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# Understanding working-class orientations towards Higher Education: a qualitative study of educational decision-making practice

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*This thesis is the result of the author's original research. It has been composed by the author and has not been previously submitted for examination which has led to the award of a degree.*



*Signed:*

*Date:*

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## Abstract

This thesis investigates the experiences of a group of working-class pupils as they experience educational-decision making in post-compulsory education. It focuses on a cohort of 28 pupils, identified as being the highest-attaining within a school with historically low-progression rates to Higher Education. The study presents the findings of an in-depth sociological study which investigates the ways in which these young people orientate and navigate towards post-school destinations. Based on emerging ideas from social practice theory, this study adopts a methodological approach which considers the multi-sited nature of post-16 choices.

The study explores how senior management responded to both policy to increase academic performance, and to localised and contextualised practice at the site in which temporal and historic community understandings of schooling and employment persist. Within these arrangements, the study focuses on the experiences of a close friendship group of ten pupils as they explore possibilities to study at university. Using methods of interviews, group discussions, participant observation and forms of actionable research (St John, 2013), the study identifies senior management strategies to support academic progress and considers pupil alignment towards academic engagement. It shows the extent to which activities need to be brokered at the site in order for pupils to access a more privileged existence in Higher Education. It also shows the extent to which this involves a collective negotiation of practice by pupils and their close networks as they participate in activities to support successful applications.

The thesis suggests that in the neglect of adequate explorations of working-class pupil experiences, current policy and interventions to address this issue maintain

a focus on the individual, and fail to grasp effectively the more complex reproductive and transformative processes within peer groups, schools and community cultures. The thesis concludes by outlining several suggestions for future research and policy in this area.

## Acronyms and Abbreviations

*A*dv
: Advanced

AERS
: Applied Educational Research Scheme

CAI
: Commonwealth Apprenticeship Initiative

DHT
: Deputy Head Teacher

EEO
: enterprise and employability officer

EMA
: Educational Maintenance Allowance

EO
: enterprise officer

EPB
: evidence based policy

FE
: Further Education

FSM
: free school meal

HE
: Higher Education

HT
: headteacher

*LNAT*
: The Law National Aptitude Test

NEET
: Not in Education, Employment or Training

*NQ*
: National Qualification

RAF
: Royal Air Force

SEU
: Social Exclusion Unit

SFC
: Scottish Funding Council

SIMD
: Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation

SMCP
: Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission (renamed the Social Mobility Commission in 2018)

SoA
: Schools of Ambition

SQA
: Scottish Qualifications Authority

UCAS
: University College Application System

UKCAT
: UK Clinical Aptitude Test

UPS
: Unified Points Scale

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# Chapter 1

# Understanding inequality in access to Higher Education in Scotland: a way forward?

## 1. Introduction

It is increasingly recognised that the UK has some of the greatest levels of social inequality among developed countries (Alvaredo *et al*., 2013; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). Within this climate, the economic, cultural, and social differences which combine to preserve privilege across generations is becoming more pronounced as rising income inequality limits the role of education as a potential driver for social mobility. Consequently, Gamoran (2013) suggests that young people who are born into economic and social disadvantage experience "fewer opportunities for advancement and lower educational and occupational achievements in adulthood" (p.10). In *Social class in the 21st Century,* Savage (2015) highlights the ways in which patterns of social inequality are enacted in the UK. He argues that these are principally through the rigidity of social networks that are linked to an occupational hierarchy as individuals centre their connections and social ties among people within their immediate social position. One area that clearly illuminates the prevalence of these patterns is the socio-economic background of young people entering Higher Education.

Increasing concerns about poor levels of social mobility and rising inequality in Scotland were expressed by Alan Milburn, former Chair of the UK Government's Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission (SMCP) 2012-2017. In a speech

delivered in 2013, Alan Milburn highlighted the failure of government policies and the role of education to deliver enough progress in improving social mobility; “In my view it’s a grave social injustice that only one in forty pupils from Scotland’s most deprived households- 220 in the whole of the country - got three As in their Highers in 2011, compared to one in ten across all income levels”. This analysis of the disparities in attainment between the least and most deprived households has proved more pronounced in Scotland than in other areas of the UK. Recent statistics published by the Sutton Trust found that Scottish 18 year olds from the most advantaged areas are more than four times more likely to go straight to university than those from the least advantaged areas. In England and Wales, 18 year olds from the most advantaged areas are 2.4 times as likely to go to university. In Wales and Northern Ireland, the most advantaged are three times more likely to go to University (Hunter Blackburn *et al*., 2016). The SMCP Commission noted further patterns of occupational inequality in their *State of the Nation* report of 2015, which found that:

> 43 per cent of people at the top of Scottish society studied for a first degree at one of the four ancient universities in Scotland. This includes 66 per cent of senior judges, 50 per cent of top media professionals and 46 per cent of Scottish MPs.” (p.178)

The SMCP Commission recognised in their *State of the Nation* report of 2013 that educational attainment has become increasingly important to future employment prospects but that informal barriers to opportunity have expanded:

> Key forces here include the shift to a knowledge-based economy where success in life depends upon formal qualifications, social networks and so-called ‘character’ skills like grit and persistence. This has occurred alongside occupational changes like the hollowing out of the labour market with fewer jobs in the middle, the erosion of careers ladders and a higher proportion of small businesses, which are more likely on average to recruit through word of mouth than larger firms. Higher skills have led to large increases in productivity and pay for those who possess them while those with low skills have experienced reduced demand for their labour and lower average

> earnings. The former tend to enjoy better job security, higher pay and decent prospects for social advance. (pp.229-30)

A policy response in 2014 by the Scottish First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, to address this problem saw the announcement of £100 million in funding to close the attainment gap in order to ensure that "a child born today in one of our most deprived communities will, by the time he or she leaves school, have the same chance of going to university as a child born in one of our least deprived communities" (Sturgeon, 2014). Recognising that a lack of social mobility remains a major problem for Scotland, the Scottish Government has also committed in their *Fairer Scotland Action Plan* (2016b) to widen access to university. It states that it will implement in full, the thirty-four recommendations made by the Commission on Widening Access in their final report *Blueprint for Fairness* (2016a). These include implementing national and institutional targets for admitting pupils to Higher Education (HE) from lower-income backgrounds, and appointing a Commissioner for Fair Access to take the lead and ensure delivery on these issues.

Widening access to universities is thus a major policy priority in Scotland. The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) implemented outcome agreements for universities in 2012/13. These required that institutions report on progress made in a number of areas including widening access. As a result, some universities have established additional funded places for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and those articulating from courses in Further Education (FE) colleges. A further evaluative exercise funded by the SFC is presently underway. This is looking at the success of current outreach activities in widening access to higher education in Scotland, in order to implement Recommendation 3 of *A Blueprint for Fairness* (2016a) which states that by 2018:

> the Commissioner for Fair Access, working with experts, should publish a Scottish Framework for Fair Access. This authoritative, evidence based framework should identify the most impactful forms of access activity at each stage of the learner journey, from early learning through to higher education and provide best practice guidelines on its delivery and evaluation." (p.10).

In 2013, Universities Scotland commissioned a literature review of widening access interventions entitled *Widening Access to Higher Education: Does anyone know what works?* In this report, Riddell *et al*. (2013) recognised that published evaluations of outreach interventions were generally positive, but that "the multi-faceted nature of most programmes … means that it is impossible to establish with certainty which element works best, in terms of influencing positively the behaviour and decision-making of participants" (pp.56-7). The interim report published by the Commission on Widening Access (2015) further noted in their assessment of outreach programmes that:

> despite these undoubted positives, the reality is that the cumulative impact of these programmes on advancing equal access is unclear. Given the marginal nature of progress over the last decade, it is tempting to conclude, at least at a national level, that current outreach activity may be having a limited impact on overall participation. It is notable too that a significant proportion of the progress which has been made was delivered in a single academic year (2013/14). That this academic year coincided with the injection of additional funded places, and the first full year of outcome agreements, may suggest that it was these factors, rather than effective outreach, which has driven progress. (p.46)

It is contended here that this process of establishing evidence based frameworks (see SFC) fail to imaginatively tackle what has become an increasingly complex social concern. The more structural focus on achieving targets in widening access and removing barriers to participation, as favoured in current political discourse, provide a too narrow conceptual understanding of the issue. Tracking the effectiveness of measures to widen access are welcome, however there is a danger that

innovation in this area may be stifled by the current phenomena of bringing reforms to scale as noted by St John (2013) in the US. In looking at policy on widening access to Higher Education, St John suggests that "neoscientific research which usually focuses on providing a single solution to a complex problem… has become the bottom line for intervention theory and methods" (p.78).

In the UK, similar approaches to taking forward social policy based on a programme of reviewing interventions have gained traction over the last five years. Government funded 'What works Centres' have been established across the UK, spanning health, justice, education, local economies, and early years. In education, the Learning & Teaching Toolkit, (Higgins *et al.,* 2014) has been widely publicised in England and Scotland as an easily accessible synthesis of available research to support practitioner decision-making on choosing interventions to close the attainment gap. Using a similar design, the Scottish Framework for Fair Access toolkit developed by CFE research and Crawford and McCaig (2018) for the Scottish Government provides a similar style matrix to understanding best practice in widening access to Higher Education. Both educational toolkits developed to support practice in the UK draw on a wide range of evidence including meta-analyses of US programmes. Interventions which have proven difficult to evaluate or have already shown to have achieved limited impact as noted by Riddell *et al.* (2013) and the Commission on Fair Access (2015, p.46) are also promoted as examples of good practice in the Framework for Fair Access.

St John (2013) suggests that in contrast to these approaches, actionable research developed through partnerships between researchers and practitioners has the capacity to address critical challenges in their situated contexts:

> Quantitative evidence of going to scale and having an impact, however provides only part of the information needed. Qualitative research that observes, critiques and reflects on the process of action inquiry in research partnerships is perhaps even more crucial in building knowledge and skills for a new generation of actionable research focusing on social justice in education and social services in the Global Transition. (St John, 2013, p.78)

In an attempt to explore opportunities to develop understanding of more situated contexts, this thesis adopts principles of actionable research in its exploration of the substantive issue, thus differing from more conventional research in this area. Firstly by engaging closely with practitioners and taking time to understand particular concerns and challenges, this research set out to develop a close partnership with a local school. The thesis thus uses data from an in-depth study of a school in Glasgow located in an area of high multiple deprivation (The Scottish Government, 2016). Glasgow City has six of the ten most deprived data zones in Scotland, the largest share of deprivation. Nearly half (48 per cent) of its data zones are classified in the 20 per cent most deprived in Scotland and which has improved by 1 per cent since SIMD 2012 (The Scottish Government, 2016). This thesis is fundamentally concerned with how wider social concerns related to increased competition and inequality, and the decreasing levels of social mobility, come to have an impact on young people from working-class backgrounds as they orientate towards Higher Education. What are the relationships between policy ideas to improve educational outcomes for young people living in these areas, and everyday experiences of orientating towards post-school destinations? What challenges exist to changing the persistence of inequality in outcomes for Scottish education? And finally, can more be done to incorporate better understandings of young people's educational decision-making behaviours in policy and practice? It is anticipated that the processes adopted in this study may be useful

to other researchers and practitioners looking for ways to address the issue of social justice in education.

The report by the Child Poverty Commission (2013) has recognised that social mobility is stunted by fewer opportunities available to pupils from lower income backgrounds (see p.14). With entrance to the professions largely gained through university education, and university entrance requirements in Scotland for well-paid vocations such as medicine, dentistry, engineering and law requiring 5+Highers in one sitting for Scottish domiciled students, there are very few studies which focus on the experiences of this group. This study draws on the experiences of 28 of the highest-achieving pupils attending a Glasgow school with traditionally low progression rates to Higher Education as they begin post-16 education in S5 in 2011. In doing so, the research study provides a detailed examination of the ways in which some of these pupils orientate towards Higher Education. The study is further informed by the experiences of these participants as they progress their studies at university and their subsequent transitions in accessing employment (Hunter *et al.*, 2018; Wilson *et al*., 2014). The account situates pupil everyday practices within a web of interrelated phenomena in order to provide evidence, on the one hand, of a fairly ordinary picture of schooling, but on the other, a detailed insight into the real-life difficulties and challenges of changing present arrangements. To begin, this chapter situates the thesis within the broad research and policy context of social disadvantage and educational decision-making in the first two sections. Section 1.3 then sets out the starting points for this study. Finally, section 1.4 provides an overview of the chapters in this thesis.

### 1.1 Post-16 learning in the UK and Scotland: have social inequalities reduced?

The last fifty years has seen major changes to youth transitions, youth labour markets and participation in post-16 education. However, across the UK, the social balance of higher education has remained relatively constant and the patterns of participation in different HE institutions continue to be largely dependent on social-class background (Fuller *et al*., 2011). Prior to the publication of *The Robbins Report on Higher Education* (Ministry of Education, 1963), only about four per cent of young people entered full-time courses at university. A further 4.5 per cent of young people went on to teacher training and other full-time courses in Further Education, and just over 5 per cent of the population were in FE colleges part-time (Barr and Glennerster, 2014). *The Robbins Report* thus marked the advent of a commitment by successive UK Governments to increase the number of people able to participate in post-compulsory education. Over time Government policies have reformulated the principles set out in 1963, but have generally adhered to the idea that "courses of higher education should be available for all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so" (Ministry of Education, 1963, p.8). Thus for the first time in UK society, the post-war period was characterised by an expansion of higher education in which those without any previous family experience of HE could access university in greater numbers. Calhoun (2014) is cautious about whether this growth produced a more egalitarian society stating that:

> Expansion of higher education responded to the growth of middle and professional classes that was already underway. These wanted more educational opportunities for their children, and the Robbins-era expansion of universities mainly created more places for them, not for children of the working class or poor (pp.70-71).

Growing levels of youth unemployment in the 1970s and 1980s resulting from social and economic changes further impacted on the expansion of the post-compulsory education sector. The decline of the UKs manufacturing base, left fewer opportunities for apprenticeships and employment opportunities for young people. Those leaving school at the minimum age with fewer qualifications were faced with a reduction in the number of suitable jobs available (Murray and Gayle, 2012). Education providers rather than industry were thus viewed by the Conservative Government of the 1980s and 1990s as a means of developing supplies of skilled people. They recommended that an untapped pool of young people with ability could benefit from Higher Education and embarked on a period of privatising polytechnics and restructuring them as universities under the 1992 Higher Education Act (implemented in 1994) (Maringe and Fuller, 2006). Calhoun (2014) further states that the relabelling did increase the number of working-class students in universities, tripling the total university population, but that it did not eliminate inequality and instead incorporated it into the university system.

> What had been a distinction between universities and non-universities was increasingly turned into a hierarchy of universities. As inequality of income increased, inequality in higher education tracked it (Calhoun, 2014, pp.71-72).

The successive Labour Government which came to power in 1997 attempted to balance concerns of social justice with economic competitiveness in their 'third way' politics. Following the *Dearing Report* (1997) which made 93 recommendations concerning the funding, expansion, and maintenance of academic standards, New Labour set a target to increase participation in Higher Education to fifty per cent of the school leaving population. For the first time tuition fees were introduced supported by low interest government loans, replacing the old grants system. In parallel New Labour

also implemented a programme of social reform setting up the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) in 1997. This agency had a remit to "help improve government action to reduce social exclusion by producing joined-up solutions to joined-up problems" (SEU, 2004). The risk of social exclusion was defined as more likely to affect individuals and communities experiencing a "combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown" (SEU, 2004, p.13). SEU (1999) identified a category of young people most at risk of becoming 'NEET', an acronym that stood for 'not in education, employment or training'. Risk factors associated with becoming NEET included young people whose parents had low levels of education; having parents who are workless; and living in deprived neighbourhoods with schools which have poor attainment levels.

McNeil (2012) suggests that the SEU reframed the political discourse from ending social exclusion by public spending on services and towards instigating social reform by empowering individuals. She also notes that the most disadvantaged individuals and communities were "encouraged under the social exclusion agenda to become 'consumers' of services rather than participants" (p.7). This is evident in current policies targeted at school leavers which favour interventions to correct the ability of individuals to foster favourable attitudes towards training, education and skills development. In the UK discussion paper for example, *Aspiration and attainment amongst young people in deprived communities* (2008), it states that:

> Young people are more likely to achieve positive outcomes when they develop ambitious, achievable aspirations, combined with the self-esteem, self-efficacy, information and inspiration they need to persevere towards their goals. (The Cabinet Office, 2008, p.2).

Similar policy discourses were echoed under a devolved Scottish Government and are evident in a number of documents that provide guidance to learning providers. The publication of *More Choices, More Chances* (The Scottish Government, 2006) set out recommendations to reduce the number of pupils becoming NEET by asserting that learning providers should focus on "raising ambition and equip all young people with the knowledge, skills, confidence and self-esteem to enable them to achieve their full potential" (p.15). Similarly Scotland's lifelong learning strategy *Skills for Scotland* (2007) defines career planning skills as "the skills, knowledge and self-awareness to develop aspirational career aims and the confidence to take appropriate actions in one's working life, time and again, as career opportunities arise and work and learning options change" (p.51).

*More Choices, More Chances* also placed a "renewed emphasis on the responsibility of schools and local authorities to consider the outcomes for all children, including appropriate monitoring as part of performance management arrangements for schools and local authorities" (2006, p.2). This increased role for learning providers is set out in proposals for improving career information, advice and guidance (IAG) in *16+ Learning Choices, Policy and Practice Framework* (Scottish Government, 2010). This policy outlines a careers education framework that focuses on "personalisation and choice, reflecting individuals' needs and aspirations [in order to] encompass relevant supports to help young people make effective learning choices; and to progress on the path of lifelong learning" (p.3). The political discourse to tackle social inequality and increase economic productivity as set out by New Labour, is still prominent today as set out in the latest iteration of *Career Information, Advice and Guidance in Scotland: a Framework for Service Redesign and Improvement:*

> Raising aspirations is a top priority for all Career IAG providers, and a key ingredient of wider collaborative action to tackle unemployment, poverty and inequality. We cannot over-estimate the capacity of good Career IAG to enthuse people about their future and to encourage them to aim high when considering and planning further learning and work. (The Scottish Government, 2011, part 5)

A current remit of the Government department, Skills Development Scotland, is to record and track pupil destinations. Under guidelines set out in 2010, learning providers are expected to ensure that its young people receive an offer of post-16 learning "well in advance of their school leaving date and before leaving any subsequent episode of learning during the senior phase" (Scottish Government, 2010, p.3). Indicators measured, include the percentage of school leavers recorded as entering and sustaining 'positive destinations' which encompasses a wide and varied set of activities. These include: school leavers undertaking FE or HE courses, young people in employment or training in the March / April after leaving school, and people who are volunteering, or on activity agreements. Headlines published in *Initial destinations of senior phase school leavers* (The Scottish Government, 2018) celebrate that a rise in the "percentage of senior phase school leavers in a positive destination approximately three months after leaving school has increased from 93.3 per cent in 2015/16 to 93.7 per cent in 2016/17". Secondly, it records that "67.5 per cent of senior phase school leavers continued their education within Higher or Further Education establishments in 2016/17" (p.2). What these headlines fail to state is the percentage of Scottish domiciled school leavers admitted to degree level studies, and at which institutions. Figures published in the report, record that of the 51,258 Scottish school leavers in 2016/17, 40.7 per cent entered Higher Education (p.6). Figures published by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) (2018) record entry rates

in Scotland to university undergraduate level in 2017 at 25.9%, omitting the figures of full-time higher education provided in further education colleges in Scotland. This entry rate to degree level is lower than in the rest of the UK. Arguably the ways in which government statistics are published in Scotland obscures the deeper inequalities that present a persistent challenge to Scottish education as outlined by Hunter Blackburn *et al*. (2016).

Whilst the introduction to this thesis has outlined a commitment by the Scottish Government to addressing inequality and education, the evidence suggests that little progress has been made since the concerns raised in a report in 2007 by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). This report, commissioned by the Scottish Government to investigate quality and equity of schooling in Scotland, concluded that the only growth in participation in post-16 education had been in the college sector. It concluded that a socially broader participation rate in upper secondary and greater equity in Scottish Higher Education needed to be addressed (OECD, 2007). This is recognised in figures published by the Commission for Fair Access (2017) *Laying the Foundations for Fair Access Annual Report* which highlight that the percentage of full-time first degree entrants from the 20 per cent most deprived areas (SIMD20), by Higher Education Institution, 2015/16 are poorly represented at ancient, research-intensive universities. Unavailable is the data which shows the percentage of pupils entering different types of institutions coming from the most advantaged areas in Scotland. However, recent statistics published by Steven *et al*. (2016) suggest that in Scotland patterns of inequality in access to medicine are more pronounced than in England. Figures indicate that 54 per

cent of Scottish applicants with an accepted offer to medical school (between 2009-2012) were from the wealthiest postcodes. In England, this figure is 38%.

Overall, the data available suggests that class differences have persisted in Scottish education. Iannelli (2011) suggests that the increase in participation among under-represented groups can be attributed to the increase in participation by people from disadvantaged backgrounds in new universities and Further Education colleges. She concludes therefore that educational expansion has "not translated into any break with the patterns of social inequalities in the chances of entering the top-level occupations" (p. 251).

### 1.2 Understanding educational decision-making: competing perspectives

The policies reviewed in the above section are suggestive of discourses that promote individual aspiration, reason and logic in preparing young people for post-16 education and positive destinations more broadly. An analysis of these policy frameworks recognise that the assumptions inherent in these policies derive from a social psychological and cognitive perspective. This illuminates the underlying tensions which exist in contemporary educational social policy between neo-liberal ideas which emphasise individualism and competition, and agendas promoting equality. Schools in disadvantaged areas from this vantage point present challenges to the overall aims to achieve excellence and equity outlined in the *National Improvement Framework for Scottish Education* (The Scottish Government, 2016c). This is due to a characteristically high intake of pupils whose academic performance is below the national average and where levels of progression into Further and Higher education is historically low (Lupton, 2004; Thrupp and Lupton 2006).

Managerial discourses from the 1970s and 80s which promoted the belief that social change could materialise from changes to individual attitudes alone has been critiqued across a range of social disciplines (see Section 1.3). In education, the idea that educational outcomes would improve by raising aspiration has led to theorisations which contextualise educational aspirations (Archer, Hollingworth and Halsall, 2007; Burke, 2012; Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2011). A range of research now argues that policy which supports interventions to 'raise aspirations' is significantly flawed and, furthermore, re-enforces a deficit model of young people and their families in which they are viewed as having intrinsically low aspirations for their future careers (Gorard, 2012; Gorard, Beng and Davies, 2012; Cummings *et al*., 2012). Policies thus premised on normative understandings of individual behaviour ignore the real-life learning and working environments in which young people and practitioners come together within an organisation.

In sociology and cultural studies from the 1970s, and in parallel with the policy landscape, a range of alternative explanations emerged which examined the importance of culture in reproducing educational and wider societal inequalities (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Willis, 1977). This literature emphasises that a focus on attitudes and intentions offers a reductive and individualistic account of human action. By developing complex theoretical understandings to explain habitual behaviour, this theoretical work recognises the situational and embedded nature of human agency. Employing these theoretical ideas, a substantial body of literature examines educational decision-making concerned with working-class experiences of education and their perceptions of post-compulsory

educational routes (Archer, Hollingworth and Mendick, 2010; Ball, Maguire and Macrae, 2000; Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997; Reay, David and Ball, 2005).

Definitions of social class are largely viewed as a contested issue in British society and have been forged in sociological studies to understand inequalities between traditional white and blue collar occupations and associated family backgrounds. Savage's (2015) analysis of social class in the 21st Century has identified seven categories of class. These are broadly defined as professional, skilled manual or unskilled. Sociological perspectives exploring the link between social-class and educational decision-making draw on larger theories of social stratification and reproduction in order to explain how young people make decisions in relation to life events and contexts. They emphasise the duality of agency and structure as individuals are located in various social relations which both mediate and constrain behaviour. That is, they highlight that educational choices are still influenced by intersections of social class, gender and race (See Chapter 2 for a more detailed review).

Perry and Francis (2010) observe that the cultural perspective offers a substantial critique of the discourses of the 'work ethic' and meritocracy favoured in prevailing neo-liberal discourse. Encouraging individuals to believe that "hard work combined with talent will naturally lead to social and economic rewards […] shift attention away from the social structures and institutions that perpetuate economic inequality and contribute to low educational achievement" (p.6). Ball (2010) argues that increasingly demanding strategic and navigational skills are needed to manage children's learning in and out of school, and these rely on social, cultural and economic capitals that are unevenly distributed across the population. Transference of privilege between families is described by Nunn (2011) as "the transfer of genetic capabilities,

the socialisation (from very early childhood) of particular behaviours and attitudes, the straightforward transfer of material assets and also the way in which families condition access to social networks" (p.7). This explains the ways in which differentiated levels of knowledge and resources inform young people's educational decision-making. Bourdieu's social conditioning formula[1] which he developed to explain the transmission of power and privilege thus endures in sociological educational research for its continued critique of the hegemonic discourse contained in policy texts (see Chapter 2, section 2.2.1 for a more detailed critique).

These competing perspectives illustrate the limited capacity of research from a sociological perspective to influence public policy. Furlong, Woodman and Wyn (2011) raise concerns for example, about the ability to reconcile policy tensions between sociological perspectives on youth cultures (Archer *et al*., 2007; MacDonald and Marsh, 2005; Maguire, 2010) and longitudinal data driven understanding of youth transitions as outlined in current government policy. Raffo *et al*. (2009) suggest that despite widespread agreement that poverty and poor educational outcomes are related, ameliorating the effects of social inequality in societies where privilege transfers between families remains a dilemma for policy-makers:

> … researchers often work in domains within the field that share a similar set of philosophical assumptions, whilst practitioners and policy makers too often reach for the action that is closest to hand, without considering its underlying assumptions about why and how poverty impacts on educational outcomes (p.3).

They view that one of the major problems for policy dominated by a culture of performance monitoring and outcomes is a tendency to look for pointers to action that

[1] (Habitus x Capital) + Field = Practice (Bourdieu, 1984, p.101).

incorporate more straightforward ways of understanding complex issues and fail to look for more reflective and long-term approaches. The exclusive focus at an individual level or at an institutional level is reductive in the sense that it de-contextualises individuals from their everyday lives. Consequently, Raffo *et al*. (2009) suggest that no single or disparate set of interventions is likely to resolve the problem. Avis and Orr (2010) view that policies and practices seeking to transform learning cultures may hold progressive possibilities. However, failure to challenge class structure means that these approaches serve a deeply ideological function in that they do little to transform the wider social structure. They suggest that to interrupt the processes through which these inequalities are generated, "it is necessary to move beyond the individual and address the social practices through which these are produced" (Avis and Orr, 2010, p.48).

This thesis contends that approaches are needed that do more than simply describe the problem of social stratification and instead offer more theoretical insights that provide a narrative of change. That is, there is a need to illuminate the situated and socially negotiated nature of transformative learning cultures. As an example, this thesis offers a detailed examination of the emergence of orientations towards Higher Education application processes by young people from working-class backgrounds. Researching these orientations has implications for the research process itself, which will be addressed in the following section. Section 1.3 will therefore outline the basis for progressing an exploration of a social practice approach to understanding educational decision-making.

### 1.3 Conceptualising educational decision-making as a social practice

The starting point for this research is an exploratory endeavour that attempts to begin charting some new theoretical terrain. It does so by shifting attention away from a focus on the effects of educational outcomes alone. This section will outline the following starting points for this thesis. Firstly, it draws on insights from a social practice theoretical perspective to conceptualise and explore educational decision-making as a social practice. Secondly, it focuses on the ways in which practices of decision-making are performed within the specific institution of the school. Thirdly, it seeks to observe the dynamics involved in the performance of practice on the ground. The final starting point for this thesis is the need for an in-depth qualitative methodological enquiry employed to achieve these aims.

Applying a social practice perspective to exploring educational decision-making departs from approaches which locate decision-making activity as residing in the individual. Empirical practice-based research poses specific challenges to dominant psychological and behavioural approaches to conceptualising social change. The application of these theoretical ideas to the field of educational decision-making continues to build on the substantial literature in the sociology of education which finds little supporting evidence to link educational decision-making with a "calculative individualistic consumer rationalism that predominates official texts" (Ball, Macrae and Maguire, 2000, p.i). Sociological understandings of learning career and learning identity crucially recognise choice as a social process (Hodkinson, 1998; Hodkinson, 2008; Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). These studies attempt to bridge and provide an alternative to studies which either emphasise macro-structures or micro-interactions of individuals. Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' has thus endured in educational

sociological theory as it explains and treats choice as both structured and structuring. Thus, according to the distribution of relevant capitals, educational decisions play a part in reproducing the social divisions within institutions such as Higher Education (Reay, 2017; Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010).

The concept of 'practice' as described in the literature is a broad and loose term which has had a presence in social theory for over a century, though never with a central role (Everts, Lahr-Kurten and Watson, 2011). The 'practice turn' in sociology is generally viewed as a move away from methodological individualism and towards accounts which view 'practice' as constituting a sense of the real. This departs from an assumption that behaviours such as decision-making begin inside the heads of individuals, and instead emphasises that the attitudes and values individuals express as social agents are parts of the practices they perform (Reckwitz 2002; Schatzki 2001). Practices and associated behaviours are social and shared entities and are thus treated as the unit of analysis in empirical work. 'Practice' is therefore viewed as a key concept for understanding central questions about how agency, structure, individual action and institutions are linked in social systems, cultures and organisations (Bourdieu, 1990; Giddens, 1984; de Certeau 1984; Schatzki, 2001, 2002).

A social practice theoretical perspective has influenced a number of disciplines in their approach to empirical research. The New Literacy Studies, for instance, have investigated the value-laden terms in which 'literacy' is associated (Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Prinsloo, 2005; Street, 1984). This work recognises the socially constructed nature of normalising discourses of literacy as a discrete and autonomous skill, and instead focuses empirical work on the everyday uses of literacy as a socially situated practice. In consumption and sustainability research (Hargreaves, 2016; Shove

and Pantzer, 2005; Spaargaren, 2003; Warde, 2005) have focused on innovation by emphasising the social and meaningful behaviours of consumers. By looking at processes of development, diffusion and appropriation of practices such as 'recycling', 'eating out', 'Nordic walking', these studies emphasise the technological and socio-cultural dimensions involved in social change rather than a narrowly defined top-down behavior change agenda popular with Governments (Spaargaren, 2003). These studies have drawn more closely on social theorists such as Schatzki, (2001, 2002); and Reckwitz (2002) who have developed social theory to deal with the theoretical problems posed by behaviourism.

Postill (2010) characterises these developments in practice theory as 'second generation social practice literature'. In these texts, philosophical understandings of the social are informed by Charles Taylor's conceptualisation of social life as being constituted in and through practices. In the field of work, Nicolini (2012) and Corradi, Gherardi and Verzelloni (2010) have applied social practice theory in their research on organisations such as the National Health Service. They approach an organisation such as a school or hospital, for example, not as the outcome of a detailed blueprint and plan, or a single system with definite boundaries. Instead, Nicolini (2012) summarises that:

> The appeal of what has been variably described as practice idiom, practice standpoint, practice lens, and a practice-based approach lies in its capacity to describe important features of the world we inhabit as something that is routinely made and re-made in practice using tools, discourse, and our bodies. From this perspective, the social world appears as a vast array or assemblage of performances made durable by being inscribed in human bodies and minds, objects and texts, and knotted together in such a way that the results of one performance become the resource for another. As such, practice theories potentially offer a new vista on all things organizational (and social). (p.2)

This thesis sets out to make an original contribution to theoretical understandings in the field of education studies by applying insights from practice studies. This perspective has emphasised the processual forms of doing, knowing and organising in which order and change arise (Huizing and Cavanagh, 2011). The literature on contemporary practice theory suggests that adopting a social practice perspective, rather than focusing on the individual, may hold some promise in the development of a more dynamic and active understanding of the social. It develops a framework that views the site as a mesh of practices and material arrangements where all human co-existence and social activity takes place or happens in "practice-arrangement bundles" (Schatzki, 2002, p.39). Schatzki (2005) explains that "All these meshes, nets, and confederations form one gigantic metamorphosing web of practices and orders, whose fullest reach is coextensive with sociohistorical space-time" (2005, p.473). Consequently, any social phenomenon is a "feature or slice" of this overall practice-order web. (See Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of this conceptual framework).

A final starting point for this study focuses on the methodological orientation to empirical work in an attempt to operationalise the study of practice. In education studies, Thrupp and Lupton (2006) have argued that a more detailed analysis of school contexts is needed. They argue that there are a range of social justice rationales for taking school contexts into better account as they influence school processes and student achievement (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2). Fundamentally this starting point is concerned with methodological orientations that are capable of illuminating how practice structures action that seamlessly connects the person to the public space via intermediate arrangements and devices such as communities, organisations and

institutions (Corradi *et al.*, 2010, p.26). In this sense, the study gives primacy to the concept of practice and a more developed examination of Bourdieu's concept of 'field' (rather than habitus) (see Section 2.1.1). Thus in adopting a site ontology framework, an analysis of practice cannot be reduced to its "cognitive features", explains Lloyd (2010). Rather, a researcher needs to consider "how the practice is constructed corporeally and socially and how these features are interwoven and mesh together within the social site" (p.249)

In order to produce a dynamic account of young people's experiences of post-compulsory schooling and orientation towards HE, this approach suggests that a consideration of work and policy practices needs to be incorporated into an analysis of community and young people's practices at the site. Situating accounts within institutional dynamics therefore begins to develop a more complex understanding of the opportunities and challenges that exist in changing present arrangements in schools with historically low progression rates to HE. Thus, in order to explore multiple practices within the field site, in-depth qualitative approaches are needed that are both capable of understanding the fluidity and porous nature of the site while retaining complexity in the individual accounts.

### 1.4 Outline of thesis

The next chapter provides the theoretical context for this study by providing a critique of the literature informing a practice-based approach. It examines concepts from sociological and cultural research that have provided useful theoretical tools to advance understanding of educational decision-making as habitual behaviour (Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Giddens 1991; Willis, 1977). It thus

explores the ways in which context has been conceptualised in educational research. It further suggests that focusing on practices rather than individuals may advance research within representational sociology.

Chapter 3 sets out a theoretical framework for researching social transformation drawing on a social ontological perspective which gives primacy to practice. Chapter 4 sets out the methodology adopted in this study, which attends to the publicly accessible performances rather than private mental events or states of social agents (Shove and Pantzer, 2012). This chapter provides an account of the phased approach to the research process in order to understand the site as a complex interplay of multiple practices from which an exploration of the substantive issue is developed.

Chapter 5 introduces the field site, a school in Glasgow with historically low rates of pupil progression into Higher Education. To develop a site ontology, the account begins by exploring the ways in which senior management have engaged in school improvement practices, particularly those aimed at supporting school leavers. It also provides an account of how different school leavers find expression for their plans upon leaving the school. The chapter provides an exploration of the interconnections between these practices by centring the account on one of the pupils, Chloe (a pseudonym), connecting her experience with senior management strategies to increase the number of pupils who are 'university-ready'. In describing the ways in which teachers perceive local challenges, and looking at way resources are deployed to support school leavers, this chapter problematises simplistic understandings of school performance, highlighting the inherently paradoxical nature of institutions.

Chapter 6 examines a cohort of 28 of 31 highest performing pupils in the school. It begins by examining the young people's supportive social networks of which only one had a parent who had been to university. This chapter concentrates on what happens when the management practices to support pupils into Higher Education interacted with pupils existing practices. It focuses on two key narratives that emerged in terms of how the young people discursively constructed ideas about their futures and how they described their day-to-day lives both in and out of school. In tracing these narratives, Chapter 6 reveals the scale of the challenge involved in changing practices. It can be seen how much of the ideas about HE or post-compulsory education were localised and contextualised rather than involving a transformation of young people's attitudes from the outside.

Chapter 7 focuses on the experiences of two pupils and their immediate friends, who engage in progressing applications to university. Instead of seeking correlates to explain cognitive behaviour, this chapter considers the ways in which decision-making practices were performed. It does so by focusing on young people's orientation to the application process, and their interactions with a range of family members, peers, community members, teachers, widening participation programmes, tutors, and researchers. In looking at how intersubjective spaces were created and how these interacted with the young people's existing practices described in Chapter 6, this chapter considers both the transformative and reproductive nature of practice. It considers that while outcomes might be transformative in that young people enter Higher Education, this might not necessarily lead to new practices emerging. In doing so, this chapter draws attention to the differentiated resources that first-generation entrants to HE bring to decision-making about their futures.

Finally, Chapter 8 concludes this thesis by addressing each of the research questions directly. It suggests that educational decision-making is a social, contextual and political process. It presents an analysis of the social practice approach adopted in this study in light of these findings and discusses the benefits of combining epistemological and methodological approaches in relation to understanding the persistence of educational inequality. It also considers how the findings may be useful to policy-makers and practitioners planning intervention work with this group of pupils. The chapter also discusses some of the challenges involved in adopting this perspective and suggests other possible avenues of empirical inquiry which could strengthen this research.

# Chapter 2

# Complex understandings of social reproduction and change

This chapter provides a theoretical rationale for the thesis by situating the concept of educational decision-making within the literature concerning social reproduction. In contrast to functionalist understandings of decision-making make assumptions about rational, individual choices, this Chapter offers a critique of educational research which has sought to explain the ways in which social exclusion and disadvantage can cause inability to move easily through education and labour markets.

## 2.1 Theorising educational decision-making

In exploring theoretical perspectives which locate educational decision-making in the theory of social reproduction, this section focuses on three key strands. The first discusses theories of social reproduction by examining research influenced by Marxist theories. The second section looks at theories that emphasise agency and the reflexive nature of decision-making as a complex process involving people's own inherent understanding of structural constraint. The final strand looks at the application of these theories in contemporary educational research.

### *2.1.1 Education and the social sorting of pupils: the emergence of cultural explanations of social reproduction*

In the 1950s and 1960s, cultural theory understood the relationship between education and employment through the lens of reproduction. In particular, the mass failure of the working class (mediated by race and gender) to be successful in education, could be

seen as a response to the requirements of the economic system for unskilled and semi-skilled labour (Bowles and Gintis, 1976). From the 1970s, under the influence of Marxist theories, a body of research emerged which examined the importance of culture in reproducing educational and wider societal inequalities (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Willis, 1977). Bourdieu generated theoretical and empirical work in order to explain cultural reproduction in 19th Century France with its increasingly complex forms of industrial relations. That is, he sought to explain how society reproduced between original class membership and ultimate class membership as mediated by the education system.

Bourdieu developed the concept of 'habitus' to explain the mental structure through which people perceive and construct the social world. Describing sets of internalised schemes, Bourdieu conceptualised the 'habitus' as both producing and being produced by the social world. As people internalise external structures, they externalise things they have internalised through practices. This analysis emphasises people's practical engagement with the world. An important element of analysis for Bourdieu was how individual actors invent and improvise within the structure of their routines.

Bourdieu developed a 'theory of practice' (1977, [1979]) with the concept of 'habitus' embedded in an understanding of the social agent as located in a network of social relations. Bourdieu described the social world as a competitive market place in which different settings, or 'fields', reward economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital, and that one's social network becomes a type of "credential" in social settings (Bourdieu, 1977). He produced the following social conditioning formula, presented in *Distinction,* that maintains practice is fluid and an interaction between one's

acquired habitus and cultural capital with the social structure, highlighting the interactive process between agency and structure.

(Habitus x Capital) + Field = Practice (Bourdieu, 1984, p.101).

Bourdieu argued that depending on people's positioning within the social world, cultural preferences emerge among various social groups within society, constituting coherent systems that unify those with similar tastes and differentiate them from others with divergent tastes. Viewing that tastes are dispositions deeply rooted in the 'habitus', it is through the practical application of dispositions and preferences within a 'field', such as politics, or academia for example, that people classify objects and both experience and assert their position within a class hierarchy.

In parallel with Bourdieu, Willis (1977) focused on the orientation by working-class young people towards shorter educational routes in England at a time when young people left school and entered employment in greater numbers than today. In *Learning to Labour*, Willis (1977) demonstrated that the rejection of mental labour by working-class boys in the pursuit of manual labour was as an expression of their intuitive understanding of their objective chances in the labour market. In his narrative accounts, Willis (1977) argued that their perceptions of manual labour as expressions of masculine power and superiority were a source of autonomy and not repression. He employed the concept of culture to describe the process of mediation between individual orientations and the economic conditions. That is, the choices of the 'lads', who consciously reject educational qualifications, have an intuitive sense of the opportunities available to them. Willis thus views that choices are shaped by working class values and his analysis of a counter school culture provides an account of pupils

who are actively failing, as they practically orientate towards the inevitability of manual work. The decision of the "lads" to labour is actively and subjectively reproduced. It is not to be understood as giving the individual limitless choice, but is "collective, if not consciously directed" (p. 120). Willis and Bourdieu both developed theoretical tools with which to conceptualise the link between an objective past and present circumstances and an internalised subjectivity that guided preferences and actions. In explaining the reproduction of inequality, Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) have influenced the ways in which researchers have conceptualised social structures as reproduced by the intuitive actions of individuals, and played out in the education system which is shaped by privileged groups in society. Thus as human agency and macro-social structures are combined to theorise the social order, these theoretical ideas emphasise the continuous reproduction of the "collective rhythms," or habitus, of the community (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 182).

### *2.1.2 'Global economies': Emphasising agency and reflexivity*

The importance and need for people to personally construct their own career and learning paths was theorised in the 1980s. Explanations looked to understand youth transitions as responses to economic and globalisation challenges facing contemporary societies. Field (2009) states that these relate to the 'wider social and cultural tendencies that are characterised by the steady – and even sometimes rapid – erosion of existing social relations and cultural patterns' (p.18). Theories of late-modernity, primarily developed by Beck (1992) and Giddens (1984), have emphasised the distinctive role of knowledge and information in driving change in contemporary society (Field, 2009). Giddens (1984) viewed that in order to be successful,

individuals need to be equipped with self-reflexivity, particularly since global economic restructuring where job certainty and translation of educational credentials into employment is less guaranteed and more complex. In contrast to the purely cognitive models of decision-making, Giddens (1984) emphasised the recursive nature of human practices. That is, that through their activities, individuals create both their consciousness and the structural conditions that make their activities possible.

> Self-identity, then, is not a set of traits or observable characteristics. It is a person's own reflexive understanding of their biography. Self-identity has continuity - that is, it cannot easily be completely changed at will - but that continuity is only a product of the person's reflexive beliefs about their own biography (Giddens, 1991, p. 53).

In developing a theory of action, Giddens (1984) emphasised the 'knowledgeability' of the social actor through his theory of structuration. Social actors are reflexive, monitoring the ongoing flow of activities and structural conditions, adapting their actions to their evolving understanding. For Giddens, the double hermeneutic described the dialectic relationship between social scientific knowledge and human practices. Giddens pointed to the need to study how people understand their world and how that understanding shapes their practice. Because people can think and make choices, and use new information to revise their understandings (and hence their practice), they can use the knowledge and insights of social science to change their practice.

Archer (2003) conceives reflexivity in terms of the forms of 'self-talk'. She describes the internal conversations that individuals have with themselves, and that this influences the sorts of decisions, personal projects and praxis which individuals undertake in their daily lives. Archer (2003) and Giddens (1984) see social structures as activated by agents through the different forms of reflexivity that agents possess.

This mediation process (social context–reflexivity–action) provides a vocabulary for the examination of how particular experiences shape dispositions towards learning. These concepts focus on the creation of a learning identity, and how subsequent events can transform these dispositions.

In producing and re-producing their own biographies, Beck understood that this extended to the way that people choose to socialise. Beck (1992) viewed that "networks of associates, friends, relatives and loved ones are similarly increasingly based on elective decision, and less and less on habit and routine" (p.135). Beck's theories of modernisation influenced the debate on educational trajectories and career planning at the beginning of the 1990s. His theory that social ties are becoming more reflexive suggests that the individual "must learn that on pain of permanent disadvantage, to conceive of himself or herself as the centre of action, as the planning office with respect to his/ her own biography, abilities, orientations, relationships and so on". (Beck, 1992, p,135).

Together, emergent theory driven from the empirical studies of (Bourdieu (1977) and Giddens (1984) in particular, outline the ways in which practice became established as a new field of the social sciences in which human agency and macro-social structures were combined to theorise social order. According to these theoretical explanations, practice is defined in terms of "repetitive, rule-governed collective features of the activities it comprises" (Huizing and Cavanagh, 2011, p.15) With global restructuring in the 1990s, the ability of individuals to successfully negotiate uncertainty came to be seen as "dependent upon individual skill and capability as well as external risks and ability to judge them" (Evans and Furlong (1997, p.18).

