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**PEER TUTORING IN FURTHER EDUCATION: A  
STUDY OF THE PERCEIVED EXPERIENCES FOR A  
GROUP OF GCSE RESIT AND A LEVEL STUDENTS  
AND THEIR TEACHERS.**

**MICHELLE WHITEHEAD**

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

School of Education and Professional Development  
University of Huddersfield

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## Abstract

This case study explores the perceptions of students and staff at a Further Education (FE) college, who chose to participate and implement a new peer tutoring programme. It considers the ways in which government policy impacts upon the FE sector and the difficulties this can cause, when dealing with large numbers of GCSE English and maths resit students. The experiences of the GCSE resit students taking part and the A Level students, who carried out a tutoring role, are explored alongside those of the key curriculum staff involved. Peer tutoring in Higher Education (HE) is a practice whereby Y2 or Y3 students provide additional support to new undergraduates; however, peer tutoring in FE is not commonly used and there is limited research within this field. I was motivated to see if some of the documented advantages of peer tutoring, such as increased confidence and academic success, would transfer to an FE context and to find out how students and staff would perceive both the benefits and challenges of being involved. This research is located within UK government legislation on post-16 education and the changes to the GCSE English qualification. It is also located within the literature on peer tutoring in HE and schools, noting that social learning theory is generally used to theorise those studies. A qualitative approach is adopted and interviews with students and staff are conducted to examine their motivations for participating, as well as evaluating approaches to the peer tutoring programme delivery. The study conceptualises peer tutoring within a Bourdieuan framework to analyse whether being involved in the research impacts on the students' educational goals and social relations. I use Bourdieu's notions of capitals, habitus and fields to offer insight into student and staff perceptions, whilst also applying them to the broader concepts of structure and agency. I conclude by reviewing the study's overall findings and contribution to new knowledge, namely that within the peer tutoring project the students formed 'functional friendships', a new term coined for this research and defined as: a purposeful relationship between peers, which is motivated by a mutually beneficial bond, or shared goals, and lasts until the purpose of that relationship has been fulfilled. Relationships built within these functional friendships were found to invert the usual dynamic of higher and lower capital. Bearing in mind this study is the first to use a Bourdieuan approach to peer tutoring, the findings also outline elements of a theoretical contribution to new knowledge. Recommendations for further research into peer tutoring in FE, with a focus on broadening out across wider curriculum areas, are then made, before reflecting on the importance of educational research from both personal and professional perspectives.



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## **Dedications and Acknowledgements**

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Finally, I must thank my partner Gary for all his reassurance throughout, reminding me to take breaks and enjoy myself too, and my Mum who patiently listened to the weekly summary of my progress.

## List of abbreviations

BERA	British Educational Research Association
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfE	Department for Education
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
EFA	Education Funding Agency
ESFA	Education and Skills Funding Agency
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
FE	Further Education
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HE	Higher Education
NWC	North West College
Ofqual	The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
UCAS	The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

# Introduction

## *Introduction*

This thesis reports on a research study which focuses on peer tutoring in FE and more precisely, on A Level (Advanced Level) students peer tutoring GCSE resit students, who are retaking GCSE English as part of their course. Since starting my teaching career in 2001, I have experienced first-hand the ways in which not getting a 'good' pass first time can lead to students feeling frustrated and demoralised. This, in turn, impacts on FE colleges and the managers and teachers responsible for finding ways for those who failed to achieve a 'good' pass in school to get the required grade C/level 4. When this research began, GCSE maths and English policy stipulated that everyone in post-16 education who had not achieved a grade C or above must continue to retake it until they achieve the standard pass grade: this was a condition of funding (ESFA, 2019). Perhaps owing to the pressures this placed on students and FE colleges, it was changed in 2019, so that students with a grade 2 or below could undertake Functional Skills, a 'stepping stone' qualification (ESFA, 2019). In short, some students do not want to continue with maths and English, and even those who do are still not free to choose whether the GCSE is the right path for them, meaning that the system could be too rigid and do more damage than good.

With policy acting as a driver for the implementation of the maths and English curriculum in FE, the focus on GCSE resit courses is arguably skewed towards the flawed hegemonic notion that doing more of the same will lead students over a symbolic finish line; this does not take into account existing negative perceptions of education and perceived failure in school (Anderson & Peart, 2016). A report was commissioned by the DfE in 2017 in acknowledgement of the fact that the delivery of post-16 maths and English is problematic, much more so in FE colleges than sixth forms (DfE, 2017a), where there are five times as many students resitting. Motivation is low unless students have a specific goal, whereby achieving the standard pass rate of grade C/level 4 or above will allow them to progress to higher level courses. All of this presents a conundrum for FE providers who are striving to meet government targets, whilst struggling to cope with high numbers of students, many of whom 'exhibit avoidance behaviours, such as infrequent attendance, passive non-engagement with learning activities or in-class disruption' (DfE, 2017a, p. 8). And so, evidence points to a narrative in which FE students and staff are entrenched in an education system dictated by policies which, although debatably well-intentioned, create more problems than they solve.

Using my past experience and expertise as a GCSE English resit teacher, I have sought to challenge the negative cycle which affects so many young people in FE today. Taking decisive action, intended to empower GCSE resit students and their teachers, this research adds to the existing strategies and practices used to teach English and maths in a college environment. It is acknowledged that peer-led learning can be an effective tool (DfE, 2017a); however, this research questions whether keeping this within the confines of a whole class setting goes far enough to maximise its potential. Although it has already been noted that there are high numbers of students entering FE who have failed to achieve the standard pass grade, there are also high numbers of students on Level 3 courses who have achieved GCSE grades in maths and English at grade B/level 6 or above. This peer tutoring research study posits that these students are an untapped resource. Engaging them as peer tutors is a way of marrying up two groups of young people who are best qualified to understand the pressures of studying for exams and the impact of qualification failure or success (Keenan, 2014). I was fortunate to find a group of likeminded staff who were ready to try something new in their college, and a group of students willing to see if peer tutoring could make a difference to their education, as well as creating empowering social opportunities for both tutors and tutees. These factors influenced this peer tutoring study and informed the writing of the following research questions:

1. To what extent does national policy influence staff to implement a peer tutoring programme in an FE college?
2. What factors affect GCSE and A Level student motivation to take part in a peer tutoring programme at one FE college?
3. What perceived impact does being involved in the peer tutoring programme have on students' educational goals and social relations?
4. What are the benefits and challenges of participating in the peer tutoring programme?

