

*What are the Implications for Working-class
Adult Learners within the structures of
Higher Education?*



By

Tracey Scully

June, 2021

Acknowledgments.

First, I would like to say thank you to my supervisor Michael Murray for his direction, guidance and support as without it this research would not have been possible. Throughout the hard times I have found Michael to be understanding, supportive and kind in his approach throughout this time.

I would also like to thank my family and friends for their continual support and patience on this long journey. They have been wonderfully positive in supporting me through this expedition.

This research would have no real bearing without the voices of the participants that created time and a space to share their heartfelt experiences honestly and openly with me, for this, I am greatly appreciative!

Abstract

This thesis sets out to explore the experiences of students within higher education in terms of ‘implications’ by where the values placed on success within the grading process has ill effects. The values placed on students can be found within common meritocratic discourses that are heavily infiltrated within the system, where ‘successful achievement’ is psychologically constructed around hierarchal status. Such internally built constructs have its foundations within middle class aspirations, where the grading system determines ‘crossing over to the other side’ for working class students, that is, *the greener side*. Where achievement to reach this *side* lies in a competitive structure that ‘operates’ on individual performance for a market orientated economy. The heavily weighted values placed on working class students to achieve to such aspirations have ‘voiced’ their implications of competing in such structures within higher education. Where educational policies and discourses that governs these operations are having serious ill effects for some working-class students. Although, the education system professes a sense of overall human wellbeing and a prosperous life through the perception of social mobility, the findings within this research would suggest otherwise, where social, emotional, and psychological damage has occurred for some working-class students. Where such operational structures are embedded with unequal practices, which will be emphasised in this research. This study has attempted to unveil the *real* and honest *truth* through the experiences of these students to highlight concerning issues for working class backgrounds who enter in the realms of the dominant structure that is highly middle class led. This thesis can only work off its limitations, sadly, where all findings cannot be included. This study involves only three participants and therefore cannot give a general perspective. Additionally, and in support to these findings, a statistical account will be offered to further support such issues. The themes that have concerningly arose within these findings would require further exploration in order to address a transformation within policy agendas and ideologies where the use of such discourse of ‘working hard and you will succeed’ are at the core of such ill effects.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	Pg. 2
Abstract.....	Pg. 3
Table of contents.....	Pg. 5

Chapter one:

Introduction

Introduction.....	Pg. 7
Background to research.....	Pg. 8
Relational research	Pg. 10
Structure and outline of the thesis.....	Pg. 12

Chapter Two:

Methodology

Methodology.....	Pg. 14
Ontological perspective...' <i>My belief</i> '.....	Pg. 15
Epistemological Perspective ' <i>How I come to know</i> '.....	Pg. 17
Plan of action.....	Pg. 17
Ethical Consideration.....	Pg. 20
Limitation to study.....	Pg. 21
Conclusion	Pg. 21

Chapter Three

Theoretical and Literature Review

Introduction.....	Pg. 23
The divide begins.....	Pg. 23
Emotional Capital.....	Pg. 26
Social Capital.....	Pg. 27
Linking ‘affects’ within the remits of higher education.....	Pg. 29
Habitus: Social class and identities within Higher Education.....	Pg. 32
Oppression – Within Instructional methods of teaching.....	Pg. 35
Conclusion and recommendations.....	Pg. 59

Chapter 4

Findings and Analysis

Introduction:.....	Pg. 40
Findings.....	Pg. 41
Profile of participants.....	Pg. 41
<i>Themes:</i>	
Competition- ‘ <i>Working class view</i> ’	Pg. 42
The value of self-worth placed on grades.....	Pg. 44
The ‘implications’ in reaching ‘the grade’	Pg. 46
What’s happening with instructional learning?.....	Pg. 48
Is the grading system fair?.....	Pg. 50
Suggestions for change.....	Pg. 51

Conclusion..... Pg. 53

Chapter 5

Analyses

Introduction: Pg. 54

Cultural capital- ‘in a physical view’ Pg. 55

Cultural capital- ‘being on the other side’ Pg. 57

Where Self -esteem is contingent to academic success..... Pg. 59

The implication’ s of *pursuing* high grades that are contingent to self-
esteem..... Pg. 61

Instructional learning – ‘lost and excluded’ Pg. 63

Conclusion..... Pg. 67

Chapter 6

Conclusion and recommendations

Introduction: Pg. 69

Recommendations..... Pg. 69

Conclusion..... Pg. 71

Bibliography Pg. 72

Appendix Pg. 78

Chapter One

Introduction to thesis:

‘Power produces realities, it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth and it produces discourse (Foucault 1977 cited in Mayr 2008) it produces identities, knowledge, and possibilities for behaviour, and it does this through discourses (Mayr 2008).

The research question posed for this study is ‘What are the Implications for Working-class Adult Learners within the Structures of Higher Education? The very purpose of this study investigates the implications where the drive for ‘educational outcomes’ has psychological, emotional, social and learning implications on students within higher education. The education system professes to act as a conveyance belt, where its transportation through the grading process takes its passengers on an upward journey on the promise for a better quality of life, that is, career status and higher income. Therefore, as Mayr (2008) points out, for some, that is, staff, students and the public who engage within its reign, their social reality is constructed and reconstructed within discourse practices. Therefore, the structures within the system creates a logical sense of view that captures the minds of working-class students into believing in a system that prophesises, ‘no more struggling’. Such prophesies of *hope* are determined within education structures, that is, the grading system, where measuring up to middle class standards are unequal, unjust, and unfair. This research will attempt to provide the reader with an understanding of the implications that these structures are having on working class students within higher education. It will provide the reader with a real scope where such implications are creating identity crises, along with self-esteem issues, learning issues etc. for working class students. Together with these findings, this research will rely on the works of Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1990, 2000, 2013) cultural capital, habitus, and field to provide a theoretical richness and understanding to the analysis of these discoveries. This research will also work off the research conducted by British Sociologist Diane Reay (2004, 2005, 2015, 2018, 2020) to support and offer a validation to this research question. It will also use the works of Crocker and Park’s (2004) research, *The Costly pursuit of Self-Esteem* to provide an understanding of the psychological damage for working class students where self-esteem has become reliant and dependent on grades. Where within this research it was discovered that such dependencies have cause serious psychological implications. It will also offer a brief scope by where ‘instructional

learning' that faces students in Higher Education are causing further implications for working class students. Within this research it has been discovered how exclusion has become a better option than to be subjugated into a realm of oppression through instructional learning practices. In order to explain this, the works of Paolo Freire (1996) will be drawn up using the concept of the 'banking education' where dehumanisation and oppression are associated. Overall, this study has investigated, captured, and unveiled the shocking emotional, psychological, social, and learning effects for working class students in Higher education who have engaged within the highly unfair, unequal, and biased competitive structure within the education system.

Background to research

The research question that has been posed, is the leading objective of this study with the intention to discover the implications that working-class students within the structures of Higher education are having. 'Mankind must decipher these warnings, not in order to submit it to the future as a destiny, but in order to be able to, if necessary, to modify it' (Bourdieu 1990). Educational practices are historical in nature, they rely on memory to adhere to institutional laws, rules, standardised practices etc. where the 'instructional model' utilized manufactures and maintains a sense of collective identity (Misztal 2003). Throughout my years of education, thriving for grades would have been an almost natural event, where the familiarity of 'following and compliancy' was at the forefront of 'hope and trust'. This was within a system that professes success, where in trusting we are mutually delivered into the hands of the other (Løgstrup 1997 cited in Frederiksen 2014). Frederiksen (2014) would say that we do trust in its process, because we are socialised to trust, in that promises that are inculcated from birth are assured through cultural context and formal institutions. Bourdieu (1990) would say, we are 'born into the game, with the game' where the associated learning is not so recognised, in this he means that we comply to the rules that are associated with learning practices and yet, we are not fully aware of its power over us. Where he additionally says, to engage in the game is not necessarily an individual based decision, instead the aim of the game becomes a common-sense rationality. Furthermore, where conditioning that is based on future direction provides a validation in oneself and a collective belief in the game and its fetishes (Bourdieu 1990).

The awareness of the effects of such conditioning to comply and engage in practices began to emerge within me within higher education through the witnessing of other student's emotional effects when presented with assignments and exams. Where through observations, such effects heightened panic, stress and physical appearance deterioration, by where I began to identify

similar effects within myself. To provide a fleeting picture, it was one bright afternoon where the weather provided a little brightness on exam day, the first of many to come. Sitting in the dining area of the college canteen I began observing others, merely to observe if their body language in some way reflected how I felt. I had known these students for years, and I detected panic, and in its form manifested into a ritual of cramming knowledge into their minds, where this, for me was a pre-existing memory every time exams were presented. However, this perception was with a different kind of awareness. I particularly remembered one peer in front of me writing furiously over and over again her preparation for the exams, relying on the memory cells for recall, where the struggle brought her to the point of tears. These tears were not merely minute droplets, but that of waterfall shed tears. Her body crumbled before my eyes, hands over her face in an attempt to cover such high emotions. I'll always remember her words 'I can't do this, I'm going to fail' and in a way, mirrored my own thoughts. I knew this girl quite well and having observed how hard she worked throughout her degree years; I must admit it was through sheer dedication. It was heart-wrenching to see how this was affecting her, she looked so exhausted. Sometimes you don't see what's in yourself until you see it in others, where I too began to realise, I was pretty deflated too. At this point, I realised there is something seriously wrong here, which made me look at my other peers that were dispersed around me, where I recognised the same pattern and effects. All with their heads down, pens flurrying along their paper, frantically regurgitation from crumpled paper written the night before in what appeared to be in a manner filled with inner panic. Where those who weren't writing, I observed in what appeared to be fear, dread, and a sense of deflation. Where the dread and fear manifested into the continuous talking of exams, where 'failing' was the leading topic. It had consumed their present world, this surely does reflect Bourdieu's (1990) thinking in his 'collective belief in the game', where such emotions and behaviour would not transpire if one did not believe in it so. Where the concept of the game becomes 'second nature' in effect, that Bourdieu 1990 (cited in Zembylas 2007) speak of, it appeared a normality, and not a recognised product of history.

This is where the habitus comes into view, where previous experiences that makes up the habitus, the dispositions developed and embodied over time shape the way we think, act and perceive (Bourdieu 1990 cited in Zembylas 2007). This is to mean the inculcation of historical values, through discourses, practices, rules and regulations that are entangled in educational institutions have become embedded within our psyche that the habitus has become identified with objective structures (Zembylas 2007). When looking from a wider and outer perspective,

I could only compare it to ‘cattle entering the slaughter-house’, where survival has become dependent on memory recall which will determine educational outcomes. Or in other words, the system that professes ‘hope’ that high outcomes will break the shackles of poverty. For working class students there always lies a sense of uncertainty, when our culture is ‘class dominated’ by the wealthiest, where the measuring ‘up to’ is not always reachable for some. Where for others, in attempting to reach such peaks can have real consequences, where embodied practices such as rewards, appraisals, favouritism are used as tools to keep us in the game.

Upon reflection, this brings me back to times when I have observed the faces within the classroom when grades are presented to each student, some faces drop and the blood drains low, their once rosy cheeks turn white in a flash, and in away, reaffirming their uncertainty. Yet for others, some faces light up like disco balls all flushed with colours of elation. Where upon distribution of grades, I remembered lecturers praising those who achieved well, and for others, to work harder. This is where you can see emotions regulated by such practices, or where the habitus has become attached to objective structures that Bourdieu (1990) speaks about. Where feelings have become normal emotions tied to grades in an effort to enforce better performance. It’s the classical example of operant conditioning where behaviour can be modified by using positive and negative reinforcement (Cohan 1969). Not only does this contribute to self-esteem issues, it creates a certain divide, where through my own observations it was evident that grades determined ‘the more knowledgeable’ student. I can understand, the ‘native membership’ of the game, as Bourdieu (1990) says, where a feel for the game has developed, and not necessarily based on consent, the competitive system draws you into the war of illusion through embodiment practices. Where I have to say, that through awareness and observation, the game not only creates a peaceful war within the classroom arena, but that of an internal war within ourselves.

Relational research:

This section will offer a brief overview of other research that has been conducted in relation to this topic of study. A study conducted by Selina McCoy and Delma Byrne in ‘*The sooner the better I could get out of there: barriers to higher education access in Ireland*’ in 2011 outlined some of the experiences felt by students within secondary schooling, which inevitably had an impact on students in entering higher education. Although this study was conducted in relation to barriers in accessing higher education, I found the experiences of the students

reflect that of my own study where those from middle class backgrounds scored relatively higher within their academic performance than those from working class backgrounds. The experiences from these students was with an emphasis of being treated unfairly by their teachers where the view and attitude was that of low expectations. Hence, where judgement and stigma are leaving working class students with feelings of being ‘nothing’ based on ability. Where additionally teachers made distinctions of who would be a more suitable ‘fit’ for higher education. This study highlighted that students from working class backgrounds had a more negative experience than their counterparts, where advice, support and guidance was not a consideration leaving students with no real direction. Whereas their counterparts had more positive experiences in term of direction and assistance. The real emphasis on this was perceptions of the more ‘intelligent’ students from professional backgrounds who were judged a more appropriate ‘fit’ for higher education which ultimately creates a reproductive cycle to the diversities between social class. Hence, leaving the more disadvantages student towards a more ‘appropriate’ place in the social order. This study reflects my own in term of feeling nothing, where such feelings are developed in structure within the education system. Although this study emphasises on secondary schooling, it is my belief that it paves the way for those who do enter higher education a complexity of inferior emotions tied to standards and social class.

The following piece of relational research will reflect on the adversities found within poverty-stricken families that offers a link to student’s coping skill within university. This was emphasised in my own study by where students that comes from disadvantage backgrounds carry adverse effects that are not common within middle class backgrounds. The article ‘*Coping, stress, and negative childhood experiences: The link to psychopathology, self-harm, and suicidal behavior*’ focuses on mental health for those who have encounter negative experiences within childhood. Its emphasis is on negative parental practices where addiction, violence, emotional and physical abuse that derive as a result of poverty impacts on ability to cope with stressors across the lifespan (McLaughlin, Conron, Koenan, & Gilman, 2010 cited in McLafferty, Armour, Bunting, Ennis, Lapsley, Murray, O’Neill 2019). Although in my own research there is an emphasis on parental emotional unavailability and its complexities for future cognitive development, this study provides a brief section that illustrates additional complexities from impoverished backgrounds that are equally important. University students, in particular, appear to have elevated levels of stress that can impact on their mental health and well-being (Bewick, Koutsopoulou, Miles, Slaa, & Barkham, 2010; Eisenberg, Gollust,

Golberstein, & Hefner, 2007 cited in Mc Lafferty et al. 2019) which may correlate from early childhood experiences. Furthermore, as a result this study indicated that many students find the transition to university stressful, and they struggle to cope with the demands of university life, with many negative consequences. This research I found to be very relational as it offers an indication to how the structures within higher education do not tend to consider the effects of such adversities for working class students later in their life.

Structure and Outline of Thesis -Chapter one -

This study has begun with an abstract that provided an overall picture of what this research is about. It has also provided the readers with an introduction for a more detailed account on what the research question is about and what will be included within this study.

Chapter Two - Methodology

Within this chapter it will provide an overall outline of my ontological and epistemological position. It will also give an account as to what methods were used in conducting this research. It outlines why I have used these methods and will illustrate the ethical considerations that are paramount to the participants that partook in this study.

Chapter three - Literature review.

This chapter will provide a theoretical perspective using the works of Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1990, 2000, 2013) where habitus, cultural capital and field are all contributing factors to the implications that grading processes have on students within higher education. The works of Dianne Reay (2004, 2005, 2015, 2018, 2020) have also provided a useful supporting framework for the argument posed within this research. Drawing on the conceptions of Freire Paulo (1996) where his theories of oppressive practices and dehumanisation also contribute to the argument where such practices with educational settings have real life consequences.

Chapter four - Findings

This chapter emphasises on the voices of the participant's experience in relation to grading processes and highlights the implications. The data retrieved will provide the reader with an honest account on the emotional, psychological and social impact from their perspective. Where the most important and common findings were constructed into a thematic analysis.

Chapter five - Analysis and conclusion

This chapter will integrate the findings chapter to the theoretical framework provided within the literature review section. This discussion has been broken down into six themes 'cultural capital - a physical view', cultural capital – being on the other side' Where Self -esteem is contingent to academic success', 'The implication 's of *pursing* high grades that are contingent to self-esteem', and finally , Instructional learning – lost and excluded'.

Chapter six -Recommendations

This section will offer brief recommendations based on the findings with the intention of suggesting an alternative solution to diffuse such implications working class students.