### *2.1.3 Modelling decision-making in educational research*

Since the 1990s, a substantial body of educational research has attempted to influence debates on social inequality by incorporating a conceptual understanding of structure and agency in models of educational decision- making. To counter hegemonic discourses of individualisation and rational and autonomous choosers, Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) developed a sociological model of 'careership' (see also Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1997). Drawing on the conceptual tools of Bourdieu (1984) and the notion of identity and lifestyle choices by Giddens (1991), this model of 'careership' rejects both the theoretical perspectives that have an individualist locus, and sociological accounts of choice determined purely by opportunity structures in the labour market. Instead, it identifies the complex relationships that individuals have with learning. It explains the way that the decisions that individuals make about education and training have contextual influences, particularly as education markets have expanded and diversified. This work emphasises the need to look at the movement of the individual through different social contexts and statuses that shape engagement with education.

Methodologically, Bloomer and Hodkinson (1997) and Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) have adopted a pragmatic rationalist position combining insights from Bourdieu and Strauss. Using longitudinal data and drawing on the experiences of people attending Further Education colleges, they suggest that 'careership' involves three interrelated dimensions. These are: "pragmatically rational decision-making located in the habitus of the person making the decision"; "the interactions with others in the (youth training) field related to the unequal resources different players possess"; and "the location of decisions within the partly unpredictable pattern of turning-points and routines that make up the life course" (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997, p.29). The

concept of ‘careership’ seeks to explain the complex personal and structural relations that influence learners’ dispositions to learning. Insights from Strauss (1962) were incorporated who saw careers as a series of turning points, where the 'habitus' of the person was transformed and interspersed with periods of routine. Pragmatic decision-making was rooted in the previous routines and turning points which make up the life history of a person. Thus ‘learning career’ is defined as ‘...the ongoing unfolding of a person’s dispositions to, and their engagement with, knowledge and learning opportunities’ (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1997, p. 7). The study shows how life events such as leaving home, the need for waged employment and the establishment of intimate relationships had reshaped students’ earlier dispositions towards education. Earlier aspirational views had become more realistic and instrumental, which in turn had informed different orientations to formal education. The research suggests however, that although dispositions can be transformed, they are nevertheless still conditioned by formative gendered and social experiences.

> The young people we followed made decisions that were strongly influenced by their personal dispositions, which in turn were part of their life histories and located in the social, economic and cultural context in which they, their families and friends lived. (Hodkinson, 1998:558)

In foregrounding the fundamentally social nature of decision-making, they empirically investigated the distinctive meanings that individuals attach to social contexts in their construction of particular dispositions towards learning, as a combination of positions (career), and dispositions (learning identity) (Hodkinson and Bloomer, 2002). Evans and Furlong (1997) use similar starting points in their research on youth transitions which also recognises the underlying patterns of social reproduction as young people progress between school and employment. Viewing the nature of protracted learning

careers as more like navigations than linear pathways, they describe how learning identities may be extremely fragile and vulnerable to sudden changes in the learner's immediate social milieu. They propose the need for a more dynamic theorisation which provides explicit understanding of how early conditioning of dispositions and the effect of subsequent life events interact to create fluid patterns of formal learning.

Incorporating spatial and temporal components in models of decision-making, Ball, Maguire and Macrea (2000) in researching decision-making of young people in London, extended Hodkinson and Sparkes' (1997) model in two ways. They identified three critical arenas of action and centres of choice making as "the arena of family, home and domesticity; the arena of work, education and training; and the arena of leisure and social life" (Ball *et al*., 2000). They further suggest that spatial and temporal components must be included in models of choice and decision-making, as these arenas of choice operate within localities defined by the individual's personal spatial zone of operation which are dynamic over time with histories and future expectations and aspirations, as well as a continuously changing present (Ball *et al*., 2000). Later on, Hodkinson (2008) updated his model of 'careership' incorporating a need to better understand a macro-context more fully. He concludes that decision-making is done by the agent, but within the logical operatives of the concept of 'field' which structures certain activities, orientations and dispositions towards an action.

> The various elements that make up this model of careership cannot be separated except as an analytical device. Everything takes place within a macro-context which has social, political, economic, cultural, geographical and historical dimensions. Within this is the field, with its interactions, power struggles, alliances and negotiations, where the rules of the game are determined by those interactions together with the formal regulations. Within a field, people make pragmatically rational decisions within their culturally derived horizons for action, at turning-points. These turning-points are both preceded and followed by periods of routine, which themselves are located within the field and the macro-context. The periods of routine and the turning-points are themselves

> interrelated, so that neither can be understood fully without the other, and the separation between them is often arbitrary. The pathway from turning-point to turning-point can be predictable and smooth or irregular and idiosyncratic. (Hodkinson, 2008:41)

Underpinning this research are the key assumptions of agency and structural limitations that situate the decision-making processes of young people as mutually connected to social, economic and cultural constraints and opportunities. Earlier research has had difficulties in understanding how similar social backgrounds or life events may lead to the emergence of very different learning identities or how very different life experiences can lead to very similar patterns of formal learning (Schilling, 1992). In employing concepts such as 'habitus' and 'structuration', researchers conceptualised how actors' dispositions towards education may change over time, by describing the ways in which practices are reproduced and at times transformed in social action.

### *2.1.4 Limitations*

Attempts to represent the relationship between structure and agency within this tradition of educational research have done so by focussing on complexity in analysis when exploring aspects of educational decision-making. Paton (2007) argues that "hybrid models are underpinned by key assumptions that the choice process is unique, eclectic and unpredictable and that although broad patterns of choice may emerge from the macro-scale summation of such 'stories', the reality of choice lies in the personal experiences and accounts of choice by individuals" (p.18). In looking at the application of cultural theory in contemporary educational research, Avis (2006) suggests that the culturalist direction in recent analysis has underplayed collectivity;

that social class and inequality have become clouded by individualisation; and that middle-class notions of individualism have become hegemonic (Avis 2006; Ball, 2003). As researchers explore learning trajectories in the current socio-economic context, the examination of learning trajectories which emphasises the reflexivity of individuals, nestles within an economic modernising agenda that obscures the structural relations of power and inequality (Avis, 2006, p.348). Mythen (2005) suggests that a failure to tackle continuities in social reproduction presents the following problems for research in this area:

> Different social groups are destined to encounter contrasting employment and life experiences, with insecurity and risk being concentrated amongst the lowest paid, least educated tranches. In the risk society narrative, everyone seems destined to share a similarly individualized experience. However, whilst the process of individualization may be universal, experience *of* this process will be heterogeneous. (Mythen, 2005, p.138)

Thus, in looking at the experiences of non-traditional entrants to Higher Education, research in this area has focused on the ways in which young people's decision-making is the outcome of individual agency; but that this is constrained and structured by institutional regimes such as social class, race and gender, as well as, a broader economic and political climate (Ball *et al.*, 2000; Evans and Furlong, 1997; Hodkinson, 2008; Paton, 2007).

## 2.2 Understanding university choices processes in educational research and policy

### *2.2.1 Learner identity and cultural belonging*

In incorporating a more structural analysis, a number of studies have explored the themes of identity and cultural belonging. This literature illustrates how participation

in higher education by young people from working-class backgrounds involves changes to learner identity. In America, studies by McDonough (1994), Horvat (2000) and Walpole *et al.* (2005) demonstrate how a Bourdieusian framework can be applied to persistent questions of educational inequality by looking at high school seniors' college choice processes. Using concepts of cultural capital and habitus, they focus on how these influence college enrolment decisions. In the UK, Archer *et al.* (2007) interviewed young people across a number of schools located in disadvantaged areas of London. They explored how young people's performances, as embodied identities, were enacted through practices of 'taste' and 'style' and are played out within the educational field. Their study offered explanations for the lack of engagement by pupils in academic cultures.

Archer and Leathwood (2003) looked at cultural belonging, employing Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' to describe a cultural dissonance when young people from disadvantaged backgrounds come into contact with elite universities. Their analysis shows that respondents perceived attendance at lower status institutions as involving less cultural dissonance and less need to construct different identities than participation in the elite universities. In another study, Ingram (2011) has looked at the ways in which working-class students, attending elite universities, negotiate a dual habitus. This derives from the social world in which they come from and the one they currently occupy within the institution. Ingram (2011) broadens the analysis to look at the experiences of the student, rather than solely concentrating on the decisions they make about education. Ingram (2011) analyses the findings through a Bourdieusian lens in which the university and local worlds are seen as fields of struggle. This research develops a more nuanced understanding of how students conceptualise their

positions and dispositions in relation to both fields and how they are able to develop strategies to overcome any internal conflict.

Warren and Webb (2007) point out that whilst 'learning cultures' work well to capture the negotiation within education, and 'learning career' can depict personal transformations due to 'turning points' in people's lives, it is the concept of 'habitus' that has captured the sociological imagination. They view that the analysis of 'field' and the different resources available to learners within a field of practice has been muted. Thus the reproduction of learner identity in education provides in-depth descriptive accounts which focus on the ways in which steps are made to fill the gap between one culture and another. The operationalisation of these ideas have found currency in the landscape of widening participation and widening access interventions which have developed institutional responses to bridging 'lifeworlds'. Grenfell (2006) in addressing the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference suggests that there 'seems to have to be an almost unexplored leap of faith to supporting policies aimed at developing social capital in educational systems'.

> It does seem that enthusiasm for the concept of social capital often amounts to a return to a kind of cultural compensation and a belief in the power to change what in Bourdieusian terms we would call the dominant logic of practice of *fields*. In some cases, this is an assertion of faith over knowledge. Certainly, the case examples presented suggest that it is possible to simply create a formula for what works, express it in ideal terms, and then set about making other cultural groups (who have their own values and network systems) behave in the desired manner. There are questions of cultural dissonance and the ignoring of the often competitive nature of relations between individuals and groups within networks, competition, that is for the *capital* which determines *field* position, which is the subject of sanction and reward (Grenfell, 2006).

This suggests that to strengthen research in this area, it is part of the empirical work of research to illuminate the socially and historically constituted nature of fields of

practice (Nicolini, 2017, p.19). To develop a study in this direction suggests that projects are needed which are fundamentally concerned with how legitimacy is conferred on particular social and cultural practice. Further to this, explanation is needed which looks at how the different resources available to social agents are given value.

### *2.2.2 School cultures and contexts: Competing for capital*

In response to a range of school performance policies that were introduced by successive Governments, Thrupp and Lupton (2006) and Reay, David and Ball (2005) offered an analysis of school cultures which counters 'school effectiveness' and managerial understandings of change. Thrupp and Lupton (2006) argue that "a more serious recognition of context could give rise to fairer evaluation of school performance, a fairer distribution of resources, and the provision of more appropriate advice and support to schools in less favourable contexts" (p.311). All of which, they argue, would enable better responses to the needs of marginalised school populations.

Within this analysis of context, there is a broadening of the empirical focus from the individual to the school culture, which in turn illuminates further opportunities and constraints on the individual according to the culture of the school. In theorising context more closely in this process, Reay *et al.* (2005) devise an analysis of the interplay between individual habitus and an institutional habitus in a study examining schools and colleges with different socio-economic areas in and around London, to investigate orientations to higher education. They explore how wider socio-economic cultures impact on organisational practices within schools and colleges in ways which also shape opportunities and constraints within the higher education

choice process. They describe their conceptual understanding of decision-making as follows:

> We recognise that the various influences impacting on students' choices cannot be separated and compartmentalised. Rather, higher education applicants are located in a matrix of influences which are best represented by overlapping circles of individual, family, friends and institution. The relative weight of these spheres of influence are not only different for different individuals, but shift and change over time for each student. Yet, in spite of an inevitable degree of overlap and blurring of boundaries between peer group, family and institution, we argue that there are specific effects from attending a particular educational institution which become most evident when you look at the choices of similar kinds of students across the private- state divide. (p.38)

Ball, Maguire and Braun (2012) further argue that analysis needs to incorporate a more nuanced understanding of schools as "Policies enter different resource environments; schools have particular histories, buildings and infrastructures, staffing profiles, leadership experiences, budgetary situations and teaching and learning challenges […] Schools differ in their student intake, school ethos and culture, they engage with local authorities and experience pressures from league tables and judgements made by national bodies such as Ofsted" (p.19).

In the US, Roderick *et al.*'s (2008) research compared guidance and resources in relation to 'college-going cultures' across schools. They described the importance of strong 'college-going cultures', concluding the importance of social networks in supporting young people with their future learning plans as knowledge and understanding takes place between people. This research describes the in-depth nature of navigating the process of college applications, highlighting some of the challenges in schools without strong college-going cultures. They recognise that decision-making about post-compulsory education involves a broader analysis of activity other than choice processes. Their study builds on previous research that finds that low-income,

first generation students are particularly likely to encounter problems, such as submitting applications on time, applying for financial aid, gaining acceptance and enrolling in college. Thus Avis and Orr (2010) suggest that to interrupt the processes through which inequalities are generated, "it is necessary to move beyond the individual and address the social practices through which these are produced" (p.48).

Warren and Web (2007) in their extended narrative accounts of adult learners attempt to account for Bourdieu's concept of 'field' in their analysis. This context dependent understanding of decision-making leads them to develop an argument for analysing accounts as socially organised narratives. They view that an analysis of social practice captures the social, cultural, economic and symbolic forces at play through a more dynamic theorising of Bourdieu's concept of 'field'.

> The particular configurations of capitals in a field determine the positions and range of strategies available to social agents. However, it is the particular deployment of strategies that allow social agents to take places within the field that reproduce or transform the social order. To understand how learners engage with transformations in their learning careers, not only is some understanding of the resources available to them within the field needed, but also which resources are differently available, and who can get access to and make use of the most powerful resources. (Warren and Webb, 2007, p.50)

In particular, this work stresses the methodological importance of conducting an analysis that constantly moves between field and habitus and between structure and agency. In their account of a 40 year old woman called 'Jenny', Warren and Web incorporate a pre-reflexive understanding of the individual:

> ...in order to understand the particularity of Jenny's life, we have to grasp how that particularity is the product of specific interactions between history, economics, institutional cultures, education policy and individual agency - that is through the interaction between 'field' and 'habitus'. (Warren and Webb, 2007, p.50)

Thus extending Bourdieu's concept of 'field' as the site where particular sets of practices occur has become more prominent in empirical research, as a necessary component when analysing decision-making across a range of disciplines. Narrative accounts of the social, and of individual locations therein, provide methodological tools with which to render explicit the structural understanding that is produced from viewing the site not as a bounded entity, but as an open and porous network of social relations (Massey, 1994).

### 2.3 Chapter Summary

The literature suggests that further empirical work is needed to understand educational decision-making which illuminates the socially and historically constituted nature of fields of practice (Nicolini, 2017). There is little research, for instance, that ties educational decision-making to cultures of performativity and management strategies to increase working-class participation in Higher Education in Scotland. My own research intends to explore these ideas by focusing on the social and collective processes of decision-making discussed in the literature. To render accounts of activity which may offer ways in which to understand and incorporate innovation, suggests that methodological approaches are needed which do not simply describe phenomena but instead serve better empirical research. Nicolini (2017) thus suggests that "one of the major potential downfalls in this case is the temptation to reify the object of study, forget that practice as an epistemic object, is a second-order concept and focus on refining such epistemic object rather than using it to investigate society or organisation" (p.32). This is important to consider as Shove *et al.* (2012) argue that:

> Practice theories provide an intellectual base and a conceptual framework around which to build programmes and policy interventions explicitly designed

> to address systemic challenges like those of engendering more sustainable routines and habits. The result is not a blueprint for practice-orientated policy, nor is it a template setting out exactly what to do. Such prescriptions are not to be expected: …. the primary value of social theory is in framing the way the world is understood and how problems are defined. (p.163)

Thus in order to advance a more complex and sophisticated understanding of working-class orientations towards Higher Education, this thesis recognises that a study which looks closely at how change occurs and unfolds within a particular organisation would make a valuable contribution to this field of study. The following chapter will discuss how the theoretical assumptions were advanced to produce a methodological framework in which I adopted a social practice approach and concludes with a set of research questions.

# Chapter 3

# Establishing a practice framework

The questions developed in this thesis regarding young people's experiences of post-school education, and navigation towards entrance to higher education focus the analysis on the negotiation of immediate circumstances. In this respect, drawing on theories of practice (Bourdieu, 1984; Giddens, 1991) provide a useful conceptual basis from which to explore this landscape. This chapter will discuss the operationalisation of a social practice perspective by outlining a series of points of departure from educational research in this area. Section 3.1 begins by discussing the conceptual underpinnings of a contemporary social practice perspective. This is followed by an exploration of the ways in which a practice perspective has been developed by empirical sociologists in a range of disciplines. Section 3.2 outlines the application of this theoretical framework in my own study and its relationship to the methodological approach outlined in the proceeding chapter.

## 3.1 Understanding change and complexity

Practice theoretical frameworks have been employed in empirical sociological studies as they potentially provide researchers with theoretical tools to address persistent social problems. In developing complex meso-level concepts, the 'practice turn' in sociology is broadly viewed as that concerning "the organisation, reproduction, and transformation of social life" (Schatzki, 2001, p,10). This section discusses the philosophical and ontological assumptions underlying a practice perspective which differ from modernist conceptions of the individual and society.

### *3.1.1 Understanding the social: moving beyond the individual*

The previous chapter suggested that understanding youth transitions involved a complex interplay of contextual influences on individual decision-making. Thus conventional approaches to exploring this issue tend to adopt modernist conceptual ideas which place the individual at the centre of surrounding social relations with social phenomena constructed as individuals and their relations (see fig. 1).

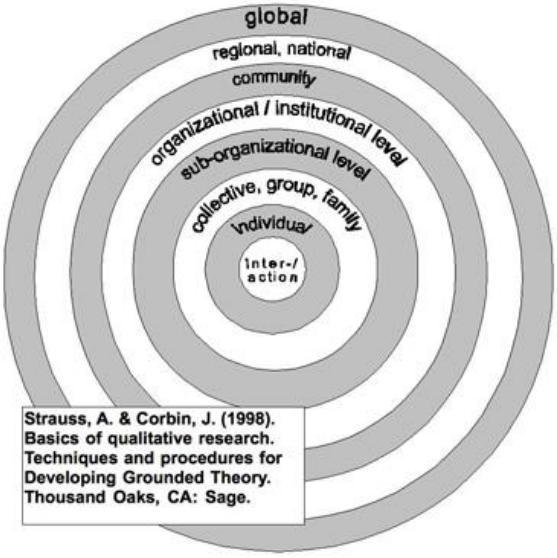



**Figure 1: Strauss and Corbin (1998) Basics of qualitative research. Techniques and procedures for Developing Grounded Theory**
(Source: Clark, 2005, p.69)

In contrast, social ontologists (Glaeser, 2005; King, 2004, 2009, 2010; Schatzki, 2002, 2003) have understood social life as an ongoing production which emerges through the recurrent actions of people. King (2009) argues that as dramatic social transformations are occurring, there is a need to investigate the ways in which multiple participants negotiate, as they interact with, and co-operate or struggle with each other. Drawing on Habermas' concept of 'lifeworld', King (2010) characterises the social as follows:

> Humans live in lifeworlds: they form social groups and on the basis of shared understandings they do things together. They co-operate and collaborate in pursuit of collective goals. These lifeworlds consist not merely of the warm and intimate relations of family and friends but of large and consequential networks comprising a myriad of potentially antagonistic and competitive interactions … On this account, society consists of people engaged in collective social activity conducted on the basis of shared understandings. (p.85)

This stance represents a departure in empirical research from a project invested in seeking ways to combine theoretical understandings of agency and structural constraint.

> The mirage of structure and agency can be overcome as soon as social reality is comprehended in terms of interacting participants engaged in collective forms of practice. Then, a vertical image of isolated individuals organised around a centralising authority is replaced by a picture of a dynamic constellation of human gatherings, dispersals and re-gatherings at each of which actors co-ordinate themselves in relation to shared goals, sometimes fleeting, sometimes enduring. (King, 2010, p.164)

Conceptualising relational aspects of phenomena using social ontological starting points in the research process, thus suggests beginning with the site or situation rather than abstract theories of individual and the social. In developing social practice theory, Schatzki (2002) outlines a process of orientating to the field. His concept of a 'site ontology' provides an orientation to the empirical site, where the social is conceptualised as a field of embodied, materially interwoven practices, centrally organised around shared practical understandings. Methods of data collection, Schatzki (2002) argues, are needed which delve into the messy complexity of everyday life, rather than beginning with individual activity. Thus to actually look at what people do in practice, is to understand the micro-level negotiations of routine and transformation. This shifts attention away from focusing on effects and outcomes related to the individual.

### *3.1.2 Analysing social action through fields of practice*

Ontological approaches which foreground process view the site of empirical enquiry as continuously evolving and characteristically in flow. Phenomena is viewed as being highly related with each other and constituted in relation to everything else. Actions are intrinsically dynamic, processual, and continually reproduced and transformed through practice, structured and characterised by meaning and values (Lawson, 2009). Glaeser (2005) argues that institutions are useful as a site for studying sets of processes, as formal organisations gather and concentrate a wide variety of actions toward a limited, interconnected set of people. Practice accounts aim to make explicit the 'hanging together' of relationships, illustrating how repeated actions, reactions and effect sequences interweave both similar and different processes into a coordinated field. Processes can merge together, and the same action can be intrinsic to a variety of processes that constitute empirical investigation of social formations. Glaeser (2005) defines social formations as:

> *People* (including their agency, desires, hopes and fantasies), their *relationships* with one another, *the cultural forms*, they use to navigate the world (practices, symbolic and emotive forms, values, and styles), and the *material environment* they build. Among these social formations, people are primus inter pares, insofar as human bodies are the key material substrate of all the other social formations. In every respect, all four categories mutually constitute each other through people's actions. (pp. 20-21)

Practice methodological frameworks have thus attempted to avoid a potentially endless boundary for empirical analysis where "the prospects of analysis seem to sink into the morass of endless possibilities of tracing action-reaction-effect linkages" (Glaeser, 2005, p.29). This suggests that theoretical ideas which have conceptualised the nature of social reproduction in schooling are still needed but that the overall study

should remain fundamentally a methodological project (Nicolini, 2017, p.32) (see Section 3.2).

### *3.1.3 Defining practice*

Schatzki (2001) conceives that practice can be understood as "pools of understandings, sets of rules, and a teleoaffective structure" where the latter refers to the orderings of "ends, projects, and tasks" typically linked with emotions and moods (Schatzki, 2001, p.53). In Schatzki's site ontology, these are the property of practices, and not of the agents who participate in them. They are expressed in the open-ended set of doings and sayings that compose the practice and are adopted to varying degrees and in different ways by different practitioners. The ends in question need not be conscious goals of anyone individually or of the group collectively. Lahr-Kurten cited in Everts *et al.* (2011) attempt to represent this as illustrated in figure 2:

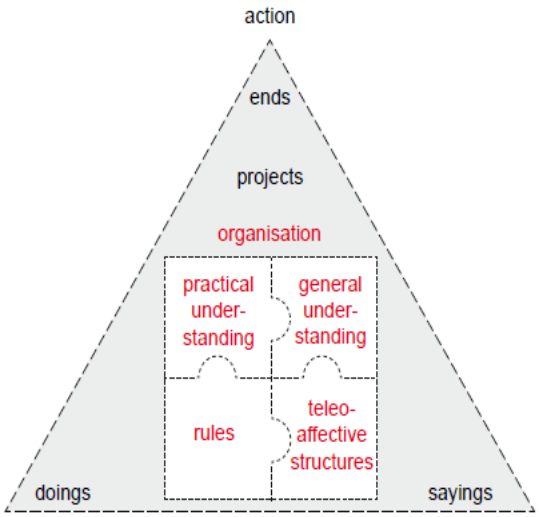



**Figure 2: Items Organising Social Practice**
(Source: Lahr-Kurten cited in Everts *et al.*, 2011)

The concept of 'context' is also problematised in social practice theory as "accounts that privilege individuals, (inter)actions, language, signifying systems, the life-world, institutions/ roles, structures, or systems in defining the social" can only be analysed via the field of practices (Schatzki, 2001, p.53). Actions are therefore viewed as embedded in practices, just as individuals are constituted within them. Language is also a "type of activity (discursive) and hence a practice phenomenon, whereas institutions and structures are effects of them" (2001, p.53).

Reckwitz (2002) also provides a working definition which highlights that practice can be understood as operating around shared goals, in order to analyse the field of practice. He suggests that practice can be understood as:

> A routinised type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, things and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge. A practice – a way of cooking, of consuming, of working, of investigating, of taking care of oneself or of other etc. – forms so to speak a 'block' whose existence necessarily depends on the existence and specific interconnectedness of these elements, and which cannot be reduced to any one of these single elements. (pp. 249–50)

Social practice theory has thus been adopted in diverse fields of empirical enquiry, as it offers a conceptual lens with which to examine innovation. In their studies on consumption and sustainability research, Shove and Pantzer (2012) conceptualise innovation through the lens of emergence and reproduction of practice. They construct the site by adopting the concepts of 'practices-as-entities' and 'practices-as-performance'. Practice-as-entities consist of a recognisable conjunction of elements which can be spoken about, asserting that:

> It is through performance, through the immediacy of doing, that the 'pattern' provided by the practice-as-an-entity is filled out and reproduced. It is only through successive moments of performance and interdependencies between

> elements which constitute the practice-as-entity are sustained over time. (Shove and Pantzer, 2012, p.7)

They suggest that innovations in practice involve changing combinations of symbolic and material ingredients of competence or 'know-how' as agents act within webs of social relations, variously involved in making and sustaining connections between these defining elements. Shove and Pantzer (2005) previously state that the notion that artefacts are acquired and used in the course of accomplishing social practices has important implications for practice theories:

> …it is not enough to show that goods are symbolically and materially positioned, mediated and filtered through existing cultures and conventions. [but that they]…arise through the active and ongoing integration of images, artefacts and forms of competence, a process in which both consumers and producers are involved. (Shove and Pantzer, 2005, p.43)

The analysis of what it means to be involved in a practice can be used to explain other phenomena, such as social change, sustainability, or how practices circulate and travel (Shove *et al.*, 2012). This focuses attention on the diffusion and distribution of the material elements on which practices depend, and on the forms of competence, meaning and images that are also involved.

In moving the unit of analysis to practice, the social, constituted by a complex of contradictory elements, is Winter (1987) suggests, "experienced in almost instantaneous succession as a single essence and a plurality of qualities, as universal and specific" (p.12). Winter thus suggests that the understanding which informs practice is not 'theory' standing outside practice, but a process of 'theorising' in which meaning resides in the relationships between the elements which constitute the practice (ibid). Nicolini (2017) questions whether social practice theory is in itself a theory or instead an "inseparable package of theory, method and vocabulary" (p.19), whereby

researchers orientate to their field of enquiry through the analysis of regimes of ordinary actions. Debating the boundaries of practice and what a practice actually is becomes counterproductive, as it stifles the engagement with the phenomena in question:

> Practice theory does not mean to theorise an ideal type of practice and then test its distance in the real world. This would, in fact, reinstate the very primacy of propositional knowledge that practice theory wishes to contest. Rather practice theory is an accumulation of choices and differences that makes a difference in both conducting empirical research and writing the results in a text (Nicolini, 2017, p.25).

Thus adopting a practice-focussed theoretical framework suggests that praxeologising decision-making acts as a device for doing social theory and empirical sociology. The next section progresses this methodological framework by discussing the application of this approach to the substantive issue.

### 3.2 Understanding educational decision-making as a social practice

This section outlines a proposed conceptual framework to examine the ways in which working-class pupils engage in decisions about leaving school. The literature on social practice theory suggests that this perspective may be more suited to understanding educational decision-making. Conventionally, decision-making is usually regarded as an individual pursuit. This implies that increasing participation of working-class young people in HE is somehow solvable through identification of separate variables to remove barriers that prevent participation.

Dominant conceptions of the failure of young people to orientate towards HE have generally conceived the issue as a problem of deficit in young people, families, and schools serving working-class catchments. Thus, in seeking to take the vantage

point of actors seriously, descriptive accounts are needed which capture the multifaceted and continuously evolving nature of social relations. By focusing on the routines and everyday actions of people *in situ*, a practice perspective provides avenues for an analysis that has capacity for understanding, stasis, change and innovation within institutions. This is not just at a strategic level, but also among the day-to-day lives of teachers, young people and their families.

Analysing decision-making via the field of practices involves understanding how individuals and the practices they perform are constituted within a nexus of discursive activity and material arrangements (Schatzki, 2001). As a second – generation attendee at university and with parents employed in the professions, I understand and am aware that my own experiences of schooling and transition to university are different from those being researched. Attending a school in a predominantly middle-class area in England with a large sixth-form contributed to a taken-for-granted expectation of university progression amongst teachers, parents and peers. This experience resonates with Ball's (2003; 2010) examination of middle-class strategies in the education market that suggest that the resources which support educational choice and decisions are mobilised to secure relative educational advantage. Schools are of instrumental value in terms of the economic, and cultural capital they provide to students through the qualifications they confer on young people.

Thus in adopting a practice framework, empirical work is needed which focuses on illuminating the practice logics present within a school serving a predominantly working-class catchment, and which exposes the complexity and dilemmas for teachers supporting working-class young people's orientations to

Higher Education (see Chapter 5). In focusing on the experiences of working-class young people, a practice approach supports taking the social and material 'doing of things' as the main focus of inquiry. This is a different position from one that starts with essentialist concepts of identity. Using Savage *et al.'s* (2013) definition of social class, working-class is defined in this study as the broad social backgrounds of young people from the precariat, emergent service workers and traditional working class (p.42). These are potentially fluid categories but largely recognise the absence of social networks with professional contacts. Thus in conducting this research, I wanted to examine the situated lives of young people from working-class backgrounds. This involved examining the ways in which strategies emerge within working-class communities where there is limited exposure to the kinds of middle-class advantages described by Ball (2003; 2010) and Savage (2015) and which I also recognise will be qualitatively different to that of my own experience of schooling. This literature and also my own experiences of schooling thus guided my analysis of the data.

In employing processual social ontological starting points, the appeal to concepts such as 'habitus' and 'structuration' as adequate concepts to explain the dissonance felt by working-class young people orientating towards higher education institutions are questioned. In critiquing Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' within this position, the concept of structure is problematic in that its reification in analysis offers a too determinist view of people's activity. Jenkins (2010) asserts that that the concept of 'habitus' is problematic in its "attempt to bundle together adequately the complexities of embodied 'practical sense' or 'logic of practice'" (p.95):

> It means that people are predisposed not to rock the boat; not because they are satisfied with their lot in life, not because they are forced to acquiesce, and not

> even because they have decided that resistance is useless, but because they literally do not – cannot – recognise any other option" (Jenkins, 2010, p.95).

Thus second-generation practice theorists have emphasised the notion of practice as the temporarily unfolding of 'materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding' (Schatzki 2001, p. 2). This epistemic feature of practice is thus highlighted to explain that practices can generate social order and stability as well as change and innovation (Huizing and Cavanagh, 2011). Analysing empirical data through a contemporary practice lens suggests avoiding essentialist and reductionist assumptions of working-class experience. Instead it suggests a focus on understanding how young people become reflexively positioned in social hierarchies as relatively powerful or powerless. This study thus focuses on the reflexivity of these hierarchies in terms of how they are constituted at the site (see Chapter 6).

Applying social practice theory to study issues related to educational inequalities and social mobility thus seeks to move the analysis from the descriptive accounts of social reproduction to understand the dynamics of change. A social practice perspective encourages looking beyond individual acquisition of cultural capital, and towards engagement in institutional practices by young people embedded within social relations. The previous chapter explained that the acquisition of cultural capital is not transparent and straightforward. Research therefore which focuses on the compensatory ways in which capital is acquired produces a project which seeks to address deficits in young people and their families (Grenfell, 2006). Practice theories encourage attention to publicly accessible performances rather than private mental

events or states as ‘understandings’, ‘know-how’, ‘meanings’ and ‘purposes’ are regarded as parts of the performance of practice (Shove and Pantzer, 2012).

Central to a practice lens is the notion that social life is an ongoing production and thus emerges through people’s recurrent actions. In advancing an account with a capacity to incorporate a narrative of change, practice accounts encourage identifying the emergence of academic processes at the site and the ways in which young people reflexively incorporate related academic practices within their everyday routines. In proposing to focus on the routines and everyday actions, the framework allows for accounts which explore how navigations towards higher education emerge at the site. Focusing on navigations allows for an analysis which looks at the complex array of deployment of capital. Conceptualising capital as unequally distributed in the field involves looking at the means to which young people and their supportive networks can strategise and mobilise, and the tensions that arise therein. In understanding that the acquisition of social, cultural and economic capitals are not transparent and straightforward, this perspective moves from a functionalist perspective which conceptualises the need to remove ‘barriers’ to accessing post-compulsory education and instead focuses on social actions and shared goals in which young people and practitioners are engaged. It seeks to understand the ways in which young people attending schools in disadvantaged areas are equipped to deal with navigating a range of processes connected to entering post-compulsory educational institutions. Consequently this study looks beyond individual acquisition of capital and towards engagement in institutional practices by young people and practitioners. It seeks to examine what happens in the field as a result of the socially distributed nature of support derived from the economic, social and cultural positioning of families and

schools. This focuses attention on the diffusion and distribution of the material elements on which practices depend, and on the forms of competence, meaning and images that are also involved.

### 3.3 Chapter summary and research questions

This chapter has explored the ontological assumptions about the social, which have found currency in empirical studies from a range of disciplines seeking to understand issues of social change and stasis. A more conventional analysis would seek to balance descriptive accounts of agency and constraint within social institutions. Adopting a process-orientated sociology, where the unit of analysis shifts to practice and that of ordinary actions could provide possible new avenues of empirical enquiry. Thus a social practice approach has implications for the kinds of empirical work that are appropriate for retaining complexity. The following chapter outlines the research design used to implement this framework in which an iterative approach was adopted in developing a research design. Research questions evolved within this process and for clarity are presented here.

As outlined in the introduction, the over-arching question for this thesis was concerned with whether ideas about increasing competitiveness in UK society come to have an impact, or not, on everyday educational decision-making among pupils from working-class backgrounds. To explore this question, the following three research questions emerged from a review of the literature and underpin the rest of this thesis.

- **Research question 1:** How does the school interact with policy and engage with pupils to support educational engagement?

Research question 1 broadens the focus of the research and recognises the institutional environment in which practice is enacted. Social practice theory encourages a more holistic understanding of institutions and the everyday performance of ordinary actions. By focusing on the activities of senior management, the focus of attention is drawn to their interpretation of policy, and the processes involved in translating this within a particular environment. Research question 1 intends to draw attention to practitioners' own understanding of the issues and challenges in supporting the highest-attaining pupils within their school and to understand how resources are deployed to meet these challenges.

- **Research question 2:** How do pupils viewed as having academic potential by senior management in S5, experience opportunities which support progression to Higher Education?

A review of the current literature in this area has highlighted that there is a need to conceptualise this issue more broadly than just an analysis of young people's intentions and outcomes. Much of the existing research in this area neglects a broader consideration of the social. Using a more grounded approach, research question 2 looks at how young people experience a range of intervening practice by identifying and mapping their collective and social engagement at the site.

- **Research question 3:** In orientating and navigating towards Higher Education in working-class communities, what constitutes decision-making practice?

Adopting insights from social practice literature, research question 3 involves analysing the constitutive nature of decision-making practice by developing an analysis which understands the interrelated nature of policy enactments, localised

social micro- interactions, engagement in wider social networks and the deployment of resources. This exploratory approach allows for a more research-informed understanding of the processes that support or hinder young people in the direction of Higher Education.

- **Research question 4:** What new insights can be gleaned from adopting a social practice perspective in understanding educational decision-making?

Chapter 1 suggested that current approaches to understanding educational decision-making have drawn from dominant psychological and behavioural approaches which view decision-making as a largely individual pursuit. A review of the literature has suggested that empirical practice-based studies are needed which generate new theoretical insights and expose the complexity and dilemmas facing practitioners and policy-makers in supporting working-class young people's orientations to Higher Education.

# Chapter 4

# Epistemology and methodology

This chapter proceeds as follows: Section 4.1 outlines the epistemological claims underpinning this study. This is followed by an outline of the research strategy and methods selected in order to answer the research questions posed earlier in this thesis. Section 4.6 critically examines the opportunities and limitations of adopting this approach. Finally, this chapter concludes by discussing the ethical considerations arising in this study.

## 4.1 Epistemological Foundations

This section provides a justification for adopting a framework for data collection and analysis that focuses on meaning-making amongst groups of actors, and on collective action, as a way of analysing the social world (Clarke and Leigh Star, 2008). In applying this approach to understanding educational decision-making, data collection strategies elicited the ways in which young people and their supportive networks, navigate opportunities in post-compulsory education. Thus the empirical investigation attends to a practice episteme which captures the nexus of educational experiences as fluid entities (Nicolini, 2017). Interpretivist in its approach, this qualitative study set out to understand intersubjective meanings as constitutive of social life (Schwandt, 2015). In this Chapter, I will firstly consider the epistemological and theoretical perspectives that have influenced my methodological approach by expanding on the constructivist stance adopted in this study.

### *4.1.1 Constructing partial fictions*

Chapter 3 suggested that one of the key aims of a social practice approach is to capture how knowing is embedded in and regenerated through practical activity. That is, how knowledge is accumulated through practical knowledge and constituted through direct participation in practice. This focuses the research on "how social actors recognise, produce, and reproduce social actions and how they come to share an intersubjective understanding of specific life circumstances" (Schwandt, 2015, p.36; Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Constructivist approaches to qualitative and quantitative methodologies thus attempt to represent active performances of the social world rather than direct representations (Denzin, 2001). One of the main points of convergence with many established research strategies relate to the knowledge claims these studies can make. Constructivist accounts of the social recognise that researchers play a role in constructing the social world they study (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). This is different from studies adopting a more positivist paradigm which hold a view of the social world as knowable through scientific enquiry, where meaning is there to be discovered.

Adopting techniques from Clarke's (2005) situational analysis, an iteration of constructivist grounded theory, consideration was therefore given to the role of the researcher within the research setting. Clarke's approach adopts a more Straussian rather than Glaserian grounded theory, which advocates that a more reflexive stance needs to be taken in the research process:

> The contextualist epistemology advocated by Strauss directs the researcher to be personally engaged with the research in an attempt to better describe and understand the world as the participants perceive it to be. On the other hand, the realist epistemology that underpins the Glaserian approach requires the researcher to embody the role of an objectively detached observer. (Howard-Payne, 2016, pp.53-4)

This stance thus encourages a reflexivity that acknowledges the ways in which the accounts produced are only partial and incomplete fictions (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Riessman 2008). Crotty (2003) defines this stance as:

> the view that all knowledge and therefore all meaningful reality as such is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context (p.42).

The remainder of this chapter addresses the central issues arising from adopting this approach in relation to: treatment of the substantive issue; my role as researcher; and the need to reflexively reveal the contextual constructions of the accounts produced. Consequently, it implies that knowledge can only ever be partial, and as such, the issue of whose knowledge is being heard or accepted raises fundamental questions about the role of power in the production of research accounts. These issues, along with questions of validity, reliability and generalisability will be addressed towards the end of this chapter following an outline of the research strategy and design adopted in this thesis.

## 4.2 Qualitative Methodological Rationale: grounded approaches to research strategy and design

In order to investigate how young people from working-class backgrounds construct ideas about post-compulsory education, this section outlines a research strategy and design that explored the situated nature of educational decision-making. Research methodologies were employed that examined how young people as 'agents', negotiated and performed within a web of social relations. This section sets out the

theoretical perspectives influencing the research design which used in-depth qualitative methodological approaches.

### *4.2.1 Examining educational decision-making as situated social practice*

Understanding the logic of social practice requires a close-up analysis of the field, in which attempts to explicate the meaning of human action are made. Strauss (1987) argues that the task of the researcher is to look for relationships in how phenomena is related within a research setting in terms of 'opening up' avenues for exploration, rather than prematurely closing down possible research leads. Early immersion in the site of study allows for the development of the fluid and dynamic nature of data collection and analysis, in which theory emerges from "the bottom-up (rather than top-down)" and from the many disparate pieces of collected evidence that are interconnected (Bogden and Knopp Bilken, 2007, p.30; Corbin, 2009). Inductive approaches to qualitative data collection promote the development of theoretical accounts which conform closely to the situations being observed. Context-driven theory creation is thus rooted in grounded theory and symbolic interactionism. This perspective suggests that the researcher can understand human action only by "first actively entering the setting or situation of the people being studied to see their particular definition of the situation, what they take into account, and how they interpret this information" (Schwandt, 2015, p.293). Developing Strauss's account of arenas Clarke and Leigh Star (2007) describe that the task of the researcher is to develop accounts of the situation which are:

> relentlessly ecological, seeking to understand the nature of relations and action across the arrays of people and things in the arena, representations (narrative, visual, historical, rhetorical), processes of work (including cooperation without consensus, career paths, and routines/anomalies), and many sorts of

> interwoven discourses. The social worlds framework is particularly attentive to situatedness and contingency, history and fluidity, and commitment and change. (p.113)

An exploratory and phased approach was adopted in this study which resisted a pre-determined approach to data collection. Thus rather than acting as a neutral observer, collecting and coding data using existing *a priori* categories, I adopted constructivist orientations to grounded theory (Clarke, 2005; Charmaz, 2006). This meant that the methodological techniques employed determined what it was possible to know (Crotty, 2003). Sections 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5 provide an outline of the different phases developed in this study, which used a more iterative process between research, interpretation and design (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Charmaz, 2006). Adopting a more exploratory framework thus allows for the accomplishment of a study of practice which is summarised by Nicolini (2017) as follows:

> The project of practice theory is fundamentally cumulative in nature. Just as different intellectual traditions allow us to interrogate practices in different ways … we need to employ different strategies to study practice. To cover the plenum of practices in any of the regions of human co-existence, we need to deploy as many as possible of the four strategies: analyse the concerted accomplishment of orderly scenes of action: study the historical dynamics of individual practices; examine how concerted accomplishments hang together to form constellations; investigate the co-evolution, conflict and interference of two or more practices; and ask what are the different effects generated by different assemblages of practices (Nicolini, 2017, p.32).

### *4.2.2 Limitations*

Patton (2002) suggests that approaches which adopt the human element of qualitative inquiry are both its strength and weakness:

> ..its strength is fully using human insight and experience, its weakness is being so heavily dependent on the researcher's skill, training, intellect, discipline, and creativity. The researcher is the instrument of qualitative inquiry, so the quality of the research depends heavily on the qualities of that human being' (Patton, 2002, p.14).

Bell and Roberts (1984) suggest that beyond the personal or academic biographies of the researcher and their intellectual concerns, decisions in the research process are shaped by the situated and bounded interpersonal, political and institutional contexts in which researchers are embedded. Thus researchers are required to make 'accommodations between theoretical judgement and practical judgement' (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2003, p.247). Further to this, they need to reflexively expose what Corbin (2009) views as the 'combination of the data and the researcher's interpretation of them that guides and stimulates the ongoing research process' (pp.42-3).

Clarke (2005) further suggests that the most important site of analysis remains the researcher, as the researcher is seen as "actor, designer, interpreter, writer, co-constructor of data, ultimate arbiter of the accounts proffered, and as accountable for those accounts" (p.12). Thus part of the invisible work of qualitative research is characterised by Clarke (2005) as beginning:

> even before a research topic is decided upon, we notice and store information, impressions, and images about topic areas and issues. Not only are there no tabula rasa researchers, but also we usually come with a lot of baggage. Such ideas and preconceptions become intellectual wallpaper of sorts, background tacit assumptions sometimes operating, as it were, behind our backs in the research process. (Clarke, 2005, p.85)

In acknowledging that my role as an active researcher impacts on the data I collected and analysed, I have attempted throughout this chapter to reflexively expose the choices made about the emergent design. I have also attempted to clarify the understandings that flowed from this process by presenting a research account which emphasises:

> Socially constructed realities, local generalisations, interpretive resources, stocks of knowledge, intersubjectivity, practical reasoning and ordinary talk (Denzin, 2016, p. 318).

In qualitative enquiry, fieldwork rarely unfolds in any neat and linear fashion. Bryant (2003) suggests that this approach encourages innovation and novel theoretical interpretations of studied life. The use of a range of methodological techniques therefore drew on established methodologies from situational analysis and ethnographic inquiry. These are summarised in Table 1 which outlines the three main phases adopted in my research design.

