad you know'. (Chloe)

'To be honest the lessons in school were just too much talk and talk but at least I was learning. It's not all bad here, but I don't think the teachers care that much because they don't force you to do things in class you don't want to. We do lots of different bits, that's alright, but we don't do much hard work really. It's good but it's not good. I'm a bit worried …… I don't think I have learned anything I can use later to be honest. We spend so much time mucking about with role play and things. I'm not better off'. (Sharon).

The responses pupils gave about their experiences in mainstream were somewhat expected as was their appreciation of being taught *'different'* and doing *'lots of different bits'* in class at the Wallace Centre. Gilbert (2008) explains that many pupils who attend PRUs have troubled educational histories and therefore benefit from the varied, innovative and interesting teaching methods and activities PRUs are able to offer. In reverse, Ofsted (2018) claim that some PRUs misuse the flexibility afforded to them and argue that some PRUs perpetuate low expectations by failing to put sufficient emphasis on raising academic standards. The opposing views above highlight the contradictions that take place in many PRUs. Whilst there is no one-size-fits-all template for what good teaching or a good curriculum in a PRU looks like, there is the continuing tension between providing flexible lessons that focus heavily on strategies that address high levels of disengagement and lessons that met the academic needs of pupils like Sharon.

6.4 Discussion

This chapter illustrates the powerful role of school[33] related factors play in the attendance, engagement and achievement of many WBWC pupils. In chapter two of this thesis, I described mainstream schools and PRUs as distinctive sub-fields within the larger field of education. The responses of the pupils confirmed the distinct nature of both sub-fields. The PRU was found to be different in terms of environment,

[33] For the purpose of this study, 'schools' refer to all secondary educational institutions including Pupil Referral Units.

expected curriculum offer and pedagogic transmission. The interview extracts also demonstrate that the game of schooling is played out in ways which are specific to each field. For example, the interview extracts have shown that for many WBWC pupils', mainstream school is a negative experience. Pupil-participants responses indicated that they had difficulty understanding, accepting or negotiating the rules in mainstream schooling which to them appeared unfair. One main area the pupils had difficulty in was meeting behavioural expectations. The pupils' previous mainstream school paid particular attention to what they deemed 'appropriate' behaviour which appeared contrary to the behaviours the pupil-participants felt were fitting for school. One main outcome from the clash in understanding and expectations of behaviours led to the feelings of disregard and disrespect that the participants frequently mentioned.

Upon initial readings of the pupil's utterances regarding their relationship with their mainstream teachers, my immediate thoughts centred on blame. I thought, (possibly partially fuelled by the uncharitable references to black individuals), if the pupil-participants were less rude and better behaved, they would have better relationships with their peers and teachers. However, as Thatcher et al. (2015) remind their readers, Bourdieu encourages sociologists to abandon their common sense and formulate findings from their research. Thus, I turned to scholars such as Harris (2017), Alcott (2017), Reay (2005), Knapp (2001) and Bourdieu (1990) for further understanding of the negative relationship between my pupil-participants and their mainstream teachers. These scholars suggest that most teachers are middle-class and may consciously or subconsciously favour pupils who hold values like theirs and penalize those who do not. Whilst there is no evidence to suggest that the teachers the pupil-participants refer to are from middle-class backgrounds, Harris (1982) explains that 'teachers are generally recognised as not belonging to the working-class' as 'their level of economic privilege sees to this immediately' (pg.35). Therefore, it is possible that some teachers in the pupil-participants' previous schools hold an image of the ideal pupil which was a standard by which all pupils should be judged. This image is typically one that exhibits middle-class attitudes to education and one that is most likely alien to my pupil-participants. Thus, as Becker (1971) suggests, in failing to match that image, they may have been seen, labelled and treated as individuals with no educational prospects.

Rogers (1982) points out, such labels can result in self-fulfilling prophecies where many pupils internalise the label attached to them and behave or respond accordingly. James, Gill, Chloe and Jenny all gave accounts of being labelled '*disruptive', 'lazy'* and *'challenging'*. Such labelling is a form of symbolic violence as these labels are often internalised by pupils as legitimate who in turn enact the anti-school behaviours that contribute to their negative relationships with their teachers and peers, their poor attendance and resulting educational underachievement.

The more amenable relationship between the WBWC pupil-participants and their teachers at the Wallace Centre appeared to encourage better attendance and improved behaviour, but by doing contradicts the argument that teachers, by virtue of their profession, are middle-class and therefore harbour preference for middle-class behaviours in pupils. Bourdieu's (1984) thinking tool, habitus, provides an explanation for this contradiction. Habitus is described as a system of long-lasting 'schemata or structures of perception, conception and action' (Bourdieu, 1984 pg. 27). Ingram (2009) promotes the idea that the notion of habitus can be extended and adapted to explain that schools have a cultural effect on those within them. This suggest that Wallace centre inculcates a habitus in teachers that emphasises its institutional habitus and transforms their habitus to align with that of the setting. In his study of AP, Malcolm (2015) found that the institutional habitus for PRUs embody patience, respect, an understanding of the advantages of meaningful relationships with teachers and peers, and the accommodation of 'non-academic success rooted in traditional working-class values of education' (Ingram, 2009 pg.432). In that case, the institutional habitus of the Wallace Centre provides an environment that does not fundamentally conflict with WBWC culture and fosters harmony between what is valued in school, home, and neighbourhood. The alignment between the institutional habitus and the pupil's habitus, as the findings show, encourages attendance and participation and allows many WBWC pupils to experience AP as a continuation of their working-class culture.

Institutional habitus offers an insight into the different social and learning experiences offered by different schools (Reay et al., 2001) and how these schools 'contribute to the inclusion and/or exclusion of different social groups of pupils' (Meo, 2006 np). Thus, as I have adopted the tool of institutional habitus to explain why the WBWC pupils-participants felt they '*fit in'* and had a sense of belonging at the Wallace Centre, I also

use this concept to explain why they felt undervalued, unwelcome and out of place in mainstream school. Brar (2016) explains that the institutional habitus in most mainstream secondary schools closely reflects academic achievement, attention to structure, appropriate behaviour, commitment, and conformity to rules that are in rooted in middle-class values (pg.96). These institutional cultural characteristics are at odds with the habitus of the WBWC pupils as they do not possess the tacit knowledge that allows them to perceive, understand and conform to the rules stressed by the institutional habitus of mainstream schools. This 'clash' between the institutional habitus of mainstream schools and the mainstream habitus that contributes to their feelings of not fitting in, their disengagement and the resulting educational underachievement.

As discussed in chapter three, one aim of this study is to effect change for the many WBWC pupils who fail to thrive in education. However, Ingram (2009 pg.424) tells her readers that schools tend to 'reinforce rather than contend with social norms' (Ingram, 2009 pg.424). I understand this to mean that most schools will continue to reproduce societal inequalities as they undervalue and misrecognise the skills, abilities, aspirations, and culture of WBWC pupils. This raises concerns, however whilst Reay (1998 pg.521) explains that the institutional habitus of schools 'through dint of their collective nature are less fluid than individual habitus', I believe schools are capable of change. As Navarro (2006 pg.16) points out, habitus 'is not fixed or permanent, and can be changed under unexpected situations or over a long historical period'.

This chapter finds that interactions of the rules, customs and practices of most mainstream schools with the dispositions and cultures of many WBWC pupils has a powerful influence on the choices they make and the grades they achieve. Whilst this chapter found that the participants experienced mainstream and AP in different ways producing different relationships and reactions to education and learning their overall predicted outcomes have not changed. The participants were underachieving in mainstream (in comparison to their peers) and whilst they were actively participating in the practical elements of their programmes at the PRU, most participants were reluctant to attend to the academic aspects of their learning. The reluctance or inability to complete the programme in its fullness places the WBWC pupil-participants back on the trajectory to educational underachievement.

I previously indicated that in-school and out-of-school factors are interconnected and interrelated. The utterances of pupil-participants within this chapter indirectly alluded to the impact of aspirations, parental preferences and class on their educational engagement and achievement. The next chapter presents and discusses such out-of-school factors that contribute to the educational underachievement of many WBWC pupils.

Chapter 7 - Out-of-school factors: Findings and Discussion

7.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with an examination of the remaining two themes (Social Class and Aspirations) that emerged from pupils and teachers' interview data. These two themes and their specific sub-themes capture the participants experiences and perceptions of the relationship between their educational outcomes and their habitual behaviours, dispositions and the choices made by their families and indeed, the pupils themselves. The value of these themes is evident in the HECE (2012) claim that '20 per-cent of variability in a pupil's achievement is attributable to school-level factors, with around 80 per-cent attributable to pupil-level factors' (pg.32). The two main themes (Social Class and Aspirations) capture the 'out-of-school' (Dean and Platt, 2016) aspects of the data. These themes along with their associated sub-themes are examined below - discussion of my findings from the data will follow and bring the chapter to a close.

7.2 Theme 3: Social Class

The impact of the pupil-participants 'social class' on their educational outcomes emerged from the data analysis as a significant theme. This is because reoccurring responses clearly highlight the relationship between the pupil's educational outcomes and their deep-rooted behaviours, thoughts and preferences which are guided and influenced by their family background. In chapter three, I argued that social class ran clearly through all the factors that contribute to the educational underachievement of WBWC pupils. This theme has obvious connections (made clear in the thematic map) with the two themes discussed in the previous chapter. However, the sub-themes in this section capture the pupil-participant's perceptions of how their speech and classed identity impacts their experience of school and their educational outcomes.

7.2.1 Sub-theme 3.1: Speech and Language

Three out of the five teachers who were interviewed had experience of teaching WBWC pupils in a mainstream school. All three teachers were very clear in their opinion that the behaviours and attitudes exhibited by many WBWC pupils in mainstream school were not significantly different to those exhibited in the Wallace Centre. The remaining two teachers could not make this comparison but their responses to my question on the potential relationship between family background and educational underachievement were similar to the responses from other teachers. The teachers acknowledged that attendance and participation improved slightly in the Wallace Centre, however, they told me that some other '*undesirable*' behaviours and attitudes which they saw as '*typical'* to many WBWC continued and in some instance increased.

As illustrated below, one key behaviour teachers felt was prevalent amongst their WBWC pupils was the tendency to use slang and profane and racist language both in and out of the classroom. The teachers felt in addition to the damaging effect this behaviour had on their relationship with teachers and peers, it also had a negative impact on their ability to learn and achieve as their '*street' and 'offensive'* language often '*spilled over into their work'*. The teachers told me that:

> *'I have noticed a lot of the white working-class as you describe them, swear a lot. They think it makes them look grown up. They also use a lot of racist words and the boys reel off lots of sexually explicit statements…… we try but it's almost like it's ingrained in them. Some teachers stop trying'* (Teacher 1)

> '*The white children in my previous school (mentions name of school) were known to flout almost every rule in the book. To be honest, they are not that much different here, especially the way they talk…. You get slang in every sentence... It might be an East End thing or a street thing …. It's typical behaviour but sadly it spills over into their work' (Teacher 4)*

> *'I heard the kids told you we don't like them and that's why they go absent. That is not true, but calling people bitches and dicks isn't on. They are absent*

because they are frequently removed from class because of bad behaviour or their language' (Teacher 3)

These three quotations suggest that the use of inappropriate language is a key contributor to the negative teacher-pupil relationship discussed in theme one. The utterances also reveal that teachers punish the repeated swearing with exclusion from lessons which in turn impacts the pupils learning and achievement. Teacher one says the propensity for profanity is *ingrained* in many WBWC pupils. The comment by teacher one may explain the reason why many of the WBWC pupil-participants in my study litter their sentences with swear words and slang without any consideration of the impact of such language or the way it may be perceived. As the researcher, I see expressions such as '*Miss X is just up herself', 'what the fuck do I need to learn French for', 'it's all calm',* and indeed referring to me as *'fam',* as clear ways in which young WBWC pupils express themselves in terms that are comfortable and familiar to them but unusual to those who are not part of their community. These language codes are culturally acceptable to many WBWC pupils but are seen as deficit in education, in fact, Edward and Thomas (2010) argue that embodying that type of habitus of conduct is itself a barrier to educational achievement.

Indeed, Niati (2018) explains that language used within a particular societal class influences the way it is perceived, and the degree of relevance and sense assigned to their conversations. Therefore, whilst teachers perceive the way many WBWC pupils communicate as offensive and a barrier to learning and achievement, Ingram (2009) explains that such language would not be considered offensive in the pupils' community as it is a familiar aspect of their white working-class culture. As explained in chapter three, 'cultures are social, shared, systemic, and learned and they include values and beliefs, rules and codes of conduct and behaviour, forms of language, patterns of speech and choice of words, understandings about ways of doing things and not doing things' (Woods,1990 pg.30). Therefore, for the WBWC pupil-participants, communicating using what Bernstein (1971) terms as restricted code, is an expressive form of culture but one which '*spills over into their work'* to negatively impact their educational performance.

In order to achieve, Willis (1977) says 'working-class students must overcome their inbuilt disadvantage of possessing the wrong class culture and the wrong educational decoders' (pg.128). That is, WBWC pupils must modify their language to the 'acceptable and correct' middle-class code in order to achieve in education. Literature shows that WBWC pupils respond to this condition in different ways. Like the boys in Willis' (1977) study, some WBWC pupils rigidly hold on to their identities even when they are aware that these would negatively impact their educational outcomes. Other WBWC pupils, like the pupils in Maslin's (2016) study, alter their habitus in order to operationalise multiple identities and align their speech to that desired and valued by their educational institution

7.2.2 Sub-theme 3.2: Class Identity

Another sub-theme emerging from this study is the way in which the pupil-participants see themselves in terms of class and how they perceive others see them. Whilst Savage et al. (2015) claims that many people are ambivalent in seeing themselves as belonging to any kind of class, in response to the question: *'what class would you say you belong to'*, all participating pupils readily identified as working-class. However, they had different views on what being working-class meant to them, how it defined them as individuals and how it influenced their view of and performance in education. Steve and Jake appeared to be proud to be WBWC. They both felt it gave them a '*hard*' image which they both felt will ensure they are *respected*. Steve spoke at length about this father and how he was '*not to be messed with'*. By '*beefing up'* and '*not having it'*, Steve is hoping he will be like his father who he said, '*everybody round here knows and respects'*. Jake was clearer in his description of his '*hard*' WBWC identity. He explained how he doesn't '*care if all the other kids are smarter or richer'* as he will '*fuck them up'* if they '*diss him'* because he is '*proper East End, like his dad'.* These responses substantiate some teacher responses which describe the '*aggressive and confrontational*' behaviours of many WBWC pupils as those which get them excluded from class and school. However, literature shows that such utterance extends beyond '*playing up to get out of lessons'* as suggested by teacher four. Woodward (2000) says identities are formed through the cultures to which people belong. For many WBWC boys their notion of identity is bound up with a construct of masculinity belonging to a culture that espouses football, boxing, violence and manual labour (Beadle, 2018).

