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**Parents' views and government rhetoric about schooling: beyond
simple notions of exclusion and marginalisation**

by

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Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Against the background of continuing political rhetoric promising better outcomes for disadvantaged children and advocating the importance of parents' roles, this study gave voice to a group of parents from a disadvantaged community. The author's experiences, as a headteacher in challenging schools, of disadvantaged children's outcomes not improving coupled with diminishing parental voice, provided the passion which drove this study. The participant parents' children attended a non-selective secondary school within a highly selective authority in England. Through an innovative combination of a Facebook group and follow up interviews, the parents chose and discussed schooling issues which they identified as relevant to their experiences. The themes interpreted from the parents' discussions were used to analyse government speeches in order to explore the extent to which there existed a relationship between parents' views and government rhetoric.

Interpretations of the parents' views, and their relationship with government rhetoric, highlight three contentions which add to current discourses about disadvantaged parents' experiences of schooling. Firstly, notions that exclusion and marginalisation cause parents' disadvantage, do not fully explain the complexity of the participant parents' views and their relationship with government rhetoric. Secondly, the thesis proposes the existence of two separate fields of schooling. An ambitious field which the parents consciously resist and are excluded from, and a less ambitious field focused on disadvantage, which the participant parents' views are most aligned with. Thirdly, the existence of two separate fields of schooling is argued to evidence political intentionality, which is demonstrated by speeches adopting deterministic and less ambitious rhetoric when focused on issues of disadvantage. Finally, the thesis adopts a notion of social justice which advocates parents' participation and roles for organic intellectuals (Gramsci, 1971), as a route to ameliorating experiences and outcomes for disadvantaged parents and children.

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Dedication

Papà who would have read this thesis and Angela who wouldn't!

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Chapter 1 Author's experiences

1.1 Personal motivation for this study

This study was motivated by a driving passion, continuing frustration and inexhaustible ambition, reflected through this initial chapter's autobiographical style. My passion was to better understand the continuing perceptions of 'failure' of certain groups of children and the schools they attended. My frustration was with the lack of solutions to these 'failures', and my ambition was to identify how to ameliorate the situation. As a school leader I was struck by the social injustice of children who were experiencing a range of disadvantages, also being consistently identified as educational 'failures'. This often resulted in their families receiving multi-agency intervention which sparked my initial interest. Originally, my interest was focused on parents' perceptions of the multi-agency intervention they received and the reported 'failure' of their children and the schools they attended. However, through my subsequent academic reading and reflection, I identified what to me appeared as a paradox.

This paradox was the tension in the role played by performativity measures. The tension was between their role in acting as the norms by which children's and schools' 'failure' was judged, and the rhetoric which identified the measures' role as providing information for parents in their choice of school for their children. The paradox for me, was that the same set of measures were allegedly serving as custodians of parents' rights but were also reinforcing, for families already experiencing disadvantage, that their children and the schools they attended were 'failing'. The striking paradox, and omission in the rhetoric, was that parents knowing about this 'failure' did not empower them to move their child to an alternative school. I began to question what parents' perceptions of this situation may have been.

The study began to focus on the relationship between parents' perceptions and various government discourses about schools. From this very personal starting point I began this research and identified reading, conferences and agencies which influenced and

challenged me along the journey captured by this thesis. Importantly, it very quickly became apparent that there was a dearth of literature and research specifically focused on exploring issues chosen and valued by parents and the relationship between these and government discourses. The potentially original contribution this study could make became in itself a motivating factor for me to embark on this research. The organization and structure of this thesis is a summary of the sequential development of my thinking. The actual questions which my research focused on did not emerge until much later in my journey. For ease of reference they are summarised here:

1. What are parents' views about schooling?
2. To what extent is there a relationship between parents' views and government discourses about schooling?

The questions reflected my personal professional experiences which shaped my passion, frustration and ambition and remained stubborn and important influences throughout the entirety of this thesis. These experiences orientated me towards a focus on parents' views alongside issues of disadvantage and social justice. In addition these experiences influenced the story told by this thesis, my analysis of the problem, the literature I interrogated, the data I collected and the interpretations and conclusions I drew. In order to remain reflexive over these influences, my experiences are briefly summarised in the following section.

1.2 Personal professional experiences

I had been in teaching for 22 years at the time of embarking on this study. For the most recent 11 years of this period, I had been a senior leader in a number of non-selective secondary schools in a selective authority in the South East of England. All the schools were in areas where at the age of 11, children were selected for grammar school or high school, based on their performance in standardised academic examinations. Over this period I worked in six different secondary schools all serving communities experiencing disadvantage. The schools were characterised by:

- High proportions of children from families experiencing levels of social and economic disadvantage significantly above mean figures for schools nationally and in the local region.
- Significantly higher proportions of children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), a strong indicator that children were from low income households and poor socio-economic backgrounds.
- Disproportionately high numbers of children with learning needs and a number of other factors recognised as ‘barriers’ to learning, such as being in care or coming from newly settled migrant communities.
- Significant proportions of the children’s parents had themselves attended the same school.
- Below average performance as judged by examination results and inspection results.

My first senior leadership post was as a deputy head teacher in a school which had recently failed an Ofsted inspection. Following this I was appointed as an advisory head teacher for the Local Authority (LA). In this latter role I was responsible for leading teams sent into schools which were judged to be underperforming. These judgements were derived from *inter alia* Ofsted inspections, poor standards of performance in examination league tables as well as other more local factors such as LA inspections, parental complaints, exclusion rates and falling rolls.

My remit was to improve the performance of the schools, particularly in relation to examination results and securing positive Ofsted inspection judgements. Depending on the circumstances of the particular school, at times my remit ended at the point where examination results had improved. On other occasions, my remit ended when the LA judged that other factors, such as the quality of teaching or behaviour of children, were such that the school would receive a positive judgement following an Ofsted inspection. In cases where the school had already received a negative Ofsted judgement, my remit would only end following a further Ofsted inspection which deemed the school to have shown sufficient improvement. Overall I served four schools in my role as an advisory head teacher, and each school was deemed to have shown ‘improvement’. During the last

nine years of my career, and so whilst conducting this study, I had been head teacher of a large secondary school serving a community with high levels of social disadvantage. Similar improvements in Ofsted judgements and levels of examination performance had also been recorded at my school but only during my first seven years in post.

Returning to how my experiences influenced this study's focus, it was the judgement that each of the schools had shown 'improvement' which was paradoxical to me. This was because despite improved Ofsted inspection judgements and improved examination results, I questioned whether the schools were actually providing better experiences for children, and whether parents would have agreed that the schools were now offering better learning, progress or experiences for their children. Importantly, my reflections focused on the fact that the parents' voices were rarely if ever sought or heard. Alongside this another striking feature of each of these schools, including my own, was that none were able to sustain these 'improvements' year on year. Indeed, all of these schools, within a period of approximately 8 years, experienced at least one of the following:

1. Failing an Ofsted inspection
2. Fall in examination performance
3. Removal of head teacher and/or other senior leaders
4. Control of school being removed from governors and LA.

Table 1 below provides a brief summary of these schools.

Table 1 Summary of schools I served in my leadership roles

Anonymised School Name	Location	My role	Period of intervention	Impact during and in the two years after intervention	School performance as at 2018
School A	Coastal	Dep. head teacher	1998-2003	Improved examination results judged 'Outstanding' by Ofsted	Placed in 'special measures', examination results below Government targets, school taken over by academy chain
School B	Coastal	Advisory head teacher	2003-2005	Improved examination results 'special measures' removed	School closed, reopened as academy. Subsequently placed in 'special measures', taken over twice by academy chains.
School C	Small Town	Advisory head teacher	2005-06	Improved examination results judged by Ofsted as 'satisfactory'	Results above Government floor targets and judged by Ofsted as a 'Good' school
School D	Large Town	Advisory head teacher	2005-06	Improved examination results judged by Ofsted as 'satisfactory'	Following a drop in examination results school closed and re-opened as an academy
School E	Rural coastal Town	Advisory head teacher	2005-06	Improved examination results judged by Ofsted as 'satisfactory'	School closed and re-opened as an academy
School F	Coastal	Head teacher	2006 to 2015	Improved examination results for first 7 years; judged by Ofsted as 'good'	In eighth year examination results fell, resulting in LA instigating intervention by an academy chain. Eight months later LA decided to close the school and re-open as a Free School in September 2018

Table 1 shows that apart from School C, each of the other schools was either closed, suffered falls in examination results or failed a subsequent Ofsted inspection; in some cases the schools experienced two or indeed all three of these outcomes. In the case of my own school, an uninterrupted seven year period of improved examination results, led to an Ofsted inspection judgement of ‘good’. A fall in results during the eighth year resulted in LA intervention and points 2 to 4 above being instigated. At the time of completing this study, I was no longer in post as head teacher of the school, and plans to close the school and re open it as a Free School, had been proposed, consulted on and eventually approved.

Throughout all of these events the parents of the children attending these schools, were merely witnesses. I was aware that their views were never sought, other than instances of statutory public consultations about school closures. It appeared to me that their agency to influence events was limited. This contrasted with the political rhetoric which underpinned my role as a school leader, which positioned parents as ‘consumers’ within a competitive ‘market’ of schools. Despite this, whilst the judgements and changes affecting these schools were predicated on the basis of serving the parents and children as ‘consumers’, they were given little voice or control over any of these events. The paradox was that it appeared to me that the choices available in the ‘market’, were changed and influenced by the events described in Table 1, rather than the parents acting as ‘consumers’. This paradox influenced me to undertake this study.

1.3 Genesis of this study

The study’s approach was influenced by my questioning the extent to which parents were acting as ‘consumers’ and how their views compared with those of the school, LA and government narratives. This focused this thesis on exploring parents’ views, importantly not their views about predetermined issues about schooling, but instead allowing parents a voice in deciding what the issues should be, and subsequently investigating the representation of these issues in government discourses. In other words, allowing the parents to choose which issues should be studied rather than identify the issues in

advance. This approach had two specific advantages: it foregrounded the parents' voices through allowing them to identify the issues of relevance to their experiences; secondly, it backgrounded my influence. This last aspect was significant because it began to address the power imbalance between my dual role as head teacher/researcher and the relatively weaker position of the parents. However, whilst this reflexive stance was important, it also gave rise to a number of challenges.

The first challenge, addressed by Chapters 2 and 3, was that by not identifying the issues or topics *a priori*, resulted in the difficulty of choosing appropriate literature to inform this thesis. Secondly, the study faced the challenge of devising a methodology which would give voice to parents, but achieve this without firstly identifying what the parents' voice would be related to. In response, Chapter 4 describes and analyses the empirical approach adopted, arguing that it is one of the original contributions made by this study. Lastly, the third challenge was that almost inevitably, any choice of literature, methodology and approach, would introduce into the study my perspectives and views. The relevance of this, was that introducing my views may have undermined the study's aim of highlighting the parents' views because my perspectives may have been very different to those held by parents. In order to try to address this challenge it was important to analyse what my perspectives were, and how these may have influenced the study. In other words I needed to situate myself in the study.

1.4 Situating myself in the study

In order to explore how my experiences might influence this study, I needed to identify and be reflexive over my assumptions and views. Collins (1998) advocated being reflexive over all aspects of social science research and, in relation to the methods used for instance, not to presume that any particular approach is always appropriate. In this sense Collins argued that as a researcher, it is necessary to be reflexive over the specific methods to be used, but in addition to also consider what assumptions were being made in the process of being reflexive. In this regard Bourdieu (1988: 777) argued that 'social

science must break with the preconstructions of common sense, that is, with “reality” as it presents itself in order to construct its proper objects’.

In response, the following list summarises my assumptions or ‘preconstructions of common sense’ which influenced my study:

1. Parents’ lack of voice and agency may have been the result of external mechanisms of exclusion, their own choice to not engage or simply my personal construct which resulted from my inability to recognise the ways in which parents’ voices and agency were enacted.
2. My professional experiences were largely based in schools serving disadvantaged communities, and these may have led me to hold a ‘common sense preconstruction’ (Bourdieu, *ibid*) of the existence of a causal relationship between children’s poor outcomes and disadvantage.
3. The heterogeneity of parents meant that each ‘preconstruction’ may have been acting differently for different parents and not simply as binary alternatives.
4. Government discourses about schooling would be indicative of contemporary political views, and that these would in some way be related to the views and perspectives held by parents in this study.

Identifying the assumptions which would inevitably influence my study, enabled me to become more reflexive about the implications of my new role as a head teacher/researcher.

1.4.1. Accounting for my new identity as a head teacher/researcher

A number of challenges arose from my dual identity as a practitioner researcher, proposing to carry out research in my own school. These challenges were evidenced by the numerous questions and re-drafts, over a year long period, requested by the ethics committee of my University, before full approval for the study was granted. The concerns centred on how the study’s design, could ensure that the parents’ participation, and any views they expressed, would be, as far as possible, unaffected by my dual roles of power. The ethical concerns were exacerbated by the socio economic circumstances of the case

study school community, meaning that there was the potential that some or all of the participant parents may have been vulnerable. Importantly, as described earlier in this chapter, when I began this study I had been the headteacher of the school for three years and by the time I was conducting my data collection with parents, I had been in post for eight years. This meant my identity as a headteacher, and the power this entailed, was well established. This required a methodology which would overcome the power imbalance between my role and the parents who I intended to recruit as participants.

Whilst the methodology chapter (section 4.5) provides a detailed analysis of the originality of the design, which addressed the concerns about the power imbalance, the approach itself resulted in further ethical concerns. This was because the approach included the implementing of a form of digital ethnography using a social networking site (SNS) group for parents. This approach was influenced by my experience at the school which had shown parents' willingness to set up such groups and express their opinions openly through the sites. This included occasions when the parents disagreed with, and were negative about, the school and its actions. In this way, the parents demonstrated their confidence and agency which appeared to be unaffected by any perceived power imbalances between themselves and the school. Overall therefore, whilst implementing the SNS satisfied the ethical concerns surrounding my dual role of power, it raised new concerns as an approach to social science research with potentially vulnerable participants. These concerns were specifically focused on the use of internet based social networking sites. It is relevant to underline that, when the proposal for this thesis was originally submitted in 2009-10, it was the first submission received by my University which proposed the implementation and use of digital ethnographic methods aimed at collecting the personal views of potentially vulnerable participants. Once again the discussion in section 4.4.5 of the methodology chapter, describes in detail the design, implementation and necessary safeguards adopted in order to address the ethical concerns. In conclusion, even though the power imbalance created by my dual identity resulted in ethical challenges which I needed to address and overcome, the process helped me to identify very specifically the focus and the 'proper objects' Bourdieu (*ibid*) of the study.

1.5 Identifying the study's 'objects'

My concerted focus on exactly what my thesis would explore, identified that the 'proper objects' (Bourdieu, *ibid*), were the parents' views and perspectives and their relationship with government discourses. The aim of the study would be to elicit and explore parents' views and to then use these as tools to analyse government discourses. The thesis would not be concerned with criticising, condemning or praising the content or actions implied by government discourses, but instead to identify how they were related to the parents' views. Through this focus, the study would explore and analyse areas of congruence and contrast between parents' views and government discourses.

1.6 Structure of the study

Chapter 1 This has aimed to provide a personal, biographic portrayal of my professional experiences and how these led me to identify a paradox which provided the stimulus for this study. Through this I identified the assumptions which premised this thesis, and so those aspects the study needed to remain reflexive over, in particular with regards to my dual roles of power.

Chapter 2 In response to the challenge of a paucity of literature focused specifically on eliciting parental views of topics chosen by the parents themselves, studies related to parents' wider contexts are reviewed. Initially literature focused on parents' roles and researcher defined topics is reviewed. Subsequently literature linking poor outcomes to contexts of disadvantage, poverty and deprivation is analysed. Overall the studies concur that various forms of disadvantage act to marginalise and exclude deprived families.

Chapter 3 As was the case for Chapter 2, the paucity of literature specifically focused on how government discourses are related to parental views, means that the analysis considers the wider literature which analyses government discourses. The Chapter identifies studies' consensus about the existence and the role of a neoliberal ideology which underpins government discourses. The discussion analyses four assumptions within the ideology which are argued to be relevant to this thesis. This includes the form

of social justice implied by neoliberal ideology. Overall the analysis identifies authors' arguments that parents experiencing disadvantage, are further disadvantaged by the workings of a neoliberal school system. Once again authors rely on notions of marginalisation and exclusion, as the mechanisms by which they explain parents' disadvantage.

Chapter 4 articulates the study's methodology by analysing and justifying the constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology adopted. The chapter describes the role of digital ethnography in collecting the parents' views and in identifying which of these the parents want to discuss further. The complex ethical issues related to my dual role and the implementation of digital ethnography, are analysed. The discussion explains how a combination of thematic and narrative analysis are used to identify themes from parents' views and how approaches from critical discourse analysis are used to explore these themes. The second part of the chapter describes how government discourses are accessed through speeches and analysed using content and ethnographic analysis, coupled with approaches derived from critical discourse analysis. Finally, the chapter argues that combining concepts derived from Bourdieu and Gramsci, provides an analytical framework appropriate for interpreting the findings from parents' discussions and government discourses.

Chapter 5 presents the analysis of the first discussion which parents had chosen to be on uniform. However, whilst parents demonstrated their pride in being able to ensure that their children wore their uniforms smartly, the majority of their discussions focused on wider structural issues. These included views about the need for children to conform to societal expectations and perceptions that children's work prospects were delineated by selective schools, class and privilege. Parents also confirmed that they did not perceive they had any real choice as to which school their child would attend and that, whilst they were aware of the expectation that they should use performativity measures to aid this choice, they did not use them.

Chapter 6 presents the analysis of two further parental discussions. The first, evidences parents asserting but also mediating their agency through what is interpreted as their wish to be supportive of school. The second discussion, related to school performativity

measures, highlights views which place greater value on moral, social and personal outcomes than instrumental performativity measures.

Chapter 7 analyses the parents' themes using Gramsci's concept of hegemony and Bourdieu's notions of field, habitus, doxa and symbolic violence to propose possible explanations and interpretations of the parents' views. These explanations propose that parents' views embody contrasts and paradoxes which cannot be simply explained by notions of marginalisation and exclusion. Instead, the views are interpreted as demonstrating the parents' conscious resistance towards various neoliberal principles of schooling, coupled with a simultaneous subconscious embodiment of the same principles.

Chapter 8 reports the findings of the content analysis of government speeches. Overall the findings highlight that parents' views and government discourses, place economic utilitarian outcomes as the most prevalent themes and those related to parents' roles, as the least prevalent. However, the real significance of the chapter's findings, is the strong similarity between discourses found in speeches specifically focused on issues of disadvantage and the participant parents' views. The chapter argues that this congruence could not be explained through notions of exclusion. Instead the discussion proposes that the congruence evidences a specific and separate field of schooling related to issues of disadvantage. In addition, that this field promotes a less ambitious doxa which parents embody. The chapter proposes that this distinctive field and doxa, imply a different more autonomous habitus for parents experiencing disadvantage.

Chapter 9 analyses how parents are represented in speeches and identifies four different notions of their roles, each characterised by different levels of autonomy. Significantly, as proposed by the analysis in Chapter 8, notions of a more autonomous habitus are only found in the speeches focused on issues of disadvantage. The discussion proposes that these findings support the contention of two fields of schooling. The field associated with issues of disadvantage, shows the greatest similarity with the participant parents' views. This field, structured by a doxa of low ambition for children but higher autonomy for parents, is argued to have become embodied as parents' subconscious habitus. This interpretation is argued to be original, and one which takes discourses about disadvantage beyond simple contentions of marginalisation and exclusion.

Chapter 10 The final chapter summarises the findings and situates them within current discourses related to the underperformance of disadvantaged children. This enables an analysis of how this study's three original notions add to discourses about disadvantage. The first is the existence of two separate fields of schooling, an ambitious field which excludes disadvantaged parents' views, and a less ambitious deterministic field focused on disadvantage which includes the parents' views. The second original contribution is that parents' views demonstrate conscious resistance to the former field and subconscious internalisation of the less ambitious deterministic field. Finally, the third contention is that the creation and maintenance of the two separate fields, implies a degree of political intentionality. Overall, the three contentions enable a reconceptualising of disadvantaged parents' and children's 'failure' not simply through exclusion, but as a form of symbolic violence. The study's interpretations are employed in the analysis of the participant parents' local context as it appears at the end of the study, and also to analyse some aspects of the national context. The latter are argued to confirm the continued existence of deterministic views about disadvantaged children's outcomes. In response to the study's aim of identifying means by which to ameliorate disadvantaged parents' condition, the discussion argues for the need to achieve social justice through increasing parents' wellbeing freedom (Sen, 2009) and proposes organic intellectuals (Gramsci, 1971), as a potential strategy for achieving this. The chapter concludes by analysing the study's original methodological contributions and design limitations.

Chapter 2 Literature focused on parents

2.1 Overview

This chapter reviews the literature related to the thesis' first question which was aimed at exploring parents' views of schooling. The analysis reveals a paucity of literature focused specifically on exploring parents' views of issues they have identified for themselves. Whilst this paucity evidences the originality of this study, it poses the challenge of identifying literature relevant to the focus of this thesis. This challenge is overcome by focusing on the wider literature related to parents' views, roles and contexts. Initially, the literature interrogated is based on studies which explore parents' views of researcher defined issues. This confirms a consensus that disadvantaged parents' children, consistently achieve poorer outcomes than their peers. From this, the review focuses on the literature which analyses the causal relationship, persistence and authors' assumptions, about disadvantaged families' experiences and outcomes from schooling. Finally, the chapter analyses how studies present different forms of material and social disadvantage.

2.2 Literature focusing on parents' views and roles

Despite the lack of studies which researched issues specifically identified by parents, wider literature which argued that parental views and involvement impacted positively on children's achievement at school, was voluminous and spanned decades (Sewell *et al.*, 1969; National Centre for Educational Statistics, 1982; Coleman and Hoffer, 1987; Henderson, 1987; Shumow, 1997; Zellman & Waterman, 1998; Gorman, 1998; Fan & Chen, 2001; Vincent, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Crawford and Simonoff, 2003; Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Lawson, 2003; Hill and Taylor, 2004; Cox, 2005; Fishel & Ramirez, 2005; Guli, 2005; Hoard & Shepard, 2005; Jeynes, 2005, 2007; Tollefson, 2008; DCSF, 2009; Pushor, 2010; Kintrea, *et al.*, 2011; Rodriguez, *et al.*, 2014). This

range of literature revealed that, whilst most was the result of academic research, some was from political efforts towards ensuring parents were involved in their children's schooling. In England for instance, the political focus on parents began with the Robbins Report (1963). Whilst the report was focused on Higher Education, it underlined the influence of '[parents'] income and ...educational level and attitudes' (The Committee of Higher Education, 1963: 51). Following this, the White Paper, 'Excellence in Schools' (DfEE, 1997) described three approaches to involving parents; firstly providing them with information, secondly giving them a voice and lastly encouraging parental partnerships with schools. Since this time, as discussed further in Chapter 3, successive governments have continually highlighted the central role played by parents in their children's schooling. This vast background of literature and political intervention, vindicated two aspects of this study: its focus on the paradox of parents' voices being largely silent, and its design aimed at valorising parents' voices. The first of these was argued to be a paradox because, despite the academic and political interest in parents' involvement, my professional experiences confirmed their lack of voice. The second reason the literature vindicated this study, was because despite the studies all being focused on parental roles, none of their designs or approaches enabled the foregrounding of parents' voices about issues they themselves had identified as being important to them.

Overall, the designs adopted by the literature shared a number of important features. The most significant, was that the studies always identified which issues they would explore with parents. In other words, parents' views were sought about issues which had been identified *a priori* by the researcher. This was significant because it contrasted with this study's approach, which aimed to explore issues and topics chosen by parents. In addition, the literature adopted four broad areas of focus which, although not mutually exclusive, provided a useful way of summarising the literature. These broad areas were: studies exploring parents' views about researcher defined issues; studies investigating parents' views about their engagement with schools; research focused on how parents' agency was contingent on disadvantage and lastly research focused on the views of parents of children with special needs. These areas of literature are explored in the subsequent four sections.

2.2.1. Literature exploring parents' views of predefined issues

Shumow's work (1997) typified this group of studies which underlined the importance of parental involvement in schooling whilst also acknowledging that 'little is known, however, about their inclusion or about the basis on which parents make decisions' (*ibid*: 205). In the study, Shumow explored parents' views about the aims of schooling, children's learning and assessment, and teachers' and parents' roles. In relation to these very specific issues, the study concluded that parents 'seemed to agree more with educators on the means than the ends of reforms' (*ibid*: 213). Similarly, Tabberer (1995) conducted a large scale survey of parents' views of specific aspects of Ofsted's work. The study, which had been commissioned by Ofsted, concluded that parents felt positive about the information they received before, during and after inspections. However, the study also reported that parents were 'unsure... if the school had been affected by the inspection and if there was a positive contribution to improvement' (*ibid*: 3). This finding was significant because it echoed Shumow's (*op. cit.*) conclusion that, whilst parents might agree with the means and processes of schooling, this did not necessarily mean that they agreed with its purposes and ends. In addition the findings were significant because they arguably supported my questioning, described in section 1.2, of how parents perceived aspects such as examination performance and inspection results. A more specific focus on parents' perceptions and satisfaction with school effectiveness, was provided by Gibbons and Silva (2011). In their study they concluded that parents generally reported greater levels of satisfaction with schooling, when examination performance was regarded as good. In contrast Rätty and Kasanen (2007) conducted a five year longitudinal study, which found that parents' levels of satisfaction in relation to a number of predefined aspects of schooling, including school effectiveness, varied according to the parents' level of education. The study reported that, although all the parents' views changed over time, the parents with the highest levels of academic qualifications were generally more satisfied with their children's schooling than parents with lower academic qualifications. Similarly, variations in parental views were reported by Hamilton *et al.* (2011) who adopted case studies to investigate immigrant parents' perceptions of how the school environment affected their children's adjustment. From this they concluded that parents' overall perceptions showed 'some ethnic differences' (*ibid*: 313). The last study

in this brief review of literature exploring parents' views about researcher defined issues, was carried out by Kintrea *et al.* (2011) and was focused on exploring how parents' levels of disadvantage influenced their aspirations for their children. Their study concluded that parents' roles were a key influence on children's aspirations, and that issues of disadvantage adversely affected parents' level of aspiration.

Overall this initial review highlighted studies' continued emphasis on exploring parents' views of a variety of schooling issues. This body of literature confirmed parents' diverse views, which at times concurred with aspects of schooling, but also diverged from some of its aims. Significantly, parents' views varied according to their own prior education and other socio economic contexts. This was relevant for this case study, because it was based in a school which served a diverse and socio economically disadvantaged community. However, all these studies explored parents' views in relation to issues which had been identified *a priori* by the researchers. It was relevant to question if parents would have chosen the same issues as ones of importance to them had they been given a free choice. Despite this, all these studies aimed to engage parents which in itself was a focus of a great deal of research as reviewed in the next section.

2.2.2. Literature focused on parental views of their engagement with schools

Deslandes' work (2001) was typical of these studies which explored factors, approaches, models and literature related to how parents viewed their engagement with schools. Deslandes' analysis for instance, concluded that parents' level of engagement with schools was dependent on the parents' perceptions of how effective they would be in improving their children's experience and performance. Deslandes argued that 'parents may choose not to become involved if they attribute their own or their child's weak performance to stable and innate factors, such as a child's lack of ability or a parent's lack of knowledge' (Deslandes, 2001: 16). Findings which indicated that parents' engagement was contingent on their perceptions of their own level of knowledge and ability, were also reported by Desforges and Abouchar, (2003) who carried out a large scale literature review of English Language studies. Their review concluded that factors such as maternal

level of education as well as material and social deprivation, all adversely affected parents' views and levels of engagement. Similarly, Borg and Mayo (2001) considered the implications of low participation for socially deprived parents and argued 'this lack of participation on the part of subordinate groups leaves the door wide open for dominant groups to lobby for their own agenda' (*ibid*: 246). Similarly, Harris and Goodall (2007) reported that parents' views of engagement with school, was heavily linked to socio economic contexts, and Peters, *et al.* (2007) concluded that disadvantaged parents showed the greatest desire to become more engaged with their schools. These studies were relevant in underlining that issues of class, disadvantage and prior levels of education, influenced parents' views of, and actual, engagement with schools. Their findings highlighted the need for my study to be cognisant of how parents' contexts might affect their views and responses and ultimately their engagement with this study. An important consideration was that these studies' findings were based on large scale literature reviews and samples whilst my research adopted a small case study design.

Turning attention to smaller scale case studies, highlighted literature which again reinforced the notion that disadvantage adversely affected parents' ability, willingness and likelihood of engaging with their children's school. However, these studies also revealed more nuanced findings. Phadraig (2003) for instance reported that in relation to parental involvement in school policy formation, neither parents nor teachers were particularly enthusiastic about parents' involvement. Irvine (2005), also investigated parental perspectives of their role in shaping policy, but her findings highlighted four parental conceptions of their involvement: 'no role... raising concerns...having some say...participating in policy decision-making' (*ibid*: 5-6). Further evidence of parents' differing views and levels of engagement, were evidenced by Ranson's (2011) study which examined parents' roles in school governance. The study focused on schools serving disadvantaged communities and which had been judged as successful by short term performativity measures. Despite the schools' successes, their longer term improvements were argued to be affected because of their failure to 'include the voice of parents and communities in the processes of improving' (*ibid*: 2). Ranson argued for the need to include parents in the governance of schools but also cautioned against simplistic

approaches which were likely to be unsuccessful with disadvantaged communities. Overall, this literature based on smaller case study approaches, confirmed the conclusions reached by larger scale studies, namely that parents' contexts influenced their views and willingness to engage with their children's schools.

In conclusion, the literature reviewed in this section was focused on eliciting and exploring parents' views and perspectives about their involvement with schools and the resultant implications for policy and practice. Once again as was noted in section 2.2.1, studies highlighted how parents' contexts of gender, race, class and socio economic circumstances, affected both their perspectives and the level of engagement they were willing and able to achieve with schools. In order to explore how these issues were relevant to my study, the final two sections reviewed the literature focused on how these parental contexts affected their views.

2.2.3. Literature focused on how parents' socio economic, class, race and gender contexts affected their views

Studies which explored how parents' views about schools were influenced by their socio economic, class, race or gender contexts, generally adopted a polemical stance. Typically these studies based their arguments on issues of social justice, on the basis that disadvantaged parents' experiences were undermined as a result of their contexts and this adversely affected their views of schooling and ultimately their children's outcomes. Gorman (1998) for instance, focused on social class in particular and argued that working class parents' attitudes towards education was more likely to result in their children's lack of success at school. In addition, studies by Lareau and McNamara (1999) and Crozier (2001, 2003; 2003 *et al.*) argued that ethnicity affected parental views, involvement, engagement and aspirations, all leading to poorer outcomes for their children. Within this literature many of the studies focused on how parents' contexts resulted in their marginalisation and exclusion from mainstream schooling practices and expectations and how through this they experienced social *injustice*.

A particular focus on issues of social justice was found in literature which explored parents' views about their agency in relation to their children's schools, and how this was contingent on their levels of disadvantage. Reay (1996, 2017) for instance argued that parents' agency in choice of school should be understood as a process mediated by contexts of disadvantage. Numerous authors (Bowe, *et al.*, 1994; Conway, 1997; Ball and Vincent 1998; Crozier 1999; *et al.* 2008) argued similarly, that issues of class influenced parental views about the process of choice of school and more generally their involvement in their children's schooling. In particular these authors argued that schooling practices favoured middle class views and predispositions, resulting in working class parents having less access and less success when engaging with schools and schooling practices. Overall, this literature invariably argued that disadvantaged parents, through their exclusion, marginalisation or in some way alienation, suffered a loss of social justice.

A notable feature of these studies was that whilst they enabled parents to have a voice, this was limited to the specific contexts which researchers had identified, and had normatively judged, to be relevant forms of disadvantage affecting the parents. Whilst this approach was in line with all the literature reviewed so far in this chapter, it contrasted with the approach adopted by my study which instead aimed to allow the parents to choose issues and contexts which they felt were of relevance to them. None the less, the literature in this section helped to underline that parents' views of schooling practices such as choice, were influenced by contexts of disadvantage. It would be important therefore to ensure that my study's collection of data enabled the parents to identify contexts which they felt were of relevance to their lived experiences of schooling. A relevant example, was that the case study school had a large number of children with special educational needs and, as reviewed in the next section, an extensive body of literature reported that these were issues which influenced parents' experiences and views.

2.2.4. Literature focused on the views of parents of children with special educational needs

The last group of studies which explored parents' views, were those focused specifically on issues related to children's special educational needs. Crawford and Simonoff (2003) for instance, examined the views and experiences of parents of children attending schools for the emotionally and behaviourally disturbed and reported that agencies needed to provide more support for parents through improved communication and joint working. Similarly, the Lamb Inquiry (DCSF, 2009) was a large scale study of parents' confidence and views about their children's special needs provision, which recommended that agencies needed to improve parents' access to relevant information, their engagement with their children's schools and their role in improving their children's outcomes. Overall, even when authors based their research on smaller case study approaches, (Gross and McChrystal, 2001; McDonald and Thomas, 2003; Rodriguez, *et al.*, 2014) their conclusions reinforced the same arguments that parents' views and voices needed to be recognised in meaningful ways in order to improve outcomes for their children. In general, the literature assumed that outcomes for special needs children could be improved through increasing parents' agency and that the key to achieving this was to valorise parents' views.

Concluding this review of the four areas of research focused on parents' views and roles, it was evident that whilst the studies focused on different aspects such as disadvantage, choice, engagement and special needs, they shared the notion that through increasing and improving parents' agency and engagement, outcomes for children could be improved. The key to achieving this, according to the literature, was to foreground the parents' views. Significantly, the consensus was that in contrast, disadvantaged parents were marginalised and excluded and that as a result, their children experienced poorer schooling outcomes. Lastly, the studies presented the causal link between disadvantage, marginalisation and poorer outcomes as not being a new phenomenon, instead implying that it had persisted over time. The discussion turned to analysing this assumption.

2.3 Literature reiterating the persistence of the link between disadvantage and outcomes

In order to explore the assumption that children from disadvantaged families persistently achieved poorer outcomes than their less disadvantaged peers, specific policies and programmes from successive governments were chosen for analysis. This overview of policies, along with the relevant academic studies, was not intended to be exhaustive of all the political interventions or literature. Rather, it was aimed at illustrating how the continual political and academic interest, evidenced the persistence of poorer outcomes for disadvantaged children. The overview also enabled a critical evaluation of the role afforded to parental views and roles.

Beginning this overview, the Robbins Report was unequivocal in confirming a ‘close association between a father's level of occupation and the educational achievement of his children at school’ (The Committee of Higher Education, 1963: 51). In 1965 the government Circular (DES, 1965), heralded the introduction of comprehensive secondary schools. In recognition of the long standing pattern of poorer children fairing less well in school, part of the circular’s stated aim was to deliver ‘*equality of opportunity*’ within a new organisation of schools designed to ameliorate class disadvantage. Harris and Ranson reinforced this point by stating that the publication of this circular coincided with a period when a taken for granted presupposition was that ‘poverty and class are inextricably associated with educational failure and that life chances continue to be dominated by class structures’ (Harris and Ranson, 2005:572). Evidence that the link between disadvantage and poor educational outcomes remained strong over the following two decades, was the publication of The Education Reform Act (ERA) of 1988. The rhetoric underpinning this new legislation, was that outcomes for poorer children would be ameliorated through the introduction of a market ideology based on principles of competition, accountability and parental choice. This rhetoric argued that through schools being held to account and having to compete for children, standards would rise and so outcomes for poorer children would improve.

Authors' analysis of this rhetoric (Bagley, 1996; David, 1997; Ball and Vincent, 1998; Gillborn 1997; Gewirtz, 2000; Reay, 2001, 2017; Sarojini Hart, 2013) invariably argued that this market ideology undermined issues of social justice and actually worsened outcomes for disadvantaged children. These criticisms were based on arguments related to how lack of social justice was perpetrated by policy which ignored contexts of race, class and gender. Once again, as previously noted, each author in criticising the market ideology, used notions of marginalisation and exclusion to explain how the injustice was perpetrated, and performativity measures as the normative standards by which to measure children's outcomes.

Returning to the brief overview of policy interventions designed to improve outcomes for disadvantaged children, Harris and Ranson (2005) critiqued approaches adopted by the subsequent New Labour Government of 1997 by arguing 'if we are serious about raising standards of achievement, for all rather than some, this can only be secured by a form of local government that represents and acts upon the voices of those in disadvantaged communities' (Harris and Ranson, 2005:584-585). This call for more democratic, localised forms of school accountability were relevant to this study's focus of giving voice to parents. More specifically for the focus of this section they underlined that, by the late nineties, outcomes for disadvantaged children were still a serious issue warranting political intervention. In addition, Harris and Ranson's (*ibid*) study was relevant because it adopted what could be argued to be a less deterministic view of poverty, class, gender and ethnicity through promoting an active role for 'disadvantaged communities'. However, the authors' scope was limited because they did not provide an approach through which parents' voices could be heard. Even assuming that the authors' view of the disadvantaged communities included parents, their stance implied at best a secondary role for parents. This was shown by their use of the phrase "...represents and acts upon the voices..." which seemed to suggest that someone other than the 'disadvantaged' would be doing the 'representing and acting'.

Continuing this brief overview, at the point in May 2010 when there was a new Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition Government, there was still little evidence of the link between poverty and poor outcomes having been broken. Wilson (2011) reviewed

a number of interventions by the previous New Labour Government, and focusing specifically on their academisation programme, argued that this had failed to significantly improve outcomes for disadvantaged children, in fact leading to a widening of educational inequality. Wilson concluded that 'results indicate that the Academies Programme is failing some disadvantaged pupils, precisely the group the original scheme has aimed to cater for' (Wilson 2011: p.i).

The publication of the Social Mobility & Child Poverty Commission's report in 2014 contained a clear statement (as had the Committee's previous report in 2010) that the targets aimed at reducing child poverty, would not be met. The report looked towards the forthcoming general elections due to take place in 2015 and made twelve recommendations which it urged the eventual government to adopt, the seventh of which was 'closing the attainment gap between poorer and better-off children to be a priority for all schools' (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2014:5). The report made several references to the role of parents, however most of these referred to the need to ameliorate economic factors such as low pay, employment and tax benefits. Within this, there was no specific reference or acknowledgement made of parents' role in 'closing the attainment gap'. This arguably underlined a view which saw parents having no specific role in improving outcomes for children. This was reinforced by the report urging the next government to '...mobilise... to action...' (*ibid*: 31) a number of groups including parents, but providing no details as to how this might be achieved. Although the report stressed that improving educational outcomes for poorer children was an important aim to be achieved, this was conceptualised as a task to be undertaken by schools and judged through performativity measures.

This brief summary evidenced that over the past half century, the persistence of the link between disadvantage and poor outcomes was evidenced by the need for continual political interventions and strategies. Significantly, whilst the rationales for the political interventions were based on improving outcomes for disadvantaged children, the specific assumptions underlying what affected children's outcomes were never explicitly articulated. This contrasted with one of the aims of this literature review, which was to analyse the assumptions underlying disadvantaged families' experiences and outcomes

from schooling. The relevance of these assumptions was that they would inform the analysis of parents' views and government discourses later in this study. In view of this the discussion turned to analysing the assumptions inherent in the literature about children's schooling outcomes.

2.4 Assumptions underlying discourses about educational outcomes

Cassen *et al.*, (2008) argued that there were three main assumptions adopted by the literature focused on approaches and barriers to improving educational outcomes:

1. outcomes influenced by IQ and genetics;
2. outcomes for disadvantaged children could be improved by adopting the correct strategies;
3. outcomes negatively influenced by social exclusion.

These three categories were adopted in this section to organise the review of literature. In addition this enabled an analysis of how each assumption took account of parents' views and roles.

2.4.1. Assumptions that outcomes are influenced by genetics

The literature focused on the link between genetics and educational outcomes, was found to be characterised by tensions, antagonisms and controversy. This was typified by researchers such as Bartles *et al.* (2002) who argued that intelligence (measured through IQ) was a greater influence on educational outcomes than disadvantage, and in contrast Turkheimer *et al.* (2003) who argued the opposite. The depth of tensions, were the result of wide ranging antagonisms over assumptions underpinning the research, the findings and the methodologies (Shakeshaft *et al.*, 2003; Joseph, 2002). The relevance to this study, was that the assumption that outcomes were, or at least might be, somehow linked to genetics, influenced a view of children's success as being somehow predetermined, fixed and measurable. Significantly, this influence could be found in political thinking, for instance in an essay (Cummings, 2013) published by a senior advisor to the Secretary of State for Education, which advocated the greater acceptance and use of IQ as a measure and predictor of children's educational success. In this work Cummings commented:

During my involvement in education policy 2007-12, I never come across a single person in ‘the education world’ who raised the work of Robert Plomin and others on IQ, genetics and schools, (Cummings, 2013: 64).

Cummings’ argument underlined his assumption that children’s schooling outcomes were not dependent or affected by disadvantage but instead were biologically fixed and predetermined. Similarly, Boris Johnson¹ in a speech (Johnson, 2013) delivered at the annual ‘Margaret Thatcher Public Lecture’, argued for the recognition that children were not equal in ability or spiritual worth, and that IQ was a predictor of this. In the speech Johnson asserted that ‘human beings are already very far from equal in raw ability, if not spiritual worth’ (Johnson 2013). In a section of the speech that was widely interpreted as a call for more selective education that explicitly privileges those with greatest assessed ability, he stated:

Whatever you may think of the value of IQ tests, it is surely relevant to a conversation about equality that as many as 16% of our species have an IQ below 85, while about 2% have an IQ above 130. The harder you shake the pack, the easier it will be for some cornflakes to get to the top (Johnson, 2013).

It was relevant to consider that assumptions such as these were summarized by the UK’s biggest selling daily newspaper with the headline ‘Boris Johnson: Thickos are born to toil’ (Ashton 2013). Johnson’s political opponents criticized him for offensive elitism but other journalists portrayed him as a brave maverick using phrases like ‘who tells it like it is’ (Pollard 2013) and claiming that Johnson spoke the ‘the kind of *plain truths* that too many politicians avoid expressing’ (Brogan 2013, emphasis added by source). These national newspapers used his speech to rehearse their own beliefs in the natural inevitability of inequality, and the significance of supposedly innate differences in ability. In contrast, the controversial nature of these views was highlighted by authors’ criticisms

¹ Mayor of London at the time of the speech and currently (2018) Foreign Secretary

that they were based on elitist and prejudicial assumptions and importantly that they were influencing government policy on education.

One such prominent critic was Gillborn who through a number of studies (2010a; 2010c; 2016) analysed assumptions about children's 'potential' and 'ability' contained in government policy documents. His rejection of this rhetoric was based on the argument that along with qualities such as 'talent', it encouraged a view of individuals as possessing fixed characteristics, which were independent of issues of disadvantage. Further to this, Gillborn (2010c) argued that political interventions influenced by this rhetoric, and designed to improve outcomes for disadvantaged children, were based on strategies which employed testing and setting by ability which signalled a new form of 'eugenics', (2010c: 231) or as Gillborn has argued in more recent work, a notion of 'educational geneism' (2016; 371). Through this notion, disadvantaged children's poor outcomes are attributed to a lack of potential, ability or talent, all controlled and predetermined by genes and biological makeup. Overall, Gillborn's contention was that through these narratives, political rhetoric could use 'scientifically respectable' data and statistics about measurable factors such as IQ, to 'explain' disadvantaged children's poor outcomes.

Overall, reviewing assumptions that children's outcomes were to some degree predetermined by fixed biological factors, strengthened this study's ability to analyse parents' views and government discourses. This was because, whilst the assumptions may have been fraught with tensions and controversies, they provided an opportunity to analyse the extent to which they influenced parents' views and government discourses. In other words, the analysis could explore how far notions such as 'talent' 'potential' and 'ability', might have influenced parental and political narratives. Alternatively, might these narratives embody assumptions that children could achieve good outcomes regardless of their circumstances? The literature which adopted this perspective was the focus of the next analysis.

2.4.2. Assumptions that children can achieve good outcomes regardless of their circumstances

This literature was characterised by its pragmatic focus and assumption that through schools and families adopting ‘correct strategies’, children’s outcomes could be improved regardless of their circumstances. These studies adopted a largely functionalist perspective focused on micro and meso loci of actions, including references to parental involvement (Raffo *et al.*, 2009). One such example was work by Mongon and Chapman (2008) which synthesised and summarised a large body of literature reporting on strategies adopted by schools which resulted in better outcomes for disadvantaged children. Significantly, parents were mentioned only once and their role was summarised by Mongon and Chapman quoting a head teacher (2008:2):

You gain an enormous amount of respect from the parents because you make sure that the students and the staff and all the stakeholders in this school know exactly where they stand and understand the consequences.

Overall this study typified research where parents’ roles were almost completely absent, and when they were referred to, they were relegated to roles which implied parents’ lower hierarchical position of power as in the extract above. In addition, authors made two implicit assumptions: that the role of deciding whether or not outcomes had improved, resided exclusively with schools and professionals; and that ‘improvements’ were judged entirely through performativity measures. Underlining the limited role afforded to parents within this literature, were studies which ‘problematized’ parents and portrayed them as adding to the potential causes of disadvantaged children’s poor outcomes. In this way parents became part of the problem which needed to be ‘solved’ as argued by Crozier (2003:82):

Much of the parental involvement discourse has tended to exclude mothers, working class and minority ethnic parents. Where it acknowledges their existence it casts them in the role of ‘other’, pathologizing their behaviour and rendering them marginalized.

Typical of these studies was Sharples, *et al.* (2010) who reviewed several thousand sources of literature and identified approaches which improved outcomes for disadvantaged children. Whilst there was a whole section focused on parents, this arguably exposed the authors' 'problematizing' of them (2010:18):

Across the studies we reviewed, parental involvement in school, and their aspirations for their children, emerged as some of the most important factors associated with lower educational achievement, even controlling for family background.

The authors underlined the point further through arguing that 'ethnicity also played a role here, with parental aspirations of white British children significantly lower than those in minority ethnic groups' (Sharples *et al.* 2010:18). Overall, the authors' contention in line with all the studies reviewed in this section, was that outcomes for disadvantaged children could be improved albeit this might necessitate overcoming 'problem' parents. This was emphasised further through research such as Demie and Lewis' (2010) case study of London schools. They reported that the schools' actions had 'improved' outcomes for disadvantaged children, whilst in relation to parents they stated 'school staff expressed frustration at the mismatch between the high aspirations of the school and low aspirations of the parents for their children's learning' (2010:44). Surprisingly, this quotation from a member of staff, was presented without any critique or analysis from the authors. Instead they used the quotation to underline how schools' difficulties, included overcoming the 'problem' of parents. This approach could be argued to exemplify what Freire (1970) and Mertens (2010) caution against in social science research, when the researcher's epistemological and empirical stance relegates the researched to positions of 'the oppressed' and 'the problem'.

A study by Siraj-Blatchford (2010) as well as reinforcing this deficit view of parents' role, also typified studies which questioned their values. In the study, various parenting actions were identified and termed 'Home Learning Environments' (HLEs). Families' ability to create a 'positive' HLE was measured and, arguably unsurprisingly, families which provided high scoring HLEs were also the families characterised as having certain

expectations which the author described as ‘the parents’ expectations for their children were extremely high with all of the higher HLE parents suggesting their children should attend higher education and go onto professional careers’ (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010:469). The author implied that these aspirations of ‘higher education and professional careers’, were the ones which parents ‘should’ aspire to. In other words, these aspirations were presented uncritically as the ‘right’ values which all ‘good parents’ should aspire to. This stance could be evaluated critically as not only ‘problematizing’ parents who may not have shared these aspirations, but also as suggesting that parents should be ‘socialized’ into having the ‘right’ values. Gewirtz provided such a critique through her analysis of aspects of New labour educational policy (2001:366):

an ambitious programme of re-socialization and re-education, which has as its ultimate aim the eradication of class differences by reconstructing and transforming working-class parents into middle-class ones. Excellence for the many is to be achieved, at least in part, by making the many behave like the few.

Overall this literature assumed that disadvantaged children’s outcomes could be improved, if the ‘correct’ strategies were adopted and implemented. The studies identified specific actions and approaches which local government, schools and families needed to adopt in order to achieve the improved outcomes. Once again these outcomes were assumed to be exclusively judged through performativity measures. In contrast a new theme which emerged from this literature, was a ‘problematizing’ of some parental attitudes, behaviours and influences. This was underlined by studies identifying middle class parenting as being the most appropriate form for ensuring children’s success at school. Within this perspective, as argued by Gewirtz (*ibid*), parents’ identities and forms of disadvantage were homogenised. An impact of this was that qualitatively different issues such as class, race and gender for instance, were largely ignored. The focus of the next section was on how the literature, which did assume a link between disadvantage and children’s outcomes, reported these different forms of disadvantage and once again the focus it placed on parents’ roles, views and perspectives.

2.4.3. Assumptions that children's outcomes are linked to disadvantage

These assumptions were particularly relevant because this study was based in a school which served a disadvantaged community and which, despite being judged as 'good' by Ofsted, consistently achieved well below government floor targets for attainment². The literature which assumed a causal link between children's disadvantage and their outcomes, was characterised by its socially critical outlook. In other words, as argued by Fay, an outlook which 'wants to explain a social order in such a way that it becomes itself the catalyst which leads to the transformation of this social order' (1987: 33). In addition, the literature focused largely on macro societal issues of poverty, class, race and gender, and investigated these factors through a variety of methodological approaches.