***Table 1: Phases of research***

| **Phase** | **Phase 1: Scoping / exploratory** | **Phase 2: Implementation of research design** | **Phase 3 Consolidating accounts of educational decision-making** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Purpose / aim** | Early immersion in site to understand organising practices at the site | Understanding experiences of post-compulsory education of 'highest- attaining pupils at the site | Understanding performance of practice as young people progress applications to Higher Education |
| **Activities / data collection methods** | Film project/ establishing rapport/ classroom observation<br><br>Participant observation<br><br>Desk-based research<br><br>Conducting mock-interviews with school-leavers for EEO. | Survey / interviews / group interviews<br><br>Participant observation | Weekly meetings with key research participant, acted as tutor / mentor, advocate to Emma.<br><br>In-depth interviews with Emma and Emma's boyfriend Richard<br><br>Interviews with tutors / practitioners<br><br>Participant observation |
| **Data Collected** | Interview transcripts<br><br>Field notes<br><br>Local statistics<br><br>Historical accounts of area | Interview transcripts<br><br>Field notes | Field notes<br><br>In-depth interview transcripts<br><br>Transcripts of tutoring sessions Richard and tutor<br><br>Transcripts of email / text correspondence with Emma / tutors |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Corresponding findings sections** | Chapter 5: Understanding practice at Chapelpark Secondary | Chapter 6: Localised understandings of young people's decision-making practice | Chapter 7: Understanding change at Chapelpark |

The activities and data collection methods could be viewed as fairly idiosyncratic and hard to recreate. The next sections provide a detailed outline of the emergent research design adopted in this study, reflexively exposing decisions made throughout this process.

### 4.3 Introducing the research setting: gaining access

Selecting Chapelpark Secondary school to conduct field work was based initially on national socioeconomic data related to school performance, and social deprivation recorded in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) (Scottish Government, 2009b). Colleagues at the University of Strathclyde had already established research links with the headteacher Marion (pseudonym) through the Applied Educational Research Scheme (AERS) which had been funded by the Scottish Government and Scottish Funding Council between 2004 and 2009. This capacity building programme provided educational researchers in Higher Education with opportunities to engage more closely with school practitioners. Agreement was sought with Marion to develop a further study to research some of the issues raised by Wilson and Gillies' (2008) preliminary study looking at pupil engagement in learning at Chapelpark Secondary. Emerging findings in this study recognised that:

> ...apparent in all pupils was the extent to which, at a young age, they seemed to be making decisions, (whether to leave school and seek work or persevere with studying for example) that would influence the rest of their lives. These sorts of decisions are ones other young people are likely to be able to delay, possibly until they leave university. (Wilson and Gillies 2008, p.10)

Agreement was sought with Marion to review the initial interview data collected in this exploratory study. This consisted of an interview transcript with Marion from 2008, and an interview with two of her Deputy Head Teachers (DHT). There were also some anonymised interviews with teachers and pupils around themes of pupil engagement. Due to the exploratory nature of both studies, the AERS data was treated primarily as 'a way in' and as a means of becoming familiar with the site. Only sections of Marion's interview are reproduced in this study (see Chapter 5). Interactions with Marion largely took place in passing conversations or during scheduled meetings about the research project. Data from these interactions was documented using field notes.

Initial consideration was given to developing a more comparative study with a school located in a more affluent neighbourhood. It was intended that this inductive research strategy could identify similarities and differences between the constitutive elements of decision-making practices. Such an approach is viewed as contributing to theory building as it facilitates an understanding of emerging patterns in the data. Schwandt (2015) suggests that this allows for the promotion of theorising processes of causation. Following several unsuccessful attempts to gain access to two different schools, the development of a comparative study with another school in a more affluent area was abandoned. A reason that one of the school management teams cited for not participating in the study were their concerns about preserving anonymity. Further attempts were made to pursue a more comparative study with another school located in a more mixed catchment, but predominantly middle-class area of Glasgow. After receiving no response from the headteacher, a pragmatic decision was made to conduct the study solely in Chapelpark Secondary. In building on existing relationships, the

headteacher in Chapelpark Secondary agreed to a plan for conducting an exploratory research study which focused on the experiences of school leavers. Feldman, Bell and Berger (2003) theorise how researchers gain access to a site and recognise it as a process of building relationships. They argue that "this process requires researchers to identify those who can help them gain access, to learn the art of self-presentation, and to nurture relationships once established" (p.vii).

Failure to develop contacts with teachers in more middle-class areas who could grant access to their school to develop a sustained comparative case study was replaced by different strategies. In the early stages I had wanted to explore the nature of social advantage and compare this with experiences in Chapelpark. Instead, I drew on some preliminary data collected during my involvement with a cross-schools film project (see Appendix 1). With consent from pupils and teachers involved, I drew on data gathered in which groups of S6 pupils spoke on camera about what they hoped to do after they left school. I also drew on field notes collected during my role in supporting the engagement of two different schools in this project, one of which was Chapelpark Secondary. This involved working closely with pupils and practitioners to develop a short film about a community project (see Chapter 5).

Secondly, by engaging with pupils and practitioners at Chapelpark Secondary, I developed an understanding of the ways in which teachers supported a range of destinations of school leavers (see Section 4.4.1). Thirdly, by drawing on interview data, group discussions and participant observation, comparisons were made between different friendship groups from within the high-attaining group identified by senior management (see Chapter 6). Each of these strategies facilitated processes of ongoing data collection and analysis which drew comparison between the phenomena in

question. This methodological technique helped to facilitate theorising from the data, a technique advocated by Glaser & Strauss (1967) in their approach to grounded theory.

The headteacher at Chapelpark Secondary provided introductions to key members of staff with a remit for supporting school leavers. Permission was also given to discuss conducting an exploratory piece of research with pupils. From thereon in, I introduced myself to staff and pupils as a researcher from the University of Strathclyde who was interested in understanding how pupils make decisions about their futures. Over the next three years (September 2009- June 2012), I was free to come to the school without having a pre-arranged appointment.

### 4.4 Phase 1: Constructing the site

The primary aim of phase 1 served to build rapport with members of the school community, allowing for extensive contact with the research setting. Bryman (2006) advocates the importance of this, as it allows the researcher to interact with "people in a variety of different situations and possibly roles, so that the links between behaviour and context can be forged" (Bryman, 2006, p.46). This section describes the exploratory methods employed during phase 1 of the research. These involved observing the situational aspects of practice, with the aim to move from an understanding of individuals and their actions to practices and their relationships. Methods employed included: shadowing teachers, participant observation with staff and pupils, and some initial desk-based research.

### *4.4.1 Understanding the multi-sited nature of Chapelpark Secondary*

The following describes how initial attempts were made to operationalise the study of practice by focusing on the historical and temporal dynamics of 'leaving school' in the locality. As a researcher entering the research setting, I began by seeking to understand the contested, fluid and historically reproduced ways in which participants at the site responded to the idea of the capacity of contemporary education systems to offer possibilities for educational uplift.

Initial 'desk-based' research was conducted in order to construct a situated understanding of the school. Developing a multi layered socio-historical and textual understanding of the local area included: internet searches to compare 'school leaver data'; and collating statistical information about the area using City wide and national comparators in relation to 'poverty' and 'deprivation'. Policy documents were also collected relating to: post-compulsory education; pupil support specifically focusing on careers advice and guidance; UK and Scottish policies concerning youth unemployment and lifelong learning. Local documents were also reviewed, such as the school inspection reports and a transformational plan, developed by the headteacher for a Schools of Ambition (SoA) programme. These provided an understanding of how local practices may be shaped by human and non-human actants outwith the physical field site. Predominantly, these texts were treated as discourse providing an insight into what Lent (2010) views as an 'audit society' where systems of work, government and public services are subject to management discourses based on accountability and excellence. Data sets relying on measurement and quantification were also treated critically and qualitatively to invite questions as to who controls and defines the identity of individuals, social groups and organisations.

In contrast to the above sources, textual research aided the construction of an economic and social historic narrative of the local area. Sources included: books written on local history with a particular focus on historic industry; a local reminiscent website; an internet forum on what was now an online version of a local museum that had previously existed in the area; and historic news articles on the school. This research produced an understanding of a situational and temporal notion of the school and its position within the local community. Online communities contained photos and anecdotes from people who continued to, or had previously lived in the local area and described their experiences of school and employment. Kozinets (2010) describes such research as 'netography', observing that the analysis of existing online community conversations and other internet discourse combines options that are both naturalistic and unobtrusive. Collectively, these resources provided both 'a way in' to understanding the locality, and were useful in understanding relationships between different phenomena, particularly the transition between education and employment. This desk-based research also allowed for the development of a project which constructed the lives of research participants as interdependent, rather than independent, embedded in a complex web of intimate and larger social relations. The history of the community in which the school was situated, and the changing landscape of local educational, employment and training opportunities for young people was therefore treated as 'process' rather than 'context'.

In addition to desk-based research, the first phase also sought to understand the ways in which senior management and practitioners responded to the current employment and educational landscape. Following an initial meeting with the headteacher, in September 2009, Marion introduced me to Janet, a member of staff

who was at the time on secondment from her teaching post and supported a range of enterprise and employability activities in the school. The following provides a summary of the nature of the relationship established firstly with Janet, and then with Paul. Paul occupied the desk next to Janet's, when she was relocated from her own office to the pastoral care base part way through phase 1.

**Janet**

Initial meetings with Janet involved discussions about her role and unique remit to support school leavers. Janet had previously been a full-time teacher at Chapelpark Secondary, who had taken up a newly created role within the school. Initially entitled 'enterprise officer' (EO) Janet's post had later expanded to an 'enterprise and employability officer' (EEO). Gaining an understanding of this position was important in that it facilitated insights into the operationalisation of Scottish Government Policy, Local Authority and school strategies to improve the educational outcomes of pupils. In line with the remit of the post, Janet supported a variety of activities in the school to encourage enterprise and fundraising. She took a lead in organising a number of events, such as the school prom and a talent show. She also instigated charitable fundraising initiatives across the school and facilitated entrepreneurial activities for pupils. Janet also delivered a timetabled class which was run in the school library for S4 and S5 pupils. The aim of which was to introduce pupils to college courses and training opportunities, and ensure that applications were completed in time. Her contact with pupils was not confined to these hours. Pupils would often drop in to her office to ask her for more information about particular college visits, or were sent there by a teacher to see about a career opportunity. She also made appointments to work individually with pupils. These meetings would

involve making phone calls to learning providers, supporting pupils with their applications for a variety of post-school opportunities and providing individual attention as she felt was necessary. Meeting Janet provided opportunities to become more involved in school life. Janet thus facilitated opportunities to engage with other members of staff and pupils.

One such task was a film project she had been asked to support for a Local Authority competition. This led to a discussion about my current involvement in a cross-schools film project and agreement was sought between Marion and the host school to incorporate Chapelpark in this activity. Janet selected 5 pupils from S6 to take part. As the project took place over two school terms, this process allowed for a sustained engagement with pupils and one pupil Chloe became a participant in the research study, with her experience being crucial in helping narrow the focus of the project. Appendix 1 provides a comprehensive overview of how the film project proceeded. Methodologically, this provided a potentially useful way to conduct participant observation (Gauntlett, 2007). It also influenced the initial idea to conduct a more comparative study which looked at the experiences of S6 pupils attending school in areas with different levels of affluence. Whilst no comparative study was formalised, early immersion in the two settings did provide opportunities to grasp insiders' perspectives, whilst simultaneously relating this to broader understandings of social inequality (Geertz, 2000). Thus I was able to construct possible lines of enquiry relating to the nature of inequality in opportunity that were available to different young people. Furthermore, this activity provided insights into the ways in which practices around navigating post-school opportunities were performed at two contrasting sites

(see Table 7, p.141). Engaging with Janet offered further opportunities for participant observation in Chapelpark and these are summarised in Table 2 (p.88).

**Paul**

Sitting next to Janet in the pastoral care base was Paul, a pastoral care teacher. Discussion about his role and remit progressed naturally and initially in passing conversation. Paul organised a class to support S6 pupils with their understanding and submission of applications to the University College Application System (UCAS). The school also used this timetabled session for university- run outreach programmes to work with pupils. Table 6 (p.127) includes a number of the different outreach programmes that the school engaged with at Chapelpark. Paul's role, as a named contact teacher for different outreach programmes, involved ensuring that pupils were registered, and attended the various outreach activities. In getting to know Chloe through the film project, it transpired that Paul was also her form and pastoral care teacher and had known her since she was in S1 (see Section 5.3.3). Paul had facilitated her involvement in an access to a career in teaching course of which there were two places per school, every two years.

In addition to his pastoral care activities and support for S6 pupils, Paul had been assigned to facilitate a Princes Trust class during the first term in August 2010. This class was run in partnership with the Princes Trust Charity and the Local Authority. It was aimed at pupils that the school identified as being 'at risk' of disengaging from school. Twelve S4 pupils were selected for the class who Marion and Janet had identified as being most likely to leave school at Christmas. In the absence of a comparator with a school in a more affluent area, and in discussion with

Paul and Janet, agreement was sought to talk to pupils attending the Princes Trust class. In doing so, this provided opportunities to compare the experiences of early school leavers with those who stayed on in post-compulsory education at the site.

Engaging with Janet and Paul provided an understanding of the ways in which different remits were organised. An orientation to the site was provided which allowed for the centring of analysis in day-to-day activity, rather than the mental states of the pupils and their individual decisions. The nature of Janet and Paul's roles within the school meant that new jobs and tasks frequently appeared at their door. Some of these related to their former roles as class teachers, and others to their remits to support a range of school leavers. Understanding the nature of their day-to-day life in the school and how they performed their roles, not as a mechanistic process, but as something filled with tensions and contradictions, became a key means with which to understand the nature of competing practice at the field site (See Chapter 5).

The role and remit of teachers I engaged with during phase 1 of the research process is summarised in Table 2 (p.88). Details of the nature of the fieldwork undertaken, and the time spent during the field is also provided.

***Table 2: Phase 1 fieldwork contacts at Chapelpark***

| **Research Participant** | **Role** | **Nature of fieldwork** | **Timeframe** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Marion** | Headteacher | Gatekeeper – granted access to conduct field work.<br><br>Access to interview transcript from AERS project 2008<br><br>Discussion to narrow focus of project and identify participants | September 2009<br><br>Meetings to discuss phase 2 of research June 2010 |
| **Janet** | Enterprise and employability officer. Seconded | Facilitated a cross schools film project in Chapelpark. I helped Janet | Film project September 2009 – June 2010 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | from teaching post to deliver work of Glasgow City Council's Determined to Succeed initiative.<br>Supported Further Education college application submissions | by filming music and end of year talent show.<br><br>Accompanied Janet to area Partnerships meeting regarding Determined to Succeed.<br><br>Regular discussion in office. Frequent access to conversations between Janet and pupils who wanted to discuss application to college, apprenticeships and training as pupils dropped by her office.<br><br>Conducted mock interviews for school leavers.<br><br>Accompanied Janet to a careers fair that she had helped organise at a local community centre targeted at early-school leavers from local secondary schools.<br><br>Conducted interview with Janet, with Janet emailing responses. | January 2010<br><br>September 2009-June 2012.<br><br>October –November 2011<br><br>8th December 2010<br><br>June 2012 |
| **Paul** | Pastoral Care teacher.<br><br>Responsible for delivery of a Princes Trust class aimed at early school leavers (pupils who could leave December 2010 as they turned 16).<br><br>Also ran a UCAS class and ensured forms were completed and submitted on time. | Attended Princes Trust class once a week for 4 double periods.<br><br>Ongoing discussion in pastoral care base.<br><br>Frequent access to conversations between Paul and pupils who wanted to discuss their UCAS applications. | August - October 2010<br><br>August 2010- June 2012<br><br>February 2010- July 2012 |

### *4.4.2 Refining the research design*

During phase 1 of the research, constructing an understanding of the site had involved examining: policy processes; historical understanding of transitions between education and employment; the roles and remits of different teachers; management strategies to improve school performance; and understanding variations in school leaver practices

by participating in different activities with pupils both at Chapelpark Secondary and as part of the cross-schools film project (see Table 1, p. 78). Linkages in phenomenon gradually became apparent through a sustained engagement in the site. During this initial phase of the research, I developed situational maps (see figure 3, p.91) using discursive headings advocated by Clarke (2005; p.564). Developing this form of mapping as an analytical tool provided a framework that involved a process of 'seeing' relationships which under other conditions would be taken for granted or not made visible (Clarke, 2005). For instance, I noted down elements from field notes relating to Chloe's experience of both applying to university and asking Janet to find an apprenticeship (see findings Chapter 5). I interpreted how Chloe's interactions with Janet and Paul linked to their remits in the school and how these were structured by policy and local discourses. I also compared similarities and differences in how Chloe progressed an application to teaching with that of a pupil from a more affluent background (see table 7, p.141). The first stage in developing analytic categories derived from these conceptual maps which provided a means of capturing emerging patterns, regularities and linkages in the data.

**Individual human elements / actors**
Young people leaving school
Senior management / teachers
Family / close personal networks

**Nonhuman elements**
**Actors / actants**
School infrastructure;
School databases; SoA report
Course / professional / employment knowledge

**Collective human elements / actors**
Researchers; Outreach programmes; universities; Colleges; learning providers; guidance staff; UCAS; school

**Implicated / silent**
**actors / actants**
Middle-class knowledge / advantage

**Discursive constructions of individual and/or collective human actors**
Working-class; low-attaining; high-attaining; Socially disadvantaged; low-income; first-generation

**Discursive construction**
**of nonhuman actants**
Concepts of social-class; inner-city school
Disadvantage / advantage

**Political / economic elements**
Scottish Government social / economic politics; Equality of access to HE and professions; Scottish Government strategies to prevent risk of NEET; tuition fees

**Socio-cultural / symbolic elements**
Class; gender; race; nationality;
Historical employment / industry
Social, cultural capital

**Temporal elements**
Competition in HE courses / labour market
Local employment opportunities
School status – performance – good/bad
History of school transitions (youth employment / FE)

**Spatial elements**
Location of school / area – proximity to city; Working-class / middle-class localities

**Major issues / debates**
**(usually contested)**
Improving school attainment;
Improving school performance
Ability – opportunity?

**Related discourses**
**(historical, narrative and/or**
**Visual)**
Individualism discourses; meritocratic society; social networks;

***Figure 3: A situational map of working-class schooling at Chapelpark, using headings from Clarke (2005, p.564).***

Whilst Chloe's options appeared fairly limited in comparison to pupils attending the school in a more affluent area, the classroom observations sharpened an understanding

that pupils like Chloe were in the best position at Chapelpark to benefit from educational uplift. Understanding the ways in which Chloe interacted with practitioners to navigate the university landscape yielded important insights that helped to conceptualise 'change' at the site. Another important dimension which was incorporated into the analysis was my continued engagement with Chloe as she progressed through her degree studies.

Mapping a conceptual landscape to empirically explore decision-making was an important first step in helping clarify what might be important in trying to explore constitutive elements of decision-making practice of the highest-attaining pupils at Chapelpark (see Chapter 5). This consideration of relational aspects, that is the mesh of human practices and material arrangements (Schatzki, 2002), supported the iterative process between research, interpretation and design. In developing a conceptual understanding of the site, phase 1 served to clarify the need to widen the focus from pupil decision-making experience alone. In order to more accurately represent the co-constitutive nature of educational decision-making at the site, the analysis incorporated an understanding of the nature of competing discourses around education-employment transitions and teacher roles in supporting and shaping engagement in this process.

At the end of this phase, pursuing further participatory projects as a means to engage with research participants was carefully considered. Although progressing a film project facilitated a more flexible approach to data collection and provided opportunities to build rapport with research participants, than for example, classroom observation, I also recognised the way it had impinged on pupil and staff time. Section 4.5 thus outlines a research design which attempted to minimise this intrusion on time

in the next stage of fieldwork. The next section provides an account of the research strategy adopted in phase 2 of the research process.

## 4.5 Phase 2: Implementation of research design

This section describes the data collection tools that were employed during the second phase of the research process. In this phase, the focus of the substantive issue narrowed to focus on a cohort of high-attaining S5 pupils. This section provides a justification for the tools adopted in the research design. This phase sought to understand the situated meaning, skills and knowledge of practices young people performed at the site, as they entered their senior phase of post-compulsory schooling in S5.

### *4.5.1 Selecting the sample*

Phase 2 began by agreeing with Marion that this stage would develop a more explicit focus on the highest-attaining pupils. Of interest was the continuing ways in which senior management supported them. Following a decision from the headteacher to allow me to conduct a study in which the school would identify these pupils, ethical approval from the University's Ethics Committee was gained (for further discussion of ethics in study, see Section 4.8). The outline submitted to the Committee provided: details about the envisaged duration of the study which encompassed phase 2 and 3 of the research design; the proposed research methods; and the ways in which consent would be sought from the participants (see appendix 8). The headteacher also introduced me to Margaret the deputy headteacher (DHT) who would become the main contact for the fieldwork (see table 3, p.94).

***Table 3: Details of research contacts in phase 2***

| Research Participant | Responsibility | Nature of fieldwork | Timeframe |
|---|---|---|---|
| Margaret | Deputy headteacher and Year Head of S5 and S6 | Discussion of remit with Margaret | June 2010 – July 2012 |
| | | Facilitated my attendance at a meeting with senior pupils and their parents | 9th September 2010 |
| | | Facilitated fieldwork by organising attendance of pupils at interviews and focus groups. | September 2010 – January 2011 |

In August 2010, Margaret provided a list of 31 pupils who had been identified as capable of achieving 5+ Highers based on their combined examination score at the end of S4 (see figure 4, p.146). Margaret organised my attendance at an S5 pupil and parent information evening and introduced my research project (see Chapter 6, Section 6.1). With the support of Marion and Margaret, all 31 pupils were invited to participate in the research study. The following table summarises the research activity involved in phase 2 in which 28 of the pupils agreed to participate.

***Table 4: Overview of fieldwork conducted with 28 high-attaining pupils at Chapelpark***

| Pupil: Pseudonym | **Completed Survey and structured 1:1 interview (September – October 2010** | **Semi-structured interview (September – October 2010)** | **Group conversation attended (November 2010)** | **Follow up in-depth interviews (December 2010 – January 2011)** | **Two follow up- group conversations with Group 1 24th Feb 2011 2nd May 2011** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Richard | Yes | Yes | Group 1 | Yes | Attended 2nd May only |
| Fiona | Yes | Yes | Group 1 | Yes | Yes |
| Emma | Yes | Yes | Group 1 | Yes | Yes |
| Nick | Yes | Yes | Group 1 | Yes | Yes |
| Andrew | Yes | Yes | Group 1 | Yes | Yes |
| Matt | Yes | Yes | Group 1 | Yes | Yes |
| Anna | Yes | Yes | Group 1 | Yes | Yes |
| Rebecca | Yes | Yes | Group 1 | Yes | Yes |
| Mark | No | Yes | Group 1 | | Invited, couldn't attend |
| Stuart | No | No | Group 1 | | Yes |
| Helen | Yes | Yes | | | |
| Michael | No | Yes | Group 2 | | |
| Philip | Yes | Yes | Group 2 | | |
| Simon | Yes | Yes | Group 2 | | |
| James | Yes | Yes | Group 2 | | |
| Finn | Yes | Yes | Group 4 | Yes | |
| Graham | Yes | Yes | Group 4 | Yes | |
| Samantha | No | Yes | | Yes | |
| David | Yes | Yes | | Yes | |
| Katrina | No | Yes | | | |
| Craig | No | Yes | | Yes | |
| Hannah | Yes | Yes | Group 3 | | |
| Kaitlin | Yes | Yes | Group 3 | | |
| Ruth | Yes | Yes | Group 3 | | |
| Alan | No | Yes | | | |
| Jen | Yes | Yes | | | |
| Jane | No | Yes | | | |
| Jennifer | Yes | Yes | | | |
| **Total number of pupils:** | **20** | **27** | **19** | **13** | **9 (10 invited)** |

In parallel with my own research project, and as a legacy of the AERS partnership, Marion (HT) had agreed to allow other research studies to be conducted in the school (see Banford and Irvine, 2012; Wilson and Hunter, 2012; Spohrer, 2012). Pupils within the high-attaining cohort were potentially involved in three studies which were

interconnected. Consent from the pupils was obtained in parallel with these studies which looked at young people's social networks, discourses of aspirations and educational decision-making. As this body of research concerned with exploring inequality in education progressed, some pupils were also invited to participate in a further study, a pilot of a tutoring project (see Wilson *et al.*, 2014). This potentially raised ethical issues for my own empirical work and these concerns are addressed in Sections 4.6.2 and 4.8. The remainder of this section discusses the rationale for the methods used in this phase of the research.

### *4.5.2 Survey*

To begin, a small survey style tool was developed (see appendix 2) in which each of the participants were asked to identify friends from among the 28 participants. The survey collected data from 20 of the 28 participants and provided an adequate sense of existing friendship groups among the cohort. Eight of the participants, although consenting to the project, were not at school on the day of the survey but were available to participate in other activities. The 28 participants were grouped according to these findings, and invited in their friendship groups to attend a group interview, initially as a pragmatic tool to minimise awkwardness. Questions in the survey asked pupils about their future plans after leaving school, and a little about their background, and their parent / carers occupation (see table 8, p.153).

### *4.5.3 Individual and Group Interviews*

On completion of the survey, pupils were interviewed using a structured interview schedule (see appendix 3). The use of structured interviews to elaborate what pupils

hoped to do after leaving school helped develop rapport with participants. The ideas that pupils articulated relating to what they would like to do on leaving school were not treated as intentions of individuals, but as circulating practice. Emerging from the results of the survey data and structured interviews were varied friendship groups. The characteristics of each group were mapped out after eliciting a better understanding about the young people's lives in situ. Emerging in the group interviews was a growing sense of how the groups defined their own connections, facilitating an exploration of group dynamics related to academic motivation (Cotterell, 1996; Kindermann, 2016). This facilitated an analysis of the characteristics of university orientation practices within the school (Roderick *et al*., 2008).

The focus of these interviews allowed for an understanding of young people's social positions within the school. The actual conversations that were generated from this activity were, like the interview data, used not as a mere reflection of participants' inner states or opinions, but as a product of the interaction between interviewer and interviewee (Fontana & Frey, 1994). For instance, for those participants thinking about studying at university, talking to a researcher working in a university led to an exchange of ideas about different institutions and courses. In this sense, the research almost acted as a catalyst for sharing information. This in itself was useful in helping to illuminate the socially distributed understanding of knowledge about Higher Education and the varying levels of engagement in planning processes among participants.

Following the initial group conversations, in-depth interviews were carried out with 13 of the pupils from groups 1 and 4. These interviews focused on experiences of schooling and ideas about what they might do when they leave school. Attendance was

given to pragmatic features of daily life rather than asking pupils to provide 'factors' or 'influences' informing their decisions. Ethnographic approaches to interviewing participants employed by Barton and Hamilton (1998, 2000) informed this approach as these researchers look at how practices, viewed as social processes, connect people with one another. These interviews facilitated the broadening of the analysis to incorporate young people's negotiations with their immediate family. In the later phases of the research, in-depth interviews were used again with some of the pupils in order to follow up, clarify and discuss findings (see table 4, p.95).

Holstein and Gubrium (1995) view that both the interviewer and respondent construct meaning through this process. They view that these data collection methods provide a means with which to gather both subjective information about specific aspects of individuals' lives, as well as data on how meaning gets made.

> The active interview data can be analysed not only for *what* was said (substantive information) and *how* it was said (construction of meaning), but also for showing the ways the *what* and *how* are interrelated and what circumstances condition the meaning –making process (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, p.79)

Both the group and individual interviews lasted between 30 minutes to 50 minutes and were conducted at the end of the school day. These were structured through the use of an interview schedule that included a number of overarching questions and probes (see appendix 4 and appendix 5). These were digitally recorded and transcribed. The outcome of phase 2 led to an understanding of the differentiated nature of future plans beyond school. Ongoing engagement with Janet and Paul continued during this phase and provided an understanding of where and when high- attaining pupils interacted with different forms of management strategies to support school leavers. In particular, it illuminated the tensions between management logics of practice and the young

people's existing practice at the site. Chapter 5 presents the findings that followed from these forms of data collection.

## 4.6 Phase 3: Consolidating accounts of decision-making practice

This section describes the in-depth participant observation techniques adopted in phase 3 of the research process. A central focus of the research became the ways in which participants in Group 1 orientated towards applications to Higher Education. In particular, in-depth data focused on the ways in which two of the research participants, Emma and Richard, navigated entry to competitive courses in law and dentistry.

### *4.6.1 Participant observation*

The participatory methods selected in phase 3 emerged in response to earlier phases of the research process and arose through ongoing discussions with Marion. These discussions centred on the need for some additional tutoring support for high-attaining pupils in Chapelpark Secondary, which Marion felt would make a difference to pupils wishing to apply for university. During the course of the first semi-structured interview with Emma, she began to describe her anxiety with English Higher. Towards the end of the interview we circulated back to this issue and I offered some support by agreeing to meet her again the following week, specifically to discuss aspects of this subject which were posing difficulty. As Emma and I started meeting regularly from this point onwards (see Hunter *et al.,* 2018), further data collection opportunities presented themselves. These were captured in field notes following conversations and tutoring sessions. I also carried out further in-depth interviews and as Emma began to progress an application to university, text message conversations were transcribed as

Emma asked for advice about what to do following her results at the end of S5 (see Chapter 7). Throughout these exchanges we discussed her participation in my own research as a reciprocal arrangement emerged over time. Schwandt (2015) defines reciprocity in field studies as "part of the larger ethical-political process of building trust, cultivating relationships, and demonstrating genuine interest in those among whom one studies" (p.267).

Offering some additional tutoring support was initially judged as something which may be potentially useful to the lives of participants. Encouraged by Mitchell's (2008) discussion of the social responsibility of the academic researcher, an underlying aim of this activity was that the 'data collection can in, and of, itself serve as an intervention [that] is crucial in that it can be transformative for the participants' (Mitchell, 2008, p.366). Thus, I continued to look for avenues where participant observation might be of use to participants at the site. The ethical considerations in carrying out qualitative research with other people have so far drawn attention to the negotiation of access to participants and the development of more reciprocal research-participant relationships. Section 4.8 provides an overview of how risk and harm to participants was minimised.

In parallel with my working with Emma in a more tutoring capacity, the headteacher supported the development of a small action research tutoring project. This was undertaken with colleagues in the School of Education and the Lifelong Learning Department at the University of Strathclyde and 12 volunteers. This involved offering predominantly S6 pupils the experience of working with a volunteer tutor. Among the research participants in my own study, Richard, Nick and Andrew were also selected from the S5 cohort to work with a tutor (see table 4, p.95). As part of the

action research project, tutors were asked to provide reflective feedback to support project development. Through further discussion with the headteacher, colleagues and participants (including tutors and pupils), it was agreed that data could be shared with my own research project. This collaboration between the two studies intensified as my own emergent findings, helped inform ongoing discussions with tutors related to the successes and challenges they encountered (see Hunter *et al.*, 2018; Wilson *et al.*, 2014).

Primarily, these data collection techniques served to illuminate a more sustained engagement with the daily lives and day-to-day routines of participants. In meeting with Emma almost weekly in the school library either after school or at lunchtimes, passing conversations were also held with her friends. Rapport with this group had already been established through their participation in three group interviews. In this respect, I am confident that when we met they were aware of my status as researcher who was interested in how they were progressing through their studies and with applications to university. In addition to these pupils, I also discussed how volunteer tutors were experiencing supporting this group as I happened to meet them in the school library. Table 5 (p.102) summarises the engagement with pupils during the final phase and details the types of data collected.

***Table 5: Overview of research methods in Phase 3***

| Pupil | Activity | Timeframe |
|---|---|---|
| Emma | Tutored English in S5, offered more mentoring support at the end of S5 and into S6. Matched her with a volunteer tutor in S6.<br>I had access to tutor notes, plus continued to meet up to discuss History, my research and her application to university. Provided access to friendship group- chatted informally to group 1 (see table 2). Data collected: field notes, copy of personal statement to UCAS, copies of assignments, text messages and email correspondence | February 2011- June 2012 |
| Richard | Access to tutor notes. Conducted two further interviews with Richard and his tutor. Accessed a recording of their initial tutor meeting. Spoke informally to Richard as part of friendship group 1. | February 2011- June 2012 |
| Nick | Access to tutor notes and two recordings of their meetings. Spoke informally as part of friendship group 1. | February 2011 – June 2011 |
| Andrew | Access to tutor notes and two recordings of their meetings. Conducted 2 further interviews with Andrew and his tutor. Spoke informally as part of friendship group 1). | February 2011 – June 2012 |
| Fiona | Spoke informally as part of friendship group 1. | February 2011 – June 2012 |
| Matt | Spoke informally as part of friendship group 1. | February 2011 – June 2012 |
| Anna | Spoke informally as part of friendship group 1. | February 2011 – June 2012 |
| Rebecca | Spoke informally as part of friendship group 1. | February 2011 – June 2012 |
| Mark | Access to tutor reflective notes S6 | February 2011 – June 2012 |
| Stuart | Spoke informally as part of friendship group 1. | February 2011 – June 2012 |

As pupils progressed further in their studies, the focus of the research narrowed to explore the nature of engagement with Higher Education admissions. A central focus in this phase of the research became the ways in which pupils orientated and navigated towards competitive courses in Higher Education. Adopting methods of participant observation generated data relating to the ways in which the young people's existing practice interacted with knowledge, meaning and skills structuring entrance to Higher Education and the professions. Findings from this phase are presented in Chapter 7.

### *4.6.2 Summary*

The three phases of the research design have described a process of in-depth qualitative data collection which draw in some respects on ethnographic methodologies. In studying practice, Nicolini (2017) asks:

> Can we study practice without starting from the middle of action (and returning constantly to it)? Is practice simply ethnography writ large? Are practice theories simply an infra language to fulfil the graphos part of ethnography? (Nicolini, 2017, p.33)

Given that the study did not seek to "write" the culture of a particular group (Schwandt, 2015, p.99), but instead to examine the dynamics of the organisation, the time spent in the field of study employed methods that were best served to capture the re-production of performances in order to study the dynamic of unfolding social practices.

Consequently this immersed involvement in the field setting involved an extended approach to data collection that presented a number of ongoing challenges to accepted codes of ethical practice. Small (2010) views that prescribed ethics codes are more relevant to biomedical research than an appropriate model for educational research which involves human judgement and ongoing decision-making in the field by the researcher. Ethics, in Small's view, is "an everyday activity that should be considered in the context of social and political goals of education: in particular, the concern for equity and social justice" (Small, 2010, p.13). Hammersley and Traianou (2012) also view that the responsibility for progressing ethical judgements in educational research lies with the integrity of the researcher and their adherence to their goals within the educational research process.

> Above all, the situated nature of practical decision-making within research makes clear that sound judgments about what it is best to do cannot be made simply by following instructions or applying rules. In this respect, and others, research is a form of praxis; in other words, it is an activity in which there must

> be continual attention to methodological, ethical, and prudential principles, what they might mean in the particular circumstances faced, and how best to act in those circumstances as a researcher (Hammersely and Traianou, 2012, p.6).

Alongside adhering to formal ethics procedures which outlined the study and were approved by the research ethics committee at the University of Strathclyde, I adopted a reflexive consideration of relationships within the study between myself and participants which was responsive and reciprocal in character (Schwandt, 2015). In this sense, adopting an approach to research in which, as researcher I held multiple roles, moved towards the kinds of actionable research advocated by St John (2013) where social research has a role to play in "finding a new balance in policy and practice that recognises the necessity of equalising opportunities for low-and middle-income families" (p.217). In this sense, the research design reflects my positionality and ideology which takes a critical stance in which the project seeks ways to "interpret data that undermines what appears natural, and opens to question what appears obvious" (Slaughter, 1989 cited in Kinchloe and McLaren, 2005, p.321). The following sections discuss the reflexive positions adopted and an outline of ethical procedures within this study.

### 4.7 Analysing and Interpreting Data

This section discusses the approaches used to identify, analyse and represent processes of reproduction and transformation of practice at the site. It describes the different methods employed to make sense of this project in which a multi-focal approach to the site had resulted in the collection of extensive data.

### *4.7.1 Field notes*

Drawing on ethnographic methods of data collection involved extensive note taking in the field. Writing field notes in the early stages of data collection produced a "running description of events, people, things heard and overheard, conversations among people, [and] conversations with people" (Lofland and Lofland, 1995, p.93). This process of comprehensive note taking involved writing immediately after events, experiences and interactions within the school. The extensive field notes kept, particularly in the early stages of the research, were used to record impressions, observing anything and everything. In the early stages, every visit to the school would prompt around two to three hours of writing. In developing a more extensive research diary, understanding theoretical ideas and concepts, methodological considerations, and personal thoughts and feelings were entwined with observations from the field. Writing field notes became not so much a linear process of description, which later would be analysed, but instead, an iterative process. Writing one day, for example, would prompt further impressions about activity which had been previously written. This made the output a messy and fairly idiosyncratic array of past and present observations as ideas about possible linkages between data were explored. Thoughts which occurred after the writing up of the field diary were also written down and this contributed to the beginnings of an extensive research diary.

The use of the research diary therefore allowed for the development of a record of the research process in which my own observations and reflection on the fieldwork undertaken were recorded. The research diary became the formative step in writing up a large body of data, and supported the seeing of important linkages in the data which helped to clarify ideas and support the overall analysis (Clarke, 2005).

As the fieldwork period took place over a number of years, the research diary provided a crucial record of decisions taken in the field. Both the writing and rereading of the research diary became part of the ongoing work of data analysis. Extracts that provided significant illustration of this process are thus presented as data in the following findings chapters to support the analysis at which I arrived.

### *4.7.2 Developing analytic categories*

Section 4.4.2 described the ways in which developing 'conceptual maps' were useful in helping to narrow the research design in phase 1. This was an important step in developing analytic categories which were produced early into the field work. These categories were constantly evolving, added to, and redrafted as more time was spent in the school and reading the literature. These were extended as linkages were made to related policy and as the theoretical base was explored in the literature on practice. The second stage in developing analytic categories employed further techniques from situational analysis using social world/ arena maps to produce operational diagrams that aided further the process of 'seeing' relationships. Clarke (2005) views that this technique allows the researcher to enter into the situation in order to make

> ..collective sociological sense out of it, starting with the questions: What are patterns of collective commitment and what are the salient social worlds operating here? The analyst needs to elucidate which social worlds and subworlds or segments come together in a particular arena and why. What are their perspectives and what do they hope to achieve through their collective action? What older and newer/emergent nonhuman technologies and other nonhuman actants are characteristic of each world? What are their properties? What constraints, opportunities, and resources do they provide in that world" (Clarke, 2005, p.110)

This technique was employed to map out some of the discursive headings which encompassed different actors' social worlds and the positions occupied. This analysis

involved grouping macro-categories to capture interaction between different institutional worlds such as ‘school’, ‘families’, ‘university’. These were sub-divided into middle-level categories, for example, ‘organising activity for high achievers’ and ‘socialising’. Each of these categories which emerged from the data was then used to think about other data. Where data did not fit with categories, these were added to and amended. Riessman (2008) argues that methodological and analytical techniques should not become disciplinary practices but are better treated as fuzzy and creative processes.

### *4.7.3 Developing pen portraits, making practice accessible*

Having sketched out different analytic categories, I employed the process of developing pen portraits, short summaries which encompassed descriptive accounts of young people’s situated practice. In focusing on the process of navigations and orientations, the project created what Nicolini (2017) describes as “discursive landscapes” (p.30) where some practices are foregrounded and others are left in the background. These pen portraits were employed to represent the interpretation of actions and occurrences and allowed for the condensing of various relational phenomena into coherent accounts that aimed to preserve complexity. In doing so, accounts were developed which attempted to make explicit the processual nature of decision-making practice. In using pen portraits, narrative accounts were developed to capture and build rich description (Barter and Reynolds, 2000). Developing and analysing these extended pieces of writing was carried out by critically reading data and material available, as well as the interview transcripts to try to capture as faithfully as possible the experience of using these methods. These pieces of writing used rich

description and in some instances these were used to inform the final collection of interview data or to elicit responses from the participants about scenarios which had been developed (Hill, 1997, p.177). These accounts were used as an adjunct to other research techniques to analyse the data, however they formed a crucial part in trying to synthesise the large body of work. Rendering an accessible account of the heterogeneous and complex character of the empirical situation attempted to explain how phenomena was spatially and temporally situated within a landscape of material, technological and discursive arrangements (Schatzki, 2002).

### *4.7.4 Presenting Findings*

Overall themes were developed following the writing of extended pieces of descriptive accounts which primarily captured experiences. Descriptions were amalgamated into a single all-encompassing narrative in order to describe activities and strategies in the school to support school leavers (Chapter 5), the ways in which these were experienced by research participants (Chapter 6) and the ways in which young people navigated the complex and at times contradictory nature of university admissions (Chapter 7).

The analysis and the writing up of the data thereof, developed an exploration of linkages between phenomena within Chapelpark Secondary by turning attention towards the social and collective organisation of practices. This analysis looks at the ways in which practices mutually shape perceptions, interpretations and actions within the site, de-centring the individual from the analyses. Focussing on empirically observable social phenomena unfolding through the 'happening' of practices and activities within the site was combined with participant accounts (Schatzki, 2005). That is, where the narrative is illustrated by interview data, this was used to illustrate

process and experience within people's daily lives, rather than as a summative account of individuals' attitudes, values, or beliefs.

### *4.7.5 Reflexivity in approaching issues of validity, reliability and generalizability*

The previous sections have outlined my role in the research design and data collection. It attempts to capture the explicit effect that this approach to data collection has had in constructing the research findings. Issues of validity, completeness and trustworthiness are thus challenging to address well when researchers are also actors in the scenes they are reporting (Langley and Tsoukas, 2010). Turner (1983) views that the creative core involved in interpreting qualitative research data demands a 'direct application of both the intellect and the imagination' of the researcher (Turner, 1983, p.334-335). The description and quotations presented in the following accounts do not function only to document, but also to reflexively expose the ways in which I have interpreted and made explicit linkages in the data. The theorisation made possible by this process allows for a consensual notion of what constitutes social knowledge and the validity or truth of such knowledge generated through the research findings (Andrews, 2012). Thus the reflexive nature of choices made about how to interpret voices in the text and which transcript extracts to present as evidence, derived from my continued engagement at the site which were recorded and explored in field notes (Schwandt, 2015, p.268).

Strauss (1987) argues that such grounded approaches to data collection mean that "the researcher will not be the only possible interpretation of the data […], but it will be plausible, useful, and allow its own further elaboration and verification" (Strauss 1987, p.11). In this sense, the aims of the research are to make claims that go beyond

the researched case. However, instead of generalising to a wider population, the aim of this research is to make generalised claims regarding the characteristics of the social phenomenon being studied (Mason, 2002; Silverman, 2001). Thus, in engaging with the 'situated life-worlds' of the young people and practitioners at the site, accommodations have been made between theoretical judgement and practical judgement in order to close the gap between practice and the developing theory (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2003). Attempts have been made to reflexively expose these accommodations by documenting empirically observable social phenomena unfolding through the 'happening' of practices and activities within the site (Schatzki, 2005). The knowledge claims made in this thesis recognise that '*how* knowledge is acquired, organized, and interpreted is relevant to *what* the claims are' (Altheide and Johnson, 1994, p.486).

### 4.8 Ethical Considerations

The adherence to ethical guidelines was followed during the research process where researchers have a responsibility to ensure that the physical, social and psychological well-being of research participants is not adversely affected by the research (British Sociological Association, 2018). Schwandt (2015) explains that in qualitative enquiry, where relationships are characterised by considerably extended personal exchanges, researchers need to develop an ethic that is responsive and reciprocal in character. The following describes how ethical considerations were implemented at different stages of the research process.

### *4.8.1 Approaching ethics during different stages of the research process*

In the first instance permission was sought from the headteacher who agreed that access could be granted to speaking to pupils and teachers. From the outset, my role as researcher in the school was overt and I started conversations with an introduction about my role in the school, information about the intended research study which would involve focussing on decisions young people made about their futures. Obtaining consent involved a combination of engaging in dialogue and inviting questions from staff members and pupils in order to discuss research ideas as they developed. In the early phase of the research process, more casual conversations with people at the site therefore helped sensitise the research design, and did not facilitate the same degree of extended discussion as with participants selected in subsequent phases of the research process. With the exception of teachers Janet and Paul, and the S6 pupil Chloe, I am satisfied that none of the people I spoke to in the early phase play a major part in the final thesis and would be unable to recognise themselves in the finished work. I am satisfied that I used my professional judgement and discretion throughout choosing appropriate language to engage participants in discussion during the early exploratory phase of the research project.