Therefore, as seen in Greg's comment below, behaviours which sit outside power, dominance and physical strength are feminised, as is education, reading books, and showing vulnerability:

> *'A lot of us used to bunk school to work out at Mirage[34] gym. All our uncles and cousins go there. That's what it's about. It's been around for ages. It's way better than sitting in some fucking class like some gay looser'* (Greg)

In his study of 15-year-old WBWC boys in a secondary school in the North East of England, Smith (2007) found that this identity of masculine prowess points WBWC boys away from schoolwork and towards behaviours that 'ill prepare them for further education and a deindustrialized future' (pg.183). The hyper-masculine WBWC identity is frequently offered as a plausible explanation for WBWC boy's underachievement at school. However, in direct opposition to the rhetoric that blames WBWC pupils for their educational underperformance, Mac an Ghaill (1994) argues that the hyper-masculine attention to 'fighting, fuckin' and football' serves as a safety net against anxiety and fear in educational contexts (pg.58). The anxiety described by Mac an Ghaill is evident in Marks words: '*I think working-class comes with not being good at stuff don't it? Like maths and science… everything is a fail really*.' However, Mark goes on to say: *'it's a waste of time, I need to get out of here, I need to get a job and stop poncing about like a flippin wasteman'.* Mark had determined that by virtue of his working-class background he was predestined not to be *'good at'* maths and science and, indeed, to fail at everything. His thinking that being in school equates to *'poncing around like a wasteman'* solidifies the notion of a relationship between the WBWC masculine identity and a rejection of anything the boys deem feminine – including school.

According to Skeggs (2002), many working-class men use class as a 'positive source of identity, a way of including themselves in a positively valorised social category' (pg.7). Skeggs (2002) claims this does not apply to working class women but the pride that the WBWC boys showed in their WBWC identity was reflected in the accounts of some of the girls. Jenny and Chloe for instance centred their responses to my question about what class meant to them, on appearance. For Jenny and Chloe, WBWC female

[34] Name of gym changed.

identity is articulated by looking '*good all the time'*. Jenny said '*white girls are pretty, especially my lot*..... *we spend loads of time making sure we look good*' and went on to explain how '*everyone knows I won't step out without my face on*'. I asked her if this differed to the behaviour of other girls. Jenny replied that it was just '*us lot'* and explained that *'others don't care how rough they look'* and they '*come to school looking like death'*. Chloe also spoke about appearance but in terms of '*garms*'. Chloe told me that:

> *'I love being from the East End. You know who we are from our garms. My mum makes sure I've got all the right designer stuff… We're lucky like that…. Can't go round looking rachet'* (Chloe)

These narratives suggest that notions of style and taste are central to the class identity of the female pupil-participants. In his considerations of working-class taste, Bourdieu (1996) claims that working-class taste is 'a taste for and imposed by necessity (pg. 374)'. That is, most WBWC pupils and their families can only like what they can afford to like. This notion is contradicted by Chloe's response and Brian and James' concept of 'being' WBWC:

> '*You know people think working-class people are crass but all my family look great. The girls here do an all. Buff. Remember I said teachers have a go cos of my hair and stuff.. they're jealous…. I am kitted out most days'* (James)

> *'Yeah, it's working class init? I mean, everyone knows that means being on point. That's why I make moves. I need to be on point.. can't let the team down'* (Brian)

These responses indicate that for many WBWC pupils a sleek appearance and wearing designer clothes are synonymous with their class identity. This finding is an important aspect in this sub-theme as it outlines how many WBWC identify with class but it also indicates how 'class signifiers' (Reay, 2015) are used to disparage WBWC as vulgar, Burberry and bling wearing chavs (Bhopal, 2018; Owen, 2016; McDonald et al., 2010). Whilst the investment in the production of the WBWC pupil-participants personal appearance may generate capital in their community, these classed behaviours frequently lead to conflict within school settings and contributes to the

positioning of most WBWC pupils as having '*no interest in learning'*. Teacher three told me that his WBWC pupil's preoccupation with '*looking the part'* serves as '*distraction*' to their engagement with education. This teacher believed that if the WBWC pupils '*put half the pride and energy they had in their identity into their work they would do very well'*. Sharon appeared to be aware of this possibility: she said that she used to be '*all about looking nice*' but when she got to the WC she decided to *'fix up'* by *'attending classes'* and '*getting all my work done'* so she can '*do well and have a better life'*. However, Sharon told me that her changed behaviour has affected her relationship with her peers and she is now seen as a *'snake'* and a *'wannabe'*. Sharon's response indicates that, though '*fixing up'* may improve educational performance, calling Sharon a *'snake'* suggests that any deviation from what pupil-participants identify as *being* WBWC renders them a traitor to their class and a *'wannabe'* middle-class. As identified by Reay et al. (2010), WBWC pupils must be ready to work outside their identity if they want to succeed in education. Whilst this is acceptable to pupils like Sharon, others such as Greg, outwardly reject any influence to change the way they speak or the behaviours they exhibit. In response to my question 'what do you think needs to change for WBWC pupils to do well in school' Greg told me that '*I ain't changing nothing*… *nah, that's what makes me me'*.

For many, the WBWC identity is not easily associated with educational achievement - pupils believe that teachers expect them to fail based on their family background and the behaviours associated with it. When I asked the question '*Do you think your class makes a difference to the way you are seen or treated in or out of school?* Mark replied that he was '*sick of this'* and asked '*what do you know ….. you can't get it'*. He left the interview immediately after this reply, so his exact meaning was not clarified, but his belief that I would not '*get it'* indicates a situation that could not be understood by a non WBWC individual. As found in theme one, some of the pupil-participants felt teachers identified them as *'dumb'* or '*wasters'* but many of responses to the above question about class and treatment in and out of school indicated that the participants also believed teachers and other pupils saw them as poor due to their working-class identity. Some of the pupils were particularly keen to avoid inhabiting the 'poor white' identity but were willing to discuss the impact of being viewed as such:

They think we are all dumb. Especially that Asian bloke Mr xxx. I think it's because he thinks all whites are dumb specially the ones that look like their mum and dad are a bit skint…. You know them ones with the dead creps… they don't come in.. too shame'. (Greg)

There's a lot of envy and stuff, they think the stuff we wear is fake or stolen because they think we're poor because of that free school meal stuff. Other kids get it but teachers don't think they're gonna fail just because'. (Jenny)

Black kids don't even belong here and they think they're better than us …. their parents used to bring them to school in flashy cars …. Funny thing is we were all in lower set so I don't know why they think they're better' (Chloe)

Whilst the utterances above evidence feelings of being positioned as inferior and less able as a result of being identified as poor, this study has established that poverty is not synonymous with working class. However, all my pupil-participants access FSM, which have been used as an indicator of poverty since at least 1998 (Ilie et al., 2017; Gorard, 2012). Therefore, by association and despite their resistance, they would be considered poor by the LA, their peers and teachers. Poverty places individuals and groups at the bottom of social hierarchies, the social stigma of that position is what the above pupil-participants struggle with.

Other participants acknowledged their low financial status and explained how being poor has affected their educational performance:

'Most of our parents are poor. We don't say it but it's true. We don't get al.l the stuff other kids get so we're kind of left out. I can't even buy the stuff for my assignment, so I might fail again. That happens to all of us. We never have any money.. but lots of us front it.. one way or the other' (Sharon)

'I get embarrassed when I say I am working-class… working-class is rough. That's poor people init? I get that.. I kindda feel bad sometimes .. I haven't been to a lot of places.. that's why I love the trips to the hotels and stuff' (Gill)

The most cited impact of poverty on the underachievement of many WBWC pupils is the inability to afford trips, extra-curricular activities and as Sharon stated '*stuff for assignments*. However, the HCEC (2014) reveals how poverty affects the confidence and self-esteem of children, leading them to see themselves as less capable than their more affluent peers. The HCEC (2014) also draw attention to poverty related issues such as 'poorer health, less stable housing and more exposure to crime' (pg.7), all of which predict low achievement for many WBWC pupils. Admittedly, the issues of poverty are not unique to WBWC pupils, however as Demie and Lewis (2010) find, in comparisons to other ethnic groups on FSM, poverty makes vast, more significant difference to the achievements of WBWC pupils.

This study has found that attitudes, language, appearance are markers of WBWC identity. Most pupil-participants maintain this identity with pride; however, these markers are often undervalued and misrecognized (Ingram, 2009) by the middle class as hinging on 'excessive corporeality and a lack of style and taste' (Tyler and Bennet, 2010). The misrecognition described by Ingram (2009) is made clear in the responses below:

> *'Aiysha called me and Brian trashy whites when we wore his and hers Michael Kors watches… racist cow… I told miss and she just laughed'*. (Chloe)
>
> *'Do you know what a Chav is? I know that's what they think of us. I heard one teacher talking about my hair and garms, you get me, my swag? Do you know what he said? He was like, typical empty-headed Essex show off. I was like piss off, jealous git'. (James)*

Young WBWC individuals are repeatedly described as tasteless and unintelligent (Tyler and Bennett, 2009) or the embodiment of laziness and fecundity (Hayward and Yar, 2006). Despite, their expressions of pride in their culture and their outwardly belligerent behaviours, it can be argued that WBWC pupils subconsciously internalise such deprecative descriptors from an early age and subsequently heighten culturally acceptable dispositions that are considered adversative to 'success' in a middle-class education system. I have argued earlier in this thesis that the definition of 'success' is subjective. For many educators, scholars and policy makers, success in education is tantamount to entry to higher education. However, the next theme indicates that

success can come in 'different shapes', it is this difference that leads to the suggestion that WBWC pupils lack the aspiration to succeed in education.

7.3 Theme 4: Aspirations

The immediate and long-term aspirations of the pupil-participants emerged as an important theme identified as a contributing factor to their educational underachievement. I consider this theme important because of its duality. That is, if this study were to equate high aspirations to progression to further and higher education, the pupil's responses would give the impression that that their educational underachievement is of their own making, that is, an outcome of their choice to follow alternative routes and pursue non-academic outcomes. However, their accounts, if viewed from a less deficient perspective, indicate that most WBWC pupils hold clear and lofty aspirations, but see do not education as instrumental to achieving those aspirations.

Amongst all the questions asked, the questions *'what do you want to do after year 11'* and '*what do you want to do in future'* generated the most detailed responses. In response to the first question, pupil-participants spoke passionately about their immediate aspirations – to earn money. However, in response to the second question, the pupil's utterances were more related to long-term and what I would consider, more realistic aspirations. The depth of their responses to both questions suggests that the pupil-participants frequently consider their aspirations and is an area which they are keen and confident to discuss. Their confidence and conviction of the importance and relevance of their aspirations is evident in the findings in the sub-themes 4.1 and 4.2, as is the way in which these aspirations impact their educational engagement and performance.

7.3.1 Sub-theme 4.1: Money

This sub-theme is labelled 'money' as opposed to wealth. This is because pupil's responses primarily focused on getting '*loads of money'* so they '*will not be poor'* and '*can get anything I want'* instead of acquiring assets (such as higher qualifications) that may eventually provide wealth. I have discussed how I have been conscious of the

need to be reflective whilst collecting, analysing and reporting on the data. However, when I asked the pupil's about future, I expected the pupils to speak mainly about occupational aspirations such as apprenticeships or entry level jobs. I am aware this is because I came to the research with preconceived ideas about the paths many WBWC pupils prefer to take after secondary education. I was unprepared for the strong focus on money and the immediate gratification the pupils believed this would bring. For example, James said:

> '*I need money. Now like. I'll do anything. People say don't say that but I will. For real. My kids are gonna have everything. You get me? I'm never gonna be saying, nah you can't have that I can't afford it. Nah man'* (James)

Brian was equally as vocal about his plans for the future. He revealed '*I am already ready for my future; I know all the right people. Runnings start as soon as I leave'* I asked Brian to explain 'runnings'. He said, '*money business init'*? Brian was reluctant to elaborate beyond his response, but like the WBWC boys in Archer et al. (2007) study, Brian's response may indicate an eagerness to leave school and engage in 'illegal economies' (pg.231). The issue of leaving school, earning money or starting work was more prevalent in the male pupil-participant's responses. Baxter et al. (2007) believes this is because education conflicts with the image of WBWC masculine identity which promotes the need to work and earn money as symbolic of being a 'real man'. On the other hand, Connor et al. (2001) argues that such need to earn money and become independent at an early age is a desperate response to an awareness that many working-class parents struggled for money and were often in debt. From an opposite perspective, Sugarman (1970) claims that working-class cultures emphasise 'fatalism, immediate gratification and present-time orientation' which in turn discourages the sustained effort required to pass examinations and reduces the motivation to remain in education. Two pupil-participants also talked about wanting money but unlike their peers indicated they were willing to work for it. They did not, however, understand that working for it meant that the 'lots of *money*' they craved would not come immediately. Thus, to some degree they also exhibited the desire for instant gratification but were not as impractical as their peers:

'I went on work experience last month, it was great. I can't wait to get out of here and start working. I'll get lots of money. Go on loads of holidays. That's achievement like you said'. (Gill)

'I am going to be really rich. When I'm done, I am gonna work in the jewellery business, buy a car and be loaded… like my grandad'. (Jake)

'I just want to play football. … we play all the time down West Ham. My dad said that's how Gazza got started.. he didn't like school either, and he's minted.. that's me at 18'. (Steve)

Whilst Steve was the only pupil to talk about football as an immediate aspiration, football came up frequently in the responses both WBWC girls and boys provided to my questions about their future selves. Most of the boys spoke about football in terms of successful or worthy careers. Travers (2016) believes that many WBWC boys hold aspirations of 'being the next Beckham or Rooney' (pg.48) and as such underachieve in education because they get caught up with the 'notion of success and wealth that comes with football' (pg. 48). It is this 'fallacy' (Travers, 2016) that leads them to consider education as irrelevant to their ambitions. Similarly, two of my female pupil-participants talked dreams of becoming footballers' wives as they '*look good all the time'* and '*can buy whatever they like'*. It is possible that these versions of aspiration are forms of 'self-protection' (Brar, 2016) or 'defence mechanism' (The London Borough of Greenwich, 2012) as opposed to genuine aspirations. This self-protection is not only against the poverty seen by most WBWC pupil's parents as described by Connor et al. (2001), but also against the educational failure they have internalised as being fixed, preordained, and predictable (Brar, 2016). Teacher four's response appears to confirm the notion that the pupil-participants have resigned themselves to the 'limited opportunities that exist for those without much cultural capital' (Swartz, 1997 pg.197), which in turn limited their confidence in their ability to '*do*' anything academic. Teacher four felt these '*deep-set*' feelings contribute to their '*demotivated, disengaged'* behaviours and '*limited*' aspirations:

'The challenge is working with someone who has little or no hope or imagination….. I've had several girls say to me that they want to marry a footballer as their aspiration because they just don't believe they are capable of anything else and no one has ever made them feel capable of anything, that there is something else out there for them. That's what they struggle with all the time' (Teacher 4)

I see the use of the term 'struggle' in teacher 4's response as particularly compelling. This is because much of the data that emerged from the pupil's interviews highlights their struggle to understand and to be understood and valued in an educational environment that normalises a middle-class curriculum and aspirations of H.E. We know that Bernstein (1970) argues that education cannot compensate for society. Thus, it appears that so far as society equates achievement to 'becoming more like the middle-class' (Reay, 2009) by gaining a raft of academic qualifications and progressing into higher education, the 'struggle' for many WBWC pupils will remain. Literature shows that many WBWC parents also have a history of 'struggle' within the education system. Like my WBWC pupil-participants, many WBWC parents were also led to believe that they were not 'natural students' (McCarthy 2015) and their behaviours and aspirations antithetical to educational achievement. Brar (2016) claims that many WBWC parents internalized the generational preconception that that they cannot succeed in education and often, consciously and unconsciously, passed on the view that there is no value in education. There appears to be some accuracy in Brar's (2016) claim as the next theme to emerge from my data shows how familial experiences and expectations influence the aspirations and educational performance of many WBWC pupils.