Chapter Two

Methodology

‘We all possess the vital instinct of inquisitiveness for, when the unknown confronts us, we wonder, and our inquisitiveness makes us probe and attain full and fuller understanding of the unknown’ (Kothari 2004). Although the education system within society is viewed as a teleporter to a successful life, it fails to highlight the consequence within its process of teleportation. This project is relational to the values that are inculcated within families and institutions alike, where common discourses of ‘work hard and you will succeed’ has psychological, emotional, social and learning implications for students within Higher Education. This research will offer an illustration to where the marriage of values to educational outcomes has been enforced through government ideologies, policies and practices, where its relationship has succumbed students into an unequal, oppressive and dominant realm. In this way, they have considerable power over shaping our routine experiences of the world and the way we classify that world (Mayr 2008). The approach to this research is that of a qualitative one in order to investigate, discover and to identify the implications through the experience of the participants who have been subjected to the highly competitive structure of grading embedded within the education system. Beginning on this journey of research I have presented my own ideas and thoughts through observation and interactions with other peers. I understand as a researcher that my biases are not necessarily the same as others, therefore, I have taking a social constructivist approach to this research whereby through qualitative research informs the experience of the student within their own world. As a research I ensured a safe space for the participants of their own choice to explore their own subjective experience. This research question begins to seek out implications where the question posed ‘What are the Implications for Working-class Adult Learners within the structures of Higher Education?’ which will attempt to unveil the real truths for students embedded within such a meritocratic paradigm that relies on grading for social mobility and success. For Kothari (2004) ‘the main aim of research is to find out the truth which is hidden’. To offer a scope in working towards the discovery of these findings a brief outline of this chapter will narrate my ontological and epistemological position that bears some fruit pickings for the beginning of this journey. It will also include a detailed account of the research methods that I have used to gather knowledge to inform this research topic. Also with the inclusion of the ethical considerations that has been provided and respected for the protection of the participants within this study and myself as a

researcher, that have been guided by the ethical regulations that are mentored and guided by Maynooth University to ensure that respect, dignity, confidentiality and privacy has been applied to each participant.

Ontological Perspective. 'My beliefs'...

It is my ontological belief that the 'inner dimensions' of a student's reality has become shaped by educational policies, structures, and practices within the education system. My belief is that this begins with 'values' that are inculcated or embedded into students psyche through discourses disseminated by educational ideologies. With the intent that a student's 'reality' becomes the basis of social construction to conform and subjugate to such powerful influences within society for economic growth. Where language within discourses, that is 'endowed with the performative power to bring into being the realities it claims to describe', where institutions are primary sites for 'reality constructions' (Mayr 2012). Therefore, I believe our 'reality' exists within the realms of education ideologies where individualism is not recognised outside of its culture, ultimately shaping our behaviour and the decisions that we make. Consequently, for some, our decisions or our '*incompetence*' that do not fall within the remits of institutional expectancy and domination will determine our 'reality', to a reality of both exclusion and marginalisation. Whereby neo liberal ideologies that underpin educational strategies hold the individual responsibility for their 'academic performance' as opposed to the system being problematic. To further emphasise and although, I believe we do internally try to make sense of ourselves, however, my view would be that where Education professes 'wellbeing' and 'hope' for a prosperous future, where the believing in the system creates trust on its promise that we become enslaved to it. As touched off this earlier in chapter one, I previously believed in the education system in terms of fairness and equal treatment, and I would consider myself as working-class status. I must admit this was due to the very nature of not really understanding or grasping the inequalities that existed due to the acceptance of the reality of compliance, that is, it became natural. Thinking back, it was the thing to do, there was no sense of 'other than' in my world as I always professed the best for me and my children which rested in the hands of education. Additionally, I loved learning regardless of the topic, sometimes though I wonder did I use this as distraction from the struggles of being a single parent. For whatever the reason, education was my lifeline, and that is what was in my makeup. I was ambitious, I always done quite well which always pushed me forward. I must admit, I never much noticed what lied in the undercurrent between classes, although I would have recognised favouritism. It is only now

that I look back that I can clearly see a difference in the way others were treated and how relational this was to grading system. I believe this structure places people into categories, reproduces difference in social class and limits individuality. But that is not why I began this journey of writing this thesis, it was the sheer wake-up call of the implications that these structures are having on students where I mentioned earlier through observations of my peers and myself. Hence, the thoughts ‘what is really happening for working class students?’ that led me to an anger that pushed me to explore the implications that these structures are having on students within higher education.

Reflective piece - how do I feel now?

Upon reflection, and having listened attentively to the views, opinions, ideas of the participants has only reinforced my ontological position within this field of study. Although, being on the other side, as I am now a qualified educator, I believe I will struggle to engage within the structures of the system as a consequence to these findings and my understanding of literature surrounding them. As a human being first, the only thoughts that enter my head, is identity, and how so easily we surrender it in the face of hope. How easily, we can be shepherded by others simply due to wealth and position. In my opinion, the system is not ‘just’ for working class students, it is merely a ploy for enslavement by the richest within our society. Ultimately, our identity and self-esteem get caught up in the journey in reaching successful standards, where finding your own inner success can be lost within a system. Success is within our own finding whether that be self-development, cleaner, miner etc. it is our choice. Unfortunately, working a ‘normal’ job nowadays is not an acceptable position in high society, and who says? Unless attitudes and perceptions are changed can we begin to lead a life that is sufficient to us and not to other’s standards. As a professional and through such awareness I will attempt to face such grading processes with a humane understanding of the difficulties that arise from them. Although the system is in no hurry to change, it is therefore as human beings and as a collective to attempt to work towards change to either abolish or provide an alternative process that functions as a fair and equal system. It is my belief, that individually, the solution is to recognise its effects and apply self-care measures that help to diffuse them and develop and sustain a sense of who you are outside of its grasp. Overall, and after the discovery of these findings, I am lost for words in how myself, my peers and generations beforehand has succumbed so silently to the clutches of past practices within dominant structures. Over and over again, we, the working-class groups accept and bow down like sheep to those who insist

on maintaining the ‘culture of power’, mostly because, like me, and others, we fail to recognise such practices of conformity within powerful institutions. Ironically, we the working-class people are the ‘ones’ that are supplying the electricity to the power charger.

Epistemology perspective - ‘Ways of knowing’..

The orchestration of this study lies within my ontological position as previously discussed, whereby the methods that I have used to gather a ‘knowing’ that either supports or rejects this position is from the experience and views of the participants within this study. Therefore, in order to develop upon this research topic, I depend upon the subjective knowledge of those who partook in this study to provide a real lived and honest account of their experience that lies within the context of *their* reality of the grading process. Creswell (2013) would imply that individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences, where the researcher then begins to interpret or make sense of the meaning that others have about the world.

As previously mentioned, it is my belief that institutional discourses play a powerful role in ‘value construction’ where through the grading process ‘a sense of reality’ is manufactured by institutional domination. Where Grillo (2005) would postulate that pedagogical rituals are deeply anchored in the minds and spirit of anybody whose life was largely spent within the context of formal education. Although this research concerns itself on the experiences within Higher Education, previous experiences within formal education have a leading consequential effect. Mayr (2008) implies that discourses have the power to foster particular kinds of identity that suit their own purpose where language plays a crucial role in capitalism because it is being of ‘knowledge driven’, that is, constantly generating knowledge about the world and how people are to act in the world (Mayr 2008). Therefore, utilizing a constructionist approach will help to uncover how students do think, act and feel within such a realm of enforcement of ‘knowledge driven’ practices where success is at the core of meritocratic ideology. Within this study, although my own beliefs will furnish it, the experiences of others will provide a great richness to the implications that have derived from such structural influences and practices.

Plan of action - ‘to gain knowledge’

The plan of action that I have chosen to bring this ‘knowing’ into play is through interactive dialogue, that is, based on one to one interviews from the personal perspectives of the experiences of the individuals that partook in this study in relation to the grading structures and

its impact. I understand that as a researcher the power relations between us will also be a consideration in that the voices within this research are the power of its evidence, and not a sole emphasis on my own beliefs. In order to attempt to unveil the implications that the grading system imposes, a set of open-ended question will be presented to each participant. Where for Mason (2017) postulates that questions about what we regard as knowledge or evidence of things in the social world are epistemological questions. This is to mean as a researcher, the questions are designed in what might represent as knowledge and evidence, that is, how is knowledge generated, therefore within this research it depends upon the knowledge from the experience and voices of the participants. Therefore, the researcher's must be able to connect the questions answered to the ontological question posed (Mason 2017). As a researcher, and although I maintain my own biases, it is important that the questions designed are not based on a led viewpoint. Additionally, the researcher will do very little talking, will refrain from imposing concepts or judgements upon what the participant is saying, and will gently lead the participants to the area of discussion (Morrison, Haley, Sheehan, Taylor 2002).

Qualitative research is not just data and techniques, it produces knowledge that contributes to more general understandings (Braun, & Clarke 2013). Furthermore, where Howitt 2010 (cited in Braun, & Clarke 2013), would emphasise that although qualitative research is not necessarily seen as 'scientific' due to its anxiety provocation, where quantitative research provides control and clarity, this study will also offer its audience a statistical analysis to further support its findings to provide a richness within its context. Furthermore, I will use a theoretical framework using Pierre Bourdieu's (1984, 1990, 2000, 2013) where his work on habitus, cultural capital and field all play a vital role in creating an understanding to where inequality lies when competing within the grading system by where it has implicatory effects for working class students. I will also use British studies from Dianne Reay (2004, 2005, 2015, 2018, 2020) where her research brings a backing to add richness to the findings to further support my ontological position. Drawing on the works of Paolo Freire (1996) is also an important theorist to bring forth as his concept of 'banking education' which plays a crucial importance to the construction of institutional learning and where for some student's serious implications lie.

Upon beginning this journey, I approached two students and one lecturer. I knew both students quite well. I asked the first student as I observed the effects that the grading system was having on her, where the obvious anxiety levels heightened at exam time. I approached this research study with her through phone call to partake in which she enthusiastically accepted. The other

student that I thought of was a girl that had dropped out of further education where I was also in the same course. I also contacted her, and she was eager to partake. My previous lecturer I also asked from my Degree course, although, I did not know his story I asked him because I wanted the experience from a now professional working within the field.

Recording the interview is the most practical method of documenting the participants experience, where it later can be transcribed, where their 'voice' becomes the life through written format. Once the data is retrieved and transcribed a method of open coding will be used to create 'titles' to where important common themes that prevailed within the interview are placed into sections. The themes will work off both the participants experience in conjunction with the literature sought in relation to the research question. The first question posed opens the door to the topic of conversation, where it could be referred to as introducing the 'opening act' before the 'featured act' within a concert, it sets the scene! The last question is as equally important in that it encourages the participant to ask questions where they might additionally want to add something extra.

According to Morrison et al (2002) conducting qualitative research means creating a space for individuals to speak of things that have meaning to them, this is more easily accomplished in a 'natural setting'. At the end of the day, the interviewee needs to feel safe within their environment, as their lived experience may trigger emotional responses that require time, space, patience, and attentive listening. Therefore, it is important to allow the setting and time to the participants choosing. One student preferred to be interviewed in the realms of a university setting, within an office which was quite appropriate given the topic of this research, where sometimes the 'setting' can trigger memories that may not necessarily be found within natural settings. The other two participants decided upon their home as a setting for the interview, which posed a more natural, comfortable, and safe setting. The importance of each interview is to capture the 'life' within that experience through their story telling, to listen attentively to changes of tone, observations of body language where emotions are commonly evoked during memory recollection. Memories are not also a positive recollection, and in some instances, can be traumatic, therefore, it is important as a researcher to observe and acknowledge emotional disturbances with a view of terminating the interview and offering support. Within these interviews for one particular student who dropped from her course I noticed a change of tone during the interview, where anger that was held deep, emerged. She described not being listened to by lecturers and illustrated frustration when talking about

expressing her opinion and that it just was not good enough for the standards needed. However, when she continued to speak of working in her present job, I observed a sense of pleasure in that her educational experience was not a necessity. For the other student, the interview went well although I did detect a level of anxiety when she spoke of her life being revolved around exams and assignments. However, she expressed she would have tackled them differently upon reflection. Whereas the lecturer appeared to reflect more towards changes in the system. There were no real concerning issues that would determine an elimination of any of the interviews based on observation. Although ending the interview is good practice if required, it does not necessarily mean ending the conversation as the participant may want you to listen to their story, as sometimes listening can be enough to support the person through past events of an emotional nature. However, once the interview or conversation has expired it is important, that I, the researcher provides the person with a list of support services available if they feel they might benefit from them.

Ethical Consideration:

The term ethical, closely linked with ‘morals’ has been described as ‘what is good or right- as contrasted with unethical as ‘bad and wrong’ (Hammersley & Traianou 2012). For Wiles (2013) ‘ethical dilemmas in research involve people making moral judgements, where the researcher decides or makes a judgment on what is the right thing to do when facing an ethical dilemma’. Although, we as individuals hold different ideas on morals, it is therefore guided on the ethical regulations of Maynooth College that mentors our behaviour towards good ethics to both the researcher and participants. However, and in my opinion a good inset of personal morals is at the forefront of good research practices, as guidance can be from a distance and can rely on memory tactics as opposed to being within a situation that relies on good natural moral judgement based on ‘care’.

Before explaining the ethical nature of qualitative research, this study was also conducted through desktop research, where I the researcher critiqued work, opinions, and theories from other professionals. Explaining the topic of research to the participant, and the potential outcomes, if any, is important before interviewing commences, where the researcher ensures that the morals of the motivation is with the intention of providing good outcomes for both the participant and towards positive societal change. As well as an ‘ethic of care’ approach it is vitally important where the researcher takes a respectful approach in an individual’s autonomy, confidentially and where a nonjudgement stance lies within the relationship. This approach is

from the basis of where the voluntary nature of consent is solely of choosing and where the researcher does not proceed towards coercive or encouraging measures (Wiles 2014). Therefore, before proceeding with the interview, I provided each participant with a clear outline regarding the topic to create an understanding, therefore the participant determined the choice to partake within this study. It was important as a researcher that a good explanation of the contents within the consent form was also delivered, to provide a clear, a more legal approach to respecting confidentiality, anonymity and their rights within this consent. Additionally highlighting that under the General Data Protection Regulation (2018) that I, as the researcher am legally bound to protect their personal data from misuse and exploitation and to inform the participants to how their information will be used, how long it will be kept for, the safety of its storage and when it will be discarded. The consent form gives a double coating of reassurance where confidentiality in all respects of the process are assured to the participant and respected accordingly.

As a researcher, it was my duty to provide the option to the participants to remain anonymous within the study, where alternatively pseudonyms were opted for. Also, it was equally important to inform the participant that, at any time, they may withdraw from the interview for whatever reason they see fit and without any explanation to me. Furthermore, to create an understanding and assurance that the participant may at any time alter the written format within the thesis or delete it completely, this is as previously mentioned written within the consent form. Overall, ethical consideration plays a huge role in research, the protection of privacy, risk from harm and the respect of the individual are humane considerations during its process.

Limitation to this study of research

The only real limitation to this study is that it relied on three participants, however this provided a real honest account of their experiences where it provides the reader with enough richness to support the research question. This research does not make any claims outside of these findings, the knowledge provided is specific to this research only. It does open the door and provides ample information about these serious concerns for other people to work and develop upon, as it would need further examination within a larger scale of qualitative research for it to hold any real bearing.

Conclusion:

As outlined within this chapter, the methods used gives a clear view of how this research was

conducted and what this research is about. It has been discussed that qualitative research best informs this study, as the voices of experience from those within the education system can unveil the 'truths' that derive from powerful structures embedded within the system. This chapter has informed the reader of my ontological and epistemological position and where in particular the questions posed within this research will provide real life answers that will contribute to a richness that lies from experience. The important feature within this chapter is that of ethical considerations, where information has been freely provided to the participants about the topic of research where the option was of their choosing, without any encouragement and solely based on free will.

Chapter Three

Literature Review

Introduction:

This section will offer to provide an argument that students from working class backgrounds are psychologically, emotionally, and socially impacted upon within middle class led structures within higher education. It will offer a link to how these structures effect children from an early age and how such effects can manifest within adult learners in later life. It will also provide a brief glimpse at the complexities faced within working class families and how these impact on educational experiences. This chapter also highlights the production and reproduction of inequalities through structures and practices within the education system. It will offer a scope of how instructional learning is not only oppressive, yet this study has discovered learning implications found in such practices of teaching.

In order to support this argument, I have used a theoretical framework using Pierre Bourdieu's (1984, 1990, 2000, 2013) work on habitus, capitalism and field, where it will emphasise that the lack of cultural, social and economic capital play a huge implicatory role for the disadvantage. Irish studies have also been integrated within this study, providing a statistical account that illustrates a concerning level of mental health issues for students within both primary and higher education. Integrated within this research are studies composed and conducted by Dianne Reay (2004, 2005, 2015, 2018, 2020) a British sociologist whose work is renowned for providing an informed knowledge on the complications that lie within the divergency between social classes within educational settings of both primary and higher education. Additionally, her study on emotional capital will also come into play within this research. The drawing on the works of Paolo Freire (1996) has also been succumbed in explaining how the structures within educational settings are oppressive and dehumanising for learners. Success is defined as 'working hard' and you will succeed', but for some, those who work hard still cannot reach this ideology within middle class measures, creating serious implications and an unequal divide within our society.

The divide begins.....

In order to understand where the complexities of social class lie within education, one must

look firstly at Bourdieu's work on habitus and cultural capital, that is primary habitus. Habitus according to Bourdieu (1979 cited in Du Plessis, 2019) is the conditions associated with a particular class of conditions of existence which produce the habitus, that is, how we have been socialised from birth, which includes our formation of habits, skills, dispositions and how we utilise them within our social world, or as Bourdieu would say, how are habitus integrates within the field in which we enter.

