DOCTOR OF EDUCATION THESIS

The Motivations and Aspirations of Level 1 Learners in North East England

Lee David Robinson

Student Number 140662791
l.robinson8@newcastle.ac.uk
School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Submission May 2022

Abstract

This thesis explores the motivations and aspirations of young people, aged 16-18, studying towards a Level 1 diploma in Music. The research took place at a large Further Education (FE) college in the North East of England and a total of 15 young people, and 5 staff members took part.

An initial group of one-to-one interviews with staff members focussed on their perceptions of Level 1 learners. This was followed by a series of five research encounters with the group of Level 1 learners. Four of the encounters took place while the learners studied on the Level 1 programme and a further encounter approximately one year later, which explored if motivations and aspirations had subsequently changed. These encounters included a range of activities, resulting in a variety of data being collected.

The methodology was underpinned by Bourdieu's concepts of Capital and a key approach was to research *with* the young people and not *on* them.

Findings show that aspirations are linked to employment within their chosen field and financial stability. Motivations are focussed on the acquisition of Capital, which the young people recognise can be accrued and exchanged for a career in their chosen industry. The findings also demonstrate that the young people are from varied socioeconomic backgrounds. This is counter to the narrative presented in much of the existing literature and shows that learners on Level 1 are from a much more diverse range of backgrounds than previously observed. This research calls for a wider understanding of the learners accessing education, at all levels, and suggests the link between class/socioeconomic status and level of study is no longer as clearly defined as it once was.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank all the participants who chose to participate in research collection activities for this thesis. In particular, the group of young people who candidly and openly shared their thoughts, feelings and experiences with me.

I have been fortunate to have had the support of three exceptional women during my doctorate. The first two are Jill Clark and Karen Laing. Jill and Karen have been my EdD supervisors and the support and guidance they have given me over the duration of the research project has been outstanding. They have helped shape my thinking and I am eternally grateful for the patience, time and reassurance they have given me. I could not have asked for two better supervisors.

The third – and most! – exceptional woman is my wife, Beth. Beth is my biggest champion and has believed in me from the beginning – especially so during times when I have not believed in myself. She has been a sounding board for my many thoughts and ideas – which have often been ridiculous – and has challenged and questioned these during my many 'thinking out loud' moments on long car journeys. If it hadn't been for these moments, along with the support and love Beth has showed me, it would not have been possible to have completed this thesis. I am eternally grateful for Beth, and I love her more each day.

Beth is now on her own academic journey, and I hope I can offer the same support and love she showed me, on her route to becoming the greatest Sociologist I know.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1. Introduction

The research for this thesis took place within a large Further Education (FE) College in the North East of England. Geographically, the region is amongst the most challenging in the country for young people to gain employment (Carter, 2012), has the second highest rate of child poverty (Social Mobility Commission, 2021) and between 2014 and 2019, the highest NEET (Not in Education, Employment and Training) rate in the country (Social Mobility Commission, 2021).

The young people who took part in the research were all studying towards a Level 1 qualification in Music. Level 1 qualifications are on the first rung of the mainstream education ladder and, depending on the grade achieved, are equivalent to GCSE grades 3, 2 and 1. Level 1 qualifications tend to be vocationally focussed and are offered as diplomas, certificates and awards; NVQ (National Vocational Qualifications) qualifications also start at this level (GOV.UK, nd). While qualifications do exist below Level1 (E1, E2 and E3), these qualifications tend not to be offered by most mainstream providers (QCA, et al., 2004). Criticism of Level 1 courses suggest that the programme outcomes do not align with the needs of employers, meaning many young people bounce between being NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training), low paying employment and low-value education and training courses (Avis & Atkins, 2017).

Young people in England must remain in some form of education or training until at least their 18th birthday. This policy was introduced for all those leaving school from the summer of 2014 (Department for Education, 2015). From within my own professional context as a Lecturer at a Further Education College, I observed a growth in the provision at Level 2 and an expansion into offering a Level 1 programme of study. Level 1 qualifications offer little in the way of Cultural Capital in the Bourdieusian

sense and are unlikely to be drawn upon to gain employment; Level 1 is academically below the GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) qualifications taken at age 16, during year 11 in English high schools. From my own observations, few employers would consider a Level 1 qualification as a signifier of mastery of a subject or skill. Because of this, I began to wonder what motivated the young people on these programmes, and I was curious about their aspirations for the future; did they access these programmes out of necessity due to a perceived lack of other choices, or was it through a more calculated decision? Furthermore, there is often a perception within Further Education providers that those studying on Level 1 programmes are less important than those studying at higher levels; there is a 'pecking order', with Level 1 learners at the bottom (Atkins, 2009, p. 4). I had certainly observed this from within my own context and staff who taught at the higher levels, particularly those who taught Higher Education (HE) courses in FE, seemed to have a clear deficit viewpoint of the learners on Level 1 programmes. I recall a debate during a staff meeting which focussed on whether the Level 1 learners should have access to the same equipment as the other learners. The rationale for this was based on the preconceived idea they were more likely to break or misuse equipment. In addition, there were some staff who were quick to blame any negative event in the building on the Level 1 students, even though there was often little evidence to support this conclusion.

I wanted to understand what it was like for a young person to be a Level 1 learner, how they were perceived by staff, what their aspirations were and what motivated them to attend college. Existing research about Level 1 learners is few and far between, with only a clutch of studies being undertaken with learners at this level; research with FE learners in the wider sense appears underrepresented in academic research, and much of the research that does exist predominantly focusses on

learners undertaking Level 3 qualifications (where a direct comparison between A Levels and vocational qualifications such as National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and Business and Technology Educational Council qualifications (BTECs) can take place). Much of my initial literature search found research focussed on FE learners who were studying on a several qualification types at levels ranging between 1 to 3 (Baird, et al., 2012) (Colley, et al., 2003) (Fuller & Macfadyen, 2012), or young people at risk of becoming NEET (Simmons, 2008) (Simmons, 2017) (Yates, et al., 2011). There is a body of research with Level 1 learners, undertaken by Atkins (2008) (2009) (2013). Atkins' work, like my own, took place within a FE college with Level 1 learners and focussed on topics such as motivations and aspirations. It is this work which most closely resembles my own and in which I can, and have, drawn upon for contextualisation, comparison, and triangulation throughout this thesis. While the work of Atkins (2008) (2009) (2013) and to a lesser extent, Colley, et al. (2003) most closely relate to my own, there has been a significant change in policy since their research was undertaken; the education leaving age was raised in 2014, meaning all young people are required to remain in education or training until their 18th birthday (Department for Education, 2015). I was interested to understand if and how this might impact on who was accessing Level 1 provision and at what level.

In addition to comparing my own work to that undertaken by Atkins, I have borrowed methodologically from her research. I utilised a *with*, not *on* approach that had been effective in Atkins' research encounters with Level 1 learners (Atkins, 2013). This approach is something I felt strongly about, ensuring that the voice of my participants came through was integral to my approach; young people report that they often feel like a powerless minority, struggling to get their voice heard (Kellett, 2010). Based on the pejorative comments I had heard from my colleagues, I felt this approach was

integral to ensure fair and accurate representation. This proved effective in previous research encounters (Atkins, 2013) (Willis, 1978) and I hoped it would help ensure my participants felt part of the research and not subjects of it.

The research was undertaken with 5 staff members and a group of Level 1 Music students I taught over the duration of one academic year. As such, I adopted multiple roles and at various points I was both lecturer and researcher to the young people in my research. Because of my position, I describe myself as a 'peripheral insider'. While I was known to the group of young people, I was in a position of power and although I was *of* the group, I would not consider myself *one of* the group. The position of power came from the fact I was their main teacher for the academic year and responsible for the programme management of the course they were enrolled into; I was responsible for the learners both academically and pastorally. This is a position I was mindful of throughout the duration of the research. The effects of this position and the possible impact on research outcomes is something I explore in the methodology chapter (p.46) and reflect upon in the discussion section (p.198) of this thesis.

Underpinning this research are a series of key theories, the most prominent of which is Bourdieu's work on the formation and accumulation of Capital (1986). This has been an important tool to understand the data and create an overview of who my participants were and the levels of Capital they held at different points during our research encounters. Indeed, the final research encounter, undertaken around a year after the first, questioned if Level 1 learners' motivations and aspirations changed through the accumulation of Capital; at this point, some individuals had progressed onto a Level 2 programme and had accrued Institutionalised Cultural Capital in the form of a Level 1 qualification. Aside from this, utilising the forms of Capital as a tool for analysis allowed for the identification of Capital which had been displayed and/or

demonstrated by the young people in my research and did not align with their position on the first rung of the educational ladder as a Level 1 learner. An example of this was the levels of Embodied Cultural Capital shown by several individuals as knowledge of music, ability to play an instrument, or drawing on names from literature when choosing their own pseudonyms.

Another key theory is Ball, et al. (2000) and their *Arenas of choice and centres of action*. This uses overarching headings for the participants to use as a framework to collectively discuss what is important to them. I simplified the headings within my research to Family, Education, Social / Leisure, and Work. The adaptation is discussed in the methodology chapter (p.69). This has been previously used by Atkins (2008) (2009) and I utilised these within one of the first research encounters I conducted. The data from this activity contributed to the formation of a contextualising statement which outlined my group of participants. This allowed for a comparison between my participants and those who had participated in Atkins' research.

It is worth noting that the primary research collected in this thesis has been punctuated by COVID-19. Each research encounter with the young people when they were on Level 1 was undertaken prior to the first English national lockdown, in March 2020. The research encounter focussing on the potential change in motivations and aspirations due to the accumulation of Capital took place in the first term of the 2020/21 academic year; after the first national lockdown, during a period of social distancing and before the second English national lockdown in early 2021 – which felt imminent at the point the research encounter took place. I felt it was important to address COVID at this research encounter and the outcomes from this discussion can be found in the findings section of this thesis (p.175).

Chapter 2 (p.13) focusses on existing literature. Initial sections of this chapter focus on Further Education at a national level, before looking more closely at the sector at a regional level. It then progresses to focus on existing research within the sector, with overviews on learner aspirations, motivations, socioeconomic status and marginalisation. Later sections focus on research methods and ethical considerations from within educational settings, including topics such as insider research, informed consent, and the formation of Capital.

Chapter 3 (p.46) focusses on the methodological approach to the primary research undertaken for this thesis. The initial sections of this chapter are used to clearly outline the research questions. After which, I have included an overview of the research in table form, which briefly outlines each research encounter, the activities, links to theory and literature, data types and overview of analysis. In later sections I then outline each research encounter, going into depth and detail as to how they worked operationally.

In chapter 4 (p.95) I present the findings from the data of each research encounter. This is presented sequentially, in the same order the research encounters took place and a summary of the main points (p.191) is included as the last section of this chapter.

The final, 5th chapter (p.197) is the discussion section of the thesis, which also includes my overall conclusions. I begin this chapter by reflecting on my own position within the research and how this might have impacted the primary research activities. The second section discusses some of the stereotypes of Level 1 learners; I compare my findings with existing and earlier work to discuss if the stereotypes of Level 1 learners are present within my own findings. The third section focusses on Bourdieu's ideas of Capital, discussing if it is appropriate for Digital Capital to be seen as a distinct form of Capital, rather than as a form of Cultural Capital. The fourth section focusses on the topic of social haunting. This is a theme which emerged from the data of my primary

research. I discuss how it is presented in my group of participants, before calling for a wider understanding of the subject and its impact on young people and their approach to education. The final section of the discussion chapter summarises the discussion, outlining key conclusions and discussing implications for future research.

1.1 Positionality statement

This section outlines my own background and position. While I consider the impact of my position at times during this thesis (p.88 & p.198) it felt important to include some biographical information. While this research is not about me – nor do I wish it to be – I have been part of it and this is an important way of outlining my relationship to the research and the participants (Pelias, 2011).

I was raised in a working-class household in a former mill town in the North of England. I have had an unconventional route through education, and like the young people in this thesis, I too was once a Level 1 learner. As I approached the end of compulsory education, I had little awareness of my post-16 options; the textile mills which would have been a clear option for young people of previous generations had declined and were largely dormant, empty, earmarked for demolition or repurposed into 'luxury' apartments. Talks between the school careers advisor and my parents suggested I should leave education and try to find a trade or employment. This was the route my parents and wider family had taken and so felt familiar to me at the time. Reflecting on this decision now, I do not recall this being a particularly lengthy decision-making process and seemed to be based largely on the fact I had told the career advisor that I had enjoyed taking woodworking classes at school. I started a joinery apprenticeship one week after completing my GCSE exams and in the September, I was enrolled as a Level 1 learner at a FE college in the neighbouring town. I completed my

apprenticeship, but from the start I had always felt I was on the wrong path. I had observed the post-school routes my friends had taken and had considered the possibility I had taken the wrong route. When I saw the same friends transition from college to university, I began to see options that I had not previously been aware of. As none of my family were university educated, that route never seemed like an option, nor was it ever fielded as one. Universities had always felt like a place for other people. It was not until I saw young people from similar backgrounds to my own taking that route, that I saw it as a viable and realistic option. Five years after leaving school, I decided to leave my job and re-enrolled at the same FE college I had previously attended. This time I had a clear view of where I wanted to be and the route to get there. FE is often seen as having a transformative effect and offering a second chance (Crossan, et al., 2000) (Thompson, 2009), and for me it did. The two years I spent at that college were a pivotal time in my life and instilled within me the value and importance FE colleges can have on the lives on young people. When I later decided to move into teaching, FE felt like the right space. Much of how I approach my teaching practice is informed by my earlier experiences of education and my background that forms my habitus in the Bourdieusian sense (Maton, 2014).

As a researcher, I feel it is important to work in a way that valorises and prioritises the voices of participants. I felt this was especially important with the research I conducted as part of this thesis, as young people on Level 1 programmes often appear framed through a language of deficit and marginalisation. Within this research I adopted a position of researching *with* my participants, rather than *on* them. I revisit this throughout the thesis, discussing the concept methodologically (p.48) and ethically (p.93), before reflecting on the impact of working in this way during the discussion (p.200).

1.2 Key Terms

This section offers definitions of several of the more salient key terms used throughout the thesis. Clearly establishing the meanings at this stage aims to remove any ambiguity and establish a distinct sense of how they are used in this thesis.

1.2.1 Social class

Social class is an organising principle used to observe and describe the hierarchy, structure, and position of people within society. An individual's position within the hierarchical structure – their 'class' – both enables and limits social movement and interaction (Skeggs, 1997). Marx would describe social class as relative to an individual's position within the means of production – the bourgeoisie and proletariat (Mattos, 2022). The relation to the means of production, employment type, is also how the UK government approximates the social class of individuals. While there is an expansion beyond the binary system used by Marx, the employment type and status of individuals is used to identify position in eight different class descriptors (Office for National Statistics, nd). While this is a useful way of observing societal position of individuals, it is less useful at identifying wider social and cultural activities and identities (Savage, et al., 2013).

Bourdieu has a more complex view of class. From his perspective, class is not simply about economic capital. Rather, an individual's objective position in the social space – their 'class' – is informed by a portfolio of capitals including *economic*, *cultural,* and *social* (Crossley, 2014). In their work on the *BBC Great British Class Survey*, Savage, et al. (2013) utilise Bourdieu's more 'sophisticated' view of class to identify a seven-tier class system in the UK. This ranges from 'elites', who have the highest levels of

capital in all three areas, to the 'precariat', who has the 'lowest scores on every […] criterion' (ibid., p. 230). It is this Bourdieusian view of social class which is used within this thesis. In this sense, class is both informed by - and informs - an individual's habitus and the ability of an individual to navigate through society. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital are outlined in greater depth on p.31.

1.2.2 Social justice

The meaning of social justice is often considered a '…subject of great dispute…' (Scott, 2014, p. 381). Rawls (2001) frames social justice as 'fairness', viewing each individual as 'free' and 'equal'. The UK government outlines social justice as a process of '…making society function better…' (Department for Work and Pensions, 2012). However, unlike Rawls, the UK government view does not appear framed around fairness, but as something to be 'delivered', centred around 'troubled families' (Department for Work and Pensions, 2014) and 'keeping people on track' (Department for Work and Pensions, 2012). As with the UK government, the OECD see social justice as a problem to be solved, rather than a philosophical position or standpoint (OECD, 2018). Both the OECD and the UK Government frame social justice around the individual, positioning them as a problem; they are placed within a deficit model and viewed as failing to meet their civic responsibility (Atkins & Duckworth, 2019). In this respect, social justice is something to be bought into, rather than experience, particularly when framed around the ideas of keeping people 'on track' and 'turning lives around' (Department for Work and Pensions, 2014).

The standpoint of this thesis aligns itself with the Rawls (1971) conceptualisation of justice as fairness. Embedding fairness as a means of social justice happened in

several ways throughout my research design, ethical considerations, data collection, data analysis and write-up. A large aspect of this centred around recognising existing power relationships and working in a way that ensured equal value is placed on the voices and contributions of all participants. There is recognition that all voices are legitimate – not least when their contributions are discussing their own lives and lived experiences. It was important to ensure that the participants voices came through, that they were not talked for, were encouraged to use their voice, that it was valorised and facilitated to come through in the research findings. I discuss my position and existing power relationship in my ethical considerations (p.87), before later reflecting on this during the discussion (p.199). Another approach to embedding social justice was done through an overarching approach of researching *with* and not *on* my participants. I initially address this as part of the epistemological approach to the research design (p.48), before discussing the ethical implications of working in this way (p.93) and later reflecting on the process during the discussion (p.200).

1.2.3 Stereotype

Stereotype is derived from the Greek words *stereos*, meaning solid and *typos*, meaning mark and was initially used as a technical term within printing (Scott, 2014). The current understanding of the word – and the way it has been applied in this thesis – is as a simplistic generalisation about a group of people (Cardwell, 1999). It was initially used in this way by Walter Lippmann, in his book *Public Opinion*. Lippmann's meaning describes fixed, narrow opinions, resistant to change, generally pejorative in nature (Scott, 2014) and censoring out '…much that needs to be taken into account…' (Lippmann, 1922, p. 112). Several stereotypes of Level 1 learners emerged from the staff interviews (p.95). The most common of which were centred around their

socioeconomic status and the assumption that they aspire for celebrity lifestyles. I revisit these stereotypes as part of the discussion (p.205).

Chapter 2. Literature Review

The aim of this literature review is to provide an overarching awareness and consideration of the literature about structure, current policies, participation and participants of English Further Education. As such, it is divided into several sections, each considered salient to the project. The early stages of the chapter outline the current structure of post-16 education in England, before outlining the choices within the North East, where the primary research was undertaken. This is followed by a review of the current policies within the sector and an overview of the current national and regional evidence relating to the engagement of young people in post-16 education. The review then uses evidence from existing research to outline the individuals who are accessing FE at Level 1. The final section of the chapter focusses on the existing evidence on motivations and aspirations of young people accessing post-16 education in England, in particular Level 1 programmes.

2.1 Post-16 Education in England

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland there are 9 levels of qualification. Of those 9 levels, 1-3 are delivered at colleges and come under the umbrella of Further Education (GOV.UK, nd). The lowest level of mainstream education, in relation to difficulty and entry requirements, is Entry Level. Entry Level has three additional sub levels, E1, E2 and E3; E3 is the most difficult. Most of the courses offered at this level focus on either Functional Skills qualifications, such as English and Maths, or generic skills for life and essential skills qualifications such as E2E (Entry to Employment) qualifications. Vocational qualifications at this level do exist but tend not to be offered by most

providers (QCA, et al., 2004). Criticism for these courses in academic literature suggest that programmes at this level fail to align with the requirements for entry to work. This leads to young people moving between NEET (not in education, employment, or training), low paying employment and low value training and courses (Avis & Atkins, 2017).

Level 1 qualifications are equivalent to GCSE qualifications at grades 3, 2 and 1, and are offered as diplomas, certificates and awards. NVQ qualifications also start at this level. Level 2 qualifications are equivalent to GCSE grades 9, 8, 7, 6, 5 and 4, and line up with the historical O Level grades A, B and C. As with the Level 1 qualifications, they can be offered as awards, certificates, diplomas and NVQs. The final level of qualification delivered within Further Education is Level 3. Examples of qualifications at this level include AS and A levels, Access to HE qualifications, Awards, Certificates, Diplomas and NVQs (GOV.UK, nd). Criticisms of 'lower level' FE programmes – such as Level 1 and Level 2 – are similar to those at Entry Level, with suggestions they are 'weakly vocational' and socialise young people into a 'churn' between low-pay, low-skill, insecure work, benefits and further government training schemes (Esmond & Atkins, 2020) (Atkins, 2022).

Levels 4 to 8 are considered Higher Education, although that is not to say that qualifications at this level are not delivered in FE colleges; HE delivered in FE settings is considered to be playing a 'crucial role' in improving the accessibility of HE (Martin, 2017). Several FE colleges have Foundation Degree (Level 5) awarding powers, allowing them to accredit their own qualifications at this level (Exley, 2016). One college has also been awarded TDAP (Taught Degree Awarding Powers), allowing them to accredit their own Level 6 qualifications, e.g., BA(Hons), with other colleges set to follow suit (Offord & Camden, 2016).

2.2 What does existing evidence tell us about the engagement of young people with education?

2.2.1 Raising the age of participation

The compulsory age in which young people must remain within some form of education or training is 18. Prior to 2014, all individuals had to remain in education until the age of 16. Raising the age of participation began to be implemented in summer 2013, and young people who completed school year 11 in summer 2014 or later must now remain in education until at least their 18th birthday. (Department for Education, 2015). The main priority for the implementation of this policy appears to be centrally focussed around reducing the number of young people considered NEET. Being NEET is seen to be a negative situation which causes and is caused by educational under-achievement, long-term unemployment, low aspiration and social exclusion (Yates, et al., 2011). The department for Education (2016) states that local authorities must take the lead on monitoring and managing NEET rates in order to increase participation in education. As part of this, local authorities are required to provide a 'September guarantee', to ensure there is a place for every young person aged 16 or 17 to continue in education. The need to reduce the NEET rates in England are linked to how the country compared to other OECD countries; policy makers often look to international league tables focussing on youth unemployment and training. When compared to other countries, England's position looked unfavourable when the education rate of 15-19-year-olds was compared. In 2009, at which point there was much discussion about raising the age of participation, England's education participation rate for 15-19-year-olds stood 9% below the OECD average participation

rate (Maguire, 2013). One possible explanation for high levels of young people considered NEET in England, is the collapse of the UK's traditional industrial base and deindustrialisation, leading to a demise in the youth labour market (MacDonald & Marsh, 2005) (Simmons, 2017). In all, low skilled jobs fell by a quarter between 1984 and 2004 (Simmons, 2008). Alternative options for employment appear centred around the precarious and casualised 'gig economy', of which many young people engage with through lack of real alternatives (MacDonald & Giazitzoglu, 2019). There is also a correlation between the collapse of the youth labour market, youth unemployment and civil unrest (Maguire, 2013). Increases in youth unemployment is seen to be linked to rises in burglaries, thefts and drug offences; youth unemployment has a stronger correlation between total crime rates than adult unemployment (ACEVO, 2012). Aside from the OECD standings, raising the age of participation is another important reason for ensuring young people have a place in education. The push for participation will have pushed the growth of provision on the initial rungs of the ladder at Entry Level, Level 1 and Level 2.

Simmons (2017) describes a 'mushrooming' of provision at Entry Level, Level 1 and Level 2 since raising the age of participation, and around 10% of each yearly cohort progress onto Level 1 programmes (Atkins, 2022). This is also something I have observed within my own professional context as a lecturer within FE. However, the data provided by the UK government does not necessarily correlate with both my own and Simmons' observations. While the NEET rate of 16-to-18-year-olds does drop 2.1% between the end of 2013 and 2015, the participation rate in education remains relatively stable, rising by only 0.4% over the same time period (Gov.uk, 2021).

2.3 Who are the potential participants and co-researchers in this project?

2.3.1 Socioeconomic background

Literature has shown that learners taking part in education on the initial rungs of FE, which includes Entry to Employment (E2E) and Level 1 programmes are predominantly from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds (Colley, et al., 2003) (Atkins, 2022). Those most at risk of becoming NEET are also considered to be from similar backgrounds and young people considered NEET are, almost overwhelmingly, from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Simmons, 2017).

In her study with a group of Level 1 learners, Atkins (2008, p. 196) describes that all her participants came from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and that Level 1 programmes '…tend to be populated…' by young people from similar backgrounds. As part of a second study, Atkins (2013) outlines that Level 1 learners are stigmatised, oppressed and constrained by their social class. For this group of individuals, the lowest-achieving young people from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds, the options for progression and training appear limited. Their options are likely to be limited to low-status and low-level courses – such as Level 1 or E2E programmes – with equally low labour-market value, delivered within a FE college (Simmons & Thompson, 2011).

When looking at the post-16 sector as a whole, it appears Level 1 learners are not dissimilar, socioeconomically, from other young people in FE colleges. While research shows that Level 1 learners are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Atkins, 2008) (Atkins, 2013), they are 'ordinary people', when compared with other learners at FE colleges (Simmons & Thompson, 2011) (Simmons, 2017). However, the post-16 sector as a whole appears to be socially stratified. Young people from lower

socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to attend FE colleges than those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Thompson, 2009). For 'low-attaining' youth, such as Level 1 learners, this means they are positioned at the bottom of an educational hierarchy which places higher value on individuals perceived as 'academic' (Atkins, 2022). Those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are much more likely to access education at specialist Sixth Form colleges or schools with a Sixth Form provision (Baird, et al., 2012).

2.3.2 Home life

Support from a learners' family, and in particular parental expectations and involvement are shown to have strong links to outcomes. Parents are seen as significant influencers in shaping their child's aspirations, providing opportunities, encouragement and support for learning (Gutman & Akerman, 2008) (Mistry, et al., 2008) (Scott, 2004) (Strand & Winston, 2008). Research suggests that the expectations of mothers of learners in particular has the biggest influence; learners perform better when their mothers expect them to (Gorard, 2012). While almost all parental involvement seemingly has a positive effect on achievement, '…parents' aspiration for children's education is the strongest predictor for achievement…'. (Fan & Chen, 2001, p. 13) Young people whose parents aspire to and expect their children to progress onto university score '… nearly 10 percentiles higher in their GCSEs than young people whose parents do not hold such views.' (Chowdry, et al., 2011, p. 67) A small caveat to the current research, is that the measure and indicators of achievement are somewhat ambiguous and subjective. Fan & Chen (2001, p. 17) acknowledge this issue and suggest future research should '…carefully consider how academic achievement can be measured most appropriately.'

On the outset, the learners featured in the reviewed literature do not appear to have typically strong family units. While there is risk for all young people to have varied and turbulent home lives, those studying on the initial rungs of mainstream education, such as Level 1 programmes of study, appear to be at much higher risk of difficult home circumstances (Cornish, 2019). During one study, Simmons (2017) noted that almost half of the participants were from single parent households. From those with dual parent households, forty three out of fifty-five participants came from a household with only one adult in employment, and ten of the participants came from workless households.

For those from single parent households, it appears that those headed by lone working mothers are an unconducive catalyst for academic achievement, and learners from these backgrounds are shown to do less well at school (Scott, 2004). A common occurrence for the young people situated in these low-income households, is the pressure to contribute to the household income. Atkins (2008) (2013) observed that helping the family meet financial obligations was a big part of some students' lives. They observed young people working in roles such as cleaners, food packers, shop assistants and construction labourers alongside their studies. In addition to employment, young people with caregiving responsibilities are commonplace. This leads to 'less stable' homelives, and young people who take on an 'onerous' workload in addition to their college course (Atkins, 2008) (Atkins, 2013) (Colley, et al., 2003) (Simmons, 2017) (Simmons & Thompson, 2011) (Thompson, 2009).

A lack of support from their families also appears to be a common theme for many learners studying in FE. This is either through a lack of encouragement, lack of care, or young people who come from families that have 'gone off the rails' (Buchanan & Tuckerman, 2016) (Simmons, 2017). For these young people, their strained family

relationships are an increasing risk to their academic outcomes; the patterns and behaviours accumulate, causing significant impact to overall life choices (Harold, et al., 2016). Thompson (2011) discusses how parents of learners are commonly identified as 'part of the problem' for young people overcoming barriers to learning. In addition, several learners in Thompson's study outlined how the attitudes of their parents were dismissive of the programme of study and/or their ability to achieve. This sentiment is reflected by a learner who took part in a study by Strand & Winston (2008, p. 262) who describes her mother as '…more interested in the telly than she is me.' A study based in the United States of America by Mistry, et al. (2008) suggests that learners reporting stress due to negative parental experiences is an indication of poor behaviour and aggression in children from as early as 36 months of age. In addition, young people who reported being unhappy in early adolescence are shown to have reduced odds of good academic performance in later life (Scott, 2004).

Having a lack of resources, in particular being deprived financially and materially has been shown to have a strong, negative impact on the involvement of parents (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003) (Sacker, et al., 2002). As deprivation worsens, parental involvement decreases. Deprivation is notably worse for those from lower socioeconomic status families and the 'deprivation factor' has been identified as accountable for much of the differences in parental involvement between the social classes. 'The higher the social class, the more parental involvement was evident.' (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003, p. 21)

A lack of parental support could also be linked to regional cultural beliefs. In particular, the relationship between father and son, as to who might be seen as the 'provider' or 'breadwinner' of the family unit. Atkins (2008) observes this during research with young people in a former mining community; a father does not like when the son does better

than him, and actively discourages the son in their educational career in order to maintain the ‘status quo’ in relation to the family hierarchy.

Aside from family influences, the young people themselves are sometimes seen to be co-creators of turbulence within their own lives. The social lives of young people can play a pivotal role in their identities. Young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to engage in ‘risky behaviours’ when developing their Social Capital (Goodman & Gregg, 2010). In addition to this, recreational drug use is observed to be higher amongst youth in ‘poor’ neighbourhoods. (MacDonald & Marsh, 2005). This was observed in the social activities described by both Atkins (2008) and Simmons (2017) whose participants described social lives revolving around ‘hanging around’ with their friends and the consumption of alcohol and drugs. While drug and alcohol use certainly exist in the ‘leisure-pleasure landscape’ of many young people (MacDonald & Marsh, 2005), should we be viewing claims of drug and alcohol use with a certain level of pragmatism? As Atkins (2008) observes, the lives of young people are largely mundane and boring, with few having the material and cultural resources to carry out the claims they make. This can be described as ‘leisure poverty’, in which young people lack the financial resources to participate in the same activities as their peers (MacDonald & Marsh, 2005). Perhaps then, it would be right to question some of the boasts around frequency and quantity of drug and alcohol consumption? As a young group with potentially impoverished and turbulent home lives, could they be encouraged to make exaggerated claims to make their lives seem interesting to others?

The home lives of young people can hugely influence the way a learner approaches their studies. In general, the lives of the young people on the initial rungs of mainstream education should not be seen as wildly different from others participating

in the higher levels. What is apparent though, is that the frequency of negative home life influences appears to be greater amongst those studying at these levels. The home lives of the participants of my own research is discussed in the findings of this thesis, where a profile of the participants is shown (p.111) and an outline of their social lives they chose to share is included (p.123).

2.3.3 Motivations and aspirations - why participate in education?

This section explores the existing evidence around the motivations and aspirations of young people who access education at or around Level 1. It shows that a young person's motivations for engaging with education post-16 and their life aspirations do not always align. While this can be said of many young people, it appears particularly prevalent with those attending Level 1 programmes of study. Many young people have 'high' aspirations, wanting to do a lot with their lives, but many do not know the route to achieving them (Atkins, 2013).

Motivations

For the young people who did not do well in GCSE exams at age 16, options for post-16 study appear limited, lacking in choice and in some cases prescribed. Some young people have their programme of study selected for them, rather than choosing it for themselves (Thompson, 2011). In particular, those attending education on the initial rungs of mainstream education are placed on courses through a lack of other options. Denied benefits and lacking the credentials to access higher levels of study, many young people choose to do Level 1 qualifications through a lack of other options and not knowing what else to do (Atkins, 2008). While the progression onto a Level 1 qualification is often perceived to be an independent choice, for those with little

Institutionalised Cultural Capital it is a choice made from little real alternatives (Fuller & Macfadyen, 2012). Level 1 programmes are often about a lack of alternatives than a proactive choice (Simmons, 2017).

Options for young people outside of education are also becoming increasingly limited. Simmons (2017) discusses how a 'demise' in the youth labour market has affected the transitions of many young people from school into the workforce. Coupled with the raised age of participation, a 'mushrooming' of entry level courses (Simmons, 2017) occurred in order to 'warehouse' (Cornish, 2018) young people in 'low quality, bottom rung', post-16 schemes for underqualified school-leavers whose options were limited or had been otherwise exhausted (MacDonald, et al., 2020, p. 18).

Influences from young people's families can also often be motivators to engage with education. Family influence is seen to help shape a young person's capabilities, motivations, and development. A strong family environment provides access to crucial social, cultural and economic resources, leading to higher paid, higher value employment (Scott, 2004). Familial motivators do not always stem from the positive though, with many families dismissive of the programme or the learner's potential for achievement. In these cases, learners were motivated by defiance and the incentive to change these opinions, to 'prove wrong' the naysayers within the familial unit (Thompson, 2011). Pressure to do well is another influence coming from the family unit. This appears particularly prevalent in the youngest child of the family, where older siblings have underachieved (Atkins, 2008).

Socialising with others is cited by learners as a motivator for attending college. As many of the students are seen to attend out of necessity, rather than choice, it would be reasonable to assume students were using the time to establish and build on their social networks (Atkins, 2008), and as a valuable site for making and seeing friends

(MacDonald & Marsh, 2005). Some programmes have an element of interpersonal skills development factored in due to teaching staff viewing the social skills of the learners at a deficit (Cornish, 2021). For those on the initial rung of mainstream education, much of their time in class seemingly revolves around maintaining friendship groups and planning future social activities; college being an environment where young people are with their friends every day (Atkins, 2013).

Aspirations

Nearly all young people have aspirations, and those studying on the initial levels of mainstream education are no different. Simmons (2017, p. 28) outlines how nearly '…all those who took part in […] [his] research had tangible aspirations in terms of employment or further education.' These findings are also mirrored, almost word-for-word by Simmons & Thompson (2011). Gutman & Akerman (2008) claim that young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds have lower academic aspirations than those from higher socio-economic backgrounds, and those from disadvantaged groups such as teenage parents have low aspirations for both them and their children. That is not to say that young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have lower aspirations generally, as aspirations are generally high amongst all young people (Kintrea, et al., 2011).

Nearly all the learners who have been documented in the reviewed literature displayed aspirations related to 'status attainment'. These are aspirations linked to achieving a perceived level of status, which act as a motivating factor for continued academic engagement (Strand & Winston, 2008). There are three main categories of status attainment, in which all aspirations can be related to: wealth, power and prestige (Haller & Portes, 1973).

Atkins' (2013) research describes how her co-researchers were keen to achieve occupational aspirations, mostly within technical roles. They also placed '… significant emphasis on money as well as their college course.' (ibid., p. 148) In an earlier study by Atkins (2008), an aspiration for one learner was to complete his qualification and earn £8 an hour.

While somewhat historical, Atkins' (2008) research with Level 1 learners found that young people's aspirations often followed gender stereotypes. Male students, regardless of background foresaw futures as the providers for wives and children, while female students outlined how they were likely to have children and work in a shop. More recently, aspirations linked to gender stereotypes have also been evident within working-class youth in Teesside. MacDonald & Shildrick (2018) describe how 'gender norms' influenced the choices and employment aspirations of young people in the region.

The status quo of traditional gender roles appears to be somewhat engrained into young people, in particular young men. A perceived signifier of successful adulthood in young men revolves around being a 'good breadwinner', which in turn is seen as a signifier of being a good father and husband (Scott, 2004). In addition to gender, Strand & Winston (2008) found aspirational differences between ethnicities of young people, primarily of lower socio-economic status, studying at an inner-city school. White British boys and girls typically outlined aspirations for vocational trades. For the boys, this meant jobs such as plumbing; the girls cited nursery nursing and hairdressing. Those from Black African, Pakistani and other Asian backgrounds aspired to work in professional roles. Both boys and girls from these ethnicities cited medicine and computer sciences as professional aspirations. Kintrea, et al. (2011, p.

8) states that evidence shows '…White young working-class people are among the least aspirational.'

Not all aspirations can be considered sensible and attainable, and few appear to be somewhat fantastical. Fascination with celebrity culture appears to be commonplace amongst young people, particularly those on the initial rungs of mainstream education. Learners often believe that one day they will undergo a 'sudden transformation', being catapulted into a celebrity lifestyle where being millionaires, living in a mansion and driving luxury vehicles become the norm (Atkins, 2008 & 2013). These types of forward-facing, long-term aspirations are described by Boxer, et al (2011) as 'possible selves'. Possible selves can be strong motivators, serving as goals that maintain focus and forward movement. However, the possible selves of students identified by Atkins (2008 & 2013) are not always derived from empirical realities. There is a real disconnect between the possible selves they *want* to become, and the expected possible selves they *believe* they will become (Boxer, et al., 2011). The learners from Atkins' (2008 & 2013) studies seem to acknowledge the gulf between the achievable and unlikely, the reality of a much more mundane future being the likelihood. One learner quite neatly summed up the difference between his probable and possible future, stating '"I can dream it"' (Atkins, 2013, p. 150).

Not all learners have fantastical ideas of their possible selves. Baird, et al. (2012) identified differences between those studying at general FE colleges, and those at sixth form colleges. While the majority of learners had aspirations of '…being happy and having a family', the 'possible self' aspirations of those from sixth form colleges appear to be much more grounded in reality (ibid., p. 294). The study found that FE students were more likely to cite wealth and expensive possessions, while those from sixth form colleges aspired to have reasonable amounts of money. The findings outline

that '…FE students made more statements like "have a mansion" and "a good car", while non-FE [sixth form] students were more likely to make reference to wanting "to be comfortably well off"' (Baird, et al., 2012, p. 303). The reason for the disparity in aspirations between the two groups of young people goes largely unanswered. It could be '…that students increasingly adapt their goals to the environment [in which they are sited].' (Hirschi & Vondracek, 2009, p. 120). Could it be that sixth form colleges have much more efficient personal and social development activities in place for learners? A more likely explanation could relate to the socioeconomic status of the participants. Gutman & Akerman (2008) describe a 'gap' between educational aspirations and academic achievement for young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Earlier, I identified that those studying within FE were more likely to be of lower socioeconomic status than those in sixth form colleges; this is then amplified when looking at Levels 1 and 2. Perhaps the fantastical aspirations are a form of escapism from the '…drudgery of low-pay, low-skill work […] [that could await them, offering] some hope for an uncertain future'? (Atkins, 2013, p. 151) In addition, research by Jacob & Wilder (2010) suggest that students of lower socioeconomic statuses are less likely to achieve their 'possible self' expectations, and have misaligned aspirations; students with more aligned expectations and aspirations of their future selves are more likely to achieve them (Gorard, 2012).

Misaligned aspirations of young people can also contribute to the overall NEET rates. The 'possible selves', as described by Boxer, et al. (2011), particularly when misaligned with unattainable goals, can directly impact the likelihood of young people becoming NEET. Oyserman, et al. (2007) describe how the 'possible self' futures of young people are unlikely to become reality unless there is a plan to obtain them. Those young people who have '…detailed and specific school focussed […]

[strategies to achieve their possible selves] are more likely to do well…' (ibid., p. 481). For young people who are uncertain of their futures at ages 11-15, 95% fail to go on and achieve A-levels (Scott, 2004). Indeed, it is '…not enough for young people just to aspire; they also need to be able to navigate the paths to their goals.' (Kintrea, et al., 2011, p. 8). Yates, et al (2011, p. 513) concluded that:

> '…young people with uncertain occupational aspirations or ones misaligned with their educational expectations are considerably more likely to become NEET by age 18. Uncertainty and misalignment are both more widespread and more detrimental for those from poorer backgrounds.'

For those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, setbacks can be hard to come back from, making them much less likely to achieve their 'possible selves'. On the other hand, those from higher socio-economic backgrounds are, it is claimed:

> '…more likely to be provided mentoring, tutoring, monitoring, and enrichment activities whether they seek them out or not. Low-income students are more likely to live in contexts lacking such collective efficacy resources.' (Oyserman, et al., 2006, p. 201) .

Young males from low socio-economic backgrounds are, in particular, significantly affected when their 'possible selves' are misaligned with their reality. Sadler, et al., (2015, p. 511) states: 'Coming from a low socio-economic background increased the risk of NEET for young men with misaligned aspirations by 90 percent.' This sentiment is echoed by Yates, et al. (2011, p. 528) whom state 'low SES background increased the risk of NEET young men with misaligned aspirations by 90 per cent, and for those with uncertain aspirations by nearly 300 per cent.' Young women on the other hand, are more likely to be affected by residing in families with little educational commitment than they are from misaligned or uncertain aspirations (Sadler, et al., 2015).

2.3.4 Marginalised?

A Common theme came through very strongly from the literature focussing on young people studying on or around Level 1: a large portion described their participants as marginalised. Phrases such as '…those on the margins…', (Simmons, 2017, p. 24) '…on the margins of education and employment…', (Simmons & Thompson, 2011, p. 448) '…on the margins of education, work and society…' (Atkins, 2013, p. 144), '…suffering from a marginalisation…' (Thompson, 2009, p. 30) and courses described as having '…marginal positioning…' (Cornish, 2021, p. 2) are commonplace throughout the literature. While there is a recognition of marginalisation by the above researchers, perhaps this could be explored further in future research? Working with participants to discuss the causes of marginalisation, if they recognised their marginal position, or if they felt marginalised at all, could provide additional insight.

Being marginalised is described as being disenfranchised from the major institutions and material benefits of wider society. This is through a dual process of disconnection and disempowerment (Wyn & White, 1997). Marginalisation describes the position of individuals, groups or populations outside of mainstream society; to live on the margins of those in the centre of power (Schiffer & Schatz, 2008). It can be seen as having a sense that a person does not belong, nor a valued member of a community, nor able to make a valuable contribution, nor have access to the opportunities available to others. Education can be perceived as a route out of marginalisation, but can also act inadvertently as an agent of marginalisation (Mowat, 2015).

Messiou (2012) states there are four different ways of conceptualising marginalisation:

> … when a child is experiencing some kind of marginalisation and is recognised almost by everybody including himself/herself; when a child is feeling that he/she is experiencing marginalisation, whereas most of the others do not recognise this; when a child is found in what appears to be marginalised situations but does not feel it, or does not view it as

> marginalisation; and finally, when a child is experiencing marginalisation but does not admit it.' (pp. 1312-1313)

A large portion of the existing research with Level 1 learners assumes their participants to be marginalised prior to commencing data collection. While those of Atkins (2008 & 2013) investigate how it might feel to be marginalised, could there be further scope to explore if the individuals feel marginalised or not? To a large extent, marginalisation is subjective and:

> '…if an individual does not recognise their life as marginalised […], by what legitimacy can they be considered by others to be marginalised?' (Mowat, 2015, p. 456) .

