Collaboration and contestation in further and higher education partnerships in England: a Bourdieusian field analysis

Helen Colley (University of Huddersfield), Charlotte Chadderton (University of East London) and Lauren Nixon (University of Huddersfield)

Abstract
Internationally 'College for All' policies are creating new forms of vocational higher education, and shifting relationships between higher and further education (HE and FE) institutions. In this paper, we consider the way in which this is being implemented in England, drawing on a detailed qualitative case study of a regional HE-FE partnership to widen participation. We focus on the complex mix of collaboration and contestation that arose within it, and how these affected socially differentiated groups of students following high- and low-status routes through its provision. We outline Bourdieu's concept of 'field' as a framework for our analysis and interpretation, including its theoretical ambiguities regarding the definition and scale of fields. Through hermeneutic dialogue between data and theory, we tentatively suggest that such partnerships represent bridges between HE and FE. These bridges are strong between higher-status institutions but highly contested between lower-status institutions competing closely for distinction.   We conclude that the trajectories and outcomes for socially disadvantaged students require attention and collective action to address the inequalities they face; and that our theoretical approach may have wider international relevance beyond the English case.

'College for All': an international policy agenda
Increasingly in advanced capitalist countries, especially in the Anglophone world, 'College for All' is promoted as a policy goal, and is creating wider participation in higher education (HE) for social groups who have not traditionally studied at degree level. This policy is underpinned by a promise of improved returns for individuals over their lifetime, in terms of higher income and upward social mobility; as well as improved competitiveness in the global economy for the nation-state Bathmaker, 2013; Bragg, 2013; Wheelahan, 2013). But how does the reality behind such promises play out?

Whilst much of this provision is vocational, its nature, status and legislative basis varies from country to country. In the US, it has mainly been delivered through community colleges via 2-year Baccalaureate programmes. Though these now offer pathways into higher-status specialist Bachelor's degrees in traditional universities, progression routes and returns to students remain unclear (Bragg, 2013). In Australia, too, some of the expansion of HE has taken place outside of universities, in technical and further education (TAFE) colleges, which are now achieving baccalaureate degree-awarding status, blurring the divide between vocational and higher education (Wheelahan, 2013). In Germany and Austria, distinct higher level vocational education and training do not enjoy complete parity of esteem with traditional HE, but they are nonetheless valued, and do tend to lead to higher level technician work and higher social and economic returns for graduates. In England, the focus of this paper, widening participation policies were initially aimed at expanding traditional HE. However, in practice this expansion has become increasingly stratified, with differing types and locations of HE for differing social groups. It has led to considerable growth in vocational

HE, franchised by universities but delivered in Further Education (FE) colleges, but current trends show that this largely leads to lower social and economic returns for individuals than university-based HE (Bathmaker, 2013).

A considerable strand of the literature on widening participation in England and the UK tends to approach such inequalities through a focus on student identity and behaviours, in terms of low aspirations, motivation or self-esteem; but such explanations, it could be argued, underplay the role of institutions and social structures in shaping students' experiences (Thomas, 2001). Ecclestone is particularly critical of the ways in which a 'pseudo-psychological' perspective of 'fragile' learners (2004, p.122) can then become sedimented in institutional beliefs and practices, reproducing rather than countering inequality (2007). This paper therefore undertakes a very different kind of analysis. Starting from the narratives of managers, tutors and students in a major HE-FE partnership to widen participation, we draw on Bourdieu's sociology, and particularly his concept of field, to understand the mechanisms which operate to shape the trajectories of both institutions (universities and FE colleges) and students involved in HE in FE. We choose Bourdieu's framework because it serves to reveal the competitive dynamics of social life, and in particular the production and reproduction of inequality. In doing so, we also seek to advance thinking about some of the ambiguities of Bourdieu's field theory through a hermeneutic dialogue between it and the data.

We therefore begin by discussing the literature on HE-FE partnerships in England; and go on to outline Bourdieu's concept of field. We then introduce the research project we undertook, and present data from it. Finally, we offer a Bourdieusian interpretation of the data and some conclusions.

HE-FE partnerships in England

Much has been written about the expansion of vocational HE in England through its delivery in partnership with FE colleges (Bathmaker, 2013; Bathmaker and Thomas, 2009; Creasy, 2012; Fenge, 2011; Harvey, 2009; Parry, 2011, 2012; Parry et al., 2008; Turner et al., 2009). Collaborative partnerships between FE and HE institutions in the UK have a long history, but their recent expansion has intensified with a strong steer from government and the introduction of Foundation Degrees (2-year sub-degree programmes which can be 'topped up' with a final year to gain a Bachelor's degree). Such initiatives, and the policies which drive them, can appear highly instrumental, treating both FE and HE as mechanisms for addressing skills gaps that undermine the country's economic competitiveness and the efficiency of public services. Accordingly, new vocational programmes into and in HE have on the one hand been closely associated with the modernisation and managerialist re-modelling of public services (Doyle and O'Doherty, 2006; Edmond et al., 2007); and on the other, they have been viewed as a substitute for the long-term failure of UK employers to contribute extensively to workforce development (Gleeson and Keep, 2004).

Partnerships with HE are thought to benefit FE colleges, staff and students, through expansion and diversification of provision, income-generation, raised status, staff development opportunities in HE, and improved progression routes; and to provide a 'safe' marginal space for HE institutions to develop new vocational initiatives (Harvey, 2009). There are nonetheless 'Byzantine' complexities (West, 2006, p.18) and tensions in such partnerships, given competitive markets in both FE and HE; the greater autonomy of HE institutions; and the separate cultural traditions of FE and HE, expressed through different approaches to pedagogy, curriculum, assessment, quality assurance (QA) procedures and research. However egalitarian the approach within the partnership, the power balance typically lies strongly in favour of the HE institution, which retains 'ownership' of the students, control over funding, imposition of methods of assessment and QA, and resources for research.

Some authors, drawing on their own experience and evaluation of such partnerships, have discussed the sticking points as well as the successes in collaboration. They tend to consist of ultimately 'happy stories', in which the ethos of FE colleges will start to 'mirror' that of HE, whilst external examiners will supposedly ensure that FE staff do not become 'submissive' to the HE institution (Trim, 2001, p.112). However, many such analyses are under-theorised, drawing on normative, managerialist discourses of collaboration, and underestimating the effects of power relations (Doyle, 2006). By contrast, Doyle and others (Lea and Simmons, 2012; Leahy, 2012) have argued that accommodations from the HE side tend to be piecemeal rather than creating a more collaborative model, and reinforce a hierarchical distinction between 'real' HE in universities, and a marginal form offered in FE colleges.

