POLICY, PRACTICE AND ASSESSMENT: REVEALING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE GCSE ENGLISH ASSESSMENT AND EDUCATIONAL REPRODUCTION

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The impact of neo-liberalism on education policy and practice in England means that assessment at GCSE is higher stakes than ever, not just for the students, for whom it determines access to courses and jobs, but for teachers and schools under ever-increasing pressure to meet performance targets. Given the published evidence regarding the strong relationship between family background, academic achievement and future income, this research considers how the GCSE English assessment contributes to the maintenance of the status quo with regards to advantage and disadvantage. The details of the assessments, the structures of the assessment systems as well as the impact of those systems on schools, teachers and students are matters of policy, hence this research is within the tradition of policy scholarship. In it I set out to engage with and understand policy, and to reveal its impacts through the lens of Bourdieusian thinking. I use interview data from students, teachers and examiners as well as documentary analysis of examination papers and mark schemes in order to give voice to those with lived experiences of the assessment and to explore the case of GCSE English assessment from multiple perspectives. I use the data to examine the ways in which the assessment privileges a culturally specific form of English in a way that necessarily includes and excludes particular groups of students. I reveal how the assessment advantages students with wide world knowledge and privileges the ability to instinctively access formal discourse. Through examining the ways in which teachers, students and examiners conceptualise English GCSE I reveal the relationships between assessment, curriculum and classroom practice and thus uncover the impacts that policy is having on teaching and learning and on teachers and students. As a result I recommend changes in policy as well as in teaching and assessment practices: I recommend that awarding organisations review their procedures to ensure that a greater range of voices informs assessment procedures; I recommend a shift in emphasis in the GCSE English assessment to focus on an understanding of language and the relationships between discourse and power; I recommend that teachers find ways within the classroom to enable students to use their funds of knowledge; and finally, regarding policy, I recommend an open conversation about what is taught, assessed and measured and for what purposes.
Declaration

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Chapter 1: Overview of the thesis

Introduction

The focus of the project reported in the thesis is the subject of English in secondary schools (11-16, 11-18 years) and specifically the assessment that the majority of 16-year-olds in England take in English, the GCSE in English. The aim of the research is to explore the interconnections between this assessment, practice and policy and to reveal the ways in which the assessment contributes to the perpetuation of social inequities and inequalities.

My research questions are as follows:

1: What are the relationships between social and cultural practices and knowledge and success in GCSE English?

2: What are the relationships between policy, the GCSE English assessment and teaching and learning?

3: What are the relationships between GCSE English assessment and reproduction of educational inequalities?

Although these are three distinct questions they are closely interrelated, as will be evident through the chapters that follow. Given the published evidence (e.g. Connolly 2006, Demack et al 2000, Strand 2014, Sutton Trust 2009a, 2009b) regarding the strong relationship between family background, academic achievement and future income, these are important questions to ask. In addressing these questions this research reveals how the GCSE English assessment contributes to perpetuating the societal status quo through awarding privileged status to a narrowly defined, socially exclusive form of literacy. Given the domination of teaching, learning and the curriculum by government policy, it is also

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1 Where the term GCSE English is used it refers to both the GCSE English and the GCSE English Language qualifications. The two qualifications are used interchangeably by further and higher education providers and by employers as an indicator of a student’s capability in English; both are also used as the English measure in the school performance tables. The key difference between these qualifications is that GCSE English is designed as a standalone qualification which incorporates assessment of English Literature. English Language does not include English Literature and only counts as the English measure in the performance tables if a student has also been entered for English Literature. See Appendix A for a narrative overview of the specifications.
important that this research reveals the impacts of policy on both assessment and teaching practice, and on students’ experiences of learning and their achievement.

My research methodology is that of a case study. The case I am studying is the relationship between the GCSE English assessment and educational reproduction. As Yin (2009) identifies, good case studies benefit from having multiple sources of evidence. In incorporating documentary analysis of assessment materials alongside interviews with students, teachers and senior examiners, this project sets out to explore the case from a number of perspectives. As this research project is about human experiences in relation to an assessment which has been produced by other humans it is qualitative in design and approach.

My research is conceptualised using Bourdieu’s thinking tools (Grenfell and James 1998, Gunter 2012) of field, capital and habitus as they provide an effective lens through which to explore the relationships between dispositions and objective structures and the means by which particular cultural practices and knowledge are consecrated by the assessment systems.

This project makes a significant contribution to knowledge on a number of levels. In illuminating practice and the impacts of policy on practice it contributes to an understanding of the contemporary educational landscape and makes recommendations on a number of levels regarding the processes of educational equity. In its use of Bourdieu’s thinking tools it contributes both to the debate about the usefulness of those tools in conceptualising research in education and to understanding of how they can be operationalised in empirical research.
Rationale

The impetus for this research comes from my own professional context. As an English teacher who, after 14 years of teaching, changed career to work within an awarding organisation managing GCSE English I have a concern with the ways in which the assessment privileges particular social and cultural practices and bodies of knowledge. I also have an increasing concern with practice in schools and the ways in which it is being impacted upon both by the structures of the assessment and by the demands of the policy context. Through conversations with many teachers since starting to work within the GCSE English team, it has become evident just how much pressure teachers and headteachers are under to deliver results because of the power exerted by the performance tables and by Ofsted\(^2\). The impact of such pressures on teaching and learning within schools, and the resultant ways in which English is experienced and understood by students, is of concern to me. My aims and research questions reflect and are located within these concerns.

This research project has taken place within an extremely dynamic policy context, which has made its concerns even more urgent. During the period of empirical research the structure of the GCSE was altered to remove the speaking and listening element of the assessment and increase the weighting of the examination component (Ofqual 2013a, 2013b). At the same time the Department for Education announced the parameters for a new GCSE in English Language for first assessment in 2017, which will replace the GCSE discussed here and will be assessed entirely through examination, excluding any internal assessment (DfE 2013). While the impacts of these changes are beyond the scope of this project, the findings of this research are important in informing practice and policy in the

\(^2\) Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills. They inspect and regulate all children and young people’s services, and services providing education and skills for learners of all ages in England. It is a non-ministerial governmental department.
light of these changes, in particular because of the dramatic shift towards exam-only assessment.

Arguably this research project could have focused on any academic discipline that students study and are terminally assessed in, however, the focus on the subject of English reflects the high stakes status it has within the education system and within society. GCSE English acts as a proxy for a functional literacy within society and achievement at a particular level is frequently demanded by gatekeepers to further and higher education and to employment. Furthermore, alongside achievement in maths, achievement in English dominates governmental measurement of schools through the performance tables (DfE 2014a). Given the high stakes nature of the subject research that examines the nature of the literacy being assessed and the relationship between this legitimised literacy and societal structures is important and lacking. This rationale is further explained in Chapter 2.

The three doctoral research papers (Johnson 2008, 2011a, 2011b) completed so far reflect these policy and professional concerns and have led in different ways to this thesis. My first paper (Johnson 2008) was completed before I changed careers – at the time I was still a teacher. I had a professional concern with social equity and with how education operates to contribute to social and educational reproduction and the thinking tools of Bourdieu were therefore of interest to me at that early stage in my research. My first paper was therefore a literature review of the use of the thinking tool of habitus in educational research. This interrogation of the ways in which Bourdieu’s tools were being used and misused led to my second research paper (Johnson 2011a). In this I put the tool of cultural capital to use to critically examine GCSE English papers and to reveal the ways in which the assessment privileges the practices and knowledge of students from socially dominant backgrounds. This paper directly informed this thesis in developing the methods of critical analysis I use to analyse exam papers and mark schemes, as explained in Chapter 3. Having
piloted the tools of documentary analysis in my second research paper, I went on to pilot and evaluate the interview approaches and schedules for this thesis in my third research paper (Johnson 2011b).

**Structure**

Because of its focus on an issue that is intrinsically embedded within education policy this work is located within the tradition of policy scholarship (Ball 1997, 2006, Grace 1995, 2000, Ozga 1990, 1999). The structure of this thesis reflects this tradition, and so following a contextual chapter I present the methodology, and then four chapters that integrate data and pertinent literatures.

The chapter that follows this gives a detailed contextual rationale for this research project. It explains the importance of research that addresses the relationships between educational assessment and social equity and highlights the importance of GCSE English on a number of levels: individual, institutional and societal.

Chapter 3 explains the details of my research design. This includes an explanation of the case study, the policy scholarship context that I locate my research within and the conceptualisation of the study. I also explain the design of my fieldwork, including how I ensure research integrity, reliability and validity.

In chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 I analyse the interview and documentary data to describe the case from multiple perspectives. In Chapter 4 I focus on the structure of the field in which the game of GCSE assessment is played and the relationships between the players in the game to reveal the power structures at play. In Chapter 5 I shift my focus to the examination and use the data to reveal the ways in which the assessment positions students to either include or exclude them. Chapter 6 focuses on internal assessment, specifically the speaking and listening assessment, and reveals how it is conceptualised by the different
players and how it operates to privilege particular language practices. Chapter 7 draws on
the previous three chapters to address the three research questions.

My final chapter is my conclusion, in which I explain my key findings and contribution to
knowledge as well as implications and recommendations for changes to practice and policy.
I also reflect on my professional learning and make suggestions for further research.
Chapter 2: The context of the study

Introduction

The role of this chapter is to establish the context of and to explain the need for this study. In this introduction I briefly outline the imperative for research that addresses questions of social equity and its relationship with education and assessment. In the second section I examine the key issues at the heart of the study in terms of what the GCSE means and the importance of GCSE English in particular for students, schools and society; this makes clear the imperative for research into the relationships between the GCSE English assessment, practice and social and educational reproduction. In the third I consider the question of what is being assessed in GCSE English and draw attention to its status as the taken-for-granted measure of literacy. I argue for the importance of research that reveals the nature of the literacy being assessed (and therefore taught) and the relationships between this legitimised literacy and educational and social reproduction.

Social inequality in the UK and specifically in England, the site of this research, is high and increasing and social mobility is decreasing (Jerrim 2013). The relationship between family background and academic success is well-documented (Connolly 2006, Demack et al 2000, Strand 2014, Sutton Trust 2009a, 2009b); in 2013 38.7% of pupils eligible for free school meals\(^3\) achieved 5 A* to C including English and Maths compared to 65.3% of pupils not known to be eligible for free school meals (The Deputy Prime Minister’s Office 2014). This is a significant gap, given the importance of this benchmark for ensuring the progression of

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\(^3\) Children are eligible for free school meals if one or more of their parents or carers receives any of the following:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The Guarantee element of State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit, provided they are not entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual income of £16,190 or less, as assessed by Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs.
young people into further education and employment. The Sutton Trust (2011) reports that:

Unlike other countries, the achievement gap between less advantaged English children and their more advantaged counterparts widens between the ages of eleven (the end of primary school) and sixteen (end of compulsory secondary school). (p. 9)

The Sutton Trust (2009b) also identifies a very strong correlation between academic success and future income. Given all these statistical indicators, it is no surprise that research suggests that many of the professions remain dominated by a small sector of society and that in recent decades many professions have become less rather than more socially representative (The Deputy Prime Minister’s Office 2014). In the interests of equality of opportunity and social mobility, it is evident that research that pays close attention to the assessments that students take at age 16 and the relationships between those assessments and social and cultural background is important.

With regards to inequitable educational processes leading to unequal educational outcomes, successive governments have paid attention to the relationship between social exclusion and education. Policy responses to educational inequalities have most frequently focussed on school improvement; whilst it could be argued the school system as a whole has improved as a result, the achievement gap between the least and most advantaged groups in society has not narrowed (Raffo 2014). The previous Labour governments (1997-2010) made some advances in tackling child development and parenting in poor communities through the introduction of Sure Start (Hills et al 2009), as well as increasing overall spending on education. During the Labour years there was a small decrease in child poverty, but overall poverty remained static while economic inequality continued to increase (Hills et al 2009). The Coalition government (2010-2015) paid attention to the relationship between education and social mobility, on a rhetorical level at least, but the policies it put in place to supposedly tackle inequality in education, such as free schools and
an accelerated academies programme, appear to have acted only to perpetuate social and educational reproduction⁴.

Raffo (2014) suggests that the reasons such policy approaches to tackling educational inequalities fail to close the gap include a lack of “both theoretical and empirical coherence” (p. 117) regarding how and why young people engage, or fail to engage with education. Raffo (2014) makes it clear that within his conceptualisation of equity as “a dynamic process of making things equal and fair” (p. 11) a key issue is relational equity. He argues that disadvantaged students need to be engaged through processes that recognise as legitimate – and respect – “the values, orientations and identities of families and communities” (Raffo, 2014, p. 122) to which they belong. Dyson et al (2010) suggest that in order for inequality within education and thus in society to begin to be addressed the reform of education needs to be more fundamental and wholesale. Rather than a school-improvement focussed agenda, it ought to include, they suggest, a change from government-driven structures of curriculum and assessment to more localised, needs-based structures (p. 14).

With these priorities in mind, therefore, this research aims to contribute to this debate in revealing one means by which the current curriculum and assessment structures and processes are inequitable and therefore perpetuate unequal educational outcomes. In focusing on GCSE English assessment, I reveal one site where the issues of inequity outlined are played out and make recommendations for curriculum and assessment that would lead to more relationally just and equitable processes. In the section that follows I explain why it is an important site of enquiry.

⁴ The claims and counter claims regarding whether Free Schools, for example, will only serve to benefit the middle classes are ongoing in the press. See, for example, Shepherd (2011).
The importance of GCSE English

The GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) is the standard assessment test taken by students in England, Wales and Northern Ireland at the end of Key Stage 4, which is currently the end of compulsory schooling. Pupils study a range of subjects at Key Stage 4. As of the Education Act of 2002 (DfES 2002) the statutory requirement is that students are schooled in English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 4. Whilst there is no statutory requirement that students take GCSEs, the expectations of further education colleges, employers and higher education institutions, as well as the performance measures by which schools are judged (DfE 2014a), mean that most schools enter their students for GCSEs in a wide range of subjects.5

It is important to understand the societal context of the introduction of the GCSE qualification. The first GCSEs were taken in 1988. Before the introduction of the GCSEs students either sat GCE (General Certificate of Education) O-Levels, which were introduced in 1951 and originally intended to be taken by the top 25% of the ability range, or they took a CSE (Certificate of Secondary Education). The CSE was introduced in 1965 and was designed to be taken by the middle of the ability range—the 40% below those that took the O-Level (Waddell Report 1978).

When the GCSEs were introduced it was with the aim of creating a single national examination to be taken at age 16 by all students. The 1978 Waddell Report recommended replacing the separate O-Level and CSE exams with a single common assessment framework (Waddell Report 1978). The common system was not implemented until 1985, when it was made clear that the new qualifications would have an emphasis on practical

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5 There is very little choice of qualification. Some schools, both from the state and independent sectors, are currently opting for their students to take the Level 1/2 Certificate, which is a version of the International GCSE (IGCSE) specifically accredited for teaching in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The qualification taken by the vast majority of students, however, remains the GCSE. In the future this proportion is expected to rise still further as from 2017 the Level 1/2 certificates will not be included in the schools performance measures (DfE 2014b).
and oral work (DfES 1985). A major change in the way exam grades were awarded was to be a shift from the norm referenced approach of the older exams, where only a certain percentage could gain each grade, to a criteria referenced approach (DfES 1985). As Gipps (1994) identifies, the introduction of the GCSE was intrinsically linked with the standards agenda:

Sir Keith Joseph's aim was to get 80%-90% of 16 year olds up to the level previously deemed to be average. On norm-referenced tests there is no point in trying to get every pupil to achieve an average or above-average score since, by definition, these tests are designed to have half the population scoring above and half below the mean. With criterion-referenced assessment in theory everyone can achieve the top grade. (p. 75)

Thus on a number of levels the introduction of the GCSE was meant as a means of enabling a greater number of students to achieve academic success. In the Waddell Report (Waddell Report 1978) this is a clear rationale for the introduction of the new qualification (p. 3).

To some degree this has been successful. Machin (2003) highlights the rise in the percentage of 17 to 18 years olds staying in education after the minimum school leaving age after the introduction of GCSEs (Table 1):

**Table 1: Staying on rates by income quintiles (%)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parental income quintiles</th>
<th>lowest</th>
<th>2nd lowest</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>2nd highest</th>
<th>highest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1979-1981</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982-1984</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985-1987</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988-1990</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991-1993</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994-1996</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997-1999</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Machin, 2003, p. 7)
It is apparent from Table 1 that a dramatic rise in the percentage of students staying in education after the age of 16 coincided with the introduction of the GCSE, especially in the lowest and second lowest quintiles. It could be inferred from this that a greater number of students was able to stay in education because they had gained the qualifications at 16 necessary to access courses in further education – qualifications that they had not had access to under the old system. However, the Table indicates that the significant gulf between students from different economic backgrounds in terms of their participation in education has endured. In addition, Machin (2003) points out that the rise in participation in further education is not mirrored by a similar increase in participation in higher education, with only a 7% rise in the percentage of students entering higher education from the lowest quintile between 1977 and 1997 compared to a 20% rise in the percentage of students entering higher education from the second highest quintile between the same dates (p. 8). Given that those students who access higher education are generally those students who achieve the highest grades at 16 and therefore choose to take A-Levels rather than enter further education courses with less direct routes into higher education, it might be concluded that whilst the introduction of GCSEs improved access, it had limited impact on enabling students from less affluent backgrounds to enter higher education with the economic and social benefits that that brings.

This is important in relation to my research. Statistical evidence makes clear the correlation between social background, academic success and, consequently, future social and economic status (Demack, Drew and Grimsley 2000, DfE 2010, Sutton Trust 2009a, 2009b, 2011). Whilst the structures of the GCSE were intended to create an equality of opportunity it is apparent that that has had only limited success. It is necessary therefore to examine the details of the assessments themselves and how they operate with regards to teachers’ and students’ perceptions and experiences in order to understand further the relationships between social background and academic success.
This research study could therefore have focussed on any of a number of GCSE subjects, but a number of factors make the necessity for research into GCSE English imperative. Alongside maths\(^6\), GCSE English carries the highest currency of any GCSE assessment: GCSE English at the age of 16 years has become a crucial benchmark by which schools, teachers and students are assessed in England.

Given the potential implications for a school if their students’ success rate falls below the Department for Education imposed floor target (which is to rise to 50% in 2015, (DfE 2012a)) – being labelled as an ‘under-performing school’ and thus at risk of being subject to the academies programme – there is a lot at stake for schools if their students are unable to access GCSE English at a higher grade. Consequently headteachers and their heads of department are under enormous pressures to ‘deliver’ those grades.

The importance of achievement in English to schools became apparent during the controversy around the awarding of grades on GCSE English and English Language following the June 2012 exam series (Furness 2012, Ofqual 2012, Vasagar 2012). Newspaper reports that followed revealed that as a result of their worries around students getting the grades they needed, schools were entering students for the same qualification with different awarding bodies (Walker 2012); in the press this was attributed to the pressures headteachers were under to meet the targets imposed upon them (Walker 2012).

\(^6\) Within current performance tables English has special status. Alongside achievement in maths achievement in English dominates the topline measurements which are as follows:

- % making expected progress in English
- % making expected progress in maths
- % achieving 5+ A*-C GCSEs (or equivalent) including English and maths GCSEs
- % achieving the English Baccalaureate
- % achieving grades A* - C in English and maths GCSE (DfE 2014a, p. 15).

This special status continues into new performance measures, introduced from 2016 (DfE 2014a). It could be argued that this research would be equally important therefore if it had a focus on maths. One of the reasons it does not focus on maths is that there is already a body of research that focuses on potential cultural barriers to success in maths exams. See, for example, Cooper and Dunne 1998, Fisher-Hoch & Hughes 1996; Little 2008; Little & Jones 2010; Taber 2003. There is no equivalent research that focuses on English exams and the ways in which those assessments might include and exclude certain groups of students.
became apparent as a result of the ensuing Ofqual\(^7\) (2012) report was that the percentage of students achieving, for example, grade C was tightly controlled and dependent on a cohort’s prior attainment. Thus while not norm referenced, it would not be possible for 90% of students to achieve ‘average’ or higher as Joseph envisaged 30 years ago (Gipps 1994). This emphasises the high-stakes nature of this exam for students, schools, parents and the government, in that in the race to gain the grades they need, schools and students are competing against each other, not being judged against a set of fixed criteria.

Clearly achievement in GCSE English is a high-stakes issue, but it is notable that in all the ongoing discussion in the press about achievement in GCSE English, there is minimal discussion about the nature of the subject, what is being assessed, and its appropriateness or accessibility for students. Similarly, research that looks at what is being assessed in English exams and the relationships between students’ social and cultural backgrounds, the details of the assessment and achievement is lacking\(^8\). Given how vital success in GCSE English is for a variety of stakeholders, a greater understanding of these issues seems to be crucial. Ball (1999) draws attention to the tendency of policy to focus upon the act of assessment and its outcomes without considering what is being assessed:

One of the key elements in the new policy panopticon is the use of highly prescriptive systems of accountability—performance indicators, inspections, league tables, achievement targets. Schools are rated and compared in terms of student

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\(^7\) Ofqual is the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation, the regulator of assessment in England and Northern Ireland. It is a non-ministerial government department.

\(^8\) Fisher-Hoch, Hughes, and Bramley (1997) write about the effects of context on students’ responses to exam questions. They distinguish between ‘valid difficulty’ and ‘invalid difficulty’: valid difficulty is the difficulty created by, say, the mathematical requirements of a maths question, whereas invalid difficulty is unintentional difficulty caused by features such as the language or the context of the question. This has parallels with my own research in its emphasis on cultural barriers to achievement. Their research covers a number of subject areas, including O-Level English (the predecessor to GCSE); however the ‘sources of difficulty’ they identify in English are mainly limited to issues related to rubric and instructions; they do however identify “rare or difficult vocabulary” and “idioms” as possible sources of invalid difficulty (1997, p.14). This has direct relevance to my research as awareness of rare vocabulary and idiom can be directly traceable to students’ social and cultural backgrounds. This is the limited extent of research that addresses possible cultural barriers to achievement in first language English examinations. There is also a body of research that focuses on cultural barriers to achievement in assessments for speakers of English as a second language which, while interesting, is not directly relevant here.
'achievements' measured by tests and examinations, for which students are carefully prepared. Institutional and national increases in test scores are then taken to be indicators of rising standards and improvements in schooling.

However, the question that is avoided here is whether these indicators actually 'stand for' and thus 'represent' valid, worthwhile or meaningful outputs. Does the increased emphasis on preparation for the tests and the adaptation of pedagogies and curricula to the requirements of test performance constitute worthwhile effects of 'improvement'? In terms of economic competitiveness is what is measured here what is needed? (p. 203)

Ball (1999) is asking an important question and one which informs this research, as is discussed further in the following section.

**GCSE English as a measure of literacy**

Following on from Ball’s (1999) question about whether assessments are measuring what is worthwhile, I examine the relationship of the GCSE English assessment with the notion of literacy. In terms of the importance of GCSE English for students and the wider society, the achievement of a grade C or higher acts as a proxy for a baseline functional literacy that enables people to participate in society; while it represents language skills assessed in the

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9 Indirectly Ball draws attention to some of the key questions at the heart of the debates that currently characterise validity theory. Although my research is not conceptualised through validity theory, as it considers an element of assessment it is worth understanding the concept of validity in relation to assessment. Originally defined as “the degree to which a test or examination measures what it purports to measure” (Ruch, 1924, p. 13) validity theory has developed over time and by the 1960s had broadened to encompass the idea that validity should indicate that an assessment was fit for purpose in a broader sense (Messick 1965). Currently, there are three main debates in the area of validity theory, they relate to:

1. the technical evaluation of intended interpretations and uses
2. the technical evaluation of intended policy impacts
3. the overall ethical evaluation of assessment policy. (Newton 2014, p. 86)

Although not conceptualised through validity theory, this research pertains to all three of these debates. In relation to number 1, in revealing the nature of the state-sanctioned literacy being consecrated through the assessment, I contribute to an evaluation of the extent to which the assessment is valid as a measure of literacy. In relation to number 2, in engaging with the relationship between the GCSE assessment and teaching and learning I contribute to an evaluation of policy impact; in relation to number 3, in revealing the relationships between the assessment and social and educational reproduction I contribute to an ethical evaluation of assessment policy.

10 This is evident through the ways in which achieving a grade C or higher in GCSE English or English Language is used as a proxy for literacy, for example in the Skills for Life survey (DfES 2003).
context of school, the GCSE English allows access to post compulsory education and employment. Sixth forms and colleges admitting students to A-Level courses frequently ask for a grade C or higher in English GCSE, regardless of the A-Level courses being studied. In most cases universities also ask for a grade C or above in GCSE English, alongside specified A-Level grades, in order to gain admission to a degree course. Many employers also demand a C or above in GCSE English as evidence of a required level of literacy.

Carrington and Luke (1997) suggest that within the public sphere literacy is viewed as “a neutral, identifiable package of skills” (p. 97); the gatekeepers of the different gateways mentioned are buying into the idea that the holder of a C in GCSE English possesses this package of skills, but, as Ball (1999) suggests, without any scrutiny of what skills or knowledge are being assessed within GCSE English11. Therefore, in this section I make explicit the links between GCSE English assessment and the notion of a normative, functional literacy and outline the importance of research that reveals the nature of the literacy being assessed and the relationships between this legitimised literacy and societal power structures.

Although the term ‘literacy’ has predominantly been used within a binary – someone is either literate or illiterate – it is important to recognise that from a sociocultural perspective literacy is intrinsically linked to social practices (Luke 1991) and therefore rather than referring to literacy in the singular, it is more accurate to refer to multiple literacies (Carrington and Luke 1997, Gee 2000, Gee 2012, Lankshear and Knobel 2003, Street 2003). This perspective is key to the approach to literacy that has come to be termed New Literacy Studies (Gee 2012, Street 2003, Van Enk et al 2005). This approach recognises

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11 Notably some discussion of this question did take place during the period of my research. It was driven by the DfE and the Secretary of State for Education and resulted in a revised programme of study, for first teaching from September 2015. As is clear from the wording of Gove’s announcement (DfE 2013c), the revisions were prompted by a concern with the standards agenda, rather than a genuine engagement with questions about what is worthwhile or meaningful in terms of teaching, learning or assessment.
literacy as a social practice, asking whose literacies are dominant and therefore viewing literacy in terms of how it constructs and perpetuates relations of power. From a linguistic perspective, literacies are located within discourses (Gee 2000, 2012), that is to say that they are integral parts of socially constructed language practices; the ways that people read and write vary enormously according to the social space they occupy. Individuals possess different literacies depending on the social spaces—or the fields—in which they are at home (Lankshear and Knobel 2003).

Within education, however, literacy is predominantly referred to in the singular, referring to a normative model of proficiency in reading and writing which is taught and assessed in and through schools (and therefore, within the English education system, is currently assessed terminally through GCSE English). Cook-Gumperz’s (1986) work on the social construction of literacy has been influential in encouraging debate about what we understand by the term literacy and the means by which literacy is taught and assessed. As she writes:

\[
\text{Literacy is not just the simple ability to read and write: but by possessing and performing these skills we exercise socially approved and approvable talents; in other words, literacy is a socially constructed phenomenon. (p. 1)}
\]

If this is located within the idea that people are conversant in multiple literacies, it is apparent from what Cook-Gumperz (1986) says here that what is distinctive about school literacy is that it is “socially approved and approvable.” That is, although individuals may be proficient in a range of literacies related to the different social fields in which they operate\(^\text{12}\), only that which is demonstrated through officially recognised assessment (in this case GCSE English) counts, in the public mind at least, as literacy. This idea is important to my research as arguably the GCSEs in English and English Language are the principal means by which literacy skills are socially approved (in the context of England, Wales and Northern

\(^{12}\text{For a helpful and accessible overview of research into out-of-school literacies, as well as a brief summary of the history of literacy theories, see Hull and Schultz (2001).}\)
Ireland) and thus they are the means by which the ‘rules’ of what constitutes an
approvable socially constructed literacy are transmitted, enforced and, partially at least\(^\text{13}\),
constructed. If, as my earlier research paper suggests (Johnson 2011a), GCSE English is
rewarding knowledge and skills that are embedded within a student’s culture, as opposed
to freely accessible to all students through hard work, good teaching, and so on, then
questions should be raised about the role GCSE English plays in contributing to educational
and social reproduction.

Luke (2003) summarises the sociological concerns with regards to literacy education with
two questions: Firstly, he asks “whose language should be the media of instruction in
schools, and also civic domains, workplaces, mass media, and other institutions?” (p. 133)
and secondly, “which selective traditions should shape what will count as literacy; which
texts and discourses, literacy practices, and events will be codified and transmitted in
schools; in whose interests and in with what material discourses will it be done?” (p. 133).
The results of my research have a direct bearing on the second of these questions in that if
achievement in GCSE English is used as a proxy for literacy, then an understanding of the
nature of those texts and discourses (and therefore the social practices) that students are
expected to be conversant with in order to achieve is important. The question of in whose
interests particular discourse practices will count as legitimate literacy is also important;
my research, in revealing the selective nature of the language practices that count within
the GCSE assessment confronts the question of in whose interests the assessment
operates.

There is also an apparent acceptance within the wider social discourse that increased
literacy, which is demonstrably measured through achievement in GCSE English, is good for

\(^\text{13}\) In that the design of the GCSE English and English Language qualifications is driven by the DfE
programme of study and approved/monitored by Ofqual, but the details of the assessments are
determined by the staff of the awarding bodies themselves.
society. Writing about the social construction of literacy, Cook-Gumperz (1986) suggests that there is something of a “moral virtue” in being identified as literate (p. 2), and Carrington and Luke (1997) write about what they term “folk theories of literacy” (p. 97), that is to say, common sense assumptions about the connections between literacy, social success and increased productivity and economic development as a nation. They go on to make the point, however, that these myths about literacy become self-fulfilling prophecies, in that in demanding evidence of ‘good’ reading and writing for admission to a college or to a job, access to social fields is being restricted to those with demonstrable ‘literacy’ (p. 98). It could certainly be argued that GCSE English is the means by which these ‘folk theories’ become self-fulfilling prophecies in that it is the main means by which literacy is evidenced with regards to entrance to continuing education and to jobs.

It is the case that governments publicly buy into the belief that there is a correlation between literacy and economic success and indeed set policy based upon that belief. See for example, any of former Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove’s speeches about education reform (e.g. DfE 2011a, 2012a, 2012b), where he continually refers to what he perceives to be the UK’s poor performance in the PISA international performance tables, which include a test of literacy. Coalition Secretary of State for Education Nicky Morgan similarly used international standing in literacy as well as maths as justification for major reforms to primary education (Shipman and Griffiths 2015). Given that two successive secretaries of state have used these perceptions to rationalise and justify the current overhaul of the school curriculum in England, the imperative for research into assumptions made about literacy measures is clear.

Carrington and Luke (1997) argue that not only does the existence of a single officially sanctioned literacy serve the interests of particular groups in society, it is also intrinsically unhelpful to students in that it does not equip them to operate in different social fields:
Part of the unresolved issue in contemporary pedagogy is how school-based literacy training theorises itself and its practices as social phenomena. School-based literacy training itself constitutes one boundaried social field ... where the transformation and exchange of such capital occurs. A great danger in educational approaches to literacy is when that training, *qua* context of acquisition, begins to assume acritically the generalizability of its rules of conversion and exchange to other social fields. (p. 105)

This problematizes the common-sense assumption that a single state-sanctioned literacy, which achievement in GCSE English represents, leads to a more productive and economically effective society. In illuminating the socially constructed nature of the knowledge and skills that are required to gain the GCSE in English, I lend a critical perspective to its rules of conversion.

This perspective on literacy as socially constructed knowledge reflects the concerns of the social constructivist body of research known in the UK as the new sociology of the curriculum and in the USA as critical curriculum studies (Apple 1992, 1993, 2004, Young 1971). The primary concern of the new sociology of the curriculum has been the relationship between what was identified as arbitrarily recognised ‘legitimate’ knowledge within the curriculum and social and power structures or “the discontinuity between the culture of the school and its curriculum and the cultures of those coming to school” (Young and Muller, 2007, p. 175). This social constructivist perspective has been criticised however, particularly by Young (2008, 2013), who argues that it is ultimately unhelpful in that it reveals the socially constructed and arbitrary nature of the curriculum without positing an alternative. Young (2008) proposes that the focus of the sociology of the curriculum should shift to the question of what kinds of knowledge should be the basis of the curriculum and how those kinds of knowledge might be made accessible to students (p. 10). He goes on to propose a theory of knowledge that he claims should underpin research into the curriculum. In this he makes a distinction between “knowledge of the powerful” and “powerful knowledge” (p. 14): the former being the knowledge that is possessed by those that are powerful within society, the latter being knowledge that itself gives power to
those that possess it, arguing that an empowering curriculum should be structured around powerful knowledge. This research study engages with Young’s critical realist perspective and reveals the ways in which English is distinctive in its positioning in relation to powerful knowledge/knowledge of the powerful; in doing so it makes a contribution, through empirical research, to the debate about curriculum theory. While I focus on revealing the socially constructed nature of the knowledge and skills that are required to gain the GCSE in English, thus taking a social constructivist approach, in doing so I develop an argument and a rationale for an alternative and empowering English assessment and curriculum.

Summary

Research evidence shows that social inequality is increasing and social mobility is decreasing. Education and educational outcomes in the form of academic qualifications contribute to these inequalities. Access to qualifications and therefore to continuing education and improved careers opportunities is more likely for students from more socially and economically advantaged family backgrounds. Given all this, any research that contributes to knowledge about how and why education perpetuates social and economic inequality is important.

Most of the existing research into the relationship between educational assessment at age 16 and social equity is quantitative in its nature (Connolly 2006, Demack et al 2000, Strand 2014). It identifies statistical correlation and while it might posit possible causality it does little to interrogate the assessments themselves or to consider the students’ and teachers’ experiences or examiners' conceptualisations. There is need for qualitative research that looks at the reasons for the continuing inequities in educational outcomes. The statistical evidence that education perpetuates the social and economic status quo is overwhelming;
government policy seeks to address this by blaming poor teaching in order to justify the deregulation of schools, and by continuing to raise the bar for teachers and schools (DfE 2012a), making them aim for goals that are unachievable because of the ways grades are awarded (Ofqual 2012). What government policy doesn’t do is seek to understand the reasons for the continuing inequalities. While there is a research tradition that draws attention to the connections between curriculum and power at a high level (Apple 1993, 2004, Young 1971), there is need for research such as this that gives voice to the people who have lived experiences of the processes that serve to include and exclude in order to shed light onto how policy and its assessments serve to perpetuate educational and social reproduction and that gives an empirically-based rationale for an alternative empowering curriculum.