These questions take into account the fact that the research took place in a single FE college and also reflect the need to explore perceptions, in order to give multiple viewpoints on the peer tutoring programme itself. Even though this research was borne out of the drive to find ways to support GCSE resit students to improve their grades, it has created opportunities to explore broader educational and social themes; these have been conceptualised using Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' of capital, habitus and field (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 50). Furthermore, the benefits of resitting GCSEs and the impact this can have on the ability of the GCSE resit students to accrue cultural capital in the institutionalised form of educational qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986), may also be viewed as offering them choices in their future career trajectory and enriching their lives. Some students may find the opportunity to retake their GCSEs as liberating, taking agency and demonstrating

'resistance capital' (Duckworth, 2014, p.88) by turning their initial failure to achieve a grade C/L4 or above in English (and maths) into an opportunity to further their education prospects and consequently, their employment prospects. Owing to the lack of existing research into peer tutoring in FE, looking at the benefits and challenges is integral to understanding the nuances of peer tutoring. Research surrounding peer tutoring in HE (Berghmans, Neckebroech, Dochy & Struyven, 2013; Fitch & Semb, 1993; Keenan, 2014; Micari, Streitweiser & Light, 2005; Topping, 1994) has highlighted existing good practice and provided some relatable content, thereby setting a benchmark for planning and undertaking this study. The contribution to new knowledge not only stems from the research having been conducted in FE but also from its Bourdieuan approach, which is utilised to explore and explain the relationships between the objective structures encountered by students and staff, alongside their lines of agentic action or thought.

## ***Rationale***

My interest in the field of FE stems from having taught GCSE English resit and other literacy-based courses in one FE establishment for thirteen years, prior to becoming a teacher educator, therefore I have a long-standing professional interest in this field. Although I now work in a HE in FE context, some of my trainee teachers undertake placements on GCSE resit courses and I am constantly reminded of the issues they, their mentors and their students face. For ethical and practical reasons the research was not undertaken at my place of work: an opportunity arose instead to do this at an organisation I have chosen to call North West College (NWC).

This research explores the reasons behind why peer tutoring was considered as a way of supporting GCSE resit students to increase their grades to the national standard of level 4/grade C or above (DfE, 2018b). The research adopts a case study design which follows staff and students from the initial planning stage of the research through to after the GCSE students sat their exams. Owing to the fact there are large numbers of students resitting their maths and English GCSEs in FE colleges (ESFA, 2019; Ryan, 2019) and that this is deemed as a 'problem' by teachers and government authorities (The Guardian, 2014; Wilshaw, in Exley, 2016b), the peer tutoring study at NWC has sought to understand the impact of government policy decisions on FE students and staff, as well as analysing the processes and attitudes towards peer tutoring itself. Peer tutoring, for the purposes of this research is defined as 'people from similar social groupings who are not professional teachers help each other to learn and learning themselves by teaching' (Topping, 1996, p. 322). The research questions are designed to enable an exploration of the influence of policy but also the perceived experiences of students and staff.



The main driver for peer tutoring being chosen as the focus for this research is that it is a well-established support mechanism, used frequently in the field of HE (Fitch & Semb, 1993; Keenan, 2014; Micari et al., 2005; Topping, 1994), so there exists a body of evidence as to its efficacy within educational settings. However, no research into peer tutoring on GCSE resit courses has been conducted, prior to the study at NWC, and there is a paucity of research overall in relation to peer tutoring in FE (Topping, 1994), hence this research begins a process of opening up a discussion about what can be done to remedy this gap by contributing to new knowledge in this field. Knowing that peer tutoring has many benefits, both academically and socially (Keenan, 2014; Micari et al., 2005; Topping, 1996), the idea that A Level students, having recently sat and passed GCSEs themselves, could make a viable contribution on a GCSE resit course was mooted as one possible solution to the GCSE 'problem.' Hence, the research began with a more functional emphasis on attending to a very specific issue, but then developed into a means of understanding how and why peer tutoring operated in one specific educational context. The students and staff brought to light the multiple ways in which peer tutoring had benefited them, but they also made clear the logistical difficulties of the programme's implementation in FE. At times the students were candid and enigmatic in equal measure and this is one of the reasons why working with young people in FE can be so rewarding.

Unlike other peer tutoring research, which conceptualises peer tutoring using social learning theories (Havnes, Christiansen, Bjørk, & Hessevaagbakke, 2016; Hodgson, Benson & Brack, 2015), this study operationalises Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 50) as a lens through which to analyse the experiences of the students and their teachers. This in itself is another way in which this research contributes to new knowledge because no other peer tutoring research has framed its findings by applying the concept of capitals (Bourdieu, 1986), habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) and field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007). Using Bourdieu within educational research is not in itself a new practice (English & Bolton, 2016), yet the peer tutoring study at NWC is innovative in that it has not sought to measure the impact of social class, which can be a primary factor when choosing Bourdieu's theoretical framework (English & Bolton, 2016; Reay, 2004a; Stahl, 2016; Zembylas, 2007). Instead of focusing on social class, this research illuminates how examining the notion of structure and agency can show how government policy creates opportunities for some and barriers for others, when striving to reach their educational goals (Ade-Ojo & Duckworth, 2016). Even though this research takes an inductive approach (Cresswell, 2013; Thomas, 2006), and new meanings were generated at the analysis stage, it was anticipated that by creating a new social structure, namely the peer tutoring project at NWC, the students would form new social relations. Again Bourdieu's 'theoretical toolkit' (Connell, 2007, p. 40) enabled some insight into the power relations of the peer tutoring pairs, as well as providing the means to

interrogate some of the hierarchies that exist within education. In particular, hierarchies such as those which emphasise the academic vs. vocational divide, often stemming from the hierarchy of qualifications, whereby A Levels are seen as the 'gold standard' (Payne, 2000; Stewart, 2014). BTECs, though popular in both FE colleges and sixth forms, are directed at 'vocational learners' (Burgess & Rodger, 2010, p. 35) and this can impact on students' personal identities and scholastic habitus (English & Bolton, 2016).