The concept of higher education, then, is a contested one in this context of expansion, involving much more than the level of study alone (Creasy, 2012). It reflects hierarchical positionings both between and within the HE and FE sectors. On the one hand, HE institutions are positioned advantageously in relation to FE colleges, particularly in terms of their autonomy and degree-awarding status, as well as their national and international profile and cohorts, their research remit, and more favourable conditions of work for lecturers. FE, by contrast, relies on external bodies for its funding and qualification awards, it is rooted in local communities and economies, has very little scope to do research, and its staff labour under heavier workloads (Turner *et al.*, 2009). On the other hand, HE itself is also differentiated, with inequalities between the higher esteemed pre-1992 universities (especially the élite Russell Group) and post-1992 universities formed from previous polytechnics and higher vocational colleges (such as teacher training institutions); and between the prestigious vocational degrees such as dentistry, medicine and law (viewed on a par with traditional academic degrees) and those which lead to lower-status occupations in public services such as teaching, nursing or social work, or in commercial areas such as retail, graphic design or business administration. Likewise, in tertiary education, sixth form colleges enjoy higher funding levels per student and greater academic kudos than FE colleges, and tend to attract more socially advantaged students.

Indeed, although the distinction between 'further' and 'higher' education is one which does important 'ideological and identity work' (Young, 2006: 3; see also Fenge, 2011), neither HE nor FE are homogeneous entities: elements of each address varied social and educational purposes, and contribute to a stratified system that differentiates on the basis of students' social background (Bathmaker and Thomas, 2009). In this respect, rather than whole institutions collaborating with one another, parts of FE colleges collaborate with parts of HE institutions (Connolly *et al.*, 2007). This partial collaboration may reinforce the filtering effect on students from different class backgrounds, particularly at points of transition between sub-degree and degree-level study (Bathmaker and Thomas, 2009; see also Leahy, 2012). As Parry argues, 'these boundary zones remain among the least understood parts of higher education... [and] should command more of our analytical attention' (2011: 147).

In this paper, we respond to this concern with 'boundary zones' by drawing on data generated by an evaluation of a regional Lifelong Learning Network (LLN), a multiple HE-FE partnership developing new vocational routes into HE for non-traditional entrants. In particular, we examine the ways in which contestation over 'collaborative' HE-FE partnerships impacted on student trajectories, even within one consortium developing a unified set of initiatives. We add to previous studies, in particular building on the work of Bathmaker (2012) on inequalities in FE-based HE, by exploring the micro-level practices by which cultural 'distinction' (Bourdieu, 1986) were enacted by staff in different types of FE and HE institutions, reproducing the 'distinction' of different types of students highlighted by Bathmaker and Thomas (2009). To do so, we deploy Bourdieu's notion of field, as an innovative way of understanding differentiating influences on students, and of elucidating the English context of 'College for All'. It is therefore to an outline of that notion that we now turn.

Bourdieu's notion of field

Bourdieu's theoretical framework, and particularly his notion of field, is especially useful when considering such contexts of inequality and contestation. It helps to focus analysis of empirical data by drawing attention to structural influences that shape institutions and practices, and avoids ascription of blame to individuals by making visible the hidden mechanisms that produce and reproduce inequalities.

Central to Bourdieu's theoretical framework is a notion of social space as historical and relational (Bourdieu, 1996). Within the social space, agents – individuals, groups and institutions – are positioned relative to others in hierarchical orderings and at different distances from each other; they struggle over its goods and positions; and therefore the space is dynamic and shifts over time. Objective positions are distributed according to both the volume and the relative weight (akin to 'exchange rate') of economic and cultural capital possessed by their occupants.   At the same time, there is a process of agentic 'position-taking', of enacting the dominant 'rules of the game' and striving for advantage in relation to others. This creates a powerful but invisible logic of practice: a shaping of behaviour which is very difficult either to perceive or to resist. These practices are mediated by *habitus* – dispositions which are influenced by the social space, but also influence it in turn. Here, it is important to note that Bourdieu treats *habitus* primarily as a collective phenomenon, expressing the cultures of groups and institutions who share an affinity with one another (Hodkinson and Bloomer, 2000; Reay, 2004; Reay *et al*., 2001). This provides a very different perspective on expressions of individual identity and behaviour: one which eschews interpretations of disposition and agency as matters of purely voluntaristic choice, whether on the part of particular people or particular institutions (cf. Thomson, 2010). All are obliged to play in relation to the established logic of the field, notwithstanding the bounded agency they may bring to their strategies for doing so.

Within this overarching social space, we find different fields located in relation to an overall 'field of power' representing dominant global interests. Fields also exist in hierarchical relationship to one another, having varying degrees of autonomy: the field of the economy and the field of politics, for example, dominate the field of education (Thomson, 2005). All fields, however, express the characteristics of the social space in homologous albeit specific ways.

> …each field prescribes its particular values and possesses its own regulative principles. These principles delimit a socially structured space in which agents struggle, depending on the position they occupy in that space, either to change or to preserve its boundaries and form. (Wacquant, 1992, p.17)

As in the social space, it is not just the *amount* of capital that is held in different positions, but also its relative *weight* that matters: the way in which the field defines and legitimates the *specific* forms of capital which make a difference. These field-specific capitals – social, cultural and economic – are 'bundles of social energy' to be circulated, accumulated and exchanged within and between fields (Rawolle and Lingard, in press), contributing to the regulation, delimitation and competition within the field. Fields also are subject to contradictory tensions and ongoing flux, especially in times of crisis sparked by external influences or direct intervention from other fields (Thomson, 2005).

An abiding difficulty with the concept of field is that of defining specific fields and their boundaries, as Bourdieu himself acknowledges:

> The question of the limits of the field is a very difficult one, if only because it is *always at stake in the field itself* and therefore admits of no *a priori* answer. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.100)

Key questions therefore need to be addressed in studying any particular area of practice: what are the 'gateways' of the field? Who gets into the field? Who is kept out? How are 'good' and 'bad', 'worthy' and 'unworthy' defined within it? What are the effects of the field? And where do they cease? Similarly, the nature of relations *between* fields – relative shifts in status, overlaps and cross-effects – is complex and unclear. Ambiguities of scale complicate matters further. Bourdieu uses the notion of 'sub-fields' as well as fields, but in different ways: at times to indicate smaller areas within broader fields (such as literature or painting within the field of art); at times to indicate institutions within a field (such as particular universities within the field of education). These quandaries have not yet been sufficiently worked through (Thomson, 2005; Rawolle and Lingard, in press), and this study of HE-FE partnership offers an opportunity to broach them, at least tentatively.

