



*Our Voices, Our Images, Our Story:*  
Children's Lived Experience in DEIS  
(Delivering Equality of Opportunity in  
Schools) Primary Schools in Ireland.

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## **Declaration**

This thesis results entirely from my own work and has not been offered previously for any other degree or diploma. The word count conforms to the permitted maximum.

Signed: *Gemma Campion*

## **Acknowledgments**

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## Abstract

In Ireland *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS): The Action Plan for Educational Inclusion* was launched in May 2005 and remains the Department of Education and Skills (DES) policy instrument to combat educational disadvantage. The action plan focuses on prioritising the educational needs of working class children from disadvantaged communities. Qualitative studies into the DEIS initiative at primary school level which prioritise pupil voice are disappointingly limited. This thesis puts forward the argument that in the interest of a social justice perspective and inclusive practices it is essential that working class voices and experiences of those who receive the DEIS programme ought to be at the forefront of any review of the policy. Hence, this thesis draws from a narrative inquiry study of a diverse group of 41 pupils (aged 11 and 12) from three DEIS Urban Band 1 primary schools in a provincial city in Ireland. The pupils engaged in one on one interviews, pair interviews and created drawings to portray their school experience. The study explores how pupils navigate school whilst trying to keep a sense of self and the implications of this on their identity, wellbeing and engagement. The study highlights the power of the school as the dominant culture in producing acts of symbolic violence and what I refer to as *punished habitus* that inculcate feelings of inferiority and self-doubt in working class pupils. Pupils proffered the notion that to be successful in school the only viable option was to conform to the middle class norms and behaviours. This enforced compliance to the institutional habitus led to an anxiety of self-management as pupils indicated altering their identities to allow for habitus-field congruency. This led to a constant self-monitoring of behaviours. I introduce the concept of *resigned habitus* to explore this abandonment of their originary habitus at the school gate. This study challenges the deficit model of working

class culture and presents a more nuanced understanding of how class is experienced and internalized in DEIS primary schools, and by doing so, shines a light on the affective dimension of schooling.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

CSO- Central Statistics Office

DCYA- Department of Children and Youth Affairs

DEIS- Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (Designated Disadvantaged Schools)

DES- Department of Education and Skills

DOH- Department of Health

EBD- Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties

ERC- Educational Research Centre

ESL- Early School Leaving

ESRI- Economic and Social Research Institute

GUI- Growing Up in Ireland Study

HEA- Higher Education Authority

HSCL- Home School Community Liaison Scheme

INTO- Irish National Teachers' Organisation

NA- National Assessment

NBSS- National Behavioural Support Service

NCCA- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

NESF- National Economic and Social Forum

NS- National School

OECD- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

RTT- Resource Teachers for Travellers

SCP- School Completion Programme

SILC- Survey on Income and Living Conditions

SSP- School Support Programme

STP- Support Teacher Project

TCD- Trinity College Dublin

VTHVI- Visiting Teachers for Children with Hearing and Visual Impairment

VTT- Visiting Teacher for Travellers

## Chapter One: Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

*“See-saw Margery Daw,  
Jacky shall have a new master,  
He shall have but a penny a day,  
Because he can’t work any faster”  
(English Nursery Rhyme dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century)*

As a child I would often sing this seemingly innocent nursery rhyme not realising the irony of the hidden and more sinister meaning. It is suggested the lyrics are actually about the gruelling conditions of child labour and is believed to be created to taunt poor children who had to earn a living in the work houses, with the word “daw” indicating a lazy or untidy person. As a child from a working class family of seven, it reminds me of the rat race of social mobility and meritocratic views of society that if I just worked fast enough, I too could reap the rewards of upwardly mobile trajectories. I recognise this is an ideology that has served me well as due to my educational qualifications I now find myself in a middle class occupation and lifestyle. This meritocratic view however does not take into account the immense emotional and mental costs of overcoming the many disadvantages faced by working class families and equally fails to take into account the advantages of middle class accumulative capital acquisition. I often saw first-hand the strain educational costs can put on a family and it is for this reason that my first teaching job in a DEIS primary school brought me on an emotional journey seemingly traveling full circle. I could relate on a deep,

personal level to issues I was seeing in my classroom that had economic insecurities and inequalities at its core. This was fuelled by many uncomfortable encounters of prejudicial views held by teachers towards the working class families they served who were often being labelled as “dysfunctional”, “chaotic” and “rough”. This fed into the ideology that they were somehow at fault for their perceived lack of educational attainment or aspirations, and not taking into account the many barriers affecting their educational success. This stigmatisation of working class families harks back to the taunting “daw” label used in the nursery rhyme. The uncomfortable and unsettling feeling I was left with lit the passion for my research journey and I felt compelled to tell the DEIS story from the pupil perspective to highlight the many powerful structures and practices that serve to reproduce inequalities in educational outcomes.

In similarity to this nursery rhyme, my study also focuses on children most at risk of poverty and social exclusion and represents marginalised communities such as those from migrant backgrounds and the Traveller community. The metaphor of the see-saw has been used in the study to illustrate the dichotomies of conformity-resistance and engagement-disengagement, and the consequential impact on pupil wellbeing and identity. I explore how working class pupils navigate through school while trying to keep a sense of self and a healthy self-concept which due to home-school discontinuity can be more difficult for working class pupils who come up against a cultural mismatch. The cards are stacked against them and when faced with the institutional power of the school, the pupils are often left with little choice but to conform to the predominantly middle class school culture or to resist. Unfortunately for working class pupils neither conformity nor resistance challenges the status quo and we still have an education system that maintains and reproduces middle

class advantage. Conformity led to what I refer to as an anxiety of self-management as the working class pupils discussed trying to alter their habitus to fit the school leading to a constant self-monitoring of behaviours. I introduce the concept of *resigned habitus* to explore this abandonment of their originary habitus at the school gate. This is a more nuanced understanding of how class is experienced in primary schools and the consequential impact on pupil wellbeing. To date an in-depth qualitative study of DEIS primary pupils' lived school experience has been missing from Irish educational research, and thus this research is both timely and significant. By bringing to the fore the immense emotional pressures discussed by my participants in trying to bridge the gulf between home and school, I hope this study can lead to more empathetic and inclusive classroom practices that allow us to more readily "see through strangers' eyes and hear through their ears" (Greene 2000:3).

The rest of this chapter will firstly present the starting point of my research journey through the presentation of my research questions. I will then present the structure of my thesis through a short summary of what to expect from each of my upcoming chapters.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

My thesis sets out to tell the DEIS story from the pupil perspective with a deep-rooted belief in the importance of pupil voice to inform policy and practice. This is of added significance in the DEIS context whereby the voices of working class pupils need to be considered in order to democratically review the very policies that are designed to serve them. With this in mind I present my three embedded research questions:

- How do DEIS primary school pupils describe and perceive their educational experience?
- How, and in what ways, do in-school processes impact affective pupil engagement?
- What could educational disadvantage policies, and in particular the DEIS initiative, learn from the pupil perspective?

### **1.3 Thesis Structure**

Chapter two sets out the contextual background of this study by taking a detailed look at the DEIS initiative to date, referring to relevant policy documents, evaluations and literature around the topic.

Chapter three explores the theoretical framework underpinning my study and introduces the Bourdieusian concepts which are key to my exploration of working class experiences' in the educational field. The study highlights the power of the school as the dominant culture in producing acts of symbolic violence and what I refer to as *punished habitus* that inculcate feelings of inferiority and self-doubt in working class pupils. I also introduce my new theoretical concept of resigned habitus and explain how this has been developed from Ingram's (2018) four way typology of habitus interruption.

Chapter four looks at the key foci of this study in greater detail through the exploration of relevant literature under the themes of wellbeing, relationships, engagement and identity. It gives an oversight of social class inequalities in Ireland in terms of educational outcomes and third level access. It takes a closer look at the affective dimension of schooling and its impact on a healthy self-concept. Considering the significant time pupils spend in school, the importance of pupil wellbeing and schooling for personal growth is emphasised as a vital



counter narrative to current neoliberal ideas present in Irish educational policies and practices.

Chapter five discusses the methodological and epistemological approach taken in my research. It explores the importance of narrative inquiry to place pupils in the expert role of their own social world with an emphasis on the affective dimension of human experience. The latter part of the chapter gives an overview of my three participating schools and looks at my data collection and data analysis methods.

Chapter six is the presentation of my first findings chapter around the core theme of pupil wellbeing with subheadings exploring school climate, engagement and the notion of a restricted self through the resignation of habitus. This chapter emphasises the higher demands placed on working class pupils' identity and habitus formation as they are forced into consciousness and self-monitoring of their behaviours. Unsurprisingly this led to low levels of affective engagement as pupils who felt they had to alter who they are to achieve habitus-field congruency did not feel as included or valued as they could do, and hence that sense of belonging was lacking. This chapter argues for the importance of the field to adapt to its pupils rather than placing the demand on pupils to change and conform to fit the school.

Chapter seven presents data analysis around the importance of positive teacher pupil relations in cultivating a positive school experience. It also explores punished habitus and authoritative teaching as a form of symbolic violence which only serves to further alienate those we are seeking to engage the most. The pupils also highlight that the process of disengagement starts early in their school life and hence primary school is an important site of intervention that should prioritise relationships for affective engagement.

Chapter eight draws this thesis to a close by returning to my research questions and re-iterating the main findings from my analysis chapters. Additionally, I look at recommendations for classroom practice and policy and present some of the limitations of my study.

## **Chapter 2: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Educational disadvantage and the underachievement of students from lower socio-economic classes has been a long-standing issue in Ireland (Kelleghan et al. 1995, Boldt et al. 1998, Breen & Whelan 1996; Lynch 1999; Smyth et al. 1999, Kelleghan 2001, Hanafin & Lynch 2002, Smyth & McCoy 2009, Smyth et al. 2010, Weir & Denner 2013, Shiel, Kavanagh & Miller 2014, Smyth, McCoy & Kingston 2015, Kavanagh, Weir & Moran 2017, Weir et al. 2018). This study is concerned specifically with DEIS status schools serving predominantly working class pupils. This chapter seeks to inform understandings of the current DEIS initiative for primary schools in Ireland. It is also important in the upcoming section to define and detangle the contested term- educational disadvantage. I will then explore some of the complex processes at play in underlining educational disadvantage and some of the literature around the recent DEIS review and publication of the new DEIS Plan 2017 (DES 2017).

Given that educational disadvantage continues to persist in Ireland after 50 years of targeting through various initiatives, it is clear that educational inequalities reflect a much wider range of social and economic inequalities in Irish society as a whole and the widening gap between the better off and those less well off (Watson et al. 2014, Weir et al. 2014). As Skerritt highlights:

“Ireland has been characterised by this acceptance since free education was introduced in 1967. The challenge, however, is that greater access to education does not equate to greater

academic participation or improved performance, and despite various initiatives in Irish education aimed at compensating children in schools recognised as serving disadvantaged areas, these children still perform less successfully compared to children in other types of schools” (2017:275).

This class gap in educational attainment is discussed in a myriad of Irish research which shows despite widespread education expansion, students from lower socio-economic status are continually underachieving in the education system (Breen & Whelan 1996; Smyth et al. 1999; Lynch & Moran 2006; Weir & Denner 2013; Smyth et al 2010), indicating social class origins remain the greatest predictor of academic success or failure (Drudy & Lynch 1993; Lynch 1999; Hanafin & Lynch 2002). The class chasm in Irish society is most apparent in recent figures showing progression to higher education (HE) with twenty percent of those from non-manual, semi-skilled or unskilled worker backgrounds progressing to HE, while those from the professional worker category is thirty eight percent (Higher Education Authority (HEA) 2018). Harford and Fleming (2019) noted “some social classes proceed to higher education at a rate of virtually 100 per cent, whereas in other cases the figure is less than a third of that”. Furthermore, recent figures representing entry to HE from students who attended DEIS schools equated to a mere twelve percent in 2012/13, which marginally increased to thirteen and a half percent in 2016/17 (HEA 2018). There is a clear underrepresentation of working class pupils in HE in Ireland.

This is significant considering “education is the key to providing children with the tools they need to break intergenerational cycles of poverty and to create positive futures for themselves” (Barnardos 2009:6). Moreover due to the immense weight placed on educational qualifications, education is even more critical in the Irish context. As Smyth and

McCoy emphasised this can have long term effects on both the individuals' life outcomes and the cost to the State:

“Education is highly predictive of future life chances in the Irish context. Those who leave school before the Leaving Certificate are more likely to be unemployed or lone parents, earn less if they have a job, and have poorer health and higher crime levels. One in six young Irish people still leave school without reaching Leaving Certificate level and their likelihood of doing so is strongly influenced by their social background. This has substantial costs for the young people themselves and for society as a whole” (2009:57).

Thus educational inequality based on social class is particularly problematic in the Irish context as education is a key mechanism through which access to resources is distributed (Drudy 2001).

## **2.2 Educational Disadvantage**

Despite the fact the term educational disadvantage has become part of the vocabulary of educators and policy-makers, there have been few successful attempts of defining it. As argued by Tormey (2010), the term educational disadvantage can be described as an “essentially contested concept” (ibid. 189). It has long been challenged as narrow in scope, as the indicators to classify those of “disadvantage” tend to focus on economic capital (see Kelleghan 2001). The deficit language of “disadvantage” (Downes & Gilligan 2007) has also been challenged as it might stigmatise people and communities. Downes & Gilligan (2007:464) hence question whether “the term educational disadvantage is still an appropriate metaphor for what we aspire to create, namely, a life-long organic education

system that encourages everyone in our society to reach their full potential.” However this study would argue that while the language of DEIS does aim to be one of opportunity (Downes 2015), there is a need to recognise that due to systemic and institutional structures, for some the odds are stacked against them and due to no fault of their own they are disadvantaged in the educational system. Recognition of this and structural and systemic change is needed to fulfil the aim of opportunity for all.

Despite the absence of a broadly agreed definition and a shift towards the term “inclusion” (DES 2005), the new DEIS Action Plan 2017 and a myriad of political discourse is littered with the term “educational disadvantage.” In Ireland’s Education Act 1998 (Sec 32.9) the concept of educational disadvantage is defined as:

“the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools.”

However, as argued by Tormey (2010) this definition has been criticised for being broad and non-specific as it fails to identify what are the impediments in question. A broad definition which attempted to encapsulate its complex nature suggests:

“that children may be considered to be disadvantaged if, for sociocultural reasons, they enter the school system with knowledge, skill and attitudes which make adjustment difficult and impede learning” (Weir 2001:23).

However this too is not without its flaws, as it could be argued that it places the blame on the child’s “habitus” rather than the school system itself. It conjures the thoughts of working class “cultural capital” not being favourable to school conditions (see Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). This is juxtaposed sharply with the attitudes and beliefs of the middle or elite classes,

which are very much in line with the value systems of schools. While defining the term as illustrated above can be a complex and contested matter, the common thread to all definitions is the discontinuity between home and school. As Higgins (2008:38) outlined:

“discontinuity of worlds and lack of acknowledgement of the child’s lived experiences beyond the school can and does contribute to the child’s disenchantment with school and failure to succeed within the education system”

McAllister Swap (1993:16) also recognised this discontinuity between home and school and highlighted that this may lead pupils to “lose self-esteem as they see little of their own history and culture represented and taught in the curriculum”. The extra emotional effort of bridging this gulf between home and school has not been explored in detail in the Irish context and is missing from the DEIS initiative to date. Research has shown that working class pupils fare less well in terms of affective engagement and self-concept (Frawley et al. 2014). This study aims to explore this finding in greater detail and to give more nuanced understandings to this affective dimension of schooling for working class pupils.

A core contributory factor to educational disadvantage is poverty. According to the latest Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) data (CSO 2018) there are 230,000 children living in poverty in Ireland in 2017. This means “children are the single biggest group of the population living in poverty” (Ward 2019). This has detrimental impacts on wellbeing as it limits life chances, generates feelings of inferiority and shame and “destroys the human spirit” (ibid.) Evidence from a recent report by the Growing Up In Ireland (GUI)<sup>1</sup> study shows

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<sup>1</sup> The Growing Up in Ireland Study is a large scale, national longitudinal study of children and young people representing over 20,000 children aged from 9 months to 20 years old. It is funded by the Department of

economic hardship generates stress in families, resulting in less parent-child interaction and a greater risk of socio-emotional difficulties in children and mental health issues in parents (Nixon, Layte & Thornton 2019). A large volume of research indicates that individuals from poorer socio-economic background are more likely to underachieve in the education systems than their more affluent peers (Kelleghan et al. 1995; Boldt et al. 1998; Smyth 1999; Lynch 1999). As Lynch outlined:

“The principal problem which working-class people have in relation to education is that they lack adequate income to maximise the advantages that the system could offer: looked at another way, they are seriously deprived of resources relative to the middle-class people with whom they must compete for credentials” (1999:57).

The fact remains in Ireland that children of low-income households, whatever their race or ethnicity, are still more likely to leave school early (see Lynch 1999) and hence why money and the lack of “underpins their sense of powerlessness and isolation which is the most powerful excluding force” (ibid. 58) within the Irish education system. This was correlated in recent findings from the GUI study which showed a clear relationship between social background and educational experiences (Williams et al. 2009). Academic performance varied by social class, income and maternal education with those from higher class, higher income and higher educational qualifications performing better on standardised Reading and Mathematics tests (ibid.)

In addition to lower levels of participation and achievement, educational disadvantage manifests itself in many ways in Ireland. The main issues raised on a daily basis in DEIS



schools include: “absenteeism, hunger, sleep deprivation, disruptive behaviour, staff turnover, poor concentration as well as some instances of lack of parental supervision” (The National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) 2009:99). Skerritt also lists problems DEIS schools face on a daily basis as: “unemployment in the community, a lack of parental interest, involvement and support, absenteeism, behavioural and emotional difficulties, dysfunction among students’ families, etc.” (2017:274). It is clear that educational disadvantage is a multidimensional issue that requires intervention on a number of fronts. However I would strongly argue against the use of the term “dysfunction” in relation to working class families and also the inclusion of “a lack of parental interest”. This is an example of the many taken for granted assumptions about working class families that this study is trying to challenge and in doing so exposes “the unacknowledged normality of the middle classes...and its corollary, the equally unacknowledged pathologisation and diminishing of the working classes” (Reay 2006:289). Findings from the GUI study directly dispute this fact with it noting that the majority of parents across all social classes expected their children to reach third level education (Smyth et al. 2010). However, the discrepancy between these expectations and the reality of class differentiated access to third level education (McCoy et al. 2014b) highlights the need for further research into the barriers preventing working class pupils realising this goal.

Children from lower socio-economic groups and those experiencing social exclusion (such as Travellers, foreign nationals and children with special educational needs (SEN)), often do not achieve their educational potential (Smyth and McCoy 2009). Even more disturbing in the Irish context is the significant proportion of young people that experience diminished educational opportunities throughout their lives:

“For instance, a child who is attending a school in a disadvantaged area of Dublin has a 30% chance of exiting primary school with a serious literacy problem (Eivers, Shiel, and Shortt); a 50/50 chance of sitting his/her Leaving Certificate (DES 2003) and a 90% probability that he/she will not go to college (O’ Connell, Clancy, and McCoy 2006)” (Frawley 2014:155).

Frawley (2014:167) highlights that educational disadvantage is “now considered to be about much more than the social background characteristics of children” and instead focuses on the processes of disadvantage which “encompasses material deprivation, transmitted deprivation, societal, community and school-level factors as well as important individual processes of student engagement with education” (ibid.). However, while shining a light on the many complex processes that further disadvantage working class pupils is a welcome shift in the literature on educational disadvantage, I would argue that social class inequalities are still at the heart of all of these factors. For example, many studies have highlighted processes within the school system that impact on working class pupils such as the pedagogy and curricular experiences of DEIS pupils which tend to have an overemphasis on classroom management leading to stricter discipline and less collaborative learning (Conway 2002). Hence creative, dialogic and interactive teaching methods are not commonly used (Devine 2011; McCoy et al. 2012; Devine et al. 2013) and teachers tend to provide less challenging content knowledge based on lower order thinking (Conway 2002; Burns 2016). Pupils in DEIS schools are more exposed to lower expectations of teachers regarding their academic achievements (Archer & Weir 2004; Eivers et al. 2005). Schools also had lower expectations and prejudicial views of working class parents despite the parents themselves indicating they were interested and concerned (Hanafin & Lynch 2002). Social class underlines these differential processes at school level for DEIS and non-DEIS pupils. The habitus-field congruence (Ingram 2009) of middle class pupils results in higher

expectations and less controlling environments. Only by making the stark hierarchical divide and the subtle acts of symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1996) in schooling visible can we really understand educational disadvantage in the Irish context. This study aims to further this debate by looking at the individual level of educational disadvantage and the complex processes that effect student engagement in DEIS schools for working class pupils.

### **2.2.1 Irish Historical Context of Educational Disadvantage Policy**

Free education was introduced in Ireland in 1967 after *Investment in Education* Report, revealed the links between education and class inequality. As a result, The Rutland Street Project was developed in 1969, which aimed to alleviate the effects of educational disadvantage in an inner city area of Dublin. Since then, a myriad of initiatives (see DES 1994, 1996, 2001, 2005, 2017) have been implemented to deal with educational disadvantage in Ireland. These include the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme in 1990; the Early Start preschool programme in 1994; the Breaking the Cycle Initiative in 1996 and in 2001 Giving Children an Even Break. Additionally, the School Completion Programme (SCP) was introduced in 2002 to combat early school leaving (ESL), and in 2005 the Educational Disadvantage Committee published the *Moving Beyond Educational Disadvantage* report outlining the need for targeted resources and additional staffing in schools combating educational disadvantage. As a result the Irish Government published the *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS): The Action Plan for Educational Inclusion* (DES 2005). Since the 2006/07 school year, schools in Ireland who were identified as serving areas of low socio-economic status fall under DEIS status and this new initiative replaced any of the older schemes.

## **2.3 Overview of the DEIS Initiative**

The Irish Government's current main vehicle of tackling social class inequalities in education is the DEIS initiative. The action plan initiated in 2005 focuses on addressing and prioritising the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities (DES 2005). At present, 825 schools participate in the programme (640 Primary and 185 Post Primary), serving 170,000 pupils (DES 2017). The schools are subdivided into Band 1 and Band 2. Band 1 schools have higher assessed levels of socio-economic disadvantage and are also more likely to cater for pupils from Traveller backgrounds, students from non-English speaking backgrounds and pupils with SEN than those in Band 2, and as a result some supports are allocated only to Band 1 schools such as reduced class size. DEIS schools and in particular Band 1 schools have more challenging disciplinary climates and children dealing with a wide range of complex social deprivation problems (Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) 2015).

In 2005 access to the DEIS initiative at primary level was measured by a survey completed by school principals based on their personal knowledge of the school community and in particular the socio-economic status of individual families. Variables used in the principal survey included percentage of: unemployment, local authority housing, lone parenthood, Travellers, large families (5 or more) and eligibility for free books. This identification process came under criticism due to the lack of objectivity and the static nature of the measurement which only provided a snapshot of the social context of a school (Smyth, McCoy & Kingston 2015). While the intention was to regularly review the DEIS status, this did not occur except for a small number of schools that were included up to 2009. The New DEIS Plan 2017 aims

to resolve these shortcomings by developing a more flexible system of identification using centrally held data from the Central Statistics Office (CSO). This data as represented in the 2016 Pobal Haase-Pratschke Index of Deprivation (HP Index 2016) (Haase & Pratschke 2017) will be combined with DES Primary and Post Primary data and will be the basis for a new assessment framework for identification (DES 2017). The HP Index uses three dimensions to assess deprivation- demographic, social class composition and labour market situation. Social class composition includes five indicators which include the percentage of- population with primary education only, population with third level education, households headed by professionals or managerial and technical employees including farmers with 100 acres or more, households headed by semi-skilled or unskilled manual workers including farmers with less than 30 acres, and the mean number of persons per room. Other demographic and labour market indicators included unemployment rate, households headed by a single parent and age demographics. Thus, as seen through the HP Index the complexity of social class classification is not to be underestimated. However it is safe to infer that based on the social composition of students in DEIS schools it strongly indicates a predominately working class population. For example, within DEIS schools there is an over-representation of children from unskilled manual and unemployed backgrounds, with lower levels of income, lower levels of maternal education, and fewer educational resources in the home (McCoy et al., 2014a). These characteristics suggest that based on familial economic, social and cultural capital these pupils would be classified as coming from working class backgrounds (Skerritt 2017:282).

The DEIS Action Plan is even more significant when taking into account that the “number of children in Ireland at risk of poverty or social exclusion not only increased between 2008

and 2011, but registered the highest increase in all of the European Union” (see AROPE indicator EU 2020 Strategy). The current cost of the programme to the DES is €97.62 million. Additional expenditure by the Departments of Social Protection and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs brings total overall expenditure on additional supports to schools to address educational disadvantage to some €161 million (DES 2017). Unfortunately a decade after the initiative was first introduced and after millions of euros of investment, DEIS schools and working class pupils are still severely underperforming compared to their more affluent peers, and the inequalities of social stratification continually persist in Ireland (see Shiel, Kavanagh & Miller 2014).

The recent report, *Learning from the Evaluation of DEIS* (Smyth, McCoy & Kingston 2015) does however outline improvements in attendance levels in urban Band 1 schools, and in retention rates and a slight narrowing of overall Junior Certificate grades in second level. Moreover, while the gap between DEIS and non-DEIS school has not been narrowed, literacy and numeracy have improved in DEIS primary schools. However, urban Band 1 schools have a higher concentration of pupils with very low test scores. To date evaluations of DEIS have focused mainly on educational outcomes. After a decade of implementation the DEIS initiative was recently reviewed and besides from pupil surveys, pupil voice was not a central part of this review and hence the need for a study like this to investigate how the DEIS policy can be informed by pupil perspectives.

One of the key features of the DEIS initiative is access to the School Support Programme (SSP). This requires schools to engage in a school planning process. This involves emphasising target setting, monitoring target progress and measuring outcomes (Weir et al.

2011). A key focus of the DEIS initiative in recent years has been literacy, with the recent national strategy for improving literacy identified one in three Irish children in DEIS schools as having serious reading and writing difficulties (DES 2011). Since the programme's implementation an independent body, the Educational Research Centre (ERC) has undertaken comprehensive evaluations of it in 2010, 2013 and 2016 (see Weir et al. 2011; Weir & Denner 2013; Kavanagh, Weir & Moran 2017). It is clear from the evaluation in 2010 that there have been no major implementation issues:

"All the main elements of the DEIS Action Plan launched in 2005 have been put in place at national level, and there is no evidence of any serious implementation failures at school level" (Weir et al. 2011: 89).

While addressing the problems experienced in DEIS schools, Weir et al. (2011) state that whether outlined explicitly or not, the initiative's ultimate goal is to make improvements in pupils' educational achievements and attainments, and as a result "gathering data on educational outcomes has been a feature of many of the evaluations" (Weir et al. 2011:13). This limited view of DEIS initiative has meant evaluations mainly represent quantitative findings and qualitative research on the DEIS programme is limited, and thus this study hopes to answer this call for more qualitative research around pupils' school experience. As echoed by the INTO:

"To date, evaluations have focused mainly on achievement in reading and maths, especially at primary level. There is scope for looking at other student outcomes, including student engagement and achievement across other subjects" (2015:53).

In 2007 the ERC gathered data on the achievements in reading and mathematics of pupils in 120 schools participating in SSP under DEIS. In 2010 and 2013, follow up achievement data

were collected from pupils in the same schools, which was now a total of 119 as two had amalgamated. In 2016 this was reduced to 118 due to amalgamation of a further two schools. These results were then compared and evaluated. On all occasions the test results showed significant and positive improvements, especially in reading:

“These comparisons revealed overall improvements in reading achievement at all grade levels...Results of the most recent cycle of testing in spring of 2013 revealed that the previous gains had not only been maintained, but had been built on” (Weir & Denner 2013:7-8).

However, without the presence of a control group to compare schools who received SSP under DEIS, and those with a similar disadvantage status who did not receive intervention, we cannot accurately say that the improvements are not part of a general improvement in reading and mathematics achievement nationally (Weir & Denner 2013:21). However when working in the best interest of minority children, such a control group would have had serious ethical considerations. Since their evaluation in 2013, the results from the National Assessment (NA) 2014 clearly illustrate that there is a significant improvement nationally in reading and mathematics (Shiel, Kavanagh & Miller 2014). Most worryingly for the DEIS initiative is the fact that “while substantive improvements have been made in DEIS schools since NA’09, there has been no real reduction in the gap between pupils in DEIS urban schools and in other school types” (ibid. xvi, emphasis added). While caution needs to be exercised due to the small sample size of DEIS schools in comparison to the previous ERC evaluations<sup>2</sup>, the findings are still of major concern as there is evidence that DEIS Band 1 schools are still lagging behind other schools and not substantively closing the gap.

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<sup>2</sup> “The sample for NA 2014 is comprised of 150 primary schools nationally, meaning that findings for DEIS schools relate to around 30 individual schools” (Smyth, McCoy & Kingston 2015:32). This sample is four times smaller than the 2010 and 2013 ERC evaluations which comprised of 120 DEIS schools.



However, it has to be acknowledged here, that the issue is not that the DEIS initiative is failing but perhaps that despite public expenditure, rising economic inequalities generally are leading to class differentiated educational achievement gaps (see Reardon 2001). Reardon (2001) suggests this is partly due to an increase in parental investment in children's cognitive development. Middle and high income families can and will use private investment to gain advantage for their children within schools and hence fuel the class divide in educational outcomes. Smyth highlights this from an Irish perspective by drawing on findings from the GUI study to show that participation in structured cultural activities such as dance, drama or music is highly differentiated by social background, "with higher levels of involvement among those in the top two income quintiles" (2016 :vii). DEIS schools alone cannot adequately compensate for the many constraints constituted by inequalities in the distribution of economic and cultural resources.

Kavanagh outlines the encouraging improvements made in DEIS schools in literacy and numeracy attainment, however disappointingly while these gains are to be welcomed, DEIS Band 1 schools in particular "continue to perform at low levels of proficiency, especially in maths" (ibid. 2015:35) and hence the substantive need for continued support in these schools. Kavanagh, Weir & Moran (2017:64) outline 15,872 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class pupils completed testing in 2016 and "evidence suggests that the gains in mathematics and reading observed from 2007 to 2016 have not come at the expense of pupils' enjoyment of school" and instead noted more favourable attitudes to school since the evaluation of the programme began. Pupils' aspirations and expectations for educational attainment have also increased with each round of testing. However, "there appears to be scope for further

raising expectations, as a substantial gap remains between pupils' aspirations and expectations" which is more marked in DEIS Urban schools than nationally (ibid.).

Another aim central to the DEIS Action Plan is the commitment to building relationships between the home and the school to better support children at risk. As the research clearly shows parental involvement, especially in areas at risk of social exclusion, does not just benefit the children and the school, it is a crucial aspect of lifelong learning (OECD 1997). The Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) scheme, which is available to all DEIS schools, has established itself as one of the key factors in breaking down barriers to access, progression and attainment in our education system (DES 2006:1). Research however has shown that despite the considerable work of the HSCL Scheme "there is a gulf between school and community which needs to be bridged" and that unfortunately the link between community based and school based initiatives is minimal, with the DEIS initiative unable to date to capitalise on community strengths in any systematic way (NESF 2009:viii). As the INTO further acknowledges the HSCL scheme has been seriously impacted in recent years as a consequence of recessionary cutbacks, along with the elimination of the Visiting Teacher for Travellers (VTT) and Resource Teacher for Traveller (RTT) in 2011 (2017:26). This has led to an immense strain on the HSCL scheme as well as devastating effects for Traveller pupils as further outlined by the INTO:

"The attendance participation and retention of Traveller pupils continues to be a concern in both DEIS and non-DEIS schools. The HSCL teacher does not currently have the capacity to fulfil the duties previously held by the Visiting Teacher for Travellers (VTT). The VTT has a specific understanding of Traveller culture that has been noticeably lost to the system" (2017:26).

This is of grave concern in DEIS schools trying to combat social exclusion. As Collins starkly contends this is an area that needs targeted support:

“55% of Travellers leave school by the age of 15. The attainment level of Traveller pupils remain significantly lower than that of their settled peers and Traveller children are more likely to be bullied in school” (ibid. 2015:22).

A recent report by the ERC (Weir et al. 2018) exploring the role of HSCL coordinators in DEIS schools outlined problems faced by pupils in DEIS schools according to the HSCL coordinators surveyed. Out of a list of options the percentages of HSCL coordinators surveyed stated that at primary level the main contextual problems facing their pupils “to a great extent” were poor oral language skills of pupils (79%), emotional and behavioural problems of pupils (74%), unemployment in the community (63%), effects of general dysfunction among pupils’ families (61%), literacy/numeracy problems amongst parents (53%), pupil absenteeism (42%), substance abuse among pupils’ families (33%), poor quality of housing (32%), poor diet (29%) homelessness (23%), bullying (18%), organised crime (12%), youth/petty crime (11%), domestic violence (11%) and ethnic conflict (9%). 71% also indicated other problems not listed which included serious illness and death in the family (including suicide), financial difficulties, stress, child neglect, lack of parenting skills and lack of integration of migrant families (Weir et al. 2018:30). While there is plenty to unpack here, one glaring addition is the use of the word “dysfunction” again in relation to working class families. As mentioned earlier this only serves to stigmatise working class families further. There is also a lot of blame being placed on the child and the family as “lacking” in some way rather than an empathetic look at the multiplying effect of systemic structures that

entrench social disadvantage. The high number of HSCL coordinators (74%) identifying emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) as an issue is also questionable considering that research has shown disproportional identification of EBD in DEIS Urban Band 1 schools (Banks et al. 2012) highlighting the influence of teacher judgement on what is “normal” behaviour and runs the risk of labelling certain groups of children (Smyth, McCoy & Kingston 2015). This will be returned to in chapter three under symbolic violence.

Both the HSCL Scheme and the School Completion Programme (SCP) are managed and operated by the Educational Welfare Services of the Child and Family Agency and are a central component of DEIS provision. SCP is a school based programme which provides in-school and out of school supports for children and young people at risk of disengagement and early school leaving. Interventions include attendance monitoring, in-school and afterschool support, breakfast and homework clubs, and socio-emotional wellbeing support (INTO 2015:41). A recent report by The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) (Smyth et al. 2015) has found that expenditure cuts have curtailed SCP provision at a time of growing need at school level. Government funding for the SCP has been cut from €32.9 million in 2008 to €24.7 million for 2015. The report notes that this is at odds with international (see Heckman & Masterov 2007; OECD 2011) and national (see NESF 2005; Frawley 2014) evidence that early intervention is likely to have greater impact and be more cost effective than remedial intervention after disengagement and drop out from school. As Heckman also argues:

“If society intervenes too late, and individuals are at too low a level of skill, later investment can be economically inefficient” (2008:55).