There are several ways marginalisation can manifest itself, including poverty, locale, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability and/or ill health, bullying and behavioural traits, although it must be said these factors are not exhaustive (ibid, 2015). Recently, the marginalisation of some young people was compounded further during periods of COVID lockdown. A lack of digital resources – digital poverty – meant some were precluded from accessing education during periods of remote learning (Robinson, 2020).

While much of the literature outlines marginalisation as something that happens *to* young people, what it does not consider is that marginalisation can be a choice. That is, young people might effectively marginalise themselves and that choosing to be on the margins of society can be about finding one's place within it:

> '…choosing to be "marginal" in one system or society is an important part of establishing one's identity and status in another network or relationship.' (Wyn & White, 1997, p. 127)

Not all young people are willing to be moulded into what society considers the 'norm'. Subcultures such as goth, punk and rave movements all exist at the margins of society and their members translate whatever is going on around them into the music, fashion and behaviour they use to identify themselves. Punk embodied rage; a perceived lack

of opportunities for young people and rising unemployment. The Acid house and rave movement on the other hand was a tonic for the individualism of Thatcher's neoliberal ideas of the self; those attending acid house raves embodied a collective identity of their fellow attendees (Garratt, 2004).

Young people considered marginalised, through their own choice or otherwise sit in a precarious position, at risk of social exclusion. Those socially excluded lack the means to fully take part in society, either economically, socially, culturally or politically. Lacking basic skills, individuals often become socially and economically impoverished, dependant on welfare and shut off from society (QPID, 1998). For many young people, an entry level programme such as a Level 1 qualification is both a potential route away from social exclusion and an arena in which to establish their identity.

2.4 The formation of Capital

Throughout this thesis, Bourdieu's ideas of Capital have been used as a framework to understand and analyse data that emerged from both primary and secondary sources. While some forms of Capital are inherited, it is mostly an 'accumulation of labour', taking time to accrue (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 241). Bourdieu's (1986) original description shows Capital taking three forms: Economic, Cultural and Social Capital. Economic Capital relates to money and finances. Cultural Capital, which relates to knowledge and skills, takes three states: Embodied, Objectified, and Institutional. Social Capital relates to networks and connections; both your own and those of your family.

In its Embodied state, Cultural Capital refers to knowledge, skills and behaviours which have been developed over time. An example of Embodied Cultural Capital is the ability to play a musical instrument. The Objectified state refers to objects and items such as musical instruments, artwork, cars, computers etc. The final state is the Institutional

state. This state refers to the Cultural Capital accrued via formalised learning and accredited by some form of institutional acknowledgement, e.g., GCSE qualifications, car driving licence, degree programmes and Level 1 courses all count as Cultural Capital in the Institutionalised form. Bourdieu (1986) describes education as linked to the institutional state. Speaking in relation to academic achievement, Bourdieu (1984, p. 15) states schooling helps '…to form a general, transposable disposition towards legitimate culture, which is first acquired with respect to scholastically recognised knowledge and practices…'. Bourdieu (1984) outlines that obtaining scholastic qualifications is the move towards understanding what he terms 'legitimate culture'. Legitimate culture can be understood as the correct way of doing things; the accruement of Cultural Capital builds a knowledge and understanding of legitimate culture. Understanding legitimate culture allows an individual to move through society with distinction. Moore (2012) uses an analogy of two shoppers – one who uses knowledge of legitimate culture to obtain the item they want, and the other who cannot navigate the environment to buy the item they wish – in order to explain Bourdieu's idea of legitimate culture. However, a more fitting adaptation to this analogy could be two music producers. Bourdieu would view the first producer as having distinction. This producer is familiar with the concepts of genre and style, understands music theory, specialist terminology and has a good working knowledge of the technical aspects of a recording studio. They move confidently through the environment, communicating clearly with others and navigate the task in hand effectively to achieve the desired result. Bourdieu would consider the second producer vulgar. They have little knowledge of music, genre, style and do not understand how the recording studio environment is structured or operates. They are unable to communicate their ideas effectively and the recording session ends without the producer having completed their

piece of music. The first producer understood the legitimate culture of the field and possessed sufficient Cultural Capital to achieve their desired outcome. The second producer is shown to lack the Capital to be effective in this environment.

Those studying on Level 1 programmes have very little existing Cultural Capital in the Institutionalised form; entry requirements for Level 1 programmes are often low. Had their Institutionalised Cultural Capital been higher at the point of entry, they would likely be undertaking a higher-level programme. Level 3 programmes, for example, often require 4 GCSEs at grades 4 or higher, usually including English and Maths (The Student Room, 2018). Furthermore, learners engaging in education at or around Level 1 are also often identified as 'lacking access to valorised capitals' (Esmond & Atkins, 2020, p. 198) such as the Embodied and Objectified states of Cultural Capital, as well as Economic and Social Capital (Atkins, 2008 & 2013) (Baird, et al., 2012) (Simmons, 2017) (Thompson, 2009). Because of observed low levels of Capital, Bourdieu (1984) would describe many Level 1 learners as lacking in legitimate culture, vulgar, and unable to move through society with distinction. As individuals from primarily low socioeconomic status families, lacking in Cultural Capital in the Institutionalised state, it could also be said there is potential to lack other forms of Capital. Atkins (2008) (2009), outlined the position of the Level 1 learners in their research as at a deficit in many forms of Capital; from low socioeconomic status families, few formal qualifications and little understanding of how to successfully navigate themselves to their aspired to position. Bourdieu would describe many of the individuals as vulgar.

While Bourdieu's concepts of Capital (1986) are effective, there are some limitations. The concept of distinction (1984) is centred around the 'bourgeoisie' (the middle classes). Because of this, there are forms of Cultural Capital which are not recognised as legitimate culture but are no less important to the individuals who possess it.

Thornton (1995) described the importance of ‘subcultural Capital’ to those who possess it, as an important factor in their lives and how they navigate the social space. An example of this is shown in Rimmer’s (2010) work with young people in the Newcastle suburb of Byker. Listening to and performing a niche genre of music they called ‘New Monkey’ was a ‘rite of passage’. It allowed acceptance in the tight-knit community of young people and adults alike; the subcultural Capital held by the young people helped them move with distinction through their area of society.

The concepts of three distinct capitals have also been discussed as being too simplistic, with not everything fitting neatly into a category. Wacquant (1995) discusses this and suggest an inclusion of ‘Bodily Capital’, based on his time spent in an inner-city Chicago boxing gym. Wacquant concluded that the boxer’s investment strategies in their physical condition meant that it could be drawn upon as a form of Capital in the right arena.

Since Bourdieu’s initial outline of the three forms of Capital (1986), there has been a significant change in society, in particular the importance of digital technologies. Bourdieu himself reflects on the idea of Cultural Capital, considering ‘Informational Capital’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) to be a better possible descriptor. Ragnedda (2018) takes this further and suggests Digital Capital – which can be measured by both the ability to use digital technologies and the level of access to digital technologies – should be considered a distinct form of Capital in its own right.

Throughout this thesis I have used Bourdieu’s (1986) ideas of Capital in the original framework presented. However, it became clear that the data from my primary research did not clearly nor neatly fit into Bourdieu’s categories. I suggest expanding Bourdieu’s ideas to incorporate Digital Capital in the discussion section of this thesis (p.214).

2.5 Bourdieu's wider ideas

While this thesis uses Bourdieu's conceptualisation of Capital as the main thinking tool, I felt it was important to include a theoretical overview of Bourdieu's views on areas such as habitus, class and symbolic violence.

Habitus

It is important to begin with Bourdieu's concept of Habitus, as the concept is helpful to frame Bourdieu's wider ideas and opinions.

The concept of habitus focusses on the way in which individuals think, feel and act. How our history and the path we have taken in life informs our ability to navigate fields (Maton, 2014). A field is the way Bourdieu describes a social space in which interactions, exchanges and events occur (Thompson, 2012). Rather than viewing wider society, a field is the localised social space in which in individual finds themselves at any given moment. An individual's habitus contributes to a meaningful viewpoint of the world, allowing an individual to make sense and see value in the field in which they operate (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Bourdieu describes habitus as a collection of both structured and structuring dispositions (Bourdieu, 1990), in the way that the habitus of an individual is both influenced by the social field they are in and influences their ability to move within it. Presented as a portfolio of capitals (Maton, 2014), it is the sum of the life experiences of an individual, as well as a tool which influences life experiences. An individual's habitus then, is not fixed, but an '…open system of dispositions that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures.' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 133)

For young people, their habitus is largely informed by their home lives and backgrounds. Their habitus influences their ability to move through the field of education, but in doing so, the field of education is also an informing factor on their habitus – so changing their ability to move through other fields. An earlier section of the literature review (p.17) gave an overview of the young people who had taken part in existing research. It outlined that the young people who took part in the research were almost exclusively from working class families (Atkins, 2008) (Atkins, 2009) (Simmons & Thompson, 2011), with few members of the family who had experienced Higher Education (Atkins, 2009). In addition, the literature describes young people whose families are dismissive about education, or the educational lives of their children (Buchanan & Tuckerman, 2016) (Simmons, 2017) (Strand & Winston, 2008) (Thompson, 2011). Each of these aspects will have played a significant part in informing the habitus – the embodied history (Bourdieu, 1990) – of the young people who were part of the research. In turn, this informed habitus will have influence on their agency to move through the social field – in this case formal education – and accumulate capital in the institutional form.

Class

As previously outlined in the introduction (p.9), class is an organising principal, used to describe and observe the hierarchy, structure and position of people within society. For earlier sociologists such as Weber and Marx, indicators of class were largely centred around financial wealth, ownership of property and the position in relation to the means of production (Jones, 1975) (Mattos, 2022). On formulating his own views on class, Bourdieu was mindful not to conceptualise a '…Marx revamped for modern tastes…' (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 723). His views on class are much more complex than

Marx, recognising that social activities and cultural tastes an individual has – in addition to their economic capital – play an important part in their class position (Crossley, 2014). These are represented as a portfolio of capitals, which inform their position in society (see p.31 for an overview of Bourdieu's conceptualisation of capital). Within *Distinction* (1984), Bourdieu conducted a large-scale survey with a sample of 1217 people. The focus of which was to determine the cultural tastes of individuals, relative to their social origin – determined by the occupation of their father. Bourdieu discusses that some forms of social activities and cultural tastes were more legitimate than others and identifies the tastes of the middle classes – the bourgeoisie – to be legitimate culture (Moore, 2012). He views the tastes of the middle classes as more legitimate due to their ability to facilitate the best movement through a broad range of social spaces and provide the best foundation for a socially mobile trajectory (Bourdieu, 1984).

Bourdieu believes class background has an impact on the ability to navigate successfully through formal education. He sees the language of education aligning with the language of the middle classes, and in *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* he argues that those from lower classes are at a deficit in linguistic capital – i.e., the ability to understand and communicate in a scholarly language. Because of this, the likelihood to succeed in a formal educational setting is reduced. As such, those from working class and low socioeconomic status families, are more likely to study at lower levels as they lack the legitimate culture to move through the field – of education – with distinction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). While Bourdieu adopts a position of deficit, when referring to the language usage of young people from working class backgrounds, perhaps this could be viewed differently? The language use of working-class young people could be considered *different* rather than at *deficit.*

Thornton (1995) describes 'subcultural capital', which is used to navigate through localised social space. Language is a key part of this, and the language used by young people to navigate their immediate social space is legitimate to both them *and* their communities. This is evident in the work of Rimmer (2010), whose work with working class young people in the North East, shows language and cultural tastes which are different to the middle-class tases Bourdieu would consider legitimate. However, they are no less legitimate – in fact probably more so – when used to navigate successfully through the communities that recognise them and consider them legitimate.

Symbolic violence

Within society, Bourdieu identifies that social hierarchies, class position and inequality are produced, reinforced, and maintained not by physical violence, but rather by a form of symbolic domination he describes as *Symbolic Violence* (Schubert, 2014). Symbolic violence plays an important role in Bourdieu's thinking, and his work as a whole has been described as a '…materialist anthropology of the specific contribution that various forms of symbolic violence make to the reproduction and transformation of structures of domination' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 14-15). Symbolic violence is found within all institutions and social relationships within society (Bourdieu, 1977).

While symbolic violence is somewhat 'gentler' than physical violence, it is equally real. However, it is generally unperceived by most, (Schubert, 2014) and is almost never recognised as violence (Bourdieu, 1977). For people in a dominant position to exert symbolic violence, they need not do anything else other than engage with the societal structures around them (Schubert, 2014). The '…dominant classes have only to *let the system they dominate take its own course* in order to exercise their domination…'

(Bourdieu, 1977, p. 190). In addition, those who suffer symbolic violence do so with their own complicity (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) by engaging with the structural norms within society.

Within education, symbolic violence is equally as present as it is in wider society, and while educational inequalities often remain unnoticed, they are sufficiently visible (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979). For those entering education, the habitus acquired in the family informs their movement through the system (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu describes social origin, above all other differentiating factors between students as 'doubtless the one whose influence bears most strongly on the student world...' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979, p. 8). In addition, the language of education is aligned with the language used by the middle classes, and so those who enter education from the higher classes, have an advantage (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). For working class students, the language of education, and indeed academia, can feel difficult to access and illegible, leading to feelings of inadequacy and anger (Mckenzie, 2018). And so, as with wider society, students from the middle classes upwards need only to engage with the educational systems – as their habitus will likely equip them to do so effectively – to exert symbolic violence on their fellow students to establish, reinforce and maintain their position.

2.6 Social Haunting

Social Haunting came through strongly in the primary research findings of this thesis. I was not aware of the concept at the time of the research design, coming across it as I analysed the primary data. As I reflected on the concept in relation to the contributions of my participants, I felt it aligned well with their thoughts on the post-education opportunities they felt were available to them. While I unpick this concept

as part of the later discussion section (p.216), I felt it important to outline a brief theoretical overview at this early stage of the thesis.

Social Haunting was initially outlined as a concept by Gordon (1997), who used the term to help understand the long term impacts of the transatlantic slave trade and state terror in Latin America (Gordon, 2011). She describes social haunting as '…one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with…' (Gordon, 1997, p. xvi). For Gordon, using the term haunting was a way of identifying unresolved social violence from the past, when the over-and-done-with comes alive and makes home become unfamiliar (ibid). Social haunting is a repressed or unresolved social violence, making itself known, demanding attention of people or a society whose past trauma informs the present (Gordon, 2011).

Within the UK, Gordon's concept of social haunting has been used to understand the lasting effects of the rapid deindustrialisation that took place in the 1980s and 1990s. Much of this research is centred around the decline of British coal mining, which as an industry saw a systematic closure of collieries over a 10-year period – a reduction from 170 in 1984 to just 16 in 1994 (Glyn & Machin, 1997). The closure of these collieries is seen to be directly linked to the policies of the then Thatcher-led, Conservative party government and had significant employment and economic consequences for the communities surrounding them (Silverwood & Woodward, 2018). Within North East England, a significant number of communities were built around mining, and their closure remains a much-discussed topic (Robinson, 2021).

McNicol (2017) has conducted 'ghost labs', in which she worked with those individuals directly affected by the closure of the mines, exploring the lasting impacts of the historic social violence they experienced. Haunting though does not appear limited to

those who experienced the social violence first hand. Bright (2016) (2018) (2021) and Simpson & Simmons (2019) have observed evidence of social haunting, linked to deindustrialisation, in young people who are several generations away from those who experienced it first-hand. Bright's work focusses around teenage individuals in former mining communities of South Yorkshire and Derbyshire. It outlines individuals who were still feeling the effects of the social violence experienced by previous generations, and felt it was excluding them from employment (Bright, 2016). Young people in these communities were reprising the repertoire of their collective past, frustrated by their situation and perceived lack of opportunity due to the historic miners' strike and closure of the collieries (Bright, 2021).

Simpson and Simmons (2019) observed social haunting in primary aged children, who's haunting appears different from the previous generation's. One of their participants discusses how young people do not recognise the pit closures as the source of the haunting. However, the young people appear no less effected by the ghosts that remain, which continue to haunt the present in ways which shape their experiences. Is this evidence of the haunting becoming what Bourdieu would describe as Doxa? The 'taken for granted' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 169) reality in which the cause of the haunting becomes unanimously unquestioned, recognised as the norm and the way things are (Deer, 2012). While this question might be difficult to answer while the cause of the haunting is still in living memory, what is certain is that the haunting and lasting legacy of industry continues to '…underpin systems, structures and relations of work and leisure…' (Simpson, 2022, p. 140) in the communities that continue to feel the effects of past social violence.

2.7 Implications and informing the methodology

Through the undertaking of the literature review, a number of questions and themes emerged which I felt important to address within the primary research encounters. While the operational outline of how these will be addressed can be found in the methodology chapter (p.46), the key research questions are summarised below.

These questions / themes occurred either through gaps in current literature, or through a necessity to form a reliable comparison between the findings of the fieldwork and previous studies. A comparison between my own findings and that of earlier work is addressed in detail in the discussion section of the thesis (p.205).

The key research questions were:

1. Who are the participants of this study and how do they compare to participants of similar, existing studies?

   This research question allowed for an understanding of the position of the young people, relating to the structural advantages and disadvantages afforded by their socioeconomic status. It also allowed for a comparison between my participants and those from earlier research, who were predominantly observed to be from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Atkins, 2008) (Atkins, 2013) (Simmons, 2017) (Simmons & Thompson, 2011) (Thompson, 2009). In addition, Baird, et al. (2012) outlines how the whole FE sector is socially stratified; those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to progress into post-16 education and those that do progress are more likely to do so at FE Colleges, rather than Sixth Forms.

   In addition to allowing for a comparison between earlier studies, it also allowed for an understanding of the position of the young people in relation to the region. Carter (2012) describes the region as one of the toughest for young people to

gain employment, and data shows an ongoing issue with youth unemployment in the region (ACEVO, 2012) (Office for National Statistics, 2022). In addition, the region has some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the country, with a large portion featuring in the top 10% most deprived nationally (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015a). This information was key to understanding the backgrounds of the young people in the region and how the young people who took part in this research were situated in relation to that data.

2. What are the aspirations of the Level 1 learners?

This research question aimed to understand what those studying on Level 1 programmes aspired to in their lives. Existing studies (Atkins, 2008) (Kintrea, et al., 2011) (Simmons, 2017) (Simmons & Thompson, 2011) outlined how those studying at or around Level 1 did not have vastly different aspirations to those of a similar age group studying at higher levels; aspirations revolve around 'status attainment' – power, wealth and prestige (Haller & Portes, 1973). However, while those on Level 1 programmes have aspirations for the future, it is shown that they do not always know the route to achieving them (Atkins, 2008 & 2013) (Baird, et al., 2012) (Boxer, et al., 2011). This raised questions about the young people's understanding of their position and their understanding of progression routes (academic and non-academic). In addition, previous studies had outlined how Level 1 programmes had an overrepresentation of young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, who were high risk of becoming NEET (Atkins, 2008) (Atkins, 2013) (Simmons, 2017). Because of this, I had wondered if Economic Capital and expensive

possessions would factor highly in the aspirations of my participants, as it had done in Atkins' (2009) work with young people on Level 1 programmes.

3. What are the motivations of Level 1 learners?

Following on from aspirations, this research question focusses on the motivations of young people for attending post-16 education. While there are clear external factors influencing and motivating young people to engage with education, post-16, such as the participation age (Department for Education, 2015 & 2016), other factors are often less clear or somewhat fluid. Historical research suggests that motivations to attend could be through a lack (or perceived lack) of other options (Atkins, 2008) (Fuller & Macfadyen, 2012) (Simmons, 2017), positive and/or negative influencing factors from families (Atkins, 2008) (Scott, 2004) (Thompson, 2011), and as an arena for socialising with others (Atkins, 2008 & 2013). In addition to this, I wondered how the well-documented collapse in the youth labour market (Atkins, 2013) (Fuller & Macfadyen, 2012) (Sadler, et al., 2015) (Simmons, 2017) (Simmons & Thompson, 2011) (Yates, et al., 2011) and the high levels of youth employment in the region (Office for National Statistics, 2022) might be influencing the motivations of my participants.

4. Do those studying at Level 1 view themselves, or feel, marginalised?

Historical research (Atkins, 2008 & 2013) (Simmons, 2017) (Simmons & Thompson, 2011) (Thompson, 2009) described those taking part in education in or around Level 1 as marginalised; they did not possess the levels of Capital to successfully operate with distinction in society, so did so on the periphery.

While the existing research identified individuals as marginalised, none addressed this directly with the young people who took part. I had wondered if the young people had viewed themselves as marginalised, either within college or as part of wider society – if they had considered it at all. I felt it important to explore this with the young people taking part in this research, and while there was not a direct discussion of marginalisation, the topic was covered. It was part of a discussion centred around the employment rates, NEET rates and links between socioeconomic status and the attainment gap (academic achievement linked to socioeconomic status).

5. Do motivations and aspirations change through the accumulation of Capital? This question was not addressed in the historical literature (Atkins, 2008 & 2013) (Simmons, 2017) (Simmons & Thompson, 2011), as their research focussed on learners during a single academic year. Bourdieu describes how education helps '…to form a general, transposable disposition towards legitimate culture, which is first acquired with respect to scholastically recognised knowledge and practices…' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 15). In addition, Cultural Capital gained through education can develop knowledge of 'legitimate culture' and an understanding of the 'rules of the game' (Moore, 2012) in relation to society. In addition, Bourdieu (1984) states that schooling at all levels can manipulate aspirations. Because of this, revisiting the young people who had progressed from Level 1 onto higher levels of study felt like an important opportunity. I had wondered if the Cultural Capital in the institutional state they had accrued on the Level 1 programme, and their potential move towards distinction, had influenced either their aspirations or motivations.

Chapter 3. Methodology

This chapter begins by outlining the ontological position of the research. It then builds upon this position by outlining my epistemological and theoretical underpinnings. Beyond this, it focusses on the research design, outlining data collection methods and the methods of data analysis. The chapter then concludes with a discussion around the ethical considerations and my position as the researcher.

3.1 Ontological position

Ontology is described as the understanding of 'what is' (Crotty, 1998), the 'nature of reality' and assumed 'real world' (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Relating this to qualitative research, Braun & Clarke (2013) outline 'the ontology continuum', in which three positions are identified: Relativism, Critical Realism and Realism. Relativism assumes that 'no absolutes exist' (Reese, 1980), and reality is dependent on human interpretation consisting of multiple, constructed realities (Braun & Clarke, 2013). On the other side of the continuum is Realism, which assumes a defined reality exists (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), outside the human mind (Crotty, 1998), separate from human perspective and interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Realism is largely used within quantitative, positivist research where knowledge and truth exists separate from the human perceptions of it and is largely measurable (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Sitting in-between the two positions is Critical Realism, in which a presumed reality exists, but only in an 'imperfectly apprehendable' way (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This position requires us to acknowledge *some* reality exists and sits behind the subjective and socially located knowledge which can be accessed (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Within this research, a relativist position has been taken. This position was taken as the research explores the perceptions and experiences of young people studying on a Level 1 programme of study. Without this positioning, it would have been impossible to create an understanding of the lives of my participants as *they* see them. The findings from the data were constructed from the contributions of the participants using their perceptions and experiential accounts. The research was not about obtaining an absolute, universal truth, but the truths of my participants and their lives (Braun & Clarke, 2013). However, while a relativist position has been taken, this is not absolute. Lincoln, et al. (2018) adopt a 'loosely defined' position, on the continuum between relativist and realist, stating there are no absolute positions. This is a viewpoint I share and the standpoint in which I positioned myself and this research ontologically. My participant's perceptions of their world were largely unknown to me prior to data collection, and it was important from a social justice perspective to gain an understanding of the world as *they* see it. They have their own views on their experiences as Level 1 learners and their position within the college, and indeed the wider society. However, there is a world that exists around theirs, with a legitimate culture to understand in order to navigate through it with distinction in the Bourdieusian (Bourdieu, 1984) sense. In addition, there had to be recognition that *some* things do exist as facts beyond the constructed realities of the participants. The realist aspect of the ontological position recognised that the young people taking part were all enrolled onto a Level 1 programme of study. As such, a reliable measure of their existing Cultural Capital in the institutional state could be identified; at this point in their lives, they had few formal qualifications, precluding them from accessing education at a higher level of study.

3.2 Epistemological and theoretical approach

Following on from the relativist ontological position, the epistemological standpoint of this research is that of constructionism. Meaning has not been *discovered* but *constructed* (Crotty, 1998). The findings were constructed from the contributions of my participants as a result of interactions between them and I (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This is not saying that knowledge has been 'made up' (Braun & Clarke, 2013), but the created knowledges were a product of how I came to understand them. Below is a series of concepts and key theories which I have used to inform the creation of knowledge from the interactions I had with my participants.

3.2.1 With, not on: participants as co-researchers?

Care should be taken when expressing the views of others in research findings. Alcoff (1991-92, p. 6) feels strongly about this, suggesting that '…speaking for others is arrogant, vain, unethical and potentially illegitimate.' However, '…educational research is always on/for/with other people – and getting knowledge on/for/with other people is a complex matter' (Griffiths, 1998, pp. 35-36). Certain positions are discursively dangerous, such as a person considered privileged speaking on behalf of someone less privileged. This can risk increasing or reinforcing the oppression of the group or person spoken for (Alcoff, 1991). When researching with students, particularly where existing preconceptions of them as a group of individuals exists, it requires care to facilitate their voice to be heard and not speak on their behalf:

> 'How confident are we that our research does not redescribe [sic] and reconfigure students in ways that bind them more securely into the fabric of the status quo?' (Fielding, 2004, p. 302)

Voice is described as a multi-layered concept, particularly in today's more participatory forms of research. It is not just the researcher who has a voice, and subsequently

speaks for their participants, but also the participants, who are encouraged to speak for themselves, in their own words (Lincoln, et al., 2018). Young people, particularly those aged 16-18, taking part in research often struggle to get their voices heard or have their voice taken away and be spoken for. Considered a powerless minority, their knowledge and contributions can be disregarded and be controlled by force – however benevolent that force might be – with age and competency frequently used as obstacles to their full participation and subsequently a loss and/or reduction of their voice (Kellett, 2010).

In order to facilitate the views and voices of the research participants to be heard, I considered my participants part of the research, rather than subjects of it; I researched *with* my participants, not *on* them. While there is an acknowledgement that they could never truly be free from my influence and paradigmatic choices (Dowse, 2009) (Fielding, 2004), I felt that viewing my participants as co-researchers – considering the data is being created from our interactions (Crotty, 1998) – was an important aspect of the research design and epistemological standpoint. As young people are often considered a powerless minority (Kellett, 2010), I had concluded that positioning them in a way that facilitated their voice was an important aspect in encouraging them to exercise their power (Feder, 2014); I did not want to speak *for* my participants and wanted to reduce this possibility (Genuis, et al., 2015).

However, that is not to say that an approach of *with*, not *on*, with participants as co-researcher was a fully formed version of Participant Action Research, where researcher and participants fully share aspects of the research process (Olesen, 2018). Kellett (2010) uses a sandwich analogy when describing participatory research involving children and young people. The bottom slice of bread is the methodological and ethical design and is the responsibility of the researcher. Similarly, the top slice of

the bread, which focusses on dissemination and writing up, is also the responsibility of the researcher. However, the filling, which includes creation and interpretation of data can be a shared responsibility. Ultimately though, the co-researcher role is a supporting one, which encourages voice and some level of ownership over the research; the participants were given opportunities to engage with the research beyond simply being 'sampled' (Clark & Laing, 2018).

Viewing participants as co-researchers is an approach Atkins (2013) takes, when undertaking their own research with Level 1 learners. The choice to use a methodological approach with participants as co-researchers, came from Atkins' concerns surrounding power, control and voice. Atkins involved participants with the analysis of the transcripts. She was reflexive in her approach though:

> '…recognising the potential constraints imposed by working with a group of young people with no previous experience and limited understanding of research processes.' (Atkins, 2013, p. 146)

Within models of research that consider participants as co-researchers, in whatever depth, it is important to ensure reflexivity, both in the methodological design and oneself:

> 'Reflexivity forces us to come to terms not only with our choice of research problem and with those whom we engage in the research process, but with ourselves and with the multiple identities that represent the fluid self in the research setting.' (Lincoln, et al., 2018, p. 143)

Within this research, the *with*, not *on* approach is used in two ways. The first way was to encourage the young people to select their own pseudonym to be known as throughout the research. I had hoped that this would help buy-in to the research and help my participants view themselves as the valued co-creators that they were. The second aspect was to present summarised data from research activities to the participants, asking them for their interpretations, reflections, and their understanding. I felt this was an important aspect of data analysis, helping to facilitate their voice and

reducing the risk of my own interpretations misrepresenting them. I considered that as the contributions were their own – their knowledge and not my knowledge – they were also best placed to further analyse and examine them in greater detail, offering a level of insight that I could not have accessed had I analysed them alone.

3.2.2 Arenas of action and centres of choice

Ball, et al. (2000) describes how young people often negotiate, prioritise and balance a range of commitments in their lives which relate to their imagined futures. They describe these areas as *Arenas of action* and form three distinct categories: Family, home and domesticity; Work, education and training; Leisure and social life. As young people negotiate and balance the commitments in their lives, they have a changing emphasis between these three arenas; there is a 'play' between them, as young people manage their transition into adult life.

There is an understanding that all young people will be involved in each category in some format but do risk 'disappearing from or between them' (Ball, et al., 2000, p. 148) based on the choices they make and what they see as important in their lives.

Atkins (2013, p. 147) used a simplified version of this in her research to good effect, providing the model in pictural form and simplifying the descriptions to 'family, work and education and leisure'.

I felt this was an important framework to use. Not only would it allow for comparison with previous research with Level 1 learners, but it was also a good framework from which to categorise what was important to the young people and a good starting point from which to develop discussions. I adapted the Ball et, al. (2000) model further than Atkins (2013), separating work and education into distinct arenas and simplifying their

names to ensure ease of understanding. The four arenas I used were: Family; Education; Social/Leisure; Work. Using this framework fitted well with the constructionist approach I had applied to the production of knowledge. The contributions by my participants were about *their* lives and what they felt important to them.

3.2.3 Bourdieu's concepts of Capital

Bourdieu's (1986) three forms of Capital – Economic, Cultural and Social – have been an integral theoretical underpinning throughout this research (for a detailed overview of the forms of Capital, see p.31). As a theory and conceptual framework, it has been an important theoretical tool in the construction of knowledge from the contributions of my participants. It has facilitated an understanding of my participants beyond their position as Level 1 learners, helping to illuminate them as the rich and complex individuals they are, and their positions within society.

3.2.4 Morgan-Jinks Student Efficacy Scale

Self-efficacy relates to an 'individual's belief in their own ability to achieve something.' (Gorard, 2012, p. 2) and Jinks & Morgan (1999) outline a link between perceived self-efficacy of young people and academic achievement. In an attempt to identify the levels of self-efficacy in young people, they created a framework which they called the *Morgan-Jinks Student Efficacy Scale (MJSES).* This takes the format of a series of statements to which the young person answers on a four-point Likert scale between Really agree and Really disagree. These questions are broken down into three categories: Talent items; Context items; Effort items. Talent items focus on the young

person's perceived ability. Context items focus on the perceptions of external and surrounding influences such as the quality of the school, family support and the relevance of education. Effort items focus on how hard they perceive themselves, and others in their class, to work. The purpose of the scale is to provide insight into the perceptions of self-efficacy, in the performance of academic activities. (Jinks & Morgan, 1999)

An adapted version of the MJSES was used with the participants of this research and was an important theoretical tool to understand the underlying perceptions of the young people towards their educational careers and their ability to progress through education. The adaptations to the scale were to ensure relevance for young people attending college. For example, the statement 'No one cares if I do well in school' was adapted to read 'no one cares if I do well in college'. A full explanation of how the MJSES was adapted and used can be found in the section outlining the research activities (p.62).

3.2.5 Messiou's four concepts of marginalisation

Marginalised is a term often used to describe Level 1 learners. I felt that because of this there was a need for a theoretical way of understanding the ways in which it presented itself within the data. It was important for me not to make assumptions on whether my participants were marginalised, or if they felt so, and even more important for me not to tell them they were marginalised (whether I believed this myself or not). Messiou's (2012) four ways of conceptualising marginalisation allowed a framework from which I could begin to identify and understand where marginalisation might be occurring and in what form that took. They describe the ways as:

> 'when a child is experiencing some kind of marginalisation and is recognised by almost everyone including himself/herself; when a child is

> feeling that he/she is experiencing marginalisation, whereas most of the others do not recognise this; when a child is found in what appears to be marginalised situations but does not feel it, or does not view it as marginalisation; and finally when a child is experiencing marginalisation but does not admit it. (Messiou, 2012, pp. 1312-1313)'

This was useful as it allowed an approach that constructed meaning from the contributions of my participants, and across multiple data collection activities. In addition, it also meant there was no direct discussion of marginalisation or 'being marginalised'. I felt this was important as I did not want my participants to have the perception (correctly or incorrectly) that I believed them to be marginalised or in a marginal situation. I believe this was important to the interpretivist, constructivist approach I had taken. I felt the framework facilitated me to create meaning from the data in a way that did not assume a definitive answer was 'out there' (Lincoln & Guba, 2003), but instead a product of how the data was understood (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

3.3 Outlining the approach

This section of the methodology outlines the methods used when undertaking the fieldwork. The data collection methods were both informed by the methods of others within the field of educational research and my own methods and ideas. Each section, task and cycle of research was reactive to the cycle that came before it. While every effort was made to explicitly outline the exact method beforehand, there was some adaptation as the project evolved over time. While the project outline was predominantly qualitative and constructivist, there was a small number of quantifiable datasets generated in this research project. This was born less through a conscious decision to adapt a mixed methods approach and more through a 'what works' approach informed by Deweyan Pragmatism (Morgan, 2014).

I firstly address the terminology I have used when discussing elements of research. I then outline the methods adopted to address each of the research questions which emerged from the literature review (p.42). For each question I first outline the number of participants, location and area for investigation. This is followed by an outline and justification of the data collection activities used and the methods of data analysis. Concluding this section, I address the ethical considerations of the project, outlining how these informed and shaped the research design.

As a reminder, the research questions were:

1. Who are the participants of this study and how do they compare to participants of similar, existing studies?
2. What are the aspirations of Level 1 learners?
3. What are the motivations of Level 1 learners?
4. Do those studying at Level 1 view themselves, or feel, marginalised?
5. Do motivations and aspirations change through the accumulation of Capital?

3.3.1 Terminology used

Within this chapter I use the terms ‘research encounter’ and ‘research activity’ and felt it important to clarify how I have used these terms and their meaning.

A research encounter is a single period of time spent with participants. Some of these encounters are on a one-to-one basis, such as the staff interviews. Other encounters were with multiple individuals, such as the various encounters I had with the group of Level 1 learners. Each of the research encounters is largely focussed on a single research question. A research activity is an activity undertaken during the duration of a research encounter and data from these activities was collected and later analysed.

Within the research encounters with the Level 1 learners, multiple research activities took place at each encounter.

3.3.2 Project overview

Table 1 (p.56) gives an overview of the research project, research encounters and the activities (and their timings) that took place to address each research question. It also summarises the links to theory, data collection methods, methods of analysis and participants of each encounter. It was initially created during the planning stages of the research project and was a helpful tool which I revisited throughout its duration.

Table 1 - An overview of the research design

Research Question	**Encounter**	**Activities & links to theory**	**Methods of data collection**	**Methods of data analysis**	**Participants**
Who are the participants of this study and how do they compare to participants of existing studies?	Staff interviews (December 2018 – May 2019)	Contextualising the group, by comparing to those in the studies of (Atkins, 2008 & 2013) (Russell, 2013) (Simmons, 2017)	1. Semi-structured interviews (audio recording, later transcribed verbatim)	1st cycle Theming the data (Saldaña, 2016) (Braun & Clarke, 2013) 2nd cycle Pattern coding (Miles, et al., 2014) (Saldaña, 2016)	5 staff members from a large FE college in the North East of England
	Encounter 1 (November 2019) Recruitment and contextualising the group.	Contextualising the group, by comparing to those in the studies of (Atkins, 2008 & 2013) (Simmons, 2017) Jinks & Morgan (1999) The Morgan-Jinks Student Efficacy Scale. Ball, et al (2000) Arenas of action and centres of choice.	1. Pseudonym identifier worksheet 2. Questionnaire 3. Participant led group task (video recording, later transcribed verbatim)	1. Theming the data (Saldaña, 2016) (Braun & Clarke, 2013) 2. Converted to numerical data, using Excel, represented in table form. 3.Theoretical Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013)	15 young people aged 16-18, studying Level 1 Music
What are the aspirations of the Level 1 learners?	Encounter 2 (November 2019) Fantasy Futures	Ball, et al (2000) Arenas of action and centres of choice Bourdieu (1986) The types and formation of Capital	1. Arenas of choice discussion 2. By the time I am 30… 3. Key signifiers of adulthood	1.Theoretical Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013) Axial coding (Saldaña, 2016) 2. Theoretical Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013) Pattern Coding (Miles, et al., 2014) (Saldaña, 2016) 3. Inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013) In Vivo coding (Saldaña, 2016)	13 young people aged 16-18, studying Level 1 Music

Research Question	**Research activity(s) to answer the question.**	**Key theories / theoretical approach**	**Methods of data collection**	**Methods of data analysis**	**Participants**
What are the motivations of the Level 1 learners?	Encounter 3 (December 2019) Motivations and transitions.	Bourdieu (1986) The types and formation of Capital.	1.Motivations Group written activity and unstructured group interview. 2. Transitions Unstructured group interview.	1. Values coding (Saldaña, 2016) Pattern coding (Miles, et al., 2014) (Saldaña, 2016) 2. In Vivo coding (Saldaña, 2016) Pattern coding (Miles, et al., 2014) (Saldaña, 2016)	13 young people aged 16-18, studying Level 1 Music
Do the participants view themselves / feel marginalised ?	Encounter 4 (January 2020) The 'gap' and marginalisation.	Messiou (2012) the four ways of conceptualising marginalisation. Mowat (2015) The ways in which marginalisation can occur. Bourdieu (1984) the types and formation of Capital.	1.Filmed focus group discussions. 2. Unstructured group interview	Theoretical Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013) Pattern Coding (Miles, et al., 2014) (Saldaña, 2016)	11 young people aged 16-18, studying Level 1 Music
Do motivations and aspirations change through the accumulation of Capital?	Encounter 5 (December 2020) Revising participants around 1 year later.	Ball, et al (2000) Arenas of action and centres of choice Bourdieu (1984) the types and formation of Capital.	1.By the time I and 30 and motivations worksheet. 2.Group discussion	1. Theoretical Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013) Pattern Coding (Miles, et al., 2014) (Saldaña, 2016) 2. Theoretical Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013) Pattern Coding (Miles, et al., 2014) (Saldaña, 2016) Inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013) Pattern Coding (Miles, et al., 2014) (Saldaña, 2016)	4 young people aged 17-19, studying Level 2 Music

3.3.3 Research question 1 – Who are the participants of this study and how do they compare to those of existing studies?

This research question was addressed in two ways. The first was through a series of staff interviews. The second was through the first encounter with the Level 1 learners, who would go on to be my participants for the remainder of the research.

3.3.3.1 Staff interviews

Participants

Participants were recruited from the same institution as the young people taking part in the main body of research. A total of five members of staff took part, from a range of backgrounds and job roles. Job roles of staff included learner support, lecturer and senior management. At the time of interviews, 3 individuals were regularly working with Level 1 learners and all outlined time working with Level 1 learners during their careers.

Location

The research encounters took place in a range of small offices on the main campus of a FE College in the North East of England.

Area for investigation

The motivation was to ascertain the feelings, thoughts and level of understanding of staff working in Further Education, of Level 1 learners within a FE College. As the research question addressed who the participants of Level 1 programmes were, I felt understanding the staff perceptions of Level 1 learners was a good starting point – and would later provide a useful comparison with who the Level 1 learners *actually*

were. Aside from the perceptions of Level 1 learners from existing literature (p.17), I had observed and overheard several staff referring to Level 1 learners in a pejorative and dismissive way. I wanted to understand if these perceptions were isolated to a small number of staff, or if these deficit viewpoints were more widely shared across the college.

Data collection activities

At the beginning of each research interview, informed consent was obtained. This was achieved by allocating the initial part of the interviews to discuss the overarching research aims and ethical standpoint. Once this was completed, the participant was asked if they still wished to take part and I requested they sign a participant consent form. All participants were issued with an information sheet (see *Appendix 2* p.242). This included an overview of the research aims as well as contact details for myself and my research supervisor, should they wish to withdraw. Each participant took part in a single, semi-structured one to one interview. Using an interview method allowed for the collection of a range of different information, providing opportunity for probing, clarification and checking on the understanding of the data being presented (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). With the interviews being semi-structured, this included scope for reflexivity and topics beyond the anticipated to be addressed (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I felt having interviews on a one-by-one basis was more suited than undertaking them as a focus group; I did not want to investigate a collective understanding, but rather individual perceptions (Silverman, 2014). In addition, the format of interview fit well with the constructivist approach and the relativist ontological standpoint of the research, as the aim was not to discover a single answer, but a series of truths (Braun & Clarke, 2013) from a range of staff members. In addition, if a survey

had been used, this would not have allowed the opportunity for probing, checking and clarification that an interview allows (Atkins & Wallace, 2012).

Regardless of the position of the staff member within the college, the same underlying framework and questions were used. Answers were probed and any interesting avenues for discussion were followed if deemed relevant. A series of questions were asked of the interviewees, including 'What are your first thoughts when I mention Level 1 learners?' and 'What do you think the perceptions of other staff members are, of Level 1 learners?'. See *Appendix 1* (p.240) for a full copy of the questions and framework for these interviews. These interviews were captured using audio recording. I felt this was the most appropriate approach as I was interested in the detail of the responses and fieldnotes would not have allowed for this in the situation (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Furthermore, with the interviews taking place on a one-to-one basis, there was little need to video the interviews; a video camera in such an intimate setting might have proved intimidating for the interviewee (Atkins & Wallace, 2012).

Methods of data analysis.