It follows that the transmission of cultural capital is no doubt the best hidden form of hereditary transmission of capital and it therefore receives proportionally greater weight in the system of reproductive strategies. Differences in the cultural capital possessed by the family imply difference first in the age at which the work of transmission and accumulation begins (Bourdieu 1986 pg. 246)

Bourdieu crushes the innate assumption where academic success lies with natural talent, where to quote, breaks the 'common-sense view, which sees academic success or failure as an effect of natural aptitude' (Bourdieu 1986 pg. 248). Bourdieu (1964 cited in Reay 2020) would suggest that working class students were less successful than middle class students because the curriculum content was biased in favour of those things with which middle class students were already of extra-curricular familiar, as the system is architecturally designed around middle-class norms. This he would suggest that acquired cultural capital lends a fleeting hand to inequality within educational settings. Using Bourdieu's concept of habitus, Diane Reay (2015) explores this within the realms of class differences within educational settings where individual's feelings are not prominently explored within this key concept. According to Diane Reay (2015) in her article *Habitus and the psychosocial: Bourdieu with feelings*; the learning that comes through inhabiting pathologized spaces within the field often results in a predilection for shame, fear, anxiety, or even righteous indignation. While the internalisation of social inequalities in the privileged can result in dispositions of superiority, entitlement, disdain but also a predilection for guilt, ambivalence, and discomfort (Reay 2015). Reay (2005) captures this perspective through human emotions within children as this is where our perceptions of our social world stems from, through socialisation and learning processes which commences during early childhood (Jenkins 2014 pg. 76). Additionally, her study illustrates that children from an early age become consciously aware of class differences. According to Reay (2005) the perspectives of achieving academic success within formal education are based on attitudes surrounding class identities. Similarly, Reay (2005) argues that success is proportionately identified within middle-class students by those of working-class students.

Where awareness of social positions contributes to low self-esteem issues in those less privileged. Students commonly compare themselves to others with 44.8% of students in Ireland reporting that they often or always feel like they will never do as well as other students in exams and tests (Department of Education and Skills & National Educational and Psychological Service 2020). Where feelings of being 'nothing' have a real-life existence within children in mainstream schools, where fear, anxiety and failure are strong emotions correlated to examinations and outcomes. Within her study, reports of being 'hopeless' and doubts encompassing examination correlated to feelings of being 'nothing' (Reay 2005). An Irish report by the Education Research Centre highlights that large numbers of young students experience high levels of anxiety at 23.9% and 13.8% experience depression, where an estimation of 1 in 3 students suffer with mental disorders by the age of 13 years (McKeown, Denner, McAteer, Shiel & O'Keeffe 2019).

Whereas middle class students showed less concern, where reports illustrate feelings more towards being 'burdened' by supporting those who are 'stupid' and 'dumb' (Reay 2005). Additionally, the perception of being 'treated unfairly' were more commonly held views because working class children cannot reach the same standard and are asked to support their learning (Reay 2005). Also, a sense of entitlement and a good sense of their educational path is prevalent in middle class students, whereas, the majority of students in Ireland at 51.6% show more concerns of failing exams and future prospects (McKeown, Denner, McAteer, Shiel, & O'Keeffe 2019). Also, 43.1% report that even thinking about exams evokes stress and nervousness. These attitudes and reactions encompassing educational outcomes in correlation to capability within young people in both primary and secondary sector, were similar to working class students entering higher education. Where in my own study all three participants reported feelings of 'not being good enough', and where feelings of being 'nothing' also emanated. Furthermore, Reay (2005) reports that working-class students have a sense of intense stress and anxiety when confronting the unaccustomed realms of higher education. Where it has been reported by the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) in The National Report on Student Mental Health in Third Level Education recently conducted in 2019, which surveyed over 3,340 students that extremely high levels of anxiety have been found in a third of students within higher education (Price, Smith & Kavalidou 2019). Where Bourdieu (2000) would recognise that sudden transition can pose difficulties, where an individual's habitus can become dysfunctional. The emotions tied to higher education are real lived affections and are significantly related with competition and social class integration which may derive from

primary habitus.

To lend a hand to these findings Bourdieu (1986 pg. 246) would offer that cultural capital lies heavily invested within the family, it is from the family that children derive modes of thinking, types of dispositions, sets of meaning and qualities of style (Reay 2005). Although, Bourdieu doesn't use the term emotional as a form of capital, he does refer to the family as being the primary source of cultural capital acquired. To explore this concept, the term emotional capital, is where emotions are transmitted to children (Reay 2005) and how emotional engagement and involvement plays a key role in educational experiences within both mainstream and higher education. Therefore, depending on emotional transmission will depend on how the process of education is received and perceived and how individuals within their social world will be viewed and responded to. Bourdieu (1986) would not only point out that the family has a contribution to cultural capital acquired, but that of the mother's emotional availability.

It is because the cultural capital that is effectively transmitted within the family itself depends not only on the quantity of cultural capital, itself accumulated over spending time, that the domestic group possess, but also on the usable time (particularly in the form of the mothers free time) available to it (by virtue of its economic capital, which enables it to purchase the time of others) Bourdieu (1986, pg. 253)

Similarly, Harding, Morris and Hughes (2015) would offer that the accomplishing and attaining of education is through developing skills and knowledge formerly through interactions between maternal relations and that of the individual, as well as the possession of cultural capital. However, it is important to note that a mother's human capital is irrelevant if the mother is not an important part of the child's or adults life as they are not raised exclusively within the family remit (Coleman 1988) as cultural capital and social capital lends a fleeting hand within an individual's ecological system also, and depending on its quantity and quality will determine future educational outcomes.

Emotional Capital

Reay (2005) would identify that emotional capital invested in children differs in both middle class and working-class families. Where working class families lived on more of a 'survival instinct', where time was consumed on working to sustain a living, and where levels of poverty entrenched on their well-being, where worrying over bills, food, clothes and security had a psychological impact on parents. Bourdieu (1986 pg. 243) would say that the lack of cultural

capital can exist in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body. Additionally, poverty so closely linked with parental depression (Elliott 2016) proved to decrease interactions and consistency with their children (McLearn, Minkovitz, Strobino, Marks and Hou 2006). Evans's (2004) would ascertain that where there is disequilibrium, tendencies of negative outcomes of socioemotional and cognitive development evolve. Furthermore, activities encompassing cognitive tasks are diminished in children within low income families. Moreover, emotional capital was not a primary focus in its transmission to their children, due to mental health, time, inexperience, and lack of security etc. (Reay 2005). Agreeably, Evans (2004) would offer that mothers in disadvantaged socioeconomic status offered less emotional support to their young children. The Growing up in Ireland (2011, 2012) a national longitudinal study conducted of 8,568 children and their families, interviewed on separate occasion on the ages of 9 and then 13 years, reported that parents of children in the 13 year old bracket were less often supported in homework curriculum at 39%. Consequently, children living within poorer conditions tended to achieve less educationally than middle class children where poverty was non-existent. Within the Growing Up in Ireland Report, it was recorded that those in the lower income bracket where 38% envisioned reaching the leaving certificate only, whereas, those in higher income families only 16% had such visions. To add, one in five children drop out of the secondary sector without achieving the leaving certificate. Additionally, where conflicts commonly found in low income families that are unresolved are transferred unconsciously to children which in turn becomes a part of character formation (Aarseth, Layton and Nielsen 2016).

Social Capital

Social capital is a form of capital that is used to build relationships outside the realms of the immediate family, that is neighbours, friends, schools, colleges, community supports, etc. for the benefit of increasing positive educational outcomes. In addition to, better opportunities and social experiences for children. The levels of interactions within an individual's social network have been shown lesser or non-existent (McLearn et.al 2006), commonly associated with within poorer families and more in abundance within middle class families (Evans 2004). Where working class families have shown less participation in children's activities such as school plays, concerts etc., where 53% of mothers with a status of unemployment involved themselves in school events in comparison to mothers with a high professional status attended at 67% (ESRI & Trinity college 2011, 2012). Also, where an ability to integrate a sense of

belonging and a set of acquired communication skills that enable the rules of the game to be played are lacking. Bourdieu (1986 pg 249) would refer this type of networking as ‘investment strategies’ that are used both short term and long term, in order to produce and reproduce lasting relationships that secure material and symbolic profits. Therefore, where social capital is shortcoming, the level of educational experiences is different from those who do benefit from such influences. For example, those from a family with a professional parental background reported positive experiences, where 35% enjoyed the experience of school in Ireland (ESRI & Trinity college 2011, 2012). The acquisition of social skills in parents of high educational attainment (human capital) that are necessary to form such networks are not commonly found in parents with low levels of educational attainment (Bourdieu (1986 pg 249), where only 25% of students reported optimistic views in relation to educational experience of those whose mother had a lower secondary qualification (ESRI & Trinity college 2011, 2012). Whereas, human capital displayed by those parents who possess higher levels of education, influence language skills and behaviour, and through repetition can be used later to influence educational achievement and attainment, as aforementioned, knowing how to play the ‘rules of the game’ within the education system (Harding, et.al 2015). Hence, creating an ability where ‘fitting in’ becomes a more comfortable experience when entering higher education for middle class students. Equally, the transmission of social capital is effective, making possible the accomplishments of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible (Coleman 1988) that is, future positive educational outcomes, and where economic capital is restricted, exchange ‘can present themselves in immaterial form of cultural capital or social capital and vice versa (Bourdieu 1986 pg. 242). Bourdieu’s social capital is relational in the sense that it comprises a competitive market in which not all players may be ‘winners’—it represents a zero-sum game (Bexley, Marginson & Wheelahan 2007). Rational theory would suggest that social capital constitutes a particular kind of resource available to an actor (Coleman 1988) and used as an exchange rate for profits, and that such practices thus salvaged from ‘the icy water of egoistical calculation’ (Bourdieu 1986, pg. 242).

Although it has been discussed that different forms of capital contribute to future educational outcomes, it is important to highlight that emotional capital was a substitute for cultural capital. Where acquiring cultural capital was perceived as a more important aspect or task within both middle and equally within working class families. Cultural capital was perceived as more imperative than emotional transmission, as perspectives of educational outcomes determined future happiness (Reay 2005). This is by no means a blame game on parents, it is merely

pointing out a link on the reproduction cycle of inequalities and the feelings that emerge through the process of trying to achieve positive outcomes. It appears that emotional capital is the weaker of Bourdieu's capitals, in terms that it is not a capital that has been majorly explored in terms of inequality between classes from a spiritual and emotional perspective. Emotional capital could play a huge role in it working towards resolving perspectives, attitudes and beliefs around success that is based on academic performance. This could be through parents promoting self-development from an emotional point of view as a prominent factor, as opposed to what is required in order for their children to succeed academically. Therefore, such emotional availability could aspire to changing the way we think futuristically, hence undo the effects of 'inability concepts' that lead to implications for working class students.

Linking 'affects' within the remits of higher education

So how has this affected on students from working class families entering higher education?

'The structure of the habitus is designed on the conditions of lived experiences held within a particular position, where conditions of existence produce different habitus (Bourdieu 1984 pg. 170)'

Cultural capital prevails in the form of long-lasting dispositions, embodied within the mind and body, as aforementioned, consequently, its lacking within working class students creates a vulnerability or unprepared for the university experience and lacks the same sense of entitlement that ingrains heavily within middle class dispositions (Reay, Crozier and Clayton 2010). Furthermore, working-class students felt a great deal of stress and anxiety when encountering the unfamiliar field of higher education (Reay 2005), previously mentioned, as well as fear and anxiety there is another emotion that compounds working-class students, where shame and the fear of shame haunts working-class relationships to education. The National Report on Student Mental Health in Third Level Education (2019) have also highlighted that in Irish Third Level Institutions students suffer poor mental health with extreme anxiety at 38.4%, depression at 29.9% and stress at 17.3%, and at times have had no one to turn to about their emotional difficulties at 20.9% account, or the backlog of waiting was at large, which brings back the importance of emotional capital invested within the family. In addition to the findings in this report, students within higher education express the effects of mental health for learning, relationship formation and to live a heartfelt life (Price et al. 2019). Reports within my own research offered that where anxiety and stress take over, fighting for grades completely changes your life.

Here lie the emotional complexities where Margaret Wetherell in her book *Affect and Emotion* (2012) would imply that when the social trajectory is threatened an individual may feel intense anxiety. For a number of working-class students, fears of failure and succession are embedded within their psyche, where previously mentioned by Bourdieu, is based on the perception of natural talent or ability. The challenging demands of the meritocratic ideology based on

qualifications and certification falls short for those who have lived within childhood poverty, which has resulted or impacted in ways where allostatic load (wear and tear on the body) has been reported in adults later in life, due to the adversities that lay within poverty stricken families (Evans 2004). Moreover, allostatic load increases with development, where it impinges on psychological wellbeing in adulthood. Consequently, short term memory has also been associated with childhood poverty which is fundamental to a host of basic cognitive skills, including language and achievement (Evans 2016). This is not to say that all those from low income families are doomed as students, it merely points out that for some such consequences are a factor in determining educational success where working class students are at a disadvantage from those where such consequences are not common within students from middle class families. It is also important to point out, in the Irish National Report on Student Mental Health in Third Level Education (2019) that students who work whilst in third level education, have also reported that having a social life was non-existent and yet those who could engage in socialising had a better mental health (Price et al. 2019).

‘The dominant fractions, who, because of their position in the space of the dominant class, incline towards, partial, symbolic subversion, contain their own dominant groups who may push towards conservation, (partly in response to the subversive dispositions of their own challengers’ (Bourdieu 1984, pg. 450).

Bourdieu’s concept of habitus infers conflict as working students attempt to integrate into higher education, not least where teachers exercise a preference for those students that possess common cultural capital to themselves. Additionally, where language is illustrated more proficiently than those less culturally influenced. Although, reports of teacher favouritism can be seen in the secondary sector where reports of unequal and unfair treatment and certain level of disrespect for working class student (The house of Oireachtas 2019), similar reports have been recorded with higher education. Kathleen Lynch & Claire O’ Riordan (1998) identified common barriers in Higher education in Ireland, where working class groups were perceived as ‘deficit’ and where parents and students were not commonly involved in decision making process about education practices.

In Bourdieu’s (1986 pg. 244) analogy, of those where investment in cultural capital can be described as ‘a muscular physic’ which is a gradual time-consuming process and not an instantaneously built one, it takes time and investment. Therefore, competitive measures are too be considered an unequal balance, where the trajectory of ingrained cultural capital for some can be compared to entering a body building championship within higher educational institutions. Such investment does not exist or are in smaller quantities in working class students when considering competing for educational outcomes, it is not a level playing field. And yet, those who enter the field either consciously or unconsciously consent to a form of

domination of the higher social order, where in order to achieve certification, the curriculum's process demands that of a different culture from that of working class habitus. Which ultimately leads to crises in aptitude and fears of an ineptitude of academic performance (Lehmann 2007).

Furthermore, there stands a level of 'dropouts' in higher education simply due to the conflicting nature of the habitus and dispositions that are embodied previously within working class students. Where the 'deserving' attitude is absent, the language skills, dress sense, behavioural codes, social networks, and social skills are different or in short supply, and where 'dropping out' is the most logical or natural thing to do. Or as Bourdieu (1984 cited in Reay 2004) would offer 'a sense of one's place which leads one to exclude oneself from places from which one is excluded'. Where feelings of alienation that are attached to university structures, as Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992 cited in Albright, Hartman and Widin 2017) would commonly describe the feelings of 'a fish out of water'. Consequently, where students identified their working-class backgrounds to 'positions' that fit their habitus and dispositions best, in terms of the labour market (Lehmann 2007). Bourdieu (1984 pg. 110) would suggest that individual's 'feel made for jobs that are made for them'. Therefore, the fertilisation of inequalities are hidden within class differences where students either drop out, select colleges that are a best suit fit or may reject their background habitus and choose alternative methods to fit into middle class dominions in order to compete for educational outcomes. Interestingly, a recent Irish report conducted by the Higher Education Authority highlights that more 'affluent backgrounds' are associated with the university sector, for example 36% in comparison to 5% for the disadvantaged within Trinity College, Dublin (O' Brien 2020, the Irish times). Additionally, these 'affluent backgrounds' achieve soaring points in courses such as medicine, finance, and engineering, creating an even larger gap between classes.

Additionally, exclusionary practices can be found also within middle class where opting for higher or private schooling and retreating from public educational institutions can be found, which also lend a hand to the role in reproduction of class differentiation, where social exclusion is closely linked to the 'collective' action of exclusive groups in society (Bill Jordan 1996 cited in Reay 2004). Equally, the perspectives and attitudes that are closely linked to educational outcomes are commonly associated with a stigma of being 'clever and working hard', where previously demonstrated in parents of middle-class families and that of middle class students; where personal judgements are powerfully knitted to emotional effect and where Reay (2005) points out are 'potentially damaging'. For example, middle class students have reported that they cannot get on with those who grades were poor, and prefer to get on with

those who are more cleverer, where judgement lies in that those who do not have good grades deserve to be in the lower end universities (Reay 2005). And yet in my own study, reports of working hard and just passing would have deemed a dropout because ‘cleverness’ in terms of reaching a distinction was presumed a more acknowledged form of existence.