Most worryingly, in regards to pupil wellbeing, principals and stakeholders say that in the absence of SCP, schools will not be in a position to provide designated supports to foster the socio-emotional wellbeing of at-risk children (Smyth et al. 2015). Reduced provision has particularly affected afterschool and holiday provision, which are seen as key in engaging children with school. Of particular concern to school principals are cuts to one-on-one counselling and therapeutic interventions for children in crisis situations. The report argues that there is a case for rebalancing, and even increasing, funding for schools with high levels of disadvantage and complex student needs, such as DEIS Urban Band 1 schools that are the foci of this study.

Another DEIS initiative that was essential to pupil wellbeing and being availed of in one of my participating schools (see Appendix A) is the Support Teacher Project (STP). The STP, formerly named the Teacher/Counsellor Project, was initiated in 1995. Support teacher posts were assigned to individual designated disadvantaged schools to assist in supporting pupils with very disruptive behaviour. Out of the 640 primary schools mentioned above only 41 schools have had access to the STP (Social Inclusion Unit (SIU) 2017). This is due to the fact it has remained in a pilot phase for over 20 years. The last evaluation of the STP, then called the Teacher/Counsellor Project, was in March 1998 carried out by the Inspectorate and the Psychological Service (see DES 1998). As a result the title of the project was changed to the STP to reflect more accurately the nature of the work and skills involved, and a revised specification for the role of the teachers involved was introduced in December 1998. Support teachers focus on social, emotional and personal development in working with children. The thrust of the work is preventative and they use creative activities such as art, drama and play in order to develop pupil's social and personal skills. The evaluation

recommendations included the appointment of a national co-ordinator and the expansion of the project to other DEIS schools. No national co-ordinator has been appointed since 2006, contrary to the importance of such a role advocated by the recommendations. Shockingly this is the last evaluation ever conducted on the pilot in its twenty years of implementation, and while it was overwhelmingly positive and perceived to be highly successful, no extra support teachers have been rolled out to schools of similar disadvantage. The government approach to educational disadvantage policies and measures of delivering equal opportunities seems somewhat ambiguous when you put this last point into perspective. Most worrying “there doesn't appear to be any clear plan to extend these programmes to same-area schools, which experience the same levels of disadvantage” (INTO 2000:7).

Meanwhile the huge level of need continues to grow. The INTO (2017) have again reiterated the importance of this much appreciated role and the need for it to be expanded to other DEIS schools. With the publication of the new DEIS plan 2017 it was hoped this role would be revitalised, however instead it seems to have been brushed under the carpet of a new and much promised Inclusion Support Service (ISS) unit (SIU 2017) along with the Visiting Teachers for Children with Hearing and Visual Impairment (VTHVI), and the National Behavioural Support Service (NBSS) for primary schools. What will happen to support teacher posts in this new remodelling is yet to be clarified, and a missed opportunity of the new DEIS Plan 2017, especially in light of the fact that the lack of mental health and wellbeing focus was a major flaw of the previous plan (Downes 2017; INTO 2015).

## 2.4 DEIS Plan 2017

As a result of the recent review of the DEIS initiative the government of Ireland published the new DEIS Plan 2017 on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2017. The plan builds on the experience of existing DEIS schools and sets out new targets to:

- Further improve literacy and numeracy
- Improve school completion rates
- Improve progression to further and higher education

Its opening foreword by the Minister of Education, Richard Bruton, is littered in political rhetoric, with ambitious goals to be the best education system in Europe within a decade and to break the cycles of disadvantage through improved educational outcomes, “to narrow the gaps and develop better pathways” (Bruton cited in DES 2017: 4). This point is hard to swallow considering a focus on educational outcomes has not been able to narrow the gap to date. Furthermore, in light of the recent UNICEF report that states Ireland has the fourth highest teen suicide in EU/OECD region (UNICEF 2017) there is a glaring need to stop and evaluate what it means to be the best education system. Instead of a product focused approach emphasising outcomes and attainment levels, this report highlights the significant and urgent requirement to put pupils’ mental health and wellbeing to the forefront of the educational process.

In saying this, much is to be welcomed in the new plan, especially the allocation of additional funding in 2018 to the sum of €112 million (DES 2017:20), along with the commitment to school-based speech and language therapists. The new DEIS plan outlines

five main goals (see figure 1) towards tackling educational disadvantage. Unfortunately as seen in the previous plan, there is an immense importance put on driving up attainment levels. This need for international competitiveness and narrow focus on literacy and numeracy (Burns 2016) is to the detriment of other curricular areas and a holistic school experience. As further highlighted by O’ Brien and Flynn:

“ideologies of success and performativity that are pervasive in the economic contexts increasingly inform rationalistic consumer models of education and have little to do with care, equality and the production of solidarity and a more equal society” (2007: 83).

This rigorous testing regime “seeks to make schools data laboratories and interventions rather than living systems. In living systems, relationships in school matter” (Downes 2017: 47). The pressure around standardised testing to increase literacy and numeracy attainment levels, leave little time to build these relationships, while they also cultivate a school climate that tends to ignore other forms of intelligence and locally produced knowledge. This tendency to treat all students the same or “inequality of sameness” (Burns 2015) is of paramount concern to DEIS schools that are serving the most at-risk pupils of social exclusion.



Figure 1: Goals of the DEIS Plan 2017 (DES 2017:9)



As identified earlier, innovative and interactive teaching methods are not commonly used in DEIS schools, (Devine 2011; McCoy et al. 2012; Devine et al. 2013) with teaching instead focusing heavily on basic skills that students find less motivating and engaging. The research shows this is very much linked to maintaining discipline (Devine et. al 2013). Teachers dominate classroom discourse and “distrust pupil talk because it distracts from what is considered in Irish schools to be the “real” business of teaching-“listening, reading and writing” (Skerritt 2017:286). As Skerritt further highlights:

“one of the greatest paradoxes of modern Irish education is that despite official discourse giving the impression of reform, very little is actually changing in teachers’ beliefs and values (2017:288).

The school supports under DEIS Plan 2017 for primary schools are mainly unchanged (see Table 1), with the most promising addition being the new focus on pupil wellbeing through the introduction of training in the *Incredible Years’ Teacher Classroom Management*

*Programme* now available to all teachers in all DEIS primary schools. The *Incredible Years' Teacher Programme* is an evidence-based programme for teachers and parents, which reduces behavioural difficulties and strengthens social and emotional competence in primary pupils (INTO 2017:33). As a limited focus on pupil wellbeing and mental health was a major flaw of the previous scheme it is very positive to see a shift towards a more holistic school experience here. However as strongly advocated by Downes (2017) while these initiatives are very welcome they are a poor substitute for provision of qualified emotional counsellors or play therapists in schools. SCP funding is often used by schools to employ counsellors and therapists "however, it is an indictment of current approaches that these vital services depend on local voices rather than national systemic strategy" (Downes 2015:6). While pupils' social and emotional wellbeing have gained greater attention, "targeted emotional counselling services in schools remains the elephant in the room" (ibid.).

Following on from the key findings of the ESRI evaluation of DEIS (Smyth, McCoy & Kingston 2015) there is also an acknowledgment of the importance of school climate in the new DEIS plan. This is to ensure schools create an environment which is conducive to successful engagement with education, and is of particular importance "when considering the factors that give rise to poor school attendance, poor concentration and engagement in class, and early school leaving" (DES 2017: 36). This is very much in line with ample research nationally and internationally that contends that authoritarian teaching can have detrimental effects on student engagement and early school leaving (Hodgson 2007, Cefai & Cooper 2010, Downes 2011, 2014). This is particularly relevant in DEIS schools, whereby, as seen earlier, schools tend to focus on didactic, traditional methods of teaching. While discourse and

policy rhetoric echoes active learning, pupil wellbeing, mindfulness and positive school climate, the reality on the ground can be quiet paradoxical as emphasised by Skerritt (2017) above. This study endeavours to give a more nuanced understanding of pupil engagement in DEIS schools, with a particular emphasis on affective engagement, which has been overlooked in the research to date (Frawley et al. 2014).

Table 1: DEIS School Supports (DES 2017:56)

<b>Supports Provided under the DEIS School Support Programme 2017</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resources for DEIS Band 1 Primary schools</li> <li>• Reduced class sizes – application of a staffing schedule to DEIS Band 1 schools to accommodate class size of 20:1 at junior classes and 24:1 at senior classes.</li> <li>• Allocation of Administrative Principal on lower enrolment and staffing figures than apply in primary schools generally (116 in Band 1).</li> <li>• Additional grant aid based on level of disadvantage.</li> <li>• Enhanced rate of funding under the School Books Grant Scheme.</li> <li>• Access to Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) services.</li> <li>• Priority access to Schools Meals Programme.</li> <li>• Access to range of supports under School Completion Programme.</li> <li>• Access to literacy/numeracy support service to specific literacy/numeracy measures.</li> <li>• Priority access to Centre for School Leadership.</li> <li>• Expansion of the National Educational Psychological Service provision in DEIS schools.</li> <li>• Roll out of Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Programme and Friends Programme to all DEIS schools.</li> <li>• Priority access to a range of professional development supports</li> </ul>

There is evidence of more joined up, interagency approach which is much stronger than the previous DEIS plan, however there is still a “need for firmer commitment to specific multidisciplinary teams in and around schools” (Downes 2017:46). Multidisciplinary teams in and around schools are a feature of many European school systems and key to “addressing complex needs of children and their families at risk of social exclusion, including their mental health needs” (INTO 2015). As Smyth and McCoy also highlight:

“schools do not exist in isolation so there is a need for joined-up planning and provision between education, health and welfare services in addressing the holistic development of children. Further, inequality within the educational system will reflect, and reinforce, inequalities within the broader society” (ibid. 2009:58).

In light of dramatic increases in child poverty since the economic crash, this is even more important to make sure no families fall through the cracks. It is a positive move to see this recognised in the new DEIS plan with hunger prevention receiving an additional €5.7 million commitment to school meals.

The most significant change in the new DEIS plan is the use of the HP Index for the identification of schools receiving DEIS status, as discussed earlier. The new identification process aims to be more transparent and responsive. The aim of this system of resource allocation is to ensure “that we can more closely match resources to need, ensuring that those in greatest need receive suitable supports for the appropriate length of time” (DES 2017: 11). While there was a clear need for schools to be added to the DEIS programme to reflect the realities of the economic crash, there is a big concern this will be to the detriment of existing DEIS schools.

“The model may reveal that some schools currently included in DEIS have a lower level of disadvantage within their school population much lower than that in some schools not included within DEIS. If this turns out to be the case, then we must consider whether it is fair that those schools continue receiving these additional resources, using resources that may be more fairly allocated to the schools with greater levels of disadvantage” (DES 2017:19).

As argued strongly by Downes (2017:46) this questionable notion of fairness is ambiguous when you take into account that taking from “the poor to give to the poorer is not a tenable ethic or public policy approach. It defies even the limited goal of equality of opportunity that is named as the very acronym and meaning of the original DEIS scheme.” He goes on to question whether this “view of *more fairly advocated* implies an unacceptable vision of “satisfactory disadvantage” rather than of ending inequality in education?” This is a view echoed by Burns (2015) who states policy discourse perceives inequality to be given and the best we can do is try to ameliorate rather than seek to eliminate it. Moreover Lynch contends this is a result of the invisibility of working class perspectives which results “in policies designed to manage rather than eliminate inequality in education” (ibid. 1999:41).

## **2.5 Conclusion**

Our current education system, despite definite improvements and developments, has a long way to go before it adequately serves the needs of the most vulnerable Irish children. The restoration of the VTT and RTT is one glaring omission from the new DEIS Plan 2017, which is striving to eradicate social exclusion. It is also disappointing to see a complete lack of therapeutic or counselling services included in the programme and with no mention of the expansion of the STP. While the rhetoric of pupil wellbeing is very popular at the moment it

is clear from the deafening silence that targeted counselling for mental health issues in primary DEIS schools remains unaddressed.

Research has shown that educational disadvantage is both a consequence and a cause of economic and social deprivation “which ultimately perpetuates the cycle of disadvantage” (Frawley 2014:155-156). This cycle of disadvantage highlights the need to equip schools with the necessary skills to alleviate rather than reproduce social inequalities. It was clear from previous evaluations that focused on educational outcomes at primary level (see Weir et al. 2011; Weir & Denner 2013; Kavanagh, Weir & Moran 2017) that there is limited in-depth qualitative studies exploring the DEIS initiative from the pupil perspective. This study hopes to fill this gap in educational research with more nuanced understanding of educational disadvantage from the pupils themselves, and thus look at the complex processes at play at the individual level in underlying educational disadvantage. Chapter four will look in greater detail at the literature surrounding working class pupils’ experience and engagement in formal schooling. My next chapter will outline the theoretical framework underpinning my study.

## **Chapter 3: Bourdieu's Spotlight**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter aims to highlight the use of Bourdieu's theoretical tools of field, habitus and capitals in underpinning my research. Working with pupils from disadvantaged areas requires research that comes from a social justice perspective aimed towards improving the lives and wellbeing of young people. The term educational disadvantage has long been challenged as narrow in scope, as the indicators to classify those of "disadvantage" tend to focus on economic capital (see Kelleghan 2001). This simplistic look at educational disadvantage benefits greatly from Bourdieu's theoretical tools which lead us to examining the full, interwoven factors in play. Bourdieu's theory of multiple capitals (economic, social, cultural and symbolic) gives a more nuanced look at the many entrenched and complex challenges faced by many of our DEIS pupils. Hence, Bourdieu's multiple capitals heavily influenced my understanding of social class and the reproduction of social inequalities. Bourdieu's work is primarily concerned with the dynamics of power in society and especially the diverse and subtle ways in which power is transferred and social order maintained. While exploring school and classroom practices this was most helpful in highlighting the subtle acts of symbolic violence and injustices around power and ascribing of value. Finally, Bourdieu's concept of divided habitus will be explored to show how I expanded and utilised the term to understand the complexities around identity formation in DEIS schools. The chapter will now give an overview of Bourdieu's conceptual tools and how they were utilised and adapted for this study.

### **3.2 "Shining a Spotlight on the Blinkers"**

Bourdieu's commitment to understanding the lived experiences of working class people whose culture and lifestyle are often condemned and devalued by dominant discourses and policies, shows how "access, resources and legitimation contribute to class formation" (Skeggs 1997:9). In this way, Bourdieu brings everyday life into focus by "shining a spotlight on the blinkers" (1990:16) and helps to "explain the subtleties, the complexities and the painful experiences of class inequality" (McKenzie 2016:26). Hence, Bourdieu's theory allowed me to explore how class is lived and experienced. Bourdieu's indepth look at the subtle workings of power within educational fields is of particular interest to this study as it is a close up look at the individual level of working class school experiences. For this reason, Bourdieusian ideas form an essential theoretical framework to my study, and will inform understandings around educational disadvantage and the multifaceted factors and complex processes affecting pupil engagement and wellbeing in DEIS schools. I will now take a closer look into Bourdieu's theoretical tool box to explain each of his terms in greater detail and how they correspond to this study.

### **3.3 Capital: A Multiplying Effect**

Bourdieu argued that an individual's social position is influenced not only by economic capital but also by social, cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). The concept of capital is central to Bourdieu's theory and can be understood as "particular resources that individuals have access to, which can be invested or exchanged for goods-tangible and otherwise" (Burke 2016:2). The level of capital an individual possesses combined with habitus influences their social positioning and hence their life trajectories or "field of possibilities" (Bourdieu 1984:110). Bourdieu's "field of possibilities" (1984: 110) is particularly relevant to the DEIS initiative as it is the pupils' habitus and their accumulation



of particular capitals that combine to affect their position within the social hierarchy and also their level of aspirations and expectations (Burke 2016:2), hence “positioning is based on judgements of “the impossible, the possible, and the probable” (Bourdieu 1977:78). Bourdieu explains that differing levels of capital can explain persistent inequalities in educational stratification. He argues that ‘it is in fact impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms’ (1986:242). A key element of Bourdieu’s demonstration of how capitals operate is not only the acquisition of different levels of capital but also their “interaction, with one form of capital compounding another, creating a multiplying effect” (Warin 2015:691). Hence, working with Bourdieu as an analytical tool is useful in considering the multiplier effect of disadvantage and how capital “operates with regard to the entrenchment of social disadvantage” (Warin 2015:691).

### **3.3.1 Economic Capital: The Choice of the Necessary**

Bourdieu explains the concept of economic capital as, ‘immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights’ (1986:243). Hence O’Brien and Ó’Fathaigh refer to it as the most “liquid capital” as it is most readily converted into other forms of capitals (2005:69). My pupils are from communities classified as “very disadvantaged” or “disadvantaged” (HP Index 2016) and are all too familiar with the harsh reality of how low economic capital can reduce life opportunities. As Bourdieu outlined low economic capital can lead working class families to the “resignation of the inevitable” (1984:372) as the field of possibilities are limited due to economic necessity and “the choice of the necessary” (1984:372). As already discussed in chapter two, this is seen most starkly in the fact that in Ireland children of low-income households, whatever their race or

ethnicity, are still more likely to leave school early (see Lynch 1999) than their more affluent peers. This reveals the extent of disadvantage facing low income families and the influence of economic capital on choices (or lack of) in regards early school leaving. This interplay between economic capital and educational outcomes has devastating effects for working class pupils:

“Education is a powerful predictor of adult life chances. Inequality in education outcomes, means that some groups do not reach their potential and experience restricted opportunities across several aspects of their lives” (Smith & McCoy 2009:1).

In regards to this study economic capital is seen most evidently in the use of the DEIS programme to even out the playing field by allocating more resources and teachers to DEIS schools. Also the classification of DEIS school is based on low income families from disadvantaged areas who suffer from cyclical social deprivation steeped in a history of inter-generational poverty. This will be explored in greater detail in my next chapter discussing the literature on social class and educational inequality.

### **3.3.2 Social Capital: The Social Network**

Bourdieu defined social capital as:

“The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a “credential” which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word’ (1986:248).

This entitlement to credit from possessing a network of positive social relationships is unfortunately not always the case for all pupils, and hence why any look at the concept of

social capital is enmeshed with social exclusion (O'Brien & Ó'Fathaigh 2005). Contributory factors to social exclusion such as low socio-economic status, illiteracy, low educational qualifications, inter-generational poverty and lone parents are all social contextual features of many DEIS schools (O'Brien & Ó'Fathaigh 2005). Students challenged by social exclusion and social isolation are more likely to experience poor educational outcomes than students whose social capital gives them the insider knowledge and "know-how" to recognise and follow the rules of the game.

A number of my participants spoke about this lack of insider knowledge and low social capital when discussing access to tertiary education and being the first child in the family aspiring to go to college. Irish research conducted by the ERC into aspirations and expectations of going to college or university among primary pupils (Kavanagh, Weir & Moran 2017) clearly show the gap between DEIS pupils and the national sample. 76.2% of DEIS pupils aspired to go to college with only 57.7% expecting to actually go. This is juxtaposed to the 82.6% aspiring to go from the national sample and 70.4% of these expecting to reach this goal. The much lower expectations from the DEIS sample and the more significant discrepancy between aspirations and expectations for DEIS pupils reveal the extent of the disadvantage facing working class pupils in reaching their full potential. Their expressions of expectations reflect the "constraints inherent within their setting, rather than a free choice of desired outcomes" (St. Clair & Benjamin 2011:502) and hence the "problem may not be what people want, but rather what they are constrained or allowed to achieve" (ibid. 503). I would argue low economic and social capital play a pivotal role here and Bourdieu shines a light on these constraints and makes visible the

disadvantages working class pupils face, such as the lack of social capital in navigating and maintaining access to college.

It is clear the DEIS initiative has many beneficial supports which aim to increase pupils' social capital. One such example is the HSCL Teacher whose specific role is to engage with parents and to build up home-school partnerships. Positive social relations between home and school has long been correlated with greater educational attainment (O'Brien & Ó'Fathaigh 2005; Galvin et al. 2007; Lawson & Lawson 2013). Another such plausible support, as also discussed in my previous chapter was the introduction of the Support Teacher for DEIS schools whose specific role is to work with pupils displaying emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD). As mentioned already in chapter two, It is worth noting here that research has shown disproportional identification of EBD in DEIS Urban Band 1 schools (Banks et al. 2012) highlighting the influence of teacher judgement on what is "normal" behaviour and runs the risk of labelling certain groups of children (Smyth, McCoy & Kingston 2015). This is really an act of symbolic violence against working class pupils who are more likely to be perceived as emotionally or behaviourally difficult than their middle peers. Symbolic violence is "the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1996:167). It is a "powerful way to consider the significance of the denigration of working class culture that is synonymous with the valuing of middle class culture" (Ingram & Abrahams 2016:143) and can be used here to understand the over-identification of EBD in DEIS schools. Unless working class pupils take on the attitudes, norms and behaviours of the middle class school culture they run the risk of being labelled difficult or as one of my participants put it "messed up" (Kayleigh, Greenhill N.S.). This correlates with a recent GUI finding (McCoy, Smyth & Banks 2012) that found young people

from more disadvantaged families were significantly more likely to say they were given out to for misbehaving in class (24% compared to 11% of those more socially advantaged). I argue that this worrying class difference is a form of *punished habitus*, whereby working class habitus is more likely to be reprimanded in school. Symbolic violence is important here to understand punished habitus, as there is an assumption at play that working class boys are unruly and need to be more controlled. This concept is developed further through the presentation of my findings in chapter seven and shows the very serious side of symbolic violence and cultural mismatch in DEIS schools.

Additionally noteworthy in a DEIS context is what Warin refers to as the “dark side” of social capital (2015:701). This relates to perceived negative peer influences that make academic success more challenging, whereby “academically motivated minority students may disguise and/or limit their academic engagement based on surrounding peer cultures” (Lawson & Lawson 2013:444). I very purposely added “perceived” here as I would argue while some people may see the peer relations as negative, it is clear these friendships are a positive source of social capital to the young people themselves. The friendships are of value as they enhance their lives by generating social wellbeing and a positive self-image. Harmful systemic practices of testing and ability grouping compound poor self-image by labelling pupils as low track and inferior on the academic hierarchy (McGillicuddy & Devine 2017; Reay 2018). Hence pupils are left with little option but to reject the importance of academic success and instead “look elsewhere for a positive self-image” (Kelly 2009: 450). This labelling of pupils as low-track only serves to further exacerbate disengagement and anti-school behaviour. It forces pupils grouped together as low track to discard academic significance and sanction successful learner identity. Hence the rhetoric that negative peer

influences makes academic success more challenging, does little to highlight the systemic practices that are a true barrier to their full academic engagement. Furthermore it places the blame solely on the pupils themselves for their own academic failure. This illuminates the psychological impact of schooling on young people by considering how the system constructs education failure as personal failure (Reay 2018).

### **3.3.3 Cultural Capital and Class Struggles**

Cultural capital was pivotal to this study in highlighting the power of the school as the dominant culture in producing acts of symbolic violence. The cultural mismatch between school and pupils and the ascribing of value to those who adhered to middle class values, norms and behaviours of the school were exposed and explored through this study. As discussed in my previous chapter this discontinuity between home and school fields is central to educational disadvantage definitions and hence the importance of cultural capital to this research. Familiarity with the dominant cultural capital of the school allows middle class pupils to move with greater ease in the school setting allowing them to fare better academically, which is juxtaposed sharply with the experience of working class pupils whose cultural capital is seen as misaligned with the school. However, I would strongly argue here that it is the school that needs to alter to fit the cultural experiences of its pupils rather than the other way around. I also acknowledge that not all middle class pupils move with ease in the school setting and can also experience high levels of anxiety around academic success (see Walkerdine et al. 2001).

Bourdieu sub-divides cultural capital into three forms, the embodied state, the objectified state and the institutionalised state. The embodied state is located in the form of 'long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body' (1986:243). The objectified state resides in the

‘form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines etc.) (ibid). Finally, the institutionalised state differs from the former as ‘it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital it is presumed to guarantee’ (ibid). In this sense, a college degree is seen as a cultural value. The concept of cultural capital facilitated Bordieu to explain ‘the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from the different social classes’ (ibid).

Bourdieu acknowledges the importance of ‘the domestic transmission of cultural capital’ (1986:244). It follows that a home environment with high cultural capital in its various forms may facilitate educational attainment more easily, as they have a deeper knowledge of the rules of the game and thus making learning more accessible. Lareau’s (2011) study explored the efforts by middle class families to ensure the transmission of cultural capital by “concerted cultivation”. This is whereby middle class families mobilise capitals to enhance future social positioning and to create pupils with all the “right” capitals to succeed in life. This is evidence of middle class families recognising and playing the game. The first wave of results from the GUI study in Ireland also highlighted the link between family cultural resources and educational outcomes and found:

“the fact that children with professional and/or highly educated parents achieve higher reading and maths scores is related to their access to more children’s books in the home, access to a computer and participation in the sort of non-school cultural activities” (Smyth et al. 2010:102).

As poverty is a core reason for some families not having access to these cultural goods or activities it is even more essential that DEIS schools deliver a broader, holistic school

experience that does not narrow out the expressive subjects such as the arts, in pursuit of testable measures of academic achievement.

Bourdieu (1984:251) describes “class struggles as being at the heart of culture, and consequently something we all internalise, whether we recognise that internalisation or not” (Reay 2015:16). It is the way we internalise cultural capital or class struggles as Reay describes above that makes this capital “the most difficult form to appreciate, as it is a sense of understanding and belonging to situations connected to a social class group” (Burke 2016:49). Burke goes on to caution against how a researcher decides whether a person has high or low cultural capital, and instead focused his research on this internalisation of cultural capital. This was measured by identifying certain individuals who felt they did not belong or fit in to certain environments due to fact they saw certain socio-economic group as “other”. This understanding of cultural capital as difference and a feeling of alienation also became evident in this study through its effect on the lived experiences of my working class participants.

### **3.3.4 Symbolic Capital as Violence**

If life is a game then in Bourdieusian language symbolic capital and the ability to legitimatise capital is seen as the ultimate prize.

“Symbolic capital is a credit; it is the power granted to those who have obtained sufficient recognition to be in a position to impose recognition” (Bourdieu 1989:23).

Therefore acquisition of the three forms of capital to this point are only valuable if they are convertible to legitimate symbolic capital, “symbolic capital is nothing other than economic or cultural capital when it is known and recognised” (Bourdieu 1989:21). Symbolic capital “is



the form the different types of capital take once they are perceived and recognized as legitimate. Legitimation is the key mechanism in the conversion to power” (Skeggs 1997:8). The working class historically have been unable to convert their capitals into symbolic capital and show the dichotomy between those in power and the powerless. For this study symbolic capital is key in looking at the role of the school and in particular the teacher who possess this legitimising power in abundance but may not recognise the power they hold in assigning value. Bourdieu (1989:21) notes this important role education plays in the blocking of this conversion into symbolic capital through officiating and imposing of values.

Bourdieu’s thinking on class notes “that classifications of class become part of a wider symbolic struggle” (Savage 2015:225). Skeggs (1997) illustrated this symbolic struggle strongly in her book *“Formation of Class and Gender”*. It explores the lack of power working class women had to convert their social and cultural capital into symbolic capital. In similarity to Burkes’s study mentioned earlier it was marked by class difference and feelings of inferiority and “otherness”.

“Overall, it is a study of how social and cultural positioning generates denial, disidentification and dissimulation rather than adjustment. It is a study of doubt, insecurity and unease” (Skeggs 1997:75).

Improvement was key to the women in Skeggs’ study and education was seen as the main mechanism in which to achieve this and to convert their capital into an economic resource. Unfortunately as a result the women in Skeggs’ study found themselves trying to distance themselves from being working class. This symbolic struggle for power to legitimatise capital and class disidentification is at the root of symbolic violence. Symbolic violence occurs through “the normalization of the middle class and a pathologizing of the working classes

through representations” (Skeggs 1997:76). This is particularly significant in terms of disadvantaged contexts when people “play the game without questioning the rules” (O’Brien & Ó’Fathaigh 2005:70). As Bowers-Brown explains further:

“Educational success requires an acceptance of the rules of the game and therefore pupils can perpetuate the symbolically violent practices without realising their complicity or because they do not perceive an alternative” (2016:111).

This acceptance of the social order, even by people disadvantaged by it is what Bourdieu (2001:1) refers to as the “paradox of doxa”.

“I have always been astonished by what might be called the *paradox of doxa* – the fact that the order of the world as we find it, with its one-way streets and its no-entry signs, whether literal or figurative, its obligations and its penalties, is broadly respected; that there are not more transgressions and subversions, contraventions and ‘follies’...; or, still more surprisingly, that the established order, with its relations of domination, its rights and prerogatives, privileges and injustices, ultimately perpetuates itself so easily” (2001:1).

In Bourdieusian language the term *doxa* is used to explain the set of rules or socially accepted truths in a particular field. These are the taken for granted assumptions which society has unquestioningly grown to believe. Bourdieu advocates for the need to question society’s hidden injustices and to question the rules of the game:

“we tend too easily to satisfy ourselves with the commonplaces supplied us by our commonsense experience or by our familiarity with a scholarly tradition” (Bourdieu 1989:24).

This acceptance of commonplaces poses a direct threat to our DEIS pupils as “agents, even the most disadvantaged ones, tend to perceive the world as natural and to accept it much

more readily than one might imagine” (Bourdieu 1989:18). The need for research to expose these symbolically violent practises such as this study, and an education system that empowers pupil to challenge rather than reproduce social injustices is advocated by Bourdieu.

### **3.4 Field: Education as a Battlefield**

“The concept of field can be read as an active and dynamic site in which habitus and capital interact” (Burke 2016:35). The field that this study is most interested in is that of education and more precisely that of three DEIS primary classrooms. However the communities which these schools serve are also intrinsically linked to this study and formulate a second dynamic field. Education is regarded as a field since it “sets its own *rules* that regulate behaviour within” (O’Brien & Ó’Fathaigh 2005:70). Educational fields are often sites of struggle in which power relations are at play:

“It is a space of play and competition in which social agents and institutions which all possess the determinate quantity of specific capital (economic and cultural capital in particular) sufficient to occupy the dominant positions within their respective fields” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1996:76).

This fight for prominence within the field leads to competitiveness and tension, as the varying levels of capital struggle for dominance. In order to be successful in any given field the individual must be aware of the rules of the game or *doxa*. The metaphor of the game further echoes the competitive element of the field. As highlighted further by Burke:

“Thompson (2008) points out that the term Bourdieu used in French for field was *le champ*, meaning battlefield, rather than *le pre*, which, on the other hand, offered images of a calm and conciliatory environment. As such, field should be understood as a site of competition

and aggression in which an individual or group is required to negotiate, and their ability to manoeuvre within a particular field will be influenced by habitus and capital” (2016:35-36).

The ability to manoeuvre within the field further develops the metaphor of the game as there is a level of strategy and technique involved in the retention and expansion of capital. Unfortunately, emphasis on competition in terms of education and educational outcomes compounds rather than alleviates social inequalities (Lynch & Moran 2006; Bathmaker, Ingram & Waller 2013; Hamilton & Canny 2018). The people are seen as contestants (Bathmaker 2015) who must employ best strategy of how to play the game in order to win. Bourdieu claims that as certain individuals or players enter the game or field, they are more aware of the rules “and have greater capacity to manipulate these rules through their established capital appropriation” (O’Brien & Ó’Fathaigh 2005:70). This allows for greater habitus-field congruence (Ingram 2009) for those more at home in the new field enjoying the self-assuredness of a “fish in water” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1996). The complexities of moving between different fields require pupils to learn how to play the rules of the many fields they work and operate within. This practice has implications for habitus and “the strategy- generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations” (Bourdieu 1977:72). These strategies can have psychological and emotional costs when pupils try to bridge misaligned fields and are often caught “between two untenable positions, continually engaged in a balancing act that requires superhuman effort” (Reay 2002:228). This balancing act can lead to a constant monitoring of self or what I am referring to as the *anxiety of self-management* and was evident in this study through pupil narratives. This self-management had significant implications for pupil identity and wellbeing and was also acknowledged by Bourdieu:

“It is likely that those who are “in their right place” in the social world can abandon and entrust themselves more, and more completely to their dispositions (that is the “ease” of the well-born) than those who occupy awkward positions, such as the parvenus and the declasses; and the latter are more likely to bring to consciousness that which for others is taken for granted, because they are forced to keep watch on themselves and consciously correct the “first movements” of a habitus that generates inappropriate or misplaced behaviours” (2000:163).

The disparity between home and school fields is particularly relevant in terms of the DEIS initiative which has been set up to try and bridge the capital gap and give all pupils a level playing field. However the additional interplay of habitus highlights the impossibly difficult task of levelling the odds as working class pupils are, as seen above, always denied the “ease of the well-born” and as such have higher demands on identity and habitus formation. This self-consciousness forces pupils “out of habitual action and into reflexivity” (Garratt 2017:630) which I understood as a form of *restricted self*, whereby a number of the working class pupils of my study discussed taking on a school identity that better fits the predominantly middle class school culture. They are denied the ease of belonging that middle class pupils take for granted and as Bourdieu stated above are forced to keep watch, monitoring for misplaced behaviours. This is very much in line with what Bourdieu referred to as “the hysteresis effect” (1977, 2000) whereby the habitus is misaligned with the field causing periods of crisis which can produce a “splitting of the self” or a “painfully fragmented self” (Friedman 2016:110). This restricted self was evident in my conversations with the DEIS pupils and hence played a central role in my analysis of habitus formation. The hysteresis effect concept also helped me analyse pupil engagement and in particular dissent from and compliance with the school field. It is this story of the added emotional and

psychological impact on working class pupils as they try to navigate themselves through school that this study brings to the DEIS conversation.

### **3.5 Habitus: Fabric of Our Being**

Habitus can be understood as norm, values and dispositions instilled in us from family and environmental experiences. It is very much the fabric of our being and as such involves “ways of standing, speaking, walking and thereby feeling and thinking” (Bourdieu 1990:70). As seen earlier it can lead to us to developing classifications based on these dispositions. It is these classifications that can limit our view of the field of possibilities.

“Agents classify themselves, expose themselves to classification, by choosing, in conformity with their taste, different attributes (clothes, types of food, drinks, sports, friends) that go well together and that go well with them or, more exactly, suit their position” (Bourdieu 1989:19).