Transcription of the interviews was done verbatim (Braun & Clarke, 2013). However, it was not verbatim in the truest sense; while slang and vernacular terms remained, as did the original punctuation, I chose not to include non-lexical utterances in the transcription. I felt this was of little use, and while there might have been opportunity to delve into the meaning of these, there was also a danger I might misinterpret them (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). Analysis of the data took place during two cycles of coding, using the NVivo software. The first cycle of coding I used is described by Saldaña (2016) as 'theming the data' and involved working through the data to attach a 'thematic statement' to sections of the interviews. These codes were very much 'data-

derived' and provided a succinct summary of the exact content of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013); some of the shorter statements were actually coded in Nvivo. Coding in this way produced a large number of nodes – 267 in total – and examples included 'School refuser', 'they won't have their "good" GCSEs', 'cool not to care' and 'Level 1 last option'.

The second cycle of coding took the initial coding nodes, and I began 'searching for themes', attributing 'researcher-derived' codes (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This was a process of 'pattern coding' (Saldaña, 2016) and allowed me to condense '…large amounts of data into a smaller number of analytical units.' (Miles, et al., 2014, p. 86) In total, there was 10 wider themes into which the first cycle data fit. All of the initial themes fitted into at least one of the second cycle themes, although several of them fitted into multiple. Examples of themes that emerged from this cycle of coding include 'mindset', 'Capital' and 'marginalisation'.

3.3.3.2 Encounter 1 – Participant recruitment and contextualising activities

Participants

15 young people aged 16-18. All participants identified as male – this was coincidental and not by design – and studied a Level 1 qualification in Music.

Location

The location for this encounter was a classroom on the main campus of a large FE college in the North East of England. The participants were all familiar with the space, as they often had timetabled lessons in the same room.

Area for investigation

This was my initial meeting with the Level 1 learners and potentially the most critical point in the whole research project. How the young people perceived the value and trustworthiness of both the research, and myself as researcher, would have a major impact on how the research would progress. As there were no rules which could be devised that ensured good relations, particularly as the young people were unlikely to have any pre-existing knowledge of social research, there was a risk of being met with suspicion by the group of young people (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Young people often have little confidence that they will be listened to, their opinions taken on board, or what they say will be taken as a legitimate contribution to a conversation (Coleman, et al., 2004). In addition, there was an existing power relationship between myself as researcher and the potential participants as they were recruited from my own teaching context.

The aims for this encounter were to recruit participants, before conducting a series of data collection activities (outlined below) to create an overview of who my participants were in relation to their background, their views towards education and what was important to them in their lives.

Participant recruitment

This was the first section of this encounter and began with an outline of the overall research aims, the types of activities that would be happening, the expectations of the participants and – more importantly – what they should expect from me as researcher. A detailed explanation of the research was provided, along with a participant information sheet (see *Appendix 2* p.242) and consent form (see *Appendix 3* p.243). This took priority over the other activities planned for this encounter; there needed to

be enough time for discussion around the project and the opportunity for potential participants to ask questions about the research, myself as a researcher and not their teacher, and the possible outcomes of the research. By the end of this section of the encounter, I had to be in no doubt that the young people who had chosen to take part was through genuinely informed consent; if I had had any doubt that the consent given was anything other than an informed decision, contributions from that individual(s) would not have been used in the findings of the research, as per BERA (2018) guidelines. Further discussion around informed consent and my ethical approach is outlined later in the Methodology chapter (p.90)

Data collection activities

1. Pseudonym worksheet. The first of three tasks, a short worksheet, identified pseudonyms by which the young people themselves wished to be referred, once their contributions had been anonymised. As part of a similar research project with Level 1 learners, Atkins (2013) asked participants to select their own pseudonym. Atkins noted that the response to this was 'interesting', with some learners choosing joke names, or names shared with popular celebrities. Names relating to sexual prowess aside, what this achieved was to encourage a level of ownership over the research to the participants; while they cannot be identified by name for ethical reasons, they can however choose how their contributions are represented. As I planned to research *with* and not *on* my participants, I considered encouraging this level of ownership key to achieving 'buy in' of the participants. To capture and document the pseudonyms, each individual was issued with a paper hand-out, upon which to write their chosen name. The hand-out also asked for a reason for choosing their particular name,

which provided an interesting insight into the mindset and values of the participants. See *Appendix 4* (p.244) for an example of the pseudonym identifier form. Some basic guidelines were given for those completing this form. The chosen name must not be constructed from explicit words or feature their real name, either in part or fully. The name must also not be deemed derogatory to others, in relation to the nine protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010 (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010).

2. Questionnaire. The second activity was a questionnaire, see *Appendix 5* (p.245) for a copy of the questionnaire given to participants. The questionnaire was designed to collect data about the backgrounds of the young people, as well as understanding their perceptions of their own ability within education. I felt a questionnaire was most suited to this task as it was an efficient way to collect data and background information. As this was potentially sensitive data, I felt that it was important to offer privacy and anonymity to the contributions of the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Some of the questions were open ended, while others were multi-choice. Examples of questions the participants were asked to complete included selecting answers from statements such as 'I live in a flat / bungalow / terrace house / semi-detached house / detached house / other', and 'I have a part time job as well as coming to college'. A large influence on the first section of the questionnaire was the *Morgan-Jinks Student Efficacy Scale (MJSES)* (Jinks & Morgan, 1999) (see p.52). Participants were asked to respond to 34 statements using a four-point Likert scale made up of really agree, kind of agree, kind of disagree and really disagree. This was adapted from the original to suit both the age of my participants and the fact they are UK based, as some statements in the original were not relevant; 'I will

graduate from high school' (ibid, p. 226) being once such statement. However, the majority of statements were used in their original format or edited slightly. For example, 'What I learn in school is important' (ibid, p. 226) became 'what I learn in college is important.' The questionnaire activity was useful for a number of reasons. Firstly, it allowed for the identification of the Capital currently held by the learners, be it self-accumulated or via existing Capital held by parents, guardians or the wider family unit. Secondly, it allowed for comparison of the young people against those taking part in other studies, which occurs as part of the discussion chapter of this thesis. As a quantifiable dataset, it allowed for contextualising statements to be made about the group of participants e.g., the percentage of participants from workless households, or participants who have part time jobs. The questionnaire did not ask participants to give their name, as it was not important to be able to identify the person completing the questionnaire; the purpose was to collect contextualising information about the group.

3. Arenas of choice. The final task at this research encounter was a short discussion task. The participants were asked to form three, self-selected groups. I felt encouraging the groups to be self-selected would ensure each participant was in a group in which they felt comfortable; I had hoped this would lead to a higher level of engagement and contribution during the activity. The activity was similar to one undertaken by Atkins (2013) during her initial meetings with a similar group of young people. The task sought to understand the things that were important in the lives of the young people, based on four categories: Family, Education, Social/Leisure and Work. These themes were adapted from what Ball, et al. (2000, p. 148) describes as the 'arenas of action

and centres of choice' (see p.51). Each group used A3 paper templates (see *Appendix 6* p.249) that featured the four headings. They discussed the headings and wrote down, using markers, the things they considered important for each. I felt that conducting the activity in this way would lead to an unstructured, but guided discussion (Braun & Clarke, 2013) that would also actively encourage interaction and group discussion around each area (Silverman, 2011). Each group was filmed while discussing and identifying what was important to them in the four categories. I felt this was appropriate as a complete transcription could be made (Atkins & Wallace, 2012), but was a much better format than audio recording; unlike the human ear, audio recordings cannot differentiate between sound sources and will pick up sound indiscriminately (Bronkhorst, 2015) and I felt a visual element would help identify who was making contributions when multiple participants spoke at once.

Methods of data analysis

1. Pseudonym identifier worksheets. These were analysed on a thematic basis. Coding in this way allowed for a 'bottom up' approach (Braun & Clarke, 2013) to analysis, bringing 'meaning and identity' (Saldaña, 2016) to the data; it allowed for categorisation and summarisation of the data from multiple participants, highlighting similarities and differences (Nowell, et al., 2017). A total of 6 categories were identified, including 'music related' and 'popular culture reference'. Please see p.109 for a full outline of the findings from this activity.

2. Questionnaire. The results for each questionnaire were combined together in Excel and presented as statistical data in table format. This is not dissimilar to how Bourdieu (1986) presents survey data taken on the French public in *Distinction.* Presenting the findings in this way allowed for the presentation of the data as a symbolic summary of the measured outcome from this activity (Saldaña, 2016). Findings from this activity are used as a form of triangulation; as a way of triangulating between different researchers and research projects (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Using this data to contextualise the group in this way allowed for comparisons to the young people that participated in similar studies. In particular, the studies by Atkins (2008, 2009 & 2013), whose participants most closely resembled my own. The data from this activity is presented in the findings section (p.111).
3. Arenas of choice. There were two forms of data from this activity. The first was the completed A3 sheets and the second was the video recordings of the discussions which took place during the activity. As the data had existing themes, due to categories being linked to the Arenas of Choice (Ball, et al., 2000) activity, the contributions were digitised and are presented verbatim in the findings section (p.124). In addition, I had planned an activity at Encounter 2 (p.69) in which I would ask my participants to analyse the findings and outline their own thoughts on the results. Working in this way was part of the *with* not *on* (p.48) approach I had adopted. The videos were inputted into NVivo, and selected sections transcribed. These sections were transcribed verbatim (Braun & Clarke, 2013) as I felt it was important to ensure the transcription was an accurate account – particularly as the voice of my participants was so important. However, like my approach to transcription of the staff interviews

(p.61) I did not feel it important to include non-lexical utterances as I felt there was a danger to misinterpreting these (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). These transcriptions were re-loaded back into NVivo as text files and coded using 'theoretical' thematic analysis, in which my themes were guided by existing theory (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The theory to guide the themes was my adapted *Arenas of choice* (Ball, et al., 2000) categories I had used for the group activity; Family, Education, Social/Leisure and Work. This was an important framework to use, as it helped to categorise and sort the contributions of my participants; the findings from this activity are on p.124.

3.3.4 Research question 2. What are the aspirations of the Level 1 Learners?

This research question was addressed during the second encounter I had with my participants. This section of the methodology outlines the participants, location, areas for investigation, data collection activities and methods of data analysis at what I considered to be Encounter 2.

Participants

A total of 13 of 15 of the participants who had consented to take part in the research during encounter 1 participated in this encounter. 2 individuals did not take part. However, this was not through an explicit withdrawal of consent, but rather they were absent from college on the day the encounter occurred.

Location

The location for this encounter was a classroom on the main campus of a large FE college in the North East of England. This was the same space used during encounter 1 (p.162).

Areas for investigation

This encounter had two main foci. One was as a process of analysis of the data from encounter 1. The primary focus of this encounter though was on the aspirations of the young people taking part in the Level 1 programme, outlining their 'fantasy futures', what they considered to be the routes to achieving them and what they considered to be key signifiers of successful adulthood. A full outline of the plan for this encounter can be seen in *Appendix 7 (p.250*).

Data collection activities

1. Analysis of data from the *Arenas of choice* activity from Encounter 1. During this activity, participants were presented with some of the common themes and key findings from the previous encounter, under the headings Family, Social/Leisure, Education, and Work. These findings were used as a framework for an unstructured group interview. This allowed for the whole group to be interviewed at the same time, hopefully making the interview situation less threatening and encouraging my participants to be somewhat more forthcoming (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Within this activity, I viewed myself more as moderator, rather than interviewer (Braun & Clarke, 2013) and I felt this approach worked well to ensure the findings from this activity were those of my participants and not influenced by myself; this was informed by the *with* not *on*

(p.48) epistemological position I had adopted. During the early stages of this activity, I directed open-ended questions at the group and there was some initial need for direct questioning to break the ice. Once the activity had begun to flow, I returned to my 'moderator' (Braun & Clarke, 2013) role. This group discussion was captured using video. As with the previous group discussion I outlined in encounter 1 (p.64), I felt that a simple audio recording might make it difficult to identify who was contributing and when, particularly if multiple people spoke at once (Bronkhorst, 2015). Unlike the earlier activities though, I did use an audio recorder at the other end of the room as a back-up, as I was concerned at the ability of the camera to capture the audio of the full room – or worse, fail (Atkins & Wallace, 2012).

2. The second activity at this encounter focussed on the aspirations of my participants. To address this, I asked my participants to individually complete the sentence 'By the time I am 30…'. This was done as a written task on an A4 worksheet I provided (see *Appendix 8* p.253). I felt this was a good way of understanding the thoughts and feelings of the young people towards their future selves, encouraging them to 'tell their story' by outlining their perceived futures (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Although there was no official guidance on how to respond or answer, there was a reminder of the four points discussed in the 'Arenas of action' activity that was adapted from Ball, et al. (2000) and used in the previous encounter; I suggested that these might be good starting points to consider when generating their responses. I gave my participants 10 minutes to consider their responses, after which an unstructured group interview took place to discuss what they had written down. I felt having an unstructured interview would be the best way to approach this as it allowed for the

proceedings to be participant led (Braun & Clarke, 2013) and encouraged freedom to talk and dictate the narrative (Silverman, 2011). Where the participants chose to share their answers, I encouraged them to consider what the routes were to achieve their aspired to futures and share what they thought they were. I had also asked if they had considered a plan B, and if so, what this might be. This discussion was captured using video, with an audio recorder as backup, for the same reasons I discussed for activity 1, above.

3. Key Signifiers of adulthood. The third, and final activity at this encounter addressed what my participants considered were the key signifiers of successful adulthood. In addition, what, if any, are the barriers to achieving or attaining the key signifiers. In the first part of this activity, I asked each of my participants to write what they considered to be the key signifiers on the back of the worksheets they had used for the 'By the time I am 30…' activity. I gave them 5 minutes to consider their responses and complete this task. I then conducted a group interview, asking them to share what they had identified, and outline why they had identified what they had. This interview was done in an unstructured way; while I had a theme, I did not have specific questions to ask, and wanted the proceedings to be largely dictated by my participants and their contributions (Braun & Clarke, 2013). As with the other two activities at this encounter, the group interview was video recorded, with an audio recorder used as backup.

Methods of data analysis

1. Arenas of choice discussion. The footage from this activity was loaded into the NVivo software and transcribed verbatim (Braun & Clarke, 2013). As

with the transcriptions from activities at my previous encounter, non-lexical utterances were not included in the transcripts (p.61). This transcript was then loaded back into the NVivo software for coding and analysis. First cycle coding utilised 'theoretical' thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013), using the four themes from the adapted *Arenas of choice* (Ball, et al., 2000) activity to create four groups of data on the themes of Family, Education, Social/Leisure and Work. A second cycle of coding was done using an 'Axial' method (Saldaña, 2016), which allows for the data to be split into contrasting sub-categories. In this case, the data was split between positive and negative experiences, in relation to each of the themes in the first cycle. Findings from this activity are on p.138.

2. 'By the time I am 30…'. The written responses provided by the participants were digitised and input into a table. While spelling errors were corrected during this process, the wording and punctuation remained as each individual had written it. The responses can be seen on p.139. The video from the discussion was loaded into NVivo and then transcribed verbatim, minus non-lexical utterances in the same way as the data from task 1. This transcript was then re-loaded into NVivo, and the data was then analysed in two distinct ways:
    a. Adapted themes from the *Arenas of choice* (Ball, et al., 2000). First cycle coding used the four areas (Family, Work, Education, and Social/Leisure) I used in the previous activity as a form of theoretical thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). However, as I progressed through this cycle of coding another theme strongly emerged, and I chose to add an additional category: Home. This was used to theme

contributions which focussed on living arrangements, as it seemed clear that for many these appeared separate from the theme of Family. The second cycle of coding took the initial section of data and looked for common themes, attributing my own 'researcher-derived' codes (Braun & Clarke, 2013) in a process of 'pattern coding' (Miles, et al., 2014) (Saldaña, 2016).

b. Bourdieu's concepts of Capital (1986). As with the first level of data analysis, first cycle coding used a process of theoretical thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I did this using the three main forms of Capital: Social, Cultural and Economic. This created three lumps of data from which to be investigated further. The section of data which referred to Cultural Capital then had a second cycle of theoretical thematic analysis, to group the data further based on the different states of Cultural Capital: Embodied, Institutional, and Objectified. A further cycle of coding was then undertaken across all themes, using a pattern coding (Saldaña, 2016) technique to identify my own themes.

3. Key signifiers of adulthood. The written responses from this activity were digitised verbatim and inputted into an Excel spreadsheet; each participant had their own column and each key signifier that had been identified was listed vertically below (see *Appendix 9,* p.254). I then themed the data using an inductive, 'bottom up' approach (Braun & Clarke, 2013) to identify meaning and categorisation (Nowell, et al., 2017). The video from the discussion on *why* they felt what they had identified were key signifiers of adulthood was inputted into NVivo and transcribed verbatim, excluding non-

lexical utterances (as per the earlier activities). This transcription was then re-inputted back into NVivo for analysis. Coding was done 'In Vivo', using the exact words and phrases used by my participants (Saldaña, 2016). As this activity was not linked to an explicit underpinning theory, I felt coding in this way was an important way of prioritising the voice of my participants (Miles, et al., 2014). The findings from this activity can be seen on p.151.

3.3.5 Research question 3. What are the motivations of Level 1 learners?

This research question addressed the motivations of the Level 1 learners, for taking part in education and was the third research encounter I conducted with my participants.

Participants

A total of 13 individuals from the initial 15 who consented to take part in this research took part during this encounter. As with the previous encounter, the two individuals who did not take part was not due to an explicit withdrawal of consent, but simply they were not present at the time of the encounter.

Location

The location for this encounter was a teaching space on the main campus of a large FE college in the North East of England. This was the same space used for the previous two encounters and was a familiar space for those taking part.

Area for investigation

This encounter focussed on two areas for investigation. The first focussed on the motivations for attending college. It was hoped that understanding this would give me an opportunity for comparison with earlier research. The second area for investigation focussed on post-16 transition from school to the next steps in life. A full outline for this encounter can be seen in *Appendix 10* (p.254).

Data collection activities

1. Motivations. The first task at this encounter was designed to explore – through a group written activity – what the motivations for attending college were. I asked my participants to form self-selected groups of no more than four. I then asked them as a group, to consider the question 'What motivates me to attend college?'. I gave the groups 10 minutes to complete this activity. At the end of the task, I asked them to write their group's findings onto a piece of paper using a pen. Once this section of the activity was completed, there was then an unstructured group interview that I facilitated, which encouraged my participants to discuss their written contributions. I felt that conducting the interview in this way would ensure my participants were more *informant* than *responder*, ensuring they had the opportunity to direct the agenda (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). While I had an overarching topic for this interview, I hoped the overall direction would be determined by my participants (Braun & Clarke, 2013) and felt this approach worked well with the *with* not *on* approach I had adopted (p.48). This interview was captured using a video recorder, with an audio recorder as backup. This was done

for the same reasons I have previously outlined for the second encounter (p.70).

2. Transitions activity. The second part of this encounter focussed on transitions. In particular, how they transitioned from school onto the next step – in this case, college. I had considered the questions that emerged from the literature: Did they see the participation age being 18 as a motivator? What options did they see as open to them? What jobs are available to them? How did they arrive at college as the best option for them? However, I did not want to ask direct questions in this format, as I felt this had the possibility of influencing their answers and limit the range and diversity of responses (Braun & Clarke, 2013). What I did was to undertake an unstructured interview, using the question 'What options were open to you, upon leaving school at age 16?', which I had written on the whiteboard at the front of the room. As with the previous activity, this was captured using a video recorder, with an audio recording device positioned at the other end of the room as a backup. While this might seem somewhat unplanned, I felt it important to encourage the direction of discussion on this topic to be dictated by my participants – again, feeding into the *with* not *on* approach (p.48).

Methods of data analysis

1. Motivations. The recording from this activity was inputted into NVivo and a transcript was created from the video. This transcript was then exported as a text document and re-inputted into NVivo for analysis. Transcription was undertaken verbatim, but did exclude any non-lexical utterances, for the

same reasons I have previously discussed (p.61). First cycle coding was done by ‘values coding’ (Saldaña, 2016). A value is something perceived as of importance; initial coding using the things that appeared as important motivators was a useful starting point. Second cycle coding was done using ‘pattern coding’ in order to condense the codes from the initial cycle into a smaller number of analytical units (Miles, et al., 2014) such as ‘socialising’ and ‘status’ etc.

2. Transitions. As with the data from the first activity, this was loaded into NVivo, and a transcript was created. This was then loaded back into NVivo as a text document. As with the previous activity at this encounter, this was transcribed verbatim, excluding non-lexical utterances. The initial cycle of coding for this activity was coded ‘in vivo’, using the words of the participants as initial codes (Miles, et al., 2014). This allowed me to retain the voice and language used by my participants. Saldaña (2016) identifies it as a method which is useful to maintain and honour the voice of interviewees, particularly in educational settings, where participants and their views are often marginalised; coding in this way placed emphasis on the actual spoken words of my participants (Manning, 2017). Second cycle coding was done through ‘pattern coding’ (Saldaña, 2016), in which I looked for patterns and themes in the first cycle results. Coding in this way allowed for the development of narratives, and statements, on the major themes coming from the data.

3.3.6 Research question 4. Do those studying at Level 1 view themselves as, or feel, marginalised?

One of the common themes from the literature review that came through very strongly was the perception that young people who participate in Level 1 programmes are marginalised (p.29). Encounter 4 was planned to address this topic with my participants. This section of the methodology outlines the participants, location, area for investigation, data collection activities and methods of data analysis for this encounter.

Participants

At this encounter 11 participants were present and took part in the activities. The remaining 4 of the original 15 participants did not take part at this encounter. This was not explicitly linked to a withdrawal of consent, but rather through absence from college on the day the encounter took place.

Location

The location for this encounter was a teaching space on the main campus of a large FE college in the North East of England. The young people at this encounter were familiar with the space as the previous encounters had all taken place in the same room.

Area for investigation

Existing research literature describes many of those taking part in Level 1 programmes as marginalised, or on the margins (p.29). This encounter focussed on generating an understanding of the perceptions of the young people in this research: Do they feel

marginalised and if so, what do they feel is causing their marginalisation? I felt that simply asking them if they felt marginalised would be somewhat leading, and the best approach would be to use a series of statements relating to young people who live in the North East. These statements were generated from the findings in the literature review and focussed on the attainment gap in the North East (Hutchinson, et al., 2018), employment statistics (ACEVO, 2012), regional and national NEET rates (Department for Education, 2018) and the fact that young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, in the North East, are more likely to drop out of education and employment at age 16 than anywhere else in England (Social Mobility & Child Poverty Commission, 2014). In addition, there was also a discussion on the compulsory leaving age of education; this was raised from 16 to 18, for those completing year 11 from 2014. Statements included 'Parts of the North East are identified as youth unemployment hotspots, 1 in 8 young people are unemployed – twice the national average' and 'The North East has the highest rate of people aged 16-24, in England, who are not in employment, education or training'. Please see *Appendix 11* (p.255) for a framework of the encounter.

Data collection activities

1. Participant led focus groups. I asked the participants to form two self-selected groups. These two groups would form two small focus groups from which to discuss statements related to the North East. These statements were projected onto the wall. There was a total of 5 statements, and these were changed at 5-minute intervals. I did not give any guidance on how the groups should respond to the statements and took a back seat during the activity to ensure the two groups were self-moderated. Conducting the

research in this way allowed for meaning of the statements to be negotiated by the groups themselves in a form of 'collective sense making' (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In addition to this, I felt my involvement in these discussions was not conducive to ensuring the voice of my participants came through. They all shared a particular position (Silverman, 2011) as young people in the North East of England who studied a Level 1 programme. As I did not share this position with them, I felt it important to remove my voice from these discussions. The discussions of both groups were filmed using small cameras. I felt it important to use a camera to capture these discussions, as it would be easier to identify who was contributing what and when, particularly if multiple people spoke at once (Bronkhorst, 2015).

2. Group discussion. The second activity was an unstructured group discussion, addressing the statements the participants had been discussing in their focus groups during the first task. I felt it important to remove much of my influence from the discussion, acting as moderator (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I felt working in this way would ensure a detailed picture of the subject as my participants saw it, prioritise their responses and – I had hoped – uncover an insider perspective that might otherwise have been missed (Mann, 2016). In addition to the original statements, I asked two additional questions and asked for a response to one additional statement at the end: What does it feel like to study at Level 1? Do you think the leaving age of education should be 18? There are no jobs for young people. I wanted to ask these questions as I felt it would allow for an insight into their perceptions and mindsets towards education, their current position within the college, and their views of the employment landscape in the region. I

also felt this would encourage contributions that might generate discussions related to marginalisation. I did not want to directly use the term marginalised nor marginalisation as I felt this had the potential to influence their responses. This activity was captured using a video camera, using an audio recorder as backup. The choice of prioritising the use of video was for the same reason I had done in the earlier activities.

Methods of data analysis

The data collected from the video footage – both of the initial activity and then the group discussion – was inputted into NVivo and written transcripts were created. These transcripts were done verbatim, excluding non-lexical utterances, for the reasons explained earlier in this chapter (p.61). Each of these transcripts were then re-loaded into NVivo as text documents. I chose to analyse the data from both activities as a single collection of data. I felt that as the group discussions and focus groups addressed the same statements that this was appropriate. First cycle coding was done using a 'theoretical thematic analysis' approach (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This was done using the four concepts of marginalisation outlined by Messiou (2012), of which a full description can be found earlier in this chapter (p.53). Second cycle coding was done using 'pattern coding' (Saldaña, 2016), which allowed for an identification of patterns to be identified – in particular, the environment or context where marginalisation had occurred. A Third cycle of coding also occurred, focusing on the causes of marginalisation. This was done using 'theoretical thematic analysis' (Braun & Clarke, 2013), focussing on Bourdieu's (1986) forms of Capital to understand if any of the marginal positions identified were related to one or more forms of Capital.

3.3.7 Research question 5. Do motivations and aspirations change through the accumulation of Capital?

This research encounter was planned to help understand if motivations and aspirations changed through the accumulation of Capital – in this case, Cultural Capital in the institutional state through the completion of a Level 1 qualification in Music.

Participants & (re)recruitment

Of the original 15 participants who consented to take part in the earlier research encounters, 4 took part during this encounter. 3 of the young people had not achieved the Level 1 programme, so had not progressed onto the Level 2. This initially left 12 of the remaining participants. However, a further 3 individuals did not stay on the Level 2 course beyond the first few weeks. Of the 9 remaining individuals, all expressed an interest in taking part at this encounter, but only 4 attended on the day the activity took place. A full overview of the participants who did not take part in this encounter can be found in the findings section (p.176). At the beginning of the encounter, I reminded the participants of the research aims and gave them an overview of the project. I also outlined the activities I had planned for the encounter before ensuring they still wished to take part. As some time had passed since the initial 4 encounters, I re-issued each participant with a new participant information sheet, which outlined how to contact myself and my research supervisor should they have any concerns, or to withdraw from the research.

Location

The location for this encounter was a recording studio at the main campus of a large FE college in North East England. While the previous encounters had all taken place in a different space, this was unavailable at the time. However, the recording studio environment was one which the young people were familiar with, and they regularly utilised the space both in lessons and independently. In addition, as an acoustically treated space it provided an excellent environment to conduct the encounter as it was quiet and devoid of natural reverberation.

Areas for investigation

The areas for investigation during this encounter were aspirations and motivations. This was to allow for a comparison between the earlier research encounters (p.69 & p.75) and help understand if/how they had changed since they were studying on Level 1. It was also an opportunity to address the issue of COVID-19[1], which had impacted the tail-end of their Level 1 programme and – at the time – was influencing how they could engage with learning on the Level 2 programme.

[1] At the time of the earlier encounters, COVID-19 was not currently in the UK and as such was not affecting the day-to-day running of the programme of study. Towards the end of the Jan-April term in 2020, this escalated, and the UK went into a full national lockdown in March. This remained in force until the end of the 2019/20 academic year, meaning all teaching and learning moved online. At the time of encounter 5, some of the lockdown restrictions had been lifted and face-to-face learning was allowed but limited to smaller class sizes with strict room capacities. The country was currently in a 'tier' system and rolling local lockdowns were in place regionally in the country. There was an overarching fear at the time of the encounter that the country would re-enter a period of national lockdown and this did occur in January 2021, lasting much of the remaining 2020/21 academic year.

Data collection activities

1. Motivations and aspirations worksheet. This first activity was designed to address both the motivations and aspirations of my participants. This was an adapted version of the 'By the time I am 30…' activity conducted in the second encounter (p.70). As in the earlier research encounter, the activity asked the participants to complete the statement 'By the time I am 30…' by writing their response on the worksheet. The participants were reminded of the four Arenas of choice, adapted from Ball, et al. (2000) we had discussed in the earlier activity (p.64) and it was suggested that they consider these when completing the task. The modification to the activity was to include a second aspect to the written task. This was the question 'What motivates me to attend college?'. I had chosen to include this as a question on this worksheet as a form of pragmatism; I had only planned a single encounter to address *both* the aspirations and motivations of my participants. Previously, each was addressed at separate encounters. It was hoped that the responses from this activity could be directly compared with the earlier activities in encounters 2 (p.70) and 3 (p.76). An example of this worksheet can be seen in *Appendix 12* (p.256).
2. Group semi-structured interview. I asked four questions to the group in this activity. The first two questions directly related to the worksheets they had filled in, asking them to discuss and elaborate on their written contributions from the first task. As it was a small group, I posed these questions to each member of the group, encouraging every participant to contribute. The third question I posed to the group was 'Do you think your aspirations have changed since completing Level 1?'. I had hope that by asking this question,

it would require them to think back and consider their contributions from the earlier encounter and consider if their aspirations might have changed. Where participants gave a single word answer such as yes or no, I encouraged them to explain *why* they felt that way and *how* they arrived at their answer. The final question – and something I felt needed addressing – was focussed on the COVID-19 pandemic. I asked 'Has COVID impacted your motivations or aspirations?'. The pandemic had become a big focus in everyone's lives. I felt that I needed to understand if and how the pandemic might be impacting their thinking in relation to what they aspire to do, and if/how it had impacted their motivations – both as a student and as a musician. The group interview was captured using audio recording only. As the number of participants was few, I felt the benefits of video recording was minimal. In addition, as the activity took place in a recording studio, I utilised the specialist equipment and microphones to create a very high-quality audio recording; I felt the step-up in audio quality would be worth losing the video element to the collection of data.

Methods of data analysis

1. Written task. The contributions from each of the participants were digitised by inputting the data into a word document. While I corrected their spelling errors, the punctuation and wording of each contribution was retained. This document was then loaded into NVivo for analysis. I used the same methods of coding as I did in the earlier activity (p.72): A first cycle using 'theoretical thematic analysis' (Braun & Clarke, 2013), using the adapted *Arenas of choice* (Ball, et al., 2000) categories, with the further addition of 'home', as

this theme had emerged strongly from the earlier encounter. This was followed by a second cycle of 'pattern coding' (Miles, et al., 2014) (Saldaña, 2016) to drill further into the data. A second coding activity then took place, again using 'theoretical thematic analysis', using Bourdieu's (1986) forms of Capital as a framework. I felt it important to retain the same methods of analysis from the earlier encounter, as I felt this would allow for a direct comparison between these findings and the previous.

2. Group interview. The audio from this activity was loaded into NVivo and transcribed verbatim, with the exclusion of non-lexical utterances, as it had been done in the earlier encounters (p.61). This transcript was then exported as a text document and reloaded back into NVivo for analysis. Initial coding of the discussion was done using the same methods and cycles of coding as the data from the first activity at this encounter. As before, I felt this would allow for a direct comparison with the data from the earlier encounter (p.72). However, as there were additional questions, I felt it important to introduce an additional coding activity, as important data could have been missed had I stuck to the theoretical coding frameworks. The first cycle of this coding activity was done by 'inductive thematic analysis' (Braun & Clarke, 2013) to assess the data from the 'bottom up'. A second cycle of coding then followed using 'pattern coding' (Saldaña, 2016), which allowed me to further 'tie' pieces of data together (Miles, et al., 2014).

3.4 Ethics

Ethical approval for this research project was granted by both Newcastle University and the host FE College – who conducted their own approval – where the research

took place. While I did not feel it useful to outline the full process of ethical approval in this thesis, I did feel it important to outline my thinking and position for the topics of insider research – which I later reflect upon in the discussion section (p.198) – informed consent and the research approach of *with* not *on* – which I also revisit and reflect upon in the discussion section (p.200) . As the research involved both young people and researching within my own employment context, I felt addressing these areas was pertinent.

3.4.1 Insider research

The fieldwork for this thesis took, at least primarily, the form of insider research; the data and evidence were collected with the young people whom I encountered on a daily basis as part of my own professional role. As a piece of original, educational research, the fieldwork connected to this thesis had several potentially sticky issues. One of these was the position of being an 'insider', with my dual role as both educator and researcher. There was a dissonance between the two roles I undertook when I engaged with the young people who took part in my research. It was important for me to understand how my two roles could be segmented and ensure the young people who were part of the research understood each – teaching *and* research – and their boundaries. Within an education setting, insider research, and from a wider perspective, action research, is viewed as a practical and systematic research method that enables researchers to investigate into their own practice (Nolen & Putten, 2007). Being an insider allowed me to 'blend in' and observe situations, while reducing the possibility of altering the research setting. I hoped this would uncover richer, more illuminating data and lead to a more informed 'story' (Atkins & Wallace, 2012) (Hanson, 2013). In addition, I hoped working in this way had the potential of '…excavating rich

data from the deep strata…' (Humphrey, 2012, p. 582) of the lives of my participants. Because of this potential, research in this way has 'flourished' in recent years (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2013).

As with any form of research, insider research has its own clear set of difficulties, primarily focussing on the status and position of the researcher within their own context (Drake, 2010). Within my own research I found I experienced, like Atkins & Wallace reported:

> '…challenges associated with undertaking insider research […] associated with role identity and boundary conflict, confidentiality, relationships, power relations and impartiality.' (Atkins & Wallace, 2012, p. 50)

Straddling the line between practitioner and researcher was a difficult situation and I found that placing myself within the frame of research was a primary ethical consideration (Drake, 2010).

> 'As with any research, gaining informed consent from respondents and taking measures to ensure their anonymity and confidentiality are required, but there are additional considerations when respondents are also work colleagues [or indeed students].' (Hanson, 2013, p. 395)

This dual role was a tough balancing act and I had questioned the nature of this by considering to what extent I was a professional and to what extent a researcher in each situation I found myself in (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). While it was true to say I could never fully 'abandon my role' as practitioner (Nolen & Putten, 2007), I did ensure this aspect took a back seat in data collection activities.

I also felt there were considerations to be had in relation to distance between myself and the young people who participated in the research. I felt that due to my insider position there was a 'built in potential' for crossing boundaries (Humphrey, 2012).

Below are several practical steps I took to ensure I minimised the potential for boundary crossing. I further discuss and reflect on the impact of my position as an insider in the first section of the Discussion chapter (p.198).

1. A clear overview of the research, research aims and the right to withdraw was given at the beginning and recapped at the end of each research encounter.
2. Research encounters took part outside of regular timetabled lessons, to ensure participants attend the research encounter of their own free will and were not present because they felt obliged to be.
3. At the beginning of each encounter, and again before each data collection task, I verbally outlined:
    a. My position as researcher.
    b. That there was no obligation to participate in tasks or activities.
    c. The tasks and activities were in no way linked to outcomes from their programme of study.

3.4.2 Informed consent

Of all the challenges surrounding my research, the issue of obtaining informed consent was possibly the thorniest.

> '… people must consent to being researched in an unconstrained way, making their decision on the basis of comprehensive and accurate information about it; and they should be free to withdraw at any time.' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 210)

I felt obtaining informed consent would be somewhat ambiguous, particularly as I held a position of power and considered the question of who is informed and who is consenting (Fine, et al., 2000)? I had concerns that the consent forms would be signed

through a matter of procedure, rather than through genuinely informed consent. I felt it unwise to assume my participants had the same level of understanding of the research and to what they were consenting to; perhaps consent would be given, but not informed due to my position of power (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). This is a situation that Bhattacharya (2007) found herself in during her research, where researcher and participant shared a 'blurred space' due to their relationship. Bhattacharya questions the nature of the consent that had been given by her participant, as the participant assumed the researcher had their best interests at heart; the participant assumed they would be represented favourably in the published findings, regardless of the contributions they made. While the scenario described by Bhattacharya is somewhat extreme, the notion of participants simply putting their trust in researchers because of their position of power is not. Atkins, in Atkins & Wallace (2012) reflected upon research, undertook with 16-19-year-old Level 1 students. Atkins questions the level of consent given from her participants, and despite using every possible strategy, remained concerned that the consent given was not truly informed. Nolen & Putten (2007, p. 402) describe their own concern around informed consent, particularly in relation to teacher-researchers. Their concerns are:

> '…minors are unlikely to possess the maturity or independence necessary to decline participation in studies conducted by researchers on whom they are dependent for their grades. […] If the research is not clearly defined apart from what the student would ordinarily be required to do in the classroom, then the student will have difficulty making an informed decision and freely choosing (or choosing not) to participate.'

However, the BERA (2018) guidelines and *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNICEF, 2004) both outline that children and young people who are capable of forming their own views, be allowed to express them and consent to expressing them. Ruiz-Casares & Thompson (2016, p. 35) outline that young people

are capable of doing research about their lives '…as long as careful, ongoing assessment of their understanding took place at regular intervals.' In addition, Atkins & Wallace (2012) outline the need for participant autonomy when discussing participants ability to provide informed consent.

The participants of my own research were a group of Level 1 learners. Due to the academic level, it was not unreasonable for me to assume some of the individuals in the group might have additional support needs – and indeed a small number did. While additional support for those taking part in Level 1 programmes is not uncommon, it does raise the question of autonomy and independence; if a learner is not considered an 'independent learner' and requires support, to what level could I view their autonomy and ability to provide informed consent? This particular quandary was wrestled with by Carey & Griffiths (2017) in research focussing on adults with intellectual disabilities. During that particular study, a decision was taken that:

> '…every adult, including those with intellectual disabilities, has the capacity to make decisions and be supported to exercise this right unless there is reasonable evidence to question this presumption.' (Carey & Griffiths, 2017, p. 200)

As with other studies, such as the one previously discussed by Ruiz-Casares & Thompson (2016), checking for consent and reminding participants of the research and their role within it was key to ensuring the consent of participants remained present and informed. In addition to verbal and written consent, Carey & Griffiths (2017) also monitored the physical reactions of participants; negative physical cues might cast doubt over just how consenting a participant might be.

My position on the nature of informed consent was that the young people who were my participants *could* provide informed consent. However, obtaining this was a continual process that needed to be revised and checked periodically. For those who

were supported and not considered ‘independent learners’, this continuous process was even more important. Ensuring informed consent was given, and not simply a process of having the consent forms signed, required an ongoing assessment from myself across each of the research encounters.

3.4.3 Researching *with*, not *on*

While I have discussed the purpose of researching *with* and not *on* my participants from a pragmatic, operational standpoint (p.48), I felt it was important to briefly outline this position from an ethical perspective.

Young people studying at or around Level 1 are often described as being on the margins of education, employment, and society (Atkins, 2013) (Simmons, 2017) (Simmons & Thompson, 2011) (Thompson, 2009) and as stigmatised, oppressed, and institutionally constrained (Atkins, 2013). They are seen to be a powerless minority, whose voices go unheard (Kellett, 2010) or are excluded, which in turn exacerbates their marginalisation (Bland & Atweh, 2007).

In addition to the theoretical positioning of young people within existing literature, I also felt that my colleagues were often dismissive of Level 1 learners. Reflections from my own practice and early informal discussions I had with colleagues left me feeling that Level 1 learners were framed as unequal within the FE landscape: their voices and contributions often seen as either invalid or unimportant.

From an ethical – and indeed moral – perspective, I felt it was important to conduct research in a way that valorised and prioritised the voices of my participants. The BERA (2018) guidance outlines that research with young people should be carried out in a way that respects participants and treats them fairly. I earlier discussed fairness as an important aspect of social justice (p.10). Working in a way that constrained the

voices of my participants, or indeed speaking on their behalf, felt illegitimate, unethical (Alcoff, 1991) and indeed unfair. I felt it important to work in a way that was emancipatory for my participants, who were framed by many as being at a deficit in multiple areas (Johnston, 2000). I was also concerned about my position and the possible influence this could have to influence, disturb, and affect what was being researched (Wellington, 2015). Working with an ethos of researching *with*, not *on*, I felt would mitigate some of these risks and allow me to prioritise the voices of my participants. I did not want to work in a way which *allowed* the voices of participants to come through. Rather, I felt it ethical to work in a way that *encouraged* and *facilitated* the voices of participants to come through, respected their contributions and included them as part of the research, rather than simply being subject of it. The young people also bring with them their own knowledge and capital, and I felt researching with them included this, rather than being dismissive of it. In the discussion section of this thesis (p.200), I reflect on the impact of researching *with* and not *on* and consider how the results might differ had I not done so.

Chapter 4. Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the findings from the primary research activities outlined in chapter 3 (p.56). The initial section outlines the results from the staff interviews. This is followed by the findings from research encounter 1, to outline an understanding of the profiles of young people who were my participants. The third and fourth section of this chapter address the main research aims of the thesis, outlining the findings from the research encounters focussing on motivations and aspirations. The fifth section addresses the topic of marginalisation. This is followed by the findings from encounter 5, which looked to understand if motivations and aspirations changed through the acquisition of Capital. The seventh and final section of this chapter outlines the key findings related to each of the initial research questions (p.54).

4.2 Staff interviews

This section outlines the findings from the staff interviews, which were conducted prior to beginning the primary research encounters with the young people enrolled onto the Level 1 programme. A full outline of the data collection activities and methods of analysis can be seen in the methodology chapter (p.59).

A total of 8 themes emerged from the analysis of the data from the staff interviews. These themes are: Barriers to learning, Behaviour, Capital, Homelife & background, Marginalisation, Mindset, Motivations, and School & prior achievement.

Barriers to learning

Staff perceptions of Level 1 learners is often complex, with a series of aspects that seemingly factor into their opinions. A common theme running through all the interviews is the perception that Level 1 learners are at a deficit in one or more aspects of their personal and/or educational lives. Staff identified a significant number of barriers to learning which are perceived to exist in the lives of young people on Level 1 programmes. These take the form of lack of familial support, or relatives not seeing the value of education; several staff even identify a decline in parental engagement with the college.

> 'In the last five years the parental engagement, specifically in E&T[2] and FE has dropped dramatically. Our parent's evening used to be absolutely full, we used to do debut shows, we used to have big exhibitions.' (Senior manager B)

One perceived barrier is 'lost learning', in which the young people on Level 1 programmes have skipped or missed large sections of their educational lives. This is perceived to be through 'negative connotations with education'. One senior manager simply describes some learners as 'school refusers'. Lost learning and school refusal is something which several staff members believe feed into a negative attitude towards education, even before they're enrolled:

> 'They'll… sit down and be bolshy [sic] in the IAG[3] and they'll be saying, "oh I divvent nah [sic] [North East England slang: I don't know] what I wanna do and I'm only here because me ma sent me" and all that sort of stuff.' (Senior manager B)

[2] E&T – Education and Training
[3] IAG – Information, advice and Guidance

The same senior manager described attitudes of Level 1 learners as 'bolshy' [sic] and that changing the attitudes is 'like turning an oil tanker.'