Habitus: Social class and identities within Higher Education

Bourdieu (1990) would point out that the dispositions within an individual’s habitus are interchangeable and can adapt to different fields of entry. He would postulate that institutions generate real effects on individuals, which becomes engraved or embodied within an individual’s bodily practices, which constitutes a feeling of ‘knowledge in the body’ (Bourdieu 1990 cited in Zembylas 2010). This is to mean that a new set of dispositions can be developed within institutions that further create an identity through socialisation, that is, creating a habitus. Furthermore, and in agreement to Bourdieu, Castell (1997) would offer that identity has its roots in dominant institutions, where an individual internalises this construct into their ‘sense of meaning’.

‘Through the self -construction process the self-system takes shape and, in turn, affects, as well as being influenced by, the social contexts and networks that constitute its social world.’ (Mischel and Morf 2003 cited in Crocker and Park 2004),

When we consider these ‘bodily experiences or practices’ we must consider from both psychological and emotional aspects that contribute to identity formation that is inculcated or engraved within structures of higher education. Firstly, from a psychological perspective we must consider how working-class backgrounds become to perceive themselves within the measures of middle-class standards and where the dominate culture takes a firm grip on those less advantaged. The ‘Looking Glass Self’ a concept that lies with Charles Horton Cooley 1902, provides us with the notion that individuals engineer themselves around the perception of others, where opinions of others have a contribution to how we design our identity (Cooley,1998). Bourdieu (2000 cited in Aarseth, Layton and Nielsen 2016) would offer that the habitus becomes into a state of conflict when radical change is almost immediate. He refers to this as an agent’s mental structure, where it might not be in line with the field of entry, typically in terms of awkwardness between social class differences. As a consequence, those of the working class take a more conscious approach whereby ‘they are forced to keep watch of themselves’

‘Such experiences tend to produce a habitus divided against itself, in constant negotiation with itself and with its ambivalence, and therefore doomed to a kind of duplication, to a double perception of self, to successive allegiances and multiple identities’. (Bourdieu, 1999: 511)

Here lies the concept, that the perception of others in a highly middle-class culture within Higher education creates a set of values that encompass self-worth. Where Zembylas (2010) would state, ‘when one’s identity is stigmatized or devalued in a particular context, concerns about self-worth are likely to be activated.’ In this way, we allow those who judge us to create an internal psychological pattern of thinking that oppresses the self. Within this context I speak of stigma, where students from working class families who cannot meet the norms are deemed deviant and dysfunctional (Gibbs, Skott-Myhre, Weima & Weima 2012) in comparison to their counter parts. Where in response, we begin to measure ourselves to those who are culturally acquired which in turn impacts on our self-worth when we cannot reach the same or expected standard.

Furthermore, judgement by a different culture evokes anxiety where an unsettling of internal conflict arises (Aarseth, Layton and Nielsen 2016). This is where the habitus becomes strained as previous dispositions are not in harmony with the dominant culture that lie within higher institutions. Where it manifests ‘that there is something shameful wrong with you’ (Reay, Crozier and Clayton 2010). The contribution of stigmatising lies heavily within the oppressive attitudes from the oppressors, that is, the middle class, where Castell finely puts it ‘stigmatised by the logic of domination’, where we have internalised such domination into perceptions that our identity should be in line with theirs. Where in my own research it was recorded that when low grades were presented that inner perceptions, thinking and feeling were of ‘not being good enough’ in oneself. Additionally, not meeting ‘high standards’ evoked feelings of where there is ‘something wrong with you’. Dominant social groups continue to deploy additional cultural and economic resources to achieve relative advantage (Tomlinson 2013 pg. 7), which enables a reproductive culture of dominance, therefore, they have the ‘greatest functional weight’ and therefore, in their structuring force’ (Bourdieu 1984 pg. 107). Furthermore, the dominant culture manifests a style of fashion, a particular way of using language and an attribution to attitudes regarding learning as well as an entitlement that exudes confidence (Reay, Crozier and Clayton 2010).

From an emotional perspective, ‘bodily experiences or practices’ can be identified within

historical context, where emotional strategies are and have been used to create a natural and logical sense that drives bodily practices. Misztal (2003) points out ‘the importance of bodily practices is reinforced by the role of emotions in the process of celebration’. Where in 1878, the Intermediate Education Act emerged which brought the regulation of a system of public examination, providing rewards, certification and exhibition and are currently present in today world in 2020 (Irish Statute Book year). For example, achieving high successful outcomes for students can be found dated back in 1926, where revealing educational outcomes within the Irish Independent *glorified* those with high success rates (Walsh, B 2016: pg. 374), which has been a continuum to this day in 2020, where exhibiting Irish school league tables in the Irish national newspapers identifies high success for high graded students. This type of exhibition inevitably created a phenomena where ‘competition’ became a socialised and internalised construction process, where it may be suggested that the rewarding grade game, that is defined by a letter and a number has developed into what Castell’s speak of as an internal construct ‘a sense of meaning’. This type of structure of practices within the system has had emotional affect among students who have become to identify their self-worth on high grades, keeping actions, feelings and perceptions tied to socialisation processes within the system. Inevitably, in its design it has also contributed into a ‘belief system’, that Nora 1996 (cited in Misztal 2003), assumes, that memory is considered ‘social’, that is, located in institutions in the forms of rules, laws, standardized practices and records. ‘It is just that we don’t directly feel the influence of these past selves precisely because they are so deeply rooted within us’ (Durkheim 1977 cited in Misztal 2003) therefore, keeping us in the game through emotional regulation.

Within this study in chapter 5, it will indicate that such emotional strategies that are tied to examination processes have implications for student’s self-esteem where feelings of greatness to incompetent and not ‘good enough’ are tied heavily to grade receivership. Furthermore, Niiya, Crocker and Bartmess (2004) would ascertain that those who place a high value of self-worth on grades tend to suffer with low levels of self-esteem. So, where you have high grade students exhibited for their success, it becomes a natural internalisation that to compete will deem us all to be successful and worthy. For Crocker and Park (2004), actions in pursuing self-worth, can be found in motivational goals that validate their ability through the realms of where it is invested. Furthermore, such investment has a knock-on effect where success or failure ultimately defines the individuals’ sense of whole worth. Due to their belief system of self-worth drives the individual to measures that require such validation within themselves, where failure to achieve self-worth can lead to feelings of shame and anger (Tangney, 1999 cited in

Crocker and Park 2004).

The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 gave *prominence* to the principle that education and training qualifications should be based on standards of knowledge, skills, or competence to be acquired by learners (QQI 2013). The heavily entrenched system based by on highly centralised system of assessment practices promote the notion that success has its foundation in ‘ability’ and hardworking. Additionally, the common discourse found within educational institutions, ‘Just work hard and you will succeed’ an aspirational phrase that creates an assumption that meritocracy is for the common good, a phrase that is infiltrated through family, friends, government, educational institutions as well as the influential role of the media, which is reinforced from historical practices (MacVeigh 2012). Interestingly, in a report from the *National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education in Ireland*, a survey conducted encompassing the importance on ‘what successful in higher education means to students’, the sample supplied that out of 1,041 students, out of a response of 887 students, 37% responded that achieving high academic attainment (referring to examinations) was considered the most important factor, where developing skills to maximise employability (Career) was equal too, which, both being the highest count, and yet personal attributes, relationship formation at 18% and contribution to community became lower down the line (O’Farrell 2019). Therefore, For Bourdieu (1984) the habitus arranges itself within the objective structures, where he points out ‘Individuals do not move about random in social space, partly because they are subject to the forces which structure this space’.

Oppression -within instructional methods of teaching!

Teachers, lecturer etc. use instructional methods of teaching with the intention of ‘leading’ their students to achieve educational outcomes that run-in line with the curriculum’s expected learning outcomes. That is, the exams will match the direction of instructional knowledge. This section will offer to argue that instructional and rote learning lends it hand to oppression for working class students. Paolo Freire’s (1996) concept of banking education will be used to highlight how such practices are oppressive where individual identity becomes lost within a system that culturally dominates. It will also highlight how such practices can develop into habit formations for students where patterns of learning become identified to a specific type of learning. Such practices are restrictive, they limit meaningful, experimental, and autonomous learning.

‘Our identity is away to understand our person hood; it’s the meaning we make of our

sense of self'. (Bardhan & Orbe 2012)

'Dehumanisation' a word referred to in *The pedagogy of the Oppressed* written by Paulo Freire 1996, which denotes any oppression of a person to become fully human. Freire (1996) concerned himself with teaching relations where the power of knowledge is fuelled by the expertise (educator) into the receiver (student), where he associates the term 'narration of sickness'. Such practices of instructional techniques are intentional, solely for the purpose of intended learning for course material. The socialisation process which begins within primary education has created a natural acceptance or narration by where students are viewed and treated like 'empty vessels'. The knowledge fuelled or poured into these empty vessels prevails over the process of meaningful and autonomous learning, where assessment practices demands that of regurgitation of what has been previously learned. Therefore, as students we are consumed by knowledge that is instilled within us from an early age, therefore, we learn to be receivers.

Epistemology, a terminology used to acquire knowledge, or to 'know something' which is found within both outer dialogue and intersubjectivity, that is conscious and unconscious thoughts between two people. Although, discussion is a form of outer dialogue, it is merely a debate about a topic of interest or required interest, where the discussion within the classroom arena lies more in what is to be understood in order to reach the educational outcome (Allan 2009 cited in Bardhan & Orbe 2012), it is not a natural explorative conversation. Consequently, Allan (2009) would surmise that the learning is 'never an active critique or formation of knowledge itself'. Freire would postulate that within such teaching methods, this is oppressive, whereby, and inevitably, students become the objects of learning as opposed to their own learners of learning.

Additionally, Freire would surmise that the notions of the oppressor becomes so embodied that the oppressed attach themselves to the identification with the oppressor (Freire 1996). Therefore, this can generate a self of devaluation and a reproduction of oppressors, where he says, 'As long as they live in the duality in which to be, is to be like, and to be like is to be like'. In reference to the above literature, and a pure example is, where it was discovered within Reay's (2005) study, that obtaining cultural capital predominated over emotional transmission, as discussed early. This study illustrates the level of identification that working-class families have to success within middle class cultures, where such identification inadvertently has impacted on emotional transmission for children. Also, within my own study, one student

identified her self-worth on grades, where to be seen as a person was within middle class standards. Yet, Freire (1996) would also postulate that the oppressors are themselves a victim of being chained internally, that is teachers, lecturers etc. where such dominance is more 'superiorly felt' than being dominated. So, rather, for those who are less advantaged learn to become liberated, instead, become brainwashed, or as Freire(1996) would say 'domesticated' into the imagined ideology that oppressors are the 'driving force' or 'ideal force' within society, where power exudes succession. Consequently, such a 'following' process it can be suggested is compensated for self-actualisation, self-development and personal transformation that can be found through meaningful experiences.

Furthermore, the pressures of reaching positive educational outcomes, with the added effects of such oppression, can lead to generalized anxiety disorders and/or depression (Alvarado 2010), where earlier this study presented some statistics on similar in both Primary and higher education. Senneth and Cobh (1972) would speculate that the effort of individuals who push for higher social status, encompass attempts for self-healing as opposed to seeking materialistic objects and economic capital, but driven in an attempt to restore a psychological deprivation that has effected in their lives. For example, where the adverse effects of poverty, as aforementioned, that impede on psychological health can develop into a subconscious drive to heal such affects within reaching up to middle class measures that dominate the social order. Moreover, the methods of rote learning used in order to achieve standards can develop into a pattern of thought where its practice for learning has become accustomed due to the continuous use of such instruction within formal education. Inevitable, this can shape future learning within higher education.

So, if you look at learning as a stimulus construction (Biesta & Vanderstraeten 1997), where failing or succeeding stimulates a response to study and memorise harder, such responses of the organism become more structured and more specific, it therefore, develops into a habit (Biesta & Vanderstraeten 1997). Furthermore, a response to a stimulus becomes a predisposition of habit, it can be implied that rote learning that is continually enforced within education settings has become a habit formation to reach high grades, which leaves students to accept knowledge as presented to them without too much critical thought. Where such habits or responses are reawakened when faced within the same situation, for example, if one has continually used rote learning as a response to addressing exams, it is highly likely that the same method will be utilised when faced in similar situations within higher education, where rote learning has become identified to a sense of purpose and meaning. Dewey's (1925 cited

in Biesta & Vanderstraeten 1997) concept of ‘acquired meaning to an organism’, where he would devise this as ‘primarily a property of behaviour’. Which ultimately can be recognised as controlled behaviour shaped within institutional practices.

However, although as previously mentioned in Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, where predispositions are durable in the context in that they are held deep, enduring and long lasting (Bourdieu 1990, pg. 53), this is not to say that other learning strategies cannot be reinvented. The point I make, is that the dispositions and habits formed within an individual’s environment is restricting on connecting knowledge and experiential learning that have meaning to the individual. Whereas instructional and rote learning is based on memory and at time holds no real relevance, except for regurgitating for exam purposes. Once habits and dispositions are formed it obscures learning outside of its formations, in that, it is limiting. As a result for one student within this study, where using her own critical thinking skills outside of the ‘learning to what is to be understood’ was continually downgraded, where she decided to leave the education arena, a pure example of limiting individual ability and thought, (which will be discussed further within the analysis chapter). Bourdieu would postulate that such exclusionary practices where the voice of those less advantaged are less heard, prevents the process of becoming a sense of being, this he would say is psychologically harmful (James 2015). The continually flow of knowledge from another source also takes away or detracts from self - development, hence personal transformation. Jenkin’s (2002) outrightly points it, that no pedagogic action is ‘culturally free’, but yet, neutrally emphasised within institutions of education and developed within educational policies. Jenkins (2002) would also say that domination, is not necessarily forced and it is barely recognisable as teaching methods mirror that of parental styles. She explains an almost innate or natural relationship formations occurs.

“Without a sense of identity, there can be no real struggle” (Freire 1985 cited in Darder 2014). A phrase that lies with Freire’s ideology for change, through his concept of ‘conscientization’, where we, the oppressed, become consciously aware of the subjugation to oppression within our environment through reflection. It is only then can we see our reality, that we internally understand what’s happening and the effect it has on us. Therefore, collectively we can take action in uprooting oppression together with those who also feel and see oppression in practice. Otherwise and to revert to Freire’s phrase, for some it is often the case that those who are oppressed do not realise that they are so, therefore, there can be no struggle as their identity lies with oppressive forces.

Conclusion:

This section has highlighted real concerning issues that working-class students face within the structures of both primary and higher education. It has highlighted as a consequence that psychological, emotional, and social wellbeing are impacted upon where assessment practices are at the core of such ill-effects. It has included statistics by where concerning measures of mental health are found in both formal and higher education, related to assessment practices. The unequal set up of the competitive structure that allows for those in abundance of cultural capital to compete with those who do not, is leaving working class children and adults feeling like they are ‘nothing by comparison.’ The illusion of ‘ability’ heavily knotted to grading practices are sending working class students to the edge, where pressures to meet such standards are impeding on mental health, identity formation, self-esteem, and social life.

As well as such concerns, working class students are faced with stigma and judgement when unable to reach middle class standards, they are frowned upon and labelled as ‘dumb’ by middle class students. Yet, this study showed the serious adverse effects of poverty for some working-class backgrounds where economic, social, cultural capital are in short supply leaving them in disadvantaged positions. Additionally, it was highlight that in some cases parental availability was shortcoming which inevitably impacts on a diverse range on cognition process that develop further with maturity. Hence, such adverse effects impact on educational experiences and outcomes as highlighted in the Growing up in Ireland report, and shows a certain ignorance from those who judge and label.

This chapter also created an understanding of how instructional teaching methods from primary education through to higher education crowds our minds with outside knowledge with the interest of improving economic growth through standard practices. It highlighted how this in turn effects personal development that can be found in meaningful, autonomous, and experimental learning where our identification has become intertwined in the what we ‘should’ know. It also offers that through reflection, which brings awareness and growth that we can begin to identify our years of educational experiences within patterns of oppressive practices. It is then that we can collectively work to change such practices through action.



Chapter Four

Research findings

Introduction:

This chapter will provide the reader with an understanding of the lived experiences of how the structures within higher education has created implications within adult working-class learners. The interviews provide an opportunity to allow for the voices of the participants to be heard on their emotions, opinions, values and suggestions about grading and assessment practices. I have interviewed three participants in which three were face to face interviews where a recording device was used. The setting for each interview was based on the choice of the participant, as being comfortable and safe is a primary consideration for open and honest dialogue. Each participant had their own unique experience within different timeframes within the education system. I cannot generalise their views on the impact on society as a whole, as three people are just a small handful, however, it just a mere opportunity to highlight some of the impacting issues that grading practices have had on their lives. A theoretical framework will be further combined with the findings for thematic analysis.

The purpose of these findings is based on my research question ‘What are the implications for working class adult learners within the structures of higher education?’. A set of questions were designed that provided the opportunity for the individuals to explore and share their experiences within an assessment and grading system. This will provide the readers with a real-life view or depiction of that experience and this will be captured through written script. I hope I have done it justice by including the important moments that were expressed within these short interviews. The names of the participants within this research are hidden under pseudonyms, however, their stories tell a true portrayal of their experience within the existence of the grading system in both further and higher education.