This very much resonates with Reay et al. study (2009) *Strangers in Paradise?* investigating habitus and the *fish out of water* concept (Bourdieu 1989) in elite universities. One of the working class students described a time someone in his area referred to him as a “swot” and expressed the view that people like them (from their area) were not meant to go to university, but instead they were meant to go on the dole (social welfare payment). This illustrates the impact of classifications in diminishing life trajectories and as Bourdieu himself stated it “makes for the fact that nothing classifies somebody more than the way he or she classifies” (Bourdieu 1989:19). This has direct implications for educational disadvantage policies. As Burke (2016:35) points out

“dispositions formed in an early period of an individual’s life that are seen as both durable and transposable do not provide a great deal of room for agency. However, for Bourdieu it is

not so much that habitus is void of choice but rather the range of choices and attitudes will be influenced by social structures leading him to also define the habitus as “a socialized subjectivity” (1992:126).”

Schools as social structures therefore have a pivotal role to play in defining the range of choices and attitudes. They also encompass one of the main fields in which habitus is played out, lived and tested and ultimately embodied. While Bourdieu acknowledges habitus can be altered and adapted, it is made difficult when the misalignment of dispositions can lead to a divided or “cleft habitus” (Bourdieu 1990; 1999; 2000; 2004). He speaks most powerfully about “the existence of cleft, tormented habitus” (Bourdieu 2000:64) when he refers to his own journey from life in a peasant society in southern France to the life of an elite academic (2004). Bourdieu portrays “a destabilised habitus, torn by contradictions and internal divisions” (2000:160). These contradictions are “marks of the contradictory conditions of formations of which they are product” (ibid. 2000:64) or scars left behind from the battle of field-habitus incongruence. Reay asserts that “implicit within notions of the divided habitus are ambivalence, compromise, competing loyalties, ambiguity and conflict” (2015:11). As seen in my previous section, this inner turmoil and confrontation between the two fields can play a heavy price on pupil’s emotional psyche. This could lend itself to explaining the high levels of frustrations and challenging behaviour reported in DEIS Band 1 schools (Smyth & McCoy 2009). This inner turmoil is encapsulated in the term “habitus tug” (Ingram 2011), which expresses the tension and emotional pull of class or familial ties while pupils navigate themselves through different fields. As Ingram highlights further:

“The difficulties that arise in operating at the boundary of different fields suggest that in order to continue on the path of success the boys must continue to diminish their affiliation to a working-class identity” (2011:300).

This diminishing of working class identity in order to successfully navigate school for many is a price too high. In relation to this study it has a significant impact on the role of individual teachers as “it is the complexity of this tension that needs to be recognized and understood by educational professionals” (Ingram 2011:301). Bourdieu’s concept of a divided habitus is central to this study as it allows for an indepth analysis of these complexities around ways of thinking about and understanding identities. Ingram (2009; 2011; 2018) has developed Bourdieu’s concept of divided habitus in detail to explore habitus interruptions further and formulated a four way typology of habitus (2018:65) that explained how working class boys in her study adapted, maintained or abandoned their originary habitus (see figure 2). This model allows for the complexities around identities and multiple ways of formulating and re-formulating habitus, as it

“accounts for those who have left behind their class without pain, those who have found it painful, those who refuse to erode their identity and those who find a way to reconcile the differences” (Ingram & Abrahams 2016:152).

Hence, it offers a more nuanced understanding of working class identities, and in doing so allows for much more than just the traditional resistance model associated with working class pupils and schooling.



Figure 2: Ingram's Four Way Typology of Habitus Interruptions (2018:65)

Table 3.1 Typology of habitus interruptions

Disjunctive: originary field OR educational field	Conjunctive: originary field AND educational field
<i>Abandoned habitus</i> —divided from originary field. A person renegotiates their habitus in response to the structuring forces of the new field.	<i>Reconciled habitus</i> —two fields are reconciled. A person can successfully navigate both fields. Can accommodate both structures despite opposition. Can induce a degree of reflexivity.
<i>Reconfirmed habitus</i> —divided from new field. The new field is rejected and so its structures are not internalised.	<i>Destabilised habitus</i> —person tries to incorporate the structuring forces of each field into their habitus, but cannot achieve successful assimilation. Instead, they oscillate between two dispositions and internalise conflict and division.

### 3.5.1 Resignation of Habitus

My study expands Ingram's typology to present a fifth way in which pupils internalise habitus-field conflict. This fifth theoretical concept I am presenting is *resigned habitus*. This concept is similar to Ingram's reconciled habitus whereby the working class boys in her study were able to adapt to the new field but had not rejected the old field. In doing so they appeared to accept the legitimacy of the structures of the new field and had somehow accommodated both. However, in my study the pupils who illustrated this resignation of habitus were not managing both fields equally or necessarily accepting the legitimacy of the school field. They instead indicated a resigning of their habitus at the school door as if it was a coat they could hang up and collect again on the way out. Essentially the pupils were talking about taking on a school identity that they were adamant was different to their real or authentic self. They did this to appease the school and teachers that rewarded and encouraged modification to the school culture. The power of the school as the dominant culture was so strong that the pupils simply felt it was easier to resign who they were,

conform and “to just get on with it” (Laura, Greenhill N.S.). This new restricted form of self, forces working class pupils into high levels of consciousness, anxiety and self-management as they have to “keep watch” on “misplaced behaviours” (Bourdieu 2000). This new theoretical concept of resigned habitus allowed me to develop a more nuanced understanding of how working class pupils negotiate their habitus as they navigate through school while trying to keep a sense of self. It also served to reveal the power of the school in identity formation, with profound implications on pupil wellbeing and engagement.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

The central theme of this research in commonality with Bourdieu is a guiding principle of critical sociology through the themes of social justice and equality. Bourdieu emphasised that theory is a means of understanding and challenging practice. The theoretical tools of Bourdieu were essential in illuminating the subtle inequalities of class portrayed through the pupil’s words. His concepts significantly framed my understandings during data analysis and helped illustrate how the power of the school as the dominant culture ascribed value, and in doing so modified behaviours and shaped identities. This study through the inclusion of pupil voice and drawings hopes to bring their untapped perspectives to the fore with implications for teachers, schools and policy makers.

My next chapter will now look at the literature around social class and working class educational experiences.

## Chapter 4: The Emotional Imprint of Class

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores a wide body of literature around the key foci of my study (see Figure 3). This includes social class and educational inequalities within the Irish context and an exploration of working class children's lived school experience through the intertwined themes of engagement, relationships, wellbeing and identity. This study argues for the importance of pupils' lived experience in analysing the class hierarchy in education and in doing so places an emphasis on the affective dimension of schooling. The lack of symbolic capital held by working class pupils often means they cannot achieve recognition or value within dominant structures, with profound implications on the individual's self-worth (MacRuaric 2011). As Sayer strongly advocates:

“One of the most important features of class inequalities is that they present people with an unequal basis for respect” (2005: 959).

It is this moral dilemma of ascribing value and respect that is explored powerfully through the pupils' narratives. Considering the significant time pupils spend in school, the importance of pupil wellbeing and schooling for personal growth is emphasised as a vital counter narrative to current neoliberal ideas present in Irish educational policies (Burns 2016). The increased emphasis on performativity and attainment runs the risk of diminishing the affective experience of schooling (Jackson 2018; Frawley et al. 2014; Grummell, Devine & Lynch 2009). This is in sharp juxtaposition to the pupils themselves who acknowledge the affective as much as the cognitive aspects of schooling (Alexander 2008). My study focuses on the affective elements of school engagement and how this reinforces

or diminishes children's sense of wellbeing and self-esteem. As the affective dimension of schooling is central to my study, I think it is important to conceptualise and define my understanding of affect here, before exploring the key foci of my study.

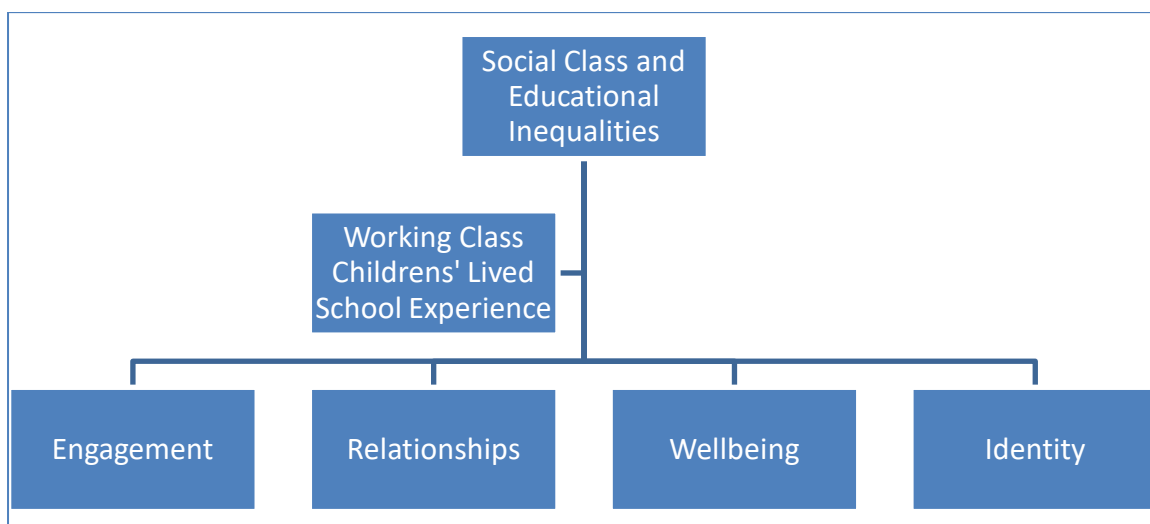
#### **4.1.1 Conceptualising Affect**

While there is a plethora of research on the theory of affect and emotions in learning (see Wetherell 2012, 2015; Jackson 2018; Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia 2014; Shuman & Scherer 2014; Furlong & Christenson 2008; Fredrickson 2001), it is a problematic and contested area which often left me with more questions than answers. There is little consensus in the literature on what is meant by emotion or affect, which is further problematized by the terms being used interchangeably and synonymously. My understanding of affect is that it is a more general, broader term that encapsulates emotions, feelings, attitudes and mood (Shuman & Scherer 2014; Fredrickson 2001). In emphasising the term affective in this study, I am asserting that this concept subsumes the phenomena denoted by other labels commonly associated with the term. It incorporates the feelings and emotional aspects of learning which include particular attitudes and habits, such as motivation, self-esteem, sense of belonging and connection with school, parents and peers (Furlong & Christenson 2008; Frawley et al. 2014). Wetherell (2012, 2014) also distinguishes between emotion and affect by stating, while emotions are more easily organised into conventional categories such as happy and sad, affect, on the other hand, can include reactions that are not so easily categorised. It is in this sense that the affective dimension takes into account the more enmeshed, entangled and complex human lived experience of schooling. It allows for not only inquiry into the individual psyche but also "the social relations within which they are enmeshed" (Reay 2015:9). Reay highlights here how affect can be viewed through the

Bourdieuian lens of habitus to “get a better grasp of the degree of ease and/or discomfort with which people respond to and internalise the wider social world, as they move across a range of familiar and unfamiliar fields” (ibid. 22). This sense of belonging or connection to their peers, teachers and schools is a theme that came through strongly in this study and demonstrates the importance of research exploring the affective dimension of children’s school experience.

I will now present my analysis and investigation of the relevant literature under the following headings (see figure 3).

Figure 3: Key Foci of Study



#### **4.2 Social Class and Educational Inequalities**

“Social class remains the one educational problem that comes back...again and again and again; the area of educational inequality on which education policy has had virtually no impact” (Reay 2006:304).

Social class and educational inequalities has long been a prominent feature of sociological research both in Ireland and internationally. A myriad of research shows despite widespread

education expansion, students from lower socio-economic status are continually underachieving in the education system (Breen & Whelan 1996; Smyth et al. 1999; Lynch & Moran 2006; Weir & Denner 2013), indicating social class origins remain the greatest predictor of academic success or failure (Drudy & Lynch 1993; Lynch 1999; Hanafin & Lynch 2002). Literature on the class divide traces right back to Paul Willis' famous book *"Learning to Labour"* (1977) which highlighted how working class children go to school, experience the social relationships and expectations that correspond to working class employment and then leave school to go into working class jobs with their prospects even worse if they rebel. Despite the rhetorical claims of social mobility and equal opportunities their life chances are not actually improved but reproduced. This is unfortunately as evident today as it was in 1977, with Sam Friedman and Daniel Laurison's (2019) recent book the *"The Class Ceiling"* revealing the extent of the class pay gap whereby working class employees earn on average 16% less than their more affluent peers in elite occupations. This study disrupts the idea of equal opportunities through social mobility by showing that "even when those from working class backgrounds enter elite occupations, they are less likely to accumulate the same economic, cultural and social capital as those from privileged backgrounds" (Friedman 2016:108).

This study follows on in the footsteps of many scholars highlighting the ways in which class is lived and experienced (Skeggs 1997; Reay 1998, 2001, 2002, 2006, 2018; Ingram 2009, 2010, 2011, 2018). This study is essentially about the experience of working class DEIS primary pupils and highlights the "emotional politics of class" (Skeggs 1997:74). The data collected portrays how class becomes internalized and for working class pupils it can be a tale of crippling self-doubt and insecurity as they are never afforded the luxury of "certainty

that they are doing it right” (Skeggs 1997:90). This point was also emphasised by Reay who states “over and above the difficulty of capturing much if any of the complexity of working-class relationships to education, there is a terror of getting it wrong” (2018:5). This emotional imprint of class is crucial to understanding children’s lived school experience. Moreover, this study in similarity to Ingram’s book *“Working-Class Boys and Educational Success”* (2018) highlights the impact of education on the maintenance and transformation of pupils’ identities and their ways of being.

While Giddens (1990) argued against the importance of social class studies and the “death of class”, I would in opposition contend that due to the persistence of inequalities in social stratification and in fact the growing inequalities in Irish society (Watson et al. 2014; Weir et al. 2014; Smyth, McCoy & Kingston 2015) there is a need in the Irish context to “reinvigorate class analysis, not bury it” (Reay 2006:289). As maintained by Skeggs, “To think class does not matter is only a prerogative of those unaffected by the deprivations and exclusions it produces” (1997:7) and it is for this reason that a study exploring these deprivations is essential to inform more inclusive educational policies.

As presented in my previous chapter, my cultural analysis of class allows for a more nuanced understanding of the everyday workings of educational disadvantage which goes much further than economic inequalities but allows for the complex interplay of multiple capitals (social, cultural and symbolic) and the acquisition of these inherited and accumulated capitals to impact on individuals’ habitus. By focusing on a cultural analysis of class this study shines a “spotlight on the blinkers” (Bourdieu 1990:16) and in doing so challenges the paradox of doxa (Bourdieu 2001) or taken for granted assumptions about class. This study contests these assumptions and in doing so uncovers the middle class institutional habitus

of our DEIS schools and exposes “the unacknowledged normality of the middle classes...and its corollary, the equally unacknowledged pathologisation and diminishing of the working classes” (Reay 2006:289). It is in this sense I understand social class to be relational in which we cannot understand working class experiences “unless they are contextualised within the wider class hierarchy” (Reay 2018:131). This is best presented through Bourdieu’s (1990) concept of the fish in water representing the self-assuredness of the middle class versus the insecurity of working class within the education field. As discussed in my previous chapter, contempt for the class “other” is a frequent feature of social class classification (Skeggs 1997; Reay, Crozier & Clayton 2010; Burke 2016). This distinction and stark hierarchical divide is often very much a felt, deeply embodied and emotional imprint of class. I think it is important to also acknowledge that this is not to say that all middle class pupils demonstrate this level of self-assuredness. Walkerdine et al. (2001) demonstrate that high levels of anxiety in schools particularly in relation to a fear of failure, can also be seen in the middle classes and in particular for middle class girls. While this study focuses on social class, research indicates that gender, and the interplay between gender and class, also plays an important role in self-reported anxiety in schooling (see Frawley et al. 2014; Jackson 2006, 2010, 2018).

#### **4.2.1 Social Class in the Irish Educational Context**

“nobody even seems to talk about social class...its influence is nonetheless everywhere we look- in the way we speak, in the way we act, in what we like; in other words, in most of the things that we think of as natural and taken for granted” (Friedman 2016:107-108).

Class difference in educational attainment is not a new or profound phenomenon and a wealth of Irish research exists in relation to social class and educational inequalities. Many



large scale studies such as the Leaving School in Ireland longitudinal study (McCoy et al. 2014b) and the Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) longitudinal study have generated a wealth of rich data that highlight the stark class differences in the Irish educational system. Research has highlighted the lower attainment levels of working class pupils in comparison to their middle class counterparts (Breen & Whelan 1996, Smyth et al. 1999, Smyth 2009, Weir et al. 2011, Weir & Denner 2013). This has direct consequences to access to third level (Smyth 1999; Smyth 2009; McCoy et al. 2014b, HEA 2018) with 84% of pupils from higher professional backgrounds continuing on to tertiary education compared with 38% of those from unskilled manual backgrounds (Smyth 2009, stats based on School Leavers' Survey 2004). However it must also be noted here that a recent report by UNICEF (2018) ranks Ireland as second out of 41 EU/OECD wealthy nations at reducing educational inequalities. While this is a positive finding for Ireland, the report also found notable exceptions with certain minority groups still in danger of being left behind, such as Traveller children, the homeless and immigrants. It states "a large minority are still falling through the gaps and not getting the resources they need" with 1 in 10 Irish students not reaching basic reading proficiency by age 15. This highlights again the social divide in Ireland with those from lower socio-economic status most at risk of social exclusion. The cautionary note from this report identifies that Ireland could and should be doing more to support our most vulnerable children.

In recent years there has been a shift in the debate on educational disadvantage away from the focus of the social and cultural background of the child and instead to the process of schooling itself (Hanafin & Lynch 2002; Frawley 2014). Many studies have highlighted the pedagogy and curricular experiences of DEIS pupils which tend to have an overemphasis on

classroom management leading to stricter discipline and less collaborative learning (Conway 2002). Hence creative, dialogic and interactive teaching methods are not commonly used (Devine 2011; McCoy et al. 2012; Devine et al. 2013) and teachers tend to provide less challenging content knowledge based on lower order thinking (Conway 2002; Burns 2016). This is despite DEIS pupils themselves highlighting a desire for more varied and active methodologies (McCoy & Byrne 2011). Research from the GUI study found that pupils from working class backgrounds and in particular boys were more likely to be reprimanded and have more negative interactions with their teachers (McCoy, Smyth & Banks 2012). Pupils in DEIS schools are also more exposed to lower expectations of teachers regarding their academic achievements (Archer & Weir 2004; Eivers et al. 2005). Schools also had lower expectations and prejudicial views of working class parents despite the parents themselves indicating they were interested and concerned (Hanafin & Lynch 2002). A recent study also highlighted that working class parents feel excluded from their child's education and feel let down by schools and stigmatised for being from a "disadvantaged" area (Doyle & Keane 2018).

Skerritt (2017) recently highlighted the under-researched area of sociolinguistics accentuating working class students' underachievement in the Irish education system which relies so heavily on strong linguistic skills. Skerritt refers to Bernstein's (1990) restricted and elaborated code to demonstrate working class pupils are limited to a context- dependent restricted code while middle class children have the ability to interchange between codes and recognise the appropriate context to use a particular code. There is a clear link here with Bourdieu's linguistic habitus and the ability of middle class pupils to learn the rules of the game and to become more adept at playing the game. For Bourdieu linguistic habitus is

a form of embodied cultural capital and the capacity to speak properly in the correct social settings is a form of symbolic capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1996). In similarity to Skerritt, Cregan's (2007) study found working class children had a more restricted range of vocabulary than their middle class counterparts. MacRuairc (2009, 2011) also found working class pupils' linguistic skills were mismatched with the more formal language of school and standardised testing. Furthermore, Cregan (2007) and MacRuairc (2011) also highlighted how working class pupils often reject the formal school language as "posh" so as to maintain a positive sense of self.

Unfortunately for working class pupils by resisting and rejecting the school linguistic code in an effort of self-preservation they are further compounding their academic failure and reproducing rather than challenging social inequalities. As Ingram highlights in a society where "working classness is seen as feckless, tasteless, and cultureless" (Ingram 2018:2) it often makes the process of working class pupils becoming academically successful more difficult than it need be. Due to the high stakes testing regime present in Ireland which favours a strong linguistic repertoire, working class pupils are unfairly disadvantaged in these biased standardised tests, thus serving only to further stigmatise working class pupils and the "ghettoisation" of their communities (MacRuairc 2009:47).

The situation is further compounded for working class pupils considering the fact that educational qualifications make more of a difference to future employment opportunities in Ireland than in many other OECD countries (Byrne & Smyth 2011). This portrays the "double bind" (Reay 2018) of working class pupils who find themselves already behind their middle class counterparts by the time they start school. Even if working class pupils manage to

“marshal sufficient self-belief and feelings of self-worth to challenge pervasive views that they are “not very bright”, they then find themselves in a race for educational success in which the upper and middle classes have started at least half way round the track” (Reay 2018:145).

Additionally, Devine (2004) points out that the middle class have the power and resources to hold onto their advantaged position through extra-curricular activities, paid tuition and school choice. As discussed in my previous chapter, Lareau (2003, 2011) referred to this as “concerted cultivation” whereby middle class parents package their children to encompass all the right social and cultural capital to ensure they maintain their advantaged positions. This idea was developed further by Abrahams (2016:2) who identified *institutional concerted cultivation* “as a tool to explore institutional practices oriented to making young people more or less ‘cultivated’ or ‘packaged’ and demonstrate how these actively contribute to inequalities in young people's opportunities and transitions”. Similarly, a recent Irish study by Hamilton & Canny (2018) explored the middle class institutional habitus of a secondary school in Ireland which I would argue represented a form of institutional concerted cultivation. As Hamilton & Canny point out:

“Measurement of success of the social and cultural reproduction for the school could be perceived as the duality between success in the Leaving Certificate state examination but also creation of a middle-class student, which in turn protects the survival of the middle-class school” (ibid. 650-651).

It is a symbiotic relationship to ensure middle class privilege for the middle class students, their families and the school. Through school practices such as rewarding pupils who conform to the middle class habitus with greater responsibility the school ensures conformity and the social reproduction of the middle class. There was some level of

resistance, mainly among the working class pupils but unfortunately this only served to alienate them further and “ultimately fail, perpetuating social class inequality” (ibid. 651). By ensuring hegemony the school is continuing the cultural dominance of the already privileged middle class and illustrates “how difficult it is for working-class students to compete and ultimately succeed” (ibid. 651). A contradictory position which is also highlighted by Reay:

“contemporary educational policy is so paradoxical. It is nominally about raising working-class achievement, although its practices generate the exact opposite, ensuring that educational failure remains firmly located within the working classes” (ibid. 2018:150).

Additionally, Hamilton & Canny (2018) argues that the Irish education system is one structured by the advantaged in order to maintain homeostasis. They highlighted the increased marketization of the Irish education system through the use of grinds (paid tuition). This is an example of the middle and upper class mobilising economic capital to ensure they maintain their advantaged position. Moreover, the TASC (2016) report *“Cherishing all Equally 2016: Children and Economic Inequality in Ireland”* which found educational inequalities for children are a manifestation of economic inequality in society, “a mechanism by which wider societal inequality is reproduced and reinforced as those with higher incomes and wealth use their multiple advantages to achieve higher outcomes” (ibid.). The report outlines findings from the Barnardos Rise Up Campaign (2015) to show students from affluent areas have double the university attendance rate than students from disadvantaged areas, with 50% of students from affluent areas study at one of the ‘top three’ universities in Ireland, four times the rate of those from disadvantaged areas. This is further compelling evidence of stark class inequalities in Irish society.

While there is evidence of a wide range of educational research in Ireland on social class and educational inequality, there is a limited amount of qualitative evaluations of the DEIS initiative at primary level, with a clear preference towards quantitative findings. However one major exception to this is the GUI study which has provided a rich data source for evaluating levels of disadvantage within DEIS and non-DEIS schools through a wealth of information on children's social background, including parental education, household income and family structure (McCoy et al 2014a). Quantitative findings from recent DEIS evaluations indicate that nine year old pupils in urban DEIS schools have much lower reading levels than their peers in non-DEIS schools and schools with a concentration of disadvantaged pupils are found to have lower mathematics scores at the end of fourth class (Smyth, McCoy & Kingston 2015). There was strong evidence that social mix has an influence on educational attainment and early school leaving levels and acts as a "multiplier effect" (ibid.). This has further implication on educational trajectories with pupils from middle class schools or more socially mixed school more likely to go on to some form of post school education or training compared to their working class counterparts (McCoy et al. 2014b). Central to the process of future educational trajectories is early school experience with recent findings from the GUI indicating primary school experiences are highly influential to future engagement (Smyth 2017). This outlines the importance of an engaging primary school experience for all. School and classroom practices hence play a significant impact on working class engagement and need to be explored further in the DEIS context.

#### **4.3 Engagement**

Smyth et al. found "children's own engagement with, and attitudes to, school significantly influence their academic performance" (2010:85) and hence pupil engagement is even more

vital in a DEIS context as it could reinforce or mitigate the effect of social background factors. Habitus-field congruency (Ingram 2009) plays a part in pupil engagement as students who are disengaged are more likely to “experience poor educational and social outcomes than students whose behaviour better fits the norms and expectations of school” (Lawson & Lawson 2013:437). This is further exasperated by the fixing of failure to working class habitus (Reay 2004, 2006, 2018; McGillicuddy & Devine 2017) through endless testing and ability grouping. This is the triumph of neoliberalism whereby responsibility for success or failure lies solely within the individual and does not take into account the contextual barriers pupils face (Reay 2018). Thus unsurprisingly early school difficulty is “thought to contribute to a cumulative cycle of student frustration, low self-efficacy, and low self-esteem” (Lawson & Lawson 2013:442). This in turn leads pupils to gradually withdraw from active participation. Over time, students’ lack of participation in school

“weakens their identification with school, debilitates their academic self-esteem and self concept, erodes affiliations with prosocial peers and eventually reduces their chances of completing high school” (ibid.).

Balfanz, Herzog and Mac Iver (2007:224) explain how students’ decision to miss school, misbehave, or to expend low effort are “all consequential behaviour indicators of a student’s growing disengagement from school and thus might be strongly predictive of dropping out.” Disengagement and these failure avoiding behaviours are mechanisms used to cope with difficulties in school (Kelly 2009: 452). It is clear from the literature that young people are extremely vulnerable with

“little leverage to change things and facing lifelong negative consequences from their failure to succeed in education. Their youth and inexperience mean that faced with serious

difficulties, members of this group are likely to use destructive strategies that make the situation worse. The cards are stacked against these young people” (Lumby 2013:3).

Destructive strategies such as truancy operates as a form of student resistance, whereby the pupils resist the institutional habitus of the school but in doing so “reproduce social class inequalities since it is associated with more negative educational and labour market outcomes in the longer term”(Darmody, Smyth & McCoy 2008:359). Corrigan (1979) highlighted resistance as a “power differential between teachers and pupils” whereby working class pupils resist compliance to middle class values being enforced. Byrne & Smyth’s (2010) study on early school leaving with indepth interviewing of second level pupils demonstrated how negative experiences of school precipitated a process of disengagement leading to the decision to leave school early. Smyth (2017) found this process of disengagement starts much earlier in pupils’ school life and highlights the importance of the primary school field in protecting against negative school experiences and future disengagement. The importance and cost effectiveness of early intervention in reducing disengagement and early school leaving has been widely reported (Heckman 2008; Heckman & Masterov 2007; Frawley 2014; Smyth et al. 2015). Early intervention can reduce the development of more serious challenging behaviours and minimise the devastating effects, such as academic failure, social exclusion and impaired mental health.

It is clear detrimental decisions about school engagement are often framed within class differentiated experiences of schooling and unequal access to economic, social and cultural resources (Smyth et al. 2010). The process of disengagement and the resulting limited future academic trajectories is a long, complex process starting in the primary school (Smyth 2017). There is a need for qualitative studies, such as this one, to explore this process of



disengagement at primary level in much greater detail to gain more nuanced insight into factors shaping working class educational engagement. Doyle and Keane's recent study with working class parents further outlines "the highly classed nature of the apparent disengagement of some families from 'disadvantaged' areas from the education system" (2018: 14). Their study portrayed the oppressive situations facing some families and how pupils basic human needs such as safety and hunger have to be met first before we can ever expect them to move on to "higher level needs, such as self-actualisation (including engagement in education) (Maslow 1943)" (ibid).

Engagement has behavioural, affective and cognitive domains (Trowler 2013; Lawson & Lawson 2013). Research has shown pupil engagement can have a profound impact on pupil self-concept and self-worth (Ryan & Deci 2000; Trowler 2010; Reeve 2012). Recent Irish research has shown working class students are faring less well in terms of affective engagement in school (Frawley et al. 2014). This indepth narrative inquiry study aims to explore this further and look at the complex processes at play in underlying affective engagement in DEIS schools which has been an overlooked area of research to date. As expressed by Trowler,

"Engagement is more than involvement or participation it requires feelings and sense making as well as activity... Acting without feeling engaged is just involvement or even compliance" (2010:5).

Lawson and Lawson describe it as the "conceptual glue" that connects student agency and "its ecological influences (peers, family and community) to the organizational structures and cultures of school" (2013:433). As an educator, student engagement is significant because it is a relatively "malleable student characteristic than is usually open to constructive

influences, such as teachers' support" (Reeve 2012:162). As a result of this malleable property it is an important area of intervention for our pupils most at risk of disengagement and the detrimental long term outcomes that encapsulate that disengagement (Frawley 2014). Middle class students who experience more habitus-field congruence (Ingram 2009) are likely to receive more positive responses from teachers. Unfortunately the reverse of this situation increases the risk of negative teacher-pupil interactions, punished habitus, poor self-image and disengagement. Without the positive reinforcement provided by a successful school experience, "the emotional ingredient needed to maintain a student's involvement or to overcome the occasional adversity is lacking" (Finn 1989:130). It comes as no surprise that in the face of constant negative feedback many pupils lose any interest in learning (Reay 2018).

#### **4.3.1 Ability Grouping**

Ability grouping has also been identified as having detrimental effects on engagement and self-worth (Smyth 2000; Smyth, McCoy & Kingston 2015; McGillicuddy & Devine 2018; Reay 2018). This is of particular importance in DEIS schools where ability grouping has become a form of "best practice" to meet pressurized demand to increase attainment levels (Conway & Murphy 2013; McGillicuddy & Devine 2018). McGillicuddy & Devine (2018) argue this is an act of symbolic violence whereby the *power of suggestion* is maintaining social order and impacting on pupil self-esteem as pupils are left in no doubt where they stand in the educational hierarchy.

“Such enmeshing of perceived contextual factors with expectations for how the children will learn and behave across ability groups is symbolically violent as it sets limits, a glass ceiling, on how teachers teach and, ultimately, on how children learn in the classroom” (2017:95).

This glass ceiling has implications on expectations for both teachers and pupils. Smyth (2000) found teachers held higher expectations for pupils assigned to the higher ability groups, and lower expectations for those in the lower ability groups with more control over the time and space being exercised over the lower ability groups. In conjunction with poor self-worth and negative perceptions of their own ability, predictably pupils assigned to the bottom class were more likely to drop out of school early (Smyth 2000). While clearly there is hence a need for schools to move away from ability grouping, a number of teachers in Smyth’s case study schools “stressed the difficulty of implementing such practices within the framework of the current curriculum”(Smyth 2000:40).

Smyth outlines the arduous situation for schools in meeting the competitive market driven demands of the Leaving Certificate while also developing mixed ability grouping. While streaming benefits high-attaining students, it is detrimental to the learning of middle- and lower-attaining students. “It benefits the academic progress of the few, at the expense of the many” (Reay 2018:187) and thus is further evidence of the maintenance of educational homeostasis. The current preoccupation with testing and streaming has severe repercussions on pupil engagement and in particular pupils’ self-worth as they come to view themselves as educational failures. Pupils are hence being inculcated with a habitus of low expectations and poor academic self-image and there is a need for a study exploring the impact of this on pupil disengagement and wellbeing in DEIS primary schools.

#### 4.4 Relationships

The negative consequences of high stakes testing is shown to also impact on relationships as teachers are more likely to revert to authoritarian style teaching in pursuit of standardised measurements of learning outcomes (MacRuairc 2009). As research shows rigid, authoritarian classrooms that do not relate to pupils' socio-cultural identities run the risk of further isolating DEIS pupils (Burns 2016) and can increase disidentification (Smyth 2017). Consequently there is an avoidance of risk taking and innovative practice. This can also affect classroom management with an emphasis on discipline which in turn "creates tension between these teachers' desire to exhibit a caring disposition to the young children that they teach, and pressure to comply with institutional norms" (Burns 2016:280). In opposition to a child-centred, dialogic view of education (see Freire 1999, Greene 2000; 2005), in authoritarianism

"knowledge is absolute and unchanging there cannot be legitimate alternatives to it. There is little point in discussion and dialogue as the role of the teacher is to impart a factual body of knowledge...It also means an emphasis on teacher-centred learning over enquiry, discussion and critical analysis" (Harber 2004:61).

There is a conflict between education for docility and conformity (Foucault 1975) for the workforce on one hand and education for personal growth and critical consciousness on the other (Freire 1995). Teachers are caught between a rock and a hard place trying to drive up attainment levels, with little time left to focus on cultivating good relationships with pupils. This is in opposition to the research that shows social relations are a key protective factor for pupils' self-worth and engagement (Smyth 2017). Relatedness is proven to increase

school engagement and the quality of pupil-teacher interactions has a strong influence on self-image (Lynch & Lodge 2002, Smyth 2017). Smyth expresses the importance of teacher-pupil relations to this cultivation of positive attitudes:

“Relationships with teachers are crucial, with more negative attitudes to school and school subjects found among those who received more reprimands and less positive feedback from their second-level teachers” (ibid.)

The GUI findings also outline the class differentiated nature of social relations, with middle class pupils more likely to have positive relations with teachers (Smyth 2018). Smyth concludes the need for a move away from the use of more negative sanctions which appear to further alienate young people. Social relationships are crucial to enhancing pupils’ sense of belonging within the school. Considering the centrality of school to pupils’ lives it is the nurturing of these social relations and positive school climate that are key to pupils overall school experience and wellbeing (Tynan & Nohilly 2018:20).

#### **4.5 Wellbeing**

The irony to the backdrop of pressurised testing and ability streaming which is detrimental to pupil wellbeing and confidence is the recent surge in interest in policy documents concerning the implementation of wellbeing in schools (DES & DOH 2013; DES & DOH 2015; NCCA 2017). There is no question that there is a need for mental health guidelines in Irish schools, especially with a recent report by UNICEF 2017, stating that Ireland has the fourth highest teen suicide rate in the EU. This sad and harrowing fact emphasises the importance of cultivating self-worth in Irish schools and hence a need for a serious look at the implications of the current testing regime. The current policy soul searching around

wellbeing guidelines and initiatives need to move in unison with a shift away from authoritative teaching, pressurised testing and neoliberal goals of competitiveness and individualism. It is important that political rhetoric around pupil wellbeing in DEIS schools does not fall into the trap of emphasising the need to develop personal qualities such as resilience “to mitigate against inequalities, rather, we show that these students are faced with greater challenges due to structural inequalities. The solution lies in challenging the structures rather than expecting more of individuals” (Bathmaker et al. 2016:146).