Obtaining consent during phase 2 of the research involved a more contractual style of agreement whereby participant information sheets were sent home to participants by Helen (DHT). These explained the potential risks and benefits to participants, provided assurances of confidentiality and that participants could withdraw from the study at any time. Obtaining consent involved asking participants to sign consent forms following a discussion about the aims and objectives of the research. At all times, sensitivity was displayed towards interviewees. In interviewing

one teacher, for instance, hesitancy about taking part in an interview was recognised as she worried about committing to an overly critical stance. Agreement was sought to email her a list of questions and she emailed back some considered responses. Although ethical issues were formalised in the consent and information form which was discussed, read and signed by all participants prior to the interview taking place, participants during phase 3 of the research were reminded during the more informal conversational style interviews, that their views would be anonymised and that they could withdraw their consent at any time if they wished. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of individuals and although individual participants will be able to recognise themselves, it is hoped that they understand how the interpretations presented in this thesis have been reached. Attempts have also been made to preserve the anonymity of the school by withholding unique details that could help identify it.

A further way in which ethics was foregrounded was by providing examples of data to research participants. Examples of this open process involved discussing emergent research findings particularly with participants in Group 1. During phase 3 of the research process, I also provided Emma with a detailed extended pen portrait which facilitated further discussion and clarification from Emma, which then in turn provided additional data by inviting further comment. This process, along with inviting mutual discussion about both of our positions as prospective and experienced university student, enacted a more reciprocal arrangement where Emma asked questions about the nature of academic work and gained insights about progressing into university. Due to the nature of this exploratory work and because of the time it lasted and its flexibility, it was important to recognise that the nature of consent could have been taken for granted, forgotten or changed over time.

### *4.8.2 Leaving the field*

As the fieldwork progressed over the three years, a point was reached which Clarke (2005) describes as 'saturation', whereby fewer new insights were gained and enough material had been collected to answer the research questions. A natural point of working with high-attaining pupils reached a conclusion as pupils left the school at the end of S6. The collaborations established between school staff, myself and other university colleagues continue on as further research work is established looking at issues of inequality and education. Some participants involved in this thesis also continue to stay in touch as they progress through their university courses and into the professions. Their input into the expansion of a tutoring (now mentoring) project has been instrumental in developing more person-centred approaches to supporting young people's progress into Higher Education (See Hunter *et al*., 2018; Wilson *et al*., 2014).

## 4.9 Conclusion

This chapter has described the methods used in this investigation which have drawn on constructivist epistemological foundations where meaning and truth is found through interpretation (Schwandt, 2015). In focusing on one school setting based in a working-class area, the exploratory approach to research design served to develop a more innovative understanding of disadvantage and education. Drawing on ethnographic methods, this chapter has described a reflexive and responsive process to data collection. The design adopted used a range of research methods that were suited to an analysis of how social life is constituted and transformed within a given setting (Schatzki, 2002).

Methods of participant observation were thus adopted to look at the interplay between management attempts to improve opportunities for young people as they progressed their education, and also to explore the young people's situated responses to education and employment more generally. In setting out a more reflexive research design in which a positionality to look for avenues to support social change, has been outlined. The overall methodology adopted therefore provided avenues and possibilities to collaborate with practitioners and young people which still exist today (St John, 2013). The following chapters present the findings that flowed from this research design.

# Chapter 5

# Understanding practice at Chapelpark Secondary

## Chapter Overview

This Chapter provides an account in which decision-making is conceptualised as a feature of practice within the social setting. This chapter proceeds as follows: Section 5.1 presents a historically situated account of the school drawing on textual constructions of local economic decline and regeneration. Section 5.2 focuses on the enactment of management strategies and partnership implementation to improve educational outcomes and drive school improvement. Section 5.3 investigates pupil decision-making by drawing on routine enactment of practices related to 'articulating a decision about leaving school' that were identified across the site. The final account in this section focuses on the ways in which two practitioners, Janet and Paul, supported Chloe, an S6 pupil, as she pursued an application to university to study primary school teaching. This section concludes by suggesting that it is within these social interactions that a more fertile basis on which to explore changing configurations of practice may be best located. Section 5.4 extends this analysis to look at senior management strategies to support the high-attaining pupils at Chapelpark. It concludes by suggesting that improving educational outcomes can be understood more fully as an attempt to intervene in the organisation of daily practice, rather than changing individuals' attitudes, values, or beliefs.

### 5.1 Introducing Chapelpark Secondary School: the social order of things

On entering Chapelpark, the school follows familiar organisational arrangements. Visitors are required to sign in at the office and are shown into a waiting room where school success and achievement is celebrated in the form of certificates and press cuttings that are framed on the walls. To the other side of the school office is the canteen which joins on to a multi -purpose school assembly hall. The Dux boards displayed on the walls in the school hall celebrate the success and achievement of former pupils. Inspirational quotes from authors and philosophers are placed on plaques throughout the corridors, and together these messages communicate values and ways of behaving that are formal and traditional. Surrounding the school office is a noticeboard entitled 'The board of fame'. Photographs of former pupils are displayed with a caption underneath detailing the course of study and the academic institution they now attend. During lesson times, the corridors are quiet and when the bell rings, the corridors and break out areas fill with uniformed pupils. The 'social order' of things at the Chapelpark site is therefore familiar, repeated time and again in different settings. But it is also unique.

Regeneration of the local area is evident. Chapelpark Secondary is located relatively close to Glasgow City Centre and is surrounded by a mixture of 1960s high rise, new housing and old tenement flats. A motorway separates the area from the city centre, as well as dividing up the original locality. In the immediate surrounding area to the school are redeveloped brown industrial sites which house a large retail centre, a job centre and a Further Education college. Historically, the area was an important and busy centre of heavy industry. The new service industries, and nearby colleges evidence a localised impact of national and global restructuring (Massey, 1984). A

narrative of decline of the local area from the 1980s onwards is found in a variety of textual sources such as local and national regeneration strategies, newspapers and educational policy documents. Unemployment in the area was around 30 per cent at the time of the study, compared to a 12 per cent national average (SIMD, 2012). Data wards immediately surrounding the school are recorded as being in the top decile of most deprived areas in Scotland (SIMD, 2012; 2016). Around 1000 pupils attend the school and nearly 40 per cent of pupils were entitled to a free school meal (FSM) at the time of the study. School performance data in terms of pupils achieving Higher level exam results improved between 2005-2009, with reports that those achieving five Highers rose from less than 5 per cent to around 15 per cent, compared to a national average of 35 per cent. The statistics suggest that the community served by Chapelpark Secondary is a target for regeneration strategies across a number of local services including health, education, housing and employment.

The aspirational messages in the school therefore take on their own particular meaning when recognised that the school itself does not produce many young people who progress to university. Conventional analysis of the school as providing a 'context' in which individual pupil trajectories can be studied has been eschewed in this study, in favour of viewing the school as an organisation with its own unique order, logics and systems. The remainder of this chapter illuminates the localised responses to the ways in which Government policy directs school improvement, particularly in schools serving more deprived catchments.

## 5.2 Chapelpark in practice

In examining a range of online content about Chapelpark, a key resource in producing a temporal understanding of the school emerged in policy evaluations of the Schools of Ambition (SoA) project (Menter *et al*., 2010; The Scottish Government, 2009a). Between 2006 and 2009, Chapelpark was selected among a number of Glasgow schools to take part in a Government led initiative which provided headteachers with additional funding to address specific localised challenges. Chapelpark's success was recognised in their HMIe report (2010), which cited improvement in terms of increases in pupil attainment, staying on rates in the senior year and progression rates in to Higher Education, as well as falling exclusion rates, and improved school attendance. In these textual constructions, the work of the headteacher was celebrated. Section 5.2.1 provides a descriptive account of the ways in which the headteacher Marion responded to local arrangements to improve school success. Connected to this idea of success, the reports identified the way in which the school worked in partnership with other educational agencies and training providers to improve the destinations of school leavers. These arrangements were generally celebrated as positive, unproblematic, and straightforward. Section 5.2.2 examines the ways in which some of these partnership initiatives manifested in the work of two teachers Janet and Paul, in order to begin examining the ways in support was provided to school leavers. In doing so, the findings presented in Section 5.2 construct a more complex empirical investigation of situated practice as constituted by and within the site arrangements.

### *5.2.1 Managing 'change' and 'innovation' at Chapelpark*

At the time of the investigation, Marion had been in post as headteacher for five years. The following account provides an overview of areas of Marion's practice which she identified as important in effecting change. The challenges of dealing with a complex catchment area and addressing the academic support needs of pupils were set out in a 'transformational plan' (2006). This document provided an overview of a range of initiatives which she had set out, as part of the school's participation in SoA. Interview transcripts conducted by researchers from the Applied Educational Research Scheme described further the ways in which she had responded to these localised challenges.

#### *5.2.1.1 Complex catchment area*

Historic newspaper sources from around 15 - 20 years before the study commenced described a problem with Glasgow's failing schools. At the time, placement requests to neighbouring authorities had resulted in falling school populations. Marion described at one point the school roll had dropped to around 400 pupils as parents and pupils considered secondary schools in the neighbouring and more affluent local authority. The present school site, built around 2000 is the amalgamation of several secondary schools, and today Chapelpark's intake remains steady at around 1000 pupils. Marion described that when she first took over as headteacher, the legacy of these arrangements were present, particularly as the large catchment area presented many challenges. Marion described that previously some pupils had been afraid to cross through different gang territories to come to school. In the past she had used funding to pay for taxis to journey groups of boys to school in the morning and home every night. She described that stories of gang fighting damaged the school reputation

and that she did not want local people witnessing trouble immediately outside of the school. She had implemented a rota in which members of senior management were present at the school gate at the end of the school day.

The SoA evaluation reports described the success of using funding to offer all S1 pupils the opportunity to take part on an outward bound course at the beginning of their first term. Marion felt that it was important to provide pupils with the opportunity to build friendships, particularly when pupils were coming from diverse catchment areas and given the recent history of trouble of gang- related problems. At the time of interview with Marion (AERS, 2008), the school were no longer able to fund the outward bound courses. Marion continued to invest teacher time into outreach work with primary schools led by one of Marion's Deputy Head Teachers (DHT). In passing conversation with this DHT, whose remit was as Year Head to S1 pupils, he described how each year he took some of the first year pupils to the primary schools where they described their experiences of attending the secondary school. He took groups of boys to reassure younger pupils and dispel fears about 'getting beaten up' (researcher notes, August 2010). Central aspects of whole school reform policies included introducing policies on school uniform and maximising pupil attendance. Marion felt these also sent messages to parents about the school expectations. As the focus of this research study narrowed to look at the experiences of high-attaining pupils in the school, it was clear that these practices were fundamental to increasing academic performance. Families, where concerns about the academic progress of their children or school reputation were of concern, were more likely to submit placing requests to other schools. Marion recognised she needed:

*'..confidence from the community. That there isn't this kind of "well you know, I really wanted to go to [name of school in neighbouring local authority], but I couldn't get in, so I am coming to you". That it was a given that everybody came here.'*

(Marion interview, AERS, March 2008)

#### *5.2.2.2 Addressing the academic support needs of pupils*

Using funding from SoA, Marion had introduced a whole school learning programme which focused on metacognitive strategies and methods to help students understand the way they learn. This programme intended to provide improved orientations to class work, homework and organised learning. Using already established resources, pupils were introduced to these skills in dedicated classes early in S1 and S2 and again in S5 and S6. Teachers were provided with training in the delivery and implementation of the resources. Marion felt that dedicated time to this activity would help pupils make more informed decisions and choices about their future ideas about learning and employment. At interview, Marion summed up her views on how success might be viewed at Chapelpark Secondary.

*I think better exam results, better attendance, better attitude in terms of learning and motivation, better self-belief. And a better focus you know 'this is what I want to do, I want to be a musician and I know the paths, and I know I need to go to [name of local college] and I know I need to do this'. Not the airy fairy 'I want to be a musician'.*

(Marion interview, AERS, March 2008)

Marion had also used funding from SoA to pay for staff time to run supported study classes after school for senior pupils and to supervise the school library, which now stayed opened to 6 pm in order to provide pupils with a quiet place to study. She was involved as a mentor to high-attaining pupils in S5 and S6 who she perceived as having the potential to go to university (see section 5.4). She also arranged for other members of the senior management team to provide similar support to other pupils recognised

as high-flyers. Prior to the start of this study, she described helping one pupil who was interested in studying law by providing some additional tutoring support in English. She had also drawn on her own contacts to help the pupil with Higher Maths and had helped to secure some work experience in a law firm. At interview, Marion expressed her views about the culmination of this activity:

> *The thing that worried me, could we sustain that same number of kids getting five plus credits? The same number of kids getting three plus Highers? And yes we did, we'd actually had one more in terms of raw numbers - we had twenty this year that had five plus credits, last year we had nineteen. Percentage wise it is slightly up. […] in the fifth year, far more people got three Highers. I'm talking like ten instead of two last year. We are still talking small numbers, but it is significant, you know… and I think that sort of success breeds success. When somebody knows somebody who has been successful and they live in the same street, it just means the community then buys into that.*
>
> (Marion interview, AERS, March 2008)

In summary, this section has provided an insight into localised practice that begins to illuminate how changing the *status quo* is situated in a web of complex arrangements. The data presented here highlights that Marion is engaged in a range of organisational practices that support strategies to improve academic performance at the site. The identification of improving school experience resonates with Bender Sebring *et al*. (2006) findings in Chicago, which suggest:

> A school can be doing a good job of communicating with parents and welcoming them to the school, but if parents see disciplinary problems increase or observe their children struggling in poorly organized classrooms, they will not continue to support the school. In fact, in Chicago, where it is mostly permissible for parents to choose a school other than their neighbourhood school, they may vote with their feet and find a better school for their children. (Bender Sebring *et al*., 2006, p.46)

Marion (HT) also described using funding from SoA to take the 5+ Higher group for a meal in a hotel which she had viewed as a good way to boost confidence and belief among pupils with good prior academic attainment. Thus the data suggests that

Marion's rationale for using SoA funds for academic purposes, as well as her own day-to-day activities, replicated the sorts of taken-for-granted educational encounters that pupils attending schools in more affluent areas may access. These include: organising a quiet place to study, providing access to additional tutoring, providing support for peer groups who are academically focused, and brokering contacts that can facilitate relevant work experience. Section 5.4 and Chapters 6 and 7 will return to these themes in more detail.

### *5.2.2 Working in partnership with local education providers*

The previous section highlighted how school performance, improvement, and accountability were viewed as central organising practices that linked Marion's everyday life with a range of institutions and individuals. These included the City Council, Scottish Government, universities, colleges, local primary schools, charities and various other service providers as well as her own informal networks and contacts. Examining the organised remits of two further members of staff, Janet and Paul helped further conceptualise localised responses to these policies at the site.

In learning about Janet's role and reading policy documents: *More Choices, More Chances* (2006), and *Determined to Succeed* (2007), the majority of Janet's role was geared to the delivery of strategies outlined in these texts. Funded by Glasgow City Council, Janet's post as Enterprise Officer (EO) had ring-fenced funding until 2011 and included a remit to take on the expansion of enterprise in the curriculum outlined in *Determined to Succeed*. As budget constraints came into effect, Janet's role to support the improvement of positive destinations in School Leaver Destination Statistics became increasingly explicit. In 2011, Janet's job title was renamed to

Enterprise and Employability Officer (EEO). Her role became realigned with a "clear focus on increasing positive destinations" as EEOs were charged with taking "the lead on meeting positive destination targets set by the authority and agreed by the school" (Glasgow City Council Education Services, 2011, pp.3-4).

Policy documents at the time described working towards a needed culture change in Scottish schools. As outlined above, a major concern was the need to improve the positive destination rates of young people and to reduce the number of people leaving school who were not in education, employment or training (NEET), a policy focus which is still evident (see Chapter 1). These aspirations for supporting partnership working in schools was set out in *Determined to Succeed* (2007) and highlights the ways in which this policy conceived a more expanded role for schools:

> The infrastructure created by local authorities to support Determined to Succeed remains a critical element of successful delivery as we drive forward the culture change required in our schools. …. And while Determined to Succeed is not the answer to reducing the proportion of young people who do not enter education, employment or training on leaving school, it does complement our NEET strategy - More Choices, More Chances. These young people represent a wealth of undeveloped talent, a waste of human potential, and a missed opportunity for our economy. We are helping to address this issue through the provision of an additional £1 million to continue and expand the Prince's Trust Scotland's 'xlerate with xl' programme, across all local authorities during 2006/08. (The Scottish Government, 2007).

The following data explores the tensions and contradictions between policy and practice. As an EEO, Janet was part of a local partnership whose representation comprised of EEO's from other nearby secondary schools, staff from local colleges, primary schools and learning and training providers. The following field note describes an area partnership meeting attended in the early stages of this research process and provides a stark understanding of the logics underpinning Janet's practice.

> *Janet invited me to attend an area partnership meeting with EEO colleagues from other schools. A central part of this meeting was a discussion of the figures of pupils not in education, employment or training referred to as 'NEET'. A headteacher from another school chaired the meeting and commended staff on their achievements in reducing the number of pupils becoming NEET. Their performance was compared with other area partnerships and there was a consensus that they could do better still. They discussed various strategies for improving the figures which involved ideas for working with early school leavers. During the meeting a fire alarm sounded and we were all evacuated. As we waited outside, I had the opportunity to talk informally with staff present at the meeting who were frank about the impossibility of the task ahead of them. Much of the discussion focused on the Commonwealth Apprenticeship Initiative which had recently been introduced and was regarded as a means to secure early school leavers in particular with a 'positive destination'.*
>
> (Research diary, January 2010)

In subsequent meetings with Janet, she reported that over 100 pupils from S4, S5 and S6 had applied for the Commonwealth Apprenticeship Initiative (CAI). The CAI was a legacy project introduced in 2009 following Glasgow's successful bid to host the 2014 Commonwealth Games. Logistically she needed to organise these pupils' attendance at three interviews which was proving a challenge. This had also resulted in a flood of pupils coming to her office to find out from Janet if they had been accepted. She said 'they think I decide whether they've been accepted or not' (research diary, May 2010). Janet counted that from almost 200 school leavers in 2010, only five pupils were accepted on to the CAI from Chapelpark, with a further three pupils securing other training opportunities. The failure of the scheme, Janet thought, related to the promise of apprenticeships that were tied to the construction industry, losses of

which were suffered following the financial collapse in 2008 (pupil leaving data 2010 and research diary, September 2010).

Paul's remit also provided further examples of staff working in partnership. In addition to his role supporting pupils with applications to the University College Application System (UCAS), Paul had been timetabled for a double period on Monday afternoon, and one period on a Tuesday morning to take a class for pupils who were considered 'at risk of exclusion', or underachieving. This class entitled 'xlerate with xl' was run in partnership with the Local Authority and a charitable organisation, Prince's Trust Scotland. Paul confessed that he had fought 'tooth and nail' not to get landed with this class, a comment which became self-explanatory as Paul struggled in the early stages of running the sessions with pupil behaviour (research notes, August 2010). He expected the class to run for one school term between August and December, as the majority of the pupils were expected to have left by Christmas. In running this class, the school was provided with a community worker, Chris. Chris was new to the school, but had experience of facilitating the 'xl programme' in other schools. Paul met Chris at the start of each session and they briefly ran over lesson plan ideas for that session (See section 5.3.1).

Table 6 (p.127) provides an overview of the different partnership activities relevant to supporting school leavers identified in the preliminary phase of research activity. This is not an entire picture of partnership working at Chapelpark. Instead, it details the type of emerging insights that were gained from being present in the school, shadowing Janet and Paul, and from conversations with pupils.

***Table 6: Partnership programmes identified at school***

| **Partnership type** | **Research activity / access** | **Staff remit** | **Participating pupils** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Local area partnership: umbrella organisation encompasses some of the work below | Meeting (section 5.2.2)<br>Careers fayre (see Chapter 6)<br><br>Discussion with Janet, shadowing Janet at attendance at meetings / events | Janet | n/a |
| Prince's Trust Scotland's 'xlerate with xl' programme | Attended two our per week support class. | Paul | Early school-leavers 'at-risk' pupils |
| Local College | Discussion with Paul and Janet and pupils about vocational programmes | Janet / Paul | S4 pupils applying for college |
| City centre Hotel | Hospitality – working in restaurant in local hotel (cooking and waiting). Janet invited me to attend a meal organised through this partnership. | Janet | S4 / S5 pupils studying in 'Get Ready for Work' programme |
| University outreach Programme 1 | Post-graduate tutors deliver small project. On completion, pupils may be offered one reduced grade requirement. Also provides university campus experience.<br><br>Discussion with Paul and pupils | Paul | S6 pupils geared towards university entry |
| University outreach programme 2 | As above with direct focus on medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine and law.<br><br>Discussion with pupils and tutors (see chapters 6 and 7) | Paul | S4-S6 pupils geared towards university entry in selected courses |
| University outreach programme 4 | Outreach programme running every two years to support access to a career in teaching. Pupils supported in gaining work experience and assistance with university interview preparation.<br><br>Discussion with Paul, Janet and Chloe (See section 5.3.3) | Paul | S5-S6 pupils interested in studying primary school teaching |
| University outreach programme 5 | Outreach programme working with Chapelpark secondary and two local primary schools. Pupils provided with introduction to university from primary.<br><br>Discussion with pupils | Paul / Head of S3/4 | S4 – S6 pupils geared towards supporting university entry |
| University outreach programme 6 | Summer school programmes for S4 pupils.<br><br>Discussion with Paul | Paul / Head 3/4 | S4 pupil introduction to university |
| City Council initiative | Movie competition<br><br>With Janet, identified S6 pupils to take part in small film project. | Janet | Open to whole school. |

Focusing on the organisation of support for school leavers at Chapelpark elicited the local responses to the central policy challenges set out in Chapter 1. These related to increasing the number of pupils recorded as entering a positive destination. It also recognised how the site was linked to other institutions through outreach programmes. The fieldwork began to identify how logics to increase the aspirations of pupils and support their transitions in to a range of destinations suggested less of a local response to the issue and drew on discourses identified in policy documents. In working with Janet and Paul during the first phase of the field work, a number of key challenges and tensions to achieving the aims of policy and practice were identified. These are presented in the following section.

### 5.3 "When I leave school I want to be…": Identifying collective aspects of decision-making

This section presents empirical data on one aspect of the ordinary actions of school leavers: the articulation of choice about their future on leaving school. By focussing on situated actions as pupils express and articulate decisions about their futures after they leave school, it identifies the apparent contradictions in Janet and Paul's roles. On the one hand, there is the need to promote resilient learners who can research opportunities based on good information, advice and guidance, as advocated in policy discourses. The findings show how these ideas underpin the formal activities designed to support 'good' decision-making. On the other hand, this chapter identifies activity where teachers work on behalf of the young people, and in a more nurturing role to support the realisation of aspirations (Archer *et al*., 2010). This section proceeds as

follows: Section 5.3.1 presents data which illustrates Paul and Janet's interaction with early school leavers. Section 5.3.2 focusses on their interactions with pupils likely to pursue a more vocational route. Finally, Section 5.3.3 presents an account of the ways in which Chloe, an S6 pupil, interacts with Janet and Paul as she experiences applying for university.

### *5.3.1 "At risk" school leavers: observing the 'xlerate with xl' programme*

Twelve pupils had been registered to attend Paul's xl programme, which totalled three periods a week between August and December 2010. In discussion with Chris, the community worker, it was clear that the way the classes proceeded at Chapelpark differed from the way Chris experienced their running in other schools. One of the central problems the community worker identified was that pupils were supposed to register for the class and at interview demonstrate why they should be considered for a place. In addition to this, Chris said that rather than a classroom, the class needed to be delivered in a place away from a formal learning environment such as in a common room. Paul said that no such space existed in the school (research diary 30th August 2010). It was clear from the start that pupil attendance had been organised rather than pupils self-selecting. Francis and her friend for instance said they would rather be in their regular classes 'actually learning something' (research diary 30th August 2010). The class was disjointed and interrupted by pupils coming in late and being sent out as illustrated in the following extract:

> *Two other pupils attended this week who weren't there last week. Within ten minutes, and after Paul caught him spitting on the floor just after he got into the classroom, one of the two boys was sent to 'time out' [a supervised space where pupils go once sent out of a class] for hitting David under the table. Within minutes of the class starting and Paul calling out the register, the*

*classroom phone rang and Neil said 'that'll be for me'. Neil was told he had to go and see the year Head.*

(Research diary, 30th August 2010)

From being present at conversations with Paul and Chris at the beginning of the class, it was evident that there was little coherent plan for the term. Different activities such as designing a poster about racism or gardening in the school allotment were discussed and implemented from one week to the next with little evident overall planning. The following describes a session which Paul facilitated around 'employability', designed to support decision-making about their futures after they left school, using workbooks provided by the programme. Paul handed out the workbooks to pupils and asked them to complete three specific sections. The following field note describes how these tasks were structured and carried out during the lesson:

*Paul outlined the task on p.35, but prefaced it with a speech which the young people seemed to listen to about going to college, and applying for the Commonwealth Apprenticeship Initiative. The pupils worked out of the workbooks and had to write down four people in their 'network' they could talk to about their futures. They then had to write about their skills and attributes. The final task was to draw a poster or write a description about themselves and where they'd be in five years-time. The pupils largely left the first two sections blank and started drawing or writing in the blank poster page.*

*Francis said she wanted to go to university – and asked me how to spell 'university'. I asked what to do or where and she said she didn't know, maybe Liverpool or London because she had family there. She then asked me to spell 'forensic' and said she wanted to take this. She said she would like to study forensics or childcare. I asked 'why childcare?' and she said because her friend was doing it. She has a cousin in [name of town in Scotland] and she said they could go to college together and because there were no colleges in [name of town], they'd have to go to Glasgow. She said she'd go to college*

*first and then work her way to university. I asked which college – she said she didn't know.*

*Jen had drawn a picture of herself with two children. She gave them boys names, and had drawn a picture of her boyfriend drunk on the sofa and said that'd be her in five years' time. Andrew had drawn a brick wall. Last week he told me he was going to go to college to do a brick laying course which older friends had done.*

(Research diary, August 2010)

This exercise, as Chris later pointed out, should have been completed in ten minutes, but over the two periods very little had been achieved. In discussion with Paul and Chris about Jen's drawing, they both felt that it was realistic and discussed at what point do they intervene and try and get her thinking about being with someone other than an' alcoholic boyfriend' (research diary, 30th August 2010). In the course of this discussion, Paul's apathy was evident, stating that one of the central problems as he saw it in terms of the lack of aspirations from the pupils related to a changing attitude towards the local colleges. He felt that in the past, pupils would have been more interested in college courses, but now that they saw older siblings going through the system, with no employment at the end, the idea of college, like school, was taken less seriously. This example suggests that both pupil displays of articulating their decision-making and the ways in which the activity itself was designed and facilitated paid little attention to the lived realities of these young people. As such, the young people were being asked to fulfil a task that demonstrated independent research skills and rational, aspirational choices.

Prior studies by Willis (1977) have noted the ways in which young people's behaviour reflects their knowledge and understanding of realistic employment opportunities that exist on leaving school. Whilst the aims of the xl programme could

be recognised as an attempt to nurture a group of potentially vulnerable young people, the data highlights that in the absence of traditional pathways between school and employment, dis-embedded tasks to facilitate individual engagement in career planning are problematic.

Coordinated responses by practitioners to support this group of pupils was also evident in the data. The following term, Marion asked Janet to follow up on one of the pupils because he was going to be recorded as NEET in February 2011. Neil, who had attended the XL programme had left school at Christmas 2010. Janet and Paul said that they had both been part of a team of teachers the previous term who had helped him gain entry on a course which was run at the local sports centre and provided a sports coaching qualification. Courses like this ran one day a week during the second school term between January and June. They were designed as an access course to supporting early school leavers onto further education courses or into employment. The school had been notified that Neil had attended one session and then had never returned. In cases like this, Janet made house calls to see pupils who had failed to turn up to school or to their training placements in an attempt to stop them from disengaging altogether. She said that if pupils turned up at a meeting at school, this would delay them being recorded as 'NEET' as they entered into an activity agreement.

In understanding how the management team responded to pupils like Neil, the data indicates the political pressures exerted on the school and that these are driven by a discourse of accountability rather than a pressure to interrupt the production of social inequality. The data presented in this section suggests that interventions like the 'xl programme' can take on different forms as they enter different resource environments (Ball, Maguire and Braun, 2012). This raises questions about how such interventions

can be evaluated for their effectiveness given the variability of institutional arrangements. The data thus problematises the assumptions underpinning such interventions which are concerned with how best to prepare individuals at the point of leaving school, rather than addressing issues of inequity in schooling which have emerged over the life course.

### *5.3.2 Vocational orientations*

During the exploratory phase of the research, a further experience was encountered where pupils were required to articulate their career ideas. In collaboration with EEOs in the local area partnership, Janet drew up a process of providing all potential school leavers from year groups S4, S5, and S6 with a fifteen minute mock professional interview. The aim was to provide pupils with the opportunity to practice talking about what they wanted to do after they left school, why they wanted to pursue a particular course or vocation, and to provide evidence of skills and experiences that would set them apart from other candidates. Janet drew on a number of contacts, including myself, who worked with the school from industry, charities and educational establishments to conduct the interviews. Interviewers were placed at stations and pupils were called out of classes to attend. The following extract from my research diary provides an outline of how this experience unfolded.

> *Janet had prepared an interview schedule and I was given instructions that I could pick and choose questions from the schedule to ask pupils. The first interview I carried out did not proceed well, as it seemed the pupil found it difficult answering questions about a hypothetical situation. When I met the second pupil, I asked if she knew what this was all about. She said she didn't, and from there on in, I spent a few minutes with each pupil explaining the purpose of the exercise and how it might be of benefit. During a break in this*

*process, I discussed the problems I was encountering with Janet and other interviewers. Janet said that pupils were supposed to have been briefed and given time to think through how they might answer questions.*

*Following this, I spent some time with each pupil ascertaining informally what they were interested in doing after they left school and deciding on a scenario such as a college interview, or an interview for a part-time job that would provide helpful practice. I also provided feedback on answers and suggested instances of how they might develop their answers to 'sell themselves' and fit with what an employer or education course provider might want or expect to hear.*

*In answering a question about an achievement they were proud of, I noted down in my research diary that around a quarter of pupils described looking after immediate family members when they were ill and one pupil described that a moment he was most proud of was calling the ambulance when his Dad was having a heart attack. It felt insensitive moving on to the next question without sustaining discussion, and I felt uncomfortable asking further questions which felt as if I was straying into counselling.*

(Account constructed from research diary, November, 2011)

Whilst the interviews appeared to proceed more productively when added explanation was given to the activity as described above, in some cases, the whole exercise felt superfluous. This was usually when pupils found it difficult to articulate their intentions about what they were going to do after they left school in a way that 'fitted' with the discourse the activity intended to produce. This is illustrated in the following extract:

*During one of the interviews, a pupil told me he was going to leave school as soon as he could and work with his uncle as a painter. The standard questions which Janet had prepared which asked pupils to imagine that they were at an interview and talk about why they were the best candidate for the job were located in a discourse of 'career aspiration' and became redundant in this scenario. The pupil talked about the practicalities of completing a paid task rather than it being a particular career aspiration, the necessity of earning*

> *money, and the security of working with his family contact as soon as he was of school leaving age. In this scenario, I was at a loss with how to transform the pupils' answers into the type of answer an interviewer might expect.*
> (Research diary, November, 2011)

As in the previous section, the data here suggested that school was something to get through until old enough to leave school and enter employment. Furthermore, what might be termed lack of aspiration in the above case, in that the young person was going to work with his uncle in manual labour, seemed entirely practical, when compared to the following encounter experienced in Janet's office. During a meeting with Janet, two S4 male pupils arrived and asked to speak to her and said that they had been sent there by a teacher as they wanted to leave school and become tilers. Janet asked them if they had looked at any course descriptions or knew where they could study this. Both boys shook their heads. Janet suggested that they should come back later and gave them an appointment time. Janet remarked on her frustrations at failed attempts to foster an independent stance towards researching future learning and training opportunities. This was clarified further in an email she wrote answering some interview questions:

> *I sometimes feel that you can give them all sorts of advice – contacts, information on their chosen subject/job etc., and they have the best of intentions of looking this advice up, but then a certain 'apathy' overcomes them. I feel that in my role I have to push a good majority of the youngsters along and at times 'drag' them along … with me doing a lot of the groundwork.*
> (Janet interview, June 2012)

In addition to these frustrations, Janet also described successes where she had used a different approach. On a number of occasions Janet described that she invited one of her former pupils to talk to the young people about his experience in the fire service. Janet recalled how she sat with him when he was a pupil at the school, at a computer

in the school library helping him complete his application form to join the fire cadets. When the bell rang for the lunch break, the pupil left to meet his friends and said that he would return later. The pupil did not return after lunch as promised and so Janet completed and submitted the form herself. The pupil was accepted to the fire cadets and Janet said that when she now invited him back to the school to speak to current pupils about his career, 'he's happy to do so' (research diary, February 2011).

Further frustrations mounted for Janet when she encountered some young people that could clearly articulate what they wanted to do but whose decisions or ideas ran counter to supporting overall academic attainment:

> *Janet was upset after a phone call with a parent. The parent was angry with the school's refusal to let her daughter participate in a one day a week photography course at college alongside studying for Highers in S5. Janet described the pupil as being 'too clever' to be encouraged to pursue a college course at this stage, and had explained to the parent that it was school policy that pupils could not miss any of their Higher classes. Janet had the girl's profile open in front of her on the school intranet system and gestured at her grades.*
>
> (Research diary, January 2011)

Following up at interview, Janet was asked how she did select pupils for various activities:

> *…, obviously I would take a good, close look at their achievements (grades etc.,) and weigh them up with the young person's ambitions for their future. We are all different – and sometimes what is the right pathway for one is not always the right pathway for another. We all have to start somewhere – and at the end of the day, if they are put on the right path at the beginning, hopefully this will lead them to their destination.*
>
> (Janet interview, June 2012)

The data suggests the contradictions facing practitioners like Janet whose role involves improving the ways in which young people from working-class backgrounds foster and articulate their own aspirational ethic. These tensions are illustrated as Janet moves between delivering career planning activities to acting almost as a parent in

which she completes an application on behalf of a young person. The data in this section therefore develops an overall understanding of the challenges facing schools that are expected to support pupils to engage in practices of self-promotion and articulating competencies at an early age. The previous sections have highlighted that articulating a future aspiration alone is not enough and that the mechanisms to making aspirations achievable involves practitioners 'intervening' in practice in a way that is not formally recognised in policy texts. The data presented in the next section suggests that these processes of 'intervening' are crucial when competition is perhaps greater and less-well understood by young people and their families.

### *5.3.3 Professional orientations*

The final account in this section illustrates the ways in which decision-making about university was performed at the site, focussing on the experience of Chloe, an S6 pupil interested in becoming a primary school teacher. Data for this section is drawn from participatory observation initially in supporting the development of a cross-schools film project.

> *When I met Chloe, she was in the process of applying to UCAS, but was having difficulty reconciling 'unconnected' choices in her personal statement. Chloe wanted to apply for a degree in primary school teaching, and if she were unsuccessful, then she planned to apply for an apprenticeship in finance. She told me that her mum had said there were no jobs in teaching and had advised her to become an accountant as she was good at Maths. She asked if I would read her personal statement after she had expressed her initial difficulty. I asked an admissions tutor at the university for advice, who suggested that Chloe could write that she was interested in both subjects, but stress an interest in combining teaching and Maths. Chloe had included the phrase, "I am determined to succeed" three times which I advised her to omit for its repetition and because it resonated with the buzz words of policy rather than her own voice. I also suggested a few other grammatical changes to help it read more clearly.*
>
> (Account constructed from research diary, October 2009)

Chloe was involved in an outreach programme to widen access to teaching (see table 6, p.127). She described how, in undertaking this programme, she had to complete a work experience placement with primary school pupils. In asking Chloe how she had been selected for the outreach programme, she described that she had previously experienced some personal issues when she was in S1. Paul, as both her form teacher and pastoral care teacher, had supported her at this time. He knew then of her interest to become a primary school teacher and so a few years later, when the outreach programme was looking for two pupils to take part, Paul asked Chloe if she was still interested in teaching. Paul also asked Chloe if she knew of anyone else who might be interested in teaching and Chloe suggested her friend Tanya. In much the same way as Tanya had been selected for the outreach programme, Tanya also became involved in the film project after Janet asked Chloe if she knew anyone else who could take part.

At the start of the summer term in April 2009, Janet identified that, in addition to Chloe and Tanya, a small group of approximately ten pupils from S4-S6 had expressed an interest in primary school teaching. Janet asked if myself and another researcher from the School of Education, University of Strathclyde could meet as a group and answer questions.

> *Twelve girls turned up to a lunch time meeting and most expressed an interest in teaching because they wanted to help people. I asked them if they were aware of the Access course that Chloe and Tanya were enrolled on, but none of them had heard of it. I asked Chloe and Tanya to describe some of the activities they had been involved in, such as working with primary school pupils, but they were not forthcoming with information. I wondered why more pupils weren't involved in the course and checking with Paul later, he confirmed that the programme had only allocated two places in Chapelpark and would take in pupils every second year.*
>
> (Research diary, May 2009)

As a result of their successful participation on the outreach course, both Chloe and Tanya were invited to attend interviews at two universities. Prior to the interviews, Chloe had already made up her mind that she wanted to attend the University of Strathclyde rather than the University of Glasgow citing that it was closer to commute. The decision Chloe articulated appeared to stem from her assessment of travel time however this was incorrect as the School of Education was located on an out-of-town campus at the time. In further discussion with Chloe she said that Tanya did not want to attend her interview at the University of Glasgow as Chloe had told her that she had not enjoyed a visit to the university during one of the days organised by the outreach programme and which Tanya had not attended. The following extract describes the ways in which Janet intervened to support Chloe's preparation for interview.

> *Chloe told me that her interview went well, that she talked about how she was from a working-class background where few people from her area applied to university. She said she had talked about how the school she attends has a wide variety of backgrounds such as asylum seekers and felt education was important for inclusion. Janet told me later that she had helped Chloe with interview preparation, and that she had practically written a speech for her. Janet asked Chloe if she would deliver this as a speech at the end of year awards ceremony which I attended.*
>
> *Chloe received a conditional offer from Strathclyde. She needed a B in English and Janet told me Chloe had been to see her to ask for help in looking for an apprenticeship, as she was worried about not getting a good enough grade in English. Janet spent time researching finance companies that would take on an apprentice. She thought that what Chloe would really benefit more from was a tutor who could support her with English and help her get the 'B' grade she needed. With an English degree, I wanted to offer to help, but resisted for fear I wouldn't be up to date with the English Curriculum.*
>
> *Following this discussion, I spoke to Paul and Janet about Chloe's interview experiences and whilst they were pleased for Chloe, they were also*

*disappointed that Tanya had not turned up to her interview at Glasgow University. Paul had felt this had been a wasted opportunity. Janet, on getting to know Tanya through the film project, could see that Chloe possessed 'a certain spark' and felt that Tanya was not ready to go to university. Tanya told me that she would like to study art. She applied to college to study social care, which Janet felt was probably more suitable but at the same time, she recognised that the opportunities granted to Tanya did not come along every day.*

(Account constructed from research diary, January – June 2010).

As Chloe proved to be the only pupil to gain entry into a primary school teaching degree from her school in 2010, one striking finding in this data was that in drawing comparisons with other pupils at Chapelpark, Chloe's disjointed and uncertain trajectory towards teaching shaped an understanding of what academic success looked like at the site. Of the cohort leaving Chapelpark in 2010, Chloe was one of eighteen pupils in her year group of approximately 150 pupils to progress straight from school to university (see table 10, p. 196).

A further method which supported an understanding of the situated nature of decision-making at Chapelpark emerged from a comparative analysis of Chloe's experience with Helen, a pupil I met during phase 1 of the research process when conducting more exploratory fieldwork. Helen attended a school serving a more affluent catchment area and was from a middle-class background. Both Chloe and Helen were progressing an application to university to study primary teaching. (See Appendix 1 for details of how the cross-schools film project progressed). Table 7 (p.141) summarises the main points of similarity and difference between Chloe and Helen's orientations towards university and begins to point towards some of the socio-economic and cultural experiences that were not accessible to pupils like Chloe.

***Table 7: Chloe's application to primary school compared with pupil attending school in more affluent area, March 2010***

| | **Chloe** | **Comparison with Helen, a pupil attending school in more affluent area** |
|---|---|---|
| Qualifications at end of S5 | Qualifications 4 Highers. 2As, 2Bs | 5 Highers 4As and a B (appealing B with exam board) |
| Courses applied for | Primary school teaching | Primary school teaching |
| Outcome of course applications | Guaranteed interview in 2 universities through outreach programme. Received 3 conditional offers, needs a B in Higher English. | Received 5 unconditional offers: Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Dundee, St Andrews. First choice St Andrews. |
| Work experience with primary school pupils | Literacy work with primary school pupils organised by outreach programme in local primary school. | Literacy tutor in primary school, organised by secondary school in partnership with local primary school. |
| How time spent outside of school | S4 onwards: working one evening a week in a takeaway. S5 onwards: worked every weekend in a local retail outlet, hours increased to evenings until 10pm around Christmas holidays. | Orchestra,<br>Part-time job on Saturday day + 1 night after school working in local newsagents.<br><br>Started job in S6 to fundraise for school trip to Malawi. |

In contrast to Chloe, Helen's experience of applying to university appeared more straightforward. There was a coherence to her application as she had a preferred choice of institution and unconditional offers as she progressed through S6. Work experience and extra-curricular activities were also framed by the school, shared with peers, and perhaps along with her grades, contributed towards her desirability as a university candidate. Chloe's time out of school which was largely in employment could not be described in the same way. As Chloe progressed on to her university course in September 2010, we kept in touch largely due to her continuing her studies in the same place as I was studying. Having fewer friends from school to share her experience with could be viewed to contribute to the sense of alienation described by Ingram (2011) in her study looking at academically successful working-class students. These difficulties were described by Chloe at interview during her first year of university.

She described her frustrations with university at a time when course work pressures were mounting and she was finding it challenging to manage both the demands of the course and her part-time work. At times she questioned whether she had done the right thing as she still had another three years of study to complete and friends of hers were now earning.

> *Well, my best friend's a hairdresser. She went to Chapelpark and she left in 4th year, but she knew she didn't want to go to uni. She knew she wasn't like that, it's not her thing, and she's like qualified now, and she's earning her money and all that. She drives, and she's like enjoying life!*
>
> (Chloe interview, June, 2011)

In discussing these observations with Janet at the school, she felt that Chloe was on the right path and asked if I would convey a message that Chloe should get in touch if she ever needed any help with anything. Overall, Janet felt that Chloe would be happier in the long run and as her career unfolded, rather than being confined in the same job as she saw with many former pupils from Chapelpark (research diary, June 2011). As the research study became more focused to look at the experience of the highest-attaining pupils at Chapelpark who were in Chloe's situation, I discussed my research with her during the interview in June 2011. Having understood how Marion (HT) attempted to differentiate a 5+ Higher group, I asked Chloe about her experience of being 'selected' as a pupil capable of studying 5 Highers. Initially I asked her if she had attended the meal at the hotel which Marion had mentioned at interview (see Section 5.2.1):

> Katie*: So can you remember at the end of S4, when you finished your standard grades, were you included in that group where the headteacher took you out for a meal?*
>
> Chloe: *I never went, they never invited me*
>
> Katie: *So did you miss the cut off for that?*

> Chloe: *I got 5 '1s' and 2 '2s' – I was smart, but I just never applied myself a lot in school. I always applied myself at the house, like with Biology right. I never ever understood anything that I was learning and it wasn't until I went home and revised it myself that I'd understand it, but I never ever done that until exams, so – like it never looked like I applied myself in the class.*
>
> Katie: *But from your standard grades, you got good standard grades to take 5 highers*
>
> Chloe: *I think that I was working that day and I never went but like, there was another meeting as well, where I picked 4 Highers, and people were being told to pick 5 Highers and she [Margaret, DHT] never asked me. I don't understand why she never asked me … so I just picked 4 highers in 5th year. And like [name of friend] and [name of friend] were picking 4 and they were getting told to pick 5, but she never approached me and told me to pick 5. So I don't understand that, I never did understand that.*
>
> (Chloe interview, June 2011)

This quote further highlights the crucial role that practitioners play in shaping young people's engagement in the practice of becoming 'university-ready' at the site. Where pupils in a more middle-class area would have a more intuitive understanding of needing 5 Highers in one sitting in order to progress an application to university, as well as perhaps an intuitive sense of the competition for places, pupils in Chloe's position need a degree of nurturing from within schools in order to encourage her to do more.