Findings:

The questions posed to the participants were open in that it allowed them to explore their experiences and share them through voicing. The findings from these voices were broken down into common themes, although, these themes were not necessarily connected to the questions posed. Each theme has been placed under its own heading, which has captured the moment within that experience of each individual where applicable. The questions posed have been varied a little for each participant as some have progressed further into adult education. For this reason, the questions have been somewhat tweaked to suit the participants 'place of time' within the education system or outside it. I will though first give you a brief summary of where each individual is 'at' within the education process or in their state of employment. The pseudonyms I have used are Jude, Jack, and Ling, where 3 out of 2 participants picked these names themselves.

Brief profile of Participants

Jack..... Left the education system when he was 15 years old, he found his own employment as a painter after experiencing working under others. Jack had an accident that left him in recovery in Rehabilitation where he found new learning through the National Learning Network. He completed his degree in Computers, which then led him to the Higher Diploma in Further Education where he wanted to be a teacher. Jack then went back teaching within the same rehabilitation centre, in which he loved teaching there very much. This drove Jack towards completing his Masters in Adult and Community Education, where he won a scholarship and went onto do a Ph.D. in Adult Education initially, in which he later changed to Anthropology. Jack is lecturing within TU Dublin Institution and is very happy in his role as an educator and who is also currently in the final weeks of completing his Ph. D.

Jude..... Finished secondary school in which she completed her leaving certificate. Jude re-entered further education as a mature student. The course she entered was Applied Psychology, in which she decided to leave mid-way through. Jude decided to take up a variety of employment roles as a way to reach her desired destination. Jude's desire was management, in which she succeeded through an experimental route. She is now in full time employment as

a Manager within a local shop, in which she says through her interview that she is very contented. Jude has not re-entered the education system since leaving when doing a PLC course in Further Education and has mentioned in her interview that possibly one day she may return.

Ling..... Completed her leaving certificate and decided to re-enter the education system two years later, where she entered Further Education. Ling completed a FETAC level 5 in Social Studies, in which she then went on to do a BTEC Higher National Diploma course. Ling then went on to TU Dublin where she completed her degree in Social Care Practice. Ling's dream was to become a Social Worker. After her Degree, Ling had missed her opportunity to apply for the Master's in Social work, were she then decided that teaching would be another option for her. She completed her H. Dip in Further Education, where she gained employment working within a prison setting through her placement. Ling had found that she loved this position as an educator and yet, her heart still longed for a Social Worker's position. After completing her H. Dip in Further Education Ling was accepted into her Master's in Social Work where she has just currently finished her second year in Trinity College.

Questions for research findings:

As aforementioned, the questions varied a little in terms of where each participant are at in terms education or employment, however they are very similar. The questions are opened, and some questioned depended on the answers given. Although, the discussion didn't much reflect on some of the questions, through exploration of experience certain issues arose that held great value to this research. After the transcribing was complete certain themes emerged from the experiences of the participants, it was evident that concurring and important themes arose throughout this piece of research. These themes were then integrated and explored from a theoretical perspective. Also, throughout two interviews I stuck to the questions planned, whereas on the third interview, it became more of a discussion that led to more inquiry. See Appendix A for questions posed.

Themes:

Competition- 'Working class view'

The first question posed to all student was based upon their experience of their engagement with the grading process. All students related their experience to 'competition' between peer relations, however, I noticed that there was no reference to class differences. It appears that grades essentially promotes competition.

Jack explained that although he was happy with 42%, in which he said was because '*they wouldn't send me home*', and yet, '*everyone around me was obsessed, talking about 60s and 70s*'...

Where Jack further continues his experience in his postgraduate;

I was hanging out with people who were hitting 70s and then it was becoming competitive, and then when they get their grade and you get your grade, in first year and when I got that 42 and their all getting 70s I was thinking I was stupid but I just didn't know how to write academically, but as soon as I learnt how to do that the grades were doubled', So I was getting rewards from the grades, so it was making me feel better and then it was pushing me to become more competitive and then getting into the top league then and I suppose getting through to the first.

Where Ling would similarly confess;

'you're competing essentially with everyone else but also yourself because if you didn't get that grade in the last one, you know that you have to work ten times harder to get the grade in the next one in order for you to be looked at by anybody'

And at the end of the day, we're only human says Jude:

'caus, even if you were to get say 90% and say someone else got 95% , even though you just got 90% and you done amazing, that other person got 95% and you know were all human and of course we are all going to get jealous and we all have those feelings inside of us'. (Jude)

The value of 'self-worth' placed on grades...

A familiar pattern of worth and unworthiness was spoken about within these interviews where there was a sense that 'not being good enough' was a feeling that the majority said they felt when low grades were presented. It appears that where 'ability' that relies on high grades have become correlated to an internal process by where 'values' of reaching such standards have manifested into self-worth issues. These findings offer how such a connection has been formed and the results of such binding ropes.

If the grade didn't meet the expectations to the point where one participant stated;

'ill never forget when I didn't get a distinction on one of my essays, I went home and I cried, I felt crap, I felt horrible, I wasn't good enough I wanted to drop out but only for I'm so stubborn, I'm really so competitive that I wanted to beat it' (Ling)

Where Jack would further comment;

'when your hitting 40's and 50's you actually feel like a bit of a gobshite because people around you are hitting 70s and you're wondering what's wrong with you, why can you not do that'

Ling offers a derivative description to how self-worth becomes contingent on high grades, where she heartfully confesses;

'Well this is it like, you want to progress, you want to do well and when you grow up in poverty, your less than in anyways, you're at the bottom, your never looked at, your completely marginalised, your completely excluded, so when you are seen as this person who had the ability to produce a really good grade, all of a sudden then your somebody then and your something, your visible'.

When Ling received her first distinction;

I was like 'wow, actually I'm worth it, I can be here, I'm capable of being in college and I'm not as thick as what I thought,' after that then it became this addiction, I needed a distinction in order for me to feel like I was good enough to stay on the course. I put so much work into it, I wanted to prove I wasn't thick, I wasn't stupid like everybody else had said, so I'd say if I had of got a pass I probably would have dropped out'.

Ling... 'it was 2010, I went back and I'll never forget it, we did an European studies

essay and I was petrified, absolutely petrified to get the grade because in secondary school I had failed, hated exams, barely got through it and it was quite traumatic,

Where she further expressed;

'if I didn't get the grade I wasn't good enough, I was crap, the grade effectively turned into a way of me proving that I was good, proving that I was worthy, proving that I was someone to the person I was in secondary level because I was nobody, I was nothing! and I didn't exist but when I got a distinction, when my grades started to come through all of a sudden I existed as a person, I existed as this person who had knowledge and was worthy to talk to.

'My whole life then became about me getting these grades because that's what made me look and feel great as a person and not shitty' Ling

Where Jack would offer that the 'emotional effect' of high grades were linked to the perceptions of others deeming him a being a better student.

JACK... 'so I had to do a lot of work myself on the Masters and academic writing and harvard referencing and when I did that I was rewarded with a better grade and that put me in the eyes of my peers or teachers as a better student and it made me feel better about myself'

Whereas Jude tells a slightly different story whereby she wasn't happy with her grade, and in turn left the course, and in her experience, she explains, *'once I got one grade that I wasn't happy with, it was like a domino effect which then made me start to think what's the point, then the self-doubt then started to come in (Jude)*

'it just takes a toll on you, then your like, what's the point, all the negativity just creeps in then and then you start to think, awh... am I not able for this? Am I just not understanding?

Ling would also make a reference to her chance in gaining entry into Trinity College Dublin, where she remarked that her personality was not a consideration when being interviewed to enter a Master's in Social Worker. She expressed that the emphasis was more on her grade that she obtained in her Social Care Degree, where she made the comment that she was seen as great through the eyes of the interviewee when presenting a 1st in her result, where she says:

'I know if I didn't get them grades trinity would look at me and it was stated in the interview, Oh you got a first in your degree, you must be great and I'm like I'm great in anyway even without the 'first.' I'm still the same person that your talking to here but in order for any college to look at you, you have to be great on paper, it's not about your personality or your ability to do the job, it's your ability to produce the grade that make the college look great'. (Ling)

The 'implications' in reaching 'the grade'

The question posed within the interview process was that of the 'implications' that striving for grades had on their lives. This topic was not elaborated on too much, and the students were of the understanding that these are private issues and were not obligated to answer as they are sensitive in nature.

'it just causes so much anxiety, so much stress, like your whole life completely changes the minute a grade is introduced or when you are fighting for that grade, it doesn't factor in life at all'....

Ling continues....

'I missed out on everything, I still remember sitting down at the table and the kids asking me 'can I play?' and I'm clock watching, I'm trying to get this essay done to get it in and completely ignoring the fact that I had a life out there, outside of this essay and everything else got neglected. I lost so much because of this whole competitive system of me needing to prove that I am worthy to be in trinity college'

'your whole growth sense of self is lost within an institution, you're only a number and a butt on the seat, ya know? and effectively I have lost out on so much time on friends and family because I was so busy trying to get the grade. To be honest with you, it is all a blur I can tell you what I got in every single essay, what grade I got in every single essay, but I couldn't tell you much about the people or the relationships that I formed along the way, and that's sad!'

Jack would mention a similar impact where he says.... *'striving for the high grade had huge implications, health, family, relationships, it had implications on everything, I always say that I am not the sharpest tool in the box, but I learned the rules of engagement and*

that's how I play, in terms of implications I mean it impacted on sleep, spending time with family, friends all that sort of thing'. (Jack)

Where Jack, as an educator now and lecturing in higher education would make a reference to secondary school teenagers entering colleges that are plagued with CAs and exams, he remarked;

It major stress on them, like at that age you think your all grown up and conquer the world, but your still only forming yourself in a whole new environment where a new self has to be formed and that impacts on the new self your forming, it effects your confidence, that will affect your self-esteem and then it affects you going forward. (JACK)

Ling would also highlight...

'we are constantly focusing on the end destination but what happens is we lose out on the learning in between and the growth within your own self, so if you think in terms of somebodies growth and somebody's esteem, you got two people who put their all into an essay and probably the same amount of time and effort, and there's the grade, it just doesn't show it. So, this person comes out with a first and you got another person who tried probably ten times harder but just couldn't meet that person's subjective criteria on what a really good essay is and in terms of self-esteem and growth it completely shatters a person'

Where the implications for striving for a good grade and where expectations were not met for Jude, she ultimately made the decision to drop from the course. Although, she confessed she loved the learning, she expressed difficulties of how *her* own opinion could deem her with bad grades.

And then it's just kinda like, if it starts off with that bad grade, is it just going to get worse and worse, even though with that bad grade I had put in maximum effort and what I'd thought I had giving it my everything and that was the grade that I got. So, I'm like 'what

is the point then!' (Jude)

'it sad that that the grading system has become so competitive and your whole sense of self is based on a piece of paper and you lose out on all the learning that happened in between and all the growths.. (Ling)

What's happening with instructional learning?

The interviews from *Jack, Jude, & Ling* tell a story of how 'the grade' has/had impacted on their learning and how it became the main focus within their lives. However, one participant would have a different outlook. The question was still on the implications.

This was not a question posed, this was a theme that arose through exploration of *Jack, Jude, & Lings* experience, this is what they had to say...

Jack says *'I think what happens is, for me, by the time I got to third year in post-graduate I was more thinking about the grade, than the stuff that I was supposed to be learning. I think sometimes it detracts from what people are supposed to learn because their focusing more on what lecturer A needs and teacher B needs as opposed to focusing on the entire components of the modules, if you know what I mean?'*

Additionally, Jack continues;

'I kinda think it takes a lot away from the teaching and learning experience and puts a lot of focus on what I'm scoring, and if I am only getting 62, how do I get 65 or 70 or whatever, that's what the focus becomes'. (JACK)

Jack also makes the point; *'ok so, we always say the best academic does not make the best social worker ok!'*

Ling appears to have similar views where she says,

'it's the pressure of the grades and the amount of ongoing assignment, 90% of the time people generally don't know what's in it, because there so focused on, I need to pass it, I need to get the grade, I need to get it in, so where is the learning, were only learning how to cope in a grading system'.

When Ling was asked to expand on this, she expressed;

'Yeah, you're not learning about the subjects, your focus is just solely on the grade and in particular when you transition from further education into higher education the focus then becomes solely on the grade,

'it's not what did you learn about the medical and the social model of disability, what did you learn about the psychosocial approach to mental health, it was about, what else can I do to make sure that I get the grade, and then we have people then that were producing results to go out to work, who are fully qualified in this sense that have learned more about grading and how to navigate their way through out the competitive system rather than the subjects and the area that they are going to go into? (Ling)

Jude's view was different when asked about her experience within further education where she was engaged in an Applied Psychology course, she explains....

'Yeah it was good, I loved it, I loved what we were learning, you know, I was so interested in it, always have and always will be interested in it'.

Jude continues...

'I don't think that the learning was difficult because once you're interested in something it can become easier to learn so I didn't struggle with learning it was when I came to assignments or essays or exams or anything like that.' (Jude)

As Jude points out, she really enjoyed her topics in the psychology course, and explained that her only real struggle was that her interpretation and opinions was not reflected in her grades, where she explains;

'but my interpretation of clearly what we had learned was not good enough to what they were asking for, you know what I mean? Even like, when I was doing an assignment or anything like that and constantly trying to get feedback or trying to understand what they were looking for in full capacity like'.

Is the grading system fair?

The response to these questions was in relation to the fairness of the education system. At times, it was not a direct question as it was evidently clear that such views were automatically discussed when voicing their experience. All participants voiced a real sense of unfairness with the system, and this was mostly related to the pressures of the grade. However, one student expressed their thoughts in that the system was partly fair, in terms of the grade being required in certain professions, such as lawyers and doctors. Where a one approach is needed and not built on interpretations or opinions. She refers to this as driving a car, in that there is only one way to master it.

When speaking with Jude, she made the comment that grading practices were essential in that certain professions require a one-way approach that depends on knowledge and skills learned. Where she says;

Jude:....I do though understand that there is somethings where grades are important, like for instance studying law or being a doctor, you have to know what you're talking about and what you are doing. But the likes of psychology, a lot of that is your own perspective and what you take away from it, so why should I be graded on my opinion? Because my opinion is not going to be the same as someone else, so why should a teacher have the opportunity to grade my opinion?'

Where she further continues, when I suggested that she felt the grading was fair in some ways;

'Yeah, because there is only one to answer and one way to do it, of course people should be examined on that like, like there is only one way to drive a car and that's why we have driving tests, like you can't improvise on how to drive a car'

Jack offered one account to the fairness of the system without being directly asked, where he pointed out;

'Like some people just want to get through and other people want to achieve, the grading system, the higher the grade, the more doors open to you, is that fair?, I don't think so, but that's the system in place, so the grade, I think is vitally important'

However, when Jack was more directly asked, 'do you think that it is a fair system, in that future pathways are placed on student's academic performance, based on a number or a

letter? he stopped to reflect, where he also provided another perspective,

'Yeah, I don't think it's a fair system, no because it is only to a level playing field because I think if a person has anything going on, or I think if a person has nothing going on, it then develops a small bit of anxiety or stress related stuff, that knocks about your ability to maintain the level that's needed to hit this top figure or number'

Jack further spoke of repeating learned content for exams, where he made the point that dyslexia and short-term memory recall would be difficult, where he expressed;

'it's an unfair system that puts extreme pressure on people. I think it impacts of people with mental health, especially their self-esteem 'if anybody has a learning difficulty it makes it very difficult for them and it puts you in a box of where you are at and where all of us are going to be, oh you're a 40 or you're a 50 or you're a 60, oh you're a first class honours!'

Suggestions for change:

When I posed the question for an alternative solution to the rigidity of the grade-based system, a couple of suggestion where made *'So yeah like get rid of the number part of it, like the way they do it in the junior cert, honour, pass and a fail is better because no one knows what they actually got, but they know they got an honour or even a pass or even a fail and everyone will feel that sense of pride knowing they got an honours or a pass.'* (Jude)

Additionally, Jude would highlight...

'I think mentally, it's not good to have the numbers there for sure, it just sucks the energy out of you, you just dwell on it over and over and over again and it's not good for anyone with even learning difficulties and stuff like that. They try really hard like and they might get the 42% , like I just got by, I tried really hard and all I got was 42% which brings back to how I was feeling when my assignment came back, so yeah I think the percentage thing should be abolished'. (Jude)

Jacks suggestion... 'I'm trying to implement this in a way here in my own teaching is in a research project where a person is given choice or their given power over how they want to be assessed than the criteria within the realms of what we have to teach. How do you want to be assessed? do you want to do a poster? do you want to do a thesis? do

you want to do a research project? Do you want to do an essay? do you know, I think choice would help people better as opposed to the very restrictive methods that we use.

Also:

'I think we just have to look at the curriculum, so look at what we want them to learn, is it just the rules of engagement to get the grade or do we want them to learn the actual outcomes and all components that we are teaching them'.