In the opinions of several staff members, there was a belief that a significant barrier to learning was centred around the perceptions of the Level 1 learners' own belief in their ability to succeed. One member of support staff described how Level 1 learners have '…already got that perception that they're going to fail…' and lack confidence in their ability to succeed. This perception is reinforced by several of the other staff during the interviews:

> 'I think they'd probably see themselves as not good enough. They're being told they need to hit these different levels of progress, and if they're not they've got a million targets in order to do it. I think some students make a choice. They can either work towards these targets and these goals and try to improve, or they give up. I think there's a lot of giving up. […] They have a negative opinion of themselves. I think it's massively hit their confidence. I think confidence is a huge thing, generally. Level 1 learners lack confidence.' (Lecturer B)

> 'Cos they'll have an interpretation of themselves. Whether that's their self-awareness, or someone else's, sort of, view or opinion. That they've already marginalised themselves, or they've pigeonholed themselves…'. (Senior manager B)

Some of the negative perceptions appear to come from staff who have previously taught the learners, who have themselves bought in to negative viewpoints. One member of support staff recalls overhearing a conversation between two learners on a Level 1 programme, discussing teachers at their previous school:

> 'I heard them talking and one of them said "nah, well my teachers said I'm going to end up like my dad, in prison." Then another said, "well you've got nee chance getting into uni".' (Support staff)

The perception of current staff towards Level 1 learners also appeared to be a significant barrier to learning, with one senior manager suggesting that the young

people on Level 1 programmes have a 'pejorative' label linked to them, which they needed to overcome before staff have even met them. They discussed, while stating that '…this isn't my, sort of, interpretation…' that there is a perception amongst staff that '…there tend to be more behavioural issues within the level.' This perception was reinforced by several other members of staff:

> '…a lot of staff don't want to work with Level 1 students because they've got too many disruptive behaviours, they think they're not going to achieve […] you just feel like you're wasting your time teaching them or supporting them.' (Support staff)

> 'I think there is a perception from staff who teach a limited range of levels. Or, in the past there has been, because obviously in the past there was a chance you were only teaching a certain level. I don't know if there are any staff that only teach HE [anymore], for example. But in the past, I have definitely seen attitudes from staff towards other groups, or courses, or levels of courses, not even Level 1. I've definitely seen in the past, people who have taught exclusively on HE, being quite derogatory or negative towards Level 3 courses, never mind Level 2 or Level 1.' (Lecturer B)

Behaviour

Aside from being seen as a potential barrier to learning, the topic of behaviour was a much talked about subject during the staff interviews. There was an overwhelming perception amongst staff that the learners on Level 1 programmes demonstrated negative behaviours. One member of lecturing staff simply outlined their belief that the behaviour of Level 1 learners was 'enthusiastic, but not in a good way'. Another member of lecturing staff described Level 1 learners as 'happy slappers' who are 'full of beans' and 'very freeform'. They described young people who were non-conformists, who were – at times – quite happy to behave violently towards each other as a way of channelling their energy:

> '…full of energy, they're not used to conforming to rules, don't behave in an orderly fashion, the way people who are more obedient, who have gone through school obeying the rules and doing what they've been told without question.' (Lecturer A)

> '… you were always hoping, "god I hope I don't have an observation during this session."' (Lecturer B)

Some staff viewed much of the behavioural issues of Level 1 learners as a lack of awareness and social skills, rather than through intentional malice. Several staff outlined their views that Level 1 learners did not always take into consideration their environment, lacking awareness of others, of their surroundings, of their situation:

> 'They might just not take into consideration the people around them. So, they were very, very good at expressing their own opinion, and not caring about the other people in the room.' (Lecturer A)

> 'They lack awareness; they're the sort of people that put shoes up on the seats of the Metro. If they've got filthy shoes, they wouldn't think twice about putting them on the seats on the Metro. There's a lack of awareness of other people and other people's needs. That's down to socialisation and that's something we have to work on.' (Lecturer B)

Staff perceived this lack of awareness to be through a '…lack of general socialisation...' with others, leading to a poor ability to communicate effectively:

> 'Socialisation, amongst level 1 students, in general, is a miss. We have a lot of students who find it difficult to communicate with other people. They do inappropriate things at inappropriate times.' (Lecturer B)

The lack of ability to communicate effectively was outlined by staff as catalysing low-level disruption within classes, something which several staff perceived made teaching Level 1 learners 'challenging', and the learners as 'trouble':

> 'I think the first thing that will spring to many people's mind would be low-level disruption. […] I think that sometimes members of staff can consider them as, as challenging. Overly challenging.' (Senior manager B)

> 'But I think the overall perception, if it was one word, it would be trouble. I think a lot of staff would simply, if they didn't know the students, that further down the levels you go, that there's a perception of there's more trouble there. They're just trouble.' (Lecturer B)

Some staff linked behaviour to the parents of the learners, describing it as learnt behaviour as the young people were brought up 'without rules or structure'. However, a member of support staff believed that social media was a factor in behaviour and had impacted their ability to communicate in a social setting effectively:

> '…a young person can stay in their bedroom and have 200 friends that'll speak to them. There's a whole thing there that affects them in a way we don't know. […] why would you leave your room, when you've already got a load of people, in your hand, to talk to? […] You know, to make friends now, you don't have to join a youth club and sit in the corner until someone comes to talk to you, 'cos you're shy. […] You have a look on Facebook, or Snapchat or whatever it is that they use, find somebody you like the look of, pretend you're something that you're not, you get friends instantly.' (Support staff)

Capital

College staff who took part in the interviews identified Level 1 learners as having a deficit of Capital. Primarily, the Capital that these learners were perceived as lacking was cultural – particularly in the institutional state. All interviewees described how those taking part in Level 1 programmes had little or no formal qualifications, lacking 'good' GCSEs. One member of lecturing staff outlined their view that Level 1 learners were 'low achievers', not just in the academic sense, but in all aspects of their lives. On a wider viewpoint, staff viewed Level 1 learners as coming from families whose own levels of Capital were also quite low:

> 'It's not always true this, but I think on the whole, Cultural Capital is quite low. I think they're from families who haven't, generally, partaken in things like theatre and, you know, all the things that [the city] has to offer. I don't think people tend to be well travelled. I think people tend to be quite insular.' (Lecturer B)

All interviewees outlined their perceptions of the importance of Level 1 programmes as a catalyst for accruing Capital. They described Level 1 programmes as having a

transformative effect to help 'get on the rung of a ladder' and ensuring the young people were able to 'have a crack at life':

> '[Level 1] …can possibly help them get onto the rung of a ladder, even if it's a part time job 'cos work might have been a complete no-no before they did the course. It just might not have been a possibility. So, it might be a case of, now you know how things work and now you can be structured about something. So now you can hold down a part time job.' (Lecturer A)

Interestingly, several staff outlined their view that accruing Cultural Capital was secondary to Social Capital. The qualification was '…secondary to their social desires', with college as a space for socialising; '…they want to be with their friends and think of it [college] as more of a social thing.'

Many staff stated that the young people on Level 1 programmes recognised they lacked Capital – although they would not describe it as such – and suggested this presented itself in a lack of understanding on things like academic progression, and routes to achieve employment aspirations. This acted as a barrier, stopping them from moving through the education and employment landscape with distinction in the Bourdieusian sense:

> 'They're very aware of what's holding them back. […] I have to explain to them what their possible options are.' (Lecturer B)

> 'Like, they want to be a nurse or whatever, but they don't realise or know the path or the qualifications you need to get, what university is going to be like, what you need to do to get into university, what voluntary experience you need to get to get into a job role. They just see what they want to be in the future, but they can't link what needs to happen, to get there. […] I think they want to achieve, they want to get that Level 1, 2, 3 qualification, get a good job or get to university, but I don't think they have the mindset. […] I think they just think they're here and that's all that needs to happen.' (Student support)

Homelife and background

Initial perceptions of staff on the backgrounds of Level 1 learners were mixed. One member of lecturing staff outlined that in their view, there was little to tie them together.

A senior manager felt that the stereotype was young people who were from 'lower quintile households' but rejected this, stating that it was 'not the case':

> 'I don't think there's anything that tied people together in terms of background at all. Apart from they've probably not got lots of qualifications.' (Lecturer A)

However, this pragmatic viewpoint was not shared by all staff members, with one senior manager quite clearly believing that Level 1 learners come from deprived backgrounds:

> 'It's the postcode. Obviously. Maybe in deprived areas and that sort of thing.' (Senior manager B)

The same senior manager then discussed their view that the background of the parents and their attitude towards education was negative, influencing how young people chose to engage in education themselves:

> 'I think that the backgrounds and the parent's situations have a massive effect on the students and the way they portray themselves. Or the way that they go to college, how they get there, how they respect people.' (Senior manager B)

They described that in their opinion, much of the stuff they 'deal with' was due to a lack of parental involvement in the academic lives of their children. Parents were described as seemingly not interested in their children's academic journey, and would only become involved when there was a threat of their child being withdrawn from college – leading to possible financial sanctions through a loss of child benefits:

> 'Well, we have a lot of occasions where we have given students first, second, third warnings because of their attendance, and their punctuality and that sort of thing, and they're not hitting the funding. For us, as a college, in that respect, and then once we go through the process of withdrawing them, we then get the backlash of the parents being involved. Saying well if my child isn't in education then we won't be able to receive a certain benefit, or a certain level. But, prior to that, when parental engagement letters have gone out and we've tried to phone and that sort of thing, so it's a double-edged sword. So, you try everything you can to re-engage them and bring the parents involved, but when it comes to the clincher, that we're withdrawing them, and that moneys being taken away, that's when we get… [involvement]' (Senior manager B)

Finally, one member of lecturing staff discussed that in their view, the home lives of Level 1 learners were potentially 'absolutely shocking' and outlined a number of home lives they had described as 'heart-breaking', with 'criminal activity going on at home.' They recalled how Level 1 learners had often opened up about their home lives during one-to-one tutorials and described many of these discussions as an 'eye opener':

> 'I know from chatting to some Level 1 students, some come from a background where it's healthy for them to come to college, because they're not in the home. If the home environment isn't good, let's say there's a criminal element at home, let's say they don't come from a good background, or there's substance abuse going on at home and things like that. Then, obviously the more time they spend at college, the more time they're away from that. They'll meet new people, they'll chat to them, and they'll realise there's a world and a different way to live your life. And they'll start to come up with their own standards and rules and if they weren't at college, then there's a kind of danger, that if they were from that kind of background, they would be in it 100% of the time. They're gonna start to see that as normal. They're not going to realise there's more out there. They could fall into that world of, there's criminal activity where I live, or in my back yard, or in my living room and that's how the world is. They might think that's how everybody lives.' (Lecturer A)

Marginalisation

Several instances of marginalisation were identified during the staff interviews. The majority of situations in which everyone recognised the learners as marginalised, including the learner themselves, primarily revolved around the lack of formal qualifications. As such, staff described how learners on Level 1 programmes felt their options were limited, in particular by low levels of English and Maths. According to one staff member:

> 'English, it's something we use every day, and a lot of students feel like they should be able to do it, even at a basic level. When they can't, it's almost like a [prison] sentence. English, and the government requirement that everyone has to study up to a grade 4, until they're 18, feels like a sentence for a lot of students. We regularly have students who don't achieve their GCSEs by the end of Level 2. I think that they feel marginalised. They're very aware of what's holding them back.' (Lecturer B)

Staff described limited progression routes and Level 1 qualifications as a ‘place where people go, when they’ve got nowhere else to go.’ In addition, a member of support staff outlined that in their opinion, Level 1 learners felt marginalised by staff, who lacked ‘respect’ and ‘talked down to’ them. They recalled an overheard conversation between two Level 1 learners, who discussed – and recognised – their marginal situation.

> ‘One of the students from [childcare], she’d described it as “the Level 1s, we’re the babies and when we’re talking it’s just garbling, and no one can understand wer [sic]. Then, when you’re at Level 2, yer [sic] a toddler and they start paying more attention to you cos they realise you’re learning. Then the Level 3s, they’re the adults.”’ (Support staff)

There were two situations where staff viewed Level 1 learners who appeared to be in marginal situations but who did not recognise the situation as marginal themselves. This is in part was attributed to the mindset of the learners and their lack of awareness of their own position.

One staff member in a lecturing role described how they did not think Level 1 learners would understand the concept of marginalisation; they would simply describe themselves as ‘not good enough’, rather than marginalised. Many of the staff commented on how they felt the learners on Level 1 programmes were marginalised but not aware. They noted that they thought this was through a form of institutionalised marginalisation in which college staff placed the learners in a marginal situation based on stereotypes, preconceived ideas relating to past learners, or anecdotal evidence. Pre-existing stereotypes relating to the behaviour of past learners is seemingly the biggest factor in this, with several staff describing the stereotype of Level 1 learners as ‘trouble’. Furthermore, they described staff room jokes and truisms that all Level 1 learners are ‘crackers’ and that ‘no one wants to touch them with a barge pole’:

> ‘I think a lot of staff don’t want to work with Level 1 students because they’ve got too many disruptive behaviours, think they’re not going to achieve anyways.’ (Lecturer B)

Another form of marginalisation described by staff was that of self-marginalisation, which seemingly stemmed from the mindset of the learners. One senior manager outlined that, in their view, there was a lot of ‘fixed mindsets’ at Level 1. They believed that many young people ‘…already marginalised themselves or pigeonholed themselves…’ based on the beliefs of their own ability. They believed the outcome of this self-marginalisation resulted in young people who were ‘wagging off’, or ‘aren’t interested’. In extreme cases, such as the one previously described (p.96), this self-marginalisation presented itself as ‘school refusal’ behaviour.

Mindset

The mindset of those studying on Level 1 programmes is something that all interview respondents discussed. In fact, one senior manager was quite contradictory in their contributions around mindset, initially outlining Level 1 learners as ‘difficult to characterise’ before outlining their belief of the ‘fixed mindsets’ of Level 1 learners. Several of the other staff also discuss fixed mindsets, outlining their belief that getting Level 1 learners to buy into education was ‘like turning an oil tanker’. A member of lecturing staff discussed how their biggest issue with Level 1 learners was their mindset and ‘general attitude towards learning.’

The staff who took part in this study described their thoughts about how these mindsets were first established and then further reinforced while in school; teachers focussed on those who could achieve and ignored the other learners, while some were told they weren’t going to get good grades at GCSE and acquiesced to this. In addition, one member of staff described a conversation with Level 1 learners, where they had

overheard their teachers discussing them at their previous school. They believed that this overheard discussion had been an informing factor on how the mindset of the individuals having the conversation had been formed; teachers had told them things at school, and they had started to believe it.

Counter to this, two of the staff stated that they felt that coming to college was a 'crucial decision' for young people. They outlined that for many Level 1 learners, their mindset towards college was that it gave them an opportunity to better themselves:

> '…the true fact of the matter is they're making the effort to come to college. They're making the effort to want to better themselves […] they're here and they're bettering themselves.' (Senior manager A)

> '…they've decided they want to change their lives. And, they think, fair enough school didn't work out and they look at the options they've got in life. […] …they probably want to achieve, otherwise they wouldn't come to college.' (Lecturer A)

Motivations

The staff perceptions of what they felt motivated Level 1 learners was varied. While there was seemingly a legal reason for them to attend – as it is compulsory to remain in some form of education or training until age 18 (see p.15) – staff perception was that there was no real 'instrument of authority' to enforce this, and there was 'no real consequence' for non-attendance.

Staff believed one of the main motivators to attend college was through a lack of other realistic options. Four of the five staff members outlined their belief that other post-16 options were precluded from them; Level 1 was a 'last resort', rather than a pragmatic choice. A member of lecturing staff outlined their perception that '…Level 1 often feels like a place for students who don't know what to do…' and '…they have to go somewhere, so they come here.' In addition, the choice of subject was viewed by staff not as a definitive choice, but the 'line of least resistance' – particularly when choosing

to study creative subjects. One lecturer described how they believed wanting a career in the subject area is 'bottom of the pile' when it comes to motivations. They described that the practical element of studying music – rather than the academic element or the qualification – was the primary motivator:

> 'Again, there's a possibility that people are going to come to the college because of the facilities. So, if they've got an interest in music, they might think that the toys are at college, for me to have fun making music. So, I'll come to college and make music. They might not necessarily be thinking, well I'll come to college because I could really do with a qualification, because I want to achieve something later in life, or I want it to be a stepping stone onto something in two or three years. I don't think, I could be wrong, but I don't think they're thinking about the long-term goals or that doors can be opened.' (Lecturer A)

Another motivating factor that emerged from the staff interview data was the perception that Level 1 learners were motivated by making a 'new start'. The same lecturer who had pilloried the young people for being motivated by the practical element of the course, described making a new start as the 'correct motivation'. Several of the staff perceived having a 'new start' as a positive motivator, with one senior manager outlining their vicarious glory related to a former Level 1 student who had 'gone up through the levels', studied a degree and now ran a successful business. Homelife was another motivator identified by staff. They perceived that for some Level 1 learners, their parents simply wanted to 'get them out of the house' and some '*need* them out of the house'; parents were 'pushing' the young people to remain in education, in order to receive a certain benefit.

Escaping an unhealthy environment was believed to be a motivator by one member of lecturing staff, with college as a healthy environment, away from troubles at home and a safe space (homelife is outlined in full in the previous section on p.101)

The social element of college was outlined by one staff member, who believed learning, qualifications and indeed education as a whole was '…secondary to their social desires.'

> 'They want to be here with their friends and see it as more of a social thing.' (Support staff)

School and prior achievement

When discussing school and prior achievement, the interview respondents described those on Level 1 programmes as lacking prior academic achievement. In particular, this lack of achievement seemingly revolved around literacy and numeracy, with learners having difficulty with English and Maths, perhaps having studied foundation papers at GCSE. One member of staff described their perception towards the academic ability of Level 1 learners as 'low-level', while others described grades in these areas as weak, 'way off' the required pass mark. Because of this, it was likely that they studied Functional Skills[4] papers at college as resits. One staff member discussed how the learners had perhaps not achieved in any aspects of their lives, with low achievement at school being one of many facets of un or under achievement. One member of lecturing staff described Level 1 learners as 'low achievers', who had experienced a disrupted or fragmented educational journey.

Several of the staff outlined views that not engaging in school was a common trait. They outlined their view that many Level 1 learners had simply 'given up' on school, seemingly feeling the pressure of not 'hitting' the key stages of development. A number of staff mused that many Level 1 learners might feel that school 'wasn't for them',

[4] Functional Skills are offered at Entry Level, Level 1 and Level 2. They offer an alternative to GCSEs, and often have a focus day to day activities such as letter writing and calculating tax / change etc.

either through a lack of enjoyment of the school environment, feelings of being overlooked while staff focussed on those learners who were progressing well, or had support needs which had not been met.

Summary of the staff interviews

For the large majority, the perceptions of staff towards Level 1 learners were negative. They outlined deficit viewpoints in relation to nearly all the key themes that emerged from the data. There is the perception that Level 1 learners are 'crackers', 'incredibly difficult' and potential 'school refusers.' They described other staff who were derogatory and negative towards the students studying at lower levels – not just Level 1. They outlined a significant number of barriers to learning in which the young people needed to overcome. They viewed the learners as lacking in several forms of Capital and outlined home lives and backgrounds which were a – largely – negative influence on the way they approached their academic lives. They identified young people who faced a significant amount of marginalisation. They believed this marginalisation came from many deficit areas in the lives of young people and that marginalisation was often caused or reinforced by educational staff and the negative viewpoints of Learners on Level 1 programmes. Staff also questioned the motivations of young people for choosing to participate in a Level 1 programme, outlining what they believed to be legitimate and illegitimate reasons for engaging with learning at that level.

4.3 Research Question 1. Who are the participants of this study?

This section outlines the findings from the activities that took place during research encounter 1. The first part focusses on the pseudonyms my participants chose for themselves. This is followed by the results from the initial questionnaire, which

focussed on homelife, background, and self-efficacy. The third section outlines the results from the written Arenas of Choice activity, and the fourth section concludes with an overarching contextualising statement about the participants of the group. A full outline of the data collection activities and methods of data analysis can be found on p.62.

4.3.1 Pseudonym identifier activity

A total of 15 young people took part in the research. This group of individuals all identified as male and were aged between 16 and 18. The Level 1 programme they studied led to a Music qualification. The first activity they were asked to complete was to identify a pseudonym by which they would be known in the published findings of this thesis. *Table 2* below shows the types of reasons for choosing the names they did. Unsurprisingly, due to the course they were studying, the majority of individuals chose names that related to music or musicians. Reasons for choosing other musician's names as their own revolved primarily around the perceived ability of their chosen musician on their instrument. However, one individual chose his name because he felt he could 'relate' to the artist's music and feelings.

Table 2 - Reasons for selecting pseudonyms

Theme of reason given	**Number**
Music Related (favorite musician, stage name etc.)	6
None (it's cool / it's funny etc.)	3
Related to popular culture (book / film)	2
Name given by others	2
Wishes privacy	1
Suggestions of strength or superiority	1

Three young people chose names seemingly at random, because they were ‘funny’, or they perceived them to be ‘cool’ names. Two young people chose names that they were called by other people. One of the two requested he was called *Unsociable* because ‘My family call me it.’ Two individuals chose names which referenced popular culture, one referencing the *Harry Potter* series and the other due to their appreciation of Anime, a popular form of Japanese cartoon with a distinctive visual aesthetic (Codesido, 2013). One young person chose the name *Concrete*, with the justification being ‘Cos I’m Solid’, possibly a suggestion at his perceived physical prowess? Finally, one young man chose to write the name *Lickmaballz,* before crossing this out when they realised this would not be a suitable name. Where individuals have chosen a first and second name, for example ‘Lars Ulrich’, the name may appear as the first name only at points during this thesis.

4.3.2 Questionnaire

The second activity in this encounter was the individual questionnaires undertaken by the participants. In total, 13 of the 15 participants who had consented to be part of the research completed this task. The data has been digitised and is represented in the statistical format that follows on the coming pages. It has also been split into four sections: The household and employment status, categorisation of household employment, participant employment, and student self-efficacy. All of the data is represented as a percentage in the coming tables and are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Household and employment status

Table 3 shows the total number of people who elected to take part in this activity (n= 13). This represents a participation rate of 87%.

All participants live in a household that has a mother figure present, be that maternal, or a foster parent. The majority also lived in a multi-parent household, with 10 of the 13 participants reporting a male figure in the family home. The majority of individuals were also the only child in the household. 5 individuals reported they had additional brothers or sisters, with 2 individuals reporting they had multiple siblings.

Table 3 - Household and employment status

Number of people agreeing to take part (based on the number of pseudonym identifier sheets completed)			15
Number of people who completed this task.			13
Percentage of respondents from consenting participants as %			87%
Type of property the participants inhabit		Number	%
	House	13	100 %
Other people who live in the household		Number	%
	Mum	12	92%
	Foster Mum	1	8%
	Dad	8	62%
	Stepdad	1	8%
	Foster Dad	1	8%
	Brother	3	23%
	Sister	2	15%
	Partner	1	8%
	Has multiple siblings	2	15%
	Single parent household	3	23%
	Multi-parent household	10	77%

Table 4 shows the employment status of the additional members of the participants' households. It shows that overall employment levels of those within parental roles was generally high; only two individuals were reported as unemployed, both mother figures.

Table 4 - Employment status of household members

Employment status of other members of the household		Number	%
Mum / Foster Mum	Employed	8	62%
	Unemployed	2	15%
	Retired	1	8%
	Don't know	1	8%
	No Reply	1	8%
Dad / Foster Dad / Step Dad	Employed	7	70%
	Unemployed	0	0%
	Retired	1	10%
	Don't know	1	10%
	No Reply	1	10%
Brother	School / Student	4	100%
Sister	School / Student	1	33%
	No Reply	2	67%
Partner	School / Student	1	100%
Confirmed number of single income households (Retired has been counted as non-income)		7	54%
Confirmed dual-income households		4	31%
Households with unconfirmed income status		2	15%

All households whose income could be confirmed had at least one source of work-based income. 7 households had a single source of income. There were 2 households

whose work-status could not be confirmed. One of the participants chose not to reply, and the other stated they did not know the employment status of their parents.

Categorisation of household employment

Those who stated that family members were employed were asked to identify the job roles of the employed individuals. *Table 5* shows the findings from this section of the questionnaire.

Table 5 - Job roles, linked to ISCO-08 job categories

Types of job roles undertaken by working members of the family, categorised using ICSO-08		
Employment category	Number	%
Managers	2	13%
Professionals	2	13%
Technicians and associate professionals	0	0%
Clerical support workers	1	6%
Services and sales workers	1	6%
Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers	0	0%
Craft and related trades workers	2	13%
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	2	13%
Elementary occupations	2	13%
Armed forces occupations	1	6%
No reply	2	13%
Don't know	1	6%

The job roles were categorised using the *International Standard Classification of Occupations* document *ISCO-08.* (International Labour Office, 2012) the results show a relatively even spread across several job categories. Of the 13 cases of confirmed job roles, 6 individuals' jobs fitted into craft and related trades workers, plant and machine operators and assemblers, and elementary occupations. These roles were

predominantly manual or service jobs such as Mechanic, Dinner Lady, HGV Driver, and Window Fitter. Examples of those from the Managers and Professionals categories include Teacher, Supermarket Manager and, somewhat generically, 'Business Man'. One individual chose to write down the employment status and job role of a non-member of their household, his Auntie. It is not known why this individual chose to include this in his reply. However, it could be that they looked up to this individual as they listed the job role as 'Big boss for TfL [Transport for London]'. This particular job role was not included in the above data as this person was not identified as a member of the household.

At this point in the questionnaire, the participants were also asked to identify if any members of their household had attended University, and if so, what was their highest level of study. *Table 6* shows this data.

Table 6 – Households with university graduates

Number of households with university graduates		2	15%
of which the highest level of study is…	Undergrad	1	50%
	Masters	0	0%
	Doctorate	1	50%

Despite the relatively wide spread of job roles and types identified, only 2 individuals reported that a member of their household had attended University. One of which had completed study at Undergraduate level, the other at Doctoral level.

Participant employment

The next section of the questionnaire focussed on the employment status of the participants; did they have part-time jobs as well as attending college, and if so, did they contribute to the family income?

Table 7 shows that a total of 5 individuals from the group of 13 that completed the questionnaire did in fact have a part-time job in addition to attending college. From those 5 individuals, 2 stated that their earnings from part-time work were used to contribute to the household's income. The job roles the participants gave have been categorised using the same ISCO-08 system (International Labour Office, 2012) to those of the household in parental roles.

Table 7 – Employment status of participants

Do the participants have a part-time job, in addition to attending College?	Number	%
Yes	5	38%
No	7	54%
No reply	1	8%
Do you contribute to the family income?		
Yes	2	15%
No	10	77%
No reply	1	8%

Table 8 below shows the types of roles the young people were undertaking. The job types that the young people undertake are predominantly categorised as Elementary Occupations. Examples of these jobs include window cleaner, assistant in a food take away, and server in a national chain of bakery shops. There is a much narrower spread of job categories represented in the young people, than those in parent roles. The low-skilled, low-paid jobs the young people undertake are likely to be the only options available to them, as they have few formal qualifications and narrower job opportunities open to them through a lack of a clearly defined youth labour market (Maguire, 2013) (Simmons, 2017).

The individual listed as having a job role which came under the Professionals category identified themselves as a song writer. While this has been included in the data, it

raises questions in respect of whether this is a role which the young person is undertaking and remunerated for, or an aspirational job role they hope to embody in the future.

Table 8 - Level 1 participant job roles, linked to ISCO-08 employment categories

Types of job roles undertaken by participants of the study, categorised using ICSO-08		
Employment category	Number	%
Managers	0	0%
Professionals	1	20%
Technicians and associate professionals	0	0%
Clerical support workers	0	0%
Services and sales workers	0	0%
Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers	0	0%
Craft and related trades workers	0	0%
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	0	0%
Elementary occupations	3	60%
Armed forces occupations	0	0%
No reply	1	20%

Student self-efficacy

Table 9 shows the results from the final section of the questionnaire. This section focusses on the self-efficacy of the participants of the study. The participants responded to 21 different statements, using a four-point Likert system. This task was developed from the *Student Efficacy Scale* designed by Jinks & Morgan (1999). It gives a general overview of the way the participants perceive themselves in relation to their academic ability and education in a wider sense.

Table 9 - Results from student self-efficacy questionnaire

Question	Really agree (%)	Kind of agree (%)	Kind of disagree (%)	Really disagree (%)	No reply
Question 1: I work hard in college.	38%	54%	8%	0%	0%
Question 2: I could get the best grades in my class if I tried hard enough	31%	46%	23%	0%	0%
Question 3: I think I am good at Maths	0%	15%	31%	54%	0%
Question 4: I would get better grades if my tutor liked me better	22%	16%	16%	46%	0%
Question 5: I am a good student	46%	46%	8%	0%	0%
Question 6: My classmates work harder than I do	23%	23%	38%	16%	0%
Question 7: I always get good grades when I try hard	8%	46%	23%	23%	0%
Question 8: I think I am good at English	23%	46%	23%	8%	0%
Question 9: Adults who have good jobs were probably good students in college	8%	38%	16%	38%	0%
Question 10: I want to go to university.	22%	8%	8%	62%	0%
Question 11: I am one of the best students in my class.	15%	31%	31%	23%	0%
Question 12: No one cares if I do well in college.	8%	23%	23%	46%	0%
Question 13: It is important to go to college.	54%	15%	23%	8%	0%

Question	Really agree (%)	Kind of agree (%)	Kind of disagree (%)	Really disagree (%)	No reply
Question 14: My classmates usually get better grades than I do.	23%	46%	15%	8%	8%
Question 15: It does not matter if I do well in college.	8%	31%	38%	23%	0%
Question 16: I am good at reading.	46%	38%	8%	8%	0%
Question 17: I do not find it hard to get good grades in assignments.	8%	15%	46%	31%	0%
Question 18: I am smart.	0%	31%	54%	15%	0%
Question 19: I will quit college as soon as I can.	8%	15%	23%	46%	8%
Question 20: When a teacher asks a question, I usually know the answer, even if the other students don't.	15%	46%	31%	0%	8%
Question 21: What I learn in college is not important.	8%	8%	8%	67%	8%

The results from this can be split into three categories, Talent, Context, and Effort; following the format outlined by Jinks & Morgan (1999). Statements relating to Talent look at belief in their ability and include ‘I could get the best grades in my class if I tried hard enough’, ‘I think I am good at maths’, and ‘I am smart’. Context related statements focus on the environment. Context statements include ‘I would get better grades if my tutor liked me better’, ‘What I learn in College is not important’, and ‘Adults who have good jobs were probably good students in College’. The Effort category, featuring statements such as ‘I always get good grades when I try hard’, ‘My classmates work harder than I do’, and ‘I work hard in College’ focuses on the perceived effort the

participants believe they put into their studies at college. The table below shows which category each statement belongs to.

Table 10 - Self-efficacy categories

Talent	Context	Effort
I could get the best grades in my class if I tried hard enough I think I am good at maths I am a good student I think I am good at English I am one of the best students in my class My classmates usually get better grades than I do I am good at reading I do not find it hard to get good grades in assignments I am smart When a teacher asks a question, I usually know the answer, even if other students don't	I would get better grades if my tutor liked me better Adults who have good jobs were probably good students in college I want to go to university No one cares if I do well in college It is important to go to college It does not matter if I do well in college I will quit College as soon as I can What I learn in college is not important	I work hard in college My classmates work harder than I do I always get good grades when I try hard.

Talent

Most of the participants agreed that they have the ability to get the best grades in the class, with some effort; a total of 77% either really agreed or kind of agreed. None of the participants really disagreed with the fact they had the ability to score the highest grades in the class. In addition, the participants almost unanimously agreed they were

good students, with 92% either really agreeing or kind of agreeing. With regard to the statement focussing on if they were one of the best students in the class, the participants gave a fairly measured response. 62% of students either kind of agreed or disagreed with this statement. However, almost a quarter of students, 23%, really disagreed with this statement, suggesting that they believed that other students in the class were working at a higher standard. The majority of participants believed they were good at English. Reading in particular was a perceived strong point for the group; 84% responded positively to the statement 'I am good at reading', with almost half, 46%, responding with really agree.

Negative beliefs about ability were primarily focussed around two areas. Many of the participants believed that their classmates often achieved higher grades than they do. Roughly half, 46%, kind of agreed to this statement, while almost a quarter of the students, 23%, really agreed that their classmates often achieved higher grades. The second area was the participants belief in their ability at Maths. None of the participants really agreed with the statement 'I am good at Maths'. In fact, the large majority, 85%, responded negatively to this statement, with over half, 54% really disagreeing.

Context

Over half the students see the value in attending College, with 54% stating they really agree to the statement 'It is important to go to college'. In addition, 67% of students really disagreed to the statement 'What I learn in college is not important'. For most students, there is support for their academic career from others. 69% of participants disagreed to the statement 'No one cares if I do well in College'.

The majority of participants seem happy with college life, 69% disagreeing to the statement 'I will quit College as soon as I can'. However, almost a quarter, 23% really

agreed that they would quit College as soon as they could, suggesting College was not important to these individuals.

Participants did not necessarily agree that doing well in college will lead to a good job. Few participants answered the statement ‘It does not matter if I do well in College’ strongly. Most were somewhat on the fence, with 69% neither strongly agreeing nor disagreeing to the statement. In addition, being a ‘good student’ at college is not necessarily seen as a signifier of attaining a good job later in life. 38% disagreed with the statement, believing that being a good student did not necessarily lead to a good job as an adult.

At this point in their educational careers, attending University does not appear to be an aspiration that the majority of participants hold. A total of 70% disagreed with the statement ‘I want to go to University’, of which, 62% strongly disagreed with the statement.

Effort

Almost all of the participants, 92%, believed they work hard in college. 38% of these individuals who believed they worked hard, responded with really agree to the statement ‘I work hard in College’. None of the individuals really disagreed with the statement. Almost a quarter of participants, 23%, really agreed that their classmates worked harder than they did. The spread of responses to this statement was relatively even, with 46% suggesting classmates worked harder, while 54% thought they worked harder than others. The largest response to this statement was kind of disagree, 38%, possibly suggesting that these participants mostly believed they worked harder than others, although not always. Finally, roughly half of the participants, 54%, agreed to the statement ’I always get good grades when I try hard’. However, the majority of participants ‘kind of agreed’ to that statement. This suggests that while there is belief

that working hard leads to good grades, there is still some trepidation over their ability to achieve those grades. In addition, nearly a quarter of individuals, 23%, really disagreed with this statement, suggesting that they had little belief in their ability to achieve good grades, even when they worked hard.

4.3.3 Arenas of choice

For this task, the participants were split into three groups and given an A3 worksheet with the titles Family, Education, Social / Leisure, and Work. This task was adapted from Ball, et al. (2000) *Arenas of action and centres of choice* activity. In total, the groups were given 10 minutes to complete the task. They were asked to discuss what they considered to be important to them, in relation to the four categories and write them down under the headings on the worksheet. The discussions of each group during this task were also captured; two groups were captured using audio and video, the third was audio recorded only.

The following three tables are digitised versions of the completed worksheets done by each group during this task.

Table 11 - Arenas of choice - Group A

Family	**Education**
Parents (together or not) Who you live with	
Social / Leisure	**Work**
Playing instruments Work Games Seeing relations	

Table 12 - Arenas of choice - Group B

Family	**Education**
I love my family because they look after you, and I love my auntie because she takes me down to London	I want to go to university to do a degree
Social / Leisure	**Work**
Guitar Band I like to hang round with my mates at the Metro Centre	I would like to work on an airline or on the trains

Table 13 - Arenas of choice - Group C

Family	**Education**
Nothing	Meh
Social / Leisure	**Work**
PS4 Xbox One Spotify Ph	Chinese Greggs Newsagent Unemployed Chef

Group A

Group A discussed family and wrote 'together or not' after identifying parents as people who were important to them. The group had an interesting discussion to arrive at this point. This begins with Kirk abruptly starting the conversation:

Kirk 'Here's a good story about my dad.'

Lars 'Story time!'

Kirk 'My dad just left. Put his shit in a little bag and moved elsewhere. Put it in a little bag and left.'

Lars ‘Really?’

Kirk ‘Pretty much.’

Other individuals then told stories about their own parents, with Lars stating his dad was ‘underground’ and Lil Skies stating his parents were still together. This got somewhat of a reaction from Kirk, who was initially surprised at the fact Lil Skies’ parents were still together before finally stating ‘Swine! Perfect family over here!’.

When discussing Education, the group were keen to discuss their experiences of education with each other, rather than what they considered important. Lars joked about how he ‘went up through the ranks’, starting in Primary and ending up in college before stating that he wasn’t smart enough for 6th Form. Kirk on the other hand, described how he ‘did what I wanted’ in Primary school and High school before arriving at 6th Form. He then described how he got kicked out of 6th Form for having the wrong shoes and telling the teachers to shut up:

Kirk ‘Got to 6th Form and ended up telling every single teacher to shut up. I got thrown out of school cos I had the wrong shoes on. So, I was like right, I’ll just go to college then.’

This prompted Lil Skies to tell a similar story, about how he got shouted at, at school, for going without black shoes on one day. The two individuals discussed their frustration as their families could not afford the ‘correct’ shoes for them:

Lil Skies ‘I came for a day without black shoes on and they proper shouted at us. I’m like “I can’t afford them”, yeah.’

Kirk ‘Neither could I!’

Lil Skies ‘They chucked us out, I was like “what for!?”’

Kirk ‘They got these big pasty-smashers out and I’m like “Whoa, I’m not wearing them!”’

Lil Skies I felt like just tekkin' my shoe off and just smashing her round the face with it.'

Their discussion about Social and Leisure was fairly brief. Most of the individuals described how they play an instrument or computer games in their spare time. The majority of the discussion was focussed on the mechanics of undertaking a back flip on a bed.

The discussion about Work took a similar format to the one about Education in the sense the group discussed their experiences *of* work, rather than what they thought was important to them *about* work and employment. The discussion revealed that for three of the individuals, Unsociable, Lars, and Lil Skies, their experience of work was limited to the weeklong experience of work planned for them by their High School. Two of the individuals, Unsociable and Lil Skies, described how they did not engage with the experience by simply not attending:

Lars 'I worked for a week.'

Kirk 'You worked for a week?'

Lars 'Well, for work experience.'

Unsociable 'I was supposed to go with mi Da for work experience, but I just didn't show up.'

Kirk 'Lil Skies, what did you do?'

Lil Skies 'Oh I don't know. Pied it off.'

While Lars did engage with his work experience, he describes how 'boring' the job was. He had done his work experience in a shoe shop, which was part of a national chain:

Lars 'It was so boring. We started chucking shoes and putting the Crocs in the outdoor section.'

Kirk ‘Haha.’

Lars ‘We were launching slippers off each other.’

Kirk was the only individual to have done work beyond his School organised work experience. He described how he had worked in a charity shop, ‘for a bit’. He had not enjoyed his experience and complained the lady in charge of the shop made him move and carry the heavier items the shop sold.

Kirk ‘She used to make us carry all the heavy stuff. That’s not my job!’

At this point, the conversation turned towards Formula 1 racing. Kirk and Lars initially discussed how great it would be to be an F1 driver before the conversation ceased and the two began to try and replicate the sound of a F1 car.

The remaining time of the task, roughly four minutes, was spent discussing different aspects of F1. Initial conversations discussed how many times a driver changed gears during an average Gran Prix. This was followed by a discussion about how a driver sits in the cockpit of the car.

Group B

Upon watching the video for this group, it became apparent that the physical work for their submission was done predominantly by a single person. Speedboil was nominated by the others to write; the debate over which lasted for around 1 minute and 45 seconds. At this point, one of the individuals abruptly started a conversation about family:

El Chapo ‘Right! What does Family mean to you? Do you love your family or do you loath them?’

Dobbie ‘I love them.’

El Chapo ‘Well write that down then!’

Speedboil ‘What should I write? I love my family?’

El Chapo ‘Write “I love spending time with my family”. I don’t have to tell you. WE DON’T NEED YOUR BIOGRAPHY!’

This was seemingly the end of the discussion about family or the other aspects of the worksheet. The group largely discussed the computer they were sat next to. El Chapo and Steinsigate spent some time joking around, discussing how Steinsigate’s accent is ‘posh’. Although, El Chapo seemed stumped when Steinsigate asked him what posh means. At this point, conversation turned to the theme of headphones. A debate over the best type – Sony or Beats – lasted for roughly four and a half minutes. The debate was broken when I can be heard in the background stating that there was two more minutes remaining of the task. At this point Dobbie took the pen from Speedboil and began to work alone to complete the task. He worked this way for roughly one minute before stating, ‘I’ve done it! I’ve done all the points.’ This was acknowledged by Steinsigate who stated ‘Yes!’ and began clapping. The conversation then returned to Steinsigate’s accent and different regional accents, which continued until the end of the task. As a whole, the group predominantly used their time during the task as an opportunity to socialise with each other.

Group C

This group initially spent roughly the first minute discussing Sillabgib’s computer screen. He was showing the other individuals how websites can be edited within the browser to change the way they are displayed. At this point, he decided to discuss the task with the rest of the group, and they scanned the different categories:

Sillabgib ‘What is this, what are we actually supposed to be doing? As a group, discuss what is important to you, in relation to the four categories.’

Concrete ‘Social and pleasure?’

Sillabgib ‘Family, Incest. Hahaha. Concrete says, Social and Pleasure!’

The conversation continued in this manner for roughly another minute before turning to the discussion of family. The group, collectively, although somewhat driven by Sillabgib and Concrete decided that there was nothing important to them, in relation to both Family and Education:

Sillabgib ‘Echo, what’s important about your family?’

Concrete ‘ABSOLUTELY NOTHING!’

Sillabgib ‘Nothing. What about you?’

King ‘Nothing.’

Sillabgib ‘What about me?’

Echo ‘Nothing?’

Sillabgib ‘Nothing. What about you?’

Concrete ‘Nothing.’

Sillabgib ‘Nothing! Education?’

Concrete ‘Nothing.’

Echo ‘Meh.’

Sillabgib ‘Echo says “Meh”.’