Given that this research openly acknowledges it was borne out of the GCSE resit 'problem' (The Guardian, 2014; Wilshaw, in Exley, 2016b), and that I experienced the impact of this during my thirteen years of teaching on GCSE English courses, it could easily have become a diatribe against FE policy drivers. Yet, whilst my professional concerns regarding the ways in which policy can have an adverse effect on study programmes in FE (DfE, 2018a) have been addressed, it is the perceptions of students and staff at NWC and the ways in which they have navigated the peer tutoring programme which have predominantly informed this study. This research seeks to promulgate the notion that although policy can encumber progression in FE, students and staff are willing to try out new ways to deal with the pressures they face. The impact of policy cannot be underestimated, but neither should it be deemed as fatalistic. By taking part in the peer tutoring study, students and staff showed the propensity to engage with innovative practices, albeit at the same time making clear the obstacles they had to overcome. Whilst generalising the findings of this thesis to the whole of the FE sector is beyond the scope of this small scale study, this research is important because it offers fresh insight into the established practice of peer tutoring. As a critical educator and researcher, I have found this research to be a heuristic experience; I now present my thesis as a means of creating a dialogue with colleagues who are interested to know more about peer tutoring in FE.

### ***Structure of thesis***

Following this introductory chapter, which sets out the rationale for the research, a review of literature was undertaken to explore GCSE English and maths resit policy (ESFA, 2019) and the changes to the GCSE English specification itself (DfE, 2013), bearing in mind the broader FE policy context (DfE, 2016). The study's research design forms the next chapter and justifies the use of a single case study, as well as describing the data collection instruments and modes of analysis. The theoretical framework chapter shows how Bourdieu's oeuvre (1990) has been used to frame the research and shapes the longer analysis which is separated into three themes. Overall conclusions are made and findings discussed in the final chapter.

The thesis is presented as follows:

Chapter 1 examines government policy relating to FE and GCSE resits, paying particular attention to the changes in structure of GCSE English. There is also a review of the literature surrounding how peer tutoring operates in schools (Baiduri, 2017; TES, 2018; Topping, 1996) and HE (Fitch & Semb, 1993; Keenan, 2014; Micari et al., 2005; Topping, 1994), noting the absence of research in FE.

Chapter 2 outlines the research design, offering an explanation of the suitability of the case study method, the chosen research site at NWC and a description of the two phases of the study. The chapter also sets out my positionality as a teacher and as a researcher, noting the way this impacted on relationship dynamics and 'insider-outsider positionings' (Milligan, 2016, p. 239).

Chapter 3 explains why Bourdieu has been used as a theoretical framework for this research and considers how his 'thinking tools' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 50), or 'theoretical triad –field, capital and habitus' (Swartz, 2013, p. 26) can be utilised to explore peer tutoring practices and interpret government policy decisions.

Chapter 4 offers an analysis of the research findings and is broken down into three distinct themes, which are nonetheless fundamentally interrelated. These are: 'Perceptions of Failure and Success'; 'Academic vs Non-academic Identity'; and 'Structure and Agency'. The Failure and Success theme considers students' feelings about their positions within educational settings and the ways in which their passing or failing of GCSEs first time (failure in this context is interpreted as not achieving a grade 4/C or above), as well as whether or not the peer tutoring pairs achieved mutually beneficial goals from being involved. The Academic vs Non-academic Identity theme explores a range of value judgements regarding what is and what is not perceived as academic; this is both in personal terms, as well as more broadly within the field of education. The Structure and Agency theme considers a variety of factors in society, which appear to have influenced the participants throughout their time in educational establishments. For the GCSE and A Level students this can be related to the options for study they had in college and how this was driven by their experiences of secondary school.

The final chapter is my conclusion and brings together the key findings of the study and makes recommendations for further study. I also reflect on the research process itself and how this has impacted on me professionally and personally.

# Chapter 1: Literature Review

## ***Introduction***

This chapter sets out the context and overview of peer tutoring, when used in educational settings, as well as linking it to GCSE policy context in the UK. A condition of funding in post-16 education is that students with a grade 3/old grade D GCSE in maths and/or English have to be enrolled on a GCSE course. Those with grade 2/old grade E or below can now study towards a Functional Skills L2 'stepping stone' qualification (ESFA, 2019) or be entered for GCSE, at the discretion of the educational institution. The review considers whether GCSE policy context could be a driver for the use of peer tutoring in FE on GCSE English resit programmes. In setting a context for the review of literature, peer learning is an overarching term used to describe multiple different ways in which people learn together and from each other (Gogus, 2012). The working definition of peer tutoring, used for the purpose of this research is: 'people from similar social groupings who are not professional teachers helping each other to learn and learning themselves by teaching' (Topping, 1996, p. 322). This definition has been chosen due to Topping's prevalence within this field, as well as its particular relevance to this peer tutoring study, namely because it denotes the importance of tutoring in 'similar social groupings' and alludes to mutual benefits. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that what participants in peer tutoring programmes learn themselves, can differ depending on whether they take on the tutor or tutee role and therefore this requires a broader discussion of peer tutoring. As a strategy to enhance learning, and the student experience itself, it seems peer tutoring is common practice in HE (Fitch & Semb, 1993; Keenan, 2014; Micari et al., 2005); yet, it is used to a much lesser extent in FE (Topping, 1994, 2015). Most of the peer tutoring research conducted in HE focuses on academic achievement and wider skills, such as managing interactions with peers, employability and taking learning out of the classroom into an alternative domain (Ford, Thackeray, Barnes & Hendrickx, 2015). Topping (2015) has also written more recently about developments related to peer tutoring in schools, which is paralleled in universities and colleges, noting that 'there is virtually no subject in which peer tutoring cannot be used' (Topping, 2015, p.7). Yet there are gaps in the literature relating to peer tutoring in FE, hence it is necessary to take prevalent themes and examine their transferability to FE. The fact that North West College's (NWC) peer tutoring programme was carried out with GCSE and A Level students, brings a contextually unique and original dimension to the study, as no literature, at the time of writing, exists in this specific field.