What is also evident from this chapter is the importance of GCSE English for students, teachers, schools and society. It has an elevated status in relation to all other GCSE subject areas apart from maths in the way that it can enable or prevent access to further and higher education and to jobs at many levels, and in the status that it has within the schools performance tables. It represents within the social field a functional literacy which, as has been demonstrated, represents a narrow, state-sanctioned literacy among all the multiple literacies that are used across society. Given this, and the connections between literacies and social and cultural backgrounds, this research is important in the way it reveals the truths about the type of literacy that is being legitimised through GCSE English and its connections with the structures of power within society.

In this chapter I have demonstrated the need for research that reveals the relationships between GCSE English and social and educational reproduction; in the chapter that follows this I describe the research design and how it is appropriate for scrutiny of the problem identified.
Chapter 3: Research Design

Introduction

The primary aim of this research project is to examine the relationships between GCSE English and educational reproduction. The research questions are focused on the relationships between the different agents involved in the assessment, which is revealed through how the students, teachers and examiners position themselves, and are positioned, both in relation to each other and in relation to the assessment. As an act of policy I am also concerned with the relationship between the assessment and policy: how policy impacts upon the assessment and on practice and therefore on the lived experiences of students and teachers.

In the chapter that follows I explain the details of my research design. This includes three sections. In the first I give an overview of the case I am studying as well as explaining the policy scholarship context that I locate my research within. In the second I outline how and why I am conceptualising the study through the thinking tools of Pierre Bourdieu. In the third section I explain the design of my fieldwork, including how I ensure the research integrity, reliability and validity.

Research methodology

The research methodology is that of a case study; Yin (2009) describes a case study as an “empirical enquiry about a contemporary phenomenon (e.g., a “case”), set within its real world context” (p. 4). The case under investigation is the relationship between the GCSE English assessment and educational reproduction. Whilst there is a wealth of statistical evidence about the relationship between family background and academic achievement
(Connolly 2006, Demack et al 2000, Strand 2014, Sutton Trust 2009a, 2009b), the use of a case study with a narrow focus on agents’ lived experiences of the GCSE English enables me to look at the processes involved in this relationship. As explained in Chapter 2, the case of GCSE English is distinctive from other academic assessments for a number of reasons. Most importantly from a student’s perspective, it acts as a proxy for functional literacy and therefore possession of a particular grade in this qualification is insisted on by gatekeepers to a wide range of progression routes for young people, including further and higher education and employment. Qualifications in other subject areas are insisted upon by gatekeepers, but generally only when the subject content is directly relevant to the next phase of study or employment; for example, a particular grade in GCSE Physics may enable a student to study A-level Physics or an engineering course because in order to do either of those things a grasp of Physics at GCSE is necessary.

The case of GCSE English is distinctive in other important ways, as will be evident through the analysis chapters and the conclusion, because of the relationship between the skills and knowledge assessed in GCSE English and the family-rooted dispositions of students. In his proposed theory of knowledge Young (2008) suggests a distinction between “context-dependent” and “context-independent” knowledge (Young, 2008, p. 14). Context-dependent knowledge is that knowledge which people develop outside their schooling, through growing up; context-independent knowledge is knowledge which is, for the most part, learnt through schooling from teachers with specialist knowledge. Young suggests that the knowledge which is codified and tested is context-independent knowledge (2008, p. 15); however, I argue that where GCSE English is importantly different from other subject areas is that it tests context-dependent knowledge.

The case is located within the tradition of policy scholarship. As Ozga argues, “all research in education to some degree engages with policy” (1999, p. 3). Given the context
established in Chapter 2, it is clear that research about GCSE English has policy at its heart and that the problem established in that chapter is a policy problem. The details of the examinations and the structures of the assessment system, as well as the impact of that system on teachers, students, schools, and on the wider society, are matters of and for policy. Ball’s (2006) discussion of the meaning of policy as both text and discourse is helpful here:

... policy is not one or the other, but both, they are ‘implicit in each other.’ Policy discourses (and I am using that term here in the Foucauldian sense, as a regulated practice that accounts for statements, rather than the linguistic sense of language in use) produce frameworks of sense and obviousness with which policy is though, talked and written about. (p. 44)

The texts of the GCSE (the exam papers, the mark scheme) are texts of policy; the taken-for-granted assumptions about the English GCSE, its currency and meaning within schools, the education system and the wider structures of society, are illustrative of policy as discourse (Ball 1999, 2006). My research is designed with the intention of engaging with policy as both text and discourse and thus, the structure and focus of my research is in the tradition of the approach to policy research which can be termed policy scholarship (Ball 1997, 2006, Grace 1995, 2000, Ozga 1990, 1999).

The term policy scholarship is used in opposition to the term policy science (Fay 1975). Ozga (1999) refers to policy research as “contested terrain” (p. 4); this draws attention to the tension between that research that is directly relevant and useful for policy makers and that which illuminates policy. Where policy science takes a positivist approach to policy, abstracting and analysing a current policy phenomenon in order to recommend changes and improvements, policy scholarship concerns itself with understanding and revealing policy through the lens of a social-historical and a theoretical approach. My research does not set out to examine technical implementation issues with a view to recommending improvements to the exam system, instead it sets out to understand the issues around
accessing the exam system and the relations between the exam system and educational reproduction.

The aims of my research are in accordance with what Ozga (1999) claims policy research can and should achieve. It is setting out to “draw attention to and challenge the taken for granted or dominant assumptions informing policy” (Ozga, 1999, p. 47) by unpicking what is being assessed within GCSE English and challenging the dominant assumptions with regards to what GCSE English is and what it should be. It is also setting out to “examine how and where policies increase inequality and impact unfairly on particular groups” (Ozga, 1999, p. 47). As I established in Chapter 2, success in GCSE assessments, which is associated with future economic success (Demack, Drew and Grimsley 2000, DfE 2010, Sutton Trust 2009, 2011), is unevenly spread across social groups (Machin 2003); my research seeks to shed light on how and where the GCSE assessment in English contributes to such social inequities. Finally, Ozga (1999) claims that:

Research can provide an illumination of injustice and inequity that may assist educationalists in working for change, and helps to challenge the ‘common sense’ assumptions about the desirability and rationality of the official logic of outcomes and indicators. (p. 47)

My research is setting out to challenge the common sense assumptions around the GCSE in English – that it is an effective measure of an individual’s literacy and an individual’s ability to operate in society in an effective way, that it is accessible to all and that it is a fair way of measuring a teacher’s and school’s effectiveness. My research seeks to illuminate whether the official logic of these outcomes and indicators is desirable or rationale.

**Theoretical approach**

Ozga (1999) identifies as problematic what she perceives to be reluctance in educational research in England to being open about theory-led choices in research design. Ball (1997)
argues that theory is crucial to policy sociology as it is that very theory that serves to
distance the researcher and the research from the common sense assumptions of policy
makers:

theory provides the possibility of a different language, a language which is not
catched up with the assumptions and inscriptions of policy-makers or the immediacy
of practice (or embedded in tradition, prejudice, dogma and ideology—see below).
It offers a potential location outside the prevailing discourses of policy and a way of
struggling against 'incorporation'. (p. 269)

My research design and my analysis of the data are led by theory. I use the thinking tools of
Bourdieu as a means by which to step outside the taken-for-granted assumptions of the
field of education and the game of GCSE English. As a researcher who occupies a position in
this field I am also a player in the game, with a background in English teaching and a job
with an awarding body; it is therefore imperative that I have the means by which to step
back from the immediacy of practice and the prevailing discourses in order to challenge the
dominant assumptions.

At the heart of Bourdieu’s (1977, 1990a) theory of practice are the interdependent
concepts of habitus, field and capital. Field refers to the objective network of relations in a
particular socially structured space that operate according to an internal logic. The field in
which this study is located is the field of education. However, the field of education is huge
and the GCSE English assessment constitutes a small part of it, therefore, the field of
assessment can be identified as a sub-field of the larger field of education in which the
game of GCSE English is played out. Bourdieu (1985) suggests that the field is constructed
through the relative positions and conditions of the agents within those fields; part of the
task of this research project therefore is to reveal the relative positions and conditions of
the agents in the game of GCSE English assessment – in this case, the students, teachers
and examiners – in order to understand the relative positions of power that constitute the
field.
Agents’ conditions can be defined as their intrinsic properties (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 724) or their habitus (Bourdieu, 1990a). Bourdieu (1990a) defines habitus as:

systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. (Bourdieu, p. 53)

Habitus refers to the durable dispositions that are developed through understanding of and exposure to the world, beginning with the family and in the home. They are structured in that they are constituted by past and present experience and they structure in that they regulate a person’s practices. The relative positions of the agents within the field are determined by their objective position in the structure of the field which in turn is determined by the ways that the qualities or experiences that they possess are misrecognised as capital within the field. Misrecognition is another useful Bourdieusian tool, explained by Grenfell and James (1998) thus:

Misrecognition relates to the ways these underlying processes and generating structures of fields are not consciously acknowledged in terms of the social differentiation they perpetuate, often in the name of democracy and equality. (p. 23)

Within this research study analysis of the ways that the different agents reveal habitus is important in shedding light on the socially constructed practices that constitute the skills and knowledge being assessed, for example, through the dispositions that examiners reveal towards literacy practices. Thinking through the data using the thinking tools of misrecognition and capital enables me to reveal the ways in which social differentiation is perpetuated, drawing an explicit connection between socially generated dispositions, social structures and practice.

The following equation summarises the interdependence of habitus, capital and field:

\[ (\text{habitus})(\text{capital}) + \text{field} = \text{practice} \] (Bourdieu, 1986b, p. 101)
This equation suggests that practice results from a relationship between intrinsic dispositions or condition (habitus), relational properties or position (capital) and the conditions of the field in which the practice is located. In constructing a research design which will generate data which pertains to practice, as understood by examiners, teachers and students, I set out to reveal the internal logic of the field and the relationships between the assessment and the structures of power.

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) describe the field thus:

> each field prescribes its particular values and possesses its own regulative principles. These principles delimit a socially structured space in which agents struggle, depending on the position they occupy in that space, either to change or to preserve its boundaries and form (p. 17)

It is evident that a field is a hierarchical space and a space of conflict, but also a space where “regulative principles” are implicitly agreed upon. With regards to this research, I reveal, through analysis of the data, the regulative principles at play and in doing so reveal in whose interests those principles operate. The principles at play are multiple and include, for example, principles about the types of English being assessed in GCSE English and hence the forms of literacy that are being given currency, and those that aren’t. The construction of what constitutes literacy and the literate through achievement in GCSE English, as discussed in Chapter 2, is a useful example of practice which is structured by the intersection of capital, habitus and field. Dispositions towards language and use of language are durably structured in the home and through the early years of education – habitus is thus revealed through dispositions towards language\(^\text{14}\). The linguistic dispositions of the dominated and excluded in society are demonstrably different from those of the

\(^{14}\) Language and dispositions towards language are partly physical dispositions, certainly with regards to spoken language. This reveals a particular type of habitus, the disposition of the body, which Bourdieu terms hexis:

> Language is a body technique, and specifically linguistic, especially phonetic, competence is a dimension of bodily hexis in which one’s whole relation to the social world, and one’s whole socially informed relation to the world, are expressed (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 86).
dominant. The GCSE assessment is the means by which particular language practices and dispositions towards language are misrecognised as capital – particular language practices are given currency within the field which, through the qualification conferred, also has an exchange value outside the field. Practice reveals the literacy that is misrecognised as capital, and thus one of the regulative principles of the field, and therefore reveals the relations between habitus (rooted in social background), field position and wider power structures. Thus using Bourdieu’s thinking tools to conceptualise practice enables me to step back from the principles which have regulated my own practice as a teacher and assessment professional and to recognise the relationships between that practice and the structures that ensure social and educational reproduction.

A form of capital under particular discussion in my research is cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986a, Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, Bourdieu and Passeron 1979). Bourdieu defines cultural capital in a number of different ways across his work15, but in essence the term, within his work, refers to a “cultural competence” (1990a, p. 124) which entails embodied dispositions towards and knowledge of elite culture that is inculcated by and in the more privileged classes in the early part of their life. That the education system plays a key role in ensuring that cultural practices translate to capital is clear in Bourdieu’s work; he writes of “the contribution which the educational system makes to the reproduction of the social structure by sanctioning the hereditary transmission of cultural capital” (1986a p.243), suggesting that institutional educational knowledge—that which is taught, assessed and rewarded at a societal level—is based around the elite social practices and knowledge of the educated middle classes. With regards to this research, the thinking tool of capital is operationalised in two main ways. Firstly, analysis of both documentary and interview data reveals how cultural knowledge and experience are misrecognised as capital; this is

15 For a useful, brief overview of the ways in which the use of cultural capital varies across Bourdieu’s work see Lamont and Lareau (1988).
particularly revealed through the analysis of the cultural knowledge students need to access the exam questions. Secondly, analysis of how particular socially constructed dispositions towards language practices are misrecognised as legitimate through the assessment reveals the ways in which the GCSE English assessment sanctions the hereditary transmission of cultural capital. Carrington and Luke (1997) argue that the very existence of one officially sanctioned literacy is “a principal form of the intergenerational transmission of capital,” (p. 103) through the conversion of institutional capital for economic capital. That is to say that through recognising a single literacy – that of the socially dominant – as the legitimate variant via a qualification such as the GCSE, socially constructed cultural resources (cultural knowledge and language practices) are exchanged for institutional capital (the qualification) which then translate to economic capital through access to continuing education and employment.

Bourdieu (1990b, 1996) also writes about the field as a ‘game’ in which agents are described as ‘players’ who instinctively understand to a greater or lesser extent the rules of the game, in a way which further reveals habitus. With regards to this research I conceptualise the GCSE English assessment – the case that I am investigating – as a game within the field of education. The players of this game are multiple: as well as including those who play directly such as the teachers, students and examiners, the players include those with power over the assessment, so those within the Department for Education, Ofqual, Ofsted and the awarding bodies who have a stake in the game. Arguably the players also include those who influence or try to influence the game or on whom it has an indirect impact, so the media, further and higher education providers, employers and parents. Within this research study I am focussing only on those players with the most direct experience of the game however: the students, teachers and examiners.
As a game it has its own regulatory principles which, whilst interconnecting with and reflecting the wider educational field, are also distinctive and particular. The regulatory principles of a game can be separated into regularities – “regularity of practice based on dispositions and the feel for the game” (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 66) – and rules. Whereas regularities are instinctive and informal and reveal the dispositions of habitus, rules are more explicit and are codified. In the context of this research both codified rules (both explicit and implicit) and regularities are of interest as both reveal the underlying structures and assumptions of the game in play and thus the mechanisms by which students either ‘win’ or ‘lose’.

Alongside the analogy of the game in play, Bourdieu introduces other helpful concepts including illusio and doxa:

Produced by experience of the game, and therefore of the objective structures within which it is played out, the ‘feel for the game’ is what gives the game a subjective sense – a meaning and a raison d’être, but also a direction, an orientation, an impending outcome, for those who take part and therefore acknowledge what is at stake (this is illusio in the sense of investment in the game and the outcome, interest in the game, commitment to the presuppositions – doxa – of the game). (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 66)

With regards to my research these concepts are useful. In analysing the interview data in particular I reveal the doxa of the game and gain understanding of the extent which the different players are committed to it or not depending on their positioning within the field. The concept of illusio, investment in the game, similarly differs according to a player’s position within the game. Use of these two thinking tools to conceptualise the data serves to reveal more about the field itself in terms of revealing the positions of power across the field; this will be developed further in Chapter 4. An additional tool that is useful here is hysteresis. The “hysteresis effect” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 78), is a “structural lag” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 83) in which the dispositions that reveal habitus, durably structured, no longer correspond to the contemporary field. This tool is useful in conceptualising the game.
because of the multiple generations with a stake in the game of GCSE assessment, as revealed in Chapter 4.

The thinking tools outlined are used to think through the data collected. In the section that follows I explain how what that data is and how it was collected.

Fieldwork

In this section I will outline the details of my fieldwork explaining first the interviews conducted and second the documentary analysis.

As Yin (2009) identifies, good case studies benefit from having multiple sources of evidence (p. 10). In incorporating documentary analysis of exam papers and mark schemes and interviews with students, teachers and senior examiners this research sets out to explore the case from a number of perspectives. I capture the dynamics of policy across and between levels in interrogating the policy texts of the assessment materials alongside interviews with the senior examiners and moderators for the GCSE English – those people who are responsible for writing the assessment materials and determining the standards at which pupils perform to achieve different marks and grades – as well as teachers and students who are judged, in different ways, according to how well they perform with regards to the assessment.

Interviews

In the section that follows I firstly explain the samples in terms of the schools and the students interviewed. I then briefly explain who the senior examiners were that were interviewed. Finally I explain the details of and the rationale for the interview schedules used in the semi-structured interviews.
I interviewed five students from each of three schools, as well as their teachers. I also interviewed five senior moderators and examiners who work in different capacities in relation to GCSE English. Therefore I have data from a total of 23 interviews. I am not aiming to ensure a statistically generalizable sample; in a research study of this size it would not be possible, and epistemologically, it is neither necessary nor desirable. Ontologically I am not claiming that my research will tell the ‘truth’ about students’ examiners’ or teachers’ experiences of GCSE English – my research is positioned from the perspective that reality is constructed through experiences. I am setting out to gain insight into a phenomenon in which people are active, subjective participants, albeit participants whose actions and dispositions are structured through social means. To use Ball’s (1997) terminology I am peopling policy through giving voice to the students, teachers and examiners. Thomson et al (2010) reflect on the efficacy of illuminating policy through small-scale research, “to reveal the power geometrics of contemporary policy at work” (p. 654). Through this relatively small sample size I am not claiming universal meaning, but in revealing everyday experiences of education and assessment in relation to GCSE English, I am illuminating the relationships between policy at a national level and policy as it is enacted by players in the game.
School interviews

The sample of schools is purposive: I have selected three schools that represent three different social contexts, as illustrated through the statistics relating to each below. The schools are all in the north of England and are as follows:16

- **Riverside High School**, a large 11 to 18 comprehensive in a suburb of a large city.
  - % of pupils eligible for Free School meals: 22
  - % of pupils of white British origin: 54
  - % of pupils whose first language is a language other than English: 24
- **Greenfield High School**, an 11 to 16 comprehensive in the suburbs of a town close to the city.
  - % of pupils eligible for Free School meals: 18
  - % of pupils of white British origin: 96
  - % of pupils whose first language is a language other than English: 1
- **Redbrick High School**, an 11 to 18 girls’ high school in the inner city.
  - % of pupils eligible for Free School meals: 39
  - % of pupils of white British origin: 11
  - % of pupils whose first language is a language other than English: 64

This sample of three schools has been selected using national data both about the schools and about the communities in which they were located. I selected three quite different schools to ensure that a range of voices is heard. Each of the schools selected has a higher percentage of students who are eligible for free school meals than the national average. This is important in that it indicates that students in the schools are not likely to be students from the most dominant social groups - I was setting out to give voice to the dominated rather than the dominant. I am not conceptualising my research through quantitative notions of ‘high’ and ‘low’ socio-economic status, nor am I drawing conclusions about ethnicity or about gender, however my research questions required sites that would enable the investigation into how children and teachers in diverse communities

16 The data is taken from the 2010 schools level census and compares to the national data as follows: % of pupils eligible for Free School Meals: 15.4; % of pupils of white British origin: 78.6; % of pupils whose first language is a language other than English: 16.0 (DfE 2010). Statistics have been rounded to the nearest whole number to preserve the schools’ anonymity.
17 Interestingly Krarup and Munk (2014) suggest that “‘Short’ and ‘long’ education and ‘dominant’ and ‘dominated’ socioeconomic positions would be preferable alternatives” (p. 16) to traditional labels of ‘high’ and ‘low’ SES.
experienced the preparation for and assessment of GCSE English. Bourdieu (1984) draws attention to the complexities that entail distinction of class, observing that “social class is not defined by a property” but “instead by the structure of relations between all the pertinent properties which give its specific value to each of them and to the effects they exert on practices” (p. 100). As my research illuminates the structure of relations between properties, values and practices, it addresses social groupings head on, revealing the structural means by which social divisions are perpetuated, without using reductive labels. Through using Bourdieu’s tools I am revealing positions of dominated and dominant within the game, and, because of the nature of the game, revealing how those positions within the game translate to capital which has exchange value outside of the game. My selection of schools reflects my aims.

Riverside High School was selected because it is a multicultural school with high levels of achievement relative to other schools in the city in which it is located; it also has the lowest number of pupils eligible for free school meals in the Local Authority in which it is situated. The following census data\(^{18}\) indicate the relatively high level of graduates within the school’s postcode\(^{19}\):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No qualifications (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1 qualifications (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2 qualifications (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprenticeship (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3 qualifications (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4 qualifications and above (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other qualifications (%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{18}\) Data taken from the 2011 census: http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/interactive/census-map-2-1---qualifications/index.html

\(^{19}\) This does not provide a wholly reliable picture of a school’s intake but it does provide an indication of the social context in which the school is located.
At Greenfield High School students are predominantly of white British origin; it has a smaller proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals. The census data suggests a relatively high percentage of adults with no qualifications and a relatively low percentage of graduates within the school’s postcode:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No qualifications (%)</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1 qualifications (%)</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2 qualifications (%)</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprenticeship (%)</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3 qualifications (%)</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4 qualifications and above (%)</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other qualifications (%)</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, Redbrick High School is an 11 to 18 single sex girls’ high school where a majority of students are not of white British origin. The census data suggests that the area in which it is located is mixed, with a relatively high number of graduates but also 20% of adults who have no qualifications:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No qualifications (%)</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1 qualifications (%)</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2 qualifications (%)</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprenticeship (%)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3 qualifications (%)</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4 qualifications and above (%)</td>
<td>35.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other qualifications (%)</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A purposive sample of students has been used. All students were entered for the Higher Tier paper of the examination.\(^{20}\) They are all Key Stage 4 students with a level 5 or 6 in

\(^{20}\) Students can be entered for either the Higher Tier or the Foundation Tier examination. If a student enters the Foundation Tier exam, their achievement is capped at a grade C. If they enter the Higher they can achieve a grade from A* down to D. As this study is focusing on success in the GCSE I chose to focus on the Higher Tier only.
English in the Key Stage 2 National Curriculum tests; this is because within government reporting (DfE 2011b) a student with a level 5 or 6 at Key Stage 2 is deemed to have made “expected progress” if he or she has gained a B or higher in GCSE English. My sample includes some students who are expected to achieve a grade B or higher and some that are expected to achieve a grade C or lower. I would like to problematise this; the Key Stage 2 SAT in English, which the majority of children take in Year 6, includes reading and writing tasks similar in style to those that appear on the GCSE English exam. If children are disadvantaged at Key Stage 4 by not having access to the cultural resources necessary to access the highest grades in GCSE English, it is entirely possible that the same is true of the Key Stage 2 SATs. Statistics show that 69.3 % of children make “expected progress” from Key Stage 2 to 4 in English (DfE 2011b); in interviewing students who are both predicted and not predicted to make that “expected progress” I include a range of students in the sample in terms of the way they position themselves and the way they are positioned in relation to the assessment. Details of the students interviewed are listed in Table 2
Table 2: Students’ academic and home contexts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Target grade</th>
<th>Expected grade</th>
<th>Languages spoken in home</th>
<th>Parents’ social class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salma</td>
<td>Riverside</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Urdu/English</td>
<td>Dad – 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zara</td>
<td>Riverside</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Murathi/English</td>
<td>Dad – 1.2; Mum - 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelley</td>
<td>Riverside</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farzana</td>
<td>Riverside</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A*</td>
<td>English/Bengali</td>
<td>Dad – 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Riverside</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Dad – 2; Mum – 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>Greenfield</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Dad – 7; Mum – 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chelsea</td>
<td>Greenfield</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Dad – 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>Greenfield</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Dad – 1.1; Mum – 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kath</td>
<td>Greenfield</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Mum – 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Greenfield</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Dad – 5; Mum – 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kasha</td>
<td>Redbrick</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>English/Urdu</td>
<td>Dad – 6; Mum – 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stacey</td>
<td>Redbrick</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Dad – 6; Mum – 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rihana</td>
<td>Redbrick</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>A*</td>
<td>A*</td>
<td>English/Somali</td>
<td>Dad – 3; Mum – 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>Redbrick</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Mum – 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edie</td>
<td>Redbrick</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A*</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Dad – 2; Mum 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I had ethical approval for the use of a questionnaire (see Appendix E) as well as interviews with the students, but too much of the 30 minutes of time that I was ethically approved for would have been taken up with completing the questionnaire. I therefore asked students two questions from the questionnaire during the interview, which is where the information in columns 6 and 7 comes from.

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21 This information sheds light on the nature of my sample. However, I am not setting out to research the barriers to GCSE English specifically for students who may be multi- or bilingual or who are second language learners, although this would certainly be an interesting area of research. There is a body of research that looks at the cultural component of language teaching (see, for example, Liddicoat 2004) and indeed, in some countries explicit attention is paid to the cultural needs of second language learners at a policy level (Liddicoat 2003, Phillips 1999, Nakamura 2002).

22 The categories of social class are NS-SEC analytic classes. They are not an entirely reliable indicator of the parents’ social status as they rely on the students’ descriptions of their parents’ occupations. They were generated by inputting the students’ descriptions into the Office for National Statistics occupation coding tool: http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/HTMLDocs/dev3/ONS_SOC_occupation_coding_tool.html
The teachers interviewed are listed in Table 3.

**Table 3: Teachers’ details**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sandra Mortimer</td>
<td>Riverside High School</td>
<td>Head of Key Stage 4 English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janet Booth</td>
<td>Greenfield High School</td>
<td>Head of English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonia Featherstone</td>
<td>Redbrick High School</td>
<td>Head of Key Stage 4 English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interviews with the students and the teachers took place shortly after the students had taken the GCSE exam. Table 4 below indicates the dates the students sat the exams and the dates of the interviews:

**Table 4: Timetable of interviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School name</th>
<th>Exam taken</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greenfield</td>
<td>May 2012</td>
<td>June 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverside</td>
<td>May 2012</td>
<td>June 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redbrick</td>
<td>June 2013</td>
<td>June 2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In interviewing the students I am giving voice to those people who have least say in the rules of the game and yet who arguably have most at stake, in that their assessment results play a part in determining their future. The teachers are, to some extent at least, responsible for their students’ performance in the game – they are the ones who mediate the game and its rules for their students and the most direct and visible means by which the students learn about the value of playing. In interviewing the students and teachers I therefore shed light on both the ‘regulatory principles’ that govern the game in play and on the relative positioning of the players in the field.
Examiner interviews

I also interviewed the senior examining and moderating team for GCSE English and English Language at an English awarding organisation. The people interviewed are Peter Owen, Steve Waters, Liz Smith, David Taylor, Mike Thompson. In this thesis, in order to preserve their anonymity, I refer to them generically as senior examiners. However, Table 5 below lists the roles they have:

**Table 5: Examiners’ roles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chair of Examiners</td>
<td>Responsible for the specification and the standards set; oversees the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief of Examiners</td>
<td>Responsible for exam papers and mark schemes; leads marking of exam papers; sets the standard on the H tier paper; oversees work of Principal Examiner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Examiner</td>
<td>Produces exam papers and mark scheme; leads marking of exam papers; sets the standard on the F tier paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Moderator (written controlled assessment)</td>
<td>Sets controlled assessment tasks; responsible for standardising marking of moderators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Moderator (speaking and listening controlled assessment)</td>
<td>Oversees standardisation of speaking and listening marks; oversees moderation of speaking and listening</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This group of people has been selected as they are the individuals responsible for deciding the details of the assessment materials that students are assessed against, that is the exam papers, controlled assessment tasks and mark schemes. They are also responsible for maintaining the standards of the exam process; that is, making sure that all assistant examiners or moderators are marking to the same standard and determining where the grade boundaries should lie. It is evident therefore that they have a lot of influence over how students perform on these assessments, both in determining what questions students are asked and in deciding what skills and qualities are valued in students’ performances. In order to reveal the regulatory principles at play – the ‘rules of the game’ – it is important to
include the voices of those within the game that would apparently have some influence over those rules.

**Interviews and data**

The questions in the semi-structured interviews were designed to address the research questions.

The students were asked a number of questions (Appendix B) about their cultural interests and experiences and about who influenced them in their cultural interests in order to develop understanding of the contexts of the students’ taking the exam. Specifically, the aim of the questions was to reveal aspects of the dispositions of habitus and in doing so provide a context for their responses to questions about the assessments. With regards to the instruments of assessment, the students were asked questions specific to parts of the exam, for example, they were asked about the reading sources – whether they found them easy or difficult, whether they found them interesting, whether they were familiar with the type of texts on the exam – and about the ways they had approached the writing questions. In analysing the data, the students’ responses to questions about the exam were read alongside the dispositions towards culture and cultural artefacts they revealed in order to address research questions 1 and 3. The students were also asked about their classroom experiences in relation to the GCSE English assessment; this was designed to elicit data that illuminated research question 2, about the relationships between government policy, GCSE English and teaching and learning.

The teachers were asked questions (Appendix C) about their experiences of the different assessments and about their own practice; in enabling teachers to reflect on their own teaching and assessment practices in relation to the GCSE I was able to generate data that shed light on the impact of policy, in particular in relation to accountability measures, thus
addressing research question 3. The teachers were also asked questions about their students’ experiences of the assessment: the aspects of the assessment that were more or less accessible for their students and about students’ barriers to achievement. The aim of asking these questions was to reveal the teachers’ perceptions of relationships between social and cultural practices and the GCSE English assessment. Located as they are in relation to the assessment – as agents of assessment through the internal assessments, as enablers for their students through their teaching role and as the subject of assessment through internal performance management procedures and external scrutiny from Ofsted – the teachers’ conceptualisation of the GCSE English assessment is key to shedding light on the way that it operates. In asking these questions I was able to gather data that enables me to reveal the ‘common sense’ assumptions made by examiners and the relationships between those assumptions and the experiences and knowledge of students. The data gathered from the teacher interviews also provided a different perspective in terms of them having experience of a greater range of students than those interviewed, thus shedding light on a greater range of student experience, albeit in a mediated way.

I asked the senior examiners (Appendix D) responsible for the papers about their selection of texts – where they came from and why they selected those particular texts. These questions were designed to elicit data about the cultural values and assumptions of the senior examiners, thus addressing research question 1, as well as getting at the rationale for aspects of the assessment. All the senior examiners, whether moderators or examiners, were asked about the purposes of the assessments for which they were responsible, the factors that might enable a student to do well and the factors that led to those assessments being the way they are. These questions were designed to elicit data that illuminates both the way the examiners conceptualised the assessments and the relationships between wider power structures and the GCSE English assessment.
All three sets of interviewees: students, teachers and examiners, were invited to talk about what is important about GCSE English and what they would change about GCSE English if they could, thus inviting them to be critical of any aspects of the assessment; this could have generated data for any of the three research questions, and indeed it did, but it was particularly helpful in shedding light on research question 2 and also on research question 3, which addresses the relationships between GCSE English and educational reproduction. All the interview questions asked were designed to generate data that enables me to address this question, in that in addressing research questions 1 and 2 I am contributing to my understanding of this question.

The interviews were transcribed and anonymised. The interview data then was organised using thematic coding which, while directly related to the research questions, also arose out of the data itself (see Appendix F for examples of extracts from coded interview data). The codes used to organise the data are both literal and interpretive (Mason 1996). The literal codes used include: exams; controlled assessment; reading; writing; speaking and listening; cheating; teaching; learning. The questions in the interview schedules were designed to lead to data about the separate skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening in order to reveal the details of the language practices that are valued in and through GCSE English. Including a code relating to ‘cheating’, however, was the result of unexpected data across several interviews that pertained to perceptions of teachers or schools cheating and therefore helped me to address research question 2. Other codes used were interpretive: teacher agency; student agency; examiner agency; policy impact; power; positioning; playing the game; the conceptualisation of English; the nature of the assessment; the public mind. These interpretive codes were driven by the data, but the data read through the lens of the research questions. Indexing enabled me to get a systematic overview of the data and to see patterns and connections as well as “surprises” (Mason, 1996, p. 152), which then enabled me to develop a structure for the analytical chapters 4, 5 and 6.
**Documentary analysis**

In order to address the research questions I also analysed the documents of the assessment. A full list of the texts analysed with reference codes appears in Appendix G; all texts are in the public domain and were obtained from the website of the relevant awarding organisation. A narrative overview of the details of the assessment is provided in Appendix A.

This particular version of the GCSE English assessment is not the only version available to schools and their students; however, it is the one currently taken by the majority of students in England. In addition, as the activities—including the examinations and subject specifications—of all awarding bodies are closely scrutinised by Ofqual and subject to the same subject criteria and regulation, one awarding body’s assessments can be taken as representative of those of all the awarding bodies.

The texts of assessment, when juxtaposed with interview data which reflects on those texts, are a source of data through which the regularities and rules of the game can be revealed, whether the codified rules evident through questions, texts and mark schemes or the regularities that reveal the dispositions of habitus of those that have influence over the assessment.

The texts scrutinised include the GCSE English exam papers (EP1, EP2, INS1, INS2) which were taken by the students interviewed and the related mark schemes (MS1, MS2). I analysed only the Higher Tier assessments as those were the assessments that the sample of students were entered for. I also scrutinised the tasks and mark schemes for the internally administered units of the GCSE, that is the speaking and listening unit (SLMS) and the written controlled assessment unit (ELCAT, ELCAMS, ECAT, ECAMS), as they contribute to the overall GCSE grade.
I use Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to engage with the texts and the assumptions made therein. This enables me to reveal the regularities and rules that are implicit. The essential difference between textual or language analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis is the focus within discourse analysis on the text not simply as an individual example of language but also as an element of social practice (Fairclough 1993, 2003; Luke 1995). That is to say that meaning is generated not just through the textual details of semantics, lexis and grammar, for example, but by the genre and discourse features of the text, that is, the relationships between that text and other texts. The meaning of the text is also broader than that: it is meaning generated by the place of the text within societal structures and practices.