Jack also explains that where he worked the grading system was non – existent where he illustrates this in his own experience, he shares;

'like I used to work in another place where people had to have a disability to go into that college where I worked in and like you never had any way of grading. Like a person could come in and not talk to anybody for 6 weeks, but we persisted with that person, we kept going and doing what we always do and included them etc. and then after 6 weeks or 2 weeks or 1 month or 1 day that person might smile or speak in the group, how do I grade that? That's usually empowering for that person and that's usually important for their learning journey to move to the next stage, but we don't capture that anywhere, ok.'

'And I know that how people say that's airy fairy etc. how are we going to resource that? we are supposed to be reflective people now that we our educators, reflection is supposed to be a vital component of what we are doing'

Whereas, Ling would give her suggestion from the perspective of a student who had completed the Higher Diploma in Further Education where she outlined that it changed her way of thinking about education.

'I just think we need to change the thinking on it and focus on everyone's' individual process of learning rather than everyone getting to the destination which is the grades and moving into higher education. I don't know where, maybe if we had like a two year course, the first year is pass or fail where you open up dialogue on how you can get your views across on paper and what did you learn from doing this piece of work, what did you learn as working part of a group. I think we need to be little bit more reflective in terms of how we're given our feedback. So pass and fail predominantly should be in further education but then when your transitioning into higher education, how do you distinguish between who gets into each course and that's where it becomes very

competitive and I don't know whether that is going to change.'

Conclusion:

As you can see from the experiences lived by Ling, Jack and Jude who all highlight their own experience on how the grading system has impacted on their lives. These findings suggest that the grading system invites 'competitive measures' to the point where in its motivation are having psychological, emotional and social implications. It was not apparent within this research whether the recognition of class difference and cultural capital had any contribution to the difference in reaching results, as it did not surface within any discussions.

Nevertheless, these findings certainly demonstrate the 'effect' of meritocracy where self-blame has become so internalised that thinking processes, actions are consumed around success and rewards, and inevitably 'ability' is at the core of failing. The value of 'self-worth' rooted in grade receivership was very much revealed within these findings, where the sense of real and natural identity has become institutionalised. It is very obvious and evident from these findings that such domains use tactical strategies to create an emotional and psychological entwinement to grades, where sadly for one student voiced 'poverty' as a seemingly contributing factor.

The implications run high for these students and even within the institutions it appears that learning enforced is not learning that is 'learned'. These findings illustrate that critical thought very much has its limitations within the grading process, where it impedes on creativity and knowledge formation, ultimately for one student leading her to self-exclude.

All participants viewed the grading system as unfair in various aspects. However, one student had mixed feelings and offered it was partially fair. Some suggestions have been put forward, where a pass and fail system seemed more plausible, and additionally a more humane and reflective approach was offered as an alternative. There is clearly something detrimentally wrong with the system of grading practices and how it has developed into the main focus of people's lives. The analysis below will examine these findings in further detail using a theoretical approach drawn from chapter three to provide a more in-depth investigation of the implications that derive from grading practices.

Chapter Five

Analysis

Introduction:

Meritocracy, where its foundation lies within our political system, basis itself on economic growth through individual performance, that is ability, talent, and achievement. The basis of achievement lies heavily within the grading system embedded in educational institutions where ‘competition’ for social mobility are at its core. The common discourses encompassing meritocratic ideologies, is ‘just work hard and you will succeed’ which promote a sense of ‘common good’ and ‘fairness’. However, the ideology that places high values on seeking money, status and career are perceptions that are based on success, yet within ambitious middle-class aspirations. Although, achievement can be a flourishing aspect in acquiring what we desire, the level to which this can be achieved are creating serious implications for working class students. These implications will be explored from the findings within chapter 4 where those who partook offer a real and honest account of their experience within the grading system. These accounts are based from two students experience within the realms of Higher Education, although there will be some reflection from secondary schooling experiences. The other student’s experience is based on a student within Further Education. This chapter will attempt to include most of the findings, unfortunately, due to the limitations it cannot possibly cover all. However, this chapter has attempted to uncover a variety of concerning themes that will give the reader a real scope of the psychological, emotional and social affects where such high ‘values’ *placed* upon students to succeed through the grading process, are in reality, creating a distorting within our society. The chapter has been broken down into four essential themes, Firstly, Cultural capita- in a physical view’, which will illustrate where its unfairness can be recognised through Bourdieu’s analogy of ‘the muscular physis’. Secondly, ‘Cultural capital-being on the other side’, demonstrates how the perception of ‘others’ can be internalised into those less advantaged by where emotional identifications can become attached to those who dominate the culture within the education system, causing concerns for real identity formation. Thirdly, ‘Where Self -esteem is contingent to academic success’, will give a view that where self-worth that relies on grading are creating self-esteems issues within students in higher education. ‘The implication’ s of pursing high grades that are contingent to self-esteem’ will also offer an experiential view that where motivations in reaching high grades are having implication for students within their family and social life. It will also give a brief illustration

of how such motivations are impacting on student's mental health. Finally, Instructional learning – lost and excluded' this section will offer a scope to how 'critical thought' can lead to self-exclusion practices for some working-class students. It will provide a suggestion that rote learning is 'instructional' this may have implications for employment practices that rely on skills and knowledge where rote learning relies on short term memory.

Cultural capital ...'in a physical view'

The grading process within the education system promotes competition where social mobility is based on merit. However, if the level field was a fair playing game, then this would provide an equal and fair opportunity for all. Bourdieu (1964 cited in Reay 2020) would speculate that working class students were less successful than middle class students because the curriculum content was biased in favour of those things with which middle class students were already of extra-curricular familiar, where the system is architecturally designed around middle-class norms. This section will offer a brief illustration of its unfairness where unequal levels of cultural capital plays a leading and crucial role towards inequality within the education system. Bourdieu (1986) refers this to as 'hidden forms of hereditary' transmission, whereby the investment of cultural capital commences at an early age where its contribution and accumulation lies heavily within the family. To explore this understanding of 'hidden' and using his analogy of the 'muscular physic' Bourdieu (1986) illustrates a physical or visual description between differences of cultural capital accumulation. Using his metaphor and integrating this in terms of competitive measures provides an understanding of how the accumulation of capital inculcated for those provides a favourable advantage, where it is in abundance within middle class families. Using his metaphor 'muscular physic', which is a body building process that takes long term planning and requires strict consistent discipline to achieve. Gyms require investment of finances, workout plans, routines, and a motivational drive for hard work, where a stringent diet plan is at the core to achievement. Which over a considerable time becomes an achievable goal to a 'muscular physic' through continual support, dedication, and adaptation. Therefore, when entering within the arena of 'competitive championships' an equal chance is provided for, as all participants of entry is logical and fair in its practice.

Bourdieu (1986) speaks of 'hereditary' or investment strategies of cultural capital that commences within the family, that is, home studies, private course/tuition, elocution lessons, music, French/Spanish language lessons etc. where its early accumulation of intelligence and

skills provide an advantage over their opponents within education settings, where such cultural capital is lacking for those within working class families. Therefore, by the time of reaching higher education, metaphorically speaking, and comparing it to body building processes, a very defined muscular body has been formed. Again speaking metaphorically, for those where such inculcations of strategic planning have not existed and for symbolic purposes, it's like putting 'Laurel' from *Laurel and Hardy* in the ring with the 'Hulk', it's an unfair, uneven competitive match as muscle building and strength have been developed over time for one opponent's advantage.

Within this study all students reported competitive feelings towards others within the classroom arena, it was unveiled within these findings where one student Jack explained that he was hitting a 42% grade in his undergraduate, however, when observing others reaching over 70% this evoked a competitiveness within him, where he expressed feelings of being 'stupid' by comparison. Comparison is quite common, to refer back to the literature review section, 44.8% of students in Ireland compare themselves to others (Department of Education and Skills & National Educational and Psychological Service 2020). Jack related this to his 'inability', he further expressed 'I just didn't know how to write academically', which could suggest, that cultural capital investment was not in his possession. Where he continues, 'but as soon as I learnt how to do that, the grades were doubled, for me I had to work very, very, hard to achieve a First, it didn't come naturally to me', he also expressed that working so hard had implications on his health and spending time with his family and friends. Although competition is healthy in some aspects, however, being embedded within a system that promotes unfair competition is having implicatory effects. Interestingly, where Jack makes the assumption that it was his 'inability' to reach high grades, could suggest that invested cultural capital in others is not naked to the eye, where, if it was more visual and obvious would such perceptions of feeling *stupid* exist? This is where Bourdieu (1986) speaks of 'hidden' transmission of cultural capital, in which it has such effects, that where it is not recognised or possessed it is internalised into an 'assumption' of inability. Where through its recognition where the grading system exposes cultural capital through high grades, and metaphorically speaking, for some within working class backgrounds, it's like rushing to the gym frantically trying to become built like the 'hulk' in a short and limited period of time to catch up. As a result, extreme measures to meet the same standards of 'ability' of that of our counterparts, where knowledge is essentially crammed in a short space of time in order to compete with middle class students within such an unfair system. Although, this is not impossible, it's the unfairness of working to the extremes to

compete within the education system where for others a more ‘natural fitting’ has been built upon, therefore, resulting in achieving higher grades.

The painstaking injustice that exists within the education system, where meritocratic ideologies promote aspirations of working hard to succeed, as so adequately pointed out by MacVeigh (2012) within chapter 3 are for the ‘common good’ and yet, for those within working class families have lived on more ‘survival instincts’, where investment of time, finances to sustain a secure living are more concerning issues. Where for middle class families, finances, security, and time are in abundance by comparison, where investment in cultural capital for their children are for the purpose of high achievement. Yet we still compare ourselves to ‘others’ in a playing field that is not level. And yet, for students from working class backgrounds who enter the field either consciously or unconsciously consent to domination of the higher social order. Where in order to achieve certification, or, for another wording, to aspire to a better life than that of poverty, the curriculum’s process demands that of a different culture from that of working class habitus, where the effects that lie within poverty are not considered, ultimately leading students into an inner emotional crises of inaptitude (Lehmann 2007).

Cultural capital - ‘Being on the other side’

This section will offer a brief outline firstly by where the grading process that promotes success through high standards have become internalised to the point in that our ability has become attached to the *perception* of others based on grades received. As outlined in the findings chapter, it illustrates that students do compare themselves to others, based on ability. Although Bourdieu (1986) would postulate that academic success or failure is *not* related to ability or talent, but that of an ‘assumption’ or a commonly held view, which are designed around meritocratic ideologies. It will be argued that such ‘assumptions’ are manifesting by where the working-class groups are identifying themselves based on measures *and perceptions* of the middle-class culture. Whereby this culture is dominantly enforced within the education system through the grading process, where the receivership of ‘high’ grades has created the perceptions of being ‘the better half’. To offer a supportive argument, it will be recalled within these findings that Jack expressed ‘I was rewarded with a better grade and that put me in the eyes of my peers or teachers, whatever, as a *better* student and it made me *feel better* about myself’. ‘The ‘Looking Glass Self’ a concept that lies with Cooley (1998), provides us with the notion that individuals’ engineer themselves around the perception of others, where opinions of others have a contribution to how we design our identity (Cooley 1998). Where Jack would confess

that it was pushing him to become more competitive. This student explained within this study that he mostly grouped himself with peers who received high grades, where he outlined that when his grades were high, he was perceived as a '*better* student' in *their* eyes. Here lies an important concept, that perception of others evoked an emotional reaction of 'feeling *better* about yourself' through the connection of grades, where an identification has been formed. Where another student Ling, described that the grades *perceived* her as 'somebody' and then she became *visible*. She describes that when she was *seen* to produce a really good grade, then all of a sudden, she remarked 'your something', where she expressed in the findings, that she had to work ten times harder to be looked at by anybody. Where she ultimately confessed 'My whole life then became about me getting these grades because that's what made me *look* and *feel* great as a person and not shitty'.

Ling heartfully confesses to growing up in the realms of poverty where she described how she was *not* looked upon and describes this experience as being completely marginalising. Meritocratic ideologies build on concepts of hope, especially for working class families where the struggle is real, such ideologies create the 'assumption' that the chains of poverty can be broken through merit. These perceptions are simply based on those who dominate within a capital society, where inevitably we are subjugated into a process that serves the industry of the capitalists. The educational structures within society enforce such perceptions where they have become so deeply embedded within our psyche, that we become oppressed. Bourdieu (1984) would offer that it is barely recognisable for the working-class groups. Where within these findings, it appears that a recognition of a 'sense of self' has been lost, where Ling offered 'your whole growth sense of self is lost within an institution', however, it did not appear that there was a recognition that the perception of 'others' culturally invested were that of maintaining oppressive practices.

Therefore, within a structure that can define you as 'somebody and visible', as one student offered within these findings, it is almost understandable that students inevitably become competitive to be 'seen' through the eyes of those who 'deem' them visible, that is, the dominant culture or the *better half*. Hence, it can be agreed upon in Freire's (1996) notions of oppression, when he speaks of the oppressed becoming attached to their oppressors, where to be *seen* as somebody and to *evoke* emotions of good feelings within working class students, simply through the approval of others perception based on their 'ability' is an understandable emotional attachment. Such perceptions are encompassed on teacher's views, where their pedagogic action is guided to mirror the interests of dominant groups of classes (Jenkins 2002).

Therefore, regardless of the Bourdieu's (1986) 'assumption' that ability is *not* based on academic success, the culture of the dominant groups within the education system reinforce and maintain such perceptions and attitudes through approval techniques, keeping the concepts of 'ability' at the forefront of succession. In addition to this, it will be recalled in chapter 3 that favouritism is shown by teachers to those with high levels of cultural capital, and where certain levels of disrespect and inequalities are found for working class students (The house of Oireachtas 2019). This was also illustrated within the study conducted by McCoy and Byrne in 2011 that relates to this research, where secondary school learners are faced with judgment by teachers and not provided with the same support, advice and guidance as those who are more culturally invested. Where their perceptions were based on a more suitable 'fit' for higher education based on their intelligence. Therefore, it is no wonder that where 'others' are being favoured, working class students who are perceived as *deficit* in Higher Education (Kathleen Lynch & Claire O' Riordan 1998), thrive to become 'other than' themselves. Where arguably, they do hold the 'greatest functional weight' (Bourdieu 1984), where within these findings, working class students within Higher education still hold the assumption that to be 'seen', is to be 'somebody' through recognition of achievement based on judgements within middle class measures. Therefore, maintaining their structuring force (Bourdieu 1984), leaving Bourdieu's (1986) postulation, 'that academic success or failure is *not* related to ability or talent' at the back door, and, therefore, maintaining the social common view that it has. Otherwise, it could be said, such a change in views could change the face of the oppression from dominant groups within the education sector.

Where Self-esteem is contingent to academic success.

Self-esteem is a concept that could be viewed as a perception of how someone perceives themselves in terms of their own self-worth and personal value. Self-esteem can be related to emotional effects by where positive (high self-esteem) is when we feel good about ourselves and negative (low self-esteem) when we feel dissatisfied within ourselves. To have a healthy self-esteem we tend to have an acceptance about ourselves and feelings of positivity overall. Although, I have argued that perceptions of the dominant groups create and maintain an ineptitude crisis within working class groups, I also argue that 'values' placed on grades is having a real impact on the emotional wellbeing of students. Firstly, and relating to the findings in chapter 4, this section will offer that self-esteems issues are evidently apparent within students in Higher Education in regarding grade receivership. Secondly, I will attempt to

provide a correlation by where educational structures contribute to such issues through emotional strategic tools in relation to grading. The question posed to all participants within this research was based on their experience as learners in relation to grading practices. Particular concerns that predominately arose was issues of negative feelings that evoked when low grades were presented and where the *needing* for a high grade contributed to feelings of being 'worthy'. It will be recalled in the findings that two students, Jack and Ling expressed feelings of either being 'nothing' or 'stupid', and where Ling offered that she had become 'grade dependent' in order for her to feel 'good enough' and 'worthy'. Whereas, when failing, she strongly admitted that she felt 'shitty' as a person. Additionally, Jack would offer feelings of 'something wrong with you' and Jude expressed 'all the negativity just creeps in' when referring to receiving low grades. The strong sense that relies on grading is quite clear for Ling, when she refers to *needing* a distinction in order to feel *worth it* and *good enough*. It could be suggested that low self-esteem has developed into feelings of a negative nature that has become attached to grades, where a need for high grades has developed for a high self-esteem in order to feel worthy. This ties in within Niiya et al (2004) where they speak of values of 'self-worth' that correlate to academic achievement, where those who place a high stake on achievement tend to suffer with self-esteem issues. Where additionally, one student offered that receiving high grades made him feel better within himself, and for the other student felt 'worthy' when presented with high grades. Within these findings, it has evidently supported Niiya et al. (2004), claim and my argument where it clearly illustrates that self-esteem, where perceptions of inner values of worth have become strongly entwined to the grading process.