The data suggests that attempts are made at the site to shift the knowledge contained within social practices in which candidates in Helen's position routinely engage, towards candidates in Chloe's position, who are historically excluded. Conspicuously, the university outreach programme seemingly provides this vehicle. However the data highlights the more subtle ways in which teachers support these processes. Paul firstly ensured that Chloe was registered for the course, and Janet provided a high level of intensive support, not only with preparation for the interview

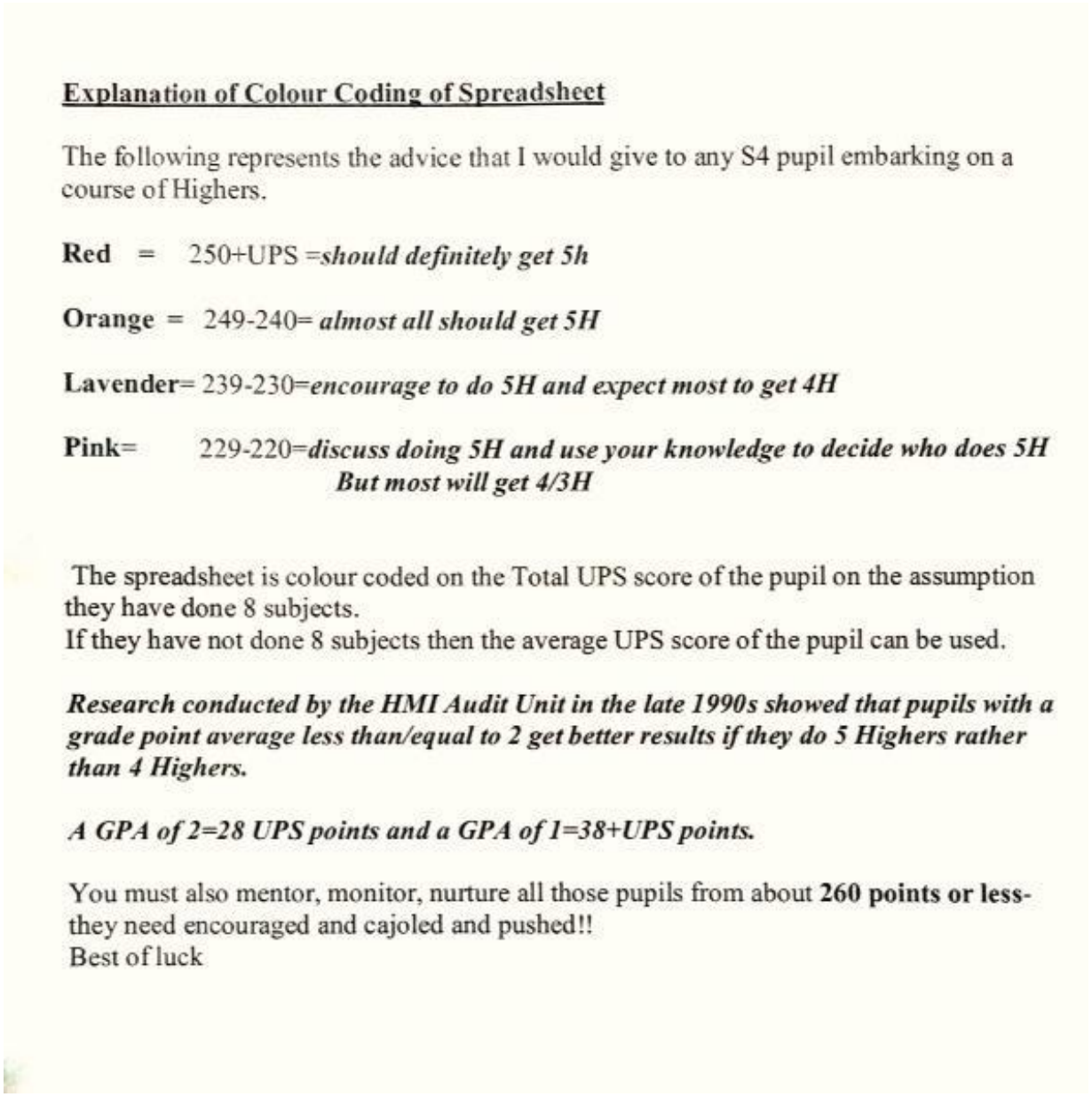
process itself, but also in managing the tensions that were produced in pursuing a professional trajectory and deferring entry into the labour market. In this sense, Chloe's experience resonates with what Bathmaker (2015) has defined as the 'flaky borderlands between two fields' (p.72), that is between the fields of practice between Higher education entrance and Further education entrance requirements. This data points towards what Bathmaker (2015) further describes as the taken-for-granted practices in the field of higher education that are already determined by more powerful groups.

Chloe's omission from being asked to take 5 Highers also highlights the role that management play in strategising on behalf of these young people. This is something that Ball (2010) recognises is crucial as competition for Higher Education has increased. This section concludes by suggesting that these spaces of social interaction where practices performed by young people interact with resources, knowledge and understanding about Higher Education at the site are worth further empirical investigation. It is through an examination of these spaces where deeper empirical understandings of fairly complex social and organisational phenomena is needed. The next section thus outlines a more systematic exploration of management attempts to recruit young people as "carriers" of these practices at Chapelpark.

The data presented in this section has identified a more fertile area in which to empirically observe 'flow' rather than stasis. In preparation for examining more closely how young people like Chloe are recruited as "carriers" of practice, the final section in this Chapter examines formalised aspects of how subsequent support was organised for the new S5 5+ Higher group cohort beginning in August 2010.

### 5.4 Selecting the Five Higher Group "Recruiting carriers of practice"

This section continues the analysis and looks more closely and systematically at organising practice for high attaining pupils in the school. As a guide, Marion used the Unified Points Scale (UPS) and used calculated tariff scores of 220 or above as a starting point to consider pupils as capable of achieving 5+ Highers. The UPS used by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework until 2015 and was an extended version of the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) Scottish Tariff points system. Marion thus used this score as an indicator to assess which pupils would be capable of achieving Highers. Chloe's omission from the 5+ Higher group, as indicated in the interview, appeared an anomaly as her exams from S4 would credit her with a UPS of 246. Pupils that Marion and the Margaret (DHT) felt were capable of achieving 5 Highers were then interviewed about their choice of subjects for S5 and assigned an academic mentor. Mentors were provided with the following guidelines, which Marion had developed (see figure 4, p.146).



**Explanation of Colour Coding of Spreadsheet**

The following represents the advice that I would give to any S4 pupil embarking on a course of Highers.

**Red** = 250+UPS =***should definitely get 5h***

**Orange** = 249-240= ***almost all should get 5H***

**Lavender**= 239-230=***encourage to do 5H and expect most to get 4H***

**Pink**= 229-220=***discuss doing 5H and use your knowledge to decide who does 5H But most will get 4/3H***

The spreadsheet is colour coded on the Total UPS score of the pupil on the assumption they have done 8 subjects.
If they have not done 8 subjects then the average UPS score of the pupil can be used.

***Research conducted by the HMI Audit Unit in the late 1990s showed that pupils with a grade point average less than/equal to 2 get better results if they do 5 Highers rather than 4 Highers.***

***A GPA of 2=28 UPS points and a GPA of 1=38+UPS points.***

You must also mentor, monitor, nurture all those pupils from about **260 points or less**- they need encouraged and cajoled and pushed!!
Best of luck

**Figure 4: Guidelines developed by senior management to support high achieving pupils**

In discussing the pupils that had achieved a UPS of 220+, Marion recognised that the use of the UPS was only a rough indicator of future outcomes. She provided the example that a Grade Point 1 in some subjects such as Physics or Maths was not the same as a 1 in subjects like Fashion (research diary, August 2010). Marion preferred

however to make the group as inclusive as possible, recognising that a larger critical mass was preferable in growing an academic focus within the school.

The guidelines presented in figure 4 therefore were treated as a starting point in terms of strategies adopted by senior management in working with new S5 pupils in order to help encourage greater educational outcomes (see Chapter 5). As highlighted in section 5.2, the data suggested that teachers attempted to prevent these pupils from taking part in activities that were geared towards transitions that required lower attainment levels. These included attending day courses at college as this would distract pupils from the more ambitious aim of preparing for Higher Education. Chapter 6 delves deeper into understanding the skills, meaning and knowledge that young people brought to this practice, as teachers attempted to contain young people's engagement in education in particular directions.

### 5.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has illuminated how senior management and practitioners engaged with pupils to encourage behaviour change in making informed decisions about their futures. The data shows that these decisions were to some degree highly constrained within the site and dependent on the sorts of conventional understandings of stratification derived from the young people's prior academic attainment. However, focusing on individual effort alone to produce high academic attainment at the site risked losing an understanding of the ways in which a web of interrelated practices worked together to support these outcomes. Specifically, this chapter has illuminated linkages in the data in which practices to improve school reputation were maintained,

partnerships were nurtured, and management practices attempted to shield young people with good prior academic achievement from vocational routes.

Methodologically, this chapter has offered an analysis of the site, which shifts the unit of analysis away from individuals and their actions to practices and their relationships. It has resisted treating the school as context, as a passive background or surrounding of phenomenon and instead has focused on phenomenon at hand, in which "conditions are strictly related and mutually implicated" (Nicolini, 2011, p.604).

> Actions, reactions, and interactions are the background in relation to which all of what we do makes sense. It is a background that is permanently there, even though in most cases it is pre-reflective and unacknowledged (Nicolini, 2011, p.604).

In drawing attention to the *doing* of practices, this chapter presents a more realistic picture of how behaviour unfolds within the site. In real life, practices cannot be isolated from one another, just as practitioners cannot be isolated from their context. Findings presented in this section consider how attempts by practitioners to change behaviour co-exist with discourses of individualisation and policy responses to youth unemployment. It also points towards historical and community practices which have emerged over time and which manifest within the young people's practice as they decide on imagined futures towards the end of their schooling. The next chapter will present a more structured understanding of how these practices compete by focusing on the highest-attaining cohort within these arrangements.

# Chapter 6

# Localised understandings of young people's decision-making practice

## Chapter Overview

Chapter 5 illuminated senior management strategies to increase academic performance by presenting the instructions that were given to senior members of staff to support their interactions with the highest-attaining pupils entering S5. This chapter extends this analysis to focus on where narratives of going to university emerged within these conditions. In tracing these narratives, Chapter 6 reveals the scale of the challenge involved in changing existing practice at the site. This chapter proceeds as follows: Section 6.1 provides an account of how teachers attempted to convey these strategies to young people with regard to keeping on track with their studies. Section 6.2 focuses on how different groups of friends incorporated, rejected, supported or resisted ideas about staying on at school. Finally, Section 6.3 examines how ideas about progressing to university were localised and contextualised, and that changing knowledge, skills and understanding about professional careers, involved less a process of transforming young people's attitudes, and more to do with intervening in existing practice. The findings in this chapter draw on the following sources of data collection: survey data from 20 of the pupils; semi-structured interviews conducted with 27 pupils, followed by in-depth interviews with 13 pupils. Group conversations were conducted with 22 of the pupils and a further two group conversations were conducted with 10 of the pupils. The data also draws on participant observation from across the three phases. (For a more detailed overview see, Section 4.3.2).

### 6.1 Preparation: Introducing expectations of the senior phase of schooling to high-attaining pupils at Chapelpark Secondary

In August 2010, Marion and her senior management team identified 31 S5 pupils that they viewed as being capable of achieving 5+ Highers, based on their academic performance in S4. On 9th September 2010, Marion invited these pupils along with their parents / carers to attend an evening meeting at Chapelpark and welcome pupils into their S5 senior year. The evening was well attended, though not all 31 pupils and their parents were present. Margaret, the DHT congratulated the group on doing exceptionally well in their standard grade exams. She announced that this was the largest year group at Chapelpark the school felt were capable of achieving 5+ Highers, and explained that this was the minimum requirement needed for entry into most university courses. Marion (HT) also added that for the first time, the school management and teachers were pleased to see an even number of boys and girls present and cited the school attainment figures (also available on the school website) and that the proportion of young people achieving five or more awards at level 4 or better had improved (see the Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework, SCQF).

Pupils and parents were provided with an overview of the year ahead. Subject teachers described course content and their expectations of the academic effort required. The room became animated when Margaret suggested that pupils would need to study for a minimum of two hours each evening. Margaret also described the various forms of extra support that pupils could access throughout S5 and S6. This included two residential study trips in the run-up to exams, supported study classes at the end of the school day, and a reminder that pupils could use the library for self-

study after school which was supervised until 6pm. The importance that senior management ascribed to this meeting was described in Chapter 5 and replicated the sorts of activities they had developed with funding from the Schools of Ambition programme. The evening meeting at the school was therefore a culmination of management understanding of what was needed to raise awareness with both pupils and parents. This comprised of repeating the message that studying and homework were crucial for continued academic success.

Marion introduced me as a researcher and I presented information about my intended research activity. The event itself provided an opportunity to talk informally to pupils and parents. I spoke individually to a number of pupils, as they sat with their parents and asked them what they were considering doing after they left school. The following field note is indicative of the spectrum of responses, from a seemingly firm decision to apply to university, to a general hesitancy about pursuing this option:

> *I spoke to Andrew and his mum. She said that Andrew and his friends had always talked about going to university since primary school, but she didn't know where this idea had come from as neither she nor Andrew's Dad had been to university. Andrew asked me questions about studying at different universities in Glasgow and what they were like. Another pupil, Jen, was sitting quietly with her parents and they said that she didn't know what she wanted to do, and nudged Jen who said she had no idea. I asked her whether she had considered going to university and she said she wasn't sure. Her Dad said, 'well – you'll need to make up your mind'.*
>
> (Research diary, 9th September, 2010)

The suggestion from Andrew's mum that Andrew and his friends had discussed the idea of going to university since primary school provided an insight into the genealogy of his friendship group. Other pupils were more ambivalent about the idea of university with some describing going to college first. These ideas were explored further by surveying the group, data of which is presented in table 8 (p.153).

The data in this section demonstrates how Marion and her team made explicit representations to this group of pupils about the real possibilities of academic success that could be achieved with continued hard work. Making these ideas as explicit as possible to the parents of pupils, that to date had demonstrated the highest levels of academic attainment, was also viewed as an important task in order to increase opportunities within families.

### *6.1.1 Mapping networks*

Mapping the social network among the research participants became a central step in identifying features of the young people's routine engagement at the site. Rather than seek to isolate discrete 'influences' in order to identify elements of pupil choice, this approach sought to illuminate elements of practice. That is, it sought to examine the processual nature of networks of support and their role in the development of the young people's ideas about their future (Semple and Howieson, 2002). Mapping friendship groups within the highest attaining pupil cohort at Chapelpark had initially emerged as a research strategy to enhance familiarity between research participants when organising group conversations (see Chapter 4). However, the survey data and preliminary interviews revealed a differentiated picture of participation in academic work and future employment ideas among different friendship groups. Data from the survey also revealed broad characteristics of social relations in terms of the strength of relationships and closeness between participants. Table 8 (p.153) summarises these findings.

***Table 8: Friendship group characteristics, initial degree / subject / career ideas, September 2010***

| | **Pupils** | **Cited career / subject interest, September - October 2010** | **Broad Friendship Group Characteristic** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Group 1 | Richard<br>Emma<br>Fiona<br>Nick<br>Rebecca<br>Andrew<br>Matt<br>Anna<br>Stuart<br>Mark | Medicine, dentistry or veterinary medicine<br>Medicine, dentistry or veterinary medicine<br>Science degree<br>Engineering<br>Don't know<br>Engineering<br>Architecture<br>Don't know<br>Accountancy<br>Teaching | The largest group among the highest- attaining pupils. The group socialised both in and out of school and were saving up for a holiday together at the end of S6. (This group became the main focus for the study – see sections 6.2.1 and Chapter 7).<br><br>Discussions about university and professional careers dominated group discussions. |
| Group 2 | Simon<br>Michael<br>Jane<br>Philip<br>Alan<br>James | Veterinary Medicine<br>Medicine<br>Don't know<br>Psychology<br>Don't know<br>Computing / IT | Fairly quiet self- contained group, all played music and interacted with Group 1 and 3 during class time.<br><br>All except Jane and Alan wanted to go to university after they left school. |
| Group 3 | Hannah<br>Ruth<br>Jennifer<br>Kaitlin | Don't know<br>Forensics<br>Biomedical Science<br>Don't know | University and college focused – also interacted with Groups 1 and 2 during class time. |
| Group 4 | Finn<br>Samantha<br>Graham<br>David<br>Craig | Psychology or Maths<br>Fire Cadets<br>Apprenticeship<br>Architecture<br>IT technician | Identified each other as being friends in school from among the group of 28 participants, but described most of their friends being out-with the study.<br><br>Finn, Graham and David were part of a larger group of S5 pupils who hung around outside of school. Samantha and Craig described socialising with people who had left school. Mixture of wanting to apply for university, college courses and apprenticeships. See Section 6.2.2 for further discussion |
| Others | Helen<br>Katrina<br>Jen | Accountancy<br>Fashion<br>Don't know | These pupils did not identify with anyone among the 28 pupils as friends and had a mixture of friends that had left school or were outwith the 28 participants. |

The survey revealed that pupils in Group 1 identified as belonging to the largest interconnected group among the research participants. That is, they all identified each other as belonging to the same group of friends, socialising together both inside and outside of school, and were all studying in similar classes. The pupils in Group 1 were usually found at the end of the school day congregating around two or three tables pushed together in between the bookshelves of the library. They had a presence in the school in that they were easily identifiable and accessible to bring together for group discussions, as the majority stayed later at the school to study following supported study classes. When engaging in field work during this phase of the research, Margaret (DHT) often referred to pupils in Group 1 as the "crème de la crème" (field notes, September 2010). The pupils were also aware of this label as illustrated in the following quote:

> Richard: *I think she (DHT) just cares about how the school looks (laughing). She's kind of using us for the media and (laughing). Aye for the media, we were in the paper and everything.*
>
> Anna: *She introduces you as the 'cream of the crop' and it's like 'we have names!' You get visitors to the school and she says 'this is the crème de la crème' and you're standing there thinking I'd like [DHT to mention] my name.*
>
> Richard: *The head doesn't know my name, she actually calls me Andrew, but I haven't corrected her yet. [Name of HT] doesn't know my name yet, she knows everyone else who has a bad name. I'd like my name to be known!*
>
> Nick: *She knows my name.*
>
> Anna: *That's 'cos your head of the school, Nick.*
>
> Rebecca: *Aye*
>
> Richard: '*Cos you (to Nick) are 'the crème de la crème'*
>
> (Group 1, group conversation, February 2011)

Initially, when Janet used the phrase 'crème de la crème', I had interpreted this to mean all the 28 research participants, as Janet mockingly used this phrase in relation to pupils studying Highers. In getting to know participants from across this cohort, Andrew's suggestion that attendance at supported study classes was not evenly encouraged even among the research participants provided a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which pupil academic ability was recognised:

> Andrew: *Aye, you need to study definitely – but I think the school kind of focuses on the top group, and the top group is always pushed and pushed and pushed to do their best- and like the lower groups, whatever they do, it's just like 'that's good, well done' and stuff like that, they don't push anybody else apart from the top.*
>
> Katie: *And in what ways- like if you were to describe the ways they push you – are they setting you extra work?*
>
> Andrew: *No, like for the top pupils they now make supported studies compulsory and like for other pupils, it's like 'ah youse can just turn up like two weeks before your exams and that'll be alright' but like the top group, they'll push you and force you in to doing stuff. It's for your benefit, but for other groups, it's like 'oh you've done this', they're more – like not strict with all the other pupils, like for homework and stuff like that.*
>
> (Andrew interview, January 2011)

In the early stages of phase two of the research, pupils in Group 1, with the exception of Rebecca and Anna, specified an interest in either a professional career that would involve completing a high-tariff university degree course such as medicine or engineering, or an interest in going to university to study a particular subject (see Section 6.2.1). Group 2, with fewer members, could be characterised in a similar way to Group 1 in terms of their academic ability and career interests. Groups 3 and 4 contained a mixture of young people with ideas about both university and college.

In a comparison with Group 1, Group 4 was less well connected socially both within the group and with pupils participating in the research study. Samantha, for

example, said she only saw pupils from this group during school time. She described that most of her close friends were older and had now left school. She spoke to Finn, Graham and Craig in class and had recently texted Graham because he had asked her to send a photo of a handout for their maths homework. She described that of her two best friends, one was now studying at university and commuted to another city, and another was working full-time. Finn, Graham and David described being part of a larger group of friends in S5 but that the majority of their friendships were out with the research participant group. They described that they mostly socialised by playing football together after school.

Finally, Jen, Helen and Katrina were grouped according to the final subcategory 'others'. These pupils described not belonging to any friendship groups within the research participant study and were mostly thinking about pursuing courses at FE college. The data therefore highlighted that there was little homogeneity between the 28 pupils in terms of their plans to pursue an academic track, as communicated by Marion and Margaret at the September meeting. The next section will explore these disparities in greater detail.

### 6.2 Exploring pupil engagement in Chapelpark Secondary

The previous section has highlighted visible attempts made by staff to structure engagement for their highest achieving cohort as they enter S5. In conceptualising pupils as active and capable agents, this section examines the ways in which young people as 'carriers' of practice incorporate or reject Marion and Margaret's presentation of an academic pathway, within their everyday routines. Section 6.2.1 examines the experiences of participants in Group 1 and presents an initial account of

the ways in which these young people utilised resources at the site to support a more academic route. Section 6.2.2 contrasts this data by looking at the experiences of participants in Group 4, who described wanting to leave school as soon as they practically could. Findings presented in this section are derived from the following data: survey findings; individual and group interview data; and field notes from participant observation during phase 1 and phase 2.

### *6.2.1 Fostering a sense of belonging at the site: experiences of pupils in Group 1*

The survey data revealed that decisions to pursue a more academic qualification, one that would provide entry into a professional occupation, were generally (though not exclusively) concentrated among closer friendship groups of Group 1 and 2. This section focuses on the experiences of participants in Group 1, and their daily interaction with the messages conveyed in the September meeting (see Section 6.1). Richard, Fiona, Nick, Rebecca, Emma, Andrew, Matt, Anna, Stuart and Mark were identified in the survey data as the largest group of good friends from among the research participant group. Decisions to orientate towards a university degree were evident in the early stages of group discussions. All participants except for Anna, applied to university. All participants except for Nick, who left at the end of S5, stayed at school until the end of S6 (see Chapter 7). Their initial ideas about the courses they wanted to pursue are grouped and summarised in table 8 (p.153).

There was a sense of coherence to Group 1 which emerged in part from long-established connections between Fiona, Emma, Andrew, Nick, Matt and Stuart who had been friends since primary school. As they moved from primary school into Chapelpark Secondary, the larger group began to form as they found themselves in

similar classes. The following quote highlights how friendships among the group were contained both within Chapelpark, and furthermore, as they found themselves in the same classes, grouped by their ability.

> Richard: *It's going to Chapelpark, that's probably where I made the most friends. 'Cos it's not like people from the primary that still hang about with each other it's some people from the same primary, but the full circle of friends is people from this school…. we were all together 'cos we work kinda the same, if you get me?*
>
> Emma: *It's because of classes. I think me and Rebecca started talking in English.*
>
> Richard: *You weren't really put in classes in S1 for your intelligence… It was more third and fourth.*
>
> Andrew: *for Maths and English*
>
> Richard: *'cos we took the tests early.*
>
> (Group 1, group conversation, October 2010)

The tests referred to a 'fast-track' system, which involved the young people taking Standard Grade level exams in English and Maths a year earlier. The data suggested that being selected for 'fast track' became entwined with a collective sense of their own academic capability in relation to other pupils in their year group. Participants in Group 1 conveyed a sense of being different to other pupils in the school, particularly as they positioned themselves as different in relation to other 'less academically motivated' peers in their year group. In the second group conversation, they referred to other people in their year as being generally disruptive in class labelling them *'the orange people'* (Emma, Group Conversation February 2011):

> Rebecca: *We're normal colour friends.*
> Stuart: *We don't pure pile on the fake tan*
>
> (Group 1, Group Conversation, February 2011)

Nick further elaborated: "*I don't think it's just the orange people, it's people who don't care*" (Nick, group conversation, February 2011). Nick, Rebecca and Anna were a little more sympathetic recognising that there was little else for people their age to do other than come to school.

> Nick: *It's 'cos they've got nothing else to do, they get money for going to school*
>
> Anna: *To be fair but, if I was them, I wouldn't leave if I had nothing to do, I'd probably stay*
>
> Fiona: *But what's the point if they don't actually work?*
>
> Rebecca: *Because there's no point in leaving and sitting about the house doing nothing all day. I'd rather go to school and have something to do*
>
> (Group 1, Group Conversation, February 2011)

The sense in which this group did have something 'to do' emerged as a process which set themselves apart from others in their year group. This sense became more pronounced as their frustrations mounted and as they felt their academic progress in class was stunted. At interview, Richard explained:

> *"There's people disrupting the classes, we were just friends 'cos we didn't disrupt the classes, 'cos we don't like the rest of the people in the class.*
>
> (Group 1, Group Conversation, February 2011)

Cumulatively, this conferred sense of superiority emerged not only from the collective sense of their imagined futures which incorporated an academic pathway, but also from an internalisation of the 'crème de la crème' status (see Section 6.4 for further discussion). Although at times mocked, the elite status was borne out in their small clique which contained the highest performing pupils in Science and Maths (Fiona and Richard) and Nick as head boy.

However, while the survey data and group interviews suggested that this group were more academically focused, the individual interviews revealed a more complex

and uneven picture. Emma, socially, seemed to be central in the group, both in that she was dating Richard and was good friends with female participants, especially Fiona and Rebecca. She described that before she began dating Richard, she had not given much thought to staying on at school beyond standard grade examinations in S4.

> Emma: *Richard's just quite a big influence. I probably wouldn't be doing 5 Highers if I hadn't started going out with him, I don't think. Because I wasn't - I was sort of on track for like passing 3 of my Standard grades before that. And then, I ended up being on track to pass all of them.*
>
> Katie: *What about your friends though?*
>
> Emma: *No, they're all dead sorted, I kind of didn't really bother and then Richard, when he's bothering, I've got nothing else to do so, I may as well study.*
>
> Katie: *So what were your other priorities before? If your friends were studying, what would you be doing?*
>
> Emma: *I just didn't really bother and such.*
>
> (Emma interview, April 2011)

Emma discussed aspects of her social life and it emerged that as a group of friends they spent most Friday and Saturday nights socialising at Rebecca's house. Emma, however spent her Fridays and Saturday evenings' waitressing in a busy city centre restaurant, and although she described enjoying waitressing, she felt that she missed out:

> *By the time I arrive, they've all had something to eat and they're all lying about half sleeping when I go in and I'm like 'hi'. I think it's difficult to study so much, and see everybody. It's difficult, it's a lot, especially as I've got work and everything and everybody else can go out and enjoy their Saturday. I'm usually at home studying on Sunday. I've not had a long lie in about 8 months … sometimes I've got homework on like the Friday, and I'll go in and do a wee bit of it then, … then on a Sunday I've usually got homework to do in the morning, and then I'll go and see Richard.*
>
> (Emma interview, April 2011)

Emma's description of homework in itself emerged as an activity in which pupils in Group 1 as a whole appeared invested and is described further in Section 6.3.1. Emma cited her need for employment as she was saving towards a group holiday to America, a trip that participants in Group 1 were planning, to celebrate completing S6. This suggestion had initially been made by Stuart's dad, who was helping them to save. Socialising became a key analytical means with which to understand how the young people in Group 1 fostered a sense of belonging in the school and out of school and collectively negotiated academic expectations.

Anna was the only pupil from Group 1 who did not apply to university. During the summer holiday after S4, she said that she had contacted her local college to make enquiries about sitting Highers. She was told that there was greater competition for places and she would only be able to sit three rather than five Highers at college. By March she described that she was going to leave school because "she couldn't stand it anymore" (Group 1, Group conversation, February 2011).

> Anna: I*t's not even the school and the work, it's like the atmosphere and the teachers going insane, they've all got to the point, like I liked them up to 4th year, but now they've just become complete idiots….and then Miss [HT] on my back…*
>
> Katie: *Do you think it's the teachers getting stressed out about you guys doing well this year?*
>
> Anna: *It's not even stressed out, it's just really sarcastic towards me and she makes me feel like an idiot, like I think in college I'd feel so much more relaxed and I'd actually study, whereas I just don't really do it 'cos she annoys me.*
>
> (Group 1, Group conversation, February 2011)

Whilst Anna talked about wanting to leave school, the conversation circled to include how as a group of friends they tried to persuade their friends to stay on at school:

> Anna: *'Cos we were trying to get [name of friend] to stay for 5th year, then she did, but now she wants to leave, but because I'm leaving she kinda sees it as an alright thing now.*

Rebecca: *It's like we're trying to get you [to Anna] to stay now*

Anna: *That's not gonna happen*

(Group 1, Group conversation, February 2011)

Paradoxically, teacher interference was not received well by the pupils. Matt and Emma described how Margaret would have a quiet word either to ask if they could make sure that their respective partners, Fiona and Richard, were on track with their studies, or to see if Fiona and Richard could help Matt and Emma with their studies:

Emma: *She pulled me into her office and pulled Richard in with me, 'cos I'm not doing well at Maths and she said 'could Richard not help you with Maths?' and I said well the teacher doesn't help me.*
…
Matt: *She always kinda puts me down a bit.*
Emma: *She does that to me because of Richard as well.*
Matt: *It's annoying because sometimes you feel that you do well and you're quite proud of that*

(Group 1, Group conversation, February 2011)

This extract suggest that teachers recognise the ways in which academic attainment can be supported and improved at a peer group level. The data shows that pupils do not receive teacher attempts to foster a more collaborative learning environment in the way it is intended, as it perhaps undermines their own already fragile sense of their individual academic abilities.

Emerging in the data is the sense that going to university is something that is socially negotiated between friendship group members rather than an individual behaviour. This is illustrated, for example, in Emma's discussion about the social aspect of studying and not having anything else to do, and the ways in which friends like Rebecca and Anna attempted to convince each other to stay-on at school. A further finding in this data identified management strategies as supporting the existence of different friendship groups at the site. In particular, the closeness

experienced by friends in Group 1 could in part be explained by differentiating pupil ability early. Farmer, McAuliffe Lines and Hamm (2011) employ a metaphor of the "invisible hand" to describe "the potentially influential, but relatively understudied contribution that educators are likely to have on children's peer relationships and their broader interpersonal growth" (p.247). Rather than focussing on individual ability or aspiration, the analysis of the data shows how a focus on social interactions provides a potentially fertile avenue for addressing the expansion of a university-going culture at the site. The data illuminates the ways in which teacher strategies support these peer relationships and how socialising is a key means by which young people consider progressing with their education at school. Before developing the empirical investigation to focus on the shared performance of meaning in order to fully understand how young people navigate university admissions processes, the next section presents data which elicits further understandings of existing practice at the site.

### *6.2.2 Getting on and getting out: experiences of pupils in Group 4*

In contrast to the data above which provided an account of the way in which a more close-knit group of friends incorporated ideas about staying-on at school, pupils in Group 4 largely expressed wanting to leave school as soon as possible, whether it be to go to university, college or pursue training opportunities. Leaving school was largely expressed in more negative terms, which involved wanting to leave what they, like Anna (Group 1) perceived as the oppressive environment created by staff:

> Finn: *I'd rather go to uni this year than do 6th year, because I'll be at school next year and I'll be 18 and they'll* [teachers] *still be treating you as if you're 10, I just don't like it at all.*
>
> (Group 4, group conversation, November 2010)

Finn, Graham and David described being part of a larger group of friends in S5, who were not involved in the research study. They described that as a group they mostly played football after school. Only Finn and Graham attended a group interview, as Samantha and Craig cited work commitments, and David was absent. In asking Finn and Graham why they thought that they had been successful in their exams the previous school year, compared to their friends, Graham laughed and said "most of them are heavy daft", with Finn adding that he thought most of them were still attending school because "they've got nothing else to do" (Group 4, group conversation, November 2010). In asking Graham how he thought he might have achieved good grades, he described that he found 'looking over things by himself helpful' (Group 4, group conversation, November 2010). Both Graham and Finn were surprised at their grades at the end of S4 and Finn was now considering studying at university. He described the pressures of being in S5:

> Finn: *It's different now from last year 'cos you need to study all the time, and last year I didn't really study and now I need to do it all the time*
> (Group 4, group conversation, November 2010)

Finn talked about the change in his personal circumstances that had occurred in the previous year. He no longer lived with his Dad and instead had moved out of the immediate locality to live with his aunt and uncle. He described that both his aunt and uncle had some experience of university courses through their jobs. Later at interview, Finn attributed his ideas about choosing university in terms of his aunt and uncle's positions in industry. Finn's aunt's role involved recruitment and Finn explained that

she felt that graduates were more employable. In terms of more manual labour, he had given some consideration to the sorts of jobs his friends were hoping to do:

> Finn: *They [friends] just don't like school and didn't have any reason to be staying on when they could be out working, 'cos they don't need any qualifications for what they want to do., 'Cos they just want to be stuff like joiners, plumbers stuff like that, a trade so they just went to college to study that.*
>
> Katie: *Did you ever think you would have liked to do the same?*
>
> Finn: *No, never. 'Cos my uncle's business is a joinery business and even though it's his business, he always says "don't get into it, it's a bad trade to get in to", like your pension and all that kinda stuff and the pay and the conditions. It's just better doing something else…..but he's obviously got it better cos he actually owns the business, and people that work for him, like my dad and that, people get injured all the time ...I wouldn't like it anyway, it's not for me.*
>
> (Interview with Finn, January, 2011)

As such, Finn was considering a business degree at the local post-1992 university, which he would attend in August 2011. In a similar discussion to Group 1, Finn and Graham described the ways in which teachers enlisted peers to exert pressure on their friends regarding staying on at school:

> Finn: *Mrs. [HT's name] has been trying to get the 5th years that are wanting to go to uni to stay on to 6th year to do Advanced Highers, so obviously that looks good for the school, so that people are doing Advanced Highers.*
>
> Graham: *It looks good for herself and all that she's managed to get people to stay on and do Advanced Highers.*
>
> Finn: *She came up to me and David the day and says that we need to try and get my pal [name of friend] to say on at school and I was just thinking 'if he wants to leave, he should be able to leave'*
>
> (Group 4, group conversation, November, 2010)

These regular attempts by staff to convince pupils to stay on at school, or to keep on track with their studies illustrate how practices at the school to raise attainment require

practitioners to press pupils in a way that middle-class parents might do for their own children.

The following data illustrates how supportive adults of pupils in Group 4 expressed a desire that their children stay on at school. However, for pupils in Group 4, there was an absence of negotiation between each other compared to pupils in Group 1. Without this, the data shows how the young people in Group 4 become active in sourcing opportunities to leave school. In Samantha's case, this involved exploring training opportunities, and then latterly FE college courses. Graham who initially talked about finding an apprenticeship, left in January to attend a sports coaching qualification, and for Craig who initially described pursuing something related to information technology found a college preparation course and also left in January before sitting his Higher exams.

Samantha described wanting to leave school, but was staying on until the end of S5 until she could apply for a fashion course at college. Until the previous year, she said she had enjoyed school and that she had always been good at it. However during the previous school year, her mum had become very ill and she found herself arguing with teachers and falling behind. In asking Samantha if she had talked to anyone in the school about her mum's illness, she said that except for one teacher, she had not spoken to anyone. She generally enjoyed her fashion class and got on well with her teacher and was now thinking about pursuing a course at a college which both her Higher Fashion teacher and her brother's girlfriend had recommended. At the time of interview, she expressed her annoyance with this class too due to the average mark she had received for the previous assignment. Samantha described that she had made a dress which she felt had been technically difficult, but had received the same mark as

other classmates who, in her opinion, had made less difficult items. Through the course of the interview, Samantha talked about how she had initially been to see Janet to see if she could join the fire cadets:

> Samantha: *You don't need any qualifications or anything to get into it, because you learn everything that you're doing there, 'cos it's like a 2 year course. And then you can qualify to be an actual fire fighter. But they're not doing that course this year … she [Janet] sent away letters for me to see about firefighting and it was her that told me that they were not recruiting and it's like in another year or something … I don't know what I'm doing. See, I think I would like to do firefighting, but I'd want 2 weeks work experience or something because I don't actually know what it's like. But you can't do work experience, you just need to go right in it.*
>
> Katie: *And where did the idea come from?*
>
> Samantha: *I don't know. I kind of want to be good and be doing something in my job, I don't want to be sitting in an office or whatever – I kind of want to be out and about and doing something.*
>
> (Samantha interview, January 2011)

Samantha felt that if she did go to university, she would go via college first, as it would better prepare her in confidence. School for now was somewhere she did not particularly want to be, despite conversations with her family as illustrated in the following quote:

> *They've [Samantha's family] all been saying you need to do it anyway – like stay on and stick at school and stuff, because I moan about it like all the time and I hate getting out my bed … it's just school, like see if I was going to work, I'd just get out of my bed happily and just go to work, because I know I need to do it, but I know I hate school. I just can't bear it, and I'm late all the time as well, just because I hate it.*
>
> (Samantha interview, January 2011)

During the interview, she said she was tired as she had been asked to work the previous night at the football stadium and did not finish until 12.30am and then had to be at school that morning at 8.45am.

The themes emerging from Samantha's responses highlighted the challenges to growing a group of university -ready pupils at the site. Firstly, Samantha's experience of the school environment was a source of frustration which contrasted with the idea of being treated like an adult at college or in employment. In interviews, many of the young people reflected on the negative atmosphere caused by this situation and constructed an imagined, more independent future for themselves. In Samantha's case her experience of school contrasted with her experience of her part-time job, or her knowledge of college and the fact that she could be there, rather than at school.

Another theme emerging from the data showed the swings in ideas as young people pursued seemingly disconnected ideas, for example, fashion and the fire cadets. These were connected in the data in so far that they were introduced to Samantha and mediated and facilitated through relationships, the fire-cadets through Janet, and fashion through Samantha's brother's girlfriend. In short, relationships, even of the briefest kind were key to understanding the ways in which young people constructed ideas about their imagined futures or found opportunities on which to forge a pathway out of school. This is highlighted in the following account of Graham's experience.

Graham described that his ideas about leaving school had not changed since the September meeting. He "couldn't be bothered" with university and had not given the idea any real consideration (Group 4, group conversation, November 2010). He wanted to find an apprenticeship as an electrical engineer which he would start looking in to after Christmas when he was 16. He did not invest lots of his time in studying, as he said he was now only doing one Higher in Modern Studies and the rest of his classes had fallen to an Intermediate 2 level (previously a level between Standard Grade and Higher, see SCQF). Graham said that his father wanted him to continue

with his studies and that he could not leave school until he found a job. The following quote illustrates the way in which he had begun to explore his leaving options:

> Graham: *You can get ones [apprenticeships] where you go to college one week every month and you get an apprenticeship, they just send you to college once a week, well once a month, that's it.*
>
> Katie: *So when are you thinking about doing that?*
>
> Graham: *I'm applying just after Christmas, that's when everything should be ready for me starting in August.*
>
> Katie: *Is it big companies that take on apprentices?*
>
> Graham: *Well, any of them… any company normally takes you on. Obviously the bigger ones offer more, but it means that more people are gonna apply for it, whereas if you go for a private one, less people are likely to see them 'cos they aren't tied up with the Council.*
>
> (Group 4, group conversation, November 2010)

Graham described that his uncle was an electrical engineer and was going to provide him with a list of contractors that his company worked with, for Graham to contact.

Following the group interview in the first term, it appeared that both Finn and Graham were going to stay until the end of S5 in June 2011; Finn to apply to university and Graham to apply for an apprenticeship. However, as described in the following account, Graham attended a careers fair in early December 2010. This event organised by Janet and her colleagues in another nearby secondary school was aimed at pupils who were termed 'early school leavers' and whom the school expected to leave at Christmas when they were 16 years old.

> *8th December 2010*
>
> *Janet invited me to a careers event which she had organised with the Enterprise and Employability Officers (EEOs) from the local partnership targeted at 'early school leavers'. Janet said that this was the first time they had attempted to run this event, which they held at a local community centre.*

*Pupils from three different secondary schools attended. Janet and her colleagues organised a 'careers carousel', a series of stalls where representatives from local education and training providers and voluntary organisations could supply information on local opportunities for pupils who were thinking about leaving school at the end of the month. The event was prefaced with a presentation from a member of staff from Glasgow City Council who described the Commonwealth Apprenticeship Initiative. This was followed by a presentation from a pupil who gave a favourable account of her experience as an apprentice in administration with Glasgow City Council.*

*Through discussions with Janet, I understood that the purpose of the event was designed as a preventative measure targeted at pupils the EEOs felt were most likely to become NEET as they had expressed an interest in leaving school early. I was surprised to see Graham sitting among a group of boys who were laughing and joking and getting on Janet's nerves during the presentations. When the carousel event started, Graham and his friends were selected to attend the first station next to the seating area and they were grouped around a representative offering a sports coaching qualification. I interviewed Graham at the school a week later. He said that he and his friends had signed up for a sports coaching course and that he would be leaving school at Christmas. The course itself would run one -day -a -week at the local sports centre, between January and June 2011. Graham said that he would get some money to attend, but described that his main motivation for enrolling was so that he could leave school.*

> Graham: *It's called 'Get Ready for Work' or something and it helps people get ready obviously for work but like, it helps you with getting your CV and everything and then, they're also linked with sports coaching, so you get to go on and do that an' all and it gets your sports badges for doing that. They just try help you make sure you get into a job when it's done. Yeah – after I finish that I'll go into college or something when it's done.*
>
> Katie: *So do you know what the course involves?*

> Graham: *The first couple of weeks they just help you with Maths and English, if that's what you need. But then after that, everything just starts to get ready for like, your CV getting your CV and everything ready for applying for stuff.*
> …
> Katie*: You were saying that a lot of your mates are thinking about doing this?*
>
> Graham: *There's a couple of my pals that are going for it, but it's not that, it's just I don't like school, I'll just take anything to get out it.*
> (Graham interview, October 2010)

*Following this interview, I met with Janet and discussed my surprise at Graham's attendance at the careers event and his decision to leave school at Christmas given that he was considered a "high flyer". Janet checked his details on the school intranet and noted that he had achieved a UPS of 230 (see Chapter 5). She expressed disappointment that he had attended this event and agreed it was targeted at those with lower academic attainment. In further discussions with Janet, she mentioned that Graham's dad had made an appointment to see her to ask if anything could be done to keep him in school as he wanted him to complete his Higher qualifications.*

(Constructed from research diary and interview with Graham, October to December 2010).

This extended example further illustrates the challenges for schools in working-class areas where there is an absence of family that have prolonged educational experiences. Thus it highlights that even if parents and teachers want to disrupt the reproductive nature of schooling, competing practice at the site with underlying logics to improve positive destination figures contend with these intentions. This is illustrated again in the case of Craig, someone who could be characterised as motivated, enterprising and extremely articulate.

Craig's experience provides further insights in to the sorts of challenges to convince pupils to stay at school. Craig, another pupil who also considered himself

friendly with Graham, Finn, Samantha and David in class time, also played football with Finn, David and Graham. He described spending time socialising with older friends who were either at college or working. At the initial interview in September 2010, Craig had described staying on through S5 and completing his Highers. He was thinking about training as an IT technician but did not expand on this further. By the following interview in early December 2010, Craig had already signed up for a college course, 'Introduction to the Music Industry' which meant he would leave school at Christmas.

> *I went to Mrs [Janet's surname] because it was on the tannoy. It says something about there's courses for so and so available, and that's when I heard 'music business'. And I went 'I'm going along'. I went along and saw her about it, so she got me an application form ... and I filled it in. And that's when I got word back for an interview [...] it was helpful, because I wouldn't have known what to do myself.*
>
> (Craig interview, December 2010)

Craig described that he had attended an interview at the college, and when asked about taking this course rather than exploring qualifications to be an IT technician, Craig explained that he was "just passionate about music" (Craig interview, December 2010). Craig described spending most of his free time making music on his laptop, using software he had taught himself how to use. He had sold a number of tracks earning £40-50 for each and had a number of contacts in the music industry that he had met online and spoke to regularly through various web forums.