No research on peer assisted learning programmes for GCSE English resit courses has been found, though the value of student accounts relating the fairness of assessments has been

acknowledged (Barrance, 2019). Moreover, there is some (limited) evidence to suggest that considering student input and accounts hold a degree of value and thus arguably should not be ignored and may be viewed as a real asset (Barrance, 2019). And yet, there is no shortage of literature about peer tutoring in HE, which shows it is a respected and widely used strategy (Fitch & Semb, 1993; Keenan, 2014; Micari et al., 2005) used within education. That said, Arrand (2014) argues the literature does not fully explore the feelings and perceptions of the peer tutors and how they navigate the challenges of their role. Gaps in knowledge and its lack of use in FE point to its infancy within this sector; therefore, this study has both currency and durability because GCSEs continue to be high on the national agenda (Gadsby, 2018; Impetus, 2017; Ryan, 2018; Tuckett, 2020), due to the large numbers of resit students affected by the resit policy. This area is hitherto under-researched and findings from the literature review relating to FE are less than those relating to schools and HE. The dearth of literature in FE could stem from the fact that neither Ofsted nor the DfE are driving forward policy on the use of peer tutoring, so in this respect it is not enforced. The Wolf Review (2011) paved the way for trimming back the FE curriculum and placing more emphasis on GCSE resits, which has a direct impact due to the fact that FE colleges are facing increasing pressure to improve outcomes on GCSE resit grades (Jones, 2019). Peer tutoring is just one means available to colleges, which could, in theory, improve results for GCSE English, thereby creating opportunities for those who are trying to improve their grades, which in turn accrues cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

## **Policy context**

Taking a review of policy context as a starting point of this literature review enables the political context to be explored and grounds the influencing macro structural factors pertinent to this study. GCSE maths and English resits in FE can be perceived as a 'problem' by teachers and government authorities (Jones, 2019; The Guardian, 2014; Wilshaw, in Exley, 2016a), creating a culture of blame, stemming from the resit policies themselves and those teachers tasked with implementing them. The main reason why there are now more students resitting GCSEs is because of the Raising the Participation Age (RPA) agenda, which was fully implemented in 2016 (DfE, 2016, 2018c). Students with lower GCSE grades, who may have traditionally been more likely to leave education, must now stay on unless they have a job or have taken up an apprenticeship. Even though Functional Skills L2 is now a 'stepping stone' qualification (ESFA, 2019) they must continue to retake GCSE maths and English until they have achieved a minimum level 4. Another factor influencing the GCSE resit policy was the *Wolf Review of Vocational Education* (2011), as the outcome of this review means that retaking GCSEs in maths and English is a condition of funding on 16-19 study programmes (ESFA, 2019). The resit process is monitored by Ofsted, so there is no scope for discretion in relation to a student's wishes regarding their overall study

programme, or their assessed capabilities (DfE, 2018a). This might also affect a small number of young people previously not in education, employment or training (NEETs), showing that policy impacts on young people's lives (DfE, 2018b) and educational choices. Furthermore, some research questions the value of FE study programmes, including GCSE resits, and suggests it does not always prepare them for gainful employment, or further progression in education (Ofsted, 2014b; Impetus, 2016; Russell, Simmons & Thompson, 2011).

As well as the impact of RPA (Raising the Participation Age) and conditions of funding, the GCSE qualification itself has undergone some significant changes since its inception in 1987. Replacing GCE (General Certificate of Education) O Levels (Ordinary Level) and CSEs (Certificate of Secondary Education), the GCSE qualification was intended to be a fairer way to assess students at 16. *The Waddell Report* (1978) highlighted the fact that it was an administrative challenge for schools to deal with all the exam boards associated with the two-streamed system of GCE and CSE, but more significantly, the report decided it was unfair to categorise students at the age of 13 or 14 years. 'This separation into two groups tends to 'mark off' pupils from one another, with CSE being regarded by many as necessarily second best despite the fact that a Grade 1 has equivalence to O Level grades' (Waddell, 1978, p. 3). The spirit of parity and creation of a qualification which encompassed all ability levels, marked a significant shift in attitude towards creating a fairer and equal education system, the genesis of which began in the 1960s when the Labour government's policy was to change most grammar schools to comprehensives (McCulloch, 2016; O'Hara, 2012; Perry, 2014). Thus, policy change is concomitant with social capital and economic efficiency.

Towards the end of this chapter, a review of literature relating to case studies conducted in peer learning (Colvin, 2007), as well as social learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978) is also included because these areas have much to contribute to this study, for framing and context.