Crocker et al. (2004) relates this to 'domains' in which self-worth is invested, where such domains 'generate real effects on individual' (Bourdieu 1990 cited in Zembylas 2010). In this he refers to bodily practices, whereby individuals are subjected to an internalisation processes whereby 'knowledge in the body' can be internalised through acts of celebration, rewards, praise within educational settings which are operational for the purpose of using 'emotions' as a tool for enforcement or re-enforcement of bodily practices (Misztal 2003). To support this and relating to the findings chapter, one student expressed feeling 'better' about himself when he was rewarded with a higher grade, where ultimately, he became more competitive. Where Ling remarked 'the grade effectively turned into a way of me proving that I was good, proving that I was worthy' and where she remarked she wanted to prove she wasn't thick. It can be implied that the highly strategic methods that are used within educational institutions are used to enforce and reinforce emotional attachment to grades, where 'ability and success' links to

values of self-worth. Therefore, to inherently agree with Castell (1997) where he would postulate that individuals construct this internally into their 'sense of meaning', where such conditioning maintains motivation and conformity. Where for one student, her 'sense of meaning' meant that her *existence* relied on high grades in which her worth became invested. This was related to poverty, where she expressed not being seen until a high grade deemed her a 'somebody'. As aforementioned, she speaks about dependency on grades, where she highlighted an emotion of sadness when she expressed that her 'whole' sense of self is based on a piece of paper. Ultimately, this could suggest that this student had become institutionalised to the point that her 'inner values of worth' got lost within the system.

To offer a further contributing factor to such practices of internalisation of emotional attachment, this student's objective was to enter into Trinity College Dublin to become a Social Worker, where she stated that within her interview, 'Oh, you got a first in your degree, you must be great' and where she was told she would not have been considered otherwise. Which ultimately, illustrates how emotional discourse and processes of merit by entry are used to reinforce values of 'worth' onto students. Bourdieu (1984) speaks of the educational certificate where its value is deemed a *natural* right, however, the process in obtaining it is not natural, where the emotional wellbeing of students is at stake or where their whole life becomes institutionalised. Bourdieu (1984) would surmise, that such *values* placed on the natural right ultimately subjugate a population of students into consenting to power and control in order to maintain social order. Therefore, it could be argued that self-esteem that has attached itself to grades has become socially constructed through practices of conditioning. It is no wonder that students fall into the traps of such psychological constructions where being poor, nothing and nobody, the certification not only professes economic status but that of a higher social standing. From where you once did *not* exist, to being a somebody within a society, although elitist led.

The implication 's of pursuing high grades that are contingent to self-esteem...

Where it was mentioned earlier and evidently outlined that self-esteem / self-worth issues are heavily correlated to the grading process, Niiya et al (2004) further explain that individuals actively 'chase' their self-worth in where it is lodged. This section will provide a suggestion to the correlation of how self-esteem issues have emerged encompassing grades, it will also suggest a motivational factor in its pursuit for high grades where self-esteem has become lodged. This discussion will also offer an account by where the *motivation* to gain high levels

of self-esteem that are contingent to grades are having serious implications for students within Higher education. The question offered within this research was with the objective of unveiling the real truths of such consequences, where the questioned posed was ‘was there any life implications in striving to reach certain grades?’ Although this is a sensitive issue, the participants were of the understanding that they were under no obligation to answer. Within these findings all participants referred to anxiety and stress. Where one particular student offered that ‘it just causes so much anxiety, so much stress, like your whole life completely changes the minute a grade is introduced’. Within this statement, it offers a reflection into this student’s past, where she identified a correlation of anxiety to grades in her younger years as grading begins in primary level. It will be recalled in chapter 3 and drawing on Reay’s (2005) research who identified self-esteem issues within children as early as 7 years. Whereby children who are continually exposed to ‘values’ that are embedded in educational achievement, have consequently led children to having feelings of being *nothing* (Reay 2005). This was very much in the context of competing for grades where there was an obvious difference between classes, where middle class students gained the higher results. However, in this context, it emphasises on values placed on children, where through Reay’s (2005) qualitative research found that some working-class parents held the perceptions that educational achievement led to a successful life. Where for some ‘valued’ acquiring cultural capital as more imperative than emotional transference to their children. Although emotional availability is vital for children’s emotional development, this illustrates the level to which the language used within discourses is actually ‘in use’ and prevalent, where some parents are aspiring to middle class values. These values are ultimately reinforced particularly within pedagogical actions, where the actions of teachers mirror parental styles (Jenkins 2002). Where Jenkins (2002) would imply, help create an almost natural binding relationship. Where values, attitudes, perception, beliefs that encompass success are reinforced into a learning environment that is employment dependent. Where ultimately the ‘value’ placed on learning has ingrained into the psyche of children, where it’s ‘natural’ engraving has placed expectations beginning at a very young age.

Interestingly, such values effectively manifest into a ‘replacement’ of self-actualisation processes (Jenkins 2002). Or as Bourdieu (2009) would say, that cognising of dispositions are held deep, in that it is hard to see past them as they have become internalised and embodied through primary socialisation. So, where you have values placed within the home and in educational institutions, it could be suggested that a natural emotional attachment to grades begins at an early age. Where according to Reay, as forementioned, self-esteem issues are

found in young children within the UK, it was also reported that in Ireland, that 23.9% experience high levels of anxiety, 13.8% experience depression, where an estimation of 1 in 3 students suffer with mental disorders by the age of 13 years (McKeown, Denner, McAteer, Shiel, & O’Keeffe 2019), highlighted within chapter 3. Crocker and Park (2004) would suggest that where self- esteem becomes invested in grades, that a non- contingent self is almost never produced. In other words, where self-esteem that relies on grades, a natural development of self-esteem does not occur. This can certainly create an understanding in Senneth and Cobh’s (1972) speculation where ‘motivation’ was not necessarily in gaining high social standing, economic status etc promised by the education system, but that of ‘reclaiming’ a sense of oneself. It is worth to note here, where it was uncovered that adults in Higher Education in Ireland, posed similar issues to those within children, where students also experienced mental health issues, where 38.4% suffered with high levels of anxiety, 29.9% depression and stress was at 17.3%.

To re-highlight from the findings chapter, Ling remarked ‘I *needed* a distinction in order for me to feel like I was good enough’ where she confessed to working harder in order to achieve high grades. Within her emotional narrative, she confessed that she kept checking the time during playtime with her children and where she offers an inner truth that she ‘neglected everything around her’. Ling speaks of this in terms, in that the grade deemed her worth, which offers a reflection by where Crocker and Park (2004) surmise, in that seeking self-esteem it consequently had implication on others too. It was also discovered within these findings in her heartfelt confession that her social life was non-existent, where she sadly expressed that her focus on the grade effectively prevented her to from building new relationships. Similarly, Jack would remark that when he became competitive in pursuing high grades it had huge implications on his life, he speaks of this were lack of sleep effected his wellbeing. He touched off the implications that it had on both himself and on others too, where he revealed that he spent less time with his family and friends. Therefore, effectively the values placed on grades that are widely inculcated from childhood and into adulthood are plunging students into an emotional turmoil. Where ultimately *motivation* in pursuing self-esteem are pushing students to the extremes by where the implications are not only affecting the inner ‘self’, it is also having implications on outer dimensions of their life.

Instructional learning- lost and excluded.

This section will offer a brief account to where the instructional learning faced by students

within educational settings are having implications, not only on authentic learning, but where instructional learning is leading to self-exclusionary practices. It will also provide a brief scope by where instructional learning ‘learned’ can be non – beneficial. For Freire (1996), the concept of ‘dehumanisation’ must be explored, as he postulates it is heavily enforced within the realms of educational institutions. It will be recalled in the literature review where Freire (1996) speaks of ‘oppression’, he describes this any type of oppression where an individual is denied becoming ‘fully human’. In this, he means the wholeness of the person, the inner dimensions of the person, where the mind, physical, emotional, and social components evolve to make up a whole part. It’s like a natural crystallization process, where all the parts come together to complete the whole diamond, where it glitters and shines so brightly. His work encompasses ‘instructional learning’, he views this type of learning to be oppressive and refers it to ‘banking education, for this he means, that knowledge is fuelled by *experts*, into the subjects of its students, where original formation of thought it not encouraged. When he speaks of experts, he relates this to teaching practices, where their expertise of knowledge learned is poured into the students by where the natural process of becoming ‘whole’ becomes interrupted by what is being streamed. To explore this understandings and in relation to the chapter findings, where a student named Jude recollected that within Further Education within a Psychology Course that *her* ‘interpretations’ of what she had learned was *not good enough* to what the teachers were expecting. Jude spoke of this in terms of ‘Freud’ where her *own* interpretations and *opinions* of his theories deemed her with low grades, and yet, her opinion was asked for. Her grades reflected badly, which shows that *her* opinion was not in line with what the curriculum content imposed. Therefore, her mind that is part of her ‘whole self’ was restricted from developing thoughts of a natural formation, this to Freire (1996) is *oppression*. For this student, this type of oppression evoked a lot of uncertainty within Jude where she failed to comprehend how her grades were so low, based on her opinion. Although, pedagogical practices can be seen to navigate towards discussion-based methods of learning, which deem more student friendly, such discussion are based on what is to be ‘understood’ in order to meet the criteria within the curriculum (Allan 2009 cited in Bardhan & Orbe 2012). Allan 2009 (cited in Bardhan & Orbe 2012) speaks of this in terms of original thinking, or formation of one’s own knowledge, where he views and mirrors Freire’ thinking in that instructional learning is a process of dampening original thought, in that, it is ‘never an active critique or formation of knowledge itself’. Although, this student expressed numerous of times that she sought understanding through continual feedback, she expressed that she was still unable to comprehend. Formal assessment is a method of teaching that relies on feedback for students in what is to be understood, it

provides a student friendly approach in order to support students in completing assignments. Whereas summative assessment in practices relies on the end destination, that is exams based on grades. Both assessment practices are embedded in policies and procedures, therefore a top down approach is taken as opposed to a bottom up approach where individualism is limited. Where for Jude, she expressed that repeatedly receiving bad grades ‘it was like a domino effect, which then made me start to think, what’s the point? This is where ‘cultural arbitrary’ and that it is hidden within pedagogical teachings (Jenkins 2002) where teachers have the ‘power’ to fail or present low grades. Where it could be suggested that those who are not invested with cultural capital cannot succumb to illogical practices within middle class domains. Where to argue, the lack of terminology an understanding of how the working-class groups think is miles apart from those who are culturally invested within the dominant group. Where, otherwise as mentioned earlier in this chapter, the transmission between teachers and those who possess cultural capital are on a more common grounding, therefore more accepted, understood, heard and recognised, hence rewarded with higher grades. This is where Bourdieu, speaks of ‘psychological harm’ (James 2015) for working class groups, where cultural arbitrary, manifests into negative thoughts and sense of internal conflict where *inability* is at the core of perceived ‘intelligence’ that is portrayed within the culture of those who dominate, defined through a number or a letter. Or as Jenkins (2002) would finely put it, ‘the objective truth of the habitus becomes obscure’.

To support this, Jude voiced negative feelings in low grade receivership, where consequently she blamed her ‘ability’ and her ‘character formation’ where she decided to leave the realms of Further Education. I agree with Freire (1996) where such perceptions and practices are ‘dehumanising’, whereby self-actualising has become an interruption through oppressive practices hidden within power relations within the system. Ultimately, those who are perceived *less* ‘intelligent’, have to work harder in order to succeed, where neo liberal ideologies embedded within the education system promote self-blaming concepts as opposed to systematic problems.

It will be recalled from chapter 3 that, ‘social exclusion is concerned with the ‘*inability* to participate effectively in economic, social, and cultural life and, in some characteristics, alienation and distance from mainstream society’ (Duffy 1995 cited in Walraven 2000), which is a very individualistic conception, where it appears in this instance that the education system, its structures and practices did not have the *ability* to facilitate this students original thinking, where ‘autonomous’ learning is suppressed, replaced and subjugated into institutionalised

learning, or commonly referred to by Freire (1996) as ‘banking education’. Therefore, for this student who could not conform or understand such methods of instructional learning or simply not adhering to controlled measures in ‘thinking practices’ has deemed her into the course of action to ‘self-exclude’.

And yet, for those who have remained in its clutches, have been subjected to the ‘banking education’ methods of learning, which determines all knowledge based on ‘rote learning’ as the examination is very specific in its design. Where in the long-term ‘rote learning’ holds no real bearing on learning, where it depends on memory recall and does not consider a humanistic approach. Within these findings, it was evidently recorded that students are not only losing out on the opportunity of creating their own knowledge, it appears from the participants experience within Higher Education that instructional learning has also become lost. Where Jack expressed that he was more focused on the grade, where he remarked ‘I was more thinking about the grade, than the stuff that I was supposed to be learning’. He also speaks of expectancy, whereby his learning was catering for the needs of his lecturer’s expectations. Similarly, Ling has similar experiences where she remarked that the emphasis was more on what was required to get a better a grade, and not necessarily on what she had to learn. This may indicate that the high focus on grades are subsequently having an impact on the learning of necessary skills for employment, in that, it is not necessarily being gained. Which ultimately defeats the purpose of where such demands are enforced within The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999, where standards are based on knowledge and skills (QQI 2013).

Furthermore, where rote learning can be considered short term learning that depends on memory recall, it will be recalled in chapter 3 where Evans (2016) suggests for some working-class groups, the adverse effects of poverty have implications, one such being is where short term memory is affected. Where cognition development that relies on interactions can be lost on some children who have suffered in impoverished environments, where parental availability, finances etc are not there. It is also worth to note here that the study ‘*Coping, stress, and negative childhood experiences: The link to psychopathology, self-harm, and suicidal behavior*’ relational to this study, illustrates that adverse effects of child poverty have an affect later in life. It emphasises on negative experiences that derive from poverty and that in later life coping with the stress can have an effect on mental well being for working class students within university structures (McLafferty et al. 2019). Not only does these contribute to inequalities, where investments of cognitive development for middle class children are in abundance and adverse effects are not as common, it could be suggested, going forward, that

when reaching employment that ‘rote learning’ that depends on academic achievement serves no real long lasting benefit, where it has been forgotten for some working class students. Where one student made an interesting comment, ‘we are only learning how to cope within a grading system’. It could be additionally pointed out that where rote learning is essential it does not have the same benefits as what meaningful learning does, by where it is more long-lasting in the memory and considers the person as a whole. It appears that the ‘instructional learning’ affects our psychological growth where memory that is ‘long term’ is at the core of retrieving past experiences and bringing them into our future events. Where consequently, the strive for grades that rely on short term memory are possibly affecting our future employment experiences. Therefore, it also could be validated that where ‘natural thoughts’ an ‘meaningful learning’ are lost within a system, it disturbs the natural crystallization process, where the diamond formed is not necessarily as bright and shiny, as it could be!

“Without a sense of identity, there can be no real struggle” (Freire 1985 cited in Darder 2014), which means a sense of individual critical awareness that comes with reflection when we question our reality and transform individually. When we realise that we are not on our own and that others bear the same grievances. Through conscientization can we truly come together and take action that leans towards social change and freedom. As without a sense of who you are and without addressing such conflict will you forever struggle within the structures of power.

‘it is a real challenge for someone who can breathe only in the pure universe of consciousness and praxis (Bourdieu 1990 pg 43).

Conclusion:

Within this chapter, the narrative of those who participated with this study revealed real and concerning issues in correlation to the grading process. They provided this chapter with a great sense of honesty, integrity and openness where their heartfelt experience was greatly received and appreciated. Their experiences provided us with a caption of how unequal and unfair practices are generated within the educational system. Where competing within an unfair system for high grades, where for the ‘other half’ who were invested with cultural capital had gained a real advantage. It also provides a scope of the implicatory effects, whereby, self-esteem invested in grades has manifested into low self-esteem where feelings of being a

‘nobody’, ‘nothing’ and just ‘not worth it’, where ability was at the core of such emotions evoked. Where additionally, lower ‘than’ grades indicated within these findings that an identification became attached to the ‘better half’, where perceptions of high grades were a measure of being the ‘better person’. Consequently, the chain reaction was to work harder to extreme measures to compete and succeed, where for some students had impacted greatly on family, friends and social life. Unfortunately, the inner dimensions where the values placed so high on ‘self-worth’ has generated into a population where ‘self-identity’ has been substituted for an identity outside itself, where an *existence* for some had become contingent to high grades.

The extreme pressures placed on students to meet high standards showed real concerns to mental health issues, where depression, anxiety and stress which have been shown to attribute to ‘grading’ and correlated to both primary and higher education within these findings. It was also discovered, that where critical thought was not ‘accepted’ or didn’t meet the requirements, ultimately led one student to exclude herself from further education. Yet, it appeared that instructional learning was also lost, where the system relies on rote learning for regurgitation within exam, has shown that it is more of a short-term effect on memory and holds no real future bearing.

All implications within this research correlate to the ‘grading system’ where within meritocratic ideologies that to succeed is based on merit, where ultimately neo liberal discourses concede to self-blaming concepts. Yet, the education system professes prosperity and for the good of the welfare for human-kind, however, it fails to recognise or address such implications that are so encompassed within an unequal structure where the culture of dominance ‘maintains’ the working class into a state of oppression. Where the dependency and hope that lies on education, where it profoundly embeds its values into society, which can be perceived as the only route to take towards succession and consequently, leaving individual limitation at the back door.