Typical studies were quantitative analyses of large volumes of literature focused on the effects of social and material deprivation on children's outcomes (Machin and McNally, 2006; Raffo *et al.*, 2006; Raffo *et al.*, 2007; Cassen *et al.*, 2008; Raffo *et al.*, 2009). Similarly, there were studies which focused on large data sets collected through cohort studies (Connolly, 2005; Cassen and Kingdon, 2007; Strand, 2008; Goodman and Gregg, 2010; Goodman *et al.*, 2011) which identified disadvantage as a barrier to children's success. Equally, this causal link between different forms of disadvantage and children's outcomes, was confirmed by qualitative studies which also underlined that the persistence of the link was a form of social *injustice* (Troyna, 1982; Bagley, 1996; David, 1997; Ball and Vincent, 1998; Gillborn 1997; 1998; 2010a; 2010b; 2010c; 2014; 2016; Crozier, 1999; 2001; Gewirtz, 2001; Reay, 1996; 1998; 2001; 2005; 2012; 2017 and Walton, 2000). Similarly polemical approaches, were adopted by studies which focused on specific areas of government policy initiative. Harris and Ranson (2005) and Clifton and Muir (2010) for instance, provided critiques of the *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners* (DfES, 2004) and *The Importance of Teaching: The schools White Paper* (DfE, 2010) respectively. Overall, these qualitative studies offered greater scope for the exploration of parents' lived and perceived disadvantage, through highlighting the different forms of exclusion experienced by families. Both studies, whilst acknowledging the political efforts and recognition of the attainment gap between poor children and their

² www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk

wealthier counterparts, were sceptical that the policy approaches they reviewed would ameliorate the situation. In addition there were studies which focused on wider political policy and strategy interventions, but did so through the lens of specific parental contexts including class, race and gender.

Beginning with the literature focused on class, Gewirtz (2001) provided a typical polemical discourse which, whilst applauding many of the policies introduced by New Labour in 1997 in response to the continuing underachievement of working class children, also critiqued their approach (2001:376):

However, in my view the government have drawn the wrong lessons from this evidence, concluding that the way to improve opportunities for working-class students is to universalize the values and modes of engagement of a particular kind of middle-class parent.

Importantly for the focus of this study, Gewirtz provided a number of alternative policy approaches including giving voice to working class parents and their children. Unfortunately, the reference to parents was only in the final concluding sentence and received no elaboration. Within this tradition of literature focused on the marginalisation of working class families, Reay argued that ‘at the beginning of the twenty-first century we still do not have a valued place within education for the working classes’ (2001:344). In a later research project, Reay (2005) focused on the impact of working class values and argued that these were ignored and marginalised by mainstream schooling, resulting in working class children’s poorer outcomes. Interestingly, Reay identified the notion of a ‘psychic economy’ (2005:911) which she argued provided a way of understanding how working class experiences could be recognised and harnessed in schools to improve children’s outcomes. In her most recent work, Reay (2017) has continued to argue that, due to educational policies, working class children’s outcomes have worsened and their parents’ roles and voices remain ignored and unheard. A more specific focus on working class parents’ roles in schooling, was provided by Gillborn’s (1998) analysis of the first White Paper on education published by the then newly elected New Labour Government. Whilst the analysis argued that it was ‘significant’ that reference was made to parents’

roles, it was critical of the view adopted which was described as a 'New Puritan strand in public policy' (1998:717). Gillborn's argument was that New Labour's policies placed the responsibility and blame for working class children's underachievement on the children and their families, simultaneously deflecting blame away from structural constraints found in schools and government policies. This argument reinforced the point raised earlier about the 'problematizing' of parents, (Crozier, 2003).

Overall this literature assumed that working class identities were marginalised and so excluded from schooling expectations and practices. Furthermore that as a result, working class children would achieve less well than their middle class peers, whose values and outlooks were more aligned to those of schools. In addition these authors were critical of policy approaches which analysed the reasons for the poor outcomes as residing within working class identities. Gillborn described these as a 'pathological analysis' (1998: 731) which interestingly, he argued were also applied to issues of race.

Turning attention to the literature which argued that educational outcomes were influenced by race, early work by Troyna (1982) reported that black pupils' low academic performance was causally related to schools' failure to develop positive identities amongst these pupils. Troyna also analysed various government policies and concluded that some were 'underpinned and sustained by racist assumptions and a belief in cultural superiority' (1982: 132). Interestingly, Troyna explicitly considered the role of parents and he concluded that their views were largely ignored and that policy was devised along 'racially inexplicit lines' (1982: 128). Strikingly, almost two decades later Crozier (2001) raised similar arguments describing government policy as a 'one size fits all' (2001: 229) approach, which ignored qualitative differences and complexities which ethnic minority children and families experienced. Focusing specifically on the views of African-Caribbean families, Crozier (2001) argued that their main concern was how racism was resulting in their children's underachievement and behaviour issues. In an approach similar to that adopted by this study, Crozier (*ibid*) then analysed how the same issue was presented in government narratives and stated that these also reported 'that whilst African-Caribbean children often enter primary school academically ahead of their white peers, when they leave they are far behind'(2001:330). Unfortunately for this study's

focus, Crozier's discussion did not explore in any greater depth, how the parents' perspectives were related to these government narratives. Gillborn's (1997) work had also considered the experiences of African-Caribbean children, reporting their higher rates of expulsion and lower rates of examination success. Further to this Gillborn (1998) argued for the need to take regard of race as a particular form of disadvantage, by quoting national UK statistics which showed minority communities having a higher incidence of factors usually associated with disadvantage, such as being in receipt of benefits, workers in low paid employment and lone-parent families. More recently, Gillborn (2014) argued that in order to understand how race issues acted in excluding and marginalising children and families from different races, it was necessary to undertake 'race-specific analyses' (2014: 27). In an example of this type of analysis, Gillborn considered the examination performance of different groups of children following the introduction of the English Baccalaureate and concluded that this had resulted in the 'redefining as failures [of] more than 80% of previously "successful" black students of Caribbean ethnic heritage' (Gillborn, 2014: 27).

Overall, the literature which argued that issues of race led to poorer educational outcomes, adopted similar arguments to the literature considered earlier related to issues of class. These arguments were that through a lack of recognition of parents' and children's identities, in this case related to race, the parents were excluded and marginalised and as a result their children attained poorer outcomes. Within the literature it was also common to find authors making reference to issues of gender using similar arguments. An example of this was Gillborn's (1998) work quoted earlier, in which he argued that minority communities also experienced other forms of disadvantage through policies' gendered arguments.

Studies which argued that educational disadvantage resulted from decontextualized gendered discourses, provided further literature which was polemical and challenged government narratives. An example of this was Reay's (1996) critique of policy makers' view and portrayal of choice as a gender-neutral activity. Crozier (1999) extended this argument, by arguing that expectations that parents should become more involved in schools and schooling of their children, ignored constraints related to gendered issues. Both studies concluded that these gendered constraints were having a disproportionately

negative impact on lone parent families. They based their conclusions on the argument that these were families where statistically, it would be more likely that there would be a female lone parent and the family would be experiencing disadvantage. Whilst the majority of literature which focused on issues of gender did so through the lens of female lone parents and how their material disadvantages affected their children's chances of success at school, there were also studies that focused directly on gendered analyses of children's outcomes. A very recent example was Gillborn's (2016) analysis of IQ test results which showed that adopting a single pass grade, would have resulted in more girls being assigned a high IQ score than boys. Gillborn argued that in order to preserve the equal representation of both sexes the scores were 'deliberately manipulated to favour some students over others' (2016: 380). Overall, literature which argued that issues of gender were relevant when considering children's outcomes, focused their arguments on critiquing government policies. In particular, they argued that policies which ignored issues of gender acted to marginalise and exclude these families to the detriment of children's outcomes. This brief analysis of literature focused on gender reinforced the notion that it adopted arguments also used by the literature focused on class and race.

In concluding this analysis of studies, it was relevant to consider how issues of class, race and gender may have been mediated through one another. This was because this study's school served a disadvantaged community where the population was composed largely of working class single parents including ones from newly settled migrant communities. The literature recognised this issue through notions of intersectionality (Reay, 1998; Gillborn, 2010a; Gillborn, 2010b; Gillborn, 2014) which argued that when families experienced more than one form disadvantage, each added to the other's complexities and challenges. Importantly the literature was clear that intersectionality resulted in new and interrelated contexts of disadvantage which could only be analysed and understood through context specific studies. Crucially for this study, the implication of this argument was that potentially parental views and perspectives would be contingent on issues of class, race and gender and, in addition, more complex intersectional relationships of each of these contexts.

In conclusion, this review of the three broad assumptions underlying discourses about educational outcomes, revealed literature which was contrasting and varied. Despite this, there was one common theme which was of particular significance to the focus of this study. This was that irrespective of whether the literature assumed hereditary explanations (section 2.4.1), the existence of pragmatic strategies which would improve disadvantaged children's outcomes (section 2.4.2), or that disadvantage acted as an insurmountable barrier (section 2.4.3), all the authors adopted examination performance, as the normative standard by which to reach evaluative judgements. Another commonality was that the literature in sections 2.4.2 and 2.4.3, adopted notions of marginalisation and exclusion as the mechanisms through which children's outcomes were argued to be affected. This assumption arguably conflated the different forms of disadvantage by presuming that they all affected agents in the same way. This was particularly evident in relation to the literature not differentiating between material poverty, social exclusion and the different forms of disadvantage. In contrast, this study aimed to ensure that parents could express their views about their contexts and schooling issues, and so through this ensure the heterogeneity of their contexts was foregrounded. In order to achieve this it was important to explore the literature which was specifically focused on the nature of disadvantage, poverty and deprivation.

2.5 Disadvantage, poverty and deprivation

Even cursory reviews of literature on disadvantage and poverty, highlighted the influence of Townsend's (1979) rejection of narrowly focused measures of poverty and his emphasis on inequality and relative deprivation. He argued that families experienced this through styles of living which they were prompted to conform to, but were unable to choose to follow because of limited resources. Adopting this premise led to a focus on the constraints which conditioned families' actual choices.

2.5.1. Choice and constraint

Piachaud (1987) although conceding that it was not possible to arrive at an absolute measure of poverty, argued for three aspects to be considered: social consensus, budget standards and behavioural choices. Unfortunately his work gave little indication as to how to distinguish choices motivated by preferences from those resultant from constraint due to deprivation. Sen (1980) on the other hand, provided greater focus on this area in two ways. He questioned whether a simple focus on resources was adequate in measuring people's equality and wellbeing (Sen, 1985:28):

A person's well-being is not really a matter of how rich he or she is ...
Commodity command is a means to the end of well-being, but can scarcely
be the end itself.

In addition in his work, known as the capability approach (Sen, 2009; Sarojini-Hart, 2013), Sen considered the issue of choice and constraint and introduced the concept of adaptive preference. This was argued to affect people who suffered levels of deprivation who would, after a while, modify or depress their choices or desires to match their situations (Unterhalter, 2003; Goerne, 2009; Deneulin and McGregor 2010; Sarojini-Hart, 2013). The relevance of this, was the possibility that views expressed by this study's parents may have been due to them having modified their preferences and expectations in response to deprivation. More practical evidence of this, was to be found in a report by Lawton and Platt (2010:14) when they concluded:

In the evidence we present in this report, it is very difficult to ascertain the extent to which genuine and informed free choice is driving exclusion and inequality. The patterns of inequality and exclusion that we uncover in this report suggest that the primary drivers are related to factors like income, discrimination and education.

Their report focused on inequalities and exclusion in accessing a number of services. Overall, these perspectives implied that there may have been myriad dimensions of disadvantage and deprivation (Tomlinson *et al.*, 2008) which the parents in this case study

may have been experiencing and so it was important to analyse the nature and implications of multi-dimensional poverty.

2.5.2. Multi-dimensionality of poverty and social exclusion

A focus on the multi-dimensional nature of poverty was provided by Bradshaw and Finch (2003) who stated (2003:523-524):

We have found that the more dimensions that people are poor on, the more unlike the non-poor and the poor on only one dimension they are – in their characteristics and in their social exclusion.

Significantly, Bradshaw and Finch (*ibid*) linked multiple forms of poverty directly to social exclusion. The implication for this study being that if the participant families were experiencing multiple levels of poverty this was likely to further impact on their exclusion. Saunders and Adelman (2006) also focused specifically on circumstances where families experienced multiple forms of poverty and deprivation, and argued for a recognition of the heterogeneity of exclusion. In their analysis they concluded that lone-parent households ranked highest in relation to a variety of forms of exclusion, claiming that ‘exclusion among British lone parents is close to five times the national rate’ (Saunders and Adelman, 2006: 573). This reinforced the arguments raised by Gillborn, (1998, 2008) considered earlier in section 2.4.3, which argued that single parent families experienced higher levels of disadvantage. The relevance to this study, was that many of the families involved would be single parent families with reduced work opportunities because of their child care responsibilities. Additionally, dependent on the number of children and their relative ages, this could be a situation of recurrent poverty which the families faced which in turn was likely to have prolonged their period of deprivation and social exclusion. This was an area considered by Tomlinson *et al.*, (2008) and Tomlinson and Walker (2010: 4) who concluded:

However, almost irrespective of the dimension of poverty considered, four groups appeared to be particularly prone to suffer recurrent poverty. These were:

- people with limited education;
- skilled manual and lower-skilled workers;
- single parents;
- unemployed people and people who are economically inactive.

The parents involved in this case study were likely to belong to one or more of the groups above and so potentially be exposed to recurrent poverty. Finally, this situation may have been exacerbated, as argued by Save the Children (2012), by low-income families being affected disproportionately by both the recession and the Government's austerity measures. Brewer *et al.*, (2011) argued that over the next decade the UK would witness a sustained increase in child poverty and that the Government's changes to taxes and benefits would put an additional 200,000 children into poverty by 2015/16.

2.6 Summary

This chapter has argued that there exists an extensive literature which recognises that children experiencing disadvantage were far more likely to achieve poorer educational outcomes. Irrespective of the approach adopted, or the assumptions which premised studies, they concurred that the link had persisted for at least the past half century. The review highlighted that both academic literature and political intervention, had largely ignored parents' views and voices. Even when writers did focus on parents' views, they began by identifying the issues which they as researchers felt were relevant to the parents. This was arguably most acute when issues of social exclusion were investigated and discussed because, even within this approach, parents' perspectives were afforded scant attention. Moreover, in studies which adopted critical and polemical perspectives, it was common to find that the authors fell foul of their own criticisms of government policy, through adopting hegemonic acceptance of performativity measures as normative standards by which to evaluate successes. In doing so, they assumed that these same evaluative norms were the ones which parents would necessarily value. Finally, the chapter analysed how the literature argued that disadvantage, poverty and deprivation, were multi-dimensional in nature, constraining choice and so led to social exclusion.

Overall, this literature emphasised the complex social, political and material circumstances which surrounded this study's parents and their children. Authors' arguments would inform the analysis of the parents' views and also helped to underline the need for this study to ensure that the participant parents were allowed to identify which aspects, if any, of their contexts they regarded as relevant. The study had an obligation to develop a methodology which would emphasise the centrality of parents' perspectives and constructed meanings (Freire, 1970; Mertens, 2010; Crozier, 2003). To achieve this, required a methodology which had the plurality of parents' circumstances and experiences as its object of study. In addition, that issues such as disadvantage, would be considered only if parents' views raised these and not because as researcher, I viewed them as relevant. Importantly in order to then explore the extent to which there was a relationship between parents' views and government discourses (the study's second question), it would be necessary to explore the literature related to government discourses which was the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 3 Literature focused on government discourses

3.1 Overview

This chapter analyses literature relevant to this study's second question, namely the extent to which there is a relationship between parents' views and government discourses. Chapter 2 underlined the challenge presented by the lack of studies designed to allow parents to identify issues they felt were important to them. Consequently, there was an even greater lack of studies that then explored how these same issues were represented through government discourses. The approach adopted in this chapter to overcome this challenge, is to review the wider literature related to government discourses about schooling and through this, maintain a specific focus on studies' representations of parents' roles and views. The review highlights the significance of the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) and the resulting 'neoliberal' marketized school system. The chapter offers a definition of 'neoliberalism' as well as identifying and analysing four assumptions inherent in its discourses about schooling. The first two assumptions are about performativity measures and agency, whilst the third is that a marketized system will deliver better outcomes for all children. Lastly, the discussion analyses the form of social justice implied by neoliberal discourses, situating this within alternative conceptions of justice.

3.2 Birth of the school market-place

Many commentators argued that the ERA created a school market-place driven by parental choice which led to competition between schools (Bagley, 1996; David, 1997; Ball and Vincent, 1998; Gillborn, 1997; Adnett and Davies, 1999; Gewirtz, 2000; Rowe, 2000; Wilson, 2011; Machin, and Silva, 2013; Sarojini Hart, 2013; Reay 2017). Authors argued that this was enacted through empowering parents to choose a school for their child, which in turn developed competition between schools focused on which could attract the most children. The economic or market metaphor, arose from the fact that schools would be funded according to the number of children they had attracted; in simple terms more children more funding. The corollary of this model, was that unpopular

schools would attract fewer children and so receive less funding. As would be the case for any commercial market environment, this would expose these less popular schools to potential closure. Importantly, some commentators (Bagley, 1996; Marginson, 1997; Adnett and Davies, 1999; Ranson, 2011; Wilson, 2011) qualified the extent of influence of market forces by arguing that a marketized school system, operated more as a ‘quasi-market’ in that many aspects of the market *inter alia* curriculum, level of funding and importantly accountability measures, were still controlled by central government.

The importance of the role played by accountability measures within the marketized school system was stressed by the literature (Ball and Vincent, 1998; Gillborn, 1997; Adnett and Davies, 1999; Gewirtz, 2000; Rowe, 2000; Wilson, 2011). In particular, authors underlined that political rhetoric argued that it would be through parents accessing the results of the accountability measures that they would be able to act as informed consumers, which in turn would result in higher standards for all children (Bagley, 1996; David, 1997; Ball and Vincent, 1998; Gillborn 1997). The higher standards, according to the rhetoric, would result from schools responding to the pressure to improve in order to demonstrate that they offered the ‘best product’ and so attract as many children as possible. Successive governments, through to the present day, have brought about changes to this competitive education market, but all have maintained its fundamental ‘neoliberal’ ideology and assumptions as analysed in this chapter.

3.3 Identifying a definition of ‘neoliberalism’

Many commentators argued that the development of a competitive market of schools was driven by a ‘neoliberal’ ideology (Barker, 2010, 2012; Lupton, 2011; Mansell, 2011; Raffo, 2011; Hatcher, 2012; Lingard and Sellar, 2012; Sarojini Hart, 2013; Kulz, 2015; Reay, 2017). These authors’ analysis of the workings and implications of the marketized school system in England since the ERA of 1988, were best captured by Venugopal’s definition of neoliberalism which was the one adopted by this study:

it is an agenda that promotes not just the withdrawal of the state from market regulation, but the establishment of market-friendly mechanisms and

incentives to organize a wide range of economic, social and political activity. As extension, it is often used as shorthand to describe any logic of organization in which the market has a significant role, or in which individual economic incentives or an economic rationality prevail (Venugopal, 2015: 172).

Applying this definition to the marketized school system, implied that the market itself regulated the schools, in other words market forces would ensure that only the most ‘successful’ schools would continue to exist. In this market it was possible to have ‘the withdrawal of the state’ as a regulatory force because ‘market-friendly mechanisms and incentives’ would provide the ‘economic rationality’ of schools through which those that provided a ‘poor’ service would not attract parents and close down. Within this model, the role of active ‘consumers’ was vital and as Venugopal (*ibid*) argued, their actions could be understood in terms of ‘rational choice-based behaviour’ (*ibid*: 172). This type of behaviour could be summarised as agents choosing between alternatives on the basis of which of the alternatives would give them the best outcome (Burns and Roszkowska, 2016). Importantly this notion presumed that the agent knew all the available alternatives and assigned some level of value to them in order to choose the best one for them. Overall, this study accepted the premise that government discourses were based on an ideology of neoliberalism. It followed therefore that by analysing neoliberalism’s assumptions about parents’ roles and views, would also reveal the assumptions government discourses made about parents and their roles.

3.4 The assumptions neoliberal government discourses make about parents’ views, roles and behaviours

A number of authors have analysed successive governments’ neoliberal education policies since the ERA of 1988, and identified assumptions about the workings of the market place and specifically what this implied about parents (Barker, 2010; Gunter and Fitzgerald, 2011, 2012; Raffo, 2011; Mansell, 2011; Wright, 2011; Lupton, 2011;

Hoskins, 2012; Hatcher, 2012; Lingard and Sellar, 2012; Reay, 2017). From these analyses, the following four assumptions were the most relevant to this study's focus on parents views' and how these were related to government discourses:

1. All parents value performativity measures;
2. All parents have equal access to information, and equity in using this when choosing schools;
3. A marketized school system will be self-regulating and result in effective schools which overcome disadvantage and improve life chances for all children;
4. Improvements as measured by performativity measures, equate to improved social justice.

The remainder of this chapter reviewed the literature related to each of these assumptions.

3.4.1. Analysing the assumption that all parents value performativity measures equally

A central tenet of neoliberal ideology as it applied to schools, was that performativity measures would be valued by all parents regardless of their personal, social or cultural contexts. This was argued to be an assumption, because the measures were not modified or contingent on parental contexts or views, therefore necessarily assumed that all parents, regardless of their circumstances, would value the measures equally. Burns and Roszkowska's argument that 'within the market, choices were made according to their importance and value' (2016:196) supported the contention that the options available to parents had an intrinsic value which was independent of the agent's circumstances. Inherent in this ideology, was the assumption that the information yielded, would be relevant and of value to all parents. Gewirtz underlined this by reporting on the investment made in support of the assumption that the measures were of value to all parents:

A significant proportion of the national budget for education is being spent by the government on monitoring the quality of schools and by schools on

demonstrating the quality of the services they provide both to the bodies that regulate them and to their consumers (Gewirtz, 2000:352).

The paucity of studies focused specifically on the value parents placed on performativity measures, meant it was not possible to explore authors' standpoints on the assumption that all parents valued the measures. Studies such as Allen and Burgess' (2011) for instance, focused on the comprehensibility of measures and were critical of their usefulness for parental choice of school. However, their study did not consider whether or not parents valued the measures. Widening the review of literature did identify studies which considered the value parents placed on other aspects of schooling such as choice, relationships with schools and parental involvement. Whilst some of this literature was quoted in chapter 2 as arguing that parents' values and views in relation to these aspects, were contingent on their contexts and circumstances, the specific focus in this section was on exploring what implications this had for the neoliberal assumption that all parents valued the measures.

Numerous studies confirmed a consistency in findings which underlined that parents' values and beliefs in relation to various aspects of schooling, were delineated along contexts of disadvantage, class, race and gender (Bowe, *et al.*, 1994; Bagley, 1996; Reay, 1996; Conway, 1997; David, 1997; Shumow, 1997; Ball and Vincent, 1998; Gorman, 1998; Lareau and McNamara, 1999; Gewirtz 2000; Borg and Mayo, 2001; Vincent, 2001; Rätty and Kasanen, 2007; Crozier, 1999, 2001, 2003; Crozier *et al.*, 2008). From this literature, two studies were analysed in greater depth, because they typified the discourses within the literature and because, in line with my study, they adopted interpretive case study approaches.

The first study, by Reay (1996), was critical of official views of parental choice which were divorced from the parents' social and economic contexts. Reay described public policy discourses as 'rhetorical devices' which concealed intentions through which, in the context of schooling, inequalities and disadvantages were maintained. Her argument therefore was that parental choice should be interpreted through issues of class, race and gender and not be regarded as 'deficient [because] ... it deviates from government sponsored norms' (Reay, 1996:594). Reay amplified her claim by arguing that working

class parents were involved in a ‘qualitatively different’ (*ibid*: 594) process to middle-class parents when it came to choice making. In relation to this section’s focus of analysing the assumption that all parents placed the same value on government performativity measures, Reay’s argument (in line with the other authors quoted) provided a number of useful insights. These included that in relation to choice, there were differences between middle-class and working-class processes and these were also influenced by race and gender. This study inferred from this that there could be differences in the values and beliefs that the participant parents held in relation to performativity measures, and that these differences could be mediated through the levels of disadvantage experienced by the parents. The second insight, was that Reay’s argument implied that through these ‘qualitatively different’ choice processes, working-class parents experienced at least some degree of social exclusion, in this case, from active choice of school. This echoed the literature considered in Chapter 2, which argued that poverty and disadvantage led to different forms of social exclusion. In the context of this study, this might be expressed through parents feeling alienated and excluded from various aspects of the marketized system such as choice or performativity measures. The third insight from Reay’s argument, was that she adopted the phrase ‘unintended implication’ (*ibid*: 594) which arguably posited that if this social exclusion did occur, it was not as a result of an overt aim of government discourses about choice, but instead a consequential one. This ‘unintentionality’ was worthy of further consideration, not least of all because Reay herself ended her study by making a claim which arguably, at least in part, contradicted this notion, through claiming ‘the ‘choice’ of official discourses operated as a rhetoric of justification for social inequalities’ (Reay, 1996: 594). The potential contradiction was in Reay’s use of the term ‘choice’ which implied an intentional rather unintentional act. Overall, Reay’s work typified the literature’s arguments that parents’ values were contingent on their circumstances and through government discourses ignoring these differences, parents and children experiencing disadvantage were further excluded and marginalised from the workings of the market.

Crozier’s (1999) study was the second chosen for analysis, and adopted an approach closer to that of this study in that it investigated the views of working class parents. Whilst the parents’ views were sought in relation to their involvement with their children’s

secondary school and so, once again, not directly focused on the assumption analysed in this section, the study was relevant because it reported very clearly on the marked differences between working-class and middle-class parents' views and values, reinforcing Reay's (1996) argument. Crozier (*op.cit.*) reported that working class parents felt a sense of detachment from school but usefully, Crozier then focused on the causes of this detachment. Her conclusions were that because schooling took no account of parents' different contexts and developed approaches which were 'constructed essentially from a logocentric position' (Crozier, 1999: 315), this alienated parents. In addition Crozier argued that this reinforced the hierarchy of positions which positioned schools 'as the powerful knower which thus reinforces working-class parents' fatalistic view of schooling and their role as passive' (*ibid*). Arguably even more poignantly, Crozier went on to argue that whilst teachers argued that they employed approaches aimed at involving all parents, they did this 'on their own terms' (Crozier, 1999: 327). Returning to Reay's (1996) argument raised earlier about intentionality, it could be argued that Crozier's analysis implied a far more overtly intentional approach. Reinforcing Crozier's argument of intentionality, were Gillborn's studies (1997; 1998; 2010a; 2010b; 2010c; 2014; 2016), some of which were reviewed in the last chapter. Whilst these studies were not directly focused on parents' values, in common with Crozier (*op.cit.*), Gillborn adopted a socially critical stance which assigned an intentionality to official discourses. This intentionality was argued to alienate parents experiencing disadvantage.

Overall, the literature demonstrated that there existed qualitative differences between parents' views and values, about choice of school and relationships with schools. The literature argued that these differences were contingent on issues of class and more generally on the levels of disadvantage experienced by the parents. In addition that there were political premises within education policy and schooling, which favoured those parents least exposed to disadvantage. The literature therefore provided a view which did not support the assumption that all parents would value performativity measures equally. In other words it was likely that parents' views of these measures would be contingent upon the level of disadvantage they experienced which in turn raised questions about their equity in a neoliberal marketplace of schools.

3.4.2. Assumptions about parents' equity in the marketplace

The second assumption implicit in government neoliberal ideology was related to parents' equity. This was an assumption that all parents experienced equity in accessing and using the information they needed. This presumed that all parents knew where to find the information, understood it and had the skills, knowledge and resources needed to interpret it in order to choose between alternative schools. Furthermore this also assumed that all parents had agency over applying for the school place and any further actions required to secure a place for their child. Returning again to Burns and Roszkowska, (2006), they put this as 'the actor is assumed to know all available alternatives, and chooses the best action or means to achieve her ends' (Burns and Roszkowska, 2016:196).

Analysing this assumption through reviewing the literature, revealed that authors' findings were synonymous with their arguments relating to parents' views and values as discussed in the previous section. Much of this literature therefore, focused on how social class and disadvantage impacted on parents' ability to act successfully as consumers in the marketplace (Ball and Vincent, 1998; Bowe et.al., 1994; Gewirtz *et al.*, 1995; Conway, 1997; Reay, 1996, 2017; Crozier, 1999; Vincent, 2001; Rätty and Kasanen, 2007; Crozier *et al.*, 2008). In particular, Rätty and Kasanen's (2007) study was relevant because it focused on parents' predisposition towards the process of school choice. The authors reported that it was primarily academically educated mothers who were most predisposed to becoming actively involved in comparing and choosing schools. This issue was also considered by Gewirtz *et al.*, (1995) in their three year analysis of parental choice of schools in three London LAs. The authors found little evidence of equity across groups of parents. They proposed three different levels of parental engagement with the process of choice: 'privileged/skilled choosers', 'semi-skilled choosers' and 'the disconnected'. The conclusion the authors drew, was that the application of market forces as a process of social engagement had certain inherent values, which were likely to favour the advantaged to the detriment of the disadvantaged. Through social networks, some parents were argued to enjoy greater agency than others, therefore calling into question the level of equity which existed amongst different groups of parents when operating as consumers

in the education market place. Ball and Vincent (1998) focused specifically on the nature of these social networks, through which they argued ‘grapevine knowledge’ (*ibid*: 377) was shared. They adopted the categories developed by Gewirtz *et al.*, (1995) and they described the ‘privileged/skilled chooser’ parents as ‘almost all middle-class parents who go to considerable lengths to maximise their market information’ (Ball and Vincent, 1998: 382). Specifically in relation to accessing the kind of information needed by parents to help them make choices, Ball and Vincent (1998) referred to the very formal nature of data such as exam results, league table positions and Ofsted reports, and how this type of information was less useful and accessible for working class and disadvantaged parents. Further support for the notion of disadvantaged parents experiencing added levels of exclusion from the workings of the marketplace of schools, came from Thomson’s (2002) political, social and economic analysis of schools serving disadvantaged communities. In this analysis she described how less advantaged, less qualified and less affluent parents, were far less likely to search for what were considered to be better schools. Her argument was that as a result these parents were far less likely to move their children to ‘better’ performing schools.

In conclusion, studies highlighted that some parents had the confidence and access to information and resources, which supported them in being able to exercise their parental choice in the ever more complex marketplace of schools. In contrast, the position of other parents, was marked by exclusion, alienation and distance from the types of information, how to access it and the resources and abilities to be able to act in response to it. Overall, the literature questioned the assumption that choice of school was equitable across all parental contexts and circumstances. Based on this lack of equity, it was relevant to question the extent to which parental choice could act as the market pressure through which school improvement could be achieved, and importantly through which all children could benefit from improved outcomes.

3.4.3. Analysing the assumption that the marketized system could deliver improved outcomes for all children

Continuing the analysis of the market ideology, neoliberal rhetoric affirmed that as a result of competition driven by parental choice, schools would either improve or close; either way all children would attend good schools or at least schools which were improving. This assumption was based on rhetoric that argued that state regulatory mechanisms aimed at improving public services, were not required and that instead ‘market-friendly mechanism’ would give rise to ‘economic rationality’ (Venugopal, 2015; 172). Through these economic pressures, poorly performing schools would be removed from the market place and so lead to an overall improvement in the quality of schools available to parents.

At the outset, the analysis of this assumption needed to be considered in the context of the persistence of poor educational outcomes for disadvantaged children, as analysed in Chapter 2. That analysis evidenced the persistence of poor outcomes for disadvantaged children for at least the past half century, all the way through to the present day. Significantly therefore, many commentators questioned the ability of the marketplace to deliver better schools and so outcomes for all children (Oplatka, 2004; Gunter and Fitzgerald, 2011, 2012; Raffo, 2011; Mansell, 2011; Wright, 2011; Lupton, 2011; Hoskins, 2012; Hatcher, 2012; Lingard and Sellar, 2012; Reay, 2017). Their contention was that the market had not delivered better outcomes for disadvantaged children and that a combination of government driven accountability measures, which homogenised parents by ignoring issues of disadvantage, coupled with a lack of equity which these parents experienced in relation to acting as consumers of education, was leading to a potential polarization of schools with the formation of ‘sink’ schools.

This concept of schools potentially becoming ‘sink’ schools was reinforced by case studies of schools serving disadvantaged communities. Thomson (2002) wrote about her experiences of schools serving disadvantaged communities in Australia. In her analysis, she argued that the combination of selection, national and local utilitarian accountability measures alongside differential levels of affluence and disadvantage, led to certain schools having larger proportions of less academically-able children. This had the effect

of depressing the performance of these schools, which in turn reinforced their ‘bad reputation’, initiating a cyclical pattern of failure. This argument echoed some of my personal professional experiences reported in Chapter 1 of this study. Similarly, Parsons (2012) in his passionate biography of The Ramsgate School in Kent, described how it was twice listed as the ‘worst school in England’ (Parsons, 2012: 39). Parsons described a cycle of events analogous to those described by Thomson (2002). Certainly this led to a worsening of the reputation of this school, and as a result, various interventions, structural changes and injections of funding were instigated. These led to sporadic, short lived and limited periods of improved examination results and Ofsted judgements; none of which were sustained (Parsons, *op.cit.*). Directly relevant to the focus of this section, was that Parsons underlined that the journey of this school was not unique arguing that it was ‘but one example of the estimated 100 plus secondary schools’ which at the time were facing similar challenges. The significance of this was that this implied that market forces alone were not delivering the improved outcomes which neoliberalism presumed they would. Both Thomson’s (2002) and Parson’s (2012) work echoed Rätty and Kasanen’s (2007) conclusion that parents, with the least agency, would be least likely to act as consumers.

Arguably, in response to consumer forces alone not delivering improved outcomes for all children, the New Labour Government elected in 1997 adopted a more interventionist stance (Barker, 2010; Mansell, 2011; Wilson, 2011; Wright, 2011). Wilson (*op.cit.*) for instance argued that ‘Labour launched an attack on low state school standards, adopting a zero tolerance of underperformance’ (2011:1). Further to this, Wilson focused specifically on the significance of New Labour’s interventionist stance which, it was argued, marked a deviation from the neoliberal principles of allowing the market to self-regulate. In other words this altered approach by New Labour signalled an altered assumption in relation to the ‘market-friendly mechanism’ and ‘withdrawal of the state from market regulation’ (Venugopal, 2015; 172). The change was characterised by actively closing schools judged to be failing and re-opening them as new academies. Underlining the extent to which New Labour intervened in the market, Wilson (2011) and Machin and Silva (2013) pointed to the academies programme starting in 2002 and how these schools were given greater freedoms from local authority control, enjoyed large

injections of funding, new buildings and greater flexibilities over staffing, curriculum and admissions. It was not relevant to provide a more detailed account of this policy initiative within the focus of this section, but it sufficed to focus on what impact these academies had on improving outcomes for disadvantaged children. The relevance was that focusing on their impact would help to analyse how far this more interventionist political stance, resulted in improving outcomes for all children which was the assumption under review in this section.

To begin with, it was important to underline that the creation of these academies did in one sense advance the notion of parents acting as consumers. This was because the parents now had alternative choices of schools to choose from; schools controlled by their local authority or more independent academies. In other words, this widening of choice for parents, further promoted the ideology of a market place of schools. However, as already argued, it also marked an increase in state intervention. In the case of the Ramsgate School for instance, this was closed and re-opened as an academy and eventually closed again (Parsons 2012). Importantly Parsons underlined that whichever guise the school was in, it continued to serve the same community, with its complex and long lasting disadvantages.

Whilst Parsons provided an in depth analysis of one school, Wilson's (2011) review focused on the 203 Academies which were opened between 2002 and 2010. The aim of the study was to establish the value of the academies' model of school improvement, which saw direct government intervention through closing 'failing' schools. Overall, the conclusions drawn by Wilson undermined the assumption that markets, including diversified markets supported by more interventionist government strategies, would deliver better outcomes for disadvantaged children. Significantly, Wilson argued that the findings suggested 'a relative rise in stratification within the schooling system compared to that which went before, implying a worsening of education inequality' (Wilson, 2011 – executive summary). This concept of stratification was of particular concern to some commentators because it implied a potential worsening of social exclusion (Raffo, 2011; Ball, 2013). In other words, Wilson's findings were not implying that academies had not improved outcomes for any children, but that the inequality between advantaged and

disadvantaged had been further exacerbated. Machin and Silva (2013) undertook a similar review of academies' impacts through a combined literature review and quantitative analysis of GCSE results. They concluded that there 'was little evidence that academies helped pupils in the bottom 10% and 20% of the ability distribution' (Machin and Silva 2013: abstract). This evidence typified arguments in the literature that academies had led to a further worsening, in relative terms, of outcomes for disadvantaged students.

Overall, the literature presented in this analysis did not support the assumption that market forces alone would improve outcomes for the most disadvantaged children. Neither was this assumption regarded as more credible following highly interventionist government strategies designed to diversify the types of schools available for parents and closing those deemed to be underperforming. Some authors (Harris and Ranson, 2005) argued that simply diversifying and increasing choice would not deliver the social justice that policy makers and professionals in education sought. Harris and Ranson (*ibid*) clarified the form of social justice they envisaged by describing that it should respond to disadvantaged communities' needs as opposed to simply relying on an ideology of market forces. The type of social justice assumed by neoliberalism was the focus of the last section in this chapter.

3.4.4. Analysing the form of social justice implied by the market and situating this in alternative notions of social justice

Authors' analysis of neoliberal policies and discourses highlighted that across successive governments policies were consistently underpinned by a particular perspective of social justice (Barker, 2010; Gunter and Fitzgerald, 2011). This perspective was that social justice, for disadvantaged children in particular, could be improved by devising and implementing more effective structural and organisational aspects of schooling. In addition this perspective assumed that the improved levels of social justice would be measurable through performativity measures (Lupton, 2011; Mansell, 2011; Hoskins, 2012). A brief overview of successive governments' strategies and rhetoric sufficed to demonstrate these perspectives.

New Labour's phrase of 'zero tolerance' towards underachievement, quoted earlier in this chapter, coupled with their overtly interventionist approach in closing schools and reopening them as academies, underlined their assumption that structural changes could lead to social justice. In addition this was further reinforced by the structural, organisational and curricular freedoms New Labour introduced for the new academies. Furthermore, the changes' moral purpose was emphasised through, for instance, a review of the academies programme which included a statement that academies should end 'the cycle of underachievement and low aspirations in areas of deprivation with historical low performance' (Wilson, 2011: 14). Following on from this, New Labour's 2002 implementation of a new National Curriculum detailed that education should promote 'equality of opportunity for all,...[and] ...reaffirm our commitment to the virtues of truth, justice, honesty, trust and a sense of duty' (The National Curriculum, 1999: 10). The election of the new Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition in 2010, saw a continuation of strategies focused on structural and organizational changes justified through a rhetoric of improving social justice for, in particular, disadvantaged children. The policy of introducing Free Schools for instance, was justified by claiming that they would increase parental choice 'and raise standards for all young people'³ Following on from this, the Coalition Government introduced the English Baccalaureate with the Prime Minister stating (Cameron, 2011):

I am disgusted by the idea that we should aim for any less for a child from a poor background than a rich one. I have contempt for the notion that we should accept narrower horizons for a black child than a white one.

Overall, even this brief analysis of successive governments' efforts in relation to social justice, demonstrated that rhetoric and action were largely focused on structural and organisational changes, with a concomitant belief that performativity measures would evidence the improved levels of social justice. In contrast a number of authors were sceptical about social justice being evaluated through structural changes. However, analysing these authors' contentions further, evidenced that whilst they were critical of

³ Michael Gove Secretary of State for Education. Written ministerial statement relating to new Free School proposals. 06.09.2010

political focus on structural and organizational changes, their arguments also embodied a congruence with governments' stance that social justice could be measured through performativity measures. Both the area of contrast and congruence were worthy of further analysis in order to explore the form of social justice implied by political rhetoric and the academic literature.

Focusing initially on the areas of contrast, Gewirtz (2006) demonstrated this through her argument that social justice should be 'understood in relation to particular contexts of enactment' (Gewirtz, 2006: 69). In other words focus should be less on what policy, approach or rhetoric was adopted, and more on the children's actual outcomes. A similar focus was provided by Gillborn (2010c) when he argued that levels of social justice should be judged through 'substantive equity, judged by inequalities of outcome' (Gillborn, 2010c: 247). Gillborn's stance (reviewed in section 2.4.3) was further reinforced by his later analysis of the impact of the E.Bacc. (Gillborn, 2014) where his criticism of the initiative was based on comparing the actual examination grades achieved by disadvantaged children with the grades achieved by their less disadvantaged counterparts. Overall, this literature differed from political rhetoric in calling for social justice to be judged through the actual outcomes experienced by disadvantaged children, but concurred with political discourses' use of performativity measures as the norms by which to measure the outcomes. This analysis raised ontological questions about the nature of social justice being implied by political rhetoric and the critics of this rhetoric.

In order to explore the differences between neoliberal notions of social justice and those implied by Gewirtz and Gillborn, Sen's (2009) ontological analysis was useful. Sen offered a view of social justice along a dichotomy between 'transcendental institutionalism' (Sen, 2009:5) and 'realization-focused comparison' (Sen, 2009:7). The former was argued to focus on issues of what perfect justice was, what type of institution would be the most 'just', what form of social contract would be the ideal to deliver justice and what the essence of 'just' was. In contrast, Sen (*ibid*) described 'realization-focused comparison' as approaches which focused on comparing social realizations within societies, actual institutions and actual behaviours. Using Sen's interpretation, neoliberal political notions of social justice were interpreted as being underpinned by a

‘transcendental institutionalism’ approach. This was because the policies were all focused on what type of school (academy, Free School etc.) or what type of curriculum (revisions to National Curriculum, E.Bacc etc.), were the most appropriate to achieve the socially just outcomes espoused by rhetoric. An alternative ‘realization-focused comparison’ approach was closer to the form of social justice being espoused by Gewirtz (2006) and Gillborn (2010c, 2014).

Turning attention to the apparent consensus between authors and neoliberal political rhetoric over the use of performativity measures, it was useful to return to Sen’s (2009) notion of ‘realization-focused comparison’ again. This focused attention on the nature of the outcomes themselves. In other words, if commentators argued that social justice should be judged on the substantive outcomes achieved by children, this raised the question of what should these outcomes be, and linked to this, who should choose these outcomes? Fraser (1996) provided possible answers through her argument that a route to achieving improved social justice for disadvantaged agents was to recognize their values and aims and allow them parity in choosing which of these they wanted to pursue. Returning to Sen’s notion, he argued similarly that social justice could only be truly achieved through individuals’ ‘wellbeing freedom’ (Sen, 1992: 57). This represented individuals’ ability to choose outcomes which they valued and wanted to pursue. Further support for this view of social justice within the context of schools, was found in Barker (2010) and Raffo (2011) who argued for greater participatory roles for parents and children in identifying outcomes which they valued.

In conclusion, neoliberal discourses assumed social justice could be achieved through structural and organizational changes at the meso level of schools and macro level of national policy. Whilst the literature evidenced authors’ criticism of this assumption, few questioned the use of performativity measures as a way of judging the extent to which social justice was achieved for disadvantaged children. In contrast the analysis identified alternative notions which judged social justice through the degree to which disadvantaged agents were able to identify outcomes they valued.

3.5 Summary

This chapter identified the literature's overwhelming consensus, that the ERA of 1988, set in motion a neoliberal market ideology which has underpinned successive governments' discourses, policies and actions, ever since this time. Authors argued that the ideology's inherent assumptions about parents' access and agency were not valid for disadvantaged families. In addition, the literature was critical of the assumption that market forces alone would improve outcomes for disadvantaged children and equally critical of the principles underlying the form of social justice implied by the neoliberal ideology. Their criticisms were related to neoliberalism's focus on creating idealized conditions, organizations and structures, rather than focused on actualised outcomes. The discussion analysed alternative notions of social justice which provided greater scope for parents to overcome exclusion through identifying outcomes which they deemed to be relevant to them and their children's needs.

Overall, concluding the review of literature from Chapter 2 and this current chapter, it was evident that authors consistently posited that mechanisms of exclusion and marginalisation impacted negatively on disadvantaged parents' views, access and agency as consumers in the marketplace of schools. The exclusion was argued to be the result of contrasts and contradictions between disadvantaged parents' identities and the prevailing schooling and political narratives. In turn, as a result of this exclusion, children's outcomes were adversely affected. Much of this literature could be understood through Bernstein's (1973) seminal work, which articulated very clearly that the middle classes had been, and remained, in control of designing schooling and that as a result, the system worked to retain their advantageous position whilst excluding disadvantaged classes. Further to this Bourdieu, (2006) interpreted these advantageous positions as social spaces, which he termed fields, as sites of power struggles, where individuals with the right social, cultural and economic capital and the right habitus would be best suited to operate and be successful. Although Bourdieu was not writing specifically about schools (Lingard *et al.*, 2005), his conception of fields could be applied to neoliberal schooling and his sense of habitus could be understood as the parents' predispositions, values and viewpoints. Both Bernstein's (*op.cit.*) and Bourdieu's (*op.cit.*) work could help to situate the literature

reviewed in both chapters. However, whilst it was important to identify recurring themes and situate the literature, it was equally relevant to take account of the fundamental difference in approach adopted by authors, compared to the approach adopted by this study. The authors reviewed in Chapter 2 and this current chapter, focused their research on specific aspects of schooling and neoliberal narratives, which they as researchers had identified *a priori* and independently of the parents. Through this approach their studies had identified contrasts and contradictions between disadvantaged parents' perspectives and prevailing narratives. In contrast, this study aimed to allow parents to identify the issues they wished to discuss and explore. Furthermore, once these issues had been chosen and discussed by parents, it would be these same issues which would be used to explore government discourses. The lack of studies adopting this approach, underlined both the originality of this thesis, and the methodological challenge it entailed, as analysed and described in the next chapter.

Chapter 4 Methodology

4.1 Overview

This chapter presents the combination of methods adopted by this study. The approach, argued to be original, is reflexive of the need to mitigate the uneven distribution of power between my role as head teacher/researcher and that of the participant parents. The qualitative interpretative methodology adopts a two part inductive approach: the first, focused on accessing parents' views and the second, on exploring the extent to which there is a relationship between parents' views and government discourses. Parents' views are explored through digital ethnography and interviews, whilst government discourses are accessed through speeches. The chapter describes and analyses the three approaches used to explore the parental data; thematic, narrative and critical discourse analysis and the approaches used for the analysis of speeches; quantitative and ethnographic content analysis and critical discourse analysis.

4.2 Assumptions about views and discourses

Inevitably, all academic studies make ontological and epistemological assumptions about the nature of 'reality' and what is regarded as valuable and legitimate knowledge. This study was influenced by notions of the mind's active role in constituting objects of understanding and knowledge. This influenced not only what would be regarded as legitimate views and discourses, but also the process through which these would be collected, in other words the study's strategy, design and methods. The following two sections considered how these notions influenced the assumptions made by this study about parents' views and government discourses.

4.2.1. Assumptions about parents' views

In relation to parents' views, the position adopted was best captured by Popper's explanation of humans' cognition of the world:

Knowledge –episteme- was possible because we are not passive receptors of sense data, but their active digestors. By digesting and assimilating them we form and organize them into a Cosmos, the Universe of Nature (Popper, 1972: 95).

This study adopted the view that the essence of an object whilst existing in time and space, could not be fully known by humans (Curtis and Boulton, 1953; Levine, 1959; Lewis, 1977; Russell, 1961; Blackburn, 1999). In relation to this study, these essences were, for instance, the various government discourses which, in themselves, were meaningless without the human mind perceiving and attributing meaning to them. In contrast, humans could, through the workings of their minds and ordinary understanding, construct and attribute meaning to these discourses. This perspective presented the world as, not simply there for us to experience and react to, but instead as a reality to be processed, packaged and made sense of through the workings of the mind.

This outlook influenced the methodology in adopting an ontology of constructionism and an interpretivist epistemology (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). The former emphasised that the 'objects' were the realities and meanings created by the participant parents, whilst the latter identified parents' views, interpretations and understandings as legitimate knowledge. The study's design aimed to access and collect parents' thoughts, perceptions and feelings, all of which favoured data in the form of words and narratives; namely qualitative data (Curtis and Boulton, 1985; Stake, 1995; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003; Yates, 2004).

In addition, the methods aimed to collect data related to three perspectives which influenced the assumptions made about the parents' views. A phenomenological perspective (Cohen and Mannion, 1985; Richardson, 1999; Bryman, 2004; Yates, 2004; Larsson and Holmström, 2007; Cresswell, 2009) which focused attention on how individual parents understood and gave meaning to an idea (Yates, 2004). In addition

phenomenographic approaches (Marton, 1986; Richardson, 1999; Ashworth and Lucas, 2000; Larsson and Holmström, 2007; Ornek, 2008) aimed at allowing alternative conceptions of ideas and exploring parents' multiple understandings of issues. Finally, whilst phenomenological and phenomenographic perspectives emphasised psychological interpretations and constructions, parents' meanings were also assumed to embody a social dimension. This perspective, influenced by symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Denzin, 1970; Richardson, 1999; Yates, 2004; Larsson and, Holmström 2007; Cresswell, 2009; Carter and Fuller, 2015) viewed parents making sense of reality and forming understandings, through socially negotiated meanings, emphasising that 'meanings emerge from interactions with other individuals and with society' (Carter and Fuller, 2015: 2). This perspective underlined the need for the study's design to allow for parental interaction in order to explore any socially constructed meanings of issues and views. Overall, the design aimed to reflect these perspectives and so 'humanise' (Freire 1970) the parents, rather than simply using them as willing participants in order to generate data.

4.2.2. Assumptions about government discourses

The constructivist outlook influenced a view of discourses as 'objects', which were assumed to only have a reality when they were interpreted by recipients and that these interpretations were epistemologically valid. In this sense, the notion of discourses included a social aspect, because their reality was only actualised through the discourses' makers and recipients. These makers and recipients would necessarily be social agents and so influenced by ideas, ways of thinking, communicating and linked to one another through their social networks. Lupton captured this notion of discourse when she claimed it was 'a group of ideas or patterned way of thinking which can be identified in textual and verbal communications, and can also be located in wider social structures' (Lupton 1992: 145). A more explicit focus of the social aspect of discourse was given by Fairclough and Wodak (1997) through their argument that the language used in discourses conveyed ideology and so had a role in constituting society and culture. This could be interpreted as assigning an interrelated relationship between micro and macro discourses

or as Gee (1999) conceived it, ‘small-d-discourse’ and ‘big-D-discourse’. The former, individuals’ micro language of talk and text, the latter the wider systems of thoughts, assumptions and beliefs of social practices. All these contentions implied a relationship between individuals’ meanings and meanings in political discourses. Phillips described this relationship taking place through ‘macro-processes of social and cultural change’ and ‘micro-processes of everyday language use’ (Phillips 1996: 209). Her argument was that media and the public were influenced by the rhetoric of political discourses, through communications’ repeated use of specific words and phrases. Overall these authors’ positions underlined this study’s social interactionist assumptions, namely that political discourses were interpreted and brought into parents’ understanding through their social contexts. Based on these assumptions, attention was focused on how they influenced the study’s design.