Wellbeing is a multi-faceted term open to a variety of interpretations, with no one universal definition (Gillett-Swan and Sargeant 2015). The one central to the documents listed above is:

“Student wellbeing is present when students realise their abilities, take care of their physical wellbeing, can cope with the normal stresses of life, and have a sense of purpose and belonging to a wider community” (NCCA 2017:17).

Key to my understanding of the term in an education context is this sense of belonging, which I view as inherently linked to affective engagement and that emotional glue that connects a pupil to a school. This has implications on relationships and the ascribing of value in schools, with further repercussions on pupil habitus, self-worth and wellbeing. Noddings stated the goal of wellbeing is human flourishing (1984) and in this sense is very much linked to discourse on human rights. Lumby (2012) notes two of Nussbaum’s capabilities which are particularly relevant to school discourse around wellbeing and human rights:

“5. Not having one’s emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety.

7. Affiliation. Having the social bases of self-respect and nonhumiliation; being able to be treated as dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. (Adapted from Nussbaum's list of 10 capabilities 2003:41-42)" (cited in Lumby 2012:265).

Both of these capabilities are extremely relevant to discourse around working class school experiences and in particular the dilemma of having cultural capital of "worth" that "is equal to that of others" in a backdrop of middle class cultural domination and symbolic violence. The deeply engrained emotional dimension of class has an impact on pupil wellbeing (Reay 2015). Sayer also outlined the correlation between class and wellbeing:

"Class matters to us not only because of differences in material wealth and economic security, but also because it affects our access to things, relationships, experiences and practices which we have reason to value, and hence our chances of living a fulfilling life. At the same time it affects how others value us and respond to us, which in turn affects our sense of self-worth" (Sayer 2005:1).

The subjective experience of class impacts on our identity and sense of self and has been under-researched in DEIS schools in Ireland. The affective dimension of habitus embodies the emotional feeling of inferiority and not fitting in (Reay 2015; Ingram 2011, 2018; Bathmaker et al. 2016) and hence is an important aspect of pupil wellbeing. Most worryingly in an Irish context is a recent study that shows working class pupils are faring less well in terms of affective engagement (Frawley et al. 2014) and hence that sense of belonging is lacking. For wellbeing to really flourish in DEIS schools and for pupils to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives (Seligman 2011), teachers and school leaders need to be aware of the hidden curriculum (Lynch 1989), the "emotional politics of class" (Skeggs 1997) and the undercurrents of subtle acts of symbolic violence. These hidden messages are embedded in the school

climate through the ascribing of value- “the visible manifestations of *“the way we view things and the way we do things round here”* (Tynan & Nohilly 2018:170). Studies prioritising the emotional and affective consequences of school structures and practices (Lynch & Lodge 2002) are urgently needed in the Irish primary school context to examine pupil wellbeing in detail.

#### **4.6 Class-Constructed Identity**

‘denial, dis-identification, defensiveness, pride and shame are familiar and often competing responses to living class on a day to day basis’ (Skeggs 1997: 7).

Pivotal to working class school experiences are the formation of identity and the impact of school practices on identity formation. While a plethora of research exists on class constructed identity internationally (Skeggs 1997; Reay 1998, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2006, 2018; Ingram 2009, 2010, 2011, 2018; Warin 2010, 2012), research in Ireland is more limited (O’Neill 1992; Lynch & Lodge 2002; MacRuairc 2009; 2011, Finnegan & Merrill 2017). Perhaps as Skerritt noted because “Irish people tend to exhibit noticeable discomfort surrounding class-related issues”(2017:281). However, as Ingram argues, despite assumptions

“that we live in a classless society where individuals are free to choose their social identity, people continue to live economically differentiated lives with concomitant differentiated outcomes in terms of health, education, and well-being. Even though the term social class has gone undercover, the effects of social stratification are still painfully obvious” (2018:8).

Belonging to the working class has long been associated with negative educational outcomes (Willis 1977). Ingram (2011, 2018) presented the difficult process of reconciling working class identity with a successful learner identity and the many tensions this caused for the boys involved in her study. The complexity of the tension and the many ways of



being working class was highlighted by Ingram as important themes that need to be recognized and understood by educational professionals and are particularly relevant to teachers in DEIS schools. Working class pupils have to try to negotiate a sense of identity and “reconcile their working class habitus within a middle class field that does not recognize or value it (Ingram 2009, 2011; Ingram & Abrahams 2016)” (Bathmaker et al. 2016: 147). As Reay argues “education is not about the valorization of working classness but its erasure; education as escape” (2001:334). Social mobility is seen as the cure to working classness and “class inequalities become just the natural order of things because working class individuals who fail to be socially mobile are seen to lack the right qualities rather than sufficient resources” (Reay 2018:180). Sections of society hence “are being forced to dis-identify with their working classness, their culture in order to “self-improve” (McKenzie 2016:27). This study will explore the emotional consequences of this identity mutation for working class pupils in DEIS school and the impact this has on affective engagement and well-being.

While my study focuses on social class there is not enough scope to discuss in detail here the important area of research that explores the intersectionality of class with gender, race and special educational needs and the role this intersectionality has on identity formation. This is an important area of research that requires much more attention to fully explore pupil identity and wellbeing. There are many studies that demonstrate the impact of gender on identity and self-concept (see Walkerdine et al. 2001; Jackson 2006, 2010, 2018; McCoy et al. 2012). Within an Irish context, Frawley et al. (2014) draw from the findings of the GUI study to demonstrate the impact of gender on self-development, with girls more frequently self-reporting anxiety. This paper also demonstrates how pupils with special educational

needs are faring less well in terms of healthy self-concept (see also McCoy & Banks 2012). While less common, there has been a number of significant studies exploring race and ethnicity in Irish primary schools (see Devine & Lodge 2004; Devine 2011; Garratt 2017). Garratt's work (2017) explores not only ethnic minorities but also the interplay of race with gender and vividly demonstrates the emotional consequences of schooling on identity through the story of Themba and his metaphor of a "frozen person" (ibid. 626) forced into constant self-monitoring. These studies along with the work of Ingram (2010; 2011; 2018) and Reay (2006; 2018) demonstrate and inform my understandings around the complexities of identity formation and the many ways of being.

Locality also plays a significant role in identity construction. In particular the "entwining of identity with locality can create difficult tensions for young people when the places that in part define them are deprived and pathologised" (Ingram 2018:104). My three schools are serving communities labelled as "very disadvantaged" or "disadvantaged" (2016 Pobal HP Deprivation Index) and hence they are at the forefront of dealing with entrenched structural inequalities that "until properly addressed, will continue to ensure that some young people are excluded from meaningfully engaging in the educational system" (Doyle & Keane 2018:14). The stigmatisation of pupils' communities is a further wall they come up against when trying to construct a positive sense of self. Schools and teachers need insight into these complex processes underlying educational disadvantage to help develop more empathetic and inclusive practices. Teachers also need time to reflect and examine their "own socio-demographic positionality, educational trajectories, and views about inequality, difference and diversity" (ibid.) so as to best serve working class pupils and their locality.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

This chapter explored a vast amount of literature around class and educational inequalities with a specific emphasis on the Irish context. The literature review highlighted the research gap of working class school experiences in the Irish primary school context. It explored the key foci of my study- relationships, identity, engagement (specifically affective engagement) and wellbeing which are all interwoven threads of the school lived experience. Combined these themes tell the DEIS story from the pupil perspective. It is not the story we have been telling to date filled with attainment levels, expenditure and initiatives but more a look at the human story filled with emotions, doubts and hopes. It is in this sense a deep look at the affective dimension of working class school experiences, and is an important contribution as it shows the importance of a study that connects pupil engagement with relationships, wellbeing and habitus. It is a story worth telling and worth listening to, for to be truly inclusive we need to be tapping into the perspective of those for whom the DEIS programme was designed to serve. Ireland is leaving too many minority pupils fall through the cracks (UNICEF 2018) and hence the need for a study based on lived school experience to illuminate class inequalities.

My next chapter will now present my research design and methods in greater detail and put forward an argument for the use of a narrative inquiry framework when working with young people. Narrative Inquiry celebrates lived experiences and the affective dimensions of qualitative research and hence nestles well within this study. It places the child at the centre of the study as the expert in their own social world and allows for the complex, enmeshed human tale to be heard.

## Chapter 5: Narrative Inquiry- Storytelling with Working Class Voices

### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I provide a rationale for the selection of research methods employed in this study. I define and describe the research methods and methodology employed to address the core research questions. I also explore and present my three primary classrooms and I look at the essential topics of ethics, validity and reliability. I would now like to briefly revisit my research questions as presented in chapter one:

- How do DEIS primary school pupils describe and perceive their educational experience?
- How, and in what ways, do in-school processes impact affective pupil engagement?
- What could educational disadvantage policies, and in particular the DEIS initiative, learn from the pupil perspective?

This study ultimately sets out to tell the story of the DEIS school experience from the pupil perspective. Hence, my research project will be framed by narrative inquiry, which follows the guiding principles of feminist emancipatory research, which sees “participants as active agents, involved in the co-construction of knowledge, engaging in and interrogating their own experiences” (Higgins 2008: 146). I employed qualitative research methods, as I feel strongly about listening to children to explore the complex, multi-layered nature of class inequalities in education.

This passion to prioritise pupil voice and their lived school experience is the driving force behind this narrative inquiry study. Its strengths lie in the fact it compels the researcher and

participants to work together and to respect each other along the journey. Children lead storied lives and hence why Clandinin and Connelly state “when persons note something of their experience, either to themselves or to others, they do so not only by mere recording of experience over time, but in a storied form” (ibid. 1994: 415). Hence telling stories is not only a fundamental human activity but it also helps us make sense of our lives.

Narratives hence lend themselves to the study of lived experience and as Clandinin and Connelly (1994) argue should be the focus of educational research as “when one asks what it means to study education, the answer is to study experience” (ibid. 1998:154). I will explore this topic in greater detail now and show how narrative inquiry was vital in collecting the necessary rich and indepth data to highlight the affective dimension of educational disadvantage.

## **5.2 Within a Narrative Inquiry Framework**

Narrative inquiry powerfully advocates for more socially just methods of research and thus is most suited to work with the marginalised, voiceless and disadvantaged members of our society in its promotion of “reclaiming narratives for one’s own rather than adapting to the narratives of a dominant majority” (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:580). It puts the child in the role of expert of their own social world. This is of increased importance in disadvantaged settings, whereby working class and minority voices have historically been excluded from their own stories:

“Not only are working class people unable to participate/excluded from the dialogue, but they do not own what has been written about themselves... the very owning and controlling of the stories of oppression adds further to the oppression as it means that there are now people who can claim to know, and understand you better than you understand yourself;

there are experts there to interpret your world and to speak on your behalf. They take away your voice by speaking about you and for you” (Lynch 1999: 42).

Narrative inquiry highlights the importance of respecting the capabilities of the participants and giving them back the expert role (see Stuhlmiller 2001). This can have a significant impact on the participants, as narrative research gives power back to those who may never have been asked for their opinion before. In terms of working with marginalised children, this positive feature of narrative research particularly resonates with this study but also comes with its difficulties in striking the balance between children’s voices and that of the researcher (see Luttrell 2010; 2013).

I personally felt immediately connected to this type of qualitative research, as it allows both the participants and the researchers to express and communicate a rich story of human experience. Narrative interviews were more informal, conversation style interviews that allowed the pupils to take the lead in our discussions (see section 5.8). The interest lies in the lived experience of peoples’ lives. As Lieblich et al. portray “the use of narrative methodologies results in unique and rich data that cannot be obtained from experiment, questionnaires, and observations” (1998:9). Narrative inquiry is in stark contrast to the traditional form of research where, “personal experience typically is irrelevant...or thought to contaminate a project’s objectivity” (Reinharz 1992:258). On the contrary, narrative inquiry encourages closeness to participants and sees strength in emotions. It encourages the establishment of trusting and caring relationships, which inevitably leads to respect and rapport.

Clandinin and Connelly portray the important role of the researcher to be able to also step back from their emotional involvement, and to analyse it as a researcher, “must fall in love

with their participants, yet they must also step back and see their own stories in the inquiry, the stories of the participants, as well as the larger landscape on which they all live” (2000:81). By its very nature, it is relational. Wincup embraces this affective domain aspect “as a source of strength not weakness, which allows (her) to develop a truly reflective and honest account of the research process” (2001:25).

As Luttrell argues, children’s narratives “provide a space for authorship, dialogue, cultural belonging and a critical social awareness” (Luttrell 2010:225). The collection of children’s narratives are intersubjective and “produced of many available voices where meanings are shared, contested and attributed to experience” (ibid.). This places a huge demand on the researcher in formulating a meaningful whole (see Luttrell 2010; 2013).

### **5.3 Working with Bourdieu**

As discussed earlier in my theoretical framework chapter Bourdieu’s theoretical tools form the backbone of my analytical exploration into pupils’ DEIS experience. While narrative inquiry celebrates the affective dimensions of qualitative research, Bourdieu also recognised the importance of the affective dimension of human life in stating: “nothing is more serious than emotion, which touches the depth of our organic being” (Bourdieu 2000:140-141). Bourdieu argues that differing levels of capital and the interplay of field and habitus can explain persistent inequalities in educational stratification. I used his multi-faceted framework as an investigative tool. It allowed me to develop his idea of the “hysteresis effect” (1977; 1990; 2000) to come up with a fifth theoretical tool (developed from Ingram’s four way typology of habitus interruption 2018) called *resigned habitus* which explored the painful “splitting of the self” (Friedman 2016:110) some working class pupils undertook in

order to fit in and to appease the dominant culture of the school. Hence why Bourdieusian ideas also form an essential methodological framework to my study, and informed data analysis and understandings around the multiple factors and complex processes affecting working class pupil engagement and wellbeing in DEIS schools. This brings with it the opportunity to confront powerlessness, emotions and identity all of which are recurring themes within this work. By bringing the complex enmeshed human tale to the forefront of my study I hope to help form tools and analytical lens in which to look at pupils' perceptions of their school experience, and to form more nuanced understandings of the pupils the DEIS programme is designed to serve.

This small scale study is a step towards allowing pupils the opportunity to reflect, discuss and question their school experience, and hence develop their critical social awareness. As schools are at the heart of every community it is essential that we view schools as "sites for social transformation and emancipation" that equip pupils to be critical thinkers, so we are not merely churning out workers or "human capital" (McLaren 1998). Freire (1999) argues in conjunction with McLaren that schools must be cautioned against this "banking method of teaching" (Freire 1999: 69) and instead strive towards empowering individuals through the promotion of pupil voice and democratic processes (Greene 2000). As a result the proposed study will focus on the importance of pupil voice and pupil empowerment.

#### **5.4 Pupil Voice**

There has been a call in recent years for research methods that, "minimise adults "voicing over" children's perspectives and experiences. A popular formulation for mutual research practises is the call for adults to *work with* rather than *working on, about or for children*" (Luttrell 2010:224). This study is in line with recent educational and policy discourse



increasingly emphasising the importance of pupil voice and children's rights (Lynch & Lodge 2002; Devine 2002; Clark, McQuail & Moss 2003; Luttrell 2010; Lumby 2012; Devine & Luttrell 2013; Devine & McGillicuddy 2016; Devine & Cockburn 2018). This research stresses the importance of tapping into their perspectives and notes "that young people are not primarily commodities to be shaped towards economic needs, but individuals whose human rights cannot be set aside because they are deemed children" (Lumby & Morrison 2009:594). This narrative inquiry research with the inclusion of pupil voice and drawings was part of this larger research effort to afford children full presence in knowledge and meaning making. It allows them the opportunity to voice their experiences, hopes and concerns in relation to their social world and school life. It acknowledges "children are active social beings with the capacity to engage critically with their social and personal environment" (Devine 2003:11). As Kostenius (2011) rightly points out, while it is often commonplace in schools to ask pupils to express their opinions, it is not common practice to put these opinions into action when decisions are being made. This very much undervalues pupils' input in the positive process of school improvement.

My concept of voice is one that is dialogic, cultural, social and psychological and in the case of this study collective and intersubjective, as many voices come together to tell their story. Luttrell expresses the benefit of pupils' sharing their experiences and values and how these perspectives can add to the work of social theorists and policy makers:

"In a context of neo-liberal social policies that have had adverse effects on young people's care worlds- whether immigration policy, welfare reform or a test-driven educational system that pushes out those who cannot measure up- these young people's images and narratives provide a glimpse of the social connections that they see and value, if not fear may be at risk. Perhaps the children's voices and concerns are ahead of social theorists and policy makers

who have ignored the centrality and intimacies of care giving and care taking, and we need to take heed” (2010:234).

It is with this in mind that this study places pupils’ narratives and images at the heart of the research to let the value of their knowledge shine through to enlighten policies and practices in DEIS schools and to help us better understand what shapes their identities and wellbeing.

### **5.5 Research as Political**

All research is a political tool “be it by default, by design, or by recognition” (Lynch, 2000: 73). It is precisely because it is a political tool that it is necessary to consider not only the methodologies employed, but also the philosophy guiding any study. This is particularly significant given the experiences of marginalised communities and research in the past as seen earlier in the words of Lynch (1999). The manner in which research is conducted and presented may either be inclusive and empowering (Stuhlmiller 2001) or alienating and disempowering as O’Neill describes:

“We are the subject of books and papers. Our lives recorded by the middle-class, who steal our stories, use our oppression to serve their own need (2000:105).

Henceforth, the centrality of the relationship between researcher and participants must be addressed as a key site of power. Through the egalitarian philosophy of narrative inquiry I set out to balance this power relationship by entering into child led dialogue that allows working class pupils claim and name their social world as the experts in their lived experience. Freire advocates dialogue as a tool of empowerment and defines dialogue as a “horizontal relationship between persons” (1995: 40). This is why the inclusion of pupil voice and an accurate record of their words and images were central to this study. Hence

the importance of working with DEIS pupils rather than for them is of key importance to the integrity of this study.

Therefore this research has a clear political element as it acts as an evaluation of the DEIS programme and allows pupils to have the opportunity to have their say, which has been missing to this point. Evaluation can be described as “a means of giving voice to the disadvantaged, dispossessed or disenfranchised and their actual and potential relationship with policy implementation” (Saunders 2006:197). An inclusive approach to evaluation maximises its opportunity to contribute positively to social and educational development. The use of pupil voice and narrative inquiry personalizes this DEIS evaluation as it explores the evaluation through participant stories and places the “recipients” of the programme as central to its evaluation. Kushner (2000) also advocated for the use of stories or narratives of key participants as an important approach to “personalizing” evaluations in the evaluation process as it helps with sense making and gives us all necessary knowledge of what is happening in order to make any positive changes. This highlights the difference between developing “a programme for a targeted community or more optimistically developing a programme with the community whom the programme is being developed” (Saunders 2006:199). This puts huge demands on the researcher, who themselves are in an influential position with ultimate control over the end product, to really listen to participants’ voices and to record and present accurately. As I am the person with the control over the finished product in this study it was vital for me to have a second round of interviews with the pupils to allow them to hear back some of their responses to seek clarification, elaboration and consensus on emerging data findings, and to ensure that my interpretations were true to what they valued and expressed.

More optimistically, by using research as a political tool, “It has a role in the civic voice as it acts to bring states and organizations to account for the way they undertake their work and spend our money on our behalf” (Saunders 2006:207). In the school sense, it allows which were to date untapped children’s perspectives and values come to the forefront of educational and political discourse. It affords children the opportunity to explain from their viewpoint what they need in schools to flourish. This has democratic importance and comes from a human rights perspective. It very much highlights the need for a dialogic education that promotes communities of learners and critical thinkers that can consequently lead to an empowered, articulate public (see Greene 1999; 2000; 2009).

### **5.6 Site, Setting, and Sampling**

Once my ethical approval was cleared in October 2016 I made contact via email with 22 DEIS Urban Band 1 schools through purposive sampling (Denzin & Lincoln 1994; Thomas 2009) due to DEIS classification and location. I employed non-probability sampling, as it is purposive and “involves simply the pursuit of the kind of person in whom the researcher is interested, professes no representativeness” (Thomas 2009:104). Through this process four willing schools allowed me to visit to speak to their sixth class pupils (most senior classroom, the final year in primary school) and to send out participant information packs and consent forms for both pupils and parents (see Appendices B & C). Eighty four forms were sent out with forty one participants (33 girls and 8 boys) signing up. Unfortunately one of the schools (an all-boys’ school with 28 potential participants) had no willing participants so my research journey continued with three schools, and more specifically three sixth class classrooms. This did lead to an unfortunate gender imbalance and is addressed as a limitation of this study in chapter eight.

Table 2: School Profiles

<b><u>DEIS Urban Band 1</u></b>	<b><u>Greenhill N.S.</u></b>	<b><u>Holy Oaks N.S.</u></b>	<b><u>North Meadows N.S.</u></b>
<b><u>Schools</u></b>			
<b>HP Index</b> <b>Classification</b>	“very disadvantaged”	“very disadvantaged”	“disadvantaged”
<b>No. of Participating</b> <b>Pupils</b>	19 (13 girls / 6 boys)	6 (4 girls / 2 boys)	16 (girls)
<b>Ethos</b>	Catholic	Catholic	Catholic
<b>Gender</b>	Co-educational	Co-educational	Co-educational Junior School (All-Girls School from second to sixth class).
<b>Pupil Enrolment</b>	275	253	210
<b>Mainstream Class</b> <b>Teachers</b>	16	16	11
<b>Support Teachers</b>	9	9	9
<b>Special Needs</b> <b>Assistants</b>	8	18 (5 class autistic unit within the school)	4
<b>No. of foreign</b> <b>national pupils</b>	6	7	168
<b>No. of pupils from</b> <b>the travelling</b> <b>community</b>	29	21	2

The three Urban Band 1 DEIS Schools (see Table 2) are located in the same provincial city in Ireland and are all located in communities classified as “very disadvantaged” or “disadvantaged” by the 2016 Pobal HP Deprivation Index (see chapter two). This means they are areas with higher assessed levels of socio-economic disadvantage including lower level of income, and parental education, accompanied with higher percentages of local authority housing, unemployment, lone parenthood and increased numbers of minority families such as those from Traveller backgrounds and migrant backgrounds. I will now look at each of my schools in more detail and give a summary of my observations and impressions of the schools and individual classrooms using notes I recorded in my field diary. As a cautionary note here, this is not an ethnographic study and I did not observe classroom practise so my field notes here are just my impression of the school as I experienced it and as shaped through pupils’ descriptions. All pupil and school names have been changed and given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

#### **5.6.1 Greenhill National School**

Greenhill N.S. is a catholic, co-educational school located in the centre of its community. The area would be widely known as suffering from a high number of social problems such as unemployment, crime and substance misuse. The school was built in 1980 and is a large, intimidating red brick building enclosed behind tall metal railings. Even as a teacher myself I found it daunting from the outside as I buzzed in to reception to enter the building. This feeling must be amplified for any parents with a negative school experience themselves. However, I was greeted pleasantly by the receptionist and directed to a seat to wait for the class teacher to be informed of my arrival. While I waited a young mother happened to walk in and I witnessed the dismissive way she was spoken to by the reception in stark

comparison to my warm greeting I received minutes earlier. This undercurrent of prejudicial views towards the local community unfortunately continued once I met the class teacher. While she was very warm and accommodating to me personally, it became apparent she undervalued certain groups and spoke dismissively of some of the boys in the study “I can only imagine what he was saying”, implying they would not have anything of value to say. There was very much an “othering” and undervaluing of the Traveller community also which comprises over 10% of the school population. She spoke about not being surprised no child from the Traveller community signed up, stating “sure where are we going there it’s a complete waste of time sure they are not here half the time”. While I feel a certain sense of guilt writing this now as if I am betraying the school, I also feel it is my duty to the integrity of the study to recount my experience honestly. Our brief interactions filled me with discomfort as her classed, prejudicial views were very obvious and I wondered how this played out for the pupils themselves. While the school experiences a high staff turnover and has mainly a young, inexperienced teacher body, the class teacher herself was one of the most senior members of staff with more than 20 years’ experience. However as well intentioned as she may have been, from speaking to the pupils I got a sense of a controlling atmosphere with an emphasis on literacy and numeracy to the detriment of other expressive subjects. This was the only school in the study that employed ability grouping to stream pupils for literacy and numeracy instruction and pupils spoke of the anxiety, self-doubt and humiliation caused by this practise. Overall, I was left with the impression of a more traditional, authoritarian classroom climate.

### **5.6.2 Holy Oaks National School**

Holy Oaks N.S. is also a catholic, co-educational school that was founded in 1958. It has many different sections including a pre-school, a unit with special classes for pupils with autism, a large main building and then also a maze of prefabs, one of which housed my participating class. The class teacher was extremely welcoming and warm and was very informally dressed in runners and jeans, which seemed to mimic the more relaxed atmosphere of the school. She has a small class size of eleven and a brightly decorated classroom. The pupils seemed really happy here and spoke of friendly and close relations with their teacher. There was an overall inclusive atmosphere of respect and I did wonder if this was perhaps a knock on effect of the diversified pupil population due to the higher number of pupils with special educational needs. The pupils were well able to articulate their views as if this was something they were used to doing. This was in stark contrast to my experience in Greenhill N.S. where the pupils seemed less able to express their views. There was however another moment of discomfort when I returned one of the pupils to the class and the teacher said “she’d be too cute to say anything that one, wise to it I’d say” suggesting the assumption that working class families are wise to the system, meaning they say little to help them in defrauding the welfare system. This again served to highlight the prevalence of prejudicial views towards working class families within schools.

### **5.6.3 North Meadows National School**

North Meadows N.S. is made up of a junior school from preschool to first class where boys and girls are educated together. The pupils are then segregated from second class onwards, with the boys moving on to a nearby all boys senior school and the girls staying in North Meadows until sixth class. Ireland has majority homogenous school populations serving a majority white, catholic population. However, in stark juxtaposition, North Meadows N.S.



school population is made up of 80% pupils from migrant backgrounds representing over 40 nationalities, mainly Eastern European, African and Asian. The exterior school building itself is extremely bright and inviting, surrounded by rainbow coloured walls. I was ushered into the staffroom on my first visit and received an extremely warm welcome from all of the staff and the principal, who really made herself available to me throughout my visits. There was no air of suspicion around me that I sensed in the other two schools and I felt there was very much an open door policy operating in this school, whereby the outside world was invited in rather than kept at a distance. The students spoke openly about how diverse their school was and seemed to wear this as a badge of honour and pride, something to be valued as unique about their school. They spoke of the funding efforts of their student council and parents association and I got a real sense of community in this school. The class teacher was young, also informally dressed and actually a past pupil of the school herself. While she no longer lived in the area she unsurprisingly spoke positively about the community, the families and the pupils. Overall I was left with a real sense of inclusion and respect and the impression that the school really valued and reached out to the community it served.

## **5.7 Pupil Interviews**

In March 2017 I conducted forty one, one on one semi-structured pupil interviews (20-30 minutes in length). I then transcribed all of these interviews and initial analysis of emerging themes began before returning to the schools in June 2017 for follow up interviews. The emerging themes at this stage involved the creation of a number of key categories that came up most frequently in our discussions to help me sort the data into headings and sub headings. These initial categories included methodologies, classroom climate, power

relations, peer relations, anxiety, testing, and identity. The follow up interviews were crucial to ensure I had encapsulated the most important parts of school life as reported by the pupils, and that my initial interpretations of the data were true to their opinions and perspectives. In Greenhill N.S. and North Meadows N.S. the follow up interviews were conducted in pairs due to school time constraints (30-40 minutes long). This did bring added challenges around managing the interview dynamics and ensuring each pupil got a chance to be heard. It also raised issues in relation to the ethics of paired interviews, as I could no longer specifically go through each individual transcript but instead focused on the emerging themes and teased these out with the paired pupils, seeking clarification of whether they agreed or disagreed that these were important areas of schooling to them and how they felt about the specific topics raised. It is also important to note here that the pairs were chosen randomly by the class teachers, who sent the pupils down to me in the interview room whenever each pair returned. This was decided mutually with the class teachers as the most effective way to get the interviews completed due to time constraints. Pupils also completed two drawings for their initial interview and these acted as a stimulus for conversation while also giving further insight into pupils' school experience. I also spent many hours transcribing all second round interviews and felt this more traditional desk method of data collection and data analysis led me to a deeper understanding of my data and participants. The rationale behind these data collection methods will now be explored further.

"The aim of this study was to make visible, and understand, possible opportunities for school improvement based on schoolchildren's lived experience and visionary ideas of school." (Kostenius 2011:511).

In similarity to Kostenius's study I explained to the children that this was an opportunity for them to represent their point of view and experiences to adults in charge of teaching children like themselves and making decisions in schools. I wanted to open a space for conversations that do not typically take place in school settings, especially in an increasingly competitive and high-stakes testing environment.

Narrative researchers seek to tell stories:

"The best stories are those which stir people's minds, hearts and souls and by so doing give them new insights into themselves, their problems and their human condition" (Reason 1981:50).

The only way to hear these stories was through indepth interviews to really understand the pupils' school experience and their meaning making around this experience. As narrative inquiry promotes the cooperative relationship between participants and researchers, semi-structured interviews allows for some set questions or topics which structure the interview to an extent, but allows for flexibility and freedom to interact more as a conversation. Hence the semi-structured interview provided "the best of both worlds as far as interviewing is concerned, combining the structure of a list of issues to be conversed together with freedom to follow up points as necessary" (Thomas 2009:169). Conversation is key to good narrative researchers listening to people's stories, undoubtedly making this a great method to get a valuable insight into educational disadvantage.

"conversations are marked by equality among participants and by flexibility...conversations entail listening. The listeners' response may constitute a probe in to experience that takes

the representation of experience far beyond what is possible in an interview” (Clandinin and Connelly 1994: 422).

All interviews took place in the pupils’ schools, and were recorded and transcribed. I had a list of sample questions for the initial round of interviews (see Appendix D) and I used these as springboards for our conversations. The list was a great help in keeping the conversation on track and making sure all areas were covered. However, I did allow the natural conversation to flow as much as possible and the inclusion of the pupils’ drawings also facilitated and steered the conversation. I was very much aware that I wanted the participants to have a strong voice in the interaction, and not for me to take the expert role, but to facilitate the conversation. The dynamic nature and interaction of the pair interviews also added invaluable insight to my data. It inevitably led to more naturalistic conversations as there is solidarity among friends, allowing people to speak more freely than one on one and to bounce off each other’s thoughts and viewpoints. However, I was really glad I had included both methods as they each had significant benefits, with the one on one interview allowing the pupils to communicate a more in-depth, rich and personal story of lived experience.

## **5.8 Pupil Images**

The research also incorporated visual images in the form of drawings created by the pupils to act as a springboard and stimulus to conversations. I invited participants to share their ideas of school by making two drawings, one depicting what school means to them and the second depicting any changes or improvements they would make to their school. In our first interview I let them use their own words to describe their drawings, and these insights from

the pupils themselves are what informed data analysis of the drawings. I invited the children to share their experiences and thoughts and noted that there were no right or wrong answers just individual responses, all which were welcome in order to help me learn more about their school experience. As Kostenius highlights

“Even though a drawing can stand on its own as a story, the combination of the drawing and the schoolchildren’s own comments, having both the written and the non-textual language to consider, gave the schoolchildren the opportunity to offer their own interpretations of the narrative story in their own drawing” (2011:512).

As Luttrell outlined “the use of visual methods allows those who might otherwise go unnoticed to be recognised and afforded voice in the body politic” (2010:233). Drawings were an unthreatening gateway into pupils’ perceptions and narratives of their lived experience of school. Mutual trust and respect were necessary for the safe expression of views and to “provide a means by which these marginal, disenfranchised voices could articulate contributions towards change and system improvement for self and others” (Leitch 2008:48). This combination of images and narratives worked dynamically to help children “frame their personal and social experiences and ensure that their “voices” are seen and heard” (ibid. 37). The fact that drawings are widely used in education was of benefit to the study as pupils felt comfortable in this task, and hence served as a means of building trust and open communication.

Leitch in her examples from studies executed by the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) emphasises the positive impact the inclusion of children’s drawings can have in a research study:

“drawings sensitively used with children in research, have potential for helping them to narrate aspects of their consciously lived experience as well as uncovering the unrecognized, unacknowledged or “unsayable” stories that they hold. These stories focus on broader political and social issues affecting their lives as well as the more personal, private and emotional ones” (Leitch 2008: 37).

The use of images also adds another layer of meaning and insight into pupils’ school experience and often their images can reveal hidden narratives (Luttrell 2010) through the representations they choose to share. Together images and narratives have the potential to open up many untapped perspectives and values and also allows those less confident in spoken word to be “heard” in another format.

## **5.9 Data Analysis**

The primary data consisted of the children’s drawings and the interview transcripts. Due to the vast amount of rich, complex and intertwined data produced it was essential to have a good system in place for storage, retrieval and coding. All my interviews were audio recorded using a digital voice recorder and transcribed by myself. I used the constant comparative method (Miles and Huberman 1994) which involves the going over and over data to emerge with themes and categories which link and make interconnections. During the course of my project, as themes started to emerge from collected data I developed categories and triangulated sources from the data through constant comparative methods. I did not use computer software to analyse my data, as I prefer to have my data on paper and at my fingertips, so therefore traditional desk methods were employed. Analysis took part in three main stages meaning making, theme analysis and interpretation. Themes that emerged will be presented in greater detail in chapter six. I am fully aware that my thematic analysis and interpretation are my own and unique to my relationship with my participants

in a certain time and place and therefore cannot be used for generalisations. Instead my hope is the words and images can be used to paint a fuller picture of the DEIS programme as expressed by those whom it is designed to target.

### **5.10 Validity and Reliability**

Validity for me can only be ensured by my own trustworthiness and the use of triangulation, to match my findings with several sources to increase its credibility, “reliance on one method, therefore may bias or distort the researcher’s picture of the particular slice of reality she is investigating” (Cohen et al. 2000:112). By trying too hard to ensure our work is reliable we run the risk of doing the work of the traditional quantitative researcher, too concerned with impartial, distant generalizations. The value of the qualitative study “is its uniqueness; consequently; reliability in the traditional sense of replicability is pointless here” (Janesick 1994:217). For such a small scale study I am not trying to make generalizations about DEIS pupils as a whole. This research is unique to me, my participants, my schools, and to my interpretations in this place, at this time. As Denzin and Lincoln state,

“We care less about our ‘objectivity’ as scientist than we do about providing our readers with some powerful, propositional, tacit, intuitive, emotional, historical, poetic and empathic experience of the other via the texts we write” (1994: 582).