Chapter Six

Recommendations and conclusion

Introduction:

Throughout this research it has illustrated the seriously damaging implications for working class adult learners within unequal structures designed within the education system. It has highlighted that working-class learners face multiple challenges to compete in a system that facilitates those more culturally privileged. In addition, it has shown that working class learners are faced with discrimination, oppressiveness and sheer judgement based on a culture that is middle class led. Unfortunately, it has paved the way for inner perceptions and a 'desire' that being successful for working class backgrounds is within the remits of the middle-class culture. Therefore, creating serious emotional and psychological turmoil and an identification that lies with the other side. The recommendations presented within this chapter are to briefly suggest a change in perceptions and attitudes from middle class backgrounds. It will also include suggestions presented by the 'voices' who partook in this study to work towards transforming the structures within the system in developing a more equal and fair game that facilitates working class students. Therefore, promoting working class students to stay, feel included and comfortable without the struggles of competing in an almost disparate world.

Recommendations:

The values that are so highly placed on educational outcomes within the family home are basically held by the ideology of success and working hard found within political and educational ideologies. This study has offered an awareness to the implications on working class students in higher education by where the grading system posed complexities within a multitude of areas. As it was pointed out, the roots of such ideologies are historical in context therefore, an overhaul of change must be considered that stirs away from such traditional thinking and practices. Therefore, it is my suggestion to transform such 'thought processes' through the integration of 'Parental Programmes' within both community centres and educational settings in an attempt to diffuse and change how we value educational outcomes that leads to such detrimental outcome for students. Where educating parents on 'values' that

promote high self-esteem in children that attempt to recognise the importance of individual success that is not necessarily tied to grading. These programmes could be designed to offer an opportunity for parental reflection to re-evaluate their attitudes and perspectives encompassing hegemonic discourses, where its power becomes diffused. Therefore, creating a new generation of informed differences and attitudes that lie independent of that of the dominant. Which in turn could diffuse 'stigma' surrounding grading processes where its effects are met with a strong sense of individualism for working class backgrounds. Ideally, middle class families need to take a form of responsibility to contributing to such a divide in society and to take a more emphatic and 'good common sense' approach as opposed to a competitive and dominating one. Where an equilibrium has to be established between classes, and in my opinion, to generate a society that becomes more neutral in its thinking and explore and understand that 'happiness' can possibly be a place where it is most felt for their children and not necessarily through resourced capital for educational outcomes. Sometimes a bottom up approach can be more effective than a top down approach as collective action can lead to changes in political ideologies.

The grading system needs an overhaul and the oppressive practices attached to it, freedom cannot be sought by both the oppressor and oppressed unless a true awareness is developed as both groups are caught up in a system of beliefs that take away from actually just 'being' in the world as individuals. Teacher training is also a suggestion where favouritism and stigma around working class backgrounds requires fresh thinking and changing practices to meet a more modern society and its complexities, instead of traditional and conventional views and practices. Therefore, through awareness to allow working class students to become more inclusive with decision making and an acceptance of a voice that 'speaks their language', where less formal relationships between both students and teachers promote an openness and acceptance. In terms of learning strategies, an integration of a constructive approach where students individually experience their own learning and are not just solely empty glasses to be filled.

Overall, a reflection within political ideologies that are embedded in educational policies require consideration, where governmental awareness to the statistical findings of the psychological impact on students prevails over economic development. Ideally, we, the people have the power to change, and call for a more democratic and inclusive approach in the designing of educational policies before implementation takes place. The highly complex

system of assessment practices requires more thought, where the students that took part in this study suggested an abolishment of the A, B, C and D grading process that promotes competing in an equal environment and could be replaced by a pass and fail system. This may allow students to concentrate more on learning than competing. These are just a few mere suggestions that tip off the scale for change, however, the awareness of this research does highlight some serious concerns that needs addressing from both governmental powers and from the powers of the people on the ground.

Conclusion:

This chapter has offered some suggestions for a change in people's attitudes, perspectives and opinions, in the hopes of creating a more understanding of the hardship that working-class students do encounter. It has offered this through suggestions of parental programmes that not only addresses such concerns but that of values too, by teaching valuing yourself that is not solely placed on grades. Teachers are also parents in that they could equally benefit from such knowledge, hence leaving favouritism and discrimination at the back door. Therefore, opening the front door to new and improved practices with the benefit of teacher training programmes, hence promoting inclusion and relationship formation that holds a more relaxed environment as well as the benefits of critical thought from students.

This chapter also offered a suggestive change in political agenda, political agenda will not change unless the demand of the people change. It is up to us, as the people, to work from the bottom up in order to be inclusive in policy changing and making, as it is the policies and procedures entwined within the education system that have become strangling for working class adult learners.

Bibliography:

- Aarseth, H., Layton, L. and Nielsen, H. B. (2016) '*Conflicts in the Habitus: The Emotional Work of Becoming Modern*', *The Sociological Review*, 64(1), pp. 148–165. doi: 10.1111/1467-954X.12347.
- Albright, J., Hartman, D. and Widin, J. (2017) *Bourdieu's Field Theory and the Social Sciences*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Alvarado, L. A. (2010) "*Dispelling the Meritocracy Myth: Lessons for Higher Education and Student Affairs Educators*," *The Vermont Connection*: Vol. 31 , Article 2. Available at: <https://scholarworks.uvm.edu/tvc/vol31/iss1/2>
- Bardhan, N. & Orbe, M.P (2012) *Identity Research and Communication*. In Sandra L.P Conway (Ed), *Understanding Identity through Dialogue*' (pp. 33–50). Lexington Books. Plymouth. United Kingdom
- Biesta, G & Vanderstraeten, R. (1997) *Subjectivity and intersubjectivity in the construction of knowledge: A Deweyan approach*. Available Online at: <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/000000486.htm>. Accessed on the 22-11-2020.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Harvard University Press. Cambridge.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). "*The Forms of Capital*." *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, edited by J. G. Richardson. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2000). *Pascalian meditations*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2013) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Routledge. Oxon. United Kingdom.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2013) *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners*. Sage Publications. London. United Kingdom.
- Castells, M (2009), *The Power of Identity : The Information Age - Economy, Society, and Culture*, John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, Hoboken. Available from: ProQuest Ebook Central. [10 November 2020].

- Cohan, J. (1969) *Operant Behavior and Operant Conditioning*. Rand McNally. Pennsylvania.
- Coleman, J. (1988). *Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital*. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94, S95-S120. Retrieved October 31, 2020, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2780243>
- Colin Gleeson (2020) 'Almost a third of students in Ireland depressed, survey finds.' *The Irish Times*. 7 December. Available at: [Almost a third of students in Ireland depressed, survey finds \(irishtimes.com\)](https://www.irishtimes.com). (Accessed on 07/12/2020).
- Cooley, C. H. (1998) 'On Self and Social Organization', in Hans-Joachim Schubert, H. J. (ed) 'Introduction'. University of Chicago Press. London. United Kingdom.
- Crocker, J., & Park, L. E. (2004). *The costly pursuit of self-esteem*. *Psychological bulletin*, 130(3), 392–414. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.130.3.392>
- Crocker, J., Karpinski, A., Quinn, D.M. & Chase, S.K. 2003, "When Grades Determine Self-Worth: Consequences of Contingent Self-Worth for Male and Female Engineering and Psychology Majors", *Journal of personality and social psychology*, vol. 85, no. 3, pp. 507-516.
- Darder, A. (2014) *Freire and Education*. Routledge. New York. United States of America.
- Department of Education and Skills & National Educational and Psychological Service (2020) *The Wellbeing and Mental Health of Young People in Ireland: Factors for Consideration for the Leaving Certificate Examination in the context of the Covid-19 Pandemic*. Dept. Of Education and Skills. Dublin Ireland.
- Du Plessis, A. E. (2019) *Professional Support Beyond Initial Teacher Education: Pedagogical Discernment and the Influence of Out-of-Field Teaching Practices Teacher Education, Learning Innovation and Accountability*. Springer Nature.
- Elliott, I. (2016) *Poverty and Mental Health: A review to inform the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Anti-Poverty Strategy*. London: Mental Health Foundation.
- Evans, G. W. (2016). *Childhood poverty and adult psychological well-being*. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 113(52), 14949–14952. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1604756114>

Evans, G.W. (2004) *The environment of childhood poverty*. American Psychologist 59(2):77–92

Freire, P. (1996) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Penguin Publishers. London. United Kingdom

Gibbs, H. Skott-Myhre, K. Weima, K. & Weima, K (2012) *Writing the Family : Women, Auto-Ethnography, and Family Work*, BRILL, Rotterdam. Available from: ProQuest Ebook Central. [17 October 2020].

Grillo, E. (2005) *Power Without Domination: Dialogism and the Empowering Property of communication*. John Benjamins publishing Company. Philadelphia. United states of America.

Growing Up in Ireland Study Team (2012) *Key findings: 13-year olds, School experiences among 13- year-olds*. (ESRI & Trinity college. Dublin. Ireland

Hammersley, M. &Traianou, A. (2012) *Ethics in Qualitative Research: Controversies and Contexts*. SAGE Publications Ltd. London. United Kingdom

Harding, J. F., Morris, P. A., & Hughes, D. (2015). The relationship between maternal education and children's academic outcomes: A theoretical framework. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 77(1), 60-76. doi:http://dx.doi.org.jproxy.nuim.ie/10.1111/jomf.12156

Irish Statue Book (2016) *Intermediate Education (Ireland) Act, 1878*. (2016) [Online] Available at: <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1878/act/66/enacted/en/print.html> [Accessed on 25th January 2020] Office of the [Attorney General of Ireland](#).

James, D (2015) *How Bourdieu bites back: recognising misrecognition in education and educational research*. Cambridge Journal of Education, 45:1, 97-112, DOI: 10.1080/0305764X.2014.987644

Jenkins, R. (2002) *Pierre Bourdieu*. Routledge. London. United Kingdom of England.

Jenkins, R. (eds.) (2014) *Pierre Bourdieu*. Routledge. London. United Kingdom of England.

Keskiner, E. (2015) “*Is it Merit or Cultural Capital?*” *The role of parents during early tracking in Amsterdam and Strasbourg among descendants of immigrants from Turkey*. Online. Available at <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s40878-015-0014-7#citeas> 30th September 2020.

Kothari, C. R. (2004) *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques*. New Age International. New Delhi.

Lehmann, W.D. (2007). "I just didn't feel like I fit in": *The role of habitus in university dropout decisions*. Canadian Journal of Higher Education, 37, 89-110.

Lynch, K. & O'Riordan, C. (1998), "Inequality in higher education: A study of class barriers", British Journal of Sociology of Education, vol. 19, no. 4, pp. 445.

MacVeigh, T. (2012). *Can a Meritocratic Education System Deliver Equality*. Irish Marxist Review, 1, 27-36.

Mason, J. (2017) *Qualitative Researching*. SAGE. New Delhi. India

Mayr, A. (2008) *Language and Power: An Introduction to Institutional Discourse*. Continuum International Publishing Group. London. United kingdom

McCoy, S. & Byrne, D. (2011) 'The sooner the better I could get out of there': barriers to higher education access in Ireland. Irish Educational Studies, 30:2, 141-157, DOI: 10.1080/03323315.2011.569135

McKeown, C. Denner, S. McAteer, S. Shiel, G. & O'Keeffe, L (2019) *Learning for the Future: The performance of 15-Year-olds in Ireland on reading literacy, science and mathematics in PISA 2018*. Education Research Centre. Dublin. Ireland

McLafferty, M. Armour, C. B. Ennis, E. Lapsley, C. Murray, O'Neill, S. (2019) *Coping, stress, and negative childhood experiences: The link to psychopathology, self-harm, and suicidal behavior*. PsyCh journal, 8(3), 293–306. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pchj.301>.

McLearn, K. T., Minkovitz, C. S., Strobino, D. M., Marks, E., & Hou, W. (2006). *The timing of maternal depressive symptoms and mothers' parenting practices with young children: Implications for pediatric practice*. Pediatrics, 118, 174–182. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2005-1551>

Misztal, B. A. (2003) 'Durkheim on Collective Memory', Journal of Classical Sociology, 3(2), pp. 123–143. doi: 10.1177/1468795X030032002.

Morrison, M. Haley, E., Sheehan, K.B., Taylor, R. E., (2002) *Using Qualitative Research in Advertising: Strategies, Techniques, and Applications*. Sage Publications. London. United Kingdom.

Frederiksen, M. (2014) *Relational trust: Outline of a Bourdieusian theory of interpersonal*

trust. Journal of Trust Research, 4:2, 167-192, DOI: 10.1080/21515581.2014.966829

Moye, J. (2019) *A Machine Learning, Artificial Intelligence Approach to Institutional Effectiveness in Higher Education*. Emerald Group Publishing. Bingley. United Kingdom of England

Mruk, C. J. (2006) *Self-Esteem Research, Theory, and Practice: Toward a Positive Psychology of Self-Esteem, Third Edition*. Springer Publishing Company. New York. United States of America.

Niiya, Y., Crocker, J. and Bartmess, E. N. (2004) 'From Vulnerability to Resilience: Learning Orientations Buffer Contingent Self-Esteem From Failure', *Psychological Science*, 15(12), pp. 801–805. doi: 10.1111/j.0956-7976.2004.00759.x.

O, Brien (2020) 'Class gap: More affluent students dominate high-points courses'. *The Irish time*. 7th December. Available at: [Class gap: More affluent students dominate high-points courses \(irishtimes.com\)](https://www.irishtimes.com/class-gap-more-affluent-students-dominate-high-points-courses). Accessed on 9th December, 2020.

O'Farrell, L. (2019) *UNDERSTANDING AND ENABLING STUDENT SUCCESS IN IRISH HIGHER EDUCATION*. National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. Dublin, Ireland.

Pernecky, T. (2016) *Epistemology and Metaphysics for Qualitative Research*. Sage Publication Ltd. India.

Price, A., Smith, H. A., and Kavalidou, K. (2019) *USI National Report on Student Mental Health in Third Level Education*. Students Union of Ireland. Dublin.

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (2013) *Assessment and Standards, Revised 2013*. Quality and Qualification Ireland. Ireland.

Reardon, S. F. (2011). *The widening academic achievement gap between the rich and the poor: New evidence and possible explanations*. In G. J. Duncan & R. M. Murnane (Eds.), *Whither opportunity? Rising inequality, schools, and children's life chances* (pp. 91–116). New York: Russell Sage Foundation. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/nuim/detail.action?docID=4417083>.

Reay, D. (2004) 'Gendering Bourdieu's Concepts of Capitals? Emotional Capital, Women and Social Class', *The Sociological Review*, 52(2_suppl), pp. 57–74. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-

954X.2005.00524.x.

Reay, D. (2004). *Exclusivity, exclusion, and social class in urban education markets in the united kingdom*. Urban Education (Beverly Hills, Calif.), vol. 39, no. 5, pp. 537-560.

Reay, D. (2005) 'Beyond Consciousness?: The Psychic Landscape of Social Class', Sociology, 39(5), pp. 911–928. doi: 10.1177/0038038505058372.

Reay, D. (2015) *Habitus and the psychosocial: Bourdieu with feelings*, Cambridge Journal of Education, 45:1, 9-23, DOI: 10.1080/0305764X.2014.990420

Reay, D. (2020) *Bourdieu and Education*. Routledge. New York.

Reay, D. (2018) "Working class educational transitions to university: The limits of success", European journal of education, vol. 53, no. 4, pp. 528-540.

Reay, D. Crozier, G. & Clayton, J. (2010) 'Fitting in' or 'standing out': working-class students in UK higher education, British Educational Research Journal, 36:1, 107-124, DOI: 10.1080/01411920902878925

Rousseau, J. (2018) *On the Social Contract*. The Austine Press. France.

Sennett, R., & Cobb, J. (1972). *The hidden injuries of class*. Cambridge University Press. London

Tomlinson. M (2013) *Education, Work and Identity: Themes and Perspectives*. Bloomsbury Publishers. London. England.

Wagner, B. and McLaughlin, K. (2015) 'Politicising the psychology of social class: The relevance of Pierre Bourdieu's habitus for psychological research', Theory & Psychology, 25(2), pp. 202–221. doi: 10.1177/0959354315580606.

Walraven, G. (2000) *Combating Social Exclusion Through Education: Laissez-faire, Authoritarianism Or Third Way?* Garant publishers. Belgium. Tracey fix and get all names

Wiles, R. (2013) *What are Qualitative Research Ethics?* Bloombury Publishing. London. United Kingdom.

Zembylas, M. (2007). *emotional capital and education: Theoretical insights from bourdieu*. British Journal of Educational Studies, 55(4), 443-463. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8527.2007.00390.x

Appendix A

Questionnaire used to inform the research project on ‘what are the implications for working class adult learner within the structures of higher education’.

1. When talking about grades within the education system, can you tell me about your own experiences as a learner in relation to grading and assessment.
2. So as a learner within the education system was there any life implications in striving to reach certain grades, that you can remember?
3. Do you think that you could have achieved the position you’re in now with less implications without the pressure of reaching high grades?
4. Overall, and in your opinion, do you think that it is a fair system, in that, future pathways are placed on student’s academic performance?
5. In your opinion, do you think there could be a better and less rigid alternative to the grade-based system and what might that look like, do you think?
6. Is there anything that you would like to add to what we have just discussed or any questions that you would like to ask me?