7.3.2 Sub-theme 4.2: Parental Influence

In chapter three, I discuss the way in which the educational and aspirational choices many WBWC pupils make are constrained, misrecognised and undervalued in a middle-class education system. This discussion underscored the view that many WBWC lack agency, that the choices they make and the outcomes the achieve are dictated by the inequalities in education and society. However, chapter three also considered the effect families and communities have on the choices many WBWC

parents make. I add Chope's (2005) thoughts to that consideration as she claims that parents are 'a powerful component in the decision-making process; they expose their children to a particular variety of career choices' (pg.296) and quotes Brown (2003, pg.332) who says 'parents exercise more influence than any other adults on the educational choices of children'. The data extracted from the pupil and teacher interviews show the words of Chope (2005) and Brown (2003) to be true for most WBWC families.

Chapter three of this study shows that contrary to the belief of policy makers and large parts of the media, most WBWC pupils do have high aspirations. However, these are not connected to achieving high educational outcomes and a place at university but are linked to employment or future based on interest, existing skills, familiarity or family influence. The data extracts below highlight the desire of some WBWC pupil-participants to work with or in similar areas to their parents. The extracts below also show that other pupil-participants appear to have been 'steered' in a particular direction by their parents' expectations and opinions which are largely based on their own experiences and feelings about education.

> *'My mum and dad work in the same shop. They have worked there forever. They've got a job for me. I just want to work there when I'm done. Part time maybe… I still wanna have a life..*. (Jenny)

> *'To be honest yeah, I don't even know why I'm here. I've got work with my dad and grandad already, so gonna go that way… been doing it since I was 10'.* (Jake)

> *'My dad said I've done enough school, yeah. He said I need to be a man and get a job and help at home. I think he's right. I might do a bit of mobile barber work with my dad's mate. Funny, I always thought I'd be a barber. You get me like? I think he's right though. I'm done with it'.* (James)

> *'Look, I'm definitely going to get an apprenticeship when I leave here. On the building site. None of that uni malarkey. My dad said I could get one with no GCSE's. So, yeah.. defo* (Greg)

‘When I talk to them about aspirations there are anecdotal stories about 'my dad does carpentry' or 'this person does construction and I'm going to do that when I leave’ (Teacher 3)

The responses above reflect Bourdieu’s (1990) idea that aspirations are not constructed in isolation but as Strand (2014) and Berrington et al. (2016) suggest are formed and moderated to reflect an individual’s way of being. That is, the aspirations and ambitions of the pupil-participants were influenced, directly or indirectly, by family and family background. The utterances above also indicate that many WBWC parents want what they consider best for their children. For many WBWC parents, the notion of ‘what is best’ is also influenced by their personal experiences of education:

*‘My mum and her friends don’t think teachers help. They said most of the teachers are up themselves and treat white kids badly even worse than gypsies. It’s a joke. Mum thinks school isn’t bad but the teachers make it bad so you don’t get anything. She thinks it’s a waste of time. I’m better of working in the salon’. (*Chloe)

‘Some parents make it clear that they do not expect their children to return to education after school. They want what’s best, but they possibly did not get much education themselves and don’t see the benefit of it. You can’t really push your kids towards something you don’t know or trust, can you’? (Teacher 4)

Many WBWC parents and indeed their wider community hold a hostile view of schooling and harbour a lack of belief in the benefits of education based on their own prior negative experience (Hill, 2013; Wilson et al., 2011). Reay (1997) explains that, almost by definition, working-class individuals have a more negative experience of education than middle-class people. This is, as explained in this study, because the education system ‘mirrors and reproduces the hierarchical class relationships in wider society’ (Reay, 2017 pg.11), leaving the working-classes in education to deal with daily encounters of failure, lack of value, recognition and an elusiveness of ‘success’ (Reay, 2017). Thus, many WBWC parents often feel as though they have been failed by their

own schooling and therefore steer their children away from aspirations of further and higher education and encourage their ambitions to leave school after year 11 and start life in a less alien, unwelcoming and unrewarding environment.

Clearly, not all WBWC parents had negative experiences of school, equally not all who had a poor educational experience believed this would be the case for their offspring. An alternative perspective is offered by Demie and Lewis (2010) who found that a 'lack of aspiration' might originate in a 'lack of knowledge and understanding of the world amongst many white working-class families' (pg.8). Demie and Lewis (2010) imply that many WBWC pupils know little of a life beyond their home and school as their parents 'don't go anywhere. They stay in their flats watching TV. They do not travel; they don't go into London city. Many don't even go to the local park' (pg.8). The issue of 'not knowing life beyond their immediate community' is a serious one for many WBWC pupils as it not only increases the difference between the amount of cultural capital the pupils possess in comparison to their middle-class peers, it also limits their educational and occupational aspirations. Some studies show that this 'small world' (Stahl, 2012) issue is compounded by a lack of education amongst many WBWC parents. Harrison and Waller (2018) and Khatabb (2015) report that parental education has an identifiable impact on pupil's ambitions, where parents with the least qualifications have the lowest aspirations for their children. However, the findings below contradict these reports. By Sharon's account, her mother left school before the age of 16 to have Sharon's older brother and never returned - *'She always says she wishes she had gotten her O' levels'.* Despite Sharon's mothers lack of education her view of the world is far from 'small'. Sharon told me that her mum:

> '*likes reading books about romance….. by Danielle something… she gets them from the library. She used to take my sister and me with her to get some books… we loved it.'* (Sharon)

> '*we go up West sometimes, we just walk around.. we don't buy anything but if mum's just got paid we get something to eat…*'(Sharon)

Sharon's experience with her mum is similar to Greg's experience with his dad. Greg told me that:

‘*My dad works on the site at Canary Wharf. I go there sometimes, and he shows me around and tells me how everything got built. Nice’* (Greg)

Like Sharon, Greg’s working-class father has no formal qualifications but contrary to the findings of Demie and Lewis (2010), he has exposed Greg to ‘life outside home and school’. Based on this exposure Greg has developed ‘high’ occupational aspirations for a career in construction. However, not all WBWC parents have the knowledge or resources to encourage their child’s aspirations, especially when they are related to education. Sharon said:

‘*I really want to go to college and then uni.. not sure what I’m gonna do there though … I’m confused. My mum can’t help. She would if she could, but she doesn’t know anything about that kinda stuff’. (Sharon)*

It appears Sharon’s mum’s behaviour is not common as teacher 1 told me:

‘I am amazed at Sharon’s mum. I am not exaggerating. She really doesn’t understand school but when you call her she is here like a shot. She really wants Sharon to do well. I am not sure what doing well is in her eyes but I know she really supports Sharon. I know Sharon really wants to keep going’. (Teacher 1)

Teacher 1 clearly considered her description of Sharon’s mum as positive. Indeed, I believe all teachers would be pleased with parents who respond to a call ‘*in a shot’*. However, for me, teacher 1’s ‘amazement’ indicates a belief that Sharon’s mum, being white working-class, does not have access to the ‘right’ form cultural capital but can still ‘amazingly’ support and encourage her daughter in education. While this study has clearly expressed that most WBWC parents exhibit less parental involvement in their children’s schooling, Grenfell and James (1998) found that despite the negative experiences and misgivings many working-class mothers have about schools most value education for their children. However, in the case of Sharon’s mum and as evidenced in Grenfell and James’ (1998) study, valuing education without a familiarity with the dominant culture in education (Bourdieu, 1977) does not easily translate into an improved educational experience or outcomes for the child.

7.4 Discussion

This chapter demonstrates the significant role of social class on the educational experiences and outcomes of many WBWC pupils. The language, behaviour and identity of most WBWC pupils is seen as antithetical to educational success as these dispositions do not align with the middle-class cultural characteristics required and valued within the education system. This chapter also highlights the relationship between aspirations and the notion of educational achievement. Educational achievement is expressed in terms of meeting academic benchmarks at GCSE level and entry to university – because the WBWC pupils who participated in this study deviate from this trajectory, they are described and treated as underachievers and having a 'poverty of aspiration'. Policy makers believe most WBWC are responsible for their low educational outcomes as they argue that the WBWC way of being and the associated 'poor' aspirations are the primary cause of their educational underachievement. Bourdieu (2000) sees this misrecognition as an everyday and dynamic social process where one thing is not recognised for what it is because it was not previously 'cognised' within the range of dispositions and propensities of the habitus of the individuals or institution confronting it. That is, the behaviours and aspirations of the most WBWC pupils are not seen for what they are because the education system is not familiar with the WBWC habitus nor does it understand, acknowledge or appreciate it.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) claim that a major way in which working-class pupils are misrecognised in education is through language. As chapter four of this current study evidenced, schools subliminally ask for and value specific forms of behaviour and language. According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), the 'linguistic capital' (the language resource available to a pupil and the value assigned to the resource) required and recognised by schools is not equally distributed among pupils from different class backgrounds (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). The unequal distribution of what is considered the 'right' language is the main method by which many WBWC pupils are set apart and marginalised within the education system. This is evident in this chapter, where the way the WBWC pupils spoke and the language they used was described by their teachers as '*undesirable', 'street', 'offensive'* and in conflict with '*the rules'* of

acceptable conduct. For the education system, acceptable conduct reflects with middle-class norms and values such as the use of educated language (Vandrick, 2014). Thus, by taking the 'linguistic practices of the middle-class and idealising them as a normative model of correct language usage' (Archer et al., 2010 pg.89), schools and even the PRU reflect social hierarchies that portray many WBWC pupils as 'problematic and unteachable'.

Despite the fact that Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) claim that 'language is made not for linguistic analysis but to be spoken and to be spoken á propos' (pg. 142), this study found that many teachers breakdown the WBWC use of language and regard it as a means of rebellion or intentionally flouting school rules and regulations. Zorcic (2019) explains that the decisive elements for the formation of a pupil's language identity is the habitus acquired during primary socialisation. Therefore, given that habitus operates below the level of awareness, I do not believe the use of 'restricted code' by my WBWC pupil-participants was intentionally disruptive. The pupil-participants' language is the expression of their class habitus, and although not congruent with school preferred practices, is embedded within their cultural framework. Indeed, Kuhn (1995) insists that 'class is not just about the way you talk or dress or furnish your home…it is something beneath your clothes, under your skin, in your reflexes, in your psyche, at the very core of your being' (pg.117). This is evident in Greg's response to my question about what WBWC pupils need to change in order to achieve in education. Greg was adamant that he '*ain't changing nothing'… 'it's what makes me me'*. The language and speech patterns the pupil-participants of the WBWC pupil-participants is part of 'what makes them them' but as Willis (1977) suggests, being in possession of the wrong class culture and language habitus will only serve to perpetuate white working-class educational underachievement.

The findings in this chapter indicate that aspirations are structured by social class. Social class covertly fuels the assumptions of some WBWC pupils that certain pathways are 'not for the likes of us'. Teacher 4 pointed out that some of her WBWC pupils do not feel '*capable of anything, as they have never been made to feel capable in education'.* Sharon was the only pupil-participant to talk about higher education as

an aspiration. For others like Mark there was the belief that their class ensures they are '*not good at doing stuff*' and for pupils from their class background '*everything is a fail'*. This common assumption is borne out of a history of being seen as 'thick' (Stahl, 207) and like Liam in Jones' (2016), a lack of exposure to people who have gone to university. This not to say that WBWC habitus is completely incompatible with the aspirations for university and 'professional' careers. Indeed, this study has referenced many WBWC young people who have aspired and transitioned to university despite the classed inequalities present in education. However, Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) assert that 'the level of aspiration of individuals is essentially determined by the probability of achieving the desired goal' (pg.111). Reay et al. (2005) says that for some working-class pupils, the choice about what to 'do next' involves a process of finding out what they cannot have. Reay quotes one working-class pupil as stating that she has 'a choice of one' (Pg.85). The way in which the WBWC habitus constrains aspirations is seen in this chapter to be particularly evident in boys whose dispositions of habitus are similar to that of the 'Real Geordies' (Nayak, 2003). Like the real Geordies, the WBWC boys form of masculinity encourages aspirations of physical labour over mental agility, places significant value on 'a fair day's work for a fair day's pay' and believes that education does nothing to prepare 'youngsters for the reel world' (pg.309). Therefore, unlike many middle-class pupils whose deeply ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions prepare them for and encourage them to view higher education as a part of their 'natural progression' or as 'non-choice' (Reay et al., 2005; Archer et al., 2007), the WBWC habitus serves to constrain the aspirations of some WBWC pupils.