### ***Raising the participation age (RPA)***

RPA is the starting point for this literature review due to the impact it has on this research conducted the FE sector: more young people are now required to stay on in education until the age of 18. Historically, policy regarding the RPA in England has shifted over several decades (Woodin, McCulloch & Cowan, 2013b). The raising of the school leaving age (ROSLA) for compulsory education has been on the government agenda for over a century (Woodin et al., 2013b), but it was not until 1972 that it was raised to 16 by the then-Conservative government. Although the debate surrounding the age to which young people

participate in education is multi-faceted and complex, there is a general consensus, spanning several eras, that if young people stay in education for longer it creates a more democratic and equal society, as well as meeting the demands of a changing world (BBC News, 2020; Crowther, 1959; DCSF, 2007; Woodin et al., 2013b). Crowther argued that one of the main duties of schools was to deliver a 'moral education', a 'task which cannot be hurried; it is also not one of the things that can be finished at 15' (Crowther, 1959, p. 114), but he also considered the 'human rights' (Crowther, 1959, p. 117) of the individual and linked this to extra years of schooling as 'a form of national capital investment' (Crowther, 1959, p. 117). Balancing what is right for the individual alongside what benefits the country could be deemed as a more difficult task in post-war Britain, because to some families it was the norm to leave school at 14 years and begin earning money for the household. It could be posited that the delay in implementing ROSLA was largely due to financial constraints placed on families who traditionally had more children and worked in the manual labour trades. Crowther stated that 'a positive case of personal economic advantage should be established before their own children are kept at school longer than the law insists' (Crowther, 1959, p. 118) and this emphasises how only by changing the law would lead to the desired outcomes.

Ensuring more young people stay on in education is a policy concern for the government, irrespective of which party is in power. In the government green paper '14-19: Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards' (DfES, 2002), published under New Labour, Estelle Morris described the need for educational reform as 'urgent' (DfES, 2002, p. 4), due to the disparity between the value of academic and vocational qualifications, and the fact that only 50% of 15-16 year olds at that time achieved 5 or more GCSEs at grade C or above. Creating an education system where there is more flexibility was a primary concern, the main aim being to offer a range of academic and vocational options, with clear progression routes and increased participation in HE. When discussing the education system, the paper states: 'We need to transform it from a point at which young people divide into those who stay on and those who leave into a point where every young person is committed to continuing to learn' (DfES, 2002, p. 7); therefore, the emphasis on 'every young person' is a clear precursor of further legislation and reform.

From 2013 government policy changed again, so that all young people have to stay in education until they are 17, and this was raised to 18 from 2015 (DfE, 2016), which marks 'profound historical and social changes' (Woodin, McCulloch & Cowan, 2013a, p. 635). In the past, students who did not achieve 'good' GCSE results could leave education altogether, but by law they must now stay on, as opposed to claiming unemployment benefits (Paton, 2013). It could be argued that the RPA policy marks a move towards an

education system which endeavours to deal with the inherent problems of youth unemployment, namely young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), because according to government statistics: 'Overall, the 16-18 NEET rate has been on a downward trend since 2008, and has remained stable at 6.3% between 2016 and 2017, the lowest level since consistent records began in 1994' (DfE, 2018b, p. 10). Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that by staying on in education, students even from lower starting points, can improve their grades to gain a level 4/grade C on a one year course (Craggs Mersinoglu, 2019).

Unusually, there is 'ostensible political accord' (Woodin et al., 2013a, p. 636) for the RPA policy, which Woodin et al (2013a) believe is inspired by historical thinking. Hall (1993) posits that policy changes are the result of societal pressure, which in the case of RPA comes from the pressure to reduce youth unemployment, as well as upskilling the workforce to compete within an ever changing and competitive global economy. This is confirmed by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF, 2009) 'Raising the Participation Age: supporting local areas to deliver':

RPA is also about our aim for a fairer and more equal society. There is overwhelming evidence of the negative consequences of leaving education or training at the age of only 16. Such young people are disproportionately from poor families and there is a strong correlation between becoming NEET and engaging in risky behaviours, having poor health and low income. Outcomes for 16 to 18 year olds in a job without formal training are only marginally better than for young people NEET. There are also intergenerational benefits for the children of those who participate in education for longer. RPA is a historic step to ensure all young people have the same opportunities and expectations of success. (DCSF, 2009, p. 3)

The link in this quote between 'a fairer and more equal society' and the notion that staying in education for longer benefits both individuals and society as a whole, is not a new one. Woodin et al. (2013a) make the case for RPA being an extension of ROSLA, a policy delivered almost 100 years earlier, in the 1918 Education Act (Board of Education, 1918). Whereas in the past it has been argued that raising the participation age, without providing high quality education, was a mistake, (Balls, 2007, as cited in Woodin et al., 2013a), it was a historical lesson to be learned from when implementing change. Additionally, picking up the point about 'intergenerational benefits' alludes to the fact that research suggests after the RPA was raised from 15 to 16 in 1972, children of those parents legally bound to stay in education had GCSE grades one or two grades higher than those of parents who had been allowed to leave at 15 in 1971 (Smith, 2013). Professor Paul Gregg and his colleagues from the University of Bristol (Dickson, Gregg and Robinson, 2016) conducted the initial research and broadly concluded there 'is a consistent finding across numerous countries that individuals with higher levels of schooling have children who also attain higher levels of schooling' (Dickson et al., 2016, p. 184). However, Dickson, Gregg and Robinson also



acknowledge that there is still a need for further research to identify whether their results were due to 'a causal effect of parental education on child outcomes or whether the intergenerational correlation is purely an artefact of selection' (Dickson et al., 2016, p. 184). The need for further research into RPA is also echoed by the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) and the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), who emphasise the differences between students drawn to education of their own volition, as opposed to being pushed towards and education they have not chosen for themselves (Commons Select Committee, 2014). The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) support their union colleagues in highlighting how geographical location and socio-economic factors can have a major impact on the choices available to young people (Commons Select Committee, 2014). Although NWC is situated in a borough where there are high numbers of residents qualified to degree level (Ofsted, 2015), and therefore would most likely have a large number of 16 year olds who would have elected to stay on in education, the RPA policy became more relevant in 2018 when the college merged with another which was classed as inadequate by Ofsted.