In considering the evolution of these partnerships, both HE and FE could be seen as sub-fields of the overall field of education; they might also be seen as fields in themselves, drawn together by collaboration but competing over social status and the validation of particular forms of cultural capital. The provision of HE-in-FE could be seen as a sub-field in itself; alternatively, it might be viewed as an overlap or a 'bridge' (cf. Thomson, 2005) between HE and FE; or as an interventionary incursion from either one into the other. Then again, the individual institutions we studied could be treated as sub-fields, though this begs the question of the field(s) to which they belong. But as Bourdieu himself repeatedly states, these questions cannot be solved theoretically in the abstract, but only through the careful analysis of empirical data, and a hermeneutic, iterative application of the theory. We move on, then, to introduce the research project, and return later on in the paper to discuss how field theory might be utilised in interpreting the data.

Studying a Lifelong Learning Network

The study on which we draw here took place from 2007-08[1] in a relatively new Lifelong Learning Network (LLN), to evaluate its first strand of provision in Health and Social Care (HSC). LLNs were regional consortia of several HE and FE institutions (in this case, three universities and thirteen colleges) together with employers and providers of information, advice and guidance. They were initiated and funded for three years by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), with the intention that they would become self-sustaining. Their main goal was to develop new vocational routes into HE to attract non-traditional students. Particular emphasis was given to recruiting mature learners in employment and responding to regional gaps in higher level vocational and professional skills. The LLN was led by a post-1992 university ('New University'), and the HSC strand also included an élite 'Russell Group' university ('Old University'), and a number of FE and Sixth Form colleges. For the evaluation, a qualitative case study approach, using Stake's 'countenance' model (2004), was adopted in four learning sites representing different types of HSC provision developed by the LLN:

- a 'Year 0' access course offered at a Sixth Form College, leading to medical, dental and allied professional degrees at Old University;
- a fast-track distance-learning access course ('Bridging Programme') offered by New University;
- a Foundation Degree (FD) offered entirely within one FE college;
- and an FD with Year 1 offered at another FE college and Year 2 at New University.

In addition, data were generated with students who had progressed from the access courses to degree study. Although we collected no quantitative data, the internal monitoring of the LLN showed that it was broadly meeting its targets for recruitment and retention.

Our prime method of data generation for the evaluation was through semi-structured interviews with:

- 18 learners from six LLN and post-LLN programmes,

- 20 tutors and student support staff working with LLN learners
- and 15 senior managers of LLN partner and associate partner organisations, including employers.

In commissioning the evaluation, the LLN had asked us to focus on the development of learner identities and processes of vocational 'becoming', so interviews with students lasted up to 90 minutes, adopting a 'life history' approach to reveal both lifelong and lifewide aspects of their journeys.   The samples from each site were very small given the limited funding for the research (usually two or three students and one or two tutors). We requested student samples representative of different social backgrounds (gender, class, ethnicity) and routes into the programmes, and the LLN required us to work with tutors to select these, possibly biasing some of the data favourably to the initiative. Given that participation was voluntary, via a process of informed consent about the evaluation project, it may also be that the element of self-selection included students with particularly strong views about their programme, for or against. Whilst the samples were broadly representative of the cohorts in terms of gender and class background, no minority ethnic students volunteered to take part in the research. The sample, then, was not so much as a purposive sample as an opportunity sample.   Ideally, with more resources, it would have been useful to interview students more than once, throughout the course of their studies and beyond; and had we had time to conduct observations of teaching and study support sessions and of students' learning at home, in the workplace, and on-line, as part of a broader ethnographic study. However, the experiences of students within different groups appeared very broadly similar. In many respects, our data provides only a limited snapshot of an initiative that was clearly evolving. However, following Dorothy Smith's feminist sociology of knowledge (1990, 2005), we would argue that the perspectives of those we interviewed offer us a *point d'appui*, a point of leverage, on the 'regimes of ruling' which order everyday social practices within institutions and coordinate the doings of those within them in ways which go beyond the immediately local. Like Bourdieu, she insists that institutions and their operations do not exist apart from the actions of people who enact them at different levels. We are therefore confident that our data allows us to analyse these processes robustly, in spite of its other limitations.

We transformed the data using methods of narrative synthesis (Moustakas, 1990; Colley, 2010). We used techniques of emplotment (Polkinghorne, 1995) to construct an account of the interaction between institutional cultures in each LLN programme studied, and the trajectories of students into, within and (where possible, though this was not always the case) beyond them. In this paper, we focus on the two most disparate sites, which highlight most strongly (although not exclusively) different institutional cultures and student experiences: the Year 0 programme, and the Foundation Degree in Integrated Practice (see Figures 1.1 and 1.2 for each of these routes). We therefore draw largely on data generated with tutors, support staff and students in those sites.

	Located in	Nature of provision
First year	Sixth Form College	Intensive Access course in: Allied Health Sciences (one of: Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Orthoptics, Physiotherapy, Diagnostic Radiography, or Radiotherapy) or • Medicine or • Dentistry
Progression	Old University	Degree course of 3 (Allied Health Sciences), 5 (Medicine), or 6 years (Dentistry), leading to full qualification in the same subject

Figure 1.1: Year 0 route

	Located in	Nature of provision
First year	Further Education College	Foundation Degree in Integrated Healthcare Practice Year 1
Progression	New University	Foundation Degree in Integrated Healthcare Practice Year 2
Progression option	New University	Bachelors' Degree in Healthcare Practice Year 3 'top-up'

Figure 1.2: Foundation Degree route

These are also supplemented by data from managers and stakeholders regarding the background to this inter-institutional collaboration, which mirrored previous findings: the HE institutions largely dominated in imposing their requirements on their FE partners, but college staff acknowledged the relative advantages the partnership brought to them and their institution.   This allows us to analyse and interpret the LLN initiatives in relation to the enactment of institutional cultures by staff, and the ways in which these enactments shaped students' experiences and trajectories.   We continue by presenting data on Year 0 in a sixth form college with progression to a high-status degree at Old University; followed by the FD in which students entered Year 1 in an FE college and transitioned to New University for Year 2.

Year 0: grooming more advantaged learners for success

Year 0 provision was available for Allied Health Sciences (Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Orthoptics, Physiotherapy, Diagnostic Radiography, Radiotherapy), and for Dentistry and Medicine. The last two of these in particular are degrees which are heavily oversubscribed throughout the UK, with around 60 applicants for each place in Medicine, for example. Recruitment is therefore both highly selective and politically sensitive. Old University managers spoke about the threat of legal challenges from parents or schools to widening participation initiatives that might include any relaxation of entry requirements. Given the government's emphasis on widening participation, the LLN funding allowed Old University to allot a small number of additional student places for Year 0 students which would in any case not be available to 'traditional' entrants, thus avoiding political controversy. Our impression was that this was an initiative that was not being widely publicised precisely because of its political sensitivity.