I have made it clear in this study that there are many WBWC pupils who aspire to attend university. Thus, whilst Bourdieu's concept of habitus explains why some pupils feel certain pathways are not for the likes of them and indeed, why some aspire to immediate jobs and careers similar to their parents, Baker (2014) argues that 'habitus' does not appear to provide an explanation why some WBWC pupils, such as Sharon, aspire to 'middle class' destinations. I do not agree with Baker (2014) here, as Bourdieu (2002) reminds us that the habitus is not something natural but is a product of history which Ingram (2009) claims can be changed by new experiences, education or training. Thus, to use Ingram's (2009) words rather than being determined by her

habitus, Sharon, who is seen to be rejecting some of the norms of her background, has shown through her response that she is consciously trying to change her habitus or lay a new one over the old.

This study found that the distinctive norms and values of social classes influence pupils' educational aspirations and performance. The attitudes and orientations of middle-class families are perceived, received and valued differently within education system. Middle-class pupils begin school with the knowledge and skills which gives them a sense of belonging. For example, the early socialization of the elaborated code ensures middle class pupils are already fluent users when they start school and are therefore more likely to speak and understand the language required for 'success' in education. On the other hand, the language, behaviours and aspirations of many WBWC pupils such as the participants in my study, are considered deficit. The responses the pupil participants provided in this chapter appear to confirm Reay's (2017) claim that most WBWC pupils have 'not had a fair chance in education' (pg.185). Like the pupils who participated in this study, many WBWC pupils have become used to and internalised descriptions such as 'thick,' 'feral,' or 'fucked up' (Stahl, 2017 pg.100), hearing comments such as 'don't get ideas above your station' (Beadle, 2018 pg.278) or indeed inferences that their educational underachievement is a result of their poor genes[35]. Such comments and opinions are internalised by many WBWC pupils who in turn feel incapable and undervalued by the schools and teachers and as Bourdieu and Passeron (1997) explain, consequently unconsciously exclude themselves from what they are already excluded from.

[35] In an interview with Education Guardian (11th May 2009), Chris Woodhead (chief inspector of England's schools 1994 – 2000) claimed that a child's 'genes are likely to be better if their parents are teachers, academics, lawyers'. The fact that some children are naturally less bright than others, in his opinion, is why children from middle class backgrounds 'do better' than their working-class peers.

Chapter 8 - Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This study was designed to explore educational underachievement in white British working-class pupils. Details of the perspectives, in-school experiences and performances of a group White British Working Class (WBWC) pupils in a PRU in England were obtained through interviews, and alongside the viewpoints of their teachers, were significant in developing an image of the factors that contribute to the educational underachievement of many WBWC pupils. Bourdieu's (1984) concepts of field, habitus and capital and the literature reviewed during the process of this study, were instrumental in providing an explanatory framework for the persistent educational underachievement of many WBWC pupils.

The Bourdieusian concepts of habitus, field and capital proved useful in teasing out and explaining the factors that contribute to the educational underachievement of many WBWC pupils. However, upon reflection of the findings in this study, it became apparent that the concepts of cultural capital and habitus require a re-examination in order to determine if Bourdieu can *really* account for the educational outcomes of many WBWC pupils. Thus, I begin this chapter with a reconsideration of Bourdieu's key concepts. At the start of this thesis, I explained that the local authority in which I work identified WBWC pupils as a target intervention group. This was because, in line with national data WBWC pupils have consistently emerged as the lowest achievers in education at the age of 16 for any socio-economic class grouping. More specifically, the persistent underachievement identified by my employer was more evident amongst WBWC pupils in the local PRU which had (at the beginning of this study) a disproportionate number of WBWC pupils compared to the corresponding number in local schools. To enable an explanation for these low outcomes, I posited three research questions which centred around the need to understand educational underachievement in many WBWC pupils. After my concluding reflections on Bourdieu, I revisit these three questions.

Within this chapter, I also identify the limitations of this study, discuss the contributions made to research on WBWC educational underachievement and offer suggestions for future knowledge within the same field. Early in this study, I identified my employer's need to understand and address underachievement in many WBWC pupils. Therefore, based on the findings in this study, within this chapter, I also offer a range of recommendations to the local authority with the aim to facilitate change in the educational experiences, opportunities and outcomes for the many WBWC pupils that attend their schools.

I end this chapter and this study with a reflection of a nine-year journey. This journey has brought laughter and tears, has afforded me the opportunity to make a unique contribution to my profession, and equipped me the with skills, expertise and confidence to become a champion of change for pupils who face inequality in the education system.

8.2 Concluding reflections on Bourdieu

Within this current study, I have shown that educational performance is a function of the forms of cultural capital and of habitus which a pupil possesses. The findings of this study also support the theory that not all forms of capital and habitus are equally valued in the field of education. However, Savage et al. (2015) advised caution about relying too closely on Bourdieu's concepts 'today' (pg.101). Therefore, leaning on my study at the PRU, I will return to the question I posed in chapter four – Can Bourdieu really explain for educational underachievement?

Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural capital implies that certain cultures are demonstrably perceived as being more valuable than others. Within the field of education, middle class culture is valued and rewarded, and despite not being available to all pupils, the education system presupposes the possession of cultural capital. As the findings of this study show, without the possession of the esteemed 'highbrow' (Bourdieu, 1977) cultural capital, or 'polish' (Friedman and Laurison, 2019), my WBWC pupil-participants were at a disadvantage in school and always more likely to underachieve. In this context, Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital helps to explain the educational underachievement of many WBWC pupils. However, as one that is

familiar with the impact of accent and language on the way in which an individual may be perceived (particularly in terms of social standing and educational ability), I feel it important that I reconsider the relationship between the language used by my WBWC pupil-participants and cultural capital. Sullivan (2002) cites Bourdieu as stating that, cultural capital consists of familiarity with the dominant culture in a society, and especially the ability to understand and use 'educated' language (pg.145). It is evident from my data that my pupil-participants do not use 'educated language'. I am aware that the use of profanity and slang by the pupils who participated in this study negatively impacts their ability to fit in and adversely affects their educational performance. Despite teachers views that the language used by many WBWC pupils signifies rebelliousness and an unwillingness to conform, I believe that for them, these patterns of speech and choice of words have prestige. I believe it produces group solidarity and identity, which many WBWC pupils find empowering and gives them a feeling of being in an exclusive club to which many teachers (and indeed other pupils) do not belong.

The boys in Stahl's (2014) study of how WWC boys experience social and learner identities are a good example as the working-class language they used was seen as more masculine, genuine and worthy of respect than 'educated' language. It can be considered that WBWC have their own cultural capital in the form of language and indeed accent. In this sense, they do not lack cultural capital, as Bourdieu (1984) suggests, they only lack the dominant middle-class derived forms of social codes required by schools for educational success. I am aware that Bourdieu (1984) does not see working-class culture as inferior or lacking, but his failure to acknowledge the value of working-class culture in some fields is of concern. I believe this is one of the reasons James (2017) criticised Bourdieu for his preoccupation with struggles. Nevertheless, my concerns or Bourdieu's preoccupations do not alter my conclusion that Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital is substantive enough to 'really' explain why many WBWC pupils underachieve in education.

In her examination of Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction, Sullivan (2002) describes Bourdieu's (1984) notion of habitus as 'nebulous' and 'messy' and of no other use than to 'give a veneer of theoretical sophistication to empirical findings' (pg.150). I disagree with Sullivan's (2002) opinion on the value of Bourdieu's habitus

(particularly in educational research), but I share her concerns about the deterministic nature of the notion of habitus. This study found that for many WBWC pupil's, their habitus directs their actions, motives, thoughts and perceptions, which in turn, govern their individual and collective practices (Bourdieu, 1977). In characterizing the operation of the habitus as 'spontaneity without consciousness or will', Bourdieu (1990, pg.56) gives the impression that the educational outcomes of the pupil-participants are preordained, fixed and predictable, leaving them doomed for failure. In fact, the pupil-participant, James categorically said *'everything is a fail'* in relation to his educational prospects. Indeed, my data suggests that there is a strong inertia in habitus and as such, is as enduring as Bourdieu proposes. This is because, all but one of my pupil-participants displayed negative attitudes towards and engagement with school and learning that appear to be indicative of the values and practices transmitted to them from their parents and seem unlikely to change. However, as described in chapter four, Reay et al. (2009) argue that the habitus can be adapted or modified, thus allowing a pupil to challenge their position and change their habitus (Reay et al., 2005) or as Bowl (2003) says, lay the new over the old.

Scholars such as Sullivan (2002), argue that Bourdieu's (1984) stoic habitus does not allow for such changes, consequently making assumptions about pupil agency and individualism. Viewed in this way, Bourdieu's (1984) notion of habitus appears to disregard the possibility of the autonomous pupil, such as Sharon. In this respect, it could be considered that Bourdieu's concept of habitus does not account for the experiences, aspirations and outcomes of Sharon, who, in her own words, has '*fixed up'* is '*planning to go to college' and 'university'.* In defence of the notion of habitus, Bourdieu (1977) states that habitus is 'not a fate, not a destiny' (pg.29) and attests that the habitus can be changed by changed circumstances (Bourdieu, 1990, pg.116) but argues that this process is often slow, that wholesale conversions are exceptional and, in most cases, provisional. In an apparent acceptance of Bourdieu's explanation of the transformative potential of habitus, Lizardo (2004), determines that there is 'nothing inherently faulty or intrinsically deterministic in the concept of habitus that precludes its usage and application in non-deterministic ways' (pg.392). According to Grenfell and Kelly (1999), this means that I can adopt and elaborate on what is potentially useful about the habitus concept, to not only explain the underachievement of my WBWC

pupils who resist change (consciously or unconsciously) but WBWC pupils such as Sharon who 'intentionally make things happen by their actions' (Bandura, 2001, pg.2).

Bourdieu's habitus was also particularly helpful in revealing how symbolic violence is enacted upon many WBWC pupils. The accounts of my pupil-participants revealed that the enactment of symbolic violence ran throughout their mainstream educational experience. It was evident in the highly academic curriculum which was imposed on them and their preferred subjects were seen as inferior. It was also evident in the way in which entry to higher education was projected as the perfect and normal aspiration. It was extremely apparent in school's proclivity for a particular type of linguistic ability that is in line with the linguistic capital of the dominant class The fact that many of the pupil-participants automatically accept this as a legitimate and internalise their preferences as inferior is one of the reasons why they were unable to achieve in mainstream education. In this sense, as with the notion of cultural capital, I consider Bourdieu's concept of habitus suitable to 'really' account for educational underachievement in many WBWC pupils.

8.3 Revisiting the research questions

In order to develop an understanding of the persistent educational underachievement of many WBWC pupils, a range of interviews were carried out with teachers and pupils in an urban pupil referral unit. The findings produced from the interview data proved to be both consistent and contradictory to existing working-class underachievement literature and Bourdieu's (1984) key concepts of habitus, capital and field. In the section below, I return to the research questions I presented in chapter one and provide summarised responses based on the overall findings of this current study.

8.3.1 Research Question 1:

What factors contribute to the educational underachievement of White British Working-class pupils?

This piece of research suggests there are a wide range of factors that contribute to the educational underachievement of many WBWC pupils. The most prevalent factors to emerge from the research are social class, pupil aspirations and the curriculum.

Social class

Within this thesis, I have shown that 'class' is a complex and contested concept. Over the years, the social class to which an individual belongs has been linked to their position as landowners, occupational status and earnings, level of education or indeed their habitus and the accumulation, possession and transmission of economic, cultural, and social capitals from one generation to the next (Bourdieu, 1991). I have acknowledged the 'notoriously slippery' (Bottero, 2005) definition of 'class' in this thesis but I have also made clear that I view 'class' in terms of varied cultural expressions, countenances, practices and beliefs which are frequently used to perpetuate unequal access to resources, status and opportunities in society and in education. Indeed, in chapter three of this thesis we saw how literature on class and underachievement and data held by policy makers, local authorities and schools clearly indicate that many middle-class pupils outperform many working-class pupils in education. However, it is difficult to attribute the reason for the underachievement of many WBWC pupils to social class because social class does not reflect any observable attributes (Stevenson and Lang 2010), and its contribution to the unfair and discriminatory behaviours that lead to stratified underachievement is often unrecognisable. In this study, Bourdieu's (1984) key concepts of capital, habitus and field function in an independent and overlapping way to highlight, explain and reinforce the surreptitious way the education system perpetuates educational inequality between most WBWC pupils and their middle-class peers.

As discussed in chapter four, schools demand and assume what they consider a superior form of cultural capital in all pupils. The cultural capital recognised and valued by schools is inculcated in the middle-class home and therefore many WBWC pupils do not possess or have access to this 'right form' of capital, leaving them at a disadvantage and more likely to underachieve in education. A prime and prominent example from my study is language. The style of speech of the WBWC pupils in this study is a powerful marker of embodied cultural capital. The 'restricted' language of the pupil-participants, which was described by their teachers as offensive and educationally limiting, is a direct contrast to the 'educated language' that is understood and used by middle-class pupils and converted into academic success (Bourdieu, 1977). In order to achieve in education and obtain the qualifications required to enter

higher education, most WBWC pupils would need to temper their working-class language habits. Like most aspects of socially stratified inequality, language is an invisible but keenly felt barrier to educational underachievement in many WBWC pupils. Reay (2004) argues that habitus is frequently used as 'intellectual hairspray' (pg.432), however, in this study, the concept of habitus has highlighted how the way of being, the predispositions, tendencies, propensities and inclinations (Bourdieu,1977) of many WBWC pupils bears little similarity to the structure of the field of education. This dissimilarity affects their 'feel for the game' and contributes to their negative experience of schooling and their subsequent underachievement.

Pupil aspirations

Whilst this study indicates that the pupil-participants do not highly value education, it failed to find much evidence of the 'poverty of aspiration' discussed in chapter three. Bourdieu (1984) claims that working-class children do not generally seek higher education because they have internalised the generational preconception that working-class individuals cannot be educationally successful. As a result, like many members of their community, many WBWC pupils are less convicted of the value of education and less likely to see university as a realistic aspiration. This may be so, however, the pupils who participated in this study and as evidenced in working-class underachievement literature a lack of interest in higher education is not synonymous with a lack of aspiration. Indeed, both teacher and pupil-participants confirmed a presence of aspirations that were mainly geared towards 'making money' and getting a job – mainly in the same or similar occupation to a parent. These aspirations appear to be guided mainly by the pupil's motivation to ensure financial security. This is possibly due to their experience with poverty and as a response to how they feel they are perceived by teachers and their peers based on the economic status of their parents. Additionally, Berrington et al. (2016) believe that the aspirations of many WWC pupils reflects their way of being, that is their classed habitus. This belief can be used to explain why many WBWC follow routes which are similar to their parents. Those routes are what they know and what they believe they are most suited to. The WBWC pupils within this study are aware that they do not need to educate themselves beyond what is required to continue in their parents' line of work. This reflects their attitude towards education and partly explains their educational underachievement.