This is where qualitative and quantitative researchers differ greatly. While quantitative work considers contextual factors to be potentially threatening contaminants to the research, the qualitative researchers embrace the complexity and context of social scientific research. If anything I consider it as another valuable dimension to our work. Hence, by staying true to the words of my participants, declaring researcher bias and checking initial analysis through

follow up interviews were key methods I used to ensure the validity and reliability of my study.

### **5.11 Researcher Bias**

Clandinin contends that the researcher enters “into the research process as a person with [his/her] own personal practical knowledge” (1985:365). She defines this personal practical knowledge as “an emotional and moral knowledge [which] actively carries our being into interaction with classroom events” (ibid:382). According to Clandinin personal practical knowledge is “intimately connected with the narrative of our lives” (ibid 383). It is with this in mind that I conclude that every piece of writing has bias, as our self is always present, no matter how much we try to isolate it. As further highlighted by McNiff each story and research journey is unique to that researcher,

“Telling a research story is an integral part of research practice. A story does not appear out of nowhere. It is written by a researcher who brings his or her own values to the writing process” (2007:319).

I feel the only way to keep credibility is to be honest and open about my biases, assumptions and impressions and declaring them openly throughout the piece as for example I have done above in my summary of my three classrooms. This clearly impacts on my analysis and is hence important to declare here for scrutiny. I also felt it was essential to have an autobiographical element to acknowledge my own background as stated in chapter one to allow me to declare biases in an honest and identifiable manner. This enhances the pieces authenticity, as Lieblich et al. outlines, “what we require of our interviewees is something we should be able to look at in ourselves as well” (1998: 643). We must find ourselves in the study and declare ourselves so as to make my biases clear to the reader.



## 5.12 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations in research with and for children are of significant priority (see Kellett 2011). The study from the outset had to concern itself with issues of harm, consent, deception, authenticity, privacy and confidentiality of data. The main ethical consideration was to not harm participants and to undergo research with the best interests at heart. As a researcher, I had the ethical duty to ensure privacy and confidentiality of my participants. I ensured to get informed consent, by explaining exactly the research design, methods and intentions, so as to be open and honest, and not misleading. As the pupils are particularly young in this study (aged 11-12 years old) informed consent was also sought from their parents.

I also needed to pay special attention to the aftermath of the research, “as personal experience researchers, we owe our care, our responsibility, to the research participants and how our research texts shape their lives” (Clandinin & Connelly 1998: 422). This is especially important in the dissemination of findings and in particular in this case the use of illustrations created by the pupils. This study must be sensitive to the use of the pupils own words and drawings and to work with the pupils cooperatively to accurately present their views. From the outset it was thoroughly explained to pupils what the data and pictures will be used for and reiterated to them that it was completely voluntary. Most importantly they deserved my loyalty to their stories by keeping interpretations true to their words, and to ensure their voices resonate strongly in the completed piece.

Despite the willingness to engage in egalitarian research characterized by trust and authenticity, the complexity and difficulty of accurately representing the views of young people is acknowledged. The power relations have to be considered when working with

children. This is so because the authoritarian role of teacher or adult could serve to unbalance the researcher-subject relationship and to influence what pupils say in favour of what they believe to be the correct answer. This leads to doubts about the researcher's position in representing a group of individuals. However as Lumby outlines in her qualitative study with young people "the aspiration is authentic listening with sustained attentiveness (Fielding & Ruddock 2006) and to use what is heard to challenge, rather than to embed further, the powerlessness of many young people" (Lumby 2012:267). The importance of authentic listening and valuing what the pupils have to say is of pivotal importance to the ethical dimension of this study. The goal of this study was to enhance democratic processes by representing pupil voice and a collection of their narratives in relation to educational policies and programmes that directly impact on them. As Lensmire stated "they cannot do it all by themselves" (1998: 286) and thus we as researchers must give pupils the opportunity to articulate themselves and help present theses narrative so as to inform educational policy.

### **5.13 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the research methods and methodologies underpinning this study were not taken lightly. After due consideration and acknowledgment of the difficulty representing the collective views of young people this study answers the call for research which priorities pupil voice and fills the research gap of rich data exploring primary school pupils' lived experience (Luttrell 2010; 2013, Devine 2001). It challenges simplistic, anecdotal characteristics and experiences of young pupils in DEIS schools and instead seeks to uncover the ways these young people experience school life and how this shapes their habitus, self-

concept, engagement and wellbeing. It places pupils as experts in their own social world and allows them to name and claim their experiences.

My next two chapters will present and analyse my main findings around the themes of wellbeing and relationships. It will endeavour to answer my research questions set out at the start of this study and tell the DEIS story from the pupil perspective.

## **Chapter 6: The See-Saw of Pupil Engagement and Wellbeing**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter and the following will present and examine my findings in detail. This study argues for the need to look at the affective dimension of school (dis)engagement, which until recently have been overlooked and neglected in the literature on educational disadvantage. The findings of this study show the importance of connecting school (dis)engagement with wellbeing and relationships, which is explored through the theoretical concept of resigned habitus. This chapter focuses on wellbeing and presents the key argument that an enforced restricted self through ensuring conformity to the institutional habitus, results in working class pupils resigning their habitus as a coping mechanism for successfully navigating school, at great emotional costs. It also highlights the dangers of symbolically violent classroom practices that cultivate a habitus of low self-esteem by essentially labelling pupils as academically inadequate from such an early stage in their school life.

As student (dis)engagement is a complex process it greatly benefits from the analytical tools presented by Bourdieu which allow for these complexities. The data gathered formed nuanced understandings of the affective dimension of habitus construction and reconstruction through schooling and presents a story of compliance, insecurity and anxiety. As discussed in chapter three, the confronting mismatch of pupils originary habitus and the new field of school can lead to a “hysteresis effect” (Bourdieu 1977, 2000). This chapter will demonstrate that this left working class pupils feeling inadequate and ill fitted to the school system (Ingram 2011, 2018), consequently leading to increased pressure for working class

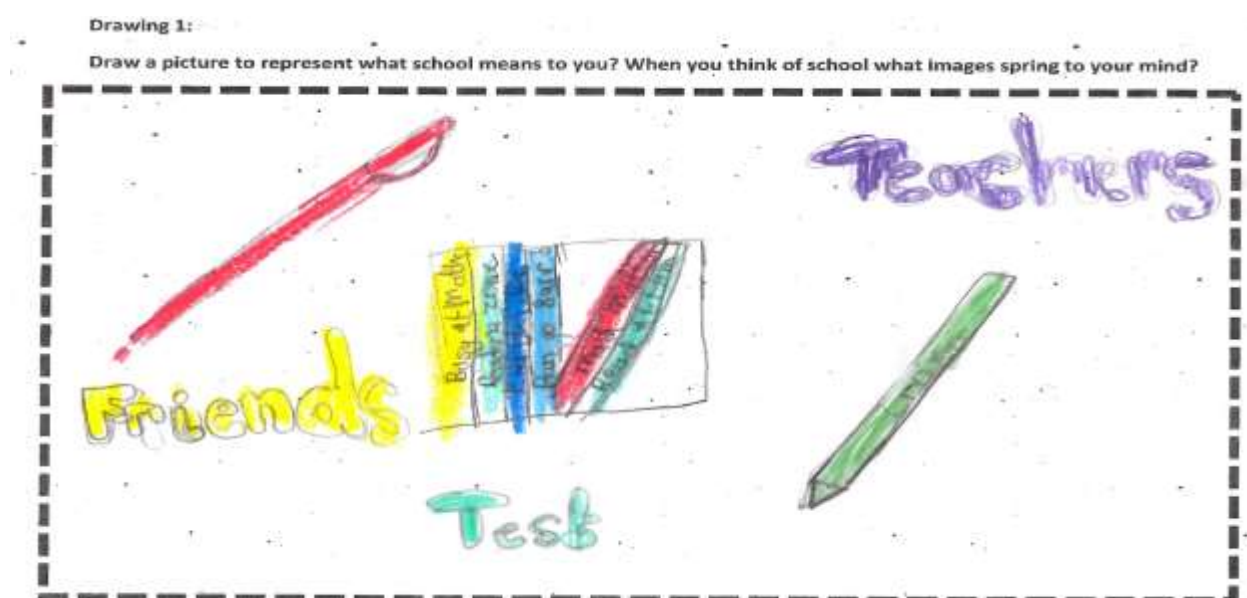
pupils' to manage their identities, which was often in conflict with what they described as their real or authentic self. This form of restricted self led to a resignation of habitus within the school boundaries as they conformed to the institutional habitus. Bourdieu's concept of the hysteresis effect can be used here to understand dissent from and compliance with the rules of the game in the school field. Due to the emancipatory goals of narrative inquiry I will present pupil drawings and words strongly throughout. This chapter on pupil wellbeing will be structured under the following headings:

- Performativity over Affectivity
- Anxiety
- The Institutional Habitus: Compliance versus Dissent

## **6.2 Performativity over Affectivity– “Higher or Lower?”**

Emerging from the data was a clear sense that the three DEIS classrooms studied place a strong emphasis on academic development over social and emotional. Testing was understood as a central part of pupils' schools lives as portrayed in Sarah's drawing (see figure 4). As discussed in chapter two and four, testing and competitive economic driven goals are a persistent and dominant feature of Irish schools. The idea that success is a combination of hard work and individual ability affects children's self-worth as the circumstantial hurdles they face are not taken into account. While mental health and wellbeing are seeing a surge of interest and importance in recent years (DES & DOH 2013,2015; NCCA 2017) the juxtaposition is while discourse and policy documents have increased in wellbeing little has actually changed on the ground (Skerritt 2017). This study highlights the tensions between performance driven goals and child centred goals in DEIS primary classrooms from the pupil perspective which until now have been silenced.

Figure 4: Sarah's Drawing (North Meadows N.S.)



The pupils clearly stated their dislike and antagonism of tests. They expressed the fear, anxiety and nerves attributed to testing:

*"Oh God I hate them" (Kate, Holy Oaks N.S.).*

*"before they get the test results...they could be expecting the worse...the stress is about like what do you think you are gonna get and you are feeling just like panicked in your head" (Christina, Greenhill N.S.).*

When the test scores impact on class streaming as seen in Greenhill N.S., this added to the level of concern and angst:

*"there's a lot of pressure when you have the tests at the end of the year cos you're like "O am I going to get in to the highest room or am I going to be in the lowest?" (Ruth, Greenhill N.S.).*

This was further outlined in a pair interview with Heather and Roseanne who both emphasise the link between testing and self-worth:

*"H- tests decide what class you are in and how you do in your job. They decide what teacher you get for what subject and whether you need help. Higher or lower. I don't think there should be a higher, middle or lower.*

*R- For every class like from third up like you have Ms. X she is the lowest maths and English, then our teacher is the highest Maths and second highest English, and Ms. X is the highest English and second highest Maths. So they are all spaced out.*

*And you all know then where you are?*

*R- Ya you get told on your first day they have a list from your Micra T (standardised reading test) and Sigma T (standardised maths test) and they call out who is in what class and then you know.*

*What do you think of that?*

*R- I think it is good cos then in the higher class you are more entitled to do like harder stuff and then in the lower classes you probably do the same thing but at different times and you get more help with it.*

*H- I feel everyone should be equal. I think there shouldn't be higher or lower.*

*How does it make people feel who are in the lower class do you think?*

*H- I mean they probably thought they would do better and be a bit embarrassed. But it would probably motivate them.*

*R-I think if everyone was in the same class like you would have to do more stuff and if you were supposed to be the low class but everyone was together then you could get like mocked*

*and stuff over not being able to do the stuff. It would be too hard for ya. It would be better then to be in a class that you can understand” (Heather & Roseanne, Greenhill N.S.).*

This conversation between the girls starkly highlights the dangers of streaming classes based on ability. Heather expressed the desire for equality and to get rid of the higher or lower classes, but goes on to acknowledge it might motivate the pupils in the lower class to do better. The idea of shaming them into doing better in their tests contradicts her earlier notion of equality. This is further compounded when you take into consideration the evidence (MacRuairc 2009; Skerritt 2016) around unfair bias in standardised testing due to linguistic capital with middle class children getting an unfair advantage, while working class students have predominantly negative experiences of testing. Roseanne also expressed the need for ability streaming so as to allow for the pace and subject matter to be pitched more appropriately for those pupils finding the work more difficult. However, in doing so she highlights the danger of ability grouping to label certain groups of pupils as “more entitled” than other learners, and is in this sense an act of symbolic violence whereby even the pupils themselves are buying into the notion of capping some pupils educational trajectory. Here is a clear example of Bourdieu’s doxa in action (1979). The public reading of the list at the beginning of the year and the pupils being well aware of which class is lower or higher runs the risk of the lower ability pupils having low self-worth and further eroding their self-efficacy, as it serves as a clear reminder of their inferior position on the educational hierarchy. Considering MacRuairc (2009) highlighted the dangers of standardised testing for working class pupils almost a decade ago the continual use of these tests to stream ability is evidence of Lumby’s argument that schools “function to pathologise them (disengaged



young people) and provide a smokescreen for the maintenance of educational homeostasis” (2012:276).

Evidence of the pupils being well aware of their perceived low ability has profound affective implications on their self-esteem and habitus formation. The cultivation of a habitus of low self-esteem in working class pupils only serves to have the undesired outcome of placing them at risk of disengagement and early school leaving (ESL). Ability grouping has been identified as an act of symbolic violence as it has profound influence on teacher expectations and classroom practices, with lower ability grouping being subject to lower expectations and higher levels of control and classroom management (McGillicuddy & Devine 2017). It also has a severe impact on pupil wellbeing and habitus construction as a result of “the power of suggestion with respect to children's learning capacities” (ibid. 2017: 98). Lynch, Lyons and Cantillon (2007:14) also noted the emotional and affective consequences of streaming pupils according to ability, as it “creates affective inequalities by undermining the self-worth and self-esteem of those not successful”. Several pupils echoed the negative connotations associated with membership to the lower bands and reported feelings of inadequacy. They had internalised a habitus of low ability and failure. This was illustrated through the words of Denis when he stated “I’m no good at Maths” and “I know no-one expects anything from me” (Greenhill N.S.). This creates a stratification of learners in the school, with those “deemed to be more academically capable and successful...regarded as the most valued members of the school community” (Lynch & Lodge 2002:61). By defining boundaries of ability within the classroom the school is having detrimental impacts on working class pupils’ self-efficacy beliefs and emotional development. As DEIS schools are particularly focused on improving literacy and numeracy

attainment levels ability grouping is worryingly becoming more prevalent as “best practice” (DES 2009).

This has important policy consequences for the DEIS initiative, as it may be causing harm to the very pupils it is seeking to help. Children can come to view themselves as worthless or “nothing” (see Reay & William 1999). The attachment of failure through endless testing (Reay 2006) has consequential knock on effects on pupils’ wellbeing as highlighted through the pupil interviews. Many pupils spoke about Maths in particular as a subject they disliked as it was too difficult and they felt they were “no good at it” (Danielle, Greenhill N.S.). This is significant because the school is cultivating habitus that certain groups of children are academically deficient, which is a belief they carry with them into secondary school and beyond. This helps us identify a more nuanced understanding of the early process of disengagement within schooling and the importance of DEIS primary schools as an intervention site to prevent later detachment or ESL.

There was evidence that this obsession with results and attainment levels has led to the crowding out of more expressive and creative subjects concerned more with the affective domain. Pupils spoke about very little time spent on the arts with a clear preference towards literacy and numeracy- “At school it’s just all writing” (Roseanne, Greenhill N.S.); “I would love to do more Art and Music” (Ruth, Greenhill N.S.). This is very much juxtaposed to the views and aims of the current Irish primary curriculum (NCCA 1999), with its commitment to each child’s holistic development. However this is under threat due to the DEIS initiative’s focus on attainment levels of reading and mathematics and also as a result of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy emphasising the need to “re-prioritise spending time

away from desirable but ultimately less important activities” (DES 2011:15). This focus on literacy and numeracy to the exclusion of other subjects threatens the holistic ethos of the curriculum and falls into the trap of the marketisation of education for economic purposes (O’Brien & Flynn 2007). It is ingrained in the notion that education and knowledge is absolute and is about getting the “right” answer. This limits the educational experience of primary pupils to mere rote learning and skill acquisition rather than an expressive and affective experience. This is of added concern in DEIS schools as it feeds into the process of disengagement for those pupils deemed as under achieving in maths and literacy. This has severe implications on wellbeing, as a habitus of failure and inadequacy is being cultivated through symbolically violent school practices that only value one form of intellect.

There was evidence in this study that the DEIS initiative’s overreliance on testing and ability grouping to increase attainment level was in fact having the opposite desired effect. Denis decided he was better off to perform poorly in the tests:

*“ the way I look at it I knows how to do some stuff and I’m better off like if you know if I get it wrong I don’t mind really like cos then I get into a low class in secondary school” (Greenhill N.S.).*

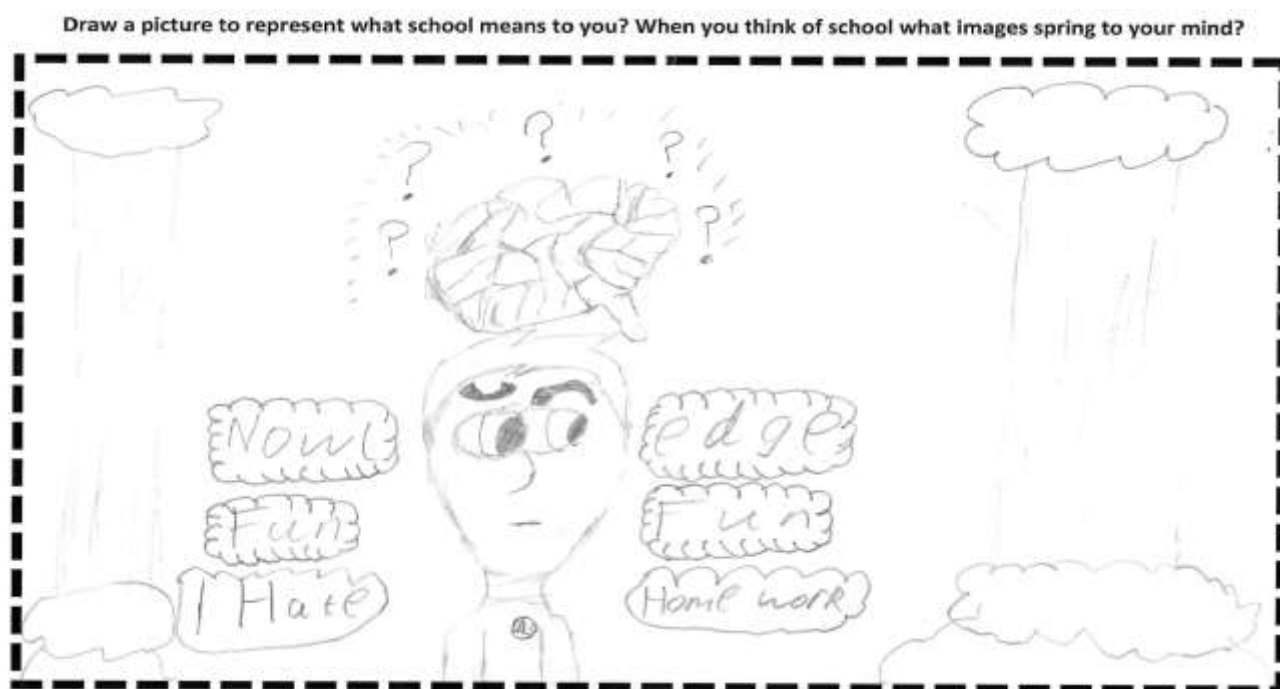
If this is due to lower expectations or lower workload it is unclear, but what is resounding is that to protect Denis’ own sense of self he must act indifferently to school success. Hence, Denis realises his best option for self-preservation is to stay in the lower ability classroom. Denis illustrated (figure 5) his mixed feelings towards school and spoke indifferently about not doing well in tests or the fact that some might think he is “dumb”. The habitus Denis is cultivating through school is one that labels him as deficit and hence expectations for his educational success are low. While this is not said overtly, the hidden “power of suggestion”

(McGillycuddy & Devine 2018) plays a significant role in shaping Denis' self-efficacy. The research shows us that Denis' failure avoiding behaviours are mechanisms used to cope with difficulties in school and can lead to eventual disengagement (Kelly 2009: 452). It is clear from the literature that young people are extremely vulnerable with

“little leverage to change things and facing lifelong negative consequences from their failure to succeed in education. Their youth and inexperience mean that faced with serious difficulties, members of this group are likely to use destructive strategies that make the situation worse. The cards are stacked against these young people” (Lumby 2013:3).

The psychological impact of excessive testing and ability grouping is profound on pupils' wellbeing and self-worth as they can attach a feeling of being worthless. This is already seen in the words of Denis when he says “no one expects anything from me”. In an education system that purports to enable the child ‘to realise his or her potential as a unique individual’ (Government of Ireland 1999:7) this is simply unacceptable and highlights the vulnerability of young pupils as seen in the quote by Lumby.

Figure 5: Denis's Drawing (Greenhill N.S.)



In relation to performativity, there were endless remarks about feeling overworked. Pupils emphasised a need for more creative teaching methods to battle a mundane school experience.

*“there’s a lot of learning and everyone’s sick to death” (Danielle, Greenhill N.S.).*

*“Probably don’t like sitting down for like 6 or 5 and a half hours just learning and working and doing nothing can get boring” (James, Holy Oaks N.S.).*

The DEIS schools in this study were portrayed by the pupils as authoritarian with an emphasis on driving up literacy and numeracy attainment levels. This diminishes the goals of education to merely economic, ensuring the creation of docile, skilled workers with little emphasis on critical thinking and creativity. This is evident through the data reported here of pupils’ criticism of boring, laborious writing tasks, that left them feeling overloaded and strained:

*“Have more like time for not doing work only for free time...Cos your brain can’t always be all the time working” (Jill, North Meadows N.S.).*

*“At school its just all writing and you only get a few minutes for breaks and stuff” (Roseanne, Greenhill N.S.).*

*“our hands get like sore from all the writing” (Michelle, North Meadows N.S.).*

Accumulated these words are a powerful statement of the detrimental impact of schooling being reduced to performance driven goals. The child centred goals of human flourishing and wellbeing are nowhere to be seen in many of these accounts. Pupil voice here shines a clear spotlight on the pedagogical practices in these three DEIS classrooms and their implications on pupils engagement and their school experience as a whole. The pupils are crying out for a change in classroom practices and highlighted the need for more breaks from all the written work and to not be confined to their desks *“because it feels like you’re trapped or something” (Chelsea, Greenhill N.S.).*

DEIS schools are at the forefront of dealing with educational disadvantage and as such should be even more concerned with pupil (dis)engagement levels. The many utterances of boredom, feeling trapped and inadequate begs the question how these practices hope to promote affective engagement for working class pupils most at risk of ESL.

### **6.3 Anxiety: “All my worries come from school”**

Due to aforementioned emphasis on testing, it is thus unsurprising that an alarming finding to come out of this study in relation to pupil wellbeing was the many utterances of self-diagnosed anxiety, stress, worries and fear. The evidence of mental health issues arising in

primary schools is even more alarming in the Irish context when you take into consideration the recent report by UNICEF 2017, stating that Ireland has the fourth highest teen suicide rate in the EU. This does not include the 9,500 people attending hospitals annually for self-harming (Costigan 2015). Costigan states that suicide is the result of “intolerable emotional and psychological pain inflicted on ordinary people” by social norms, as

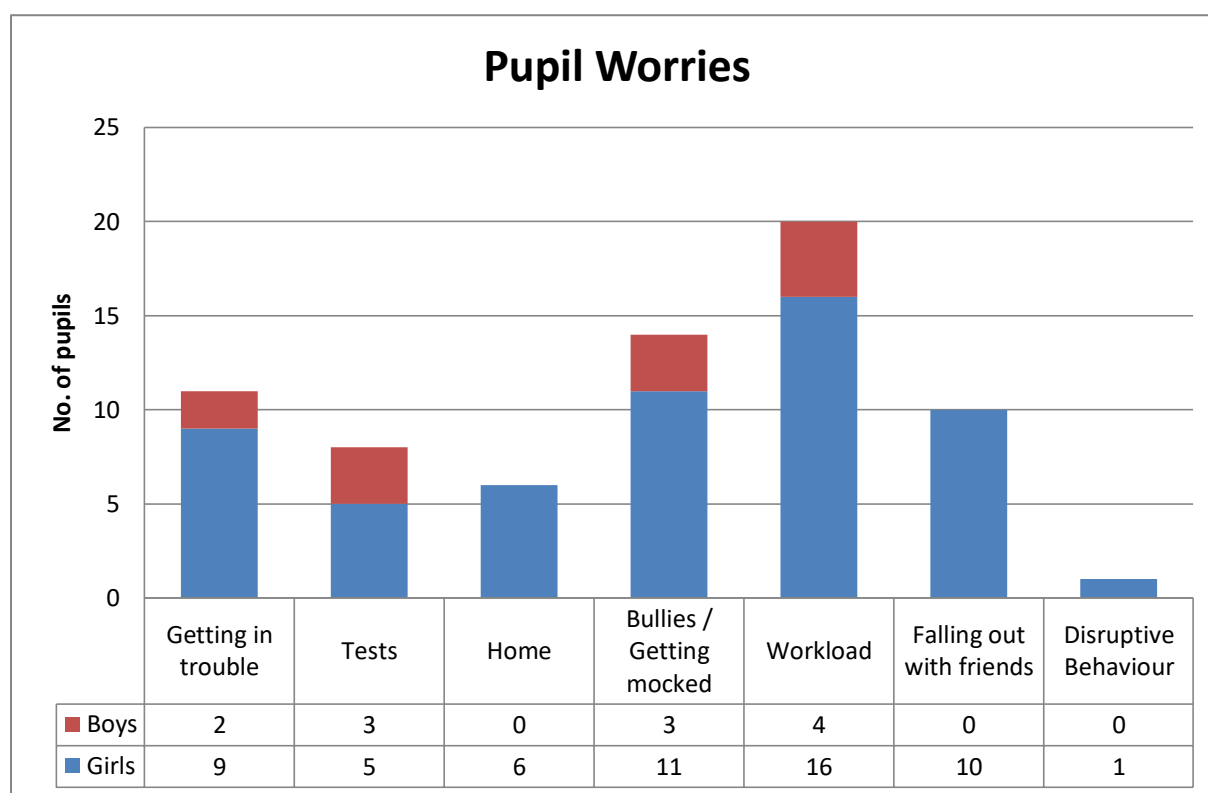
“failure to fit in with those norms identifies an individual as flawed or inferior in some way.

When people feel they have to hide their true identity because they don’t fit into society,

suicide may become an option to take away the pain of isolation.”

This resonates strongly with the inner turmoil mentioned earlier in chapter three in regards the navigation of conflicting fields for working class pupils (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977), whereby pupils are stretching their habitus to the limit by trying to fit in (Ingram 2011, Reay 2015). This has a direct impact on wellbeing as working class pupils are denied the ease that come with belonging in a field and as a result are forced out of habitual action and forced into self-consciousness and reflexivity (Garratt 2017). This psychological impact of schooling and the anxieties generated were very evident in this study. It was apparent that a vast majority of stress is associated with workload, followed by bullying, and thirdly getting in trouble (see figure 6). Bullying and authoritarian teaching will be looked at in greater detail in the next chapter on relationships.

Figure 6: Pupil Worries



Most significantly pupils did not identify problems at home as a main cause of worry. While there has been an emphasis on pastoral care in DEIS schools, presumably as a lot of policy proffers a deficit model of working class family life as dysfunctional, the pupils themselves still name school as the main stress in their life. As Ruth strongly highlights,

*“sure like all my worries come from school. Stress like I don’t do something well and I get like panic attacks and I think I am not gonna do anything right and sometimes I even hate myself over it” (Greenhill N.S.).*

These emotive words make a powerful impact as they illustrate the impact of schooling on pupil wellbeing and habitus. The high number of pupils discussing anxiety and stress correlates with recent discourse on youth mental health in Ireland stating the high numbers of pupils needing specialist support to deal with mental health issues (Barnardos 2018). This



study highlights the impact of neoliberal policies more focused on driving up attainment levels than cultivating human flourishing (Grummell, Devine & Lynch 2009). These academic driven environments tend to focus on skills pupils find less motivating (see figure 7- Emmet’s Drawing “I hate work”) and run the risk of further alienating pupils who are struggling academically. These practices are detrimental to pupil wellbeing and engagement, however they continue despite a myriad of research and policy recommendations on the importance of mental health promotion and emotional supports in schools, specifically for those most at risk of ESL (Joint Oireachtas Committee 2010; Downes 2008, 2011; EU Council Recommendations 2011; Thematic Working Group Final Report on ESL 2013).

Figure 7: Emmet’s Drawing (Greenhill N.S.)

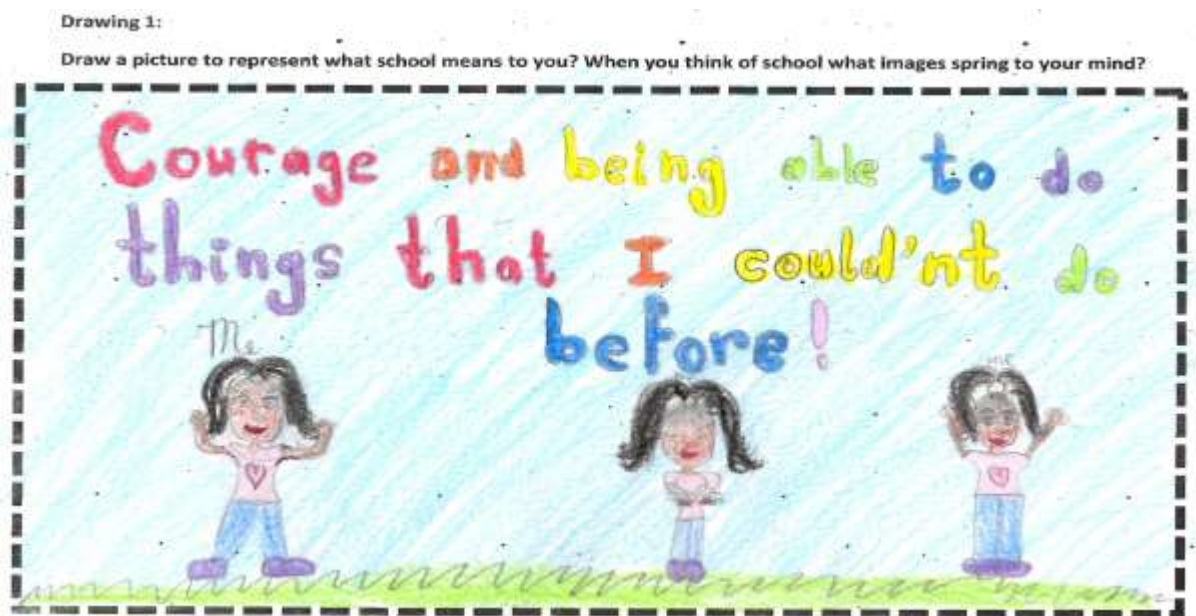


### 6.3.1 Inclusion: “Everyone, every religion and every skin colour is welcome”

Emerging from the data, it is apparent that for wellbeing to flourish there must be an inclusive and positive school climate at the epicentre of schools. A positive school climate is vital to the social and emotional needs of pupils (Tynan & Nohilly 2018) and also combats

the aforementioned high levels of pupil anxiety. It acts as a protective factor and emphasises supporting rather than further alienating young people (Smyth 2017). Considering the length of time pupils spend in school it is imperative “that it not only develops their capabilities, but that it reinforces their sense of wellbeing and self-esteem” (Lynch & Lodge 2002). Michelle’s drawing (figure 8) shows the importance of a positive school climate in reaching this goal as it allows pupils “to be confident” and to grow in “courage”. Michelle’s sentiments are a positive and uplifting message of how schools can be a place of empowerment that allows self-confidence to flourish.

Figure 8: Michelle’s Drawing (North Meadows N.S.)



The theme of inclusion was central to their concept of a positive school climate, with Lisa noting:

*“Like the school’s a lovely place aswell like and its good cos everyone gets involved and everything and theres always something for everyone to do. So no one ever feels left out”*  
(Holy Oaks N.S.).

The pupils see the importance of everyone feeling welcome and not being left out. This includes visibility of minority cultures as a significant aspect of school climate as seen through the words of Sarah and Eimear.

*“Everyone, every religion and every skin colour is welcome” (Sarah, North Meadows N.S.).*

*“Our school is a very diverse school with 44 I think different nationalities. Our teachers are very nice and we do a lot of work. We have nice classrooms and everyone here is very friendly and welcoming” (Eimear, North Meadows N.S.).*

From the overview of my schools that I included in chapter five, it is unsurprising that North Meadows is a school the pupils describe positively in terms of diversity, inclusion and accepting attitudes. The heterogeneous school population has an impact here, whereby in stark contrast more homogenous schools with a lack of visibility of diversity feed discriminatory attitudes (Lynch & Lodge 2002). The cultivation of negative views towards minority cultures was apparent from my conversations with Tyler in Greenhill N.S. in relation to the Traveller community. When discussing ESL Tyler mentioned that both his parents left school early and this is not something he wants for himself. He believes the only people who quit school now are pupils from the Travelling community:

*“Ya you can’t just quit school now unless you are a you-know-who. You know who I am on about don’t you? If you are a T-R-A-V-E- (spelling)*

*What? A Traveller is it?*

*Ya a Traveller unless you are a Traveller. They get to quit school.*

*Why do you think that?*

*I don't know like do you know they are after giving them new land and everything its not fair. Like they just get free property over like they gave X a small field and then they get a bunch of a ton of houses and the government pays for all that and its not fair.*

*But would you like to quit school?*

*No...cos your family want you to succeed...and because you don't just want to be a fiend at the side of the road, why would you?"*

Tyler's prejudicial view of the Traveller community, cast them in the role of the other or "the fiend at the side of the road", someone Tyler very much wants to disassociate himself with. He is adamant around the issue of equity that the Traveller community are receiving land unfairly and in this sense they were seen as responsible for the discrimination they encounter. His inability to even say the word "Traveller" at the beginning of our conversation raises questions about the level of inclusion of minority cultures in this school, when those from marginalised backgrounds are silenced to the point of being unspeakable. He resigns to spelling it, as if it was a bad word. This lack of inclusion only leaves room for social exclusion and the cultivation of prejudicial views. It portrays the indirect role schools play in the reproduction of racial attitudes by silencing and ignoring pupils' histories and cultures, whereby Traveller pupils are tolerated rather than fully embraced as active school members. This feeds into the cyclical reproduction of the oppression of minority groups through doxa, (the unquestioned norms, practices and processes of the school system), and undoubtedly has huge implications for the affective engagement of Traveller pupils. In this sense, "schooling helps to reproduce the racial separation, mistrust and hostility of the wider society by omission" (Harber 2004:54). Schools through their power to ascribe who and what to value through recognition have a powerful role to play here in social

inequalities, and shines a light on symbolically violent processes that hinder pupil affective engagement and wellbeing. This injustice relating to denial and denigration of the Traveller community was a distressing finding also highlighted in the study by Lynch and Lodge in 2002 with post-primary pupils, and considering that study happened over a decade ago is further evidence of educational homeostasis in Irish schools.