While the group were vocal about not being able to identify any aspect of Education or Family as important, they were quite engaged in their discussion about Social and Leisure. Most of the individuals identified gaming devices such as PS4 or Xbox, as well as listening to music through Spotify. Concrete initially identified swimming as a leisure activity, before suggesting that he used some of his leisure time in a porn website’s comments section. Sillabgib, Concrete and King spent a short time

discussing if this was an appropriate thing to write down, before conceding that it might actually be leisure time:

Sillabgib ‘Concrete says PornHub. I’m not writing that, I’ll just write Ph. If anyone asks what it means, I’ll just say “brown sauce” and end the conversation.

Concrete ‘Brown sauce?’

Sillabgib ‘Besides, the website says Ph on the bottom.’

Concrete ‘No it doesn’t!’

King ‘Are you sure?’

Sillabgib ‘OK, well it *is* Leisure, I suppose.’

The group’s conversation about work was largely about what jobs they currently do. One learner discussed how he had two jobs, at a Chinese take away and a high street bakery chain. Nearly all the individuals in this group stated they were employed, with Concrete being the only individual who did not have a job. Sillabgib and Concrete discussed how to spell Sillabgib’s job role. He was a chef, and the pair debated whether the word ‘chef’ has one or two of the letter f at the end of the word.

At this point, distracted by something on one of the computer screens, the group began to discuss the movie *Shawn of the Dead*. They did impressions and quotes from the film. This continued until Echo silently pointed at the camera. Sillabgib became embarrassed, realising his impressions had been caught on film. Concrete then stopped the camera recording.

4.3.4 Overall contextualising statement

Overall, the young people who took part in this research project were not seemingly dissimilar to those from the wider population of learners represented in a FE College. Only two individuals were from households with unconfirmed income status, the

remaining thirteen participants had households with at least one income. A total of 15 out of 22 individuals, who took a parental role were confirmed as employed. This equates to an employment rate of at least 68.2%. However, when this is adjusted to discount the two individuals who were retired, the overall parental employment rate moves to a minimum of 75%. This rate is potentially higher, but two households have an unconfirmed income status, relating to four parental figures. As their employment status was unconfirmed, these individuals have been counted as a negative employment statistic. At the time of the data collection activity, the employment rate for North East England, across all age groups was 72.9% (Office for National Statistics, 2020). This means the employment statuses of the participant's families was a little higher than those regionally and closer to the overall UK employment rate of 76.6% (Office for National Statistics, 2020) than the regional rate. The types of jobs these individuals did are spread relatively evenly across the different job types. Roles were categorised using ISCO-08, *International Standard Classification of Occupations* document (International Labour Office, 2012); rather than job roles being clustered into a small number of categories, roles were spread over most categories. Technicians and Associate Professionals, Skilled Agricultural and Forestry and Fishery Workers were the only categories not represented.

From the 22 individuals identified as undertaking a parental role, 2 were identified as being University graduates. This equates to a percentage of 9.1%, significantly under the national rate, which identifies that 42% of individuals aged over 21 are university graduates. (Office for National Statistics, 2017b)

When looking at the employment status of the participants, four individuals stated they had a part-time job in addition to attending college: 26.7% of the whole group. The latest national data on this is from 2001, when the UK rate of employment for students

in year 12 of academic study, the first year post-16, was 42%. (Payne, 2001) However, due to the age of the data, it was not possible to reliably compare the two statistics; it was not known if the rate of employment amongst the participants of this study was representative of the employment rate for all 16-to-18-year-old students. In addition to the individuals who were employed, two stated they also contributed to the household income. When looking at the types of jobs the young people do, they predominantly fell into the ICSO-08 (International Labour Office, 2012) category of Elementary Occupations. These occupations included low-pay, low-skilled jobs such as takeaway food worker and window cleaner.

The results of the self-efficacy task allowed for the formation of the following statements:

- The majority of individuals believed they were good students and had the ability to achieve good grades, if they tried hard. Despite this, around half of the individuals believed their classmates often achieved higher grades than themselves.
- Around half of the students thought it was important to go to college, with a majority believing what they learnt in college was important.
- Most individuals felt they had someone at home, who took an interest in their college life.
- Nearly all individuals believed they worked hard in college and only a quarter believed that others work harder than they do.
- Most individuals thought they were good at English and reading. However, when discussing the belief of their ability in Maths, most had felt negatively about their ability in this subject.

- The majority of individuals were happy with college life. Only a quarter of individuals identified they would quit college as soon as possible.
- Many of the individuals did not view being a good student in college as an indicator of getting a good job later in life.
- Over two thirds of individuals, at this point in their academic career, did not wish to go to university.

Beyond their college lives, there were several things the young people who participated in this study found important. The participants undertook an activity, in three groups, based on an adapted version of the *Arenas of action and centres of choice* activity by Ball, et al. (2000). Many individuals identified their family or who they lived with as important to them. However, a small number of individuals simply stated 'Nothing!' when discussing what was important to them in relation to their families. This group of individuals also came to the same conclusion, nothing, when discussing what was important to them about education. Other individuals discussed their experiences of education, which were focussed on their school lives. Their discussion was around how they felt singled out in school for not having the 'correct' type of footwear or uniform. The majority of all verbal discussions focussed on education were pejorative, with previous experiences of school acting as the framework for these discussions. When discussing work, some individuals identified their current jobs as important to them, describing their roles. Other individuals discussed how their previous experience of employment or work experience had left them unmotivated with the job types available to them; two individuals felt so strongly about this they had excluded themselves from the work experience placements, which had been set up for them by their previous schools.

The area of highest importance to the young people in this study was seemingly the social and leisure activities they engaged in. Unsurprisingly, as they are a group of Musicians, most identify playing, performing or making music as an important part of their leisure time. In addition, many individuals also discussed playing computer games and seeing friends as important. Their use of time during the group tasks was focussed mostly on socialising with each other. Two of the groups rushed through the task, before using the remaining time to socialise. The third group used nearly all the allotted time to socialise, before one individual completed the written worksheet on the group's behalf; all groups worked hard at being social.

The existing levels of Capital the young people have can be measured in three forms: Cultural Capital, Social Capital and Economic Capital. However, it was not possible to reliably draw any conclusions on the Economic Capital of the young people, or their families. This has been excluded from the following analyses.

Cultural Capital can be found in three forms, Embodied state, Objectified state, and Institutionalised state. The Embodied state is Capital that has been developed by an individual and is now present in the knowledge and skills that individual has. The ability to play a musical instrument is an example of this form of Cultural Capital. The Objectified state takes the form of physical goods, such as books and instruments etc. Standardised qualifications would be classed as Capital in the Institutionalised state. (Bourdieu, 1986)

Cultural Capital in the Embodied state is amongst the highest form of Cultural Capital present in the participants. As a group of Music students, all had a good knowledge of music, and all could either play an instrument or operate specialist music software and/or hardware. In addition to this, the level of digital literacy of the group appeared high. This was demonstrated excellently by Sillabgib; he spent some time at the

beginning of the *Arenas of Choice* activity modifying the text on a website using the developer tools in the web browser. In order to do this, he was demonstrating an Embodied form of Cultural Capital as knowledge of HTML language and coding. In addition to this, several individuals chose their pseudonyms based on cultural figures. Dobbie chose his name based on the character in the *Harry Potter* series, Stensigate chose his to reference Japanese Anime, and several of the other individuals chose names relating to musical figures. This suggests an awareness and knowledge of Cultural Capital in the Embodied state, which can be drawn upon as legitimate culture. Cultural Capital in the Objectified state is somewhat hard to measure in the participants of this study; it is not possible to know all the things they own which would signify this form of Cultural Capital. However, what can be said is that many of the individuals owned their own instruments; indeed, a signifier of Objectified Cultural Capital. As a counter to this, there was a small number of individuals who described a situation in which they lacked Objectified Cultural Capital. During the *Arenas of Choice* discussion, both Lil Skies and Kirk describe marginalising situations at school, where they did not have the correct type of footwear for the uniform.

Cultural Capital held in the Institutionalised form is below average, when compared with other young people of a similar age. Unlike subjects such as Construction, where the entry point is at Level 1 for all learners, the entry point onto a Music qualification is largely based on the level of existing qualifications; the majority of Level 3 qualifications will expect participants to have at least five or more GCSEs at grade 4 or higher. Similarly, most Level 2 programmes will also expect a clutch of GCSEs at grade 4 or higher, with some learners being required to resit English and Maths. Therefore, for those studying on a Level 1 Music programme, their existing Institutionalised Capital will be lower than many other young people their own age.

Had their Institutionalised Capital been higher, they would already be on a higher level of study.

Social Capital appears to be very important to the young people in this study. While there are few observable, institutionally guaranteed forms of Social Capital present, there is a significant amount of work being done in what Bourdieu (1986) would call 'investment strategies'. This was observed during the *Arenas of Choice* activity, when looking at how the young people chose to spend their time while the activity was ongoing. All three groups spent much of their time during this activity socialising. Group B, in particular, spent almost all their allotted time for this activity socialising and discussing topics such as headphones and regional accents. It appears that investing in Social Capital is important and that developing relationships with their peers is an important aspect of their time at college.

When comparing the information the young people provided, and the way they presented themselves during these initial tasks, there were some similarities and differences. Staff perceptions characterised those on Level 1 programmes as having tough home lives, from 'lower quintile' households and having parents or relatives at home who did not see the value in education. However, the group of individuals in this study cannot be categorised in this way. The questionnaire that was completed showed a group of individuals whose families were predominantly employed and who worked in a broad range of job types. Many of the learners identified their families as being important to them during the *Arenas of Choice* discussions. In addition, when completing the student efficacy questionnaire, the majority of individuals felt they had family who cared if they did well in college; contrary to the idea that the families of these individuals do not see the value in education.

Staff perceptions were of learners as individuals who lacked Cultural Capital. While this might be true of Cultural Capital in the Institutionalised form, the individuals who contributed to this study demonstrated they had a high level of Cultural Capital in the Embodied state; they played instruments, had knowledge of popular culture and demonstrated strong digital literacy skills. Staff also perceived Level 1 learners as individuals who lacked self-efficacy, had barriers to learning based on preconceived ideas of their own ability and held negative connotations about education. Data from the self-efficacy questionnaire challenged these stereotypes. The majority of learners felt they could get high grades, should they try hard, and almost all the participants felt they were good students. In addition to this, the overwhelming majority also felt it was important to go to college.

Another stereotype staff held about Level 1 learners is that they lacked the skills and ability to effectively communicate with others. This is not something I witnessed amongst the young people in any part of the initial encounters. As observed in the *Arenas of Choice* activity, the majority, if not all the learners worked hard at being social and appeared keen to invest in the development of their Social Capital.

4.4 Research question 2. What are the aspirations of Level 1 learners?

This section of the findings explores the aspirations of my participants using data produced during encounter 2. The section begins with a group discussion on the *Arenas of choice* activity which took place at the previous encounter. The section then outlines the findings from the 'By the time I am 30…' task and is followed by the outcomes from the discussion of the activity. Next, I describe what the participants consider to be the key signifiers of adulthood. The final part of this section provides a

summary of the aspirations of the Level 1 learners. A full overview of the data collection activities and methods of data analysis can be found on p.69.

4.4.1 Discussion of the Arenas of Choice activity

The results from the previous activity were shared with the group. Using the titles as prompts, a short discussion took place about the things the young people had identified. Initially, the discussion focussed on Education and in particular, why those who said it wasn't important felt that way. One of the individuals, Concrete, shouted out, 'cos it sucks!', this was then responded to by Sillabglib, who stated 'That's exactly the reason.' Kirk also stated it wasn't important, which launched a short dialogue between himself, Lil Skies and El Chapo, who discussed their own thoughts about education; they discussed how education needs to feel important to them, their dislike of English and Maths, how college is more 'chill', and their family always comes first, over education:

Kirk 'Nah, it's [education] not important.'

Lil Skies 'I do feel like it's important, but I'm only going to learn something that I'm interested in. Like Music. Just being honest, like. Maths and English, I just don't like them.'

Lee 'That's OK. I want you guys to be honest and I want this to be an honest dialogue. You're not going to get wrong[5] for sharing your opinions.'

Lil Skies 'Even when I was in high school, I wasn't interested in science and things like that. It was just… If I'm not interested in something… I've just always been like that.'

[5] 'Get wrong' or 'getting wrong' is a North East term for being told off.

El Chapo ‘Aye, see, I think education should come to like a certain extent. Cos at school like, they expect too much of you like. In college, they’re like, chill. But [in school] they expect you to do this and do that, yeah, right. But in my life, family always comes first, over education.

The group were not as open to discussion for the other three remaining topics. Dobbie did briefly discuss why he wanted to work on an airline or on trains. He had a relative who already worked in a similar role. When asked ‘So, have you seen their job and thought, that’s pretty good, I’d quite like that job?’ he simply replied ‘Yeah’.

When asked about the remaining two categories, Family, and Social and leisure, no one in the group chose to reply or explain the answers they gave any further. Perhaps in this instance the young people felt that their responses at the previous encounter were self-explanatory? Whatever the reason, I chose not to press further and moved onto the next planned activity.

4.4.2 By the time I am 30…

The initial part of this activity was a worksheet for the participants to complete. This was a simple task where each individual was asked to complete the sentence ‘By the time I am 30, I want to…’. No formal guidance was given on how to complete this task, and everyone was free to respond how they saw fit. However, they were reminded of the four categories used in the previous *Arenas of choice* activity and it was suggested they could use these as a guide when forming their answers. *Table 14* shows a digitised version of the answers provided by those who elected to take part. Spelling errors have been corrected, but otherwise the wording and punctuation remains as each individual had written it.

Table 14 - Participant answers for the 'By the time I am 30...' activity

Have a stable job in the music industry; working in a studio, record label, in a band, produce music and have fun whilst doing my job. A stable relationship with my partner, potentially married or starting a family. Living in a city or on the side of the city in a well-off house with my partner. I would like to have finished my college course, L1, L2, L3 and possibly university.
- Decent vehicle – Audi, Range Rover - Log cabin out of the way of traffic and cities - Pursue music career, if not follow tree service
Have money. Be happy. Maybe in a band or something in the Music Industry.
Be married, kids and in a band.
Be secure in myself and have a family with my other half. Be married and be financially stable and happy.
Have moved. Have new mates. Have a side hustle. Have a job I earn reasonable amounts of money. Have a horse box.
Be a popular or semi-popular musician in a Punk Rock or Metal band with good members.
Have a simple job such as café while getting money for studio time to make songs on my feelings and have somewhere to post my songs.
Have a family and hopefully have a self-employed record label.
Get a job and save up money for future plans.
Front man in a band, in front of Glastonbury. The best.
Live in Japan, as a musician.
Be leaving university and going into a better job. Down London.

Work

All but one of the individuals described a form of employment. Predominantly, and unsurprisingly due to the nature of the course they study, most identified a job in the Music Industry. One individual identified that they wished to be at the pinnacle of their field, a front man, '…in a band, in front of Glastonbury. The best.' Other individuals were also similarly specific in their desire to work within music, although had less clearly defined ideas on the measure of success. For these individuals, it appears stability or having a career based in music is their aspirational target. One individual stated they wanted a 'stable' job in the industry, before listing options such as working in a studio, at a record label or being in a band. This individual also identified a need to have fun whilst doing their job.

Some individuals were less clear about their future employment prospects but did identify they wished to work. For these individuals, work was seemingly solely about the acquisition of money; Economic Capital which would allow them to do other things. One individual wanted to have a job where they '…earn reasonable amounts…' of money, while also having a 'side hustle'[6]. His other responses suggest this would be to move away from his current location and to buy a horsebox. Two further individuals identified money being the main concern, rather than the job type. One stated they wished to have a 'simple job' working in a café, allowing them to save up to buy time

[6] A 'side hustle' is a secondary form of employment taken in addition to an individual's main job, in order to supplement their income.

in a recording studio. A second individual simply stated they wish to ‘Get a job and save for future plans.’

As a group of individuals, almost all articulated clear aspirations relating to work or employment. For some, their aspirations related to specific job roles with little mention of financial wealth. Other individuals did not have fixed ideas about job roles, instead focussing more on the acquisition of money as their employment target.

Home

A total of five individuals wrote about their home lives or living arrangements. All five mentioned living arrangements that were different to their current ones. None of the individuals identified grand mansions or palaces; most had fairly modest aspirations. One individual identified wanting to live in a ‘well-off house’ with their partner in, or close to, a city. The other four individuals talked about moving away from their current area. One individual wanted to live in Japan and work as a musician. Another individual had his sights set on moving to London, for the chances of a ‘better job’. Counter to this individual’s desire to move to the Capital city, one of his peers hoped for a quieter life; they wanted to live in a log cabin, ‘…out of the way of traffic and cities.’ One final individual simply stated, ‘have moved’. They are seemingly not concerned about where to, as long as it is away from their current location. For those that mentioned living arrangements, it seems as though these are important because they are different from what they are now. Some seem to have specific ideas of their future location, whereas others simply hoped for change.

Family

Four individuals identified spouses or children for their 30-year-old selves. Two stated marriage was something they wanted, with one stating they hoped to be 'married and financially stable.' In addition, this individual also hoped to be 'secure' in himself, with a family. One individual simply stated, 'have a family', with little further identification of marriage. The final individual though, prioritised a stable relationship, with the notion of marriage or children as secondary to stability: 'A stable relationship with my partner, potentially married or starting a family.' Overall, only a clutch of individuals, roughly 31%, felt that family was important to identify in their aspirations for the future.

Social and leisure

Only one individual mentioned aspects of social and leisure in his aspirations for his future self. He identified two aspects in this category; he stated, 'have new mates' and 'have a horse box'. None of the other individuals chose to write anything for this category; this is counter to the results from the *Arenas of choice* activity, in which the response to the category was the highest. This could possibly be because the young people already have rich social and leisure lives; they have previously identified varied activities such as gaming, playing musical instruments and spending time with their friends as social and leisure activities. In addition, they predominantly used their time during that activity as an opportunity to socialise with one another. Perhaps the lack of identified aspirations in this area is linked to the fact they already feel somewhat fulfilled in this area of their lives?

Social Capital

The Social Capital aspired to by the individuals who took part predominantly focussed on family. This was either through finding a spouse or having children. Only two individuals described types of Social Capital that existed beyond the family. One individual simply stated ‘have new mates’, which tells us very little. The reason for wanting these new friends could be as complex as wanting friends who can help him further a career, or as simple as the fact he does not share many common interests with his current group of friends. However, one individual suggested they wish to be in a band with ‘good members’, which suggests a band can form a sort of collective Capital; their understanding being that if the other band mates are ‘good’, however ambiguous this term might be, gives the group a higher level of collective Capital which can be traded in or converted to another form of Capital, as the individual pursues his aspiration of becoming a ‘…popular or semi-popular musician…’.

Economic Capital

Economic Capital was mentioned in the aspirations of seven of the thirteen individuals that took part in this activity. The levels of Economic Capital identified were all very similar for each individual. There was seemingly a priority of stability and comfort, rather than significant wealth. One individual wanted to ‘…earn reasonable amounts of money…’ while having a ‘side hustle’, while others suggested they wished to live in a ‘well-off’ house or have a ‘simple job’ in order to get money to buy time in a recording studio. Others aspired to be ‘financially stable’, ‘…get a job and save up money…’ or simply to ‘have money’. It appears that for the group of individuals in this study, financial stability was the main priority; they did not seemingly aspire to be millionaires,

but perhaps instead view Economic Capital as a safety net, rather than an aspiration in its own right?

Cultural Capital

Bourdieu (1986) outlines that Cultural Capital can be viewed in three states, Embodied, Objectified and Institutionalised. Because of this, further coding has been done to ascertain where each state of Cultural Capital has been identified.

Cultural Capital in the Embodied state

In its Embodied state, Cultural Capital only appeared in one form during this activity. Five of the young people had aspirations of being in a band or producing music. In order to achieve this, each individual would have to be able to play a musical instrument or sing. This is an embodiment of Cultural Capital, as it is something each individual would have to accrue and develop over time. In addition, it is not something which could easily be traded for other forms of Capital.

Cultural Capital in the Objectified state

There was very little mention of Cultural Capital in the Objectified state. However, one individual described how they would like to own a record label. This is an aspiration which can be seen as a conversion of their Embodied Cultural Capital; developed knowledge and understanding of legitimate culture will feed directly into this aspirational target. Two other individuals aspired to own material possessions. The first individual aspired to own a ‘decent’ vehicle and identified Audi and Range Rover as examples. The second individual aspired to own a horsebox. Unlike the record label, these personal possessions are a conversion of Economic Capital. In addition to being Objectified Cultural Capital, they are also items which can signify status.

Cultural Capital in the Institutionalised state

Two individuals identified aspirations linked to Institutionalised Cultural Capital. The first individual aspired to have completed college, including levels 1, 2 and 3. In addition, they also considered university stating 'possibly', when they have identified it. Completing university was a definite aspiration for the other individual though. They clearly stated, 'leaving university', which they described as a route into a '…better job. Down London.' In stating this, the individual showed they saw a link between two forms of Capital. He formed the connection between formal qualifications and Economic Capital, demonstrating an understanding of how one form of Capital, in this case Cultural Capital in the Institutionalised state, can be converted into Economic Capital.

4.4.3 Group discussion of the 'By the time I am 30…' activity

Four of the individuals who took part in this activity were happy to verbally discuss their responses. Joe and El Chapo had both identified musical careers for themselves; Joe wanted to be a '…popular or semi-popular musician…', while El Chapo hoped to be a front man in a band and perform at Glastonbury Festival, 'The Best.' Dobbie and Sillabglib were less specific about the job they would have, but both expressed a desire to move away from their current home. Dobbie wanted to attend university and go to a 'better job', in London. Sillabglib also hoped to have a significant change in his life. By the time he was 30, he hoped he would have new mates, a job he earned a 'reasonable' amount of money for, and a 'side hustle'. In addition, he hoped he would be able to move to North America.

When asked *why* they had chosen the things they had, each individual could articulate the rationale. Joe, who wanted to be a musician, simply described '…music is a passion of mine and I want to pursue it as a career.' When asked what the route he

needed to take, to achieve this, he seemed a little unsure and El Chapo was happy to interject and add his own thoughts:

Lee So, in order to get there, what route do you need to take to achieve that?

Joe Erm, make good friends who play music.

El Chapo NO! Make good music!

Joe And, jam out with people who play the guitar.

Lee Do you feel that route is open to you and that is achievable?

Joe Yes. Especially in the college.

Lee So, why especially in college?

Joe Because it's a music college and there's a lot of people who have similar music tastes to me.

For Joe then, although he seemed somewhat unsure of the exact route, he identified that college is an opportunity or a catalyst to achieve his aspiration. However, rather than identifying the institutional state of Cultural Capital, in the form of formal qualifications, it is the Social Capital which he views as important. In the dialogue above, he identified the social and networking opportunities that college provides. He sees this as the main fulcrum for achievement, rather than the acquisition of knowledge the formal qualification provides.

When asked, El Chapo lacked an awareness, more so than Joe, of how to achieve his aspiration of performing on the main stage of Glastonbury festival. His response, while self-assured and clear, showed he lacked an understanding of his current position and the route he needs to take:

Lee Why have you chosen that?

El Chapo Cos I just want to be a front man!

Lee So, do you know what route you need to take in order to get there? How do you get from where you are now, to being main stage at Glastonbury?

El Chapo Get a good band and make good music.

Lee Good band, good music. Do you feel that route is available to you? Do you feel like it is achievable?

El Chapo Yeah. Write songs and, erm, live.

Sillabglib came across as very focussed and sure of the aspirations he identified. His main aspiration was to move out of the country, and the other elements he described appeared to feed into this. When describing how he hoped to achieve his aspirations, he focussed in on Economic Capital, identifying this as a main catalyst; he appears very focussed on money when discussing his aspirations:

Lee Sillabglib, what did you put?

Sillabglib Right, OK. Sorry boys, but erm, have new mates. Move. Have a side hustle. Have a job I earn reasonable money for.

Lee OK, so there's a few different facets there. So, why have you picked those things?

Sillabglib Erm, I'm not too bothered about the job itself. I haven't got anything specific. I just want to get paid. And, have a side hustle to earn extra money.

Lee So, think about moving. Where is it you want to move to?

Sillabglib Aw, WAY out of this country, it's absolutely terrible!

Lee So, where? Any ideas?

Sillabglib America! Or Canada.

Lee So, do you think… what route do you need to take to get to that point, from where you are now then?

Sillabglib Save money

Contrary to the economically focussed Sillabglib and the socially focussed Joe, Dobbie focusses in on Cultural Capital, in the Institutionalised state, as a key component to achieving his aspiration of moving to London. He was able to describe, albeit tentatively, a route to achieving a job working on the London Underground. In addition, he felt that it is a route available to him. Dobbie mentioned in earlier activities that he has a relative that works at Transport for London; perhaps his awareness of the required route to achieving his aspiration, is through seeing the route his relative has taken to get there?

Dobbie I want to finish university and go to a better job down London.

Lee OK, so you want to go to university, complete university and then go to a better job, down London. Does that mean you already have a job?

Dobbie I might be getting one.

Lee OK, so what route do you need? From where you are now, on Level 1, what route do you need to take to get to university and get the job down in London?

Dobbie Well, first off I want to finish college and then work towards a university degree.

Lee What kind of university degree would you like? What route do you think you need to take to first get to university, and then to London?

Dobbie Travel and Tourism

Lee Travel and Tourism, OK. And then, London, what sort of job would you do in London?

Dobbie Work on the underground.

Lee So do you feel that route is open to you?

Dobbie Yes.

As part of this discussion, I also asked each individual if they had a plan B, or back-up plan, should they not be able to achieve their identified aspirations. Joe said he'd like to work in a game shop, '…cos that's the second-best job.' Dobbie also identified a plan B, in which he said he would like to live in Canada. Sillabglib and El Chapo both stated they did not want a plan B, as it would draw focus away from achieving their aspirations. Sillabglib summed up the feeling of both individuals when he stated: 'If you have a plan B, right, you're not going to go for plan A because you've always got something to fall back on.'

Each of the four individuals who chose to speak about their aspirations believed that they were achievable, and all spoke positively about their ability to get where they wanted to be. However, each of the four individuals attributed different things as key catalysts for achieving them. El Chapo was, perhaps unintentionally, reliant somewhat on good fortune and luck. While he understood that he needs to make good music, there was little evidence he was aware of what else he might need to do, to get where he wanted. The other three individuals each identified a different form of Capital as the facilitator of their aspirations. Joe, who had similar aspirations to El Chapo, identified he needed Social Capital and could describe that he could accrue this at college. Dobbie focussed on Cultural Capital, in the form of formal education; a reaction to seeing how the route had worked for his relative. Sillabglib focussed on Economic Capital, and while he had no fixed plans on how to obtain it, he saw the acquisition of money as a route to his aspiration of emigrating to North America.

4.4.4 Key signifiers of successful adulthood

A total of 12 individuals chose to take part in this activity. For the initial task, I asked each of the participants to work individually for five minutes. During this time, I asked them to write down the things they thought were the key signifiers of successful adulthood. Initially some of the group were unsure of what I meant by 'key signifier', so I rephrased my question slightly and asked, 'What sort of things make you an adult?'. The word cloud below was developed from the digitised written responses the participants gave and gives an overview of the main themes.

The main theme that came from this initial part of the activity was the idea of adults having 'responsibilities'. This was mentioned by 8 of the 12 participants (67%). 6 of the participants (50%) identified housing as an important aspect of adulthood; although owning a house did not seem a particular priority, as only 2 of these 6 individuals identified home ownership. 6 of the participants (50%) identified

employment as important. The next common theme was having their own transport, with 5 individuals (42%) identifying owning a car or their own transport was important. Behind this, bills, marriage or relationships, being over a certain age, and the ability to legally consume alcohol and tobacco products were each identified by 4 (33%) individuals. Other themes included children (3 individuals, 25%), trust and loyalty (3 individuals, 25%), independence (1 individual, 8%), money (1 individual, 8%) and having a moustache (1 individual, 8%). The full collection of themes is shown in *Table 15*.

Table 15 - Key signifiers of successful adulthood (N=12)

Key Signifier	**Number**	**%**
Responsibilities	8	67
House	6	50
Job	6	50
Car	5	42
Bills	4	33
Marriage / relationships	4	33
Over a certain age	4	33
Alcohol / tobacco	4	33
Children	3	25
Maturity	3	25
Trust / loyalty	3	25
Commuting to work	1	8
Looking after your health	1	8
Communication	1	8
Food	1	8
Money	1	8
Independence	1	8
Moustache	1	8
Role model	1	8

Following on from this activity, there was a group discussion. During this discussion, several of the participants were given the opportunity to discuss what they had identified and written down. 11 of the participants who had participated in the paper-based task, chose to contribute to the group discussion.

Concrete identified having children and being over the age of 19. Steinsigate said drink alcohol, drive, buy cigarettes, and buy a house. Neither could describe why they thought those things in particular were signifiers of successful adulthood. When asked, Concrete stated 'I dunno, it sounds like it should be.', Similarly, Steinsigate replied, 'I dunno, they just seem like it.' Echo, who identified having a car, job, food, money, 18+ and responsibility gave a very definitive answer when asked why he thought they were key signifiers of adulthood. He simply stated, 'To have money!'. This explanation was mirrored somewhat by Unsociable, who when asked why he had identified jobs, bills and housing as key signifiers, stated 'Cos you need somewhere to live, so you need a house, and you need a job to buy supplies. And you need to pay your bills to stay in the house.' In addition, Kirk also recognised the importance of paying bills. Asked why he thought it was a key signifier, he stated:

> 'Cos paying bills will probably mean you can get your own house and it helps if you've got your own job. Cos if you've got your own job you can make your own money and stuff. You can, pretty much, make financial decisions by yourself.' (Kirk)

For these three individuals then, their key signifiers of adulthood were focussed on autonomy: not reliant on others, with their own jobs and in control of their own daily lives. King Chronic identified trust, loyalty, cigars, and whiskey as his key signifiers. When asked, he said trust and loyalty were important '…particularly in life and stuff, you need them otherwise no one will take you seriously.' Cigars and Whiskey, he described were a 'first class sort of thing'; a signifier of status and something that would show you are doing well as an adult. It was not just King Chronic who recognised

certain behavioural traits were key signifiers of adulthood. Lil Skies offered some insight into why he thought maturity was important:

Lil Skies I said maturity.

Lee Maturity? That's really good. Why've you picked that?

Lil Skies I Dunno, just cos, I dunno, it's like being grown up in certain situations that can happen.

Lee So, what does maturity, for an adult, look like? Is it different to maturity for a teenager?

Lil Skies Erm, not really. I would say if you're a mature teenager, you're, like, showing signs that you're taking on adult maturity. If that makes sense?

Lars also touched on maturity, when he described why proper communication was a key signifier:

Lars Cos if you have proper communication, then you're likely to, not win over, but get on with more people. If you know what I'm saying? If someone used slang in an important situation, you can tell that they're not mature enough. Whereas, in the likes of a job interview, if you're well-spoken and well mannered, then you're chances of getting the job increases.

Joe, who identified responsibility, was also very forthcoming with his explanation. He went on to describe how being responsible, he believed, goes beyond the individual and is important to be a role model to younger people:

Joe You've got to be responsible, otherwise you're not going to do very good. If you're an adult, you're free to do more stuff, that could be dangerous. Like drinking and smoking and stuff. So, you've got to be responsible. And you've got to be responsible to drive.

Lee So, you've got to be responsible to drive and drink…

Joe And to be a role model to younger people

Lee So, a key signifier of being an adult is being a role model, to younger people? Why do you think that is then? Why do you think it is a key responsibility of an adult, to be a role model?

Joe So that you don't get people growing up, just doing whatever they want. Rowdy little kids.

Of the remaining participants, Kurt thought that memory was an important aspect of adulthood. He identified how writing things down was important, 'just so you remember things that you need to do.' El Chapo identified a physical trait of adulthood, the moustache, as a key signifier of adulthood. Unfortunately, when asked why he had chosen this, Kirk interrupted stating 'Steinsigate's got a moustache and he's not an adult!' At this point El Chapo decided not to continue his explanation. However, facial hair is often seen as a rite of passage for young men, a signifier of status and age (Dixson & Vasey, 2012)

At this point in the discussion, I asked the group what they thought could be potential barriers to achieving the signifiers of adulthood. Lil Skies said being 16 and El Chapo shouted out, 'Money!'. Dobbie however, had fairly fully formed ideas of the barriers he felt were precluding him from successful adulthood:

Dobbie Not being able to get a job.

Lee Not being able to get a job? So, what could be the barriers, stopping you getting a job?

Dobbie Mine is basically qualifications.

Lee Qualifications. Does anyone else feel like that is an issue?

At this point, the whole group began to chatter loudly about qualifications. I picked up on two individuals, Kurt and El Chapo, who disagreed about the importance of

qualifications and pitched their opposing viewpoints to the whole group. Kurt stated that qualifications were not important, and it was skills that made the difference. El Chapo on the other hand thought qualifications and skills were important. I pitched these opposing viewpoints to the group, hoping for an in-depth discussion. However, Lars, Dobbie, Lil Skies, King Chronic, and Kirk shouted back, in unison:

'It's who you know!'.

4.4.5 Summary of the aspirations, of Level 1 learners

Almost all the young people reported that they have aspirations relating to employment. Some had quite clear, specific and definitive employment goals. One individual was very sure of his aspiration of being a musician on the main stage at Glastonbury Festival. For others, the job roles were less fixed, and seemingly a facilitator for the acquisition of Economic Capital, which could be traded in for Objectified Cultural Capital. Other than the individual who discussed his aspirations for Glastonbury Festival, they mostly spoke about having 'good' jobs or earning a 'decent' amount of money. However, none of the individuals identified having significant amounts of wealth as an aspiration. Indeed, the aspiration for stability, was a widely shared aspiration, with individuals using words like 'secure', 'stable', 'happy' and 'family'.

While almost all individuals had clear ideas for their future, very few individuals demonstrated a full awareness of their position and the route they needed to take to achieve their aspirations. A small number of individuals identified specific individual capitals that could help them achieve their aspirations; be that the 'who you know' Social Capital, formal qualifications and Economic Capital. However, only one individual could describe the route he needed to take to achieve his aspiration. This

individual (Dobbie) wanted a job working on the London Underground. Having seen a relative follow a similar career path, he could describe quite clearly the route he needed to take.

When discussing what the signifiers of successful adulthood are, almost all the individuals recognise 'responsibilities'. For most, these are the physical responsibilities that they have witnessed their parents or guardians undertake, such as paying bills, going to work, keeping their own home, and transport. For many, they could not describe why these were key signifiers of adulthood, but they 'just seem like it'. A small number of individuals also recognised behavioural responsibilities of adulthood such as maturity, effective communication, trust, and being a role model for younger people. Unlike the physical responsibilities, they could articulate *why* they felt these behavioural traits were important, offering examples to elucidate their thoughts. Perceived barriers to successful adulthood included lack of money and the inability to obtain work, linked to a lack of qualifications. While there was some debate about if qualifications, skills, or both were important, almost all recognised that Social Capital, the networks of 'who you know', were an important catalyst to remove the barriers to successful adulthood.

4.5 Research question 3. What are the motivations of Level 1 learners?

This section of the thesis focusses on the outcomes from the data relating to the motivations of the Level 1 learners and their post-16 options they perceived to be open to them. These findings represent the data collected during encounter 4. The initial section focusses solely on motivations, and this is followed by an outline of the post-16 options. A full outline for the data collection activities and methods of data analysis can be seen on p.75.

4.5.1 Motivations

In the initial section of this encounter, I asked those who wished to take part, to get into self-selected groups of no more than 4 people. A total of 13 people chose to take part, this resulted in 5 self-selected groups. I asked each group to have a short discussion about what motivates them to attend college and note down their thoughts onto a piece of paper. Three of the groups identified motivations which focussed on future success as musicians; they wished to 'pursue a dream', 'being famous', 'being successful', and getting 'something' out of music. Aside from the motivation for success in the music industry, one group identified the social aspect of attending college as a motivation, stating 'I've got my friends here…'. One group also focussed on not getting into trouble, as they identified not 'getting wrong off my teacher' as a motivation to attend. A final group had identified that college was a better fit for them than their previous education provider. However, it appears this answer was provided by a sole member of the group, rather than through group consensus, when they wrote college was '…better than my old school sixth form. That place is crap!'. The main theme which emerged from this initial task, was that for many their motivations focussed on developing the Cultural Capital that can perpetuate a career in the music industry.

The second part of this encounter was a group interview, which sought to discuss and investigate further the motivations identified in the previous task. Each group was asked to consider and discuss why they had the motivations they did. During this interview, each group described their motivations. The main theme of being 'successful', performing music, and being a 'big rock and roller' came through. Another theme that emerged was a motivation to attend college to avoid getting in trouble. Both

Joe and Unsociable described situations in which they would 'get wrong' off a parent for not attending. In particular, Unsociable described a situation in which he believed he would be kicked out of home, for not attending:

Unsociable So I don't get kicked out of my house.

Lee So you don't get kicked out of your house!? Would that happen, if you didn't come to college?

Unsociable If I got kicked out of college it would.

Lil Skies also described how a family member had motivated him, albeit without the threat of being 'kicked out'. He described a situation where he would be sat at home doing very little, without the motivation from his mother:

Lil Skies …it was my mam who motivated me to come here. Otherwise, I'd probably have just sat in my room and just… urgh… still be playing my Xbox.

One motivation which did not seem present, at least in the wider group, was the motivation to achieve a certain level of qualification or hit certain grades. Dobbie described one of his motivations as 'I just want to pass my English [GCSE]'. When I asked the wider group if this was the case, El Chapo shouted out 'Nah, I don't care about grades.' This was followed by nods of approval from many students in the wider group, and the comment from Lil Skies, who described how he just wanted to perform music. Seemingly, aside from the threat of 'getting wrong', their main motivation was the ability to perform and develop their skills, with the Institutionalised Cultural Capital secondary to the Embodied form.

4.5.2 Post-16 options

The third section of this encounter was an open group discussion, asking the question: 'What options were open to you, upon leaving school at age 16?'. Almost immediately after asking the question, five individuals, including Zane, Kirk, and El Chapo all shouted out 'None!'. The feeling that there were few or no options open to them was a recurring theme during this discussion, with Lars, Lil Skies, Unsociable and Concrete all stating that they felt they had no options open to them upon leaving school at age 16. Kirk, who was one of the individuals to shout none, described how he '…wasn't doing very well in certain subjects…' at school and because of this he felt he had no options. He went on later to describe that this was not entirely the case, although his options did appear to be limited to two choices, due to the grades he achieved in school and the closure of his first choice for post-16 study. The name of the school he identifies in the below excerpt has been anonymised:

Kirk I left school at like, 15, and I thought, "oh I've got to get a job". It was like a massive, big thing and I thought, "oh, I don't have the right grades, that I'm told I needed, to get a 4". And I was told before year 11, that I needed to get a 4, or else I'm not getting into college. I only got a 4 in, like, IT.

Lee So, you didn't even realise college was an option for you?

Kirk I wanted to go to sixth form, at the school I went to. But they, like, closed it down completely. So, I couldn't go there and the only option was Forthward, and I didn't want to go to Forthward, so I had to come here.

In addition to Kirk, both Lars and Lil Skies felt their options were limited due to achievement at school. Lars stated, quite bluntly, he was 'too thick' to go to sixth form, which limited his options. Lil Skies described how he felt his only option was to study

a Level 1 programme at college, after being knocked back for several other opportunities due to him not having achieved GCSE English and Maths:

Lil Skies My only grade on my GCSEs was music and that was it really. Like, the rest of them weren't very good. So, everything that I applied for and that, like apprenticeships and that, they wouldn't take 'us cos I didn't have 4s in English, Maths. So, it's like… The only GCSEs I really walked out with was DT, like Design Technology and Music. They were the only two I really got.

On the whole, many of the individuals described situations in which they felt their options were limited. Steinsigate and Concrete described their limited options as being linked to lost learning. Steinsigate described the route he took to get to the Level 1 course, after missing a significant period of time during high school:

Steinsigate So, before me even turning 16, I wasn't even in high school. I left in year 9, due to personal shit. Came back, end of year 11, for 6 weeks, to sit my GCSEs. So, I definitely didn't pass. So, I went to a media and art course, and I basically barely got through the media and art thing, as it was not something I wanted to do. Then I found this course.

Concrete's lost learning came a little later on in his educational career, when he described how he was 'kicked out' and found that the college he currently attended was the only one which had given him a chance:

Lee OK, Concrete, it'd be nice to hear your thoughts. So, what options did you feel were open to you at 16?

Concrete Nothing.

Lee So how did you arrive at coming here then? How did you decide this was the right option?

Concrete It's the only college who'd take 'us. I got kicked out of my last college.

Lee So, you were withdrawn from a previous college and found yourself here, rather than it being a choice?

Concrete I felt a bit forced here by my ma, it wasn't my choice.

Only two individuals believed they had multiple options on leaving school at 16. Dobbie discussed how he had 'three colleges, two apprenticeships and a sixth form' to choose from. He says he would have stayed on at school, given the option, but they did not have a sixth form and got 'shut down, sort of' after he left. Echo also described having multiple options. He stated he did a year of sixth form, before deciding it was 'crap' and electing to leave for a vocational college at the end of the first year.

4.6 Research question 4. Do those studying at Level 1 view themselves as, or feel, marginalised?

This section of the thesis outlines the findings from research encounter 4, which focussed on marginalisation and the academic attainment 'gap' linked to socioeconomic status. The first section outlines the findings in relation to Messiou's (2012) four ways of conceptualising marginalisation. This is then followed by three further sections discussing the key areas of marginalisation that emerged from the data: School & education, The North-South divide and Employment. The fifth and final section documents the findings from the discussions and focusses on the academic attainment 'gap'. For a full outline of the data collection activities and methods of data analysis see p.79.

4.6.1 Marginalisation linked to Messiou's concepts of marginalisation

A total of 11 participants were present at this encounter and elected to take part. The 11 participants formed two self-selected groups and the initial section of the encounter had these small groups discussing statements and statistics relating to North East England. Of Messiou's (2012) four categories, individuals experiencing marginalisation, recognised by everybody was the most prominent during analysis. Where the young people described marginal situations, they were almost always recognised as such by themselves and each other. However, it must be said, while they understood how they were in a marginal position, they did not directly use the word marginalised. The predominant themes from this category focussed on a lack of jobs and opportunities for young people, particularly for young people who might not be academically gifted; there was much dialogue centred around school experiences. In addition, Lil Skies also described a situation where young people in his neighbourhood had marginalised themselves; after suffering a knockback by not getting the grades they wanted, they had given up and lost motivation. Within this exchange, he also described one friend who *did* get the grades he hoped for in school, but still gave up:

Lil Skies [My friend] got the grades he wanted, he got everything he wanted. He was really good at Art and something. He got the Art grade he wanted and, and I dunno, he just gave up from there. As soon as he left school, he didn't… he didn't push to do it. I think he wanted to be a tattoo artist or something, but I dunno, he just didn't go for it. He hadn't got the motivation to want it enough. He just kinda stopped. He doesn't do anything now.