4.3 Overall Design

Chapter 1 stated that the two questions being addressed were:

1. What are parents’ views about schooling?
2. To what extent is there a relationship between parents’ views and government discourses about schooling?

The aims therefore were threefold: firstly accessing parents’ views; secondly identifying the specific government discourses related to the parents’ views; exploring the relationship between the two. In this sense the study was an idiographic study (Yates, 2004) focusing on ‘emic’ issues (Stake, 1995) because the aim was to provide detailed descriptions of the participant parents’ views and explore any relationship between these and government discourses. The starting points, were the parents’ views which guided the analysis of government discourses and subsequently led to interpretations, positioning the thesis as an inductive study. A more deductive approach for instance, would have entailed identifying issues related to schooling and then exploring parents’ views about these and subsequently analysing government discourses based on these views. Whilst this approach was prevalent in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, it was not chosen

because it would have emphasised my role in the initial choice of issues and these of course, may not have been the ones most relevant or of interest to the parents in this study. In relation to government discourses, the aim was to explore how they were related to the specific issues raised by the parents. This approach required a design which addressed the ontological assumptions about parents' views and government discourses, as well as their interrelatedness.

The empirical approach adopted involved collecting the data through two distinct designs. The first was a case study involving parents at my school. The case study had a qualitative 'intrinsic' focus (Stake 1995) exploring the views and understandings of the participant parents, rather than aiming to identify quantifiable generalisations. The second part of the design was based on document analysis aimed at exploring government discourses. This part of the study was inductive in nature, because the analysis of the discourses was carried out using the themes raised by the parents. In other words, the focus was on the extent to which there was a relationship between the parent-identified themes and the government discourses. This approach maintained the study's reflexive focus on foregrounding the parents' voices through each stage of the methods.

Both designs, and the methods they employed, were guided by this study's constructivist interpretive paradigm focused on foregrounding parents' views whilst backgrounding mine. This is shown in the remainder of the chapter which explores methods and ethical issues associated with collecting the parents' views, methods for the document analysis and the analytical tools adopted by each design.

4.4 Part 1 – The paradox in collecting parents' views

The paradox in collecting qualitative data was that whilst this was aimed at recognising parents' heterogeneous identities and views, it also necessitated reflexive analysis over my role. This was because collecting qualitative data through, for instance, me as headteacher/researcher conducting formal interviews, could have resulted in parents expressing views which were contingent and mediated by my role. This was potentially exacerbated by the study's aim of collecting 'thick descriptions' (Stake, 1995) of parents'

views therefore likely to be intensive and personal. The implications of such research have been recognised by Freire (1970) who argued that the role of the researcher inadvertently becomes that of oppressor and as Mertens (2010) argued, this could have the effect of further stigmatising marginalised individuals and communities. These were ethical issues which my study needed to be reflexive over.

The extent of the ethical challenges posed by my dual role and undertaking research in my own school, were underlined in Chapter 1 (section 1.4.1). In practical terms the ethical issues were addressed by implementing an empirical design which included what Rogers (2017) described as ‘unobtrusive methods’. In other words, methods which created a space within which the parents felt able to express and explore their views. This was achieved through implementing a form of digital ethnography aimed at allowing parents the opportunity to raise issues and topics of interest to them, which were subsequently discussed through interviews. It is worth noting that, as explained in Chapter 1, the use of digital ethnography satisfied the university’s ethical criteria regarding my position of power with respect to the parents. However, it raised new ethical challenges because at the time, there had been no previous research submissions which included the collection of views through the use of internet based social media. The details of the specific ethical issues encountered and how each was addressed are included in section 4.5 later in this chapter. Ahead of this in order to identify the context within which the ethical issues arose, the methods, rationale and sampling approaches which gave rise to them, are considered.

4.4.1. Rationale for digital ethnography as a way of creating a space for parents

The rationale for implementing digital ethnography was based on writers’ (Jacob, 1987; Richardson, 1999; Bryman, 2004; Yates, 2004; Cresswell, 2009) arguments that ethnographic approaches were the most effective means by which researchers could get close to where and how participants developed meanings, views and understandings. Moreover, that through ethnographic approaches researchers were able to observe and immerse themselves in the culture and life contexts of the participants in the ‘field’ (Gold,

1958; Wilson, 1977; Jacob, 1987; Hammersley, 2006; Murthy, 2008; Kidd, 2012; Baker, 2013). Importantly for the ethical challenges faced by this thesis, Rogers (2017) and Jowett (2015) argued that the rapid increase in the use of internet based social networking, offered researchers the opportunity to access naturalistic qualitative data whilst reducing researcher influence on the forms of interaction and discourses produced. However, all the forms of ethnographic studies referenced by these writers, were based in settings and groups or 'fields' interconnected by shared cultural, social, geographic or other forms of commonality or interests. In the case of this study, this raised the question of how far the participant parents could be considered a self-contained 'field' which typically ethnographic studies focused on.

The answer to this question lay in the observation that during the eight year period of my headship at the school preceding the empirical part of this study, many parents had regularly used social networking sites (SNS) to set up groups, aimed at discussing decisions and actions taken by the school. Importantly, this was almost exclusively when the parents disagreed with the school, and often resulted in many more parents freely and openly joining the SNS groups to add comments both in favour, as well as against the issues raised. In addition the parents' comments showed their interactions with the issues, their multiple conceptions and how they shaped and altered their views through their online social interactions. All these communications and exchanges potentially enabling phenomenological, phenomenographic and symbolic interactionist interpretations which were described in section 4.2.1, as approaches which influenced this study. In summary this high level of parental agency and autonomy, offered an approach which this study adopted in order to foreground parents' voices.

Based on this experience, and in contrast to arguments that the physical and virtual worlds are markedly different (Hine, 2000), the view was taken that social media offered a legitimate 'field' for ethnographic research. A growing body of literature (Murthy, 2008; Baker, 2013) argued that the internet had become an integral part of agents' social world minimising the dichotomy between the physical and digital worlds. Baker (*ibid*) argued that the social world was mediated by traditional and digital communications, whilst digital ethnographers (Murthy, 2008; Snee, 2008) argued that it could help in

demarginalising the voices of respondents and, within feminist ethnography, allow participants an iterative role and increased agency.

This dual iterative and feminist focus, was considered to be of particular significance for a number of reasons. In the first instance, I had noted that the majority of ‘users’ of the spontaneous parental SNS groups had been mothers and in addition the school had a very high number of single mothers. Being reflexive over my identity as a male head teacher, it was important to choose research methods which increased my participants’ agency, and so arguments such as Murthy’s (2008) and Snee’s (2008) that digital ethnography provided positive female gendered modes of communication, were influential in this study adopting these methods. In addition, the authors’ arguments that an SNS had the potential to act iteratively was again significant, because this was part of the purpose the SNS was due to fulfil in this study. In other words, to act as a tool through which issues could be raised which in turn could inform the next stages of the study.

Further support for the use of digital ethnography, was found in Markham’s (2004) arguments regarding the value of internet based tools in qualitative research because they provided a medium for communication, a global network and a scene of social construction; all three relevant to this study’s empirical aims. In relation to communication, the SNS enabled parents to interact with each other as well as *with* me as a participant and *for* me as an observer. In addition, the SNS would act as a global network through parents using it to post materials to invite comments. Lastly, and this study would argue the most important aspect, the SNS created an environment within which the process of personal and socially constructed meanings could take place allowing a space for parents’ voices to be heard whilst minimising my role as an observer ethnographer (Jowett 2015). Through this, the aim was to allow the parents to choose, explore and discuss topics related to schooling which were of interest to them, and from these eventually choose ones they wished to discuss further, through interviews.

4.4.2. Rationale for choosing interviews based on focus group methodology

Adopting interviews as a way of exploring parents' views was designed to address the paradox described in section 4.4, between being reflexive over my role of power and so needing to allow parents to foreground their views through the SNS, but on the other hand, running the risk of this approach not raising issues sufficiently relevant, to encourage the depth of discussion required to achieve the 'thick' (Stake, 1995) interpretations sought by this study. Reviewing the use of interview methodology reflexively, raised a number of issues. On the one hand, the approach could be justified through arguments such as Stake's (*ibid*) and Yates' (1998) who very pointedly remarked that interviews were an effective means by which to access individuals' constructed meanings. In this sense, interviews were influenced by an interpretive strategy of phenomenology, in that they aimed to access the parents' constructed meanings and subjectively lived experiences (West and Carlson, 2006). Based on this, whilst the use of interviews in this interpretive study appeared an obvious choice, it was important to remain reflexive about this approach. This need for reflexivity, was underlined by writers who cautioned against a simplistic view of interviews as a way of accessing 'facts' from respondents, and argued that the nature of the data collected needed to be considered (Collins 1998; Hammersley, 2003). Collins (*ibid*) in particular, argued that interviews could be gendered methods where their purpose was disproportionately weighted towards the interviewer's aims. In the case of this study, the danger was that the parents would simply provide responses which they believed a head teacher/researcher would want to hear. In contrast, the aim was to create a situation where the interviews were a form of socially constructed reality. The response to this was to adopt a form of interviewing which was influenced by focus group methodology.

The decision to use focus group methodology, was influenced by Kitzinger (1994) who argued that the approach emphasised individual and social meaning making, allowing heterogeneities to emerge whilst minimizing observers' roles. Further support for the adoption of this approach, came from authors (Smithson, 2000; Gill *et al.*, 2008; Sagoe, 2012) who underlined that the method allowed participants to interact and so develop and explore views and meanings. In addition, there was literature which argued that focus groups encouraged more naturalistic and contextualized group environments, as opposed

to the more contrived interviewer interviewee situation (Wilkinson, 1998, 1999; Bryman, 2004). The individual was argued to be placed within a social context which encouraged more open discussion. Overall these arguments justified the choice of interviews based on focus group approaches, as part of the inductive strategy for generating deeper discussions of topics chosen by the parents through the SNS. Finally, this inductive approach also emphasised a hermeneutic (Rennie, 2000; Bryman 2004; Yates, 2004) re-analysis of parents' initial views, aimed at generating deeper meanings. This was achieved by providing the parents attending the interviews, with cards with the SNS conversations printed on them (described further in section 4.4.5). The interview group, through their discussions, would be able to read, re-read and explore the printed SNS conversations further.

4.4.3. Gathering parents' views

The following sections describe how the two data gathering methods were implemented and the sampling approaches used in each case.

4.4.4. Implementing digital ethnography through a Facebook group

The implementation and management of the SNS aimed to achieve the precarious balance between giving voice to parents, and at the same time allowing me to act as a participant observer. An important part of the implementation was the decision to use Facebook as the SNS. This decision was based on Facebook being free to use and commonly used by parents, therefore increasing the chances of the participant parents' familiarity with it. In support of this, in 2017 Facebook activity accounted for 66%⁴ of internet traffic in the UK⁵, with over 32 million users. In addition it offered easy access through users registering with the site and creating a personal profile, which would allow access to a dynamic online social community. A further key benefit of using Facebook was that it

⁴www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/datasets/internetaccesshouseholdsandindividualsreferencetables

⁵ www.statista.com

offered multiple functions, such as instant chat; messaging; public posting areas⁶ and sharing of, for example, photos/videos/events/songs/websites, all of which facilitated social networking and relationship maintenance.

The management of the Facebook group was equally crucial in securing the success of the digital ethnographic strategy. This management was reflexive over the power imbalance between my dual roles and the participant parents who may have been vulnerable. The reflexive approach was employed from the initial contact and setting up of the group through to each subsequent stage. The parents were initially contacted through the school's termly newsletter, which described the research project and invited parents to join the Facebook group. Two weeks later a letter (including different versions to ensure accessibility) was posted to all families outlining:

1. project aim - finding out parents' views about any aspect of schooling they chose;
2. my role as participant observer and administrator;
3. research carried out through a closed Facebook group of volunteer parents running for a period of six months;
4. group would choose which issues would be discussed through the subsequent interviews.

All parents who expressed an interest in joining were then sent another letter outlining the need for them to adopt pseudonyms and the letter reiterated that the group would be closed. Importantly the letter explained that all members could post materials in any form relating to schooling and that all would be free to comment, discuss and ask questions. Lastly parents were reminded to be respectful and their right and means to withdraw at any time.

Following on from the letter any parent who requested to join the Facebook group was accepted once they had accepted two statement documents⁷. Importantly these documents

⁶ such as the 'News-Feed', the central column of each individual's homepage appearing as a constantly updating list of stories from the people and pages that the user follows

⁷ the '*Statement of Rights and Responsibilities*' as set out by Facebook and the school's '*Statement of Agreement: Parent's/Guardian's Acceptable Use of Portal*'. The latter was an agreement which all families

protected parents through ensuring that their usernames and passwords were kept confidential, all parent contributions would be monitored and that access would be removed if any of parts of the agreements were abused. The Facebook group was initially set up as a 'closed group' making it 'visible' so enabling parents to request to join. Once parents were accepted, the settings were set to 'secret group' ensuring all further activity would only be accessible by members of the group.

The intention was to encourage as much participation as possible, so no limit was set for the size of the sample. The study's dual focus of exploring the heterogeneities of parents' views whilst overcoming my uneven share of power, led to the reflexive response of adopting convenience sampling (Cohen and Manion, 1985; Bryman, 2004; Somekh and Lewin, 2005). The group ran from June 2014 through to April 2015 and had 10 parents who all joined during the first month and remained as members throughout. Overall there were 206 separate posts or comments from the parents, and a further 152 'likes' in response to posts or comments. No parent ever deleted or edited a post or comment. No posts or comments were ever deemed to be inappropriate or offensive in any way. Summaries of the Facebook interactions are presented in Chapters 5 and 6, along with a description of how the parents through their discussions chose the topics to be discussed through the subsequent interviews.

4.4.5. Implementation of interviews

Inviting parents to join the interview groups was initially done through the school's newsletter, as described earlier, and then a more detailed letter. This gave parents the opportunity to express their interest in taking part in either the Facebook group or interviews or both. Parents who subsequently expressed an interest in taking part in the interviews were sent a letter which included: reminder of study's focus; choice of times when group could meet; possible venues; details of recording and transcription of discussions; right and means of withdrawal and a reply slip consenting to participation in

at the school signed in order to gain access to the school's portal (through the school's website) allowing access to information about their children.

the interviews. Before the interviews, the Facebook group conversations (including numbers of 'likes' and 'dislikes') were transcribed onto cards. The venue was chosen based on parents' preferences, avoiding power imbalances being reinforced through for instance using formal offices (Gill *et al.*, 2008; Sagoe, 2012).

The approach to 'managing' the interviews was also important in encouraging all parents to explore issues openly. In particular, there were three reflexive approaches adopted. The first, was that whilst the interview groups were reminded of the topics they had chosen to discuss and made aware of the availability of the Facebook comments, they were encouraged to decide for themselves if to refer to the comments. Secondly, my role in the group was as 'facilitator' (Gill *et al.*, 2008; Kitzinger, 1994) as opposed to 'moderator' (Smithson, 2000; Bryman, 2004; Gill *et al.*, 2008; Sagoe, 2012) the latter implying a more controlling and active role which would have undermined a reflexive stance. Thirdly, Smithson (2000) raised the question of 'dominant voices' within groups, which Sagoe (2012) described as a potential limitation of focus group approaches. The approach adopted was that dominant participants' views, even when in quantitative terms the most representative, were not regarded as representative of the group. To further minimise the potential influence of dominant voices, the phenomenographic stance described earlier ensured that all voices, silences and non-verbal cues (Sagoe 2012) were collected.

In practice there were three interviews, two with two parents and one with one parent. All parents were also members of the Facebook group and through these discussions, volunteered to take part in the interviews. All interviews occurred during February and March 2015. The first group had chosen the topic of 'uniform', the second 'use of technology' and the third 'school accountability measures'. Importantly, as explained in sections 5.1 in relation to 'uniform' and sections 6.1 in relation to 'use of technology', both groups widened their discussions focusing on broader issues and contexts than their original briefs. The third interview maintained a focus on 'school accountability measures'. This latter interview had originally been planned to have three parents but two were unable to attend so the interview was held with only one parent. The reasons the two parents were unable to attend were because of child care and zero hour contract work commitments. The parent volunteered to continue with the interview despite being the

only one present. The parent had access to the printed cards and chose which to discuss. Overall, the contention was that the approach to interviewing, removed many of the interviewer-interviewee power imbalances by ensuring that the discussion was focused on parents' views, rather than questions or issues chosen by me.

As stated earlier convenience sampling (Cohen and Manion, 1985; Bryman, 2004; Somekh and Lewin, 2005) was adopted for the methods used to gather parents' views. In addition due to the Facebook and interviews taking place concurrently, this gave rise to 'snowball sampling' (Somekh and Lewin, 2005) where participants nominated further potential participants. Whilst this approach had not been planned for, it was welcomed as it further foregrounded the parents' role in the study. The literature varied widely over what constituted an ideal number of participants for focus group discussions (Gill *et.al* 2008; Sagoe, 2012) however there was a general consensus that the more important criterion, was ensuring the dynamics within the group allowed for all participant voices to be heard. Overall the interviews were very detailed with examples of parents agreeing, contesting as well as modifying, their views. The low participant numbers allowed for silences and non-verbal cues (Sagoe 2012) to be recorded, which further supported the phenomenographic analysis, whilst the richness of discussions enabled the phenomenological and symbolic interactionist analysis.

4.5 Ethical issues

The discussions in Chapter 1 and earlier in this chapter, outlined the ethical challenges faced in undertaking the empirical part of this study. Initially, the challenge was devising an empirical approach which mitigated the uneven power distribution between my dual role as headteacher/researcher and the participant parents. The concerns were related to how it would be possible for me to access views from parents which were not mediated by my role. Influential in addressing these ethical concerns were the approaches adopted in implementing the Facebook group. These included not prescribing which topics or issues would be discussed, allowing parents to make their own contributions related to any schooling matters they chose, and allowing parents the freedom to choose when and

if to post, respond or interact with any materials. Another significant feature was giving the parents assurances that their Facebook contributions would not be analysed or interpreted other than 'visibly' within the SNS group itself. In practice, this meant that I never posted any comments which expressed an opinion or view about the parents' discussions, or undertook any form of interpretation other than ones which were published back to the parents to seek their agreement. A significant example of this was the process through which topics were chosen for the interviews. This was achieved through me posting questions asking the parents which of their discussions they wanted to discuss further through interviews. Once parents had responded, I re-posted all their choices and asked parents to rank their choices. I allowed a period of a week between each of my posts, in order to give parents as much time as possible to respond. In practice, those parents who responded, normally did so within 48 hours of the post. Once responses stopped being posted, I posted one further reminder to elicit any further responses. Through this approach, I remained reflexive over ensuring the parents, as far as possible, were interpreting their discussions and choosing the issues for further discussion. Inevitably, as with any form of interpretive research, in the process of me reading the parents' comments and reaching an understanding of what topic the parents were referring to, there was a degree of interpretation on my part and so increasing my researcher influence. Despite these approaches the implementation of the Facebook group and interviews gave rise to ethical concerns related to issues of identity, anonymity and privacy. The following discussion focused on these issues describing how each was minimised through the Facebook group and interviews.

4.5.1. Digital Ethnography – Ethical Issues

Whilst it was argued that there was a growing body of research which adopted the Internet as a tool (Markham, 2004; Murthy, 2008; Snee, 2008), its use was still relatively rare. Jones (2011) argued this may have been due to an erroneous view that online research presented greater ethical risks, which he countered by arguing that the risks were not necessarily greater but simply new and altered versions of previous ones. In order to help to identify the ethical issues surrounding this study's implementation of Facebook with

parents, Jones's (*ibid*) three areas of ethical focus were adopted: the boundary between private and public; issues of anonymity and confidentiality; and ensuring informed consent. Table 2 shows how each ethical issue affected the study, and the strategies implemented to either completely eliminate or minimise each of the potential risks and harms.

Table 2 Ethical issues related to Facebook group

Ethical Issue	Potential risk to participants/study	Approach taken to eliminate/ minimise risk
Verification of identity	Non parents access the group	Asking parents to confirm their pseudonyms before joining group. Only I as administrator could allow them to join.
Distinguishing private and public domains	Individual parents choosing to use the group discussion to raise issues specific to their children, families or other private matters or any of these as they relate to other group users	Through my role as administrator I was able to remove comments and/or group users if they infringed any of the Facebook expectations (<i>‘Statement of Rights and Responsibilities’</i>) or those specified by the school's <i>‘Statement of Agreement: Parent's/Guardian's Acceptable Use of Portal’</i>
Obtaining proper informed consent	Parents at any point in the research feeling they had not been fully consulted	Once individual parents joined the Facebook group asking them to reconfirm their full consent. Seeking consent from the parents before any of the Facebook content was used in subsequent interviews or final thesis.

Anonymity and confidentiality	Potential for individual parents, children or families to be identified	Advising all participating parents to adopt pseudonyms. Once all parents joined the group, then changing the settings of the group from 'closed' to 'secret'.
Right to withdraw and means of withdrawal	Parents feeling pressurised to take part in the study especially if they have to ask me to have themselves removed	Through the Facebook settings all members of the group could simply select 'leave group' to enable them to withdraw. This was not controlled by the administrator of the group so my power could not exert influence on the parents
Minimising harms and maximising benefits	<u>Harm</u> through parents feeling pressurised in any way or private information being shared. <u>Benefits</u> mainly through increased agency and ability to discuss issues of relevance to them	<u>Harms</u> - As administrator I enabled e-mail messages to alert me as soon as any new posts had been uploaded on the Facebook page enabling me to quickly monitor and if necessary remove the posts. In addition any other member of the group could request me to remove the post should they find it inappropriate in any way. <u>Benefits</u> – Allowing all users in the group to post any items which they felt to be of interest, worthy of discussion or relevance and so through this having an increased sense of agency
Protection of participants and researchers	Potential for participating parents, families, the school or myself suffering malicious comments	Adopting pseudonyms, ensuring group settings set to 'secret'. Only potential was for group member to make an electronic copy of an entry (e.g. making a JPeg file) and then making this available to others

		outside the group. Adoption of pseudonyms protected identity of user.
Data protection	Information shared within group becoming more widely available outside of the group.	Through the group being a 'secret group', by me retaining role of administrator and all participating parents having to agree to Facebook and the school agreements.

4.5.2. Ethical issues associated with the interviews

The adoption of interviews was aimed at minimizing deception and harm, whilst increasing wellbeing through creating a naturalistic environment for social interaction and exploration of views (Wilkinson, 1998). This was achieved through briefing participants and answering any questions before the discussions. In addition the participants controlled the discussions through deciding which issues to consider, which to ignore and the order and amount of time spent on each. Overall, further support for adopting focus group approaches to the interviews, was based on their promotion of reflexive and ethical issues (Madriz, 2000). In addition, Madriz also contended that focus group approaches provided participants with rare opportunities to articulate and so make sense of some of the lack of agency and autonomy which they experienced. Sagoe (2012) confirmed these features and in addition listed specific ethical issues associated with focus group approaches. These issues were deemed to be relevant for the interviews implemented by this study and are summarized below:

1. obtaining ethical clearance from the ethics committee and the Governors at my school;
2. obtaining consent from interview participants;
3. ensuring parents understood their participation was completely voluntary and that they were free to leave at any point;

4. when selecting the participants, ensuring that full information about the purpose and uses of participants' contributions were given;
5. being honest and keeping participants informed about the expectations of the group;
6. not pressurizing participants to speak, instead acknowledging that some would want to remain silent over some issues;
7. clarifying with parents that I was responsible for anonymizing all data;
8. There was an ethical issue related to the potential for sensitive material to be shared in the two interviews where more than one parent was present. In particular all parents being from the same school may have meant they knew each other or have common acquaintances. To address this I clarified that each participant's contributions would be shared with the others in the group as well as with me. Participants were encouraged to keep confidential what they heard during discussions.

All the data from the interviews, was transcribed verbatim and analysed using approaches described in the last section of this chapter. This analysis was carried out over a period of about a year leading to the interpretation of a number of themes as described in Chapters 5 and 6. It was only after this, that the second part of the empirical study, focused on document analysis, was started.

4.6 Part 2 – Document analysis

This discussion describes how government discourses were accessed and analysed in order to answer the second question posed by this thesis; to what extent is there a relationship between parents' views and government discourses about schooling? The initial decision was to ensure that as wide a range of government documents as possible was reviewed in order to access the discourses they contained. This was done by using the government web site www.gov.uk and entering 'announcements' in the search field on the 'welcome page' and then making the following choices:

1. From subsequent page the first option ‘*Government announcements*’ was chosen
2. On the subsequent page the following choices were entered in the nine drop down checkboxes⁸:

- i) **Contains** – left blank
- ii) **Announcement type** – ‘*All announcement types*’
- iii) **Policy area** – ‘*Schools*’
- iv) **Department** – ‘*All departments*’
- v) **Person** – ‘*All people*’
- vi) **World locations** – ‘*All locations*’
- vii) **Include local news from UK embassies and other world organisations** – not selected
- viii) **Published after** - 31/08/2012
- ix) **Published before** – 01/05/2015

3. The titles of each announcement were listed in chronological order which allowed each to be accessed and downloaded for further analysis.

These selections accessed 641⁹ government announcements, comprising 4 government responses, 111 news stories, 380 press releases, 106 speeches and 40 statements to parliament. The time period chosen (1.9.2012 to 30.4.2015) coincided with the time span during which the eldest of the participant parents’ children, had been in secondary school. The rationale for this was to capture, as far as possible, all government narratives and discourses prevalent in the public domain, which could have influenced the participant parents. This strategy resulted in a year-long analysis of the 641 texts aimed at identifying the range of words used in government announcements which were synonyms and carried

⁸ The check box name is shown in bold and underlined.

⁹ The www.gov.uk website quoted 646 announcements but when the individual announcements were accessed and totalled there were 641.

the same meanings, as the themes interpreted from the parents' discussions. This range of words (shown in section 8.2.1 in Table 4) were used in the subsequent analysis of speeches as described in Chapters 8 and 9.

4.6.1. Rationale for focusing on speeches

The challenge for the second part of this study's design, was to access the discourses contained in government announcements in order to analyse the extent to which there was a relationship between these and the parents' views. The decision was taken to focus on speeches rather than other forms of announcement. This decision was based on the notion of discourse presented in section 4.2.2 when it was argued that discourses represented the ideas and ways of thinking which operated through interrelated micro and macro social communications (Lupton 1992; Phillips 1996; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997; Gee, 1999). Phillips' (1996) work in particular, provided a useful starting point through her argument that, as a result of the repeated use of specific words and phrases in political communications, the rhetoric contained in the discourses influenced the media and the general public. Adding to this, Fairclough argued that speeches played a fundamental role in 'generic chains' (Fairclough, 2000; 174) through which political messages were represented and shared with the public. Fairclough and Fairclough focusing specifically on political speeches, argued:

In our view, focusing on the structure of argumentation in a political speech is relevant in precisely this sense, as the purpose of the speech, what it is designed to achieve, may be to convince an audience that a certain course of action is right or a certain point of view is true (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012: 18).

However, a limitation of these works was their disregard of the potential reciprocal relationship between citizens' views and political communications. Fairclough and Fairclough (*ibid*) partly acknowledged this, claiming that their work did not focus on this aspect. In addition, they recognised politics as a social field in which politicians and citizens interacted and communicated; the former motivated by the threat of electoral

sanction. Hobolt and Klemmensen (2005) focused on this threat of electoral sanction concluding that public opinion drove political rhetoric. The authors also highlighted the dearth of studies focused on the potential reciprocal relationship between public opinion and political responsiveness. They underlined that the literature which did exist, was largely based in America and influenced by notions of framing. Jerit (2009) argued that framing had made significant advances in explaining how political communications influenced public opinion. Whilst it was not relevant to the focus of this thesis to consider fully the role of framing, a brief overview was useful in underlining its influence on this study's decision to focus on political speeches, as a way of accessing government discourses.

Druckman argued that through what he described as 'frames in communication' (2001: 227) a speaker chooses the political, economic or social issues through which a speech addressed a topic and that in turn, this influenced an individual's cognitive understanding, or 'frames in thought' (*ibid*: 228) of that topic. The relevance of this was that the pressure for politicians to 'strategically choose frames' (*ibid*: 247) came as much from their political views and ambitions, as it did from their need to respond to public opinion. In a more recent analysis, Druckman (2014) argued that the literature itself was divided between whether it was public opinion, or responsiveness of politicians, which drove this dynamic relationship. Overall, the relevance of this literature and other studies (Phillips 1996; Druckman 2001, 2014; Hobolt and Klemmensen, 2005; Jerit, 2009; Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012; Hänggli and Kriesi, 2012; Lagerwerf *et al.*, 2015) which analysed the relationship between agents' views and political discourses, was twofold: firstly the assumption that the two were interrelated and secondly that all the authors adopted speeches as their objects of analysis in order to access political discourses.

Whilst this literature was influential in underlining the fundamental role played by speeches in promulgating discourses, none were explicit in stating that speeches were preeminent amongst other forms of government communications. It could not therefore be assumed, that the speeches within the corpus of 641 announcements chosen by this study, would necessarily play a more fundamental role than the other forms of announcement. In order to address this, a hermeneutic reading of the announcements was

undertaken to explore the relationships between the particular forms of announcement (government responses, news stories, press releases, speeches and statements to parliament) and their content. From this analysis, three further reasons emerged for focusing on speeches rather than any other form of announcement:

1. Speeches addressed the widest range of policy areas. Press releases for instance, only addressed certain policy areas whilst news stories covered others and so on.
2. Speeches' coverage of policy areas offered the opportunity to explore how the policies were combined and used to support each other's arguments.
3. Speeches adopted a greater variety of language forms, which provided more opportunities for a study based on textual analysis.

In conclusion, the hermeneutic analysis confirmed that speeches rather than other forms of announcement, provided the richest corpus of text for a textual based analysis. The speeches were considered to have the most relevance for the parental themes because, as was the case with the parents' discussions, they adopted less formal and more narrative styles which encompassed a wider range of themes and issues than other forms of announcement. This would facilitate an analysis of the extent to which there was a relationship between parental views and government discourses.

4.7 Analytical tools

The qualitative strategy adopted by this study, implied that the tools adopted to analyse the data should be interpretive and focused on 'emic' issues (Stake, 1995) arising from the participant parents' views, rather than quantifiable generalizations aimed at wider applicability. Equally, the notion of discourse adopted included a role for socially influenced and constructed meanings which necessarily, were contingent on the agents' perspectives. This notion of discourses, reinforced a qualitative interpretive approach to analysing the speeches. This stance supported the use of interpretive analytical approaches for both the parental data and the speeches. However, there was a recognition that parents' discussions adopted narrative forms whereas speeches, whilst less structured

than other announcements, none the less contained more formal language forms. This led to the decision that no single analytical approach would be appropriate for both the parental discussions and the speeches. Rather, the study would borrow from different approaches as discussed in the following sections.

Another important decision affecting the analysis, only emerged after the hermeneutic reading of the parental discussions and government speeches. This reading revealed areas of similarity and contrast between parents' views and government rhetoric. This was interpreted as demonstrating a potential relationship between structurally generated norms and agents' accepted common sense truths. In addition, the findings evidenced that at times, this relationship operated at a conscious level for parents, whilst at other times it appeared to be predominantly operating through subconscious predispositions and responses. Based on this, it was decided to use Gramsci's (1971) notion of hegemony and Bourdieu's (2000, 2006) notion of doxa as a way of interpreting the relationship between parents' views and speeches' rhetoric. This was because both hegemony and doxa were focused on how agents' meanings and common sense world views were related to, and influenced by, structural societal influences. The reason for adopting both notions was that Gramsci conceived hegemony as operating at a conscious level whilst Bourdieu's doxa was argued to operate at a sub conscious level as argued by Burawoy (2012). Whilst these approaches were identified as being applicable to both the parental data and speeches, each set of data also presented differences which warranted the use of analytical tools which were responsive to these differences.

4.7.1. Tools used to analyse parental narratives

The reading and re-reading of the verbatim transcripts of the interviews, reinforced the narrative nature of the parents' talk. These contained personal accounts, vignettes and anecdotes which only took on meaning and significance, when read as part of parents' narratives and biographies, rather than as fragments of speech. The reflexive response was to include narrative analysis (Riessman, 1990; Josselson, 2011; Baldwin, 2013) alongside Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phase approach to thematic analysis. The latter provided a clear method for coding parents' discussions, whilst the narrative analysis,

coupled with observations of non-verbal utterances such as sighs, laughter, interjections, nodding (to express agreement, disagreement or as a form of pointing to other participants) and pauses, provided a more nuanced sense of parents' meanings. The narrative analysis was carried out through hermeneutic engagement (Yates, 2004) which involved repeated reading and re-reading of the transcripts. In practice the process involved a continuous iterative micro and macro reading of the transcripts. The micro level analysis was influenced by the thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, *op.cit.*) and involved recording key words, phrases and the links between them. The macro reading was influenced by the narrative approach, which involved recording when and where words, phrases and ideas first appeared and how they developed through the whole transcript, including how non-verbal communications influenced these meanings. Josselson (2011) described this as a 'hermeneutics of restoration' and argued that this:

aims to be faithful to the text and restore its explicit and implicit meanings. The purpose is to absorb as much as possible the message in its given form and to re-present, explore or understand the subjective world of the participants or the social and historical world they feel themselves to be living in (Josselson, 2011: 38).

The sensitivity expressed by Josselson, captured the reflexivity which this study aimed to achieve. The focus on parents' narratives, foregrounded their 'implicit meanings' Josselson (*ibid*) which was reflected in the eventual themes interpreted from the transcripts. The subsequent chapters highlight where interpretations were derived from hermeneutic narrative approaches.

Finally, the transcripts' language was analysed using tools derived from critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2000; Fairclough, 2000a; Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012; Hyatt, 2013). This enabled a focus on the social dimension of the parents' meanings which neither the thematic nor the narrative analysis offered. This was relevant because, as argued earlier, the notion of discourse included a recognition of its socially constructed influences from social agents and politicians. CDA focused on this interplay between the social and political, which led to questions about power (Lupton, 1992) and how control of the discourses was shared. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) included in their summary

of the main tenets of CDA, that it addressed social problems through considering power relations which were taken as discursive, ideological and constituting society and culture. It must be underlined that for the purposes of this study, CDA's overtly Marxist stance (DeMarco *et al.* 1993; Powers, 2007) and its focus on power relations, was not the reason for choosing it as a tool. In fact, this study took a more postmodernist stance (Leonard, 1990; Denzin 1994; Powers 2007) which did not start with reified concepts of reality such as power, domination or oppression as found in Marxist traditions. Instead, the view taken was more closely matched to Denzin's notion of reality when he claimed that there 'can never be a final, accurate representation of what was meant or said, only different textual representations of different experiences' (Denzin 1994: 296). Limiting the use of CDA approaches to analysing 'textual representations' was appropriate within the context of this study, which aimed to work inductively from the parents' accounts of their contexts and experiences. In contrast, adopting grander theories such as power, oppression or emancipation *a priori* to parents' views, was reflexively incongruous.

4.7.2. Analysis of government speeches

CDA approaches were also adopted for the analysis of speeches because the rationale for adopting these approaches for parental data, was equally applicable to government speeches. Using the same tools for both also provided the advantage of having a commonality of analytical language, which would help in exploring any relationships between parents' views and government discourses. However, hermeneutic reading of the speeches influenced the choice of two further analytical methods.

The first method was quantitative content analysis (QCA) (Altheide, 1987) which was focused on the frequency of occurrence of words in speeches which were synonyms of the parents' themes. The second method was influenced by the observation that speeches' frequency of references to particular ideas, was not always consistent with the context or focus of the speech. Whilst this observation was positivistic, assuming a direct correlation between occurrence and intended meaning, it was none the less worthy of further analysis. To this end, it was decided to couple QCA with a more interpretive form, focused on descriptive accounts of the speeches. This approach, described by Altheide (*ibid*) as

ethnographic content analysis (ECA), stressed the researcher's role beyond quantitative accounts:

Like all ethnographic research, the meaning of a message is assumed to be reflected in various modes of information exchange, format, rhythm and style, e.g., aural and visual style, as well as in the context of the report itself, and other nuances (Altheide, 1987: 68).

This approach ensured that the analysis also focused on the significance and influence of the context of speeches, and not solely their content.

Both the quantitative and ethnographic content analysis, were focused on the 41 speeches which were delivered over the period during which the Facebook group and interviews took place (June 2014 to April 2015). The rationale for adopting this time frame was to ensure that the analysis captured any government discourses and narratives which may have been in the public domain, whilst parents were holding their discussions. This aimed to capture any relational influence between the parents' views and government discourses as discussed in section 4.6.1. Overall, the corpus of 41 speeches covered a wide range of government reforms, changes in policy and practical administrative and organisational changes in schools and subjects. Significantly, five of the speeches were specifically focused on issues of disadvantage and vulnerability. These speeches, as demonstrated through the analysis and discussions in Chapters 8 and 9, evidenced a strong congruence with parents' views. In contrast, there was a dissimilarity between parents' views and the remainder of the speeches. These findings along with others described in the subsequent four chapters lead the study to propose a thesis which is argued to offer an original interpretation of the continuing poorer performance of disadvantaged children in schools.

4.8 Summary

Reflecting on the impact of the methodology, identified a number of important aspects. Arguably the most significant, was that both the aim and the approach to foregrounding parents' views, were original contributions to qualitative methodologies which focused

on exploring the views of potentially vulnerable participants. Particularly relevant, was that the digital ethnography adopted to foreground the parents' views, in itself an original contribution, gave rise to ethical challenges which were compounded by the study being conducted by a researcher being a practitioner in the case study school. The discussion's description of how these ethical risks were addressed and minimized, potentially added further to qualitative methods aimed at working with vulnerable participants.

Analysing the impact of the digital ethnography, underlined its usefulness as a tool to elicit and explore views, enabling these to be used inductively in subsequent stages of discussion and analysis. In this sense, the Facebook group was successful on a number of counts. In the first instance, no parent asked to leave the group or posted any messages or comments which directly or indirectly implied they had negative feelings about their continued participation. In addition, the strategy enabled parents to comment, express personal opinions, agree, disagree, raise questions aimed at clarifications and importantly initiate their own topics and areas of discussion. As administrator, I never had to alter or delete any comment for being inappropriate in any way. In methodological terms, the Facebook group gave rise to very rich and diverse qualitative material, which enabled equally rich analysis and interpretation.

Subsequently, the interviews which borrowed from focus group approaches, produced the rich discussions which enabled the phenomenological, phenomenographic and symbolic interactionist analysis as described in Chapters 5 and 6. Overall, the combination of digital ethnographic techniques with follow-up interviews, was judged to be an effective methodological approach to minimizing practitioner/researcher influence in a case study design. The chapter also argued that a single approach to analyzing the parental discussions would not have captured the richness of parents' views and meanings. In particular, narrative analysis of biographical accounts, coupled with language based analytical approaches, enabled interpretations which would not have been possible if the analysis relied solely on coding techniques.

Finally, based on works from a number of authors, as well as this study's own hermeneutic reading of a large corpus of announcements, identified speeches as the most effective form of government announcement through which to access political rhetoric

and discourses. Speeches achieved this, through combining a diversity of language styles with comprehensive coverage of government actions and policies. In order to fully explore the complexity of these discourses, required quantitative and qualitative approaches to content analysis, as well as language based analysis.

Chapter 5 Parents’ deterministic views about conformity, social class and lack of choice

5.1 Overview

This chapter briefly presents the outcomes of the Facebook discussions which led to the identification of ‘uniform’ as a topic for this first interview. However, as underlined in section 4.4.5, the parents’ discussions were far more wide ranging and interpreted as demonstrating parents’ beliefs that their children needed to conform and prepare for adult life, and how social class and selective schools affected their children’s eventual employment options as adults. The parents also voiced strong views about a lack of school diversity, coupled with an equally strong sense of pride in being seen as parents who were supportive of schools’ actions. The parents’ views were interpreted and summarised as five themes.

5.2 How ‘uniform’ was chosen as a topic for the interview

The methodology chapter explained that the Facebook group had two roles; to enable parents to raise, discuss and explore issues of relevance to them, and to choose which topics would be discussed in the interviews. In line with this, the Facebook group first discussed topics related to uniform, when a parent posted a photograph of their children in their new uniform. This elicited eighteen responses from six different parents¹⁰, six within 50 minutes and twelve the following day across five hours. The comments were positive about how smart the children looked along with practical questions about sizes and washing instructions. The second discussion, the following day, was prompted by my post asking how parents viewed the issue of uniform. This elicited seven comments from four parents within five hours, and included views about uniform signalling a caring

¹⁰ There were eight parents in the group at the time of this post.

school, and preparing children for following rules and future employment. The third post appeared two months later and coincided with the start of term. This complimented the school on how smart the children looked. This post received no replies. Two weeks later there was a post questioning the policy on coats. This received nine replies from five parents; the first seven within two hours and the remaining two the following day. All the replies were practical, focused on what parents felt was appropriate as a school coat and where they could be bought. Finally, when the group was asked about topics they wanted to discuss in the forthcoming interviews, all chose uniform as a topic.

It is important to underline that, as was explained in section 4.4.5, the analysis of the Facebook discussions was limited to me identifying topics which reoccurred and then posting a question to the parents asking if these topics were ones which they wished to discuss further through the interviews. In practice, any comment which was raised by a parent at least once and received at least one written comment from another parent was identified as a topic. Whilst this approach was designed to minimise the influence of my roles of power, it none the less inevitably required a level of interpretation on my part. In the case of ‘uniform’ for instance, I interpreted that all posts related to the purpose, wearing, choosing, appearance and cost of the items, would be interpreted as the ‘uniform’ topic. The methodology (section 4.5.1) explained the ethical considerations leading to this limited level of analysis.

5.3 Development of the interview discussion

The group was attended by two parents and their discussions began very quickly. I introduced the parents to each other and reminded them of their right to withdraw at any point, that the discussions would be recorded and my role being limited to answering any questions they posed and from time to time asking clarification questions. As described in the methodology, the group was given printed cards showing the comments from the Facebook group relevant to ‘uniform’. The parents were reminded that they were free to choose to discuss any, the order or none of the comments.

The parents agreed with each other to consider the comments one at a time. Parent 1 (P1) asked Parent 2 (P2) to read out loud by saying:

P1: 51 I'm going to let you [looking and nodding towards P2]
52 read out loud because I've got a morbid fear of
53 reading out loud...

P1 chose a comment (discussed in section 5.3.1) and read it out loud. This immediately elicited views from P2 and the discussion continued from this point for 56 minutes. Parents from time to time chose further printed comments and this is highlighted in the remainder of this chapter. Overall, the analysis of the transcript showed that parents expressed support for the importance of school uniform, and from this parents cited the need to teach their children to conform as a preparation for work and life. Parents' discussions of employed work, also elicited views about social class and how this was linked to selective schooling. Parents expressed their limited choices over the type of school they could choose for their children and they made frequent references to their children's employment prospects which were always limited to low paid manual types of work. Throughout the discussions the parents reiterated views which indicated their desire to be regarded as supportive parents by the school.

5.3.1. Parents' belief in their children's need to conform

The discussion began with P2 choosing and reading the following printed Facebook comment:

sums it up for me for a lot of the kids the parents aren't bothered so he [sic] the school can take an almost surrogate role it can be invaluable it's like the letter of praise same principle the kids need to feel valued supported and part of a team.

P1 responds to the statement immediately as shown by the following extract¹¹ and this underlines their support for uniform:

- P1: 63 yeah hm [.....] I suppose some parents aren't but I think
64 probably the vast majority of parents are [emphasis]
65 bothered about uniform do you think? [looking at P2]
P2: 66 Yeah [sighs] I don't know what the [.....] statistics are
67 what I would hope and like to think more parents [...]
68 being personal are like me
P1: 69 yeah

The parent's conviction is shown shortly afterwards, when they questioned why a parent would not support uniform:

- P1: 81 ...I wonder what would make a parent
82 not bothered about [.....]

Although parents viewed uniform as a positive aspect of schooling, this did not in itself provide insights as to what motivated this view. Through hermeneutic narrative reading (Yates, 2004, Josselson, 2011) of the transcript, parents' motivations were interpreted to be extrinsic (Gagné *et al.*, 2010) and linked to instilling conformity. Gagné *et al.*, (*ibid*) described extrinsic motivation as driven by instrumental reasons and contrasted this with intrinsic motivation. The latter guided individuals to behave and act in certain ways because of their belief in their inherent value and worth. The relevance to this study, was that Gagné *et al.*, (*ibid*) argued that extrinsic motivation was associated with low levels of autonomy. The implication was that the parents in this study who showed support for uniform, may have done so within a context of low autonomy and agency. Ryan and Niemiec (2009) argued that a lack of autonomy within educational settings was detrimental to individuals and institutions achieving their aims. The relevance of this, was that low levels of parental autonomy contrasted greatly with neoliberal rhetoric and the

¹¹ Extracts throughout this chapter are direct copies of the relevant transcript section showing line numbers. 'P1' and 'P2' refer to participants in the interview and 'I' refers to interviewer.

assumptions it made about parental agency as discussed in section 3.4.2. The following extract further supported the argument that the parents' motivation was extrinsic:

P1: 134 I think and it's a mind frame I think mind frame getting
135 your kids into that frame of mind work ethic I think is
136 what it's doing isn't it.

The parent's phrase (underlined) was the reason uniform was important to them. In other words, uniform was a means to an end, the end being the development of the 'mind frame'. The same expression was used on a further two occasions by P1, each time P2 agreed:

P1 226 or whatever hm most jobs are there's an element of
227 conforming and it's getting kids into that mind frame...
228 that if they turn up to a job interview in trackies tee
229 shirt and a cap likelihood is the employers are going to
230 have certain expectations

The second occasion:

P1: 232 and it's the preparation for life it's getting your young
233 person into that mind frame that it's not all about going
234 to be playing computer games for Sony or working at
235 Google and being able to skate board, the majority of
236 jobs...

Deeper analysis of the transcripts revealed contrasts in the parents' degree of commitment to their views. To start with in Lines 134 to 136 parents demonstrated what Fairclough (2000) described as modulated modality; modality being the speaker's level of commitment to the claims they make. The use of 'I think' on three occasions in the extract, and ending the sentence with a rhetorical question, showed a degree of uncertainty or modulated modality in Fairclough's (*ibid*) terms. This could have signalled the parents' resistance to this idea of their child having to develop a 'mind frame'. However, despite the modulated nature of the first use of the idea of 'mind frame', subsequently in lines

226 to 230 and 232 to 236, the commitment expressed was categorical (Fairclough, 2000). This was shown by the parent's clarity that the purpose of uniform was to develop a 'mind frame'. In this respect, the parent appeared to be showing acceptance of the idea. The latter two extracts also provided further evidence of extrinsic motivation as shown by the strong link made between developing an appropriate 'mind frame' and conforming in employment. P2 repeated this on two further occasions, one example was:

P2: 147 its work and they pay your wages so therefore they
148 deem the right to tell you what to wear...

Through hermeneutic reading, the nature of the extrinsic motivation was analysed further to explore the different forms of extrinsic motivation shown by parents (Deci and Ryan, 1985a, 1985b; Niemiec and Ryan, 2009; Gagné *et al.*, 2010). To start this analysis, the following extract was relevant, not least of all because it also contained the first occurrence of the word 'conform'.

P1: 216 You have [emphasis] to conform [sighs] in life you do
P2: 217 Yeah, yeah

The statement was categorical (Fairclough, 2000) showing a high level of commitment, accentuated by the emphasis placed on the word 'have'. In contrast the marked sigh which followed the word 'conform' could be interpreted as a sign of passive resignation or perhaps active resistance towards conforming. The latter interpretation was reinforced by the following:

P1: 443 because [...] should you have to conform? I mean that
444 could just spark off into a totally different debate but
445 because of imprisonment and our restraints I suppose
446 and the way society is constructed that's to be
447 expected

Both extracts reinforced an interpretation of the parents' views as showing simultaneous resistance and acceptance towards the need to conform and that the motivation for the latter was extrinsic. Ryan (1995) described extrinsic motivation as doing something for

external (to the agent) instrumental reasons but that these could become internalized to different degrees. Gagné *et al.*, (2010) developed this idea further by arguing that the internalization of the behaviour could be enhanced by rewards or punishment. This latter aspect was evidenced by the parents' discussions when they asked the rhetorical question 'should you have to conform?' The parent then answered the question by using 'imprisonment' and 'restraints' as the likely results of not conforming. Both 'imprisonment' and 'restraints' are argued to be examples of a punishment and congruent with a conclusion that the motivation was externally regulated extrinsic motivation; typifying a low level of autonomy.

A further analysis of this extract, showed that the parent adopted what Fairclough (2000) described as a presupposition, where meanings are to varying degrees implicit in what is said. The parent in this instance, implying that forces within society meant that individuals did need to conform. Hyatt (2013) developed the concept of presuppositions through describing a number of lexico-grammatical forms they could take in speech. One of these was a closed rhetorical question which was typified, as in the extract above, by the speaker asking a question and then providing the answer. Overall, the use of presuppositions in this form showed the speaker's construction of a reality which they believed in and were convinced by (Fairclough, 2000; Hyatt, 2013).

Another aspect of interest from the last extract was the parent's inclusion of society' as one of the factors driving the need for conformity:

P1: 445 because of imprisonment and our restraints I suppose
446 and the way society is constructed that's to be expected

Within this sentence the use of the conjunction 'and' could imply that society exerted pressures which were in addition to 'imprisonment' and 'restraint'. Analysis of the transcript identified four other occasions when 'society' was cited:

P1: 464 unfortunately we don't live in a society that you know
465 allows that freedom so we have to conform

P1: 743 In today's society it's about the ritual of being smartly
744 dressed for your daily task.

P1: 976 ...In the society that we live in today because that is
977 what is deemed as necessary

P1: 1152 and I try and put society's values onto my son and not
1153 necessarily my own

In each extract 'society' was identified as the locus of control and pressure to conform. This further substantiated a view that this extrinsic motivation was externally controlled and so indicative of a low level of parental autonomy. This was exemplified in the last extract where the parent identified 'society's values' and said these were 'not necessarily my own'. A limitation of this analysis was that it was not clear from the data what the parents intended as 'society'. It appeared that the parents saw this as forces outside of themselves, which they had little agency over and which espoused values they did not necessarily agree with but felt their children had to conform to.