The national curriculum

A frequent question pondered within research on educational inequality (Reay, 2017; Shain, 2015; Ball, 2010; Gorard, 2010) is whether schools can compensate for society. In line with the discussions in chapters three and four, this study finds that schools' posture as meritocratic, as ensuring all pupils are afforded equal opportunities to succeed in education. However, in effect they are enthusiastically willing players in an education system which 'mirrors and reproduces the hierarchical class relationships in wider society' (Reay 2017, pg.11). The inequality that is evident in society is reproduced in schools in and by a number of ways. In particular, this study, in line with much current and historical literature (Reay, 2017; Johnson, 1976), finds by prioritising the core academic subjects, the narrow English curriculum is aligned with the cultural capital possessed and embodied by the dominant middle class. For the pupils who participated in this study, the curriculum appeared to be a source of demotivation and frustration, to which the pupils responded with continuous absenteeism and a general lack of engagement. Literature and the findings from this study evidence that some WBWC pupils prefer vocational courses, which are undervalued and limited within the curriculum. However, there are also studies (Henderson et al., 2018; Blanford, 2017; Reay and William, 1999) which argue that, as suggested above, the development of the national curriculum was based on the knowledge and experience of middle-class people and 'success' is measured by the way in which pupils understand, traverse and perform within a classed school system. The ability to understand and navigate the school system dependent on the possession of the 'right' cultural capital. This study has discussed and evidenced that many WBWC pupils lack the 'right' cultural capital, as a result their ability to successfully engage with and navigate the national curriculum is inhibited and the possibility of educational achievement significantly reduced or indeed removed.

8.3.2 Research Question 2:

How do the lived experiences of White British Working-class pupils explain their educational underachievement?

This study used the voices of a group of WBWC pupils in a PRU to provide a picture of their experiences of education, which in turn afforded an insight into a range of factors that contribute to their educational underachievement. The literature reviewed in chapter three underscores this study's findings that many schools have a clear set of standards which specify how they expect pupils to behave, speak, dress and to some degree, what they expect them to learn. The data collected in this study indicates that the WBWC pupil-participants were unable (or unwilling) to conform to these standards whilst in mainstream schooling. Research (Bourdieu, 1994; Bennet et al., 2020; Davies and Risk, 2018) and the findings from this study explain that this is due to their distinctive habitus – learned in a cultural or familial context. The pupils will have internalised the values, behaviours and expectations of their habitus which would have shaped what they regard as 'reasonable, common-sense' behaviours (Bourdieu, 1994). However, the pupil's responses within this study indicate that their mainstream teachers rarely regarded their words, actions, choices and aspirations as 'reasonable' as they did not align with the middle-class behaviour schools expect and require. This disregard put the pupils in positions of conflict with their teachers and largely contributed to the negative relationship the pupil-participants spoke about having with their teachers.

The pupil-participant's experiences show that the negative relationships they had with their teachers in mainstream school had a significantly adverse impact on their willingness to attend school, participate in class and less discernibly, their self-esteem and self-belief. The pupils spoke about their experiences of being shouted at, spoken down to, ridiculed about their work, punished for their hairstyles and sent home for what they considered minor infractions. These accounts show the pupils particularly believed the teachers in their mainstream schools neither liked nor respected them and treated them less favourably than their peers. Many of the participants believe they were treated unfavourably by their teachers because of their ethnicity and class. Whilst it is impossible to discern if this is exact in the case of the participants, their reports of being made to feel '*not good enough', 'bad, 'disrespected' 'embarrassed', as if they 'shouldn't be here'* or indeed their perceptions that they are seen by teachers as '*dumb', 'lazy' and 'rough'* give a clear view of their experiences and perceptions. The pupils do not explicitly cite their relationship with teachers as impeding their

educational progress, but they do explain that the behaviours of teachers do not engender their attendance at school or their participation in lessons. The link between absence and disengagement and educational achievement is clear, in fact the HCEC (2014) and Ogg and Kalill (2010) list absenteeism as a key factor contributing to low educational outcomes.

Lived experiences do not solely represent a research participants' experience, they are also defined as a portrayal of the choices they made and the options that were open to them (Given, 2008). In a counter-narrative to the pupil's accounts, some of the teachers who participated in this study attribute the educational underachievement of many WBWC pupils to their 'continuous refusal to obey the rules at school'. In their descriptions of their experiences in mainstream school, most of the pupil-participants proudly described the importance and energy they put into maintaining their 'hard' and 'pretty' identities which they felt defined and elevated them. The pupils in this study were aware that such behaviours result in negative perceptions and reinforced stereotypes but persisted because they perceived 'troublesome, oppositional and resistant behaviour within school as a social good' (Reay, 2009 pg. 27). They felt this behaviour 'elevates their status in their all-powerful peer group' (Stahl, 2012 pg.15) (described by Jenny as '*us lot'*) which values and validates what they see as an indication of their WBWC identity. Interestingly, despite being aware of the effect of their behaviour on individual teacher perceptions, the pupil-participants failed to consider how these behaviours impact their educational outcomes.

It is important to consider how the pupil-participant's behavioural choices impact their relationship with their teachers and in terms of their continuous use of profanity and slang, their ability to write and access the 'educated language' necessary for educational success. However, it is equally important, as this study has shown, to recognise that the language and some of the behaviours the pupil-participants display, is an expression of their class habitus, and is embedded within their cultural framework. The classed behaviours the pupil-participants and their teachers spoke about are not congruent with the preferred practices of mainstream schools and are therefore frequently misrecognised as antithetical to educational success. Having said this,

despite displaying the same behaviours upon arrival at the Wallace Centre[36], the lived experiences of the pupil-participants in mainstream schools differ to their experiences in AP. Pupil-participants describe their experiences in the WC in a positive light: they found the teachers approachable, the rules flexible and accommodating, the curriculum relevant and unlike the '*dead'* lessons in mainstream, classes were '*calm*'[37] and '*enjoyable*'. Gutherson et al. (2011) say that the flexible environment of PRUs positively impacts the social and behavioural development of pupils. This claim is justified by the teachers at the Wallace Centre who reported that most of the pupil-participants responded to their experience at the PRU with improved attendance and more positive feelings about their education, ability and self. However, despite these improvements in behaviour and attendance, the predicted outcomes for the pupil-participants did not change from when they were in mainstream school, they remained on target to achieve few or no qualifications at the end of KS4.

The pupil's accounts of their experiences in mainstream school portray problematic relationships with teachers and difficulties with the curriculum in particular and schooling in general. These experiences, according to the participants contributed to their absenteeism, lack of motivation and overall dislike of school. In contrast, most pupil-participants describe their experiences in alternative provision as positive but also explain that these positive experiences do not change their views on education. These reactions show that the lived experiences of the WBWC pupils who participated in this study cannot categorically explain their educational underachievement.

8.3.3 Research Question 3:

To what extent does the nature of Pupil Referral Units facilitate or hinder the educational achievement of White British Working-class pupils?

Chapter two of this thesis introduced Pupil Referral Units (PRU) as an alternative education provision which provides education for pupils who cannot or will not attend school and may as a result fail to receive an education. Whilst PRUs are seen as a

[36] The Wallace Centre has previously been highlighted as a pseudonym. This is to ensure confidentiality is upheld and the unit and research participants remain anonymous.
[37] The urban dictionary defines 'calm' as an alternative word for good or chilled.

type of school, chapters two highlights the differences between mainstream schools and PRUs, and within chapter four, I describe them as distinct fields with different institutional habitus. It is important to clarify that this is not a comparison study. However, the responses from the participants highlight the different 'taken-for-granted' (Ingram, 2009) beliefs each distinct field possesses. The way many WBWC pupils respond to these beliefs and how they work together to hinder or facilitate their educational achievement.

Based on the responses of the pupil-participants and current and historical literature, mainstream schools are sites that pervert the educational experiences for the majority of WBWC pupils. In particular, the findings from this study indicate that whilst in mainstream schools, the pupil-participants were confronted by the 'institutional processes of cultural exclusion, marginalisation and subordination' (Mac an Ghaill, 1996 pg.169). These processes were found to be covertly present within a mainstream schooling system that presents a hegemony of academic learning, attention to 'appropriate' behaviour and adherence to rules that align with middle-class values and expectations. Bourdieu's (1990) theory makes it clear that where most WBWC pupils fit or do not fit, whether they succeed or do not succeed is dependent on a match between the individual field and the pupil's own habitus. Thus, the mainstream habitus described above is at odds with the WBWC habitus and contributes to their negative experience of school and their low educational outcomes.

As explained in chapter two, there is no fixed template for good practice in PRUs (HCEC, 2018), however the DfE (2018) strongly advises PRUs to seek to recognise and meet pupils' personal, social and educational needs and support them with the self-confidence, attendance, and engagement with education they require to succeed. Accordingly, the pupil referral unit which contextualised this study, is seen to accommodate non-academic aspirations, have greater flexibility with respect to the curriculum, more relaxation around rules for behaviour and attendance and a less hierarchical teacher-pupil relationship. In line with other AP studies (Kendall et al., 2003; Malcolm, 2015), the primacy of a flexible curriculum emerged from this study as a critically integral to a positive experience and improved educational engagement of

WBWC pupils in pupil referral units. PRUs are not expected to deliver the whole national curriculum and are therefore able to offer more vocational options than mainstream schools. This flexibility proved to be highly motivating for many WBWC pupils who Reay (2017) claims prefer and excel in vocational subjects over academic. The pupil-participants were on one of several vocational pathways on offer at the PRU, each leading towards a BTEC qualification (and English and mathematics) and including work experience and other work-related activities outside school. Nearly all the pupils expressed their satisfaction with the work experience opportunity and felt they learnt valuable skills and enjoyed visits to places of interest. It appears that being able to access a curriculum which felt meaningful and enjoyable gave many WBWC pupils felt a deeper sense of belonging in the PRU, in that their attendance improved, they participated and enjoyed more lessons and built better relationships with their teachers and peers. The importance of a sense of belonging runs clearly through this thesis and is steered and conceptualised by Bourdieu's (1990) analogy of pupils being as 'fish in' or 'fish out of water' (pg108). This analogy explains how many WBWC comprehend education, how education comprehends them and how this impacts their educational aspirations and outcomes.

Despite their sense of belonging and the improved attendance and engagement with learning, this study found that the WBWC pupils' levels achievement did not improve significantly. Most of the pupils were only completing areas of the work they enjoyed and were on target to achieve few or no qualifications at the end of KS4. This finding adds support to previous reports that state that irrespective of the quality of the PRU, white working-class pupils who leave at age 16 'do considerably worse than their peers in mainstream school in terms of educational attainment and are considerably more likely to become NEET (not in education, employment or training)' (DfE, 2018 pg.15) This finding can be explained by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) who state that many working-class pupils exclude themselves from what they are already excluded from. This exclusion is not from schooling as previously considered but from the very notion of education and this is why, despite fewer restrictions than mainstream, a more flexible and inclusive curriculum and the amenable teacher-relationships, PRU's are also institutions where many WBWC pupils do not achieve.

8.4 Limitations of the study

I undertook this study as a researching professional as opposed to a professional researcher (Bouner et al., 2001 pg.71), therefore, there are inevitably several limitations to this piece of research. Some of these limitations have been briefly addressed in chapter five, however, I would like to revisit them and acknowledge others in this section.

One limitation to this study is its size. The study took place in a single PRU with a limited number of contributors to the data (ten pupil participants and 5 teacher participants). As discussed in chapter five, my initial concern was that the reduced size of sample would weaken my data, this concern was unwarranted as voices I captured generated rich and interesting data. However, the small size of this study means the findings are not immediately generalizable, therefore, any dissemination or general application of the findings must be carefully considered.

Another limitation was the use of free school meals as a proxy for working class. The use of free school meal data as a proxy for working-class is prevalent in governmental estimates of educational disadvantage and underperformance as well as in research that focuses on educational inequality in England. This study has evidenced that the concept of 'class' is complex and nuanced and should not be purely income based. Furthermore, this study reveals that only pupils from the lowest income families are eligible for free school meals and therefore the statistics do not include the 'hidden poor' - families who are in receipt of a low income but are above the income threshold to claim FSM. For these reasons, I was very clear in the study that eligibility for free school meals is an inexact proxy for working class but admitted that the use of this measure in my study was born out of pragmatism rather than idealism. Having said this, using FSM as a selection criterion for my pupil-participants did not in any form diminish the quality of the data neither does it invalidate the findings of this study.

A final limitation to this research is the lack of data from WBWC parents. I offered an explanation for not interviewing parents in chapter five but upon reflection, I feel

interviewing parents would have added an interesting layer of data with regards to their experiences of education and their educational hopes and occupational aspirations for their children.

I feel at this point it is necessary to consider the impact that researchers may have on their own process. Therefore, whilst not necessarily a limitation, I return to my discussion on my positionality to acknowledge the possibility that my personal attributes (black African, middle-class woman who is significantly older than the 16-year-old WBWC participants) and my familiarity with the teachers and the centre could have influenced the way in which the participants perceived me and/or responded to the questions I asked.

8.5 Contributions made to knowledge and professional practice

Wellington and Sikes (2006) tell their readers that the Professional Doctorate is 'seen as being largely of benefit to the individual rather than the profession as a whole, or to 'educational practice' in the case of the Ed.D' (pg.733). I am inclined to disagree with these authors. Whilst this piece of research addresses has a direct impact on policy and practice within the LA where I work and the schools it funds, as outlined below, it also makes a unique contribution to knowledge.