As discussed above, the RPA policy is clear in its intention to create opportunities for young people to gain better qualifications and access to employment; yet, in trying to address the NEET problem, it is not wholly accepted by all that staying in education is the right course of action. Arguably, more damage can be done, unless the education provided is of a high quality and right for the individual (Russell et al., 2011). Research within the field indicates that the NEET category is a flawed construct (Russell et al., 2011) in itself:

Not only does it conflate young people with different experiences and conditions into a single category, but it also tends to problematise non-participation in a somewhat moralistic fashion and, in official discourse at least, individualises processes that are often based in social and economic inequalities. (Russell et al., 2011, p. 91)

The point that characteristics of diverse individuals are conflated within the same group detracts from the intention of increased participation in education and training being of benefit to the individual. This is compounded by the *Wolf Review* (2011) which found that many of the courses offered to young people in post-16 education were of low quality and did not lead to gainful employment or higher level study. Factors that include the potential for peer tutoring to be implemented in FE, could be deemed as one way to add quality and value to existing programmes. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that education is 'only one facet of an individual's broader societal experiences' (Simmons, Thompson & Russell, 2014, p. 4) and this being the case, there are any number of possible outcomes which education alone cannot control. Policymakers aim to address social inequality and lack of social mobility for NEET young people in policies such as RPA and increased participation in education is seen as one way to prevent 'engaging in risky behaviours, having poor health and low income' (DCSF, 2009, p. 3); nevertheless, factors such as globalisation, local

priorities and the individual's ability to use the resources available to them could have even greater significance (Russell et al., 2011).

### ***Historical Context of GCSE***

The GCE O Level and CSE were replaced by the GCSE in 1986, with the first examinations taking place in 1988. This merger had been 'favoured by the political left' (Brooks, 1991, p. 1) because the GCE and CSE qualifications, first implemented in 1951 and 1965, respectively (Waddell, 1978), were deemed as socially divisive due to the two-tier examination system. The feasibility of a single qualification was scoped out in *The Waddell Report* (1978), after the Schools Council made its recommendations for a common 16+ examination, shortly before James Callaghan's Ruskin College speech (Brooks, 1991). Waddell concluded that it was feasible to introduce a new examinations system whereby there were options for differentiated papers, but students would all have marks awarded from a single scale (A-G) and certificates bearing the same title (GCSE). In relation specifically to the English Language qualification, it was considered that 'English as a subject involves the practice of complex skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing in many different and highly specific contexts' (Brooks, 1991, p. 16) and this paved the way for the assessed elements of the new GCSE English Language qualification. It is significant to note how Waddell also acknowledged the fact more students sat an English language qualification than any other, as it is required for entry to further educational studies and employment alike. Bearing in mind the ability range would be 'exceptionally wide' (Brooks, 1991, p. 17), the need for a new qualification which could meet the assessment needs of CSE and GCE students, whilst maintaining the academic standards of the O Level, was met with some controversy. As opposed to the purely academic nature of the O Level, the GCSE was intended to test practical skills as well as knowledge (Letwin, 2017); however, eminent politicians such as Rhodes Boyson, a former Conservative Education minister, questioned the rise in pass rates and overall higher grades (Brooks, 1991). The grade inflation was 'not reflected in international comparisons' (DfE, 2012b; Smith, 2015, p. 3), meaning that it was difficult to conflate the new qualification with the old ones.

Up until reforms to GCSEs in 2010 the English qualification remained relatively static, with modularised units equating to 40% coursework, 20% speaking and listening and 40% exams (QCA, 2006a). The main reason that independent coursework was replaced by controlled assessment, was because of the rise in the number of people using the internet to get coursework model answers (BBC News, 2006; Crisp & Green, 2013; QCA, 2006b). The controlled assessment method was introduced so that teachers could ensure plagiarism did not take place and there was a more 'fair and robust' (BBC News, 2006) assessment

process. It was not long until further reforms took place and first teaching of GCSEs in their current format began in 2015. Ofqual stated that:

The proposed primary purposes of the reformed GCSEs will be to provide evidence of students' achievements against demanding and fulfilling content and a strong foundation for further academic and vocational study and for employment. The reformed GCSEs should also provide a basis for schools to be held accountable for the performance of all of their students. (Ofqual, 2013)

The statement is significant because not only does it clarify the government's stance on its aims for young people, but it also acts a warning that schools will now be more 'accountable' for their results. This alludes to the fact the government believed that schools had succumbed to 'perverse incentives... seeking examinations in which they believe their students may achieve higher grades' (DfE, 2012b, p. 1) and as such, there is now only one awarding organisation for the core academic subjects.

The new GCSE English is composed of 100% external examination and graded 1-9 (9 being the highest) (DfE, 2013). Grades 4 and 5 are equivalent to the old GCSE grade C, with grade 4 classified as a standard pass and 5 as a strong pass (Long, 2017). The qualifications are now linear, through exams being sat in Y11, at the end of a two year course. All tiered papers have now been removed, other than in GCSE maths and science, and for courses other than English and maths, exams are sat once a year in the summer. Further controversy surrounds the new GCSEs because 'They contain questions of a level of difficulty that we have not seen since the abolition of O-levels in 1987' (Lenon, cited in Pells, 2017) and are exam based, as opposed to coursework (CIFE, 2019); therefore, the qualifications now sat by students in the UK at 16 are more like the old O Levels. There is evidence to show that educational policy has come full circle and GCSEs now resemble the old GCE O Level structure, which was one of the primary goals of Michael Gove when he announced the changes (BBC News, 2012).