In conclusion conformity was a recurring theme, interpreted as parents' simultaneous resistance and acceptance of the need to conform. Moreover, their acceptance and support, was as a result of externally controlled extrinsic motivations. The lack of clarity over the parents' meaning of 'society' was partly mitigated by the extracts implying that the pressure to conform came from a need to prepare for life and work which was the focus of the next analysis.

5.3.2. Parents' views about their children's need to prepare

Parents consistently linked the pressure for their children to wear uniform, to the need to conform and prepare for life and ultimately, that this was aimed at the instrumental goal of gaining employment. The first occurrence of the idea of uniform being a preparation, was in the following extract:

P2: 133 it's it's a preparation!

Following this, the discussion developed the idea of a 'mind frame' and then:

P2: 212 ...and like you [looking at P1]
213 were saying preparation it's about saying to them you
214 will be expected in life and employment to wear a
215 uniform

The extract contained the two forms of preparation which were then repeated in the remainder of the discussion; namely 'life' and 'employment'. There were six further occasions of the former, but with no amplification of what aspects of life were being alluded to. It was plausible to speculate whether life and work were used interchangeably. In relation to 'employment' the analysis showed that the parents conflated school uniform and conforming at work:

P2: 137 the kids argue that "*oh well not everyone wears a*
138 *uniform*"¹² now look even a high vis vest is uniform if it's
139 a requirement [...] I say to NAME you want to go into the
140 army [...] that's a uniform would you think of not doing
141 as you're told? No [emphasis] well although it's a much
142 more relaxed regime that is what school is preparing
143 you for [...] maybe not everyone is going [...] well not
144 everyone is going in the army but or whether it's the
145 army or Tesco's

P1: 146 work! Work! [Emphasis]

P2 adopted a role play conversation between parent and child to stress their point. This added a sense of realism, and could be argued to be a device to express the degree to which they believed the point they were making. Fairclough (2000, 2013) and Hyatt (2013) used the term intertextuality to describe the process whereby texts legitimise and reinforce their meanings by borrowing from other texts. P2 adopted a form of

¹² Italics used to denote parent speaking the words said by their child

intertextuality by borrowing from what were represented as real life conversations, in order to reinforce the validity of what they were saying. To add to this realism, the parent used their child's name in their sentence (omitted for anonymity). In addition, the parent's level of conviction was reinforced by the use of a presuppositional closed rhetorical question (Hyatt, 2013). The extract ended with P1 showing agreement through exclaiming 'work! work!' in what could be interpreted as being a summary and accentuation of what had just been said. The level of commitment to this view, was arguably reinforced by the next extract which equated conforming at work with qualifications:

P2: 745 Preparing them for working life and the conformity
746 aspect is as important as giving them the right
747 qualifications for the job cos being prepared to wear the
748 uniform is a qualification isn't it you know, if you're not
749 going to wear the uniform it doesn't matter what
750 degrees or GCSEs you've got you're not going to get it

This was immediately followed by both parents stressing the importance, but undesirability, of conforming coupled with the very instrumental need 'pay the mortgage'.

P1: 751 If you're not prepared to conform within that working
752 structure then you're not going to last very long
P2: 753 As much as it's a nasty word, the more I say it the
754 more I dislike it, but conformity at the end of the day
755 if you want to survive you have to conform that's how
756 you pay the mortgage.

Another salient aspect, was that on the four occasions when parents used anecdotes describing their children's future work, three were based on manual, low paid, non-professional forms of employment. In making these references the parents could, of course, have chosen whichever examples they felt appropriate or indeed made no references at all. The fact that they chose these particular forms of employment, was felt

to be significant and worthy of further analysis. The following extract was the first occurrence of parents referencing forms of work:

P2: 143 you for [...] maybe not everyone is going [...] well not
144 everyone is going in the army but or whether it's the
145 army or Tesco's

In the next extract the parent adopted the same lexico-grammatical form of a role play of a conversation between parent and child, incorporating a presuppositional closed rhetorical question:

P2: 286 "*...older I only want to work in construction*"¹³ and I went but
287 they still have a uniform "*don't be daft they go in jeans*
288 *and a Tee-shirt*" I said do they wear safety boots? Yeah
289 do they wear a high vis vest? Yeah Do they wear a hat?
290 Yeah it's a uniform doesn't matter whether it is a suit or
291 a high vis vest and a hard hat it's like you say
292 [pointing to P1] it's a conformity that you're required to
293 wear to do that job so you know

In this extract the example of work used was construction, whilst in the previous example it was army. This variation in the example of type of work used by the parent, arguably reinforced the role play nature of what was being said, rather than indicating that the parent was conveying a real conversation between themselves and their child. The relevance of this form of intertextuality (Fairclough, 2000, 2013; Hyatt, 2013) as argued earlier, was that the use of such a device helped to convey the speaker's depth of belief in what they were saying. There was also evidence of the parents accepting that individuals could progress through their work (underlined in the extract below) however, as was shown by P2, this was once again confined to manual work:

P1: 294 and you might not always stay in that job role you
295 know you might go into construction and become a site

¹³ Words in italics and speech marks are words spoken by the parent playing the role of their child

296 manager and then go up to being a manager which a
297 a lot people do over the ages work their way up so
298 you're not necessarily always going to stay on the tools
299 kind of job are you

It must be underlined, that such short extracts were not seen as definitive and exhaustive depictions of parents' views. This was arguably reinforced by the parents' fourth example of work being 'office work'. Accepting the methodological limitations of trying to gain meaning from short extracts of speech, this study did nonetheless interpret that the parents' choices of types of employment to use as vignettes, showed a degree of conformity. Arguably this was best represented as the discussion developed, as shown in the extracts below:

P2: 1088 I think when they go into year 7 at secondary school
1089 and once they take that step into their given secondary
1090 school, barring their parents moving and the little
1091 exceptions to the rule, the average student is [...] and I
1092 know as a pupil that went here people who have
1093 gone to be leading financial analysts in Singapore
1094 and so on, there are different individual but the
1095 majority it's kind of carved out well that's where you're
1096 going to be average

Interestingly, the parent never actually explicitly named low paid or manual work, but implied this through setting up an antithesis (Fairclough, 2000) as shown by the underlined words. The antithesis worked through implying that the norm would be less well paid, less glamorous jobs in the UK. This metaphor was composed of three separate elements. The use of the word 'leading' which could be taken to mean someone who had reached the top of their career; 'financial analysts' which was synonymous with well-paid work in the financial sector and finally, 'Singapore' which is often cited as one of the tiger economies and a world economic centre (Page, 1994). This choice of metaphor could have been indicative of the parent identifying a type of work which was, in their view, far

removed from the type of employment accessible to their child. The next extract, which was from the last part of the discussion, was a lot more explicit about the parent's view of the qualitatively limited work opportunities available for their children:

P2: 1105 you're at X school. You know it's almost like it's
1106 indoctrinated in you. That's your school and there's a
1107 couple of A4 sheets of paper they're the jobs that you
1108 can look at, you know because we don't expect
1109 anything more or less of you

Overall, developing from the theme of conformity, the parents' discussions highlighted a recurring view of the need to conform in order to prepare for life and more specifically, prepare for work and paid employment. In discussing these issues, the parents showed a deterministic view of the limited work options available for their children. These discussions again reinforced this study's argument that the motivations behind the parents' views were externally regulated extrinsic instrumental motivations. In relation to the theme conformity, the parents identified society as the agent; though it was not possible to identify the exact meaning of this. Within this theme of preparation, there was again no specific articulation of how or who exerted the control. Despite this, the parents' depth of feeling was expressed through the emotive and deterministic phrase used at the end of the extract (underlined above). It could be argued, based on the start of the extract, that the responsible agents were schooling and schools which became the next area of focus.

5.3.3. The role of social class and selective schools

A striking feature of the transcripts, was that parents made several references to social class and almost invariably linked this to selective grammar schools. The first occurrence of this was when P1 recounted a conversation with their foster child (referred to as 'she' below):

P1: 249 ...and she saw all
250 the X Grammar kids in suits and we were on our

251 way yesterday and she said “*why on earth are they*
252 *dressed like that?*” You know so I explained that they’re
253 dressed at Grammar school because those kids are
254 possibly going to get even possibly dare I say it better jobs
255 because of the type of education they’re getting rather
256 than the normal comprehensive school hm and again
257 the ethos there is they’re probably going to go into
258 office jobs that type of role probably higher going in at a
259 higher level so they have to wear actually full-on suits
260 you know not just a blazer uniform like NAME School is
261 and I had to explain to her you know the different levels
262 of society as it is you know hm[...] so yeah...

The parent explicitly linked selective schools, type of uniform and potential employment. They extended the notion of ‘different levels of society’ further by stating:

P1: 264 That’s how it is as much as I’m not particularly
265 comfortable with the class system hm there is one and
266 you can’t ignore the class system and I can’t afford to
267 put my son didn’t pass to get into the grammar and it’s
268 about what is it about 9 grand a year a term or
269 whatever it is for the grammar to pay I’m not on that
270 kind of money but there’s certain people that are

In this extract, the parent substituted society with class system and also linked selective grammar schools with fee paying schools. Although this latter link was erroneous, it was relevant that the parent believed this to be the case. Their language was categorical in modality and declarative in mood (Fairclough, 2000); showing a high level of commitment to the truth of their statement. Once again, as was noted in section 5.3.1 in relation to the theme conformity, it was possible to interpret that the parents were showing simultaneous resistance and acceptance. In this case in relation to a ‘class system’, they

expressed resistance through claiming ‘I’m not particularly comfortable’ and acceptance through saying ‘there is one and you can’t ignore the class system’.

Later, the parents raised a point which required reflexive consideration. This was when parents returned to the notion of grammar schools benefiting from higher levels of funding. On this second occasion the parents asked me what I knew about this, prompting me to confirm that selective grammar schools were not fee paying and did not receive additional funding. Considering this point reflexively I had an ethical duty to confirm these details. My concern was whether the parents might interpret this as me making negative judgements of them, in terms of what they might have perceived to be an error or lack of knowledge on their part. This may have engendered negative feelings of self-worth in the parents, and also may have affected their willingness to continue to explore what was clearly a strongly held set of beliefs. Whilst it was not possible to establish to what extent the parents may have felt negative about their misunderstanding about school funding, at least in part this appeared not to have influenced them enough to stop them raising the issue again. This was because later in the discussion both parents returned to the theme of grammar school children enjoying privileges not available to other children:

- P2: 1074 It seems to me that when kids leave primary schools
1075 obviously they do their plus hm [...] whatever it’s called now
1076 and then from there on they’re channelled. They’re
1077 given a class really aren’t they. Grammar school there’s
1078 your elite, private schools Harrow, Eton they’re in a
1079 completely different league and then without putting it
1080 in any other way that I can think of, you get the average
1081 schools like us, just your run of the mill
1082 comprehensive local secondary schools and it’s well
1083 that’s the one you’re going to, suck it and see that’s it...
- P1: 1084 ...Bit of a pathway isn’t it I suppose is what you’re saying

The concept of funding or fees was now not mentioned, but the parents articulated the view that selective grammar schools were linked to class and, as P1 put it, set children on ‘a pathway’ which reiterated the point made by P2 in their phrase ‘they’re channelled’

Within this extract the parents provided evoked evaluations (Fairclough 2000; Hyatt, 2013). These are expressions, which appear as neutral choices, but are used to denote an evaluative attitude towards the subject being referred to. In the extract above, the underlined words could be seen as describing something which was in no way special; very ordinary. This contrasted with selective grammar schools which were identified with the word ‘elite’ and private schools which were ‘in a completely different league’. Taking this analysis further, Fairclough (2000) and Hyatt (2013) also argue that evaluative comments are at times inscribed and so are more overtly evaluative. In the extract, the use of the word ‘just’ implied a limit as to what the school was. In other words, it was only, or limited to or no more than ‘run of the mill’. Interestingly in the second extract discussed earlier in this section, the parent again used what is argued to be an inscribed evaluation (underlined):

P1: 255 ...rather
256 than the normal comprehensive school

The word ‘normal’ qualified or evaluated ‘comprehensive school’, making it in no way special. The term comprehensive school appeared on seven occasions. On six it had a pejorative adjective as a collocation (Fairclough, 2000):

- 3 occurrences of ‘normal’
- 1 occurrence of ‘deprived’
- 1 occurrence of ‘average’
- 1 occurrence of ‘run of the mill’

In the term ‘comprehensive school’, the word comprehensive was an attributive adjective, meaning it did not require a further adjective to clarify its meaning. The speech pattern of adding an adjective therefore was of significance in that it denoted a need to qualify or evaluate the worth of this type of school. Of course it was not possible through this analysis to clarify whether the use of the pejorative adjectives were conscious choices of speech or potentially automatic subconscious collocations (Fairclough, 2000).

In conclusion, this section considered the theme social class and selective schools; the coupling of the two themes occurred in the transcript and not through researcher interpretation. Through this coupling, the parents appeared to express explicit views about a class system and that selective grammar schools played a role in ‘channelling’ or setting ‘pathways’ which were deterministic in relation to potential employment that their children could expect. Once again parents pointed to how uniform helped to delineate the differences between selective grammar schools and non-selective schools. The externally controlled extrinsic nature of social class, was alluded to and the deterministic nature of this was something parents recognised and were not comfortable with, arguably best captured by the parent saying:

P1: 264 ...as much as I’m not particularly
265 comfortable with the class system...

Within this phrase the parents were interpreted as expressing resistance and acceptance and may have also been expressing a lack of choice and agency, which was the theme considered in the next section.

5.3.4. Parents’ belief that they lacked choice of schooling

The first occurrence of choice appeared about half way through the discussion:

P1: 486 But then you can’t pick a school that doesn’t have that
487 and that’s just out there for individuality and you
488 haven’t got a choice if you don’t get that from this
489 school you’ll have the same conversation with every
490 there isn’t a school out there where they can just
491 do whatever a freedom school is there?

Whilst the parent was clear that there was no choice, it was not initially evident whether the parent viewed this necessarily as a negative feature. Their view became more explicit as the discussion developed:

P1: 509 ...and there’s different learning styles even the

510 curriculum and the way children are taught I don't agree
511 with you know hm and yeah I think it would be nice if
512 there was an alternative school it'll never happen but
513 in my dream world of fantasy it would be nice if there...

The above extract underlined the parent's dissatisfaction with the lack of 'alternative school' and that the existence of alternatives was only part of a 'dream world of fantasy'. Importantly, the parent expressed this dissatisfaction in relation to curriculum and children's learning, not just uniform which was the case in the first extract. This was significant because whilst uniform could be argued to be a limited aspect of schooling, curriculum and approaches to learning, are more fundamental aspects. The parent then expressed a more personal motivation when referring to their own child:

P1: 935 [...] but it's the way he has to learn things you know and
936 it's being in that environment where you have to si [unfinished word]
937 and I know that is how it is and it is how it is because
938 there is no alternative I'm not saying he would be a
939 genius if he was taken out of that and could just do
940 whatever but [...]

The deterministic sentiment was reminiscent of how the parents spoke about social class and limited work options available to their children. Significantly, the parent did not consider as real the possibility that choosing between schools could in any way ameliorate the situation for their child. This was significant because in the district in which this case study was based, all the secondary schools, (apart from the case study school) were academies. The parent not recognising the diversity between the schools as widening their parental choice, brought into question government rhetoric (discussed in Chapter 3) about the autonomy afforded to academy schools enabling them to diversify and so respond to parents' issues and needs.

Another aspect explored by the parents of relevance to educational policy, was what evidence they would look for to base their choice of school on, if alternatives did exist.

To illustrate this, shortly after the parents considered the lack of alternatives, P2 expressed that they would stay with the current school:

P2: 582 ...simply because there is no track
583 record now if when NAME came to we came to choose for
584 NAME for Year 7 there'd been 25 or 30 years of history of
585 2 different schools then you can look and compare the 2
586 and go well which has had the best results overall to get
587 a comparison but we don't know

To support the analysis of the parents' potential meanings in this extract, Fairclough's (2000) evidentialities (phrases and words which express factuality) and Hyatt's (2013) evidentiary warrants (claims based on evidence) were useful tools. Firstly, the use of the word 'simply' at the start of the extract was an example of an evidentiality (Fairclough, 2000), words and phrases such as 'of course', 'obviously' and 'everyone knows', which often precede a claim, expressing its factuality and its accepted common sense truth. The word 'simply' may have been implying that it was common sense, factual and accepted that for any parent before a choice could be made, they needed to see evidence or a 'track record'. Later in the extract the parent was explicit that this would be based on results, which presumably implied examination results. The use of examination results as statistics is what Hyatt (2013) would refer to as evidentiary warrants. This was extended later in the discussion:

P2: 958 ...we'd like to hope that maybe there's an alternative
959 but if we don't know what the alternative is we can't
960 implement it
P1: 961 No but sometimes it's worth exploring aren't they?
962 there will be statistics, there will be other types of
963 learning won't there? And there will be research done
964 on different types of learning

In the first instance P2, although prepared to 'hope that maybe there's an alternative', would still need to know exactly what this looks like. Interestingly, it could be argued

that this implied a very objective ontology, one that assumed the existence of real discreet unchangeable realities which could be measured in positivist terms; Hyatt (2013) argues this is a typical feature of evidentiary warrants. The response from P2 reinforced this when they claimed ‘there will be statistics’ and then ‘there will be research’. Once again an interpretation is that the parents regarded the statistics and research as objective depictions of reality and so immutable, trustworthy and reliable. Similar views were expressed in the interview focused on accountability measures which are analysed and discussed in more detail in the next chapter in section 6.3.4.

In conclusion, the parents expressed views which seemed to imply their perception of a lack of choice and alternatives, between schools. In addition that if such choices did exist, they would expect there to be statistics and evidence to support which approach or alternative was the best or most effective. It is proposed that this could imply a paradox for government rhetoric. On the one hand the parents did not recognise the diversity of schools which existed in their area as actually increasing their level of choice. Whilst on the other hand, the parents seemed to have fully internalised hegemonic discourses about positivist accountability measures which enabled comparisons to be made between schools. In a sense the parents were expressing a resistance towards the idea that choice was available to them, but simultaneously an acceptance that the schooling system inherently enabled parents to make choices.

5.3.5. Parents’ desire to be seen as supportive of school

Very early in the discussion, once parents had expressed their support for uniform and their expectation that all parents would be as supportive, the following comment was made:

- P2: 67 what I would hope and like to think more parents [...]
68 being personal are like me
- P1: 69 yeah

The parent later reiterated their role in ensuring that their child adhered to the uniform:

P2: 102 ... and so you know as I say personally Carl
103 comes every day in hm an ironed shirt every single
104 day you know clean shirt every day maybe that's
105 extreme I don't know but that's just me hm [...]

The sentiment was interpreted as parents showing pride in themselves and not necessarily pride in their children, or how they looked or how they were now presenting themselves in their uniforms. This distinction was important, and was in part contrary to the apparent meaning implied by the Facebook group's conversations and actions. To explain this further, the parents' Facebook conversations and posting of photographs of their children in their new uniform, could have led to an interpretation of parents' pride in their children wearing their new uniforms. However, during the interview discussions, parents' references appeared to qualify the source and focus of this pride. In the extracts below for instance, the source of the pride appeared to be the children themselves showing pride in how they as individuals looked when wearing their uniform:

P1: 402 but it has been massively positive as is the blazer when
403 my son first put it on he was like cock of the walk you
404 know I mean he was check me out and...

And then later:

P2: 422 Yeah its alright dad its cool you know yeah so hm [...]
423 they at school they [...] don't do that but they are
424 privately proud all of them individually I think

None of the above seemed to indicate parents' pride in their children, instead it indicated children's self-pride. The interpretation was that the parents' focus of pride, was more specifically in how they had enabled their children to wear and adhere to the uniform. A deeper narrative analysis (Josselson, 2011) revealed that the parents' pride may have been focused on their financial position which allowed them to be supportive of the school's expectations regarding uniform. The following two extracts, from very early parts of the discussion, shed some light on this:

P2: 76 ...parents do
77 their utmost to A get their kids a uniform send them in
78 it and hm [...] support the school I suppose
P2: 155 ... you're not the other
156 kids your school deems that you wear black shoes I can
157 afford black shoes I will buy you black shoes you will
158 wear black shoes end of. It's not up for discussion

In the extract, the underlined words showed the parent stressing their financial ability to ensure the correct uniform was worn and so through this, their ability to support the school. The issue of affordability had already been linked to ability to support the school, earlier in the discussion:

P2: 72 [...] and I'd like to think most parents
73 where they're capable of doing that obviously certain
74 what-evers [...] would do the same
P1: 75 yeah

P2 was referring to their hope that other parents would support the school as effectively as they did. The vagueness of the phrase 'certain what-evers' was later clarified by P2 as meaning financial constraints as shown in line 91 in the extract below:

P1: 86 in what I'm about to say [laughs loudly] but possibly in
87 in my thinking which is a little bit controversial maybe
88 the parents that aren't possibly working might not be as
89 bothered about what their kids wear to school maybe
P2: 90 this is where I said and I didn't want to get personal
91 either but you know where financial constraints
92 because they can't afford [...] you know

The above extract was chosen for two reasons. The first was that it clarified that P2 had earlier alluded to financial constraints when using the phrase 'certain what-evers'. In addition, the claim made by P1, further supported the tentative conclusion that parents' pride was actually pride in their financial ability. Specifically, the comment made by P1

above when they said ‘the parents that aren’t possibly working might not be as bothered’, could be interpreted as implying that P1 viewed a particular type of parent, characterised by not being in work, as one who may not have had the same value system as themselves. Moreover, that this value system was one which identified supporting the school, as an essential role for parents and importantly, one which the participating parents claimed to have and showed pride in having. The same parent at the very end of the discussion reiterated this point, arguably with even more clarity:

P1: 1170 ...always comes back to, sure there’s plenty of people
1171 that obviously aren’t working that have got good
1172 parenting values hm [...] but there’s going to be those
1173 that haven’t

In both extracts the parent adopted complex lexico-grammatical styles which were perhaps indicative of the fact that they felt that what they were saying was controversial. In support of this view, in the first extract P1 openly said ‘which is a little bit controversial’. The extract exemplified this, through the parent using a number of words which did not have a role in clarifying the subject of the sentence. Instead, the words were used before, during and after the parent actually said ‘parents that aren’t ...working’. These words have all been underlined in the extract reproduced below for ease of reference:

P1: 86 in what I’m about to say [laughs loudly] but possibly in
87 in my thinking which is a little bit controversial maybe
88 the parents that aren’t possibly working might not be as
89 bothered about what their kids wear to school maybe

Also of note was that the parent laughed loudly before reaching the part of the sentence they felt was controversial. Adopting Fairclough’s (2000) terminology, the sentence was highly modulated; ‘possibly’, ‘maybe’, ‘might’ all examples of this.

Further reinforcing the argument that parents were expressing pride in their ability to support the school, was a strong example of an antithesis (Fairclough, 2000) in the extract lines 1170-1173. The antithesis worked through various stages, starting with the sentence

carrying the message that there would be parents, who were not working, who would have bad parenting values. However, instead of constructing the sentence in this direct way, it was presented as a less explicit and perhaps less controversial way, by indicating the exceptions first. The exceptions were ‘plenty of people...aren’t working’ ‘good parenting values’ and then finishing with what was arguably the real meaning of the sentence ‘but there’s going to be those that haven’t’. Overall the inclusion of ‘values’ further substantiated the contention that the parents were expressing pride in their personal values and financial ability to support the school. This could be seen earlier in the discussion when the parents made clear evaluative judgements, about their personal moral values:

- P2: 1155 ...even though we’ve got slightly different ideas of
1156 school and everything we’ve both got good moral values
1157 of how we send them, you wouldn’t send him to school
1158 dirty?...
- P1: 1159 No definitely not...
- P2: 1160 ...that’s basic...
- P1: 1161 ...that comes from the home that comes from parents

The use of the word ‘good’ in line 1156 when referring to their moral values, was a clear example of an inscribed evaluative judgement (Fairclough, 2000). It implied that whilst other moral values existed, these may not have been good, therefore implying they were bad. In addition, P2 used a closed rhetorical question (Hyatt, 2013) to co-opt P1 into the argument and ensured they too were included in the ‘good moral values’ grouping. There was also evidence of these parenting values being linked to membership of a class:

- P2: 1166 but your parenting, it’s a family thing because your
1167 parenting values come from your parents and it goes
1168 down generations it’s a [...] again it goes back to class

It could be interpreted that this class with ‘good moral values’ was being presented by the parents as distinct from that represented by those not in work, some of whom at least, according to the parents, had poor moral or parenting values. The pride expressed by the parents was therefore pride in their identity as belonging to a class, as they perceived it,

which had the values and financial capital to enable it to support the school. Within the scope of the limited discussions held by the parents, it was not possible, or indeed the aim, to draw firm conclusions about the views they held. This study's constructionist stance simply aimed to provide possible interpretations of the utterances and words used by the participating parents. Within this limited context, the parents' views were interpreted as showing that they viewed supporting the school as an important role for them and one they showed pride in. This pride may possibly have been underlined by, as the parents saw it, their identity as having the right values and financial ability which they linked to social class. The analysis offered a tentative interpretation that the parents may have been reinforcing their sense of identity through differentiating themselves from other families which were not supportive of schools' expectations.

5.4 Summary

The analysis of this interview identified five themes. The first two conformity and preparation, were interpreted as being extrinsically motivated (Gagné et al., 2010) and so linked to low levels of autonomy and agency (Deci and Ryan, 1985, 1991; Ryan and Niemiec, 2009; Ryan 1995; Gagné et al., 2010). Parents used terms such as 'mind frame' and 'conform' to express what they saw as a need to teach their children to conform as a preparation for work and life and that uniform was a means to achieving this end. Parents linked their children's limited employment opportunities to the selective school system which they identified as having a deterministic role in 'channelling' and setting 'pathways' for potential employment that their children could expect. They also expressed views about the selective grammar schools' uniforms, as signalling social class and enabling access to more prestigious employment; this was the third theme social class and selective schools. Overall, through all three themes, parents' views were interpreted as displaying simultaneous resistance and acceptance towards the aspects they were describing.

The fourth theme, choice, was interpreted from the parents' expressions of dissatisfaction with the lack of choice between schools, curricula and approaches to children's learning.

Despite all the other secondary schools in the area being academies, therefore ostensibly having the autonomy to provide parents with a diversified school market as described in Chapter 3, the parents did not view moving their child to any other school in the area as a means to ameliorate the situation. A paradox emerged when parents discussed what evidence they would look for to base their choice of school on, if alternatives did exist. Their language was interpreted as showing a common sense, factual and accepted belief that this would be based on examination results. The paradox was that whilst the parents recognised this aspect of the political neoliberal rhetoric, they did not recognise that through the establishment of autonomous academies a diversified school market had been created which was aimed at widening their choices. It is important to underline that whilst this analysis was limited by the small amount of parental data it was based on, it none the less provided an interesting contrast between parental perceptions and government rhetoric which was significant because this was the focus of the second question posed by this study. Moreover, the other significant interpretation was that again with this theme, the parents' views were interpreted as showing simultaneous resistance and acceptance. This was evidenced through their resistance to the notion that they had had any choice of school for their child but simultaneously accepting the notion of the schooling system inherently providing parents with choice.

The last theme support school, was interpreted from the analysis of the pride expressed by the parents in seeing their children in new school uniforms. This was argued because the analysis showed that the focus of the parents' pride was on their ability to reinforce their identity through ensuring their children wore and adhered to the uniform. The discussion posited that this pride may possibly have been related to the parents' view that they had the right values and finances. Furthermore, that these values resulted from the parents' identity expressed through their social class, which enabled them to support the school's expectations about uniform.

In conclusion, the five themes interpreted from this first interview, summarised parental meanings and views which in general were interpreted as raising macro and meso issues related to conformity, preparation for life and work, societal norms and parents' responsibility to be supportive of schools. The themes from this and the next chapter

became the categories used in the content analysis of government speeches in Chapters 8 and 9.

Chapter 6 Parents' views about their agency and school accountability measures

6.1 Overview

This chapter presents the analysis of the interviews related to parents' agency and school accountability measures. As described in Section 4.4.5 of the methodology chapter, originally through their Facebook discussions parents identified the topics 'use of technology' and 'school accountability measures'. However, in practice the 'use of technology' interview discussed issues which were wider ranging and was more focused on parents' agency and so is named as such in the remainder of this study. On the other hand, the 'school accountability measures' discussion, remained largely focused on issues relevant to school outcomes, accountability, inspections and performativity measures. The analyses of these two discussions are presented in this separate chapter, because whilst the conformity discussion, revealed issues which were predominantly external to the school (employment, society and class), the issues raised in this chapter, are interpreted as being more closely related to parents' relationship with schools. In the parental agency discussion for instance, the majority of parents' discussions are focused on claiming their own agency but mediating this because of their strong desire to want to be supportive of schools. Through the interview on school accountability measures, the parent valorises personal, social and moral aspects of schooling contrasting these with school performativity measures, which they perceive as yielding information not designed or useful to them. Despite this, whenever the parent references comparisons or evaluations of schools, they refer to quantitative strategies.

6.2 How 'use of technology' was chosen as a topic for the interview

In the methodology chapter, and again in section 5.1 of the last chapter, the purpose of the Facebook group was argued to be to allow parents a space to raise and explore issues,

and a space to choose topics for further discussion. In line with this, during the Facebook discussions the ‘use of technology’ in schools was first raised by one of the participant parents through the following post¹⁴:

What are your thoughts on Facebook in current education and the use of? with social media being at the forefront of a child's average [sic] day! Dependant on age and the parents view with allowance of having an account, before the legal age of 13. We now as parents are using the same social media to discuss current topics? Interesting and food for thought!” (posted 14th July 2014 at 10.39 pm).

The post was spontaneous in that the topic (social media in schools) had no antecedent. The post was seen by all in the group, elicited 15 responses by half the group members¹⁵ and the first seven were posted within 65 minutes of the original post. The conversation resumed the following afternoon when over a period of just over five hours the remaining eight responses were posted. The comments covered various forms and uses of technology, not solely social media as in the original post. Views included parents claiming that the spread and use of technology within and beyond school was inevitable, along with cautionary views about the use of social media within school.

Finally, all group members chose the topic as one they wanted to discuss further. In preparation for the interview discussion, all posts related to the use of computers and mobile devices at school and at home and all related software applications including social media, were printed verbatim onto cards.

6.2.1. Development of the interview discussions

Two parents attended the interview and before the discussions began, I outlined the details about right of withdrawal, recording of discussions and the availability and choices parents had over the use of the printed Facebook comments. One parent (P3) began reading some of the comments quietly, the other parent (P4) immediately expressed an

¹⁴ The transcript is a direct copy of the message posted on the group’s Facebook page.

¹⁵ The group had 8 members at the time of this post.

opinion over the use of Facebook at school. From this point, the discussions continued without pause for 31 minutes. There were infrequent references to the printed comments, where the parents did refer to them during their discussions, this was recorded in the following sections.

6.2.2. Parents' mediated agency

Parents mediating their agency was a theme which emerged through the hermeneutic narrative readings of the transcripts, rather than explicitly stated by parents. However, once this theme was interpreted, it became evident that every occurrence of parents claiming agency was accompanied by some form of self-regulation on the part of the parent. The first occurrences were noted when parents expressed that they would like to be involved in knowing what type of social media applications their children were using at school:

- P4: 108 I think there should be some sort of conversation with
109 the parent first
- P3: 122 you know we will contact parents so that it's not [...] so you
123 open the idea of it to parents and by the time it comes
124 around you've mulled it...
- P4: 271 the parents should at least have the option to actually say
272 yes or no on that hm it's just pure safety isn't it. I mean
273 I know obviously there is privacy settings on these sites
274 but it is it is a safety thing, a parent should really [...]

The parents demonstrated a degree of modulated language (Fairclough, 2000), evidencing the parents' varying levels of commitment towards their claims. In the first extract, the function of the underlined words, was to avoid the sentences being declarative in mood or categorical in terms of commitment. The second extract showed an even higher degree of modulated language. This was shown by the sentence at line 122 being incomplete and pausing at a point where arguably the subject of the sentence would be placed. The sentence was interpreted as meaning that parents should not be uninformed or uninvolved;

in other words they should be part of the decision. Accepting this, implied that the end of the extract could be interpreted as implying that if parents were informed of the choice of social media beforehand, that somehow eventually when it was actually used by the children, the parents would have accepted this because they had ‘mulled it’; once again this appeared to be an unfinished sentence.

A possible interpretation was that the parents were somehow avoiding a direct claim over their agency regarding their children’s use of social media. The third extract, was in fact the most categorical, but interestingly, even this one ended with an incomplete sentence at the point where the parent seemed to be about to claim their agency. Further support for interpreting parents’ claims to agency being mediated, was to be found in a statement made earlier in the discussion, where the parents explored the possibility of another agent somehow controlling the use of which applications schools should use:

P3: 111 I would have thought, I don’t know if there is, but if
112 there is isn’t there should be some sort of directive
113 you know within education that limits or you know like
114 when kids come to sec...well to primary and secondary
115 school...

There were two striking features of the extract above. The first was once again the highly modulated language (underlined words) showing low levels of commitment or certainty (Fairclough, 2000). The second, was the passive transitive pattern (Fairclough, 2000; Van Dijk, 2001) of the sentence. Transitivity relates to how processes and actions are described through language. To illustrate this, in the sentence above, the process or action was that of limiting (line 113), but the responsibility for carrying out this action was not assigned to any particular agent. The parent used the term ‘directive’ which might imply that the agent could be *inter alia* the school, local authority, government. The relevant point was that, as Van Dijk (2001) argues, this passive construction, characterised by the absence of specific agents who were to carry out actions, systematically de-emphasized and defocused responsibility, which was left implicit rather than explicit. In this construction, the parent expressed the view that the use of social media should have ‘limits’, but they were not explicitly assigning the agency for this to parents or identifying

who should be carrying out the action. This was consistent with the earlier extracts in lines 108-109 and 122 – 124.

Overall adopting a narrative analysis (Riessman, 1990; Josselson, 2011; Baldwin, 2013) in conjunction with a thematic analysis, the parents' claims of agency over the type of applications their children used at school, were interpreted as being mediated. This interpretation was not based on parents articulating directly what was limiting their involvement or agency, but rather it was based on the modulated, non-declarative and passive lexico-grammatical language they adopted. It was therefore interpreted as showing a subconscious parental predisposition, which contrasted with their claim to agency which was more overtly and therefore consciously expressed. It was relevant to explore what the source of the subconscious mediating influence may have been.

Narrative reading of the transcript revealed that it was only towards the latter parts of the discussion that evidence of what was mediating the parents' claims to agency appeared. This initially took the form of parents expressing immediate resistance to the idea of social media use in schools, but also contemporaneously mediating this agency. Evidence of the potential source of the mediation was found in the extracts below. The first one reiterated a claim for parents to be involved but only at the level of informing parents:

P3: 291 ...I don't
292 personally see [...] too much of an issue really hm I think
293 it would be common courtesy to say to the pupils'
294 parents you know this is what we're going to do as part
295 of their coursework but I wouldn't see it as rigid...

The obligation for informing was presumably with the school or teachers, although this was not explicitly stated. This, once again, was masked by the use of a passive transitive construction (Van Dijk, 2001). Moreover, the obligation was only at the level of 'common courtesy' and arguably even more poignantly, it was an obligation to tell the parents 'this is what we're going to do'. This declarative (Fairclough, 2000) phrase offered no scope for a dialogue with parents, instead it placed parents as passive receivers of information. The interpretation was that the mediating influence on parents claiming

greater agency, was their sense of responsibility towards showing support for the school. This had parallels with the theme identified in the previous chapter (section 5.3.5), where parents reinforced their identity of being supportive of school. Reinforcing this interpretation, in the extract above, the parents could have expressed greater and more formal obligations on the school whilst affording parents greater rights and control. However, if parents had made these claims, they may have felt they would have been seen as not supporting or trusting the school. The only example in the discussion of the parents fully asserting a claim to agency, was found later in the transcript:

P3: 383 you know I think that you can only hm [...] yeah if I was
384 to find that the school had been negligent then I would
385 jump up and down and stomp my feet.

In this instance, agency was claimed, but only in response to the school having been negligent. In other words, in order to claim unmediated agency, the parent needed to create an extreme metaphor, namely the school having acted negligently.

Finally, evidence for the parents' agency being mediated by their sense of responsibility towards supporting the school, became clearer towards the end of the discussion. This was through an example of the school contacting the parent to question the appropriateness of a website, which their child had said they were using at home. The parent assured the school that they were aware of the site, and that it was safe and appropriate:

P4: 396 ...I knew it was
397 perfectly safe but they the school rang me to say what
398 is this site and we are going to investigate it, and I
399 said you don't need to. But I could understand it in the
400 sense where I can see there is protection on the
401 school site which is good, but also like you know it's
402 knowing where to draw the line

The parent used declarative and categorical language to express that the school did not need to investigate the site. This direct claim to agency, was then mediated in the second

sentence by the parent identifying ‘protection’ as a reason why the school might have wanted to investigate the site anyway. Having provided a justification for the school’s actions, it was salient that the parent linked the ‘protection’ to ‘the school site’ and, although claiming that this was a good thing, then used the conjunction ‘but’ thus introducing a contrasting clause. The contrast was with ‘where to draw the line’. This was interpreted as the parent claiming their agency, but then balancing this with the mediating influence of wanting to support the school whilst also then questioning how far the school’s influence should reach. Specifically, they questioned whether it should extend beyond the school site. The tensions these contrasting positions created for the parent were then demonstrated by the parent providing a more personal description of their feelings. Even when describing their feelings about the episode, the parent again evidences the tension between their claim to agency and a need to support the school:

P4: 404 ...it made me feel stupid actually [laughs] but I can
405 understand where they were coming from...

A little later the parent’s comment evidenced this same tension:

P4: 415 so yeah I’ve had that experience wasn’t quite really
416 really pleasant but I answered it, I was a little bit sort
417 of like how dare they [laughs] but then I thought come
418 on think about it logically here...

In both these extracts the parent laughed; firstly, immediately following a claim they made which could have been interpreted as accusatory towards the school ‘it made me feel stupid actually’. The second, following the phrase ‘how dare they’ which was a confrontational statement. The laugh, in both cases, could be interpreted as reducing the level of confrontation offered by the parent. Once again, at a point when the parent claimed their agency, they appeared to mediate this so as not to neglect their responsibility to support the school. This passage of speech by the parent remained unfinished due to an interruption by the other parent. The timing of the interruption was at the point when the parent seemed to reflect and perhaps try to resolve the tension by saying ‘think about it logically...’, but instead the other parent offered a non-polemical resolution, which was

certainly supportive of the school, but in effect, provided no resolution to the tension. P4 readily agreed which removed the need to try and resolve the tension:

P3: 419 ... rather their over protective rather than too lax...

P4: 420 ... Yeah absolutely

Overall, throughout the transcript there was evidence of the parents expressing conscious claims to agency but subconsciously mediating this agency. The analysis also reinforced an interpretation that it was the parents' sense of responsibility towards supporting the school, which was mediating their claims to agency. The analysis moved to focusing on this theme of supporting the school which, importantly, had also emerged from the analysis in the previous chapter as presented in section 5.3.5.

6.2.3. Parents' desire to be seen as supportive of school

Evidence of parents' desire to be seen as supportive of school was evidenced throughout the discussions, although this was rarely expressed directly as demonstrated in the first extract below. This was interpreted as reinforcing that this was a sub conscious parental predisposition. During this part of the discussion, the parents stressed their belief that technology was a vital part of a child's education (discussed in section 6.2.4), however they also reflected on the fact that they received little information about what their children were learning:

P4: 328 We don't really

I: 329 Is that an issue?

P3: 330 I personally gauge well not gauge, I can see evidence of
331 how much [emphasis] my boy learns simply in his ability
332 at home you know it used to be that I would be staying
333 up with the trend and NAME as he grew up and now
334 he's just completely overtaken me. And I can see that
335 when now I get a new TV or a new phone he has to
336 show me...

P4: 337 [Nods vigorously in agreement and laughs]

The parents seemed to accept their children's familiarity and confidence with technological gadgets as a proxy for the education they received at school, as reiterated later:

P4: 365 It's just sort of really I suppose accepted that that's it's
366 there now and there's not really any need I suppose to
367 discuss about it in certain ways but it is there

The parent claiming that there was no need to discuss their children's learning of technology 'in certain ways' was interpreted as meaning that there was no need to hold the school to account in formal ways. Linking back to the previous extract, the other parent started by saying 'I personally gauge' but then immediately without pause, qualified this with 'well not gauge'. An interpretation is that the act of 'gauging' involved some form of measuring or quantifying; implying a more formal way of checking what their child was learning, and by implication, what the school was doing. The parents may have felt that this form of accountability may have been seen as them not supporting the school and so they modified their language accordingly.

An even more explicit example of the parents' desire to be seen as supportive of the school, emerged from the discussions concerning the use of social media. The following extract showed how the degree of mediation shown by parents when discussing the use of social media, undermined their claim to agency completely:

P4: 424 Then I think then if it's been if it's a site being used at
425 school then it's up to the school to say it's fine it's
426 acceptable I think any parent would probably go along
427 with that ...

P3: 441 ...School is school and home is home and you know hm

An implication of the parents' comments was that they were happy for the school to make judgements about the type of technology to be used:

I: 499 But you're comfortable with the school the teacher
500 making that judgement?

P4: 501 Yeah, yeah it's not a problem my thoughts on it is that
502 when I was at school it was all hands on we did all the,
503 the teachers really taught from the front and you write
504 it all down. Now it's go to this site sit down and do your
505 work and I'm thinking how are they actually really
506 learning there...

The above extract showed quite clearly how the parent's initial response was one which implied their support of the school; double use of 'yeah' and then 'it's not a problem'. Once the parent begins to elaborate their thinking, what emerged was them questioning how their child learnt through what they perceived to be, less didactic and less effective approaches based on the use of technology.

Overall, this analysis provided further evidence of the parents' sense of responsibility towards supporting the school as was reported in section 5.3.5 in the last chapter. In that analysis it was argued that the parents felt pride in being able to show support for the school, which they achieved through ensuring that their children adhered to the school's uniform requirements. This current analysis, whilst supporting the interpretation of parents' strong sense of wanting to support the school, also evidenced how this contributed to a mediating of their own agency. Extending this analysis further, parents' views seemed to indicate a perception that claiming agency was in some way contradictory with being seen as supportive of school actions and decisions. In summary, the parents' subconscious desire to be seen as supportive, had a propensity to mediate their more conscious claims to agency.

6.2.4. Parents' views about their children's need to prepare

This theme shared meanings with the theme preparation from the conformity interview analysed in Chapter 5. Specifically, the views expressed in this section, and those in section 5.3.2 in the last chapter, underlined parents' strong sense of their children's need to prepare for adult life including employment. As was the case in the last chapter, the parents' views showed externally regulated extrinsic instrumental motivations (Ryan, 1995; Gagné *et al.*, 2010), coupled with deterministic views of the limited work options

available for their children. The following extracts from the very start of the discussion exemplified the parents' views:

- P3: 66 I think technology for children for this generation is a
67 must, it's an absolute necessity you know
- P3: 77 so I think technology [...] is just absolutely vital to a
78 child nowadays because I can't imagine any job that
79 doesn't embrace some form of technology you know
80 that they may go into however manual it may be even
81 if it's in a supermarket or a checkout or in a factory,
82 printing, every job has some aspect of technology so
83 can't see that you can get away with it, from [emphasis]
84 it sorry

The words underlined in the extract above, evidenced that future employment was the extrinsic motivation. In addition, the parents' choice of type of employment, reiterated earlier findings when parents chose predominantly manual low paid examples. Returning to references to the use of technology as a way for their children to prepare for later life, further examples occurred later in the discussion when the other parent reiterated:

- P4: 311 Well it's majorly important isn't it I mean at the end of
312 the day that is the way the world is going, it's getting
313 more and more [...] what's the word I'm looking for...
- P3: 314 ...automated...

Reference was also made to the importance of education in how to use social media:

- P3: 134 why there couldn't be a case for there being social media
135 education involved in citizenship or PSHE or something
136 like that.

It was striking that parents only referred to an education *in* how to use technology safely on one occasion. This supported a claim that preparation was very much motivated by, and limited to, the instrumental need to gain employment.

The way technology should be used also had an instrumental connotation. Parents made frequent references to using technology to find out information and it was never referred to as a creative or leisure tool:

P3: 35 its important and the main topic really would be to use
36 hm [...] technology in the right sense for learning and
37 finding out facts as you know I mean like encyclopaedia
38 type you know what I mean, research and things like
39 that

Overall preparation for future employment was a recurring idea within the transcripts of both interview discussions. This appeared to be the extrinsic motivation behind parents' claims about the importance of technology in schools. Narrative analysis revealed that the idea showed no modification as the discussion developed.

6.2.5. Summary

The first theme of mediated parental agency was argued to show parents' tensions between claiming agency over wanting to know what type of social media their children were using in school, but equally wanting to show their support for school. Their claims to agency were interpreted as consciously held whilst simultaneously, they mediated these claims through a more subconscious need to be seen as supportive of school. The discussion contained recurring examples of the latter which were interpreted through the theme support school which had also been interpreted in the previous chapter's analysis. Another theme interpreted from both this analysis and the analysis in the previous chapter, was the theme of preparation. In both discussions this theme evidenced externally regulated views, driven by extrinsic instrumental outcomes (Ryan, 1995; Gagné *et al.*, 2010). In addition, this theme reiterated parents' deterministic views of the work options available for their children, and that these were limited to manual low paid employment.

6.3 Findings and analysis from interview on ‘school accountability measures’

As explained in section 4.4.5 of the methodology chapter, this interview was initially planned to include three parents. However, only one parent was able to attend. The Facebook comments which had been printed and intended as prompts for the group discussion were used as prompts for the parent to discuss and comment on; leaving them a free choice of which comments if any to choose and discuss.

6.3.1. Facebook discussions on ‘school accountability measures’

The Facebook group had five separate discussions relating to school accountability. The first involved three parents over a period of two hours commenting on the validity of Ofsted; with a fourth member using the ‘like’ function in response to two of the thirteen comments. The comments included those highly critical of Ofsted, those acknowledging the need to inspect schools and some highlighting the Ofsted Dashboard tool, as a useful one for parents to use.

The second discussion took place over a period of nine days, involving four parents making five comments. The comments included views that agreed with Ofsted making unannounced inspections, an argument for an alternative approach with groups of head teachers carrying out peer inspections and comments which argued for greater focus on children’s progress and the effectiveness of communications with parents.

The third discussion involved one parent responding to a BBC newsfeed about the appointment of a new Ofsted chairman¹⁶. The comment received one ‘like’ and one comment critical of the appointment due to the new chairman’s background in business.

The fourth discussion was prompted by me posting a question asking if there were any further comments on the third discussion. Three parents responded making eleven comments over a period of approximately 28 hours. The comments included views about the need for Ofsted to monitor schools’ communications with parents, and that schools

¹⁶ www.bbc.co.uk/news 31.7.14 ‘Academy chain trustee David Hoare is Ofsted chairman’

should create their own league tables and parent boards; the latter generating cautionary comments about parents being too involved in the running of schools.

The final discussion was a post from a group member which they claimed was an article in the Daily Mail online newspaper. The parent wrote: 'Michael Wilshaw is a great guy, but Ofsted is devastating education Interesting read'. The same parent then commented on their own post by praising Michael Wilshaw but calling for the abolition of Ofsted due to its negative impact on education. The post and comment received no further responses from parents. I added a comment asking for the link to the original article, so that other group members could read it and comment if they felt it appropriate; the parent responded that they would post the link but this never happened. When the group voted on which topics to discuss, eight of the ten parents chose this topic. The following section discussed the analysis of the interview transcript.

6.3.2. Parent's valuing of affective measures

The parent read through the printed cards and then immediately began talking about aspects of schooling which they regarded as being of value. Throughout the interview the parent continued to reference aspects of schooling linked to emotions, feelings, attitudes and social relations which they valued. Authors such as Krathwohl *et.al.* (1973) used the term 'affective' to categorise educational objectives related to feelings and attitudes and so this study named this theme affective measures. It must be underlined, that whilst this study adopted the term as a tool for categorising this theme, this did not include adopting the exact definitions proposed by the authors. This was because their definition did not fully reflect the wide range of meanings intended by the parent as shown by the following analysis.

The parent's reference to affective measures, was arguably best captured from the parent's opening few sentences:

- 18 Hm yeah they are generally a good indicator...
22 ...but I don't think that is the only indicator of a
23 good school.

The comments referred to league tables and, during the fifty eight minute interview, this theme was repeated on twenty nine occasions. Each time the parent described features of a school which they felt were important to them:

- 41 ...whereas parents hm [...] as a
42 parent it's more a feeling of a school you know hm
- 51 how many kids are here hm you know how many kids from
52 his old primary school were going to be here hm
- 59 the security because compared to the other school that
60 was in the offing they are the first school that closes in
61 the area when there's bad weather...
- 67 yeah you know and first impressions of walking in you
68 know [...] there's a greeting area here, there's a
69 reception that you walk into where you're initially met

A salient aspect, was that the comments included no specific mention of league tables, instead provided what appeared to be a list of oppositional or alternative features which the parent valued. The language was declarative and showed no modulation (Fairclough, 2000). The parent's belief and commitment to their views was further reinforced by their consistent use of the present simple tense. Hyatt (2013) argued that the use of this tense in speech, helps to construct events as realities. These linguistic features remained consistent throughout the interview as did the parent's contrast of league tables and affective measures. The first occasion was when the parent claimed:

- 157 ...but it's not just the exam results whilst they're
158 major because that's where kids are leading to is
159 getting their exams it's, it's [...] you know it's the
160 behaviour the the hm [...] the extra facilities [...] you
161 hm [...] it's all the little things. Every school offers an

162 education but it's how they look after the children that
163 also matters you know hm [...]

Whilst talking about Ofsted's role, the parent contrasted this with what they valued about school, which was how a school cared and showed concern for children:

820 ... [...] as I said you can't quantify it on 1 to 10 but any
821 reasonable person can [...] can sense and see hm
822 concern warmth you know hm [...]

The parent repeated the importance of caring, through providing a contrast with an approach they disagreed with:

178 Yeah, one local school in particular has hm [...] basically
179 a book system where anything you want to do you have
180 to carry the book with you, if you are minute late hm [...]
181 that's great [...] but what if there was a genuine out of
182 control [...] you know.