Year 0 programmes were delivered in a sixth form college, a type of further education institution which tends to exhibit a 'subtle elitism', focused on traditional 'A Level'[2] qualifications and entry to HE (Hodkinson and Bloomer, 2000, p.192). They were full-time programmes for one year, and very high pass marks were required to progress to degree level. Each Year 0 course prepared students specifically for the same degree subject at Old University, offering more restricted but more specialised and higher level content than 'A Levels' (traditional qualifications preparing students for degree level study) or typical Access courses (for adult returners seeking to progress to HE). Twice a semester, the students went to Old University for delivery of the programme on a 'taster day', and to get some experience of the related job role within the NHS.

The level, intensity and full-time nature of the programme, together with a commitment to give up work in order to study full-time for at least four years, seem to operate as one level of filtering on recruitment. The learners came from varied employment backgrounds, ranging from a ski instructor to a telecommunications engineer and a company buyer, as well as including people already working in health and social care. Almost all of them already had 'A Level' qualifications with an additional technical qualification, while one student already had a science degree, and most had been working

at associate professional level. Most owned their own homes and had families, which made the long-term commitment to Year 0 and the degree difficult. One the other hand, all had economic resources in the form of personal savings or financial support from families which made this feasible. Nevertheless, the programmes were not recruiting to their capacity, and staff feared that the financial commitment required of students studying the full-time Year 0 programme, especially since its intensive nature allowed little or no opportunity for them to earn money through part-time employment.

All of the students said that they had always dreamed of going to university, in most cases to study the subject they were now doing in Year 0, but had been prevented or deflected from doing so for a range of reasons. They cited financial and family difficulties, immaturity and unreadiness for further study, the desire to travel, and motherhood. Their narratives are strongly reminiscent of Bloomer and Hodkinson's (1999) study of young people's decisions to drop out of education during or immediately after FE (see also Hodkinson and Bloomer, 2001). The decision to come onto Year 0 was not something previously unimagined, then, but a response to the sense of hitting a 'ceiling' in existing careers, or the desire to change career for personal and moral reasons. As a result, these students were very highly motivated to succeed.

This leads us to consider a second level of filtering in recruitment, the application process, which was led by Old University. Students had to go through a selection process very similar to the selection of traditional 'A Level' students for direct entry to a degree. In contrast to 'A Level' applicants, however, Year 0 applicants also had to have an individual interview with both the admissions tutor for the degree, and a representative from the college. Staff at the sixth form college suggested that entry requirements for Year 0, in terms of work experience and team-working skills, were too similar to those for direct entry to Year 1 of the degree; that this was unrealistic and unfair; and that Year 0 students should have a year to develop these requirements, with the college's support. However, the university staff explained that they had to be 'stringent', as it was not in learners' interests to be taken on if they might not succeed.

These differences between FE and HE staff in their approaches to mature students returning to education were evident in their attitudes to student support. For example, the Psychology tutor at the sixth form college assumed no prior knowledge of the subject, and took an incremental approach to developing key concepts, increasing the complexity as students progressed. In at least some of the sessions, he spent time with them on a one-to-one basis. This tutor felt that the students initially resisted interactive learning techniques, perhaps because they had been out of education for a while, and therefore had different expectations of the roles of teachers and learners.

> You need to be active on several fronts at the same time. You can't just try and develop their knowledge of the subject. You have to develop their skills as a student, as a learner, from where they are, to something a bit more interactive and a bit more confident. Confidence is a big issue for these people. (Psychology Tutor, Year 0, Sixth Form College 2)

Students were universally enthusiastic about the support they had had from college tutors:

> [*The college tutors*] really wanted you to get there, they really wanted you to succeed and they were like pushing you forwards, saying 'You can do this', 'Do you need extra time?' or 'Go over it again if you want', and you know, 'Oh, don't worry, come and see me after class or at lunchtime, and we'll go through it again if you need to'. (Hannah, Y0 Cohort 1, Radiotherapy Student, Old University)

All students agreed that their personal tutors and course co-ordinators at college gave them excellent pastoral support and were very approachable. They felt that tutors treated them as adults,

sharing the staff room with them, and talking to them on an equal level. However, there had been some contestation between the college and Old University over pastoral support. The college were concerned that Old University were trying to impose their own system, since the university 'owned' the students, but college staff felt strongly that their student support services would be more appropriate and easier to access, and this was finally agreed.

In making the transition to degree study at Old University, students generally felt that Year 0 had prepared them well. 100% of the first cohort (13 students) completed Year 0, and 11 of these progressed to university. A major adjustment for them in HE was being in very large groups rather than small classes, and having a more distanced relationship with their tutors. One student was concerned about the considerable reduction in academic support, particularly for subjects such as Physics and Maths, but when she complained about this to her lecturers, she felt this was met by further criticism, and the response that students should have formed peer support groups to help each other. However, almost all of the former Year 0 students were succeeding well by the end of their first term at Old University, and enjoying their degree courses. How does this trajectory from FE provision into the field of HE compare, then, with the experiences of Foundation Degree students?

Foundation Degree students: warm, breathing but unwanted?
The Foundation Degree we studied was related to work with children and young people, offered through a blend of part-time attendance, distance learning and work-based learning. Its entry requirements were Level 3 qualifications[3] or equivalent prior learning. All of the students in our sample were already volunteering or employed in the area of children's care and education at technician level, with Level 2 or 3 vocational qualifications, although some were also managers of service centres, employing and supervising other staff. Most hoped that the Foundation Degree would lead to career promotion. Their parents and spouses worked in craft or semi-skilled occupations, and all except one (whose mother is now a mature student in HE) were the first in their family to go to college. For almost all of these students, aspiring to HE was something they had 'never ever dreamed of'. Most had had quite negative experiences in compulsory schooling, including some literacy problems, and had failed in their 16+ examinations. They had had no encouragement to succeed at school or remain in post-compulsory education.

Some students were recruited through advertisements in the local press, but there appeared to be some resistance to this method among tutors at New University:

> This course was put together very quickly. From what I remember, we were that desperate to recruit, we put an advert in the local newspaper! So it was literally anybody with a pulse who could read who got a place! Everybody who's ever babysat applies for a job in Children's Practice. (Josie, Health Tutor, New University)

This comment, and the indignation with which it was made, suggests a strong preconception on the part of this tutor about the (un)suitability of some students, both for HE and for employment in this sector. As we shall see later, it was not an uncommon perspective at New University.