Lee He doesn't do anything?

Lil Skies Nah

Lee Would you say that there's a lot of people like that? They get to a certain age and decide, that's it?

Lil Skies Yeah. Definitely.

The second most frequently identified category was individuals describing themselves in marginal situations but not viewing it as such. In these instances, instead of viewing themselves at a deficit, they saw others as having an advantage. This was primarily linked to socioeconomic status, but there were also elements of Social Capital; Kirk described how his wealthier friend received a job offer due to his social connection to an employer.

Zane and El Chapo both described how they viewed people from wealthier backgrounds as having extra resources to pay for additional academic tuition. However, rather than seeing themselves at a disadvantage by this, Zane and Kirk discuss that '…being poor, you seem to get a bit smarter, like streetwise.' As such, they viewed their marginal situation as a possible catalyst:

Zane People who come from a poorer background want a better life, so they try harder to get a better life. People who are richer and that, just don't care. Cos they know that their parents are rich and they're just going to go off their parents. Get their parents to pay for everything.

Kirk I was just going to say. How many people do you know, that are celebrities, that come from poor backgrounds who've ended up making it really high!? Then there's loads of rich people who've not taken life seriously and have ended up at the bottom of the food chain!

When discussing why the North East has the highest number of young people, aged 16-18 considered NEET, three individuals suggested it might be laziness above all else that was the issue. Joe describes how '…as the years progress, everyone just gets lazier…' and suggests the North East is 'trash'. Concrete then interjects; 'cos it's full of chavs!' Joe and Steinsigate are then both quick to agree. This is counter to the situation previously described by Lil Skies, who had discussed the lack of jobs and opportunities for young people.

Responses that fit into the remaining two categories, marginalisation not recognised by others and marginalisation but does not admit it, were minimal. Zane described how he felt marginalised because there was a lack of 'decent education' in the North East. None of the other young people described feeling this way. In addition, Zane did not initially recognise the North East as having the highest 16-24-year-olds considered NEET in the country. He exclaimed '…false! […] cos you've got to be in education until you're 18.' Kirk agreed with this statement, however El Chapo quickly pointed out the reality that people can still drop out, stating that '[some] people don't really care…' and that '…they just don't go…'.

4.6.2 Marginalisation linked to experiences with school or education.

The experiences of prior education the young people described were predominantly negative. Many felt that their academic ability or 'bad' grades they had received during school were a factor in their marginalisation. Zane and Lil Skies had attended the same school and shared their experience of feeling marginalised due to their ability; separated from the main population of the school to learn in a 'different room':

Lil Skies I know in my school, like Zane went to my school. Like, me and Zane were always put in like, we were always separated into different rooms, weren't we!?

Zane Yeah, cos it doesn't matter how skilled you are, if you have something wrong with you, you were just put in a different group.

Lil Skies Like, we were always… We weren't like, the most academic. Even in science class, they would split a group of wer [sic] up. Like, take you into a different room, just to teach you.

Zane You had, like, higher, which were all the smarter kids. Then you'd have second higher. Then you would have foundation, where all, like, the dumb kids and all that [were taught].

Lil Skies Aye.

El Chapo also shared a similar story of being separated in school due to his perceived academic ability. He described how he felt he could not ask for help in school, as every time he did, he got '…pulled into a special Eds class…' and that his school didn't have '…high expectations [of people] who learn differently.' Subsequently, he felt side-lined and 'under pressure'. The pressure that El Chapo described and the marginalising effect of being segregated due to academic performance was described by Joe as having a wide-reaching effect:

Joe If someone doesn't get good grades, then they're pretty much screwed. They're forced to either do nothing or keep doing education. Or just hope that there's a job for them.

Several participants described that achieving 'good' grades was not always valued by parents and guardians. In these situations, they identified a link between parental expectations and socioeconomic status. El Chapo suggested that those from

residential areas he called ‘working class’ do not have ‘patience’ for education. Zane challenged this, suggesting he was still in education, as he is from a poor area. El Chapo then challenged the notion of a poor area, reinforcing that he believed working class is the correct term:

El Chapo …people from working class areas have no patience for education. Two things that affect a child’s background is DNA and background. And background is going to affect their education.

Zane It’s not true! I’m from a poor area and I’m still here and…

El Chapo HOW! Call it a working-class area. You sound like you’re in Oliver Twist! [in a mocking voice] Please Sir, more education!

El Chapo went further, suggesting that those from working class families ‘…don’t really care…’ about their child’s education and discussed how those from the ‘upper class’ push their children to get the ‘…best grades possible.’ Kirk agreed with this. He described his belief that the area you are from can impact your attitudes towards school and education. The routes taken by those around you can impact your own trajectory and he suggested that being around those on benefits can affect the academic motivations of young people:

Kirk …When you’re in education and being brought up around benefits and stuff, it’s like when they drop off, out of schools, it’s like “aw well I’ll just go on benefits then.”

Joe stated that those from poorer areas ‘reject education’. He suggested that there is more emphasis on ensuring an income and that if you are ‘…in a poor area, then people are going to be more focussed on the money coming in, than if you lived in a more wealthy place.’

Lil Skies also talked about residential areas. He suggested that a negative attitude to education might exist in the North East as a whole, and used his own neighbourhood as an example of this:

Lil Skies Compared to some places, the North East is kind of… I dunno, like no one really cares about education, really. […] I'm not saying everyone. Some people do, but most people don't. I know a lot of people where I live don't really care about education.

Lee So what is it that's important to them?

Lil Skies I dunno really. I don't think any of em go to school where I live or owt like that. A lot of the people I went to school with have just dropped out completely. Not in education at all. Doing nothing.

Lil Skies also identified another form of marginalisation he experienced in school. He described a scenario where he and others were side-lined as their teacher favoured another learner. In the scenario he described, another learner was in favour with their PE teacher due to the fact the other learner's parent owned a gym. Lil Skies perceived the teacher to be favouring the other individual, subsequently marginalising him, due to the Social Capital held by the other learner; the teacher hoped they could access Objectified Cultural Capital held by their parent:

Lil Skies …in my school, there was always loads of favouritism with the teachers. So, like, I took GCSE PE and I picked Football for it. I was always quite a good footballer, and there was a certain lad in our GCSE group. His mam owned a gym and that and everything, down the road from the school. And the teacher favouritised [sic] him, because he knew he could get the gym, for like, free and things, if he was giving him all the right support and that. He was always first picked for the football team and

that and everything. It was favouritism, you couldn't not see it. Do you know what I mean!? Just cos he had a gym and so they could use it for school. And I understand that the school wasn't the most wealthiest school and that. Didn't have much money… I divvinah, it was just the way he treat some of the other kids, it wasn't fair, do you know what I mean!? […] You could get put in a football match, and you'd always end up on the bench, just so he could play him.

4.6.3 Marginalisation and the North-South divide

For several of the young people, they felt marginalised due to living in the North of England. Zane discussed how those from 'down south' have 'more money', allowing them a 'better education'. This was contrary to his feelings of the North, which he described as having '…no money and hardly any decent education.' When asked to further describe why he felt like this, Zane talked about those from the North who have done well have done so in spite of being from the North. Zane really appeared to feel at a deficit by living in the North East:

Zane They've got better education, facilities, better learning environment. Compared to us up here that have hardly nothing. Like people who get the best grades, are the ones who're doing it on their own and without help from teachers. Revising on their own without any tutors or anything like that. But people down south, they can… they've got tutors they can do at home. They've got private tutors at their own school and are only focussing on their education…'

Zane felt similarly strong about employment opportunities in the North. He stated his belief that there were 'no decent jobs' in the North; if you want a 'good, well-paid job',

then you would need to move down south. This led to a discussion on where the North of England begins. This seemed a very hotly contested issue, with Lars, El Chapo, Dobbie, Zane and Kirk all weighing into the discussion. Eventually, the group settled on Sheffield as being the start of the North. This was agreed through a point Dobbie made, where he suggested 'the North is about manufacturing' and that '…Sheffield is in the North because they have steel and manufacture things.' This discussion led El Chapo to outline his feelings about the North-South divide. He discussed that in any country there is the pull of the Capital city, and naturally, the money was mostly near the capitals:

El Chapo AYE, SEE, BUT THE LINE THOUGH! The North and South divide. So, it means the North has always got less money than the south.

Lee Why do you think that is?

El Chapo Cos it's the Capital. And the Capital has always got money. See…. What's the Capital of China?

Lee Beijing?

El Chapo Aye, if you go there, then there's loads of money in there. But, if you go out into the country, there's no money.

The economic pull of the Capital was then discussed further by Zane. He suggested that the North East has lost its industrial manufacturing, such as shipyards. However, 'down London and down south' still had a large amount of trade and had better connections with the European mainland.

4.6.4 Marginalisation and employment opportunities

The young people described feelings of marginalisation in relation to employment opportunities. The opportunities they believed were open to them included joining the

Army and ‘mostly just minimum wage jobs’ such as a cleaner or working in a shop. While they all felt there were jobs available, they felt that demand for these jobs outweighed the number of opportunities. Kirk stated that jobs were going to ‘wealthy people’ and ‘people who’re higher up the chain’, who’ve been to ‘better’ schools. In addition, El Chapo, Zane, Lars and Kirk all believed that the best way to get a job was through existing social connections. Kirk described a situation in which a friend of his used their existing Social Capital in order to get a job:

Kirk Well, I’ve done all this and volunteered, and I still can’t get a job. I told him about it and he’s like, “You’ll never get a job!”. And I’ve applied for them, he said “where”. I said to the shop, and he asked how I did it. He didn’t know! The only way he managed to get a job is because he knew who the person was over Facebook! That’s the only way he managed to get a job.

Two individuals also described how they had been excluded from job opportunities due to their age. El Chapo described being ‘discriminated’ against, stating ‘you need the age’ to get the job.’ He had been provisionally offered a job in the warehouse for a well-known internet retailer, but the offer had been withdrawn once they realised his age. The employer stated he needed to be 18, to work near heavy goods vehicles. Lil Skies also describes a similar situation. Like El Chapo, he had also been offered a job, only for the offer to be withdrawn once his age became apparent:

Lil Skies Before I came to college, I got offered a job cos I passed my DT in high school, which is like woodworking and that. I got offered a job in this woodwork factory thing. I don’t know what it was, it was like building furniture and that. Outside furniture and stuff. I got the interview and

everything for it and they wanted to take 'us on, but they couldn't because I wasn't 18.

Overall, the group of young people regarded employment as a route to a better life. Both Kirk and Zane felt that employment was often prioritised over continuing education, and if a job came along they would leave education to take it. Kirk suggested that people in the North East 'want to get working quicker', and is a reason for high educational dropouts at age 16 in the North East. Zane described how he felt being employed can allow for a better life and can lead to better jobs in the future.

One strong feeling about employment that many of the group felt, is that historical events in the region were impacting their ability to get jobs. Zane, El Chapo, Lars, Joe and Kirk all discussed how a decline in industry in the region has led to fewer job opportunities. They identified ship building, fishing, dock work and mining as declining or obsolete industries in the region. Mining was once one of the largest employers in the region. When I asked the group if there were still jobs like that now, El Chapo was quick to interject. He quickly added there was no mining jobs anymore, '…cos of Maggie Thatcher!' I pressed the issue further and questioned the whole group about their thoughts, asking 'Do you think what happened in the 1980s is still impacting you now?' Without hesitation, and in unison several of the group including Zane, El Chapo and Kirk quickly replied 'Yep', 'Yes!', "Aye!'. At this point El Chapo was quick to continue his explanation on the subject, helped by Kirk who reinforced El Chapo's thoughts with his own:

El Chapo See, cos if Margaret Thatcher never happened, we'd be still down the mines and like, in the shipyards. We'd have a straightaway job. Cos back then, you didn't really need a CV […]. Like you'd learn from your father. […] You'd follow your Da and it carries on.

Kirk My Grandad said he left school on the Friday and started working in the pit on Monday. He got one weekend off and that was it. That was his job.

I rephrased my first question to the group, asking if they were '…still feeling the effect of those [mines] closing down?' As before the group answered in unison 'Yep', 'Yes!', "Aye!'.

4.6.5 The gap

This activity sought to explore the attainment gap, linked to socioeconomic status. I explored some of the statistics with the young people, hoping they would offer their own insights and opinions.

The first insight came from Zane, who felt that wealthier families had the financial Capital to afford private tutors and extra tuition. He felt quite certain that much of the gap could be explained in this way and articulated his point clearly:

Zane …they get private tutors. Cos, their parents pay the best money for, like, good, private tutors. As well, they get extra time, get home schooled, as well as going to normal school. So, they get extra teaching, than someone who's less wealthy.

Zane also felt that there were expectations linked to this additional tutoring. Parents of students from wealthier backgrounds expected '…higher marks and higher grades. A stars and that!' Counter to this, parents who were 'less wealthy' just expect their child to attend school and 'do well'. El Chapo agreed with Zane on both points, pointing out '…if you're not from a rich background, you're not going to get private tutors.' However, he also felt that parental expectations weren't just linked to their financial position, but linked to parental attitudes towards education. If '…parents didn't bother with school' or see the value in school, they don't push their children to go. He described how he

didn't go to school and despite his mum knowing, she wasn't able to convince him to go. In an earlier part of the research encounter El Chapo had mentioned a similar topic, suggesting that people in 'working class' areas didn't have patience for education. Both Joe and Lil Skies had also touched on this topic earlier. Lil Skies suggested that the North East as a whole doesn't 'care' for education. Joe on the other hand, discussed how their priority might be bringing money in, rather than grades at school. Steinsigate also mentioned the need to bring money in as a priority over achievement at school. He suggested there could be 'tough times at home', with people trying to financially 'support their families, rather than doing more education.'

Kirk also identified influences linked to finance that impacted attendance to education. He described two of his friends who had dropped out during the first year of a college course. They had to travel some distance to access education, and they could not afford the bus fare each day. While there was a college in their town, it did not offer the qualifications they were taking. Kirk felt that if his friends were from a wealthier background, they would either be able to afford the bus fare, or live in a nicer area, or in closer proximity to a major city.

Kirk I think people from wealthier backgrounds get better education, because two of my friends were forced to go to [a college in a different city] for their courses, because [their local college] doesn't do it. [The local college] has nothing, so me and like my mates were forced to go everywhere else. So, like, me, I came here, they had to go to [a college in a different city] and them two just stopped going. They stopped going because they cannae afford it. Its £20 a week for a bus [pass] and they've got to get two different bus [passes] a week.

Throughout this section of the research encounter the young people were keen to speak about their experiences in school and education. However, while I had hoped to explore themes around the attainment gap linked to socioeconomic status, often the marginalising factors they were describing weren't linked to the amount of Economic Capital their families had. Much of the discussion focussed on 'wealthier' families having an advantage, rather than people from poorer backgrounds being at a deficit. Other than Lil Skies describing a situation where a classmate getting picked for sports before him, because their family owned a gym, their descriptions of feeling marginalised came from perceptions of learning styles, ability and having additional needs.

4.7 Research question 5. Do motivations and aspirations change through the accumulation of Capital?

This section addresses the fifth research question, which considers if motivations and aspirations change through the accumulation of Capital. This section begins by outlining the young people who chose to take part in this follow-up encounter – and provides a narrative for those who did not. The second section outlines the findings from the written activity focussing on motivations and aspirations, and the third section outlines the findings from the subsequent discussion of the activity. The final section addresses the overall findings from this encounter, in relation to Bourdieu's (1986) forms of Capital. This research encounter was undertaken approximately one year after the original encounters. The participants who took part all achieved their Level 1 qualification and were now studying full time towards a Level 2 qualification in Music. In addition, since the first research encounters had taken place, there had been the emergence of a global pandemic in the form of COVID-19. The young people had

spent the latter half of the 19/20 academic year in a national lockdown. All learning moved to remote delivery after the British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, addressed the nation on the 23rd of March 2020 and told the British public they '…must stay at home.' (Johnson, 2020) Face to face delivery would not resume until the beginning of the 20/21 academic year; part of the group discussions addresses this. For a full overview of the data collection activities and the methods of data analysis, please see p.83.

4.7.1 The young people taking part in the follow-up research encounter.

Of the original 15 young people, only 4 took part in the follow up encounter. Of those 15, 3 did not have the option of progressing onto a Level 2 qualification. Both Lil Skies and Sillabglib failed to achieve the Level 1 qualification. Lil Skies was withdrawn from the programme of study before the third term. As he hadn't previously achieved a grade 4 or higher in GCSE English and Maths at school, he was required to attend English and Maths classes alongside his Music programme. Sporadic attendance to these lessons developed into a prolonged period of absence, and after some time Lil Skies refused to attend these lessons altogether. This resulted in his withdrawal from the whole programme of study, including music, mid-way through the second term of the academic year. Sillabglib was also withdrawn during the second term of the academic year. Unlike Lil Skies though, he had not become disengaged with English and Maths, but instead became disengaged with the programme as a whole. Initially this presented itself as sporadic attendance but grew over time to complete non-attendance and an unwillingness to engage with staff in any form. In the earlier research encounters, Sillabglib was often critical of education and had previously been part of a group who stated 'nothing' when asked to identify what was important to them

about education. Unlike Lil Skies and Sillabglib, Speedboil completed and achieved the Level 1 qualification. However, he had struggled with both the written and practical elements of the Level 1 programme, including his additional English and Maths. As such the decision was taken that he should not progress onto the Level 2 programme. At the end of the academic year, Speedboil did not have a plan to continue in education beyond the end of the Level 1 programme and at the last contact, he was NEET.

The remaining 12 individuals all progressed onto a Level 2 Music programme. However, not all 12 continued on the programme after the initial few weeks of induction. Zane, Joe and Concrete would all leave the programme during the initial weeks. Zane had been keen to progress onto the Level 2 Music course. However, when the course team had assessed his practical ability on his instrument, they found he was not at the ability he needed to be in order to achieve the practical elements of the course. Rather than becoming NEET, he decided to continue in education and found himself a place to study motor vehicle mechanics at Level 1. Joe had been very keen during the Level 1 course. In the early research encounters, he had outlined aspirations of becoming a '...popular or semi-popular musician...', stating music was one of his 'passions'. However, when he returned to begin the Level 2 programme, he quickly decided that the pursuit of a career in music wasn't for him. He described how he had 'lost the passion' after a lengthy period of lockdown, due to COVID-19. He did not have an alternative plan but had made his mind up that Music was no longer for him, left the programme and became NEET. Concrete had also left the programme in the first few weeks due to complications from COVID. During the initial lockdown and running into the summer months he had become increasingly anxious about leaving his house. Over the initial few weeks of the course, he had been attending as normal, but travelling and using public transport each day exasperated his anxiety. He decided

he no longer wished to travel and be in a public space with other individuals. This left 9 individuals from the original group, of which 4 decided to take part in the follow up research encounter. The individuals who took part were Kirk, Unsociable, Anonymous and Dobbie. While El Chapo, Lars, King Chronic, Steinsigate and Echo expressed an interest in taking part in this activity, they did not attend the research activity.

4.7.2 'By the time I am 30…' and motivations written activity

This activity was largely adapted from the version of the earlier activity which took place in the encounter focussing on aspirations. In this activity, the young people were asked to complete the sentence 'By the time I am 30, I want to…' by writing their response on a worksheet. However, the activity was adapted to include a second section for the individuals to respond to. This second section asked them to provide a written response to a question: 'What motivates you to attend college?'. This was an activity they completed in the earlier encounter which focussed on motivations. As in the earlier encounters, I gave no official guidance on how to complete the task and everyone was free to respond how they wished. However, I did remind them of the *Arenas of Choice* activity they completed at the first encounter. I suggested they could use the four areas of Family, Education, Social / Leisure, and Work as a guide should they feel unsure of how to respond. Tables 16 and 17 show the responses given by the young people. Spelling errors have been corrected, but the wording and punctuation each individual used has been retained.

Table 16 - By the time I am 30... one year on

By the time I am 30, I want to…
be able to have my own record label and have other artists on the label as well
be a DJ and performing at festivals / nightclubs and be able to play abroad. Having a record label
be in the music industry as a music producer or / DJ
Be in a semi successful band or something in music I can make a living from

As with the data from the earlier encounter, I used two methods of coding for the 'By the time I am 30…' activity. The first was the four topics (Family, Work, Education, and Social and Leisure) from the *Arenas of Choice* activity, with the addition of the category Home. In the earlier activity, there was a range of responses which focussed on a number of aspects such as home lives, families, work, education, cars etc. However, this time around, the individuals chose to solely focus on employment. Each of the four individuals described a future for themselves in which they all had job roles within the music industry. The responses at this point seemed much more specific overall than those given a year earlier. The second focus of coding for the written aspect looks at Bourdieu's (1986) three descriptors of Capital. The majority of their responses were centred around Cultural Capital. While there are clearly identified job roles in the written data, they are focussed on the job role, rather than the Economic Capital that goes along with the role. In this respect, it is a representation of the Embodied Cultural Capital that the young people hope to have. For example, one individual describes

being in the music industry '… as a music producer or / DJ'. Two of the young people also identify Embodied forms of Cultural Capital when they identify owning record labels from which to release music. While one individual did identify an element of Economic Capital, this was secondary to their main aspiration of being in a 'semi-successful band'. None of the young people identified any element of Social Capital in this section of the research encounter.

Table 17 - Motivations one year on

What motivates you to attend college?
I want to be able to get on the Level 3, so I need my English GCSE
Being in the studio on the decks.
being able to mix my songs and play on the decks and produce, family and friends that live up here.
I can do something I love and earn from it.

At the previous encounter, this written activity was done in small groups. The main motivational themes that came through were focussed around getting 'something' out of music, as well as using socialising with friends. On this occasion, the main motivation written down focussed on having access to the specialist music equipment and recording studios; equipment and facilities they were unlikely to have access to at home. Two of the individuals identified motivations that went beyond the immediate access to facilities and are focussed on attaining future success. One individual was motivated to achieve his grade 4 in GCSE, allowing him to access the next level or study, while the other individual mentioned that they could 'earn' from it.

4.7.3 Group interview

This interview took place immediately after the written activity. The written worksheet was used as a guideline, and further probing questions were used to help elucidate the reasons behind the aspirations and motivations. Many of the probing questions focussed on the route to achieving their aspirations, if the participants felt that route was open to them, and what obstacles might be in the way. Similarly, when discussing motivations, I asked further questions in order to understand the reasoning. The final section of this encounter addressed the COVID-19 pandemic, and I directly asked if and how the pandemic has affected either their motivations or aspirations.

Aspirations and routes to achieving them

Kirk's aspiration was to be in a semi-successful band, or working in music, doing something he could make a living from. When discussing if this was achievable and if there was a clear route, he stated that while the route wasn't clear he felt it was something he could achieve and he would '…stick to it as long as I can.'

Lee Is there a clear route there and can you see the route to achieve that?

Kirk I don't think it's a *clear* route. I think it's doable though!

Lee What do you think you need to be in place, to achieve that, do you think?

Kirk I need to continue with my education and go out of my comfort zone. Like, play for more people, release my music, more places.

Anonymous' aspiration was to have his own record label and grow it to a point where he could release other artists as well as his own music. He thought this is an achievable aspiration but recognises there would be '…objects in the way. […] Stuff to do, to get there.' When asked what these objects were, he described meeting people and becoming comfortable with them, as a possible barrier to overcome.

While Kirk and Anonymous both had a basic idea of the route to achieving their aspirations, Dobbie had the clearest picture of the route to achieving his aspiration of becoming a DJ and Producer who has bookings '…playing abroad and playing at parties and sometimes nightclubs…'. Replying with a definitive 'YES!' when asked if his aspirations were achievable, he discussed the route he felt he needed to take:

Lee What do you think the route is to get there then?

Dobbie Well, start to build up a record label. Start producing my own songs. Get some money together… gather it. Perform a little bit around the UK. Then, go abroad to like Spain and Benidorm.'

Unlike the other three individuals, Unsociable did not have as clear of an idea of the route he needed to take to achieve his aspiration of being a Music Producer or DJ. When asked if his aspiration was achievable, he replied 'possibly', and although he said he could see the route to get there he could not articulate what that route was; he identifies developing skills '…on the computers and stuff…' is important but cannot describe why.

Unlike the earlier encounter, which also focussed on aspirations, the group had a much more focussed idea of the routes they needed to take to achieve them. While Dobbie was equally as detailed in the previous encounter, the other individuals had developed their understanding of their position. In the previous encounter the level of awareness of the route to achieve aspirations was fairly low, and while some individuals could describe a route to achieving them, their answers lacked depth; El Chapo, in the earlier encounter, stated to achieve his aspiration of being a front man in a band could be achieved by writing songs and living life. In this encounter, most of the individuals articulated not only their aspirations, but routes to achieve them, and possible barriers that might stop them being achieved.

Motivations

Three of the four individuals, Dobbie, Anonymous and Kirk all identified obtaining qualifications as a motivating factor. Kirk described how obtaining the qualification made it a '…bit easier...' to progress in the industry as well as giving the opportunity to meet like-minded people during the learning process. Dobbie identified the link between qualifications and job opportunities. He described how he had noticed that as he obtained qualifications and progressed through his learning journey, the more interest he received from employers. In addition, he recognised that individuals with high status jobs in the industry had 'higher qualifications' and used the example of working for the popstar Katy Perry to make his point.

Dobbie …you might want to work for Katy Perry. Producing and having the higher qualification, the more employers want you. Because I learned that by looking through jobs. Cos obviously, going through English and Maths, and going from Level 1 to Level 2, I've noticed the higher my grades get, the more employers want to hire me.

Lee Do you think Katy Perry would ask you for your certificates?

Dobbie Her manager might!

Anonymous was also focussed on academic achievement and cited achieving his English GCSE as one of his main motivations. He had recognised that should he not achieve this, it would preclude him from accessing the Level 3 Music programme during the next academic year. He described how it was his sole focus and motivation at the time we had the discussion.

Lee Anonymous, what've you put down for what motivates you to come to college?

Anonymous Get me GCSE English. So I can get on Level 3.

Lee Get your GSCE English. That sounds like a good one. Have you got anything else [written down]?

Anonymous No. Just that.

Lee So, what is it about the English GCSE then?

Anonymous Well, to get onto the Level 3, I need it. So, that's why I'm trying to get it.

This discussion on formal qualifications led to a debate amongst the group about if the important aspect was the knowledge you learn or the qualification itself. The group were evenly split on this topic. Dobbie and Anonymous both felt that having the qualification was important, as it was a signifier of hard work and being able to see something through until the end. However, Kirk and Unsociable felt the knowledge and skills development was the most important factor, more so than the qualification.

Unsociable …you've developed those skills, they're something that'll stay with you and you can go away and do your own thing, cos you've developed those skills to be able to do something.

Lee So, you've got the skills and they're going to stay with you no matter what happens?

Unsociable Yeah!

Lee OK. Kirk, you also said it was more about skills than the qualification, so talk us through that.

Kirk Yeah, like, in my time off I watch quite a lot of documentaries about different bands and like, celebrities and stuff. There's not very many times they mention going to, like, a music school or music college. It's quite often just "I started out with one of my friends in a garage and then…" So, it's just sort of worked itself out for them.

In addition to qualifications and developing skills, access to resources was also discussed as a motivating factor for both Dobbie and Unsociable. Unsociable describes how he was motivated to '…come into college and play on the [DJ] decks…'. Similarly, Dobbie cites '…being on the [DJ] decks…' as one of his motivating factors, describing how he missed accessing the specialist equipment during a period of remote learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Overall, the motivations of the group at this time focused on attaining the qualifications, developing skills, and having access to specialist equipment. This is much more focussed than the motivations given at the previous encounter. During the group tasks at the earlier encounter, the main themes of motivation focussed on 'pursuing a dream', 'being successful', and getting 'something out of music'. In the earlier activity, Unsociable described his main motivation to attend college was so he didn't get in trouble with his parents, who'd said they'd kick him out of his house if he didn't attend his lessons. This is in sharp contrast to the motivations he described at this activity, which focussed on developing his skills and gaining access to the specialist equipment and facilities. As a final question to this section of the interview, I asked the group: 'Do you think your aspirations or motivations have changed between finishing Level 1 and now?' Dobbie answered, stating he didn't feel like he'd finished Level 1 due to the 19/20 academic year being cut short by a period of national lockdown. Kirk agreed with this, discussing how it initially impacted his motivation:

Kirk Yeah, it [lockdown] took away a bit of your motivation at first, because it was like… We were doing all this stuff and we were in the studios and we were rehearsing and we were doing a show on a Thursday. It was like a continuous thing all week and I'm sure that kept a lot of us going, knowing we could show off what we've been doing at the end of the

week. And then, it was sort of like “nah, you’re not doing that anymore”. It takes away a load of your motivation.

Altered aspirations and Motivations: COVID-19

Of all the individuals, Dobbie shifted his aspirations more significantly than anyone else in the group. At the previous encounter, he was really focussed on obtaining a job on the London Underground and was able to articulate in some detail the route to achieving this. I asked the question: ‘Do you think COVID has impacted what you’d initially aspired to do?’ To this, Dobbie immediately and definitively stated ‘Yes!’. Dobbie’s aspiration had shifted from a job on the London Underground to being a DJ and Music Producer. Discussing why he had made this shift, he outlined the COVID-19 pandemic as an influencing factor; considering the number of people he would likely come into contact with, he felt being a performer would be a safer prospect and he would be less likely to be exposed to the virus.

Dobbie …technically I’m working with less people. Because, if I was working on the tube, I would be working with millions and millions of people. But, with being on a music course, I worked out that there might be two to three thousand people there [at a gig].

Contrary to Dobbie, Kirk described how his motivations hadn’t changed, but described how there would be a need to ‘…work in a different way…’ and COVID-19 in general is ‘…going to make it a bit harder.’ He outlined how the message from the government, suggesting musicians retrain in other areas was demotivating and ‘…stopped a lot of people’s motivation…’. He also described how live performances had adapted and described how engaging an audience via an internet live stream diminished the experience.

Kirk …people who like, old school, like, Metal [music] gigs can't turn up to a show and go in. They're going to have to sit at home and open their laptop and push a button. That's how they're going to have to watch a concert. Well, that's what they did for a long time, and I think it takes away part of the experience.

Despite the barriers he identified, Kirk still aspired to be a musician, and described how, if anything, it had made him more determined to get where he wants to be. This feeling is also shared by Anonymous.

Kirk Still the same as before lockdown. I sill wanna… I sort of wanna do what I wanna do whether I have to work really, really hard to do it or if it comes any easier. Like, I still wanna do it, no matter what obstacles I have to get around.

Lee Do you feel it's made you more determined?

Kirk Yep!

Lee Anonymous is nodding away, how do you feel about that Anonymous?

Anonymous I feel the same. Like, it's motivated 'us more to do what I want to do.

Kirk If we can work together, away from people, we can work together, together.

North / South divide

A final area of discussion occurred during this activity. The topic had not been scheduled for discussion and the young people chose to raise it themselves. Both Dobbie and Kirk both felt very strongly that the North of England was being treated differently than the south, in terms of the government's approach to COVID-19. At the time of this encounter, the country was split into different tiers; each region was

allocated a tier based on several metrics, including pressure on the NHS (in your area) and infection rate. The tiers ranged from Tier 1: Medium alert, through to Tier 4: Stay at home (Department of Health and Social Care, 2020).

Through their discussion, they described feeling marginalised by the government, could not understand how the tier system worked and felt the North East in particular was being harshly treated. Asked if they felt the North was being treated differently, both Dobbie and Kirk replied, 'Yes!' and 'Oh yeah. Massively.' Dobbie felt like London in particular was being unfairly prioritised. Kirk also identified a difference in the way the North and South were being treated, but said it could be because the south, and London in particular was '…more important…' than the North, economically.

Dobbie One thing that really annoys me, right, and it's to do with the tiers, again. That we've got lower death rates now and we're still in tier 3. But, however, in London, they're in tier 2 and they're closing schools. So, they should be in tier 3, and we should be in tier 2.

Kirk Yeah, they have, like, 10 times more jobs than we do. They have to leave them open, otherwise we'd completely crumble. Well [town in the North East] is only a mining village. What, there's like an ASDA, an Iceland and a couple of corner shops and that's about as much as you've got. Whereas London, there's like, everything you can think of is open.

In addition to his frustration around the tier system, Dobbie described how he felt the government, Boris Johnson in particular, had been unfairly treating the North of England for some time:

Dobbie I feel like the government has been treating us unequally and it feels like the North has been left out and I feel like that Boris has been picking on the North for a long time. And he's finally got his hands on it.

While Kirk did not feel Boris was unfairly treating the North, he did describe his frustrations at politicians who were seemingly not bound by the same guidelines as everyone else. Using Boris Johnson's recent visit to the region as an example, he outlines his frustrations at the politicians moving around the country, while he was made to stay at home.

Kirk …when he [Boris Johnson] came to Blyth the other day, that was a bit like "well, we've all got to stick 2 meters apart". Like, I'm only allowed to see my grandma, who I've not seen for 9 months, at Christmas. But you're allowed to come down and see some random politician who you've never met in your life, but I can't see my granny, who I haven't seen in 9 months?! Like, how come you can do it, but we can't?

4.7.4 Capital

Of the three forms of Capital, the one mentioned the most and seemingly the most important was Cultural Capital. In its Embodied form, both Dobbie and Unsociable mention Embodied Cultural Capital during the discussion. Unsociable described developing his ability to produce music, stating that the skills he learned on the computer were key to overcoming any barriers in the way of achieving his aspiration. Dobbie mentioned Embodied Cultural Capital when he talked about being a producer, having the skills to DJ at parties, being good enough to be booked at international events.

In its Objectified form, Cultural Capital was mentioned by Kirk and Anonymous. Kirk mentioned being part of a band which was 'semi-successful'. Anonymous stated how he aspired to have his own record label, to release not only his music, but music from other individuals as well. In addition to this Cultural Capital, Anonymous also

recognised that if he combined it with Social Capital, it would enable him to develop and help other artists; using his combined Social and Cultural Capital as a vehicle to help other musicians.

Anonymous So, basically, like, the help I've got to be where I am now, I wanna do that for other people. So they don't have to struggle with the music. So they can get, like, big, from being in a record label. And get noticed more.

Other individuals who also recognised the importance of Social Capital were Kirk and Dobbie. In discussing his motivations, Kirk described how meeting people was an important part of his educational experience and felt it was more important than having the institutional form of Cultural Capital provided by the formal qualification. Dobbie felt similarly, describing how '…getting contacts for people…' was important to him. In addition, he describes '…the social aspect…' as an influence on his motivation to attend college.

The form of Capital least explicitly discussed was Economic Capital. While Kirk, Dobbie and Unsociable all mentioned elements of Economic Capital, these came as a secondary to their main aspirations, or as a catalyst to achieving them. At no point was Economic Capital the main focus of any aspiration or motivation. Unsociable mentioned how he'd like to be '…earning a good wage', while Kirk mentioned one of his motivations for being a musician is the potential to do '…something you like and make money from it.' Dobbie mentioned getting 'money together' and gathering it, this was part of a wider plan linked to an aspiration of his to perform as a DJ in Spain or Benidorm.

4.8 Summary of primary research

This section of the thesis provides an overarching summary of the key points and findings from each of the main research aims. It is presented as a series of bullet-pointed statements, which aim to give an abridged overview of the key take-away points.

- Who are the participants?
    - Not dissimilar to those from the wider FE landscape.
    - Predominantly from employed families (only two individuals from families with no household employment)
        - The group parental employment rate is 75%, around the same as the regional average employment rate 72.9% and just under the national rate 76.6% (Office for National Statistics, 2020)
        - Employment types are from a spread of categories from the ISCO-08
    - The majority of participants felt they were good students, capable of achieving good grades. Most felt they worked hard in college and thought what they learned was important.
    - Most of the individuals held negative feelings about their ability in Maths, but felt they were good at English.
    - For most participants, their family and who they live with is important to them.
    - Many individuals felt negatively about their experiences in school and several individuals felt marginalised during their school experience due to their socioeconomic status or their perceived ability in certain subjects.

        - Those that felt it wasn't important described how they struggled to engage with the format of school, describing a lack of interest in one or more subjects.
    - Most individuals felt unmotivated by the job opportunities open to them at the current time, with two individuals describing how they had opted out of employment opportunities.
    - Developing social skills was very important to the whole group. Many of the individuals chose to spend time in college developing their Social Capital and often prioritised this over educational outcomes.
    - Perceptions of those studying on Level 1 programmes by staff at the college often had negative connotations. There was the overarching perception that individuals on these programmes had behavioural issues, lacked social skills, were from lower socioeconomic statuses, and saw little value in education. Very little of these stereotypes were observed during any of the research encounters.

- Aspirations
    - Most had aspirations linked to employment and many aspired for a career in the music industry, unsurprising considering the subject they study.
        - Jobs ranged from 'frontman at Glastonbury', to an unspecified but 'stable' job in the music industry.
        - Most job aspirations were not explicitly linked to money, but those who did mention money hoped to earn 'reasonable amounts' or have a 'side hustle' as a second income.

        - Those who aspired to specific job roles did not mention a specific income. The job was more important than the amount they earn.
    - Many of the individuals prioritised stability and security within their aspirations.
    - A small number of individuals aspired to have families and partners.
    - Most felt their aspirations were achievable. However, many had an unclear understanding of the route needed to take in order to achieve them.
    - Almost all felt that Social Capital, the 'who you know', was an important catalyst to achieving their aspirations.
- Motivations
    - Most were motivated by developing skills, which would help them to have a career and success in the music industry.
    - Some individuals were motivated by the social aspect of college, with one individual stating '…I've got my friends here.'
    - A small number of individuals were motivated to attend so they did not get in trouble. The threat of trouble coming from family members, with one individual saying he would be kicked out of home if he did not attend college.
    - Academic achievement, or the attainment of high grades and scores was not a motivator within the majority of the group.
    - Many individuals felt their motivation to attend college was linked to lack of other post-16 options open to them. This was linked to a lack of formal qualifications, academic attainment or through pockets of lost learning.
- Marginalisation

- Where individuals recognised themselves as being in a marginal situation, it was primarily linked to either a lack of job opportunities or caused by a deficit in formal qualifications.
- The majority of individuals did not feel marginalised by their socioeconomic status. Those who described themselves as working class or from lower socioeconomic status', saw those from wealthier backgrounds as having an advantage, rather than seeing themselves as being at a deficit.
- A large number of individuals held strong feelings about their experiences in school, often discussing how they felt marginalised by the process of streaming by academic ability.
    - A number of individuals discussed how working-class families within the region, particularly from poorer areas 'reject education'. In discussing this, they suggested that the family prioritised employment and 'the money coming in' over education.
        - A small number of individuals suggested that the region as a whole had a negative attitude towards education, with one individual describing how large numbers of people from his community have '…dropped out completely. Not in education at all. Doing nothing.'
- There was a belief that the North of England was treated differently to the south by the government; that the south of the country was economically more prosperous, with higher paying jobs and a higher quality of education.
    - There was the belief that historical events in the region were affecting current job opportunities. A number of individuals cited how the miners' strike in the early 1980s, the subsequent closure of collieries,

and the deindustrialisation of the region was still impacting employment opportunities. The group were vocally critical of Margaret Thatcher and appeared to be 'socially haunted' (Gordon, 2011) by the historical events.

- Do motivations and aspirations change through the accumulation of Capital?
    - Aspirations linked to job roles were much more specific and detailed than in the earlier encounters. In addition, the routes to achieving them and possible barriers could be articulated in more detail.
        - As in the previous encounter, where a specific job role was identified, this was the main priority, rather than Economic Capital.
    - Motivations were much more closely linked to employment or educational outcomes, with some of the individuals citing achievement of qualifications as a motivating factor for attending college.
    - As before, there was a motivation to access the facilities and equipment in order to develop skills within their subject.
    - The largest change in attitude, in relation to their motivation, came from Unsociable. In the earlier encounter he described being motivated to attend, so he didn't get into trouble with his parents. At this encounter, he was focussed on developing subject specialist skills and accessing the equipment.
    - The group felt affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and felt that the remote learning at the end of the 19/20 academic year meant that they never really felt closure on the Level 1 course.
        - While one individual shifted his aspiration quite a lot due to the pandemic, most described feeling more determined to achieve. They

recognised that it would be tough but could identify barriers to achieving their aspirations.

- As in one of the earlier encounters, the individuals raised the topic of the North/South divide. They felt the North was being treated unfairly during the pandemic and that the south felt ‘more important’ than the North.

Chapter 5. Discussion

This section of the thesis focusses on some of the salient points which emerged from the primary data during the analysis stage. The first section of the discussion reflects on my dual position as both a lecturer and researcher; during the course of the research, I would adopt both positions with relative fluidity. I felt it was important to understand the impact my position had on my ability to not only capture research data, but also on how it might affect the type, depth and quality of the data. In this section, I also discuss how successful I have been at encouraging and facilitating the voice of my participants to come through in the research findings. Ensuring the voice of my participants was fairly reproduced was a big aspect of my ethical approach – researching *with* not *on* – and I outline how this approach has been utilised within the research and reflect upon its success.

The group of young people who made up my participants came from a background not dissimilar to those from other learners in the wider FE landscape. However, there are existing stereotypes about Level 1 learners, both from existing literature (Atkins, 2008) (Atkins, 2013) (Colley, et al., 2003) and academic staff, which view those studying programmes at this level as being at a deficit in one or more areas. In the second section of this chapter, I attempt to unpick the stereotypes focussing on socioeconomic status and celebrity lifestyles; the primary data collected during the research encounters is compared to the existing data and findings produced by earlier researchers. The latter stages of this section suggests ways in which stereotypes can be challenged and how an accurate picture of the individual learners in a group can be captured.

The third section of the discussion expands upon Bourdieu's (1986) ideas of Capital. Reflecting on the findings and observations from across my research encounters, it became clear that the Capital the young people held would not neatly fit into the headings of Economic, Cultural, and Social. One of the areas in which individuals show a significant amount of Capital is in digital literacy, competencies, and knowledge. Given the importance of digital technology and digital literacy in society, I suggest that Bourdieu's three forms of Capital should be expanded into four, with the fourth titled Digital Capital.

The final section of the discussion focusses on how historical events in the region are informing the present lives of young people and their approach to things like education and employment. Throughout my primary research encounters it became clear that the young people felt affected by deindustrialisation in the region, which occurred during the 1980s and 1990s. This section draws on the idea of Social Haunting (Gordon, 2011), discussing how historical social violence is still being felt in the North East of England and the bruises of which have passed down through generations of individuals living in the region.