This approach is particularly appropriate in facilitating the illumination of policy as text (Ball 1993) but also of policy as discourse (Ball, 1997, 2006) – in analysing the details of the texts I focus on the internal discourse features but also on the external discourse features, thus shedding light on how the internal features of the text operate alongside and within the external features to create and perpetuate power structures.

As Luke (1995) observes, much that goes by the name of critical discourse analysis has difficulty in linking what he terms “macro” (p. 10) analyses with more detailed textual analyses. That is to say, researchers focus on the large scale ideological aspects of discourse study, but don’t include detailed analysis of technical features of text. The challenge for educational researchers, says Luke (1995) is to:

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theorize and study the micropolitics of discourse, to examine actual patterns of language use with some degree of detail and explicitness but in ways that reconnect instances of local discourse with salient political, economic, and cultural formations. (p. 11)
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My approach is to do just that; to use detailed analysis of language features to uncover the power structures at play within the text, and to locate the text within the power structures of the educational and assessment systems.
One particular aspect of discourse analysis which is most useful here is pragmatics, which, simply put, is the study of ‘implicitness’ in texts. In particular, the area of pragmatics which deals with presuppositions (Levinson 1983) is of use. Fairclough (2003) sometimes refers to presuppositions as assumptions and identifies three types of assumptions:

- Existential assumptions: assumptions about what exists
- Propositional assumptions: assumptions about what is or can be or will be the case
- Value assumptions: assumptions about what is good or desirable (p.55)

Thus analysis of presuppositions can uncover what is assumed within a text with regard to value systems and ideologies, as well as what is assumed with regard to knowledge. I use this form of analysis to uncover what is assumed with regard to cultural resources.

Fairclough (2003) acknowledges however that in terms of social research discourse analysis is of limited use on its own:

> There is a need to develop approaches to text analysis through a **transdisciplinary** dialogue with perspectives on language and discourse within social theory and research in order to develop our capacity to analyse texts as elements in social processes. (p. 6)

That is to say that there needs to be some relationship between discourse analysis and other approaches to social research. With this in mind I use CDA to uncover assumptions about cultural resources thus setting up a ‘transdisciplinary dialogue’ between text analysis and Bourdieu’s thinking tools. I use CDA because it enables me to uncover the power relationships at play within the texts and to unpick the assumptions implicit within the texts. I then use an “integrative logic” (Mason 2006) to integrate my analysis of the textual data with my analysis of the interview data, reading each set of data through the other, then use the lens of Bourdieu’s thinking tools to reveal how the GCSE English assessment includes or excludes particular groups of students and thus “how and where policies increase inequality and impact unfairly on particular groups” (Ozga, 1999, p. 47).
Research integrity and ethics

Given that I interviewed students under 16 years of age I dealt with a number of gatekeepers in order to gain access to the students. Firstly, I sought access from the headteachers at the schools; secondly, I gained access to the targeted sample of pupils through the Head of English and/or English teacher; and finally I sought permission from the young peoples’ parents or guardians as well as informed assent from the young people themselves. Examples of the letter to the headteacher and to the parents, copies of the information sheets and of the consent forms for parents and assent forms for students are found in Appendix I.

I also adhered to the University of Manchester’s ethics procedures and received ethics approval from the School of Education (see Appendix J). As the interviews were individual, they took place in a public place, in order to ensure safeguarding. In order to protect anonymity and confidentiality I changed all names of participants and schools. All interviews were anonymised as soon as they were transcribed and, as is clear from the Participant Information Sheets (Appendix I) in order to maintain confidentiality recordings were erased as soon as the transcripts were completed. I took extra measures to protect the anonymity of the senior examiners, as explained above.

As an employee the awarding organisation that awards the exams that I am interrogating, I am conscious that my position in relation to the research may be perceived as ethically problematic. From an ethical perspective it is important for me to be transparent about my status, therefore the students and teachers who I interviewed were made aware of my relationship with an awarding organisation through the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix I).
This is also important in terms of my relationship with the senior examiners and moderators who I interviewed. I am, have been or will potentially be involved in their management. Thus, in order for them not to feel under pressure to cooperate with my research, I used an agent to approach them and to ask if they would consent to being interviewed; as is evident from an example of the email sent from the agent (Appendix I), there was no coercion for the examiners to participate.

Reliability, validity and positioning

Some researchers (e.g. Lincoln and Guba 1985, Robson 1993, Smith 1984) have argued that the concepts of reliability and validity are not relevant to qualitative research such as this, and are the preserve of quantitative research. Whilst I agree that the means by which reliability and validity are ensured in quantitative research are widely removed from the overall epistemologies of qualitative research, my positioning in relation to this research means that it is important to take steps to ensure reliability and validity. As an English teacher previously and now an employee of an awarding body, I am firstly a part of the power structures that I am seeking to investigate, and secondly I bring to the research my knowledge, experiences and common sense preconceptions. Thus, while not a problem, my positioning in relation to the research is problematic.

Cresswell and Miller’s (2000) perspective is helpful here:

What governs our perspective about narratives is our historical situatedness of inquiry, a situatedness based on social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender antecedents of the studied situations. The implication for validity of this perspective is that validity is called into question, its assumptions interrogated and challenged, and the researchers need to be reflexive and disclose what they bring to a narrative. (p. 126)

In relation to my positioning, it is ongoing reflexivity and disclosure that ensure validity and reliability. This links with Ozga’s (1999) argument that choice is inevitable in research and
so if other researchers are to understand the rationale for and the implications of any research project the researcher’s principle of choice (Howell 1990, Ozga 1994, 1999, Seddon 1996) must be as explicit as possible.

It is a challenge, however, for the researcher to determine how far she should go in unpicking those choices. Seddon (1996) argued that the researcher’s task is to excavate, from the taken-for-granted personal baggage of values, assumptions and disciplinary formation, the critical features of the ‘what’, ‘orientation’ and ‘perspective’ which shapes the choices and selections in their research. (p. 202)

This is important in terms of identifying what aspects of my positioning are important to explain here. The ‘what’ and the orientation to the ‘what’ is critical: as Ozga (1999, p. 47) argues, the very selection of a particular policy problem for research is indicative of a particular set of values. In the case of my research, my “gut feelings” (Ozga, 1999, p.53) about the English assessment, how it operates and the impacts of policy on practice led me to the research questions identified in Chapter 1. The selection of my research topic indicates a personal concern with social equity and the ways in which educational structures and processes can perpetuate or challenge social inequalities, as is clear from Chapter 2.

In terms of my ‘perspective’, this research project is qualitative in design and approach; that this research is about human beings and their interaction with a document which has been produced by other human beings determines the approach I am taking. As Bell (1999) suggests, qualitative researchers:

are more concerned to understand individuals’ perception of the world; they seek insight rather than statistical analysis. They doubt whether social ‘facts’ exist and question whether a ‘scientific’ approach can be used when dealing with human beings. (p 7)

Epistemologically my perspective is subjectivist; I am interested in how people experience and understand the social world and believe that those experiences and understandings
construct meaning. Ontologically I am positioning the research from the perspective that reality is constructed through experiences and thus that there are multiple truths. I am not setting out to find a ‘truth’ but to gain insight into a phenomenon in which people are active, subjective participants. This may seem at odds with the use of what some have seen as Bourdieu’s apparently deterministic approach (DiMaggio 1979, Jenkins 1982, King 2000, Sullivan 2002). However, this is to misread Bourdieu. The use of Bourdieu’s thinking tools enables me to read the data in a way allows for a continuing dialectic between subjectivity and objectivity, which simultaneously recognises individual agency and socially structured constraint. Through analysis of agents’ subjective experiences of the assessment I am able to reveal “regularities of practice” (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 66) which in turn expose the embodied taken-for-granted assumptions generated by social structures.

Summary

In summary, this is a case study of the relationship between the GCSE English assessment and educational reproduction. The case is distinctive for a number of reasons, but in particular because of the peculiar status of GCSE English and the relationship between the skills and knowledge assessed in GCSE English and the culturally constructed dispositions of habitus (Bourdieu 1985, 1986b, 1990a). The case study is located within the tradition of policy scholarship (Ball 1997, 2006, Grace 1995, 2000, Ozga 1990, 1999) because all aspects of the case, from the student experience to the societal meaning of the assessment, are matters of and for policy.

This research is conceptualised using the thinking tools of Bourdieu, most centrally, the interdependent tools of field, habitus and capital. What is gained by using Bourdieu is a theoretical framework which enables me to think through the data and its wider societal significance in a way which enables me to simultaneously recognise individual agency and
socially structured constraint. In addition, the use of his thinking tools helps me to position myself in relation to the study. As a practitioner/researcher I am located simultaneously as an outsider looking in at the game in play and as a player in the game. The use of Bourdieu’s thinking tools enables me to think outside the process to ensure that being of the game I don’t misrecognise the “true logic” (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 116) of the game in play.

The fieldwork includes semi-structured interviews with agents with different experiences of and relationships with the assessments in order to gain insight into both the lived experience of the GCSE English assessment and the structures that impact upon that experience. It also incorporates documentary analysis of the assessment instruments themselves which, alongside the interview data, sheds light on the regularities of practice of the assessment. The data was coded and analysed using themes which arose both from the research questions and from the data itself. The themes and patterns that I identified then led to the structure of the analysis chapters that follow this one.

In Chapter 4 I develop an understanding of the field in which the game is played out through analysing the interview data in order to locate the different players relationally within the field. I construct an understanding of the field through revealing the players’ conceptualisation of the game and their place within it and the extent to which they express a sense of agency. That there is a focus on agency is the result of both the concerns of the research questions and the themes that arose in analysis of the data. Within Chapter 4 I also illuminate the relationship between the game in play, the field of education and the wider field of power such as politics and economics that impact upon this. This is achieved through analysing the interview data to reveal the structural impacts upon the practice of the different agents, especially the teachers and examiners.

Having focused on how the wider power structures of the field are played out in the case under scrutiny I then focus, in Chapter 5, on an analysis of the relationships between the
practice of the GCSE English exam and the habitus and misrecognition of capital revealed by the players. The interview questions were designed to elicit responses about the reading texts on the examinations and in this chapter I analyse those responses alongside documentary analysis of the assessment texts in order to shed light on the culturally constructed knowledge and skills assessed in the examination. In Chapter 6 I focus on internal assessment and in particular on speaking and listening in order to shed light on whether it operates to position students in the same way as the external assessment. It is important to focus on internal assessment in the light of the findings of chapters 4 and 5 not least because the role of internal assessment within GCSE assessments, and specifically speaking and listening, is a site of policy conflict. The findings of Chapter 6 therefore shed light on the implications of the Coalition (2010 – 2015) government’s decision to move to exam-only assessment in GCSE English (DfE 2013).
Chapter 4: Social constraint, agency and power in the field

Introduction

In this chapter I use data from interviews with students, teachers and examiners to develop an understanding of two aspects of the field and the game in play therein: firstly, the relative positioning of the agents within the field and in relation to the game of GCSE English assessment, and secondly, the influence and impact of the fields of economics and politics on the field under scrutiny.

Bourdieu (1998) describes the field as follows:

That is what I mean when I describe the global social space as a field, that is, both as a field of forces, whose necessity is imposed on agents who are engaged in it, and as a field of struggles within which agents confront each other. (p. 32)

This draws attention to two key aspects of the field: firstly, that agents’ actions and dispositions cannot be seen as the result of individual decisions, but rather as the product of their position within the field and the structuring forces at play, which include both the structuring structures of habitus and the regulative principles of the field; and secondly, that the field is a competitive, hierarchical space.

In illuminating these two aspects of the field I conceptualise the field as both a field of forces and a field of struggle (Bourdieu 1998). The forces under scrutiny within this chapter are those necessities imposed upon agents within the field, both through the habitus that agents reveal and through the structuring forces at play, manifest through agents’ conceptualisation of the field, their place within it and the external forces impacting upon the field. The struggle examined here has two dimensions: firstly, it is a struggle for position within the hierarchy of the field (Bourdieu 1998), which, as the product of the relationships between habitus, capital and field, is manifest through practice (Bourdieu 1986b), and secondly, it is the struggle by agents “depending on the position they occupy in that space,
either to change or to preserve its boundaries and form" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 17). In this chapter I reveal who is seeking to preserve the boundaries and form of the field and thus the rules of the game played therein and who – if anyone – is seeking to change them.

I also start the process of revealing the positions and conditions of the agents within the space through examining the gaps and spaces between individuals and groups. Bourdieu (1985) emphasises the importance of thinking relationally in this way, in that it is only in revealing the relations between agents in a field that an understanding of the relative positions of power that constitute the field becomes clear. Bourdieu (1998) explains the importance of revealing the relative positions of the agents within a field thus:

> Apparent, directly visible beings, whether individuals or groups, exist and subsist in and through difference; that is, they occupy relative positions in a space of relations which, although invisible and always difficult to show empirically, is the most real reality ... and the real principle of the behaviour of individuals and groups. (p. 31)

Understanding how teachers, students and examiners conceptualise themselves in relation to the other players in the game – their sense of agency and the agency of the other players, and indeed if they have a sense of the other players – reveals the relative positions of the players in the game. This is also evident through the different ways in which players reveal a “feel for the game” (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 66), the nature of the illusio they reveal and the extent to which they understand and are committed to its doxa (Bourdieu 1996). This “difference” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 31) sheds light on the reality of the relative positions in the space of relations and thus reveals the power structures at play within the fields.

The first section of this chapter, which follows this introduction, briefly introduces the field, the game in play and the players therein, describing the role of each set of players and the investment, or illusio, each potentially has in relation to the game. The second section begins to reveal the power structures at play, and the relative positions of the players,
through an examination of the ways the examiners articulate their understanding of the structures and processes that lie behind design of GCSE English. The third section sheds light further on the relative positioning of the players of the game through an examination of the way that teachers are positioned; this is developed further in the fourth section which reveals the way the students are positioned. A summary concludes this chapter.

The field and the game in play

In this section I introduce the field and the game in play. The research is located in the field of education. However, the field of education is vast, and, as established in Chapter 3, this research focuses on a game within it – the game that is the GCSE assessment in English. Yet the high stakes nature of English educational assessment, established in Chapter 2, means that players from across the field of education have an investment in the game (whether directly playing or indirectly participating, through operating in a way which serves to give the GCSE in English its currency) and thus struggle for position therein. Furthermore, Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) suggest that the educational field is one which is particularly susceptible to being influenced by the political and economic fields; this is particularly the case with regards to GCSE English assessment, as discussed in Chapter 2, so the players with investment in this game extend beyond the field of education.

The players in the game reveal different types and levels of interest in the game – *illusio* – dependent on the relationships between the structuring structures of habitus and their positioning in relation to the objective structures of the game.

The players in the game include the students, who take the exams and receive the concomitant grades at the end of the process. For them, being a player in the game is not something they have any control over – firstly they are in compulsory education which
requires that they take whichever exams the schools they attend require, and secondly, they are preparing to enter the field of work, which requires the possession of exam grades, especially in English. Their interest in the game – *illusio* – is dependent on the extent to which the structuring structures revealed by habitus have given them a ‘feel for the game’ and investment in its outcomes. The students’ parents similarly have no control over whether or not they are players in the game: their children are taking the exams therefore they are in the game. The extent to which they participate actively however, the extent to which they *play*, is dependent on whether or not they have a ‘feel for the game,’ whether they understand its rules and the extent to which they are invested in its exchange values.

The teachers who teach English and their leaders in the schools in which they work are players in the game. In becoming teachers and headteachers they have opted to enter the field of education, and in doing so have entered the assessment game – they have no option other than to play; for a school not to play would lead to inevitable intervention by Ofsted and the DfE. Teachers’ professional identities, practices and status depend on the *illusio*: their participation in and investment in the game regulates their standing within the game, for example, through performance management procedures and the use of performance-related pay. Teachers and school leaders might have some choice in how they play the game – there is a limited choice of exams and awarding organisations – but in one form or another they must play.

The examiners who set the exams have chosen to play the game – they have applied for jobs with awarding organisations and been appointed to their roles. Their position in the game is wholly dependent on their interest, or *illusio*. Yet the way in which they play the game is circumscribed by the regulations in which they operate: the subject criteria and the regulations (the explicit, codified rules of the game, rather than its regularities (Bourdieu
handed down from the DfE and regulated by Ofqual, and the processes introduced by the awarding organisations.

And these three players, the DfE (and therefore the government of the day), Ofqual and the awarding organisations are themselves players in the game. The awarding organisations and Ofqual must play – it is their raison d’être. The extent to which the government and the DfE play – the extent to which they reform and regulate the field and the games played therein – varies, however, and has varied across time. In 1976 James Callaghan’s Ruskin College speech (Callaghan 1976) was hugely controversial because of its suggestion that the political field ought to play a greater role in the educational field, but now the Secretary of State for Education is able to drive wholesale curriculum and assessment reform and there is a general acceptance that this is the appropriate role of government.

All of these players are positioned and take relative positions within the field according to their intrinsic properties or condition and their relational properties or position (Bourdieu 1985). They are located within a hierarchy of exchange relationships. Within the following sections I look at each group of players’ perceptions of the field and the game played therein, which begins the process of understanding their relational properties. I begin by examining the examiners’ positioning, as within the ‘teams’ of players that I have interviewed they hold the most instrumental power. In revealing how they articulate the positions of power I also discuss the positioning of the government in relation to the game.

**The examiner-players**

In this section I examine the ways the senior examiners conceptualise their own position through revealing how they locate themselves in relation to the power structures within
and without the field. Grenfell and James (2004) write about how thinking relationally in educational research can contribute to an understanding of the mutual interdependence of social constraint and individual agency. In this section I shed light on this mutual interdependence through analysis of the ways the examiners articulate their understanding of and their role within the processes and structures that have led to the assessments being the way they are. This leads to an awareness of relationships between the field of education, and the game of GCSE English assessment at play therein, and the wider social fields of economics and politics, the impacts of which I also begin to explore in this section.

The senior examiners have differing levels of awareness as well as varying degrees of a sense of agency with regards to the processes and structures that have led to the GCSE English assessment being the way it is. When senior examiner Liz is asked about what has influenced the assessment she explicitly emphasises her own lack of agency on two occasions:

**VRJ** Where do assessment objectives come from? Where are they born?

**LIZ** They come from the Key Stage 4 National Curriculum requirements. They come from QCA. Because the same assessment objectives are the rules, whichever board you do you've got the same assessment objectives, so they are centralised.

**VRJ** Do you have an insight into who does that?

**LIZ** No, I've no idea. They land from a planet somewhere. (EX/L p. 4)

Liz goes on to say:

**VRJ** Why is the paper the way it is, what factors have led to it being, to have this structure, this style, this content? And I'm also going to ask in a minute about how you go about setting a paper, so it's not thinking about an individual year's paper, it's thinking about the whole, the structure...

**LIZ** I was handed a specimen, I had no input in development at all, so I was given a specimen to work with and I was given a specimen mark scheme.

**VRJ** What's your understanding about where those specimens came from?

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23 QCA (The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) no longer exists. Its regulatory powers were transferred to Ofqual (the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation), which was established in 2008.
None whatsoever, I have no understanding as to where they came from. (EX/L p. 2)

Liz’s expression emphasises her lack of a sense of agency and power. In describing the assessment objectives as landing “from a planet somewhere” it is clear the extent to which she feels divorced from the processes and power structures that have led to the English assessment assessing the skills that it does, even though she is a senior examiner. Similarly, her passive location in the sentences about where the details of the assessment came from – “I was handed” “I was given” – emphasises not only her own lack of agency, but an apparent lack of understanding or awareness of where the power lies within the field. The tone of her language and the structure of her sentences – for example, the hyperbole of “They land from a planet somewhere” and the repetition of “I was given a specimen” – suggests an amount of frustration with the lack of power she feels she has.

Senior examiner Mike is clearer about where the details of the assessment came from:

While we are governed by quangos like QCA and Ofqual who have this apparently big umbrella power, what they actually do specifically is often given to individuals on a consultancy basis who they know have worked for them in the past and are safe pairs of hands and those people can have a disproportionate influence on the curriculum. And I know who wrote (and I won’t name but I know who wrote) the criteria, I don’t think that he particularly had a very, the strongest of grasps of spoken language and I think spoken language is bedevilled by always being compared to writing. (EX/M p. 3)

This is an illuminating picture of the power structures. As well as locating the power in the governmental power structures such as QCA and Ofqual, Mike adds an additional level of structural power when he suggests that the details of the criteria are left to consultants – individuals who then have direct impact on the curriculum.\(^{24}\) In this case Mike seems to be implying that the particular qualities of the individual in question has had a measurable detrimental impact on the ways in which spoken language is conceptualised and constructed within the curriculum. Bourdieu (1984) notes that:

\(^{24}\) It would be illuminating to locate these individuals and interview them in order to understand further the processes of curriculum construction and the location of the different players within the field. This is unfortunately outside the scope of this research project however.
The most indeterminate sectors of the social structure offer the most fertile ground for the operations which, by transforming old positions or ‘creating’ new ones ex nihilo, aim to produce areas of specialist expertise, particularly in the field of ‘consultancy’, the performance of which requires no more than a rationalized form of competence in a class culture. (p. 153)

In relation to what Mike says about consultants, what Bourdieu says here suggests that the position of consultant is an arbitrary one created by necessity in an evolving and therefore indeterminate sector of the social structure. This is reinforced by what Mike says about the qualification for becoming a consultant being nothing more than being perceived to be a “safe pair of hands” (EX/M p. 3).

In terms of understanding the spaces between the players, it is clear that there are individuals who have a direct impact on the regulative principles of the game of the assessment of English, and hence on the teaching and learning of English nationally, who hold a significant position in the field, and yet are apparently anonymous. Mike is aware of their identity, because of his biography and his subsequent location within the field, but Liz doesn’t know who they are or even appear to have an explicit awareness of their existence, so this knowledge isn’t freely available even to the players within the field who have some identifiable level of power.

All the examiners express an awareness of their location within a hierarchy within the educational field and to a varying degree, a sense of a lack of agency. Although the examiners appear to hold power and indeed within the field of education or at least the game of GCSE English assessment they (to some extent at least) do, in relation to the wider social space and the political field they conceive of themselves as powerless – as having no voice. This is evident when senior examiner Steve speaks about the reasons why the exam paper is the way it is:

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Well it’s not an evolutionary process, it’s a function of government thinking and policy; it’s a function of criteria. I mean the criteria for English and the assessment objects for English are not mysterious and they’re not particularly inventive either. I mean they’re obvious, you know, I mean the components of assessing them, the components of English and reading, writing, speaking and listening, and within that the sub-components of reading and writing and being able to do things a certain way, so the evolution of this examination, although from my point of view, as someone who writes it, I would have drawn upon things that I’d done previously as a principal examiner and writer of previous examinations, which I wouldn’t do again because that didn’t work, for example, or would do again because it did work, essentially the construct of any English examination which is a function of the constraints put upon the principal examiners and the exam boards by criteria set down by the quango and the regulator. (EX/S p.2)

The structure of this narrative is interesting. Within this narrative Steve has some sense of agency – he asserts himself as “someone who writes it” and identifies his own status, “as a principal examiner and writer of previous examinations”. But structurally within the narrative his power is bookended by other powers: he begins with “it’s a function of government thinking and policy” and ends with “a function of the constraints put upon the principal examiners and the exam boards by the criteria set down by the quango and the regulator”. He locates himself within the power structures of the field but is aware that his power is limited by the wider structures of government. It is clear that Steve has a limited sense of his own agency, or indeed, of the autonomy of the field of education or at least the game of GCSE English assessment: education occupies a dominated position within the larger social space.

Steve rationalises his own lack of agency through identifying the decisions that are made about English by other, more powerful agents, as common sense, as doxa: “I mean the criteria for English and the assessment objectives for English are not mysterious and they’re not particularly inventive either. I mean, they’re obvious, you know”. (EX/S p. 2) Steve reveals a habitus here structured through his biography: his route to his current position of power and his embedded position within the field of education and game of GCSE English assessment. This reflects Bourdieu’s (1977) suggestion that the structuring structures of habitus mean that players take for granted shared practices:
One of the fundamental effects of the orchestration of habitus is the production of a commonsense world endowed with the objectivity secured by consensus on the meaning (sens) of practices and the world, in other words that each of them receives from the expression, individual and collective (in festivals, for example), improvised or programmed (commonplaces, sayings), of similar or identical experiences. The homogeneity of habitus is what – within the limits of the group of agents (possessing the schemes (of production and interpretation) implied in their production – causes practices and works to be immediately intelligible, and hence taken for granted. (p. 80)

This seems to be the case here, at least to a degree. Steve sees the assessment objectives for English, the way it is assessed as “obvious” – he shares the practices of the other powerful agents in the field (the consultants, QCA, Ofqual) because of a homogeneity of habitus and therefore a shared perception of the qualities that should be consecrated through the assessment. The processes of assessment operate to consecrate the shared cultural values and practices of the powerful agents and thus contribute to a perpetuation of social differentiation and yet this is not consciously acknowledged – an example of misrecognition. Because of his stake in the game, the illusio revealed through his sense of the rules as commonsense, Steve would be unlikely to view these criteria as anything other than taken for granted: his position depends on it. There is however, some hint of dissent when Steve says, “they’re not particularly inventive” (EX/S p. 2), which is perhaps a reflection of some awareness of the greater power structures and his place within them and of his struggle for position (Bourdieu 1998) within the field. As described by Steve, agency is both explicitly constrained by the powerful external structures that determined the rules of the game, and implicitly constrained through the internal dispositions that reveal habitus, themselves structured through the field and the game. There is a continuing dialectic between agency and socially structured constraint.

It is evident through the ways in which the senior examiners speak about the impact of political structures upon assessment practices within English that the field of education is subject to control by the wider political field as Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) indicated. Thomson (2005) suggests that the relative autonomy of the educational field has been
ruptured by a synchrony of crises in the economic, political and educational fields. She argues that globalisation has led to crises of the economic and political fields and that these crises have driven and legitimised the ways in which agents in the dominant fields have breached the borders of dominated fields, in this case education (p. 751). 26 Both senior examiners David and Mike reflect this in the ways they talk about the wider influences on the curriculum. David’s discourse about the purposes of GCSE English reflects an awareness of some of the factors that apparently motivate curriculum reform and development:

Because if you look at it to try to, say, if you take the CBI line, the kind of Government line about we’re slipping down the international league table, which are all about industry and business, productivity, and that view of literacy, I think arguably you could say that there’s a lot of what happens in GCSE English at the moment that somebody might say I’m not too sure of the relevance of this. (EX/D p. 10)

Although David’s perspective is that in its current inception GCSE English might not be perceived as meeting the needs of the political and economic fields, the fact that he is articulating those perceived needs in itself reflects the dominance of the political and economic fields and their importance within the educational fields, as identified by Thomson (2005). Mike also refers to the economic influences on the curriculum:

always being fairly siren voices and over-listened to because they don’t really know what they’re talking about, business, I mean Terry Leahy of Tesco for example, whatever you do he’s going to say kids can’t communicate, can’t do it, can’t do it. (EX/M p. 6)

There is an awareness here of the influence of these fields on the educational field, a sense that voices from the business world are ‘over-listened to’, but more particularly it is evident that there is something distinctive about the subject of English that makes it of interest and importance within the wider social space. As discussed in chapters 2 and 3, GCSE English is

26 For further examples of the ways in which globalisation has driven the political field’s dominance of the education field it would be worth examining the public discourse around the PISA test and ways in which Britain’s performance in the PISA tests is used by, for example, Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove to justify curriculum and assessment changes (DfE, 2013). See also Morris (2012) for an illuminating analysis of the 2010 schools white paper and the quest to achieve a ‘world class’ education system.
a particular matter of policy. There is a concern at governmental level with the selective tradition that counts as literacy (Luke 2003) as well as a common-sense belief that increased socially-approved literacy is good for society (Cook-Gumperz 1986, Carrington and Luke 1997).

The ways the examiners talk about the impact of the political structures on the curriculum and assessments would indicate that the political field has breached the field of education, and there is an awareness on the part of the examiners of the voices from the field of business and the influence those voices have that suggests that the field of economics has similarly breached the field. Senior examiner Mike sheds light on the impact of this breach within the educational field:

the regiment of people who are called, they used to be advisers who were sort of, you might say sort of drippy people who were trying to make the world better, and they’ve been replaced by a sort of army of militants who are assessment focused: ‘This is how you...’ And the drive for better results I’m convinced is about institutions, whether they be local authorities, whether they be academy groups, whether they be single schools, and the notion that they’re interested in kids to me is a smoke-screen. They’re interested in institutional continuity – their own survival. (EX/M p. 5)

The way that Mike talks about what he perceives to be a clear change in the educational field seems to illustrate the effects of the breach of the educational field by the dominant fields in two ways: firstly, he raises the issue of how the neo-liberalisation of the educational landscape and the growth in the visibility of accountability measures, both the results of explicit and ongoing policy decisions, have led to an overwhelming focus on assessments within the educational field (which are themselves a tool by which the neo-liberalisation of education is effected). Secondly he appears to be saying that the result of this breach is to increase the struggle within the education field itself, a struggle emphasised by Mike’s use of the language of war: “regiment”, “army”, “militants”. The focus on assessments has contributed to a field in which agents are placed in the position of struggling for their place in the hierarchy instead of focusing on education. It is evident
from what Mike is saying that the struggle within the field is for position – there is no sense of a struggle to change the boundaries and form of the field from within (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) even though there is recognition of the reality of the field by agents such as Mike.

In this section I have started to reveal the relative positions in the space of relations (Bourdieu 1998) that constitutes the game of GCSE English assessment. The examiners’ conceptualisations of the field and the game in play have revealed an ongoing interplay between structure and agency. I have also revealed the breach of the field by the dominant social fields of politics and economics and started to discuss the ways in which the examiners position themselves, and others, within the field. In the section that follows, I further reveal these relative positions by examining the positioning of the teachers within the game.

The teacher-players

In this section I discuss the positioning of the teachers within the field in order to further reveal the relational properties of the players in the game. I examine the ways that the examiners position the teachers, as well as the ways they position themselves and reveal a sense of agency, or otherwise.

The discourse that the examiners use to describe the teachers suggests that they view themselves as separate from them, as other: they define themselves by their “difference” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 31). Liz, for example, even though she is a practising teacher as well as a senior examiner, makes it clear that she believes that there is and should be a clear division between the two groups:
I think that a big mistake (this sounds terrible) but a big mistake is asking teachers what they want. I think that was the fault with new spec. It was developed in consultation with teachers and actually, even speaking as one, I don’t think as teachers we have the time or the imagination or the creative space left in our head to know what we want. What we want is what’s in the stock room and what’s downloadable and what’s going to get us through the term, and there is no creativity in there. If you think back to the old spec, say for example the poetry from other cultures, and everybody was like, ‘ooh what’s this? I don’t know anything about Nigerian poets.’ It’s that absolute blind panic. And in a multi-cultural society how interesting were those poets to teach? (EX/L p. 15)

While Liz uses “we” to identify herself with teachers and thus give herself an authoritative voice with regards to their experiences, her characterisation of teachers, although it shows sympathy with their experiences, also makes it clear that, to an extent, she feels that as a senior examiner she is in a position to make decisions on their behalf. She appears keen to remove even the little agency teachers have in terms of power over the game, “a big mistake is asking teachers what they want”. She is clear that she thinks that the experience of being a teacher in the current dominated context leads to a situation that means that teachers are lacking in creativity and imagination, qualities that, by implication, she values and believes that she and her senior colleagues are in a position to offer. The voice of panic that she gives to teachers, “ooh what’s this?”, is reflective of the embattled position within the field in which she locates them.

The senior examiners’ discourse around teachers’ controlled assessment marking is interesting; the suggestion that changes in the field have led to inevitable cheating is made in a number of instances. Steve talks about what he first terms ‘errant marking’ and then clarifies that he means ‘cheating’:

But errant marking in controlled assessment is a different kind of errancy, it’s an errancy which has got other things happening with it, like target grade analysis, like pressure from senior management to inflate marks, like statistical, and we know statistically that there are great gaps, there’s bunching which is a polite way of saying cheating, there’s all kind of odd things going on with the controlled assessment, which are quite natural and completely unable to be policed or changed really by the exam board. (EX/S p. 11)
And Liz suggests that the removal of internal assessment is desirable because of how far it is open to abuse:

I would definitely get rid of controlled assessment, because I do think it's a vehicle for widespread cheating. Absolutely widespread cheating. I don't think that cheating is about students and students’ well-being, I think that cheating is about places in league tables of schools and I think that that used to be on coursework correction of marks, now it's on controlled assessment. It's creative accountancy and creative annotation and I think it does candidates a really deep disservice and means that they end up on courses that they absolutely can't cope with and it just passes the buck in terms of how actually de-skilled they are. (EX/L p. 14)

It is evident here that both Liz and Steve firstly believe strongly firstly that cheating is happening, that teachers are deliberately inflating the marks of students on the controlled assessment, and secondly, cheating is an inevitable product of an educational field in which performance tables play such an important role. Steve identifies “pressure from senior management” (thus identifying another set of players in the field who exercise power over teachers but who are also dominated themselves) and Liz identifies “places in league tables” as the driving factor in teachers’ actions. It is notable that Steve says that the things that are happening with regards to controlled assessment, that is the mark inflation, “are quite natural”. This illustrates the ongoing interplay between structure and agency: teachers’ actions, as described by the examiners, are the result of both external and internal structuring structures.

This returns us to the ways in which the educational field is dominated by the fields of economics and politics. It is the breach of the field – the imposition of accountability measures and the ensuing imposed neo-liberalisation of education, creating markets and privatising schools through, for example, the enforced academies programme – that has led directly to the practices described above. Senior examiner Peter describes what he sees as a discernible change in the role of teachers with regards to internal assessment:

I believe very strongly in a hundred per cent coursework, where the teacher’s professional responsibility was to make that assessment correct. We’ve now moved from that and in effect the teacher’s professional responsibility is to get the
best possible result by playing the examination game and marking positively. (EX/P p. 11)

Peter is talking about the time when in English the GCSE was assessed by 100% coursework, a time which pre-dates the introduction of the current schools’ accountability measures. He notes that the teacher’s priority in marking has changed from ensuring that the students got the mark that reflected their achievement to ensuring that students get the best marks they can get away with awarding. It is interesting that he describes this as the teacher’s “professional responsibility”; this language is surely controversial. To equate a practice that is at the very least ethically questionable with “professional responsibility” is surprising, but is perhaps symptomatic of the same level of acceptance of the doxa of performance tables and their effects as Steve’s description of those practices as “quite natural”. The way that the senior examiners position teachers emphasises their dominated position: in order for teachers to play the game, they have to do so in a way which is tantamount to ‘cheating’. This draws attention to the impact of the breach of the field on the professional practices and identity of teachers.