It was also clear that employer engagement and funding were critical issues in recruitment if mature working people were to be brought onto the programme. This FD was not recruiting its full complement, although the same FD offered wholly at another FE college was recruiting three times its expected numbers, since staff there were proactively promoting discretionary funding available to employers from the local authority. This suggests not only that a lack of economic capital added to the social and cultural obstacles for potential students; but also that the FE college delivering the FD on its own had a stronger outreach practice than the college collaborating in provision with New University (where tutors objected to the type of students being recruited by the FE college for Year 1).

These difficulties came to a head at the point of transition between the FE college and New University, as students moved into Year 2. In order to facilitate the transition from the college, students visited New University at least three times during Year 1 for joint FE-HE teaching sessions. Students had to enrol at the New University campus initially, and university staff went out to the college within the first month to provide learning support and IT services. However, students who had had to make this transition were still struggling to find their way round and cope in a new environment well into the first semester. They said that they had been given no information about the transition, and did not know when or where they were supposed to go:

> We started individually ringing up the university, and asking when we were supposed to come back, and myself and two other girls kept in touch during the holidays, and all rang the university at different times, and realised that we'd all been given completely different information. (Rosie, Year 2 Foundation Degree, New University)

According to the Health tutors at New University, learners were also finding it difficult to meet the required level of study in Year 2. Tutors we interviewed felt the students had been 'spoon-fed' and 'cosseted' at college, and did not have the appropriate skills or attitudes to study:

> [*College*] tutors have provided all the information for them and told them exactly how to do their assignments. They come here and expect us to do all this for them, and I make it absolutely clear, they have to go and find information for themselves, and we show them how to do it, and they have to get on with it. (Sandra, Health Tutor, New University)

They also believed that some of the FD students had poor listening skills, lacked emotional intelligence, and tended to wander off task, interrupt other people's learning, and engage in schoolchild-like behaviour.

> Every lesson, they will say, 'Is this to do with the assignment?', and you have to say, 'Yes', and get them to listen, which seems a bit basic, really. I don't know if it's their backgrounds, it could just be individuals. At one point, somebody did say last week, 'Will you just shut up and let them [*the tutors*] talk!' (Marilyn, Health Tutor, New University)

This made them question these students' suitability for health and social care work. One tutor claimed that students were not coming to lessons in an appropriate state of mind because of their outside lives. She recounted a story about a young woman who came into class talking about a gun battle on her street the previous night which had terrified her and prevented her from doing her preparation for class the next day: 'The widening participation aspect there is quite stressful', she commented. However, one tutor argued that the students tended to be people who might have been working in low-paid jobs, thinking they were not clever enough to go to university, but they had turned out to be very able. All of this suggests that entry to the field of HE within a university – albeit a non-prestigious one – was subject not only to tutors' judgements about students' vocational suitability, but also demanded particular academic dispositions both of independent learning and of compliant dispositions within the lecture room.

Students, in turn, were dissatisfied with the lack of academic support they perceived from university tutors, in strong contrast with the support they had received at the FE college. For example, the students asked a tutor for a print-out of the Powerpoint work he had done with them, but he refused, saying it should be on their virtual learning environment (VLE). However, students were having great difficulty accessing the VLE; and when they could access it, it was sometimes impossible to find materials that should have been available. There were also errors and discrepancies in the work on the VLE, and students' perception was that tutors were not addressing these problems, nor apologising for them. To make matters worse, it had been very difficult for students who did not have wide contacts in the employment field to arrange work-based learning placements. No list of

employers was supplied by the university, no tutor appeared to them to take any responsibility for organising placements, and students felt they had been left to fend for themselves. In terms of pastoral support, personal tutors had been allocated to them, but well into the first semester, students in Year 2 had still not been told who their personal tutor was, and regular contact with them was not timetabled. According to Rosie, 'We were told that "You signed up for the course, you should just get on with it"', and she felt that Year 2 of the course had not been a good experience. Students felt that none of the tutors were 'seeing the bigger picture' or listening to their concerns, and a number were considering dropping out. Moreover, as others have reported (Dunne *et al*., 2008; Fenge, 2011), second-year FD students were worried about career progression, feeling that they were performing better and taking on more responsibility in their jobs, but without any prospect of increased salary or promotion. This underlines the way in which the FD may contribute to upskilling in these sectors, but also that it may do so in an exploitative way which does not reward individuals who have enhanced their own capacities. They are, one might say, running up the down escalator of the knowledge economy.

Using Bourdieu's field analysis to understand HE-FE partnerships

How, then, can we understand the ways in which collaboration and contestation between different types of institution serve to shape the experiences and trajectories of LLN students, particularly in the 'boundary zones' (Parry, 2011, p.147) of inter-institutional transition? Here, we suggest a tentative interpretation, using Bourdieu's notion of field, whilst grappling with its ambiguities and unresolved lacunae.

Earlier in this paper, we noted that, within the overall field power, the fields of economics and politics dominate the field of education (Thomas, 2010), which itself functions to replicate the inequalities of the social space (Bourdieu, 1988; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Although HE and FE could each be seen as sub-fields of the broad field of education, for the heuristic purposes of this study, we choose to treat them as fields in themselves. We consider institutions within them as sub-fields, which cluster together according to their relative positions (and hierarchically organised distance from other clusters of institutions) within their respective field (see Figure 2).
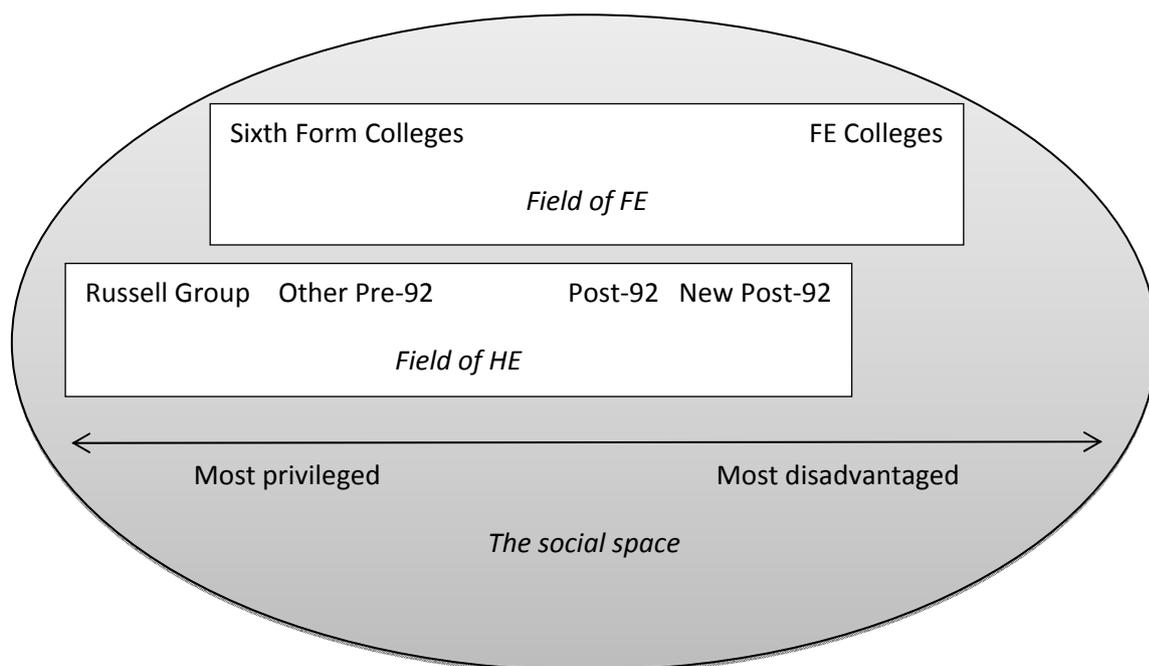