This contrast arguably highlighted an impersonal approach which the parent later explained as lacking in fairness for individual children:

206 But then it's not fair if that child feels aggrieved because
207 genuinely [emphasis] they've not done anything wrong
208 or something has gone wrong but it was completely
209 out of their control and not their intention hm...

Through verbalising their thoughts, the parent then focused on what they described as the attitude of the school and whether this was 'caring' or 'rigid' which arguably, was a return to their earlier point about an impersonal approach.

218 ...it's the attitude of the school you
219 know if the attitude is we will try on every occasion to
220 treat each child individually then that [...] that's a kind
221 of a caring culture rather than a rigid, hm ...

Interestingly, the parent also cited examples of how the school communicated with parents, which was an issue also raised through the Facebook discussion. The parent clarified:

252 I can personally say that with every [...] not incident
253 but every communication I've had with the school since
254 NAME has been here has been [...] hm may have not been
255 positive in the nature but was always a
256 positive outcome hm [...]

An interesting point was what the parent may have intended by 'positive outcome'. This was unlikely to be in relation to their child, because the situations the parent described were ones where as he put it:

270 ... when I've come in and NAME's been [...] the wrong
271 party or the wrong side of the fence hm [...]

The outcome for the child was therefore likely to be some form of sanction or reprimand; therefore unlikely to be the positive outcome the parent was alluding to. The nature of what the parent meant, became clearer through their narrative:

273 ...as NAME's dad I
274 can't believe he's done something but I've never been
275 made to feel belittled or hm like the guilty party you
276 know ...

This was interpreted as demonstrating that the positive outcome the parent was valuing was how they themselves were treated by the school. This may have been linked to a sense of responsibility which the parents demonstrated through the theme support school identified in both the previous interviews (sections 5.3.5 and 6.2.3). In other words, if the parent felt they were treated positively by the school, they may have perceived this as the school confirming they were being supportive of the school. The interpretation drawn, was that a situation where the school may 'belittle' a parent or made them 'feel guilty', was equivalent to accusing the parent of not having fulfilled their responsibility to support the school. It would seem consistent therefore that the parent would value the right kind

of communication, as they saw it, which did not call into question them fulfilling their responsibility to support the school. A fuller analysis of this view was conducted in the next chapter.

The remainder of the transcript contained numerous further examples of the parent identifying aspects of schools which they interpreted as important and valuable. The most frequently quoted aspect was ‘emotion’ which the parent cited on six occasions; two in relation to league tables and four when discussing Ofsted, as shown respectively in the two extracts below:

239 best interests not just educationally but safety
240 emotionally welfare, because they are me from 9 till
241 3.20

803 ...but the actual getting the heart
804 of the school and getting the emotion and the warmth
805 or lack of ...

The second extract above, also contained ‘warmth’ which was cited by the parent on five occasions as being an aspect which they felt was important about a school; once again this was in relation to them discussing league tables as well as Ofsted:

373 ...is important hm but I do feel that it’s
374 very sterile and statistical it doesn’t take and [...] I
375 don’t have any ideas of how you could quantify emotion and
376 warmth in a school...

Through discussing school inspections, the parent focused on the Ofsted online questionnaire ‘Parent view’ and argued for what they believed, the questionnaire should focus on:

444 this questionnaire that’s available from Ofsted if there
445 was a part of that that said you know hm how would
446 you say your child has changed since being at school x

447 hm do you feel that hm [...] I don't know about
448 emotionally satisfied but do you feel that they are
449 confident that they are happy you know

In the extract, emotion was again raised and in addition, 'confident' and 'happy' were also included, the latter being quoted on one further occasion. Finally, analysis of the transcript revealed that the parent used the term 'social' on three occasions. The first:

385 school isn't just about [...] school is about learning
386 but not just educational learning but social learning
387 and life [...] you know, there's all that it's [...] you
388 know it's about the interactions you know hm [...]

The contrast provided by the parent between 'educational' and 'social' learning, was interesting and was analysed more fully as part of the next theme. At this stage, the salient point was that the parent had identified that 'social learning' was another aspect which they valued. The parent returned to 'social' on two further occasions; firstly in relation to the school community itself:

745 as I was saying about hm Ofsted being a little more
746 relaxed and trying to find a way of taking into
747 consideration the emotive side of school and the social...

Secondly, related to the wider local community:

755 ...and also you know the local
756 climate, the local [...] social you know etc. So I think
757 that would be a much better [emphasis] hm [...]

The interpretation drawn was that the term 'social' was used interchangeably to denote children's learning of interpersonal relations, the social interactions and relationships within the school environment, and also the school's interactions with its local context.

The final analysis in relation to affective measures, was an attempt at exploring the degree of commitment shown by the parent. The initial level of analysis was simply based on the frequency and consistency with which the parent raised these aspects. The findings

confirmed that in neither of the two previous interviews, was a theme repeated as often or as consistently. The second level of analysis, was through the textual study of the extracts which, as described, showed significant levels of commitment on each of the occasions the parent talked about affective measures. In practice, when the parent referred to this theme it was referenced as an antithesis to performativity measures, and the language was never modulated, which was regarded as significant and so warranted deeper analysis.

The antithesis was identified through a macro reading of the transcript, influenced by a hermeneutic narrative analysis approach (Riessman, 1990; Josselson, 2011; Baldwin, 2013). This confirmed that on each of the occasions when the parent discussed league tables or Ofsted, they never spoke directly about the details of what may or may not have been in the tables or reports. Instead, the parent raised affective measures as a form of antithesis. Fairclough (2000) argues that this can signify that the speaker is excluding the possibility of two realities coexisting or being possible. In other words, if the parent's affective measures were the true meanings of what they valued about schools and were the antithesis of league tables and Ofsted measures, the latter may have therefore at best, carried little value or meaning, and at worst have had no meaning or relevance at all for the parent.

A pertinent counter argument to this analysis, was that perhaps the parent was simply not familiar or aware of league tables or Ofsted, and so for this reason they at no point, talked specifically about what aspects they disagreed with or did not value. However, the relevant point for this study, was that even if this were true, it would still have been valid to argue that whatever level of familiarity the parent had with league tables and Ofsted, the parent had formed, at the very least, an implicit view that they were of little relevance or hold little meaning in relation to what they valued about schools. The significance of the performativity measures' lack of value for the parent, was that this contrasted with neoliberal assumptions (as analysed in sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2), which predicated that parents trusted, valued and accessed information from these measures. In the case of the parent involved in this interview, this raised the question of how much agency they had as a consumer in the marketplace of schools in their area.

In conclusion the three levels of analysis were argued to show the parent's conscious and deep commitment towards the value of affective measures. In addition, the suggestion of these measures as antitheses of league tables and Ofsted, was interpreted as a conscious resistance to neoliberal notions of the role of performativity measures. The parent's views were argued to attribute a detached quality to performativity measures, which revealed a theme of otherness which formed the focus of the next analysis.

6.3.3. Parental views of otherness towards performativity measures

The theme otherness was identified as capturing the parent's detachment from performativity measures. At the very start of the interview, the parent made the following statement in response to a Facebook post from a parent asking what other parents thought of examination league tables:

31 ... [...] I have to be honest and say
32 league tables didn't really play a huge part in that hm...

The parent was referring to the role played by league tables, in their choice of school for their child. The mood of the sentence was declarative (Fairclough, 2000) implying the parent was unambiguous about their actions. This was arguably made more significant by the fact that the modality (*ibid*) of the sentence showed a degree of modulated language; the preamble 'I have to be honest', use of the word 'really' and perhaps most significantly, rather than saying that league tables played a small part, expressing it as the negative form 'didn't really play a huge part'. According to Fairclough (2000), this form of modulated language towards obligation, can be interpreted as the speaker's awareness of not having met a duty they perceive to be incumbent on them. The significance of this, was that the parent may have felt they had a duty to base their choice of school on league table information, but actually they chose not to. This could not be explained by assuming that the parent was unaware of league tables, as on four separate occasions they referred to them indicating who they may be useful to; two examples are shown below:

76 So yeah league tables they they
77 can tell you if that's what you want to know and some

78 parents...

94 ... [...] obviously people

95 who are data facts and figures inspired and understand

96 hm [...] they're fine you know

Returning to the argument about the parent's sense of obligation, both extracts demonstrated that the parent had actively formed an opinion about league tables, and had decided that they had a value to others but not to them personally. This theme of otherness was further reinforced when the parent again identified value in league tables for other agencies:

36 ... hm I think

37 they're important to to [...] the establishment to

38 compare themselves hm...

I: 39 Do you mean the schools themselves?

40 Schools, local authority Ofsted because they you

41 know use facts and figures, whereas parents hm [...]

Much later in the interview, the parent returned to this same theme of accountability measures being useful to other agencies; this time in relation to Ofsted's 'parent say' questionnaire:

341 So I think if Ofsted changed

342 that not hugely but just said you know hm and I don't

343 know if they want it as a one off or a once a year thing

344 from parents...

The parent accepted that the questionnaire was useful for Ofsted, but again reiterated that it served others' purposes and not theirs as a parent. Using 'they' as the agent who wanted the questionnaire, implied no internal or external parental motivation (Gagné *et al.*, 2010). Reinforcing this interpretation were the parent's subsequent suggestions of a possible external motivation Ofsted could adopt:

346 ... once a year they would do a draw where x
347 amount as a percentage of the people that did it would
348 get a 10 pound or whatever voucher you know some kind
349 of little incentive, then parents would do it.

The relevance of a lack of motivation was that, as Niemiec and Ryan (2009) argued, this implied a low level of agency and autonomy. The significance of this was that a form of school accountability, which successive governments' rhetoric had argued served the purpose of increasing parental agency, had arguably failed to serve its purpose in relation to this parent.

Analysing whether the parent's lack of motivation could potentially be explained by their disinterest in their child's education, came from two areas of the transcripts. The first, was the evidence already cited in relation to the theme of affective measures, where the parent provided numerous aspects of schooling which they valued and felt were important for their child. The second, was evidenced through the parent's comments slightly later in the discussion when they stated:

351 ... so if you're incentivised to do something
352 you make time hm and that doesn't make it less
353 important [...] because obviously it's our children's
354 education and if the comments we make on that would
355 make an impact and we may be realised that a little bit
356 more [...] so [.....]

This was interpreted as unambiguously confirming that the parent was interested in their child's education, and that their lack of motivation towards performativity measures, was due to their belief that the information yielded, did not further their agency as parents; it was intended for others.

Another recurring theme (seven occasions) linked to the notion of otherness, was that the parent referred to the complexity of the information acting as a barrier, as shown by the following extracts:

105 ... hm I think if you wanted them to take the

106 league tables into consideration more if they were
107 simplified...

113 [...] I think if the parents could understand them they'd
114 matter to them hm...

Once again the parent's language was declarative and showed no modulation (Fairclough, 2000), indicating their commitment to their comments. The interpretation was that the complexity of the information alienated the parent and reinforced the view that it was information not intended for them but rather aimed at other agents. The parent used similarly declarative language when they argued that the accountability measures served institutional purposes, which they saw as different to their priorities as a parent:

235 No, no league tables tell you about the performance
236 of a school hm whereas one of the main things for
237 me is when I pack my boy off in the morning [...] I know
238 that those people that are looking after him...

The comment above reinforced the sense of otherness which the parent expressed about league tables and the lack of personal relevance.

At this juncture it was relevant to revisit an argument raised in relation to the previous theme affective measures. It was noted, during that discussion, that the parent remarked: 'school is about learning but not just educational learning but social learning'. The interpretation was that the otherness which the parent felt towards league table information, was linked to 'educational learning' and that the affective measures, as described earlier, represented the 'social learning'. This more 'personal' focus was reinforced on a further eight occasions when the parent talked more specifically about Ofsted. The following were two examples:

446 ...if there
445 was a part of that that said you know hm how would
446 you say your child has changed since being at school x...

465 and I think if if parents were given some facility to try
466 and say you know look my my son [...] NAME on a personal
467 note...

Additionally, the parent expressed this sense of ‘personal’ through making reference on a further seven occasions to the importance they attached to locality and locally based information about schools. An example of this was the parent referring to locally based knowledge as an important source of information:

150 ... hm personally because I’m
151 local and I know the area and I know that [SCHOOL] does
152 vocational courses hm as I’ve had family members here
153 so that would be something instantly star [SCHOOL] because
154 it offers something that nobody else does.

Much later towards the end of the discussion, the parent reiterated their view that they valued more ‘personal’ and locally held information. They voiced this in relation to Facebook comments which argued for a revised form of inspection based on local headteachers carrying out the reviews:

863 Thing is local heads would have their hand on the pulse
864 and it’s no different than you know you as a local head
865 here going to Devon or Lincolnshire [...] you wouldn’t
866 have a clue.

Once again the parent’s language was declarative and showed no signs of modulation. Their example implied quite directly that in their view, inspections carried out by non-local head teachers were of little value. Once again the parent’s meaning was interpreted through the theme otherness. In this instance, this was based on the parent implying that other people besides local heads, ‘wouldn’t have a clue’. In addition, the parent on four separate occasions, cited other advantages of local head teachers carrying out inspections. The first of these was that the approach should be non-judgemental:

616 ... but I just think it should be hm [...] it

617 shouldn't be just judgemental ...

Later, the parent clarified this further (four occurrences) by expanding the notion of a non-judgemental approach, to one which encouraged collaboration between schools, their staff and children:

681 local area hm and I think it would also build better
682 ties between secondary schools you know hm not
683 just the schools but I mean the staff and the pupils...

698 ... also joint ventures
699 where it brings them together in a neutral or positive way
700 rather than just competing

887 4 local schools, then it could also build up better
888 relations as I said between the heads the staff and
889 the pupils.

This study interpreted the meanings of the underlined parts of the extracts above, as implying collaboration and togetherness and that these were proposed by the parent as antitheses (Fairclough, 2000) to what they believed current Ofsted inspections entailed and engendered between schools. Based on this premise, the implicit view held by the parent, was that Ofsted could engender less collaborative approaches and so rather than encouraging togetherness, encouraged otherness.

Overall, within this theme of otherness the parent's meanings were interpreted as consciously characterising performativity measures as serving the purposes of, and being accessible to, others. Also, that these measures encouraged competition and judgemental approaches which, in turn, distanced schools from one another and so fostered a sense of otherness between them. This interpretation implied the parent consciously refuted the usefulness of accountability measures. However, simultaneously the parent accepted the existence and, usefulness of the measures for others. Based on this interpretation the

analysis moved to focusing on the nature of the parent's acceptance and internalisation of accountability measures.

6.3.4. Parent's doxic acceptance of quantification

The ideas and meanings categorised under this theme of doxa of quantification, were always implicit or tacit implications of what the parent articulated. It was only through a hermeneutic narrative analysis (Riessman, 1990; Josselson, 2011; Baldwin, 2013) that these more subconsciously held meanings emerged. This was demonstrated for instance through collocations (Fairclough, 2000) the parent made between affective measures and notions of quantification. In other words, despite the parent citing affective measures as antitheses to school performativity measures, they then referred to ways of measuring or quantifying the outcomes of schooling. There were six separate occurrences of these collocations; the first was in relation to league tables:

374 [...] I
375 don't have any ideas of how you could quantify emotion and
376 warmth in a school on a local or national basis

Towards the end of the interview, the last of the six was in relation to Ofsted:

819 hm but I certainly think that there needs to be some way
820 of [...] as I said you can't quantify it on 1 to 10 but any
821 reasonable person can [...] can sense and see hm
822 concern warmth you know hm [...]

These collocations were interpreted as a doxa (Bourdieu, 2006) espousing a subconsciously accepted common sense understanding that, if judgements were to be made about aspects of schooling, then they needed to be quantifiable. In the two extracts above, the parent was providing affective measures as explicit counter examples to what they perceived as being accountability measures. Despite this, they did not proceed to question the need to measure, but rather posed a rhetorical question about how it might be done. Analysis of the transcript revealed that throughout the interview the parent never

questioned the need to measure, quantify or rank aspects of schooling or the schools themselves.

Another striking collocation was found between school performance in league tables and choice of school (five occurrences). The parent's first remarks in relation to this were:

- 18 Hm yeah they are generally a good indicator of where
19 the school sits within all schools hm but you know hm
20 hm personally hm whilst obviously you want a good
21 school that you know hm the higher it is the better I
22 suppose but I don't think that is the only indicator of a
23 good school.

The extract showed a degree of modulated language (underlined words) but interestingly, this was a preamble to the parent actually saying that league table positions did not influence their choice of school:

- 29 ...So [...] for me personally hm [SCHOOL] was a choice
30 because of different things that it offered

The focus of their statement was that league tables did not influence their choice, yet in order to arrive at this statement, the parent firstly cited what they believed or perceived to be the common sense accepted norm of using league table information to inform parental choice of school. It was relevant that in section 5.3.4 of the previous chapter, this same conclusion was reached. In that instance, the discussion was about the theme of choice and parents demonstrated that they had internalised and accepted the principle of using accountability measures as tools to help in the choice of school. At this stage of the analysis this acceptance and internalisation, was interpreted as the parent's subconscious support of principles based on their societal acceptance as norms and common sense experience, again captured by Bourdieu's notion of doxa (2006). Importantly, this notion includes a view that agents are unaware of the possible disadvantages they may be experiencing as a result of the doxa. To explain this further, through the theme of otherness the parent expressed a detachment towards performativity measures, yet through this current theme they simultaneously implied a common sense accepted view

that these measures were in place to help parents choose between schools. The nature of the disadvantage, which the parent may have been unaware of, was that they as an individual were therefore excluded from having the agency to use the information and so were impeded from accessing a process available to other parents.

Another form of doxa, which it was possible to identify within the extract, was the notion of ranking schools. The parent referred to this by saying ‘where the school sits within all schools’. This collocation occurred on a further three occasions. The extracts below show each of these occurrences:

100 ...how they pan out compared to each other...

115 if there was a mosaic way of making an average of ...

117 [SCHOOL A] hm you know hm academy, [SCHOOL B]

118 rank in this order that would be great [...] and that

119 would be simple this the best school this is the second

120 third, ...

It was relevant that, in relation to the theme otherness, it was argued that the parent felt little or no motivation towards accountability measures. Furthermore, the parent also expressed conscious resistance towards judging and comparing schools because this acted against collaboration, which they felt was important. Despite this, in the extracts above, they showed an acceptance towards ranking and comparing schools. Based on this analysis, the interpretation drawn was that, whilst not explicitly valuing performativity measures, the parent nonetheless showed a subconscious acceptance of the doxa of quantification; a ubiquitous mantra which claimed that if it was of value it must be quantifiable.

6.4 Summary

Chapters 5 and 6 aimed to answer this study's first question, namely what are parents' views about schooling? This was done through exploring and interpreting parents' views about aspects of schooling they had identified through the Facebook group and had chosen to discuss further. Their views were interpreted through the nine separate themes discussed in these last two chapters and summarised in Table 3 below. The table also shows the number of occurrences of each theme and the interview from which the theme was interpreted. It is important to underline that the themes shown in Table 3 remained unaltered and were adopted in the analysis of government speeches as discussed in Chapters 8 and 9. This maintained the study's reflexive aim of ensuring parents' realities and meanings were foregrounded whilst minimising, as far as possible, my dual role as researcher head teacher.

Before analysing the government speeches, the next chapter focused on further analysis of the parents' themes. The aim of this analysis was to provide interpretations of the themes using concepts derived from Gramsci and Bourdieu. In particular, the aim was to explore the nature of the parents' conscious resistance and simultaneous subconscious embodiment and internalisation of the issues they had raised and discussed. Carrying out this further analysis also enabled this study's findings and interpretations of parents' views to be situated within the literature considered in Chapters 2 and 3. The purpose of this was to identify areas of congruence and contrast between this study's perspectives and interpretations of disadvantaged families' experience of schooling, and the perspectives presented by the literature.

Table 3 Summary of the 12 parental themes

Theme	No. of occurrences	Interview Focus
Conformity	18	Conformity
Preparation ¹⁷	17	
Social Class and Selective schools	20	
Choice	7	
Support School ¹⁸	20	
Mediated parental agency	7	Parental agency
Support school	5	
Preparation	11	
Affective measures	29	School Accountability measures
Otherness	37	
Doxa of quantification	15	

¹⁷ Preparation – this theme was interpreted from two discussions and in both it was represented the same parental meanings so was treated as a single theme in the analysis of government speeches in Chapters 8 and 9.

¹⁸ Support School - this theme was interpreted from two discussions and in both it was represented the same parental meanings so was treated as a single theme in the analysis of government speeches in Chapters 8 and 9.

Chapter 7 Analysing the parental themes

7.1 Overview

This chapter situates the parental themes within the literature presented in Chapters 2 and 3. This reveals that much of the literature supports this study's interpretation that parents' views contrast and show resistance to various aspects of schooling. However, there was far less evidence of the literature reporting this study's findings that parents' views also simultaneously showed embodiment and internalisation of the same aspects of schooling which they consciously resisted. These differences between the literature and this study's findings, are analysed using concepts derived from Gramsci and Bourdieu. Based on this analysis the discussion questions whether the literature's reliance on notions of marginalisation and exclusion can adequately and fully explain disadvantaged families' experiences of schooling. Instead the chapter proposes that parents' views provide evidence of their simultaneous inclusion and exclusion from neoliberal discourses about schooling.

7.2 Situating the parental themes within the literature

Overall the parents' views, interpreted through the themes, captured three parental discourses. Firstly, that schooling was primarily focused on preparing children for instrumental outcomes linked to employment. Secondly, parents' awareness of aspects of neoliberal schooling. Thirdly, their claims to agency. However, most of the themes also contained a paradox between parents expressing conscious resistance to, and simultaneous acceptance of, aspects of the neoliberal ideology. This interpretation appeared to contrast with authors' arguments in Chapters 2 and 3.

Beginning with the literature reviewed in section 2.2.1, exploring parents' views about different aspects of schooling (Tabberer, 1995; Shumow, 1997; Rätty and Kasanen, 2007; Gibbons and Silva, 2011; Hamilton *et al.*, 2011; Kintrea *et al.*, 2011), it was clear that authors agreed that issues of disadvantage and exclusion influenced parents' views. More

specifically the literature explored in section 2.2.2 (Borg and Mayo, 2001; Deslandes, 2001; Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Phadraig, 2003; Irvine, 2005; Harris and Goodall, 2007; Peters, *et al.*, 2007; Ranson, 2011) indicated that issues of disadvantage adversely influenced parents' confidence, ability and actual engagement with schools. Finally, authors considered in section 2.4.3 who focused on disadvantaged families' experiences and outcomes, argued that contexts of class, race, gender and deprivation, acted as mechanisms of marginalisation and exclusion resulting in these parents' inability to access aspects of the neoliberal school system (Crozier, 1999, 2003; Gewirtz, 2001; Reay, 1996, 2001, 2005, 2017; Sarojini-Hart, 2013; Gillborn, 1998, 2014, 2016). Overall these authors argued that disadvantaged parents' values and contexts, contrasted with those expected by schools and that as result the parents and their children would experience further marginalisation. Similarly, the literature cited in Chapter 3, demonstrated that, authors who were writing shortly after the inception of the marketized system (following the 1988 ERA), argued that the market would result in negative outcomes for disadvantaged families (Bagley, 1996; David, 1997; Ball and Vincent, 1998; Gillborn, 1997; Adnett and Davies, 1999; Gewirtz, 2000; Rowe, 2000). In addition, the chapter reviewed studies focused on developments of the neoliberal rhetoric, including more interventionist government stances, increasingly complex performativity measures and greater diversity of schools. These studies also argued that disadvantaged families' marginalisation and exclusion had been exacerbated by these more recent developments (Barker, 2010; Gunter & Fitzgerald, 2011; Raffo, 2011; Mansell, 2011; Wright, 2011; Lupton, 2011; Wilson, 2011; Gunter & Fitzgerald, 2012; Hoskins, 2012; Hatcher, 2012; Lingard & Sellar, 2012; Barker, 2012; Machin, and Silva, 2013; Reay, 2017). Overall, the authors argued that the assumptions made by neoliberal ideology contrasted and were not relevant to disadvantaged families' experiences, values and contexts. These authors' contentions supported this study's interpretations of parents' resistance to aspects of neoliberal schooling. However, the authors did not report on the paradox of parents' simultaneous internalisation of the same principles they were consciously resisting.

Briefly exploring the findings from Chapters 5 and 6 helped to focus on this paradox. To start with, whilst there seemed little doubt that the parents opposed and contrasted with the nature, complexity and role of performativity measures, they equally embodied its

principles of quantification. Moreover, the parents resisted the symbolism of uniforms, selective schools and their combined impacts on employment prospects. However, they also showed pride in ensuring their children wore the uniform and embodied deterministic views about their children's future work. The parents made frequent claims about their agency and identity but also appeared to subconsciously mediate these in order to be perceived as being supportive of school. Lastly, the parents resisted the notion that they had a choice of school and form of schooling but simultaneously implied they had not fulfilled their obligation of using performativity measures when choosing a school for their child. The paradox of parents' conscious resistance and simultaneous subconscious internalisation of aspects of neoliberal rhetoric, could not be adequately explained through notions of marginalisation and exclusion alone. This study's findings implied that parents' views were far more complex than had been reported in the literature reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3. In order to address this complexity, the analysis used concepts which addressed issues of agents' conscious and subconscious motivations, as well as their resistance and acceptance of societal pressures.

7.3 Parents' views as motivation and conscious hegemony

The complexity of parents' motivations, were demonstrated throughout the discussions. In the first interview for instance, the themes, conformity and preparation, were interpreted as being extrinsically motivated (Gagné et al., 2010) and so linked to low levels of autonomy and agency (Deci and Ryan, 1985, 1991; Ryan and Niemiec, 2009; Ryan 1995; Gagné et al., 2010). This interpretation adopted a psychological perspective focused on the motivations and actions of individual agents. Whilst this was congruent with parents' views, because they used terms such as mind frame and conform, which could be interpreted as psychological perspectives, the parents also identified society as creating the need for their children to conform. This implied that parents had an implicit belief that it was societal expectations which created the need for their children to conform in order to prepare for work and adult life and that uniform was a means to achieving this end. However, the parents' conviction over the need for their children to conform and prepare, also created a tension in them because they stated that as parents,

their values did not necessarily correspond to the expectations of society. In order to fully explore the parents' meanings, motivations and tensions, it was therefore necessary to use concepts which combined individual agents' psychological predispositions with societal perspectives; as Harvey (1996) argued, it was necessary to consider the interrelatedness of agents' actions and structural perspectives.

This dual perspective was achieved by analysing the parents' extrinsic motivations through Gramsci's (1971) notion of hegemony which he described as systems which 'influence the popular masses as an external political force, an element of cohesive force exercised by the ruling classes and therefore an element of subordination' (Gramsci, 1971; p.770). Adopting this perspective, the parents' consensus over the need for their children to conform and prepare was interpreted as a form of hegemonic dominant discourse about schooling preparing children for the world of work. Subsumed in this, was adherence to wearing a uniform, which Reay (2001) argued was a distinguishing aspect of schooling in the UK. Reay underlined this view by quoting survey data which looked at education in England, France and the USA which showed 'England as the most explicit example of the use of schooling by a dominant class to secure hegemony over subordinate groups' (Reay, 2001: 333).

In addition to parents' views about uniform being interpreted as a form of hegemony, their consensus over the importance of their children developing computer skills, was also interpreted to be hegemonic in nature and was also captured through the theme preparation. Evidence of the hegemonic nature of their consensus, was reinforced by the fact that the need for computer skills was unmediated irrespective of the type of employment the parents envisaged for their children. Also from the conformity interview, aspects of the theme of choice could be interpreted through a conception of hegemony, because parents accepted the common sense factual belief, that parental choice was a reality. In contrast however, parents also expressed their conscious resistance to the notion being relevant to their lived experience because they claimed they had no choice of school. Throughout their discussions parents' views demonstrated contrasts between what they claimed consciously and what they implied subconsciously. In order to explore

how far this could be explained by hegemony required a deeper analysis of the notion itself.

Gramsci's (1971) contention, was that hegemony was a form of political and ideological control through consent. Importantly, consent implied a level of conscious thought as argued by authors analysing Gramsci's notion of hegemony:

this prevailing consciousness is internalised by the population it becomes part of what is generally called 'common sense' so that the philosophy, culture and morality of the ruling elite comes to appear as the natural order of things (Boggs 1976: 49).

Further reinforcing the conscious nature of hegemony, was Burke's analysis (1999, 2005) which argued that a hegemony retained its neutrality and general applicability, even if agents acting within the hegemonic environment, complained, called for improvements or attempted to reform it. The salient aspect of Burke's argument, was his focus on agents' resistance through complaints and calls for reforms, because this concurred with the parents' resistance. Importantly, this underlined that the processes involved in resisting was predominantly, although not exclusively, a conscious engagement with the hegemony. Exploring the extent to which Gramsci considered the act of resistance as operating solely at a conscious level, it was useful to return to his own analysis. This revealed that Gramsci underlined that it was possible to interpret resistance as operating at different levels of consciousness and that it took different forms:

One might almost say that he has two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness): one which is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed (Gramsci, 1971: 641).

This reading of Gramsci was further supported by Burawoy (2012), who emphasised that Gramsci allowed for different forms of consciousness including dual consciousness, and that through these different forms, hegemony operated through agents giving consent. In summary, the conception of hegemony provided a useful way of explaining the parents'

engagement and resistance to aspects of neoliberal schooling. In addition, it highlighted that parents may have been expressing their resistance through differing levels or degrees of consciousness. These degrees or dualities of consciousness could help to explain the paradox of parents simultaneously resisting whilst also embodying the same neoliberal aspects. In order to explore this paradox further, the analysis turned to concepts developed by Bourdieu which placed greater emphasis on the role played by agents' subconsciously assumed realities.

7.4 Analysing parents' views as symbolic violence and doxa

Bourdieu's notion of 'symbolic domination and misrecognition' (Bourdieu, 2006), as argued by Burawoy (2012), differed from hegemony in not presuming a conscious consent on the part of the individual, but none the less, described a dominant discourse which was accepted by agents as common sense. The essential difference in how the domination operated, was arguably best shown by contrasting Gramsci's description of consciousness, as quoted above, with Bourdieu's own words:

In the notion of 'false consciousness' which some Marxists invoke to explain the effect of symbolic domination, it is the word 'consciousness' which is excessive; and to speak of 'ideology' is to place in the order of representations, capable of being transformed by the intellectual conversion that is called the 'awakening of consciousness', what belongs to the order of beliefs, that is, at the deepest level of bodily dispositions. (Bourdieu, 2000: 177)

In Bourdieu's terms agents suffered symbolic violence and disadvantage because of the impact of their deeper subconscious beliefs (Bourdieu, *ibid*). To illustrate this, a study of low paid workers (Bowman, 2010) found that interviewees understood the structural processes that affected their lives, and yet at the same time they also internalised responsibility for their lack of success. Bowman argued 'there is here a form of 'symbolic violence', as they are caught between a desire to advance and an inability to do so' (Bowman, 2010:13). Similarly in my study, the participant parents' description of performativity measures to aid in choice of school, could be interpreted as symbolic violence. This was because the parents showed a clear awareness and resistance to the

structural processes involved, but equally assumed responsibility for their lack of engagement with it. The unquestioning nature of this internalization, strongly echoed Bourdieu's (*op.cit.*) notion of symbolic violence, and this was evidenced on two further occasions.

The first of these was in the parental agency interview, when a parent described a situation where the school questioned their decision to allow their child to access a particular website at home. In their account of the incident, the parent vacillated between, on the one hand, consciously asserting their agency over being able to judge what was safe for their child to access, and on the other hand, abiding by the school's wishes to investigate the site. The parent expressed this as:

P4: 404 ...it made me feel stupid actually [laughs] but I can
405 understand where they were coming from because I
406 thought hold on are they telling me that I'm a parent
407 that doesn't actually look to see what my children are
408 actually doing on the internet and it made me actually
409 double look then and I felt [...]

Then clarified further with:

P4: 415 so yeah I've had that experience wasn't quite really
416 really pleasant but I answered it, I was a little bit sort
417 of like how dare they [laughs] but then I thought come
418 on think about it logically here...

The parent was argued to have suffered a level of misrecognition or symbolic violence in her role as a responsible parent, shown by the single-underlined phrases in the extract. However, the parent then simultaneously showed an almost subconscious need to conform to the school's requests, as shown by the double-underlined phrases. The analysis interpreted this as the theme mediated parental agency which, it was argued, was the domination which acted at a subconscious level and created in parents a predisposition to show that they were supportive of school; in turn the latter was interpreted as the theme support school which appeared in both the conformity and parental agency discussions.

A further example of symbolic violence, was in the interview on accountability measures. The parent expressed the view that they valued school communications which were positive, and did not want to experience ones which were potentially negative. The latter left them feeling ‘guilty’ or belittled. Whilst this was interpreted through the theme affective measures because the parent’s narrative was about aspects they valued about schooling, it was also possible to interpret the more subconscious motivation as a form of symbolic violence. This was interpreted through viewing the parent as having a predisposition towards acting in certain ways, which identified them as being a ‘good parent’ i.e. one who supported the school (the theme support school). If the school communication was negative, then this was equivalent to accusing the parent of not having fulfilled their responsibility, or predisposition, to act appropriately; this mismatch or misrecognition was what constituted the symbolic violence. The deep personal nature of this potential misrecognition, was shown by the phrases used by the parent:

270 times when I’ve come in and NAME’s been [...] the wrong
271 party or the wrong side of the fence hm [...] it’s been
272 quite humbling and not embarrassing...
273 ...I
274 can’t believe he’s done something but I’ve never been
275 made to feel belittled or hm like the guilty party...

Overall, the parents’ lack of use of performativity measures, their mediated agency and their desire to be seen as a ‘good parent’ were all examples of symbolic violence. This operated through the parents because at a structural level there existed a common sense orthodoxy of the accepted world view of schooling. Whilst in Gramscian (1971) terms this common sense view was sustained through a conscious consensus giving rise to hegemony, for Bourdieu it operated as a subconsciously held worldview of common sense accepted truths which led to misrecognition or symbolic violence. Bourdieu used the term *doxa* to denote this subconscious worldview. This concept was useful in providing a deeper analysis of the three examples quoted and indeed the remainder of the themes interpreted from the parental data.

Before re-analysing all three examples using the notion of doxa, it was useful to consider Thomson's understanding of how doxa operated to the detriment of agents. In her analysis Thomson (2005) argued that 'doxic narratives deliberately obfuscate how the game (re)produces social inequality through the (re)production of the hierarchy of positions' (Thomson, 2005: 746). Applying this to the parent's almost apologetic admission 'I have to be honest and say', and using Fairclough's notion of modulated language (2000), an interpretation was that this showed the parent's conscious awareness of the hegemony of the neoliberal rhetoric surrounding parental choice. In addition this also demonstrated the parents' internalisation of their responsibility for not having used the performativity measures in choosing their child's school. In doing this they had internalised the doxa to the extent that this obfuscated the measures' creators' responsibility to ensure the data was accessible to all. The extent to which the parent had internalised the doxa was shown later when they appeared to justify the data by stating:

94 ...obviously people
95 who are data facts and figures inspired and understand
96 hm [...] they're fine you know ...

This statement was interpreted as the parent defending the data through identifying that it was of value to others. The parent had internalized responsibility for their failure to use and indeed understand the performativity measures. This in Thomson's (*ibid*) terms, reproduced the inequality between this parent and other parents who had followed the process; this in turn maintained the hierarchy between the participant parent and the other parents. Of course the participant parent was never explicit about knowing, or having experience of, other parents who had not 'failed' to use and understand the performativity measures. None the less, within the parent's perceptions driven by the doxa, these other parents did exist and so were perceived to be in a superior hierarchical position. The obfuscation of responsibility was evidenced through the parent never questioning why it was not easier for them to access or understand the performativity measures; their perception was that the blame lay with them for not understanding the data and not with the creators of the data.

Moving now to using doxa to re-analyse the extract where the parent recounts the school questioning the appropriateness of a website their child was accessing, the parent continually mediated their agency despite their confidence about the website. This was interpreted as occurring in response to a doxa which promulgated a view that the school's judgement occupied a higher hierarchical position. On each occasion when the parent consciously claimed their agency, in the same sentence, they mediated it through self-critical evaluations, as shown by the underlined sections below:

P1: 396 ...I knew it was
397 perfectly safe but they the school rang me to say what
398 is this site and we are going to investigate it, and I
399 said you don't need to. But I could understand it in the
400 sense where I can see there is protection ...

404 ...it made feel stupid actually [laughs] but I can
405 understand where they were coming from ...

416 ...I was a little bit sort
417 of like how dare they [laughs] but then I thought come
418 on think about it logically here...

Once again the parent assumed responsibility and never challenged the school's authority. This obfuscated the school's responsibility in engaging in a dialogue with the parent about the nature of the site and steps the parent had taken to evaluate its appropriateness for their child.

In the last of the three examples, the parent's predisposition towards supporting the school, again provided evidence for a subconscious doxa, which predicated that being a 'good parent' equated to one who supports school. In this instance, the hierarchy between parent and school was maintained through the parent judging any communication which reinforced them as a supportive parent, being a good communication. The parent placed no responsibility on the school for not 'embarrassing' or 'belittling' them, instead it

seemed that the parent felt that if they did not fulfil their responsibilities as a ‘good parent’, that it would be legitimate for the school to make them feel that way; I argue this is a misrecognition of the parent’s rights and so a form of symbolic violence.

The doxa of being a ‘good parent’, which equated to the theme support school, was a powerful doxic narrative which emerged from the parental data and underlined all the themes, regardless of the specific topic under discussion. Overall, doxa and symbolic violence provided clearer insights as to how the parents’ sub conscious views may have operated alongside hegemony, to provide a macro structural societal level explanation. However, what was neglected by these notions, was a specific focus on how doxa or hegemony may have operated at the level of the agent. In other words how were structural influences such as hegemony and doxa, related to individual agents’ actions and decisions? In asking this question the perspective adopted was that both agent and structure were interrelated and so each could only be fully explored through an analysis which took account of this relationship. This stance was influenced by authors (Bhaskar, 1986; Giddens, 1990; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Archer, 1995) who considered social theory through the lens of the interrelatedness of structure and action.

7.5 Using field and habitus to interpret the parents’ views

In order to explore how individual agents’ actions were influenced by, and related to, macro structural influences, it was useful to consider Bourdieu’s notions of field and habitus. Bourdieu (1998) described the notion of field as a dynamic social space in which agents interacted with each other in competitive relationships and added:

It contains people who dominate and people who are dominated. Constant, permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this space, which at the same time becomes a space in which the various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field (Bourdieu, 1998: pp. 40–41).

Based on Bourdieu’s description of field, the evidence from this study supported two contentions; firstly that the parental views supported a conceptualising of schooling as a social field and secondly that doing so, provided powerful means by which to analyse the

relationship between macro structural influences and micro agentic responses and actions. A number of authors (Naidoo 2004; Lingard *et al.* 2005a; Sarojini Hart, 2013) supported the notion of schooling as a social field and viewing these as being interrelated with individual agents' actions and predispositions. These predispositions were argued by authors (McLeod, 2000; Pilario, 2006; Mills 2008; Sayer, 2009) as representing the agents' internalized responses and sub conscious preferences to their external world. Similarly, Bourdieu (1998) conceptualized these predispositions as agents' habitus and underlined its interrelated relationship with the field the agents occupied. In explaining this interrelatedness Bourdieu (*ibid*) used the analogy of a sports player who had developed '*le sens pratique*' of playing a particular game. In this analogy the players' sense of the game was their habitus whilst the rules of the game were the field. In this context a successful player was one who had developed their *sens pratique* (habitus) for that particular game (field). Importantly Bourdieu conceived that *le sens pratique* operated at a subconscious level so did not require the player to actively and consciously think through every move. Rather, the player performed the moves as subconsciously embodied dispositions. Furthermore Bourdieu argued that doxa provided the link between the concepts of field and habitus. In other words the link between the structural influence and the agentic action. The doxa achieved this through providing the set of rules, common sense views, taken for granted assumptions and orthodoxies, which governed the field and the agents' habitus (Reay, 1996; Everett, 2002; Pilario, 2006; Thomson, 2005; Grenfell and James, 2004; Cameron and Ojha, 2007; Sarojini-Hart, 2013). Applying these interrelated notions of habitus, field and doxa provided a further opportunity to interpret the parents' views.

In relation to this study's findings, it could be argued that the parents' views embodied a subconscious habitus which predisposed them to aspects of the neoliberal ideology or doxa. Specifically, the doxa of the field of schooling could be argued to have conditioned the parents' views and as argued earlier, perpetrated symbolic violence on the parents. Everett described this by saying:

Where the actions motivated by the habitus are rooted in doxa and where they lead to an unequal distribution of capital there is symbolic violence: the

symbolic domination of the dominant, a domination that implies the complicity of the dominated' (Everett, 2002: 69).

Based on the notions of a structural field and agentic habitus, it was possible to re analyse the apparent paradox of parents' conscious resistance and simultaneous subconscious embodiment of neoliberal aspects of schooling. In the case of performativity measures for instance, the paradox could be interpreted as the parent's habitus not being well suited to the field of schooling. This field could be conceived as being governed by the neoliberal doxa which predicated the use of performativity measures; the latter's role in aiding parental choice, itself a facet of the doxa. The strength of the field's doxa was shown by the contrast between the parent voicing active resistance towards them but not questioning their personal lack of access and instead developing a habitus which predisposed them to assuming responsibility for their 'failure', as they perceived it. In Thomson's terms the parent's sense of 'failure' was their embodiment of the 'doxic narrative' (2005:746). In Bourdieu's terms they had not developed '*le sens pratique*' required to play the game properly.

The second finding was the case of the school insisting on investigating the website the child was using at home. In this instance this could be interpreted as the doxa of support school resulting in the parent's habitus sub consciously being predisposed to mediating their parental agency. In addition, on each occasion when the parent consciously resisted this, they saw this as them 'playing the game' of schooling wrongly, rather than the rules of the game being wrong.

Lastly the parent's appreciation of communications which did not cause them 'embarrassment, or to be 'belittled' or feel 'guilt', was again explained by viewing the parents' habitus as predisposing them in the field of schooling, to want to conform to the doxa of support school and mediate their parental agency. If the school communication was negative, then this was equivalent to accusing the parent of not having fulfilled their habitus. This implied their habitus was somehow not well suited to the field, this mismatch or misrecognition, was what constituted the symbolic violence.

In all three of these examples, the field operating through its doxa, structured the parents' habitus in such a way as to instil in it that any failure was due to their poor playing and not due to the poor rules of the game. Moreover, that through this symbolic violence, the domination of the field of schooling, was maintained subconsciously over the dominated parents. It was important to reiterate at this stage that the doxa operated at a subconscious level, resulting in the parents being unaware of its impacts on them. In other words, their subconscious habitus predisposed them to embody attitudes which were in opposition to what they declared consciously. To exemplify this: they claimed agency but then on each occasion mediated this; they claimed their preference for affective measures but then continually searched for quantifiable ways of comparing schools; they claimed to not always agree with societal expectations of conformity and privilege, but then chose vignettes of manual low skilled employment for their children and showed pride in ensuring their children conformed through uniform.

This analysis was drawn from examples where the parents were describing situations in which, it could be argued, they were in a 'deficit position': their lack of use of performativity measures; the school questioning websites their child was allowed to access at home; their fear of school communications demeaning them. It was relevant therefore to analyse the applicability of Bourdieu's concepts when the parents were in a positive situation with respect to the school. An example of this was the pride the parents expressed in seeing their children in new school uniforms. This had been interpreted through the theme of support school and could be argued as evidencing a parental habitus, which predisposed them to have certain expectations of themselves; best captured through their own words:

P3: 102 ... and so you know as I say personally NAME
103 comes every day in hm an ironed shirt every single
104 day you know clean shirt every day maybe that's
105 extreme I don't know but that's just me hm [...]

The parent's pride could be conceived as their habitus towards expecting that a child should have a clean ironed shirt every day. Consequently their ability to fulfil this expectation, became a source of pride. Extending this further, this form of habitus was

one which operated within the field of schooling where the doxa of being a 'good parent' was enacted through parents mediating their agency and their ability to support school. Overall, this enabled them to be 'good players' in the field and consequently this became their source of pride. The contention was that this too was a form of symbolic violence, as demonstrated by two narratives expressed by the parents. The first, was related to the themes of conformity and preparation, during which the parents expressed their resistance to certain values of 'society' which imposed the expectation of adherence to uniform. Secondly, that the type of uniform worn by their children signalled that they did not attend a selective grammar school and so were destined for lower levels of employment. At this stage, based on these two narratives, the contention was that the parents actually were opposed to what uniform symbolised. This implied that their pride was not in relation to the essence of a smart uniform itself or its deterministic symbolism. Instead, their pride was related to the parents' ability to fulfil their habitus which, as argued earlier, was to support school and mediate their agency by ensuring their children wore the uniform. Therefore it could be argued that their habitus, acting subconsciously, was actually predisposing the parents to misrecognise their opposition to the symbolic value of uniform. This was perpetrating symbolic violence through misrecognition of the parents' values and aspirations. In conclusion, even when findings were related to situations which were seemingly positive for the parents, analysis substantiated the argument that the field of schooling through its doxa had a structuring effect on the subconscious agency or habitus of the parents, which in turn perpetrated symbolic violence on them. Importantly, this confirmed that Bourdieu's concepts were applicable regardless of the context of the parents' interaction with the school.

Overall, these findings underlined how parents subconsciously embodied a habitus which predisposed them to respond in certain ways to the doxa predicated by the field of schooling. Coupled with this, simultaneously parents were also responding consciously to the hegemony of neoliberal principles of schooling. This dual interpretation of a conscious hegemony and subconscious doxa, provided an interpretation of the paradoxes in parents' views. At this stage it was relevant to compare this dual interpretation of parents' views, to the literatures' reliance on explaining disadvantage through

mechanisms of exclusion and marginalisation. Importantly this would enable a judgement to be made about the extent to which notions of marginalisation could explain the apparent paradoxes and contradictions in the participant parents' views. This became the focus of the next analysis.

7.6 The limitations of exclusion and marginalisation as concepts to explain disadvantage

The combination of Gramsci's notion of hegemony and Bourdieu's concepts, enabled the parents' views to be interpreted as operating at a structural-agentic level through conscious resistance and simultaneous subconscious embodiment and acceptance. The conscious resistance acting as a form of hegemony, whilst the subconscious embodiment as parental habitus structured by the doxa of the field of schooling. In contrast, the literature quoted in Chapters 2 and 3, based their explanations on notions of parents' views, values and contexts conflicting with neoliberal schooling leading to marginalisation and exclusion. The literature did not report a simultaneous embodiment of these same neoliberal principles. This study's findings showed that the parents' views were far more complex and less delineated than could be explained solely through notions of contrast and exclusion. The parents were not simply marginalised or excluded from the neoliberal school system because they had, at a subconscious level at least, internalised some of the principles. These internalised principles were seemingly predisposing the parents to behave and respond in ways which the neoliberal ideology would expect of parents and so in these terms, the parents were included. In other words, the parents' habitus showed that it was predisposed to responding to the marketized field of schooling structured by the neoliberal doxa. The contention was that parents were experiencing a complex form of simultaneous conscious and subconscious exclusion and inclusion in the neoliberal field of schooling.

7.7 Summary

Overall, this chapter interpreted parents' views as responding consciously to a prevailing hegemony and simultaneously subconsciously embodying doxic narratives of schooling. This interpretation enabled explanations of the apparent paradoxes in parents' views. Importantly, it has been argued that this interpretation includes a notion of parents not simply being excluded but instead being involved in a more complex simultaneous inclusion and exclusion from neoliberal rhetoric about schooling. Whilst this interpretation potentially added to discourses about disadvantaged families' experiences, it was limited by being based solely on findings and interpretations of the parents' views. In order to analyse this interpretation further, it was necessary to turn attention to the analysis of government speeches. In particular, to focus on how speeches, about the themes raised by parents, supported the interpretation of complex mechanisms of parental inclusion and exclusion. This was the focus of the subsequent two chapters. Importantly this analysis, would also address the study's second question focused on the extent to which there was a relationship between parents' views and government discourses about schooling.

Chapter 8 Using parental themes to analyse government speeches

8.1 Overview

This and the following chapter, present the analysis of government speeches, which was in response to the study's second question, aimed at exploring the extent to which there existed a relationship between parents' views and government discourses about schooling. The first analysis demonstrates the predominance of conformity and preparation themes, compared to those linked to the themes of parents' roles¹⁹. The analysis highlights a significant congruence between parents' views and speeches, when the latter are focused on issues of disadvantage. The strength of this congruence leads to an analysis of the parents' perceptions of their contexts, and these findings, along with evidence from the speeches, are interpreted as evidencing a separate less ambitious and more limiting doxa and field of schooling for disadvantaged families and children. This doxa is interpreted as echoing parents' habitus, which is argued to further substantiate the thesis that parents' disadvantage is not solely because of simple mechanisms of exclusion.

8.2 Reflexive approach to analysing government speeches through the parents' themes

One of the original contributions made by this study was using parents' views to analyse government speeches. This focus on using the parents' views came from the reflexive concern of foregrounding parents' voices. Chapters 5 and 6 argued that parents' themes would be adopted as the categories of analysis of the speeches. As explained in section 4.6 of the methodology, in order to operationalise this aim the words used in government announcements (not just speeches) that were synonyms, or were judged to convey similar meanings as the parents' themes, were identified. This was achieved through a detailed

¹⁹ Themes of support school and mediated parental agency

analysis of all government announcements spanning the period from when the participants' children started secondary school, through to the end of this study's data collection phase (1.9.2012 to 30.4.2015). These words, representing the parental themes, were the ones adopted as the categories in the analysis of the speeches.

8.2.1. Identifying government words which were related to parents' themes

The 641²⁰ government announcements were accessed as described in section 4.6 of the methodology chapter. Table 4 below shows the parental themes and the related government words. The themes were combined to retain, as far as possible, how parents had raised them. In the case of conformity and preparation for instance, parents had raised both themes as part of their narrative about conforming to expectations in order to prepare for work and later life. The themes of social class and selective schools, captured parents' views about grammar schools signalling membership of a particular social class. The themes of mediated parental agency and support school were both raised in relation to parents' roles and interactions with schools. Finally, the three themes of affective measures, otherness and doxa of quantification, were all related to what the parent valued about schooling and how schools were held accountable.