The gap between the educational underachievement of White British working-class pupils and their more affluent peers is a key focus for schools, education researchers and policy makers in England. This study identified a significant amount of literature that examines the educational performance of many WBWC pupils in secondary and higher education, and an equally significant amount of studies that investigate the causes of educational underachievement in many WBWC boys. Whilst acknowledging paucity, this study also identified some studies that explore the educational aspirations and outcomes of WBWC girls. However, amidst the plethora of work around WBWC pupils and educational inequality and underachievement, I was unable to locate any studies that explore the educational achievement of both WBWC boys and girls in a Pupil Referral Unit. The absence (or limited amount) of research into the performance

and experience of WBWC pupils in a PRU has created a gap in the literature around classed inequalities and underachievement in education. This study sought to fill this gap. Statistics show that WBWC pupils are overrepresented in PRUs, therefore, there is much need for a study that presents an understanding of the factors that hinder or facilitate their educational achievement whilst in the PRU. By hearing and sharing the voices of a group of WBWC pupils who have moved from mainstream school to alternative provision, this study has provided unique and personal insights into the way in which a range of in-school and out-of-school factors work independently and jointly to negatively impact their experience of schooling and educational outcomes. In addition, the contributions of teachers based in the PRU delivered new insights into the behaviours and aspirations of their WBWC pupils - providing additional evidence to support a shift in the current discourse that promotes the image of a WBWC pupil whose negative behaviour, reluctance to learn and poverty of aspiration contributes to their educational underachievement.

8.6 Suggestions for further research

For me, the need to disrupt, dismantle, question and wherever possible, tackle inequality has gradually intensified since I became aware of the way in which covert discriminatory and marginalising practices impact the educational and life chances of individuals who do not match society's image of ideal. Policy makers regurgitate the rhetoric of equality and freedom in education but contrarily this study highlights that most WBWC pupils do not and never have had a fair chance in education. In the section below I offer recommendations for the local authority to improve the 'chances' of many WBWC pupils. My desire to uncover, illuminate and transform tensions that are related to social divisions and power differentials (Griffiths, 2009) also leads me to offer some suggestions of further research that may provide a more in-depth understanding of the educational underachievement of many WBWC pupils.

Chapter two of this study describes the wealth of literature that contributes to the discussion around the educational underachievement of WBWC boys in comparison to the limited studies around the performance of WBWC girls. Wilshaw (2014) pointed out that underachievement in WBWC pupils is not a gender issue as many WBWC girls were also underperforming in education. This study evidenced Wilshaw's point.

Therefore, perhaps a further, more in-depth exploration of the educational performance of WBWC girls is warranted. Research in this area will tease out the ways in which many WBWC girls perceive and experience the educational and social environment in comparison to their male peers. It will also allow for a greater understanding of how schools perceive and respond to dispositions which are particular to many WBWC girls.

Additionally, this research found that mainstream schools mirror the inequalities evident in society. For example, the narrow definition of achievement and aspirations, the restrictive curriculum and the expectations of pupil behaviour, speech and appearance are all rooted in middle class beliefs and values. The findings from this research also indicate that an inclusive environment, such as the Wallace Centre, and a flexible curriculum that support the interests and aspirations of most WBWC pupils have a positive effect on their educational engagement but not necessarily their educational outcomes. A comparative longitudinal study which statistically and qualitatively tracks and documents educational performance, occupational outcomes and perceptions of success of WBWC pupils would provide further insight into the different ways the institutional habitus of mainstream schools and alternative provision mediates the habitus of WBWC pupils to impact (negatively or positively) their long-term trajectories. Such research will also contribute to the debate around the notion of achievement and success and the parity of esteem between vocational and academic courses and qualifications.

8.7 Recommendations for the Local Authority and Schools

For the local authority where I work, the persistent educational underachievement of most WBWC pupils continues to be a concern. Whilst there is a need for local, and indeed national, considerations around the actual definition of ‘achievement’, the fact remains that WBWC pupils are the lowest performing group at GCSE level. Therefore, my employers are interested in the factors that lead to this underperformance and possible strategies and interventions at both school and family levels that can better the chances for many WBWC pupils to achieve educational ‘success’. Cohen et al. (2017) explain that the purpose of critical research is to explain society and behaviour, to understand situations and most importantly, to also seek to facilitate change in them.

By taking a critical perspective, I have uncovered features of inequality in our schools and based on the findings from this study provide recommendations that might facilitate change for many WBWC pupils in education.

This study indicates that the dispositions, values, tastes of many WBWC pupils differs to that of their middle-class peers and are often misrecognised as intentionally antithetical to education. One of the main reasons for this misrecognition is a lack of understanding of and appreciation for the educational needs and aspirations of many WBWC pupils. This is evident in the many WBWC pupils who have vocalised frustration at the overly academic curriculum that leaves little choice for vocational qualifications or pathways. This frustration has been evidenced to contribute to the disengagement with learning and an increased level of educational underachievement in many WBWC pupils. Whilst the local authority does not have the power to enforce curriculum change in schools – but is able to strongly advice, I recommend what Reay (2011) describes as a 'revalorizing of vocational and working-class knowledge and a broadening out of what constitutes educational success beyond the narrowly academic' (pg.3). Acknowledging that education in England is a class-based system and appreciating the challenges that accompany change, I propose that schools redefine their curriculum to increase vocational choice and make it more meaningful and relevant for many WBWC pupils.

This study has shown the impact of parental expectations and aspirations on the educational choices and outcomes of most WBWC pupils. I also recommended that the LA develops a partnership to develop creative and flexible strategies which will ensure parents of WBWC pupils feel valued. I also recommend that these key departments provide assistance and opportunities that will enable parents to support their children's education and academic aspirations.

My final recommendation is for the PRU. Whilst literature and the findings of this study suggest many WBWC pupils do prefer and enjoy vocational subjects, there are also many that would choose pure academic subjects and indeed aspire to university. It is clear that the vocational model of the Wallace Centre does not cater to the needs of all WBWC pupils that are educated there. Therefore, I recommended that the PRU avoids the misconception that *all* WBWC pupils favour vocational subjects over

academic subjects (Brown et al., 2015) and offers a varied curriculum that ensures WBWC pupils are supported to gain qualifications in their desired subjects and at the level they are able to work to. Whilst it is clear that this will require additional effort on the part of the PRU it is a vital step to take and one which will not only improve the educational outcomes of many WBWC pupils, but will also align with Ofsted's (2018) suggestion that pupils in alternative provision should be able to access both GCSEs and vocational qualifications as this will enhance students' chances of transitioning to further and higher education.

With a view to contributing to discussions on ways of working with and in schools to improve the educational outcomes of the many WBWC pupils who are not thriving in education, the findings of the study will be presented to the local authority school improvement board in both oral and written form. The summarised report will also be provided to schools (including the PRU) to help them think about how they might develop effective targeted interventions to meet the aspirational, educational and social needs of their WBWC pupils.

8.8 The end and beginning of my journey.

When I had started on the Professional Doctoral programme nine years ago, I felt that with careful planning and sheer determination I would 'waltz' through my journey in record time. I drew up a timeline which outlined how I would complete all five assignments and step with ease into the second stage of my journey in a way that even I would find amazing. After all, I was clear about the subject area I wanted to explore, I had the approval of my employer, access to participants, relevant literature and supportive and informed lecturers and supervisors. By the time I wrote my second assignment, the reality and enormity of the journey ahead set in with great force. Having completed my sixth form and first degree in Africa, I was unfamiliar with many of the sociological perspectives and completely unprepared for the academic challenges I encountered and the way in which the Doctoral journey would clash with 'life'. I was also unprepared for the professional and personal change the journey would bring about. This journey has indeed been about change and has caused me to turn a magnifying glass upon myself and look deeper into who I am and what I believed in.

From a professional perspective, I became increasingly cognisant of my values and beliefs around social justice and inclusion and how they were at the very basis of the work I do and the passion with which I do it. I became aware that my roles in alternative provision, school improvement and vocational education and training are all related to my life experiences and my personal need for justice and equality. This realisation gave me an additional degree of confidence in my professional endeavours, but it also engendered an awareness that I had to maintain a high level of self-awareness of how I filtered and interpreted my experiences in relation to this study.

From a personal perspective, the change has been profound. Until I began this Doctoral programme, I held firmly on to the feelings of self-doubt and thoughts of inadequacy (outlined in chapter five) that I believe stem from an early socialisation as a minority and later as an 'other'. I started school in England as one of five ethnic 'minority' children in my school and completed my first degree in Africa where I was also a minority – an English girl, with an English accent and an English name in Black skin. I have never felt completely at ease as a student in education as I always felt 'out of place' as an 'other'. However, during the course of the Doctoral programme, I realised that my experience of 'otherness' gave me an insight into the feelings of some of my working-class pupils and an increasingly confident voice to identify, challenge and offer solutions to injustice in the workplace, in my personal life and indeed in my writing about the experiences of some WBWC pupils.

Through this study, I sought to develop an understanding of the perpetual educational underachievement of many white British working-class pupils. This was achieved by exploring the educational experiences of a group of WBWC pupils in an inner London PRU through the lens of Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital and field. The voices of this group of WBWC pupils provided further understanding of their experiences. The voices disrupted the illusion that the English education system is meritocratic by highlighting it as an unequal and unjust system that fails to compensate for society by working to reward the privileged and exclude those who possess limited social, cultural and economic capital. My study has evidenced that many underachieving WBWC pupils have a negative experience of education and that through experiences of poverty, lack of motivation, poor teacher and pupil relationships, misrecognition of identity and aspirations and an irrelevant curriculum most opportunities for

achievement are removed. As I end this study, I am compelled to reiterate that at no point do I imply that all white British working-class pupils fail to achieve in education. If success is measured by participation in higher education, then indeed, many succeed – albeit, often at the expense of their cultural identity. However, it is also important to me and I believe to educators and my employers, to recognise that many WBWC pupils do not progress into university but are still successful, in that they have met their occupational goals and most times maintain their all-important working-class identity.

My final thoughts are with the participants who took part in this study. I found their accounts extremely interesting but also greatly saddening. Whilst these amazing individuals have now left school, I do hope this study, informed largely by their data, will in some way inform better educational experiences and outcomes for white British working-class pupils still treading water in the English educational system.

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APPENDIX A

Cass School of Education and Communities

University of East London

Stratford Campus

London E15 4LZ

Study Information Sheet

Title of Project:	A phenomenological study of pupils' experiences and perceived impact of a tailored vocational curriculum in an inner London Pupil Referral Unit (PRU).	**Ethics Approval Number:**	**UREC 1516 43**
Investigator:	Tina Sode	**Researcher Email:**	u0021454@uel.ac.uk

Aims of the Study:

The proposed research will explore the factors that contribute to the educational underachievement of white working-class pupils at GCSE level in England.

The study will also highlight key messages for education professionals in terms of retaining, engaging and facilitating the progression of white working-class pupils who are often considered to be underachieving in education.

Eligibility Requirements:

Full time KS4 pupil attending the selected Pupil Referral Unit

Teacher or behavioural support worker at the selected Pupil Referral Unit

What you will need to do and time commitment:

Complete an informed consent form

Attend a briefing session at the selected Pupil Referral Unit

Participate in 30-minute individual semi-structured interviews at the selected Pupil Referral Unit. These interviews will be built primarily around feelings and perceptions of the vocational curriculum and its impact on pupil behaviour, educational lives, progression probabilities and potential careers. Responses to interview questions will be recorded in note form.

Risks/Discomforts involved in participating:

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts associated with this piece of research.

Confidentiality of your data:

Please be reassured of the confidential nature of the research. All interviews will be carried out on an individual basis and all responses will be anonymised, ensuring non-traceability of responses. Data, codes and all identifying information generated in the course of the research will be kept in separate locked filing cabinets in accordance with the University of East London data protection policy. Data will be securely preserved and accessible for 6 years from the date of collection.

Please note in the event of disclosure of a child protection or safeguarding issue the anonymity and confidentiality clause will be overwritten, and the matter will be reported to the relevant authorities.

Disclaimer

Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. Even after you agree to participate and begin the study, you are still free to withdraw at any time without obligation to give a reason. You are also free to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.

Information

The research will be disseminated through an internal report to the researcher's place of work and published in the form of a thesis for a Professional Doctorate in Education.

The researcher has passed appropriate Disclosure and Barring Service Checks and has provided UREC with the certificate number.

This research has received formal approval from the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC).

If you have any queries, complaints or concerns about this research, please direct these to Catherine Fieulleteau, Research Integrity and Ethics Manager by email at: researchethics@uel.ac.uk, by telephone 020 8223 6683 or by post to: Research Integrity and Ethics Manager, Graduate School, EB 1.43 University of East London, Docklands Campus, London E16 2RD.

APPENDIX B

Cass School of Education and Communities
University of East London
Stratford Campus
London E15 4LZ

RESEARCH INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Project:	A phenomenological study of pupils' experiences and perceived impact of a tailored vocational curriculum in an inner London Pupil Referral Unit (PRU).	**Ethics Approval Number:**	**UREC 1516 43**
Investigator:	Tina Sode	**Researcher Email:**	u0021454@uel.ac.uk

Please read the following statements and, if you agree, initial the corresponding box to confirm agreement:

	Initials
I have the read the information leaflet relating to the above programme of research in which I have been asked to participate and have been given a copy to keep. The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what it being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without obligation to give a reason. I am also free to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.	
I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential. Only the researchers involved in the study will have access to the data. It has been explained to me what will happen once the programme has been completed.	
I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me and for the information obtained to be used in relevant research publications.	

Signatures:

____________________	____________________	____________________
Name of participant (block capitals)	Date	Signature
____________________	____________________	____________________
Researcher (block capitals)	Date	Signature

If you would like a copy of this consent form to keep, please ask the researcher.

If you have any queries, complaints or concerns about this research, please direct these to Catherine Fieulleteau, Research Integrity and Ethics Manager by email at: researchethics@uel.ac.uk, by telephone 020 8223 6683 or by post to: Research Integrity and Ethics Manager, Graduate School, EB 1.43 University of East London, Docklands Campus, London E16 2RD.

APPENDIX C

Change project title - Ms Tina Sode

The School of Education and Communities Research Degrees Sub-Committee on behalf of the Impact and Innovation

Committee has considered your request. The decision is:

Approved

Your new thesis title is confirmed as follows:

Old thesis title: A Phenomenological study of students' experiences and perceived impact of a tailored vocational

curriculum in an inner London Pupil Referral Unit (PRU).

New thesis title: An exploration of educational underachievement from the perspectives of teachers and white British

working-class pupils in an urban Pupil Referral Unit.

Your registration period remains unchanged.

APPENDIX D

School of Education and Communities
University of East London
Stratford Campus
London E15 4LZ

Dear Tina

Application ID: ETH2021-0046 Original application ID: UREC 1516 43

Project title: An exploration of educational underachievement from the perspectives of teachers and white British working-class pupils in an urban Pupil Referral Unit

Lead researcher: Ms Tina Sode

Your application to University Research Ethics Sub-Committee was considered on the 26th of October 2020.