Figure 2: The social space, its homologous fields of HE and FE, and institutional sub-fields

At the level of fields, HE occupies a privileged position vis-à-vis that of FE: we have already noted its greater resources, autonomy and kudos, as well as its power to control and award higher forms of cultural capital to students, in the form of Bachelors' degrees. However, that does not render HE immune from the dominating influences of the fields of economics and politics: it no longer enjoys the degree of autonomy it enjoyed in Bourdieu's day (Deer, 2003). Indeed, by widening the market for HE students to FE – including, since the completion of our project, the conferment of degree-awarding powers to some large FE colleges offering HE programmes – economically instrumental education policies have opened up a sphere not only of collaboration but also of competition between the two fields. We shall return to this point slightly later, to discuss the ways in which collaboration and competition are differentially distributed across both fields, and between sub-fields within them.

At the level of sub-fields, Figure 2 also traces positions within fields, and the relative distances between sub-fields. The elite Russell Group university is most widely separated from the post-1992 New University, which was itself only recently formed as a university. Likewise, Sixth Form College is widely separated from the FE college. Given the homologies of these sub-fields with the social space, each is also associated with student cohorts that themselves are distanced from each other in the social space. The data shows that the more privileged institutions in both fields attract a more advantaged type of student, with more economic as well as cultural capital: funding to support themselves while studying, academic 'A Level' qualifications, long-term aspirations to enter HE, and work experience that in one way or another gives them the social credentials to do so through the highest-status route within the LLN. There is immanence in their 'second chance' prospects of success in their transition to HE and of upward social mobility thereafter. Old University meet their widening participation targets without political controversy, and Sixth Form College enhances its reputation for high-status destinations for its students. There is therefore an homologous 'win-win' position-taking for the more advantaged institutions, staff and students.

By contrast, those with little economic capital, few prior qualifications and lower-level work experience find themselves able to access HE only through the lower-status FD route initially based in an FE college (a sub-field of lower status in the field of FE), with progression to the lowest-status sub-field within the field of HE. Whilst this may secure some future advantage within the social space, relative to others positioned socially and economically 'near' them, this is by no means guaranteed: these students were the least confident of increasing their economic or social capital, having uncertain prospects of gaining promotion or higher pay in their workplaces even if they achieved the cultural capital of a FD. They may have increased their volume of cultural capital, but its relative weight in the field of employment – its exchangeability, as it were – is negligible. This too represents immanence in their transitions and trajectories.

How, though, can we understand the way in which 'College For All' policies have shaped the relationship between the fields of HE and FE through the establishment of partnerships such as the LLN? The metaphor of an 'overlap' of fields does not seem to fit here: both HE and FE remain separate and distinct fields, despite their collaboration in creating new forms of shared provision. In addition, it would be easy to accept the prevalent view in the literature on HE-FE provision that this overlap is a space in which HE directly dominates FE, winning in the struggles between different institutional *habitus* and practices in the two fields, and imposing its own protocols. But our data suggest that things are not so straightforward. Instead, we follow Thomson (2010, discussing the nature of educational policy in relation to the fields of education and the field of policy) in choosing the metaphor of *bridges* between fields to represent HE-FE partnership (see Figure 3).
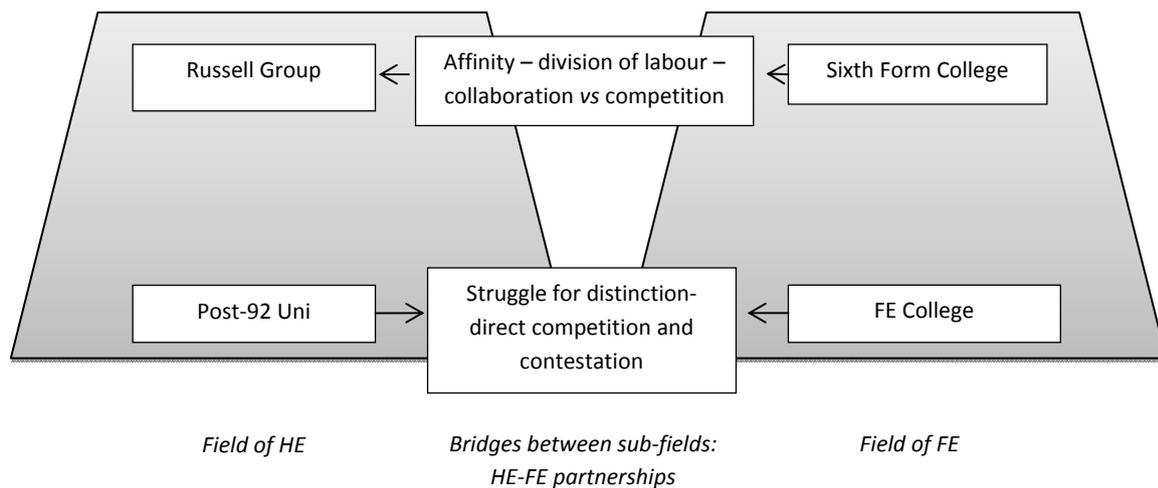
Figure 3: Institutional sub-fields and bridges between them

In the upper echelons of each field, the positions of the institutional sub-fields mirror each other: within the social space, they are relatively closely located, and accordingly share affinities. The LLN's Year 0 partnership initiative acts as a collaborative bridge between them, but without bringing them into direct competition with one another. Contestation is minimal, over the issue of pastoral support, but Old University can concede this issue to Sixth Form College: the logic of practice in both fields does not threaten the field-specific relationship between them, which is a division of labour in which the college prepares 'suitable' students for entry to the university.