The ways the teachers talk about teaching and about marking doesn’t reflect this discourse around cheating or inflating marks, but it does reflect to some extent a doxa within the field that education is focused upon assessment. The way that Janet, Head of English at Greenfield High School, talks about teaching her students to complete a controlled assessment task is reflective of this focus:

The quality of preparation is crucial. You know, you absolutely have to prepare them. I very much prepared my group to hit a band 4. Everything we’ve done has been to hit a band 4 and then they’ve sat and done a planning sheet with key phrases to help them hit band 4. They’ve gone in, they’ve done it ... we’ve had to change questions that clearly some questions do not lend themselves to band 5, you know we had a lot of debate about what question we would set for Of Mice and Men to ensure it would allow them to hit band 4 and 5 and I think if the staff aren’t conscious of that they’re really setting themselves up to fail ... Everybody’s – the quality of teaching and learning has improved within the department because of Controlled Assessments, because they know that we’ll do it to the letter and it’ll be very clear at the output if their input wasn’t good enough. (GF/TCH p. 8)
There are several striking features of this extract. Firstly, the use of the words “preparation” and “prepare” at the outset is interesting. Preparation is being used as a synonym for teaching and yet it has such different connotations. It seems less about learning and much more about education as a production line, an analogy that is supported by Janet’s reference to “output” and “input” later on. The focus on the mark bands is also striking; the way Janet focuses on getting children to “hit” a “band 4” and giving them key phrases to make sure that they do, rather than focusing on the teaching of skills or knowledge seems to reflect an acceptance of a particular conceptualisation of teaching – an acceptance that teaching is preparation for assessment. The way that Janet talks about setting the questions is also interesting: designing questions to make sure the student responds at a particular mark band again makes the focus wholly about assessment. What is notable is the obvious pressure on teachers – rather than students – to succeed. When Janet says, “if the staff aren’t conscious of that they’re really setting themselves up to fail,” it reflects a culture in which teachers are wholly accountable for their students’ results; a lack of achievement on the part of a student is a failure on the teacher’s part. Janet’s position in school, her job and her income all depend on her students’ success – her practice reflects the importance of the game, her interest and investment in it, the illusio that means that she appears to entirely accept the doxa that assessment is the purpose of education.

The way that Sandra, Head of Key Stage 4 English at Riverside school, talks about the exam and how it functions as an assessment is interesting in terms of revealing her perception of the game in play and her position within it.

**SANDRA** But I think because I’m Key Stage 4 Coordinator and I understand the exam and I mark the Lit exam, that I’m a lot better at teaching it, even though my knowledge of English isn’t particularly, well it’s not very good at all really compared to a lot of people, but I think sometimes students in my class do a bit better just because I know what the exam is, so therefore it’s not really a test of English as
much as a test of how well you can sit an exam. And that’s what, you know I wasn’t being, I’m not blowing my own trumpet about the teaching, I’m just saying about….

VRJ No I do understand, I understand.

SANDRA I’m just saying cos I do a lot more stuff on it.

VRJ Yeah, yeah. It’s an interesting... Do you think there are any more effective ways of assessing English?

SANDRA Yeah, I don’t know. I was just going to say that I think, this is more a political thing though, that if you make it a true test of English then students would find it harder and exam boards wouldn’t do it because it would be too difficult for – you want, schools want it to be predictable, schools wouldn’t use an exam board if it was a true test of English, they want to know how to get students through it. (RS/TCH p. 13)

There are several things of note here. Within her first speech Sandra expresses a belief that she has status in the field because she is an assistant examiner on the GCSE English Literature exam. She identifies herself as a better teacher, explicitly not because she believes she has a better subject knowledge, but because marking the exam has given her insight into the way the questions function. In terms of her positioning, it is apparent here that in Sandra’s conceptualisation of the game a quality which is misrecognised as capital and hence determines position depends upon enabling students to access exam results through an understanding of the assessment systems. What is being misrecognised as capital in terms of the positioning of teachers is being determined by those outside the game – by the wider political field that decides the means by which schools and teachers are measured.

Within her final speech Sandra’s discourse reflects the impact of the political and economic fields on the game of GCSE English assessment on several levels. Firstly, in suggesting that schools wouldn’t choose a harder exam even if it were a truer test of English, she is reflecting a system that values results above education because of the driving factor of the

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27 An assistant examiner is a teacher who is temporarily employed by an awarding body during an exam series to mark the exams.
performance tables. Secondly, in suggesting that an exam board wouldn’t offer such an exam because schools wouldn’t choose for their students to take it she identifies – and problematises – the competitive nature of the exams market. She perceives that the combination of the competitive nature of the market and the pressures of accountability measures is driving a system whereby exams are valued for their predictability, which makes them easier (and therefore more attractive to schools). She recognises that it is the breach in the field of education that has led to this situation: “this is more a political thing though”. Thus within Sandra’s discourse here the effects of the political and economic fields on the field of education are made plain, and the result seems to have led to a less valid approach to English education.

Teachers’ sense of agency with regards to the game is varied. Janet, Head of English at Greenfield, is able to engage with the question of how the assessment might be different in terms of how her students’ outcomes would be improved:

**VRJ**  How would you change English if you could? The assessment of it.

**JANET**  I’d probably make the exam units a bigger chunk cos that’s what we do really well in. But to be honest I think it’s more clear and fair than it’s ever been if people are abiding by the rules on Controlled Assessment.

**VRJ**  Yeah.

**JANET**  But it doesn’t help that student who’s a, well we’ll see what they do on the exam. I’m a great believer that, what they do on that Unit 1 is real, what they should get grade-wise and then we have to ensure that we’re giving them the opportunities to get there. The only sticking point with a few is that they’ve this year they’ve Aced the exam, they’ve got A*, but their Speaking and Listening has been a B so they’ve not come out with an A* and, but that’s the case of the child who Speaking and Listening they don’t like and I’m not sure whether I would have Speaking and Listening 20% maybe. I’d rather have it maybe as just a 10% part because it doesn’t up students’ grades. In our case it lowers them. (GF/TCH p. 12)

She doesn’t engage in depth with the details of the assessments but instead focuses on the percentage weightings of the different units and how those weightings impact upon her
students. Her suggestions for change are numerical shifts that she believes would improve her particular students’ chances.

Sandra, Head of Key Stage 4 English at Riverside High School, expresses some sense of unease about the nature of the assessment but is limited in her ability to engage with questions about how the assessment of English might be different:

VRJ  Do you think it does its job as a qualification?

SANDRA  Yeah, generally. I have criticisms of it but I’m just trying to think now what they would be really, I can’t think. I think it’s better than the old spec and I think it does do its job, but again I think it’s a lot easier to teach to less able pupils in certain settings than it is in others and I think that’s probably a bit unfair but I don’t know if there’s any way of changing that really. (RS/TCH p. 12)

Sandra has criticisms of the assessment but is unable to fully articulate them and plays them down. She identifies something potentially significant around unfairness but doesn’t pursue it or develop her ideas. Her conclusion, “I don’t know if there’s any way of changing that really,” reflects a reluctant acceptance of how things are, of the *doxa*. The structuring forces of the game have positioned her so that although she recognises that something isn’t right, either she is dominated to the extent that she doesn’t have the sense of agency to fully explore what that is, or her investment in the game, *illusio*, as teacher and examiner, means that she doesn’t dare.

Sonia, Key Stage 4 coordinator at Redbrick School, when asked a similar question, is more able to speak about what a more valid assessment of English might look like:

SONIA  For me it’s got to link to the real world. English has got to... Young people need to see the relevance of English for the rest of their lives. So I’m not saying it’s got to be English in the work place, I don’t mean in that sense, but in one sense how English allows you to communicate and understand how others communicate, and how language can influence people and manipulate people, both in a good and a bad way, but also to understand how literature is, how it shapes human nature and how it reflects human nature and to link that to media as well. I don’t think you can look at modern language without looking at how media shows that. So both print
media and audio-visual as well, I would have that as a big strand within the course too. (RB/TCH p. 14)

It is interesting that whereas Janet has overall responsibility for English within her school, Sandra and Sonia do not: they are only responsible for Key Stage 4. Sandra and Sonia are, to differing degrees, able to step outside the lived day-to-day of their jobs and consider some of the flaws within the assessment and within the system which has produced it, whereas Janet seems entirely, and happily, accepting of the doxa. Janet’s position and positioning within the game means that she appears unable to conceive of the possibility of real change: her standing, status and professional progression depends on an investment, illusio, in the game.

Within this section I have further revealed the relative positions and positioning of the players of the game. In shedding light on the ways in which examiners position teachers and the ways in which teachers conceptualise GCSE English assessment, and their place within it, I have gone some way to illuminating the structuring forces of the game and the complexity of the interplay between structure and agency. I have also further exposed the impacts of the breach of the field by the political field. In the section that follows, I further reveal the relative positions of the players in the game, and thus the regulative principles by which the game is played, by examining the positioning of the students within the game.

The student-players

In order to understand the structuring forces at play in the game it is vital to examine the ways in which the students are positioned both by themselves and the other players of the game, as I do in this section.
If the teachers are located in a position of relative powerlessness, the ways in which the examiners speak about them does at least suggest that they see them as having some agency, albeit within crippling social constraints. The discourse the examiners use to describe the students, however, seems to deny them that sense of agency, locating them as victims within the system. When Liz describes the cheating of teachers she firmly locates the students in the position of passive victims:

It’s creative accountancy and creative annotation and I think it does candidates a really deep disservice and means that they end up on courses that they absolutely can’t cope with and it just passes the buck in terms of how actually de-skilled they are. (EX/L p. 14)

What she is describing is students passing their GCSE courses and therefore being able to move on to A-level courses, a course of action that could be viewed through a positive lens as a successful one, and yet, she perceives them as victims who “end up” on courses, a phrase which absolutely denies them any agency. David also locates students as victims:

one of things that has saddened me about what's happened to GCSE English and what happens to kids in Key Stage 4, is that this relentless pursuit of the Grade C because of league tables and people’s jobs and kids’ chances, what that has done, is that has led to an approach to taking exams and to taking units that is nothing whatsoever to do with education and is all about kind of trying to count beans and to try to get things, and so things are squashed and they’re repeated and they’re repeated in ways that I just can’t, as an educator, I just can’t approve of. (EX/D p. 20)

While there is an acknowledgement here that getting a grade C in GCSE English is partly at least about “kids’ chances”, this is bound up with the other factors that drive that need for a grade – “league tables and people’s jobs”. David acknowledges that to an extent the students are a means to an end. This chimes with Janet’s focus on the staff “setting themselves up to fail” (GF/TCH p. 8) – that students’ performance at GCSE is more about the success of the school and the teacher than it is about the individual student. Again this reveals the extent to which the political field has breached the field of education and the
impact of that breach on the game in play and the players within it: students’ achievement is reduced to counting beans.

In terms of how the students themselves position themselves within the field it is interesting to examine to what extent they exhibit a sense of agency around English and its assessment. The students, when interviewed, were very limited in their ability to engage with questions about the nature of the assessments in English and with the purposes of English assessments. For example, the way that Zara, a student at Riverside school who is predicted a B in GCSE English, is able to speak about the assessment of the subject is not untypical of the students interviewed.

VRJ What do you think an English GCSE should be testing? What should it be setting out to do?

ZARA What it does now.

VRJ What does it do now?

ZARA Writing and reading. It should also maybe, it does all the things I think it should do, it has essays and I think that’s the main thing, exams yeah. (RS/Z p. 8)

Where students are able to suggest changes or alterations to the way things are done, the focus is on the length of time of the exam, a concrete factor which impacts upon them directly, or amendments to the questions as they currently appear on the exam paper. Sam, a student at Greenfield school, is predicted a grade C and Farzana, from Riverside school, is predicted an A* (and is extremely eloquent elsewhere in the interview about subject matter she is confident in exploring, such as her literature blog), yet there is striking similarity in the lack of depth in their responses when asked about how the assessment might change:

VRJ OK. If you could change this exam, or any of the things that you do in English when you’re being tested, is there any way that you can think that they would be better? Any changes that you would make?
SRAM  What do you mean?

VRJ  Like, if someone said to you, right design an exam for English, is there anything you would change?

SRAM  No. Probably the last question, it’s too long.

VRJ  So the writing question would be better a bit shorter.

SRAM  Mm, and shorten the time of the exam cos you’re sat in there for like two and a half hours and it’s a bit of stress and you get bored just sitting there. (GF/S p. 10)

And Farzana says:

VRJ  If you could change the way English is assessed is there anything that you’d do differently?

FARZANA  I’d rather do like, you know like Question 5 and 6, I’d just have just one big question 5 and 6 so I’d just write a big newspaper article and something like that.

VRJ  So it’s the writing...

FARZANA  Yeah, I like the writing. (RS/F p. 9)

This lack of engagement with questions about the nature of what they are participating in may simply be a function of their relatively young age and the pressure of an interview context. Yet these students are eloquent elsewhere when talking about subjects in fields where they are empowered, such as their family, their future or their wider interests. Their lack of ability to engage with questions around English and its assessment is likely to be a function of the way they are positioned by the structuring forces at play in the game.

The way that the students position themselves in relation to their teachers again suggests that they have little sense of agency within the field: for them, the power is with the teacher. For example, when asked a question about what they do in English lessons students have a tendency to shift the focus from themselves to the teacher – the player with agency in their part of the field:

VRJ  So, was that something that was familiar to you as a kind of writing? Had you seen anything like that before?
ANDREW Yea, Miss like has took like part of a novel before and shown us. We had to highlight the effects and differences. (GF/A p. 8)

And Kath says:

VRJ What sorts of things do you do in English lessons?

KATH Erm, well Miss aims us at a question and we’ve got to like zoom into it, like we did *Of Mice and Men*, we’re doing it now, and to get a B you’ve got to zoom into a word and then suggest why he uses that and I don’t know how to get, I don’t know. (GF/K p. 6)

Here Kath and Andrew, both students from Greenfield school, immediately shift the focus from themselves to the teacher – what they do in lessons is what “Miss” tells them to. They’ve “got to” do what their teacher instructs them to. The language Kath uses to describe the activity seems to echo the teacher’s discourse: “to get a B you’ve got to zoom into a word”. The repetition of the word “zoom” suggests that this is a deliberate technique the teacher has taught the class; the focus on “to get a B” makes it evident that the classroom discourse is continually around grades and how to attain them. Zooming into a word isn’t described here in terms of the skills that presumably it is developing – of analysis and close reading – it is instead described as a means of getting a target grade.

In this section I have revealed the ways in which students are positioned. It is evident that of the players in the game the students are positioned both by themselves and by others as the most dominated. This is not surprising – they are the players who are the passive recipients of others’ actions – they are taught and they are assessed. They have no instrumental power and no real choice as to whether or not to be a player in the game. The limitations of their power and the social effects of that are examined further in subsequent chapters.
Summary

In this chapter I have examined the relative positions in the “space of relations” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 31) that constitutes the game of GCSE English assessment and in doing so have shed light on the structuring forces at play.

Bourdieu (1985) makes it clear that agents’ perceptions of the field, or players’ perceptions of the game and of themselves and the other players, reveals the truth of the structures that players have internalised that then determine the extent to which they have a sense of agency or of acceptance:

The categories of perception of the social world are, as regards their most essential features, the product of the internalization, the incorporation, of the objective structures of social space. Consequently, they incline agents to accept the social world as it is, to take it for granted, rather than to rebel against it, to counterpose to it different, even antagonistic, possibles. The sense of one’s place, as a sense of what one can or cannot “permit oneself,” implies a tacit acceptance of one’s place, a sense of limits (“that’s not for the likes of us,” etc.), or, which amounts to the same thing, a sense of distances to be marked and kept, respected or expected. And it does so all the more strongly where the conditions of existence are most rigorous and where the reality principle most rigorously asserts itself. (p. 728)

Within this chapter it is clear that the students are inclined, for the most part, to accept the game and its rules. The teachers vary in their sense of agency. There is acknowledgement by some of the teachers that the game isn’t perfect, but there is little sense of struggle to change the shape or form of the field (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). For the students and the teachers the domination within and of the field is so complete that its regulative principles, its orthodoxies are incorporated. The students’ inability to engage with the idea of how English assessment might be different and their lack of sense of agency even with regards to what they do in English lessons reflects their domination within the field. The teachers by and large demonstrate an acceptance of the regulative principles of the game; there is some awareness of the inequities of the system and the limitations of the English assessment but little sense of an ability to rebel against the game and its doxa. The
teachers are embedded within the game and within the objective structures of the game: they are firmly located on and in the playing field, and therefore they are largely committed to the doxa or presuppositions of the game – they don’t have any other choice.

The way that Janet conceptualises teaching – purely as preparation for assessment – is shocking, but not to her. Sandra might acknowledge that the GCSE is not a true test of English but as her students’ achievement – and therefore her capital within the field – benefits from her understanding of the assessment, gained through examining, she continues to play the game and to be committed to its doxa.

As Bourdieu (1990a) observes, those playing the game, in the real, lived-in world, are so subjugated by day-to-day urgency, the immediate steps to be taken, that they do not have the capacity to step outside the field to view it from without. The teachers and the students are in this position: for them success in the assessment is urgent. With regards to the examiners however, while they are inside the game they are outside the school and its urgencies; this gives them the distance to be able to look at this aspect of the game and comment on it. Once these lived imperatives are removed, one is able to look at the field and “bring up questions about the meaning of the world and its existence, which people never ask when they are caught up in the game” (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 67) as senior examiners David and Liz do. Because of this partial distance, they are able to at least to some extent recognise the effects of the game on its players as Bourdieu (1990a) suggests. It is notable that those questions are about the effects of the game upon the students, as those players within the game who are most dominated. The teachers, who are the most direct instrument by which the domination takes place, are limited in their ability to consider those effects, so entrenched within the game and its orthodoxies are they.

Yet none of the players interviewed, no matter their relative position in the hierarchy, expressed any sense of the possibility of change in the field, change to the rules of the
game. It is evident from the continual sense of the impact of the political field on the players and the game, that this is to some extent at least the result of the breach of the field of education by the fields of economics and politics, the extent to which the field of education is dominated. It is clear from what they say that the activities of teachers, examiners and students are operating to fulfil the requirements of an assessment and accountability system demanded by government policy. Even those few players that can imagine other possibles also express an acceptance of what is, so dominated are they by the immediate structures of school or assessment system and by the wider structures represented by political interests and business interests.

As is evident, the structuring forces of the game of GCSE English assessment, while apparently internal to the game, are determined through the breach of the field of education by the wider political field. This is evident through the ways in which the examiners describe the game and their role within it, the ways teachers conceptualise practice and their sense of agency and the ways in which students are positioned both by themselves and by others. This interplay between structure and agency is further revealed in chapters 5 and 6 through analysis of the ways the regulative principles and orthodoxies of English assessment or the ‘rules of the game’ are played out and through thinking through the data using the tools of habitus and capital.
Chapter 5: The right kind of reading, the right kind of writing

Introduction

In the previous chapter I began to reveal the nature of the structuring forces that constitute the game of GCSE English assessment through examining the relative positioning of the players therein. Within that chapter, players’ difference was revealed through their conceptualisation of the game and their positioning within it and the extent to which they expressed a sense of agency in relation to the game and its practices and rules. In this chapter I shed further light on the structuring forces of the game in play as evident through difference, but here through an analysis of the relationships between the practice of the GCSE English exam and the habitus and misrecognition of capital revealed by the players. In doing so, I address my research questions in illuminating further how the assessment process contributes to educational and social reproduction.

Bourdieu (1985) writes about capital as a quality (or ‘power’) that determines an agent’s position within a particular field or game played therein:

The kinds of capital, like the aces in a game of cards, are powers that define the chances of profit in a given field (in fact, to each field or sub-field there corresponds a particular kind of capital, which is current, as a power or stake in that game). (p. 724)

That quality is only translated to capital because within that field it is arbitrarily recognised as such:

It must be asserted at the same time that a capital (or power) becomes symbolic capital, that is capital endowed with a specifically symbolic efficacy, only when it is misrecognized in its arbitrary truth as capital and recognized as legitimate. (Bourdieu 1990b, p. 112)

With regards to the game in play it would be possible to conceive of capital in a number of different ways: there is the capital that gives the players their status within the field, which to a degree at least is “legally guaranteed” (Bourdieu 1985, p. 724) because of the roles of
the players within the field as examiner, teacher, student and so on; there is also the ways in which the game of assessment legitimises cultural experience through giving it institutionalized capital (Bourdieu 1986a) which translates into a symbolic capital that has currency within the social field as a whole. Thus students who share the cultural knowledge consecrated by the exam receive the exam results that enable them to move on to further and higher education and into employment. It is the latter that I am focusing on in particular here through analysis of interview data and exam papers and mark schemes. In shedding light on this process of misrecognising particular knowledge or experience as capital I reveal more about the nature of the literacy being assessed which, through the uncritical societal acceptance of a grade C or higher in GCSE English, acts as a benchmark of a normatively defined literacy.

In Chapter 2 I drew attention to the arbitrary and socially-constructed nature of any construction of a single literacy (Cook-Gumperz 1986, Luke 2003). In Bourdieusian terms, dispositions towards texts and towards what are or aren’t legitimate literacy practices reveal habitus, as “society written into the body” (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 63). It is instructive therefore to view the data in this chapter through the lens of habitus as well as the lens of capital. In this chapter the dispositions of the different agents towards literacy and literacy practices are revealed through analysis of interview data and of exam papers and their mark schemes. In revealing these dispositions, which are both constructed through the structuring forces at play, and are structuring forces themselves in that they generate practice (Bourdieu 1990), I reveal more about the relational properties of the players of the game, and thus how GCSE English operates to ensure that the education system maintains the pre-existing order (Bourdieu 1998).

Following this introduction, this chapter has three sections and a summary. In the first, I reveal the process by which students’ cultural experiences and knowledge can become
misrecognised through the assessment process as capital through examining students’ reactions to the texts on the exam paper. In the second section I reveal how the assessment operates to position students as insiders and outsiders through close study of the exam texts themselves and the way the senior examiner rationalises the texts on the exam. In the third section I shed light on the practice of teachers in response to the assessment and illuminate the narrow range of literacy practice that is misrecognised as capital.

**Literacy as knowledge/knowledge as literacy**

In this section I focus on the responses of the students who have taken the GCSE English exams to the texts that have been set on the paper as reading sources. In particular, I discuss the level of confidence they show in how they have dealt with the reading sources and where that confidence comes from, using the lens of habitus to reveal the relationships between their dispositions, societal structures and social reproduction. In analysing the students’ responses to the texts I gain insight into how their cultural knowledge and experience prepares them for the exam, and how students can be positioned as insiders or outsiders (Fairclough 2003) in relation to the text and hence in relation to the game of the assessment. In doing this I reveal the process by which students’ cultural experiences and knowledge can become misrecognised through the assessment process as capital.

The majority of the students at both Riverside and Greenfield schools expressed some unease and unfamiliarity with regards to one or more of the source texts. It is notable that when speaking about the reading sources on the exam, the students appear to have two criteria in mind when judging how accessible a text is: firstly, their familiarity with the type
of text and secondly, how familiar they are with the content of the text. For example, student Andrew of Greenfield School found Source 1, an article about the Beach to City beach safety education campaign from the RNLI magazine (Stamp 2010) challenging because of his unfamiliarity with its content.

Andrew: I found it was challenging, question 1 with the life-saving.
VRJ: Did you? What was challenging about that one?
Andrew: Cos I didn’t really know a lot about it and...
VRJ: Right. Was that the most difficult bit of the paper?
Andrew: Possibly yeah, or question 4 I think it was....
VRJ: You can take your time and have a look at them if you just want to remind yourself of them. But you said that question 1 was something you didn’t know a lot about... and so did that... when you say it was challenging, how did you, what did you mean about that?
Andrew: It was because I didn’t really know like what it was about so I couldn’t like use my own knowledge into it as well. (GF/A p. 7)

He goes on to say:

VRJ: Yeah I understand. So you’ve seen, certainly Source 2 and Source 3, similar things in class, but Source 1 was a little bit more..
Andrew: ...challenging cos you didn’t really know about lifesaving that much. (GF/A p. 9)

Andrew is quite explicit here that for him the barrier to understanding this text is nothing to do with an ability to decode the text: he understands that it is a text about lifesaving. The barrier to understanding is a lack of knowledge about or familiarity with the subject matter. In commenting that he can’t “use my own knowledge into it” he is articulating the benefits of a familiarity with the content of the text. Students with that knowledge or familiarity are at an advantage in terms of confidence in the exam and ability to engage with the source texts.

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28 The importance of prior knowledge in enabling a student to make sense of a text is well documented. See, for example, Baldwin et al 1985, Johnston 1984, Lipson 1982, McKeown et al 1992.
Looking at the text itself there are assumptions being made within the text that have the effect of locating the reader as an insider or an outsider in relation to the text (Fairclough 2003). In identifying young people from the city as the target audience of the Beach to City scheme, the text is defining that group as outside the audience of the article:

Through close analysis of incident statistics, children living away from the coast in city areas have been highlighted as a high-risk group who are less likely to be aware of the work of the RNLI. (Stamp, 2010)

There is a “value assumption” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 55) being made here that these children are at fault – they ought to know about the work of the RNLI (Royal National Lifeboat Institution); the text is identifying a perceived cultural deficit that is being corrected by the RNLI. Many of the students taking the exam will be in this identified ‘high-risk group’ but through identifying them as other the article makes it clear that it is about them, but not for them. This is inevitable positioning: this text originally appeared in a magazine for supporters of the RNLI, therefore it has a defined audience of subscribers who have an interest in its work.

The text also makes an “existential assumption” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 55) in the way it refers to “beach flags”. In referring to them without any explanation of their function the text assumes shared knowledge about their existence. The exclamation mark at the end of “some seem to think the red flag (for dangerous water) means there’s a shark about!” implies that this is ridiculous and thus humorous, but this can only be found humorous by someone who shares the assumptions being made here. The reader is invited to laugh at the “some” who have this opinion, but only the text’s insiders can do that. In including this text, the exam is separating out those students with an awareness and understanding of the RNLI from those who are not familiar with it. Those students who have been to the British seaside, seen lifeguards at work or visited a lifeboat station are positioned as the insiders of the text – they are able to share the assumptions of the text. Students who
don’t visit the British seaside, or who do so, but don’t have the cultural or economic resources to engage with the RNLI, are potentially disadvantaged in responding to this text: this is an example of how a student’s lack of cultural experience can limit his achievement in GCSE English. In her paper on the relationship between cultural capital and what is perceived to be academic ability Sullivan (2007) draws the following conclusion:

Children from non-graduate homes had strikingly low levels of knowledge of what many ‘educated’ people sometimes unthinkingly assume is a generally shared culture. (p. 14)

In setting this text on a reading exam paper the examiner has made this unthinking assumption, misrecognising the arbitrary culturally specific knowledge of the RNLI as capital and recognising it as legitimate. Students who share the examiner’s cultural experiences, whose knowledge and practices are structured through habitus which overlaps with that revealed by the examiner, are at an advantage, whereas the student Andrew does not and is disadvantaged.

When asked how he would change the exam if he had the power to do so, Andrew replies:

Andrew  I’d probably change Source 1.

VRJ  You’d change Source 1 – what would you put in its place?

Andrew  Er, probably like from a games magazine. (GF/A p. 12)

Andrew would choose to replace a text that he doesn’t perceive as having relevance to him – the RNLI text – with one that would have relevance and with which he believes he could successfully engage. As explained in Chapter 2, different literacies coexist and operate as capital within different social spaces (Carrington and Luke 1997). It is not that Andrew is without interests or without literacy, but that his cultural knowledge reflects an “illegitimate extra-curricular culture” (Bourdieu 1984, p. 25), that of gaming. Gaming has its own literacies (McAllister 2004) but they are not misrecognised as legitimate here and therefore do not have currency in the game in play. The literacy that does have currency within the GCSE is culturally arbitrary – it has no more or less intrinsic value that the
For Andrew a lack of familiarity with the content of the RNLI text served to exclude him from the text. Kath, also a student from Greenfield School, speaks about a similar experience with Source two of the same exam paper: the newspaper article (Batty 2010) about the rescued Chilean miners. It is evident that Kath’s lack of understanding of the content of the text has affected the extent to which she could answer the question:

Kath  I found that one hard.
VRJ   The Chilean miners one?
Kath  I didn’t know nothing about it; I just made it up.
VRJ   You didn’t know anything about the miner thing, or?
Kath  Both, I just like tried to figure it out myself but it was, it was really hard. I thought that one was really hard.
VRJ   So, was the question hard, or was it difficult to read? The question was the presentation one, on page 5, question 2. That was the main one.
Kath  I didn’t know how they linked together.
VRJ   Right, so you found that a difficult question.
Kath  Yeah.
VRJ   Is that – when you say you found it difficult, can you try and explain what about it that you think was difficult.
Kath  Because, I don’t know, of rescue drill, each is there. I don’t know.
VRJ   Did you not know what it was about?
Kath  Not really, no.
VRJ   Right OK. So it was about these Chilean miners who were trapped underground. Was that not something that you had been aware of when it happened?
Kath  Yeah, I don’t even know what Chilean miners are.
VRJ   Right OK.
Kath  Are they people?
VRJ   Yeah, like coal miners.
Kath Oh.

VRJ Right OK.

Kath See I don’t know who he is. Is he one of the things?

VRJ No, he’s just a clown\(^29\) who was there. OK. So when it says Chilean it’s about, you know the country Chile?

Kath Yeah.

VRJ Right, so it’s set there. (GF/K p. 8)

Kath says that while she doesn’t read newspapers at home (GF/K p. 5) she has studied newspaper articles in English lessons, so should be familiar with the form of the text, but, when asked, says that it isn’t like anything she’s read before. It appears that a lack of familiarity with the subject of Chilean miners has made the text incomprehensible to her.

The term “Chilean” is used three times in the text, twice to premodify “miners” and once to premodify “time”. Kath says she knows of the country Chile, which is never directly mentioned, but may well never have come across the term “Chilean” as things which are Chilean are not a common topic of conversation or, indeed, study in schools; if she heard the word she may have a chance of inferring its meaning, but written down there are a number of different possible ways of pronouncing it. Without an understanding of the term it would be difficult to understand what is meant by “Chilean miner” or “Chilean time”; as the first reference to “Chilean miners” is in the headline a student without the cultural resources to understand this would be alienated from the text from the outset.

Interestingly Andrew was familiar with the miners’ story which seemed to lead to more of a sense of confidence with the text:

VRJ Is it, as a text is it something that you’re familiar with, as a kind of writing?

Andrew Yeah, I used to watch it like on Sky.

\(^{29}\) The newspaper article as it appears on the exam paper is accompanied by a picture of a clown carrying balloons, who has apparently turned up to celebrate the rescue of the miners. Kath is thus unable to use visual cues to make sense of the article because the image is of a clown, not a miner.
Andrew, like Kath, immediately equates a familiarity with the type of text with a familiarity with the content of the text, but in his case it works in his favour. Both students were expected to gain a grade B overall by their teachers, although Andrew was performing a grade higher than his target grade of a C, which had been set according to prior performance; perhaps this is because Kath reveals habitus which does not engage with global affairs whereas Andrew does, to some extent. Janet, the teacher of both Andrew and Kath, expresses a belief that the exam generally assumes a wider world knowledge that her students don’t have:

I felt that some of the questions were presuming students had a worldly-wide experience. This idea of primitive cultures; dangerous sports for example... Students not knowing what the word primitive meant, not knowing what a dangerous sport was, not even in the realms of what that could be. (GF/TCH p. 1)

Whilst it could be argued that testing comprehension of the word ‘primitive’ is testing a legitimate literacy skill within the context of an English exam, not knowing what a dangerous sport is is not a failing of literacy: it is not a failure to decode the words ‘dangerous’ and ‘sport’ but a failing of cultural knowledge. Knowledge of and participation in dangerous sports require economic and cultural resources that aren’t available to Janet’s students: the habitus that they reveal has little overlap with the habitus revealed by the examiner and hence they are positioned as outsiders.

Similarly, Sonia, Head of Key Stage 4 English at Redbrick High School, believes that the focus on travel texts, which senior examiner Steve identifies as a deliberate decision (“quality travel writing” (EX/S p. 3)), positions her students as outsiders because of their lack of experience of travel:

the theme that seems to run through a lot of the texts, adventure and journey, that’s not always something that students can understand. (RB/TCH p. 7)
There is a clear perception here that students’ cultural experiences are preventing them from fully accessing the texts on the paper. She also perceives there to be a gender-bias on the paper:

I actually think quite a lot of the texts are more boy-friendly than girl-friendly as well ... There’s a lot do with, stereotypically this is, a lot of the texts are about adventures and journeys and a lot of the texts focus on male characters or male writers as well. (RB/TCH p. 7)

Like Janet, Sonia identifies as exclusive the practice that reveals the habitus of the senior examiner responsible for this paper. The dispositions revealed serve to position many students, from non-affluent, non-graduate backgrounds, as outsiders. Students who reveal habitus generated by a familial context with wide experience of travel or adventure, who have global knowledge, will be positioned as insiders within the assessments and will hence be advantaged.

The exception in terms of students from Greenfield and Riverside schools was Paul, a student at Riverside, who seems confident when speaking about the texts and expresses familiarity with all three. Of source 3, which is a longer extract from a literary non-fiction text, *Alive* (Read 1974), he says:

**VRJ** What about this last one, Source 3?

**Paul** Erm, I didn’t think there was anything, it’s more, it’s nothing that I haven’t seen before really.

**VRJ** Have you seen something like that in school or at home would you say, that kind of thing?

**Paul** Well it’s just like anything – yeah I’ve seen it in school but I’ve seen it at home as well like in a book. Like, a just a normal, yeah just like a normal book there would be something like that in it, I’ve seen it before. (RS/P p.9)

The way that Paul speaks about this text, “it’s just like anything,” illustrates how familiar he is with this text – for him, it is “normal” which suggests that reading and being around this type of book is habitual to the extent that for him it is normality. Similarly, when asked
about the newspaper, rather than engage with its subject matter he immediately discusses its form and its place within the genre:

Paul Erm, I’ve certainly seen one like this before, it was only surprising because we’ve done newspaper articles and looked at loads of newspaper articles, but they were never, each paragraph was never as short as that.

VRJ Right, so Source 2 was surprising in how...