> *I've got a few people on my MSN who I talk to, and they've got other contacts, so I mostly talk to them about it. And they gave me their email addresses. So I got a hold of them, so I started talking actually to sort of big people about it – and they've said to me I've got the potential to do it. "So keep at it". So that's what I've been doing.*
>
> (Craig interview, December 2010)

Craig described that the lecturer interviewing him for the course had advised him to complete his S5 year and Highers:

> Craig: *I talked to him and told him like 'I make my own music and stuff like that' ... he says 'so you're better off going to get your Highers and then apply and you'd probably pick up a lot more' ... And I was like 'alright' so – he was just trying to keep me in school and I just didn't want to stay.*
> .....
> Katie *So how does that feel if that's the advice they're giving you is 'get your Highers and then apply?' And that's probably what the school would want for you.*
>
> Craig: *I just don't want to be in school anymore – it's annoying, you can't do what you want. They say they're treating you like an adult, but they're still moaning at you if you don't do your homework and in college if you don't do it, it's your own fault. If you fail, you fail. But in here, they moan at you twenty four – seven, so it's quite annoying.*
>
> (Craig interview, December 2010)

As the data illustrates, opportunities to leave school early come on to the horizon throughout S5 which are not particularly targeted at this group. Where Janet struggles with pupils to display motivation and an ability to articulate career goals, Samantha and Craig, and to some extent Graham, display a capability and ease with the practice that Janet finds difficult to draw out in other pupils (see Chapter 5). Opportunities to leave school become fused with ideas about offering real life employment, independence, gaining respect in the work-place or college environment and being treated like an adult. Clearly these more structured pathways from school offer a broader appeal than taking a more imagined leap of faith than that of staying on at school, and embarking on an extended programme of study through university that lead to more abstract qualifications. In this respect, rather than reading the young people's choices as low aspiration, the data illuminates the fairly pragmatic decisions made by young people.

The data suggests that the desire to leave school either during or at the end of S5 was common among all participants in Group 4, regardless of their decision to pursue training opportunities, college or university courses. Only David appeared to be ambivalent about staying on, as illustrated in the following quote:

> *If I don't get into uni this year, then I'll just come back to school and try again next year… you've probably got more of a chance in 6th year then 5th year.*
> (David interview, January, 2011)

Perhaps striking in the data was the absence in the group of any tensions between participants regarding the different choice of pathway. That is, there was little sense of Craig, Graham and Samantha's engagement with Janet and her remit to support young people into training opportunities, being at odds with the decisions Finn and David made to go to university. Instead these tensions emerged between the young people and adults, parents, college tutors who, like Marion and Margaret attempted to encourage them to stay at school and obtain qualifications. The data suggests a sense of both a co-existence and erosion within the community of the shop-floor culture that Willis'(1977) 'lads' actively engaged in reproducing. Instead of working towards a more defined working environment that existed at the time that Willis was writing, the data here highlights that training opportunities were pursued as these unfolded at the site.

The data in this section however also highlights shared experiences between young people in Group 1 and Group 4. Across both groups, it is evident that teachers attempt to keep the young people on track with their subjects. The idea to 'encourage, cajole, and push' (see figure 4, p.146) were generally perceived as unnecessary nagging, or a more cynical motive concerning teacher self-interest in raising school reputation. However, the data highlights how the young people in Group 1 did not

experience any particular opposition to the messages conveyed at the meeting, and generally felt that the teachers should push everyone equally. Thus attempts and efforts made by Marion and her team to disrupt young people following more traditional transitions out of school, is for the most part, not something that existed without tensions.

## 6.3 Understanding initial orientations towards Higher Education and the professions

Section 6.3 considers how participants in Group 1 constructed their imagined futures by focusing on the meanings and knowledge that informed understanding of professional occupations. This section proceeds as follows: Section 6.3.1 examines the professional knowledge and experience that the young people had to draw on, highlighting how limited this is compared to young people in similar positions from middle-class backgrounds. This is followed in Section 6.3.2 by an analysis of the data to show how ideas about certain kinds of professions are informed by the activity of close family and personal networks. The data in this section is drawn from individual and group interviews and participant observation. The data presented illustrates the meanings and knowledge informing interests in pursuing careers in dentistry, engineering and scientific research.

### *6.3.1 Initial orientations towards professions*

The previous section suggested that a conferred elite sense of status at Chapelpark helped shape thinking about a career in a competitive profession among participants in Group 1. Key themes emerged in the data regarding the young people's

understanding of pursuing jobs with high earning potential. Immediately identifiable was the way in which professions were chosen, which were conspicuous as summarised by Nick:

> *I wanted a degree that would guarantee me an actual job. Law - everyone needs a lawyer right, even in the recession, and then I went for Engineering, 'cos it's like Maths and Physics and it's pretty necessary.*
>
> (Nick interview, September 2011)

The data revealed a stark absence of knowledge and understanding by pupils of working in the professions. Savage (2015) suggests that one of the major challenges for social mobility in the UK is that entry into the professions is largely dependent on access to professional networks. The initial survey results indicated that fourteen of the twenty pupils cited that they wanted to pursue a professional occupation. These findings along with parents' occupations, were grouped according to the Office of National Statistics Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) Hierarchy. Table 9 (p.177) provides an overview of parent occupations according to these groupings.

***Table 9: Parents/ carers occupation grouped according to the Office of National Statistics Standard Occupational Classification Hierarchy***

| Office for National Statistics Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) Hierarchy | Number of people (parents of pupils) |
|---|---|
| Major Group 1: MANAGERS, DIRECTORS AND SENIOR OFFICIALS | 0 |
| Major Group 2: PROFESSIONAL OCCUPATIONS | 0 |
| Major Group 3: ASSOCIATE PROFESSIONAL AND TECHNICAL OCCUPATIONS | 3 |
| Major Group 4: ADMINISTRATIVE AND SECRETARIAL OCCUPATIONS | 3 |
| Major Group 5: SKILLED TRADES OCCUPATIONS | 7 |
| Major Group 6: CARING, LEISURE AND OTHER SERVICE OCCUPATIONS | 4 |
| Major Group 7: SALES AND CUSTOMER SERVICE OCCUPATIONS | 10 |
| Major Group 8: PROCESS, PLANT AND MACHINE OPERATIVES | 1 |
| Major Group 9: ELEMENTARY OCCUPATIONS | 2 |
| Unemployed | 7 |
| Deceased | 2 |
| Not in contact | 1 |
| **Total** | **40** |

It is apparent from this table that of those pupils interested in pursuing university study, there was no one from among their immediate family members who were employed in professional occupations. Findings from the survey data confirmed that these pupils could typically be described as 'first generation' which is significant when applying insights from cultural perspectives which recognise transference of social and cultural capital within family networks (Ball, 2003; Reay *et al.*, 2005; Savage, 2015). This section takes the following professional areas: healthcare, engineering and scientific research and examines the ways in which the young people constructed meaning about entry into these professional fields. The findings suggest that the immediacy with which young people in Group 1 desired to enter employment is similar to pupils in Group 4. Thus, university courses were chosen for their known obvious vocational

employment opportunities. Pupils were engaged in an academic practice in that they were studying for Highers, but beyond this they had limited professional insights on which to draw.

#### *6.3.1.1 Healthcare: an opportunity to run a business?*

Richard attributed his initial ideas to studying medicine to a story circulating in the school about a former pupil from Chapelpark who was the first to pursue a course in dentistry. The following quote illustrates how Richard linked the celebrated success of this pupil with his own ideas:

> *…and I heard she was kind of like this legend that teachers talked about. Oh [name of pupil] did this, [name of pupil] did that, and I thought, "I'll do that then". There was a Maths teacher that said, she got one of the highest marks in Maths, and they got the news in and everything and she'd gone away to do dentistry. [Name of teacher] just talked about it like it was a pure good thing, so I decided I'd go along those lines as well... Then I saw, because we have 'the board of fame' and everything, and I saw [name of pupil] … I'm not saying I wanted to dentistry because I wanted to do medicine, veterinary medicine or dentistry. I kind of wanted to be the first person from the school to do medicine.*
>
> (Richard interview, June 2012)

The desire to achieve a similar sort of celebrity status appealed to Richard as well as the desire to "wear a lab coat …because I want a lab coat" (Richard interview, January 2011). During a tutoring session with Emma, she recounted that Richard had joked about wanting to study either medicine; veterinary medicine or dentistry, because important people wore a white coat. However, after realising that the only people that wore white coats were students studying beauty therapy at the local college, he updated this idea to wearing scrubs (research diary, May 2011). Richard recounted at the first group interview that his grandmother had prompted him to ask his GP during an appointment, about becoming a doctor. His doctor had described that universities

welcomed applications from pupils living in deprived areas. Compared to other friends, Richard (like Nick and Fiona) displayed a level of confidence in their status at the school, perhaps conferred from their academic success. However, in reflecting further on the 'fast-track' classes which were described in the previous section, Richard identified that this was a process by which he not only recognised other pupils in his year group as being academically capable (see Section 6.2.1) but also his own ability. He viewed that his success at Standard Grade in S4 had helped him to consider the idea of university as a real possibility:

> *My standard grades - I didn't really know what I was doing at that stage, I knew I liked chemistry, but I didn't really think I was good as what I was in it. The 3rd year exams which were just kind of mock exams to get you prepared for it, were the most nerve wracking exams I've ever done compared to the standard grades or the Highers … – so I think my nerves and S3 compared to standard grades, made me feel I wasn't as capable as what I was when it came to the results. Once I'd done my Standard Grades, I got quite good results and I started to think about what I would do with my life, cos I was quite good at chemistry and biology so I thought I'd go on the science route.*
>
> (Richard interview, June 2012)

In the initial group conversation Richard described that pursuing a subject like medicine carried business possibilities in that he could reinvest the high salary into a medical practice (Group 1, group conversation, November 2010). This resonated with earlier comments he made during this session, when he described playing around with different ideas before realising that he could, with his academic ability, pursue a university course:

> Richard: *I wanted to open my own Starbucks… well, I know it's a franchise, but I'd like to buy into the franchise … it's not something that I've seriously thought about, but it's something that I'd like to do, but I think it's too risky compared to the security of going to university and knowing that if you pass then you've got a degree and your able to get a job….*
>
> (Group 1, group conversation, November 2010)

The oscillation between medicine and business was prevalent in the subjects that Richard and Emma had both elected in their Highers: English, Maths, Chemistry, Biology and Business Management. Rebecca described that she too had also initially thought about a similar career path in medicine, but early into S5, had begun to dismiss this idea as she began finding her science classes difficult. Although beginning with the same intentions as Richard and Emma to pursue a health related course, she began to feel that with the Highers she had taken she 'couldn't really do anything with them' (Rebecca interview, March 2011). Rebecca described that business management, a subject she had taken in S4, was the only subject from among her 5 Highers that she could salvage something from:

> *I'll probably apply for that one [music industry] then see how it goes, 'cos I cannot think of anything else, … 'Cos I wanted to go and do science, like maybe chemistry, but then when I started Higher chemistry, it got quite hard. I was like if I can't even do this in Highers, I won't be able to do it in uni so, I've just kinda gave up on that. … I picked chemistry and physics… I cannot really do anything with them so, I don't know. That [music industry course] was the only one that I can think. I was gonna do business management next year, pick that as a Higher, but I can't really think of anything else I can do with the Highers I've picked.*
>
> (Rebecca interview, March 2011)

This quote provides a further insight into the ways in which the young people constructed conceptual links between a career and school subject, and as illustrated in Chapter 5, some of the school subjects that were offered at Chapelpark, such as Business Management were popular for their practical links to employment.

Unlike Richard, Rebecca described feeling at a loss about what to study at university. She described that "I just listen to a lot of music and go to a lot of music events and stuff, so like to be able to organise them, I think it would be fun", however she also described 'not really having a clue' (Rebecca interview, March 2011). She also described that she preferred:

*..people telling me what to do and then doing it, rather than doing it myself and not knowing if it's right or not. I'd prefer someone just tell me to do that*
(Rebecca interview, March 2011)

Rebecca's perceptions of the conviction of her friends also seemed to compound her own sense of confusion. In the initial survey and interview, Emma had identified that she, like Richard, wanted to study either: medicine, dentistry or veterinary medicine and had chosen to take the same subjects as Richard at Higher. The previous section (6.2.1) suggested that Emma's engagement in school was primarily social in that the impetus to study and keep on track with her work was directed by the ambitions of others in her friendship group. In meeting with Emma regularly to support her with English, conversations often turned to her dislike of Chemistry. She therefore worried that if she did not achieve a B grade at Higher then she would be unable to progress to Advanced Higher, a subject she needed in order to be able to progress her application to university. Emma's naivety about pursuing a range of jobs interchangeably is illustrated in the following two extracts from the first and second group interviews:

Katie: *Do you worry at all about people getting a job?*
Andrew: *No*
Anna: *Yes*
Richard: *I worry about it sometimes*
Nick: *Sometimes*
Rebecca: *There's like 25 people to every job in Glasgow*
Emma: *I don't 'cos all my like back up options are things you're always gonna need*
….
Katie: (to Emma) *What's your back up option?*
Emma: *I want to be a vet*
(Group 1, group conversation, October 2010)

…..

Rebecca: *I'm worried that I'll pick something then not like it, and then waste my time doing something*
Emma: *See to be honest if I pick something and I don't like it I'm just gonna do it anyway 'cos …if it gets me a good job …*
(laughs)
Rebecca: *'Cos you know what you want to do*

Emma: *I don't know what I wanna do*
Rebecca: *But most of you have it all planned out and I don't have a clue*
Emma: *But I've got about 8 billion options*
….
Emma: *I don't know what I want to do*
Rebecca*: I thought you wanted to be a dentist*
Emma: *I did but I'm not gonna get the grades for it, so I've got a billion other options*

(Group 1, group conversation, February 2011)

These quotes suggest that as Emma's progress with pursuing an application to dentistry become untenable, failure to grasp a deeper and more nuanced understanding of different professions leads her to pick and choose between different high-status jobs. A prominent linkage in the data identified the way in which Emma described and understood both her mum and her grandmother's experiences of employment on leaving school:

> *I think she [Emma's mum] was in and out of jobs. She used to be a manager for a bookies, so she was all about doing that. And then she sort of left that because it was too many hours when my wee brother was born, 'cos she was working until, 'cos it was late night betting and everything, like half 10 at night.*
>
> (Emma interview, July 2012)

Emma said she felt pressured by her mum. She described that her mum pushed her to aim for a well-paid job which Emma attributed to her recognising that she could have done better at school herself. The idea to study dentistry, had perhaps also linkages with Emma's mum as the pupil who had left two years earlier to study dentistry from Chapelpark, was her mum's best friend's daughter.

> Emma: *I think she just sort of wants better, like she probably knows she could have done it if she'd wanted to – and –I think that's why they sort of try and push me, and try and push my wee brother as well. ….*
>
> Katie*: Do you think then that your mum wanted you to do dentistry because that's what her friend's daughter studied?*

> Emma: *Maybe, like I think she just wants me to get a well -paid job, I think she's got an idea of like professional jobs that she knows will make a lot of money and that you're successful in. And she knows that you'll always be employed with, so I think she just wants me to get something like that. So – you're never out of work.*
>
> (Emma interview, July 2012)

Emma, like others across the cohort described the appeal of studying and pursuing a more professional career because she did not want to work in an office and do repetitive tasks like her mum who now worked for a bank processing mortgage applications (Group 1, group conversation, February 2011). Emma studied at her grandmother's house most nights as she found it quiet and a good place to study. She described how her grandmother who had also left school at 15 described different jobs on leaving school.

> *She said 'I did about a million and 1 jobs like, but at that point you could just walk out of a job and walk into another one'. Like- she said her and her pal used to work in a factory at one point, and then textiles and everything, they worked in a shop, and they worked in a hospital and everything, and – she worked with sort of geriatrics, and she said it was just a pure laugh, and in those times they used to have like a laugh and interact with them properly, and there wasn't all these sort of rules in place and everything.*
>
> (Emma interview, July 2012)

This provided an insight into the ways in which Emma constructed her own transition. As Emma's academic progress becoming more uncertain, the differences in the way Emma and Richard began to engage in finding out more about university courses became apparent:

> *No, I think I'm only doing this [dentistry, medicine, veterinary medicine] 'cos he [Richard] is- and like I don't know – it kind of puts me under pressure when he does like a lot better than me and all, if I'm kind of at his and his gran are like 'what did you get Emma?' and I'm like, Richard's got like an 'A' and I'm like 'C'.*
>
> (Emma interview, January 2011)

Unlike Richard who appeared to actively pursue information and was encouraged by teachers at the school as he maintained a good academic track record, Emma experienced this period differently. She described following her grandmother's advice to 'wait and see':

> *I might just, like my gran says, I've just to wait to see my grades first before I decide to do anything – if I'm getting my hopes up for anything or whatever – I dunno.*
>
> (Emma interview, June 2011)

Emma's ambivalence about university more generally was evident in the early stages of the research as the group talked about money and the earning potential of a degree:

> Richard: *But in the long run people that go to uni probably make more money*
>
> Emma: *I'd rather leave and get a job but I don't want to if I get to uni, I can get more money in the long run… I'm pure money orientated*
>
> Richard: *Do you think if you go to uni, you do make more money?*
>
> Emma: *It depends what you do. … I think I'd rather leave school and get a full- time job*
>
> Katie: *What would you do?*
>
> Emma: *I like my job waitressing, I like that* [Laughter from rest of group]
>
> Emma: *What?! my job's good!*
>
> (Group 1, group conversation, October, 2010)

Emma had secured her waitressing job in a busy city centre restaurant, through a family friend of her dad, and in this domain, she not only appeared confident, but became a source of knowledge to Richard who was interested in how both the franchise operated, and the cleaning business that Emma's boss' son had successfully developed following his law degree. The identification of a plan to study for a professional course appeared to be in part from her relationship and connection to Richard, her

mum's desire for her to get a good job and knowledge of success of former pupils. However, the distance she had to travel to believe in it appeared far greater than Richard, whose confidence grew as he maintained good academic scores. Paradoxically, Emma's distance of believability but ability to go along with the idea provided a practical sense of the process and which supported a heuristic engagement with her application (see Chapter 7). This more experiential learning is absent from discourses of decision-making in which young people are being asked to make decisions about their futures with little experience of new fields of practice. The data highlights that without this engagement, young people like Rebecca can find themselves making decisions in a vacuum and which causes further tensions in justifying these ideas. In this respect, Emma operated as an adviser to friends like Rebecca, who openly struggled with the indeterminacy and lack of understanding about what to do:

> *[I was thinking about] management and I told my teacher and she was 'alright', but then I told my mum and she …she thinks…'cos I only like need, is it a B and 3 Cs to get in? and I've picked all the hard subjects and she thinks that it's a waste of time me doing that if I'm picking all these subjects so I don't think she was too happy about that.. [my friends] just say I should find something that I want to do and then, like when I told them about the whole thing I wanted to do they were like 'well you should just do it, if that's what you want to do'.*
>
> (Rebecca interview, March 2011)

The data in this section shows how the idea of a career in healthcare (either medicine, dentistry, or veterinary medicine) provided a starting point for Richard, Emma and Rebecca in S5. These career ideas appeared to emerge based on the status and money they would confer, without an explicit understanding of what each particular profession might entail. The data highlights that there is very little opportunity for the

young people to engage with any of the professions in question. The only evidence of speaking to someone from a health background about a possible career in this direction is discussed by Richard, who mentions becoming a doctor to his family GP. Apart from this, the data suggests that hearing about the success of a former pupil who received recognition for her Maths ability, inspired Richard to greater fame and by becoming the first pupil from Chapelpark to study medicine.

These high aspirations and the need to achieve exceptionally high grades present challenges for more ordinary pupils like Rebecca and Emma (see Chapter 7). Rebecca's quote provides a stark illustration of the challenges of changing career ideas and attempting to orientate towards a university degree without any cumulative educational qualifications from Higher level subjects. The data shows that changing from science subjects leaves her with fewer ideas to draw on once she realises that she would struggle to achieve the grades required for medicine. It also shows the omission from her thinking to study for a more ordinary science degree based on her initial interests but without a more conspicuous profession attached.

Without this knowledge, the data highlights the ways in which young people draw on more local and contextualised understandings of employment to replace initial ideas. This is evident in the way that different career ideas are spoken about with an interchangeability. The idea of becoming *either* a doctor, a dentist or a lawyer, for instance, are suggestive of historic narratives of 'walking into any job' after leaving school as described by older family members. There is an absence of a more nuanced understanding of the requirements and expectations of high- status professions which are likely accessible to young people from more middle-class backgrounds whose networks can provide explicit or implicit guidance over a longer period of time.

#### *6.3.1.2 Engineering: meaningful manual work?*

Andrew (Group 1), like his friend Nick, had specified an interest in engineering. Andrew and Nick had been good friends since primary school, and while Nick was set on leaving at the end of S5 to study civil engineering, Andrew talked with less certainty. For Andrew, the idea of working as an engineer was conceptualised as 'not working in a boring office' or doing 'a repetitive job' (interview with Andrew, January 2011). When asking if this idea had come from his father's job as a park attendant, Andrew laughed and said that his dad wanted him to work in an office (interview with Andrew, January 2011). In an interview with Andrew, he talked about how his thinking had been shaped by his cousin's participation in the army.

> Andrew: *To all the careers people, I've said I wanted to be in the RAF, because one of my cousins is in the army and that kind of led me to thinking I want to be in the armed forces. I want to be like an officer, like a soldier- so that's what's made me lean towards that… [name of Andrew's cousin] did an apprenticeship in joinery in the army and then he's just been there ever since. He left school at 16 I think, he's 24 or something now…. he's in the Royal Engineers, obviously they're just mainly in the base fixing stuff, so he didn't really do much fighting I don't think, but he said he quite enjoyed it.*
>
> Katie: *What does your mum think about you wanting to do that kind of thing?*
>
> Andrew: *I don't think they're really bothered – 'cos – they see [name of Andrew's cousin] in it as well, and obviously they will be a bit worried, I think they're just leaving it up to me to make my decisions.*
>
> Katie: *So if you didn't go to uni and you trained up through the army – are you thinking about that route rather than going to uni or are you set on uni?*
>
> Andrew: *No I've always wanted to go to uni – it's kind of like a backup, because I know I'll change my mind at some point... Going through uni gives me the opportunity to see what other stuff I could possibly do.*
>
> (Andrew interview, January, 2011)

In terms of asking Andrew about gaining further advice from family members, Andrew described that his aunt and uncle had been to university and had both studied History. He described that they could offer some practical advice in terms of thinking about which university to study at:

> Andrew: *My auntie and my uncle both went to [name of uni] – both studied History, but obviously I'm not interested in History – but I'm just talking to them about what the university's like and stuff*
>
> Katie: *And what's their opinion?*
>
> Andrew: *Well, they're just saying that they don't think there'll be that big a difference between the two of them – it's just like whatever I feel has got a better course for me …. we've had hundreds of - like the careers advisor, we've had meetings with them and they tell us where we can go for our courses and how we get into the universities and stuff, but I think it's kind of focused on getting there and not really which one to pick.*
>
> (Andrew interview, January 2011)

This interaction with careers advisers was not apparent in Emma's thinking, who mainly cited Richard as her source of knowledge. Because of Nick's decision to pursue university at the end of S5, there was evidence that pupils in Group 1 gravitated to his knowledge of the application process as highlighted in the following extract:

> Katie: *And what about the actual universities and colleges, how did you come up with some of those decisions?*
> …
> Nick: *I looked up a university league thing and that helped*
>
> Katie: *So did you just look up the course with it?*
>
> Nick: *You pick a topic and it gives you a table for 2010 I think, you can pick a different year I think*
>
> Anna: *Is it just like the best one for it?*
>
> Nick: *Just the top 40, no in fact, it shows all of them, it shows all of them*
>
> Richard: *The top 40?*
>
> Nick: *All the universities in the UK right, it just compares them all*

Richard: *What one do you wanna go to?*

Nick: *Probably Strathclyde, although Glasgow's is slightly just above it, because the student satisfaction is a lot higher*

Richard: *How is that?*

Nick: *It is, they put it under different things alright*

Katie: *They have teaching and -where are the students more satisfied?*

Nick: *Strathclyde*

Katie: *Who wants to go to Glasgow?*

Nick: *It's one of my choices*

Andrew (to Richard and Emma) *'Cos you want to do dentistry and medicine, Strathclyde doesn't do it*

Nick: *Aye but Cally does*

Andrew: *They've got a crap rating*

Richard: *'Cos they have health professional courses but they don't do dentistry*

(Group 1, group conversation, October 2011)

The conversation illustrates the ways in which Nick, Andrew and Richard were using seemingly impartial sources to base decisions around which course to take based on university reputation. Nick could not attribute why he had looked at these league tables, when his friends were unfamiliar with them. When asked why he was the only one of his friends that mentioned them, he said:

> *Dunno. I'm sure Andrew did at some point. He must have done, 'cos that's the type of thing Andrew does. He just randomly goes on the internet and looks up the courses… but he would come in the next day and say 'guess what?' He would come up with some random thing that Glasgow does this or Glasgow does that that no other university does.*
>
> (Nick interview, February 2011)

Whilst Nick talked with some authority and confidence, the data suggested that Andrew's research underpinned some of this activity. Unlike his friends who were all born locally, Nick moved to the UK from the Caribbean when he was eight years old. Whilst ethnicity was not particularly explored in the data, Nick's actions suggested that, unlike his friends, he was able to operate with a less oppressive view of the world and that anyone with the grades could attend university. Nick had asked to be enrolled in the UCAS class a year earlier and had a decided focus to leave school at the end of S5 if he obtained the necessary grades to study engineering:

> *I don't see the point in wasting another year, I want to go next year, the end of this year so I'd be 17… I mean I don't see the point in, if I get in, although people keep saying that you'll be a bit more mature but I don't see the point*
> (Nick interview, December 2010)

Absent in Nick's narrative was a fall back option, and if it was present, it would be that he would go to university at the end of S6. Andrew however, like Emma, appeared to act with greater hesitancy. In constructing an understanding of employment from knowledge of supportive family networks and contacts, Andrew's concept of a 'back-up plan' emerged which he perceived as realistic. The data showed how Andrew was able to provide greater insights in to training opportunities with the Royal Air Force than his knowledge of working as an engineer. This was indicated by the ways he described choosing a job that would mean that he would not work in an office. Advice from family members is therefore minimal and at best, maps on to the similar notion of traditional careers advice which utilises prospectus' and league tables. These forms of information, advice and guidance leave pupils with little knowledge and understanding on which to base their decisions.

#### *6.3.1.3 Scientific Research: gaining more nuanced insights from family networks*

In contrast to the above narratives, Fiona perhaps showed a slightly deeper understanding of the transitions between university and employment. Fiona was viewed by the group as being one of the most academically capable pupils at the school as she and Richard competed for top marks. Among the group, Fiona was the only pupil who talked about studying a subject, Chemistry, at university without specifying a career. The following extended extract from an individual interview with Fiona provides an insight into how she arrived at this thinking.

> Fiona: *I don't know whether to do the university lecturer thing where you're teaching other people the things you've learned or to do the research within science, like find out new medicines and stuff, that's like the sort of thing, I don't know which one to pick*
>
> Katie*: Have you got anyone that you can speak to that does science stuff?*
>
> Fiona: *Well my uncle is sort of research based but I don't really get to speak to him a lot, if he's up we usually talk about it, I'll ask him what he's doing and stuff but there's nobody I really speak to, I just speak to my friends and my family*
>
> Katie*: 'Cos there's a few of you that want to do science?*
>
> Fiona: *Most of us are interested in science yep, there's like Richard and Emma who want to do medicine and dentistry and stuff and there's other people who want to be vets and there's people who want to study physics, there's quite a lot of us who like Science, Science and Maths, cos like Nick wants to be an engineer*
>
> Katie: *why do you think that is?*
>
> Fiona: *I don't know, I think we just all like it and that's maybe why we're all friends, in the circle most of us are like science, well there's a lot, like Matt he's creative and does Product Design and Art but he likes Physics and Maths as well*
>
> Katie*: and have you ever thought about doing medicine?*
>
> Fiona: *Quite a lot of people have asked me, well they've said 'why do you not want to be a doctor? You're throwing away your intelligence' and that, and I*

> *like don't know, I don't like the blood and the eugh!, no, no, I don't like the people dying and stuff.*
>
> (Fiona interview, February 2011)

Fiona, through her uncle, appears best placed to obtain some industry knowledge. However, like Emma and Andrew, her parents also worked in the local service industry and contact time with her uncle was very infrequent. The data suggests that the contact of someone (an uncle) with some experience of university and who worked in the sector, provided a different insight into opportunities within the labour market that were less conspicuous than the highest-earning professions.

In examining the narratives of future study and employment ideas, the data presented in this section has illuminated how initial orientations towards elite professions emerged at the site. In many ways, the predominant choice of degree studies leading to professional vocations could be seen to replicate the process of minimising ambiguity and uncertainty within transitions, as displayed by pupils in Group 4.

### 6.4 Chapter summary: Nurturing university-ready pupils

The data provided in this chapter highlights challenges involved in changing the *status quo* at Chapelpark. It has done so by focusing on the highest-attaining pupils and their initial orientations towards their futures as they identify potential university courses. In particular, it has illuminated how the largest group of friends from among the participant group arrived at ideas to apply to university and choose largely high-status professional occupations. This approach involved using information about students' positions within social networks which Bryk *et al.* (2010) advocate in understanding how school cultures coalesce around academic norms and behaviours. The data

suggests that transforming the idea of university into a reality at the site is less a process of raising individual aspiration or ambition, but that of nurturing a social engagement at the site which coalesces around academic performance. The data here suggests that this social engagement provided a more fertile basis in which young people became active in collectively negotiating academic and professional trajectories. These entwined processes find currency in the 'crème de la crème' status and it is the cultivation of this group which the data highlights is critical, in a school where the majority of pupils progress on to employment and training opportunities. This chapter has thus sought to make explicit the linkages between Marion's and her colleagues' activity to raise overall academic performance at the school, and the ways in which pupils respond within their own localised and contextualised understandings of employment opportunities.

This chapter has therefore demonstrated that in addition to the young people's sense of (non)belonging within the social environment, supportive networks also contribute to the ways in which educational and career opportunities are constructed. This chapter has considered the more subtle and complex ways that meaning and knowledge about professional careers emerges within existing practice at the site. Rather than see the motivation to pursue high status professions as properties residing in individual aspiration or ambition, the data suggests that most young people forge an understanding based on knowledge and meaning related to the experiences of employment and transitions of close networks. The data therefore highlights a fragility underpinning the ways in which a group of university-ready pupils emerged at Chapelpark. Without the networks that Savage (2015) suggests are prevalent in configurations of social class in the UK, the progress of these young people looks

extremely limited.  The next chapter seeks to understand how young people navigated towards their chosen Higher Education courses given this baseline.

# Chapter 7:

# Understanding change at Chapelpark

## Overview

The data presented in this thesis have so far shown that the idea of going to university was less about raising individual pupil aspirations, and more a product of interactions and negotiated understanding between young people and their immediate networks. Chapter 6 has already shown that staying on at school was linked to processes of socialisation. Decisions about going to university could be read more as emergent properties of existing understandings of employment and education, and were not inseparable from reproductive community practices. Chapter 6 thus focused on understandings and practices related to orientating towards university.

This chapter continues by producing an account employing more ethnographic approaches to data collection than interviews alone, in order to study the performance of routines as young people navigate the application process. It proceeds as follows: Section 7.1 characterises the nature of change at the site by presenting school leaver data of university entrants from two cohorts leaving in 2010 and 2012. In employing a social practice perspective, Section 7.2 focuses on the experiences of two pupils as they navigate towards highly competitive professional fields. Section 7.3 then considers changes to the performance of practice at the site by looking at how these actions are given meaning. It suggests that an analysis of this behaviour may provide more useful avenues to explore change and stasis.

### 7.1 Explaining educational outcomes

Chapter 5 presented an account from Marion in which she described the small, but increasing number of pupils progressing to university from Chapelpark Secondary. In the final year of this fieldwork, the school leaver data for 2012 represented the largest cohort of school leavers who gained a place at university from Chapelpark until that point. Using data available on the school website in 2010 and access granted by Marion for pupil level data in 2012, table 10 characterises these changes at the site by providing details of the university establishment for those gaining a place at an HE institution.

***Table 10: Comparison of HE destinations by type of institution and location 2010 and 2012***

| | **Russell Group local** | **Russell Group different city** | **Post-1960s local** | **Post-1960s different city** | **Post-1992 local** | **Post- 1992 different city** | **Totals** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2010** | 3 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 10 | 0 | 18 |
| **2012** | 7 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 9 | 1 | 20 |

The data shows a small increase in the number of pupils entering university and highlights that changes in 2012 to the number of pupils applying to older, well-established, research-intensive universities that typically demand higher academic entry criteria increased from three pupils in 2010 to eight pupils in 2012. The data also shows that half of each cohort entered a local post-1992 university, reflecting broader patterns of entrance to HE institution as differentiated by socio-economic background (Fuller *et al*., 2011). Table 11 (p.197) indicates the different subject areas pupils applied for against the type of institution and highlights an increase in the number of pupils gaining entry into 'high status' professional courses such as Dentistry, Engineering, Accountancy and Law at universities with a different social status.

***Table 11: Breakdown of subject areas by type of HE institution 2010 and 2012 cohort***

| Type of institution | Subjects | 2010 | 2012 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Russell Group / Ancient** | Dentistry | 1 | 1 |
| | Engineering | 0 | 1 |
| | Science / Biochemistry | 1 | 2 |
| | Languages / Social Science | 1 | 1 |
| | Computing | 0 | 1 |
| | Management /Marketing | 0 | 2 |
| **Post-1960** | Architectural Engineering | 0 | 1 |
| | Primary Teaching | 1 | 0 |
| | Science / Biochemistry | 1 | 0 |
| | Social Science | 2 | 0 |
| | Business /Administration | 0 | 1 |
| **Post -1992** | Law LLM | 0 | 1 |
| | Business Law | 1 | 0 |
| | Architecture / Technician | 0 | 1 |
| | Science / Forensics | 3 | 2 |
| | Social Science | 1 | 1 |
| | Events Management/ Business Management/ Marketing | 5 | 3 |
| | Computing | 0 | 1 |
| **Totals** | | **18** | **20** |

Cognitive explanations for these outcomes would locate increasing participation in Higher Education and at more prestigious universities as a result of young people's aspiration and individual academic ability, or as a result of removing contextual barriers, reflected in changes to outcome agreements (see Chapter 1). Seeking causal explanations to understand the effectiveness of interventions in education, in order to better direct resources, has, as Grenfell and James (2004) suggested, relied on mechanistic understandings of input and output, arguing that 'where input and output systems are seen to work, it is often according to narrowly identified criteria' (Grenfell and James, 2004, p. 512).

Cultural approaches have critiqued positions which seek assumed correlates to explain change, highlighting how conventional approaches tend to confuse processes of change and outcomes. Pragmatic theorisations of this process such as those offered by St John, Hu and Fisher (2011) in their development of the concept of academic capital formation have suggested a reframing of cultural capital which takes account of the non-cognitive variables that distinguish children who have a "capacity for personal uplift expressed through self-navigation of educational and social systems" (St John, Hu and Fisher, 2011, p.41). They highlight a need to study the habitual patterns that reinforce gains in educational attainment among low-income, first-generation students. Employing a social practice theoretical lens to focus attention on the doing of everyday practice therefore allows for a detailed observation of the processes of change, making no *a priori* assumptions about what causes them (Shove *et al*., 2007). The question this chapter seeks to address is, whether focusing on changes to the performance of daily habitual practice can provide any useful insights for understanding the constitution of decision-making practice within working-class communities.

This chapter will thus continue by providing an account which primarily focuses on the situated actions of Richard and Emma, as they orientate towards highly-competitive courses. It does so by looking at their interaction with enduring and resilient HE application practices. The following account draws on a range of qualitative data collection procedures which included: transcripts of recorded tutoring sessions, reflective notes from volunteer tutors; further interview data and conversations with volunteer tutors; collation of researcher notes based on meetings,

telephone calls, text message conversations and observations, and in depth interviews with Richard and Emma at the end of S5 and S6.

## 7.2 Navigating towards a highly-competitive vocational field

Chapter 6 has already highlighted the limited knowledge and understanding that young people at Chapelpark displayed in terms of university and professional fields, and that the young people had little to draw on from among their close networks. Chapter 6 further established that within Group 1 there was different reasons for young people's uncertainty related to progress within education. This section attempts to capture both ends of this spectrum by illustrating how Richard and Emma, having articulated a desire to become either a vet, a doctor or a dentist, began to narrow their focus. With a relatively short time in which to become equipped with the necessary knowledge and understanding to progress an application, the account elicits empirically observable aspects of this process by focusing on social interactions from a tutoring project which Marion initiated in collaboration with university researchers (see Chapter 4, Section 4.6.1).

### *7.2.1 Furthering decisiveness of exceptional pupils*

Richard and Brenda

In February 2011, five months into the academic term, Marion (HT), identified Richard as being the only pupil from among the S5 and S6 cohort that was both interested in medicine, and had, she felt, a reasonably good chance of achieving the grades required (see table 8, p.153). Chapter 6 illustrated the ways in which Richard had attempted to find out about courses and university admissions which included

research on websites, visiting his GP and joining online forums with pupils in other schools. Richard's ambition to pursue a career in a medical field, combined with his academic achievement was known to Marion and her team. Richard was selected to work with a volunteer tutor, Brenda, who was a retired physician. They began to meet weekly, in the school library at the end of the school day and after Richard's supported study classes. Having cited an interest in becoming a health professional, the following recorded extract from the first tutoring session between Richard and Brenda illustrates Brenda's attempts to elicit Richard's understanding of the different professions:

> Brenda: *Have you looked at any of the sites about, like www.wanttobeadoctorco.uk? Have you looked at any of those sites yourself or have you been pointed to any by the school?*
>
> Richard: *I go into a site called I think it's 'prospects' a lot and that tells you about different jobs and the conditions that you'll have, and like if you have that job then the salary and how it goes up if you're either in public sector or private sector, how it differs and stuff like that and that's one of my favourite because it seems like a reliable source of information.*
>
> Brenda: *So it gives you sort of range of things about it which is quite useful. Have you tried writing down for yourself a sort of list of what you think are the advantages of going into medicine, or dentistry or veterinary medicine or what are the disadvantages?*
>
> Richard: *Not really, I've kind of thought about it though, in my head, I think I'd rather do dentistry for the social hours than medicine because, well that's what I've been told anyway, the social hours for dentistry are much better.*

Brenda: *The hours for dentistry are better because on the whole no one really offers much out of hours dentistry, though people perhaps need it, but they don't get it. But there are a whole lot of fields in medicine where you can do very sociable hours, it depends on what you want to do – you know what speciality you go into, there are lots and lots of specialities – if you're in a very acute medicine or surgery – if you did obstetrics… but you can do things like public health, and pathology and a whole range of specialities in medicine that don't involve antisocial hours. And things like dermatology and skin diseases – I think when I was in rheumatology, there wasn't a lot of out of hours work, although there was some, there was less than if you were a cardiac surgeon, or neurosurgeon, I think those you really wouldn't want to do – but if you're thinking of the hours is important because not everyone – some people run on adrenalin, they love 3 o'clock in the morning and off they go – that was never for me.*

Richard: *I doubt that's for me either.*

(Recorded tutoring session, February 2011)

The meetings with Brenda provided a forum in which Richard could discuss his consideration of a career in a health- related profession and in which Brenda could make more explicit what each of these professions might actually entail. The above quote suggests that Brenda's knowledge facilitated access to more specialised and detailed branches of the field of medicine. These conversations provided a more realistic consideration of the realities of the day-to-day job, broadening-out Richard's understanding beyond the salary and financial opportunities. Having trained many young doctors during her career, Brenda worked from a position of ensuring best-fit for Richard, a process that evolved over the course of getting to know him. Following their initial meeting, Brenda reflected:

> We discussed his view of the disadvantages of possible careers. His perception of medicine is that the hours will be unsocial. I indicated that certain specialties do have regular hours (although initial training may be more of a problem). His concern about dentistry is dealing with a localised anatomical site, and about veterinary medicine the possibility of injury from a sick animal. We did discuss that all professions require continuing professional development.
>
> (Benda, reflective note, February 2011)

Following their initial meeting, Brenda made enquiries with Marion about Richard's involvement in a university outreach programme with a specific focus on access to medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine and law (see table 6, p.127). Chapter 6 highlighted that Richard had been aware that universities would reduce grade requirements for widening access students but there was no indication in the data that Richard understood the mechanisms by which they would do this. Brenda also contacted the outreach programme directly and made enquiries as to when they would next visit the school so that she could best prepare Richard for attending this activity. A week later Brenda updated the research team that Richard had, "heard nothing about the meeting which the medical school had indicated they were arranging" (Brenda, reflective note, February 2011). In supporting Richard, Brenda kept in regular contact with the outreach programme to keep Richard abreast of their activities. She also sourced other opportunities, including a science summer school programme at an older established university outside of Glasgow run by the Sutton Trust. She also liaised further with Marion to ensure that Richard's involvement in these activities were supported by the school.

Over the next few sessions, Brenda found out more about Richard's personal circumstances, work experience and employment in order to support him with an application the following school year. Richard had no experience in the medical field and described that he would try to find a job in the summer holidays and that his uncle

had offered him some work through a friend in a local takeaway shop. Brenda suggested that alongside this, he should enrol on a first-aid course and look into volunteering opportunities as a first aider. In March, Brenda wrote that Richard "and his girlfriend Emma have made good progress with their first aid course and will by now have sat the exam" (Brenda, reflective note, March 2011). Addressing Richard's academic progress then began to overtake discussions about career choices which Brenda described as being "on hold because of Higher exam challenges" (Brenda, reflective note, March 2011). Brenda highlighted Richard's academic progress and the support she had put in place to help him achieve the grades necessary in S5 to study either medicine AAAAA or dentistry AAAAB.

> *He achieved A grades for chemistry and biology in prelims, which is good news –I congratulated him on this success. He knew Maths and English were proving more challenging. Maths: [name of Brenda's husband] will try to help him with maths on Thursday 3rd March…. English: I note the close reading part of 2010 exam related to an article in the Observer from 2008. I took him the Guardian as well as the Herald to read and will also take him the Observer when I meet him next week. Grandmother has started taking the Herald at home. These interventions may be a bit late with Highers due in May. Working on the critical essay part of exam in relation to poetry, prose, or drama may be more useful for him-will discuss next time. Meanwhile I am enjoying reading The Changeling [set work for Higher English] and am seeking help from experts with The Almond Tree and The Crucible. Remains to be seen if he can earn the extra marks to progress from B to A grade.*
>
> (Brenda, reflective note, February 2011)

……

> *Richard remains concerned about the Critical essays for his English exam. We spent much of the time discussing the Crucible (which unlike his other two set works, I have not enjoyed, although I usually enjoy drama, and appreciate the message Miller was trying to convey). Richard selected a Q from practice exam book and will try to write an essay for our next meeting. He had mislaid the drama essay from my friend which I had given him last time, so I have agreed to drop another copy into the school for him tomorrow. I was impressed that he had worked on a formal answer to the essay Q he had chosen last time on the Changeling. The standard of writing in his answer was high, and we discussed some minor structural and grammatical changes. Suspect Emma had helped him a bit!!*
>
> (Brenda, reflective note, April 2011)

In May 2011, Brenda reported that Richard had reached a decision about a course: "I think he has decided to apply for dentistry and once exams and study week in late June in [name of summer school] are over, I could arrange for him to meet a dental student for an informal discussion" (Brenda, reflective note, May 2011). Later the same week, Brenda provided an update on her thoughts in terms of further challenges needing addressed:

> *Both Richard and Emma are now keen to pursue a career in dentistry. In view of this, there are two important aspects to address:*
> *1) Choice of 6th year subjects - Glasgow Dental school favours Human Biology, but Chapelpark does not offer this (nor Advanced Business Management which Richard wishes to do).*
> *2) UKCAT exam-Richard is very anxious about this- clearly the techniques required to succeed are very different from Highers.*
>
> (Brenda, reflective notes, May 2011)

From Brenda's position, this arrival at a decision appeared logical in the sense that Brenda had discussed the various options over a period of time. The data further indicates Brenda's sense of Richard's overall well-being, in which she had her own concerns about Richard's ability to handle stressful situations. She described that his personal circumstances were not straightforward. He lived in kinship care with his grandmother, walked over 45 minutes to school each day and recognised times when Richard was feeling the pressures of studying:

> *He is becoming anxious about his exams and in the library was intolerant of noise, even though we moved to the quietest corner we could find. (I sympathise with him, but found the noise minor, so suspect he is feeling generally under pressure).*
>
> (Brenda, reflective note, March 2011)

At interview in 2012, Richard's recollection of his final decision to study dentistry was attributed to the decision he had to make during a meeting for the outreach programme:

> *We sat down, and she [Brenda] said 'so what do you want to do?' and kinda 'how will we get there?' I said I either want to do medicine, veterinary medicine or dentistry because I like all three. She kinda worked with all three of them, how to get into all of them, she kind of went – right veterinary medicine is not for you – so that was out the picture- and then it was kind of between medicine and dentistry. And the reason that I went for dentistry was the [name of outreach] programme made you choose between medicine or dentistry, to help you get into it. And just a split second decision one day at a [name of intervention] class, I picked medicine, and then went 'no dentistry' and then that's how. If I'd got the grades I did, and UKCAT, they still helped me with my UKCAT, I would probably have got offers for medicine, probably not from St Andrews.*
>
> (Richard interview, July 2012)

This data illustrates the time pressures and relatively short period from the start of S5 to December the following year in which Richard had to make a decision about his future. In order to support Richard, the data highlights that Marion had some confidence in Richard's academic ability, firstly by providing him with Brenda as a tutor and as the data further illustrates, by reconciling difficult timetabling issues in S6. In order for Richard to complete Advanced Higher Chemistry, Marion had organised that an extra period would occur before the school day, as Richard explained at interview:

> Richard: *I got picked up because they didn't make enough room to have my Advanced Higher Chemistry class during the school day, they just hadn't been able to fit in*
>
> Katie: *Was it just you?*
>
> Richard: *No, it was just I stayed furthest away, I basically said 'I can't get there in time'.*
>
> Richard: *And he [the teacher] went 'I'll give you a lift then', and I went 'fine'.*
>
> Katie*: So how many people were in that class?*
>
> Richard: *Four, so they didn't make it a priority. We didn't go to our UCAS class, we went to Chemistry instead for two days a week, and then we came in early before school, to study, and I think another day was allocated to us, and another day wasn't. So we got Chemistry four days a week, and three of the*

> *days, they made time for us to do it ourselves. And in Business Management, we were supposed to be getting a teacher two times a week, and we got her once because she didn't have time to teach the Highers, maybe some Intermediate 2s and an Advanced Higher class.*
>
> (Richard interview, July 2012)

Similarly, in order to support Richard in this pursuit, Brenda needed evidence of his academic ability in order to provide further support with his preparation. Following his Higher results of AAAAB in August 2011, and on completion of his attendance at the summer school, Brenda and her husband met Richard and Emma in a coffee shop to support preparation for UK Clinical Aptitude Test (UKCAT) which Richard needed to sit in September 2011. Confident in his progress, but still unsure how his UKCAT score would be treated, Brenda drew on her contacts to organise some work experience for Richard in a hospital in facial reconstruction, and facilitated a tour of the historical archives at the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons. Whilst awaiting to hear about whether he would be granted an interview, Brenda focused on interview preparation using tutoring sessions to discuss articles which she sourced in the British Medical Journal and the Guardian, adding that "If he has an interview, we will need to work further with him, preparation will be important" (Brenda, reflective note, November 2011).