The decision is: Approved

- Change of project title from 'a phenomenological study of pupils' experiences and perceived impact of a tailored vocational curriculum in an inner London Pupil Referral Unit(PRU' to 'An exploration of educational underachievement from the perspectives of teachers and white British working-class pupils in an urban Pupil Referral Unit'

The Committee's response is based on the protocol described in the application form and supporting documentation.

Your project has received ethical approval for 2 years from the approval date.

If you have any questions regarding this application please contact your supervisor or the secretary for the University Research Ethics Sub-Committee.

Approval has been given for the submitted application only and the research must be conducted accordingly.

Should you wish to make any changes in connection with this research project you must complete 'An application for approval of an amendment to an existing application'.

Approval is given on the understanding that the UEL Code of Practice for Research and the Code of Practice for Research Ethics is adhered to.

Any adverse events or reactions that occur in connection with this research project should be reported using the University's form for Reporting an Adverse/Serious Adverse Event/Reaction.

The University will periodically audit a random sample of approved applications for ethical approval, to ensure that the research projects are conducted in compliance with the consent given by the Research Ethics Committee and to the highest standards of rigor and integrity.

Please note, it is your responsibility to retain this letter for your records.

With the Committee's best wishes for the success of the project

Yours sincerely

Fernanda Silva

Administrative Officer for Research Governance

8 February 2016

Dear Tina,

Project Title:	**A phenomenological study of pupils' experiences and perceived impact of a tailored vocational curriculum in an inner London Pupil Referral Unit (PRU).**
Principal Investigator:	**Dr Gerry Czerniawski**
Researcher:	**Tina Sode**
Reference Number:	**UREC 1516 43**

I am writing to confirm the outcome of your application to the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC), which was considered at the meeting on **Wednesday 20th January 2016**.

The decision made by members of the Committee is **Approved**. The Committee's response is based on the protocol described in the application form and supporting documentation. Your study has received ethical approval from the date of this letter.

Should you wish to make any changes in connection with your research project, this must be reported immediately to UREC. A Notification of Amendment form should be submitted for approval, accompanied by any additional or amended documents:
http://www.uel.ac.uk/wwwmedia/schools/graduate/documents/Notification-of-Amendment-to-Approved-Ethics-App-150115.doc

Any adverse events that occur in connection with this research project must be reported immediately to UREC.

Approved Research Site

I am pleased to confirm that the approval of the proposed research applies to the following research site.

Research Site	**Principal Investigator / Local Collaborator**
Tower Hamlets Pupil Referral Unit	Dr Gerry Czerniawski

Approved Documents

The final list of documents reviewed and approved by the Committee is as follows:

UEL University of East London

Document	Version	Date
UREC application form	V2	8 January 2016
Participant information sheet	V1	23 December 2015
Parent/carer letter	V1	23 December 2015
Consent form	V1	23 December 2015
Assent form	V1	23 December 2015
Interview questions	V1	23 December 2015
Gatekeeper permission letter: Head Teacher Tower Hamlets	V1	23 December 2015

Approval is given on the understanding that the UEL Code of Practice in Research is adhered to.

Please note, it is your responsibility to retain this letter for your records.

With the Committee's best wishes for the success of this project.

Yours sincerely,

Rosalind Eccles
University Research Ethics Committee (UREC)
UREC Servicing Officer
Email: researchethics@uel.ac.uk

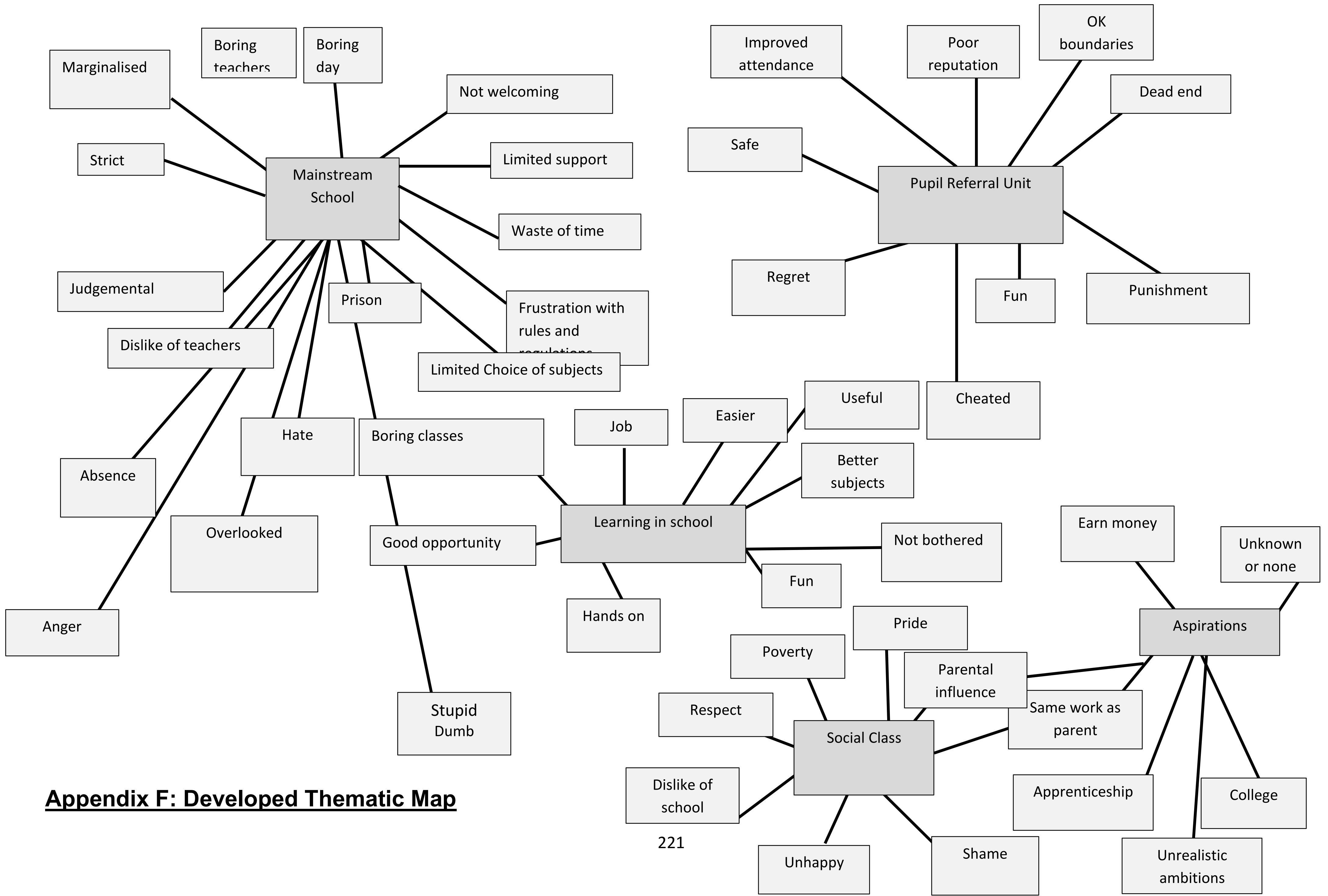
POSITIVE ABOUT DISABLED PEOPLE
INVESTOR IN PEOPLE
CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE UK The Government Standard

Boring subjects
Boring day
Boring teachers
Not welcoming
Strict
Limited support
Mainstream School
Good opportunity
Waste of time
Judgemental
Prison
Frustration with rules and regulations
Dislike of teachers
Hate
Limited Choice of subjects

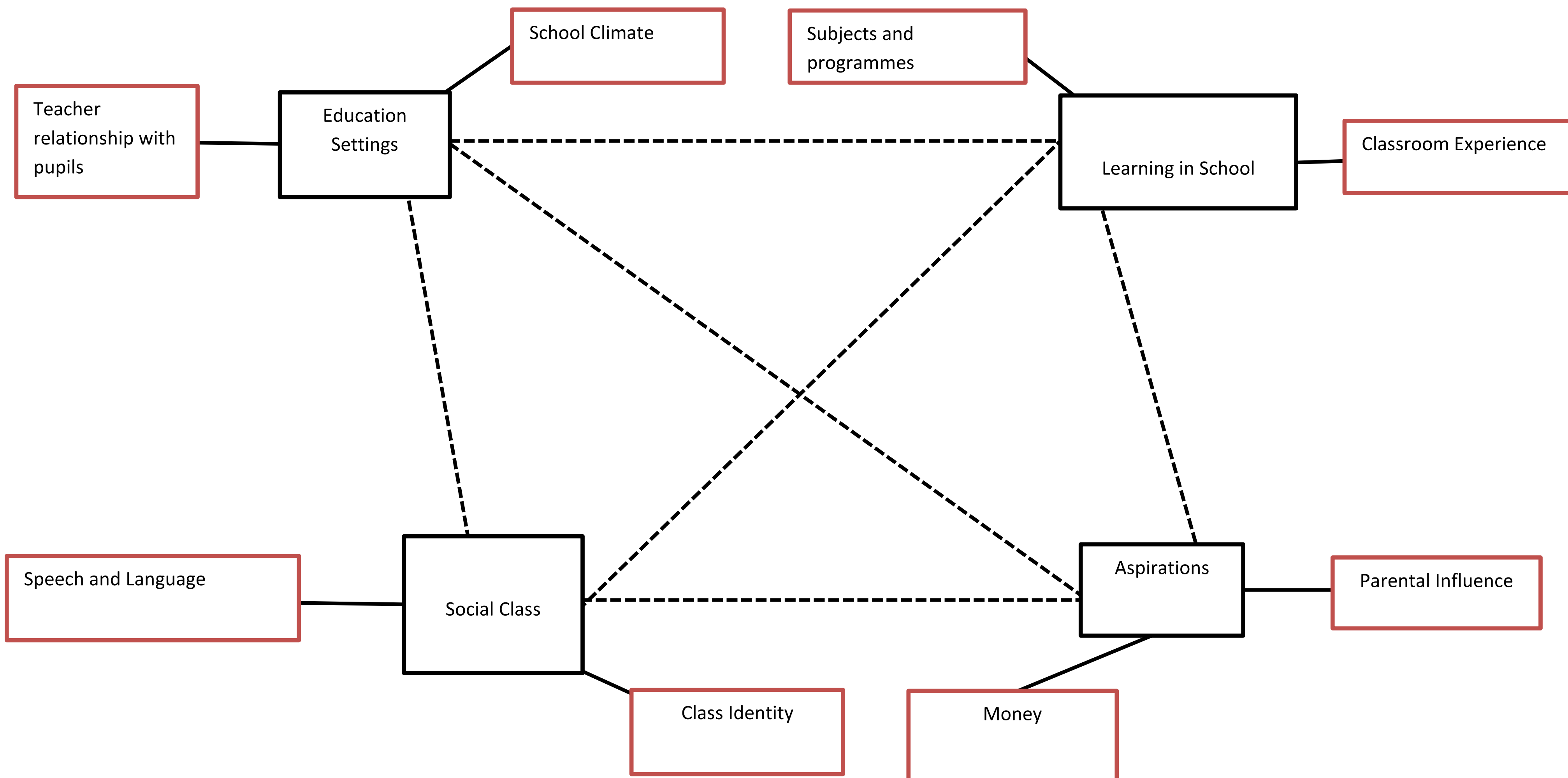
Poor reputation
OK boundaries
Improved attendance
Dead end
Easier
Safe
Job
Pupil Referral Unit
Vocational Subjects
Better subjects
Fun
Punishment
Hands on
Lazy
Useful
Practical

Marginalised
Not bothered
Stick with
Earn money
Unknown or none
Appearance
Respect
Absence
Regret
Aspirations
Grafters
Poor
Parents
Behaviours and feelings
Cheated
Shame
Social Class
Pride
Same work as parent
Overlooked
Anger
Stupid Dumb
Apprenticeship
College
Dislike of school
Unhappy
Expectations
Education: waste of time
Unrealistic ambitions

Appendix E: Initial Thematic Map.

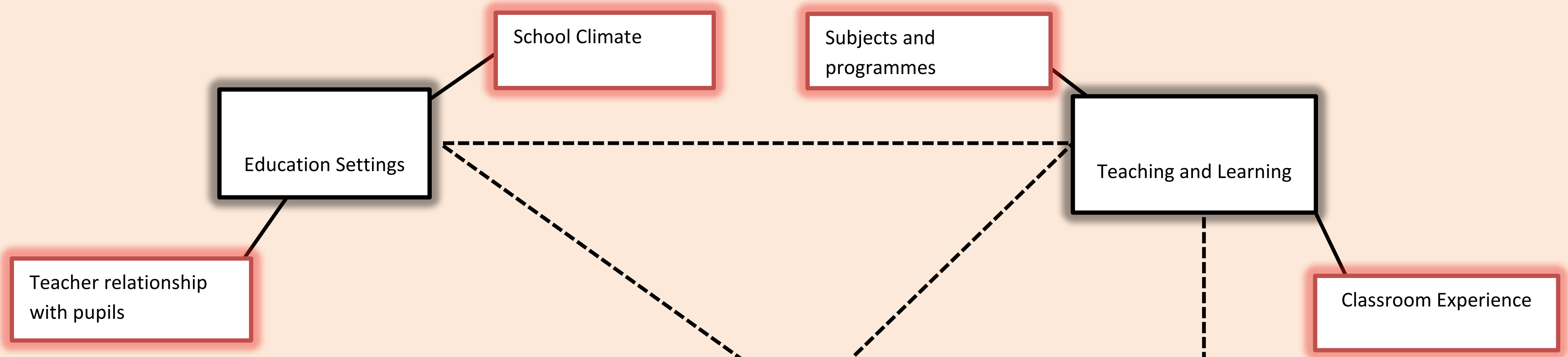


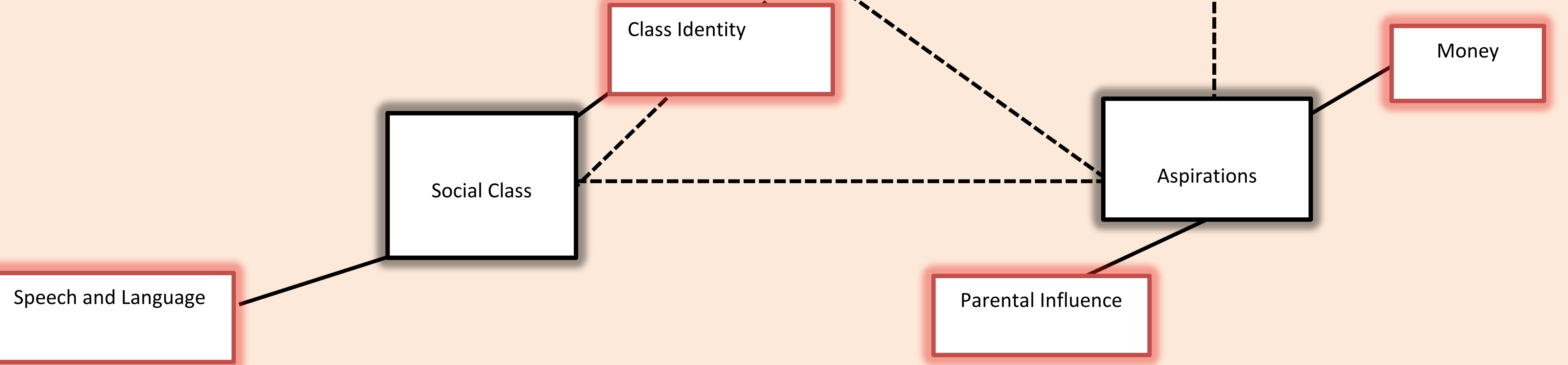
Appendix F: Developed Thematic Map



Appendix G: Reviewed thematic map

IN-SCHOOL FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO EDUCATIONAL UNDERACHIEVEMENT IN WHITE BRITISH WORKING-CLASS PUPILS