### ***GCSE Policy Context***

Since the Coalition government passed legislation to raise the participation age to 19 (DfE, 2012a), this has compounded and increased the focus on GCSE maths and English, initially highlighted in the *Wolf Review* (2011). More young people are now required to continue their education and therefore more young people are required to resit their GCSEs, if they have not achieved the national benchmark of a C or above (now grade 4/5). Due to the fact the continued study of maths and English for these students is a condition of funding (EFA, 2014), it means that 'institutions are operationally bound to these reforms' (Anderson & Peart, 2016, p. 197). Being 'operationally bound' has an impact in areas such as staffing, timetabling and the curriculum offer itself. With the number of entries for GCSE English

resits having risen by a third in 2016 (Belgutay, 2016), FE colleges need to provide a curriculum which offers students something different than school, because it is argued these young people often arrive in post-compulsory education and training feeling demotivated and reluctant to engage with English again (Raikes & Longman, 2017; White, 2017). This points towards a deficit model of education because the GCSE resit policy is trying to fix a deficit in the individual who does not have the desired GCSE grade.

When the implementation of a new policy has such a wide ranging effect on curriculum delivery in the FE sector, it is useful to unpack the consequences of implementing a deficit model. A deficit model of education can be defined as:

A perspective which attributes failures such as lack of achievement, learning, or success in gaining employment to a personal lack of effort or deficiency in the individual, rather than to failures or limitations of the education and training system or to prevalent socio-economic trends. (Oxford Reference, 2018)

The use of vocabulary such as 'failures', 'lack of effort' and 'deficiency' can be thought of as a 'discourse of fragility' (Atkins, 2008, p. 5), whereby learners are disempowered and stigmatised. Smit (2010, p. 2) argues that this, in turn, strengthens stereotypes, in the minds of 'educators, policymakers and students themselves.' That said, students are often portrayed as recalcitrant teenagers (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2018), as well as victims of an ineffective system, in equal measure, leading to a dominant cycle of blame within the education sector (The Guardian, 2014). Consequently, it could be posited that the deficit model applies not only to the individual, but also to the education system itself.

Given the dearth of academic literature in this area, it has been both necessary and useful to provide contextual information by using newspaper sources; this also highlights the prevalence of press and public interest. As from 2015, the requirement that students with a grade D must keep on retaking GCSE English has been attributed to England's poor performance in the OECD league tables (The Guardian, 2014): it is intended as a way to ensure the UK can compete on the world economic stage. Writing a blog for *The Guardian*, The Secret College Tutor said:

At times, of course there is poor teaching. But we have to recognise the huge challenge tutors face. Expecting a teacher to achieve something in 36 weeks that countless people have failed to do for the past 11 years is simply unrealistic. (The Guardian, 2014)

This raises to the forefront the issue of resits being sat in a 36 week academic year, as well as the frustration of picking up a 'problem' which has conceivably been created at school; nevertheless, it also focuses on the difficulties of the teachers and not the students. It sounds almost petulant and contradictory, in that on the one hand the 'huge challenge' is an attempt to absolve resit teachers of any blame for poor performance, yet on the other it

infers that those 'countless people [who] have failed' previously are surely teachers too. Although it is possible to view the argument as valid, if taken purely as one of timescale, the inference here is that teaching within the school sector is also 'poor' and the culture of blame prevails. There is a focus on product, not process, and this displays an antagonistic stance towards policy. And yet, on balance, when considering the hurdles faced by FE teachers on GCSE resit courses, the reality of the situation is often quite emotive. In their role as 'professionals they want to motivate and get the best out of their students, but for many their best will not get them a C grade' (McGregor, 2017).

The other side of the argument is that educational establishments should be made accountable since taxpayers' money funds education and one way of doing this is through Ofsted, which monitors the quality of education. Ofsted continues to review how maths and English are taught and the 2016 Annual Report raised concerns about whether the current resit policy is the best way to support young people in FE. Sir Michael Wilshaw (Head of Ofsted 2012-2016) believes 'It remains unclear whether the GCSE qualification is the best way of ensuring that students have the English and mathematical skills needed for their intended career' (Wilshaw, in Exley, 2016b). This is a tacit challenge to government policy, but more damningly he said 'We can't go on seeing two-thirds of youngsters who have just failed their GCSEs, got a D grade, continue to fail two years later. That's not acceptable... We can't let FE off the hook, actually, on this one' (Wilshaw, in Exley, 2016b). Wilshaw's sentiments here take on a colloquial tone, almost bordering on the paternal, with the use of the word 'youngsters' to describe the students resitting their GCSEs in FE. In doing this, it could be argued he is lining up his reasoning for not letting 'FE off the hook' and unlike The Secret College Tutor, there is more focus on the students than the teachers/GCSE process itself. Nonetheless, as with the quote from The Secret College Tutor in *The Guardian*, there is contradiction in what Wilshaw has said: if there is a lack of clarity as to whether retaking the GCSE in FE is the right decision for those students who failed their GCSE in school, then seeking to blame the FE sector could be counterproductive. Looking semantically at Wilshaw's choice of the word 'fail' is also significant because technically students who have not achieved a grade D/level 4 have not failed, but they have not achieved the standard grade used to measure performance and success. Additionally, the use of the pronoun 'We' is also significant because working on the assumption he is speaking on behalf of Ofsted here, he is enforcing a government policy, despite the fact Ofsted is meant to be 'independent and impartial' (Ofsted, 2017). Irrespective of who is to 'blame', the policy context is such that FE colleges, like NWC, are looking for ways to enhance their GCSE English curriculum offer, not only to meet the targets set by the government, but to increase motivation by offering higher levels of support, 'in an environment where they feel cared for and important' (Dietrich, Dicke, Kracke & Noack, 2015, p. 46). It is also noted that

offering GCSE resits opens up pathways for students to increase their chances of accessing further employment and education opportunities (Craggs Mersinoglu, 2019; Higton et al., 2017). Yet, as a note of caution, Topping (1994), who has researched extensively on peer learning, believes organisations should carefully consider whether they are 'trying to remedy a deficit or add value' (Topping, 1994, p. 12) and echoes Wilshaw's statement, in that if they are trying to remedy a deficit, it should not be due to inadequacies with the teaching staff, or because of a lack of resources. Linking back to the research study at NWC, it is important to emphasise that although the peer tutoring programme was intended to increase GCSE resit grades, that was not the sole purpose. There is no suggestion of poor teaching quality at NWC and I contend that the 'deficit' comes from GCSE policy and the ways in which this impacts on colleges and students.