²⁰ The www.gov.uk website quoted 646 announcements but when the individual announcements were accessed and totalled there were 641.

Table 4 Government words which were related to parental themes

Parental theme	Related government words
Conformity and Preparation	'jobs', 'careers', 'work', 'skills' ('un') 'employment' 'labour market' 'occupations' 'pay', 'earnings', 'wage-returns', 'salary' 'income' 'employers', 'business', 'industry' 'prosperity', 'economic' 'economic-competitiveness' 'educational- competitiveness'.
Social Class and Selective Schools	'society, 'social' 'social class' 'societal' 'values' (<i>'British values'</i>) 'grammar schools' 'comprehensives' 'choice' 'academies', 'free schools' 'University Technical Colleges' (UTCs) 'freedoms' 'school autonomy'.
Mediated parental Agency and Support school	'parent', 'parents', 'parental', 'family', 'families', 'carer', 'carers' 'grandparents'.
Affective measures, Otherness, Doxa of quantification	'accountability' 'Ofsted' 'league and performance tables' 'English Baccalaureate' 'Progress 8' 'rigorous' 'academic'

8.2.2. Number of times themes occurred in speeches

The first analysis looked at how often government words occurred in the 41 speeches and the results are shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5 Quantitative summary of occurrences of parental themes in speeches

Parental theme	Number of occurrences	Percentage of total occurrences²¹
Conformity and Preparation	423	39%
Social Class and Selective Schools	236	22%
Mediated parental Agency and Support school	201	18%
Affective measures, Otherness, Doxa of quantification	223	20%

The most frequently occurring themes were those associated with conformity and preparation, which echoed the pattern found in the parents' discussions as analysed in Chapters 5 and 6. This suggested a strong theme threaded throughout parents' views and government speeches, related to the instrumentalism of schooling and the notion of

²¹ (x%) percentage occurrence of a particular group of themes out of the total number of all themes across the sample of 41 speeches

education being a route to employment. The other striking feature was the low occurrence of themes associated with parents' roles (themes of support school and mediated parental agency). This was significant because it reinforced the paradox, found in the literature reported in Chapters 2 and 3, of a paucity of emphasis on parents' views and roles, despite neoliberal ideology predicating parents as the central agents in the marketized school system. This limited role for parents was also demonstrated in parents' discussions through them restricting their role to that of showing support for school actions and through mediating their own agency. The previous chapter interpreted these parental views as a doxa, which was argued to perpetrate a form of symbolic violence on the parents. Whether this same interpretation could apply to the way government speeches portrayed parents' roles, required deeper analysis as reported later in this, and the next chapter.

Continuing the quantitative comparison of occurrences of themes, another area of significance was that the themes of social class, selective schools, affective measures, otherness and doxa of quantification were less prevalent than conformity and preparation in both the parental data and speeches. Overall, this pattern underlined the similarity in the emphasis placed on themes by both parents and speeches. However, whilst this initial analysis was useful in comparing the occurrence of themes, a deeper interpretive language based analysis, as described in section 4.7.2, was needed to explore the emphasis speeches placed on the themes. The challenge was that due to the limitations of length of thesis, it would not have been possible to carry out this level of analysis on each of the parental themes across all 41 speeches. This required a rational decision about which themes to analyse in depth.

8.2.3. Choice of themes to analyse in government speeches

The decision was taken to focus on the themes of conformity and preparation, and mediated parental agency and support school. This decision was based on the following three arguments:

1. Themes of conformity and preparation were the most frequent in government speeches and parental discussions. Choosing the theme most frequently raised by parents, was therefore appropriate given this study's aim to foreground parents' views. In addition, having established that this theme was also the most frequent in speeches, raised the question of what qualitative relationship may have existed between parents' and government's representation of this theme; this was highly relevant because it addressed the study's second question, which explored the relationship between parents' views and government discourses.
2. Themes related to parental roles showed the lowest occurrence in speeches; similarly, Chapters 2 and 3 reported this as a paradox in the literature and so this warranted further analysis.
3. Finally, given this study's focus on highlighting parents' views, it was important to adopt a theme related to parental roles as one of the categories through which to analyse the government speeches.

Before analysing the speeches in depth through each of the two chosen themes, I decided to firstly explore how themes of conformity and preparation and parents' roles were represented in the speeches. This was because the quantitative analysis shown in Table 5 evidenced what appeared to be a contrast in occurrence between the two themes, and so the first analysis aimed to explore if this quantitative contrast was also evidenced through qualitative analysis.

8.3 Contrasting how conformity and preparation and parents are represented in speeches

Hermeneutic reading of the speeches very quickly revealed the disparity between representations of conformity and preparation and representations of parents' roles. Themes related to conformity and preparation were the most frequent in speeches, which supported the contention that government narratives affirmed that the aims of education

were economically focused. To exemplify this, a speech delivered by Michael Gove²², referred to schooling and education preparing children for employment. In the extracts below, the specific government words relating to the parental themes of conformity and preparation were underlined:

There were four references to '*skills*' and five to '*job*' or '*good job*':

We want young people and their parents to have the peace of mind that they'll gain the 'skills' they need to get a good 'job'.

Also in the same speech, two references to the needs of employers, one example being:

minimum qualifications that most 'employers' and universities demand.

The speech also contained four references to the role of education in achieving more macro national economic ends:

But it's also an 'economic' imperative for every developed nation. Because the twin forces of 'economic globalisation' and technological advance are transforming the world we live in.

The speech typified a pattern where themes related to conformity and preparation were far more frequent than those related to parents; ten of the former contrasting with only three of the latter. The significance of this was that the title of the speech was 'The future of education reform'²³. This study therefore questioned whether the neoliberal rhetoric of educational reform being needed in order to better serve parents by delivering improved schools, was masking a reality of school reform being instigated to deliver a narrow set of instrumental economic aims.

Evidence towards answering this question, came from analysing how the themes related to parents' roles were articulated in the speech. In the first extract cited above, parents were relegated to a relatively passive role of having 'peace of mind'. This could be argued

²² Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education, speaks to the first Education Reform Summit in London 'The future of education reform' 10.7.2014

²³ *Ibid*

to represent a treatment of parents typified by a degree of sympathy which betrayed a view of superiority from those who can give the ‘peace of mind’; arguably a patronising view of parents.

In the second reference to parents, Gove cited the example of an academy replacing a primary school that had failed an Ofsted inspection. Talking about parents’ roles Gove stated that the new academy:

worked very closely with parents, who are supportive of the academy.

The sentence afforded the parents an active role through the phrase ‘worked very closely’ implying that parents were co-workers in the establishment of the new academy. In addition, through describing the parents’ role as ‘supportive’, implied that the process was unproblematic and uncontested. However, analysis of the contemporaneous reports, suggested the conversion of the original primary school to the academy was problematic. Local press coverage²⁴ reported that Gove needed to exercise his powers as Secretary of State to remove the governing body of the school including the parent governors. Furthermore that a ballot of parents resulted in over 94% voting against the setting up of the academy and that parents launched a claim for judicial review against the opening of the academy. Returning to the speech, the third reference to parents stated that the new academy:

is now giving hundreds of pupils and parents a better, brighter chance in life.

There was no articulation of how the new academy might have given the parents a brighter future. In relation to the pupils, the speech used improved performativity measures to justify its claim. However, it is difficult to see how a school could improve life chances for parents. This was analysed using Fairclough’s (2000) notion of ‘equivalences’ where different ideas or subjects are made to be equivalent by presenting them in the same list. In the extract above, the equivalence was set up by adding parents to the list so that ‘better,

²⁴ Tottenham and Wood Green Independent:

20.6.2012 ‘Downhills Primary School in Tottenham to be forcibly converted to academy, Michael Gove announces’

20.7.2012 ‘Downhills Primary School campaigners in Tottenham seek judicial review of academy decision’

brighter chance in life' now also applied to them. However, the improved life chances, as reported in the speech, were as a result of examination results which could only be used by the children, for instance in accessing higher education or employment. Accepting this premise, led to a conclusion that the reference to parents was arguably no more than a tokenistic gesture. Overall, this analysis began to illuminate the role afforded to parents in a speech that, although focused on the future of educational reform, made only three references to parents. Parents were not afforded active meaningful roles; instead, references appeared to be tokenistic and even patronising.

Returning to the focus of contrasting how speeches represented conformity and preparation and parents' roles, the analysis showed that government rhetoric was equally prevalent in speeches by non-ministerial departments such as Ofqual²⁵, as demonstrated by an analysis of their six speeches. This revealed 27 occurrences²⁶ of conformity and preparation; ten related to the needs of employers, seven related to individuals' employment and the remaining ten to national prosperity and international competitiveness. In contrast, there was only one reference to parents, which argued that for the purposes of parents choosing between schools, it was important for Ofqual to ensure the reliability of grades. However, the premise of this argument, namely that parents valued and used league tables, was not supported by this study's parents who claimed they did not use the measures despite being aware of them. In fact, this study interpreted the parents' views through the theme of otherness, which captured parents' views of performativity measures as being aimed at other parents and users.

The relevance of this analysis of Ofqual speeches was that it showed that even speeches from non-ministerial departments contained the same two features reported in Gove's speech; instrumental economic ends and a concomitant paucity of references to parents. The paucity of references to parents could not be simply justified through viewing Ofqual's role as separate to parents, as evidenced from their communications²⁷:

²⁵ The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation and is a non-ministerial government department responsible for regulating qualifications, exams and tests in England as well as vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland.

²⁶ Equivalent to 67% of all occurrences of themes

²⁷ www.ofqual.blog.gov.uk/2014/08/06/waiting-results/ accessed 16th July 2016 at 1.40 pm

But I know that the way these issues are reported can increase the anxiety and worry for individual students and their parents, with speculation about pass rates and grade boundaries. But students and parents can have confidence that in amongst all these changes, we are making sure that standards are held steady...

Here Ofqual was appealing directly to parents to reassure them about the maintenance of examination standards. The press²⁸ unequivocally identified that parents were the blog's intended audience.

Concluding this initial analysis, the speeches from Gove and Ofqual were argued to typify how themes of conformity and preparation and parents' roles were represented in government narratives across the 41 speeches. Firstly, conformity and preparation were over three times as frequent as themes related to parents, secondly, the achievement of economic outcomes was presented as the principal role of schools whilst in contrast, parents' roles were either absent or misrepresented. This initial textual analysis of speeches confirmed the congruence between parents' views and government rhetoric, as had been evidenced by the quantitative analysis. The remainder of this chapter focused on a more detailed analysis and comparison of how conformity and preparation was presented through parents' views and government speeches, whilst Chapter 9 analysed how themes related to parents were presented.

8.3.1. Exploring different notions of conformity and preparation

A more detailed exploration of how conformity and preparation were presented in parental views and government speeches, necessitated an analysis of the different notions of these themes. This entailed reviewing the different government words which had been chosen in order to identify any shared or contrasting meanings between them. To explain this further, Table 4 showed the 19 government words which had been identified as

²⁸ www.theguardian.com/education/2014/aug/07/a-level-and-gcse-exam-grades-will-not-be-fiddled-ofqual 'A-level and GCSE exam grades will not be 'fiddled', watchdog tells parents' accessed 16th July 2016 at 1.55 pm

representing the theme of conformity and preparation. However, analysis of the contexts in which these words were used in speeches, highlighted the different notions and emphases carried by each word and importantly enabled them to be grouped according to these shared notions. Table 6 below lists the government words related to the parents' themes of conformity and preparation (as presented earlier in Table 4) and in addition groups them according to their shared notions or emphases. For instance, all words grouped under the focus of 'agents' employment', shared the common focus of describing agents' work and employment, whilst those grouped as 'agents' remuneration' were all words related to notions of pay, earnings etc.

Table 6 Quantitative summary of occurrences of notions of conformity and preparation in speeches

Government words	Overall focus	Number of occurrences	Percentage occurrence
<i>'educational-competitiveness'</i>	International educational comparisons	71	17%
<i>'economy', 'economic-competitiveness'</i> <i>'(national) prosperity'</i> <i>'labour market'</i>	Macro-economic focus	47	11%
<i>'employers', 'business'</i> <i>'industry'</i>	Providers of employment	91	21%
<i>'jobs' 'careers' 'work'</i> <i>'employment' 'occupation'</i>	Agents' employment	178	42%
<i>'earnings' 'wage'</i> <i>'returns' 'salary' 'income'</i>	Agents' remuneration	36	9%
	Totals	423	100%

Before discussing the significance of the findings from this analysis, it was important to remember that the aim was to explore any relationship between parents' views and government discourses, in relation to the themes of conformity and preparation. However, whilst achieving this aim was important, the process of categorising the words had the potential to increase my influence as researcher, and so potentially background the parents' views. The reflexive (Bourdieu, 1988) response was that adopting the categories did provide a new perspective on how parents' views and government speeches compared in relation to the theme of conformity and preparation.

A new perspective to emerge was that, whilst the earlier analysis resulted in the simple conclusion that parental views and speeches were broadly similar in how they presented the themes of conformity and preparation, this was not the case when the analysis was carried out using the notions of 'agents' remuneration' and 'agents' employment'. This analysis revealed that in the parental data these notions accounted for all of the occurrences, whilst in speeches they accounted for only 51% of the occurrences. In other words, in the parental data all references to conformity and preparation were related to either the notion of remuneration, or employed work. In contrast, in speeches only 51% were related to these notions, whilst the remaining 49% were words related to the three notions of 'International educational comparisons', 'Macro-economic focus' and 'Providers of employment', significantly all of which were notions not identified in the parental data.

Overall, categorising the words in this way highlighted three government notions which parents had not identified. Returning to the contention developed in section 7.6, these three notions may have represented government discourses, which excluded or marginalised the parents, therefore concurring with the positions adopted by authors quoted in Chapters 2 and 3. Significantly, this finding also potentially undermined this study's argument that the simultaneous resistance and embodiment of neoliberal principles evidenced in parents' views, implied relationships which were more complex than simple mechanisms of exclusion and marginalisation. Based on this the focus of analysis moved to exploring these three notions present in the speeches but not in parental data.

8.3.2. Notions of conformity and preparation not found in parental data

The three notions found in government speeches but not in parents' discussions were:

1. **'international educational comparisons'** - which argued for the need to improve the UK's performance in international league tables of educational achievements;
2. **'macro-economic focus'** – focused on the achievement of national economic prosperity and international economic competitiveness;
3. **'providers of employment'** - references to the needs of employers, businesses and industry.

There were 91 incidences of 'providers of employment' all of which were consistent with the occurrences already referred to in section 8.3 earlier in this chapter, when speeches by Gove and Ofqual were analysed. Based on this no further discussion is provided at this stage. Instead, attention is turned to the other two notions, namely 'international educational comparisons' and 'macro-economic focus'.

Examples of both notions were found in a speech by Nicky Morgan²⁹ which was typical of those across the 41 speeches. Morgan made six separate references to these notions:

Now more than ever we need to ensure that more of our young people are leaving education, not just with the skills to succeed in modern Britain, but to compete in an increasingly global economy...

The reference to the macro-economic aim of competing in the world economy was unequivocal. However, the reference to young people was far less explicit in identifying exactly which were the ones that needed to leave school with the prerequisite skills. The statement did not mention all young people but instead was limited to 'more' of them. To explore this ambiguity further, it was useful to employ Fairclough's (2000) rhetoric of reconciliation (shown by the underlined words), which is a linguistic device depicting two positions as co-existing. In Morgan's speech, the two positions were the skills to

²⁹ Nicky Morgan, Secretary of State for Education, speaks at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) on closing the skills gap. '*closing the skills gap and our plan for education*' 19.11.2014

succeed in modern Britain and the skills to compete in the global economy. However, the sentence did not clarify if it was possible to have both and if it was, what the relationship was between the two. For instance, could the same young people achieve both or were the two sets of skills mutually exclusive and so implying that some children could achieve one set of skills and a different group of children could achieve the other set. Nor was it explained which set of skills was the most valuable and how this might influence the distribution of energy and resources. This ambiguity was significant and warranted further analysis for two reasons: it related to the motivation behind this thesis and potentially reinforced a view expressed by parents. The motivation was my experience, and the literature's consensus, of disadvantaged children's poorer outcomes. The parental view it might have reinforced, was the limited and deterministic employment prospects available to some children. Each of these was considered separately.

To begin with, the analysis focused on the potential that the ambiguity in Morgan's speech, may have betrayed a government ideology which accepted and planned for a hierarchy of outcomes for children. The justification for questioning whether the speech betrayed such a plan was threefold. The speech's title explicitly signposted its purpose as that of communicating a plan, it was Morgan's first major speech as Secretary of State for education and lastly, it contained a number of planned reforms to education policy. The justification for questioning whether the plan assumed and accepted a hierarchy of outcomes for children, was linked to the literature review in Chapter 2 (section 2.4.1.) That discussion argued that government documents, whilst promulgating a rhetoric of improving outcomes for all children, especially those experiencing disadvantage, would qualify this by referring to notions of fulfilling children's 'potential', 'ability' or 'talent'. The discussion referred to Gillborn's most recent work, in which he argued that these government notions were a form of 'educational geneism' (2016; 371) which ultimately justified poorer outcomes for some children on the basis that they lacked the necessary 'talent'. Morgan's speech provided examples of this rhetoric:

Our research base misses out when we are not drawing scientists and engineers from as wide a talent pool as possible...

The implication was that the pool, from which scientists and engineers needed to be drawn, must be one that had children with ‘talent’. This premise, through establishing a ‘frame in thought’ (Druckman, 2001 and 2014), allowed for the possibility that some children could legitimately be excluded from this because they did not have the necessary ‘talent’. This predicated that it was acceptable that not all children would achieve the outcomes claimed to be important, because not all children had the ‘talent’ required. Government speeches representing this duality of expectations was significant in itself, on the grounds of equality for all children, however this also led to the second area of relevance which was the similarity between this duality created by Morgan’s ambiguity, and views expressed by parents.

The parental views in question were those interpreted as demonstrating a deterministic habitus towards accepting that their children’s employment prospects were limited to manual, low skilled and low paid jobs. These views may have been related to the duality of expectations implied by Morgan’s speech. Accepting the premise explored in section 4.6.1 of the methodology chapter, that political discourses were to some degree influential on and influenced by agents’ views (Phillips, 1996; Jerit, 2009; Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012; Druckman, 2001 and 2014), it was significant that there should be this similarity between Morgan’s and parents’ narratives. The significance was that, despite this current analysis focusing on notions found in speeches but not in parental discussions, there was evidence of a congruence between government rhetoric and parents’ views. As argued at the end of the last section, if the analysis had simply identified contrasts between speeches rhetoric and parents’ views, this would have potentially reinforced authors’ views that neoliberal rhetoric marginalised and excluded some parents. Instead, it was significant that, within areas of contrast between speeches and parents’ views, there were also areas of agreement. The significance was that this reinforced the notion posited by this study, that the relationship between parents’ views and prevailing government discourses was more complex than that implied by simple notions of exclusion and marginalisation.

The second notion found in speeches but not parental discussions, was a recurring collocation (Fairclough, 2000) between macro-economic focuses and international

educational comparisons; the latter measured by educational tests such as PISA³⁰. The following was an example in a speech by Nick Gibb³¹:

Our long term economic prosperity depends upon an education system with the very highest standards. As research by Hanushek and Woessmann has found, a 25 point increase in PISA scores could raise the UK's GDP growth rate by 0.5% every year

The collocation was through language which expressed certainty (the first sentence) but that was also modulated (Fairclough, 2000) as shown by the word 'could' rather than will. In addition, the extract referenced specific researchers in order to add authority to its claims. Authors such as Cochran-Smith and Fries (2001) and Hyatt (2013) described the referencing of research to back up political claims, as a form of evidentiary warrant, which was never neutral and always based on assumptions. In the case of the speech by Nick Gibb for instance, no mention was made of the international group of more than 80 academics who addressed³² the OECD expressing deep concern about the PISA tests and asking for their immediate halt. Overall, these two speeches were typical of how macro-economic focuses and international comparisons of educational achievement were referenced, overall accounting for 28% of the 423 occurrences of government themes linked to conformity and preparation. In addition, the analysis revealed another interesting government collocation not found in parental discussions. This was the dual focus of achieving macro-economic aims and improved standings in international educational league tables, but with a focus on specific subjects. Typical of these speeches

³⁰ The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is carried out by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). It is a worldwide study of 15-year-old school pupils' performance in mathematics, science, and reading. It is repeated every three years and has been running since 2000.

³¹ Schools Minister Nick Gibb speaks at Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Education Policy Outlook Conference. '*Reforming education through international evidence*' 22.1.2015

³² '*OECD and Pisa tests are damaging education worldwide*' (2014) www.theguardian.com/education/2014/may/06/oecd-pisa-tests-damaging-education-academics accessed 17.7.2016 at 18.00

was one by Elizabeth Truss³³ in which she focused on the need for reforms to mathematics as shown by the following three extracts:

No subject is more crucial to this country's economic competitiveness...

These skills are vital to get our country's businesses, and our national economy, growing...

OECD analysis suggests that if 15-year-olds in this country could increase their average performance by 25 PISA points - the equivalent of just over half a school year - the potential benefit to our economy would be something in the order of £6 trillion.

The speech had three occurrences of macro-economic focuses and 11 related to international educational test performance. Overall, in the 41 speeches seven were focused on reforms to specific subjects; three focused on STEM³⁴ subjects, one on reading in primary schools, one on music, one on sport and one on technical changes to Mathematics GCSE examination. Strikingly the very high occurrence (74%) of notions of 'macro-economic outcomes' and international educational comparisons' in these speeches all occurred in four of the seven speeches. These were the three on STEM subjects and the one on reading, the three remaining speeches contained no references to these notions.

A critical interpretation of this pattern questioned whether this revealed not simply a government teleological justification for subject reforms, based on the need to deliver economic aims, but that within this, STEM subjects were afforded a primacy over others. STEM subjects were presented as ones that would deliver economic outcomes whilst the other two subjects, music and sport were not linked at all to the achievement of these outcomes. This interpretation was supported by analysing a speech by Nicky Morgan,³⁵

³³ Schools Minister Elizabeth Truss speaks at the Core Maths Support Programme launch workshop about post-16 maths 2.7.2014

³⁴ STEM is a collective term used by government to denote Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths.

³⁵ Nicky Morgan, Secretary of State for Education, speaks about science and maths at the launch of *Your Life campaign*. 10.11.14

which provided a contrast between subjects children were advised to study in the past and ones she currently advocated should be studied:

...then the arts and humanities were what you chose. Because they were useful for all kinds of jobs. Of course now we know that couldn't be further from the truth that the subjects that keep young people's options open and unlock doors to all sorts of careers are the STEM subjects: science, technology, engineering and maths...

There was a clear link made between STEM subjects and access to 'all sorts of careers'. Later in the speech STEM subjects and macro-economic outcomes were linked:

...and let's just think about what that means - that's 50% more highly qualified and skilled young people equipped to take their place in modern Britain, equipped to compete against the best in the world in our increasingly global economy, and equipped to win the top jobs and reap the rewards. An increase that benefits not just them, but our whole country.

The strength of the collocation (Fairclough, 2000) established between STEM subjects and the achievement of micro and macro-economic outcomes, was such that it caused the Secretary of State to address its implications for other school subjects as the following clarification underlined:

Earlier this month, I gave a speech supporting an initiative to get more young people to study science and maths and almost immediately I was accused of implying that no arts student would ever get a job again. Needless to say this wasn't something I said, nor would ever believe.³⁶

Despite this strong denial, two months later the Secretary of State once again reiterated the premise of the collocation, namely that school subjects had differential levels of value that were to be measured against economic and monetary outcomes:

³⁶ Nicky Morgan, Secretary of State for Education, speaks at the University of Birmingham's annual Priestley Lecture. 'Our plan for education' 27.11.2014

In future, we could try to link qualifications to tax data too in order to demonstrate the true worth of certain subjects.³⁷

Overall, all of these speeches' references to macro-economic focuses, international educational comparisons, the importance of STEM subjects and teleological economic justifications, all underlined clear areas of contrast between political rhetoric and parents' views. Once again, it was possible to argue that these narratives excluded this study's parents, therefore potentially reinforcing arguments based on marginalisation as found in the literature. Yet, a deeper analysis of the context and focus of the speeches revealed a significant area of congruence between parents' views and the speeches' rhetoric.

This area of congruence was related to parents' and some of the speeches', valorising of affective measures. In the case of parents this was evidenced in section 6.3.2 whilst in speeches this was evidenced by analysing how different subjects were valued, when the same speaker delivered the speeches. This was demonstrated by two speeches, delivered by Nick Gibb, the first focused on music³⁸ and the second on mathematics³⁹. In the former, there were no references to conformity and preparation whilst in the latter there were 11; three related to macro-economic outcomes and eight related to international comparisons. The significance of this, was that adopting a view of political speeches as a form of argumentation (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012), implied that the arguments used to justify a particular policy would be based on deliberations. These deliberations would aim to balance different values in order to arrive at the best solution; presumably the policy being advocated by the speech. In cases where the same speaker delivered speeches, it would be reasonable to presume that any differences in content were more likely to be the result of different government policies, rather than the speaker holding different values. In the case of these two speeches by Gibb, the justification for reforms to music and mathematics were based on different and mutually exclusive arguments. In

³⁷ Nicky Morgan, Secretary of State for Education speaks about the future of technology in the classroom at the BETT show 21.1.2015

³⁸ Nick Gibb, Minister of State for School Reform, speaking at the Music Education Expo in the Barbican outlines the government's support for music education in schools. 12.3.2015

³⁹ Nick Gibb, Minister of State for School Reform, speaks to the London Thames Maths Hub Primary Conference about the government's maths reforms. 27.3.2015

the case of mathematics, they were all teleological economic arguments, whilst in contrast, in the speech on music, the arguments were all based on personal, social and emotional attributes, as shown by the underlined words in the three extracts below:

...helps to build a love of music among pupils.

Building this love of music in schools is crucial.

The wider educational and social benefits of music are also clear. ...the positive effects of different aspects of music teaching and training on verbal instruction, reading and comprehension, motivation, communication and behaviour.

Finally, the speech quoted a senior leader from a school offering music to all children:

Not only are pupils enjoying school more, but almost without realising it they are gaining confidence, resilience and team working skills which they then bring into other subject areas.

The underlined words in the extracts shared meanings with the outcomes identified by parents and summarised by the theme affective measures. It was significant that once again within what appeared to be contrasting narratives between speeches and parents' views, there was this area of agreement. It need not necessarily have been the case, that values associated with affective measures were only used to justify reforms in music. They could also have been used in relation to mathematics, as shown by the subjects' Programmes of Study:

...an appreciation of the beauty and power of mathematics, and a sense of enjoyment and curiosity about the subject (National Curriculum, 2014:3).

The underlined words denoted values that were analogous to parents' affective measures and which Gibb could have used as justifications for mathematics. Alternatively, Gibb could have referenced the contribution that music made to the UK economy (UK Music, 2013). This discord between the different justifications adopted for music and mathematics, was significant. This was because mathematics was a STEM subject and as already argued, identified by speeches, as a more important subject. Music on the other

hand was not a STEM subject and significantly, values and justifications associated with parents' affective measures were only aligned to this 'less important' subject. Overall, the importance of this analysis was twofold. It again evidenced that within government narratives, which appeared to exclude this study's parents' views, there were none the less areas of congruence; in this instance the valorising of affective measures. In addition, the analysis evidenced that within notions of conformity and preparation, values associated with affective measures were assigned a lower level of importance than macro-economic values.

In summary, in response to this study's second aim, exploring the relationship between parental views and government speeches, this section highlighted macro notions of conformity and preparation that, whilst not identified by parents, occurred frequently in government speeches. Parents did not identify issues related to international comparisons of educational performance, macro-economic outcomes, or relative differences in the importance of subjects studied by their children. Government speeches on the other hand, repeatedly based their arguments on these three notions of conformity and preparation, especially when the focus of the speech centred on the reform of subjects. However, deeper analysis of these differences between speeches and parents' views, also highlighted two fundamental areas of agreement. The first related to an acceptance that there would be a hierarchy of outcomes for children, expressed through notions of 'talent' in government rhetoric and through a deterministic habitus by parents. The second was a recognition by parents and speeches, of the value of personal and social outcomes (affective measures) coupled with an acceptance that these values were of lesser importance than instrumental economic outcomes. Once again, as argued in Chapter 7, particularly in section 7.6, these findings confirmed the complex nature of parents' views. This was demonstrated by, at times, parents' views showing congruence with government narratives, whilst at other times showing contrast. This further substantiated the contention that simple notions of marginalisation and exclusion were not adequate to explain this complexity. At this stage in the analysis, it appeared that government narratives echoed this complexity, through contrasting and concurring with parents' views. In order to explore this further, the analysis moved onto notions of conformity and preparation that were found in speeches and parents' discussions.

8.3.3. Notions of conformity and preparation found in parental discussions and government speeches

Hermeneutic reading of the speeches highlighted that in five of the speeches notions of conformity and preparation were similar in meaning to those found in the parental data. In these speeches, the occurrences of this theme were confined to the one notion of ‘agents’ employment’ (see Table 6). These speeches made no references to achieving improved standings in international league tables or macro-economic outcomes related to national prosperity. The relevance of this more limited notion of conformity and preparation, was that it was similar to the parents’ representations of this theme as analysed in Chapter 5. In that discussion, it was argued that the vignettes used by parents to describe their children’s potential employment options, were limited to low paid manual work. In fact, the only occurrence in the parental discussions of non-manual high salaried work, was a vignette that was presented by the parent as an antithesis to what their children could expect, as shown by the following extract:

1090 ...and the little
1091 exceptions to the rule, the average student is [...] and I
1092 know as a pupil that went here people who have
1093 gone to be leading financial analysts in Singapore
1094 and so on, there are different individual but the
1095 majority it’s kind of carved out well that’s where you’re
1096 going to be average

This similarity between parents’ views and the five speeches led to a closer analysis of the focus and content of the speeches themselves. This was aided by adopting approaches from ethnographic content analysis as described in section 4.7.2 of the methodology chapter. In particular, Altheide’s argument that the meaning of a document was reflected in various ways including ‘in the context of the report itself, and other nuances’ (Altheide, 1987: 68). Based on this, the speeches’ contexts, focus, intended audience and speakers’ government role were analysed. The findings revealed that the speeches’ contexts were linked to children and families experiencing a range of social, economic, medical and learning disadvantages. The significance of this finding, was balanced against the low

number of these speeches and so the analysis was extended to the wider time range from when the participating parents' children started secondary school, through to the end of the data collection period (1.9.12 to 30.4.15). Despite this longer time-period identifying 13 speeches focused on disadvantage, once again there were no references to international educational comparisons and only one to macro-economic issues. The significance was further underlined by the five speeches also making no references to the achievement of individuals' micro economic outcomes (*'earnings'* *'wage returns'* *'salary'* *'income'*) despite the majority of occurrences being focused on *'work'* and *'job'* (8 and 3 respectively). The strength of these findings highlighted two questions: how were the findings related to parental views and what did they imply for notions of marginalisation?

The speeches shared parents' views in two ways. They positioned obtaining work as an ultimate achievement and they did not reference any of the other notions of conformity and preparation. In other words, obtaining employment became an end in itself; it was no longer a means to achieving prosperity for individuals or the nation. This limited notion of conformity and preparation echoed the parents' deterministic views of their children's employment prospects. These similarities between speeches and parents' views were interpreted as adding weight to this study's contention that government discourses did not simply exclude or marginalise parents, but that the relationship between them was more complex. In the case of parents' views, this complexity was argued to be explained better by assuming that parents were simultaneously resisting and embodying aspects of the neoliberal ideology. In line with this, the current findings of complex government narratives, were similarly interpreted as the speeches seemingly including the parents' embodied views, whilst at other times excluding their views. This inclusion of parents' views was not confined solely to these cases when speeches contained limited notions of conformity and preparation, but was also demonstrated by some speeches (as analysed earlier in section 8.3.2), recognising the importance of personal and social aims of schooling (affective measures). In addition through speeches' references to talent, they acknowledged a hierarchy of outcomes which again recognised the parents' embodied acceptance that issues of selective schools and class prescribed the types of outcomes their children could expect. Overall, speeches that had a focus on disadvantage, included the parents' views, whilst the remainder of the speeches, focused on wider micro and

macro-economic outcomes, contrasted with parents' views and so arguably excluded the parents. At this stage, the analysis supported the notion that government discourses did not simply marginalise and exclude parents but instead, that there was a more complex relationship potentially reflecting the parents' complex simultaneous resistance and embodiment of government rhetoric. The discussion turned to proposing an interpretation of these findings based on the concepts derived from Bourdieu used in Chapter 7.

8.3.4. Proposing an interpretation of shared and contrasting notions of conformity and preparation

At this stage of the analysis, the focus was on using notions adopted in Chapter 7, to propose an interpretation of how government narratives and parents' views could show both congruence and contrast. In brief, Chapter 7 argued that Bourdieu's (2006) notion of habitus described parents' predisposition towards accepting and embodying subconsciously held beliefs and values, termed doxa, which structured and operated within a social space or field. Using this conception to explain the findings in this chapter, it could be argued that the parents' embodied habitus towards favouring affective measures, deterministic outcomes and limited employment prospects for their children, were aligned with government doxa which espoused these same notions. Returning to Bourdieu's argument that within any social field, agents' success was dependent on how well their habitus was aligned to the prevailing doxa, parents' views concurring with speeches' narratives, would ensure the parents were well suited to that field and its prevailing doxa. Lastly, combining this contention with arguments about the inter-relationship between agents' views and political speeches, as described in section 4.6.1 (Phillips 1996; Druckman 2001 and 2014; Hobolt and Klemmensen, 2005; Jerit, 2009; Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012; Hänggli and Kriesi, 2012; Lagerwerf *et al.*, 2015), provided a mechanism through which the two could influence each other. In other words, speeches' narratives provided the doxa about schooling, which structured the parents' subconsciously embodied habitus. This doxa becomes part of the parents' world view through the influence of language (Phillips 1996; 209) and strategic 'framing' of how issues were discussed and thought about (Druckman 2001; 247) affecting the parents'

opinions (Jerit, 2009; 412) and ultimately convincing them that ‘a certain point of view is true’ (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012; 18). Overall, this provided a potential interpretation of how parents’ subconsciously held acceptance of aspects of schooling, enabled them to be included within certain government narratives. However, the question remained of how parents’ resistance to, and exclusion from, other government narratives, could be explained.

In order to explore how parents’ resistance and exclusion from government narratives could be explained, it was necessary to briefly return to Bourdieu’s (2000, 2006) conception of doxa. In particular, his notion that doxa prescribed the accepted viewpoints, and common sense knowledge, of the particular social field with which it was associated. This raised the possibility that when parents’ views contrasted with, and were resistant to, aspects of schooling, that on these occasions they were contrasting with a different doxa. In other words, values and norms that excluded their views. The implication of this, based on the interrelatedness of field and doxa (Bourdieu’s 2006), was that there existed separate and different fields of schooling each structured by their own doxa.

Overall, the interpretation proposed the existence of two separate fields of schooling. A field which excluded parents’ views, evidenced through speeches’ doxa focusing on competitive macro-economic aims of schooling. Alongside this there appeared to be another field focused on issues of disadvantage that was governed by a doxa that acknowledged the role of affective measures and hierarchical outcomes and prospects for children. This field included the parents’ views, and in turn, the parents’ habitus embodied this field’s doxa. Having proposed this interpretation, the aim was to explore the extent to which it was supported by the five speeches focused on disadvantage, with a particular focus on the extent to which the speeches promoted a doxa of disadvantage.

8.3.5. Exploring the extent of a doxa of disadvantage

This analysis focused on a more detailed analysis of the five speeches aimed at exploring the extent to which they supported the interpretation that they contained a doxa in relation

to children and families experiencing disadvantage. The first two extracts were from two speeches by Edward Timpson⁴⁰. In the first, he stated:

To support them to aspire and achieve at school, at work and as happy, fulfilled adults.

And in the second:⁴¹

see all children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities do well in education, find employment, lead happy and fulfilled lives, and have more choice and control over the support they receive.

In both extracts the end being aimed at was securing work and achieving ‘happy’ and ‘fulfilled’ lives. This reinforced a pattern of speeches focused on disadvantage promulgating a doxa devoid of economic aims. Both extracts also contained ‘frames of communication’ (Druckman 2001) related to personal ends of happiness and fulfilment, significantly, reinforcing parents’ notions of affective measures. Arguably, of even more significance was that these ‘frames of communication’ were not present in any of the other 36 speeches not focused on issues of disadvantage.

Returning to Edward Timpson’s second speech, there was further evidence of a limited and limiting doxa which promulgated the achievement of employment for children as an ultimate end, as shown by the following extract:

For example, in West Sussex and Hartlepool, families are using personal budgets to improve the continuity of care between home and school and, in one case, to set up a work placement at a local charity for a young person with autism...

Here, Edward Timpson cited examples of good practice from across the country. This study’s contention was that the setting up of a single work placement appeared to be a modest achievement to warrant being included as an example of national good practice.

⁴⁰ Children’s Minister Edward Timpson addresses the Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS) annual conference. 10.7.2014

⁴¹ Children’s Minister Edward Timpson addresses The Key at the Improving the progress of pupils with special educational needs conference. 5.11.2014

As a comparison for example, in the academic year 2011-12 there were 42 work placements for schoolchildren in the Department for Education alone⁴², this of course took no account of other work experience placements across the country in the multitude of businesses and organisations in the UK. Another aspect which showed the ambition as not only limited but also limiting on families, was that the work placement was being enabled by the families using ‘personal budgets’. The significance of this was that the personal budgets were financial support paid to families with children whose needs exceeded a pre-determined threshold, as was detailed in the government press release⁴³ announcing the launch of personal budgets:

Parents are to get a new legal right to buy in specialist special educational needs (SEN) and disabled care for their children...

Returning to the extract being analysed, the minister was clearly in support of the use of the personal budgets to secure the placements. However, up to 2012 work placements were compulsory for all school-aged children with no expectation that parents should pay towards this. Underlining this were articles in *The Times*⁴⁴ and *The Guardian*⁴⁵ newspapers, which were critical of the government’s withdrawal of schools’ obligation to deliver work experience for all children and the likelihood of parents having to pay for their children’s schools to arrange work experience placements. The government defended its decision and stressed it was not intended to lead to parents having to take on any additional financial burden. This arguably provided a sharp contrast with the expectations for disadvantaged children, as implied in the speech, where the use of personal specialist funding to access experiences enjoyed as a matter of course by non-vulnerable children, was applauded.

The next speech provided clearer opportunities to explore the extent to which speeches contained a doxa of disadvantage. This was because the speech focused specifically on

⁴² Freedom of Information Request *Information about the number of children who had work experience at the Department for Education*. 10.1.2014

⁴³ Press release 15.5.2014 ‘*Special educational needs support: families to be given personal budgets*’

⁴⁴ Greg Hurst ‘*Pupils face fee for work experience*’ *The Times*, 20.5 2013

⁴⁵ Libby Page ‘*If parents have to pay for school work placements, their children will suffer*’ *The Guardian* 22.5.2013

colleges' role in preparing vulnerable children for work and adult life, and additionally the speech contained 12 of the total 15 occurrences of these themes in the five speeches. In the speech⁴⁶ there were three occurrences of 'job', the first of which arguably best confirmed that within the field there was a doxa promoting the notion of obtaining employment as a final end:

Yes, we want students with SEND to enjoy their course, make friends and feel safe in the college environment - but what about what happens next?

What about their chances of getting a job...

Interestingly in this extract the affective measures of 'enjoy', 'make friends' and 'feel safe' were all represented as worthy aims but the final end was limited to 'getting a job'. The next two occurrences further underlined this doxa. For the purposes of brevity, only one extract is included:

Great news, but I want to hear about more SEND students finding their dream jobs...

The phrase 'dream jobs' was found in both extracts and imparted a sense of the ultimate and best that could be achieved; it was an inscribed evaluation (Fairclough, 2000; Hyatt, 2013). This expressed the minister's attitude towards what professionals should be aiming for in relation to disadvantaged children.

Continuing the analysis, despite six occurrences of the word '*work*' in the context of employment or job, it was always represented as an end in itself as the following extract, typical of the six occurrences, showed:

And this is an area where supported internships can really help and provide a valuable bridge into meaningful work...

The limited ambitions and expectations expressed in the speech, were also present in the last three occurrences of themes related to conformity and preparation, which all

⁴⁶ Edward Timpson: '*supporting SEND students in further education*' 4.12.2014

contained either the word ‘employer’ or ‘business’. In the first two extracts, the minister described employers’ involvement in offering work placements to vulnerable children:

...where job coaches not only mentor students through their work placements but also mentor employers...

...perhaps with some really big-name employers already involved with supported internships...

Neither of the extracts addressed or recognised any level of obligation on the part of employers. Under the aegis of equal opportunities for example, it could be argued that the language used in the speech should have conveyed an expectation that opportunities for vulnerable children would be equal to those offered to their non-vulnerable peers. Instead, in the first extract it was seen as acceptable that the ‘job coaches’ who were employed to support the vulnerable children, should also ‘mentor employers’. In the second extract the use of the word ‘perhaps’ conveyed a sense of limited government agency as confirmed in the last of the occurrences:

They’ve all set a great example, but I hope more businesses will get involved and discover for themselves just what students with SEND can and do contribute.

Employers were portrayed as compassionate benefactors offering disadvantaged children work placements or ultimately a job. This implied agency on the part of employers and businesses that was unencumbered by normative government standards defining expectations of employers. This government position again could be interpreted as one betraying less ambitious outcomes for vulnerable children.

Overall, this more detailed analysis of the five speeches added weight to the claim that a doxa existed in relation to a field of schooling related specifically to vulnerable and disadvantaged children. In addition, this doxa was less ambitious about disadvantaged children’s outcomes and promoted the importance of personal and social outcomes from schooling. Through this conception, it was possible to propose that the participant parents’ views were included in this doxa related to issues of disadvantage and vulnerability, whilst their views were excluded from the remaining speeches focused on

mainstream schooling issues. This contention raised the question of why this study's parents' views were more aligned to government narratives about disadvantage, and whether this was related to the parents' contexts.

8.4 Exploring the parents' context

Parents' contexts were not explored at the start of the study due to the reflexive stance aimed at foregrounding parents' views of their realities and contexts. This approach, influenced by the argument that researchers needed to reflect on their 'preconstructions of common sense' (Bourdieu, 1988; 777), meant that rather than me as researcher, deciding which contexts would be relevant to the parents, it was more appropriate to allow the parents' voices to do this. In this regard and at this point in the study, the analysis had highlighted a congruence between parents' views and government discourses when the latter were focused on issues of disadvantage. These findings therefore warranted a re-analysis of parents' discussions, in order to identify how the parents treated issues of vulnerability and disadvantage.

The re-analysis of the transcripts revealed that throughout their discussions, parents expressed their awareness and depth of feeling about their circumstances. To demonstrate this, the following extracts were chosen which, although lengthy, were by no means exhaustive of all occurrences. They were chosen to show that parents viewed their children's learning needs, economic constraints and the influence of class and selective schools as barriers, which acted to limit opportunities for them and their children.

Firstly parents' awareness of financial constraints:

- 171 ...simply can't
172 afford it and like you said he's only got one pair that
173 he's got to wear for school and for PE and at the
174 weekend [...] where do you draw the line?

Parents' views of the link between class and attending grammar school:

264 That's how it is as much as I'm not particularly
265 comfortable with the class system hm there is one and
266 you can't ignore the class system and I can't afford to
267 put my son didn't pass to get into the grammar

Parents' view of privilege:

1030 ...not saying they shouldn't have what they get but if
1031 they're privileged children and they're bright [...] they
1032 yeah they should be rewarded and have things but the
1033 funding that the grammar gets because they're
1034 wonderful children, should go to the comprehensive
1035 schools so those children that are deprived can
1036 experience more and like you say maybe they go to
1037 whatever and see event A and go wow that's amazing
1038 I want to try that, then they try it and you've got
1039 yourself an Olympic champion or a Richard Branson or

Parents' awareness of their children's learning needs:

934 ...and I've just heard from parents' evening
935 [...] but it's the way he has to learn things you know and
936 it's being in that environment where you have to si...
937 and I know that is how it is and it is how it is because
938 there is no alternative I'm not saying he would be a
939 genius if he was taken out of that and could just do
940 whatever but [...]

Lastly:

466 and say you know look my my son [...] [NAME] on a personal
467 note as I said going back and over it again he came to
468 the school with a hm [...] with action plus with social
469 deficiencies and he's still a little bit of a loner sometimes
470 but he's comfortable here hm [...] you know [...]

Overall parents' views repeatedly highlighted contexts which they viewed as forms of disadvantage and vulnerability. However, the parents never self-identified with categories of disadvantage, in other words they did not 'pathologize' (Gillborn, 1998: 731) or 'problematize' (Crozier, 2003) themselves or their situations. In view of this, it was important, when exploring the parents' contexts, to achieve a balance between avoiding attempts at categorising, whilst also establishing some of the characteristics of the parents' lived experiences. Through this, the aim was to explore and interpret why their views appeared to be more aligned with government discourses and doxa linked to issues of disadvantage.

8.4.1. Interrelatedness of learning needs, poverty and disadvantage

Parents' narratives continually referenced their children's learning needs and their socio economic circumstances as barriers leading to reduced opportunities. It was striking however, that the parents did not try to differentiate between these barriers, but instead referred to them in such a way as to homogenise their impacts. An example of this was in the conformity interview (analysed in Chapter 5) when the parent referred to their family's socio economic circumstances coupled with selective schooling, their child's learning needs and lack of choice of school as shown below.

Socio-economic and selective schooling:

P1: 266 ...I can't afford to
267 put my son didn't pass to get into the grammar...

Their child's learning needs:

P1: 935 [...] but it's the way he has to learn things you know and
936 it's being in that environment where you have to si [unfinished word]
937 and I know that is how it is and it is how it is because
938 there is no alternative I'm not saying he would be a
939 genius if he was taken out of that and could just do
940 whatever but [...]

Lack of parental choice:

P1: 511 with you know hm and yeah I think it would be nice if
512 there was an alternative school it'll never happen but
513 in my dream world of fantasy it would be nice if there...

The parent summarised their feelings towards the end of the discussion with the phrase:

P1: 1084 ...Bit of a pathway isn't it I suppose is what you're saying...

This parental perspective that assumed an interrelatedness between different forms of disadvantage was not only implied by the parents' views but also by the literature. Firstly, in section 2.4.3 the literature's arguments about intersectionality (Reay, 1998; Gillborn, 2010a; Gillborn, 2010b; Gillborn, 2014) were analysed. This literature described intersectionality as underlining that when families experienced more than one form of disadvantage, each form added to the other's complexities and challenges, resulting in new and interrelated contexts of disadvantage. Crucially for this study, the implication of this argument was that parental views and perspectives appeared to be contingent on the complex intersectional relationships of their contexts. In addition to this literature focusing on intersectionality, recent studies by Shaw *et al.* (2016) and Andrews *et al.* (2017) underlined that SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities), poverty and disadvantage were interrelated, and acted both as causes and effects of each other. Whilst the authors estimated that 15% of school-aged children were represented by these categories, in this study's school the proportions of children affected by disadvantage was closer to 50%. This higher concentration was due to two local factors. The school was a non-selective, local authority school in an area where children at age 11 were selected for grammar school based on their academic ability. The significance of this was that as many studies (Andrews *et al.*, 2016; Bolton, 2017) reported, selective schools continued to have far lower proportions of children from deprived backgrounds and other medical and learning needs, than other schools in their areas. Furthermore, in the case study schools' area all the other secondary schools were converter academies which, as numerous recent studies showed, also continued to admit low numbers of disadvantaged and vulnerable

children (Academies Commission, 2013; Ball, 2013; Bernardes *et.al.*, 2015; Norwich and Black, 2015; Shaw *et al.*, 2016).

The purpose of this analysis was to explore why parents' perspectives may have been more aligned to government speeches focused on disadvantage, than speeches focused on mainstream schooling issues. Through combining parents' narratives with studies' arguments, the answer appeared to be that this greater alignment was because parents' habitus embodied contexts and predispositions related to issues of disadvantage. In turn, government discourses focused on disadvantage contained the doxa that corresponded to this parental habitus. On the other hand, speeches focused on mainstream issues of schooling, promoting neoliberal principles focused on macro-economic outcomes, were based on a doxa that was less well suited to parents' habitus. This interpretation added weight to the notion that government discourses emanated from two separate fields of schooling. The mainstream field which largely excluded the participant parents' habitus, and a field focused on disadvantage, which was more inclusive of the participant parents' habitus. Returning to the contention developed in Chapter 7, that parents' views simultaneously resisted and embodied government discourses, this could now be conceived as the parents simultaneously resisting issues from the mainstream field of schooling and embodying issues from the field focused on disadvantage. In addition, this interpretation again underlined, that simple notions of exclusion and marginalisation, did not adequately explain parents' disadvantage and their relationship with neoliberal discourses. Arguing for the existence of two separate fields of schooling, had an important implication in relation to Bourdieu's arguments about the workings and interrelatedness of social fields. This was the focus of the next section.

8.5 Understanding separate fields of schooling through notions of the 'precariat'

The contention proposed by this discussion potentially overlooked an important aspect of Bourdieu's conception of how fields operated. This was a notion that fields acted as dynamic, interrelated social spaces, in perpetual states of flux, and with varying degrees of relative autonomy from each other. In addition, that flux within one field would lead

to changes in how it related to other fields, as argued by Grenfell and James (2004) who quoted Bourdieu directly:

The source of that change can lie within the field itself, or (and) occur in response to outside influences. For Bourdieu, fields lie along a continuum between autonomy and heteronomy, defined in terms of the degree to which a field can 'generate its own problems rather than receiving them in a ready-made fashion from outside (Bourdieu 2000/1997, p. 112).

Based on this, the contention proposed by this study of the existence of a separate field of schooling for disadvantaged families, was unlikely to have taken place in isolation from other fields. In other words, two separate fields of schooling would be more plausible if the literature reported similar separations in other social fields.