### **6.3.2 Poverty- “the dole doesn’t give you enough money to live on”**

Poverty is at the core of many of the class specific difficulties facing our DEIS pupils. While this is a political problem that cannot be solved in schools, it is a powerful backdrop shaping pupils’ educational experience. According to the latest Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) data (CSO 2018) there are 230,000 children living in poverty in Ireland in 2017. This means “children are the single biggest group of the population living in poverty” (Ward 2019). This has detrimental impacts on wellbeing as it limits life chances, generates feelings of inferiority and shame and “destroys the human spirit” (ibid.). Poverty not only dims opportunities but has devastating effects on pupil wellbeing and increases levels of anxiety and stress. Pupils were very aware of financial difficulties and the strain educational costs put on their families. Due to this heightened awareness of economic capital and lack of the pupils were very sensitive to the need of getting a good job purely for economic security. The pupils are acutely aware of the consequences of poverty and discuss the importance of education to make sure they do not end up homeless, hungry or on the dole.

*“Ya cos you don’t have a good education you are not gonna be able to get a job. If you don’t have a job you can’t get money and then you are just gonna be poor” (Donnacha, Greenhill N.S.).*

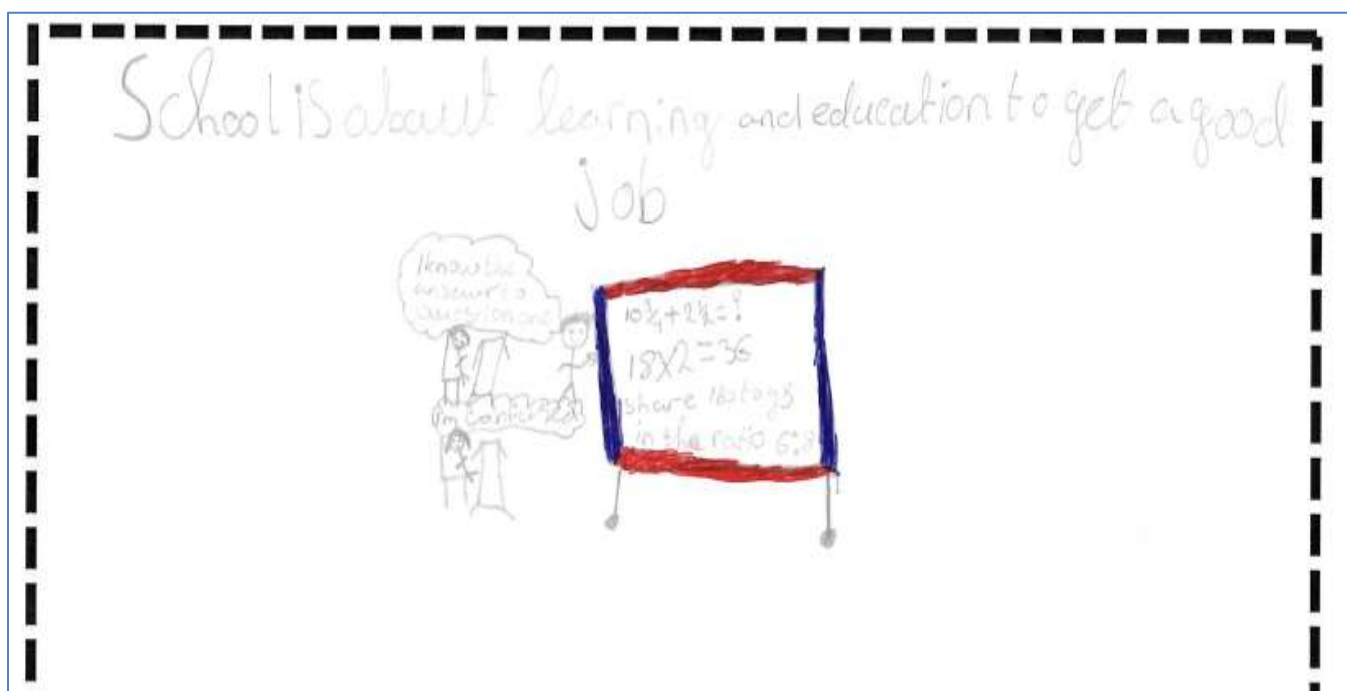
*“Cos you don’t want a job that you don’t get like a lot of money for...it’s better to have a job you get a lot of money for so then you can pay for your own stuff...you wouldn’t have to worry about it” (Emma, North Meadows N.S.).*

Emma portrays the emotional side of poverty and the constant worry surrounding financial difficulty. Heather also illustrates a deep awareness of the vicious cycle following low educational qualification and poverty. She implies low literacy attainment levels results in social welfare payments (the dole) and once receiving the dole it is very difficult to then work your way up to an “actual good job”.

*“if you leave school illiterate you can’t get as good a job and then you would be living on the dole and the dole doesn’t give you enough money to live on...then trying to get an actual good job would be very hard cos you can’t do anything that good to get your first job” (Heather, Greenhill N.S.).*

The pupils in my study portray the added emotional burden financial instability places on working class pupils in DEIS schools. School’s role in social reproduction is understood by the pupils. There is an increased pressure for them to do well in school as it is seen as the main mode of improvement to ensure future financial security. This is in opposition to O’Brien & Ó’Fathaigh who stated “Education is seen as more than the acquisition of qualifications and social mobility” (2005:73). In fact all pupils when asked the purpose of school and the importance of school stated it was for qualifications, getting a job and as a means of improvement. James’s drawing (figure 9) below states “School is about learning and education to get a good job”. The recurrence of improvement narratives in working class studies is nothing new and was a significant finding of Skegg’s well documented study (1997) with working class women.

Figure 9: James's Drawing (Greenhill N.S.)



These improvement narratives in a DEIS context again show the danger of political rhetoric around social mobility and an emphasis on raising aspirations among working class as “such fantasies estrange the working classes from any sense of personal worth or feelings of value if they remain as they are” (Reay 2013:666). It also fails to acknowledge the unequal structures and resources impacting social mobility. Pupils in my study heartbreakingly echoed Reay’s sentiments by emphasising that education was a means of improvement and a way of bettering themselves, indicating that to stay where they are, or where their family is, is not sufficient:

*“I want a job better than my parents...for a better life” (Jeanann, North Meadows N.S.).*

*“I don’t want to carry on the same as my mom cos like she just dropped out of school in third year and she didn’t learn anything she said and that was one of the worse decisions she ever*

*made. And then she did hairdressing for 10 years and she does it now herself and she said you could still get a better job than me” (Chelsea, Greenhill N.S.).*

*“School is important to help us learn, make new friends, make us smarter and inspire us to become different” (Kerry, Holy Oaks N.S.).*

While there is plenty to unpack in the words above, what is clear is an overwhelming sense of a need “to do better”, “become different” and consequently embedded negative connotations associated with their home field. Ingram (2018:2) highlighted the dark side of a “parent telling their child that their life and their way of being is not to be valued” and unfortunately this subordinated view of working class life is also witnessed in the cases above with pupils stating they wanted “to do better” than their parents as a common account. The need to become different is evidence that they have internalised the belief that to be of value you need to change your identity to become more middle class. This again underlines the power of the school and more specifically the role individual teachers play in habitus formation. This was made most apparent through my interviews with Kayleigh.

### Kayleigh’s Story

Kayleigh is a bright and articulate 12 year old girl who is achieving well in school and is above average ability in her class according to her teacher. She speaks about being able to “put on like an act” in school and has never gotten in trouble in school. She refers to herself as “a little goody two-shoes” but is adamant this is only her school persona, and is not at all like this outside of school, “once you see me outside school I am not a goody two-shoes I swear. I just don’t want to get in trouble so I just be good in school.” It is clear the power of



the institutional habitus has shaped Kayleigh's habitus to ensure conformity. Her teacher happened to interrupt our first interview to get something in the room and spoke to us both about Kayleigh as "a rock of sense. You see Gemma she will go to college this one, she will go to college". Kayleigh is well aware that to be valued in school you must sign up to the notion of college being the ultimate goal. However, once the class teacher left Kayleigh made it clear, despite the impression she gave her class teacher, college is not something she values. She illustrated here just how proficient she has become at playing the rules of the game, and the juggling act needed to manage these two identities. Within the school field, the habitus she portrays is one that aspires to go to college, while her authentic self sees no real value in it.

*"I kind of don't really want to go to college. That's just like some people's opinions about college I don't really want to go cos like my sister only went to Beauty college to study make up and stuff and like she only went there not even a year and she ended up coming a supervisor in a shoe shop.*

*Did she not like the beauty college?*

*I think she actually really liked it. I think she just couldn't take it anymore I think it was just really annoying" (Kayleigh, Greenhill N.S.).*

Kayleigh would be the first generation in her family to attend college and it is clear her view of college has been strongly influenced by the experience of her sister dropping out of Beauty College. While it is not clear what pressures led to her sister's departure, what is apparent is how Kayleigh has understandably internalised this as college as a waste of time. No-one in her immediate family has had a positive experience of third level and hence the

social and cultural capital to recognise the rules of the game around third level is lacking. These restrictions play a part in cultivating a habitus that college is not for her. Her teacher also by emphasising college as the only viable and respectable option, however unintentional is also sending Kayleigh the concealed message that the choices her family made are not correct or to be valued, and this is where our own prejudicial biases as teachers have to be critically reflected upon. She goes on to state she would like to be a crèche teacher and in contradiction to her teacher's earlier suggestion states "I'm probably not gonna waste seven years of my life in college learning to become a teacher". She also adds she would not like to be the teacher that is like "O give out them books, stop that and stuff like that just little kids running around the classroom and just playing little games with them and stuff." It is fair to say her impression of what it means to be a teacher is very much in line with the traditional, authoritative teacher. She talks about importance of school to help us "learn to speak properly". There is a clear devaluing of working class cultures, lifestyle choices and dispositions. Kayleigh has learned how to reconcile her habitus to appease her teacher and in doing so portrays the "right" attitudes towards third level even though this is not in line with her actual beliefs. In essence she finds herself in a middle class field that does not value or recognise her working class habitus (Ingram 2011; 2018) so she essentially resigns it at the school gate, and in doing so receives positive feedback from her teacher. This allows her to successfully play within the rules of the game and to move with ease between the two fields. This does however come at an emotional cost with Kayleigh expressing a lot of anger in her:

*"in my experience now I would have a load of anger in me just like a random thing and one thing I would do if I was at home I would scream into my pillow to get like all the anger*

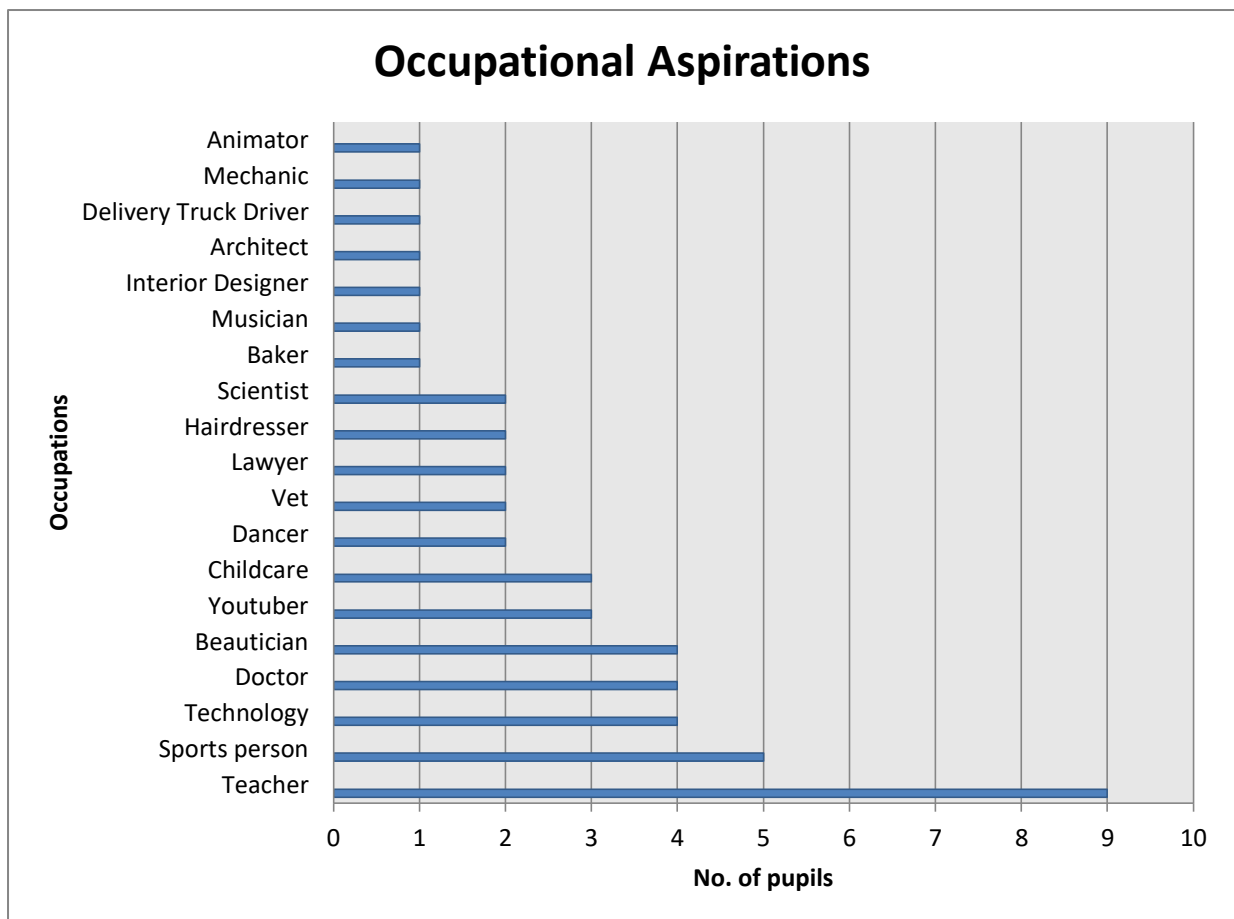
*out...Cos like it's a bit stressful if you keep everything inside cos your head just goes all around the place so I say its good to just like talk out" (Kayleigh, Greenhill N.S.).*

While she has mastered the ability to navigate opposing fields, the necessary juggling act of self- management and resignation of habitus is leading to immense emotional pressure and effort. Kayleigh's story also highlights the danger of schools proffering the symbolically violent notion that a college degree is the ultimate goal of education and the only way for working class pupils to legitimatise their cultural capital (Skeggs 1997). The massification of third level education has resulted in it becoming the only "respected" choice and those choosing not to progress as being "othered" (Bowers-Brown 2012:66). There is vast political rhetoric around aiming high with little discussion given to the unequal structures that limit aspirations becoming a reality (St. Clair & Benjamin 2011; Abrahams 2016). While research shows DEIS schools lag behind schools nationally in terms of aspirations and expectations to attend third level (Kavanagh et al 2015; Kavanagh, Weir & Moran 2017), this study would like to recognise and acknowledge that the working class pupils had high, aspirational goals to proceed in a wide range of training and employment paths (see figure 10).

#### **6.4 The Institutional Habitus: Compliance versus Dissent**

As evident in Kayleigh's story, when faced with the power of the institutional habitus the pupils had very little option but to conform to the school norms and in this sense take on a more middle class habitus. The pupils who did choose to resist habitus modification experienced more negative feedback from teachers and eventual disengagement. This led me to create a "Three Way Engagement Framework" (see Table 3) to map the different forms of habitus interruptions with engagement or disengagement.

Figure 10: Occupational Aspirations



In this framework, the concept of resigned habitus operates as a form of coping mechanism to ensure conformity without necessarily incorporating the new field norms or values within their originary habitus. In this instance, it is a creative strategy of self-preservation undertaken by working class pupils in DEIS schools. I will now present more evidence of this self- preservation in action as described through the pupils' own words.

Table 3: Three Way Engagement Framework

<u>Relationship with School</u>	Compliance: <i><u>With It</u></i>	Somewhere in the Middle: <i><u>Neither with it nor against it</u></i>	Resistance: <i><u>Against It</u></i>
<u>Habitus Typology</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Abandoned Habitus</li> <li>Reconciled Habitus</li> <li><b>Resigned Habitus</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Destabilised Habitus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reconfirmed Habitus</li> </ul>
<u>Engagement</u>	Engaged	-Tethering between engaged and disengaged.  -Small Acts of Resistance	Disengaged
<u>Example of pupils:</u>	Kayleigh  Laura  Ruth	Denis  Donnacha	Lee  Tyler

#### **6.4.1. Restricted Self- “put on like an act”**

Pupils spoke in detail about having to act differently at school and at home and how this led to “two conflicting selves” (Reay 2002:228), with a more restricted self adopted in school. This restricted self is the form pupils take on when they resign their habitus for self-preservation.

*“I’m way different when I am out of school” (James, Greenhill N.S.).*

*“at home you are more yourself” (Jill, North Meadows N.S.).*

*“at school I would be way different...you have to keep yourself more controlled” (Laura, Greenhill N.S.).*

*“No I am way different. At school I am more quiet and stuff at home I am loud and confident” (Christina, Greenhill N.S.).*

This was also seen earlier in Kayleigh’s story, when she stated she can “put on like an act”. There is a clear link here with Bourdieu’s “hysteresis effect” (1977, 2000) whereby the habitus is misaligned with the field causing periods of crisis which can produce a “splitting of the self” or a “painfully fragmented self” (Friedman 2016:110). Evidence of this restricted self demonstrates the central role school has in habitus formation. The hysteresis effect concept also helped me analyse pupil engagement and in particular dissent from and compliance with the school field. It is this story of the added emotional and psychological impact on working class pupils that these findings brings to the DEIS conversation. This is manifested through the anxiety of self-management as they try to navigate themselves through school, while trying to maintain a sense of self.

The majority of pupils spoke about being restricted and constrained in school and to have to act “prim and proper” (Eimear, North Meadows N.S.). It is clear the pupils are aware that to achieve habitus-field congruency, they must alter their originary habitus to suit the new field. By acting more middle class and keeping themselves in check, the pupils receive more positive feedback from teachers. This self-restriction can lead to emotional turmoil as apparent in the anger expressed by Kayleigh. It can have detrimental implications on pupil wellbeing and pupils require “super human effort” for this “careful balancing act” (Reay 2002:228). Denis discussed the difficulty of miscommunication between the differing fields with words he uses at home as acceptable in this field but then the same words at school can see him labelled as a “weirdo”:

*“do you know if you are at home and you say something normal people would be like oh grand grand, then you say it at school and people are like you are some weirdo” (Denis, Greenhill N.S.).*

Denis highlights here the discontinuity between the language practices of children’s home and school life, and is an example of class specific barriers working class pupils come up against in the education system. Bourdieu (1977) explained the power of linguistic capital (a form of embodied cultural capital) by showing how a posh, upper class accent enjoys more credibility or legitimacy and thus yields benefit to the speaker endowed with them. This can result in symbolic violence for those who speak different to those in the middle or upper classes. The pupils portrayed several examples of where they felt their linguistic repertoire was undervalued as seen in the abstracts below. Their words identify the importance of language in the school field in the struggle for cultural recognition and acquiring of value.

*“school is important cos....you need to learn to speak properly. Like yesterday my friend said “I didn’t finish it a all” instead of “at all” like she didn’t really give out to us but she was making a funny little joke” (Kayleigh, Greenhill N.S.).*

*“teachers don’t understand us sometimes like the words we use they’re not proper you know. Teachers speak posher and that’s why in school you have to careful what you say or you just get given out to like” (Tyler, Greenhill N.S.).*

It is clear Kayleigh, Denis and Tyler are all aware of their linguistic repertoire being different than the school context and as a result they feel their mastery of language is invalidated or rejected in the school context. In Denis’ words this makes him feel like a “weirdo” when he says certain things in the school context that would be perceived as normal at home. This self-consciousness forces pupils “out of habitual action and into reflexivity” (Garratt 2017:630) and is another form of restricted self whereby the working class pupils of my study have to monitor and change their behaviour to fit the predominantly middle class school habitus. Tyler distinguished the class differential between the way he speaks “not proper” compared to the “posher” words used by Teachers. This impacts his growing disidentification with the school culture as he is forced into self- monitoring of “misplaced behaviours” (Bourdieu 2000:163). The working class pupils are demonstrating here the denial of the ease of belonging that middle class pupils take for granted. Instead they are forced into monitoring and changing their accent and language to fit into the school. Tyler illustrates this self-management and resignation of habitus through his acknowledgment of being careful of what he says in school, and also the disparity between his teacher’s linguistic repertoire and his own. The pupils’ internalisation of their own linguistic capital being somewhat inferior and subordinate is an example of symbolic violence and shows the



schools' "power of suggestion" (McGillicuddy & Devine 2017). This inevitably leads to subsequent implications on working class children's habitus and their emotional wellbeing.

This correlates with MacRuairc's study (2011) which found working class pupils were self-conscious and aware of their use of language being invalidated and as a result they rejected the formal language of school with profound implications on school engagement. Skerrett (2017) also highlighted how the role of sociolinguistics engenders social class inequalities, particularly in the Irish context which relies heavily on strong linguistic skills. Evidence of a split between formal school language and language used at home risks further alienating DEIS pupils and can form a language barrier that impedes pupil engagement.

The examples presented of restricted self portray the insecurities and unease, "the emotional politics of class" (Skeggs 1997:82) that comes with being a fish out of water. Working class pupils can never have "the certainty that they are doing it right" (ibid. 90). This notion of not quite fitting in is deeply emotional and embodied by the pupils. As a result the pupils expressed a need to be more controlled at school and unable to be themselves within school. This idea of restricted self strongly illustrates the power of the school field in entrenching conformity and resignation of habitus for working class pupils.

#### **6.4.2 Resignation to the Inevitable: "Just get on with it"**

Pupils identified disruptive behaviour as a stressful element of school life. Ruth from Greenhill N.S. described witnessing pupils being quite aggressive and damaging school property:

*"People just go down and rip them (coat hangers) off the wall...If they are angry at one of the teachers...Cos there are certain things you are not allowed to do in school. Like you have*

*to be well mannered and stuff and some people don't do that so they get given out to and then they just get mad...Its kind of stressful because then the teacher is off trying to get them to calm down or punish them or something and then we are left and we get time taken off learning and we can't learn anymore so its just upsetting and stressful at the same time"* (Ruth, Greenhill N.S.).

This not only causes a tense classroom environment but can also unfairly take from pupils' own learning. Interesting to note the majority of pupils who discussed misbehaviour seemed to "other" the offender, by blaming them and distancing themselves from them. In juxtaposition they seemed to favour the side of the teacher:

*"Well I mean they are doing all they can. They are doing the best they can to help everyone to make sure they are getting a good education but it is their decision to not listen"* (Heather, Greenhill N.S.).

Kayleigh (Greenhill N.S.) identifies the reason for them lashing out as them being "messed up" and "they should learn that they have to be good". There is little sympathy for the pupils who are acting out, instead they are seen as a burden who really should "just get on with it" and "deal with it" (Laura, Greenhill N.S.). In a Bourdieusian sense, they should learn the rules of the game and do not question them. The pupils very much feel that complying to the institutional habitus is in short, a "resignation of the inevitable" (Bourdieu 1984:372). It is just a necessary part of school life and the best strategy to employ to successfully navigate the school field.

One child in particular that a number of pupils in Greenhill N.S. identified in regards to misbehaviour was Lee (name changed). Lee was unfortunately not part of this study. They

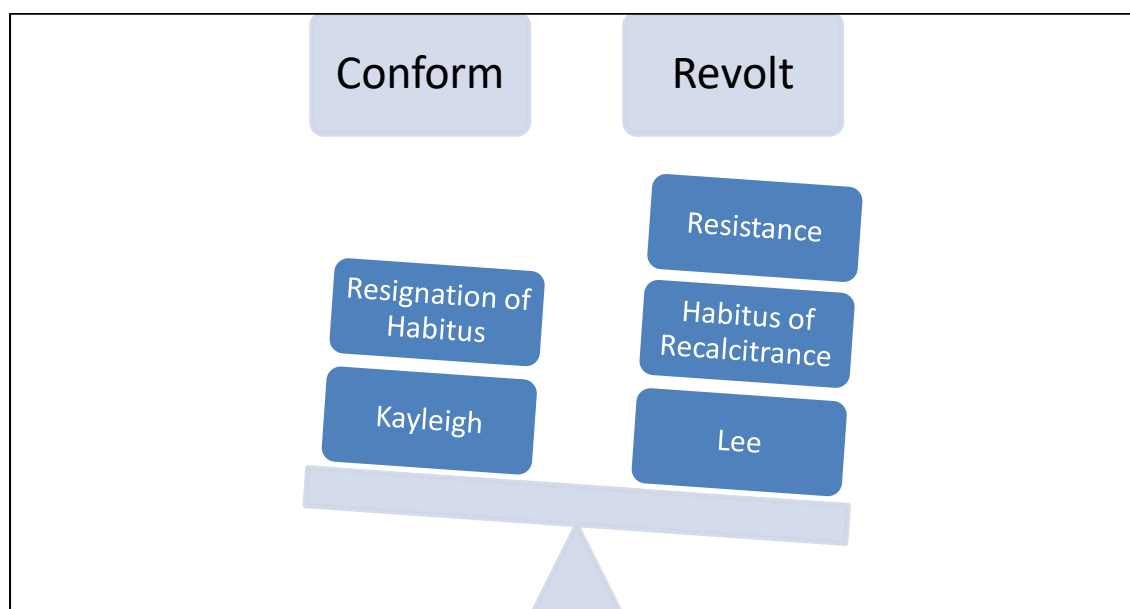
indicated Lee has dropped out of school. According to them he is now working in his Uncle's "Whippy Van" (ice-cream van). Lee's story, as told by the pupils in his class, illustrates the cycle of misbehaviour, disengagement and eventual drop out. It presents an example of re-confirmed habitus whereby he fought and resisted the institutional habitus he was presented with in school. By refusing to resign his habitus, Lee rebelled, lashed out and eventually left. There is an "othering" of Lee as the pupils question why he does not just "get on with it" like everyone else. Chelsea (Greenhill N.S.) also highlighted how the other boys in the class had learned to self-manage their habitus and "wouldn't act like that in school but they would act like that outside of school". This checking in and checking out of their different identities is a form of self-management and self-regulation which Lee clearly resisted against and unfortunately by portraying the one habitus that was misaligned to the school, it led to his inevitable disengagement.

The power of the school only leaves the pupils with two viable options- to conform or to resist, which in the case of Lee has detrimental impact on school engagement with lifelong consequences. Bourdieu's hysteresis effect (1977, 2000) helped me to understand the emotional impact of this misalignment between habitus and field and helped me analyse pupil engagement and in particular dissent from and compliance with the school field. For some working class pupils the added emotional and psychological impact of "identity mutation" (Friedman 2016:117) in complying with the school was a cost too much and hence their resistance to this mutation is the only viable option left to safeguard their sense of self. In the case of Lee, the pupils themselves are so encultured with the institutional habitus that they could not understand why Lee would not just take the easy option, comply and "get on with it" (Laura, Greenhill N.S.). The power of doxa and symbolic violence is

manifested here whereby there is no one questioning the impact of Lee's identity mutation to ensure compliance. It is an assumed taken for granted practice that his identity mutation and compliance is for the best. However, I would argue in whose best interest? The constant need to alter working class habitus to mould into middle class institutions does not challenge social class inequalities but further maintains educational homeostasis that best serves middle class interests and advancement.

Figure 11 below shows the impact of habitus on engagement in the case of Kayleigh and Lee and borrows from my nursery rhyme metaphor of the see-saw as seen in chapter one. Kayleigh's resignation of habitus led to positive feedback from teachers and a perceived engagement, whether this is simply compliant engagement or a deeper level of engagement is hard to measure but Kayleigh is successfully navigating school life. As seen earlier, she is skilled at playing the game, resigning her habitus at school to appease the institutional habitus. Lee on the other side of the see-saw portrayed a habitus of recalcitrance and resisted against the school rules and as a result became disengaged. Pupils such as Denis presented earlier is tethering somewhere in the middle between ambivalent engagement, conformity and small acts of resistance (see table 3). It is clear that the process of disengagement starts very early in pupils' school life. This is of increased importance in our DEIS primary schools as a critical site of intervention. For pupils to feel affectively engaged and attached to the school it is clear they need to feel valued, respected and free to express their authentic self.

Figure 11: The See-Saw Trajectory of Pupil Engagement



The resignation of habitus by the pupils who have conformed to the school rules and learned how to play the game more successfully does not necessarily imply they are fully engaged with school, and I would question if this form of compliant engagement is sufficient enough for lifelong learning. Through my exploration of the *See-Saw Trajectory of Engagement* and my *Three Way Engagement Framework*, I was able to plot the multiple forms of habitus interruptions along an engagement trajectory and illustrate the difficulty for working class pupils to succeed in school when they do not manifest their working class habitus. Those most successful in the current educational system are the ones that alter their identities to fit within the school. I would argue strongly here for the need of the field to be altered rather than placing that emotional burden on the shoulders of young children.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

In conclusion, by presenting pupils' images and words I hope to add a more nuanced understanding to the experience of working class pupils attending DEIS primary schools. This chapter highlights the extra psychological demands placed on their habitus on a daily basis

and the consequential effects on pupil wellbeing and affective engagement. Pupils demonstrated the many ways performativity was emphasised over the affective dimension of schooling with detrimental consequences on pupil wellbeing. The data draws out many examples illustrating the power of the school and individual teachers to shape pupils' habitus and trajectories (Ingram 2018) and in doing so generates practices that ensure conformity to the institutional habitus. Pupils' self-management skills were forced to monitor their habitus as they navigated between their school self and authentic self, ultimately leading to tales of anxiety and insecurity. This chapter also presented the worrying finding of the invisibility of Traveller culture in DEIS primary schools where numbers of Traveller pupils are at their highest. This raises the question how affective engagement can be achieved for these pupils who are evidently tolerated more so than embraced as an active member of the school community. The impact of habitus on engagement trajectories was illustrated through the metaphor of the see-saw, with those willing to resign or alter their habitus most likely to successfully navigate school life, while any resistance to the institutional habitus only serves to alienate pupils further and fuel disengagement. This identity mutation is more dramatic for working class pupils facing greater disconnect between home and the school field, and hence pupil wellbeing needs to be at the forefront of DEIS schools.

## **Chapter 7: Relationships for Affective Engagement**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines my findings around the centrality of relationships as an important in-school process that impacts on affective engagement. As discussed in detail in chapter three, relatedness is proven to increase school engagement. Pupil attitudes to school and the quality of their interaction with their teachers and peers have implications for their long term educational success (Ryan & Deci 2000; Reeve 2012, Trowler 2013; Lawson & Lawson 2013; Smyth 2017). This has increased importance in DEIS primary schools as outlined from the recent GUI findings (ESRI 2012) that primary school experiences set the tone for later school engagement, with relationships between teachers and pupils a crucial element of positive attitudes and experiences (Smyth 2017). This chapter highlights the importance of positive and egalitarian teacher-pupil relationships to further enhance pupil affective engagement. In particular this chapter introduces and explores the concept of punished habitus, whereby working class boys were more likely to experience negative interactions with teachers. Hence, in similarly to Smyth (2017), this study emphasises the need for a move away from the use of more negative sanctions which further alienate young people. Students who are academically and socially engaged in school are likely be more successful and as a consequence receive more positive responses from teachers. Unfortunately the reverse of this situation increases the risk of failure and school drop-out. This study highlighted the dangers of positive feedback only being given to pupils who are conforming to the school system and in an essence resigning their habitus to be more aligned to the school field. This added to the anxiety of self-management and can constrain pupil engagement and increase disidentification.

Considering the centrality of school to pupils' lives it is the nurturing of these social relations that contributes to pupils' overall school experience, and has direct implications on wellbeing and habitus formation. I argue nurturing positive school relationships is a social capital building exercise and is an important component of the affective structuring of school. It has significant implications on habitus formation as it is "the means through which we develop a sense of self-regard, importance, worthiness and sense that we "matter" and are valued by others" (Luttrell 2013:296).

I will now present my findings in this chapter under the following headings:

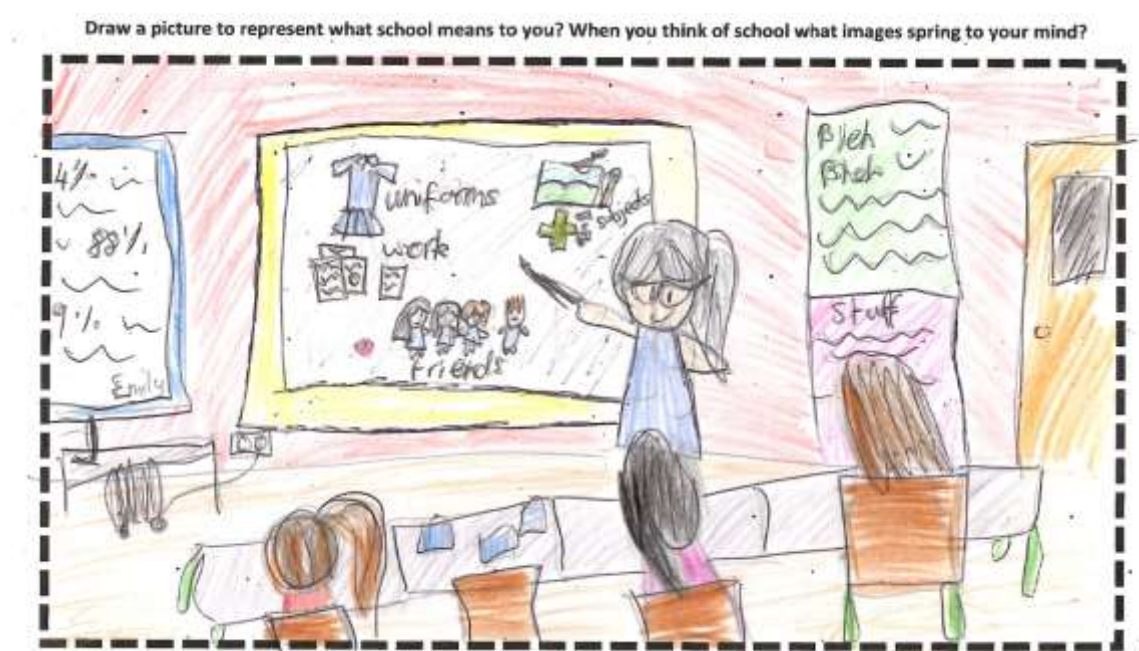
- Climate of Fear
- Social Wellbeing
- Anxiety of Self-Management

## **7.2 Climate of Fear: "scared to talk to teacher"**

As mentioned previously in chapter four, the dominant authoritarian model of schooling "suggests that the original purpose of control and compliance is deeply embedded in schooling and is highly resistant to change" (Harber 2004:59). This study presents findings that this model is still very much prevalent in the participating DEIS Urban Band 1 classrooms. It also vividly demonstrates the significant role individual teachers can play in alienating pupils, as opposed to the school as a whole. This is seen most clearly in the juxtaposition of pupils' negative views of school and their class teacher in Greenhill N.S., in comparison to the more positive views expressed by pupils in North Meadows N.S. This highlights the importance of classroom climate on affective engagement and a child's sense of belonging as opposed to feeling alienated or rejected.