OUT–OF-SCHOOL FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO EDUCATIONAL UNDERACHIEVEMENT IN WHITE BRITISH WORKING-CLASS PUPILS

Appendix H: Final thematic map

Appendix I

Interview Schedule – Pupils

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. I am carrying out a study that that explores the factors that cause or contribute to the educational underachievement of White British pupils from a working-class background. Your name will not be used and anything you say in this interview will remain confidential. I would like to record this interview; please can you confirm that this is ok with you? Before we begin, I'd like to remind you that you are free to end this interview anytime you like. Thank you

1. Can you tell me about your family?

- Do your parents work? What jobs do they do? [38]
- Did either of your parents go to university?
- Do your parents want you to go to university?
- Do your parents help you with your assignments?
- What family activities do you take part in outside school?

2. Can you tell me what class means to you?

- What class would you say you belong to? Why?
- Do you think your class makes a difference to the way you are seen or treated in or outside school?
- Do you think your class influences the way you see school?
- Schools report that White British pupils from working-class backgrounds do not do as well as pupils from middle-class backgrounds. Why do you think this happens?
- What do you think needs to change for them to do well in school?

3. Can you tell me what you think about education and achievement?

- What does achievement in education mean to you?
- How do you think schools define achievement?
- Do you think going to college or having a university degree is important?
- If no, why not?
- What is your idea of success?
- How do you plan to achieve this success?

[38] Bullet points denote prompts which were only to be used if necessary.

4. Can you tell me about school?

- Why were you referred to the Wallace Centre?
- Are there any differences between your experience at your previous school and the Wallace Centre?
- Do you enjoy the subjects you do at the Wallace Centre?
- What are they?
- Are they different to the subjects you did in your previous school?
- If yes, which subjects do you enjoy more? Why?
- What helps you learn better?
- What stops you from learning?
- What were the main challenges you faced at school?
- What are the main challenges you face here at the PRU?
- Did these challenges affect your level of achievement?
- Would you say your teachers have had a big influence on the way you engage with education?
- If you could choose, would you pick your previous school or the PRU as a place to learn?

5. Can we talk about your aspirations?

- What do you want to do after year 11?
- What do you want to do in the future?
- Have you always wanted to do this?
- Does what you want to do influence how you perform in school?
- Did the course you are on now (at the Wallace Centre) help you make the decision?

6. **Is there anything that we have not covered in the interview that you would like to add?**

Thank you very much for your time. Is there anything you would like to add or ask me before you go?

Appendix J

Interview Schedule – Teachers

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. I am carrying out a study that that explores the factors that cause or contribute to the educational underachievement of White British pupils from a working-class background. Your name will not be used and anything you say in this interview will remain confidential. I would like to record this interview; please can you confirm that this is ok with you? Before we begin, I'd like to remind you that you are free to end this interview anytime you like. Thank you

1. Can I ask you about your background?

- Have you taught in a mainstream school before?[39]
- If yes, could you describe the general difference (if any) in behaviour and performance of white working-class pupils in each different setting?

2. Can we discuss the curriculum at the Wallace Centre and White British working-class pupils' learning?

- How does the offer at the Wallace Centre differ from mainstream schools?
- How do pupils decide which option they wish to take?
- Do all the pupils access work experience opportunities?
- Do you think white working-class pupils engage better with vocational subjects?
- Most White British working-class pupils arrive at the Wallace Centre with predictions of few or nil GCSE outcomes. In the past, have these predictions generally been inaccurate?
- If so, what in your opinion contributed to this change?
- What in your opinion contributes to the underperformance of White British Working-class pupils at GCSE level?

3. Can we talk about class and its impact on educational outcomes?

- Are there any challenges that teachers face that are particular to White British working-class pupils?
- Do you believe the family background of White British working-class pupils has an impact on their educational outcomes? What are the reasons for your response?

[39] Bullet points denote prompts which were only to be used if necessary.

- Do you feel White British working-class pupils engage better with working-class teachers?

4. Can we discuss the career and educational aspirations of White British working-class pupils?

- What in your opinion are (if any) the main aspirations of White British working-class pupils?
- What gives you this opinion?
- What do you see to be the main influence on these aspirations (or lack of)?
- Where generally do White British Working-class pupils progress to after KS4?

5. From experience, how would you describe the involvement of White British Working-class parents in the education of their children?

6. **Is there anything that we have not covered in the interview that you would like to add?**

Thank you, very much for your time. Is there anything you would like to add or ask me before you go?

APPENDIX K

Appendix I: Sample pupil interview transcript with codes

TS: Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. I am carrying out a study that that looks at the reasons why some white pupils from a working-class background underachieve in school. I am not going to use your name and anything you say in this interview will be confidential. I would like to voice record this interview, is this okay with you? Before we begin, I want to remind you that you are free to end this interview anytime you like. Is that alright?

C: Yeah

TS: Thank you

TS: Do your parents work? What jobs do they do?

C: I thought this was about me.

TS: It is, but I just want to get a picture of your family background

C: ahhhh right. My dad used to work but he's banged up now. He didn't do it, but yeah. Mum's alright, she does massages in a salon, so she has her own business and she has loads of customers.

TS: Did either of your parents go to university?

C: Don't know. Don't think so. I don't know you know. I don't really care.

TS: What family activities do you take part in outside school?

C: What do you mean?

TS: Do you do things with your mum outside school?

C: Not really. I hang out with my mates most of the time. We do go up to Clacton to see my granddad sometimes.

TS: Do your parents want you to go to university?

C: Nah. They're not fussed. My mum just wants me to be happy.

TS: Are your parents involved in your education?

C: Of course. The teachers know

TS: What do the teachers know?

C: My mum has always got my back. She's here like a shot when the teachers get funny with me.

TS: What class would you say you belong to? Why?

C: What here? Wait, you mean like East End and stuff like middle-class? Nah, I'm not middle-class, both my mum and dad grew up in Shadwell. I love being from the East End. You know who we are from our garms. My mum makes sure I've got all the right designer stuff. My sister's the same, she lives up in Ongar in a really nice place. We're lucky like that. We get all the stuff we need cos we can't go round looking rachet.

TS: Do you think your class makes a difference to the way you are seen or treated in school?

C: Yeah. Really. Everyone thinks we are poor. Like everyone, even Black kids don't even belong here, and they think they're better than us. They look poor but their parents used to bring them to school in flashy cars, so teachers treated them better than us. Funny thing is we were all in lower set, so I don't know why they think they're better.

TS: Schools report that white pupils from working class backgrounds do not do as well as pupils from middle class backgrounds. Why do you think this happens?

C: I dunno. It's true though. We still end up in better places though. What do you think?

TS: I am not quite sure. That is what I am trying to find out.

C: Yeah. I dunno. I never liked school though. I think it's the teachers, they don't help and think they are all that. That Miss X was just up herself. She goes around making people feel bad. She tries to make me feel daft, but it doesn't work. Like, just because I failed a couple of tests she said I was gonna fail my GCSEs. Right in front of the whole class. She can't teach anyway. Yeah. The teachers don't help us. They don't want to.

TS: What do you think needs to change for them to do well in school?

C: My mum and her friends don't think teachers help. They said they think they're better than us and treat white kids badly even worse than gypsies. Mum thinks school isn't bad but the teachers make it bad so you don't get anything. She thinks it's a waste of time. I'm better of working in the salon. So maybe teachers need to change. Maybe we need more like us.

TS: What do you mean by like you?

C: Not being funny but white. Yeah.

TS: What does achievement in education mean to you?

C: Do you mean doing well? I think it's being happy. My mum says that's what's important. She said as long as I know what I'm gonna do when I leave school and I'm happy with it, then it's all good. My old teachers just wanted everyone to do useless stuff and get useless quals. I mean, did you do geography in the old days? What the hell am I gonna do with a qualification in Geography. I told the teacher she was having a laugh, she said I have to do it but I never went back.

TS: How do you think schools define achievement?

C: Doing loads of rubbish subjects. And when you don't wanna do it, you get chucked out. Yeah.

TS: Do you think going to college or having a university degree is important?

If no, why not?

C: I don't know you know. I don't think so. I know loads of people who didn't and they're alright. My sister didn't and she's alright. My mum helps her but she's still alright. A lot of rich Asian kids wanna go but it's because they have to, or they get beats. I don't know. I think I might like college, it might be different. I don't know if any of my mates are going.

TS: What is your idea of success?

C: Nice house, nice car. Loads of money. Get married. Be a footballer's wife. They can buy whatever they like. I could have a business.

TS: What would your business be in?

C: I don't know but it'll be nice. I could have a garage, but I won't work there just get people to do the job.

TS: How do you plan to achieve this success?

C: Keep looking good and get loads of experience in something. Like my mum. And I know how to do massages so I can do that.

TS: Why were you referred to the Wallace Centre?

C: I kept getting into bother in my old school. It wasn't my fault or nothing so I stopped going in, so I don't get the blame. We didn't have a problem with them

TS: Who did you not have a problem with?

C: The black kids, but I just didn't want to be friends with them, but there were loads in my old school. I really didn't like it. I didn't like the school or them. Everything was about them. We had loads of arguments in that black month. I always got the blame and I got sent home all the time. I'm glad I'm out of there.

TS: Are there any differences between your experience at your previous school and the Wallace Centre?

C: Bares. they had rules for everything. I felt so suffocated by the rules. Don't do this, don't say that, learn this, learn that. Like everything. Especially my hair, homework, even whistling was a biggie. I told my mum I couldn't do anything right. I remember one time I got to school about 15 minutes late and it was a madness. It kicked off and I got sent back home. I mean, it's not great here but they understand stuff better here. I don't get stressed for being late but funny enough I don't really come late and can wear what I like. No one gets on to me about my hair and stuff. Yeah, they get it.

TS: What do they get?

C: Life.

TS: Do you enjoy the subjects you do at the Wallace Centre?

What are they?

C: Do you know what? I really don't like school but the course I am doing is a little bit okay. I get to do stuff outside. I am the only girl, but I am not doing too bad you know. I like the car bits but hate coming back in. I thought it would be messy but it's alright. It can mess up my nails sometimes, but I get that sorted. Don't think I'd do it for work though but yeah.

TS: Are they different to the subjects you did in your previous school?

If yes, which subjects do you enjoy more? Why?

C: Everything was sooooooo boring. Sometimes, I just wanted to kill myself… it was that dead. I just stopped going…then I got into trouble for not going. I really hate sitting there listening to them going on and on. I can't bear it.

TS: What helps you learn better?

C: I think I like doing stuff. Me and my mates all said we like doing stuff.

TS: What stops you from learning?

C: What at XXX school? Was just too much unnecessary stuff. I couldn't bear it. I couldn't focus. It was pages and pages of stuuuuuff. I mean it's not that much better here but at least we get to go out and do practical stuff and that's our class. Mr W isn't stiff. He gets that we don't know stuff, so he teaches us different. Like with the bolts and stuff. Last week we did a hangman game for a test, so we can show we know what things go. It wasn't bad you know

TS: What were the main challenges you faced at school?

C: I really hated my head of year. I think he knew it. I just couldn't hide it. He was racist and snobby. Didn't like anyone who wasn't rich and smart. He really didn't like Brian, he thought he was a wasteman. We really wanted out. They all just found reasons to get om to us. It's not just him, I think it's a teacher thing. They're all the same, some just hide it better than others but I know they only like the clever ones. Yeah. The clever ones or the blacks.

TS: Did these challenges affect your level of achievement?

C: I don't know what you mean. Do you mean did this make us do badly? Maybe, I don't know, you know. They did make us not want to go in though. Yeah.

TS: Would you say your teachers have had a big influence on the way you engage with education?

C: Oh, my days, you have no idea. Have you heard Miss Y's voice? I hate all of it. I used to dream about her going on about how bad I am and how bad my work is. And the teachers didn't really care.

They only pretend. I remember that Aiysha called me and Brian trashy whites when we wore his and hers Michael Kors watches. She's such a racist cow, but that doesn't matter because I told miss and she just laughed. They never took our side, even some of the white teachers. They maybe didn't want to be called racist or they felt there was no point bothering to stick up for us.

TS: What do you want to do after year 11?

C: I don't really know for sure, but I can't wait.

TS: What do you want to do in the future?

C: What like a job or for life?

TS: Either or both

C: I know I want to be alright and not have to get benefits or anything like that. I don't want to do any minging work like shops n stuff either. I can do massages and I am good with numbers in my head.

TS: Are you? Do you like Math?

C: No, I don't you know. It's not hard, I just hate being in class but I get the numbers. My vehicle teacher said I'm quick.

TS: Does what you want to do influence how you perform in school?

C: I don't even know what I want to do.

TS: Is there anything that we have not covered in the interview that you would like to add?

C: No. Wasn't bad though. I told my mum about this and she said you must be getting paid a lot for it.

TS: I am not getting paid at all. Do you remember the information sheet you got? What you have told me will help me get answers to the questions I am asking in my research.

C: Oh yeah, your doing some degree thing. Okay. I remember. Good luck, I hope you pass and stuff.

TS: Thank you. You take care.

C: Bye

End