One such analysis was a nationwide survey that elicited 161,000 responses (Savage *et al.*, 2013) which resulted in an analysis in which the authors claimed 'the existence of seven new classes' (Savage, 2015: 5). These findings, published as an interactive web tool, received 7 million logins in its first week. However, despite this nationwide interest and participation, the class the authors termed 'precariat' (claimed to be the lowest ranking of all seven) showed almost no participation at all. Instead, ethnographic interviews were required to complete the survey. The work carried out by Savage (*ibid.*) was significant because it identified this separate 'precariat' group who the authors estimated represented approximately 15% of the British population, in other words the same percentage as quoted earlier for disadvantaged and vulnerable children. Whilst the purpose of this analysis was not to label the parents, it did serve to indicate that there might have been characteristics shared by the 'precariat' and the participant parents. In addition, the notion raised earlier of social fields influencing one another, highlighted the possibility that the emergence of a separate 'precariat' social class may have been interrelated with the existence of a separate field of schooling. Furthermore an analysis of the 'precariat' contexts, revealed similarities with the contexts highlighted by the participant parents.

Standing (2011) argued that the 'precariat' was a new class of disadvantaged, marginalised people, for whom issues of economic, social and educational

marginalisation coupled with a strong sense of identity, were important contexts. Significantly, Standing identified a number of aspects related to ‘precariat’ agents, which were similar to this study’s analysis of parents’ views. He argued that the ‘precariat’:

- held deterministic outlooks regarding social and economic opportunities;
- through lack of voice, created their own alternative value system and strong identity;
- These were the result of neoliberal policies of globalisation and institutional change.

Comparing each of these with the parents’ views, highlighted important parallels: parents expressed deterministic views about their children’s prospects; they demonstrated their alternative values and sense of identity through consciously resisting neoliberal aspects of schooling; and their views were excluded from neoliberal discourses focused on macro-economic aims. Overall Standing’s characterisation of contexts relevant to a ‘precariat’ class, were very closely matched to this study’s analysis of parents’ contexts and views.

In summary, the analysis in this section addressed the contention that if separate fields of schooling existed, then this was likely to be reflected in other fields. Savage’s (*et al.*, 2013; 2015) and Standing’s (2011) work confirmed similar separation within social classes in the UK, through the emergence of a ‘precariat’ class. From this, the contention was that, just as the ‘precariat’ occupied a different and unique social space, the participant parents also occupied a separate field of schooling, structured by a deterministic and unambitious doxa related specifically to issues of disadvantage. Inevitably this analysis again questioned how conceptions of separate social spaces and separate fields of schooling, could be balanced against simpler notions of marginalisation and exclusion adopted in the literature about disadvantage.

8.6 The inadequacy of simple concepts of exclusion

At this point, it was pertinent to underline this study's contention that authors' arguments (Gewirtz 2001; Crozier, 2003; Reay, 2005, 2017; Barker, 2010, 2012; Raffo, 2011; Hoskins, 2012; Hatcher, 2012; Lingard and Sellar 2012) based on marginalisation and exclusion, could not fully explain this study's findings. Marginalisation and exclusion could not fully account for the paradoxes in parents' views, or this chapter's findings of the relationship between these views and government speeches. Instead this study proposed a notion of separate and distinguishable fields of schooling. This notion implied that the participant parents are potentially being excluded from the mainstream field of schooling and simultaneously, included into the field focused on issues of disadvantage. In Standing's (2011) terms, a separate 'precariat' class occupying a separate social space. Whilst this analysis provided a potential explanation for the paradoxes in parents' views, it raised questions about how the separate fields and simultaneous inclusion and exclusion, affected parents' habitus. In other words, in view of Bourdieu's (2000; 2006) contention that structural fields were interrelated with habitus and authors' arguments about social theory only being fully comprehensible through combining macro and micro societal analyses (Bhaskar, 1986; Giddens, 1990; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Archer, 1995), separate and distinguishable fields of schooling necessarily implied different parental habitus.

8.7 The implications of separate fields on parental habitus

Adopting the thesis that the parents' disadvantage was potentially due to them occupying this separate and distinguishable field of schooling, raised the question of how this might be reflected in the parents' habitus. The analysis had already highlighted that the aspects of parents' habitus that showed congruence with the prevailing doxa were: deterministic expectations, low ambitions, valorising of affective measures and a mediated claim to agency. However, it had not highlighted how disadvantaged parents' habitus might differ from the habitus of parents within mainstream schooling.

In order to explore how the two forms of habitus might differ, required a deeper consideration of the notion of social fields. To start with, section 8.5 underlined Bourdieu's contention of the interrelatedness and flux found in and between social fields. The relevance of this, was that doxa from one field could influence another field and so also influence the habitus of agents in that field. Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) and Lingard *et al.*, (2005) for instance argued that utilitarian economic agendas such as global competitiveness, influenced the content and focus of speeches in other fields including education. Bourdieu himself argued:

It is always possible to import and impose external forces and forms into the field, which generate heteronomy and are capable of thwarting, neutralizing and sometimes annihilating the conquests of research freed of suppositions (Bourdieu, 2000: 112)

The point was that the field of schooling was in a dynamic relationship with, in particular, the political and economic fields, with the latter two holding the balance of power. The field of schooling has been described as being heteronomous and unable to refract the 'external forces and forms' from other fields (Shilling, 2004; 475), exposing it to 'cross-field effects' (Rawolle, 2005; 705). Within this contention, it was possible to argue that if the economic and political fields influenced the field of schooling, then they would also influence the habitus of agents within the field of schooling. Whilst this might explain how the field of schooling and habitus of the agents occupying that field may have been influenced, it did not explain the specific changes in parental habitus this might lead to.

In order to understand how the parental habitus might be affected by an altered field it was necessary to briefly outline how agents have been described as acting within the fields. To this end Bourdieu's (1998) notion was that agents from one field influenced and dominated those agents from another field who they perceived could best advance their doxa, and through this 'maximise their position' (Maton, 2005: 689). Based on this, political agents could be perceived as identifying issues and individuals related to disadvantage, as being of less strategic relevance because they were seen as not being able to advance their fields' neoliberal doxa and priorities. It followed that political agents' speeches, when focused on disadvantage, would not need to promote a neoliberal

doxa. In contrast, there were advantages to promoting this doxa in the remainder of the field of schooling. This resulted in different fields and doxa of schooling developing and, by implication, a modified parental habitus. Importantly, for political agents to impose their doxa successfully they would need agents with a heteronomous habitus. In practical terms this implied that speeches were most likely to show examples of politicians ‘who dominate’ and parents ‘who are dominated’ (Bourdieu, 1998; 40–41) when the speeches were focused on mainstream schooling.

In relation to this study’s analysis of the 41 speeches, the contention was that in the 36 speeches focused primarily on mainstream schooling, the parents’ habitus would be expected to lack autonomy and therefore be more susceptible to influence from political doxa. In contrast, in the five speeches specifically focused on issues of disadvantage, the expectation would be that representations of parents would imply a much greater degree of autonomy. The reason for this, being that they were excluded from neoliberal macro-economic outcomes and so political agents would not need to dominate them. Interestingly the notion of a more autonomous habitus for disadvantaged parents appeared counter intuitive. This was because the prevailing literature, as discussed in section 7.6, continued to argue that these parents lacked autonomy and so were more easily marginalised and excluded as a result. Significantly, Standing’s (2011) characterisation of the ‘precariat’ having a strong sense of identity and creating their own alternative value system, was closer to the notion of disadvantaged parents having a higher level of autonomy.

8.8 Summary

Overall, by combining the analysis of parents’ views from Chapter 7 with the analysis in this chapter, resulted in the interpretation of there being two separate fields of schooling. A mainstream field characterised by ambitious neoliberal macro-economic aims and a less ambitious and deterministic field focused on issues of disadvantage. The first of these excluded parents’ views, whilst the latter was structured by a doxa that was embodied by the parents and was inclusive of their views. Linking this with the analysis in Chapter 7,

led to the notion that parents' conscious resistance was towards the neoliberal field and doxa that excluded them, whilst their simultaneous subconscious embodiment was in relation to the field and doxa of disadvantage. The discussion has argued that proposing these two separate fields, mirrored similar reported changes in the field of social class in the UK, including the identification of a 'precariat' class. This overall contention, undermined simple notions of exclusion and marginalisation, including their characterisation of disadvantaged parents having low levels of autonomy. In contrast, this chapter proposed that disadvantaged parents' habitus was likely to be allowed to be more autonomous because political agents perceived the parents as not needing to be dominated by neoliberal rhetoric.

Whilst this contention was plausible based on the findings of these last four chapters and authors' arguments about the 'precariat' sense of identity, it could only be fully analysed through exploring how government discourses portrayed parents' roles, identities and habitus. Interestingly, as argued at the start of this chapter, the focus of Chapter 9 had originally been to explore to what extent there existed a relationship between parents' views of their roles (themes of mediated agency and support school) and speeches portrayal of their roles. In addition, now due to the discussion and contention developed in this chapter, the analysis of this theme had a second purpose. This was to explore if speeches focused on mainstream schooling, represented parents' habitus as less autonomous and different to the habitus implied for disadvantaged parents.

Chapter 9 Do speeches' representations of parents support the contention of a separate doxa and field of schooling and a more autonomous parental habitus?

9.1 Overview

The purpose of this chapter was twofold. Initially as discussed in section 8.2.3, having recognised that for practical reasons it was necessary to limit the number of parental themes to be used as categories for the analysis of speeches, parental roles⁴⁷ was one of the themes chosen. However, a second reason for analysing the theme, was that the analysis in Chapter 8, led to the contention that speeches promoted an altered doxa and field in relation to disadvantage and that in turn, this implied a more autonomous parental habitus. In line with this, the analysis focuses on how themes related to parents' roles are represented in government speeches and how this is related to parents' views of this theme. The findings substantiate the contention developed in Chapter 8 of a separate field of schooling for disadvantaged families, structured by a deterministic and less ambitious doxa coupled with a more autonomous parental habitus. This interpretation, along with the analysis of parental views from Chapter 7, are synthesised into a single interpretation proposed as an original contribution to discourses about the persistence of underachievement of disadvantaged children. This interpretation proposes that parents' disadvantage is evidenced by their conscious resistance to and exclusion from the neoliberal school field coupled with their simultaneous subconscious embodiment of and inclusion in, the field focused on issues of disadvantage. This interpretation reinforces the contention that parents' disadvantage is not simply due to mechanisms of exclusion, but instead it results from their inclusion into this separate, deterministic and less ambitious field.

⁴⁷ Themes of support school (sections 5.3.5 and 6.2.3) and mediated parental agency (section 6.2.2).

9.2 Summarising the interpretation proposed by this study

Briefly summarising the interpretation proposed in the previous chapter was useful in situating the findings from this chapter related to how parents were represented in speeches. The interpretation proposed that there were two distinguishable fields and doxa of schooling. The mainstream field was ambitious and predicated neoliberal instrumental economic aims, and its doxa excluded the participant parents' views. This was shown in Chapter 7 by the parents' conscious resistance to these neoliberal principles and in Chapter 8 through the contrasts between mainstream speeches and parental views. In contrast, the field of schooling focused on disadvantage, shared the participant parents' less ambitious and deterministic outlooks with a concomitant recognition of the value of personal and social outcomes. This doxa was interpreted as being subconsciously embodied by the parents. Finally, the interpretation argued that the parents' habitus would experience the greatest degree of heteronomy and so being altered or 'dominated' (Bourdieu, 1998; 40–41), in the mainstream, ambitious, neoliberal field of schooling. Conversely, in speeches focused on disadvantage, higher levels of parental autonomy would be expected. Consequently, the purposes of the following analyses and discussions were to explore how parents' roles were presented in speeches and what forms and levels of autonomy they ascribed to parents' habitus.

9.3 Analysing speeches' representations of parents' roles

The previous chapter revealed that notions related to parental roles were the lowest occurring in the 41 speeches, with only 201 occurrences compared to 423 for the themes conformity and preparation. Whilst this appeared as a paradox considering neoliberal rhetoric and assumptions (as analysed in section 3.4) about parents as consumers, the analysis was limited by its quantitative approach. In response, through language based analysis and hermeneutic reading, four broad notions of the theme parent roles were identified, as shown in Table 7 below.

Table 7 Quantitative summary of representations of parents in speeches

Representation of parents	Number of occurrences	Percentage occurrences⁴⁸
The 'assumed' parent	110	55
Parents needing reminders of their responsibilities	21	10
Parents as home educators	16	8
Active parental agency	54	27
Total	201	100

As was the case when different notions of the themes conformity and preparation were identified in the last chapter, the four representations were not derived from parents' views but were instead interpreted from the government speeches. Once again, as was the case in Chapter 8, reflexive evaluation concluded that using these different notions of parental roles, enabled a deeper level of analysis of the speeches and so justified the use of the notions despite them not being raised by parents. In particular, the separate notions enabled the analysis to explore the contention that government speeches presented altered field, doxa and habitus in relation to disadvantage.

Overall as shown in the Table 7 above, the representation termed the 'assumed' parent, was the most frequently occurring and was also the only representation which was noted across the 41 speeches. In other words, this representation was just as frequent in speeches focused on issues of disadvantage as in other speeches. The analysis focused on this first notion of 'assumed parent' before considering the remaining three notions, which importantly, showed significant variations in occurrences across the speeches.

⁴⁸ As a percentage of all occurrences of parental representations.

9.3.1. Representations of the ‘assumed parent’

Reading the speeches revealed that this representation assigned a low level of agency to parents either through ‘assuming’ and voicing parents’ ambitions and needs, or simply by adding parents to a list of other agents and so homogenising their identities through a logic of appearances (Fairclough, 2000). This was demonstrated by Nicky Morgan in a speech⁴⁹ in which she voiced what she believed were parents’ aspirations:

Because this ambition to focus on the basics and driving up standards matches the ambition of parents at school gates around the country.

The statement was declarative (Fairclough, 2000) in that it allowed for no other options other than to pursue the ‘ambition’ which was claimed to coincide with parents’ ambitions. The use of parents to justify a particular policy reform was identified in the previous chapter. However, a significant aspect on this occasion was the use of the metaphor ‘at school gates’. Metaphors such as these provide powerful representations of meanings (Fairclough, 2000; Hyatt, 2013). In this case the image of lots of parents with their children at the school gates, was inclusive in that it did not convey a particular type of parent. This made the metaphor powerful in conveying that the ambition was shared by all parents. This was further reinforced by the use of ‘around the country’ underlining that the consensus was nationwide. This was a powerful rhetorical device, which of course was neither substantiated nor challenged through any form of argumentation (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012). Adopting approaches from ethnographic content analysis (section 4.7.2 of the methodology) and therefore focusing on ‘the context of the report itself, and other nuances’ (Altheide, 1987; p.68), it appeared that the metaphor was arguably needed to pacify criticisms of the policy reform. This was emphasised later in the same speech:

As Education Secretary I’m committed to implementing these reforms, not because I’m an ideological warrior, determined to impose my world view on schools and young people.

⁴⁹ Nicky Morgan, Secretary of State for Education, speaks at the University of Birmingham’s annual Priestley Lecture. ‘*Our plan for education*’ 27.11.2014

This use of ‘parents’ as a justification for reforms was found to be common in the corpus of speeches. Morgan’s speech exemplified this:

...but as the parents in this audience will know, being a mum or a dad doesn’t come with a guidebook and many parents find themselves asking what they should do to help their child learn, how they know that their child is progressing well at school and how involved they should become in their child’s education.

The depiction of being a parent expressed through the colloquial ‘being a mum or a dad’ enhanced a sense of empathy by appealing directly to members of the audience who may themselves have been parents. A number of authors (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Chilton 1988) have argued that discourses and arguments based on ‘real life’ events, and ‘real life’ people, have a greater influence than more traditional and professional styles of presentation based on statistics. Returning to the extract, the difficulty with parenting, which Morgan ‘assumes’ all parents will agree with, was underlined further through her claim that it did not ‘come with a guidebook’. This language was used in the speech to help justify the reforms on the basis that the speaker ‘knew’ the difficulties the parents faced. Of course the reality was that Morgan was ‘assuming’ she knew what circumstances and contexts parents were operating in. In order to achieve this, Morgan homogenized parents’ identities and so gave the illusion that their needs and ambitions were visible and known. In this sense, Morgan was making the parents ‘visible’ and ‘knowable’ which could be argued to weaken their individuality, identity and autonomy. This contrasted with ‘precarious’ identities as argued by Savage: ‘the precariat recedes from view, and this limits our awareness of social inequality and class divisions today’ (Savage, 2015: 334). The extent to which Morgan ‘assumed’ and made parents’ needs and ambitions visible, was best shown as the speech developed:

From speaking to parents, not just in Loughborough, but right across the country, I know that many have worried that some of our reforms seem too harsh, that the focus has been on too narrow a set of academic indicators, that young people are trapped on an exam treadmill.

Here Morgan provided two sources of ‘evidentiary warrants’ (Cochran-Smith and Fries, 2001; Hyatt, 2013) to validate her comments. She started by quoting a specific name place and then adding ‘right across the country’. Later she cited the three specific areas of criticism that the reforms had attracted. This level of specificity was designed to establish the veracity of her claims and that they were truly from parents. However, the paradox in Morgan’s speech, and the aspect which most underlined her representation of the ‘assumed parent’, was that she then immediately followed this by saying:

Let me say again, I make no apology for the early focus of our reforms, our immediate priority in 2010 had to be getting the basics right for young people.

The paradox lay in the contrast between the efforts made in the speech to establish that the criticisms were genuinely representative of parents’ views, and then completely negating them by claiming that the reforms had to be those implemented by the government. There was no justification offered apart from a temporal explanation ‘our immediate priority in 2010’. However, 2010 marked the start of the coalition government; Morgan was now speaking in 2014 and only four months before prorogation due to the 2015 general election. The fact that the speech still referred to the criticisms, demonstrated their currency even at the end of the government’s term. The temporal justification was at best a weak, and at worst a deliberate, obfuscation of the continuing ideological drive to bring about the reforms. Significantly, in terms of the focus of this analysis, Morgan ‘assumed’ the reforms were necessary despite parents’ views. It is pertinent to reiterate that at the start of the speech, Morgan had specifically claimed that the reasons for implementing the reforms were ‘not because I’m an ideological warrior’. However, analysing Morgan’s approach it could be argued that according to Bourdieu’s notion, this was an agent from the political field trying to ‘dominate’ (1998; 40–41) agents from the field of schooling. Morgan’s speech, despite acknowledging parental resistance and criticism, still supposed it knew what was best for the ‘assumed’ parent. This typified the widespread, and arguably deeply entrenched, representation of an ‘assumed parent’

across the 41 speeches. Adding weight to this contention was a speech⁵⁰ which explicitly declared:

That means recognising what government can and can't do. Sometimes it means taking bold and unpopular decisions to drive up standards, but above all it means working in partnership with teachers, parents, pupils, governors, employers and unions to ensure we fulfil our mission.

The speech's reference to carry out 'unpopular decisions' was clear and its significance arguably augmented by the title of the speech 'Our plan for education'. The additional relevance of this extract was that it exemplified the second form of occurrence of the 'assumed parent'; namely adding 'parent' (or a synonym) indiscriminately to a list. This representation once again functioned through a logic of appearances (Fairclough, 2000) which minimised qualitative differences between agents and so minimised relational tensions between their competing aims and needs. In the last extract, for instance, it was questionable how 'working in partnership' with the different agents named would have been possible without compromising the needs and aims of at least some of them. Overall, adding 'parent' to a list was very frequently adopted (110 occurrences) and one particular example offered the opportunity for deeper analysis.

This was in a speech⁵¹ focused on the implementation of maths teaching techniques from 'high performing jurisdictions and countries' which also included claims about the benefits of using 'quality textbooks'. 24 of the 41 speeches referred to this reform and Gibb's speech typified references to parents:

Across the maths hubs, schools are also trialling Singapore textbooks, which provide a coherent, structured programme and benefit teachers, pupils and parents.

⁵⁰ Nicky Morgan, Secretary of State for Education, speaks at the 2014 Foundation for Excellence in Education summit. '*our plan for education*' 21.11.2014

⁵¹ Nick Gibb, School Reform Minister speaks to the London Thames Maths Hub Primary Conference. '*The government's maths reforms*' 27.3.2015

Whilst the claim that parents, as well as teachers and pupils were enjoying the benefits of the ‘structured programme’ was clear, the actual benefits to parents was not made explicit. In order to explore this, the ‘Maths Hubs’ website⁵² was analysed through accessing all the available tabs, navigation links, case studies and searching ‘parent’ (and synonyms) across the whole website. These steps revealed no references to parents at all. This result, at least in relation to this particular inclusion of parents in a list, reinforced the argument that the inclusion of parents was a tokenistic gesture and functioned through a logic of appearances rather than having a reality borne in parents’ actualised agency.

Continuing the analysis of the ‘assumed’ parent there were 15 occurrences characterised by a rhetoric that, whilst still speaking on behalf of parents, identified them specifically through their need for help, support or assurance. In each instance the speech alleged the parents’ needs would be met by the particular government policy or strategy being promoted in the speech. For the purposes of brevity only one extract is included. This extract came from a speech⁵³ focused on reformed inspections of local authorities. On each occasion the word family was used rather than parent:

The primary aim of the new inspection arrangements is to ensure that the experiences and outcomes of vulnerable children, young people and their families are at the heart of help, protection and care...

The context of the speech was the Chief Inspector of schools adopting an unequivocally critical stance and challenging the way local authorities (LA) administered schools and children’s services. The emotive imagery of ‘vulnerable children, young people and their families’ was employed as a justification for the strong criticism of LAs who were portrayed as the protagonists who were not ‘taking those responsibilities seriously’. Overall this typified these occurrences where use of the word ‘family’ rather than ‘parent’, coupled with ‘vulnerable’ were employed to help create a metaphor of helpless families in need of protection.

⁵² www.mathshubs.org.uk

⁵³ Sir Michael Wilshaw ‘*Speech to the Association of Directors of Children's Services Annual Conference*’ 14.7.2014

The final form of the ‘assumed’ parent, were 34 occurrences that focused on parents’ socio economic circumstances. Once again the speeches employed the representations as means by which to justify the particular policy or strategy being promoted by the speech. The occurrences focused on lack of wealth (including intergenerational comparisons) parents’ work, housing, and income. In all the occurrences, parents acted as benchmarks against which their children’s prospects were compared. The following extract was typical of those found across the speeches:

...it’s about a refusal to accept that educational attainment must be correlated to the wealth of your parents...⁵⁴

Whilst this extract typified the 34 occurrences, there were examples which differed because they promoted particular normative values and beliefs. Two of these speeches were analysed in greater detail because of their significance in relation to what they implied about values and opinions and how this related to the views expressed by this study’s parents. The other highly significant finding, was that none of these references occurred in speeches focused on vulnerable children, the significance of which was that this may have added weight to the contention of a different field and doxa governing discourses related to disadvantage.

The first speech⁵⁵ focused on reforms to music:

Because music shouldn’t be the preserve of those who can afford it, whose parents play instruments themselves or listen to music at home. This government’s plan for education has focused on raising standards for all and narrowing the gap between disadvantaged students and their peers.

Whilst the extract was another example of referencing parents in order to signpost disadvantage, it also contained an assumed link between disadvantaged students and parents who do not ‘play instruments themselves or listen to music at home’. This

⁵⁴ Nicky Morgan Secretary of State for Education ‘*why knowledge matters*’ 27.1.2015

⁵⁵ Nick Gibb Minister of State for School Reform ‘*the government’s support for music education in schools*’. 12.3.2015

embedded assumption linked parents' economic capital with their cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2006); the former through 'afford' and the latter through ability to 'play...listen'. The sentence construction set up an antithesis (Fairclough, 2000) between musical agency and 'disadvantaged students' To explain this further, if it is assumed that disadvantage is a negative condition, this implies that the economic and cultural capital associated with musical agency is regarded as a positive condition in Gibb's statement. Whilst it is not the aim or role of this thesis to analyse whether such evaluative judgements are appropriate, Gibb's normative assumption did have parallels with arguments by Gewirtz (2001) considered in Chapter 2. In these arguments, she described the 'problematizing' of parents who did not have the 'right' values and aspirations, and political attempts to 'socialize' them into these 'right' values. The implication of Gibb's statement was that government favoured a parental habitus with a particular disposition towards music and that this in turn implied that the parents should have the necessary capital to 'afford...play...listen'. Whilst accessing and enjoying music was arguably not a contentious aspect of life, the next speech highlighted what was a far more explicit example of Gewirtz's (*ibid*) 'problematizing' and attempts at 'socializing' of parents. This next speech launched Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM)⁵⁶, which was described as a policy:

...that will save ordinary parents money and improve children's education and health.

And in the same speech:

If we get this right, no one will be able to take it away - because it will be so popular with parents that no politician would dare.

Whilst it was not possible for this thesis to provide a detailed analysis of the political milieu that gave rise to this policy, in brief it centred on a tension within the coalition government. This tension resulted from the coalition having to choose between the Liberal Democrat's favoured UIFSM and the Conservative's policy of giving tax savings

⁵⁶ David Laws Schools Minister talks about universal infant free school meals 11.07.2014

to married couples. The significance was that Laws' speech on UIFSM adopted representations of parents through their socio economic circumstances. These representations promoted a particular set of values and norms, which were in opposition to those the Conservative's tax credits aimed to promote. The following extract from a news story⁵⁷ evidences the tension:

The deputy prime minister told Sky News there were "philosophical differences" with the Lib Dems' coalition partners, the Conservatives, over the issue. He said there was a limit on what the state "should seek to do in organising people's private relationships". Fellow Lib Dems Vince Cable and Simon Hughes also attacked the idea during interviews with the BBC. Mr Hughes, deputy Lib Dem leader, also denied the issue showed coalition tensions, telling BBC Breakfast it was one of four areas in the coalition agreement where the two parties had agreed to differ.

The extract underlined that the differences were rooted in differing social values which could only be resolved through an agreement 'to differ'. The significance was that the Conservative's Family Tax Allowance was explicitly aimed at reinforcing a traditional normative view of marriage⁵⁸:

Conservative leader David Cameron said in his party conference in October: "Marriage is not just a piece of paper. It pulls couples together through the ebb and flow of life. It gives children stability. And it says powerful things about what we should value. So yes, we will recognise marriage in the tax system."

Cameron explicitly claimed that marriage was 'what we should value'. The marriage allowance was specifically targeted at families, which were defined as married couples; single parents and other family set ups therefore would not benefit from this allowance. The policy promoted a normative view, or doxa, of 'family'. It is important to underline

⁵⁷ www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-16235463 'Nick Clegg on the offensive over marriage tax breaks' 18.12.2011

⁵⁸ *ibid*

that the purpose of this analysis was not to evaluate the relative merits of the two policies or indeed what they implied as constituting ‘family’. The aim was to highlight how in some speeches, representations of parents through their socio economic circumstances were employed to promote certain values over others. Arguably best captured by Clegg⁵⁹ when he claimed the tax allowance was going beyond what the state:

...should seek to do in organising people's private relationships.

Focusing on the significance of both Gibb’s speech on music and the Coalition Government’s implementation of UIFSM, two interpretations emerged. The first was the appropriation of parents’ socio economic identities to valorise particular normative cultural, social and moral values. This was interpreted as evidence of ‘cross-field effects’ (Rawolle, 2005; p.705) from the political and economic fields designed to impose a cultural arbitrary or doxa onto the field of schooling. However, arguably of even more significance, was that neither speech was specifically focused on disadvantage or vulnerability. In other words the issues they raised about music and UIFSM, and more specifically the normative social and moral values they promoted, were not evidenced in any of the speeches focused on disadvantage. This finding supported the interpretation developed in the last chapter that political and economic doxa were aimed at influencing the field of schooling through dominating and modifying the parents’ habitus. Crucially, this was most likely to occur when speeches were focused on mainstream issues and not on disadvantage.

In conclusion this section analysed the most frequently occurring representation of parents, one which assumed parents’ needs and ambitions in order to justify policies or reforms. Some representations used emotive vignettes and language in order to cast families as helpless. All the representations assigned parents low levels of agency and autonomy and those which focused on parents’ socio economic circumstances also problematized them. In addition some of the latter, promoted particular normative social and cultural values and significantly, these only occurred in mainstream speeches not

⁵⁹ www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-16235463 ‘Nick Clegg on the offensive over marriage tax

focused on issues of disadvantage. The next section presented the analysis of two further representations which again only occurred in mainstream speeches.

9.3.2. Parents needing reminders of their responsibilities

Analysis of the 41 speeches revealed that representations of parents needing reminders about their responsibilities, only occurred in mainstream speeches. These representations were characterised by references which were arguably patronising, implying that parents needed the reminders in order to ensure they would fulfil their responsibilities. There were 21 of these occurrences (10% of all references to parents) some focused on parenting skills, others on parents' responsibility in ensuring children followed school rules and lastly, those berating parents' low demands on schools. A typical example of these representations, focused on parenting skills:⁶⁰

The starting point should be parenting. Effective parenting has a bigger influence on a child's life than wealth, class or education. Most parents do a great job but some do not and there has been a reluctance to call out bad parenting or to support more parents develop parenting skills. Existing public policy interventions here tend to be too timid or too targeted. We believe the time has come to end this equivocation. We look to the next Government to develop a national parenting programme to help more parents to parent well...

This representation demonstrated a normative view of parenting as a technical, managerial task (shown by the underlined words) which implied that if parenting was done 'well' it would deliver the right results; presumably a child who would have a better life, transcending any disadvantages linked to 'wealth, class or education'. The rhetoric assumed that parents, children and their relationships were homogeneous, and that they all followed predictable and controllable behaviours. This rhetoric reduced parents to

⁶⁰ Alan Milburn, Chair of Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission. 'State of the Nation 2014' 20.10.2014

agents who needed to be reminded, or even taught, how to carry out the task of parenting. These discourses did not recognise parental autonomy or identity and instead prescribed a norm which judged parenting as either 'good' or 'bad' depending on how well it matched the normative standards prescribed by the speeches. This rhetoric was repeated in a later speech⁶¹:

Yet it would be wrong to suppose that for all its benefits this support is a total substitution for good parenting. It is not. It is easy for politicians and the press to blame schools for youngsters' ill-discipline or lack of ambition and achievement. But as we all know, a child who has a supportive family, regardless of income, is far likelier to succeed in school than one who hasn't.

The reference to 'good parenting' was again clear. The relevance of this extract was that it went further in that it also identified the negative outcomes of parenting which was by definition not 'good parenting'. These outcomes were "'ill-discipline ... lack of ambition and achievement'. The extract also drew an equivalence (Fairclough, 2000) between parenting which was not good and an unsupportive family. It achieved this through the grammatical construction which established 'good parenting' as being linked to 'a supportive family' which consequentially implied that the type of parenting which led to 'ill-discipline' and 'lack of ambition and achievement' was an unsupportive family. The relevance of this was that it not only conveyed normative values to parenting, resulting in alternative forms being identified as 'bad parenting', but that the latter were also judged to be unsupportive. This added a further evaluative judgement on 'bad parenting' which went beyond a simple conception of parents not getting the process 'right'. The notion of a 'non-supportive family' arguably had a more deliberative quality.

Similarly when speeches referred to uniform it was always in the context of reminding parents of their responsibilities. In the first of these⁶², the speech expressed support for a

⁶¹ Her Majesty's Chief Inspector Sir Michael Wilshaw's speech to launch Ofsted's 2013/14 annual reports for schools and FE and skills.10.12.2014

⁶² Her Majesty's Chief Inspector Sir Michael Wilshaw's speech to launch Ofsted's 2013/14 annual reports for schools and FE and skills.10.12.2014

head teacher who had been criticised for sending children home for not wearing the correct uniform:

But all she was doing was reminding children, and just as importantly their parents, that there were rules and that if youngsters wanted to study at her school they had to abide by them.

The declaration that the rules about uniform were not just there for children, but also for parents, was clear. This was repeated in further speeches⁶³:

Hard as it may seem to some, headteachers like Mrs Churton need to know they have the support of us all - and that starts with the parents of the pupils entrusted to her care.

The reference to the parents' primary role in supporting the school, was underlined by use of the expression 'and that starts with the parents'. In addition, the sentence started by referring to unidentified agents 'Hard as it may seem to some' and ended by identifying parents. This construction was interpreted as a passive allusion to parents as the unidentified agents who were expected to enact their agency by showing adherence to uniform rules, and so as a consequence to the school.

At this point, the argument was that these speeches betrayed a discourse which was based on normative judgements or doxa, of 'good' and 'bad' parenting. However, because these notions did not appear in any of the speeches focused on disadvantage, this supported the contention that this doxa of parenting prescribing the dispositions, or habitus, which parents should enact, was confined to the mainstream field of schooling and not on the field focused on disadvantage. In other words, the habitus of parents experiencing disadvantage was not exposed to or dominated by this doxa; their habitus was allowed greater levels of autonomy. This conclusion reinforced the interpretation of separate fields of schooling structured by separate doxa constituting different parental habitus.

⁶³ Nicky Morgan, Secretary of State for Education, speaks at the University of Birmingham's annual Priestley Lecture. 'Our plan for education' 27.11.2014

Significantly, these findings also enabled an interpretation of how this separation of fields contributed to disadvantaged families' experience of symbolic violence.

In section 7.4 symbolic violence was argued as operating at a subconscious level, as a result of agents embodying the prevailing doxa but then also internalising their perceived failure when they did not match or achieve the expectations of the doxa (Thomson, 2002). Based on the current analysis of representations of parents needing reminders, the notion of disadvantaged parents suffering symbolic violence appeared counter intuitive, because their field of schooling was not being influenced by the doxa of 'good' and 'bad' parenting. However, closer analysis led to a different interpretation. This interpretation saw the lack of 'cross-field effects' (Rawolle, 2005; 705) from political agents, as being the result of the latter's lower level of ambition in relation to disadvantaged families and so this justified political agents deploying less capital in trying to 'improve' the parenting of these children. This interpretation was further supported when considered alongside the findings in the last chapter (section 8.3.5), which argued that in relation to conformity and preparation, speeches focused on disadvantage, promoted a less ambitious doxa. In addition, parents' views interpreted through the theme support school (section 5.3.5 and 6.2.3) showed their subconscious drive to ensuring that they were perceived as being 'good' parents who supported the school. The parents therefore were aware of expectations on them, but arguably unaware that political efforts were not focused on them. Returning to Savage (2015) and Standing (2011), the parents were occupying a separate social field, which was less visible and of less interest to political agents. In order to explore the validity of this interpretation, the analysis focused on the second representation of parents which again only occurred in mainstream speeches not focused on disadvantage.

9.3.3. Representations of parents as home educators

Across the 41 speeches there were 16 occurrences of representations of parents as needing to have the skills, time and interest required to actively help their child with school work at home. All of these occurrences were found in the 36 speeches not focused on issues of

disadvantage. A number of the occurrences were in a speech⁶⁴ at a conference organised by educational publishers and suppliers. The focus of the speech was on the need to produce ‘high quality’ and ‘best-quality text books’ which were phrases quoted on fourteen occasions. The speech could be argued to have been parochial in that it based its judgement of ‘quality’ in textbooks on a policy paper by Tim Oates⁶⁵ which had a forward written by Gibb who delivered the speech. The paper reviewed textbooks used in what were described in the speech as ‘high-performing’ countries and jurisdictions; as discussed earlier, this equated to countries higher than the UK in PISA rankings. The simple inductive argument adopted by the speech was based on an initial premise that if these countries performed well in international comparisons and they used textbooks, the textbooks must have been of a good quality. Secondly, the ‘better’ performance of the countries was causally linked to their ‘better’ education. The inductive conclusion was that the UK should adopt these textbooks. It would have been easy to dismiss such claims on the grounds of argumentation theory, which states that it is possible for false conclusions to be drawn from true premises (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012); or indeed more poignantly, dismiss the speeches’ claim by using arguments from the research paper the speech was based on, which cautioned against one of the premises:

There are high performing jurisdictions which do not use central approval processes⁶⁶ (e.g. Massachusetts) and low ranked jurisdictions that do.

None the less, analysing the claim was relevant because its arguably flawed assumptions and simplistic inductive argument, were also present in the speech’s doxa governing expectations of parents. Firstly, the speech adopted a form of cultural homogeneity in assuming that text books and teaching styles that were effective in other countries, would work equally in English schools. However, as Ruth Merttens⁶⁷ argued:

⁶⁴ Nick Gibb School Reform Minister speaks to education publishers about ‘*quality textbooks*’ 20.11.2014

⁶⁵ ‘*Why textbooks count*’ <http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/Images/181744-why-textbooks-count-tim-oates.pdf>2014

⁶⁶ approval processes are procedures through which text books are reviewed and approved for use by schools

⁶⁷ The Guardian ‘*Why are we blindly following the Chinese approach to teaching maths?*’ Tuesday 10 February 2015

Not only is this profoundly undemocratic, but there hasn't been a shred of evidence that a mass move to textbook-orientated teaching across 100% of English primary schools – rural and urban, in affluent and poorer areas – would improve children's understanding of mathematics.

In addition, the speech assumed a class and socio-economic homogeneity which embodied a doxa of all parents and families being able to support their children's school learning at home. One extract from the speech by Nick Gibb, sufficed to show how the doxa was promoted:

...and it helps parents support their children - good textbooks have workbooks which support homework in a positive way by providing well-structured practice exercises linked to clear explanations, which parents can understand and use to help their children.

The doxa promulgated a view of parents' academic ability, language, access to time, other work commitments, parental responsibilities and housing conditions; all of which conformed to a middle class norm (Gewirtz, 2001; Reay, 2001, 2005, 2017; Sarojini-Hart, 2013). Chapter 2 of this study analysed authors' arguments about how issues of class, gender (Reay, 1996; Crozier, 1999) and race (Crozier, 2001, Gillborn, 1998, 2014) were ignored and how this contributed to a 'problematizing' and alienating of parents who did not conform to the government notion of parenting. Gewirtz, (2001) termed this process the 're-socialization' of parenting which was aimed at 're-making parents as home educators' (Gewirtz, 2001: 369).

The analysis of this representation of parents again reinforced the interpretation of an altered doxa influencing only certain agents in the field of schooling and ignoring others. In this representation of parents as home educators, the normative expectations were only expressed in mainstream speeches not focused on issues of disadvantage. In other words the 're-socialization' which Gewirtz argued was operating, was in fact not aimed at families experiencing disadvantage. Disadvantaged families were excluded from the 'cross-field effects' (Rawolle, 2005; 705) emanating from political doxa arguing that

parents should act as home educators. Three more occurrences of this representation reinforced this argument further.

...get parents to set aside 10 minutes a day for their children to read to them or something as simple as practicing their times tables.⁶⁸

And in another speech⁶⁹ focused on assessment policy reforms:

...to help parents support their children on this part of reading, or that part of maths;

...parents might encourage their child to undertake wider reading, or practise an aspect of maths, or discuss with them a particular topic.

Overall representations of parents as ‘home educators’ never appeared in speeches focused on disadvantage and vulnerability. This reinforced the contention of a differentiated doxa which acted to influence the habitus of only some parents; namely those not experiencing disadvantage. In relation to these parents, their habitus would experience greater levels of heteronomy as argued Bourdieu ‘it is always possible to import and impose external forces and forms into the field, which generate heteronomy’ (Bourdieu, 2000: 112)

Overall, the two representations of, parents needing reminders of their responsibilities and as home educators, both reflected a doxa aimed at generating heteronomy. These findings also supported the contention that parents facing disadvantage, were experiencing further separation from the mainstream not solely through mechanisms of marginalisation and exclusion, but through being allowed a potentially more autonomous habitus and inclusion into a separate less ambitious field of schooling focused on issues of disadvantage. From this it followed that if disadvantaged parents’ habitus was not the target for the altered doxa, then this would be demonstrated through speeches focused on

⁶⁸ Nicky Morgan, Secretary of State for Education, speaks at the University of Birmingham’s annual Priestley Lecture. ‘*Our plan for education*’ 27.11.2014

⁶⁹ Nick Gibb ‘Assessment after levels’ 25.2.2015

disadvantage, providing evidence of a more autonomous parental habitus. This became the focus of analysis of the last representation of parents.

9.3.4. Representations which recognised parents' autonomy

In the 41 speeches there were 54 references which attributed some degree of agency to parents' roles in relation to their children's schooling. This representation was characterised by speeches clearly articulating either parents' roles, influence or importance with regard to their children's success at school. Overall, whilst this representation was the second most frequently occurring representation of parents (as shown in Table 7), closer analysis aimed at identifying which speeches this representation occurred in, revealed a striking feature as summarised in Table 8 below.

Table 8 Quantitative summary of occurrences of parents' agency in speeches

Representations of parents' agency	No. of occurrences	Percentage occurrences⁷⁰	Number and (%)⁷¹ of speeches which contained the representation
In the 36 speeches <u>not</u> focused on disadvantage and vulnerability	12	8	2 (6)
In the 5 speeches focused on disadvantage and vulnerability	42	78	5 (100)

⁷⁰ As a percentage of all occurrences of representations of parents in that group of speeches.

⁷¹ As a percentage of either the group of 36 or group of 5 speeches

The analysis showed that the majority of occurrences were found in the five speeches focused on issues of disadvantage and that within this group of speeches, this representation of parents' agency, accounted for the majority of the occurrences related to parents. In contrast only two of the 36 mainstream speeches, made any reference to parents having their own agency. The significance of this variation was that it supported the contention that political and economic doxa appeared to target their influence and domination, on the habitus of parents within the mainstream field of schooling. In order to illustrate how these notions of parents' agency were represented in speeches, a few illustrative examples were chosen.

In the first instance, within the 36 speeches not focused on issues of disadvantage, one of only two speeches which made any reference to parents' agency, referred to parents' influence on their children's education⁷²:

For most young people it will be their parents who have the greatest educational influence on their lives, and yet too often there is a false divide between what children learn in school and what they learn in the home.

It's impossible to exaggerate the impact that parents have on young people's education.

Whilst the extracts showed Morgan's awareness of parents' role, it was limited by not elaborating what their impact and influence might be and, importantly, how reforms might support or extend this. A more explicit articulation of parents' involvement was offered later in the same speech:

Some parents will want to get involved in the running of a school itself, by joining the governing body. ...parent governors in particular play a crucial role and their contribution should never be understated...

However, the contrasting reality to this statement was referred to in the last chapter in relation to the forced academisation of schools. That analysis showed that when parent

⁷² Nicky Morgan, Secretary of State for Education, speaks at the University of Birmingham's annual Priestley Lecture. '*Our plan for education*' 27.11.2014

governors opposed the process, they were removed by the Secretary of State. Secondly, Ball has argued that academies ‘introduce and validate new agents and voices within policy itself and bring them into processes of governance’ (2013: 10). Barker, (2010) has argued that the consequence of this has been to reduce parents’ roles in the governance arrangements of academies. The remaining occurrences of references to parents’ agency in the 36 speeches were related to differing levels of communication as in the extract ⁷³ below:

We will shortly be holding focus groups with school leaders, teachers and parents to seek their views on the format and content of the reports from the new short inspections.

Overall, these occurrences were the closest articulation of the government’s recognition of parental agency when speeches were not focused on issues of disadvantage. The references were very infrequent and lacked specificity regarding parents’ actual roles and agency which contrasted with the occurrences in speeches focused on disadvantage.

In all five speeches focused on disadvantage, there were clear references to parents’ roles and influence with regards to their children’s schooling. Analysis of the occurrences demonstrated that parents’ agency was represented in two forms, each with approximately equal numbers of occurrences. In 19 occurrences, the references were characterised by clear descriptions of parents’ potential roles but assigning the locus of control to the professionals and agencies working with the parents. For ease of reference, these were referred to as ‘potential agency’. In a further 23 occurrences, the references were, again explicit about parents’ agency, but also actualised the agency either through identifying the control or decisions parents could make, or by providing real examples of their involvement; these were termed ‘actualised agency’.

⁷³ Sean Harford, ‘*Speech to Association of School and College Leaders Conference 2015- reflecting on Ofsted’s work and the future of education inspection*’ 20.3.2015

Instances of ‘potential agency’ were characterised by language explicitly stating the possible role the parents could perform⁷⁴:

Which means raising our ambitions much higher - and putting young people and their parents firmly in the driving seat.

This extract typified this form of representation, which underlined the need and importance of involving parents in their children’s schooling. In relation to the 23 occurrences of ‘actualised agency’, speeches were far clearer about parents’ roles:

...we’ve also been listening to parents and young people and taking on board their advice about how we can make the system better.⁷⁵

Even more explicitly from the same speech:

Families have consistently told us - and all of you - over the years how hard they’ve found it to get information, to deal with different agencies, to find their way through the system.

Within the 23 occurrences of ‘actualised agency’, there were 12 describing how parents’ views had influenced the new legislation related to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). There were 8 occurrences which focused on real examples of parents’ active role, albeit within specific contexts, as exemplified by the following:

Some of the parents I met hadn’t ever really been that engaged with their children’s school before, but at Frederick Bird, I saw how the insights from parents, carers and the children themselves could influence the support provided.⁷⁶

Arguably the highest level of parental agency was expressed through occurrences which explained parents’ roles without limiting these to a specific context. In the first:

⁷⁴ Children’s Minister Edward Timpson addresses the Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS) annual conference. 10.7.2014

⁷⁵ *Ibid*

⁷⁶ Children’s Minister Edward Timpson addresses The Key at the Improving the progress of pupils with special educational needs conference. 5.11.2014

Parents give professionals working with them access to these personalised sites...⁷⁷

The speech was referring to computer sites which parents controlled including deciding who could access the information and when. In the second example the parents' role was fundamental in influencing their children's support:

Parents will need to see changes in their relationships with professionals, in how much say they have in defining outcomes for their children, and in shaping local services.⁷⁸

This extract identified a form agency not noted in any of the mainstream speeches; parents 'defining outcomes for their children'. Across the corpus of speeches outcomes were always linked to accountability and performativity measures. Finally, an arguably even higher level of agency was a form where control was devolved to parents, as evidenced in this last extract, which identified parents' autonomy over when to exercise or relinquish their agency:

Schools and colleges can manage personal budgets, and are already doing so where a family want a personal budget, but don't want to manage it directly.⁷⁹

In conclusion, this type of government narrative promoted a doxa which acknowledged and encouraged greater levels of agency and autonomy for parents experiencing disadvantage. As already argued, due to the dynamic and interrelated nature of fields, doxa and habitus, these findings substantiated the contention of a less ambitious field and doxa for disadvantaged children, coupled with a more autonomous parental habitus. At this stage it was important to underline that the purpose of this chapter's analysis was twofold. Firstly it was aimed at exploring the extent to which speeches' representations of parents substantiated the contention developed in Chapter 8 that disadvantaged parents were likely to be represented as having a more autonomous habitus. Secondly the

⁷⁷ Children's Minister Edward Timpson addresses the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) annual conference. 10.7.2014

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid*

analysis, was originally planned in response to the study's second question, namely exploring the extent to which there was a relationship between parents' representations of their roles and government discourses about parents' roles. In view of this the discussion turned to analysing this relationship.

9.3.5. Analysing how the four government representations of parent were related to parents' views of their roles

A comparison between government notions and parents' views of their roles, demonstrated areas of congruence as well as areas of contrast. The congruence was evidenced by government notions of 'assumed parents' and the parental theme of support school which was argued to show a subconscious parental predisposition towards recognising, and wanting to be seen to be abiding by, norms and expectations set by the school. Similarly, the themes conformity and preparation, captured parents' recognition and embodiment of externally set norms. Lastly the theme mediated parental agency, evidenced parents' acceptance of their responsibility to abide by school values and expectations, even when these may have differed from their own. In all the themes, as reported in Chapter 7, parents' views evidenced a subconscious habitus which predisposed them to accept aspects of the neoliberal representation of the 'assumed parent'. This was the key area of similarity with the government representation, which assumed a parental habitus predisposed to accepting externally set norms. In general the speeches achieved this through appropriating and homogenising the parents' identities, needs and ambitions. However, as argued in Chapter 7, the parents' views also evidenced conscious resistance towards aspects of neoliberal discourses.

The parents' conscious resistance, revealed a significant area of contrast between their values and, in particular, government representations in mainstream speeches. In these speeches parents' habitus was depicted as heteronomous and being predisposed to be unquestioning of norms set outside of itself. Speeches which typified this heteronomous habitus were ones related to parents needing reminders and as home educators. In contrast the participant parents' views showed autonomy and underlined their identity through their conscious awareness and questioning of norms and expectations. The parents

underlined their sense of identity and autonomy through their conscious resistance to various neoliberal aspects of schooling. They did this by ‘creating an alternative value system’ (Mackenzie, 2013:4) through valuing affective measures, despite them being conscious of the ubiquity of performativity measures. They also disputed that they had real choice between schools and they questioned the validity of societal expectations. This higher degree of autonomy shown by the participant parents’ habitus, was much more aligned to the doxa prevalent in speeches on disadvantage. In addition parents’ views always implied that they would take the necessary actions to deliver the expectations. Government notions which implied heteronomous parental habitus, generally implied that other agents would take actions on behalf of the parents. Significantly, there was no evidence of these notions in parents’ views and neither were there any occurrences of these representations in the five speeches on disadvantage. In short, the parents’ views implied a habitus which, albeit limited, had a higher degree of agency than the habitus implied by government discourses about mainstream schooling. It was possible to contend that the parents’ views were providing evidence of a more autonomous habitus and significantly one which was more aligned to the representations of parents in the five speeches focused on issues of disadvantage. In contrast, the ‘assumed parent’ along with the other two notions, were arguably more indicative of an overall government representation of parents. This overall representation arguably contained a doxa which typified an ‘assumed’ heteronomous habitus and not one from a disadvantaged or ‘precarious’ perspective (Standing, 2011; Mackenzie, 2013; Savage, 2015) characterised by a more autonomous identity.

In conclusion, through this analysis of government discourses about parents’ roles, it was possible to further substantiate the contention derived from the analysis of parents’ discussions in Chapter 7, and the analysis of the theme of conformity and preparation in Chapter 8. The focus of the discussion was now on unifying all the arguments from each of the analyses to propose a single coherent interpretation.

9.4 Summarising the interpretations

This section summarised the interpretations derived from the analyses presented in this and the previous three chapters. The three analyses focused on: parents’ views, speeches’

representations of conformity and preparation and speeches' representations of parental roles. The aim was to demonstrate that the assumptions and arguments from each interpretation, reinforced one another and so could be conceived and understood as a single coherent thesis.

The analyses of parents' discussions were argued to evidence paradoxes and tensions in their views. These were demonstrated by parents' resistance towards principles of neoliberal schooling and simultaneous embodiment of the same principles. Two examples in particular underlined these tensions. The first, when parents consciously expressed their resistance and detachment from performativity measures (themes affective measures and otherness), but then embodied quantitative approaches to judging schools (theme doxa of quantification). The second example, was parents consciously asserting their agency and identity by questioning the need for them and their children to conform, for instance, to uniform and societal expectations, but despite this, then implying their pride in being able to support school expectations (themes support school and mediated agency).