Paul only cos of how short the sentences were, cos it didn’t give you a lot. Maybe usually it would have like a one that big and then another one and then another one, but it was only very short paragraphs. But other than that, that one was fairly normal. (RS/P p. 8)

In order to engage with a text on this level, to critique the style of it, Paul must be very familiar with its form. He suggests that that is because he’s “done” newspaper articles in class, but when asked about his reading habits, he talks about the wide range of texts that he reads:

VRJ What sort of things do you read?

Paul I read ‘The Week’ magazine, I read some books, not as much as I used to, but I do read some books.

VRJ What sort of books do you read?

Paul I like, I don’t really have a style, I read Percy Jackson books, they’re good. I’ve read, I’ve just started to read The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo, so I don’t really have a style.

VRJ And how have you chosen those books? Has anyone in particular influenced you?

Paul My mum bought me The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo for Christmas, cos she’s already read it and she wanted me to read it. Other books probably because my brother liked them as well, so I just read them, so.

VRJ Older brother?

Paul Yeah – he liked reading a lot so I read what he’s got, I just read his books.

VRJ OK thank you. Do you read newspapers? You mentioned ‘The Week’.

Paul Yeah, I read The Week magazine so that’s sort of like a newspaper.

VRJ Yeah.
Paul: If I’m on the bus I might read a newspaper that’s on the bus. I like reading, like you know the magazine that comes with the newspaper.

VRJ: Yeah.

Paul: Like, *The Sunday Times* magazine I like reading that.

VRJ: Right OK. Is that something that is in your family home, *The Sunday Times* newspaper?

Paul: Yeah. I occasionally read the newspaper, but not really the main newspaper, but I might read the magazines. (RS/P p. 2)

Paul is a reader who is able to talk about books in an informed way, as is evident by the way he comments, “so I don’t really have a style”; he also shows familiarity with a range of newspapers. What is evident here is the influence of family on Paul’s reading habits: his mum and brother influence his choices of books and his choice of newspaper, *The Sunday Times*, is the result of that being in the house. So while he may have studied newspapers in class the level of confidence he expresses, the sense that he has a ‘feel for the game’, is reflective of the cultural experiences he brings from home. Even from the brief mentions of his family, we understand something of the structuring structures that have given Paul the durable dispositions that constitute his habitus (Bourdieu 1977). From Paul’s interview data, it is apparent that there is much more overlap between the habitus revealed by Paul and that revealed by the senior examiner, than is the case with the other students. Interestingly this apparent advantage doesn’t seem to have noticeably benefited Paul in his assessments at the point of interview: although his target grade was an A he was predicted a B. The sense of confidence he expresses in relation to the assessment, however, is notable.

The girls of Redbrick school took the GCSE exam a year later than the students of Greenfield and Riverside and therefore were faced with a different set of reading sources.

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30 The predicted grade is based on teacher assessment, which can be influenced by many factors. It would be necessary to access Paul’s actual grade and academic trajectory to ascertain the effect of this apparent confluence of revealed habitus. These are not within the scope of this study, however.
The comments they made about the sources were similar to those made by students at the other schools in terms of a sense of unease and unfamiliarity overall. However, the exception was with Source 2 (Macrae 2011), which in this case was an article about the dangers of teenagers’ eating habits, particularly those of girls. All the students interviewed said they found it interesting and would have chosen to read it, for example, student Kasha:

**VRJ** Would you read anything like that at home? Any of the three?

**Kasha** I think more Source 2 I would have read at home ‘cos it’s about teenagers, girls, and I am a teenage girl. At home, like I go on *Daily Mail* and it’s a really easy website because it shows you everything, not confusing or anything, so I suppose I picked that on one of things cos talking about teens which I am and then I know what they’re saying. (RB/K p.9)

It is notable that when speaking about why she would read this text at home Kasha switches between commenting on the form and commenting on the content. The text appeals to her both because it is a form she recognises and it is, in a sense, about her: “it’s about teenagers, girls, and I am a teenage girl”. Just as content can serve to position students as outsiders, as with Andrew and Kath, it is evident here that content can position students as insiders to the text and hence to the assessment. It is apparent that the socially-constructed literacy that is being assessed in the exam incorporates an arbitrary cultural knowledge that is being misrecognised as capital. Assumptions are being made about a shared culture that lead to students who share that culture profiting within the game and gaining academic capital (Bourdieu 1990a) that then has currency within the wider field of the jobs market.

**The ‘quality’ of the text**

Assumptions about a shared culture, the product of habitus, are also revealed through the practice of the senior examiner, uncovered through close study of the exam texts.
themselves and the way the senior examiner rationalises the texts on the exam. In this section I examine this, as well as further examples of students’ responses to exam questions to understand how these assumptions operate to position students as insiders and outsiders.

In senior examiner Steve’s narrative about how he selects texts for the exam he reveals a particular set of dispositions towards texts that in turn reveal a specific habitus. Steve’s revealed habitus is both structured by his positioning as English teacher and long-time examiner (EX/S p. 1) and, importantly, also structuring not just of his practice, but of practice across the game because of the position he holds. It is apparent from Steve’s narrative that he assumes that students are able to access texts from a narrow set of cultural contexts:

**VRJ** How do you select reading materials then?

**Steve** Well, you read *The Guardian*. You read the newspapers. Because, particularly in this case it’s non-fiction, so to start with you’re restricted to non-fiction pieces, if you work backwards, the third source which also is similar to the second source I used in the previous specification which lasted a long time, I decided, or it was decided but I drove the idea, that this should be what I call quality literary non-fiction, so that’s good travel writing or biographical writing.

**VRJ** What do you mean by good travel writing as opposed to…?

**Steve** The answer to that is that I mean travel writing which is published in books or maybe quality magazines, by which I mean expensive magazines as opposed to the supplements. So what you’ve got is they’re literary in their approach to their structure rather than being media orientated. So you’ve got quality biography, quality travel writing or biographical writing, so you know where to look for that, it’s the library, so you look for that in the library. The source 1 for the current spec which is pretty much the same as the previous specification which ran for a long time which was actually pre-released, is media orientated so it’s actually news stories, or if not actually news, but features. News features in broadsheets; usually broadsheets, because the level of reading age, to use an old phrase, in broadsheets approximates to higher tier, whereas the level of reading age in tabloids is probably about six or seven years old, whereas the broadsheets are thirteen and fourteen. So that’s the first one. So that’s the first and third source; the middle source, because it actually addresses text specifically as visual, either the picture or the headline, it’s specifically geared to those assessment objectives. A broader scope for places I can look for that
includes internet and tabloids because you want something which is
tablloid orientated because you’re doing something very visual rather than
something you can qualify as literary. So you’ve got big pictures with lots
going on; you’ve got headlines which have got puns or lots of detail. So
you do look to different places for the three different things quite
specifically. So broadsheet, media and tabloid for the visual stuff and then
books and libraries for source three. (EX/S p. 3)

There are a number of assumptions being made here by Steve about what cultural
artefacts are valued and ought to be valued. Although he expands upon his opening
(perhaps flippant) comment, “you read The Guardian,” it is significant that this is his
instinctive response to the question about how he selects the texts: he reveals an
educated, liberal habitus.

Steve sets up a hierarchy between texts: although it becomes apparent that media or
tabloid type texts do appear on the exam paper as the middle source, he chooses to focus
on the first and third sources. He identifies those texts as “literary in their approach and
structure” as opposed to being “media oriented”. He says later in the interview that “it’s
source 1 and source 3 which is where the real stuff is.” This reference to these more
literary or broadsheet-based texts as “the real stuff” makes it clear that within Steve’s
conceptualisation of English, of literacy, there is a hierarchy, and media type or tabloid type
texts are not as legitimate as more literary (specifically literary biography or travel writing)
or broadsheet type texts. Media and tabloid texts are only included for compulsory
(determined by assessment objectives) analysis of their visual impact, not for their
linguistic merit or their content.

It is also notable that there are cultural and economic factors at play here. When speaking
about what good travel writing is, he explains that it is “travel writing which is published in
books or maybe quality magazines, by which I mean expensive magazines as opposed to
the supplements.” Many people will be excluded from accessing this type of writing: only
certain sectors of society will have the luxury of spending money on such expensive
magazines, even if they have the cultural experience that informs them that these magazines exist in the first place. Whilst membership of a public library – and therefore access to the books therein – is free, not everybody in society has the cultural experience or set of dispositions necessary to understand or value their liberty to use a library. The knowledge that is being privileged here, through the assessment, is the arbitrarily selected knowledge of the powerful rather than knowledge that itself is powerful (Young 2008). Steve reveals habitus here that values these culturally and economically exclusive texts and misrecognises the practice of reading them as capital. In doing so he creates a taxonomy of texts which mirrors the social taxonomy and allows for social reproduction. The lens of habitus, in transcending the dialectic between structure and agency, is helpful here:

collective belief, here as elsewhere, is inscribed in the direct conformity between the objective structures of the divisions of the academic world and the cognitive structure of the principles of vision and division that the agents engaged in this world apply to it. We have come, in fact, to the most obscure principle of action, which lies neither in structures nor in consciousness, but rather in the relation of immediate proximity between objective structures and embodied structures - in habitus. (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 38)

That Steve is able to divide groups of people – students – into categories (grades) through their ability to engage with these arbitrarily selected but socially divisive texts can be explained by the homology between the objective structures of the academic world within which Steve is situated (which in turn are homologous with the social world) and the embodied dispositions of habitus, which are structured by that world.

It is evident that Steve unquestioningly accepts that the decisions that he is making – his choice of those texts which come from an elite culture – are the right decisions. Although their positioning as legitimate texts is arbitrary and the ability to read and engage with them is only one of multiple possible literacies (Luke 2003) there is no awareness or acknowledgement that there may be other equally legitimate types of texts that he has ruled out in favour of those he has selected, nor any doubt about whether the tabloid text
might be equally valid as a reading source as the broadsheet or quality non-fiction texts. He is wholly committed to the doxa of the game because for him the game has a subjective sense; he has a significant stake in the game, illusio, because of his positioning within the game and hence within the wider social field.

The taxonomy of texts that Steve’s practice constructs is understood by teachers and by students and is structuring practice with regards to English teaching and learning. Sandra, Head of Key Stage 4 English at Riverside High School says that in order to be successful in the exam students, “need to have a lot of experience of reading texts of, you know, as in formal texts” (RS/TCH p.1). She goes on to explain that the need to read and write about this type of texts on the exam is having an impact on the English curriculum across the school: “we are trying to do now a lot more in Key Stage 3 having the similar sorts of texts rather than before we did focus quite heavily on fiction” (RS/TCH p.1). The implication of what she says here is that the taxonomy of reading that is constructed through the exam is being mirrored within the school, with fiction or literary texts being relegated to second place behind formal, non-fiction texts. Speaking about the exam, however, Sandra believes that school can help a student access these types of texts, but only to an extent, “I think school probably can at least narrow the gap, but probably not make up for fifteen years of that experience at home” (RS/TCH p. 2). Sandra recognises implicitly that the GCSE assessment misrecognises as capital qualities that originate in the social context of the home and family, which, as revealing of habitus, are intrinsically bound up with social structures. This suggests that English, as it is understood and taught within schools, is concerned with trying to transmit a particular form of “context-dependent knowledge” (Young, 2008, p.14) acquired through life rather than a powerful, context-independent, specialist knowledge.
The texts students are asked to write in the Writing section of the examination also operate to position students as outsiders or insiders and misrecognise culturally specific qualities, revealing of a particular habitus, as capital. They do this in two ways: firstly by making assumptions about shared cultural knowledge or experience, accessible to all, and secondly by consecrating an embodied ‘feel for’ formal non-fiction texts. An example of a question is:

A website called The Best and the Worst is asking for contributions. Write an entry for it which describes the best meal you have ever had and the worst. Explain the reasons for your choices. (EP2, p. 15)

This question makes a number of cultural assumptions which operate to include and exclude different categories of student. Firstly, it makes an existential assumption about the existence of websites; it assumes students share the writer’s understanding of what a website is. Additionally, it makes a value assumption about the idea of the ‘meal’. The increasing use of food aid including food banks suggests that within a growing number of households in Britain there is not enough money for food (Lambie-Mumford et al 2014), yet here the student is being asked to rank the meals that he or she has had in terms of their quality. This will be a straightforward task for the student who eats out at restaurants, or even the student that sits down regularly for family meals at home, but not for the student who, for cultural and/or economic reasons, is excluded from both of those experiences. This is potentially going to be a particular issue for those students eligible for free school meals, who already perform significantly below those students not eligible for free school meals in GCSE exams (DfE 2010).

The mark scheme for this question also makes a number of assumptions. In the top two mark bands of four the following descriptions appear:

Band 4: form, content and style are consistently matched to purpose and audience and becoming assuredly matched
writes in a formal way, employing a tone that is appropriately serious but also manipulative, subtle and increasingly abstract

Band 3: clear identification with purpose and audience, with form, content and style becoming increasingly matched

writes in a formal way, employing a tone that is appropriately serious and clearly chosen, with increasing anticipation of reader response (MS2, p. 10)

The bottom of Band 3 is 5 marks out of a possible 10, so in order to achieve half marks a student has to implicitly understand that in writing a website they need to write formally. Yet there is no indication in the question that this is a formal piece of writing. The types of websites created for or accessed by young people are not generally formal in their style – the students who would choose to write formally are those who reveal habitus, the product of an educated household in which formal language is habitual, that means that they intrinsically understand the rules of the game.

The question on the previous year’s paper, which would have been marked using the same mark scheme was:

Write an entry for your online blog which describes a time in which you felt uncertain or unsure about a situation you were in and explain how you overcame it. (EP1, p.15)

The task of writing an entry for a blog doesn’t necessarily lead to a formal response. It would depend on the student’s experience of blogs. Riverside student Shelley was unsure about how to write in response to this question:

VRJ OK. The other writing question was an entry for an online blog. How did you feel about that question?
Shelley It confused me. I had to read it like three times.
VRJ Why did it confuse you? What was confusing about it?
Shelley I don’t know, I didn’t know how to set it out. I didn’t understand what it meant.
VRJ Have you ever seen an online blog?
Shelley You mean like a status update on Facebook? (RS/S p. 6)
It is not ridiculous to equate a blog with a Facebook status update, but to do so in the context of this exam with its insistence on writing in a formal register would not lead to a successful written response. Similarly Paul, who demonstrated confidence overall with regards to the exam, understood a blog to be an informal form:

**VRJ** And were you comfortable with the idea of writing the blog?

**Paul** Erm, yeah because it’s just like an account, it’s not really different to any other piece of writing, any other personal writing it’s just er your online blog. I mean it’s slightly different in that way but yeah, it’s just, it’s scary when you think at first but when you realise it’s like a diary entry, it’s not really different.

**VRJ** How did you adapt your style of writing to the idea of a blog? You say a diary entry, did you think it was diary-like, or?

**Paul** Well I was, yeah, that’s basically how I wrote it, so like, yeah, so like an online sort of help thing so like if someone was searching ‘what should do I blah blah blah’ like I could address it, like how would, if I had a problem and then how I dealt with it. So I did it like that.

**VRJ** Was it formal or informal, your writing?

**Paul** Informal. (RS/P p. 8)

Looking at the mark scheme above, if Paul wrote in an informal register as he suggests he did then he would not have achieved highly in the exam. Yet to understand that a blog would need to be formal, where there were no explicit instructions to suggest that it should be, would rely on a student having an embodied and instinctive understanding of the rules of the game. The disposition to use formal language is a dimension of bodily hexis (Bourdieu 1991), which reveals embodied dispositions generated by and reflecting relations with the structures of the social world. The practice which encompasses this type of question and mark scheme reveals habitus in which such dispositions are taken-for-granted and thus privileges students whose familial and social structures structure similar dispositions. This insistence on formal writing is another means by which the assessment structures a taxonomy which reflects and perpetuates the social taxonomy. The practice of the writing assessment positions students as insiders and outsiders: the socially dominant
are conversant in the formal discourses of the kind rewarded within this assessment; the dominated are excluded from, by and through this assessment.

**Culture club**

As has been established in previous sections, the practice of the senior examiner, manifest through the assessment, misrecognises as capital arbitrary cultural knowledge and experience that reveals a privileged habitus. This in turn is structuring the practice of teachers in schools and thus the students’ experience of English. In this section I shed further light on the practice of teachers in response to the assessment. In doing so I further illuminate the narrow range of literacy practice that is being consecrated, through the GCSE assessment, as the socially approved, dominant literacy and the relationship between that literacy and the habitus revealed by socially dominant groups.

When Redbrick school Key Stage 4 coordinator Sonia discusses the classroom practice structured by the assessment she raises questions about the construction of the socially approved literacy that is at the centre of the assessment.

**Sonia**  With my Year 10 and Year 11 class this Year, on several occasions students have said to me 'why are we reading these newspapers? We never read these newspapers' and, you know, you try and encourage them to read those newspapers. Try to encourage them to read newspapers like *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Times* or *The Telegraph*, but ultimately they're often the papers that they don't have at home either, and they do read newspapers; they'll read *The Metro* because that's what they come across and they are interested in news and current affairs but for them it doesn't have any resonance to their lives, those sorts of articles. I think it will do when they get older, but now it doesn't ring true to them at all and they'll ask why can't they do things more relevant to their age group. I don't think they necessarily mean 'can we do easier texts'.

**VRJ**  Right, so it's not about...

**Sonia**  No, they're quite willing to have something that's a bit challenging, but it's when it's perhaps about a topic that doesn't interest them, or if it's written in a style that's so alien to them because it's not something that they've
experienced either for themselves or through their home life that they've been sort of introduced to that kind of thing. (RB/TCH p. 3)

Sonia doesn’t object to those texts which she perceives as intrinsically challenging to read or to write about, but to texts where the challenge comes from a lack of cultural relevance to her students. The emphasis on students’ home experiences here draws attention to the importance of home and family in inculcating “inherited capital” (Bourdieu 1984, p. 80); when Sonia mentions the importance of being exposed to “that kind of thing” at home she is recognising, as a teacher, the limits of schooling in ensuring a student has the kind of cultural experience that translates to capital in this game.

Sonia also raises the issue of the “age group” of the students here and subsequently:

Sonia When it comes to some of the creative writing tasks, for example, I know that young people are meant to write blogs, but really not that many write blogs, so I find it a bit embarrassing as a middle-aged woman having to explain what a blog is and the realisation that probably more middle-aged women write blogs than teenagers. Also, some of the words have been a little bit tricky for the lower ability students, like 'leisure facilities' for example there was a question to write about leisure facilities, and I know it had been mentioned in one of the Section A texts, but it’s not a phrase that most young people use – 'sports centre' perhaps would have been more accessible.

VRJ Mm. Is that a cultural thing? I mean is there any cultural thing in that?

Sonia I just think it’s more of an old-fashioned phrase that's all. I just think it’s an older person's phrase. (RB/TCH p. 8)

Sonia perceives that elements of the assessment are flawed in that they misjudge the audience of young people who are taking it. The source texts and the wording of the exam questions are more appropriate to an adult audience, rather than the 15- and 16-year-olds that will be taking it. This appears to reflect the “hysteresis effect” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 78) in that there is a structural lag between the habitus revealed by the examiners in setting the paper and the contemporary field which the students occupy. But whereas Bourdieu (1977) suggests that hysteresis results in “negative sanctions” (p. 78), Sonia is not in a position with the power to enact such sanctions. She has to adapt to the regulative
principles of the game because her position, and the success of her students, depends on it.

Sonia’s grasp of the regulative principles of the game in play has led to her attempting to develop her students’ cultural knowledge through introducing a culture club. This, she says, was the result of perceiving that her students, “didn’t have the wider cultural knowledge to be able to explore texts in as much detail or with as much understanding as they could to be able to access the very top of Band 5” (RB/TCH p. 13). This is a very clear statement of a recognition that cultural knowledge of a very particular type is being misrecognised as capital in this game. It is evident from the eclectic list of what has been covered by the culture club that its ‘curriculum’ is designed to give the students a feel for the cultural experiences of the educated middle classes:

the golden age of Hollywood, Ernest Hemingway, photography as storytelling, so photo journalism, poetry, the scene of the monster in literature, classics. We've just watched All About Eve. (RB/TCH p.13)

Whilst is has, Sonia says, other positive impacts, the stated aim of the club is to “help improve how many A and A* grades we get in English, English Language and Literature” (RB/TCH p. 13). That Sonia believes that such an eclectic cultural experience will benefit her students resonates with the research of Bennett et al (2009). Their research suggests that rather than there being a fixed and reproductive relationship between social status and a taste for high culture (Bourdieu 1984), within the field of contemporary British culture, advantage rather comes from what they term a “cultural omnivorousness” (Bennett et al 2009, p. 254). That is to say that the educated middle class’s ability to access and appreciate a wide range of cultural forms is misrecognised societally as capital:

contemporary cultural advantage is pursued not through cultivating overtly exclusive forms – of snobbishness or modernist abstraction – but through the capacity to link, bridge, and span diverse and proliferating cultural worlds (Bennett et al 2009, p. 39).
In giving her students the possibility of a cultural omnivorousness it is evident that Sonia has a “feel for the game” (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 66). This is not to say that she is engaged in struggle either for position in the field or against its boundaries (Bourdieu 1998, Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), she has investment in the game and its outcome, illusio, and is committed to its doxa, but she has enough experience of the game to have learned how to play it and in doing so is trying to give her students access to that knowledge that she hopes will translate to capital through the GCSE English assessment.

The knowledge that Sonia is trying to give her students through the culture club could be characterised as context-dependent knowledge (Young 2008). It is not the specialist knowledge of the academy but knowledge gained through the home-based cultural experiences of the privileged – the knowledge of the powerful. That Sonia believes it to be also powerful knowledge is interesting and raises important questions about both the fairness and the validity of the GCSE English assessment: such eclectic cultural experiences are an unexpected component of a “socially-approved” (Cook-Gumperz, 1986, p.22), state-sanctioned literacy.

Janet, Head of English at Greenfield High School has also amended school practices to give her students the knowledge that she perceives they need to achieve on the exam. She has introduced a weekly homework to research a given topic with the aim of giving her students a broader understanding of the world. This was sparked by her experience following the June 2011 exam when, she says, “In the exam hall I’ve seen at least five candidates go, ‘I don’t know what to write, I don’t even know what word, what that means Miss’” (GF/TCH p. 5). This was not because the question or the text was particularly demanding but because they simply didn’t understand a particular cultural reference. She perceives that what she sees as her students’ lack of world knowledge has prevented them from achieving their potential on the Writing section of the exam. She believes this is
because she can teach the skills necessary to answer the questions in the Reading section, but the Writing section relies on cultural knowledge to access the questions.

Janet I always find it easier to teach the reading skills than the writing skills because I think the problem with writing, certainly in this school, is they can employ the techniques, they haven’t necessarily got the imagination or the ideas to develop the paragraphs and I think that's where some of them missing out on hitting detailed and developed because they are just making points and not elaborating. That seems to be the biggest stumbling block and I think that’s quite hard to teach because you can’t give, you can say ‘what about using a quote from somebody or a fact’ but still, they’re, it’s like dredging something out of nothing, where with the reading it seems to be quite comfortable within doing that.

VRJ Why do you think that’s a characteristic of children here?

Janet Erm, lack of wider reading, you know. Only relying on the reading that they do in school, erm, not engaging with documentaries on, you know, everything’s Facebook, X-Box sort of mentalities and a lot of people don’t even engage with soap operas, so that sense of the outside world doesn’t seem to be. (GF/TCH p. 4)

Janet’s conceptualisation of her students is that they have the “techniques”, presumably because techniques are teachable, but that something intrinsic to the students is preventing them from being able to write. She characterises them as lacking “imagination” or “ideas” and says “it’s like dredging something out of nothing”. In equating her students’ minds or experiences with “nothing” there is a suggestion that she has a specific expectation of what would equate to ‘something’. Whereas Sonia reveals habitus that enables her to question the structuring structures and regulative principles of the game, Janet appears to accept the doxa of the game and misrecognise its regulative principles as legitimate. She puts the responsibility for their lack of success on the students rather than accepting the alternative, which is that they are being structurally set up to fail. She summarises the students as having “Facebook, X-Box sort of mentalities”. It is interesting to recall here Janet’s student Andrew’s suggestion of including a text from a gaming magazine here alongside what she says. Andrew is fluent in literacies that are meaningful to him, but these are valued neither by the examiner who sets the exam papers nor by his own
teacher, so embedded is she in the rules of the game, which are structured to some degree at least through the out-of-time practices of the senior examiner.

**Summary**

This chapter has examined how, within the game of GCSE English assessment, specific qualities are misrecognised as capital which, because of the nature of academic assessment and the qualifications that it leads to, operates as capital in the social field beyond the field of academic assessment. The focus of the assessment on formal discourses, and on non-fiction texts selected by an individual with a particular taxonomy of texts (and their associated literacies), means that students who reveal the dispositions of habitus that mean that they are at home with those literacy practices will be at an advantage. This is evident through, for example, the way in which the writing tasks don’t make clear that formal writing is expected yet reward formal writing. Students who reveal habitus that, because of a privileged family background, means that for them formal writing is habitual and that their feel for the game of exams leads to an instinctive understand that formal writing is required will achieve more highly in an exam than those students who reveal dispositions that mean that all they understand about formal discourses and about the English exam they are taught in school. This is a clear illustration of the ways in which this assessment contributes to educational and social reproduction.

This chapter has also examined how wider world knowledge and understanding is misrecognised as a legitimate variant of literacy which translates to capital through the GCSE English assessment process. This supports Bennett et al’s (2009) claim that cultural omnivorousness, knowledge of and an ability to range across cultural worlds operates as capital in modern Britain. Within the GCSE English assessment knowledge beyond that which can be taught in the classroom confers an advantage in the exam. There is no single specific cultural experience that is misrecognised as capital in this game – if there were
then it would be teachable and therefore learnable through schooling: it would not then serve to advantage those privileged students whose home backgrounds structure dispositions towards cultural omnivorousness.

With regards to revealing the structures of the game in play, it is evident that the practice of the assessment, structured partly by the dispositions of a senior examiner manifest as practice, positions students according to their social and family background. Different agents are also positioned within the game by the extent to which they express awareness and acceptance of the extent to which the assessment misrecognises a legitimate culture and an illegitimate culture (Bourdieu 1984). Steve the senior examiner is clear and absolute in his belief that there is a legitimate taxonomy of texts. Some students such as Andrew suggest that the assessment might change to encompass his illegitimate culture but in most cases, as evident from the previous chapter, students accepted the doxa. The teachers show awareness that the assessment misrecognises a specific culture as capital and explain how they are trying to enable their students to access the legitimate culture through extra homework tasks or the establishment of a culture club. These relative positions are inevitable. Steve’s position of power within the field, his stake or illusio, relies on him absolutely believing in what he is doing, in accepting and perpetuating the doxa; such is his power that even when his conceptualisation of what constitutes legitimate literacy appears to be out of time, revealing hysteresis, the regulative principles of the game reflects his taxonomy. The teachers are employed to make sure their students achieve the highest grades and they are also of the field in a way the students aren’t. The teachers recognise what is being assessed, understand that the GCSE assessment is not straightforward assessment of some notional culturally neutral literacy, but to some degree misrecognise it as legitimate because they themselves are the product of the field and are players within the game whose own capital depends on their ability to understand and play by its rules, accepting its doxa. The students have been through the education system, have to a large
extent swallowed the *doxa*, but they are not wholly embedded within the field in the way that the teachers are.

The ways the different agents respond to the details of the assessment in this chapter is illuminated by Bourdieu’s (1996) explanation of why all the agents in a game such as this accept the *doxa*:

> There is action, history, and preservation or transformation of structures only because there are agents. But these agents are only effective and efficient because they are not reduced to what is ordinarily meant by the notion of the individual. As socialized organisms, they are endowed with a set of dispositions that imply both their propensity and their ability to enter into and play the game. (p. 38)

What Bourdieu suggests here is that the players in this game, the teachers, students and examiners accept the game and field as they are, accept the *doxa* because of habitus. In particular, they accept it because of the relationship between agents’ embodied dispositions, which are themselves the result of the structuring structures of society, and the objective structures of the academic field and of the wider social field. Bourdieu argues that the endemically hierarchical structures of the field of education reproduce “the principles of the most fundamental social classifications (dominant/dominated, etc.) in a recognizable form” (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 38): its hierarchical structures reflect the reality of the social world. This is then reflected in a taxonomy such as that practised by Steve. Steve’s taxonomy of texts operates to position students within a parallel, socially structured, taxonomy which reflects the wider social taxonomy. Bourdieu (1996) identifies the ways in which academic assessment operates as a means by which the dominant ensure dominance:

> The academic taxonomy, a system of principles of vision and division implemented at a practical level, rests on an implicit definition of excellence that, by granting superiority to the qualities socially conferred on those who are socially dominant, consecrates both their way of being and their state (p. 37)
The implicit definition of excellence in the GCSE assessment includes the ability to access and write about formal non-fiction texts and the disposition towards cultural omnivorousness, which are the result of social practice. In granting superiority to these qualities, which are habitual in those who are socially dominant, the English assessment consecrates the way of being of the dominant. The habitus of the players in the game, structured within the structures of the social world, mean that all concerned appear to accept the hierarchical judgements and believe them to be just.
Chapter 6: Domination and empowerment: the case of speaking and listening

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the role of internal assessment within GCSE English. As explained in Chapter 2, internal assessment is the part of the assessment that is undertaken by the students’ teachers. Within the GCSE being taken by these students it comprises 60% of the assessment: 40% in the form of written controlled assessment and 20% in the form of assessed speaking and listening. Having focussed on the examination in Chapter 5, and how that assessment operates to perpetuate social and educational reproduction, I shift the lens in this chapter to examine children’s, teachers’ and examiners’ attitudes towards and beliefs about internal assessment, in particular towards speaking and listening, in order to understand whether and how it positions students in the same ways that the formal examination does according to a social taxonomy.

In Chapter 5 I established that the game in play benefits players who reveal habitus that enables them to instinctively understand its rules as well as players who bring with them that cultural knowledge that is misrecognised as capital through the assessment. To some degree at least the internal assessment components of the GCSE should give teachers and their students the opportunity to contextualise the assessments, rather than students having to respond to a question set by an external examiner, thus locating the students in a more powerful position. In the previous chapter the analysis suggests that the examination advantages and disadvantages students in the same way that Thomson and Hall (2008) suggest that schooling in general provides particular students with a benefit from the outset:

... children come to school with virtual school bags of knowledges, experiences and dispositions. However, school only draws on the contents of some children’s school bags, those whose resources match those required in the game of education. Children who already ‘know’ and can ‘do’ school are thus advantaged in the
classroom right from the outset, while those children who are not privileged in having the required ways of speaking, acting and knowing start at a disadvantage. Through the selective practices of pedagogy, the gap grows between these children and their peers who are born fortunate by virtue of their class, heritage or gender. (p. 89)

Internal assessment has the potential to enable teachers to provide students with some means of unpacking their virtual school bags and making use of the resources therein. In theory, the content of speaking and listening and to an extent written controlled assessment tasks can be negotiated between student and teacher to make the assessment relevant to the student, as well as fulfilling the requirements of the curriculum. This is the space where, in theory at least, student Andrew (GF/A) could write or speak about gaming magazines if he wanted to, as referred to in the previous chapter.

In the sections that follow I examine the case of speaking and listening from a number of different perspectives using interview data from examiners, teachers and students. I focus on the case of speaking and listening in particular, as the written controlled assessment has enough overlap with the written exam to mean that findings in relation to that component, in particular in terms of mark schemes, can to some extent be extrapolated to apply here. In focusing here on spoken rather than written language I focus on the type of language use where an agent’s habitus is most clearly revealed, as speech starts in the site of primary inculcation: the family. This is different from writing, which is taught rather than acquired; thus an agent’s dispositions with regards to written language arguably have their genesis within school to some extent. Dispositions towards spoken language reveal bodily hexis (Bourdieu 1991), which expresses “one’s whole relation to the social world, and one’s whole socially informed relation to the world” (p. 86). It is important therefore to understand how the assessment of speaking and listening operates: if dispositions towards spoken language reveal habitus and if habitus is revealed through spoken language then any assessment of spoken language has the potential to be a direct assessment of a
speaker’s social, cultural and economic origins, leading inevitably to social and economic reproduction.

Following this introduction this chapter has three sections and a summary. In the first I examine the ways senior examiners conceptualise speaking and listening. In the second I reveal the logic of practice as lived in the assessment-driven context of the school through a discussion of the teachers’ conceptualisation of speaking and listening. In the third I discuss the students’ conceptualisation and understanding of speaking and listening and use teachers’ and examiners’ interview data to shed further light on students’ experiences.

Speech, culture and domination

In this section I examine the ways in which the senior examiners conceptualise the assessment of speaking and listening. In particular I use interview data to reveal what is apparently a tension between the potential for speaking and listening in school to allow students to use their funds of knowledge and the necessity for assessment to measure use of Standard English.

The senior examiners interviewed have a commitment in general to the idea of internal assessment as a humane means of assessing students and a meaningful way of assessing English. Senior examiner David explains that he believes that internal assessment is a more fair way of assessing students than an examination:

Now I've always been committed to the notion that terminal examination is an unfair way of assessing 16-year olds, or anybody really, because it means that memory becomes very very important and also because I've always believed it restricted the curriculum, because terminal assessment, by its very nature, can only focus on a small range of assessment objectives and a small range of content because of, and for, all sorts of practical considerations, and that has a backwash effect onto what the English curriculum becomes. So my belief has always been that what course work or controlled assessment does, it allows for a broader English curriculum, because it allows you, across two years of a course, to stage
assessments at different times, which means again for practical reasons you can assess a wider range of objectives. It also means, because terminal exam and particularly large-scale terminal exam, you have to things like things like set texts and a fixed body, that what you can do with controlled assessment in course work is allow an element of individual local selection of text for example. For example, allowing students to write about, talk about, think about things that are important to them in their particular locality. So that’s been my major commitment. (EX/D p.2)

David’s primary objection to exams is around the way it restricts the curriculum; he has a belief that internal assessment can be contextualised for the student, allowing teachers and students an element of control over what is studied. There is implicit acknowledgement here that English exams structure a single monolithic literacy which, as established in Chapter 5, serves to perpetuate the interests of those that, because of the structured dispositions that reveal habitus, are able to play the game. In using words such as “individual” and “local” and suggesting that students can “write about, talk about, think about things that are important to them in their particular locality” David is implying that internal assessment is a means of challenging the hegemony of the dominant forms of knowledge – here students can use the resources in their virtual school bags and those resources are recognised as valid forms of knowledge.