Richard was given a conditional offer to study dentistry, which he met following his results at Advanced Higher level. The data however illuminates how Brenda and her husband both ensured that Richard met his academic grades in S5, but also how they supported an exposure to the profession which was otherwise inaccessible to Richard from among his own networks. Richard's ongoing activity towards his application to university, which was supported by Brenda highlights the relatively unproblematic way in which Richard can absorb this activity due to the

convergence of his academic results and interest in the subject. The only detectable tensions arose around the initial dream of becoming the first doctor from Chapelpark Secondary, his actual grades and a narrative of settling for dentistry as a safer option reinforced through participation in the outreach track. The following account of working with Emma however further highlights the exceptionality of pupils like Richard at the site.

### *7.2.2 Developing decisiveness of ordinary pupils*

Emma and Katie (researcher)

The data presented in the previous section suggests that Brenda and her husband supported both Richard and Emma, as she too enrolled on the first-aid course and met with them out of school time. At interview Emma elaborated:

> *Because he's in touch with Brenda and [name of husband] and so was I, because of Richard, if you know what I mean. And Brenda used me to get Richard organised, because he forgets everything, so if he's got something to do, then I'll probably find out about it first, 'cos I can remind him.*
>
> (Emma interview, July 2011)

In parallel with the activity described in the previous section, I also met with Emma, initially to support her with preparation for her English Higher exam (see Chapter 4). As Emma and I worked on preparation for English Higher, I recognised some of the difficulties Emma experienced related to a lack of exposure to cultural content. For instance, on our first meeting, she showed me a past paper they had been given which contained a reading comprehension piece on 'Gregorian Chant'. She described 'not being interested in it' and tried to move on to another question. I asked a few questions to see if she knew what the text was referring to, and said I only knew because I had studied music (researcher notes, February 2011). Over the time we worked together

we also discussed a reflective essay and I made some suggestions to help structure it. We also discussed her approach to studying the set text, in which she was engaged in writing practice exam essays. In preparation for the exam she had memorised quotes and knew these well but admitted having not read the book. I suggested that she did read it and also bought a copy so that we could discuss further. However, performing well in test essay questions, Emma persisted with her preparation strategies. As Brenda suspected, she helped Richard with his work, which continued throughout S6.

> *I can help him and he could help me with …sciency subjects. I'm fine with the wordy, like see when he was doing his report and everything, I could go through it and check grammar, punctuation, and everything like that.*
>
> (Emma interview, July 2012)

Throughout the duration of S5, Emma became more openly ambivalent about her ideas and again acknowledged Richard influence to study dentistry and being guided by his choice of subjects at Higher (see Section 6.2.1):

> Katie: *And now you've got this far into the term, is there subjects you wish you'd taken or are you happy with the ones you've got?*
>
> Emma: *No, I wish I'd taken History, History was like my favourite, but I was kind of between that and Business Management for like taking the Higher, but I'm glad I didn't take History because I wouldn't be doing Higher. They've turned it into and Int2 class because there's too many Int 2s. So I'd end up with that as an Int 2, and like Business Management is another one I'd get an A in easier. It's the same amount of writing, it's just I'm more interested in History, 'cos it'd be learning about different stuff. Whereas Business Management's just repeating … because we were all studying for the exam last year, the standard grade exam, and the like- our teacher was sort of giving us the sheets like that the Higher study guide and everything, so it's kind of seeing them write all the information down for this year to study it and we've done it before and it's dead repetitive and I don't like it anymore, I don't like the subject*.
>
> (Emma interview, January 2011)

This quote illustrates one of the many tensions pupils experienced throughout S5 and S6 in terms of subject choices and grade outcomes. In particular, it illustrates the

tensions in getting good marks in social subjects (like History, English, Modern Studies) which rely on engaging with cultural understanding and demonstrating understanding through extended writing, compared to subjects like Business Management, Administration and to some degree, science subjects. For example, during one meeting at the start of S6 the following field note indicates Emma's difficulty in grasping meaning in discussion about her Advanced Higher English in S6.

> *I went through Silvia Plath poetry, Emma asked if 'Frisco' (which refers to San Francisco) meant as in a supermarket- cash/carry. I didn't ask why that would be so but on later reflection thought she might be thinking about Costco. She hadn't heard of Luftwaffe etc. but pretty good grasp of the poem and expressing herself is getting better.*
>
> (Research diary, November 2011)

Both Richard and Emma's unfamiliarity with a cultural curriculum and their struggles to demonstrate success in these areas, highlight the resilience of practices upon which many HE selection decisions are based. The previous chapter highlighted the ways in which subjects like Business Management supported staying-on rates at school. In needing 5 Highers in one sitting Emma's decision to study Business Management, like Richard, rather than History could be viewed as facilitating greater opportunities to apply for university in that she received a 'B' for the subject. The data however shows how these more tactical actions, which may derive from socialising and studying with friends, paradoxically for Emma, produced the following: an engagement in staying-on at school, engagement in extra-curricular activities to support an application to dentistry, an emergence of divergence from her initial decision as she became more confident with subjects she enjoyed.

Thus as well as enrolling on the first-aid course, Emma also asked the school if she could enrol on the outreach programme for dentistry. However, due to her academic performance, her participation was more problematic as illustrated in the following field note extract:

> *I met Emma, two weeks to go to exam. She said her and Richard are now doing [name of outreach] programme to get people into dentistry from these schools, and that they are entitled to adjusted entry in their grades. … I asked how come she and Richard got on the [name of outreach] programme. Emma said that Mrs [DHT] put Richard forward for it but then Emma asked if she could do it too. Mrs [DHT] said 'no' because of her grades. Emma said her mum rang the school and kicked up a fuss. They talked about Emma's standard grades being as good as Richard's and so she's been included in the programme. The [name of outreach] programme involves writing a report about community dentistry based on work experience. Emma said her mum rang her dental practice to see if she could volunteer there.*
>
> (Research diary, April, 2011)

Emma's uncertainty in pursuing either dentistry, medicine or veterinary medicine was thus becoming more explicitly exposed due to her academic progress, particularly in science. The above field note extract illustrates that senior management had less confidence in Emma's progress than Richard's. Thus 'sticking with Richard' produced both a perseverance in the same academic and extra-curricular activity as Richard, and a hesitancy as she grappled with contingency plans. This is further illustrated in the following field note which highlights that she and Stuart also applied, unsuccessfully, for the summer school that Brenda had sourced:

> *Her mum is ringing in sick for her tomorrow so that she can go and get some work experience in a dentist. Her mum has also said 'why doesn't she ask if she can go and watch when they treat her brother when he gets a brace, that way she can get a range of experience'. She says she wants to focus on cosmetic dentistry. […]*
>
> *Emma explained that if she doesn't get a C or B in Higher chemistry this year, then she can't do Advanced Higher Chemistry next year. If she got a*

*B in her advanced Higher chemistry, this is equivalent to an A at Higher which is what you need. Emma said that if she doesn't get her grades this year she'll drop the dentist idea and maybe study law which she thinks will be boring or pharmacy, another job which she thinks she won't like. Her mum said she won't earn enough as a pharmacist but Emma reckons it's OK at about £28K.*

*She said she was talking to someone from another school who had 'failed?' the IQ test* [UKCAT]. *It costs £65 and they have to take it before September. She said Richard was worrying because of the time restrictions. Emma felt like she was fine with extended answers, just more issues with the multiple choice (for Chemistry) and fitting shapes– spatial test. She said if she could get a book then that would help. I said I'd let colleagues know so that we could get Brenda involved.*

*Richard and Fiona got into a summer school, the one that Emma had also applied for. Richard said he wouldn't go if Emma didn't want him to but she thinks he should go so that he gets more experience. She said it was to do with the fact that he received the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA). I wondered if the teachers had anything to do with it or whether it was to do with his and Fiona's grades. Stuart did not get accepted either.*

(Research diary, May 2011)

The data suggests that Emma's decisions to study dentistry derive from her participating in the same activities as Richard, coupled with her mum's eagerness to follow a similar well-paid career route as her friend's daughter (see Chapter 6). At the end of June 2011 and following her 5th year examinations, Emma decided that she no longer would pursue dentistry, announcing her intention was now to study law.

*I think Richard thinks I'm stupid because I'm dead naive about it all, and I'm not really gonna get a job if it's not one of the 'five'- like medicine, or dentistry, or vet, law, engineering […] I feel like, I know what I want, I've kind of changed what I want to do. I want to do law now. […] Richard will do pure well and get into dentistry and if I don't get into law, then I'll just be extremely disappointed with myself, 'cos it's like my thing, I want to do a smart job.*

(Emma interview, June 2011)

After seeing Emma struggle with Chemistry and Maths, I felt that she was beginning to make some decisions about her future based on her own interests and ability rather than Richards. Although pursuing one of the five career options as outlined in the above quote is suggestive of Richard's ideas. The following interview highlights the ways in which the research process began to support Emma in preparation for studying a subject like law. In this first meeting since finding out about Emma's decision to pursue law, discussion focused on her choice of university course and her subject choices which she had recently picked to study in S6.

> Emma: *I've seen a course I want to do, and it's like 5Bs or something, minimum. There's no specific subjects that you need, so I've picked subjects this year I think I'll get quite good marks in them*
>
> Katie*: So what have you picked?*
>
> Emma: *I just picked Admin cos it's my favourite teacher that's doing it, and it's quite easy so, I just thought if I picked that, then it's another Higher, so if I can get an A in that, and then, I picked Advanced Higher Biology, because I quite like Biology anyway, and I'm alright at that, I picked Advanced Higher Business Management, and think I can do quite well in that.*
>
> Katie*: And what else?*
>
> Emma: *That's it. Just two Advanced Highers and another higher, and if I can get them then and I can get quite good grades in all them then, that should build it up a wee bit. So I think I could get quite good, like the way they make an expectation of what your grade will be, then the uni's kind of look at that to give you a conditional or not so I think I'll be alright with them.*
>
> Katie*: You could even look at Modern Studies Higher?*
>
> Emma: *Aye, I was going to*
>
> Katie*: Just because you know with law … one thing you could do is ring one of the unis and even though they say any highers, is just have a chat with them –or even I could ask someone at Strathclyde uni –*

Emma: *Modern studies is quite good- it's just…My pals are like that – 'don't pick modys – don't pick modys, it's too difficult'. 'Cos see I'd need to crash*[2] *it – and 'cos they've done it, and they've been doing it since like 3rd year – and they're like 'no, horrible, the exam's horrible – it's just so much to learn'. And especially if you've not any knowledge of it at all, and I especially hate politics – so…*

Katie*: I was thinking of it more like something to do with 'society' or something – but I would have a chat – we could find someone in here –*

Emma: *I quite like the idea of it, I'd quite like to go to a uni here and do it, but it's just the course I like is in – Edinburgh*

*I: And how do you feel about*

Emma: *Travelling? I don't want to move, I'm just going to travel.*

Katie: *On the bus?*

Emma: *Train, or drive –Just got to tell them [parents] to get me a motor*.

(Emma interview, June 2011)

Checking university websites, courses to study law stated that candidates needed at least one "essay-based Highers/Advanced Highers/A Levels" specifying that along with a good grade at Higher English, social subjects like Philosophy, Psychology, RMPS were recommended (Guidance from Scottish university LLM information to undergraduate student website information). In August 2011, Emma telephoned to tell me her results. She received 2Bs for English and Business Studies, 2Cs in Biology and Chemistry and a D for Maths. Emma had a scheduled meeting with a member of staff at Chapelpark to discuss her results and finalise her subject choice for S6. Having achieved a B in English, discussions again centred on taking another more essay-based subject to better prepare her for her course. Emma asked for advice and following a

[2] 'Crash Higher' described when pupil has not studied subject since S3

rather frenetic and panicked phone call, the following text message conversation summarised and clarified my advice.

> Emma: *Modern studies is recommended and I dunno about how your Advanced Highers count, so I dunno how my grades will look or if I'll have the entry requirements with another Higher, but I think social subjects are good, so I dunno if Business Management will be good cause that's a social subject.*
>
> Katie: *Break everything down into tiny manageable steps, you can't do everything at once. So first see about Modern Studies, you've already demonstrated your essay writing ability with English, so it's just the subject content that's new. Try to find one of your friends that's done it and get a good overview of the content. Decide if there's anything in it that sounds like it might interest you, not just the content but the approach to study, e.g. Researching a topic etc. Also find a nice modern studies teacher and get their advice.*
>
> (Text message conversation, August 2011)

Following this conversation, Emma evidently talked to friends as she texted back the next day to seek further advice on her handling the meeting with teachers at the school.

> Emma: *I think I'm going to ask them if they will let me teach myself Higher History, seems easier than crashing modern studies. I dunno if they'll let me though.*
>
> Katie: *Great! There's teachers there right who can help you? Do they not do Higher or is it they dropped the class down to intermediate 2?*
>
> Emma: *They don't offer Higher, but I think I could get my standard grade History teacher to help me after school or something, I think I could teach myself the information and if you could help that would be great, the only thing I would probably struggle with is teaching myself the exam technique and how to answer the question properly.*
>
> Katie: *There's plenty of resources to help with that. My suggestion for Thursday then is to print out the prospectus blurb on the law course that you're interested in at Edinburgh so you can show you're serious about that. Next thing is to have a look at different papers for Higher History. You want to go in there asking how to make it work rather than asking if you're allowed.*
>
> Emma: *Yeah and if I tell them it's giving me more of a chance of getting into it because there's a better chance of me getting the grade I need in History then*

*there is in Modern Studies. I think they'll moan about the work load and the fact I have to go to a different school for Business Management though.*

(Text message conversation, August 2011)

The following day, I texted Emma to see how her meeting with Margaret had progressed:

Emma: *Not bad, she said that she will see about letting me stay at the school I'm going to for Business Management for History if they do it, and I dunno if I can take Adv Higher Biology because I only got a C, so if I can't she wants me to take Adv Higher English.*

Katie: *That all sounds pretty encouraging. How you feeling about it all now you've spoken to them?*

Emma: *Good because before I spoke to her, other people had been asking about stuff and she had just been saying 'no'*

Katie: *When do you find out what they'll let you do?*

Emma: *Next Wednesday, would we be able to meet up before I go back to maybe contact some unis and see what they think would be best about my subjects?*

Katie: *Sure, are you free Monday afternoon?*

Emma: *Yeah*

Katie: *Cool, shall we say about 2? I'll see if I can book a room at the uni in town with a telephone or we could send emails if can't speak to people. The other thing is we could find someone from law to speak to at Strathclyde uni. Leave it with me n I'll be in touch Monday morning.*

(Text message conversation, August 2011)

To support Emma's understanding of the course, I contacted an undergraduate admissions coordinator at the University of Strathclyde and made arrangements for Emma to visit the department to find out more about studying law. She also spoke to a former student who was undertaking some part- time work in the department, who told her about her experience of studying law. Emma remained hesitant at the meeting,

unable perhaps to see the relevance of finding out about studying at Strathclyde when she had found a course in Edinburgh with lower entry requirements.

> Emma: *The only thing is, I don't know whether to do is the LNAT, it's the law version of the UKCAT – but only one university- it's the university of Glasgow that do it – the rest of them don't do it, so I was like, I don't think I'll do it. But it doesn't look too bad – not as bad as the UKCAT – it gives you like a wee passage or something and it's like your opinion on it, and then it's like 'write an essay on sort of controversial issues' it's like, I was looking at it – it's like, women – like women can do whatever they want in like – it's like a pure feminist statement – what are your views on this – I was like 'can I choose that one' …*
>
> Katie: *Well I guess it's like looking at what that exam is asking you to do, is pretty indicative of what a law course would be asking you to do –*
>
> Emma: *Reasoning – your view, aye and it was something like abortion – write and discuss points for it, and points against it – but like – any..*
>
> Katie: *You can just find out more about what's necessary to get in and what you need – Would you not go for Glasgow then?*
>
> Emma: *No*
>
> Katie: *Why not?*
>
> Emma: *Too high grades –*
>
> Katie: *What do they want?*
>
> Emma: *Something like 4As and a B – same as dentistry –*
>
> Katie: *And have you looked at the widening access - you should speak – I think [name of HT] helped a former pupil who got into Law at Glasgow, so you could always speak to him about what it's like –*
>
> Emma: *I think I'll probably like it at Edinburgh, Stirling or Cale, cos at the end of the day it doesn't matter what uni you go to.*
>
> (Emma interview, June 2011)

This section captures attempts to introduce ideas about approaching academic work as offering relevant learning and preparation for university. Discussing subject content for enjoyment, rather than based on grades and outcomes alone was not so

straightforward. Negotiating choice of subjects that Emma should take in S6 involved mediating not only Emma's understanding of university requirements but also helping her best prepare a convincing narrative to present to senior management at the school. This was because not all subjects in S6 were possible to take, and in some cases, Marion drew on contacts in other schools to negotiate pupils taking subjects in other secondary schools. Thus, making that extra effort required a degree of confidence by staff in the ability of the pupil.

During the summer in August 2011, Emma attended the meeting with Brenda and her husband in the coffee shop which was focusing on UKCAT preparation. With Emma no longer proceeding with dentistry, she described how she spent the time talking to Brenda's husband about her plan to study law and that he had advised volunteering with the Citizen's Advice Bureau. Emma began following up on these suggestions and looking up training opportunities. Emma described that she had given the community placement she had previously secured at the dentist to Richard and in return, Emma said that she and Richard had spent an afternoon wandering the city centre with Richard randomly calling in to lawyers' offices and asking if they had any work experience opportunities for his girlfriend. Emma talked about finding some work experience in a law firm to support her own application and said she would ask her dad's friend. At interview the following July, Emma described her experience of this placement which she had managed to secure during her half- term in October 2011 in one of her dad's friends' lawyer's office, a big company that dealt primarily with debt collection:

> *I just got to work on what I wanted with* her [contact at work experience placement], *and they said that law was like speaking another language, it's like a language in itself. So I had to try to translate stuff into what clients could read and understand. So they had me do some of that, like they gave me the*

*law, and then they said 'can you translate that into what you would say to a customer if you were trying to explain what that law was'. So I did stuff like that, and they had some of the trainee lawyers and then the court and that, so that was quite good.*

(Emma interview, July 2012)

Emma and Helen

As the only pupil at Chapelpark to study Advanced Higher English, I asked if one of the volunteer tutors, Helen, a retired English teacher, who had previously supported an S6 pupil, could work with Emma. Arrangements had been made whereby Emma would work independently in the library supported by an English teacher, who was teaching a Higher English class. During those periods, he would come to check to see if Emma needed any specific help. Although Emma was meeting with Helen, I still continued to meet Emma to see how she was getting on. The following field diary notes characterises the nature of support given:

*I met Emma in the library and she announced that she was going to drop History. We sat for an hour and talked through a number of issues. One problem she encountered was a clash in her timetable with History and her Advanced Higher Business Management. She described getting 'grief' from her History teacher. Another was that she didn't know where to begin with an essay and we spent time looking at the question and talking through what the question entailed and what kinds of information she might put in each section. I asked her how she was getting on in English. She had achieved an A and an A+ for her last two assignments and was enjoying meeting Helen. I left Emma in the library and went to meet Janet, fairly convinced Emma was going to drop History. At the end of the meeting I coincidently met Emma in the corridor looking visibly more relaxed. She said she had just completed a draft of her History essay. Following this meeting, Emma emailed to say that she'd had a chat with her Business Management teacher and that the school had organised an extra period of Business a week.*

(Research diary, January 2012)

In July 2012, I interviewed Emma about her experiences of working with Helen. She talked favourably about the experience and that working with a tutor had made her tackle difficult aspects of the work that she would have found challenging to complete alone:

> *I think it helps, because when you're sitting down with somebody, you're made to do it. So even if you don't want to, you arrange to meet them, so you can't really, you know, get away from it. So it kind of keeps you on track a wee bit and then if they're asking you what you want to work on then you're kind of forced to identify what you actually need to work on, and it kind of prevents you sitting there and doing everything you know you can do. Like – if – I don't know- sometimes you'd be sitting and you'd do hundreds of questions just to make yourself feel better that you know you're able to do, rather, than – kind of looking at harder ones and that.*
>
> (Emma interview, July 2012)

Of particular interest was Emma's growing interest in English as an academic subject as illustrated in her tutor's reflective notes:

> *She had an essay question to prepare for and sketch out an answer to. So, firstly I established where her priority preparation is right now. She said the dissertation and creative writing are on the back burner at present; she has to concentrate on training herself to handle Sylvia Plath questions for the Prelim in February. They had done an exercise in matching suitable poems to questions and she had chosen one question to start answering in class on Monday pm. She wanted me to look with her at the 3 poems she wants to discuss in the essay. We started with the poem she wants to be central to the essay, Lady Lazarus. This proved to be the <u>only</u> poem we discussed as it was so interesting. We will talk about the other 2 on Monday before noon, before she starts the essay in class in the afternoon. The joy with Emma is that she knows what she needs to discuss - rather than 'be taught' - so all I really need to do is slot into that topic and help her bounce the ideas around. A joy!*
>
> (Helen, reflective notes, December 2011)

In asking Emma about working with Helen she described:

> Emma: *I felt better, it kind of reassures you that like see when you've got somebody to talk to – and it's like you're talking to them, and they're not like talking at you and telling you – and you're discussing ideas, and you're like 'I do know this' – 'I really do have the knowledge to do this, and if I can do this, if I can talk to somebody about it – and I can do the exam' and gives you*

*confidence…if you know to talk about it, then you're kind of reassured that like 'I know what I'm doing'.*

Katie: *So did anything else come out of the sessions? Like I saw in one of the notes she said she'd given you a book*

Emma: *Aye she gave me a book, like we just ended up talking about Sylvia Plath quite a lot and then she gave me 'The Bell Jar', so I'm going to read that, I'm going to read it when I go on holiday.*

Katie*: Oh good-*

Emma: *She said like 'leave it until after your exams' 'cos she knew I would have probably picked it up and started reading it*

(Emma interview, July 2012)

In preparation for the university application, I introduced Emma to another tutor, a former senior lecturer in Human Resource Management who provided Emma with support on completing her personal statement. Her supporting statement for her suitability to study law mentioned the independent study skills and writing skills she had developed from studying Advanced Higher English and History, her voluntary first aid experience and intention to volunteer with the Citizen's Advice Bureau. She also described some additional prefect responsibilities she had at school as senior pupil, and as with many of her friends, she too met the conditions of her offer to study for the LLM (law degree) at university.

### *7.2.3 Section Summary*

This section has presented an in-depth account of Richard and Emma's encounters with a taken-for-granted order of access to professional fields. In doing so, it highlights the durable nature of practice which involves making an informed decision; accessing work experience; achieving necessary grades in S5; performing well in an aptitude test; progressing with suitable academic subjects in S6; achieving the

necessary academic qualifications; and submitting a successful application; and in the case of dentistry, performing well at interview.

In describing Emma and Richard's interaction with these processes, this section has highlighted the resilience of practice within the academic fields (Nicolini *et al*., 2007). It has shown that the nature of work and effort that is needed lies beyond what the individual pupils are able to realise alone. These include processes of successfully demonstrating cultural knowledge and accessing networks with professional knowledge and expertise. The data shows how some progress towards these outcomes is made by engaging with researchers, retired professionals and practitioners within institutions, and that these opportunities need to be brokered and made explicit to both the young people and family members. The data shows how family members in turn have responded to supporting the brokering of necessary practice such as accessing broadsheets or helping to organise relevant work experience. In doing so the account has provided grounded illustrations within a Scottish context of what St John *et al*. (2013) refer to as Academic Capital Formation (ACF) where ACF is defined as:

> …building personal and family knowledge and skills for successful transitions through educational process and institutions, from initial engagement in education through completion of advanced degrees for professions (including the professoriate), and engaged in scholarship and practice. These transitions involve engagement in social processes in families, schools, and communities, as well as the application of intellectual and mechanical abilities and talents (St John *et al*., 2013, p.195).

Focusing on Emma and Richard's experience thus illuminates the unequal access to the necessary forms of social, economic and cultural capital which are needed to submit a successful application. This section has highlighted the ways in which supporting Richard and Emma involves a close process of mediating knowledge,

brokering access to resources and networks and supporting navigation of this landscape. The next section presents an analysis of these findings, suggesting that to increase more pupil participation in Higher Education from Chapelpark, might more usefully be understood as a collective process of 'stabilising' and 'remaking' practice at the site.

## 7.3 'It's all we talked about, uni uni uni uni': Stabilising and re-making practice at Chapelpark

Having described Emma and Richard's experiences of navigating the application process, this section discusses aspects of decision-making that quantitative results may fail to grasp in terms of shared understanding and learning at the site which are crucial in effecting change. Reflecting on the data in the previous section, Section 7.3 focuses on the socially situated nature of decision-making practice (see Section 7.3.1); the role of mediating practice (see Section 7.3.2); and the ways in which agency / self-navigation, reflexive understandings of transition find expressions through performance of practice at the site (see Section 7.3.3).

### *7.3.1 Understanding decision-making as a socially situated practice*

The findings in Chapter 6 suggested that culturally situated aspects of decision-making were arrived at from naïve understandings about accessing the professions and that these were interconnected with understandings of school-employment transitions. The data showed that Richard and Nick, two influential members of Group 1, whom other members identified as 'going to' for information, both expressed views that aiming for a well-paid profession was a desired goal. This found further expression in Fiona's

comments that by not choosing to study medicine she was 'wasting her intelligence' (see Section 6.3.1.3). These data draw attention to the social world in which Emma chooses a more academic path which, the data suggests, has a more social impetus than desire for academic qualifications. As Emma's hopes of pursuing dentistry begin to fade, her regrouping towards law involved eliminating professions of dentistry, medicine, veterinary medicine and engineering, to leave only law. The idea of finding it 'interesting' or 'boring', two statements she makes in relation to studying law at different times during S5, are permeated by little pre-reflective understanding of the profession. Having decided to study law at the end of S5, the following quote illustrates Emma's knowledge of the profession and what studying law will confer:

> *None of them went to uni, so I don't think they get it. My mum and that left before they could get there. My dad went to college and did something to do with engineering, but that's about it….My mum puts a lot of pressure on me, my dad just doesn't, he tries not to bother I don't think – because I think he doesn't want to say too much ... I think he knows that he doesn't know what he's talking about really like, so I don't think he wants to say all that stuff about 'oh aye this' but he can get me work experience with lawyers because he's got a couple of pals that are lawyers. ...I think he's got two of them or something so I can just get work experience whenever... The only thing, I used to go to scouts …. so it was kind of like one of the older pals –I used to go to there when I was younger, and she was saying she went to work experience in a lawyers when she was about 15, and they were like, "if you want a family and you want a life, don't do it, it takes so much of your time"…. I think I'm just going to be a career person, I like the idea of that. I don't want anything else. I like animals that's about it… I want a big house and a horse and that's it [laughter]*
>
> (Emma interview, June 2011)

The data highlights how young people like Emma, experience tensions between pressure to transfer their Higher qualifications into something commensurate with high

earning potential and a more modest approach to waiting to see how their qualifications at the end of S5 will allow them to progress. The data described how a range of back-up plans drawing on existing and more immediate understandings of employment and earning such as the Royal Air Force (RAF) (Andrew), finance apprenticeship (Chloe, Chapter 5), run own business (Richard and Emma), suggests that the idea to enter a profession enters the horizon relatively late. The input from Brenda, a retired physician and her husband who supported both Richard and Emma highlighted the need for a more pro-active engagement in order to satisfy entrance requirements beyond achieving the grades needed.

What is particularly striking about Emma and Richard's activity in this respect is the way this processes facilitates a heuristic engagement in learning about the application process from S5, something which Emma had initially stated that they found out about in the UCAS class in S6. The data also highlights the immediacy in which the young people and their families act on the suggestions from Brenda and her husband. This includes reading and buying broad sheet newspapers, enrolling on access programmes and participating in extra-curricular opportunities such as first aid courses and citizen's advice training. Richard even commented on eating more snacks in order to sustain energy levels to study at Brenda's suggestion. Cumulatively, these changes to pupils' routines highlight a need for intensive forms of pro-active and academic behaviour in order to navigate successfully towards a professional field which are made explicit to them only through these social interactions. Rather than choosing a profession based on some degree of interest or knowledge, the data illustrates the ways in which these young people have a short window in which to bridge implicit understandings about different professional fields. The data further

suggests the limitations of conventional approaches to widening access in changing and altering durable practices. As such, these programmes might simply reinforce inequalities, in their failure to address a reflexive understandings of the process that rely on inaccessible knowledge on which to make initial decisions.

### *7.3.2 Mediating practice*

Chapters 5 and 6 highlighted how the school environment offered constraints and enablement to pupils at Chapelpark Secondary in terms of their progression between school and future destinations. This chapter has illustrated challenges involved in negotiating transitions to university and a professional career in a school where the social environment reinforces social inequality in promoting transitions from school to work and other pathways instead of university. The immediacy of these other pathways is illustrated in the following quote from an interview with Richard:

> *One thing that annoyed me, every assembly, all the people going to university sat there and all they talked about was the Commonwealth Apprenticeship Initiative. Every time we were there and we just thought 'why are we sitting here? We have better things to do'. We always used to joke about it, when Mr [teacher] used to go on about it, we'd go 'oh here we go again, Commonwealth Apprenticeship Initiative'.*
>
> (Richard interview, July 2012)

The data has highlighted attempts made by Marion and her team to steer high-attaining pupils towards university, however as illustrated in this chapter, this is not without sets of tensions related to the school's socio-historical location. The following discussion focuses on the way in which understanding this location is critical as it produces practices of advocacy, mediation and negotiation between different groups of people and organisations.

Illustrated in the data is the way in which Chapelpark's status as a low-progression school to HE made it a site of interventions aimed at supporting young people with transitions (see Table 5, p.102). The data suggests that the neutral presentation of these programmes in supporting entrance to HE from lower-income first generation students is problematic. This derives from the degree to which young people need support in accessing widening participation interventions. Brenda is instrumental in introducing Richard and Emma to these initiatives, which, in Emma's case, need some further advocacy work from her family to support participation. The data highlights that participation alone in these projects is not enough. This was illustrated in data presented in Chapter 5 which showed the ways in which Janet and Paul supported Chloe in her involvement of an access to teaching outreach programme. In supporting Richard, Brenda sources work experience opportunities, helps with UKCAT preparation as well as supporting knowledge of the different fields of medicine. A further problem identified is that these programmes rely on models of rational choice in their initial enrolment and fail to support pre-cognitive aspects of decision-making. In Emma's case, this results in her missing any interventions to support access to law. As the data highlights, aspects of belonging and socialisation appear to have greater currency than individual attainment alone. However, further processes of mediation occur between the young people themselves as the summer school that Richard and Fiona are accepted to lacks transparency for why they were accepted and Emma and Stuart were not.

The data also illuminates further tensions and challenges around academic progression for schools with historically low progression rates. This data illustrates the way in which Emma initially made educational choices in S5 based on previous

academic success, socialising with pupils who were among the highest-attaining at the school, including her relationship with Richard. Emma's progress in science makes entering a profession on the same pathway as Richard increasingly untenable. The data illuminates that the young people need to travel less cultural distance in subjects like Business Management and Admin compared to English, History and Modern Studies. The data further reveals the tensions that progressing to Advanced Higher level Business Management confers in terms of preparation for high-tariff vocational courses. Whilst Marion recognises that the universities will accept these subjects and make offers on successful grades, Brenda's reservations illuminate the benefits that young people who have access to other subjects like Human Biology gain elsewhere, as these offer preparation for courses at university.

Further tensions however reveal that progressing subjects at Advanced Higher level creates timetabling problems at Chapelpark. This leads to a need to present a convincing narrative to staff in order for them to support the young people's decisions. Based on Emma's experience of having to make a case to take part in the outreach programme, and having been unsuccessful in the summer school experience, emphasis was placed on her being able to demonstrate some coherence to her thinking. These processes of mediation and support were needed in order for Marion and her team to broker opportunities to support her progress with subjects at other institutions. This involved further negotiation on Marion's part in facilitating opportunities for pupils to sit Highers using her own networks rather than any formal arrangements being in place. Thus for Marion to go that extra mile for a pupil, there was a sense in which effort was made in this area for stronger or more focused candidates. Stuart for example had always displayed an interest in becoming an accountant and following

his success at Higher level, she made preparations for him to study Higher Accountancy at a private school. Thus Marion supported Richard's engagement in the outreach course, sorted out any clashes in timetables early on in S6. However accommodating S6 pupils was difficult for Marion and her team and points to issues with resourcing a small sixth year.

The data has illuminated the scarcity of resources that both the young people and the school can access to support the young people, but that are necessary in supporting decision-making and progress towards HE. These mediation processes thus stabilise practice at Chapelpark and suggest that greater attention could focus on interactions which mediate cultural knowledge and broker opportunities. With additional resources, commitment to a narrative on which subject to study at degree level can grow as young people become more involved in the performance of the application processes. These performances serve to facilitate understanding and meaning attached to such practice rather than choice preceding engagement in such navigational processes. This discussion has so far raised issues on the extent to which accessing HE can be viewed as an individual or collective practice.

### *7.3.3 Understanding agency and self-navigation*

This final section discusses data that supported processes which normalised university as a transition. Elicited from the interview data, it provides a sense in which habitual practices emerged at the site that were more outward looking from the characteristics of group belonging described in Chapter 6. At an interview towards the end of S6, Richard revealed a sense in which the learning and knowledge about university and

academic practices strengthened further as his friendship group progressed throughout S6:

> *It was all we talked about –for the full year, we had some good conversations about other things, but the rest was like uni, uni, uni, uni. What you were doing – most of the jokes were based around like subjects and the knowledge that we knew. We were making these dorky jokes about 'endoplasmicrecticulums' in biology and stuff like that [laughs] and laughing and slagging ourselves, because we knew that stuff was funny. It was good being around like-minded people.*
>
> *…*
>
> *And I do think, that so many people by chance got together and were going to uni, that it made other people in that group want to go to uni as well. Probably people that you haven't interviewed… [name of pupil], he probably would have went to be a joiner or something because everybody else was going to uni he's going to study business at [name of university] now. He's going this year, he got a conditional this year and he met it…and I really just think he was influenced because everybody else was going …*
>
> *And other people as well [name of pupil] – is a good example as well. He was in my geography class, I was studying credit and he was studying foundation, he hung about with different people, we got pally with him one day, and we said talk to the teacher- and– he went up to the teacher, "I think I'm too smart to be doing this", and she said 'get a 3 in the general exam and I'll let you into the Higher class' and she did. He didn't do that well in Higher – but because again there was corruptive influences in the class that he was distracted by – but he's been hanging about with us since then, and he's studying Business at [name of post-1992 university] as well now and I don't think he would have if he was hanging about with the people that he did before.*
>
> (Richard interview, July, 2012)

The data suggests that the social environment in Chapelpark helps normalise university as a transition and that effort is needed to exclude other options. The following quote from an interview with Emma at the end of S5 captures this negotiation:

> Emma: *I loved my work [waitressing] at first because it's just a million times easier than school. When school's difficult, I just can't wait to go to my work on Friday, because it's just nay thinking.*
>
> Katie*: And does that make you think … about the kind of work you could do?*
>
> Emma: *Aye, I just think … I just wouldn't like it. I want to go to uni and I want a degree and I want to learn something good.*
>
> Katie*: And what sort of thing has made you go for that?*
>
> Emma: *I don't know, just my pals and everything. I think we all still say, "if I was to win the lottery, I'd still go to uni, and still have a job and still do something", because I can't imagine just sitting about and doing nothing. I want to run my own business and all so I just want something with my own business with, that financially would have a good chance. I kind of like the idea of having something that you can go anywhere, and do it and you're always going to be needed and there's always going to be jobs.*
>
> (Emma interview, July 2011)

These quotes further illustrate the importance of friendships in negotiating ideas with which the young people were largely unfamiliar. Chapter 6 also suggested that the group developed a clique through which they excluded others and maintained their elite identity within the school. This behaviour appeared to continue throughout S6, but was expressed more so in relation to the separation of their identity as going to university and the need to justify this route, as opposed to finding work with more immediate wage earning potential. At the end of S6, Richard described in his interview, a recent encounter with Craig (group 4) who had left school early in S5 (see Chapter 6).

> *He done 'Introduction to music business' in an NQ I think. He dropped that and went back into sales, because he'd done sales before, and he was gonna*

*get a low level management position … but he decided not to do that… He was selling insulation, doing door to door selling, he dropped that and went back into sales, ..I think it was telesales… I don't think I see him going back to college any time soon, because he had a discussion with me, 'oh I'm going to be a musician and I'll have mega money when you're at uni and you'll still be doing tests to be a doctor" and I was like, 'so, I'm good at it, I'll be good at those tests anyway, and I'll make lots of money when I graduate, and 98% of people that go into music fail". … so that was him told.*

(Richard interview, July 2012)

This chapter has highlighted the limited access to resources at the school and home, but has highlighted how Marion and her team utilised funding arrangements, research activity and personal networks to help prepare pupils. As Group 1 progressed into S6, the data pointed to the emergent and creative ways in which the young people attempted to re-make practice at the site. At interview, Richard was asked about the behaviours of studying in the library as the young people often congregated together in one area between two book shelves.

Richard: *We didn't study in the library …we stole the place – we put up some tacky signs that said 'S6 study area' and a new librarian came in and took them down and put up some nicer signs that said 'S6 study area' and we sat and talked every time we were in the library – so aye – studying in the library's tough – because*

Katie: *It looked like sometimes you were talking about your work*

Richard: *We probably were – but we were probably laughing and joking about it*

Katie*: Did other people come into that group through S6?*

Richard: *Well in the library it was just for us S6- it was just our wee clique and it just kind of scared everybody else away – so they didn't come over unless they were like 'oh aye' and if we didn't like you then don't come over. …. I've read the rules in some of the books and it says we're supposed to meet in the mezzanine and they're the rules for S6 students*

Katie*: Say again*

Richard: *The mezzanine is where we're supposed to study – quietly – and we broke the rules by walking in and studying in the library*

Katie*: The mezzanine area is quite noisy isn't it?*

Richard: *So – I thought the library was more cushy – it was me that put the signs up – I printed them up – there was nice comfy chairs there before – and it was kind of like that area was a – what do you call that room that 6th years use? - It's a room that 6th years use*

Katie*: Like a common room?*

Richard*: Aye something like a common room, was there two years before – and I seen that they looked like they were studying there sometimes, so, I wanted it back*

Katie*: It makes sense that you should have a separate space*

Richard: *There isn't enough room- we needed to build two new classrooms beside PE because there wasn't enough room, so there's definitely not enough room for us.*

(Richard interview, July 2012)

This absence of social space for older pupils is a further reminder of the legacy of schooling in an area with historically low 5th and 6th year cohorts of pupils and where increasing numbers of pupils staying on at school presents fresh challenges. This lack of space draws attention to the taken-for-granted assumptions about schooling experiences for pupils attending schools where larger cohorts progress to university. Having spaces to negotiate the sorts of activity as described above is identified in the data as being an active process in normalising processes of transition. The data captures ways in which micro-interactions which negotiate peer and community cultures support forms of agency and self-navigation processes that move away from deficit understandings of young people. The sense of movement is reflected in the data as illustrated by Richard as he described the way he began to interact differently within his own network:

> *Only 2 people from my extended family went to uni, I think. I stay with my gran, so great uncles are uncles. I call everybody my aunty or my uncle. I've got an aunty that studied accounts at Glasgow and she lives in this big house down in London and she's a chartered accountant. She works high up in [name of bank] and she's kind of a legend. I've recently got in contact with her because I'm a fundraising officer for my volunteering and I wanted her to help me, because she's the only person I knew that probably would. So we've recently started talking to each other. She's my Gran's, brother's, daughter, so extended family and I've never seen her before in my life, but I started emailing her just saying "I hope you were expecting this". She knew exactly who I was and she said "Ah I've heard good things about you".*
>
> (Richard interview, July 2012)

Whilst knowledge and access to contacts are still relatively weak, the data shows the ways in which young people start to understand the relative advantages that can be gained from engaging with networks in more powerful positions.

### 7.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter began by looking at the university destinations of pupils from two cohorts at Chapelpark. Rather than attempt to explain these results in terms of individual attributes, the chapter followed a descriptive approach to observe the ways in which navigating towards highly competitive vocational courses occurred at the site. In this sense, it has focused on transition as a process rather than individual decision-making and has highlighted the ways in which individuals are capable of relating to everyday practices in new ways. The data further highlights the durability of HE application processes which, with support and intervention in daily routines and habits, could facilitate new ways of incorporating and negotiating aspects of university transition.

The data therefore highlighted the limits to these shifts which were responsive to performance and meaning emerging together, rather than an understanding of careers preceding a knowledge of existing practice. This chapter has focused on the dynamic

ways in which knowledge, meaning and understanding of HE practices emerges by different people at the site. It has therefore elicited the collective and taken-for-granted aspects of decision-making. In Chapelpark, this involved the role of school practitioners, volunteers with professional knowledge, peers and families. Success in these processes is something which educational sociologists have viewed as being based on the resources and social power and networks of middle-class parents rather than the ability and effort of the child (Gerwitz and Cribb 2003, 2009; Reay, 2017).

The data highlights that schools are not equal and neutral places which facilitate pupil progress. It has highlighted processes of accessing and mobilising unevenly distributed social, cultural and economic resources in an environment where transitions from school to work and other pathways instead of university are the norm. This chapter has therefore illustrated the considerable effort, resources and culturally inaccessible aspects of decision-making that need mediated and negotiated at different levels in order for young people to successfully transition towards professional fields. Thus by focusing on these processes, this chapter has provided some pragmatic pointers for action, but has also elicited inherent tensions in education which are dominated by discourses of neutrality and meritocratic norms.

# Chapter 8

# Conclusion

The initial stimulus for this thesis problematised dominant understandings of educational decision-making and critiqued the framing of post-16 transitions in Scottish policy (The Scottish Government, 2010; 2011; 2012). At the start of this thesis, it was suggested that the policy focus to increase participation of young people from working-class backgrounds in Higher Education locate ideas such as aspiration, attainment and resilience as properties residing in individuals. In these policy texts, decision-making is understood as the individual making rational, autonomous and 'better' choices for themselves as they draw on a range of information, advice and guidance. This thesis has identified that within the current policy and practice landscape, a discourse of changing present arrangements has been presented as something which is fixable and solvable.