Figure 12: Eimear's Drawing North Meadows N.S.



Eimear's picture above (see figure 12) illustrates the traditional, didactic classroom scenario, prevalent in authoritative teaching. Authoritarianism can create a culture of fear and oppression and unfortunately was expressed by pupils across all three of my participating schools:

*"Maybe the homework like if you got stuck on it and you would be afraid teacher would give out to you or something" (Eilish, North Meadows N.S.).*

*"sometimes I would be scared of the teachers and sometimes I get really stressed about not doing it right and I get too scared and blow up explode.*

*Explode with anger?*

*No upset explode like stress really stressed" (Kerry, Holy Oaks N.S.).*

*"The work like and some teachers can be like very strict and that's why they don't like it...Like going into school they'd be kind of scared in case they missed one bit of their homework and they'd have to do it all over again or something" (Keith, Holy Oaks N.S.).*

*"Like I remember when I was younger I was so scared to talk to teacher cos I was afraid I would get in trouble and whenever I did I started crying cos I was so scared of getting in trouble" (Lisa, Holy Oaks N.S.).*

*"I have my friends around me and if I'm stuck I can ask my friends not just my teachers cos I can get nervous asking my teachers in case she might yell at me or anything" (Andrea, Greenhill N.S.).*

*"Why do you think pupils are afraid of getting in trouble a lot?"*

*Well that bothers me a lot. I hate it. I do not like getting in trouble. I don't really get in trouble but the fear is still there.*

*What is you think you really hate about it?*

*Its being looked down on I suppose" (Claire, Holy Oaks N.S.).*

*"I don't like answering questions an all that in case its wrong" (Amy, Greenhill N.S.)*

The overwhelming emotion presented in the pupils' words is fear, even of trivial things such as forgetting homework or answering a question in class. Claire highlighted above the manifestation of being inferior or less than when you get in trouble, "looked down on". Amy illustrates the notion of knowledge as being absolute with only the "right" answer being of value. This is in direct juxtaposition with the goals of education as a dialogic, creative and expressive experience (Greene 1999; 2000; 2009). Amy's example serves to illustrate the

danger of authoritative teaching in stifling dialogue and an engaging schooling experience. Unfortunately traditional, authoritative methods are commonplace in Irish classrooms and are proving reluctant and slow to change (Sugrue 1997; Devine et al., 2013; Skerritt 2018). The numerous statements from the pupils expressing anxiety in relation to getting something wrong was quite startling. Under a curriculum that stresses the holistic development of the child I question how this can fully be the case if pupils feel so afraid to express themselves. There is clearly a need for a move away from authoritative and traditional teaching methods that exclude so many and instead shift towards creative and dialogic methods.

For working class pupils who are already feeling disaffected these rigid and controlling school environments can be particularly isolating and oppressive. Authoritarian teaching practices restrict pupil engagement and undermine personal and academic growth (Lumby & Morrison 2009). As discussed also in chapter six, the power of the school and individual teachers is so great that pupils are left with little option but to conform and resign their habitus at the school gate. Classrooms controlled by fear and authority are undoubtedly harmful to not only pupil engagement but also pupils' emotional development and wellbeing. In chapter four, I explored how Nussbaum (2003) describes one of her ten capabilities as "not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety." Unfortunately a vital finding, explored in this chapter, shows pupils were being denied this capability as unequal power relations were having a direct impact on their alienation from school by enculturing feelings of fear of failure and insecurities. This highlights again the mitigating effects positive teacher-pupil relations can have on habitus-field congruence (Ingram 2009).

*“its very important to feel safe cos I don’t think you should feel scared or nervous or any of that” (Christina, Greenhill N.S.).*

Fear of getting in trouble and subordination was a common theme running through many pupil accounts (see figure 6). This climate of fear hindered their feelings of safety and security. It was apparent the schools were still very much seeped in their historically authoritarian role which conflicted with the cultivation of a positive classroom climate. It leads to “a conflict between education for control in order to produce citizens and workers who were conformist, passive and politically docile on the one hand and those who wanted to educate for critical consciousness” (Harber 2004:59). Education aimed at docility runs the risk of reproducing rather than challenging social inequalities, and hence why Bourdieu’s challenge to break the paradox of doxa is so important in our schools to promote critical thinkers. This cannot happen in classrooms whereby pupils blindly conform. It raises the alarming question as posed by Grant (2012:911), “Are students being taught in ways that are consistent with cultivating flourishing lives, or are they being trampled over by workforce preparation and consumerism.” This study regretfully points to the latter.

### **7.2.1 Positive Relations: “If they are mean the child won’t want to stay here”**

*“Teachers can make a big difference to a child’s future when they spend the extra effort developing positive relationships with students” (Webster-Stratton 2012:69).*

The importance of good teacher-pupil relations was stressed over and over again by the pupils who emphasised the importance of connecting on a personal and human level. Issues of respect, fairness, differential power and exercise of authority were over-riding themes. This had implications on habitus as “power relations within schools impair their capacity to develop as persons” (Lynch & Lodge 2002:143). Pupils strongly advocated for

Figure 13: Laura's Drawing Greenhill N.S.



Emmet emphasised the difference a kind teacher can have on pupil engagement, with knock on effects on pupil learning:

*“What do you think some people find difficult about school?”*

*Maybe if they find a subject hard and they get in trouble for like not paying attention they might think school is bad they might not like their teacher and they might not like school at all. But then when they like a subject and their teacher’s kind to them cos they are trying to learn more then they might like school” (Emmet, Greenhill N.S.).*

Emmet also portrays the negative outcomes of the opposite scenario where academic difficulty leads to you getting in trouble for not paying attention, which in turns results in you disliking the teacher and inevitably school. Emmet has effectively described the process of disengagement facing DEIS pupils when the supportive teacher and positive feedback is missing. It was clear the pupils understood that negative teacher-pupil relations had an impact on engagement with pupils discussing becoming bored, withdrawn or indifferent as a result. Andrea highlights this when she portrays a form of ambivalent engagement:

*“Do you think that’s important that the teachers are nice?”*

*Ya it helps us to like do our work for them more than like, if they like yell at you more you’d probably like stop working for them. You’d still do something but like you’d just be like “forget about it” and stuff” (Greenhill N.S.).*

Heather (Greenhill N.S.) also stressed the impact of a negative teacher-pupil relationship when she stated she thinks kind staff is so important “cos if they are mean the child won’t want to stay here” and she felt she “would be very angry if there was always angry staff.” Additionally, respondents argued that positive relationships started with mutual respect,

allowing the inclusion of voices and views to be heard and valued. This echoes strongly with Freire who stated “our relationships with the learners demands that we respect them and demands equally that we be aware of the concrete conditions of their world, the conditions that shape them” (2005:102). The majority of pupils in this study spoke about the importance of how trust and respect were central to these relationships. It was apparent from the pupil responses that they really valued supportive and encouraging relationships with their teachers:

*“the teachers can like motivate you and inspire you. Like come on you can do it and stuff”*  
(Kayleigh, Greenhill N.S.)

Danielle emphasised trust as a cornerstone to the relationship building exercise with a teacher.

*“you have to really connect with the students cos if you don’t like there’s nothing there really... you just don’t have trust in them really and you wouldn’t enjoy being in their class...actually sit down and actually talk with us as well and its lovely to talk to our teacher as well and tell her what’s going on in life and everything”* (Greenhill N.S.).

Trust is hence seen as a central component of social capital building. Additionally the need for connectedness and to be able to talk to your teacher was an overriding theme. Teachers who took an interest in pupils’ lives made them feel recognised and valued as important members of the class community. Subsequently the trust this builds up was echoed by many of my pupils.

*“if you have nice teachers they could help you and like talk to you about stuff that you feel frightened of or scared of and stuff”* (Roseanne, Greenhill N.S.).

*“in case you like there’s something happening at home and that you really need to talk to someone and there’s no-one there to talk to so then you can just come to your teachers and stuff” (Andrea, Greenhill N.S.).*

*“What do pupils need from school?”*

*Em like teachers that you can talk to and stuff like to get rid of their problems besides from like just keeping them locked in their own heads” (Ann, Greenhill N.S.).*

*“Like if you have anything to say you can say it to them and like they’re not like putting you down or anything like that” (Emma, North Meadows N.S.).*

This has critical implications for pupil wellbeing and mental health. The pupils are identifying teachers as a significant adult in their lives who they recognise they may need to lean on in times of crisis. If the supportive relationship is lacking Ann highlights some pupils are left with no option but to keep their problems “locked in their heads”. This emphasises the important pastoral care role teachers play in pupils’ lives. While we would hope all teachers recognise this vital role and subsequently spend time nurturing relations with pupils, unfortunately some pupils in this study painted a different picture whereby negative interactions with teachers left them feeling patronised and humiliated. Emma highlighted above the effect these “put downs” can have on being willing to engage in conversations with teachers, as the pupils fear being ridiculed. This has implications on self-worth and the ability to develop a healthy self-concept. Considering pupils’ utterances of anxiety and fear, as seen in my previous chapter, this is an important element of positive teacher-pupil relations. Relationships with teachers have the ability to mitigate or aggravate working class pupils’ experience of the “hysteresis effect” (Bourdieu 1977, 2000; see chapter three). By



forming close bonds with working class pupils that value and recognise their home fields, teachers can ease the “fish out of water” concept (Bourdieu 1989). The opposite scenario devalues pupils’ originary field and forces them “out of habitual action and into reflexivity” (Garratt 2017:630). It causes self-consciousness and anxiety as they have to keep watch on “misplaced behaviours” (Bourdieu 2000). It was clear the pupils recognised the mitigating effects of positive teacher relations as they stated that close relations and connections with their teachers simply made school life easier. This study highlights the unfair additional effort some pupils have to put in to achieve these positive interactions by altering their identity and resigning their habitus to appease the class teacher, as seen in the case of Kayleigh in the previous chapter. The exercise of authority over pupils impacted heavily on pupils’ decision to resign their habitus and illustrated the power of individual teachers on habitus formation.

As Reay (2018) highlighted another blow to working class pupils is the way they are often treated in schools with some teachers and schools operating under the assumption that working class families are chaotic and dysfunctional and hence children need school to impose control and discipline. As previously discussed in chapter two and four, it can also help to explain the disproportional over-identification of EBD in DEIS Urban Band 1 schools (Banks et al. 2012) highlighting the influence of teacher judgement on what is “normal” behaviour and runs the risk of labelling certain groups of children (Smyth, McCoy & Kingston 2015). This is an act of symbolic violence against working class pupils who are more likely to be perceived as emotionally or behaviourally difficult than their middle class peers, and is a form of punished habitus (further expanded in section 7.2.3). Unless working class pupils take on the attitudes, norms and behaviours of the middle class school culture they run the

risk of being labelled difficult or as one of my participants put it “messed up” (Kayleigh, Greenhill N.S.). This shows the very serious side of symbolic violence and cultural mismatch in DEIS schools and plays an important backdrop to school relationships in the three participating DEIS Urban Band 1 classrooms.

### **7.2.2 Power Dynamics: “feel like you have no control”**

As Arnot & Reay emphasised “opportunities for teachers to hear, through the voices of pupils, the embedded power relations and forms of control which organise pedagogy can be forceful” (2007:322). Pupil voice can have profound implications on breaking the paradox of doxa by making visible symbolic violence and power relations that are hidden as commonplace in our society. The pupils in this study felt powerless to change the things they did not like in school and were in an unenviable position. The teachers have all the power and control and the pupils as portrayed in chapter six are left with little option but the resignation of habitus to fit the school field. The school field is an uneven playing field with the teachers very much at the epicentre of the field with all the power. In a curriculum that advocated for pupils as active learners, the unequal power relations illustrated in these DEIS schools are completely at odds with these guiding principles. This finding is even more shocking considering the child-centred curriculum has been in place in these schools since 1999 yet the pupils are still not expressing widespread implementation of active, collaborative, child-led learning. Numerous research shows this change to more active, dialogic classrooms is even more slow and resistant in DEIS schools (Devine 2011; Devine et al. 2013; McCoy et al., 2012). It is suggested this is as a result of more challenging and disruptive behaviour in DEIS schools, thus there is an overemphasis on discipline and control. While discipline may be a challenge in the DEIS classrooms, this is a double sided

sword as we also know that traditional, authoritative classrooms further alienates our working class pupils leading to resistance and disengagement. The pupils in this study clearly expressed a desire to have more equal power relations:

*“So what is it like to be a pupil in your school? is it a good feeling or a bad feeling?”*

*Ya like sometimes it can be good but then sometimes you feel like you have no control cos all the teachers pick your decisions and stuff so like sometimes I don’t really want to be a pupil”*  
(Lisa, Holy Oaks N.S.).

*“Ya because the teachers are always like telling you what to do and if you don’t get to say what you want to do like it will probably like ruin you over”* (James, Greenhill N.S.).

*“I don’t know really. You don’t really get that much say, teacher decides anyway”*  
(Donnacha, Greenhill N.S.).

Pupils expressed an aspiration for improved respect and democratic participation. Kerry emphasised this through noting the importance of teachers allowing pupils to have a say in decision-making. She felt this would also help teacher-pupil relations as it would allow teachers to really get to know their pupils on a deeper level.

*“Ya cos most of the time its just the teachers making up the rules and it’s their choice but if you don’t let the pupils decide you will never really know them, you will never really get to know them”* (Kerry, Holy Oaks N.S.).

Kerry’s words echo the need for more equality in power relations and democratisation in the decision making processes. In this respect, she highlights the need for pupils to be recognised as active citizens in primary schools. As discussed in chapter three, a vast

amount of research highlights the importance of pupils being viewed as citizens in their own right (see Devine 2002; Greene 2000; 2004; Nussbaum 2003). This requires greater democratisation in schools which impacts on differential power relations. Overly controlled and regulated classroom environments alienate pupils and fuel disengagement. Traditionally pupils have had little voice or say in what goes on in school. This study emphasises the importance pupils themselves placed on being able to have a say or control in school. Pupils passionately and enthusiastically discussed changes and improvements they would like to see in their schools through the interviews and their drawings, and it became apparent that while they knew what was needed to engage more in schools this was not necessarily being listened to. Damien emphasised this point by stating that being able to speak also needs someone to listen. The absence of this symbiotic relationship had implications on self-worth.

*“Ya cos like I don’t know. I just can’t put it in to words. It should matter like you’re gonna speak and no one will listen and that makes you feel bad” (Damien, Greenhill N.S.).*

The pupils expressed a desire for greater democratisation in schools by including their voices, opinions and choices. Considering the amount of time pupils spend in school and the role school plays in social reproduction it is essential that pupils are actively given a voice in the decisions that affect them on a daily basis. This allows them to question the rules of the game rather than blindly conforming to the paradox of doxa. Unfortunately from the many pupil statements below this seems to be a rare occurrence in their classrooms:

*“Ya cos school is always made up of what they think we should do but what about what we want...There could be something in the school that kids are uncomfortable with or something and like they just deserve to have a say” (Laura, Holy Oaks N.S.).*

*“Ya cos like some people you know if they have an opinion and stuff they keep quiet cos like they think they might get in trouble or something” (Lisa, Holy Oaks N.S.).*

*“Having a say matters because we have been in school so long. We know everything about the school. We know what could be better or worse” (Claire, Holy Oaks N.S.).*

As a result of pupils rarely being asked their opinions it was apparent pupils subsequently found it hard to formulate opinions as expressed by Lisa below. If we want pupils who are empowered and articulate and have minds capable of critical thinking they have to be afforded this opportunity in the primary school. While we would like to think schools have moved on substantially from the days of pupils being seen and not heard, unfortunately the pupils highlight this is quite simply not the case. DEIS schools aiming to serve pupils most at risk of social exclusion have to move towards more creative and dialogic teaching methods to ensure more equal, inclusive classroom power relations. This would serve not only in the production of empowered, articulate, critical thinkers but also help pupils on the journey to developing a sense of self. This needs time and space not only on the side of pupils, but also for the teachers who in the current performance driven climate are unable to take more risks in their teaching.

*“They should like children more options in what they want to do and stuff. They usually like sometimes we don’t get the options on what to do and stuff.*

*What kind of things would you like to do if you had the options?*

*Em like I don’t really know to be honest” (Lisa, Holy Oaks N.S.).*

The pupils of this study are in the final year of primary schooling and it is a sad reflection of their experience to date that they feel they have had little say or input. It is no wonder that

as a result pupils are feeling disconnected and disaffected and instead discussed merely trying to “get in and get out” (Denis, Greenhill N.S.).

### **7.2.3 Punished Habitus: “get in trouble for nothing”**

Getting in trouble was identified as a main worry for the pupils in this study (see figure six). This is not surprising considering the GUI finding (McCoy, Smyth & Banks 2012) that young people from more disadvantaged families were significantly more likely to say they were given out to for misbehaving in class (24% compared to 11% of those more socially advantaged). I argue that this worrying class difference is a form of punished habitus, whereby working class habitus is more likely to be reprimanded in school. This anxiety of getting in trouble or being wrongly accused was mostly expressed by the boys. This also correlates with the GUI (ibid.) key findings that 13 year old boys had more negative attitudes to school, and were more likely to misbehave and to experience negative interactions with their teachers than girls. This fuels social inequalities, as it leads to further disengagement and misbehaviour and the continuation of the vicious cycle of social disadvantage. It is no wonder in the face of regular negative interactions, many pupils, in particular working class boys, lose interest in learning.

The boys in my study predominately discussed the issue of inequity whereby they identified getting in trouble unfairly and being reprimanded more frequently. There is a sense of them being more scrutinised and over regulated. The notion of symbolic violence is important here to understand punished habitus, as there is an assumption at play that working class boys are unruly and need to be more controlled. As a result of the intense surveillance they were more likely to resist and act out. Their resistance and misalignment with the school results in regular chastisement by teachers and a form of punished habitus. Repetitive,

negative interactions coloured their attitude to school and directly impacted on their affective engagement. Five out of the eight boys interviewed mentioned times they felt they were doing very little to deserve the reprimand:

*"Sometimes I don't really like this school too.*

*Why?*

*Because of getting in trouble, sometimes I get given out to and I didn't even do anything"*  
*(Tyler, Greenhill N.S.).*

*"Ya cos like if you have a bad friendship with them they might not be as nice to you and you might get given out to more than other people" (Emmet, Greenhill N.S.).*

*"Ya cos if you don't get along with the teachers they could just get you in trouble for nothing" (Damien, Greenhill N.S.).*

*"I like school cos like some of the teachers are fair but then like the others I just get in trouble for nothing then like out of nowhere they would be like Donnacha is that you talking?"*  
*(Donnacha, Greenhill N.S.).*

*"I find this weird like sometimes you know if you do something wrong the teachers be mad at you and they don't get it and then straight after that they'd be so like they'd be acting like nothing happened and they'd be acting like your best friend and then you do a tiny thing wrong and they'd be so odd with you, its weird.*

*Is it that once they have given out to you they move on?*

*Ya like you'd be thinking are they against ya or are they with you" (Denis, Greenhill N.S.).*

Emmet and Damien's words above highlight the unequal power relations in play as pupils try to navigate the educational field. The teachers have all the power in the centre of the field and the boys understand the little power they hold. They also demonstrate an understanding of the rules of the game. They express the consequences of having a "bad friendship" with their teacher, resulting in them getting further reprimanded. Denis' words express the confusion of this power struggle relationship and questions whether teachers are on his side or not. Together the boys' words illustrate the Bourdieusian power struggle concept of the field. Denis expanded further about being unfairly punished in school and even expressed a desire for cameras to be installed all over the school so as to prevent him being wrongly accused in the future. This resonates with Harber's thoughts on school as violence and use of surveillance in school to control (2004) or in this case to protect.

*"Ya and that's why I don't like about schools and stuff the way that happens. You don't do nothing wrong and like I hope there's like cameras in each school so they can see everything and then like if I was just talking to my friends the whole time the camera would see that and like I hope there's literally cameras each way you turn. (So you can't get blamed?) Ya and then like you won't be able to get in trouble" (Greenhill N.S.).*

This cultivation of a punished habitus can have direct implications on pupils' affective engagement and also their sense of self. The boys in this study are left with the option of continuing with this new reputation as a troublemaker or difficult and ultimately own that new school identity, or else try the uphill battle of shaking that reputation off. Ultimately it has become easier for the boys to continue in this new role as a "messenger" which gives them the attractive peer validation and masculine connotations of the "hard man". DEIS schools in manifesting strict, controlling classrooms are making it more difficult for the working class



boys in this study to align themselves with the school. This is seen in the case of Tyler where he has started the process of disengagement with school stating *“sometimes it can be real garbage... Like the homework, the seriousness, the bullying and all that”*. He is beginning to question matter of inequity and is angry in his disapproval of the way teachers handle behavioural issues:

*“some teachers can actually turn into monsters ya like Mr. X he is all sound but then he turns into a plum when he is angry when he gives out his face just goes red and I just hate Ms. X...Sometimes I don’t really like this school too.”*

Tyler was quite adamant he was being unfairly treated, *“I didn’t even do anything”*, and regularly getting in trouble in school by teachers that can turn into “monsters”. As he navigates the school field there is evidence his habitus is disconnected from school and he feels alienated. The strict teachers and getting wrongly accused is directly linked to his anger and disidentification with the school. The necessary supportive and nurturing relationships are lacking from his school experience and thus prevent him from becoming affectively engaged. The misaligned habitus between Tyler and those of his teachers perhaps has resulted in a gulf too great for either party to be willing to bridge. The persistent reprimanding of working class boys’ habitus further alienates the very pupils we are trying to engage the most. It can ultimately lead to disengagement and school dropout with detrimental effects on their life outcomes. It is for this very reason that a move away from negative sanctions and an emphasis on human connections and positive teacher-pupil relations are key to the affective engagement process in our DEIS schools.

The boys in my study support the worrying finding that working class pupils, in particular working class boys experience more punished habitus in schools. This points to the urgent

need to make more allowances for working class boys in DEIS primary schools, and instead of focusing on control and reprimands there needs to be an emphasis on cultivating positive interactions and healthy self-concepts with working class boys in DEIS schools. However, I think it is also important to note here that this paper raises important questions for further exploration into the themes of resignation and punishment across all schools. Given the power imbalance between teachers and pupils in almost all school, perhaps these are wider issues that need further investigation if we are to truly strive towards inclusive schools that prioritise wellbeing and the affective experience of schooling.

### **7.3 Social Wellbeing**

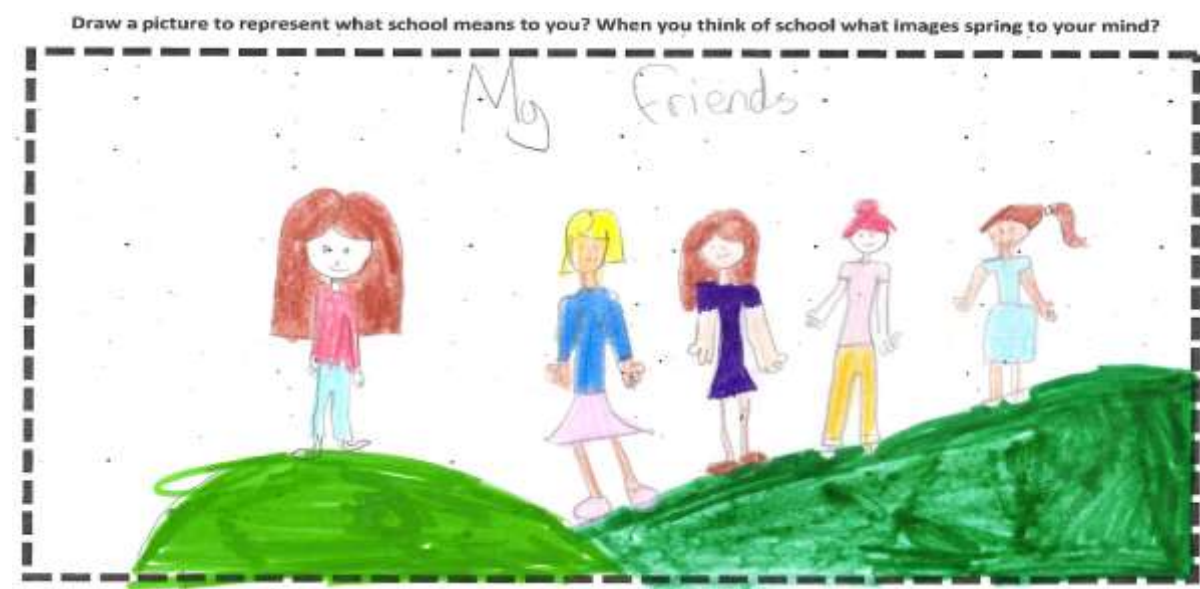
#### **7.3.1 Friendship: “one of the main reasons I even come to school”**

The main protective factor against authoritative, fearful classroom experiences was the centrality of friendships. This section highlights the need for DEIS schools to capitalise on this significant aspect of school-life through collaborative learning to further cultivate affective engagement. This study shows a clear link between wellbeing and peer social capital, as the value of their friendships, for primary school children, is that it is a part of the process of generating social and emotional wellbeing.

Figure 15: Tara's Drawing Greenhill N.S.



Figure 16: Margaret's Drawing North Meadows N.S.



It was clear from speaking to the pupils that friendships were an integral part of their school experience (see figure 15 & 16). The value of friendship in generating social and emotional wellbeing had implications on pupil engagement and their overall school experience.

*"when you have friends you kind of feel like you don't need anything else. You can start from there then" (Margaret, North Meadows N.S.)*

Lisa states chatting to her friends is “one of the main reasons I even come to school” (Holy Oaks N.S.). She illustrates here the central role peer relations play in school engagement and enjoyment. The importance of harnessing this positive aspect through allowing pupils the time to interact and collaborate more cannot be underestimated in a DEIS context geared towards improving engagement levels and preventing ESL.

However, accruing peer social capital is not without its complications in relation to school engagement as some pupils discussed the opposite scenario of social isolation and exclusion, particularly in relation to bullying. It was clear bullying was a main worry of the pupils in this study, as seen in figure six in my previous chapter. Some of the quotes below articulate this worry and demonstrate the severe impact of negative peer relations on the process of disengagement. A sense of belonging is an essential component of affective school engagement and in juxtaposition bullying and negative peer relations denies pupils this sense of belonging.

*“Bullying makes people sad and they wouldn’t want to go to school” (Jeanann, North Meadows N.S.).*

*“They might be stuck in some subjects or they might just not like school or they might have problems like with some other students or something, not getting along with them or something, feel like they are left out” (Ann, Greenhill N.S.).*

Chelsea (Greenhill N.S.) discussed while her own experience is positive she knows some children find school difficult because they get bullied and they “don’t fit in”. She also

interestingly states “some people don’t understand the reason why you would go to school”. Not believing in school or seeing the value in it is understood by Chelsea to make school much more difficult, and in doing so she highlights how the disparity between home and school fields can have implication on school engagement. She also outlines academic performance as a reason for being excluded in school and portrays the negative impact of the educational hierarchies in schools.

*“some people have a hard time learning and some people don’t understand the reason why you would go to school and then just some people who don’t get along with other people and they get bullied and all that so its harder.*

*Do you know some people who find the learning hard how might they act in school do you think?*

*They would act like very shy and they wouldn’t try talk to other people cos they would know they don’t fit in so they would just walk away and then they would just be on their own all the time.” (ibid.).*

This indicates the exclusion of those pupils deemed as less successful in school and indicates another dangerous aspect of ability grouping, as already discussed in the previous chapter. Lisa (Holy Oaks N.S.) discussed the impact of bullying on pupil wellbeing stating pupils become “sad” and “depressed”. Keith (Holy Oaks N.S.) aptly describes the aftermath of bullying “*cos like they’re always getting mocked and stuff like that and there’s a bad feeling in your head like. And they’re just afraid to come to school everyday.*” Bullying inevitably has a profound impact on pupil mental health, self-esteem and wellbeing and emphasises the importance of the promotion of an inclusive classroom environment that values all pupils

and has zero tolerance towards bullying. This study indicates negative school relationships with either their peers or teachers can feed into the “existence of cleft, tormented habitus” (Bourdieu 2000:64) as pupils are left feeling alienated and isolated from the school field with critical implications on affective engagement.

### 7.3.2 Capitalising on Peer Relations

It was apparent from data collected that there was a strong desire for the inclusion of more collaborative learning opportunities such as group-work (see figure 17 & 18).

Figure 17: Use of Groupwork

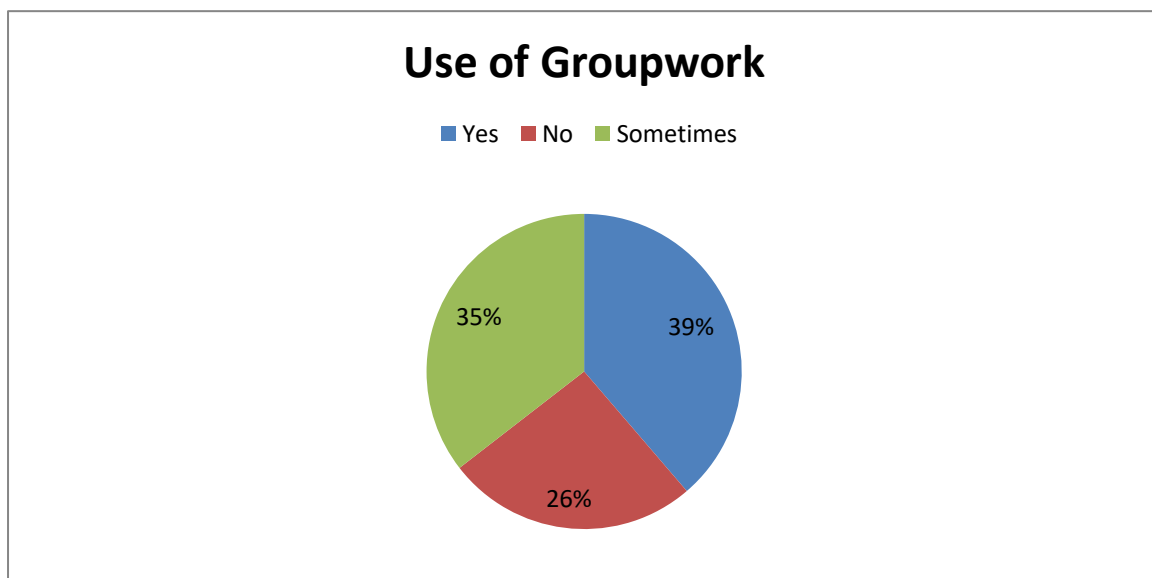
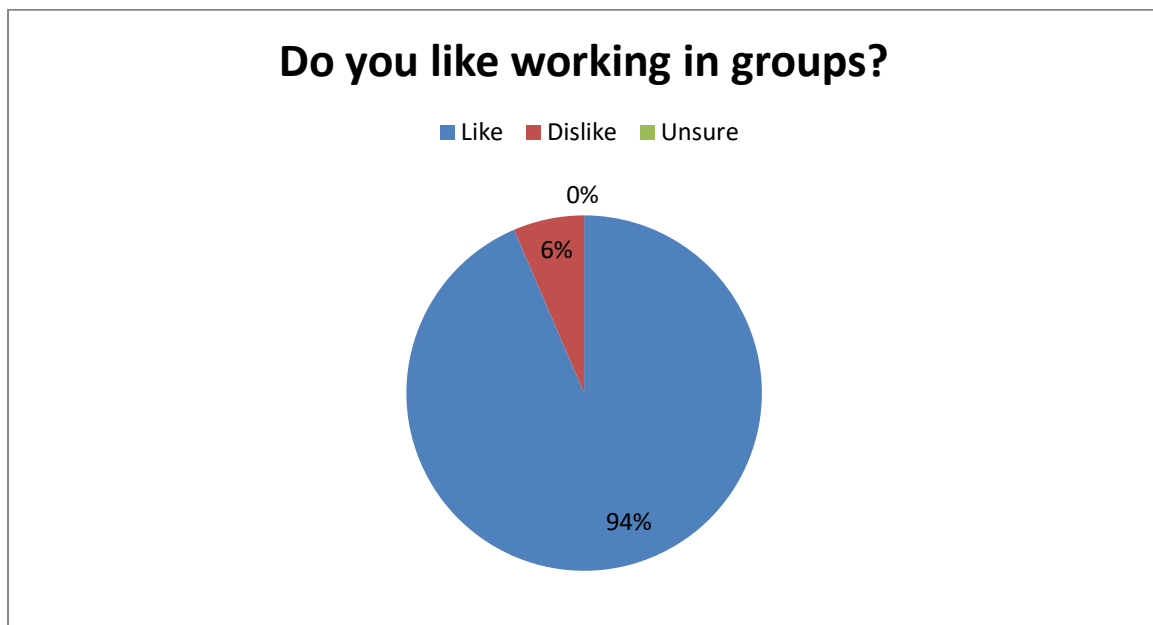


Figure 18: Do you like working in groups?



Group-work was seen as a positive methodology by the majority of the pupils (94%) (see figure 18) with many pupils emphasising a desire for more opportunities to interact with peers.

*“What do you like so much about group-work?”*

*Cos you see I like that teacher sometimes pick different people and then you can get to meet them people instead of going with the same people all the time” (Eilish, North Meadows N.S.).*

*“I don’t like working on my own. I kind of find it hard.*

*What’s good about working in groups?*

*Cos if you’re stuck you can just turn around to your friend and ask them for help.*

*Ya and do you think you get enough chances for that?*

*Mostly we do work on our own” (Lisa, Holy Oaks N.S.).*

*“Cos like you have other ideas not just your own and you can give other people a chance and stuff. Instead of just sitting by yourself they have to listen to what you say and you have to listen to what they have to say too” (Ann, Greenhill N.S.).*

While it was overwhelming in favour of group-work, some pupils still expressed a preference to working independently. This is also seen in the work of Archer et al. (2017) who found pupils resisted creative methodologies because the silent classroom and the test culture was so dominant in schools and encultured by pupils that they were afraid to spend time on activities they did not see as valuable.