Chapter 8 analysed how speeches represented themes of conformity and preparation, which revealed that the majority of the speeches contained ambitious, neoliberal, economic aims which contrasted with parents' views. However, speeches focused on issues of disadvantage, contained discourses which shared many similarities with parents' views and narratives. These included: less ambitious and more deterministic outlooks; little focus on neoliberal instrumental aims and an acknowledgement of the value of personal, moral and social outcomes. The contexts of disadvantage addressed by these speeches, were similar to ones the parents reported as being relevant to their lived experiences of schooling. Importantly, the analysis implied the existence of different fields and doxa of schooling and that in turn this would result in parents' habitus being altered. This was substantiated in this current chapter, which evidenced that the habitus of parents whose views were represented by the neoliberal field, was less autonomous than that of disadvantaged parents.

Overall, bringing these interpretations together identified the contention presented by this thesis. This proposed that the parents' conscious resistance and simultaneous

subconscious embodiment of neoliberal principles, was due to the existence of two separate fields of schooling. The parents were consciously aware of the prevailing hegemony of neoliberal schooling and they expressed their resistance and detachment from this. As a consequence, the parents were excluded from this field. However, the parents also demonstrated a subconscious predisposition to another field of schooling, which was less ambitious and more deterministic about disadvantaged children's prospects. The parents subconsciously embodied the doxa of this field and so their views were included in it. Lastly the narratives expressed by this field's doxa, allowed for higher levels of parental autonomy and identity. This was characterised by more autonomous 'precariat' identities, expressed by the participant parents through their conscious resistance to neoliberal schooling. Whilst this greater autonomy appeared counter intuitive, because the prevailing literature portrayed disadvantaged parents as lacking autonomy, it in fact resulted in deeper levels of disadvantage. This was due to parents and children subconsciously internalising the doxa of a less ambitious and more deterministic field of schooling. Another point of departure between this study's interpretation and the prevailing literature, was the contention that simple notions of marginalisation and exclusion did not fully explain the parents' relationship with schooling. Instead this study's notion was that disadvantaged parents and children were experiencing exclusion from government neoliberal rhetoric and simultaneously inclusion into a far less ambitious and deterministic rhetoric. Overall this interpretation is argued to offer an original contribution to literature focused on disadvantaged parents' experience of schooling.

Chapter 10 Conclusion

10.1 Overview

This final chapter provides a summary of the thesis, situating it within current discourses about the underperformance of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Situating the thesis highlights its original conceptions of: parents' views showing conscious resistance and subconscious predisposition towards government discourses; the existence of two different fields of schooling and an intentionality underlying government doxic narratives. All three conceptions are argued to offer new insights about disadvantaged children's continued 'failure', which go beyond simple notions of exclusion and marginalisation. In addition the interpretation is used to review the participant parents' local context and disadvantaged parents' national perspectives, as they emerged by the end of the study. In response to the bleakness of this review, and the study's aim of identifying a positive future, a notion of Gramsci's organic intellectuals is proposed as a means by which to help remove parents from the less ambitious field of schooling, and so increase their wellbeing freedom (Sen, 2005). The chapter concludes by identifying its original contributions to methodologies as well as limitations in the study's design.

10.2 Summarising the study's motivations and findings

My professional experiences of the social injustice of children from disadvantaged communities being consistently identified as educational 'failures', were this study's motivation. Coupled with this, I was motivated by the inexplicable paradox of the children's parents' voices being largely absent, despite the prevailing neoliberal ideology identifying parents as key agents. Overall, carrying out this study involved me in accessing literature, meeting fellow researchers and, above all, giving voice to a group of parents, all of which fuelled my motivation further. In particular, as stated in Chapter 1, this developed my passion to better understand the continuing perceptions of 'failure',

my frustration with the lack of solutions and my ambition to identify how the situation could be ameliorated. From this, the thesis identified that its *raison d'être* was to give voice to parents through answering two questions:

1. What are parents' views about schooling?
2. To what extent is there a relationship between parents' views and government discourses about schooling?

In response to the first question, the findings demonstrated that parents' views centred on their children needing to conform to norms and expectations in order to prepare for adult life, especially employment. The parents expressed deterministic views about their children's employment prospects and linked these with issues of social class, the influence of selective grammar schools and the symbolism of school uniforms. Throughout their discussions, the parents referred to issues of socio economic status and their children's learning needs as barriers, although importantly, the parents never 'pathologized' (Gillborn, 1998; Crozier, 2003) or 'problematized' (Crozier, 2003) their situations. The parents made frequent references to issues such as choice, performativity measures and diversity of schools, which Chapter 3 identified as typifying neoliberal assumptions of schooling. In each instance, the parents voiced conscious resistance to these aspects, but simultaneously implied a subconscious embodiment of the same principles. Equally, parents' views implied their sense of identity and agency but also their tendency to mediate these in order to be seen as supportive of school actions. Overall, the discussion interpreted these views as representing complexities which could not be adequately explained by regarding the parents as simply being marginalised or excluded. Instead the discussion proposed that parents' views represented a more complex conscious agentic resistance to the prevailing hegemony and a simultaneous subconscious embodiment of the structural doxa.

In response to the study's second question, the analysis' clearest finding was that government discourses echoed parents' views in identifying the achievement of instrumental economic outcomes, as the primary aim of schooling. In addition, some speeches attributed low levels of agency and autonomy to parents and demoted their roles

through homogenising their identities and prescribing normative modes and standards of ‘good parenting’. In contrast, other speeches portrayed parental roles in a very different light. In this smaller group of speeches parents were assigned greater levels of agency. This again echoed parents’ tensions, evidenced by their assertions of self-identity coupled with their propensity to mediate this in order to reinforce a view of themselves as supportive parents. Exploring this smaller group of speeches, identified a more profound congruence between them and parents’ views.

These speeches were focused on contexts of disadvantage which shared characteristics with the contexts parents identified as being part of their lived experiences. Identifying that it was government discourses focused on disadvantage which were the ones most closely related to parents’ views, potentially provided an answer to the study’s second question, exploring the extent to which there existed a relationship between parents’ views and government. Seemingly, the answer was that they contained shared meanings within contexts of disadvantage. More specifically, the participant parents’ narratives contained views about schooling and self-acknowledged experiences of disadvantage, which conveyed meanings and emphases, similar to those expressed in government discourses about disadvantage. Importantly, when the government discourses were not focused on issues of disadvantage, there was far less evidence of shared meanings with the views and perceptions expressed by this study’s parents. In order for the next section to analyse how these findings were related to the available literature, the specific areas of congruence and contrast between parents’ views and government discourses, were briefly summarised.

Beginning with areas of congruence, the following summarised the parents’ views which were interpreted as sharing meanings with discourses found in speeches focused on disadvantage:

1. Economic and instrumental aims of schooling evidenced lower levels of ambition and deterministic views of children’s employment and economic futures.
2. The valuing of personal and social schooling outcomes.
3. A recognition of parents’ identities, roles and autonomy.

In relation to areas of contrast, these were evidenced between parents' views and those speeches focused on mainstream schooling, in other words the speeches which were not specifically focused on contexts of disadvantage. The following summarises these areas of contrast:

1. The prevalence of ambitious educational outcomes linked to micro and macro-economic targets.
2. Heteronomous parental dispositions implied by speeches' frequent references to expectations and norms about parenting aims, responsibilities and approaches.

Based on these findings it was possible to analyse how this study's interpretations could be situated within discourses about disadvantage. The specific focus was on how the interpretations supported current arguments and offered original insights and contributions.

10.3 Situating the findings within discourses about disadvantaged families

The findings in response to the first question, in part, concurred with the literature which argued that disadvantaged parents' views contrasted with neoliberal schooling principles. However, in relation to both this and the second question, the study's findings highlighted that parents' views and their relationship with government narratives, were more complex than those reported by the literature. Parental views in themselves showed complexities which were not reported in the literature and the latter's reliance on conceptions of marginalization and exclusion could not fully account for parents' apparent inclusion in some government discourses but not others. The following sections analysed the extent to which the findings concurred with some arguments found in the literature and also how the findings offered new perspectives and insights.

10.3.1 Findings which concurred with the literature

Beginning with the first question, it was evident that parents' consciously expressed resistance to many of the neoliberal aspects of schooling, coupled with their repeated

references to the impacts of their disadvantage, echoed much of the literature cited in Chapters 2 and 3. This study's findings were consistent with, for instance, Gewirtz (2001) who argued that it was wrong for government discourses to ignore the role of class in the poorer performance of disadvantaged children and similarly, Reay's (2001, 2017) arguments that the lack of recognition of different class values in schooling, had a negative impact on working class children. In addition, the findings related to parents' perceptions of different aspects of the neoliberal ideology of the marketized school system also echoed much of the literature quoted in Chapter 3. This was seen in relation to choice, when the participant parents claimed they had little or no choice of which school to send their child to. These views were similar to those of authors (Ball and Vincent, 1998; Bowe *et al.*, 1994; Gewirtz *et al.* 1995; Conway, 1997; Reay, 1996; Crozier, 1999; Crozier *et al.*, 2008; Vincent, 2001; Raty and Kasanen, 2007; Sarojini-Hart, 2013) who argued that disadvantaged families did not engage with, or perceive, choice of school in the same way as more privileged families. In addition, the participant parents' propensity to mediate their agency in order to be perceived as supportive parents reinforced Crozier's notions of how disadvantaged families were more likely to view teachers 'as the powerful knower' (1999: 315) and not recognise themselves as the active agents implied by neoliberal rhetoric. Finally the parents' descriptions of performativity measures as information which was neither comprehensible to them nor aimed at them, reinforced the arguments of authors writing at a time when the marketized system was first having an effect (Bagley, 1996; David, 1997; Ball and Vincent, 1998; Gillborn 1997) and of authors writing more recently after 30 years of the market's effects (Barker, 2010; Gunter and Fitzgerald, 2011, 2012; Raffo, 2011; Mansell, 2011; Wright, 2011; Lupton, 2011; Hoskins, 2012; Hatcher, 2012; Lingard and Sellar, 2012; Reay, 2017). Overall, with regards to the parents' views resisting and contrasting with neoliberal aspects of schooling, this study's findings supported the literature which spanned a period of over two decades.

The significance of this congruence, was that this study adopted a methodological approach not found in any of the studies cited in Chapters 2 and 3, yet despite this, its findings concurred with those found in the literature. Unlike those studies, this thesis did not decide which schooling issues would be explored, instead it allowed the parents to

make this choice. In other words, confirmation that disadvantaged parents did not agree with, or easily conform to, neoliberal aspects of schooling, was evidenced regardless of whether the methodological approach allowed researchers or parents to choose the issues to be investigated. However, as evidenced by the analysis in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, this study did reveal that parents' views contained paradoxes and tensions which were not reported by the literature.

10.3.2. Divergence from the literature - the contention of parents' conscious resistance and simultaneous subconscious embodiment

This first area of divergence between this study's findings and the literature, was found within the parents' views themselves. In other words, their views contained tensions and complexities, which went beyond simply contrasting with neoliberal rhetoric. These complexities were demonstrated by the parents' apparent resistance and simultaneous embodiment of neoliberal aspects of schooling. Whilst the former was amply evidenced in the literature, the latter was not reported or considered by any of the studies. This meant the literature was able to rely on notions of exclusion, to explain the contrasts between parents' views and neoliberal values. On the other hand, because this study's findings highlighted that parents' views also showed a predisposition towards these same neoliberal values, it was argued that the structure-agent relationships were more complex than simple notions of an incompatibility between the two. As discussed in section 8.6, the parents' conscious resistance to, and simultaneous subconscious internalisation of neoliberal rhetoric was argued to operate at an agentic-structural level (Bhaskar, 1986; Giddens, 1990; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Archer, 1995). The parents' conscious resistance was interpreted as their agentic response to the prevailing hegemony whilst their subconscious embodiment was the result of the structural influence from the field and its prevailing doxa.

It is relevant to underline that these paradoxes may have been evidenced more readily in this study because of its methodological approach of not identifying issues *a priori*. In other words, it may have been because parents identified their own issues of interest, that this increased the opportunity for them to explore more fully their views about these

issues. This in turn may have resulted in the contrasts, tensions and contradictions within the parents' views becoming more apparent. Conversely, as reported in Chapters 2 and 3, successive studies and reports explored parents' views about issues which researchers had identified prior to the research. It may be that these approaches were not as likely to illuminate the tensions and contrasts in parents' views. Equally significant, was that this study's approach was to then use the parents' views as the categories of analysis of government discourses, and that this analysis again highlighted findings not reported in the literature as considered in the next section.

10.3.3. Divergence from the literature - the notion of separate fields

The second divergence between my study and the literature, was the contention that there existed two distinct fields of schooling, each structured by a separate doxa which in turn predicated a different parental habitus. This was argued because the analysis highlighted significant differences in the rhetoric and doxa contained in speeches on disadvantage, compared to the doxa in mainstream speeches. The former contained an unambitious, deterministic doxa, which recognised personal and social outcomes of schooling coupled with a degree of parental autonomy. In contrast mainstream speeches contained an ambitious doxa focused on macro-economic and educational targets, and espoused neoliberal schooling principles which presumed a heteronomous parental habitus.

Further substantiating this contention of two separate fields was that parents' views were found to contrast with the rhetoric of the mainstream field but share meanings with the field focused on contexts of disadvantage, importantly the same contexts which the parents claimed were relevant to their lives. Based on this, it was argued that parents were not simply marginalised or excluded as argued by the literature, but instead experienced a more complex inclusion and exclusion from government narratives. In other words, the participant parents were excluded from the mainstream field's narratives, but included in narratives related to disadvantage. Their inclusion and sharing of these narratives, marked an important departure from the literature.

This departure was the result of authors (as listed above from Chapters 2 and 3) not identifying shared meanings between government discourses and disadvantaged families' experiences. Instead, studies repeatedly identified contrasts between disadvantaged parents' views and neoliberal values and assumptions as analysed in Chapter 3. Based on this, their findings could be explained using concepts of parents and children being marginalised and excluded from a single field of schooling. Authors argued that this exclusion functioned through the single organization (field) of schooling not recognising the parents' and children's different identities, experiences and forms of disadvantage. This in turn effectively left these families outside of the field. In addition, even when this stance was analysed from a social justice perspective, it still reinforced the notion that poorer outcomes were attributable to marginalisation and exclusion. Gewirtz, (2006) and Gillborn, (2014) for instance, argued that educational processes were unjust because their conceptions of social justice were focused on providing equality of opportunity and experience, rather than equality of outcomes. This, they argued, favoured some children whilst ignoring, marginalising and excluding others. Overall, even when these conceptions were viewed through the lens of social justice, they sustained the notion of a single school system which passively marginalised and excluded disadvantaged families and children. The passive nature of the process was arguably best expressed by Reay's most recent description of the English education system:

...it operates as an enormous academic sieve, sorting out the educational winners from the losers in a crude and often brutal process that prioritises and rewards upper and middle class qualities and resources (Reay, 2017: 26).

Reay's analogy of the sieve reinforces the assumption of a single field which suits and advances some identities whilst sifting out others.

This study's contention of two separate fields of schooling, whilst argued to be an original interpretation within discourses about disadvantage, did resonate with work carried out in other areas of social science. Fraser (1989), for instance, focused on how mothers and housewives in the US struggled to achieve a political legitimacy for their needs. Fraser considered how the needs crossed from the domestic into the public spheres and how the political field resisted this process through the creation of a two tier welfare system. One

was characterised as being focused on the rights of employees and the other on the claims of stigmatized dependents. Fraser's notion of a two tier welfare system, had direct parallels with this study's contention of two separate fields of schooling, governed by their own distinctive doxa and that through this, disadvantaged agents suffered a loss of entitlement, in other words symbolic violence. Further support for the notion of separate fields, was also found within the literature quoted in section 8.5 focused on notions of a 'precariat' class (Mackenzie, 2013; Standing, 2011; Savage, 2015). This literature argued that disadvantaged communities were aware of their identities, including how they were viewed by others, which led them to form their own norms and sense of value making them distinguishable from other class identities. However, in drawing these distinctions Standing (2016) specifically argued:

The terms 'social exclusion' and 'marginalisation' are unhelpful in understanding the precariat and the class dynamics of contemporary capitalism (Standing, 2016: 199)

It was in this respect that Standing's argument mirrored this study's contention, that the parents were included into a separate and distinguishable field of schooling. Significantly, this contention of two separate fields governed by different doxa, implied a level of political intention not implied by simpler notions of exclusion and marginalisation.

10.3.4. Divergence from the literature – how separate fields implied political intentionality

The third area of divergence was the degree of intentionality implied by the notion of two separate fields, compared to the intentionality implied by notions of exclusion. This study argued that the contention of separate fields and doxa, implied an intentionally different political rhetoric, which prescribed different aims, ambitions and outcomes for different groups of children. This was based on the argument that the striking differences between the speeches, coupled with the convergence between parents' views and only those speeches focused on disadvantage, could not reasonably be viewed as coincidental. This assumption of intentionality contrasted with authors' notions of exclusion. In relation to

authors who focused on issues of class, gender or race (Gillborn, 1998, 2010, 2014, 2016; Gewirtz 2001; Crozier, 2003; Sarojini Hart, 2013; Reay, 2005, 2017), their arguments centred on how the system favoured certain agents, whilst excluding others who did not share the same cultural and class identities. In ontological terms, this state of affairs could simply be the result of a poorly designed, or inadvertently homogenising, school system. In other words, following the approach adopted by many authors (Barker, 2010, 2012; Raffo, 2011; Hoskins, 2012; Hatcher, 2012; Lingard and Sellar 2012; Sarojini Hart, 2013; Reay, 2017) it was possible to critique the neoliberal marketized school system, as being poorly matched and not responsive to diverse families' needs. This approach encouraged discourses related to how the system could be better designed, less homogenising and therefore less inclined to exclude and marginalise disadvantaged families. In contrast, the conception that parents were included into a separate field of schooling, encouraged a focus on the differences between the fields, making discussions about improving the system more problematic because of the existence of more than one system. In addition this raised social, moral and political questions about the intentionality implied by the creation and maintenance of separate fields.

The creation of a separate field implied, at least at some level, an element of political intentionality. The differences in doxa between mainstream speeches and speeches focused on disadvantage, supported this notion of deliberate efforts towards creating a prescribed set of expectations and commonly accepted norms, about disadvantage (Druckman, 2001 and 2014). In addition, the fact that disadvantaged parents' views and habitus shared views only with those speeches focused on disadvantage, supported a notion of the parents' active inclusion in this field of schooling. Authors' arguments (explored in sections 4.6.1, 8.3.4 and 8.3.5) about the interrelationship between political speeches and agents' views (Phillips, 1996; Jerit, 2009; Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012; Druckman, 2001 and 2014) substantiated this argument. In particular, Druckman's (*ibid*) contention, that political speeches carefully chose their content and language, and created the 'frames of communication' which in turn directed agents' 'frames of thought', substantiated the notion of political intentionality. The deliberate nature of the creation of two fields of schooling was further supported by Standing's arguments about the 'precariat':

...the concept of precaritisation⁸⁰ is intended to mean the process by which those in the precariat are being habituated to accept a life of unstable labour and unstable living... (Standing, 2016: 190)

Whilst Standing was writing specifically in relation to work and employment, his argument underlined the intentional nature of habituating the ‘precariat’. Standing’s analysis supported this study’s contention that disadvantage occurred not through ignoring, excluding or marginalising the parents, but through the creation of a separate distinguishable field whose doxa structured and habituated the parents’ expectations and views.

Overall these four sections identified this study’s interpretations, some of which concurred with arguments found in the literature and others which provided new perspectives and understandings. These new perspectives all went beyond notions of marginalisation and exclusion, in order to explain the complexities of this study’s findings. However, by not adopting notions of exclusion, created the challenge of explaining how children’s outcomes were adversely affected. This was because the prevailing literature argued that neoliberal schooling did not recognise or support disadvantaged families’ identities and priorities. This resulted in the families placing less value on schooling and as a result, their children were more likely to experience ‘failure’. Thus the question for this study was how could its three original interpretations of parents’ conscious-subconscious views, two separate fields of schooling and political intentionality, provide a possible explanation for disadvantaged children’s ‘failure’?

10.4 ‘Failure’ as symbolic violence

To understand how the three interpretations could help with reconceiving ‘failure’ as symbolic violence, it was necessary to briefly review the notion of ‘failure’ itself. Throughout this thesis the term failure, when it referred to disadvantaged children’s schooling outcomes, was shown with inverted commas. This was to signify that the word

⁸⁰ Emphasis as found in original reference.

denoted a particular normative understanding. The norm was based on children's (and schools') outcomes as measured by performativity measures such as national examinations and Ofsted judgements and reports. In the reviews of literature in Chapters 2 and 3, the discussions underlined authors' repeated reliance and references to performativity measures, as the norm by which to judge children's outcomes and schools' effectiveness. Significantly, this was true despite the literature reporting that disadvantaged parents did not value the measures. Within this context, studies continually relied on notions of disadvantaged parents and children being excluded and marginalised from 'success' and so experiencing 'failure'. In contrast, this study's three notions of: parents' conscious-subconscious views; separate fields and political intentionality, question the validity and nature of the reported 'failure', and instead reconceive the 'failure' as a form of symbolic violence.

Starting with parents' conscious resistance and subconscious internalisation and acceptance of neoliberal schooling doxa, the argument is that the 'failure' is not because of exclusion from 'successes', but rather, the 'failure' is the parents' subconscious embodiment of the doxa. This doxa prescribes the norms by which 'success' and 'failure' are judged, for instance in relation to performativity measures, choice of school, adherence to uniform and employment opportunities being determined by selective schooling. The parents consciously resisted these aspects, but simultaneously showed a subconscious adherence and embodiment of them, not as arbitrary norms, but as common sense immutable realities. Importantly, when the parents (and their children) 'failed' in achieving these norms, they then internalised that this was because of their own failings, inabilities and shortcomings. This internalisation of responsibility coupled with an inability to see that the norms are arbitrary, is the misrecognition and symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1990; Everett, 2002; Thomson, 2005; Bowman, 2010) perpetrated on the parents. In practice, parents' 'failure' is their embodiment of the arbitrary norms and deterministic outcomes, a process which Bourdieu described as they 'conspire and commit isolated treasons against themselves' (Bourdieu, 1990; 166-167). Importantly, a fundamental assumption in Bourdieu's notion was that agents were acting subconsciously so were not aware of their participation in the doxa. The participant parents implied a sense of subconscious obligation towards various neoliberal expectations, but rarely

questioned the fact that these obligations contrasted with their consciously stated views. The parents' inability to fulfil these obligations resulted in them internalising guilt and responsibility for their 'failure'. The parents' guilt was driven by their subconscious sense of responsibility which obfuscated schools' and government's responsibility. The parents consciously experienced their guilt and responsibility, but were unaware, as argued by Thomson (2005) of the subconscious structural doxa causing this. In this study this was demonstrated by the parents' sense of obligation towards using and understanding performativity measures but their conscious claims that they did not understand the information, had not used it and that in practice they did not have a choice of school anyway. Similarly, the parents stated their agency over decisions made by the school but simultaneously mediated this in order to fulfil their obligation of being a supportive parent. Lastly, parents consciously questioned the need to conform, the deterministic roles of social class and selective schooling and the symbolism of uniforms. In contrast they showed pride in their ability to ensure that their children wore the school uniform and limited their references to work opportunities for their children to low paid manual work. Arguing this point, underlined the key roles played by the separate fields of schooling and political intentionality. In essence the creation and maintenance of a separate field of schooling for disadvantage, with its unambitious and deterministic doxa, was what preconditioned and prescribed the parents' subconscious expectations. This ensured the parents' participation in their own misrecognition and symbolic violence, the coercive potential of which Bourdieu and Wacquant described as:

Symbolic violence can do what political and police violence can do, it only does it more efficiently (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 166).

Overall, this analysis proposed an alternative conception of 'failure' as a form of symbolic violence perpetrated by an intentional political creation and maintenance of separate fields of schooling which parents were subconsciously complicit in. This analysis underlined that the literature's continued focus on exclusion, as the cause of 'failure', resulted in arguably misguided efforts to identify organisational and managerial approaches to removing the causes of exclusion. In turn, this resulted in less focus on the role played by the parents' own subconscious predispositions and importantly the

political instigators of these predispositions. Maintaining this study's focus on the participant parents' views and experiences of schooling, the next section, focused on situating the findings within the parents' local and national contexts as they appeared at the end, and potentially beyond the end, of this study.

10.5 Contextualising the findings within the parents' local and national contexts

Section 1.2 described that by the time this study was completed, the most salient aspect of the parents' local context, was that control of their school had been passed to a multi academy trust, and that within a year it had been closed and plans approved for it to be re-opened as a Free School. The closure decision was taken in spite of objections from parents, children and local stake holders, including formal representations to the County Council. The impact of opening this Free School, was that none of the secondary schools in the area would be under local authority control because, as described in section 8.4, all the other secondary schools in the area were already academies with some of these also being selective.

Reviewing how the participant parents may have perceived the closure of their school, it was necessary to return to an important example of the parents' resistance and simultaneous embodiment of neoliberal discourses. This was evidenced when parents expressed that they had no real choice of school, yet they frequently referred to parental choice as a feature of schooling (sections 5.3.3 and 5.3.4). The parents' consciously expressed views did not recognise that the diversity in school type in their area afforded them any real choice. This study could only speculate as to whether the addition of a Free School in their area, would dramatically alter this view. For instance, how would the parents view the fact that their efforts to stop the school closing were in vain? Arguably this might add weight to their conscious hegemony that their choices were limited. In contrast, narratives and 'frames of communication' (Druckman, 2001) produced by the LA, local press and the Free School Trust, may have reinforced their subconscious view and 'frames in thought' (Druckman, *ibid*), that parental choice was part of the school

narrative. In other words, this doxa may have reinforced the parents' subconscious acceptance that through the opening of the new Free School, parental choice was a reality.

A more national perspective of the impact of Free Schools on localities, was available through the literature (Ball, 2013; Andrews and Johnes, 2017; Reay, 2017) which focused on how the schools were responding to what government rhetoric purported to be parents' demands for better local schools especially in areas of disadvantage. Overall, the authors reported negative impacts as summarised by Reay's (*ibid*) reference to National Audit Office figures:

...free schools have a negative effect on surrounding schools, creaming off more privileged students, and provide poor value for money (Reay, 2017: 50).

Overall, the authors argued that Free Schools, when compared to other schools in their area, had significantly lower proportions of disadvantaged and vulnerable children.

Widening the national perspective to disadvantaged families' access to all types of schools, reinforced these findings. Andrews and Perera (2017) for instance, building on previous analyses (Allen *et al.*, 2014), demonstrated that irrespective of school type, disadvantaged children were consistently less likely to be attending 'high performing' schools as judged through Ofsted inspections. In considering this point, it was relevant to question the extent to which Ofsted judgments would be relevant to this study's parents, considering their conscious rejection⁸¹ and simultaneous subconscious internalisation⁸² of performativity measures. The relevance of this being that disadvantaged parents might have outwardly expressed their disinterest and detachment from what a 'good' school was, but at a deeper subconscious level, internalised a doxic narrative which predisposed them to believe and accept that their child would not attend a 'good' school.

Moving beyond considerations of the type of school attended by disadvantaged children, and instead focusing on children's outcomes, it was relevant to situate the study's findings within the contemporaneous evidence from Ofsted's last two yearly reports. The first of these (Ofsted, 2016) was particularly significant because it was the last by Michael

⁸¹ As demonstrated by the themes affective measures and otherness

⁸² As demonstrated by the theme doxa of quantification

Wilshaw, following his five years as Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of schools. Overall, as had been the case in his previous four reports, he highlighted disadvantaged children's continued poorer outcomes. In relation to the E.Bacc for instance he stated:

The gap in achievement between pupils eligible for free school meals and their more affluent peers has grown over time... (Ofsted, 2016: 58).

This contrasted starkly with government narratives, analysed in section 3.4.4 which argued that the E.Bacc was designed to deliver improved social justice for the most disadvantaged. Continuing the focus on outcomes for disadvantaged children, the subsequent Ofsted report in 2017 was arguably even more damning. This highlighted that since 2005 a significant number of schools nationally had continued to underperform, and all these schools had high proportions of children with learning, social and material disadvantage. In addition, the report argued that interventions such as school closures, conversion into academies, making them part of multi academy trusts or Free Schools, had not had long lasting impacts.

Overall, taking a national perspective seemed to underline that issues of disadvantage, continued to be the single most important factor in deciding the outcomes for children and their schools. It was relevant to evaluate this conclusion against the background presented in section 8.4.1 which argued that SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities), poverty and disadvantage were interrelated, and acted both as causes and effects of each other (Shaw *et al.*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2016; Andrews *et al.*, 2017). The significance of these arguments, was that if different forms of disadvantage were interrelated in this way, this was likely to affect much higher numbers of families and children than might otherwise be implied by government statistics which tended to look at issues such as learning needs, poverty, ethnicity etc. in isolation. This was an argument advanced by Hutchinson (2017) who posited that as many as 39% of the national school population in 2017 may have been affected by at least one form of disadvantage. Based on this, this study's findings potentially adopted a much wider relevance and applicability. In particular, Hutchinson's (*ibid*) findings may have implied that the deterministic political doxa and disadvantaged parents' views of their children's

prospects, may be constraining outcomes for at least 15%⁸³ and as many as 39% of the school population. Importantly, this argument presumed that the deterministic doxa related to disadvantaged children was a continuing feature of government rhetoric. It was relevant therefore to analyse the degree to which this doxa continued to be evidenced through political rhetoric as it emerged by the time this study was concluded.

Deterministic assumptions based on genetics were analysed in section 2.4.1 whilst deterministic government doxa was discussed in section 8.3.2. In both sections it was argued that notions of ‘talent’ in speeches and government publications were based on forms of eugenics (Gillborn, 2010c). Moreover, that these approaches were given a ‘scientific aura’ (Gillborn, 2016; 366) through their use of data and statistics, which ultimately justified poorer outcomes for some children on the basis that they lacked the necessary ‘talent’. In particular, section 2.4.1 analysed assumptions such as Cummings’ (Cummings, 2013) that children’s schooling outcomes were not dependent or affected by disadvantage but instead were biologically fixed and predetermined. In addition, Boris Johnson’s speech (Johnson, 2013) was also reviewed and in particular, the widespread favourable coverage it received in the national press. At this stage of this study, it is argued that the press coverage of his views will have inevitably influenced, and at least to some degree prescribed, parents’ ‘frames in thought’ (Druckman, 2001) about disadvantaged children’s limited and fixed schooling outcomes. In addition that Cummings’ role (senior advisor to the then secretary of State for Education) and Johnson’s high ranking position within Government⁸⁴, will have influenced political assumptions and rhetoric about disadvantaged children’s schooling outcomes. At the time of concluding this study it was clear that government deterministic doxa prescribing disadvantaged children’s outcomes, continued unabated.

Evidence of the continuation of this doxa was underlined by the Department for Education publishing an action plan in December 2017, titled: *Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential* (DfE, 2017). This publication quoted the term ‘talent’ on 19 occasions and ‘potential’ on 16. For the purposes of brevity only four extracts are reproduced below. The first three

⁸³ Government data quoted by Shaw *et al.*, 2016; Andrews *et al.*, 2017.

⁸⁴ Mayor of London at the time of the speech and currently (2018) Foreign Secretary

underlined a view that it was only some children that had this ‘talent’ and so the aim was finding these particular children:

...talent and hard work alone should determine how far people can go in life... (DfE, 2017: 6)

...to support the most able disadvantaged children... (DfE, 2017: 22)

...Because we still face a defining challenge: while talent is spread evenly across this country, opportunity is not... (DfE, 2017: 6)

The last extract demonstrated a view found throughout the plan, namely that the telos of finding the ‘talent’, was to fulfil macro-economic aims:

...but only accessing a smaller pool of talent is hurting business’ bottom line... We want to support employers to find untapped talent everywhere to drive greater competitiveness across the UK economy...(DfE, 2017: 30)

Overall as was evidenced in sections 2.4.1 and 8.3.2, the doxa precluding the possibility of focusing on all children’s success, continued to underlie government discourses. An equally recent example of political rhetoric promoting a deterministic doxa about disadvantaged children’s outcomes, was the appointment of Toby Young in January 2018, to the board of the Office for Students (OfS)⁸⁵ by the then Education Secretary, Justine Greening. The responsibilities of the OfS were to include⁸⁶:

...a duty to promote equality of opportunity. This will mean looking beyond getting students from disadvantaged backgrounds into university - they will also be charged with making sure that providers are doing all they can to support the students throughout their course, helping to tackle drop-out rates and support disadvantaged students into employment.

⁸⁵ From 1st April 2018 the OfS would be the government-approved regulatory and competition authority for the higher education sector in England.

⁸⁶ Department for education (2018) ‘New universities regulator comes into force’ www.gov.uk/announcements 05.07.17

The relevance of Young's appointment, was that as a member of the board, his responsibilities included disadvantaged children's outcomes. It was therefore relevant to consider his views on what factors might influence these outcomes. He expressed these in an essay he published (Young, 2015) in which he advocated the genetic modification of some parents' embryos:

My proposal is this: once this technology becomes available, why not offer it free of charge to parents on low incomes with below-average IQs? Provided there is sufficient take-up, it could help to address the problem of flat-lining inter-generational social mobility...

The pertinence of Young's view was that, in addition to his appointment to the board of the OfS, Young was also director of the New Schools Network (NSN) which is the only agency in England which receives Government funding to support the setting up of new Free Schools⁸⁷. Whilst Young resigned from his OfS post before it began its work, he continued his work with the NSN and so his views were relevant to this review. In particular, it is relevant to consider that in Chapter 3 section 3.4.4, Free Schools were argued to be an example of an increased political interventionist approach. This approach was justified through government rhetoric arguing that the schools would improve outcomes and social justice for disadvantaged children. It is relevant to question how Young's strongly deterministic views about genetics, might influence his role in ensuring that Free Schools improved outcomes and advanced social justice for disadvantaged children. Referring back to the findings and interpretations from this study, it could be argued that deterministic views such as Young's would allow, accept and expect a hierarchy of outcomes from children, and that disadvantaged children in particular, would be expected to achieve the lowest positions in this hierarchy. His views would underline the political intentionality argued in section 10.3.4 and in turn this would reinforce the existence and maintenance of separate fields of schooling. Following from this, any 'failure' on the part of disadvantaged families in, for instance, gaining places at the Free

⁸⁷ Department for Education (2011) *New Schools Network awarded grant to support free schools* 19.10.11 available at: www.gov.uk/government/news/new-schools-network-awarded-grant-to-support-free-schools accessed 21.11.16

Schools or their children's performance in examinations, would be subconsciously internalised by the families. Evidence that this 'failure' is occurring specifically in relation to Free Schools, was discussed in the analysis earlier in this section which highlighted the very recent literature arguing that Free Schools had not improved outcomes or access for disadvantaged children (Ball, 2013; Andrews and Johnes, 2017; Reay, 2017).

Completing this review of political rhetoric continuing to be influenced by a deterministic doxa, it was relevant to consider the appointment of Damian Hinds as Secretary of State for Education in January 2018. Shortly after his appointment a newspaper article reported:

...the appointment of Damian Hinds, who was educated at a Catholic boys' grammar school ... has been interpreted as opening the door to stronger DfE support for grammars to expand (George, 2018).

Arguably, substantiating this argument was Hinds' chapter in a book (Renewal, 2014), which despite acknowledging the electorate's lack of support to a return to selective education, advocated the opening of a new grammar school in every town in England. Hinds' arguments for the expansion of selective schooling were based on assumptions about social justice which in Chapter 3 (section 3.4.4) were described as 'transcendental institutionalism' (Sen, 2009:5). This was a view which assumed that social justice could be achieved through structural interventions such as instigating the 'right' type of institution. In Hinds' terms this would be grammar schools, through Young's role this would be Free Schools. Importantly this notion of social justice ignores responsibility for agents' actual and realized outcomes (Sen, 2009). Instead as argued earlier in relation to Free Schools, the continuing political deterministic doxa would 'explain' any 'failure' through notions of children's lack of 'talent' and 'ability'.

In conclusion, this review of the local and national context as they appeared by the end of this study, evidenced continued poorer outcomes for disadvantaged children, seemingly unaffected by interventionist initiatives such as Free Schools, E.Bacc and increased accountability from Ofsted. In addition, government discourses continue to be influenced by a doxa which this study contends deliberately creates and maintains a

separate unambitious and deterministic field of schooling for disadvantaged children. This political doxa in turn creates parents' subconscious predispositions and internalising of 'failure'. It is poignant that in the conformity interview one parent stated:

P2: 1074 It seems to me that when kids leave primary schools
1075 obviously they do their plus hm [...] whatever it's called now
1076 and then from there on they're channelled. They're
1077 given a class really aren't they.

And later the other parent stated:

P1: 1084 ...Bit of a pathway isn't it I suppose is what you're saying...

Both statements influenced the title of this thesis. The parents' sentiments were interpreted as implying that their experiences of schooling went beyond being excluded and marginalised. Their experiences were better conceived as deterministic pathways and channelling which placed them in separate and distinguishable spaces characterised by limited ambitions and outcomes.

It is important to underline that the purpose of this analysis was not to be polemical, but to reflect on how this study's thesis could help interpret the participant parents' local context, and more generally disadvantaged parents' future contexts, as they appeared by the end of the study. Whilst this analysis was argued to be based on this study's original contentions, it could only be regarded as tentative and incomplete. Tentative because of design limitations (analysed in the last section of this chapter), but more importantly at this stage, incomplete because the contentions' deterministic nature only addressed two of the study's ambitions described in Chapter 1: a passion to better understand my experiences; a frustration with the enduring failures. However, the third ambition, to identify how to ameliorate the situation, also needed addressing and this became the focus of the next section.

10.6 Organic intellectuals – the route to a positive future

In order to identify and suggest a more positive forward looking approach, interpretations of parents' agency are combined with Gramsci's notion of organic intellectuals (1971). The approach would enable agents, working as organic intellectuals, to engage with parents' conscious resistance of different aspects of neoliberal doxa and so involve parents in democratic deliberations about their children's schooling. Gramsci described the work of organic intellectuals as 'active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser, "permanent persuader" and not just a simple orator...' (Gramsci, 1971: 141-142). Burawoy (2003) argued that Gramsci's conception of organic intellectuals underlined their role in ensuring disadvantaged agents' priorities could be helped to cross the boundaries from one social field to another. The relevance of this argument was firstly its notion of separate social fields, which echoed this study's contention of two separate and distinguishable fields of schooling. Secondly, Gramsci's notion viewed disadvantaged agents occupying a social field which exacerbated their disadvantage, which was similar to this study's contention of disadvantaged parents occupying an unambitious, deterministic field. The organic intellectuals would be agents able to work with parents enabling them to become more aware of their embodied beliefs and the further disadvantage and symbolic violence this was perpetrating on them.

Further support for the need for disadvantaged agents to be represented was found in Fraser's (1996, 2008) work on social justice, (reviewed in section 3.4.4). In this she argued that disadvantaged agents needed representation in order for their identities to be valued and recognised. In addition, that through representation they could become involved in democratic processes based on participatory parity. It is significant that Fraser based her arguments about the need for representation, on her conclusion that the welfare system in the US (considered in section 10.3.3) had in fact become a two tier system. This was significant because the notion of a two tier system had parallels with this study's contention of two separate fields of schooling. Fraser argued that participatory parity would enable disadvantaged agents to become involved in democratic deliberations about their contexts and priorities, which would help ameliorate their conditions. Standing (2011), whilst writing about the 'precariat' and not parents or schooling, supported

arguments for advancing deliberative democracy in order to avoid the ‘precariat’ becoming increasingly separated, less socially altruistic and more likely to favour the political extremes:

Deliberative democracy requires public spaces, in which grievances can be articulated and shared, leading to political proposals and the rebirth of collective action, rather than just resistance. In this respect, the precariat needs a flourishing commons, not just to complement its inadequate income but to counter the dominant discourses permeated through a media manipulated by the plutocracy (Standing, 2015: 14).

Standing’s contentions were relevant because of the similarities in context between the participant parents and the ‘precariat’ as identified in sections 8.4 and 8.5. Standing’s argument like Fraser’s (1996, 2008), was interpreted as a mechanism for achieving social justice, which at the start of this thesis was argued to be a motivation for this study. That discussion (section 3.4.4) considered Sen’s (2009) notion of social justice, which focused on actualized outcomes for disadvantaged agents, and which was argued to potentially offer a useful perspective. The relevance of this was that Sen (2005) also emphasized a key role for democratic deliberation in order to allow agents to identify outcomes (which he termed capabilities) which were of value to them and led to wellbeing freedom. Importantly, Sen stressed that to fully achieve wellbeing freedom the outcomes should not be fixed or predefined as this would: ‘deny the possibility of progress in social understanding, and also go against the productive role of public discussion, social agitation and open debates’ (Sen, 2005: 160). Overall, Fraser (1996, 2008), Standing (2011) and Sen (2005) emphasized the need to engage disadvantaged agents in discussions, deliberations and debates about their circumstances and aspirations, in order to help them achieve the outcomes they desired. Importantly for this study these authors assumed that the agents were aware of their levels of disadvantage and not subconsciously influenced by a doxa perpetrating symbolic violence. However, the contention developed in this study, is that parents’ views were subconsciously embodying a doxa which perpetrated symbolic violence on them. This underlined the need for organic intellectuals

to ensure the parents could overcome their subconscious embodiment of doxa and achieve participatory parity.

Parents' subconscious embodiment of doxa could be understood as 'what belongs to the order of beliefs, that is, at the deepest level of bodily dispositions' (Bourdieu, 2000: 177). It therefore follows that if parents are to become involved in democratic deliberations they need representation to help them recognise and liberate themselves from the beliefs which they accept as common sense and beyond challenge. In this context organic intellectuals could help to achieve this and, as argued by Burawoy (2003; 250): 'patrol and transgress the borders between spheres' and so liberate 'good sense' from 'common sense'. Gramsci's contention, was that organic intellectuals would be able to achieve this because they would be generated from the social groupings they represented and so would understand their priorities and identities. Applying this notion to the case of parents experiencing disadvantage, the role of the organic intellectuals would be to work with and amongst the parents to explore their forms of resistance. The specific relevance of this was that the analysis of parents' discussions highlighted that their resistance to neoliberal doxa, was always expressed overtly and so was interpreted as being a conscious resistance. Further substantiating this interpretation, were studies quoted in Chapter 2, which also reported disadvantaged parents' overt resistance to neoliberal aspects of schooling. In line with this, Gramsci's conception of organic intellectuals presumed they would be addressing agents' hegemonic motivations and views which, as argued in Chapter 7 (section 7.3), were consciously known. In practice, organic intellectuals could help parents to liberate 'good sense' from 'common sense' (Burawoy, 2003; 250), through engaging the parents' conscious resistance. This would aim to make visible to the parents their subconscious embodied views, which predisposed them to the unambitious doxa and symbolic violence. Approaches based on notions like this, may provide improved social justice through overcoming the obstacles of participatory parity (Fraser, 1996) and so potentially change what might appear as stubborn doxic views. Through this, allowing for wider wellbeing freedom as advocated by Sen (2005) and 'the rebirth of collective action, rather than just resistance' (Standing, 2015: 14).

It must be underlined that whilst this may appear as a utopian ideal, history has shown how through increased social understanding, numerous disadvantaged groups have achieved expanded capabilities (Sen, 2005); suffragettes in England, civil rights activists in the US and anti-apartheid activists in South Africa. Perhaps even more pragmatically, the work of educators such as Paulo Freire (1970) working with poor and isolated communities in South America and researchers like Mertens (2010) advocating particular research methodologies designed to valorise the perspectives of disadvantaged participants. Ultimately, here in the UK the work of Savage, (2015) described in Chapter 8 (section 8.5) showed how, through adopting ethnographic approaches, it was possible to access the otherwise silent voices of the ‘precariat’. This was led by Lisa Mackenzie whose description of her position echoes the role of organic intellectuals:

Consequently my own position and thoughts of the neighbourhood is that I belong to it; part of my own identity that I recognize and subscribe to is that I am a council estate girl (Mackenzie, 2012: 464).

Finally, in some small way, the contribution this current thesis may have made to giving voice to a small group of parents, through allowing them to consider and explore issues they themselves identified and chose to discuss.

In conclusion, this section aimed to address this study’s third motivation; namely a desire to identify ways of potentially overcoming the enduring underachievement of disadvantaged children. The discussion identified the need to ensure that parental identities were valorised through recognition and democratic deliberative processes involving them in identifying outcomes they valued and so increasing their wellbeing freedom (Sen, 2005). Finally, in addressing the challenge of ensuring that the deliberative approaches overcame the subconscious doxa, the discussion explored a potential role for organic intellectuals; agents working within and alongside parents, whose role is arguably captured by Russell’s reference to Plato’s allegory of the cave:

The philosopher who is to be a guardian must, according to Plato, return into the cave, and live among those who have never seen the sun of truth (Russell, 1961: 144).

The positive future note struck by this study, is that agents working as organic intellectuals can act as Plato's 'philosopher guardians' and so support the parents in identifying for themselves, the outcomes they want for their children; gaining freedom to choose what they value or in Sen's terms wellbeing freedom (Sen, 2005).

10.7 The research design – contributions, limitations and recommendations

In addition to the original interpretations offered by this thesis, the empirical part of the study made two contributions to methodological approaches: the use of parents' views as categories of analysis of government speeches and the combination of methods aimed at foregrounding parents' views. The former, whilst being an innovative methodological approach, also created challenges and is therefore analysed later in this section when the limitations of the study are analysed.

Turning attention to the combination of methods, Chapter 4 argued that this offered a useful approach for studies aimed at exploring the views and perceptions of disadvantaged and potentially vulnerable agents. In brief, the implementation of an internet based SNS enabled the parents to generate, discuss and ultimately choose, which issues they felt were relevant to them and that they would want to explore further. This approach enables the researcher to minimise their influence, whilst foregrounding their participants' voices. In this study, the use of the SNS ensured the focus of analysis was on issues which the parents had chosen, as opposed to issues which the study had chosen *a priori*. Ultimately, this meant the interviews were based on themes and ideas which had been raised by the participant parents. However, studies aiming to adopt similar approaches need to be mindful of the tensions which can arise between using SNS aimed at reflexively highlighting participants' voices, and the ethical issues which can result from the use of SNS as discussed in section 1.4.1 and analysed further in 4.4. Both these discussions highlighted the paradox of choosing approaches based on SNS in order to foreground potentially vulnerable participants' voices, but which at the same time raise the potential of exposing participants to further harms resulting from SNS. This includes the potential harm on participants from the power imbalance of the researcher's role

within the SNS. Whilst the discussion in section 4.4.5 underlined that this study's approach to my role within the Facebook group was as facilitator rather than administrator, it was none the less the case that the role reinforced my hierarchical position in relation to parents. The detailed discussion in section 4.5, described how the study mitigated, as far as possible, these potential harms and limitations. Inevitably, as with any research there were a number of further limitations associated with different aspects of the study.

These limitations were related to two aspects: the design of the study and the approach to analysis. In practice, the design limitations were due to the constraints of time, length of thesis and the interpretive methodology, which valued depth of analysis over quantity. This resulted in only small numbers of parents being involved and equally small numbers of speeches being analysed in depth. Overall, this meant the study's findings and interpretations were restricted to the small sample group, within the context of a specific community and school. Whilst this limitation did not undermine the study's aim of achieving 'thick' (Stake, 1995) and in depth interpretations, as opposed to generalizations, other limitations were potentially more meaningful because they were related to the aim of foregrounding parents' views.

Most significantly, the design did not allow the parents to express their views on the study's interpretations and explanations. To explain this further, parents' discussions were analysed and then summarised through a number of themes as presented in Chapters 5 and 6. However, parents did not have the opportunity to review or analyse these themes. Had the design included the parents in this further stage of analysis, then their voices could have further influenced the study's interpretations. Similarly, when the analysis of speeches identified meanings which the study interpreted as showing congruence or contrast with the parents' views, there was no opportunity to allow the parents to express their opinions on whether or not they agreed with the study's analysis. This approach would have required a method based more closely on grounded theory design (Charmaz, 2008) where findings are continually reviewed and systematically used to plan and undertake the next phase of data collection. In practice this would have implied greater demands on parents' time in order for them to review findings and interpretations. Whilst

including these further opportunities for parental involvement, would have furthered the study's aim of highlighting parents' voices, it would have been impractical for a small study such as mine.

Another of the study's limitations was due to the challenge of using the parents' views as the categories by which to analyse the government speeches as described in sections 4.6 and 8.2. Whilst this was another original contribution and a way of foregrounding participants' views, in practice it resulted in the need to identify which words would represent the parents' views and so act as the categories of analysis. The discussions described how an analysis of a large number of government announcements was undertaken in order to identify the words used in political announcements which were synonyms and carried the same meaning as the parents' words. This approach contained a reflexive tension between on the one hand, using parents' themes and so maintaining their voices throughout the study, and on the other hand, having words which would in practice, yield results when used as the categories of analysis of the speeches. The significant limitation, was that the design did not then allow the parents an opportunity to review these government words to decide whether they did convey the same meanings and views as they as parents had intended. Inevitably, the words chosen carried my interpretations of both the parents' meanings and the speeches' intended meanings. Once again future studies working with less restrictive time scales, resources and word count limits, could consider allowing participants to choose the words from the texts being analysed. In conclusion, it is important to be cognisant of the extent to which not affording parents the opportunity to review interpretations, further emphasised my hierarchical position of power in relation to their roles.

Overall this study has contributed methodological insights for future studies focused on exploring the views of vulnerable participants. Whilst the limitations identified in this discussion need to be addressed, it is none the less possible for future studies to employ combinations of methods, in order to create a space for vulnerable participants' voices to be heard. This approach reduces the need for researchers to identify issues *a priori*, which they regard as relevant to their participants. In particular, it is argued that in studies where the focus is on giving voice to vulnerable and disadvantaged participants, an important

step is to avoid approaching the participants with pre-defined contexts, issues and priorities. If the aim is to give voice to participants, then it is important to ensure that this includes allowing them the space to identify their own issues and contexts, and not be in a position where they are responding to externally set priorities

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