Drawing on alternative explanations from cultural theory, this thesis adopted insights from educational and social research to dispute cognitive understandings of decision-making (Archer, Hollingworth and Mendick, 2010; Ball, Maguire and Macrae 2000; Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997; Reay *et al*., 2005). These authors have applied Bourdieu's conceptual theory of cultural capital and habitus to describe the mechanisms by which advantage and privilege is maintained and social inequalities are reproduced. Bourdieu's theory of practice (1977) therefore suggests that cultural capital in education is supplemented by hidden processes of knowledge, skills and experience residing in access to social networks. The ways in which inequality is

reproduced manifests through complex interactions with the social world. This thesis has identified that interventions based on cultural understandings of the issue still tend however, to focus on ways in which to prepare young people for an experience in Higher Education. Kezar (2011) suggests that interventions intending to provide low-income students with the social capital missing from their environments may be based around over-simplistic transmission models of capital which are likely to have limited impact (Kezar, 2011, pp. 251–2). This is also evident in the current landscape of educational research where a proliferation of discrete forms of capitals have been identified; see for example, Archer *et al*. (2015) and Godec *et al*. (2018) for an exploration of science capital. This thesis has thus suggested that in the current landscape to widen participation to Higher Education, the removal of financial and social barriers is modelled on overt middle-class assumptions of navigating towards university. This is characterised by a process which might include a prospective student scanning options, choosing a university to apply to and selecting the university from those to which the student has been accepted (St John *et al*., 2012).

As a consequence, there appears limited interventions which build programs based on the experiences of low-income students, rather than simply the experiences and knowledge of middle-income students (Coylar, 2011). This thesis has contended that there is limited research, particularly in Scotland, which provides a more researched-informed understanding of young people's lived experience and which seeks to understand the production and interaction of different forms of capital. As wealth inequality has increased and as resource constraints in delivering social policy have prevailed, St John (2013) argues that educational research which has drawn on widely used theories of cultural capital to describe the ongoing existence and renewal

of educational inequality require reframing to contend with new growing inequalities. St John (2013) advocates that it is important for researchers to work in collaboration with practitioners to "find out why and how current and past practices work or don't work" (p.43). In looking at the role that research can play, he argues that:

> Research can help inform practitioners about adjusting and adapting strategies to fit the actual conditions they face. Rather than merely applying and testing theory, I encourage researchers and practitioners to engage in the process of deconstructing, testing, and reconstructing claims embedded in social theories and theories of action." (St John, 2013, p.43)

On these grounds I developed an exploratory study to investigate educational decision-making by young people from working-class backgrounds. In doing so, this thesis adopted the following conceptual and methodological starting points. Firstly it applied insights from post-structural social theories concerned with social and organisational change by drawing on social practice theory. This perspective advocates a theoretical lens that focuses on the social and collective organisation and doing of practices using ethnographic methodologies (Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 2001, 2002; Warde, 2005). Building on Bourdieu's social reproduction theory (1984, 1990) these approaches encourage researchers to develop conceptual frameworks which redirect explanations of social reproduction from institutional processes to an activity that its members perform. This study thus conceptualised decision-making as a situated activity in which methods were introduced that were more suited to providing greater analytical clarity to the concept of 'field'.

Secondly, that in giving greater consideration to the role of organising practices and by focusing on the activities of practitioners, the findings introduced a social practice perspective to explore ideas around 'transformation' looking at how senior management in one school responded to more generic policy imperatives to

improve school performance. By examining senior management strategies, the findings presented in the three preceding chapters illuminated the more immediate challenges in achieving educational uplift for pupils attending a school in a traditionally working-class area.

Thirdly, the findings illuminated experiences of 'academic alignment' by S5 pupils at the school as orientations towards Higher Education were encouraged by practitioners. This thesis thus narrowed the focus of the study to examine a group of 28 pupils whom senior management had identified as having the highest prior academic achievement at the start of S5. By looking at young people's agency and recruitment as 'carriers' of practice, the data in this thesis revealed more precisely the ways in which ideas about going to university were incorporated, rejected and transformed at the site.

Finally, in examining the ways in which two pupils and their immediate friends navigated towards competitive Higher Education courses, this thesis employed in-depth qualitative methodological approaches which were suited to examining the nature of performance of practice. As researcher, practitioner and participant relationships developed, methodologies were introduced throughout the study that moved towards a more critical inquiry-based action approach interested in promoting social justice (St John, 2013). From these starting points I set myself the following research questions:

1. How does the school interact with policy and engage with pupils to support educational engagement?

2. How do pupils viewed as having academic potential in S5 experience opportunities which support progression to Higher Education?
3. In orientating and navigating towards Higher Education in working-class communities, what constitutes decision-making practice?
4. What new insights can be gleaned from adopting a social practice perspective in understanding educational decision-making?

In addressing these questions, the thesis presents an in-depth qualitative and longitudinal account, in which for a variety of personal and professional reasons, an extended engagement with the site occurred. Data for the study was collected over a three year period rather than a more typical timeframe of six months. During the writing up phase of the project, from 2012 onwards, reciprocal arrangements between myself and research participants (both pupils and practitioners) have emerged from this study. These relationships have provided a longitudinal understanding of school innovation and transitions as young people and successive cohorts of high-attaining young people have progressed through education and into employment (see Hunter *et al.,* 2018)

The preceding chapters have offered an account of behaviour change processes that differ theoretically, empirically and methodologically from most contemporary research in this area. This concluding chapter will begin by reviewing the major findings of this study and relate them to my research questions. It will then consider the conceptual implications of this thesis and set out the basis for a new research agenda which seeks to develop local understandings of social relations from which more careful intervention work might draw upon.

## 8.1 Summary of Findings

The three preceding empirical chapters have problematised methodological individualism when attempting to explain patterns of educational outcomes for young people from different social class backgrounds. This thesis has addressed gaps in the research knowledge by focusing on what we can learn from the actions of practitioners in schools. It has also focused on what we can learn about young people's responses as they are guided by their own current practices, and what we can learn by looking at the social spaces in which competing practice is incorporated, reproduced and transformed. In the remainder of this section, I will outline the major theoretical and practical findings of this study to highlight the nature and the benefits of departing from conventional understandings of the issue.

### *8.1.1 Responding to policy and engaging with community*

Chapter 5 introduced Chapelpark Secondary School and described practice by focusing on the day-to-day routines of the headteacher, deputy heads, and Janet and Paul, two teachers with explicit responsibility to provide support to school leavers. It analysed strategies and processes that were understood as operational responses to Government policy related to delivering overall school improvement and ensuring that pupils entered a positive destination. Employing a social practice lens and in particular Schatzki's development of a site ontology (2002), Chapter 5 produced a grounded and situated analysis of the site. The research explored the ways in which the organisation of practices were understood as mechanisms and potential drivers for interrupting classic social reproduction. The findings thus contribute to an existing body of

knowledge which recognises the difficulties and challenges of disrupting these social processes within education.

In focusing on practitioner roles at the site, the data in Chapter 5 illustrated that more localised approaches to supporting young people were needed which drew on a range of interconnected organisational practice. These findings suggested, that in general, the task of improving overall educational outcomes at the site is a far bigger endeavour than those prescribed in policy which attend to change at an individual pupil level. Thus Chapter 5 captured some of the intensive and longitudinal work of practitioners at the site to address community concerns about school performance and reputation. Chapter 5 then focused on how practitioners sought to improve outcomes for school leavers. It examined the formal and informal roles of practitioners and showed the critical need for practitioners to engage with, facilitate and nurture pupil interests in order to interrupt patterns of local trajectories of young people. In doing so, the narrative provided an analysis of tensions and contradictions inherent in practitioner roles as they delivered the sorts of support for post-16 transitions advocated in policy and practice. Thus policy which advocates that practitioners should provide young people with good information, advice and guidance and raise aspiration and overall educational attainment existed alongside more tailored and intensive support. This was characterised as intervening within the daily lives of the young people, family and broader community understandings. The findings showed that there was a difficulty in interrupting ideas related to finding a job and being independent. The possibility to earn a wage which may contribute to the family income or provide young people with some financial independence provided a strong backdrop to community understandings of school transitions. Within these arrangements, the

findings in Chapter 5 examined the types of intensive support needed. This included completing application forms on behalf of young people, engaging with parents to persuade them of the benefits of completing Higher qualifications, and in the case of pupils who were orientating towards university, the support involved additional help with the application and interview process. The data also revealed tensions in this approach by realising the limitations of delivering this type of support to all pupils. The value in adopting a social practice approach thus provided a way to look at how the organisation was constructed from the view point of practitioners who were working within a number of existing practice logics. These included providing support to young people and fulfilling the demands of policies which place an increased responsibility and accountability on schools to ensure that young people are recorded as entering a positive destination (The Scottish Government, 2016).

With so few numbers progressing to university, the study identified that progress towards a professional career required a degree of exceptionality in the young people. As such, the study began to give greater consideration towards the mechanisms by which senior management facilitated engagement in an academic pathway. Drawing on comparative strategies of data analysis, Chapter 5 narrowed the focus to understand the more intensive nature of support that senior management and practitioners perceived was needed for their highest-attaining pupils. Findings in Chapter 5 explored how attempts were made to undo broader community expectations of school to employment transitions as strategies were identified that supported achievement and persistence. Chapter 5 then looked at the more explicit guidance developed by the senior management team to keep young people on track with their academic work. Instead of the presentation of a discourse of raising aspiration, the findings identified

that the language used by practitioners to help pupils achieve outcomes used language such as, “encouraged, cajoled and pushed” (p. 141). By focusing on what practitioners did in their daily practice ‘on the ground’, and by seeking reflection on how practitioners responded to localised practice, Chapter 5 highlighted the challenges involved in changing arrangements in schools serving working-class catchments in which few pupils progress to university.

In looking at the individual experience of a pupil progressing an application to study primary school teaching, the data highlighted the range of support that practitioners needed to provide in order to achieve a successful outcome. The data thus highlights that although there are existing interventions which support access to HE, the research has thrown up many questions in need of further investigation related to the additional effort, nurturing and facilitation required to support young people in their engagement with these interventions (see also Section 8.1.3 and 8.2). In the case of accessing primary school teaching, the data showed that a number of key actions by practitioners were needed. Notably these involved identifying appropriate pupils to take part on the outreach programme, which involved some intelligence about pupil interests. Support was also required with preparing a structured response to key questions which would be asked at the university interview. The data shows how this activity drew on teacher knowledge and awareness of the presentation of self that applicants should demonstrate at interview in order to ensure that universities regarded them as suitable candidates.

In parallel with the more functional aspects of support, the data highlighted the ways in which practitioners at the site negotiated community understandings of studying and employment with pupils. At the insistence of a close family member, the

pupil was also urged to consider finding an apprenticeship in finance rather than studying primary school teaching. Concerns were raised about the employment prospects of graduates in teacher training which at the time had made news headlines as less teachers were retiring from the profession than predicted. The data suggests that in order to keep options alive, practitioners need to engage with these community concerns. The data thus illuminates the effort involved in day-to- day routines of practitioners as they attend to and engage thoughtfully in the lives of young people at the site.

In this exploratory chapter, highlighting the very nature of support individual pupils needed in terms of navigating and orientating towards higher education provided a starting point for examining existing practice at the site. That is, it started to identify shared practical understandings about how a pupil constructed ideas about studying at university and how practitioners responded to and engaged with embodied practice (Schatzki, 2002). Thus it provided a more detailed and complex examination of different 'bundles of practice' (Schatzki 2002, p.39) which were identified as involving: navigating apprenticeship opportunities; navigating tensions between family and school expectations of earning; understanding the mechanisms underlying pupil participation in widening participation activity; understanding the processes of how young people come to meet adjusted and non-adjusted requirements set by university admissions; understanding how practitioners kept up-to-date with a changing landscape of opportunities in widening access; and examining this situated activity within broad historic changes related to schooling, university expansion and employment opportunities. Also of interest was the ways in which pupils and practitioners established rapport and relationships at the site. Data gathered during the

exploratory phase suggested that focusing on these relationships was critical. Focusing on these relationships provided avenues for understanding the nature of practices needed to interrupt socially reproduced educational outcomes at the site. Further examples of this were also evident in the account of how the headteacher personally supported former individual pupils which involved providing them with additional tutoring support from among her own networks in order to support access to competitive courses. This is particularly salient, if as the literature suggests, university can be a particularly lonely and isolating experience for pupils from working-class backgrounds (Ingram, 2011; Reay, 2017). The data here points to the ways in which challenges to improve educational outcomes of pupils at the site may not be immediately solvable by the school alone. It also suggests that there is a startling omission of how this effort contributes to overall understandings of the effectiveness of particular outreach programmes, which in their evaluations do not incorporate this effort into their analysis.

### *8.1.2 Understanding academic alignment at the site*

Chapter 6 extended the analysis presented in Chapter 5 by considering what happened when the highest-attaining pupils in S5 interacted with senior management strategies to improve academic performance. Chapter 5 explained the mechanisms by which the school identified a larger group of 31 pupils (28 of whom participated in the research), from among a cohort of approximately 150 pupils. In identifying this group, the data showed how senior management strategies to apply and exert pressure were enacted in order to keep pupils on track with their studies throughout S5. Insights from a social ontological perspective which draw attention to the interactions in which shared

understandings are developed and that explain both regular social practice and innovation (King, 2005) were thus identified. The findings recognised the problematic nature of assuming a straightforward adoption of desired behaviour as critiqued in the literature (Gorard, 2012; Gorard *et al.,* 2012). Chapter 6 thus explored the interaction between practitioner strategies and the emergence of 'academic alignment' at the site. That is, it showed the ways in which groups of young people from among the research participants came to understand themselves as exceptional and different compared to their peers. The findings showed that there was a very varied engagement with practices to support academic achievement from among those pupils who were selected for the study and identified as capable of achieving 5+Highers.

The data in Chapter 6 thus identified organisational strategies which contributed to growing a small academic culture at the site. The findings also illustrated the ways in which pupils themselves came to recognise their different status. To investigate the emergence of 'academic alignment' in more depth, the study focused on a group of ten pupils who identified as being close friends, nine of whom initially expressed a desire to study at university and enter a competitive profession.

The evidence presented in Chapter 6 suggested from both pupil data and management discussion of practice, that pupils in Group 1 began an alignment process to an academic pathway. This involved the role of both the staff and pupils in which senior management selected pupils in S3 for additional preparation in English and Maths to aid their success in exams in S4. Within these arrangements, the data illustrated how friendships among Group 1 emerged and that these peer relationships provided many benefits to sustaining engagement at school as they progressed their studies. This was evident in the socialising that took place both inside and outside of

school. Throughout S5 and S6, the group were visible in the library at the end of the school day. They described attending supported study classes and were saving for a holiday together, organised by one of the pupils' parents, to celebrate completion of school at the end of S6. The data showed how the young people established their own exclusionary 'clique' in which they 'othered' pupils in their year group, labelling them as disruptive or disinterested in learning. Pupils in Group 1 thus cultivated the elite status at the school conferred on them by senior management. The study found that this social engagement in schooling provided opportunities for young people within Group 1 to construct and negotiate imagined futures at university or in a professional career.

Building on the findings from Chapter 5, the study explored the complex ways in which imagined futures were constructed by participants as they described interactions with family, peers, school teachers and community members. Chapter 6 thus identified representative tasks that captured reproducible everyday pupil routines related to leaving school across the cohort. Through participant observation, the study also recognised the diverse pathways into training, vocational and higher education opportunities that were publicised at the site, for example in daily assemblies and tannoy announcements. This spectrum of opportunities are perhaps less conspicuous to the highest-attaining pupils attending schools located in more middle-class areas that produce sizeable cohorts that progress to university.

The analysis examined similarities in practice between the more academically focused group of pupils in Group 1 and pupils in Group 4 who expressed a desire to leave school as soon as possible. Emerging discourses across the two groups showed many similarities related to a desire to earn money either during school or on leaving,

to secure employment and to become independent. These observations extended knowledge of the ways in which young people imagined their futures by drawing on their familiarity with the world around them. Evident in the data was the familiarity that young people had with jobs in the service industry and with more traditional notions of blue-collar employment as experienced by family members.

The uptake of business and administration at Higher level was also evident and something which the headteacher had recognised would facilitate greater engagement at Higher level. The data showed how young people identified this subject as offering a more obvious application to possible employment opportunities compared to other subjects in arts and social science. These more practical subjects were viewed as useful, and as something which could be salvaged from their education experience, particularly if they struggled with the more culturally unfamiliar subjects such as English or Social Sciences, or encountered difficulties with subjects like Science or Maths. Thus the identification of becoming a doctor, a dentist or an engineer for example, were linked to existing understandings about earning and employment such as running a business. These performances of decision-making were thus viewed as constitutive of existing knowledge and practice of community employment cultures.

Pupils across Group 1 and Group 4 both described the oppressive and "nagging" environment created by teachers in the school who treated them like children rather than as adults. This situation provided a justification for pupils in Group 4 to leave school as soon as they could either at Christmas or in the summer of their S5 and to take up opportunities where they felt they would be respected and treated like an adult. Pupil responses in Group 1 to this situation were countered

through their socialising in which school seemed to have something still to offer in terms of the social environment which they created.

The application of a social practice approach provided conceptual tools to understand the interaction of bridging capital, observing the ways in which the young people negotiated futures and became engaged in processes to support their transitions. This perspective allowed for an analysis that highlighted the existence of local and contextual norms in which individuals were socialised within the practices they performed. The data showed how young people who specified a professional career interest needed to create new norms at the site as they justified longer transitions between school and employment to peers. Some elaborated that studying at university and getting a job as a doctor, engineer, lawyer or dentist for example would allow a greater earning potential, it would help avoid working in an office, or avoid doing something boring and repetitive. The data shows how Group 1 constructed new understandings of professional careers based on immediate community practices. Studying to achieve these imagined outcomes linked Higher Education courses with direct entry into employment with limited or nuanced understanding of the nature of broader competitiveness. By focusing on these practices, the data showed that among those expressing a desire to study at university and enter a competitive profession, the performance of university preparation tasks were localised and contextualised.

By focusing on the sets of interconnected activity involved in the doing of practice, this perspective produced an understanding of behaviour change which problematised the notion that it is simply a matter of changing individual attitudes or removing contextual barriers. It also evidenced the ways in which challenges to changing educational outcomes are unlikely to respond to interventions in a

straightforward manner. The following provides a summary of the benefits of adopting this approach.

Firstly, the data suggests that young people from working-class backgrounds are involved in processes of reconfiguring their own understanding about employment practices. These include traditional careers that are either present or have historically existed in their communities. At the time that Willis (1977) published *Learning to Labour*, young people were able to familiarise themselves and access trades through family and community interactions. The data presented in Chapters 5 and 6 shows that young people at the site are not equipped to learn about either skilled or semi-skilled occupations, or particular professions. In this sense, career ideas operate in a vacuum, particularly those jobs where the community has no experience of them. Within this situation, the young people are exposed to policy initiatives to fill this void which include the advertisement of apprenticeships, one-day-a week college courses and a range of vocational courses available to study within Further Education colleges. The data suggests that more effort is needed to engage with these realities rather than starting from the assumptions that understanding about a professional occupation is something which is known and accessible outside more middle-class contexts.

Secondly, in showing how young people are connected both historically and spatially to communities, adopting a social practice lens problematises more conventional understandings of education and social reproduction. Social and cultural practices are not discrete entities. The data shows how attempts to disrupt the young people's unfamiliarity with university, professional occupations, and the need for concerted efforts to achieve Highers in S5 and S6 is challenging. By looking at existing social practice at Chapelpark Secondary, the data highlights how practice is thus

interlinked in complex systems. Changing behaviour is entangled within processes of community cultures that have developed over time. The data highlights the ways in which parents and carers as well as teachers and college interviewers attempt to disrupt young people's understandings of education and employment transitions. However, these young people are situated in coherent social practices that have taken years to develop and form a normative basis for experience in working-class communities.

Thirdly, the data shows how progressing orientations towards university need mutual support from within peer groups, family and positive school experiences to underpin exceptional academic performance at the site. A social practice perspective has thus aided the conceptualisation of a process of understanding decision-making, characterised as a socially negotiated and situated activity which is recontextualised in particular settings. The data thus provides some explanatory understanding to growing a more academically aligned group at the site. It does so by highlighting the ways in which a small group of pupils emerged who were the most fertile group from among the cohort to absorb processes of bridging capital.

Finally, the data has highlighted distinct senior management strategies and responses to policy and community which may or may not look similar in other secondary schools serving similar populations of pupils. The analysis presented in chapters 5 and 6 showed how understanding the mechanisms of how practices are shaped in a particular settings involves a process of analysing management strategy, and processes that analyse and take cognisance of the ways in which different dynamics are present in different settings (Reay *et al.,* 2005; Thrupp and Lupton, 2006) Chapelpark's location for instance means that young people can live at home and commute to Higher Education institutions but also have a range of other learning

providers within close proximity. Similarly, although there is high unemployment within the local community, employment opportunities are more accessible in this locality than for instance those in more rural locations.

The data reveals how processes of decision-making about studying at university and entering the professions can be challenged at some level by interventions where a more implicit understanding of the professions is addressed. In conceptualising decision-making from this perspective, the data highlights that young people from more middle-class backgrounds who have access to knowledge and networks gain a considerable advantage in orientating and navigating access to higher education and into the professions (Ball, 2010; Nunn, 2011; Savage, 2015). Although the most prominent finding to emerge from this study is the limited access the young people in the study have to professional contacts from within their local community, the evidence from the mentoring project developed in partnership between the headteacher and researchers at the University of Strathclyde, shows some scope for replicating aspects of middle-class advantage. By illustrating the potential of an intervention which supports the development of relationships between mostly retired professionals and the young people, the findings of this study draw attention to the need for developing a more differentiated approach to the educational situations and challenges faced by pupils at schools like Chapelpark. This thesis has illuminated how practice at the site involves an ongoing and evolving response to issues around social class and the economy. As a conclusion, no one-size-fits-all approach to intervention is likely to have impact or disrupt patterns of social reproduction.

### *8.1.3 Accessing privilege*

Chapter 7 continued the analysis and focused on the outward and social performances of developing an application to high-tariff university courses of dentistry and law. It showed the challenges involved as young people enacted particular forms of academic and cultural practice in fields socially and historically constituted through resources and knowledge far removed from their own working-class networks and daily social interactions. This was brought into stark focus as the findings presented an account of the ways in which pupils engaged with volunteer tutors in order to advance their applications.

As discussed in the previous section, one of the most evident findings to emerge from the study was that the young people had limited access to the knowledge and networks which structure understanding of professional employment. The data showed that dis-embedded sources of information, advice and guidance such as league tables compiled in the national press, or information in university prospectuses provided limited input in the decision-making process. Pupils who did articulate their knowledge of these sources of information were viewed by their peers as more knowledgeable about Higher Education and viewed as authoritative voices within the group. As resource constraints in careers services have increased, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) have targeted their resources towards pupils likely to leave school early or be recorded as 'NEET'. The data thus problematises the ways in which their more academically-focused peers are expected to make career decisions and apply for courses informed by their own research on websites such as 'My World of Work' (https://www.myworldofwork.co.uk, produced by SDS).

In contrast to this mode of delivering career support, the data showed what could be achieved by introducing pupils to tutors that they could meet regularly, and who had considerable experience, knowledge and networks relevant to their career interests. Firstly the data problematised assumed notions that the process of decision-making takes place in a linear and neat fashion, as pupils moved between ideas of pursuing dentistry, medicine or veterinary medicine and also law. As different career ideas were discussed, the data showed how one particular tutor adopted a strategic approach to supporting their pupil. This involved addressing immediate challenges arising in school work and supporting day-to-day engagement with cultural activities such as reading broadsheets and the British Medical Journal, finding work experience and supporting enrolment on a number of outreach programmes.

Conventional modes of outreach activity tend to conceptualise and address discrete forms of practice to support pupil applications to university (Kezar, 2011). By looking at the performance of practice at the site, the data instead shows the complex interaction of social, cultural and economic disadvantage which are challenging to identify from the outset. The data shows how participation in activities to support applications to high-tariff courses are socially constructed and are constituted by the pupils' own participation in these practices. New challenges emerge as pupils progress their studies and the data shows the need for further introductions to various professional contacts which tutors and professionals from more middle-class backgrounds are able to broker. The data demonstrates perhaps a naïve learning of these particular behaviours by pupils as they describe walking around Glasgow City Centre searching for work-experience opportunities by going in to law firms unannounced. The tutors brokering of opportunities and one-to-one nurturing is

typically beyond what school practitioners can offer through their own contacts and well beyond what candidates from working-class backgrounds are able to facilitate for themselves.

The data does however highlight what can be achieved as pupils gain insights into professional practice. Data in Chapter 7 shows a gradual practice of pupils beginning to draw on their own weak ties (Coleman, 1998; Putnam, 1995) to help facilitate work experience or fundraising. This could be viewed as a movement away from narratives of independence identified in Chapter 6. Thus instead of focusing on deficit and accumulation of social and cultural capital by individual young people, Chapter 7 widened the focus to understand the outward performance of social practice. St John (2013) suggests that this reformulation of current practice is needed as:

> "History shows us that authentic innovation occurs through conscious adaptation using insight and experiences rather than the replication of scripted models" (St. John, 2013, p.6).

In this respect the conceptual framework and methodology advanced the analysis which describes the forms of constraint young people may experience in their decision-making which are bounded by their 'horizons for action' (Hodkinson, 2008, p.4) It thus progressed a more precise understanding of how forms of bridging capital can support change at Chapelpark. This involved a more collective negotiation of existing practice as activities were discussed within a more social setting and which helped to rationalise a new way forward. These findings correspond with St John *et al's* (2011) development of the concept of Academic Capital Formation (ACF) where engagement with educational processes and institutions involves social processes in families, schools and communities as well as the application of intellectual and mechanical abilities and talents (p.195). Thus the findings presented here have illustrated the role

played by professionals and other practitioners, as well as life within family and community (St John et al., 2011 p.194) within this particular Scottish working-class urban context.

Evidently the data in these findings point towards a need for greater acknowledgement in political discourse about the limited access to weak and bridging ties across different social groups. Clearly this issue is not solvable by young people, their families and schools alone, and a focus on the problem at this level fails to tackle the lack of social mobility derived from the rigidity of class structures in the UK (Savage, 2015). In reframing social reproduction theories using a social practice conceptual framework, analysis of the findings has developed an understanding of how a small group of pupils move between a "normal future" and much more privileged HE existence. The findings of this study thus magnify the ways in which achieving academic success is embedded in action, and that engagement with specific and tailored forms of support, derived from cultural knowledge and supportive networks, is crucial.

### 8.2 Conclusion: Towards a New Research Agenda

The over-arching research question in this thesis which set out to explore whether concerns related to rising levels of social inequality come to have an impact on educational decision-making has been asked in the sociology of education since the 1970s (Bourdieu, 1977; 1984; Willis, 1977). Finding effective answers to today's questions where complex economic changes have taken place in employment and social structures, and where inequality in access to university is at its highest in Scotland, compared to other areas of the UK (Hunter Blackburn *et al*., 2016; Milburn,

2013) motivated an attempt to apply insights from contemporary practice theory and adapt methods to investigate this issue. A single study cannot hope to answer this question, but I hope that this thesis has developed new ways of addressing the issue and represents an enquiry-based approach that is capable of finding some new answers.

This thesis has found that a collective intent to achieve social uplift through education was present among practitioners, educational providers, family members, policy-makers and by the young people themselves. However conceptual understandings of these ends and the mechanisms by which achieving aims could be realised were contested. At the beginning of the fieldwork it was apparent that changing behaviour towards more academic routes involved a more complex understanding of interactions at the site. Understanding young people's enjoyment of the school environment, for instance, provided a widening of the focus of this empirical study. This thesis has uncovered that finding ways to create more social environments needs to be recognised for young people from working-class backgrounds. This is something that schools could nurture in order to create more fertile environments to support greater numbers of pupils in orientating towards university. Although the research was not comparative with a more middle-class school, it is suggested that these schools are able to structure such opportunities by providing spaces such as common rooms, and running greater numbers of extra-curricular activities. Larger classes of pupils studying for Highers and Advanced Highers also present opportunities for more social engagement. Thus by focusing on Bourdieu's concept of 'field', this thesis has critiqued a conceptual understanding of change as a process of individual decision-making and instead suggests that research needs to take greater cognisance of situated behaviour. This thesis therefore suggests

that policy should move away from a focus on individual level behaviour change and towards collective socialisation processes.

This exploratory research has thus attempted to provide an alternative focus to a salient issue in education and one which in the present climate arguably needs fresh approaches in looking at old questions. This study I believe offers new and effective understandings of the ways in which educational decision-making in working-class communities is understood. Although a single case study cannot hope to accomplish these aims alone, to bring this thesis to a close I will highlight the four major conceptual advances that this study has made and would suggest that they form a future research agenda which recognises social relations more prominently.

First, policy focusing on critical challenges to schools should be given a greater weight in research practice than current policy practices of data driven accountability. The findings raise issues about whether schools and teachers operate with enough understanding of the ways in which social-class interacts with strategies to achieving equity in outcomes. Whilst this study has pointed towards an agenda which focuses on the senior management strategies of school leaders within a particular local community, it is not clear whether all school leaders would develop similar practice. Policies are needed which draw from evidence-based research that provide a better understanding of the role that schools can play in communities in order to fulfil expectations that families may have for education. Policy also needs to reflect the mechanisms of how schools are able to build these expectations in communities where the locality has historically seen fewer opportunities for young people within education.

Second, the current policy landscape of widening participation is dominated by activities funded by universities, the Scottish Funding Council, or large charities which operate interventions across schools and localities in Scotland and the UK. Within this policy landscape, it is difficult for more localised projects to gain recognition, particularly those that have developed to address specific challenges at a more local level. One such example is described in this study where partnerships between teachers and volunteers emerged that was facilitated through the research process. This offered opportunities for older retirees from professional backgrounds considered as having accumulated high social and cultural capital to mediate, interact and offer tailored forms of support as interpersonal relationships developed with young people in working-class communities. These types of more localised community-led interventions offer insights into the complexity of everyday lives and are thus needed. They offer the opportunity to build on more holistic theoretical approaches that illuminate behaviours as they unfold in real life situations. It is precisely these insights that are omitted from the evaluative policy landscape described in Chapter 1, but which offer a more balanced approach to reform, offering greater cognisance of the context in which interventions operate.

Third, this thesis has illustrated the power effects of current social practices and asked how they might be challenged and changed. Given that pupils from working-class backgrounds will never amass the same levels of economic, social and cultural capital valued in application processes to Higher Education institutions, should the focus to change the composition of universities sit with individual working-class pupils? Without fundamental acknowledgement that the social practice of entering and progressing through university and into the professions is structured by middle-class

knowledge and networks, schools in more working-class communities will continue to struggle to bridge the gap (Hunter *et al.*, 2018; Wilson *et al.*, 2014). The data has shown how young people can transform their practice. However with limited access to the implicit resources that these social practices are predicated upon, little is going to change in the current climate as the focus on outreach activity focuses on adaption of the working class rather than a focus on the ways in which advantage operates.

Finally, this thesis has raised concerns about prevailing methodologies in research in this area which are concerned with accumulating an evidence-base of strategies that for at least two decades have shown very little impact (Riddell, 2013). In order to address the identified gaps between contemporary policy, research and practice, less reliance on mapping structural change is needed in order to recognise how social change and innovation manifests. As such, researchers need to recognise the importance of problem solving, rather than simply describing the renewal of inequality in relation to these constraints in policy and practice. Focusing on social practice thus sets out an agenda of co-enquiry for researchers and practitioners which may prove to be more cost-effective than current modes of financing school activity through Pupil Equity Funding, and accountability through the Scottish Funding Council arrangements.

Former projects like the Applied Educational Research Scheme (2004-9) provided opportunities for the development of such research-practitioner partnerships. In the current research climate signalled by the research excellence framework within universities, opportunities to develop more exploratory forms of research offer fewer academic rewards. Social practice approaches offer opportunities for reframing 'theories of change' with the intent of supporting the aims of social justice. However these modes of engagement are vying with prominent public discourses which promote evidence-based policy (EBP).

The research outputs from 'What Works Centres' (see Chapter 1, for discussion) are viewed as promoting cost-effective, 'evidence-based' solutions based on systematic reviews and meta-analysis that view the use of "randomized-controlled trials (RCTs) as the "gold standard" of evidence" (Cowen *et al.* 2017, p.266). In abstracting evidence from more localised forms of engagement, Cowen *et al.* (2017) suggest that the EBP literature recognises that context matters but has failed to incorporate the substantive implications of this within research outputs:

> The problem for practitioners is that EBP clearing houses and what-works centres are far less good at providing information and advice about what it is about local contexts that matters to a policy success than they are at vetting and summarizing evidence about how well the policy has succeeded in study sites. This is sometimes because the relevant information is knowable (at least in principle) but is not an area of interest for researchers. In other cases, the relevant information is essentially inaccessible to researchers. (p. 273)

As difficult and complex challenges persist and with an ever decreasing resource with which to bridge the attainment gap, St John (2013) advocates that that schools adopt open strategic environments where there is an emphasis in organisations on colleagues "setting goals and designing strategies" (p.145) to address challenges faced by their own institutions. This suggests that rather than relying on the EBP research outputs to implement changes in practice, research which seeks to test new approaches offer a more flexible and pragmatic approach to critical and localised social issues and are better suited to generating theorisations of change processes.

This thesis has suggested that localised understandings of everyday life contain practices which are worth focusing on to understand processes of behaviour change. Whilst there is broad support for these approaches across social sciences, there are fewer applications within education that contribute to current policy agendas. The

status of qualitative research is still relatively marginalised within the current educational policy landscape. This thesis has identified that current policy in Scotland is characterised as committed to achieving greater educational equity through target driven goals. There is a limited acknowledgement within these policies of the existence of advantage and even less of a more prominent research spotlight on the ways in which powerful groups continue to exert influence. This research has shown how a practice approach is able to produce a more commonplace understanding of ordinary real-life lived experience as existing in more rigid social worlds produced by advantage and privilege. In conclusion, future research and policy concerned with promoting social justice should take cognisance of frameworks that can be gleaned by shifting to a focus on practice.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Cross-schools film project

Between September 2009 and April 2010 I was involved in a cross-schools documentary film making project involving two secondary schools in Glasgow. The project was initiated by School A, located in a more affluent area of Glasgow. Building on existing contacts with research colleagues in the School of Education at the University of Strathclyde, the project proceeded with the following aims:

- To produce some material for a newly created website at School A for their citizenship course, an elective option for S6 pupils.
- To facilitate and forge cross- school working between two schools
- To develop critical understanding of local issues of citizenship
- To present this work at a school conference
- Films were also submitted to Glasgow City Council's 'Determined to Make Movies' initiative

**Research involvement:**

Myself and another researcher from the School of Education provided pupils and teachers with some initial training on using video equipment. The researchers identified a number of community projects that dealt with a range of social issues and in groups, pupils chose a community project to make a film about. The researchers worked with pupils to develop shooting schedules and supported pupils with filming and editing.

**PhD Fieldwork:**

This project provided an opportunity to work with two schools in contrasting socio-economic locations of Glasgow and acted as a preliminary exercise in understanding educational advantage and disadvantage. In the first instance, discussion between

colleagues at the university and school A had discussed ideas about making films centred around student experiences of growing up in particular localities. As Chapelpark Secondary came on board, the teacher at school A became keen to steer away from producing a depiction of 'rich school/ poor school'.

Following a revised outline (see above), verbal agreement was sought with teachers and pupils that I could explore issues surrounding what pupils were hoping to do on leaving school. Discussions centred on aspects of pupil decision-making which evolved over nearly a whole school year. Detailed field notes of interactions between pupils and staff were kept throughout the duration of this project.

**Themes identified and data emerging:**

- Janet's role as Enterprise and Employability Officer in Chapelpark Secondary
- Understanding the influence of the school and the way opportunities are structured for pupils
- Understanding young people's lives (jobs, friends, extra curricula activities)
- Understanding different academic pressures for S6 pupils between two schools
- Understanding of different types of institutions that young people were applying for, School A- all research intensive institutions, Chapelpark- mixture of training, FE and university (Post-1960 / 1992).

## Appendix 2: Survey

Q1. Ask each pupil to complete matrix

| **Name** | **I socialise with…** | **I socialise outside of school with..** | **I am friends on facebook/ bebo / other site** | **I have their mobile number** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *List each pupil* | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

Q2. Do you hang out with others who aren't on this list? (*Get a sense of who and what they do)*

Q3. Who do you text / call the most?

**Appendix 3: Structured interview**

Q4. What subjects are you studying?

Q5. How do you spend time outside of school?

Q6. What's next after school?

**Appendix 4: Topic Guide Semi-structured interview**

**Tell us about your family**

- who do you live with?
- Do you have siblings?
- What jobs do your family do?
- How do you spend time with your family? (eg, just at home – etc)
- Can you describe the close relationships you have in your family?
- How do family members view choices you make about what you do when you leave school?
- What sort of advice do they give you? What do they say to you when you speak about your plans?
- Do you have other family living close by? – do they play a role in your everyday life?

**Could you provide me with an idea of the ground you usually cover. *Mark on map:***

e.g. House / Friends' house / Family / Activities / Socialising / Job

- How do you get around?
- When you leave school – what will your journey look like then?
- Is it expensive getting about?
- Do you get any support with living costs? – parents? Job? Educational Maintenance Allowance? Etc.
- If parents give you something – do they expect you to spend it on certain things, or do anything around the house in return etc? *(get a sense of homelife responsibilities)*
- Do you think it'll be difficult financially when you leave school?

**Tell us about your future plans**

- So the first time I interviewed you - you said you were going to …… what's changed? / how's that plan progressing?
- Where / who / how do you get information from to help you decide what to do?
- Could you say why this plan is attractive to you?
- Do you have any concerns about what you're wanting to do?
- Do you think your life will change much when you start to do something other than school?
- What do you see your life being like after? (who are you with; what are you doing; where are you living)
- What is your ideal job? Why? Do you think you will get there?
- How will you get there? What could hold you back? *Find out about their perception of local opportunities in terms of jobs and other aspects they might perceive as barriers*
- Is there anyone you know of that you think – 'yep – I want my life to be like that?'
- Outside of all this stuff – career / job / etc – is there anything else you want to do with your life?

## Appendix 5: Topic Guide 1st Focus Group

1. **Social Networks**

*[Discuss assumptions of their friendship group based on survey data]*

- Ask about what's missing from this map? - who else is important -
- When did you all get to know each other?

2. **Present**

*[Get a sense of where they hang out and what they do in spare time (e.g.round at each others' houses? In town, study, play sport, watch TV, going out ]*

- Is there anything missing from this picture? (e.g. jobs/ family / youth groups?)
- How's school going? Has it changed over the last few years in terms of taking up your time?
- Have teachers / family changed expectations of your studying? (e.g. Putting more pressure on)

3. **Past experiences of school / education / learning**

- Would you describe that you have always been engaged in school?
- Which first schools did you go to? Similar ones? What was it like coming to Chapelpark Secondary?

4. **Future ideas**

- Ask about what's made them choose particular Universities / colleges
- When / if they expect to go to University – age wise –
- Do they view uni / college education as necessary for type of job they want
- I've asked about uni / college ' - said in initial interview - do any of them feel (deep down) that they don't want to go - have other ideas - anything?
- Do you have 'back up' options?

**Appendix 6: Topic Guide 2nd Focus Group (with Group 1 only)**

**1. Genealogy of Group**

- Together discuss how group evolved – who became friends in first school – to friendship group now – as people joined ask them how their friendships came about.
  E.g.Through other friends / Interests / Live near each other / Started working together / Like going out to same places / music etc.
- Elicit their views of their academic success in relation to being part of the group. - How do you think being part of this group of friends has effected how you see school/ how well you do at school? (studying together, competitive element)
- Elicit their thoughts on the way the school fosters friendship groups - do you think the teachers or school has anything to do with the fact that you guys are a group of friends? (they might not recognise this)
- What about life outside of school - is there anything here that fosters it? (eg. parents letting everyone hang out together – live close by, involved in similar out of school activities?)
- Does anyone have important people/ friendships outside the group?
- Can they discuss in more detail shared leisure activities – taste in music, film, sports, clothes, views on things etc – does this in anyway draw them closer together compared to other people's tastes etc – is this important?
- Do you see yourselves as being any different from other friendship groups in the school? (maybe in relation to their rapport with teachers etc.)

**2. Social Capital**

- I know that some of you help each other out with homework, and that you help others- can you describe ways in which you do support each other through school?
- You guys all seem motivated to go to uni – some of the others who could have done 5 Highers have started to leave to go college – what are their views about this – could they explain it?
- Would any of you say you've got ideas about what to do from each other?
- Is there anyone who stands out as an obvious choice to speak to about uni?
- Do any of you speak to each other's family or family contacts about any of this?
- Do your parents know each other / friends with each other or friends with you guys?

**3. Shared Understandings about the world of work and how to get there - how do we get a sense of this**?

- Some of you talked in your interviews about not wanting to do 'repetitive' and in some cases 'office work'. Can you tell us more specifically what kind of jobs you're talking / thinking about there?
- What comes to mind if someone described a job as a 'good job' or 'bad job'? 'good uni / bad uni' 'uni courses'? ( or are these unspoken)

**4. The group**

- Is there anyone missing from this group? (Am I overstating what this group is?)
- What do you think will happen to the group over the next few years?

## Appendix 7: Topic Guide, interview with staff who support school leavers

**Supporting students:**

- Ask about what happens when a groups come to make subject decisions in S5?
- Can you describe some of the differences between pupil transitions at the school e.g. more academically able/ less academic in terms of the type of help and support they need / or school can give them?
- How do you feel the school / the system / individuals support their transition after school?
- What kinds of issues / challenges do you feel staff encounter in supporting pupils?

**Appendix 8: Participant Information Sheet**


## Understanding young people's experiences of decision- making

### What is this about?

How do you decide what to do when you leave school? Is it from your experiences of learning, influences within the school – teachers – friends – careers service? Do you get ideas from your family or other people in the community? Do your ideas come from the media? Are you deciding about your future based on financial or personal considerations?

The researcher will work with you over this school year and a few months of the next school year to understand your experiences of deciding what to do as you become able to leave school.

You are being invited to take part in this work. Before you decide whether or not you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the work is being carried out and what you will be asked to do. If there is anything that you do not understand, or if you would like more information please contact us. The names and telephone numbers of people who would be happy to speak to you and answer your questions are on the back of this leaflet.

### Do I have to take part?

No. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part and you can stop at any time you want to.

### What will happen if I decide to take part in the study?

If you think you would like to take part in the study a researcher will arrange to meet you and tell you what would be involved before you finally decide. You will be able to ask questions and get to know the researcher who would visit you during the study.

### What will the study involve?

If you are happy to take part in the research project a researcher will meet up with you to spend some time with you. The researcher will want to speak to you and your family and friends to find out about your experiences of deciding what to do with your future.

### Where would the interviews take place?

The researcher will arrange to visit you somewhere that suits you. The researcher would visit you like this at least 4 times over one year.

## What if I change my mind and do not want to take part during the study?

You can change your mind about taking part or stop at any time – you do not have to give a reason.

## Will other people find out what I have to say?

Anything that you say will be private. No one will know your real name unless you want them to.

## What will happen to the results of the research study?

Some of your thoughts and ideas and those of others taking part in the study might be helpful to other people.

## Will I be able to find out the results of the study?

Yes. Once the research has been completed, we will invite you to a meeting where we will tell you what we have found.

## Who can I contact about the research?

Katie Hunter is the main researcher on the project and would be happy to talk to you about the study and answer any questions you may have. You can phone, write or email at the following address:

**Katie Hunter**
Department of Educational and professional Studies
University of Strathclyde
Henry Wood Building, 1st Floor
76 Southbrae Drive
GLASGOW
G13 1PP

Tel: 0141 950 3136
Email: katie.hunter@strath.ac.uk

*Thank you for taking the time to read this leaflet*

University of Strathclyde
20th September 2010

**Appendix 9: Participant consent form**

**Consent Form for Research Study: Understanding young people's experiences of decision making**

*Please circle YES or NO to the following questions.*

- Have you read and understood the Information Leaflet for research participants, dated September 2010?

  **YES NO**

- Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study?

  **YES NO**

- Are you happy with the information that you have been given about the study?

  **YES NO**

If you agree to take part in the study you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving a reason.

- Do you agree to take part in the study?

  **YES NO**

Finally, I would like to record interviews. Your name would not be recorded on the tape, and when the tape is transcribed into words it would be recorded using a participant number, and not your name. Audio recordings would be stored in a secure password protected computer in the University of Strathclyde. Only the researchers and the transcribers directly involved in the study will have access to the recordings, and the transcripts. If you do not feel entirely comfortable with this, and would prefer that the interview were not taped, the researcher will make notes instead.

- Do you agree to the interview being recorded?

**YES NO**

**Signature of interviewee** **Date**

**Name printed**

**Signature of parent / guardian**

**Researcher's signature** **Date**