*And do you like working in groups?*

*No I prefer to work on my own cos like when you’re working in groups you’re talking and you don’t get nothing done and then when you’re on your own you get everything done (Emma, North Meadows N.S.).*

This shows the danger of neoliberalism whereby responsibility for success, achievement or failure lies solely within the individual. This idea is so engrained in our education system that the pupils themselves are concerned more with the pursuit of the right answer and getting the work done than collaborating in open dialogue. For this to change, what we value in our education system would need to be confronted and challenged if we are to dispute the educational homeostasis currently being reproduced.



## 7.4 Anxiety of Self-Management

In similarity to the idea of restricted self, presented in chapter six, pupils were involved in a process of image management, which requires constant checking in and checking out of their identity portrayal. In an effort to put their best foot forward there was a need to constantly monitor and self-manage their image. This was not only the identity or habitus they portrayed to their teachers but it was clear the image portrayed to their peers was equally significant to the pupils. It was clear the “reputation” you got in primary school was another aspect to their self-making and identity formation. As Denis stated the reason you worry what people think is “cos like you don’t want a bad reputation for yourself” (Greenhill N.S.). This was discussed in detail by Lisa:

*“if you get known as like a bookworm or like a nerd and stuff its very hard to get rid of that name like and then they would have to do like do something that they probably wouldn’t want to do just to get rid of the name and its unfair to them...like if you get a bad reputation like its not easy to get rid of or like its not a good thing either like you shouldn’t be proud either you shouldn’t be going around the place saying like “O I done this and I done that” and stuff cos people do that like and they think that they’re mad now cos they are doing stuff like that.*

*Why do you think people do that, act up to be mad?*

*Cos they are showing off in front of all their friends and then they can look like cool in front of all their friends and stuff” (Holy Oaks N.S.).*

Lisa illustrates here the notion that pupils act out just to cement themselves as a “messenger” and to ensure they do not get a reputation as a nerd. Jill also stated this in her interview

that the reason pupils are disruptive is so “everyone will look at her and to be the messer” (North Meadows N.S.). In a pair interview with Laura and Christina they emphasised how, for the girls, this also effects the way they look and present themselves and is an example of bodily hexis and their embodied habitus (Bourdieu 1986):

*“Why do you think we care so much what others think?”*

*L- I don’t know like I’d say people think like say now even in the morning when they are doing their hair how will this affect my relationship with my friend.*

*Like it has gone to the extreme?*

*L-Ya they worry about every little thing.*

*C-Just afraid of being mocked or left out” (Greenhill N.S.).*

They suggest there is an added pressure on the girls as they try to portray the right image. The reputation they get is similar to Warin’s snail shell idea (2010) of the self and how it is carried around with them. Chelsea and Ruth also illustrated this permanent fixing of reputation and how it is hard to shake off:

*C- Ya like you don’t want to have a name.*

*R- No one wants a title.*

*Why do you think that matters so much?*

*C- Cos if you are labelled than no one will get to know you they will just think that of you.*

*R- Cos its not nice everyone calling you a name” (Greenhill N.S.).*

This is an important aspect of the process of identity formation and habitus construction and reconstruction in primary school. The impact of peer relations here on self-making is significant. Opportunities to discuss these worries in a classroom environment openly would allow for self-reflection and self-awareness and is an important aspect of the construction of self which is crucial to the school experience. While this is not a class specific issue, I would argue that the promotion of a healthy self-concept in DEIS schools is even more significant when you take into considerations the findings of the GUI study that shows working class pupils are faring less well in this regard (Frawley et al. 2014).

Two main identities depicted by the pupils were the successful learner identity and the masculine identity. In relation to successful learner identity the pupils discussed the fear of being labelled a “bookworm” or a “goody two shoes” and that this may result in bullying.

#### **7.4.1 Successful Learner Identity: “goody two shoes”**

Successful learner identity was often a doubled sided sword for the pupils in this study. While they wanted to be labelled as academically successful by their teachers it often meant they were ridiculed by their peers.

*“Because people might like mock you for being a goody two shoes or something like that”*  
(Amy, Greenhill N.S.).

Bookworms were seen as vulnerable or easy targets for bullying *“because they are easy to pick on because they don’t have a bunch of group of friends to support them”* (Jeanann, North Meadows). However, a number of pupils were defiant and strongly against academic success being seen as negative. In opposition to this they wanted to encapsulate the successful learner identity and did not want to “dial down” their academic achievement.

*“My friend was like don’t go to class early again just to do work again I don’t want that reputation. But I don’t really care what anyone thinks” (Eimear, North Meadows N.S.).*

*“Well yourself, like your own person, like you so when you feel like you are doing good in school it kind of makes you feel good but like sometimes you don’t really care what other people think so you shouldn’t really think “Oh I’m too smart I have to dial it down a bit” (Margaret, North Meadows N.S.).*

Conversely, Eilish highlights that even if pupils are strong and represent the successful learner identity this can often be in direct opposition with being perceived as popular and as a result it becomes a decision to be one or the other.

*“Some people like to do well in school but they also like to be popular with everyone but sometimes you can’t do both because if you are a really hard worker some people might mock you but if they mock you they are obviously not your friend and you can’t be friends with them. It’s kind of hard to do both” (Eilish, North Meadows N.S.).*

The emotional pull of peer approval resonates with Ingram’s habitus tug (2009), as it expresses the complexities and tensions surrounding pupils as they navigate conflicting identities and peer loyalties. Some pupils are forced to pick between academic success or peer popularity which ultimately impacts on school engagement. The same pupils may also be experiencing a habitus tug as a result of class and familial ties and highlights the added emotional burden working class pupils experience through schooling. This is an area of affective engagement the DEIS initiative needs to further explore and support as it is the “complexity of this tension that needs to be recognized and understood by educational professionals” (Ingram 2011:301).

#### 7.4.2 Masculinity: “the hard man”

Being identified as academically successful meant some pupils had to choose between educational accomplishment and peer popularity. This shines a light on the difficult process of engagement facing pupils on a daily basis and the many choices and obstacles that impact that process. In relation to masculinity these choices became more pronounced. The boys in the study when talking about reputation or worries were strongly displaying indifference and ambivalence to caring what others thought which was in total opposition to the girls openly stating they really cared what others thought.

*“No I don’t care what people think. They can have their opinions but I don’t care.”*

*Why do you think other people care so much what others think?*

*It might make them think like I’m not wanted or whatever or stuff like that” (Donnacha, Greenhill N.S.).*

*“Why would you care what other people think of you?” (Tyler, Greenhill N.S.).*

A number of girls spoke about the boys “being boys” and misbehaving to get this macho “hard man” image. In similarity to Lynch and Lodge’s study (2002) on equality in post-primary, toughness was regarded as an accepted and expected part of masculine identity. Kerry identified it as “just an act” and not their true identity. She believes they are doing it only for peer approval. Jackson’s work on “laddish” behaviours in the classroom (2002; 2006; 2010) also identifies the use of disruptive behaviour by boys to enhance their status within their peer group and portray an “appropriate” masculine identity (2002:46). Jackson broadens our understanding of these “laddish” behaviours by identifying them as a self-worth protection strategy employed by the boys to deflect from poor academic

performance. The girls in my study also identify their attention-seeking behaviour as a method of self-preservation.

*“Definitely in school people act out to be mad or trying to be impressive to someone else. I don’t like that I think you should just be yourself.*

*Why do you think people do that?*

*To get more impressive and to not be known as the weird one. They get cheeky with like the people who are most cheeky. They say something mean about the teacher or someone in the class. Its just an act” (Kerry, Holy Oaks N.S.).*

Ruth and Chelsea (Greenhill N.S.) portrayed in their pair interviews that the boys are really insecure and also identify it as just an act by the boys to come across “hard”:

*“R-They just be causing more trouble outside of school. They have been very badly lately like just picking on the same people all the time and just going at them and always saying stuff its actually really sad. Like one girl in my class now they have given her the nickname “Fish” and it’s just mean.*

*Why do you think they do that?*

*C- Just cheek. Trying to show off like to show people like don’t come near me and don’t start talking about me or I will start taking about you.*

*R-They try and make themselves be big but you know inside they just feel terrible.*

*Do you think they feel bad?*

*C- I don't think they would think twice about saying anything. Like if I said something I would think about it later, but like I wouldn't say anything mean like, but like if they said something mean they wouldn't even think about it. They would just be like ya I called him that...trying to show off, going ya I done that and they keep like spreading it and spreading it trying to get themselves a reputation for themselves, that I wouldn't really want but they probably look like the hard man and that's what they want" (Greenhill N.S.).*

The girls suggest here that the boys want to get this hegemonic masculine "reputation" for themselves, and want to be identified as tough and hard. Chelsea goes on further to indicate that this behaviour is seen more outside of school than in school.

*"You know you were saying there the boys act differently inside of school than outside of school, in what way?*

*Like they would have more fights outside of school like inside of school they would be like fight me but they wouldn't do anything until after school. Some boys are aggressive but some boys are nice. They are all different but some boys in our class would like to fight each other and like rob and stuff" (Greenhill N.S.).*

It seems that the boys, while acting ambivalent to what people think, are also engaged in depicting themselves in a certain image and are arguably even more under pressure to portray a certain macho image to get peer validation. Anti-social behaviour such as robbing and fighting was also deemed to be a way of achieving the tough, masculine image. Ruth's words about the boys trying to make themselves feel big but really they just end up feeling terrible inside emphasises the psychological impact of the process of self -making and image management.

## 7.5 Conclusion

This study through pupil words and images brings into sharp focus the importance of positive in-school relationships in DEIS schools. A sense of inclusion and belonging was essential to pupil wellbeing and affective engagement. Their relationship with individual teachers was hugely significant in feeding their sense of belonging or alienation. This fed into their self-esteem and feeling of being valued and respected. It also mitigated the effects of Bourdieu's hysteresis effect by making pupils feel they were respected and recognised in the school field. Friendship was identified as central to their school lives for generating social and emotional wellbeing. As a result, it is an area that should be capitalised on to ensure affective engagement in DEIS schools through the use of collaborative learning. My presentation of image management emphasises the many different processes at play in identity making and the influence of peers on habitus construction. My analysis of the working class boys and punished habitus serves to highlight the dangers of negative sanctions in DEIS schools to further alienate the pupils we are trying to engage the most. Strict and controlling classrooms are making it unnecessarily difficult for working class boys in particular to cultivate positive school identities.



## **Chapter 8: Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **8.1 Introduction**

This thesis makes an original contribution to sociology of education in Irish literature by challenging the deficit model of working class culture and unpacking the lived experience of pupils in DEIS primary schools. In doing so, it gives a more nuanced understanding to recent findings that working class pupils are faring less well in terms of affective engagement in education (Frawley et al. 2014). It brings into sharp focus the contemporary ways in which the current educational system reproduces social class inequalities through systemic structures and everyday symbolically violent classroom practises such as ability grouping, authoritative teaching and punished habitus, testing regimes, invisibility of minority cultures (as seen in Tyler's account of the Traveller community) and the undervaluing of working class life and culture in schools.

The findings of my study would also suggest affective engagement is coherently linked to pupil wellbeing and relationships. The process of disengagement starts much earlier in pupils' school life and hence highlights the importance of the primary school field in protecting against negative school experiences and future disengagement or dropout. The strict and controlling classrooms with little evidence of active and collaborative learning meant pupils were cultivating a habitus of inadequacy, fear, anxiety and doubt. This resulted in several pupils naming school as the main cause of worry in their lives. This is a significant finding that challenges the deficit model of working class life, as despite the common assumption that working class family life is dysfunctional, the pupils themselves name school as the main stress in their life. As primary schools are an essential site for cultivating

positive attitudes to lifelong learning it is essential all pupils receive an engaging and positive primary school experience (Smyth 2017) that prioritises pupil wellbeing. This is even more important in DEIS schools where ESL is most common.

This thesis also demonstrated the ways working class pupils felt they had to alter their identities to fit into the school and to achieve habitus-field congruency (Ingram 2009). In doing so, it acknowledges the impact of social class on affective dimensions of children's lived school experience. The study highlights the power of the school and individual teachers as the dominant culture in producing acts of symbolic violence that inculcate feelings of inferiority and self-doubt in working class pupils. Pupils proffered the notion that to be successful in school the only viable option was to conform to the middle class norms and behaviours. This enforced compliance to the institutional habitus led to what I referred to as an anxiety of self-management as the working class pupils indicated they had to alter their identities to allow for habitus-field congruency. This led to a constant self-monitoring of behaviours. I introduced the concept of *resigned habitus* to explore this abandonment of their originary habitus at the school gate. This study therefore presents a more nuanced understanding of affective inequalities and how class is experienced and internalized in DEIS primary schools. This gives evidence to the notion that schools are educating pupils out of their working-classness (McKenzie 2016) and to be successful in Irish schools one has to take on middle class norms and behaviours. The pupils in this study understood this idea and manifested it through the resignation of their habitus at the school gate. This in turn led to more positive interactions with teachers in sharp juxtaposition to those who refused to align their habitus with the school resulting in being sanctioned, reprimanded and "othered" by both staff and pupils alike. I wish to now draw out central issues which emerged to weave

together the DEIS story from the pupil perspective. Firstly, I will revisit my research questions and in doing so will draw out the key arguments from each of my data analysis chapters. I will then make recommendations for policy, practice and future research. Finally, I will make note of the limitations of my study and make my concluding remarks.

## **8.2 Revisiting the Research Questions**

- **How do DEIS primary school pupils describe and perceive their educational experience?**

While there were positives from speaking to the DEIS pupils the over-riding themes were ones of insecurities, anxieties and stress. I wish to summarise these here. The components that made up an enjoyable school experience included a positive school climate that was welcoming and friendly. Kind, supportive staff and positive teacher-pupil relationships were the crucial backbone to a positive school experience. Friendship was the other main positive element of schooling and was seen as the most significant part of school-life for the pupils. This peer capital was also valuable in generating social and emotional wellbeing.

In relation to negative aspects of school life pupils described a climate of fear and control. They spoke about being afraid of getting in trouble and afraid to answer questions in case they get it wrong. It was apparent the climate of fear and the power dynamics were very much in line with traditional, authoritative classrooms. The frequent mention of anxiety was a perturbing and significant finding of this study. This anxiety from getting in trouble led pupils to assess that school was the main source of worry in their lives. Frequent testing and ability grouping fed in to insecurities and self-doubt around self-worth and their learner identity. The power of the school and individual teachers in controlling pupils all led to an

enforced compliance, whereby pupils had little option but to conform to the institutional habitus to successfully navigate through school. This had affective repercussions on pupil identity with many pupils indicating that they needed to resign their habitus at the school gate so as to have an easy life within the school walls. Pupils highlighted a lack of active methodologies and collaborative learning. They portrayed a desire for more time to be spent on expressive subjects and to move away from boring, laborious writing tasks. Additionally, pupils discussed the invisibility of pupil voice and how significant they felt it was that their views be heard and valued.

While many of these findings would be relevant across a variety of schools that also experience unequal power relations, the very class specific issues such as poverty, improvement narratives, invalidated linguistic repertoire and punished habitus emphasise the increased emotional pressures working class pupils face in schools. In order to achieve habitus-field congruency (Ingram 2009) they must undergo a much more dramatic identity mutation which fuels affective inequalities in our education system.

- **How, and in what ways, do in-school processes impact affective pupil engagement?**

This study outlined the importance of linking affective engagement with pupil wellbeing and relationships. It found many in-school processes that impacted affective pupil engagement and the pupils' sense of belonging in the school. These included authoritative teaching that alienated pupils and encultured a sense of fear and powerlessness. Authoritative classrooms with an emphasis on control had detrimental impacts on affective pupil engagement with pupils becoming withdrawn from classrooms dialogues because of fear of getting reprimanded. In chapter seven, I explored my concept of punished habitus to show how

working class boys felt overly scrutinised and reprimanded. I presented evidence that this enforced subordination only served to increase disengagement for some of the working class pupils who chose to resist the strict, controlling environment. However in doing so, it only further served to reproduce rather than challenge social class inequalities. Symbolically violent classroom practices such as ability grouping and constant testing further alienated and pathologised pupils by labelling certain pupils as inferior in the educational hierarchy and hence less worthy of more challenging instruction. This eroding of self-esteem and self-efficacy had detrimental impacts on pupil wellbeing.

It was unsurprising as a result pupils felt they had to alter their identity to align with the institutional habitus of the school, leaving pupils feeling ill-fitted to the school field. To counter-balance this misalignment, schools have to be willing to meet pupils halfway. A positive, inclusive school climate that valued and recognised the socio-cultural background and lived experience of all its pupils is hence even more important in a DEIS context. In juxtaposition to this was evidence of the invisibility of the Traveller community, which only served to reproduce negative and discriminatory attitudes that maintain social exclusion.

In light of the findings of high levels of self-diagnosed anxiety, this study would strongly argue DEIS schools need to promote the development of healthy self-concepts and emotional supports. Additionally, there needs to be recognition by classroom teachers of the significant extra psychological demands schooling is placing on working class pupils who are experiencing a habitus-field misalignment. Positive teacher-pupil relationships that nurtured and supported pupils at a deep, personal and human level were seen as a crucial, protective factor against disidentification and disengagement.

The lack of collaborative learning and active methodologies were identified by pupils as essential in schools to help them to feel more affectively engaged. This in addition to the promotion of pupil voice and great democratisation in schools would ensure working class pupils felt valued and respected within schools. It would promote them to active citizens in their educational journey and as such their capabilities to make decisions about their school experience would be acknowledged.

- **What could educational disadvantage policies, and in particular the DEIS initiative, learn from the pupil perspective?**

This study argues that in the interest of a social justice perspective and inclusive practices it is essential that working class voices and experiences of those who receive the DEIS programme ought to be at the forefront of any review of the policy. The DEIS primary story as presented here illustrates the added emotional and psychological impacts of schooling on working class pupils as they try to navigate through school while keeping a sense of self. The tensions and emotional demands placed on working class pupils' habitus places an onus on DEIS schools and classroom teachers to recognise these additional complexities and to promote and prioritise pupil wellbeing. The lack of recognition of working class cultures and lifestyle choices fuelled their misalignment with the school field. While the working class pupils themselves were very clear what they needed from school, they find themselves unenviably in a position of powerlessness unable to impact change. There is plenty that educational disadvantage policies can learn from their account and I will draw on the main points here.

Pupils wanted a shift away from strict and controlling classrooms that only served to further alienate them. Inclusive and greater democratic practices such as strong pupil voice in

decision making was seen as a preventative measure to authoritative classrooms. They wanted less of an emphasis on testing and ability grouping which was a great source of stress and anxiety. In juxtaposition, pupils emphasised the need for more collaborative learning that capitalised on their love for peer interaction. There is a need for a move towards creative and dialogic teaching methods instead of didactic methods that further alienate those we are trying to engage the most. The accumulation of working class pupil voices in this study highlighted the everyday structures and practices in DEIS schools that erode self-worth and inflict damage on working class identities, through the cultivation of habitus of lower self-esteem and inadequacy. Their voices contribute to the debate on educational disadvantage by personalising everyday working class experiences of primary DEIS schools, which is absent in current Irish educational discourse. For DEIS schools to be truly places of inclusion that help pupils to become more affectively engaged in primary school, the pupils' lived experiences must be valued and recognised within schools. Prejudicial views expressed by teachers have no place in an education system striving to celebrate diversity and challenge discriminatory attitudes. Hence, teachers in DEIS schools need to reflect on their own bias towards working class families and ensure they are not giving traction to the deficit model of working class families. This study would strongly argue that it is the school field that needs to be altered to be more in line with the lived experiences of its pupils rather than placing this demand on young shoulders.

### **8.3 Recommendations**

#### **8.3.1 Recommendations for Policy**

The DEIS policy would benefit greatly from the inclusion of working class pupils' voices to take account of those it is designed to serve. The study highlighted many recommendations for the DEIS policy. I will summarise some of them here.

To be a truly inclusive education system we must improve our inclusion of minority cultures within our curriculum. The invisibility of working class culture and certain ethnic backgrounds, such as the Traveller community, only serves to reproduce prejudicial and discriminatory views that continue the cycle of social exclusion. This is most relevant in DEIS schools where percentages of pupils from the Travelling community are at their highest. Tyler's account presented in chapter six served to stress the continued invisibility and under-recognition of this minority culture in DEIS schools. DEIS schools need to immerse themselves in the lived experience of the pupils they serve. Alternatively, the misalignment between the two fields function to widen the gulf further, which young working class pupils are then being asked to bridge. The higher emotional demands placed on working class pupils' identity to achieve this habitus-field congruency needs to be acknowledged and supported in DEIS schools.

Prejudicial and biased views held by DEIS teachers proffers the notion of the deficit model of working class families and acts as a barrier to positive teacher-pupil relations. Teachers need to recognise the "power of suggestion" (McGillicuddy & Devine 2017) that they hold and how this can greatly influence pupils' self-worth, habitus and wellbeing. Due to the high numbers of pupils discussing anxiety and stress, it important DEIS schools prioritise the affective dimension of schooling to reinforce emotional wellbeing and the development of a healthy self-concept.



There is an immediate demand to move away from symbolically violent practices such as ability grouping, negative sanctions and authoritative teaching that further alienate working class pupils and labels certain pupils as inferior in the educational hierarchy. Instead there is a need to advocate for egalitarian teacher-pupil relationships with an emphasis on pupil voice and collaborative learning. Chapter six advocates for the re-balancing of performativity and affectivity in DEIS schools, with the inclusion of more expressive subjects over prioritisation of literacy and numeracy attainment levels. There is a need to question whether schools are places designed to churn out human capital or places for personal growth and human flourishing.

Finally, this study emphasises the requirement to reflect critically on symbolically violent classroom practices labelling certain working class pupils as inferior in the educational hierarchy. In particular, chapter seven identified the need to look at punished habitus in relation to working class boys, and how to mitigate these factors to help working class boys feel more affectively engaged. This study strongly highlights the need for the field to be altered rather than leaving pupils with little option but to alter their identities to achieve congruency. The resulting resigned habitus only serves to cultivate the view that to be successful in Irish schools one has to become middle class.

### **8.3.2 Recommendations for Classroom Practice**

Teachers need to be given the space to reflect critically on their own biases and evaluate who and what they are ascribing value to and recognising as legitimate. It is this ascribing of value that led to certain pupils feeling undervalued and disaffected from school. Teachers have to be careful of their ascribing of expectations of working class pupils and ensure through their “power of suggestion” (McGillycuddy & Devine 2018) that they are not placing

children as inferior on the educational hierarchy. DEIS schools need to cultivate positive teacher-pupil relationships and safe, dialogic classrooms where pupils feel free to express their authentic selves. Promotion of a healthy self-concept and emotional wellbeing is essential in DEIS schools for working class pupils to feel valued.

Inclusive classrooms promote democratic practices and value the opinions of all pupils. Opportunities for inclusion of pupil voice in decision making processes encourage pupils to be active citizens in the school community and should be promoted. More active and collaborative methodologies need to become more commonplace in DEIS primary classrooms and is an important method for ensuring the delivery of an engaging school experience for all. Teachers have the ability to break repetitive practice that is expressed as boring and laborious by DEIS pupils and bring about real transformative change in their classroom practice. It is hoped by personalising their school experience, working class pupils can challenge these practices and cause educators to stop and reflect on their pedagogies.

#### **8.4 Future Research**

The DEIS primary school story from the pupil perspective is a crucial research topic that requires significantly increased attention in Irish educational discourse. For too long, the reviews have focused on attainment and attendance levels, overlooking the affective dimension of schooling. There is a need to explore further at a much larger scale the lived school experience of working class pupils to really inform the DEIS policy from a more nuanced perspective.

## 8.5 Limitations

In this section I would like to present a number of limitations of this study. Firstly, the small sample size of forty one pupils has to be addressed. I initially send out eighty four information and consent forms and I was disappointed with the participation rate. However, in saying that the rich indepth data I collected from the forty one pupils who did participate was more than enough to put into sharp focus the DEIS school experience from their perspective. It is however such a small scale study that the findings cannot be generalised and as such the findings are unique to this research story at this specific time and place.

The issue of race and ethnicity was not explored in detail in this study and as such is a limitation of this research into the DEIS school experience. Due to the high numbers of pupils from migrant backgrounds in North Meadows N.S., I was aware of its impact on pupil identity however it did not come up in any significant way in our conversations. As I chose to focus on class inequalities in this study, I did not explore the interplay between race and habitus which is an extremely interesting area of study that deserves further research.

Additionally, another limitation of this study is the gender imbalance present with only eight male pupils taking part in my study. While I explored masculinity and punished habitus in chapter seven this is limited due to the small number of respondents and as such is an area that requires further research with a larger male cohort to validate findings.

Finally, as I focused on pupil voice, the absence of parents' perspectives is a limitation of this study. Information from home could have painted a more comprehensive picture of pupil identity and engagement as I could only draw conclusions on their school engagement from what they themselves shared. I think the combination of pupil and home perspectives could

enlighten research on the DEIS initiative further and also serve to challenge the deficit model of working class families.

## **8.6 Concluding Words**

This thesis with the use of Bourdieu's spotlight disrupts the silence around the inequalities that manifest themselves and are entrenched in the everyday practices of schools, specifically in this case, DEIS schools designed to ameliorate social class inequalities. Pupil voice is a significant method of improving school and classroom practices as it enforces us as Teachers to really reflect on the ways we are ascribing value in schools. By listening to the pupils it also highlighted the danger of the "power of suggestion" (McGillycuddy & Devine 2018) that we hold. Bourdieu informed understandings around the multifaceted factors and complex processes affecting pupil engagement and identity in DEIS schools. It also demonstrated how the school as the dominant culture produces acts of symbolic violence and in doing has a powerful role to play in habitus formation and re-formation. While this study is not saying middle class pupils cannot also feel alienation from school procedures and practices (see Hamilton & Canny 2018), it does put forward the argument that this alienation is even more exaggerated for our working class pupils. The higher demands placed on working class pupils' identities to bridge the habitus gulf between home and school is the central argument of this study and gives much needed attention to the huge psychological and emotional demands being placed on working class pupils on a daily basis, which to this point it has not been acknowledged in Irish literature. The complexities around identity were explored through the many ways pupils indicated resigning their habitus by putting on an act in school. This form of restricted self they took on in school, forced them into consciousness through constant self-monitoring of their behaviours. This portrays how

class becomes internalized for our working class pupils in schools and is a tale of inferiority, self-doubt, anxiety and insecurity as they are never afforded the luxury of “the ease of the well-born” (Bourdieu 2000:163). In schools striving to emphasise wellbeing and human flourishing we must first evaluate the classroom conditions needed for this to be achieved. This type of schooling demands an inclusive, collaborative school climate that truly values the lived experiences of pupils. There is much we can learn from the pupils in this study and while change is slow I do believe schools can be “tools for social change towards greater equality and equity” (Manion & Menashy 2013:235). As Greene poetically puts it and to end on a hopeful note, “out of the dread, out of the inequalities, out of the contradictions, and the cruelties, and the misunderstandings, there may be a vision of marvellous. The dialogue, the wonder, the openings” (2000: 279).

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: DEIS School Supports in Participating Schools

	<u>Greenhill N.S.</u>	<u>Holy Oaks N.S.</u>	<u>North Meadows N.S.</u>
School Completion Programme	✓	✓	✓
Reading Recovery	✓	✓	✓
Maths Recovery	✓	✓	✓
Home School Liaison Teacher	✓	✓	✓
Support Teacher	✓		
Early Start Preschool	✓	✓	✓
Play Therapy		✓	✓
School Lunches	✓	✓	✓
Roots of Empathy	✓		
Incredible Years	✓		
Breakfast Club	✓	✓	
Homework Club	✓	✓	✓

## Appendix B: Participant Information Sheets



### Participant information sheet

**Note: Parents and pupils must read this sheet before signing the consent form.**

Hello,

My name is Gemma Campion. I am a primary school teacher in Aghabullogue National School. I would like to invite you to take part in a research study which is part of my PhD studies in the Department of Educational Research at Lancaster University. Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Talk to others about the study if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

The Study is called *“Our Voices, Our Images, Our Story”* A Narrative Inquiry Study on Primary Pupil’s Experience in Designated Disadvantaged Schools in Ireland. It aims to tell the DEIS experience from a pupil perspective.

#### **What is the study about?**

This study aims to interview sixth class pupils in DEIS schools to tell their experience of school. As the DEIS programme is currently under review it is an important time to gather information from all parties. This study hopes to give the pupils a voice in expressing what they need to best achieve in our schools.

#### **Why have I been invited?**

I have approached you because you are a sixth class pupil in a DEIS school who has first hand experience of the DEIS programme. I would like to hear about your school experience.

I would be very grateful if you would agree to take part in this study.

#### **What will I be asked to do if I take part?**

If you decided to take part, this would involve the following:

-Sign the consent form.

-Take part in two one on one interviews, which will be recorded and transcribed. No names, or school names or locations will be used.

-Create two drawings: The first drawing will illustrate what your view of school is, while the second will show any improvements you would like to be made to their school. The pictures will be used during our interviews to explore your experience of school.

### **What are the possible benefits from taking part?**

Taking part in this study will allow you to share your experiences of what school is like for 11 and 12 year old boys and girls. Your insights will help us to better understand what pupils like, dislike and need in school.

### **Do I have to take part?**

No. It's completely up to you to decide whether or not you take part. Your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

### **What if I change my mind?**

As explained above, you are free to withdraw at any time and if you want to withdraw, I will extract any data you contributed to the study and destroy it. Data means the information, views, ideas, etc. that you and other participants will have shared with me. However, it is difficult and often impossible to take out data from one specific participant when this has already been anonymised or pooled together with other people's data. Therefore, you can only withdraw up to 6 weeks after taking part in the study.

### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

It is unlikely that there will be any major disadvantages to taking part, but you will be asked to give two interviews which could take 30-60 minutes of your time.

### **Will my data be identifiable?**

After the interview only I, the researcher conducting this study will have access to the data you share with me. The only other person who will have access to the data is my supervisor.

I will keep all personal information about you (e.g. your name and other information about you that can identify you) confidential, that is I will not share it with others. I will anonymise any audio recordings and hard copies of any data. This means that I remove any personal information.

### **How will my data be stored?**

Your data will be stored in encrypted files (that is no-one other than me, the researcher will be able to access them) and on password-protected computers.

I will store hard copies of any data securely in locked cabinets in my office.

I will keep data that can identify you separately from non-personal information (e.g. your views on a specific topic).

In accordance with University guidelines, I will keep the data securely for a minimum of ten years.

### **How will we use the information you have shared with us and what will happen to the results of the research study?**

I will use the data you have shared with only in the following ways:

I will use it for academic purposes only. This will include my PhD thesis and any future educational articles or journals. I may also present the results of my study at academic conferences.

When writing up the findings from this study, I would like to reproduce some of the views and ideas you shared with me. When doing so, I will only use anonymised quotes (e.g. from our interview with you), so that although I will use your exact words, you cannot be identified in our publications.

If anything you tell me in the interview suggests that you or somebody else might be at risk of harm, I will be obliged to share this information with your teacher or parent. If possible I will inform you of this breach of confidentiality.

### **Who has reviewed the project?**

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Lancaster Management School's Research Ethics Committee.

### **What if I have a question or concern?**



If you have any queries or if you are unhappy with anything that happens concerning your participation in the study, please contact myself:

Gemma Campion tel. XXX email: [XXX](#) or

Dr. Nicola Ingram email: [XXX](#)

If you have any concerns or complaints that you wish to discuss with a person who is not directly involved in the research, you can also contact:

Joanne Dickinson email: [XXX](#)

***Thank you for considering your participation in this project.***

## Appendix C: Consent Forms



### Pupil Consent Form

**Project Title:** *“Our Voices, Our Images, Our Story”* A Narrative Inquiry Study on Primary Pupil’s Experience in Designated Disadvantaged Schools in Ireland.

Name of Researcher: Gemma Campion

Email: XXX

**Please tick each box**

1. I understand the study information sheet. ☐
2. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and get answers. ☐
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. If I withdraw within 6 weeks after my first interview my data will be removed. ☐
4. I understand that any information given may be used in future reports and articles by the researcher but my personal information will not be used. ☐
5. I understand that my name or school will not appear in any reports, articles or presentation. ☐
6. I understand that any interviews will be recorded and typed out, and that data will be on password protected devices and kept secure. ☐
7. I understand that data will be kept according to University guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study. ☐
8. While all information is confidential if anything worrying is said, I understand that the researcher might have to tell a teacher or parent. ☐
9. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

**I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.**

**Signature of Researcher: Gemma Campion**

**Date 04/10/16**

## Parental Consent Form



**Project Title:** *“Our Voices, Our Images, Our Story”* A Narrative Inquiry Study on Primary Pupil’s Experience in Designated Disadvantaged Schools in Ireland.

Name of Researcher: Gemma Campion

Email: XXX

**Please tick each box**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily ☐
2. I understand that my child’s participation is voluntary and that they are free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. If we choose to withdraw within 6 weeks of the first interview of the study my child’s data will be removed. ☐
3. I understand that any information given may be used in future reports, academic articles, publications or presentations by the researcher/s, but my child’s personal information will not be included or identifiable. ☐
4. I understand that my name/my child’s name/ school name will not appear in any reports, articles or presentation. ☐
5. I understand that any interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed and that data will be protected on encrypted devices and kept secure. ☐
6. I understand that data will be kept according to University guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study. ☐
7. Any disclosures of a sensitive natures made by the pupils will be dealt with according to child protection procedures. ☐
8. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

**I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.**

**Signature of Researcher: Gemma Campion**

**Date 04/10/16**

## **Appendix D: List of Sample Interview Questions**

How old are you?

How long have you been in this school?

Do you live near the school?

What can you tell me about your school?

Can you describe your first drawing to me?

What is it like to be a pupil in your school?

What do you like about your school?

What do you not like about your school?

If you could change something about your school, what would it be?

How do you think we could make your school better?

Can you describe your second drawing to me?

What are your favourite subjects in school?

What are your least favourite subjects in school?

What activities should we have in school and why?

Why is school important?

Do you feel safe in school?

What makes school difficult?

Do you like your school building?

What do you think you are really good at doing?

What do you find difficult to do? Can you think of anything that would help you with this?

What sorts of things do you like doing at home/after school/at weekends?

What sorts of things do you like doing with your friends at school? Is there anything would make these things easier/more fun for you?

How did you feel about answering these questions? Which bits were good/not so good?

Are there any other questions you think I should ask to find out about your school?

Is there anything else you would like to say?