The assessment of speaking and listening has potentially more facility than that of the written controlled assessment for contextualisation. Within written controlled assessment teachers are able to adapt set tasks for their students but the core content of the task is prescribed by the awarding organisation (ECAT, ELCAT). With speaking and listening, however, only the skills to be demonstrated are prescribed: role play, presentation and discussion. The content and form the assessments take are determined by the teacher (ESPEC, ELSPEC).

The value of the internal assessment of speaking and listening is expressed by all the examiners, in particular as the part of the assessment where a student’s own cultural background and experiences have a place and can count as valid forms of knowledge.
Senior examiner Mike sees speaking and listening as the place where there can be freedom from cultural prescription, as opposed to what he terms the "highly cultural" reading and writing assessments:

in the end the highly cultural nature of reading and writing tasks is always going to be more problematic than speaking and listening, at least with good teaching, where you should be able to develop it and tailor it to the students you've got. So, you’ve seen on DVDs, and more to come in the next two years, where we talk to various recently arrived kids to Britain about their experiences, and they’re brilliant, they’re wonderful. They have so many things to say in really quite splendid fast-learned English. (EX/M p. 10)

The use of the term “highly cultural” to describe the assessment of reading and writing reflects the conclusions of the previous chapter; Mike shows that he understands the narrow and selective nature of the English that is assessed in the examination and the cultural resources that are required for achievement therein. He identifies the strength of speaking and listening as an ability to “tailor” it to the context of the student, again suggesting that it is a way to enable a challenge to dominant forms of knowledge.

What he says next though draws attention to a tension in speaking and listening. The students he describes above may be wonderfully articulate but, “the assessment of them slightly hits the Standard English buffers” (EX/M p10), that is to say that the marks they can achieve are capped by the fact that they don’t express themselves in Standard English31. So while speaking and listening is the space in which students from a range of social and cultural backgrounds can use English in a way that is meaningful to them, if they don’t or can’t use spoken Standard English then they are prevented from achieving the highest marks in the assessment. This is important: Thomson and Hall (2008), when researching teachers’ practices, found that wherever there was a chance for teachers to take up students’ or community knowledge they failed to do so. This they attributed to a number of factors, not least that:

31 Crystal (1994) defines Standard English as “a minority variety (identified chiefly by its vocabulary, grammar and orthography) which carries most prestige and is most widely understood” (p.24).
The discourses of the national curriculum are not yet easily permeable to a diverse range of children’s and community pedagogies and knowledges. Skills and content are prescribed and a very particular set of knowings and doings are privileged. (p. 100)

In English, even where the content of assessment can be contextualised, the knowings and doings that are privileged incorporate the use of formal Standard English which is itself culturally exclusive.

Steve, when asked about the ideal GCSE English assessment, expresses the potential for speaking and listening to engage with students’ experiences:

I would trust its organic viability in itself, I think I’d have an interesting wide range of things so it wouldn’t – including restricted codes, slang, all sorts of stuff, I think that it’s really quite interesting that some of the spoken language studies have been interesting about the use of almost taboo language, because, you know, it’s a reflection of what goes on. Everybody does it. (EX/M p. 15)

It is notable here that Steve talks about the value of non-standard spoken language; he goes so far as to say that he would lose the insistence that verbal expression takes place in Standard English from the criteria, thus allowing students the freedom to express themselves in the language they believe to be most appropriate to their context. Steve’s points about non-standard and taboo language being “a reflection of what goes on”, and something that “everybody does”, reflect that in spoken language at least non-standard English is ubiquitous and yet within GCSE English assessment is a liability.

When Mike speaks about this dichotomy at the heart of the assessment of speaking and listening, it is clear that he sees it is a function of the perceived need for English to have a functional element, preparing students for the world beyond school:

So you’ve got this sort of imposed reference to Standard English which is nonsensical in this context. So I think you’ve got on the one hand the liberal view that speaking is good particularly in the liberal subject that English can be, and then it’s sort of got fudged into functional need to not just communicate, but to communicate in adult formal ways which you can’t really do if you’re only 15 and in school. So it’s this weird sense that somehow school and education has to replicate something that’s to come, and the people who receive them haven’t got any responsibility for teaching them how you talk in their workplace. That’s what
puzzles me. How can we prepare people for Tesco until they get to Tesco? It’s a nonsense. I come back to not understanding; you can only speak in the context you are in. (EX/M p. 15)

It is notable that Mike refers to this element being “imposed”, a reference to the policy structures that have determined the assessment criteria for the GCSE. It is clear from his interview data that within Mike’s conceptualisation of English speaking and listening play a key role, but that this imposition of the necessity for a functional and formal element imposes a false context on the talk. When Mike says, “you can only speak in the context you are in,” he is drawing attention to the dichotomy that is apparent when asking a 15 year old to speak to a group of his or her classmates. In the majority of cases a student would not naturally use Standard English in this context, and yet they are expected to do so here. This may be another example of the hysteresis effect, as discussed in the previous chapter. The individuals and quangos establishing the criteria are of the adult world, they operate in the political field, yet the assessment is designed for teenagers. The details of the assessment reflect a time and space that the students don’t yet occupy but that the agents of power did and do.

What the senior examiners describe is the process of linguistic domination, as described by Bourdieu (1991):

In order for one mode of expression among others (a particular language in the case of bilingualism, a particular use of language in the case of a society divided into classes) to impose itself as the only legitimate one, the linguistic market has to be unified and the different dialects (of class, region or ethnic group) have to be measured practically against the legitimate language or usage. Integration into a single ‘linguistic community’, which is a product of the political domination that is endlessly reproduced by institutions capable of imposing universal recognition of the dominant language, is the condition for the establishment of relations of linguistic domination. (p. 45)

The GCSE speaking and listening assessment has the effect of practically measuring the different class, regional or ethnic dialects of students against the dominant variant, Standard English. Schools, regulated by the assessment regime, impose universal recognition of the dominant language. Mike identifies the imposed rationale for this as
preparing students for the labour market and raises questions as to both the efficacy of and
the logic for this. Bourdieu (1991) would suggest that this is the only means by which
linguistic domination can be accomplished, however:

To induce the holders of dominated linguistic competences to collaborate in the
destruction of their instruments of expression, by endeavouring for example to
speak ‘French’ to their children or requiring them to speak ‘French’ at home, with
the more or less explicit intention of increasing their value on the educational
market, it was necessary for the school system to be perceived as the principal
(indeed, the only) means of access to administrative positions which were all the
more attractive in areas where industrialization was least developed. (p. 49)

Bourdieu’s context is not 21st-century Britain, but the operation is the same: students must
have GCSE English at a certain grade in order to access jobs and Further Education courses;
students must speak in Standard English to do well in the speaking and listening
component of GCSE English. Thus the structures of education and assessment induce
holders of dominated linguistic competences – of regional, class and ethnic dialects – to
collaborate in the destruction of their instruments of expression.

Speech and habitus

In the previous section I examined the ways in which the senior examiners conceptualise
the assessment of speaking and listening in order to reveal the tension between the
idealistic conceptualisation of the senior examiners with regards to the possibilities of
speaking and listening and the policy-driven restrictions of the assessment. In this section, I
reveal the teachers’ conceptualisation of speaking and listening, which reflects the logic of
practice as lived in the assessment-driven context of the school.

Whereas the examiners, while recognising its limitations, have an idealistic commitment to
the speaking and listening as a means by which to legitimise the lived experiences of all
students, two of the teachers interviewed identify a link between familial background and a
student’s ability to achieve the highest marks in speaking and listening. When Sandra of Riverside High School is asked about the performance of her students on speaking and listening her response immediately focuses on social background:

I would say that’s definitely a big divider between backgrounds, you know, the children from, I don’t know if this a really wrong thing to say, but you know, from a middle-class background who are used to discussing things with their families round the dinner table do a lot better than the ones who don’t. (RS/TCH p. 9)

Of course there is an argument that it is the job of an English teacher to make sure that his or her students develop the skills necessary to access the curriculum at the highest level, but Sandra is clear about the limitations of teaching students who don’t have access to sophisticated language use at home:

they don’t have the vocabulary, and again I don’t really know how you address that really because, again in a class of 30, trying to teach sophisticated language, I mean we do do things, thesaurus tasks and things like that, but it’s not, as you know, it’s not a replacement for using it at home. (RS/TCH p. 10)

Sandra does her best to enable her students to achieve even when recognising that it is an impossible task – she implicitly recognises that language is intrinsically linked to family context and thus reveals habitus, the durable “system of dispositions” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 214) that is both structured by societal position and structuring of an agent’s actions. Bourdieu (1991) is clear that the “‘choices’ of the habitus” with regards to speech “are accomplished without consciousness or constraint” (p. 51); they are the inevitable product of family context.

When Sandra articulates an understanding that social class affects outcomes in English she is evidently uncomfortable in doing so: “I don’t know if this is a really wrong thing to say.” In working as a leader in a school her job, with its focus not just on teaching in the classroom but on raising the attainment of pupils under the scrutiny of the headteacher and beyond that Ofsted and the DfE, depends on her accepting the doxa unquestioningly; in questioning whether raising achievement in speaking and listening is really possible she
is questioning the whole foundation on which her professional position rests. There is a
tension between her stake in the game, *illusio*, and what she perceives about the reality of
an assessment that privileges the dispositions of middle class habitus. Steve and Mike are
outside the school context and so are able to bluntly suggest that the criteria for assessing
speaking and listening are divisive and not a wholly valid assessment of speaking. The
implication of what Sandra says is that the criteria assess the ability to converse in the style
of a middle class discussion around a dinner table; in what they say both Steve and Mike
are acknowledging that this leads to a narrow and arbitrary assessment of speech. The
status afforded to middle class dinner table speech is an illustration of the way in which the
academic assessment operates to consecrate the language practices of the socially
dominant. As concluded in Chapter 5, the assessment structures an academic taxonomy
that is homologous with the social taxonomy through granting superiority to the way of
being of the dominant (Bourdieu 1996).

Janet at Greenfield High School speaks about the amount of effort she was putting in to
teaching the skills necessary to achieve in speaking and listening but believes to a large
extent that their achievement will be capped at the top of Band 4 (Band 5 is the top band
of marks). Interestingly she also draws attention to the lack of a wide vocabulary that
Sandra mentioned:

Group discussion – we’ve worked really hard on that; we’ve created sort of prompt
questions that we use now to really sharpen up their vocabulary, so when they’re
doing a discussion there’ll be lots of cards of out and it will be, you know, and it
allows them to, there’ll be a question that they could ask to show that they are
challenging to get into Band 4, so I understand your point of view; however, have
you thought about this? What would be your opinion on this? So they’ll use them
to help them accelerate through the bands, so we’ve got more and more now
hitting Band 4, but I still think the lack of extensive vocabulary that we see in their
writing is directly impacting their ability to hit Band 5. (GF/TCH p. 6)

It is notable that when asked whether she thought it was possible to teach someone the
skills necessary to hit the Band 5 marks Janet’s immediate response was, “I don’t think so,
no” (GF/TCH p. 6) and yet, after talking around the subject she concluded, “I think Speaking and Listening is definitely something we need to work on as a department.” (GF/TCH p. 7) It seems apparent that within the high stakes context of GCSE, it is impossible for Janet as Head of English to accept that the assessment is constructed in a way that means that students from a particular background are unlikely to access the highest marks no matter how well they are taught, and so she articulates the need to continue to work on it with her department, and yet, her instinctive reaction was to express a belief that the skills necessary to access the top band just can’t be taught. Janet’s position within the field, which structures and is structured by habitus, means that on the one hand she constructs the field as “a world endowed with sense and value” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 127); her role as a teacher means that she has to believe that students can be taught what they need to succeed. But on the other hand she displays intrinsic awareness that the nature of the game means that the knowledge needed to achieve the highest grades can’t be taught to her students. She briefly demonstrates awareness of the reality of the relationships between social background (and concomitant habitus) and achievement in GCSE but quickly reverts to a voiced acceptance of the logic of practice because to do otherwise would be to shatter her belief in the sense and value of the field and to undermine her position within it.

The difference between the way Sandra and Janet engage with questions pertaining to speaking and listening reflects their different school contexts. As established in Chapter 3, Riverside School is located in a postcode in which 67.4% of adults have a Level 4 qualification or higher in contrast to Greenfield, which is located in a postcode in which 15.2% of adults have a Level 4 qualification or higher. The intake at Greenfield appears to be more homogenous and it is likely that it doesn’t include many children of graduates; hence Janet’s conclusion that her students can’t achieve the highest mark band in speaking and listening. Riverside is more comprehensive: it is likely that there is a significantly higher
proportion of children of graduates but still 22% of students are eligible for free school meals. Thus Sandra is able to observe those students whose social background has prepared them for GCSE assessment, who reveal habitus that disposes them to middle class speech practices, as well as those that “don’t have the vocabulary” (RS/TCH p. 10).

**Students’ experiences of speaking and listening**

In this section I use interview data to discuss the students’ conceptualisation and understanding of speaking and listening. As the most dominated players in the game – and the ones to whom the outcomes matter the most – shedding light on students’ lived experience of the assessments is important in understanding their effects. I also use teachers’ and examiners’ interview data to shed further light on students’ experiences and how those experiences are impacted upon by the breach of the field of assessment by the dominant fields of politics and economics.

The students’ experiences of and attitudes to speaking and listening were varied; however, in all cases, their responses were limited to commenting on the assessed tasks they were doing or had done for their GCSE, rather than on an overall sense of the place of speaking and listening within their lessons. That may, of course, have been a function of their awareness of the focus of my research; nevertheless it is striking that the students’ focus is entirely on assessment tasks. For example, the way that Andrew spoke about speaking and listening is typical, “We’re doing one at the moment – *Of Mice and Men.*” (GF/A p. 6) Sam immediately equated how good he is at speaking and listening to his mark, “I think I’m all right at speaking and listening, I think I got a 9. I think that’s Band 3.” (GF/S p. 6) Farzana also seems to refer to speaking and listening as discrete tasks; when asked how she feels about speaking and listening she responds, “they’re good, they’re interesting.” (RS/F p. 6)
Even where students speak about improving in speaking and listening the improvement is limited to how to do better for assessment, for example, Chelsea says, “We did a few things like the techniques that would help us push for a higher grade” (GF/C p. 6), or in a specific assessed task:

VRJ And does Miss, does she help you know how to do better in Speaking and Listening?

Kath Yea, because she like she does some of the questions and then we’ve got to like figure out some of them ourselves. (GF/K p. 8)

Where the examiners viewed speaking and listening as the space where assessment can be contextualised and students’ knowledge can be recognised as legitimate, it seems that within the classroom, under the rigorous assessment regime, it is reduced to assessment rather than learning. It seems apparent that rather than taking the opportunity to give students the chance to bring their funds of knowledge into the classroom (and thus to give legitimacy to their practices and knowledges), the domination of teaching by the imperative to monitor and assess has led to teachers equating the teaching of speaking and listening with assessment activities. Senior examiner David recognises this:

I also think there's evidence that Unit 2 is not particularly well taught. I think that's a difficult one because of the problems of reliability of marks, but from what I see in centres I go into I think there's a lot of evidence that the students are not taught the skills they need to operate again at the higher bands in Unit 2 and we're back to 'what is sophisticated, what is assured, what is challenging' and it seems to me that, for example, role play is not taught, it's just done, and I think there's been a lot of evidence for a number of years about that, and I think a lot of English teachers would admit that, that they just kind of get them to do things without teaching them the skills. (EX/D p. 15)

In David’s view teaching of speaking and listening focuses on its assessment rather than developing students’ skills and competences. This is another illustration of the effects of the breach of the field of education by the field of politics, as explored in Chapter 4: the emphasis on the accountability and measurement of schools, which is most easily achieved through quantifiable data such as assessment outcomes, has led to teaching in which students are schooled in the logic of practice rather than being taught in a way that would
lead to a real understanding of the relationships between their own experiences, the game (and the wider social field) and the capitals at play. In relation to social equity, processes which could contribute to relational equity (Raffo 2014) do not do so because of the pressures exerted on schools and teachers by the dominant structures.

A number of students expressed fear or worry about the idea of speaking and listening whereas this wasn’t the case at all with reading or writing, even where students felt they weren’t particularly good at it. Shelley, for example, equated speaking and listening with writing something down and then reading it out, but still found it anxiety-inducing:

Shelley I can’t read out loud, my words get all messed up and everything, like.

VRJ OK.

Shelley I don’t like it, go red and embarrassed. (RS/SH p. 4)

Chelsea felt exposed when speaking out loud:

VRJ How do you feel about speaking and listening? Do you enjoy it?

Chelsea Yeah, sometimes. Sometimes, like, I don’t know, I feel a bit embarrassed when I’m doing like in front of the class, but then like I just do my best. (GF/C p. 6)

Nick was clear in his dislike of speaking and listening:

Nick I hate speaking and listening.

VRJ Why is that?

Nick I don’t know, I just don’t like it whatsoever. (GF/N p. 9)

Nick also didn’t believe that speaking and listening had any place in the English assessment:

I don’t see what the speaking and listening part has to do with it in English. That’s, I don’t know, it just confuses me how like, the debating side, but like the role plays it’s more a drama so I don’t see why it’s like such a big, 25% (sic) is quite a lot. (GF/N p. 10)

This anxiety around speaking and listening, which is not mirrored in attitudes to reading or writing, may have its source in the connections that have already been established between speech and bodily hexis, a constituent of habitus, and between the dominated
and the dominant linguistic competences. Bourdieu (1991) observes that symbolic violence:

is never more manifest than in all the corrections, whether *ad hoc* or permanent, to which dominated speakers, as they strive desperately for correctness, consciously or unconsciously subject the stigmatized aspects of their pronunciation, their diction (involving various forms of euphemism) and their syntax, or in the disarray which leaves them ‘speechless’ or ‘tongue-tied’, ‘at a loss for words’, as if they were suddenly dispossessed of their own language.” (p. 52)

Whether students are explicitly corrected or whether they are simply aware that their way of being and their way of speaking is not the one which is consecrated through the GCSE English assessment, it is understandable that they may feel embarrassed when speaking. Riverside teacher Sandra draws attention to what she perceives to be a reluctance in students eligible for free school meals to speak publicly:

*Sandra*  I’ve really noticed this, that the free school meals pupils just won’t, are just really, really reluctant to talk in front of their peers, whereas, you know,

*VRJ*   Really, it’s that clear?

*Sandra*     Yeah definitely, there’s a real issue with it, with group work as well, you know, I’ve tried, with the free school meals pupils, there’s a big push at the moment within school as well, to try and focus on free school meals pupils, and one of the sort of strategies was to try and get them to be group leaders, but they hate doing that, they hate having to feed back any kind of discussion that they’ve had; they hate leading discussions. (RS/TCH p. 9)

When a student lacks confidence and competence in using the legitimised variant of English he or she is led, through the structures of assessment, to feel invalid. The connections between speech and bodily hexis mean that an implicit criticism of one’s speech is a criticism of one’s self and one’s social and familial origins. What Sandra says suggests that Speaking and Listening is an area of assessment which in her experience operates to exclude socially dominated students and, by implication, include those whose linguistic competences, revealing of habitus, reflect those consecrated by the assessment.
The place of speaking and listening

I have established in previous sections the way that speaking and listening is marginalised within the English curriculum because of the policy-driven focus on accountability measures. In this section I use interview data to examine briefly the status of speaking and listening within the English curriculum within schools and look at the one school in my sample where speaking and listening is made a clear priority and the outcomes of that.

As established in the previous section, in my interview data with teachers and students it was generally evident that speaking and listening was not central to the English curriculum. Salma of Riverside school wasn’t sure whether or not she had really done any speaking and listening:

VRJ OK. And what about Speaking and Listening? Have you done many Speaking and Listening tasks?
Salma Er, I don’t know. I think no, well one, the first one?
VRJ Do you do much Speaking and Listening in class? Do you do much kind of work on that? Where you work on it and practice it.
Salma No but like cos of reading books, like people just read and everybody listens. (RS/S p. 7)
It is clear from her answer she didn’t really know what was being referred to. And yet later in the interview when asked about what she would improve in the assessment of English she observed that:

Maybe like speaking. Cos most of them are writing, cos English is more about punctuation and capital letters, so but I think speaking should be, cos most people speak slang, so like I think they should improve that. (RS/S p. 11)
Salma sees improving her spoken language as a priority but doesn’t recognise that it is already an intrinsic element of the English curriculum.

It is notable that when asked questions about what they thought the overall function of assessment in English should be or about how they would improve the assessment if they
had the power, Salma was the only student who referred to speaking and listening;
everyone else immediately referred to elements of reading or writing. It seems apparent
that within students’ minds speaking and listening is at the margins of both their learning
and the assessment of English. This is confirmed by teacher Janet from Greenfield:

Yeah, I think the moment you do Speaking and Listening there’s still that feeling
among students that it’s the end of term or a bit of a doss or.. There is that feeling.
Getting them to engage and understand that it’s what you’re doing here is equal to
that written essay that you’ve just done on *Mice and Men*, think about the effort
that you’ve put into that, you know, and there’s still that feeling. And I think there
needs to be a lot more structure. (GF/TCH p. 7)

In one of the three schools in my sample however the ways that the students and teacher
spoke about speaking and listening was different. It is evident from what teacher Sonia says
that the school prioritises spoken language:

The majority of students here are really really strong at speaking and listening.
They take it very seriously. They’re extremely well prepared. They work brilliantly
in groups. Having worked at previous schools where perhaps it’s not always been
taken seriously, I'm consistently impressed at how they do and quite often it's the
students that where you perhaps wouldn't have expected them to be so interesting
in the way that they present that, particularly their role plays and it's brilliant to see
their understanding and their interpretation in a different way. Perhaps a student
that's got EAL issues in their writing and it means that they don't always get great
marks on Section B because they perhaps don’t write full sentences, but when it
comes to the speaking and listening, because they can express themselves with
more confidence, their understanding and their perception of the text really comes
across. It's a real pleasure to see actually. I think with the plans to change
speaking and listening would be quite devastating for a lot of students. We do a lot
of work on group work and debating across the school as a whole, obviously with
English as the sort of main faculty that helps with that, a lot of students get
involved in 'Debate Mate' which is a national scheme and the students really
understand how important it is to be able to express themselves and project
themselves positively in the way that they speak. They do take it seriously. (RB/TCH
p. 12)

It is notable that Sonia acknowledges that in other schools she’s taught in speaking and
listening hasn’t been taken seriously but in Redbrick it is. When she says that students “do
take it seriously” it is implicit that she as a teacher also takes it seriously. The percentage of
pupils at Redbrick whose first language is a language other than English is 64%, so Sonia’s
perception that students are confident speakers does not stem from her having students
with habitual usage of the dominant forms of English. She explicitly comments on the way that speaking and listening enables students with English as an additional language to express their understanding and perceptions in a way they may not be able to in writing. This echoes the observation by senior examiner Mike that speaking and listening can be facilitating and empowering for students who speak English as an additional language where reading and writing isn’t (EX/M p. 10).

Sonia’s students also express more positive attitudes towards speaking and listening than the students at the other schools. Redbrick student Kasha, for example, speaks about her strengths in speaking and listening in response to a question about her careers plans:

KASHA I want to do something where I can like pitch stuff to people, like schools and that, business, you know like The Apprentice, and people pitching products to a company and because I think I’m better at verbally and talking, whereas I can't like stay, I can stay, but I can't stay focused for an amount of time to just keep writing, I think I'm better more verbally than written.

VRJ OK lovely. Do you think that has been a benefit in your GCSE, being verbal?

KASHA Like yes, the exam when we’ve done stuff like this, to speak your mind is very good to do and then when you’re writing just write what you would best, but I always do it seeing if I could do a speech, so I am like, right, need to think of what I'm writing, what kind of sound you need to write in, and whatever that is I applied that to writing. (RB/K p. 12)

It is notable that Kasha has confidence in her verbal abilities, that she speaks about it as relevant to something outside the curriculum and assessment and that she sees it as something that has a positive impact on her written skills as well. This seems to be a direct reflection of what Sonia talks about when she says that focussing on speaking and listening skills is a priority “across the school as a whole” (RB/TCH p. 12) not just the responsibility of the English teacher. Kasha clearly sees competence in speaking and listening as a life skill, not as something she is doing to fulfil the requirements of an assessment. When Sonia says that, “the students really understand how important it is to be able to express themselves and project themselves positively in the way that they speak,” (RB/TCH p. 12) it is evident
that the school has equipped the students with an understanding of capital, albeit non-directly. It is implicit in what Sonia says about the students' understanding of the importance of speaking skills that some learning has taken place that explicitly empowers students through addressing what is recognised as capital in the wider social field. She is equipping students with “powerful knowledge” (Young, 2008, p.14) despite the curriculum, the assessment and the dominance of accountability measures and procedures.

Summary

Within this chapter I have revealed that the senior examiners in particular conceive of internal assessment as the space where “individual” and “local” (EX/D p.2) forms of knowledge have legitimacy in the curriculum – where context dependent knowledge that is not necessarily the knowledge of the powerful (Young 2008) has a place. And yet it is evident from the ways teachers, students and examiners speak that in most cases the opportunity to create that space, and to recognise experiences beyond that of the dominant culture as legitimate, isn’t taken. While Bourdieu (1996) writes about the educational institution and “the symbolic violence it commits insofar as it is able to impose the misrecognition of its true logic upon all those who participate in it,” (p. 116) it is arguable that where internal assessment is a feature of assessment, particular where there is the facility for teacher and student to negotiate the content of that assessment, the force of that symbolic violence can be weakened. Yet here the opportunity is missed and the focus of the teaching and learning that takes place is on assessment.

It is notable that it is the examiners rather than the teachers that recognise the facility of internal assessment, particularly speaking and listening, to empower students through legitimising their funds of knowledge. As discussed in Chapter 4, teachers are fully
immersed in “the urgency, the appeals, the threats, the steps to be taken, which make up the real, really lived-in world” (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 82). The examiners’ position, which is outside the dominated environment of schools, arguably aligned with the dominators, allows them firstly to step outside the immediacy of practice and hold such ideals, and secondly, to look at the game in play and recognise some of the reality of its nature (notably the reality that reflects on the practice of the other – dominated – players rather than on their own practice).

Through academic assessment the individual and the individual’s way of being is either ‘consecrated’ or ‘condemned’ (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 377) and this is most directly evident in the case of speaking and listening, where the outward display of a student’s bodily hexis is scrutinised and placed in a hierarchical taxonomy. Within speaking and listening, as in writing as explored in Chapter 5, formal discourse, here characterised as Standard English, is most highly placed within the taxonomy. Bourdieu (1996) neatly summarises the effects of this sort of taxonomy:

The nearly miraculous logic of the classification performed by the educational institution can be understood if it is realized, on the one hand, that the selection operated by the field at each moment in its history, according to its own logic, retains the properties that are "functional" from the point of view of its own perpetuation as well as the perpetuation of those who dominate it; (1996, p. 228)

The consecration of the form of spoken English that is used by those at the highest levels of society ensures the perpetuation of those who dominate the field: as established in Chapter 4, the field is dominated by the political field and it is within that field that decisions are made about what is assessed in GCSE English.

As is evident from this chapter (and from Chapter 4), the dominated nature of the field of educational assessment impacts upon classroom practice, which in turn affects students’ learning. It is clear within this chapter that practice surrounding speaking and listening is dominated by the imperative to assess, which is driven by the demand for accountability by
the political field. Yet within this chapter there is an example, at Redbrick School, of empowering practice taking place at the edges of the ‘official’ curriculum, across the school, despite assessments rather than directly because of them. This is not to say that there is a struggle within this location to change the nature of the game – the players are of the game which structures their habitus (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 127), they have a stake in the game, *illusio*, and thus they are inevitably accepting of its *doxa*, as Bourdieu (1996) expresses:

> ... collective belief, here as elsewhere, is inscribed in the direct conformity between the objective structures of the divisions of the academic world and the cognitive structure of the principles of vision and division that the agents engaged in this world apply to it. (p. 38)

The struggle at Redbrick is to give their students the skills that are misrecognised as capital within (and beyond) the field, thus empowering them to play the game.
Chapter 7: Challenging the logic of practice

**Introduction**

This chapter addresses the three research questions, summarising the key findings with regards to each from the analysis chapters and the implications and recommendations arising from my findings. As established in Chapter 1, the three primary research questions addressed by this research are as follows:

1: What are the relationships between social and cultural practices and knowledge and success in GCSE English?

2: What are the relationships between policy, the GCSE English assessment and teaching and learning?

3: What are the relationships between GCSE English assessment and reproduction of educational inequalities?

This chapter is separated into three sections, following this brief introduction. In the first I set out to address research questions 1 and 3 and reveal the relationships between the practice of the game of GCSE English assessment, social and cultural knowledge and practices and social and educational reproduction. However, as school and assessment practices are products and reflections of policy the first section also addresses research question 2. In the second section I address research questions 2 and 3 and reveal the relationships between policy, assessment, practice and educational and social reproduction. Again, however, because of the overlapping nature of my research questions, I touch on research question 1.

**Culture, practice and educational reproduction**

In this section I draw upon the analysis of data in chapters 4, 5 and 6 to address the relationships between the practice of the game of GCSE English assessment, social and cultural knowledge and practices and social and educational reproduction. In doing so I set out to address research questions 1 and 3. However, as school and assessment practices
are intertwined with policy at every level, as teachers, students and examiners are embodiments of the impacts of policy as lived, this section also addresses research question 2.

In order to reveal the relationships between achievement in GCSE English assessment, social and cultural practices and social and education reproduction it has been and is helpful to conceptualise the analysis of the data through the thinking tools of field, habitus and capital. Bourdieu (1986b) suggests that practice results from a relationship between socially structured intrinsic dispositions or condition (habitus), relational properties or position (capital) and the conditions of the field in which the practice is located. The GCSE English assessment itself can be characterised as practice, in that it is both structured by and structures habitus, capital and field. As has been revealed in chapters 4, 5 and 6, the practice of GCSE English assessment structures taxonomies of literacy practices, themselves revealing of habitus and bodily hexis, which position students in a way homologous with their positioning within the structures of the wider social field.

As demonstrated, the GCSE English assessment misrecognises a wide cultural knowledge as cultural capital and in doing so it constructs a taxonomy of literacies that mirrors the social taxonomy and therefore perpetuates social divisions. Through the analysis of the data in chapters 5 and 6 a narrative unfolds that suggests that students are advantaged, in terms of the likelihood of their achieving success at the highest levels in GCSE in English, if they reveal habitus that disposes them towards experience of a range of cultural practices. This is evident through documentary analysis of the exam questions and the mark schemes as well as through analysis of interview data, for example, the ways in which students Andrew (GF/A p. 7) and Kath (GF/K p. 8) explain that they are prevented from accessing the questions not through a lack of reading ability but through a lack of world knowledge and the ways that teachers Sonia (RB/TCH p. 13) at Redbrick and Janet (GF/TCH p. 5) at
Greenfield have amended their practices to develop their students’ cultural and world knowledge with the express aim of raising their students’ achievement in the assessment. It is also evident through the habitus revealed by Steve when he rationalises his selection of formal, exclusive texts for the exam paper (EX/S p. 3).

Analysis of the data does not suggest that in order to achieve the highest grades students need to have the sort of specific knowledge and experience of the beaux arts that Bourdieu (1984) identifies as operating as capital or of the type that has most frequently been linked with academic success in studies that have examined the correlation between academic success and cultural capitals (DiMaggio, P. 1982, Katsillis, J and Rubinson, R. 1990, Sullivan, 2001, 2007). Rather that the exam – its questions and its mark schemes – rewards a wide world knowledge which might be acquired through the type of “cultural omnivorousness” that Bennett et al. (2009, p. 254) identify as operating to confer advantage in modern Britain. It assesses and rewards a context dependent knowledge of the powerful (Young 2008) rather than a context independent powerful knowledge that Young (2008) argues ought to constitute a curriculum.

The GCSE English assessment also constructs a taxonomy that misrecognises bodily dispositions towards language as capital: advantage is conferred upon students who reveal habitus that means that they are able to not only understand and use formal discourses but do so habitually, understanding implicitly that that is what is required in the context of the assessment. This is evident again through analysis of the interview data (RS/P p. 8) as well as of the question papers and mark schemes. As revealed in Chapter 5, it is evident that students must write, and instinctively know to write, in a formal discourse in order to achieve the highest marks in the writing element of the exam. The exam question asking students to write a blog entry (EP1) doesn’t state that the language to be used should be formal and yet the mark scheme in the top two bands rewards a formal use of English
It is revealed in Chapter 6 that the highest marks in the Speaking and Listening section of the exam are reserved for those students with a confident command of Standard English. This understanding and ability to use language formally is intrinsically linked to a student’s home background, as teachers Janet (GF/TCH p. 6) from Greenfield and Sandra (RS/TCH p. 9) from Riverside recognise when they express reservations about their students’ abilities to access the highest marks in speaking and listening. They recognise implicitly that English rewards a context dependent knowledge (Young 2008) that privileges the practices of the privileged.

Students’ dispositions towards language is integral to and within habitus, those embodied dispositions that are structured in the home. Students who reveal a habitus that reflects a lived experience of formal language use will inevitably be more likely to achieve success in GCSE English; those students who reveal a habitus that means that their habitual language use is non-standard will be disadvantaged by the lack of explicit direction in the exam questions. Even if they are able to access formal discourses through school-based inculcation their bodily disposition will not be to reach for a formal discourse unless explicitly directed to do so. Fairclough (2001), observes that formality serves to limit access to discourses:

`Formality is a common property in many societies of practices and discourses of high social prestige and restricted access. It is a contributing factor in keeping access restricted, for it makes demands above and beyond those of most discourses, and the ability to meet those demands is unevenly distributed. It can also serve to generate awe among those who are excluded by it and daunted by it (p. 55).`

This echoes the observation made by teacher Sandra (RS/TCH p. 9), referred to in Chapter 6, about the absolute lack of confidence of those students who are entitled to free school meals – those students who are least entitled within society – in their command of spoken English. Where an assessment consecrates a form of language that generates awe and daunts it can only lead to the perpetuation of social divisions.
The analysis of the data supports Bourdieu’s (1996) argument that the knowledge and practices that form the basis of academic classifications are arbitrary: they are recognised as superior forms of knowledge and practice not because they are intrinsically superior but because they are the forms of knowledge and practice that characterise the socially dominant:

As objective structures that have become mental structures through a learning process that takes place in a universe organized according to these same structures and subject to sanctions formulated in a language also structured according to the same oppositions, academic taxonomies classify according to the very logic of the structures that have produced them, as do the objects to which they are applied. Given that they find never-ending confirmation in a social universe organized according to the same principles, the taxonomies are implemented with the sense of "self-evidence" that characterizes the doxic experience of the social world, and its reverse of the unthought and the unthinkable. (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 39)

The habitus revealed by the socially dominant, as both structured and structuring, means that when they determine the currency to be misrecognised as capital and the exchange rate within the field they reward the qualities and knowledge that are esteemed by but are also habitual to the socially dominant. This is not a conscious act: they are not choosing one practice over another. Rather, the doxa regarding the constructs to be assessed is self-evident because it is structured by habitus.