5.1 Reflecting on my dual role as lecturer/researcher and my position as an 'insider'.

This section reflects on some of the key issues around my position as both an educational professional and researcher. I outline my position, as well as trying to understand the impact my position has had on the research and its outcomes.

Outlining my position

Within the research, I adopted several roles and switched between these with a certain amount of fluidity over the series of research encounters. My position was relatively complex and in addition to being a researcher and lecturer, I was also responsible for programme management of the course the young people were enrolled onto. This meant I had additional responsibilities to my participants that went beyond the classroom walls; I was pastorally responsible for each of them, as well as monitoring each individual's progress on the programme of study as a whole. As such, I felt very much 'native' (Gold, 1958) to my research and identified as an insider within the research setting. The research was conducted in an existing arena, classrooms, a familiar setting to both me and my participants. At the time of the first research encounter, the relationship with my participants had existed for roughly three months; I was their teacher, and they were my students. To my participants then, I was a trusted person in a position of authority, part of their everyday lives and very much a member of the group. However, as Atkins & Wallace (2012) outline, it is never possible to be an absolute insider, or outsider. While my position granted me access as a trusted insider, it was clear my multiple roles also meant I could never truly be an absolute insider. In reality, I was a peripheral insider; I was very much *of* the group, but my position within it meant I could never truly describe myself as *one of* the group. My participants and I lived very different lives and undertook very different roles within our shared arena. This meant that rather than being an absolute native, I was a 'marginal native' (Freilich, 1970), poised somewhere between researcher, teacher, mentor and friend (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

The existing power relationship was in the forefront of my mind during each research encounter; I considered it was very possible my participants did not know what was,

and what was not, research and might not be aware when research was taking place (Costley, et al., 2021). Because of this, ensuring I obtained informed consent was a big focus point at each research encounter; I really wanted to make sure consent was not just given, but an informed choice had been made by each individual. With the existing power relationship, I was concerned that participant consent forms would be insufficient and signed as a matter of course (Fine, et al., 2000). I was mindful that the research activities needed to be clearly and distinctly separate from our ordinary classroom activities, and that having ill-defined research encounters could cause difficulty for my participants to freely choose, or choose not to, participate (Nolen & Putten, 2007). Because of this, I ensured I reminded my participants of the research, and the right to withdraw consent prior to each research activity. In addition, I ensured each activity was clearly and distinctly separate from the overarching lesson objectives. The activities were sufficiently separated from day-to-day learning, and some individuals elected not to take part or contribute to some of the research activities. I believe this shows my participants understood their position and while acknowledging the power relationship, clearly felt they had the agency to give and remove consent from some or all parts of the research encounters.

Who's voice? – with not on

Facilitating the voice of my participants to come through, using their words, is something I felt very strongly about. Speaking for others and removing their voice is potentially unethical and illegitimate (Alcoff, 1991). There are existing stereotypes and truisms of Level 1 learners, and because of this I wanted to be careful not to speak for my participants, nor misrepresent their words in ways which reconfigured their contributions and securely bound them to the existing status quo (Fielding, 2004). That

is not to say that I hoped to explicitly push against the status quo, but I recognised the risk of exploitation and betrayal my position allowed (Griffths, 1998) and concluded it was my duty to encourage their voice to be heard, whether it aligned with the existing status quo, or not. Young people can often be a powerless minority, struggling to get their voices heard (Kellett, 2010), but they are capable of forming their own opinions (British Educational Research Association, 2018) (UNICEF, 2004) and I wanted to ensure they were not only encouraged to use their voice, but that it also came through clearly and accurately.

My methodological strategy to ensure my participants' voice was present in my findings and discussion centred round an approach of researching *with* and not *on* my participants. In some ways I viewed my participants as co-researchers as they had an involvement in the analysis of the first research encounter (p.138). However, the research project is not to be seen as a full participatory research project, as the analysis of the primary data was largely my own. In addition to ensuring their voices came through, I also wanted them to *feel* like they had a voice that would be listened to. I hoped that if my participants felt part of the research, rather than subjects of it, that it would make them feel like their contributions would be heard and acknowledged, that they were important and valued within the research project as a whole.

To support *with* not *on,* my approach focussed on two main points. The first was to encourage my participants to choose their own pseudonym, and the second was to include them in the analysis of research encounters by sharing earlier research findings and asking them to provide their own interpretations. Encouraging research participants to choose their own pseudonym has been shown to be effective in previous studies. Willis (1978) uses it to great effect in his ethnographic work with working class schoolboys, who elected to be collectively referred to as 'the lads' in the

published research. So too is it effective in the work of Atkins (2009) (2013), whose own research with Level 1 learners most closely resembles my own. However, I went a step further than both; I asked my participants why they chose the names they did. While Atkins (2009) does have some analysis of this, it appears based on her own observations, rather than explicitly asking the participants why they chose the names they did. This simple question returned a significant amount of data. It told me a lot about my participants, who they were, what was important to them, and in some cases, allowed for the demonstration of existing levels of Cultural Capital to be shown.

Including my participants in the analysis excavated some rich and detailed data. The approach was particularly effective during our second research encounter, focussed on aspirations (p.137). During the first encounter (p.109), the young people had worked in groups to complete an adapted version of the *Arenas of choice* activity, first proposed by Ball, et al. (2000); each group wrote down what was important to them, related to family, social and leisure, education, and work. This activity had been used very effectively by Atkins (2008) and a similar adaptation to my own had previously been proposed by Hart (2012). During the activity, one group had written nothing down and another group simply wrote ‘meh’ when identifying what was important to them about education. Asking the group to analyse this resulted in rich data around why they felt that way; Lil Skies and El Chapo both contributed significantly to this discussion. Because of their contributions, it was clear there was not a refusal to engage with education, nor a pushback against it, nor was education unimportant to them. However, my interpretation of their contribution suggested that they needed to see the value in education and how and what they studied could be applied elsewhere; they needed to see a useful application to what they learnt, for it to truly interest them. In addition to this, I would argue that education is seen as much less valuable to them

than other aspects of their lives, particularly family and their social and leisure time. Because of this, they had prioritised their thinking time and discussion during the activity on other arenas.

Had I not included the group in the discussion of the data, it would have been easy to obtain a different outcome from the analysis of the initial task. I would have read the results differently and concluded that education lacked importance in their lives. Researching *with* my participants and not *on* them, produced a more accurate and rich narrative. It facilitated their voice to come through and for them to be represented in *their* words and not mine.

A model for future research?

Young people can be wary of outsiders, particularly teachers and people in positions of power. In a research situation, they are concerned they will not be listened to, or their opinions not respected (Coleman, et al., 2004). Because of this, it was only right to question how my position impacted the data I collected.

Researching with my students, where I had an ongoing dialogue and trust, allowed me to access knowledge of my student's backgrounds, how they perceive themselves, their relationships with other people and their social reality (Kincheloe, et al., 2018). Having this access enabled me to give a fair and accurate representation of the individuals, ensuring fairness and accuracy. Existing research with similar groups of young people have been predominantly undertaken by outsiders (Atkins, 2009) (Atkins, 2013) (Avis & Atkins, 2017) (Simmons, 2017) (Simmons & Thompson, 2011). Their position will have allowed access to different sorts of information, and the danger is that their outsider perspective risks misunderstanding the data through lack of background knowledge of the participants (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

During the research encounters, the young people frequently described how they felt their experience of college was different to school; they felt supported, and staff had their best interests at heart. As an individual within this environment, it is clear I was regarded as being in a position of trust. Being an insider has been a benefit to the richness of the data and findings. I feel that being a trusted individual allowed me to obtain a much more informed story than if I had been an outsider (Atkins & Wallace, 2012).

Would my participants have been as open, candid, honest and clear about their aspirations and motivations had I undertaken the research as an outsider? Considering my position, I feel it is unlikely that the group would have discussed so honestly their experiences had I not been trusted; they would have seen me as an outsider, as a 'teacher', the same as those who many discussed had marginalised, or allowed them to become marginalised, at school. Perhaps the reason my research findings offer an alternative narrative to other research is not because the group is different, but because my position as a trusted insider is different to those who've undertaken research as an outsider?

I believe that conducting my research as an insider, even a marginal one, allowed for a level of detail and insight that I would not have access to otherwise. Further educational research should be conducted by insiders, or at the very least have an insider on the research team. In addition, the impact of researcher position as insider/outsider needs to be further assessed, and research into how this affects the type, quality and volume of data collected within research encounters.

The position of the researcher can have an impact beyond the collected data. Insiders have identified something that they hope to change or understand from within their own setting. An outsider might also seek to understand and hope for change, but while

they call for action, they are not necessarily people *of* action, nor always in a position to take action. An insider can call for action, but unlike those in an outsider position, can have the agency to *take* action. When considered with the rich data an insider can collect, this agency to take action could be a real catalyst for change.

My insider perspective has offered me a unique vantage point from which to understand the lives of my participants, and in turn, offer an alternative narrative for those studying on Level 1 programmes to those who have been outsider-researchers. However, this does not mean that my group of participants are, nor should they be, spokespersons for *all* Level 1 learners. They are spokespersons only for themselves, and while their voice has been assisted to come through, it is their voice only, and should not be seen as representative of similar groups of young people now, or in the future.

5.2 Unpicking stereotypes

Within the existing literature (Atkins, 2008) (Atkins, 2013) (Colley, et al., 2003) (Crossan, et al., 2000) (Simmons, 2017) (Thompson, 2009) and the first research encounter (p.59), undertaken with staff at a large FE college, a series of pre-existing stereotypes emerged about the young people studying on Level 1 programmes. Presented as truisms, these stereotypes appeared to be widely accepted, often pejorative, and/or outlined areas of deficit. However, throughout the research encounters I undertook with the Level 1 learners, it became apparent that many of these truisms and stereotypes did not align with my findings, and in many cases, the two were at odds with each other. This section covers two of the most frequent stereotypes – socioeconomic status and a fixation with celebrity lifestyles – before

discussing the impact this could be having on the learning journey of those studying on Level 1 programmes.

Socioeconomic status

One of the most widely accepted stereotypes about the young people who participate in Level 1 programmes is the fact they are predominantly from lower socioeconomic statuses and working-class backgrounds; a theme which emerged strongly and was discussed in the literature review (p.17). Atkins (2008) (2013), whose research most closely aligns with mine, described her participants as predominantly from a working-class background, constrained by their social class. There is an overarching narrative that participants in FE colleges are from working-class backgrounds with little family history of higher education (Colley, et al., 2003) and that those on the initial rungs of the education ladder, who are most at risk of becoming NEET, are predominantly from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Simmons, 2017). In addition, FE in the wider sense has historically been described as a major second chance route for the disadvantaged (Crossan, et al., 2000) and individuals lacking academic skill (Thompson, 2009).

This apparent stereotype of Level 1 students was both perpetuated and challenged by the college staff who participated in the first stage of my research (p.95). Five members of staff from a range of roles participated in one-to-one discussions, with topics focussed on their understanding and perceptions of Level 1 learners.

One senior manager challenged the idea that the majority of Level 1 learners were from ‘lower quintile households’, being really clear that, in their opinion, this was ‘not the case’. In addition, another member of staff described how there was ‘little that tied people together’ in relation to their background. Counter to this was the opinion of

another senior manager. When asked about the background of those studying on Level 1 programmes, their answer was clear: ‘It’s the postcode. Obviously. Maybe in deprived areas and that sort of thing.’ In addition to this, a member of teaching staff described how ‘financial pressures at home’ are an influencing factor for those on Level 1 programmes, suggesting that continued attendance is to ensure that certain benefits the family receive are not reduced or lost. Drawing on my own experiences of leading educational programmes for 16-19-year-olds, I cannot say I have had a conversation with a parent, where they have explicitly cited child benefit payments as a motivation for their child to remain in education. While child benefit does indeed stop if the young person leaves education or training after their 16th birthday (gov.uk, nd), conversations I have had with parents when withdrawing learners or discussing their suitability for the programme has almost always revolved around ensuring their child has ‘something to do’, and frustration at the thought of their child sitting at home and doing nothing. When I discussed motivations in the 3rd research encounter (p.157), Lil Skies, Joe, and Concrete all mention parents as motivators, outlining how they would ‘get wrong’ if they dropped out; Lil Skies discussed how his mum pushed him to attend college, so he wasn’t sat playing XBOX all day.

In the first research encounter I had with the Level 1 learners, I asked my participants to complete a short worksheet which asked a series of questions focussed on their home lives, family, and household employment. My findings (p.112) can offer an alternative narrative to the stereotype of Level 1 learners as predominantly being from low socioeconomic status families. The employment rate of those in a parent/guardian role, in the family home, was a minimum of 75%; potentially higher, but 2 individuals chose not to respond to this question. This figure is slightly above the regional employment rate of 72.9% and just below the national average of 76.6% (Office for

National Statistics, 2020). When I looked at the types of employment, what I found was a range of job roles and employment types; roles included supermarket manager, teacher, mechanic, HGV driver, and rather ambiguously, businessman. Mapped against the *International Standard Classification of Occupations* document, *ISCO-08* (International Labour Office, 2012)*,* the job roles fell into a broad split of categories, including *managers*, *professionals*, *services and sales workers, craft and related trades workers,* and *armed forces occupations*. In fact, the only two employment categories not represented were *technicians and associate professionals,* and *skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers.* While this data cannot allow us to reliably identify socioeconomic status, or indeed class, it suggests that employment is varied and not limited to low paid or low skilled roles. This could contribute to an alternative narrative to the findings of Atkins (2009), whose own research with Level 1 students across three college sites shows a parent/guardian employment rate of 61%. This has been calculated based on participants who chose to respond to the question of parental employment status. The types of roles identified were predominantly '…low-paid, working class occupations' (ibid., p. 60), including roles such as cleaner, shop assistant, and factory worker. While Atkins' research is now over a decade old, with the difference in employment rate looking significant against the current average, the rate is still around 10% lower than the national average at the time; the employment rate fluctuated between 72.9% in January 2006 and 70.6% in December 2009 (Office for National Statistics, 2021).

So, why is the stereotype of Level 1 learners predominantly coming from low socioeconomic status backgrounds presented as a truism by both existing literature and indeed some staff from an education setting? For one, there is a distinct lack of knowledge of those who study on the initial rungs of the education ladder. As I

demonstrated in the literature review, very few studies focussing on learners at this level exist. So, when research into these learners takes place, much of the initial contextualising information comes from historical sources such as Colley, et al. (2003) and Crossan, et al. (2000). When later work, such as that undertaken by Atkins (2009) aligns neatly with the existing consensus, this further reinforces the generalisation that those studying on Level 1 programmes come from lower socioeconomic status families.

In addition to the above, there is also a lot of research which focusses on an academic attainment gap, linked to socioeconomic status (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015b) (Dowson, et al., 2012) (Hutchinson, et al., 2018) (Newcastle City Council, 2015). This research isn't explicitly framed around Level 1 learners, or even learners in Further Education, but primary and secondary school children. However, when popular media outlets such as the *BBC* feature headlines such as 'Disadvantaged pupils "stuck 18 months behind"' (Coughlan, 2019), it is perhaps unsurprising that links between Level 1 learners and their socioeconomic status are formed.

Behaviour of those studying on Level 1 programmes could also be a contributing factor to the existing stereotype of socioeconomic status and class background. Young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to engage in risky behaviours than those from wealthier families (Goodman & Gregg, 2010) and within my own research, staff spoke negatively about the behaviour of those studying on Level 1 programmes. Within these interviews, Level 1 students were described as 'disruptive and challenging', 'school refusers', and 'trouble'. Almost all descriptions of their behaviour were pejorative in nature. Within the work of Atkins (2009) there are pockets of negative behaviours, such as the group of individuals who were clearly

disengaged and off topic for the duration of a class during one research encounter (ibid., p. 88), and another who chose to use time during lessons to boast about the consumption of alcohol (ibid., p. 72). Within my own research encounters with Level 1 learners, their behaviour was always fairly good: some pockets of low-level disturbance, some self-directed social activities during lessons, but largely comparable to the behaviour of FE learners at other levels.

Celebrity lifestyles

One of the themes that came through strongly in the work that Atkins (2009) did with Level 1 learners, was their apparent obsession with celebrities, celebrity lifestyles and significant wealth. This obsession informed how they approached their lives and within Atkins' research, presented itself as participants who chose their pseudonyms based on celebrities (ibid., p. 78), imagined futures involving multimillion pound mansions (ibid., p. 96) and overnight lifestyle transformations facilitated by television programmes such as *Big Brother* and *X Factor* (ibid., p. 64). This is something that one of the staff participants in my own research identified. They described through their own observations, that young people, particularly those on Level 1 programmes, wanted instant gratification; focussed on celebrity lifestyles, they saw television talent shows such as *X Factor* as a route to overnight change. In addition, the same staff member shared their belief that social media played a big part in the aspirations of young people; they viewed social media likes, shares, and follows as a form of Capital, something to be accrued and called upon, opening up a legitimate route towards fame and success.

From wider research, with FE students generally, Baird, et al. (2012) observed that students at FE colleges were more likely than those from sixth form colleges to cite

mansions, significant wealth, and expensive possessions when discussing their future aspirations.

What I observed with my own research largely offers an alternative narrative. Looking at the names the individuals chose for themselves, many of them chose names related to their favourite musician. However, unlike the young people in Atkins (2009) (2013), the names were not focussed on celebrity, but on the perceived musical ability of their chosen name; *Metallica* guitarist Kirk Hammett and drummer Lars Ulrich were chosen, along with guitarist Joe Satriani. Overall, the pseudonyms chosen seemed much more like a demonstration of their Embodied Cultural Capital than a focus on celebrities. In relation to their aspirations, they were predominantly focussed on work and stability. While El Chapo wanted to be a 'big rock and roller', a frontman at *Glastonbury Festival,* and Concrete hoped for a *Range Rover*, the majority of the group had aspirations focussed on stability and working in the music industry. When I revisited this activity with the learners who had progressed onto a Level 2 programme a year later (p.175), the aspirational focus had tightened in further on employment in the music industry. When discussing the reasons for these aspirations, my interpretation was that their motivations did not come from hopes of attaining status or wealth, but a passion for the industry and the opportunity to earn a living from their creative outlet. Discussing the routes to achieve their aspirations, none of the individuals cited social media as a route towards success. While many of the individuals did recognise Social Capital as being important, their focus was on building lasting relationships, 'jamming', and creating professional networks. In the two academic years I had contact with the group, social media never really seemed important to them, even during discussions around their social lives. On the whole, my interpretations of my findings suggested

social media, and indeed television talent shows such as *X Factor,* seemed to be rejected by the young people and not seen as a legitimate route to success.

Pushing against the stereotypes

'Like turning an oil tanker' is the way one senior manager described how difficult they felt it was to change the 'fixed mindsets' of those studying on Level 1 programmes. Perhaps though, fixed mindsets can occur in all corners of the classroom, including within staff. As outlined above, the learners can be far more diverse, complex, self-aware and hold higher levels of Capital that both existing literature and educational staff often give them credit for. Holding these pre-conceived ideas, I would argue, is a form of inertia against progress, development, and potential; we run the risk of marginalising individuals and operating within a model of deficit for those learning on the initial rungs of the ladder. This model of deficit exists within the existing literature (p.17) and is felt by young people, as they described feeling marginalised in a number of ways during their educational journeys (p.165).

I believe my own research outlines the need for a more mindful approach to those studying on Level 1 programmes; clearly not all Level 1 learners are the same. It is easy to form a fixed mindset about the learners on these programmes; buying in to the existing literature is easy, the headline take-aways are compelling and conversations around individuals and small groups become truisms applied to a wider set of learners. Certainly, while I was conducting the literature search for my own research, I felt somewhat seduced by aspects of it; while I feel my research is an accurate report of my findings, it would have been easy to arrange the findings in a way which further reinforces and deeper entrenches a pejorative narrative about those studying on Level 1 programmes. One of the aspects of the research that really helped

me understand there was an alternative narrative was the questionnaire which formed part of my first research encounter (p.62). The first section of the questionnaire was a version of the Jinks & Morgan (1999) *Student Self-Efficacy Scale*, adapted to ensure relevance to the age group and institution of study. The latter part of the questionnaire gathered data on the homelives of the learners, including parental employment and family history of Higher Education. While this was a relatively quick activity, the contextualising data gathered gave a detailed overview of the individual learners' lives beyond the classroom. As a summarised dataset it quickly gave an overview, at a snapshot in time, of the mindset of the individuals towards education, and an overview of their homelives and backgrounds; family employment was mapped against the *International Standard Classification of Occupations* document *ISCO-08* (International Labour Office, 2012). Overall, what this activity provided was an unbiased and accurate overview of the profile of the group at that particular point in time. This approach could be used to support existing initial assessment at the beginning of programmes of study. Embedding it within the initial assessment stages of a programme of study could allow for a much more robust overview of learners than simply assessing current attainment; much of initial assessment currently focusses on understanding existing skills or knowledge within a specific subject. Utilised as a starting point from which to measure progress, it feeds into two of the four 'key judgements' outlined in the *Education Inspection Framework* (Ofsted, 2021). Understanding the learners beyond their attainment starting points, to include contextual information about their educational mindsets, background and self-belief could help to push against some of the conscious and unconscious stereotypes held by academic staff. In addition, knowing this information, the contextual starting points of the learner journey, could help us understand how, and in what areas we can best

develop not just academic achievement, but establish and build upon wider levels of Capital. More research needs to be done to understand what impact deficit-focussed stereotypes have on overall progression and academic outcomes on those studying not only on Level 1 programmes, but at all levels. In addition, can working in this way help us support the self-directed 'investment strategies' (Bourdieu, 1986) that young people seek out, further developing the individual beyond the learning outcomes of the curriculum and programme of study?

5.3 Bourdieu's ideas of Capital, incorporating digital Capital

Bourdieu's initial ideas of Capital outlined three overarching forms, made up of usable resources and powers (Bourdieu, 1984). These initial categories are described as Social, Economic, and Cultural Capital, with Cultural Capital being broken down into three further categories, dependent on the format in which it presents itself (Bourdieu, 1986). Using Bourdieu's initial ideas as a framework for analysis within my findings, it became apparent that the observed Capital held by my participants did not neatly fit into the three forms of Capital that Bourdieu described. In particular, the group demonstrated some advanced digital skills, as well as clearly being very competent on the utilisation of both the software and hardware at their disposal. An example of this occurred during the first research encounter. Being somewhat disengaged with the activity I had asked them to do, Sillabgib had logged into one of the nearby computers and was busy showing another two of the participants how to change the coding of the website on the screen; he changed the wording of the website, so the main heading read differently. It struck me that this individual had demonstrated a somewhat advanced understanding of digital coding in undertaking this process. This

was not the only element of digital literacy shown by the group. Other individuals could easily navigate around and exploit the specialist music sequencing software, and discussions around their social and leisure time often included elements of online gaming and streaming music via the internet on varying devices.

In addition, I witnessed almost all individuals utilising a smartphone at varying points during the series of research encounters. Due to the volume of digital skills, knowledge, and engagement I observed, I began to wonder if categorising this as Cultural Capital might be oversimplifying its significance. Bourdieu himself also reflected upon this idea, suggesting that Informational Capital might be a better descriptor than Cultural Capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). However, when considering the significance that digital and computer-based technology has on the current world, it seems best to view it as a distinctly separate Capital in its own right. A range of new forms of Capital have been described since Bourdieu's initial three, including Bodily Capital, described by Wacquant (1995) and based on observations during time spent with boxers in a Chicago gym. A conceptualisation of Digital Capital has been outlined by Ragnedda (2018), who describes digital Capital as having two components: the accumulation of digital competencies and access to digital technologies. While this conceptualisation can be used to successfully map the digital Capital held by individuals, could it be expanded further? Perhaps we have come to the point in the development of digital technologies, particularly with respect to the interconnectivity of devices and technologies, that we view the digital world as a distinctly separate society and realm in its own right? While the digital and physical worlds are within a symbiotic relationship, the digital world operates as a society in its own right; it has its own form of Economic Capital (Bitcoin, cryptocurrencies etc.), its own culture and its own social arena in which Capital can be accrued and traded for

digital status. In addition, there is further scope to identify and map a digital class system and descriptors such as Digitariat, Developer class, Influencer class and Digital Elite could be ways of mapping those engaging within a digital society. Much research is needed to develop this idea further and understand digital society, but also if and how class and Capital in the physical society can be transferred into the digital society and vice versa.

5.4 Socially haunted?

As discussed in the literature review, employment options for young people in England appear limited. This is due to a collapse of the UK's traditional industrial base; the mass school-to-work transitions that occurred in the decades after the second world war no longer exist (Simmons, 2017), meaning early school leaving and rapid entry into employment is largely no longer a viable option for many young people (Yates, et al., 2011).

The North East region of England is amongst the hardest hit by the industrial decline, and one of the toughest places in the country for young people to find employment (Carter, 2012). The region has amongst some of the highest rates of child poverty in the country. The rate has risen sharply by 11 percent over a period of five years, to a rate of 37%; the second highest rate in the country, after London (Social Mobility Commission, 2021). In addition to this, young people in the region are more likely to drop out of education and employment, at age 16, than anywhere else in England (Social Mobility & Child Poverty Commission, 2014). This translates to a NEET rate which has consistently been above the national average since 2009. While the regional NEET rate has shown some improvement in recent years – at the time of writing it is currently 0.2% above the national average and only the North West, East

and London regions have lower NEET rates – when the initial research encounters took place in 2019, the region's NEET rate had been the highest in the country since 2014 (Department for Education, 2021).

I wanted to discuss some of the data relating to the regional unemployment rates with my participants. I was keen to hear their insights and perspectives as the data related to young people with lives not dissimilar to their own. One of the explanations they provided for the high levels of youth unemployment took me by surprise: Margaret Thatcher. I was quite taken aback by this answer; growing up in a Northern wool town whose economic fortunes did not rely on the excavation of coal, perhaps I had naively not considered the impact the Thatcher-led Conservative government had would still be reverberating so loudly and explicitly in the North East.

In the early 1980s, the coal industry was heavily subsidised by the government and the selling price only covered around 83% of the production costs. In addition to this, it was cheaper to import coal from places like the US, South Africa, and Australia than it was to extract it from British coalfields (Boyfield, 1985). Thatcher-Conservative policies led to a liberalisation of the market and a reduction in the subsidies provided to the coal industry. This accelerated job losses in a mining industry which was already in decline and led to a miners strike (Silverwood & Woodward, 2018). The strike ran from 1984 to 1985 and in the decade following there was a systematic closure of collieries; 170 collieries were in operation in 1984, but by 1994 only 16 remained (Glyn & Machin, 1997). Of the remaining collieries, only 1 was in the North East, Ellington Colliery (BBC, 2004). Ellington, situated around 4 miles North of Ashington in South East Northumberland, remained open until 26th January 2005 (BBC, 2005). At the time of the miners' strike, it had a workforce of over 2000 (Graham, 2020) and in 1983, had

boasted of producing a record-breaking 1 million tonnes of coal in just 29 weeks (Morton, 2016).

Discussing the Thatcher-led government of the 1980s, my participants felt strongly that their policies and actions were still impacting them now. During a discussion centred around options open to school leavers, El Chapo was quick to point out that in his opinion, there was none '…cos of Maggie Thatcher.' He continued to outline his thoughts by following up his initial statement by saying: 'See, cos if Margaret Thatcher never happened, we'd still be down the mines and, like, in the shipyards. We'd have a straight away job. Cos back then, you didn't really need a CV, […] you'd learn from your father. […] You'd follow your Da and it carries on.' Taken aback by this, I posed a question to the group as a whole: 'Do you think what happened in the 1980s, is still impacting you now?' Almost in unison and without hesitation, the group shouted out, 'Yes!', 'Yeah', 'Aye!'. Reinforcing El Chapo's statement, Kirk described how his '…grandad said he left school on the Friday and started working down the pit on Monday. He got one weekend off and that was it.' I rephrased my original question to the group, asking if they were still feeling the effect of the mines closing down and as before, I received a unanimous response in union, 'Yes!', 'Yeah', 'Aye!'.

It struck me that the group of young people still felt bruises from historic social violence, seemingly affected in a way Gordon (2011) would describe as 'social haunting': a repressed or unresolved social violence, making itself known, demanding attention of people or a society whose past trauma informs the present. While Gordon's understanding of social haunting was formulated from discussions on the transatlantic slave trade and state terror in Latin America, Bright (2016) (2021) applied the concept to help understand the lives of those living in the former coalfields in the North of England. Like the participants in my own research, young people in the former

mining communities in South Yorkshire and Derbyshire still felt the long-term effects of the miners' strike and pit closures; they felt excluded from employment and haunted by the social violence that had been inflicted on previous generations (Bright, 2016). The young people within these de-industrialised coalfields had a clear sense of struggle, lingering and hidden in plain sight after the closure of the pits. There is an observation that young people in these communities are reprising the repertoire of their collective past, and one youth worker describes how the phrase 'Aye, it's the fucking miners' strike!' is often heard; a statement made by young people, frustrated at their situation and haunted by a past they are struggling to move on from (Bright, 2021).

Although it is not explicitly labelled as such, there is evidence of social haunting within the work of Atkins (2008). The haunting took two forms, the first of which focussed on post-16 choices. Reflecting the opinions of my own participants, those in Atkins' work felt their choices at ages 16 were limited; enrolling onto a Level 1 programme was not an active choice but their only option. The second form of haunting clearly links the closure of the mines and the impact on later generations. A lecturer who took part in the research describes how male former miners are often upset if their sons exceed their own achievements, and often discourage them from engaging with education to protect their status within the family hierarchy.

While little is known about the lasting effects of social haunting, it is clear that it has affected the communities within post-industrial areas of the United Kingdom. McGarvey (2017) discusses the long-term outcomes of rapid deindustrialisation on the communities of Glasgow. Their description mirroring that of Bright's (2016) (2021) observations of communities in South Yorkshire; highly precarious communities,

where many had become demoralised by rising unemployment and lack of opportunity:

> 'Thousands of families, already struggling to make ends meet, were placed under so much strain that it altered them physically, psychologically and emotionally. What was left of the local economy adapted to supply the community's mutating demands; off licences, pubs, chip shops, licenced bingo halls, bookmakers and, latterly, drug dealers, provided temporary relief from the grim reality of deindustrialisation.' (McGarvey, 2017, p. 42)

Social haunting and the approach to qualitative research in Education

Just like hauntings in the paranormal world, social haunting presents itself in many formats. While it has been observed within former mining and shipbuilding communities, it is not *only* about those communities and individuals living with the effects of rapid deindustrialisation. While there is little research in the UK beyond the 'Ghost Labs' (McNicol, 2017) conducted in South Yorkshire and Derbyshire, and the work of Bright (2016) (2021), it can be observed within different communities throughout the UK. The work of McGarvey (2017) and Daley (2018) outline communities in both Glasgow and London who are coming to terms with the haunting of historical social violence. Work like this shows social haunting affects a much wider range of the population of the UK than initially identified by Bright (2016) (2021). We know very little about how these hauntings occur and the effects on the communities in which they exist. More research into the lasting impact of historical social violence needs to be conducted in order to give a clearer picture of the lasting social haunting. It is important we not only understand the impact to those who experienced it first hand, but the impact on those who have inherited it from previous generations.

Currently, there is limited research that explicitly focusses on the effects social haunting has on young people and how it influences their learning journey and educational careers. Understanding the inherited, intergenerational haunting could be

crucial to understanding how young people approach and view education; identifying and understanding what learners bring with them to the classroom and how it informs their learning journey can be key to developing not only individual lessons, but a curriculum which meets the needs of its learners and wider community. Understanding the haunting, be it underlying and residual or overtly painful, means it can be addressed in a pragmatic way. This could lead to higher learner outcomes in class as well as research which accurately represents the voice of its participants.

5.5 Summary of discussion and implications for future research

My findings suggest that some of the long-standing stereotypes about Level 1 learners can no longer be applied as truisms. The stereotype that Level 1 learners are predominantly from low socioeconomic backgrounds risks misrepresenting a significant number of young people. What I found was Level 1 learners from a mix of family backgrounds and their parents/guardians undertaking a broad range of job roles. While this cannot help us identify class, it does indicate that there is likely a range of class backgrounds. Although my research was with a single group of learners, it is unlikely that this group is significantly different to other Level 1 groups; if there is a mix of socioeconomic backgrounds within this group, is it not likely that a mix of backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses exist in other Level 1 groups, regionally *and* nationally? These findings are counter to those by both Atkins (2008) (2013) and Colley, et al. (2003), who describe Level 1 learners, and indeed FE students in the wider sense as coming from predominantly lower socioeconomic status and working class backgrounds. I do not dispute their findings, but it is worth noting that Atkins' research took place around a decade earlier than mine and Colley's, closer to two. This suggests that the Further Education landscape has changed, perhaps as a

reaction to the raising of the age of participation which rose from 16 to 18, beginning in 2014 (Department for Education, 2015). This was a large shift in policy, which affected all young people and their educational journey. Importantly, it occurred after the research by Atkins (2008) (2013) and Colley, et al. (2003) and prior to my own. We need to rethink what we know about the learners who participate in Further Education and re-evaluate who is accessing education, at what academic level and in what capacity; we can no longer rely on legacy information to understand the learners in our classrooms.

In order to generate a wider understanding of the young people participating in FE, not just at Level 1, there are a number of further research avenues which can be explored; understanding the young people who are in our classrooms can help us tailor a curriculum to meet their needs and ensure the approach to teaching and learning best facilitates progress. The first avenue is to widen the scope of the research I have undertaken in this thesis. In particular, the initial assessments undertaken in the early stages of research, focussing on contextualising the group (p.62). This research activity effectively captured contextualising information about the individuals taking part in the research; it allowed for a thorough group profile to be created, which focussed on home life, parental employment and educational levels, and educational self-efficacy. If a similar activity was completed at the start of future research projects with learners in FE – at all levels – we could start to build up an ongoing and developing picture of who is choosing to participate in FE in relation to their backgrounds and the perceptions of their own ability.

Another area for investigation is Social Haunting. Very little is known about social haunting and the impact it has on young people, particularly when passed down intergenerationally. While some research does exist on the topic (Bright, 2016) (Bright,

2021) (McNicol, 2017) (Simpson & Simmons, 2019) (Simpson, 2022), its scope is limited and explores the topic in a small number of communities. Within my own research, the theme emerged serendipitously rather than by design, and there is also evidence of Social Haunting within the research of Atkins (2008). More research needs to be done on the effects of Social Haunting and how, or if, it is influencing or impacting the approach young people take on their educational journey.

Finally, I believe there is also an opportunity to re-explore Bourdieu's ideas of Capital (Bourdieu, 1986), in particular considering if there is scope to establish a fourth category of Capital: Digital Capital. Within current society, digital technologies have become so fundamentally integral in day-to-day life, that moving through society with any level of distinction is becoming increasingly difficult. I believe it is time we began to investigate the importance of Digital Capital, its relationship with other forms of Capital and the influence it has on the ability to navigate successfully through society.

6.0 References

ACEVO, 2012. *Youth unemployment: the crisis we cannot afford,* London: ACEVO.

Alcoff, L., 1991. The Problem of Speaking for Others. *Cultural Critique,* 20(1), pp. 5-32.

Anderson, L. & Brown McCabe, D., 2012. A coconstructed world: Adolescent self-socialization on the Internet. *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing,* 31(2), pp. 240-253.

Atkins, L., 2008. Travelling hopefully: an exploration of the limited possibilities for Level 1 students in the English further education system. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education,* 13(2), pp. 195-204.

Atkins, L., 2009. *Invisible Students, Impossible Dreams: Experiencing Vocational Education 14-19.* 1 ed. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.

Atkins, L., 2009. *Invisible Students, Impossible Dreams: Experiencing Vocational Education 14-19.* 1st Edition ed. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.

Atkins, L., 2013. Researching 'with', not 'on': engaging marginalised learners in the research process.. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education,* 18(1-2), pp. 143-158.

Atkins, L., 2022. Addressing In/Equalities: A Re-imagined Curriculum for Low-attaining Youth. *Qualitative Research Joural,* 22(3), pp. 364-377.

Atkins, L. & Duckworth, V., 2019. *Research Methods for Social Justice and Equity in Education.* 1st Edition ed. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Atkins, L. & Wallace, S., 2012. *Qualitative Research in Education.* 1st Edition ed. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Avis, J. & Atkins, L., 2017. Youth transitions, VET and the 'making' of class: changing theorisaions for changing times?. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education,* 22(2), pp. 165-185.

Baird, J.-A., Rose, J. & McWhirter, A., 2012. So tell me what you want: a comparison of FE colleges and other post-16 students' aspirations. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education,* 17(3), pp. 293-310.

Ball, S. J., Maguire, M. & Macrae, S., 2000. *Choice, Pathways and Transitions Post-16: New youth, new economies in the global city.* 1st Edition ed. London: Routledge Falmer.

BBC, 2004. *Pit closures, year by year.* [Online]
Available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/3500979.stm
[Accessed 9 December 2020].

BBC, 2005. *Figurine tribute to coal heritage.* [Online]
Available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/tyne/4217174.stm
[Accessed 22 August 2021].

BBC, 2019. *Families affected by school refusal share thewir stories.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-derbyshire-49758800
[Accessed 27 October 2019].

Bhattacharya, K., 2007. Consenting to the Consent Form: What are the Fixed and Fluid Understandings Bertween the Researcher and the Researched. *Qualitative Inquiry,* 13(8), pp. 1095-1115.

Bland, D. & Atweh, B., 2007. Students as Researchers: Engaging Students' Voices in PAR. *Educational Action Research,* 15(3), pp. 337-349.

Bourdieu, P., 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice.* 1st Edition ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, P., 1984. *Distinction.* 1st Edition ed. London: Routledge.

Bourdieu, P., 1985. The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups. *Theory and Society,* 14(6), pp. 723-744.

Bourdieu, P., 1986. The Forms of Capital. In: J. G. Richardson, ed. *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education.* Westport: Greenwood, pp. 241-258.

Bourdieu, P., 1990. *The Logic of Practice.* 1st Edition ed. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. & Passeron, J.-C., 1979. *The Inheritors: French Students and their Relation to Culture.* 1st Edition ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Bourdieu, P. & Passeron, J.-C., 1990. *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture.* 1st Edition ed. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Bourdieu, P. & Wacquant, L., 1992. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology.* 1st Edition ed. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Boxer, P. et al., 2011. Educational aspriation-expectation descrepancies: Relation to socioeconomic and academic risk-related factors. *Journal of Adolescence,* 34(4), pp. 609-617.

Boyfield, K., 1985. *Put Pits into Profit: alternative plan for coal,* London: Centre for Policy Studies.

Brannick, T. & Coghlan, D., 2007. In Defense of Being "Native": The Case for Insider Academic Research. *Organisational Research Methods,* 10(1), pp. 59-74.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V., 2013. *Successful Qualitative Research: A proactical guide for beginners.* 1st Edition ed. London: Sage.

Bright, G., 2016. 'The lady is not returning!': educational precarity and a social haunting in the UK coalfields. *Ethnography and Education,* 11(2), pp. 142-157.

Bright, G., 2018. "A Chance to Talk Like This": Gender, Education and Social Haunting in a UK Coalfield. In: R. Simmons & J. Smyth, eds. *Education and Working Class Youth: Reshaping the Politics of Inclusion.* Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 105-129.

Bright, G., 2021. Feeling, re-imagined in common: Working with social haunting in the English Coalfields. In: M. Fazio, C. Launius & T. Strangleman, eds. *Routledge International Handbook of Working-Class Studies.* Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 213-224.

British Educational Research Association, 2018. *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (Fourth Edition),* London: British Educational Research Association.

Bronkhorst, A. W., 2015. The cocktail-party problem revisited: early processing and selection of multi-talker speech. *Attern Percept Psychophys,* 77(1), pp. 1465-1487.

Buchanan, S. & Tuckerman, L., 2016. The information behaviours of disadvantaged and disengaged adolescents. *Journal of Documentation,* 72(3), pp. 527-548.

Cardwell, M., 1999. *The Dictionary of Psychology.* 1st Edition ed. London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers.

Carey, E. & Griffiths, C., 2017. Recruitment and consent of adults with intellectual disabilities in a classic grounded theory research study: ethical and methodological considerations. *Disability and Society,* 32(2), pp. 193-212.

Carless, B., Melvin, G. A., Tonge, B. J. & Newman, L. K., 2015. The Role of PArental Self-Efficacy in Adolescent School-Refusal. *Journal of Family Psychology,* 29(2), pp. 162-170.

Carter, E., 2012. *Mapping youth unemployment across Britain,* London: ACEVO.

Chowdry, H., Crawford, C. & Goodman, A., 2011. The role of attitudes and behaviours in explaining socio-economic differences in attainment at age 16. *Longitudal and Life Course Studies,* 2(1), pp. 59-76.

Clark, J. & Laing, K., 2018. Co-production with young people to tackle alcohol misuse. *Drugs and Alcohol Today,* 18(1), pp. 17-27.

Clemente, M. & Diaz, Z. E., 2018. Children with poor attachement to their parents: Explanatory variables as a function of their perception of their parents' behaviour. *Children and Youth Services Review,* 87(1), pp. 140-144.

Codesido, I., 2013. *Anime for beginners: five TV series to get you started.* [Online] Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/tvandradioblog/2013/apr/01/anime-for-beginners-five-tv-series [Accessed 10 April 2020].

Coleman, J., Catan, L. & Dennison, C., 2004. You're the Last Person I'd Talk To. In: J. Roche, S. Tucker, R. Thompson & R. Flynn, eds. *Youth in Society.* 2nd Edition ed. London: Sage Publications, pp. 227-234.

Colley, H., James, D., Tedder, M. & Diment, K., 2003. Learning as becoming in vocational education and training: Class, gender and the role of vocational habitus.. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training,* 55(1), pp. 471-498.

Cornish, C., 2018. 'Keep them students busy': 'warehoused' of taught skills to achieve?. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education,* 23(1), pp. 100-117.

Cornish, C., 2019. Student Welfare: Complexity, Dilemmas and Contradictions. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education,* 24(2-3), pp. 173-184.

Cornish, C., 2021. Exclusion by Design: Uncovering systems of segregation and 'Ghettoization' of so-called NEET and 'Disengaged' Youth on an Employability Course in a Further Education (FE) College. *Journal of Youth Studies,* pp. 1-17.

Cornish, C., 2021. The paradox of BKSB assessments and functional skills: the experiences of 'disengaged' youth on an employability course in a further education college. *Journal of Further and Higher Education,* 45(10), pp. 1411-1423.

Costley, C., Elliot, G. & Gibbs, P., 2021. Research Ethics and Insider-Researchers. In: *Doing Work Based Research: Approaches to Enquiry for Insider-Researchers.* London: Sage Publications Ltd, pp. 25-35.