In the lower echelons of the fields, however, the bridge of HE-FE partnership in FD provision seems of a very different character. It is marked by more open competition between the distinct *habitus* of the HE and FE sub-fields, played out in a way which directly affects students. Their transitions from FE to HE appear far more troubled than for the Year 0 students, and considerable resistance is expressed by HE staff to both the students and the practices of FE. Transition from the college to the university is a strongly-defined gateway, and some tutors show consternation that the type of students recruited by the college ('anyone warm and breathing') can enter in. Similarly, the college-based element of the FD is dismissed as 'spoon-feeding' in terms that suggest it is not 'proper' HE. We see here the contestation over 'HEness' (Lea and Simmons, 2012) and a construction of HE practiced in the field of FE as 'HE lite' (cf. Creasey, 2013). We might argue, tentatively, that the respective positions occupied by each sub-field are not only close in terms of their homologous capitals, but that there is actually a threat, for New University, of direct competition from the FE college given current policy directions. The bridge between them, then, is one in which a struggle for distinction must be played out by the university staff, resulting in much sharper and more open contestation than in the Year 0 partnership. It is here that the struggle over the very definition of HE takes place. As a result, New University tutors feel the need to resist 'contamination' by the FE College sub-field and its student cohort. Yet, unable to prevent it, given widening participation policies, they can only protest. Any appearance of disdain or hostility on their part towards FD students transitioning from FE College should not therefore be regarded as a blameworthy or callous attitude on the part of these individuals. Having only recently taken their (lowly) position within the field of HE, and facing the threat of competition for degree-awarding powers (and for students) from the field of FE, they can be seen instead as being obliged – as a group – to play out the logic of practice of the field and sub-field: struggling to maintain and (if possible) enhance the position-taking they have achieved, and to ensure that it is not eroded by competition from FE.

The data on which we base this tentative analysis is, as we have earlier acknowledged, limited, particularly with regard to the size of our samples. But as Thomson (2010) argues in her study of just one headteacher, such data can nevertheless, through a careful application of theory, reveal mechanisms which operate translocally to co-ordinate the strategies of similar actors across a field.

Conclusions

In this paper, then, we have sought to flesh out the micro-level practices by which 'College For All' policies play out differentially in contrasting HE-FE partnerships. We have demonstrated the way in which these practices are co-ordinated by the logic of practice of each field, as well as the logic of the particular way in which partnerships act as bridges between the fields and sub-fields involved. These findings contribute directly to the literature on HE-FE partnerships in England, but our Bourdieusian field analysis may also offer illumination to studies of 'College For All' in other countries, through drawing attention to the possibilities of the hermeneutic dialogue between empirical data and Bourdieu's theoretical framework. It has been particularly through attention to the interstices in that framework – unresolved theoretical questions about the scale of and relationship between fields and sub-fields – that our interpretation has provided insights, albeit speculatively.

It is, of course, always difficult to recommend responses from the perspective of a radical theoretical position such as Bourdieu's, which logically calls for a radical transformation of the social space and all fields within it. There are, of course, ameliorative reforms which might be introduced, along with efforts to create a more amenable culture for disadvantaged students, as attempted by the learning support staff at New University. Researchers such as ourselves need to raise these issues, and the supporting evidence we have generated, for debate in forums at different levels across these fields – though efforts to generate such impact may meet considerable resistance from dominant groupings, especially in the field of politics (cf. Colley, 2013). Our location in the sub-fields of HE and FE also means that we may be able to influence directly HE-FE partnerships we may be involved in. But repeatedly, Bourdieu reminds us that the chances for successful struggle in the field on the part of subordinated groups depend on those groups acting collectively and in solidarity with others positioned with or near them. This might mean, in the case of the FD students who participated in the LLN, that their dissatisfactions with New University could be taken up by their Students' Union, and that their 'stalemate' in the labour market could be taken up by the relevant trade unions. The issue, then, is not to burn the bridges which have been opened up for those positioned disadvantageously in the social space as well as in the fields of FE and HE, but to challenge the rules of the game which render their acquired capital relatively weightless as currency beyond those bridges.

Notes

1. Given the potential identifiability at the time of the institutions and staff involved, we decided to embargo publication of our data for 5 years. However, from our continued involvement in FE and HE, as well as from our knowledge of further research on this topic, we would argue that the data, analysis and interpretation remains as relevant today.

2. 'A Levels' are traditional, academic qualifications taken usually at the age of 18, and geared mainly towards university entrance.

3. Level 3 vocational qualifications are supposed to be comparable to 'A Levels', and allow for entry to HE as well as employment, but tend to be viewed with significantly lower esteem than 'A Levels' in England. They are competence-based qualifications, requiring knowledge and skills to be applied

in a broad range of contexts. Level 3 typically entails a level of autonomy and responsibility for supervising other staff.

References

Bathmaker, A. M. (2013). What Future for 'College for All' in England? Paper presented in the symposium 'Cross-National Perspectives on "College for All" in Australia, England, and the United States'. *American Educational Research Association Conference*, San Francisco, 27 April-1 May.

Bathmaker, A. M. and Thomas, W. (2009). Positioning themselves: An exploration of the nature and meaning of transitions in the context of dual sector FE/HE institutions in England. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, *33*(2), 119-130.

Bloomer, M. and Hodkinson, P. (1999). *College life, the voice of the learner*. London: FEDA.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Eds.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (pp. 241-258). New York: Greenwood.

Bourdieu, P. (1987). What makes a social class? On the theoretical and practical existence of groups. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, *32*, 1-17.

Bourdieu, P. (1988). *Homo Academicus*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. (2000). *Pascalian Meditations, trans. R.Nice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J.-C. (1990). *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture (2nd edn).* London: Sage.

Bourdieu, P. and Wacquant, L. (1992). *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bragg, D.D. (2013). 'College for All' and New Baccalaureate Degrees in the United States. Paper presented in the symposium 'Cross-National Perspectives on "College for All" in Australia, England, and the United States'. *American Educational Research Association Conference*, San Francisco, 27 April-1 May.

Colley, H. (2010). 'There is no golden key': overcoming problems with data analysis in qualitative research. In P.Thomson and M.Walker (Eds), *The Routledge Doctoral Student's Companion: Getting to Grips with Research in Education and the Social Sciences* (pp. 203-221). London: Routledge.