The act of academic taxonomy, which all teachers and examiners are engaged in, and which is accepted as doxa by all the players in the game because of their stake in the game, or illusio, is only possible because of the misrecognition of what is really going on:

Agents entrusted with acts of classification can fulfill their social function as social classifiers only because it is carried out in the guise of acts of academic classification. They only do well what they have to do (objectively) because they think they are doing something other than what they are doing, because they are doing something other than what they think they are doing, and because they believe in what they think they are doing. As fools fooled, they are the primary victims of their own actions. It is because they think they are using a strictly academic or even, more specifically, "philosophical" (or "literary") classification, because they think they are awarding certificates of charismatic qualifications in literature or philosophy ("philosophical mind," etc.), that the system is able to
effect a veritable deviation of the meaning of their practice, thereby getting them to do what they would not otherwise do for all the money in the world. (p. 39)

The examiners and teachers are only able to do what they do – classify students according to the physical manifestations of their habitus, the results of inculcation in and by the social context in which they exist – because they believe they are doing something else. In his interview data, for example, senior examiner Steve expresses unshakeable belief in the logic of practice within the game:

... you can communicate in writing and communicate in speaking, with other people in the same context or a different context to you, in your own language, with an articulateness which is refined, then you are going to advance civil society and, therefore, a peaceful society and, therefore, a society worth living in. (EX/S p. 17)

He believes that the assessment is genuinely assessing essential academically constructed skills, rather than arbitrary language practices that are the result of socialisation. Those who make academic judgements, whether teachers or examiners, can rarely conceive of any different taxonomy because of the durable structures of their habitus, because of the qualities and qualifications that endow them with capitals in that field, which both determine and are constituted by their place in the field, because of their interest in the game, illusio, and because of the field itself – its rules and conditions – which are understood as doxa.

This is not to claim that the exclusion (and implicit inclusion) of students is the result of any deliberate action on the part of examiners, or even the result of deliberate government policy. Rather that the habitus of those in dominant positons within the field means that they rarely conceive of any other course of action. Bourdieu (1996) explains it thus:

32 Rarely does not mean never, however. While the majority of the examiners misrecognise the logic of practice of assessment Mike is able to step outside the game and imagine a contextualised model of assessment:

I just think it needs to be left to the individual institutions which shouldn’t be set against each other in that way and, you know, that, let’s not say each versus somewhere, let’s say Saffron Waldron versus Rochdale. Saffron Waldron’s going to do better if your only measure is a middle class base test of reading and writing. So what I think you need is that you don’t have national testing, you have highly localised, which sort of stands or falls on its market value. So if a school or an institution can say well this is what we’ve done in our
The extraordinary collective denial that makes the direct apprehension of the social foundations of academic judgments unthinkable (reducing them to ordinary acts of the derealizing ritual of initiation), as much for those who pronounce them as for those upon whom they are pronounced, is not simply the result of the aggregation of a set of individual denials. In fact, collective belief, here as elsewhere, is inscribed in the direct conformity between the objective structures of the divisions of the academic world and the cognitive structure of the principles of vision and division that the agents engaged in this world apply to it. We have come, in fact, to the most obscure principle of action, which lies neither in structures nor in consciousness, but rather in the relation of immediate proximity between objective structures and embodied structures - in habitus. (p. 38)

As is clear from chapters 4, 5 and 6 the players in the game of GCSE English assessment have limited understanding of the social foundations of the judgements made through the GCSE English assessment. There is some awareness, such as when the teachers suggest that students can’t be taught to hit the highest marks in the speaking and listening assessment (RS/RCH p. 9, p. 10, GF/TCH p. 6), however overall the students, teachers and examiners interviewed expressed an implicit collective belief in the logic of the assessment. There is very little explicit recognition that the taxonomy enacted serves little practical purpose beyond replicating the dominant taxonomy.

There is much in the data, as analysed in the chapters that precede this, that can be and has been productively thought about through this conceptualisation of academic knowledge and academic judgement. In particular, revealing the nature of the knowledge and skills that are misrecognised as capital in and by the GCSE English assessment, as discussed in chapters 5 and 6, leads to an understanding of the field and its doxa, which, when viewed through the lens of habitus, suggests a clear relationship between the GCSE English assessment and social and educational reproduction.

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curriculum, and the kids, as part of their understanding of what they’re doing can talk about what they’ve been doing, so instead of going with a piece of paper that says C, they can say well I’ve done, I’ve had to write some short stories which I really liked (EX/M p. 13). This perspective reflects Mike’s practice: his particular area of responsibility is an area of internal assessment, rather than the externally assessment examinations. Thus he is predisposed to contextualised assessment whereas Steve, who sets exams, is not.
Bourdieu’s ‘absolute substantive theory of arbitrariness’ (LiPuma, 1993, p. 17) has been criticised as limited and limiting. Naidoo (2004), for example, argues that Bourdieu’s theory needs to incorporate a theory of “the content and internal structuring of knowledge” (p. 469) rather than viewing academic products as nothing more than arbitrary emanations of social structure. Similarly Young (2008), who, as one of the main proponents of what has been has been classified as the new sociology of the curriculum in the UK and critical curriculum studies in the USA (Young 2008), previously focused upon inequalities in the curriculum and the relations between knowledge and power (Young 1971), is now critical of Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of academic knowledge as necessarily arbitrary and homologous with the social field and argues for a “theory of the differentiation of knowledge” (Young, 2008, p. 10). He argues that the sociology of the curriculum needs to go beyond the task of revealing the basis of the curriculum as the culturally arbitrary knowledge of the powerful; it ought rather to posit the means by which a curriculum can enable students to acquire powerful knowledge (Young 2013).

If one accepts this criticism of Bourdieu’s theorisation and recognises Young’s distinction between powerful knowledge and knowledge of the powerful then the findings of this research suggest that English as it is currently conceptualised in schools, in the curriculum and in the GCSE English assessment, represents knowledge of the powerful in that, as has been demonstrated, it reflects specific cultural and language practices that are those of the socially dominant. What makes English distinctive from other subject areas of the school curriculum is the relationship between the content that is being assessed and bodily hexis and habitus. Bourdieu notes the relationship between language and bodily hexis:

Language is a body technique, and specifically linguistic, especially phonetic, competence is a dimension of bodily hexis in which one’s whole relation to the social world, and one’s whole socially informed relation to the world, are expressed (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 86).
Through the GCSE English assessment several aspects of language use that can be attributed to bodily hexis are consecrated, notably, the disposition to use Standard English and formal discourses in speaking and in writing. The relationship between the content assessed and the wider dispositions of habitus is evident through the ways in which the assessment rewards a wide cultural knowledge and experience, beyond that which can be acquired in the classroom. Much research that makes use of habitus as a means by which to interrogate inequities in education tends to focus on students’ broader dispositions and achievement or progress (Dumais 2002, McClelland 1990, Reay 1995) rather than a specific focus on achievement in a particular subject area. This reflects the difference between English and other subject areas: what is taught in, say, history or science or languages, is knowledge that is only, in most circumstances, acquired in the classroom (what Young, 2008, terms “context-independent knowledge” p. 15). A student may have dispositions that influence how s/he feels about the subject or how hard s/he wants to study it, a student may have ‘a feel for the game’ of education and assessment, but the subject content itself is context-independent – the knowledge of the academy rather than the knowledge of the home. Within the game of GCSE English assessment, which is both reflective of and constitutive of the practice of English in schools, “context-dependent knowledge” (Young, 2008, p. 15) is being assessed, specifically, the “knowledge of the powerful” (Young, 2008, p, 14). Aspects of hexis and habitus are being misrecognised through teaching and assessment as capital and the assessment is thus operating to ensure social and educational reproduction.

That the GCSE English assessment is the way it is, is the result of the interactions between the conditions of the field of education, the structuring structures that characterise the habitus of the players in the field and their relative positions (constituted by their capitals) in the field. It is also impacted upon by the breach of the field of education by the wider
social fields of economics and politics, as developed further in the section that follows this one.

Policy, practice and social and educational reproduction

In the previous section, while focusing on the relationships between GCSE English assessment, social and cultural knowledge and practices and social and educational reproduction I also revealed the impacts of policy as lived. In revealing the social structures that underpin the common sense assumptions (Ozga 1999) of the rationality of the official logic of the GCSE assessment I shed light on the injustice that the GCSE English assessment perpetuates. In this section I further address the relationships between the practice of and around the assessment, policy and social and education reproduction and in doing so address research questions 2 and 3. Again, however, because of the interrelatedness of my three research questions, I also address research question 1.

As is evident from the analysis of the ways the examiners speak about the field in chapters 4 (EX/S p. 2, EX/M p. 3) and 6 (EX/M p. 15) the structures of the assessment are the way they are to a large extent because of decisions made at a governmental level and by the quangos to which power is devolved, which themselves are part of the machine of government. In terms of the relationships between government policy, the assessment and the practices of teaching and learning, however, the most striking finding analysis of the data reveals is the extent to which practice – teaching and hence students’ experiences of learning English – is impacted upon by governmental accountability measures. This is most notable in three areas: firstly the belief on the part of the examiners that students were being short-changed by a system that prioritises teaching to the assessment rather than teaching skills (for example, EX/D p. 15); secondly, the ways the teachers and their students
conceptualise teaching and learning as teaching to the assessment\(^\text{33}\) (for example, RS/TCH p. 13) and thirdly, examiners’ perceptions that teachers are ‘cheating’ (EX/S p. 11, EX/L p. 14). All three of these draw attention to the direct impact of policy on practice.

During the period of my empirical research UK government policy impacted dramatically in England on the structure of the assessment and upon students’ and teachers’ experiences of it through the removal of the Speaking and Listening component from the assessment. When I started my research internal assessment was worth 60% of the total mark, with Speaking and Listening comprising 20% of that; by the end of my period of research the examination was worth 60% of the total mark with the remaining 40% made up of written internal assessment.\(^\text{34}\) Speaking and Listening is now reported as a separate grade. In the series of reports and recommendations that led to the removal of the Speaking and Listening component it was clear that all parties believed that problems that purportedly led to its removal were the result of pressures from the accountability system. For example, in the consultation document on the removal of Speaking and Listening from the assessment Ofqual observes that “written exams are more resilient to pressures on schools from accountability measures and therefore we are proposing to adopt the highest weighting for the written papers” (Ofqual, 2013a, p. 8), indicating that a key driver in the changes to the structure of the assessment was the pressures created within schools by the accountability measures. The construction of this sentence is interesting in that the pressures are described as coming “from accountability measures” which has the effect of making the agent responsible for the destructive pressures the measures themselves rather than the Department for Education – the makers of policy are not called to account. Even

\(^{33}\) This may of course be to some extent the result of their awareness of the focus of my research. However, it is striking that a number of the students when asked generally about their learning return immediately to questions of target grades and how to achieve them. See for example (GF/K p. 6).

\(^{34}\) The controversy surrounding this was well documented at the time in the national press; for an example see Walker (2013).
while acknowledging the problems created by accountability measures there is no will to challenge the measures themselves, rather the problem has to be solved by amending the assessment.

The pressure of the accountability measures has led directly to changes to the assessment to reduce the status of Speaking and Listening, the part of the assessment that is the sole location where students can legitimately bring into play their own experiences and culture, as argued in Chapter 6. It has therefore also led directly to an increase in the importance of the final, terminal examination. The formal examination is an absolute example of the way in which symbolic violence is exerted through the educational system. When Bourdieu (1996) writes about the educational institution and “the symbolic violence it commits insofar as it is able to impose the misrecognition of its true logic upon all those who participate in it” (p. 116) it is arguably in the exam room that this is most evident. Senior examiner Steve acknowledges the brutality of the external exam and by implication the more humane nature of internal assessment:

**STEVE** The most secure is the examination. From an assessment point of view. It may not be from a human point of view, but from an assessment point of view the most successful is the examination, which is obviously why there is something now for that to be the only one, which I don’t agree with but you can understand it.

**VRJ** What do you mean, when you said about it may not be from a human point of view, what did you mean?

**STEVE** Well, it would be really unusual for a sixteen-year-old to enjoy an exam. It happens. I mean there are people who, I mean I used to enjoy exams and you probably did too, but we’re not normal from that point of view. I’ve always preferred examination rather than continual assessment. I got a prize for my finals papers and it didn’t entirely surprise me that I got the prize because I just absolutely loved doing finals papers and it’s just ridiculous but I know I’m weird about that, so there is an inhumanity in putting kids through rigorously controlled conditions where they have to remain silent and focused for two and a quarter hours, which is not a natural state for them to be as a human being at sixteen years old. (EX/S p. 11)
Steve acknowledges that exams are not ‘natural’ and not secure from ‘a human point of view’ and yet he is able to collude in their manufacture. Part of the reason this is possible is that exams and the examination system have evidently benefitted him: he “got a prize” for his finals papers; as a “socialised organism” (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 38) Steve reveals the habitus – the set of dispositions – that has allowed him, and the other agents in positions of power within the field, to successfully play the game: the game has consecrated his practice and his way of being. The rituals surrounding the examination – the rigid timings, the strict rules about conditions, the non-negotiable nature of the exam paper and the secrecy surrounding its marking – all conspire to give it the force of violence yet all the agents involved from the pupils and parents to the teachers, headteachers and examiners all collude in the violence through misrecognising its true logic. Through assessment the individual and the individual’s way of being is either ‘consecrated’ or ‘condemned’ (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 377) and yet all agents willingly participate because of their differing stakes in the game, the illusio described in Chapter 4. In increasing the proportion of the assessment to be assessment through terminal examination government policy is increasing the level of symbolic violence and reducing the possibility of teaching and learning that is embedded in a student’s context as examiner David expresses:

> terminal exam and particularly large-scale terminal exam, you have to things like things like set texts and a fixed body, that what you can do with controlled assessment in course work is allow an element of individual local selection of text for example. For example, allowing students to write about, talk about, think about things that are important to them in their particular locality. (EX/D p.2)

As discussed in Chapter 6 internal assessment invites at least the possibility of students being able to draw on the knowledge and experiences in their “virtual school bags”

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35 From 2017 the GCSE English assessment will be by 100% terminal exam. There will be no internal assessment which counts toward the final GCSE grade (DfE 2013). If increasing the proportion of assessment by exam from 40% to 60% represents an increase in symbolic violence, then to remove entirely the possibility of assessment which can be contextualised for the student constitutes an act of terror. The investigation of the results of this shift are beyond the scope and the timescale of this research. However, there is an imperative for future research into the impacts of this change in assessment on teaching and on students’ learning in English.
(Thomson and Hall, 2008, p. 89). As is evident from chapters 5 and 6, assessment drives teaching and learning; for example, Sandra explains that in preparation for GCSE, across Key Stage 3 students are studying non-fiction texts rather than the fiction texts they had studied previously (RS/TCH p.1). In creating an assessment structure which is driven by the needs of the accountability system policy is narrowing the curriculum and ensuring that it represents a body of knowledge that is centrally determined.

What is apparent about the relationships between policy, practice and social and educational reproduction is how absolutely dominated practice in the field of education, exemplified here by the game of GCSE English assessment, is by policy. In chapters 4, 5 and 6 and in this chapter I have shed light on the impacts of the breach of the field of education by the dominant fields of politics and economics (Thomson 2005). Through the accountability measures and through control of assessment content, practice in schools is utterly dominated. Haney et al’s (1993) suggestion that assessments are “not simply sources of information but are instruments of reform in themselves” (p. 265) is important here: the narrative that unfolds about current practice and about the changes to the GCSE English assessment makes it clear that practice is dominated by assessment which in turn is dominated by policy. In order to enact educational reform the most direct route is via the assessment structures.

It is ironic that one of the impacts of globalisation and the neo-liberalisation of education has been the illusion of choice and a free market in education while arguably the impact of a global market has led to an education system which is increasingly centrally controlled in order to serve perceived market needs (Kuehn 2001). The discourse of the Coalition government (2010 – 2015) with, for example, the rapid introduction and increase of free schools (Adams and Wintour 2015) suggests that the field of education is a ‘free market’ in which all stakeholders have an increasing degree of autonomy. As Kelly (2009) observes:
though most schools are public institutions, they are increasingly semi-autonomous, not in the neo-liberal sense of management simply being devolved to them, but in the real sense that they can represent and empower local communities, families and minorities (p. 61).

There is a conflict between this neo-liberal illusion of freedom of choice which can notionally empower and the neo-conservative move towards increasingly strict control of both the curriculum and pedagogy (Apple 2007b), as revealed, through governmental domination of and imposition of assessment and measurement processes and structures. The findings here confirm Nuttall’s (1978) speculation that the government’s real motive for introducing a common system of assessment at age 16 was to take control of the assessments and therefore of the curriculum.

Broadfoot (2001) criticises this move towards an education system that is structured more around systems of measurement than around meaningful pedagogy:

Rooted in a rationalistic assumption that it is possible – and, indeed, desirable – to ‘measure’ performance, whether this be of the individual pupil or of the institution as a whole, the concept of ‘performativity’ arguably represents one of the clearest expressions of modernist thinking. (p. 136)

This drive to measure means that the importance of what is taught and assessed has been eroded in the interests of measurement; as Broadfoot (1996) writes, “the reliability of assessments has tended to eclipse concern with validity” (p. 28). That is to say that concern with how effectively assessments can discriminate between students has become more important an issue than how well the tests assess something meaningful. This draws attention to GCSE English as the means by which a state sanctioned literacy is constructed, transmitted and enforced, as explained in Chapter 2. The drive for something that can be accurately measured, or so the dominant discourse assumes, has led to the exclusion of Speaking and Listening and, as from 2017, written internal assessment from the overall GCSE assessment (DfE 2013). As senior examiner Peter expresses (EX/P p. 11) there is a long-held belief that coursework is the most valid way to assess English, in terms of it being the most real reflection of how people read and write in the world. Peter’s viewpoint is an
example of hysteresis, however; his set of beliefs and values with regards to English education were constructed in a different time in which assessment was not dominated by politics and in which education was not driven by the incessant need to measure.

It is evident that the field of education, here exemplified and represented through the game of GCSE English assessment, is breached and dominated by the field of politics, which in itself is dominated by the field of economics. In this section I have revealed the relationships between policy and practice. This in turn reveals the relationships between the assessment, culture and social and educational reproduction. As was evident in the first part of this chapter the cultural practices misrecognised in and through the GCSE assessment are the practices of the dominant. In controlling the GCSE assessment the hand of policy is directly implicated in the construction of both the coded rules and the regulatory principles that control practices of the game.

Summary

In this chapter I have addressed my three intersecting research questions. I have revealed, in this and previous chapters, the logic of practice of GCSE English assessment which, through consecrating the arbitrary forms of knowledge and practice of the socially dominant, ensures educational and social reproduction. The distinctiveness of English as a subject area has also been revealed. In that the assessment, which structures practice, operates to consecrate the bodily “knowledge of the powerful” (Young, 2008, p. 14), English is different from other academic disciplines which transmit and assess “context-independent” (Young, 2008, p. 15) “powerful knowledge” (Young, 2008, p. 14).

The relationships between policy, practice and educational and social reproduction have also been revealed within this chapter, as has the extent to which the game of GCSE English assessment, as a microcosm of the wider field of education, is dominated by policy. The
damaging effects of this on teaching and learning in the English classroom are clear. The implications of these findings are considered and addressed further in my conclusion, which follows this chapter.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

Introduction

In this chapter I explain the key contribution to knowledge made by this research project and the implications and recommendations that arise from my findings, as well as identifying priorities for future research. In the first section I focus on the main implications with reference to both policy and practice. In the second section I make recommendations for awarding organisations and for policy and practice. In the third section I reflect on the conceptual achievements of this study, discussing the effects of conceptualising the work through Bourdieusian thinking and the contributions made to understanding of the ways in which such thinking is useful within research in education. I conclude by reflecting on my professional learning as a result of this thesis and the Ed.D overall.

Key findings and implications

This research project makes a significant contribution to knowledge on a number of levels, both in relation to education policy and practice and in relation to methodology and theorisation. In this section and the one that follows I focus on the contribution to knowledge regarding the contemporary educational landscape.

My findings show that the assessment operates in such a way as to ensure that the children of the socially dominant go on to be socially dominant through their possession of institutional and consequently social capital. As has been revealed, the GCSE English assessment constructs and enforces a socially divisive and arbitrary variant of literacy that operates to consecrate the literacy practices of the dominant, thus contributing to the processes of educational and social reproduction.

Not only does this mean that students from dominated sections of society are less likely to achieve success in the exam, and thus be the holders of institutional capital, but the
domination of practice by assessment means that those students are less likely to be equipped with powerful tools in and through the classroom. Because of the domination of the curriculum and the imperative to assess, students aren’t given the opportunity to understand the relationships between language and power, which would constitute teaching of real “powerful knowledge” (Young, 2008, p. 14) rather than assessment of the “knowledge of the powerful” (Young, 2008, p. 14).

These findings raise questions about the validity (Newton 2014) of the GCSE English assessment on a number of levels. There is a common sense assumption that the type of literacy being assessed and therefore taught in schools is the right type of literacy for society. There is also a common sense assumption that the GCSE English is the right tool by which students are selected for further education and for employment and by which schools and teachers are held accountable. My findings suggest however that that literacy being assessed and therefore taught is a narrowly defined, culturally arbitrary and formal variant of literacy. This raises questions about whether the GCSE English really equips students for further study and for life and work in the 21st century and whether it can be used as a fair discriminator between students, teachers or schools. The illumination of these inequities can and should lead to changes in practice.

This research has revealed the extent to which those with the power to influence assessments, whether senior examiners or those employed by the DfE or related quangos, make unspoken assumptions about the cultural knowledge and practices that result in the construction of a taxonomy that reflects and reinforces the social taxonomy. The assessment misrecognises a cultural arbitrary as cultural capital and in doing so contributes to educational and social reproduction. This can be addressed on a number of levels.

**Recommendations**
At the level of the assessment, awarding organisations and the senior examiners they appoint need to be made aware of the extent to which assumptions are made about a shared culture which lead to students being positioned as outsiders or insiders by the assessment. This research project focuses on GCSE English, and my findings suggest that the relationships between language assessment and the bodily dispositions that reveal habitus mean that English has distinctive characteristics, but the questions need to be asked across all subject areas. An awareness of the importance of and effects of such assumptions, built into question setting and reviewing procedures can have impact here: the players need, through structural means, to be made to step outside the immediacy of the game (Bourdieu, 1990a) and evaluate the cultural assumptions they are making. In order to enable this shift in perspective, however, I recommend that a wider range of voices is needed to inform the process of setting exams. The importance and potential of student voice within education has been widely recognised (Mitra 2003, 2006, Thomson and Gunter 2007), and the possibilities of democratic assessment (Shohamy 2001) have been explored, albeit theoretically. However within current practice assessment is in no way democratic and a limited range of voices is heard. Teachers’ voices are represented within awarding organisations insofar as examiners by necessity either are or have been teachers. However, as has been revealed, their interest in the game, illusio, means that to a significant degree teachers believe in the logic represented by the rules and regularities of the game. As the GCSE English assessment establishes the boundary line between legitimate and illegitimate knowledge (Bourdieu 1984), including a wider range of voices can and should inform a debate about where that line should be.

At a policy level, it is apparent that the curriculum in schools is dominated by the imperative of assessment. An assessment structure that has increased the weighting of external assessment and reduced the proportion of internal assessment (Ofqual 2013a, 2013b) with the eradication of internal assessment in future (DfE 2013) has determined
that the assessment is necessarily more rooted in a centralised “fixed body” (EX/D p.2) of knowledge, controlled by the dominant. The amount of space where the knowledge of the dominated can be recognised as legitimate in the assessment is reduced and subsequently abolished and, given the pressures of the accountability system, the assessment drives the curriculum. This has implications for the relationships between the assessment and social and educational reproduction; in this model, and without the changes described above, the knowledge that is recognised as legitimate is wholly determined by the dominant – it is *their* knowledge.

Given these shifts towards an increasingly centralised fixed body of knowledge being assessed and taught there needs to be an ongoing research that takes a critical perspective on GCSE English assessment. If my findings suggest that the current incarnation of GCSE English is socially divisive and iniquitous then research needs to take place once the new specification is being taught and assessed to reveal the impacts of the move to 100% examination on students and teachers. The new subject criteria for the GCSE in English Language (DfE 2013) also represent a shift to an even more formal variant of English being at the centre of the assessment and therefore the curriculum. The subject content prescribes the reading and assessment of “high quality, challenging texts” and that “each text studied must represent a substantial piece of writing, making significant demands on students in terms of content, structure and the quality of language” (DfE, 2013, p. 4). Awarding bodies’ proposed GCSEs were only accredited by Ofqual if they demonstrated that their interpretation of what terms such as “quality” and “substantial” meant was in accordance with that of Ofqual. This represents a significant shift towards a government-sanctioned, narrowly-defined exclusive form of literacy. Analysis of the implications of this is not within the scope of this research study but is an imperative for future research.
Any state sanctioned literacy will represent someone’s interests: there is no culturally neutral literacy. My recommendation is therefore for a more wholesale rethinking of what GCSE English is and what it is for. What would be more democratic and empowering for all would be an assessment which was structured in a way which enables students to understand the nature of multiple literacies, giving students the analytical tools to evaluate language and understand its socially constructed nature. Gee (2012) suggests that in order for students to understand the discourses that they are attempting to acquire, they need to gain, through juxtaposition, an understanding of the differences and similarities between different discourses (p. 170). An assessment which assessed such understanding and therefore drove a curriculum in which such understanding was explicitly taught would give students the knowledge to select discourses appropriate to context as well as a critical understanding of the relationships between discourse and power. It would also provide a context in which students’ own linguistic dispositions, revealing of habitus, were valued and discussed, rather than being systematically devalued through an assessment which consecrates only the language practices of the dominant. Raffo (2014) argues that in order to address the distributional inequalities of educational outcomes students need to experience relational equity within school, which “means educational institutions recognising, respecting and representing what is valued culturally, socially and educationally by their young people, families and communities” (p. 118). Such an assessment would give students’ language practices – indeed, their voices – a valid and valued place within school. It would shift the emphasis within English assessment and within the assessment-drive curriculum from “knowledge of the powerful” Young, 2008, p. 14) to “powerful knowledge,” (Young, 2008, p. 14).36

36 This approach to language teaching is not revolutionary or new: it is consistent with how English Language is studied and assessed at A-level and within Higher Education. It was also the approach to language teaching advocated by the LINC (Language in the National Curriculum) project, which was an in-service teacher education programme funded by the UK government between 1989 and 1992.
Until such an assessment and curriculum exists, however, I recommend that schools look beyond the assessment for ways to build in empowering understanding of multiple literacies, to teach explicit understanding of discourse and power despite rather than because of the assessment. If teachers are able to empower students through the use of their funds of knowledge, allowing them to unpack their virtual school bags (Thomson and Hall 2008) in the classroom and focus on skills outside the narrowly defined curriculum then, as seen at Redbrick school (RB/TCH p. 12), students can grow in a sense of power and confidence. From an ethical perspective, English education and its educators need to recognise explicitly the intrinsic connections between language and identity, that dispositions towards language reveal bodily *hexis* (Bourdieu 1991) and are thus reflective and expressive of a student’s relationship with the world. Where an assessment and the curriculum that it structures only acknowledges as legitimate an exclusive body of knowledge and set of dispositions, characteristic of the habitus of a dominant social group, it serves to devalue and exclude students’ experiences and their lives, contributing to relational inequities. English teaching is the means by which those dispositions and thus experiences and lives can be recognised and legitimised, but currently only at the margins of the official curriculum.

Suggesting that this would be beneficial won’t make it happen, however. As Thomson and Hall (2008) found, teachers rarely take up the opportunity to engage with students’ funds of knowledge. It might be useful here to extend Thomson and Hall’s (2008) metaphor of the virtual school bag to encompass multiple school bags that sit alongside each other, distinct but overlapping. So students have the school bag that contains official curriculum, which is handed to them on entering the classroom, but they also have their home school

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Controversially the government of the day decided in 1991 not to publish the LINC materials as they believed that there was insufficient focus on formality and on the rules of Standard English (which itself is interesting in terms of the findings of this research project). For an account of the political and ideological debates surrounding LINC see Carter (1996).
bag, which carries their cultural experience and values (they may indeed have more than two, which encompass multiple cultural contexts and their associated discourses).

Classroom practice needs to enable students to unpack all their school bags simultaneously and learn about the connections and differences between the two, giving value to their home school bags while also giving them the powerful tools necessary to make the school curriculum work for them. Young (2008) argues that pedagogy needs to find ways to enable students to ‘recontextualize’ (p. 15) both school and home-based knowledge in order to enable them to move beyond their own experience and acquire new knowledge. Guiding students through a way to an understanding of what is in each of their school bags would enable students to do that, and lead them to powerful knowledge.

That this connecting – and valuing – of cultural resources does not happen continually and naturally, as Thomson and Hall (2008) found, is partly, if not wholly, the result of the domination of the classroom by the imperative to assess, due to the pressures exerted on teachers by headteachers and on schools by accountability measures and Ofsted. In order for real change to occur in English classrooms, to allow teaching to focus on the skills and knowledge students really need to negotiate the complexities of the lives they lead, the domination of the field of education by the field of politics needs to come to an end. The centrally-prescribed body of knowledge, the insistence on high stakes (for all) testing and the risks implicit for schools and their teachers if they fall below continually more demanding performance measures are all driving a system in which classroom practice, as has been revealed, focuses on testing at the expense of real learning. Altering the assessments to control them more centrally (Ofqual 2013a) in order to avoid the possibility that teachers – not students – will ‘cheat’ is papering over the cracks in a system that is not serving anybody’s needs apart from those who stand to profit from the increasing marketization of schools (Barker 2010). Schools – and teachers – need to be liberated from the threats that dominate them and enabled to teach – and assess – their students in a
contextually appropriate way. In order for this to happen there needs to be a massive cultural shift away from the threatening audit culture that permeates education. Apple (2007b) suggests that for this to happen there needs to be open discussion:

Trust and achievement can only emerge in a framework of public accountability that enables different accounts of public purpose and practice to be deliberated in a democratic public sphere: constituted to include difference, enable participation, voice and dissent, through to collective judgment and decision, that is in turn accountable to the public. (p. 16)

In the context of education and assessment a genuinely open conversation needs to take place about what is being taught, assessed and measured and for what purposes. This can then lead to more open and democratic educational structures that meet the needs of more than the dominant classes and the policy makers.

My final recommendation is with regards to some areas where this research can be developed and taken forward. Within this project I focused on the players in the game of assessment who I identified as those most directly involved and with most at stake. It would be interesting, however, to reveal the roles, positioning and influence of the other players in and around the game through further policy scholarship. One possible area in which to undertake further research would be a focus on national policymakers and assessments, especially in terms of the increasing importance of the global context in the educational policy discourse. Shedding light on the processes of curriculum reform – and who is making what decisions and why – is important in order to understand its impacts. Related to this, another area which would be instructive to research in this neo-liberal educational landscape would be the role of media organisations, the powerful academy chains and parents as consumers and influencers in relation to curriculum and assessment policy. Curriculum and assessment represent a site of continuing and important struggle and therefore research that continues to reveal what is changing and in whose interests is vital.
Reflections on Bourdieu

In this section I reflect on the use of Bourdieu’s thinking tools in my research and consider what has been gained from their use in this empirical research. I also consider the contribution that this research study has made to the pantheon of research in education that is conceptualised through Bourdieusian thinking.

Bourdieu’s thinking tools have been criticised by researchers in education for being overly deterministic and therefore pessimistic (DiMaggio 1979, Jenkins 1982, King 2000, Sullivan 2002). Criticism is particularly levelled at the tool of habitus, which is described as “no more than another form of determination in the last instance” (Jenkins, 1982, p. 272). It is certainly possible to infer a certain determinism from Bourdieu’s writing: he writes about the “homogeneity of habitus” which “causes practices and works to be immediately intelligible and foreseeable—and hence taken for granted” (1977, p.80). Such criticisms can and should be challenged however. In order to fully understand the question of how habitus sits with issues of agency and structure it is necessary to cease to view the two as an opposing dualism; habitus allows an individual neither boundless freedom of choice nor a single determined course of action, rather, the reality is somewhere in the middle:

Because the habitus is an endless capacity to engender products – thoughts, perceptions, expressions, actions – whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production, the conditioned and conditional freedom it secures is as remote from a creation of unpredictable novelty as it is from a simple mechanical reproduction of the initial conditionings (1977, p.95).

This has enabled me to think through practice as simultaneously structured by objective conditions and subjective dispositions, themselves structured through objective conditions: “the feel for the game is the social game embodied and turned into a second nature” (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 63). It has allowed for thinking within a continuing dialectic between subjectivity and objectivity which simultaneously recognises individual agency and socially
structured constraint. In doing so, it has allowed me to reveal “regularities of practice” (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 66) which in turn expose the embodied taken-for-granted assumptions generated by social structures. This is neither deterministic nor pessimistic: it allows for struggle against domination (Bourdieu 2003) as Bourdieu (1977) observes:

The dominated classes have an interest in pushing back the limits of doxa and exposing the arbitrariness of the taken for granted (p. 169).

In exposing the doxa and its structural genesis research such as this can enable debate and struggle to change the rules of the game.