Coughlan, S., 2019. *Disadvantaged pupils 'stuck 18 months behind'.* [Online] Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-49150993 [Accessed 06 June 2021].

Crossan, B., Field, J., Gallacher, J. & Merrill, B., 2000. *FE and social inclusion: understanding the process of participation.* Nottingham, Education-Line.

Crossley, N., 2014. Social Class. In: M. Grenfell, ed. *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts.* 2nd Edition ed. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 85-97.

Crotty, M., 1998. *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process.* 1st Edition ed. London: Sage.

Daley, K., 2018. *Natives: Race and Class in the Ruins of Empire.* 1st ed. London: Two Roads.

DCSF, 2007. *Raising Expectations Policy,* Nottingham: Crown Copyright.

Deer, C., 2012. Doxa. In: M. Grenfell, ed. *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts.* 2nd Edition ed. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 114-125.

Demie, F. & Lewis, K., 2011. White working class achievement: an ethnographic study of barriers to learning in schools. *Educational Studies,* 37(3), pp. 245-264.

Denzin, N., 1989. *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods.* 3rd Edition ed. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.

Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015a. *The English Indices of Deprivation 2015,* London: Crown.

Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015b. *English Indices of Deprivation 2015: File 10 Local Authority District Summaries,* London: Crown.

Department for Education, 2015. *2010 to 2015 government policy: young people.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-young-people/2010-to-2015-government-policy-young-people#appendix-3-raising-the-participation-age
[Accessed 28 May 2018].

Department for Education, 2016. *Participation of young people in education, employment or training: Statutory guidance for local authorities,* London: Crown.

Department for Education, 2017. *Participation in Education, Training and Employment by 16-18 year olds in England,* London: Crown.

Department for Education, 2017. *Participation in Education, Training and Employment by 16-18 year olds in England: End 2016,* London: Crown.

Department for Education, 2018. *DfE NEET Statistics - Quarterly Brief - October to December 2017,* London: Crown.

Department for Education, 2021. *16- to 17-year-olds recorded in education and training and NEET by local authority, 2021,* London: Crown.

Department for Work and Pensions, 2012. *Social Justice: Transforming Lives.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-justice-transforming-lives#:~:text=Social%20justice%20is%20about%20making,not%20about%20income%20poverty%20alone.
[Accessed 1 October 2022].

Department for Work and Pensions, 2012. *Social Justice: Transforming Lives,* London: Crown Copyright.

Department for Work and Pensions, 2014. *Social Justice: Transforming Lives Progress Report,* London: Crown Copyright.

Department of Health and Social Care, 2020. *Full list of local restriction tiers by area.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/full-list-of-local-restriction-tiers-by-area
[Accessed 12 April 2021].

Desforges, C. & Abouchaar, A., 2003. *The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievement and Adjustment: A literature Review,* Nottingham: DfES Publications.

Dixson, B. J. & Vasey, P. L., 2012. Beards augment perceptions of men's age, social status, and agressiveness, but not attractiveness. *Behavioural Ecology,* 23(3), pp. 481-490.

Dowse, L., 2009. 'It's like being in a zoo.' Researching with weople with intellectual disibility. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs,* 9(3), pp. 141-153.

Dowson, J., Kidd, S. & Rowe, I., 2012. *Northumberland Poverty and Worklessness Assessment,* Morepeth: Nothumberland County Council.

Drake, P., 2010. Grasping at methodological understanding: a cautionary take from insider research. 33(1), pp. 85-99.

Duffy, G. & Elwood, J., 2013. The perceptives of 'disengaged' students in the 14-19 phase on motivations and barriers to learning within the contexts of institutions and classrooms. *London Review of Education,* 11(2), pp. 112-126.

Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010. *Equality Act 2010: Chapter 15,* London: Crown.

Esmond, B. & Atkins, L., 2020. VET Realignment and the Development of Technical Elites: Learning at Work in England. *International Journal for Research in Vocational Education and Training,* 7(2), pp. 193-213.

Exley, S., 2016. *First college granted full degree-awarding powers.* [Online] Available at: https://www.tes.com/news/first-college-granted-full-degree-awarding-powers
[Accessed 15 August 2018].

Fairclough, N., 1989. *Language and Power.* 1st Edition ed. Harlow: Addison Wesley Longman Limited.

Fan, X. & Chen, M., 2001. Parental Involvement and Students' Academic Achievement: A Meta-Analysis. *Educational Psychology Review,* 13(1), pp. 1-22.

Feder, E. K., 2014. Power/knowledge. In: D. Taylor, ed. *Michael Foucault: Key Concepts.* London: Routledge, pp. 55-70.

Fielding, M., 2004. Transformative Approaches to Student Voice: Theoretical Underpinnings, Recalcitrant Realities. *British Educational Research Journal,* 30(2), pp. 295-311.

Fine, M., Weis, L., Weseen, S. & Wong, L., 2000. For Whom? Qualitative research, representations, and social responsibilities. In: *Handbook of Qualitative Research.* 2nd Edition ed. London: Sage , pp. 167-207.

Foucault, M., 2002. *Archaeology of Knowledge.* 1st ed. London: Routledge Classics.

Freilich, M., 1970. *Marginal Natives: Anthropolohists at Work.* New York: Harper & Row.

Fuller, C. & Macfadyen, T., 2012. 'What with your grades?' Students' motivation for and experiences of vocational courses in further education. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training,* 64(1), pp. 87-101.

Ganzálvez, C. et al., 2018. Functional profiles of school refusal behaviour and their relationship with depression, anxiety and stress. *Psychiatry Research,* 269(1), pp. 140-144.

Garratt, D., 2004. Youth Cultures and Sub-Cultures. In: J. Roche, S. Tucker, R. Thomson & R. Flynn, eds. *Youth in Society.* London: SAGE Publications, pp. 145-152.

Genuis, S. K., Willows, N., Nation, A. F. & Jardine, C. G., 2015. Partnering with Indigenous student co-researchers: inproving research processes and outcomes. *Internation Journal of Circumpolar Health,* 74(1), p. 27838.

Gibson, S. et al., 2017. Including students as co-enquirers: Matters of identity, agency, language and labelling in an International participatory research study. *International Journal of Educational Research,* 81(1), pp. 108-118.

Glyn, A. & Machin, S., 1997. Colliery Closures and the Decline of the UK Coal Industry. *British Journal of Industrial Relatiions,* 35(2), pp. 197-214.

Gold, R. L., 1958. Roles in Sociological Field Observations. *Social Forces,* 36(3), pp. 217-223.

Gonzálvez, C. et al., 2018. Functional profiles of school refusal behaviour and their relationship with depression, anxiety and stress. *Psychiatry Research,* 269(1), pp. 140-144.

Goodman, A. & Gregg, P., 2010. *Poorer children's educational attainment: how important are attitudes and behaviour?,* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Google Maps, 2018. *Colleges in the North East.* [Online]
Available at:
https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?hl=en&hl=en&mid=12Rbfaz87flX_nRzZzZtzQUVVyoCqansU&ll=54.92438926742553%2C-2.1763094630040314&z=9
[Accessed 15 August 2018].

Gorard, S., 2012. Querying the Casual Role of Attitudes in Educational Attainment. *ISRN Education,* Volume 2012, pp. 1-13.

Gordon, A. F., 1997. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination.* 1st ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Gordon, A. F., 2011. Some Thought on Haunting and Futurity. *Borderlands,* 10(2), pp. 1-21.

Gov.uk, 2021. *Participation in Education and training and employment.* [Online]
Available at: https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/participation-in-education-and-training-and-employment/2020
[Accessed 7 March 2022].

gov.uk, nd. *Child Benefit when your child turns 16.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.gov.uk/child-benefit-16-19
[Accessed 6 November 2021].

GOV.UK, nd. *What qualification levels mean.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/print
[Accessed 15 August 2018].

Graham, H., 2020. *15 years since Northumberland's last mine closed, Ellington still feels its loss.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/15-years-northumberlands-last-mine-18372047
[Accessed 22 August 2021].

Griffiths, M., 1998. *Educational Research for Social Justice: Getting off the Fence.* 1st ed. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Griffths, M., 1998. *Education Research for Social Justice.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Guba, E. G. & Lincoln, Y. S., 1994. Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In: N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln, eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Research.* London: Sage, pp. 105-117.

Guinta, M. R. & John, R. M., 2018. Social Media and Adolescent Health. *Pediatric Nursing,* 44(4), pp. 196-201.

Gutman, L. M. & Akerman, R., 2008. *Determinants of aspirations,* London: Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning.

Haller, A. O. & Portes, A., 1973. Status Attainment Processes. *Sociology of Education,* 46(1), pp. 51-91.

Hammersley, M. & Atkinson, P., 2007. *Ethnography: Principles in Practice.* 3rd Edition ed. London: Routledge.

Hanson, J., 2013. Educational developers as researchers: the contribution of insider research to enhancing understanding of role, identity and practice. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International,* 50(4), pp. 388-398.

Harold, G., Acquah, D., Sellers, R. & Chowdry, H., 2016. *Whats works to enhance inter-parental relationships and improve outcomes for children,* London: Crown.

Hart, C. S., 2012. *Aspirations, Education and Social Justice: Applying Sen and Bourdieu.* 1st Edition ed. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Hirschi, A. & Vondracek, F. W., 2009. Adaptation of career goals to self and opportunities in early adolescence. 75(2), pp. 120-128.

Humphrey, C., 2012. Dilemmas in doing insider research in professional education. *Qualitative Social Work,* 12(5), pp. 572-586.

Hutchinson, J. et al., 2018. *Education in England: Annual Report 2018,* London: Education Policy Institute.

International Labour Office, 2012. *International Standard Classification of Occupations: ISCO-08,* Geneva: International Labour Organization.

Jacob, B. A. & Wilder, T., 2010. *NBER Working Paper Series: Educational Expectiations and Attainment,* Cambridge, MA: National Bereau of Economic Research.

Jinks, J. & Morgan, V., 1999. Children's Perceived Academic Self-Eccicacy: An Inventory Scale. *The Clearing House,* 72(4), pp. 224-230.

Jinks, J. & Morgan, V., 1999. Children's Perceived Academic Self-Efficacy: An Inventory Scale. *The Clearing House,* 72(4), pp. 224-230.

Johnson, B., 2020. *Prime Minister's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 23 March 2020.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-address-to-the-nation-on-coronavirus-23-march-2020
[Accessed 22 January 2021].

Johnston, R., 2000. Whose Side, Whose Research, Whose Learning, Whose Outcomes? Ethics, Emancipatory Research and Unemployment. In: H. Simons & R. Usher, eds. *Situated Ethics in Educational Research.* London: RoutledgeFalmer, pp. 69-91.

Jones, B., 1975. Max Weber and the Concept of Social Class. *The Sociological Review,* 23(4), pp. 729-757.

Kellett, M., 2010. *Rethinking Children and Research: Attitudes in Contemporary Society.* 1st ed. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Kerswill, P., 2013. Identity, ethnicity and place: the contruction of youth language in London. In: P. Auer, M. Hilpert, A. Stuckenbrock & B. Szmrecsanyi, eds. *Space in language and linguistics. Geographical interactional and cognitave perspectives.* Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 128-164.

Kincheloe, J. L., McLaren, P., Steinberg, S. R. & Monzó, L. D., 2018. Critical Pedagogy and Qualitative Rersearch: Advancing the Bricolage. In: N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln, eds. *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research (fifth edition).* Thousand Oaks: Sage, pp. 235-260.

Kintrea, K., St Clair, R. & Houston, M., 2011. *The influence of parents, places and poverty on educational attitudes and aspirations,* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Lincoln, T. S. & Guba, E. G., 2003. Paradigmatic Controversies, Contradictions, and Emerging Confluences. In: N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln, eds. *The Landscape of Qualitative Research: Theories and Issues (2nd Edition).* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, pp. 253-291.

Lincoln, Y. S., Lynham, S. A. & Guba, E. G., 2018. Paradigmatic Controversies, Contradictions, and Emerging Confluences, Revisited. In: N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln, eds. *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research.* 5th Edition ed. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications Ltd, pp. 108-150.

Lippmann, W., 1922. *Public Opinion.* 1st Edition ed. London: George Allen & Unwin, LTD.

Lynch, R. A., 2014. Foucault's theory of power. In: D. Taylor, ed. *Michael Foucault: Key Concepts.* Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 13-26.

MacDonald, R. & Giazitzoglu, A., 2019. Youth, Entherprise and Precariarity: or, what is, and what is wrong with, the 'gig economy'?. *Journal of Sociology,* 55(4), pp. 724-740.

MacDonald, R. & Marsh, J., 2005. *Disconnected Youth?: Growing Up in Britain's Poor Neighbourhoods.* 1st Edition ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

MacDonald, R. & Shildrick, T., 2018. Understanding Youth Transitions in Teesside. In: S. Irwin & A. Nilsen, eds. *Transitions to Adulthood Through Recession: Youth and Inequality in a European Comparative Perspective.* Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 74-96.

MacDonald, R., Shildrick, T. & Furlong, A., 2020. 'Cycles of Disadvantage' Revisited: Young People, Families and Poverty Across Generations. *Journal of Youth Studies,* 23(1), pp. 12-27.

Maguire, S., 2013. Will raising the participation age in England solve the NEET problem?. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education,* 18(1-2), pp. 61-76.

Manning, J., 2017. In Vivo Coding. In: J. Matthes, ed. *International Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods.* New York: Wiley-Blackwell.

Mann, S., 2016. *Reflective Practice and Reflexivity in Research Processes.* 1st Edition ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Martin, W., 2017. *HE in FE: 7 things we've learned.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.tes.com/news/he-fe-7-things-weve-learned
[Accessed 15 August 2018].

Maton, K., 2014. Habitus. In: M. Grenfell, ed. *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts.* 2nd Edition ed. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 48-64.

Mattos, M. B., 2022. *The Working Class from Marx to Our Times.* 1st Edition ed. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Maynard, B. R. et al., 2015. Treatment for School Refusal Among Childrem and Adolescents: A systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *Research on Social Work Practice,* 28(1), pp. 56-67.

McGarvey, D., 2017. *Poverty Safari: Understanding the Anger of Brtiain's Underclass.* 1st ed. London: Picador.

Mckenzie, L., 2018. Narrative, Ethnography and Class Inequality: Taking Bourdieu into a British Council Estate. In: J. Thatcher, N. Ingram, C. Burke & J. Abrahams, eds. *Bourieu: The Next Generation.* Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 25-36.

McNicol, S., 2017. 'We can do it imaginatively forst!': Creating a magic circle in a radical community education setting. *Studies in the Education of Adults,* 49(1), pp. 45-61.

Messiou, K., 2012. Collaborating with children in exploring marginalisation: an approach to inclusive education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education,* 16(12), pp. 1311-1322.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M. & Saldaña, J., 2014. *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook.* 3rd Edition ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Miller, G. & Fox, K. J., 2004. Building Bridges: The Possibility of analytic dialogue between ethnography, conversation analysis and Foucault. In: D. Silverman, ed. *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice 2nd Edition.* London: Sage Publications, pp. 33-55.

Mistry, R. S. et al., 2008. Socioeconomic status, parental investments, and the cognitive and behavioural outcomes of low-income children from immigrant and native households. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly,* 23(2), pp. 193-212.

Moore, R., 2012. Capital. In: M. Grenfell, ed. *Pierre Bourieu: Key Concepts.* London: Routledge, pp. 98-113.

Morgan, D. L., 2014. Pragmatism as a Paradigm for Social Research. *Qualitative Inquiry,* 20(8), pp. 1045-1043.

Morton, D., 2016. *10 images of Ellington Colliery in Northumberland which closed in 2005.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/10-images-ellington-colliery-northumberland-11383693
[Accessed 22 August 2021].

Mowat, J. G., 2015. Towards a new conceptualisation of marginalisation. *European Educational Research Journal,* 14(5), pp. 454-478.

Newcastle City Council, 2015. *Newcastle Children and Young People's Plan 2015 - 2020,* Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Newcastle City Council.

Nolen, A. L. & Putten, J. V., 2007. Action Research in Education: Addressing gaps in Ethical Principals and Practices. *Educational Researcher,* 36(7), pp. 401-407.

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E. & Moules, N. J., 2017. Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods,* 16(1), pp. 1-13.

OECD, 2018. *Equity in Eduction: BReaking Down Barriers to Social Mobility,* Paris: OECD Publishing.

Office for National Statistics, 2017a. *Regional labour market statistics in the UK: Jan 2017,* London: Office for National Statistics.

Office for National Statistics, 2017b. *Graduates in the UK Labour Market: 2017,* London: Office for National Statistics.

Office for National Statistics, 2020. *Labour market in the regions of the UK: May 2020,* London: Office for National statistics.

Office for National Statistics, 2021. *Employment rate (aged 16 to 64, seasonally adjusted).* [Online]
Available at:
https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/timeseries/lf24/lms
[Accessed 6 November 2021].

Office for National Statistics, 2022. *X02 Regional labour market: Estimates of unemployment by age,* Newport: Office for National Statistics.

Office for National Statistics, nd. *The National Statistics Socio-economic classification (NS-SEC).* [Online]
Available at:
https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/otherclassifications/thenationalstatisticssocioeconomicclassificationnssecrebasedonsoc2010
[Accessed 22 August 2022].

Offord, P. & Camden, B., 2016. *NCG first college granted full taught-degree awarded powers.* [Online]
Available at: https://feweek.co.uk/2016/07/01/ncg-first-college-granted-full-taught-degree-awarded-powers/
[Accessed 15 August 2018].

Ofsted, 2019. *The education inspection framework,* Manchester: Crown Copyright.

Ofsted, 2021. *Education inspection framework.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-inspection-framework/education-inspection-framework#what-inspectors-will-consider-when-making-judgements
[Accessed 6 July 2021].

Olesen, V., 2018. Feninist Qualitative Research in the Millennium's First Decade: Developments, Challenges, Prospects. In: N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln, eds. *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research.* 5th Edition ed. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc, pp. 151-175.

Oyserman, D., Brickman, D. & Rhodes, M., 2007. School Success, Possible Selves and Parent School Involvement. *Family Relations,* 56(5), pp. 479-489.

Oyserman, D., Bybee, D. & Terry, K., 2006. Possible Selves and Academic Outcomes: How and When Possible Selves Impel Action. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 91(1), pp. 188-204.

Payne, J., 2001. *Post-16 Students and PArt-Time Jobs: Patterns and Effects,* Norwich: Policy Studies Institute.

Pelias, R. J., 2011. Writing Into Position: Strategies for Composition and Evaluation. In: N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln, eds. *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research.* 4th Edition ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage, pp. 659-668.

Pictures of England, nd. *North East of England Map.* [Online]
Available at: http://www.picturesofengland.com/mapofengland/north-east-map.html
[Accessed 5 August 2018].

QCA, ACCAC, CCEA & LSC, 2004. *An evaluation of Entry level qualifications,* s.l.: Qualifications and Curriculum Authority.

QPID, 1998. *TECs and CCTEs Working Towards Achieving Social and Economic Inclusion,* Sheffield: Training and Enterprise Council and Department for Education and Employment.

Radivic, A., Gmelin, T., Stein, B. D. & Miller, E., 2017. Depressed adolescents' positive and negative use of social media. *Journal of adolescence ,* 55(1), pp. 5-15.

Ragnedda, M., 2018. Conceptualising Digital Capital. *Telematics and Infomatics,* 35(8), pp. 2366-2375.

Rawls, J., 1971. *A Theory of Justice.* 1st Edition ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Rawls, J., 2001. *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement.* 1st Edition ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council, 2011. *Raising the participation age: Redcar and Cleveland's strategy to increase the number of young people participating in education, employment or training. The plan for 2011-2013 - planning for implimentation,* Redcar: Redcar and Cleveleland Borough Council.

Reese, W. L., 1980. *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion: Eastern and Western Thought.* 1st Edition ed. Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press Inc..

Richards, D., Caldwell, P. H. & Go, H., 2015. Impact of social media on the health of children and young people. *Journal of Peadiatrics and Child Health,* 51(1), pp. 1152-1157.

Rimmer, M., 2010. Listening to the monkey: Class, youth and the formation of a musical habitus. *Ethnography,* 11(2), pp. 255-283.

Robinson, L., 2020. *Why FE's Fight Against Digital Poverty is so Important.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.tes.com/magazine/archive/why-fes-fight-against-digital-poverty-so-important
[Accessed 7 January 2023].

Robinson, L., 2021. *Social Haunting in Former Mining Communities: A Young Person's Perspective.* [Online]

Available at: https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/social-haunting-in-former-mining-communities-a-young-persons-perspective
[Accessed 6 January 2023].

Ruiz-Casares, M. & Thompson, J., 2016. Obtaining meaningful informed consent: preliminary results of a study to develop visual informed consent forms with children. *Chindren's Geographies,* 14(1), pp. 35-45.

Russell, L., 2013. Researching marginalised young people. *Ethnography and Education,* 8(1), pp. 46-60.

Sacker, A., Schoon, I. & Bartley, M., 2002. Social inequality in educational achievement and psychosocial adjustment throughout childhood: magnitude and mechanisms. *Social Science and Medicine,* 55(5), pp. 863-880.

Sadler, K., Akister, J. & Burch, S., 2015. Who are the young people who are not in education, employment of training? An application of the risk factors to a rural area in the UK. *International Social Work,* 58(4), pp. 508-520.

Saldaña, J., 2016. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers.* 3rd Edition ed. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Savage, M. et al., 2013. A New Model of Social Class? Findings from the BBC's Great British Class Survey Experiment. *Sociology,* 47(2), pp. 219-250.

Schiffer, K. & Schatz, E., 2008. *Marginalisation, Social Inclusion and Health,* Amsterdam: Foundation RetenboogAMOC.

Schubert, J. D., 2014. Suffering / Symbolic Violence. In: M. Grenfell, ed. *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts.* 2nd Edition ed. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 179-194.

Scott, J., 2004. Family, Gender and Educational Attainment in Britain: A Longitudinal Study. *Journal of Camparative Family Studies,* 35(4), pp. 565-589.

Scott, J., 2014. *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology.* 4th Edition ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Silverman, D., 2011. *Interpreting Qualitative Data.* 4th Edition ed. London: Sage.

Silverman, D., 2014. *Interpreting Qualitative Data.* 5th Edition ed. London: Sage.

Silverwood, J. & Woodward, R., 2018. *The Schizophrenia of UK (De) Industrialisation Policy.* [Online]
Available at: http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/2018/10/01/the-schizophrenia-of-uk-de-industrialisation-policy/

Simmons, R., 2008. Raising the Age of Compulsory Education in England: A Neet Solution?. *British Journal of Educational Studies,* 65(4), pp. 420-439.

Simmons, R., 2017. Employability, knowledge and the creative arts: reflections from an ethnographic study of NEET young people on an entry to employment programme. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education,* 22(1), pp. 22-37.

Simmons, R. & Thompson, R., 2011. Education and training for young people at risk of becoming NEET: findings from an ethnographic study of work-based learning programmes.. *Educational Studies,* 37(4), pp. 447-450.

Simpson, K., 2022. Education, Social Haunting, and Deindustrialisation: Attuning to Ghosts in the Hidden Curriculum. In: R. Simmons & K. Simpson, eds. *Education, Work and Social Change in Britain's Former Coalfield Communities: The Ghost of Coal.* Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 127-148.

Simpson, K. & Simmons, R., 2019. Social Haunting or Reclaiming the Past? Education and the Working Class in a Former Mining Community. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies,* 17(3), pp. 1-23.

Skeggs, B., 1997. *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable.* 1st Edition ed. London: Sage.

Social Mobility & Child Poverty Commission, 2014. *State of the Nation 2014: Social Mobility and Child Poverty in Great Britain,* London: Crown.

Social Mobility Commission, 2021. *State of the Nation 2021,* London: Crown Copyright.

Stoten, D. W., 2014. NEETs: a case study in addressing the issues relating to disengaged youth in East Clevelend. *Education + Training,* 56(5), pp. 467-480.

Strand, S. & Winston, J., 2008. Educational aspirations in innie city schools. *Educational Studies,* 34(4), pp. 249-267.

The Student Room, 2018. *A guide to FE qualifications.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.thestudentroom.co.uk/a-level/advice/a-guide-to-fe-qualifications
[Accessed 11 April 2022].

Thompson, P., 2012. Field. In: M. Grenfell, ed. *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts.* 2nd Edition ed. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 65-80.

Thompson, R., 2009. Social class and participation in further education: evidence from the Youth Cohort Study of England and Wales. *British Journal of Sociology of Education,* 30(1), pp. 29-42.

Thompson, R., 2011. Reclaiming the disengaged? A Bourdieuian analysis of work-based learning for young people in England. *Critical Studies in Education,* 52(1), pp. 15-28.

Thornton, S., 1995. *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital.* 1st Edition ed. Cambridge: Polity.

UNICEF, 2004. *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child,* London: UNICEF UK.

Wacquant, L., 1995. Pugs at Work: Bodily Capital and Bodily Labour Among Professional Boxers. *Body & Society,* 1(1), pp. 65-93.

Wellington, J., 2015. *Educational Research: Contempory Issues and PRactical Approaches.* 2nd Edition ed. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Wilkinson, S. & Kitzinger, C., 2013. Representing Our Own Experience: Issues in "Insider" Research. *Phychology of Women Quarterly,* 37(2), pp. 251-255.

Willis, P. E., 1978. *Learning to Labour: How working class kids get working class jobs.* Reprint 2016 ed. Abingdon: Routledge.

Wyn, J. & White, R., 1997. *Rethinking Youth.* 1st Edition ed. London: SAGE Publications.

Yates, S., Harris, A., Sabates, R. & Staff, J., 2011. Early Occupational Aspirations and Fractured Transitions: A Study of Entry into 'NEET' Status in the UK. *Jnl Soc. Pol.,* 40(3), pp. 513-534.

Zuccotti, C. V. & O'Reilly, J., 2018. Ethnicity, Gender and Household Effects on Becoming NEET: An Intersectional Analysis. *Work, Emplyment and Society,* 00(0), pp. 1-23.

Chapter 7. Appendices

7.1 Appendix 1. Questions and framework for semi-structured interviews with staff working in a Further Education College.

Time, approx. 30 minutes.

0-10 minutes

- Main aims of research project
- Consent form
- Information sheet
- Topics to be discussed during this interview.
- What is their current role at the college, have they done any other roles previously?
- How long have you been in service, in education?

10-25 minutes

- Interview.
- 5 open ended questions

Questions.

1. What are your first thoughts when I mention level 1 learners?
2. Can you describe a typical level 1 learner? (background/mindset/previous achievement and/or attainment)
3. What do you think the main motivations are for learners on level 1 programmes of study?

4. Do you think there is an accurate perception of Level 1 learners, amongst other staff members? Why?
5. What do you think the young people on level 1 programmes would be doing, if they weren't participating in full time study?

25-30 mins

- Any further questions
- Debrief sheet

7.2 Appendix 2. Participant information sheet

Newcastle University

School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences

Participant information sheet – Group interview/discussion

About the Student and the Research

My name is Lee Robinson. I am carrying out research that will form a major contribution to a final doctoral thesis. This thesis will then be submitted to the University of Newcastle, as part of my studies towards a Doctorate in Education. The research seeks to understand the motivations, aspirations and desires of level 1 students, studying towards Music and Performing Arts qualifications, within a Further Education College in the North of England. I have an active Enhanced DBS Certificate, details of which can be provided upon request.

About the Activity

Participation in this stage of the research involves taking part in a group discussion. The duration of this activity is expected to last around 20-30 minutes, although could last up to 60 minutes. The venue for this research is the Performance Academy Building, Newcastle College. Topics for discussion will include, but not be limited to the aspirations, motivations and desires of yourselves and your peers.

Safeguarding confidentiality

The activity will be video and/or audio recorded, so that what happens can be analysed. These recordings will then be stored on a password protected folder, on an encrypted portable hard drive. It will only be viewed by myself and, if requested by my project supervisors, named below. Your name will not be used in the transcripts of these videos or in any other part of the written report that follows. As part of the activity, each participant will be allowed to choose their own alias, which they will be known as in the final publication. Subsequent research activities will include one to one interviews with some individuals to further clarify comments made during this activity. This could involve replaying extracts of the video/audio back to you at a later date. Text transcripts, either in full or extracts of this activity might also be used in lieu of, or in addition to, the audio/video recording(s). Excepts of recordings or un-anonymised transcripts will only be shown to yourself or other participants present at this research activity.

Should you have any concerns before, during or after the research is carried out

Should you have any concerns or questions to raise, the primary contact will be myself. My email is l.robinson8@newcastle.ac.uk

7.3 Appendix 3. Participant consent form

Participant Consent Form

Name of the Researcher: Lee Robinson

The title of the study: What are the Motivations and Aspirations of Level 1 Learners Within UK Further Education?

Nature of participation in research: Participants in this research will be expected to take part in group and/or one to one discussions. These discussions will be captured using audio/visual methods including, but not limited to, video and audio recording. The data collected will be used in the formation of a doctoral thesis, to be submitted to the University of Newcastle. The research seeks to understand the motivations, aspirations and desires of level 1 students studying towards Music and Performing Arts qualifications, within a Further Education College in the North of England. The researcher holds an up to date Enhanced DBS Certificate, details of which can be provided upon request.

I consent to participate in this study. I am satisfied with the instructions I have been given so far and I expect to have any further information requested regarding the study supplied to me at the end of the investigation.
I have been informed that the confidentiality of the data I provide will be safeguarded during storage and that the thesis will be written maintaining confidentiality of participants.

I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study. I have been provided with a copy of this form and the participant information sheet.

I have not been coerced in any way to participate in this study and I understand that I may terminate my participation in the study at any point should I so wish. I also understand my rights to withdraw my data without explanation and retrospectively but only until the point that my data is anonymized.

Name of participant:

(print)…….. Signed…….. Date……

Name of researcher:

(print)…….. Signed…….. Date……

Researcher's contact details:
l.robinson8@newcastle.ac.uk

7.4 Appendix 4. Pseudonym identifier form

Name:	
I wish to be known as:	
I chose this name because…	

Appendix 5. Encounter 1 questionnaire

Student questionnaire for research conducted
By Lee Robinson.
Research collected will feed into an EdD thesis, to be submitted to Newcastle University.
Please see footer for researcher and supervisor Contact details.

Statement	Really agree	Kind of agree	Kind of disagree	Really disagree
I work hard in college.	1	2	3	4
I could get the best grades in my class if I tried hard enough.	1	2	3	4
I think I am good at Maths	1	2	3	4
I would get better grades if my tutor liked me better.	1	2	3	4
I am a good student.	1	2	3	4
My classmates work harder than I do.	1	2	3	4
I always get good grades when I try hard.	1	2	3	4
I think I am good at English.	1	2	3	4
Adults who have good jobs were probably good students in college.	1	2	3	4
I want to go to University.	1	2	3	4
I am one of the best students in my class.	1	2	3	4
No one cares if I do well in College.	1	2	3	4
It is important to go to College.	1	2	3	4
My classmates usually get better grades than I do.	1	2	3	4
It does not matter if I do well in College.	1	2	3	4
I am good at reading.	1	2	3	4
I do not find it hard to get good grades in assignments.	1	2	3	4
I am smart.	1	2	3	4

Researcher: Lee Robinson
l.robinson8@newcastle.ac.uk

Supervisor: Jill Clark
Jill.clark@ncl.ac.uk

Statement	Really agree	Kind of agree	Kind of disagree	Really disagree
I will quit College as soon as I can.	1	2	3	4
When a teacher asks a question, I usually know the answer, even if the other students don't.	1	2	3	4
What I learn in College is not important.	1	2	3	4

About you:

I live in a:			
House	Bungalow	Flat	Other (please state)

Who else lives with you? What do they do?		
Person	Relation to you	What do they do? *student / work / unemployed / retired / other (please specify)*

Researcher: Lee Robinson
l.robinson8@newcastle.ac.uk

Supervisor: Jill Clark
Jill.clark@ncl.ac.uk

School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences

For those members of your household that work, what kind of job do they do?	
Person	Job

How many members of your household have been to University?	
For the members of your household that have been, how many have the following type of qualification:	
Degree	
Masters	
Doctorate	

Researcher: Lee Robinson
l.robinson8@newcastle.ac.uk

Supervisor: Jill Clark
Jill.clark@ncl.ac.uk

School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences

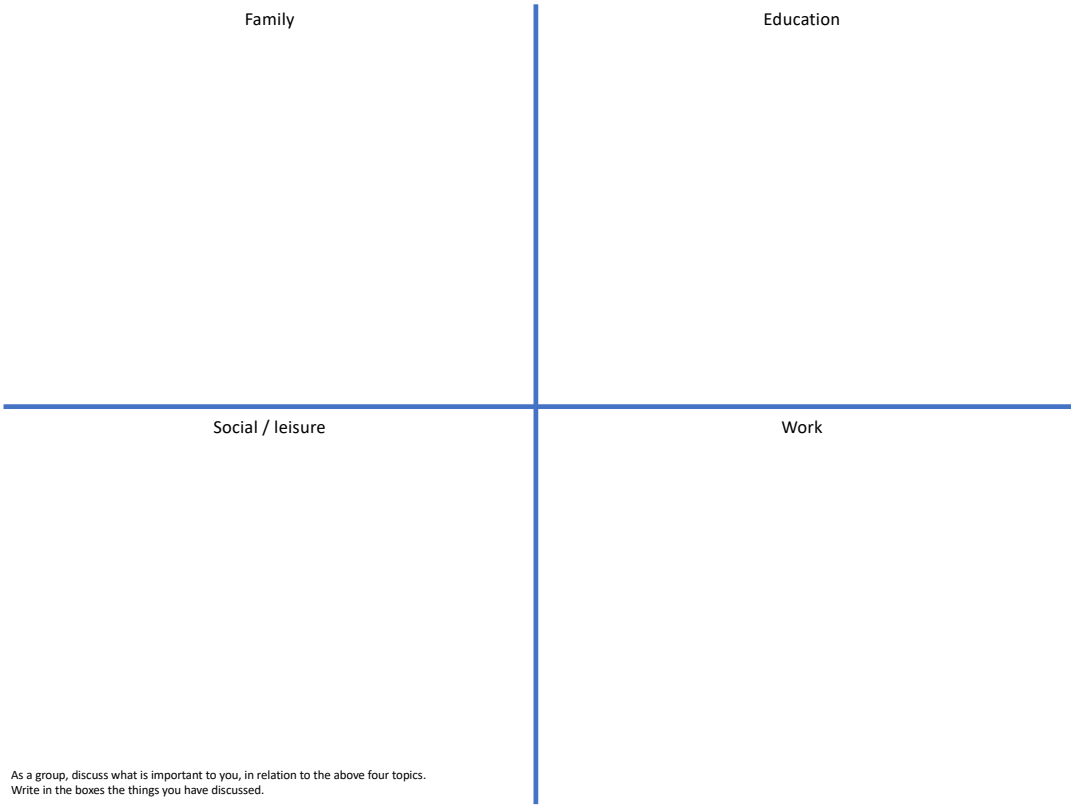
Do you have a part time job, as well as coming to college?	
Yes	No
If you said yes, what job do you do?	
Do you contribute to the household income?	
Yes	No

Researcher: Lee Robinson
l.robinson8@newcastle.ac.uk

Supervisor: Jill Clark
Jill.clark@ncl.ac.uk

School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences

Appendix 6. Arenas of choice activity



As a group, discuss what is important to you, in relation to the above four topics.
Write in the boxes the things you have discussed.

Appendix 7. Framework for Encounter 2

Plan for 2nd encounter with the Level 1 learners – recap from encounter number 1 and Fantasy Futures.

Activity 1

Discussion of the results from the Arenas of Choice activity. (Filmed from the front of the room, plus additional audio recorder from the rear of the room.)

Findings:

Education

No reply

Nothing (meh)

University – degree

Work

Unemployed or low-level employment (Greggs/Chinese/Newsagent)

No reply

Airline/Trains

Family

Parents / who you live with

Nothing

Parents / auntie

Social / Leisure

Music (guitar/band) – spending time with friends

Music (instruments) - spending time with family – games (computer?)

Computer console – listening to music – PH (pornhub?)

Activity 2

Worksheet which seeks to identify the 'Fantasy Futures' of the learners. They will write down responses to the question 'By the time I am 30, I want to…?'.

Activity 3

Discussion of the identified 'fantasy futures. Directed questioning of the learners, asking the following questions:

- Why have you chosen to write what you have?
- How can you achieve them; what route do you need to take to get there?
- Do you feel the route toward the fantasy future is available to you?
- Do you have an alternative or plan B?

Activity 4

Open discussion on the following questions:

- What are the key signifiers of successful adulthood?
- What are the barriers to achieving them?

Activity 5

Reminder of the nature of the research, how the data will be used and the right to withdraw from the research.

Appendix 8. ‘By the time I am 30…’ worksheet

‘Fantasy Futures’ activity. Research gathered will feed Into an EdD thesis, to be submitted to Newcastle University. Please see footer for researcher and supervisor contact details.

Please consider the below question for a few minutes and write down your thoughts and response below. It might be worth considering the four areas that have been discussed previously (Work, Education, Family, Social/Leisure) when you are thinking of your answer.

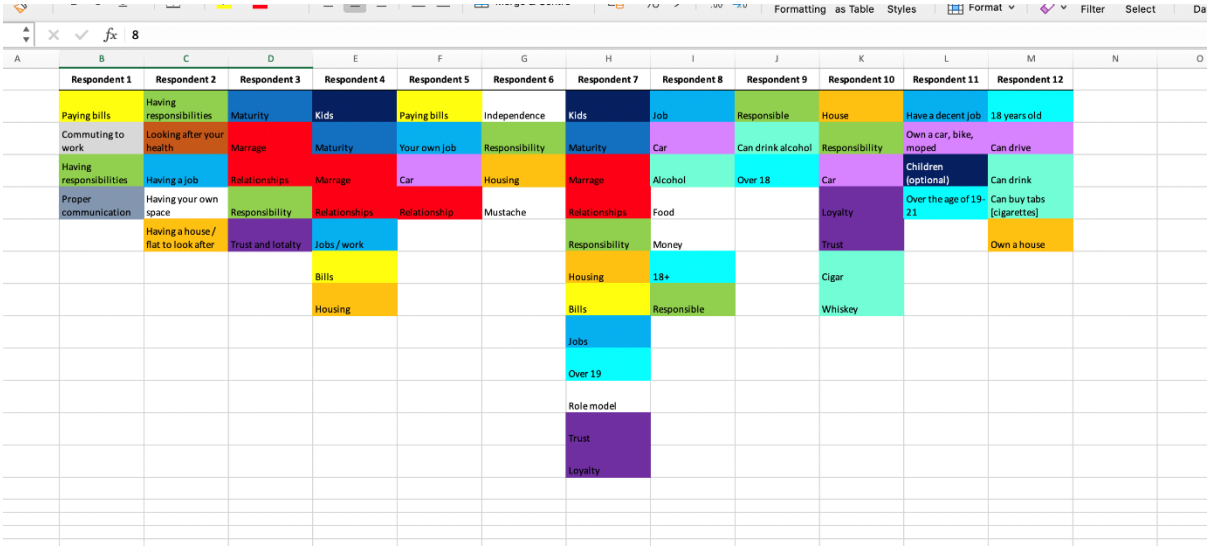
Please complete the following sentence:

By the time I am 30, I want to…

Researcher: Lee Robinson
l.robinson8@newcastle.ac.uk

Supervisor: Jill Clark
Jill.clark@ncl.ac.uk

Appendix 9. Key signifiers of adulthood



Respondent 1	Respondent 2	Respondent 3	Respondent 4	Respondent 5	Respondent 6	Respondent 7	Respondent 8	Respondent 9	Respondent 10	Respondent 11	Respondent 12
Paying bills	Having responsibilities	Maturity	Kids	Paying bills	Independence	Kids	Job	Responsible	House	Have a decent job	18 years old
Commuting to work	Looking after your health	Marrage	Maturity	Your own job	Responsibility	Maturity	Car	Can drink alcohol	Responsibility	Own a car, bike, moped	Can drive
Having responsibilities	Having a job	Relationships	Marrage	Car	Housing	Marrage	Alcohol	Over 18	Car	Children (optional)	Can drink
Proper communication	Having your own space	Responsibility	Relationships	Relationship	Mustache	Relationships	Food		Loyalty	Over the age of 19-21	Can buy tabs [cigarettes]
	Having a house / flat to look after	Trust and lotalty	Jobs / work			Responsibility	Money		Trust		Own a house
			Bills			Housing	18+		Cigar		
			Housing			Bills	Responsible		Whiskey		
						Jobs					
						Over 19					
						Role model					
						Trust					
						Loyalty					

Appendix 10. Framework for encounter 3.

Task 1

Motivations and Transitions.

- Group discussion (no more than 4 per group) to discuss and write down what their motivations are for attending college.
    - Template (A3/A4?) with the question ‘What motivates me to attend college?’
- Followed by whole class discussion to unpick the answers that have been provided – (filmed and audio recorded).

Task 2

Group interview (filmed and audio recorded) to answer the question ‘What options were open to you upon leaving school at 16?’

Options / how did they arrive at college as being the best option???

Appendix 11. Framework for Encounter 4

Stats to react to:

- Parts of the North East are identified as 'Youth unemployment hotspots', 1 in 8 young people are unemployed – twice the national average.
- In the North East, young people from poorer backgrounds are more likely to drop out of education or employment at 16 years old than anywhere else in England.
- The North East has the highest rate of people aged 16-24, in England, who are not in employment, education or training.
- Educational attainment of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and deprived areas, in the North East, can be around 2 years behind those from wealthier families, upon leaving school at aged 16.
- Young people from poorer backgrounds score, on average, 33% less in standardised testing at age 16 (GCSE) than those from wealthier backgrounds.

Questions statements to answer/react to:

- How does it feel to study on Level 1?
- Do you think the leaving age (of education) should be 18? Why?
- There are no jobs for young people.

Appendix 12. Encounter 5 worksheet

‘Fantasy Futures’ activity. Research gathered will feed Into an EdD thesis, to be submitted to Newcastle University. Please see footer for researcher and supervisor contact details.

Please consider the below question for a few minutes and write down your thoughts and response below. It might be worth considering the four areas that have been discussed previously (Work, Education, Family, Social/Leisure) when you are thinking of your answer.

Please complete the following sentence:

By the time I am 30, I want to…
What motivates you to attend college?

Researcher: Lee Robinson
l.robinson8@newcastle.ac.uk

Supervisor: Jill Clark
Jill.clark@ncl.ac.uk

Chapter 8. Glossary

BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
E2E	Entry to Employment
E&T	Education and Training
FE	Further Education
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HE	Higher Education
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OECD	Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development
TDAP	Taught Degree Awarding Powers