Colley, H. (2013). What (a) to do about impact: a Bourdieusian critique. *British Educational Research Journal*. DOI: 10.1002/berj.3112.

Colley, H., James, D., Tedder, M. and Diment, K. (2003). Learning as becoming in vocational education and training: Class, gender and the role of vocational *habitus*. *Journal of vocational education and training, 55*(4), 471-498.

Connolly, C., Jones, C. and Jones, M. (2007). Managing collaboration across further and higher education: A case in practice. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, *31*(2), 159-169.

Creasy, R. (2013). HE lite: Exploring the problematic position of HE in FECs. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 37*(1), 38-53.

Crozier, G., Reay, D., Clayton, J., Colliander, L. and Grinstead, J. (2008). Different strokes for different folks: Diverse students in diverse institutions – experiences of higher education. *Research Papers in Education*, *23*(2), 167-177.

Doyle, M. (2006). Foundation degree and partnership approaches to curriculum development and delivery. In P. Beaney (Eds.), *Researching Foundation Degrees: Linking research and practice* (123-145). Lichfield: fdf.

Doyle, M. and O'Doherty, E. (2006). Foundation degrees and widening participation: Earning, learning and public sector modernisation. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, *8*(1), 4-13.

Dunne, L., Goddard, G. and Woodhouse, C. (2008). Mapping the changes: A critical exploration into the career trajectories of teaching assistants who undertake a foundation degree. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, *60*(1), 49-59.

Ecclestone, K. (2002). *Learning Autonomy in Post-16 Education: The Policy and Practice of Formative Assessment.* London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Edmond, N., Hillier, Y. and Price, M. (2007). Between a rock and a hard place: The role of HE and foundation degrees in workforce development. *Education + Training*, *49*(3), 170-181.

Fenge, L.A. (2011). 'A second chance at learning but it's not quite higher education': Experience of a foundation degree. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, *35*(3), 375-390.

Gleeson, D. and Keep, E. (2004). Voice without accountability: The changing relationship between employers, the state and education in England. *Oxford Review of Education, 30*(1), 37-63.

Harvey, L. (2009). *Review of research literature focussed on Foundation degrees*. Lichfield: fdf.

Hodkinson, P. and Bloomer, M. (2000). Stokingham Sixth Form College: Institutional culture and dispositions to learning. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *21*(2), 187-202.

Hodkinson, P. and Bloomer, M. (2001). Dropping out of further education: Complex causes and simplistic policy assumptions. *Research Papers in Education*, *16*(2), 117-140.

Lea, J. and Simmons, J. (2012). Higher Education in Further Education: Capturing and Promoting HEness. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, *17*(2), 179-193.

Leahy, S.M. (2012). The barbarians at the gate. Playing the higher education game: Observations from the periphery of the field. *Journal of further and higher education*, *36*(2), 169-185.

Lingard, B., Rawolle, S. and Taylor, S. (2005). Globalizing policy sociology in education: Working with Bourdieu. *Journal of Education Policy*, *20*(6), 759-778.

Moustakas, C. (1990). *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology, and Applications*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Olneck, M. (2000). Can multi-cultural education change what counts as cultural capital? *American Educational Research Journal, 37*, 317-348.

Parry, G. (2011). Mobility and hierarchy in the age of near-universal access. *Critical Studies in Education*, *52*(2), 135-149.

Parry, G. (2012). Higher education in further education colleges: A primer. *Perspectives*, *16*(4), 118-122.

Parry, G. *et al*. (2008). Universal Access and Dual Regimes of Further and Higher Education: Full Research Report, *ESRC End of Award Report*, RES-139-25-0245. Swindon: ESRC.

Polkinghorne, D.E. (1995) Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. In J.Hatch and R.Wisniewski (Eds) *Life History and Narrative* (pp. 5-23). London: Falmer.

Rawolle, S. (2005). Cross-field effects and temporary social fields: a case study of the mediatizations of recent Australian knowledge economy policies. *Journal of Education Policy*, *20*(6), 759-778.

Rawolle, S. and Lingard, R. (2013). Bourdieu and educational research: Thinking tools, relational thinking, beyond epistemological innocence. In M.Murphy (Ed.), *Social Theory and Education Research: Understanding Foucault, Habermas, Bourdieu and Derrida* (pp. 117-137). London: Routledge.

Reay, D. (2004). 'It's all becoming a habitus': beyond the habitual use of habitus in educational research. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *25*(4), 431-444.

Reay, D., Crozier, G. and Clayton, J. (2010). 'Fitting in' or 'standing out': Working-class students in UK higher education. *British Educational Research Journal*, *36*(1), 107-124.

Reay, D., David, M. and Ball, S. (2001). Making a Difference?: Institutional Habituses and Higher Education Choice. *Sociological Research Online*, *5*(4). Available at http://www.socresonline.org.uk/5/4/reay.html [accessed 9 June 2013].

Reay, D., David, M. and Ball, S. (2005). *Degrees of Choice: social class, race and gender in higher education*. London: Trentham Books.

Smith, D. (1990). *The Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Smith, D. (2005). *Institutional Ethnography: A sociology for people.* Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.

Thomson, P. (2005). Bringing Bourdieu to policy sociology: codification, misrecognition and exchange value in the UK context. *Journal of Education Policy*, *20*(6) 741-758.

Thomson, P. (2008). Field. In M.Grenfell (Ed.) *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts* (pp.67-81). Durham: Acumen.

Thomson, P. (2010). Headteacher autonomy: a sketch of a Bourdieuian field analysis of position and practice. *Critical Studies in Education*, *51*(1), 5-20.

Trim, P.R.J. (2001). An Analysis of a Partnership Arrangement between an Institution of Further Education and an Institution of Higher Education. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 25*(1), 107-116.

Turner, R., McKenzie, L.M., McDermott, A.P. and Stone, M. (2009). Emerging HE cultures: Perspectives from CETL award holders in a partner college network. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, *33*(3), 255-263.

Wacquant, L.J.D. (1992). Toward a Social Praxaeology: the Structure and Logic of Bourdieu's Sociology. In P.Bourdieu and L.J.D Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (pp.2-59). Cambridge: Polity Press.

West, J. (2006). Patrolling the borders: Accreditation in further and higher education in England. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, *30*(1), 11-26.

Wheelahan, L. (2013). 'College for all' in Australia – meritocracy or social inequality? Paper presented in the symposium 'Cross-National Perspectives on "College for All" in Australia, England, and the United States'. *American Educational Research Association Conference*, San Francisco, 27 April-1 May.

Young, M. (2006). Editorial. Further and higher education: A seamless or differentiated future? *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, *30*(1), 1-10.