The use of the thinking tool of cultural capital in research into educational achievement has also been criticised (Kingston 2001, Lamont and Lareau 1988, Lareau and Weininger 2003, Krarup and Munk 2014). There is an extensive body of quantitative research that sets out to examine correlations between students’ educational performance and cultural capital (DiMaggio, P. 1982, Katsillis, J and Rubinson, R. 1990, Sullivan, A. 2001, 2007). Lareau and Weininger (2003) argue however that DiMaggio and subsequent researchers are too narrow in their interpretation of and operationalization of cultural capital. They criticise DiMaggio and others for establishing an opposition between cultural capital and ‘ability’, arguing that academic skills are part of what we should understand as cultural capital (p. 598). Krarup and Munk (2014) also criticise the conceptualisation of cultural capital in much educational research:

We argue that most quantitative studies claiming to deal with cultural capital in fact do not since they ignore the qualities of the concept of ‘capital’. Rather, these studies can be said to be about individual cultural ‘resources’. To actually engage with CCT, quantitative studies of educational achievement will need to focus less on isolated effects of individual resources and more on the social structure of resources and how these resources are invested, reconverted, and reproduced as capital (p.3)

I would agree with Krarup and Munk that much of the quantative research treats cultural capital in an overly simplistic way and I would argue that research which incorporates qualitative approaches such as this is needed in order to reveal the means by which
resources are misrecognised as capital. Bourdieu (1990) makes it clear that cultural resources only become capital once systemically misrecognised as such:

   Just as economic wealth cannot function as capital except in relation to an economic field, so cultural competence in all its forms is not constituted as cultural capital until it is inserted into the objective relations set up between the system of economic production and the system producing the producers (which is itself constituted by the relationship between the education system and the family). (1990, p. 124)

However many studies use the term cultural capital synonymously with cultural experiences or knowledge with no consideration of the structural means by which such experiences are given currency.

Where my research is distinctive is in revealing the processes by which cultural resources are misrecognised as cultural capital, which translates through the GCSE assessment to an institutional capital that acts as currency in the wider social field. In doing so I am illuminating Lareau and Weininger’s (2003) observation that academic ability is part of what is understood as cultural capital: my research reveals that this is the case because of the structural means by which socially constructed knowledge and experience is misrecognised as capital to construct a taxonomy that mirrors the social taxonomy. This distinction between my research and that of many studies into academic achievement, social reproduction and cultural capital can be attributed to both the integrated use I have made of the tools of habitus, capital and field and to my qualitative epistemology.

In my research I have theorised capital as inseparable from the thinking tools of field and habitus. To theorise research through cultural capital in isolation, as many quantitative studies do (DiMaggio 1982, Katsillis and Rubinson 1990, Sullivan 2001, 2007), without considering the relationships between capital, field and habitus, is reductive. Bourdieu (1986b) makes it clear that practice is constructed through and is revealing of the relationship between field, habitus and capital. Thinking through practice through the relationship between these tools enables understanding of the correspondence between
dominant and dominated social and mental structures (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). It has enabled me to think relationally and in doing so to reveal the objective structures and relational properties that both structure and reveal practice.

Furthermore, to conceptualise practice in relation to academic achievement through a quantitative epistemology fails to recognise the objectivist/subjectivist dialectic that use of Bourdieu’s thinking tools enables and hence “ends up projecting into the minds of agents a (scholastic) vision of their practice it could only uncover because it methodically set aside the experience agents have of it” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 8). In adopting a qualitative perspective which simultaneously reveals structures and lived experiences of structures I am able adopt a lens of “structuralist constructivism” or “constructivist structuralism” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.11). This thus enables me to “encompass both objective regularities and the process of internalisation of objectivity whereby the transindividual, unconscious principles of (di)vision that agents engage in their practice are constituted” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 13). The research design and conceptualisation of this project have hence allowed me to reveal the homology between mental structures and objective structures which ensures that positions of domination and dominated are continually reproduced.

A learning process

This research project, and the Ed.D in general, has given me the space and the capacity to step outside the immediacy of practice and recognise the realities of the logic of a practice within which I am located. Acting as a researcher has enabled me to situate myself as an outsider looking in at practice, including my own practice, which has enabled me to step back from the common sense assumptions of the insider and raise questions about the legitimacy of the game in play. As Bourdieu (1990b) expresses:
It is the scientist who raises the question of legitimacy; he or she forgets that this question does not arise as such for the dominated and that the answer that the dominated give to it in practice appears as an answer only to those who raise the question (p. 112).

As an insider – an English teacher and a professional working within English assessment – I have a stake in the game (illusio), or a practical acceptance of the possibilities or impossibilities of the field. Undertaking this research has forced me to be the ‘scientist’. It has put me into the (sometimes uncomfortable) position of raising the question of the legitimacy of my own practice and that of the game in which I am a player and reflect on the logic of practice that is unquestioningly enacted.

My positioning throughout the research project has been a source of continual focus and reflection. I have found the concept of fluid researcher identity (Bauman 2004, Thomson and Gunter 2011) helpful in terms of deconstructing the insider/outsider binary and recognising that throughout I have been both insider and outsider and yet also something which is neither – a researcher with multiple overlapping and sometimes contradictory roles (Jones 2014). With regards to my professional identity I self-identify in a fluid way as English teacher, academic researcher and assessment professional. Rather than this being problematic, this has helped in both my interviews with the teachers and the examiners, and to a degree the interviews with the students, and in my relationship to the collected data. Bourdieu (1999) observes that “social proximity and familiarity provide two of the conditions of “nonviolent” communication” (p. 610) yet also acknowledges that too much proximity can lead to nothing being said because “everything goes without saying” (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 612). In being someone with multiple and fluid identities, I strived for a position of both proximity and distance which enabled me to deconstruct the object/subject binary and be able to put myself respectfully in the shoes of those interviewed (Bourdieu 1999), gather useful and meaningful data and interpret that data. That relationship of simultaneous proximity and distance varied with those interviewed,
however, and was most difficult to achieve with the students because of the inevitable, visible power dynamic. From a methodological perspective this links with my recommendations around student voice; it is an area for my continuing consideration and development and something I aim to work through in future research projects.

I will take these experiences, and this knowledge, back into my professional life and work to influence change from within while continuing to position myself as scientist, questioning the legitimacy of the logic of practice.
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Ruch, G. M. (1924) *The Improvement of the Written Examination* (Chicago, Scott, Foresman and Company).


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Appendices

Appendix A: Narrative overview of GCSE English/English Language

The GCSE in English and the GCSE in English Language that have been used for analysis are made up of the following components:

Unit 1: Examination (at the time of writing this unit is worth 60%; at the time of the field study this unit was worth 40%)

For the purposes of this research study only the Higher Tier exam was scrutinised, but there is also a Foundation Tier equivalent exam.

In Section A of the exam students are asked to respond to a number of questions about three reading texts. The texts include an extract from a website; a newspaper article with an image; an extract of literary non-fiction such as travel writing or autobiography. The total word count for the three reading texts is around 1260 words. The questions test the reading assessment objectives, which are as follows:

i. Read and understand texts, selecting material appropriate to purpose, collating from different sources and making comparisons and cross-references as appropriate.

ii. Explain and evaluate how writers use linguistic, grammatical, structural and presentational features to achieve effects and engage and influence the reader, supporting their comments with detailed textual references.

In Section B of the exam students are asked to write two compulsory writing questions. One question asks students to write a shorter response to inform, explain or describe. The other asks students to write a longer response that argues or persuades. Section B tests the following assessment objectives:

i. Communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively, using forms and selecting vocabulary appropriate to task and purpose in ways which engage the reader.

ii. Organise information and ideas into structures and sequenced sentences, paragraphs and whole texts, using a variety of linguistic and structural features to support cohesion and overall coherence.

iii. Use a range of sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate punctuation and spelling. (At least one third of the assessment for writing is allocated to iii)

Unit 2: Speaking and listening (at the time of writing this unit is worth 0%; at the time of the field study this unit was worth 20%)

Students are assessed by their teachers on three speaking and listening activities:

- Presenting
- Discussing and listening
- Role playing.
Their marks are submitted to the awarding organisation and those marks are moderated.

**Unit 3: Written controlled assessment** (40%)

For GCSE English Language students undertake the following written controlled assessments:

- Extended reading
- Creative writing
- Spoken language study

For GCSE English students undertake the following written controlled assessments:

- Understanding creative texts (literary reading)
- Producing creative texts

Each written assessment is completed in timed conditions. Students are able to take in brief notes. The assessments are marked by the students' teachers and moderated by the awarding organisation. For the regulations regarding controlled assessments for all awarding organisations refer to the Joint Council for Qualifications website: http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/controlled-assessments.
### Appendix B: Interview schedules - students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What do you think I mean by the word ‘culture’? Is culture something you care about?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What sort of things (if anything?) do you read in your own time? Do you tend to read on paper or on a screen?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who have influenced you in what you read?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What newspapers have you read? Why did you read that one/those?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What other things do you do in your spare time? Do you have interests/hobbies?</td>
<td>What sort or television or films do you watch? What music do you like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What influence have your family been on your interests? Do you do any activities with any of your family members? Who else has influenced you?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has school influenced you in your reading? Has school influenced you in your other interests?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever visited any of the museums/galleries in Manchester? With school? Family/friends? How often?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever been to any live music performances? Who/where? Who with?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you tell me a bit about the kind of things you have done in lessons for English GCSE? Have you done any controlled assessments? Speaking and listening? What did you think of them?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Front page of the exam—what do you think it means when it says you’re being tested on the quality of your reading and writing?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which parts of the exam did you find most easy? Why? Which parts were hardest for you? Why?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading sources—for each one—have you seen anything like this before? Where? Home/school? Have you read anything like this in your English lessons? Would you choose to read anything like this in your own time? Did you think the subject was interesting? Did you find it difficult or easy to read? Why?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing questions—for each one—can you describe the sort of writing you did for this question. Have you ever read anything like this before/can you picture it? What sort of things have you done in your lessons to prepare you for these questions?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think an English GCSE should be testing? Do you think this exam tests those things? Can you think of any better ways of testing your English?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think you will do when you finish your GCSEs next year?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix C: Interview schedules - teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do your students do on the Unit 1 exam in general? Which parts do they find hard? Which parts do they find more easy? Why?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you approach teaching that exam with your students?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What sort of students do you think the principal examiner has in mind when he/she writes the exam papers? Your students? Or someone different? Why?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think are the barriers to achievement on the exam paper for your students?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How about the controlled assessments? Do your students find them harder or easier than the exam? Why?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What about speaking and listening? How do your students do in that? Are they able to get marks in the highest mark bands? Why/not?</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D: Interview schedules – senior examiners

Interview schedule: Principal Examiners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Could you describe your role as Principal Examiner?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you get the job? What was your career path up to this point?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you see as the main purpose of your exam paper? What is it testing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why is this exam paper the way it is? What factors led it to have this structure/style/content?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the strengths of this exam paper? What are its weaknesses?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could you describe the process of setting an exam paper?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you decide what reading sources go on to the exam paper? How do you find them? How do you choose those over other possible sources?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you come up with writing questions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look at specific writing questions—what would an ideal answer look like to these questions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What factors do you think enable a student to do well on your unit?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do those factors enable a student to do well on the GCSE English as a whole, do you think, or do different units require different skills/enable different students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you had unlimited power, how would you reform GCSE English?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interview schedule: Principal Moderators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Could you describe your role as Principal Moderator?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you get the job? What was your career path up to this point?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you see as the main purpose of your unit? What is it testing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why is your unit the way it is? What factors led it to have this structure/style/content?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could you describe the process of setting controlled tasks (if applicable)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What factors do you think enable a student to do well on your unit?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Do those factors enable a student to do well on the GCSE English as a whole, do you think,
or do different units require different skills/enable different students?
If you had unlimited power, how would you reform GCSE English?

**Interview schedule: Chair of Examiners**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Could you describe your role as Chair of Examiners?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you get the job? What was your career path up to this point?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you see as the main purpose of the exam paper? What is it testing? What about the GCSE as a whole?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why is the specification the way it is? What factors led it to have this structure/style/content?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the strengths of this specification? What are its weaknesses?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could you describe the process of setting an exam paper?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What factors do you think enable a student to do well on the three different units? Do the same factors enable a student to do well on the GCSE English as a whole, do you think, or do different units require different skills/enable different students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you had unlimited power, how would you reform GCSE English?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E: Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What year group are you in?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What language(s) is/are spoken in your home?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do your parents or carers work? If so, what do they do?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What do you think you would like to do once you finish your GCSEs at the end of Year 11?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What do you like to do in your spare time?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What was the last book you read?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is your favourite book?</td>
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<tr>
<td>When was the last time you read a newspaper? Which newspaper was it?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What sort of music do you listen to?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your favourite film?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What magazines do you read?</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F: Extracts from coded interview transcripts

Extract 1 (Mike)

MIKE And if I’m honest (and I cringe at saying it, it sounds a bit disloyal) I think 1. quite a few of my senior colleagues these days, when asked searching questions, say it’s just an exam get on with it, that’s what kids do. Well, I’ve always wanted a bit more than that you know. I’ve always wanted it to be a 2. bit more than knowing how to do a test. I’m not being cynical I really think that’s what it does. And then I suppose it 3. forces currently a very strange literary diet and does some work about 4. writing quite formulaically.

VRJ What do you mean by that?

MIKE Well, the notion that writing is a set of structures that can be taught, so you know we have the weird, so you teach discourse markers, but not discourse.

VRJ Yeah

MIKE Is that fair? 1. You don’t know why you’re doing it but you’re doing all these funny words, probably incorrectly some of the time. 2. So no-one’s told you

1. Nature of the assessment (NOTA); Doxa /misrecognition; Examiner agency/acceptance of doxa
2. NOTA/Playing the game – assessment as just a test of knowing the rules – what is it for?
3. Reading
4. Writing
about how discourse, in all the sense of the word, works, but you're expected to use notwithstanding and furthermore and moreover because that gives you a mark. 3. You get the mark which gives your score its league table place. 4. And everybody's sort of happy.

VRJ  Does it…

MIKE  God that's cynical isn't it!

VRJ  Does it in any way do you think, if a student does well in GCSE English, do they demonstrate what the public mind thinks they're demonstrating, do you think? Is there any sort of marrying between them?

MIKE  1. Well I think the public is confused/bemused anyway. People who can't spell certain words will complain about bad spelling. People with regional accents will complain about regional accents. Look at the whole debate about phonics. So you go right to the age of 5 and beginning reading and the notion that you give students words that don’t exist to help them read and 2. that that is allowed almost to be an unchallenged doctrine.

3. Policy impact /illusio – stake in the game

4. Doxa – no questioning; illusio – because of their stake in the game

1. Public mind/conceptualisation of English - discourses around cultural capital

2. Power/teacher/examiner agency – ref to dominant structures/doxa/field
apart from a few people who are called lefties and trotskyites if they dare question it, so I don’t think the country itself is very linguistically aware, so it’s got…

---

**Extract 2: Nick**

**VRJ** What about the other things you’ve done in English? Controlled Assessments and your Speaking and Listening. How have you found those?

**NICK** I hate Speaking and Listening.

**VRJ** Why’s that?

**NICK** I don’t know, I just don’t like it whatsoever. 1. I don’t mind group discussions cos I normally end up winning, but when it’s like role play and stuff I just can’t do them, like at the minute, cos it’s like the last few weeks, 2. finishing a Controlled Assessment that’s what we’re doing now and then it’s Speaking and Listening as well, like we’re doing that 3. like Wednesdays we do the Controlled Assessment and the rest we’re preparing for this role play thing *Of Mice and Men* and stuff.

---

1. Speaking and listening – barriers gender?? (winning) – *habitus*
2. Teaching; policy impact? – Continual assessment
3. Teaching/policy impact – continual assessment. Learning??
VRJ: So you were happy with Controlled Assessment rather than Speaking and Listening?

NICK: Yea cos I prefer writing to like acting like, I don’t know, I just prefer writing than doing anything else.

VRJ: OK, and how have you done in your Controlled Assessments?

NICK: Well the first one we did 1. I only got a D on cos I can’t work on computer whatsoever, I don’t know I just like I can write but I can’t do the accuracy side. I did a Controlled Assessment and I got like I think a D might even got an E+, 2. then I did it again and I got a B+ like hand-wrote, so I don’t know I just can’t write on computers. That’s what we’re this (13.50), 3. so I was like I gave it her back for her to like tell me what to do and stuff and then she told me what to edit on, but 4. it’s just like all my accuracy on it. I’m like one mark off the A now and it’s like just cos it’s like the accuracy of this messed up and everything on the computer.

VRJ: OK. Just a couple of more questions. What do you think an English GCSE should be testing.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do you think it should be setting out to test?</th>
<th>Speaking and listening/conceptualisation of English. Reflection of public mind? Hierarchy of skills – use/importance. Doxa?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **NICK** I’m not (14.18). I don’t see what the Speaking and Listening part has to do with it in English. That’s, I don’t know, it just confuses me how like, the debating side, but like the role plays it’s more a drama so I don’t see why it’s like such a big, 25% is quite a lot. | 1. Speaking and listening – gender?  
   Education/English and its purpose – doxa – from where? Social field?  
3. Speaking and listening and relationship with reading/writing – not as important. Why? |
| **VRJ** So you’d take that out…? |  |
| **NICK** I’d rather have – 1. the debating stuff yea I can how that like, cos controversy and stuff, but 2. when it comes to like role play, it’s not like it’s really going to help you in life. 3. You’ve read the novel anyway, so I don’t see that part. | 1. Conceptualisation of English – use?  
2. Doxa re education and what it’s for? |
| **VRJ** That’s interesting. |  |
| **NICK** The spoken and 1. studying stuff like where you have to compare languages obviously that’s important but I don’t know, 2. it’s like the role play thing stuff I don’t see the point in it. |  |
### Appendix G: Documents list

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Reference code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English/English Language Higher Tier exam paper 2012</td>
<td>EP1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam paper insert 2012</td>
<td>INS1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark scheme 2012</td>
<td>MS1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English/English Language Higher Tier exam paper 2013</td>
<td>EP2</td>
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<td>Exam paper insert 2013</td>
<td>INS2</td>
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<td>Mark scheme 2013</td>
<td>MS2</td>
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<td>Speaking and listening mark scheme</td>
<td>SLMS</td>
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<td>English Language written controlled assessment tasks 2013</td>
<td>ELCAT</td>
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<td>English Language written controlled assessment mark scheme 2013</td>
<td>ELCAMS</td>
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<td>English written controlled assessment tasks 2013</td>
<td>ECAT</td>
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<td>English written controlled assessment mark scheme</td>
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<td>English Language specification</td>
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<td>English specification</td>
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## Appendix H: Coded document extract

**Lifesaving with Class by Rory Stamp**

‘Help!’ shouts an 11-year-old girl to her friend. ‘I’m drowning! Help me!’ Luckily, her friend knows exactly what to do - he quickly finds an RNLI (Royal National Lifeboat Institution) lifeguard, who springs into action.

Fortunately, this is not a real-life emergency on the beach. In fact, we’re a long way from the sea. It’s an inner-city school, and pupils are acting out a scenario as part of the RNLI’s Beach to City programme.

1. **Beach to City is based in inner-city areas aimed at educating children who live away from the coast.** RNLI lifeguards visit these areas educating children on the dangers of the seaside and **how to stay out of trouble.** The scheme is aimed at primary school children. Through close analysis of incident statistics, children living away from the coast in city areas have been highlighted as a high-risk group who are **less likely to be aware of the work of the RNLI.**

Each Beach to City Team is made up of an operational RNLI lifeguard and a beach safety supervisor. Their task is not an easy one. In 40 minutes they have to deliver key beach safety messages that children will listen to and retain. So the sessions are designed to be as memorable and fun as possible with plenty of play-acting to take part in and equipment to get to grips with.

Each session begins with an introduction to the RNLI charity and its lifeguard service. Children are taught how to identify lifeguards and where to find them. Then it’s time for beach safety messages. First up, sun protection: slip on a T-shirt, slap on a hat, slop on the sun cream. Next up are the beach flags and their meanings. Some children have an impressive knowledge of the flag system – **though some seem to think the red flag (for dangerous water) means there’s a shark about!** Sharks don’t present a threat to beach users but toy inflatable boats do, so guidelines on their use form a key part of the Beach to City programme. ‘I used to patrol as a lifeguard **in North Cornwall,**’ says Duncan.

| Existential assumption – assumed knowledge – lifeguard/lifeboat. Culturally exclusive/positions reader according to prior knowledge/experience. |
| Misrecognition – assessment as exclusive, assessing cultural knowledge/translated to capital/habitus |
| 2. Connotations – negative behaviour – links to ‘inner city’; positioning of reader |
| 3. Value assumption |

| Existential assumption – humour based on assumption of shared knowledge – positioning of audience and therefore links to misrecognition/cultural knowledge as capital/habitus |
| 1. Existential assumption – assumption of shared cultural reference point links to misrecognition/habitus |
| 3. Assumes a particular cultural experience/set of cultural knowledge – British beach experience/habitus |
| 4. Positioning/habitus |
| 5. Positioning/habitus |
Wood, a beach safety supervisor, ‘and 3. there were days when the majority of what we did involved rescuing children from drifting inflatables.’ Sessions also focus on the use of public rescue equipment (PRE), especially in 4. Birmingham, with its extensive canal network. Respecting and using equipment such as life-rings, throw lines and emergency communications is very important. The PRE advice has also been aimed at schoolchildren in 5. London, where the Beach to City programme visited 30 schools.

Next year the RNLI’s Education Team aims to add a fourth city to the Beach to City tour, and plans to continue adding more in the coming years.

(from INS1)
Appendix I: Information documents and consent/assent forms

1. Pupil documents
2. Parent/carer documents
3. Teacher documents
4. Examiner documents
5. Headteacher documents

1. Pupil documents

1 March 2012

Dear Pupil

Your teacher <<name to come>> has suggested that you might like to take part in a research project. I enclose an information sheet about the project and a form for you to complete if you agree to take part in the project.

I hope all the information on the sheet is clear. If you have any questions about what you will be agreeing to please get in touch with me through the email address above.

If you agree to take part in the project please return the enclosed Pupil Assent Form to your teacher <<name to come> by the <<date to come>>.

Yours sincerely,

Ruth Johnson

Postgraduate researcher (Ed.D)

c/o Professor Helen Gunter

Ellen Wilkinson Building
The University of Manchester
Oxford Road
Manchester
M13 9PL

Ruth Johnson

Postgraduate researcher (Ed.D)

c/o Professor Helen Gunter

Ellen Wilkinson Building
The University of Manchester
Oxford Road
Manchester
M13 9PL
What helps pupils to do well in GCSE English?

Participant (Student) Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a study into what helps pupils to do well in their GCSE English exam. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the study is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the study?

My name is Ruth Johnson. I am a postgraduate student at the School of Education at the University of Manchester. I also work for [name of awarding body].

What is the aim of the study?

This study is about what things help people to do well in their GCSE English exam. I want to find out if teachers can teach everything you need to know to do well on the exam, or if students do well on the exam because of what they already know.

Why have I been chosen?

Your English teacher has chosen you because they thought you might have some helpful things to say about the GCSE English exam.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?

Firstly I would ask you to fill in a questionnaire. This would ask you questions about some of the things you like to do in your spare time. Then you would be asked to take part in an individual interview with me. I would be asking you questions about what you thought of the GCSE English exam you had taken and how you had been prepared for that exam. I would ask you a bit more about your background and about some of your interests and hobbies.

What happens to the data collected?

I would record the discussion and then I would listen to the recording and type up everything that everybody said. This is called a transcript. I will make sure that nobody’s name is used in the transcript, so everything will be anonymous. I will then use the transcript to help me write my research paper about what helps people to do well in their GCSE English exam.

How is confidentiality maintained?
The recordings will be stored on my computer until they have been typed up. After they have been made into a transcript the recordings will be erased.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a form to say that you agree to take part. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. Whether you decide to take part or not will not have any effect on your exam results.

How long will it take?

The discussion will take about 30 minutes.

Where will the study be conducted?

At your school.

Will the outcomes of the study be published?

What I find out will appear in my research paper for the university. It may also be included in journal articles in the future.

Criminal Records Check

I have a valid CRB check.

Contact for further information

If you want to know anything else about the study please email me at Victoria.Johnson@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk
What helps pupils to do well in GCSE English?

PUPIL ASSENT FORM

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the form below.

1. I have read the attached information sheet and understand what the study is about. I know that I can ask questions if I want to know anything else about it.

2. I understand that I can change my mind at any time and leave the study if I want to.

3. I understand that the interviews will be audio-recorded.

4. I agree to what I say being quoted anonymously.

5. I agree that anything I say may be passed to other researchers.

6. I agree that anything I say may be published in anonymous form in academic books or journals.

I agree that I will to take part in the above project.
Name: _______________________________

Signature: ___________________________  Date: ___________________________
Dear Parent/Carer

Your child’s English teacher <<name to come>> has identified your child as someone who might like to take part in a research project. I enclose an information sheet about the project and a form for you to complete if you agree for your child to take part in the project.

I hope all the information on the sheet is clear. If you have any questions about what you will be agreeing to please get in touch with me through the email address above.

If you agree that your child can take part in the project please return the enclosed Parent/Carer Consent Form to <<name to come at <<name>> High School by the <<date to come>>.

Yours sincerely,

Ruth Johnson

Ruth Johnson
Postgraduate researcher (Ed.D)
c/o Professor Helen Gunter
Ellen Wilkinson Building
The University of Manchester
Oxford Road
Manchester
M13 9PL

1 March 2012
What helps pupils to do well in GCSE English?

Participant (Parent/carer—group) Information Sheet

Your son or daughter has been invited to take part in a study into what helps pupils to do well in their GCSE English exam. Before you decide whether you consent for them to take part it is important for you to understand why the study is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take your son or daughter to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the study?

My name is Ruth Johnson. I am a postgraduate student at the School of Education at the University of Manchester. I also work for [name of awarding body].

What is the aim of the study?

This study is about what things help people to do well in their GCSE English exam. I want to find out if teachers can teach everything students need to know to do well on the exam, or if some students do well on the exam because of what they already know.

Why has my son/daughter been chosen?

Your child’s English teacher has chosen him/her because they thought he/she might have some helpful things to say about the GCSE English exam.

What would my son/daughter be asked to do if he/she took part?

He/she would be asked to take part in a discussion with me. I would be asking questions about what students thought of the GCSE English exam and how they had been prepared for that exam. I would also ask questions about students’ backgrounds, hobbies and interests. He/she would also be asked to complete a very short questionnaire.

What happens to the data collected?
I would record the discussion and then make a transcript of it. I will make sure that nobody’s name is used in the transcript, so everything will be anonymous. I will then use the transcript to help me write my research paper.

**How is confidentiality maintained?**

The recordings of the discussion will be stored on my computer until they have been typed up. After they have been made into a transcript the recordings will be erased.

**What happens if I do not want to my son or daughter to take part or if I change my mind?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to allow your son or daughter to take part. If you do decide that he or she can take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a form to say that you consent to their taking part. If you decide to allow them to take part you are still free to withdraw them at any time without giving a reason. Whether you decide to allow them to take part or not will not have any effect on your son or daughter’s exam results.

**How long will it take?**

The discussion will take approximately 30 minutes.

**Where will the study be conducted?**

At your child’s school.

**Will the outcomes of the study be published?**

The results of my research will appear in my research paper for my doctorate in education (Ed.D) at Manchester University. It may also be included in journal articles in the future.

**Criminal Records Check**

I have a valid CRB check.

**Contact for further information**

If you want to know anything else about the study please email me at Victoria.Johnson@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

**What if something goes wrong?**

If a participant wants to make a formal complaint about the conduct of the study they should contact the Head of the Research Office, Christie Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL
What helps pupils to do well in GCSE English?

PARENT/CARER CONSENT FORM

If you are happy for your son/daughter to participate please complete and sign the consent form below

Please
Initial
Box

1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above study and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my son/daughter’s participation in the study is voluntary and that he/she is free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason

3. I understand that the interviews will be audio-recorded

4. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes
I agree that I allow my son/daughter to take part in the above project:

Name of participant: _______________________________

Name of parent/carer: _______________________________

Signature: _______________________________  Date: ______________________
1 March 2012

Dear <<name to come>>

I am a postgraduate student in the School of Education at the University of Manchester. My area of research is cultural barriers to achievement in GCSE English. This area of interest has arisen as I am also a Subject Manager of GCSE English at [name of awarding body].

I am writing to ask whether you would consider being interviewed about your experiences with regards to the GCSE English assessment for my research.

All the data I collect will be anonymised. My supervisor is Professor Helen Gunter (0161 275 3449) and so if you need to ask any further questions about my studies or follow anything up from the data collection please do contact her.

I enclose an Information Sheet about the study and a consent form. If you are happy to take part in a discussion with me, please complete the form and return it to me by <<date to come>>. If you have any further questions about my research study please don’t hesitate to get in touch.

Kind regards

Ruth Johnson
Cultural barriers to achievement in GCSE English

Participant (Teacher) Information Sheet

You have been invited to take part in a study into possible cultural barriers to achievement in GCSE English. Before you decide whether you consent to take part it is important for you to understand why the study is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the study?

My name is Ruth Johnson. I am a postgraduate student at the School of Education at the University of Manchester. I also work for [name of awarding body].

What is the aim of the study?

The aim of this study is to investigate potential cultural barriers to achievement in GCSE English.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?

You would be asked to take part in a discussion with me. The focus of the discussion would be your experiences of and thoughts about GCSE English assessment.

What happens to the data collected?

I would record the discussion and then make a transcript of it. I will make sure that nobody’s name is used in the transcript, so everything will be anonymous. I will then use the transcript to help me write my research paper.

How is confidentiality maintained?

The recordings of the discussion will be stored on my computer until they have been typed up. After they have been made into a transcript the recordings will be erased.
What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

If you decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a form to say that you consent to take part. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

How long will it take?

The discussion will take no longer than 1 hour 30 minutes.

Will the outcomes of the study be published?

The results of my research will appear in my research paper for my doctorate in education (Ed.D) at Manchester University. It may also be included in journal articles in the future.

Contact for further information

If you want to know anything else about the study please email me at Victoria.Johnson@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

What if something goes wrong?

If a participant wants to make a formal complaint about the conduct of the study they should contact the Head of the Research Office, Christie Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL
1 March 2012

Dear <<name>>

I am acting as the agent for a postgraduate student in the School of Education at the University of Manchester. Her area of research is cultural barriers to achievement in GCSE English. I am writing to ask whether you would consider being interviewed about your experiences with regards to the GCSE English assessment for her research.

All the data collected will be anonymised. If you need to ask any further questions about my studies or follow anything up from the data collection please do contact me.

I enclose an Information Sheet about the study and a consent form. If you are happy to take part in a discussion, please complete the form and return it to me by <<date to come>>. If you have any further questions about my research study please don’t hesitate to get in touch.

Kind regards

Professor Helen Gunter
Cultural barriers to achievement in GCSE English

Participant (Examiner) Information Sheet

You have been invited to take part in a study into possible cultural barriers to achievement in GCSE English. Before you decide whether you consent to take part it is important for you to understand why the study is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the study?

A postgraduate student at the School of Education at the University of Manchester

What is the aim of the study?

The aim of this study is to investigate potential cultural barriers to achievement in GCSE English.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?

You would be asked to take part in a discussion. The focus of the discussion would be your experiences of and thoughts about GCSE English assessment.

What happens to the data collected?

The student would record the discussion and then make a transcript of it. She will make sure that nobody’s name is used in the transcript, so everything will be anonymous. She will then use the transcript to help me write the research paper.

How is confidentiality maintained?

The recordings of the discussion will be stored on my computer until they have been typed up. After they have been made into a transcript the recordings will be erased.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

If you decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a form to say that you consent to take part. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.
How long will it take?

The discussion will take no longer than 1 hour 30 minutes.

Will the outcomes of the study be published?

The results of the research will appear in my research paper for my doctorate in education (Ed.D) at Manchester University. It may also be included in journal articles in the future.

Contact for further information

If you want to know anything else about the study please email me at Helen.Gunter@manchester.ac.uk

What if something goes wrong?

If a participant wants to make a formal complaint about the conduct of the study they should contact the Head of the Research Office, Christie Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL
ADULT CONSENT FORM

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the form below

1. I have read the attached information sheet and understand what the study is about. I know that I can ask questions if I want to know anything else about it.

2. I understand that I can change my mind at any time and leave the study if I want to.

3. I understand that the interviews will be audio-recorded.

4. I agree to what I say being quoted anonymously.

5. I agree that anything I say may be passed to other researchers.

6. I agree that anything I say may be published in anonymous form in academic books or journals.

I agree that I will to take part in the above project.
Name: _______________________________

Signature: ___________________________    Date: ___________________________
1 March 2012

Dear <<name of head>>

I am a postgraduate student in the School of Education at the University of Manchester. My area of research is cultural barriers to achievement in GCSE English. This area of interest has arisen as I am also a Subject Manager of GCSE English at [name of awarding body].

I am writing to ask your permission to interview six Year <<10/11—as applicable>> students following the <<date as applicable>> GCSE English exam; I would like to find out their responses to the exam and I intend to use those responses in the research paper for my doctorate. I would also like to interview their English teacher to find out his or her thoughts about the exam and the specification in general.

My intention is that the interviews would take place within the school at a time which is convenient to you and your pupils sometime in the two weeks following the GCSE English exam on <<date>>.

All the data I collect will be anonymised, both in terms of the individuals involved and in terms of the name of the school. My supervisor is Professor Helen Gunter (0161 275 3449) and so if you need to ask any further questions about my studies or follow anything up from the data collection please do contact her.

I have been teaching in secondary education until last year and I have a recent enhanced CRB disclosure. I enclose a copy of the questions I intend to ask in the interviews. If you have any further questions about my research study please don’t hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely

Ruth Johnson

Ruth Johnson
Postgraduate researcher (Ed.D)
c/a Professor Helen Gunter
Ellen Wilkinson Building
The University of Manchester
Oxford Road
Manchester
M13 9PL

<<name and address>>

Of school>>
Appendix J: Ethical approval

---------- Forwarded message ----------
From: Ethics Education <ethics.education@manchester.ac.uk>
Date: Thu, May 17, 2012 at 8:41 AM
Subject: Ethics Approval Application - CONFIRMATION after Panel
To: "ruthjohnson70@gmail.com" <ruthjohnson70@gmail.com>
Cc: Helen Gunter <Helen.Gunter@manchester.ac.uk>, Shelley Darlington <Shelley.Darlington@manchester.ac.uk>

Dear Ruth,

I am pleased to confirm that your ethics application has now been approved by the School Research Integrity Committee (RIC) against a pre-approved UREC template.

If anything untoward happens during your research then please ensure you make your supervisor aware who can then raise it with the RIC on your behalf

Regards

Gail Divall
PGT & Quality Assurance Administrator
School of Education

Tel: +44(0)161 275 3390