An important point, worthy of discussion, is whether peer tutoring is a temporary solution to a problem created by GCSE resit policy, or whether it is a proactive education tool. If peer tutoring is taken as serving the purpose of seeking to 'add value to the educational experience for both tutor and tutee' (Topping, 1994, p. 11), it serves a much broader educational purpose and could be deemed progressive in its ability to develop wider skills, such as organisation, communication and developing confidence (Ford et al., 2015; Giles, Zacharopoulou & Condell, 2016). Yet, peer tutoring 'as a means for a supply of cheap or possibly free surrogate or professional teachers' (Topping, 1994, p. 11), ostensibly undermines its inherent values. Judgements regarding the purpose of peer tutoring would therefore depend on how and why any educational organisation chooses to implement it; to utilise it in any way other than how the likes of Topping intended may actually create more problems than solutions (Ward, 2015). Ullah, Tabassum & Kaleem (2018, p. 2), although in support of peer tutoring, point out 'peer tutoring programs should be highly structured and planned and should be conducted under strict supervision and in a controlled environment', meaning there is still a need for qualified teachers to monitor and control them. Teachers working on GCSE resit programmes, who are already stretched, could therefore see the addition of peer tutoring programmes as another responsibility, which adds to their workload.

The peer tutoring study at NWC is one measure put in place for 2017, as a result of the GCSE policy context, but there is also an emphasis on adding value. There is a difference between adding value to the students' educational experience at NWC and the practice of value added as a measurement of school effectiveness; nonetheless, the assumption that there will be gains for both the tutors and the tutees does mean that any kind of intervention in teaching and learning is open to scrutiny. Within the education sector as a whole, value added is seen as a means of school performance evaluation and can be defined

as: 'Value-added measures are those that attempt to indicate the educational value that the school adds over and above that which could be predicted given the backgrounds and prior attainments of the students within the school' (Downes and Vindurampulle, 2007, cited in National College for Teaching & Leadership, n.d). There has been a lot of debate surrounding this area, not least because of the potential impact on individual teachers or schools (Education Reform, 2013). In her critical review of value added, Saunders posited its inception as a policy in 1998 was 'integrally linked with the national agenda for educational quality' (Saunders, 1999, p. 1); therefore, not only are the educational gains measured for individuals, but there is also an explicit focus on how and why those gains did or did not happen. There is potential wider impact for 16-19 providers who might decide to offer peer tutoring for GCSE English resit students because performance in English and maths is closely monitored. From 2018 the DfE will supplement headline progress measures with additional data 'showing the proportion of students in scope for either the English and/or maths measures who entered an approved qualification' (DfE, 2018b, p. 6). Clarkson and Luca (2002, p. 1) make a perceptive point about the expectations placed on educational organisations and how these can be remedied by peer tutoring: 'It is ironic that schools and tertiary institutions are often chided for not providing a real world experience for students, yet they can provide a perfectly realistic environment for students to tutor others.' Thus, peer tutoring as a teaching and learning strategy, above and beyond the academic level, can be viewed as one means of broadening an educational offer.

### ***Peer tutoring***

Although the main definition of peer tutoring, used for the purpose of this research is: 'people from similar social groupings who are not professional teachers helping each other to learn and learning themselves by teaching' (Topping, 1996, p. 322), peer tutoring is a multi-faceted practice, which has been used 'for years' (Topping, 1992, p. 151): reportedly even as far back as ancient Greece (Topping, 1996). For me, this definition allows for the moral and educational imperative of fostering mutual benefit for both the tutor and the tutee, namely because it emphasises learning for both parties. Additionally, when applied to the research at NWC, there is scope to interpret learning in more than one way. By teaching, the A Level peer tutors have the potential to learn how to interact with people from similar social groupings, who they would not normally mix with. Similarly, this also applies to the GCSE resit students, but it is hoped they would also gain subject knowledge too. I contend that there is something ostensibly logical about people of similar social backgrounds and settings working together to create a means of collegial learning. It can be defined in a number of ways, which have related meanings; for example, the definition above from Topping (1996) focuses on the notion of mutuality, whereas others link more precisely to its purpose of being 'a pedagogical tool to promote curriculum learning'

(Havnes, 2008, p. 193). Building upon this, peer tutoring can also be seen as 'a far more instrumental strategy in which advanced students, or those in later years, take on a limited instructional role' (Boud et al., 2001, p. 4), alluding to a process which has a specific purpose and design. This definition also gives a reminder, with the emphasis on 'a limited instructional role,' that it is not intended to replace a teacher's input in the main form of curriculum delivery; it can be linked to the concept of functional friendships, due to the acknowledgement of the limited role and the way it is instrumental in nature, meaning that the relationship does not need to last once its purpose has been fulfilled. A more basic definition of peer tutoring comes from Clarence (2016, p. 41), 'a form of student academic assistance or development.' Its succinctness ought not to be seen as a deficit because there is still a terse emphasis on academic development, which aligns with that of Havnes (2008). In comparison with Boud et al. (2001), Tymms et al. (2011) describe peer tutoring as 'a specific form of peer learning. It generally involves one student teaching another where pairs are typically of differing academic standing and sometimes differing ages' (Tymms et al., 2011, p. 267). Similarly, Colvin (2007) said that 'peer tutoring involves those of the same societal group or social standing educating one another when one peer has more expertise or knowledge' (Colvin, 2007, p. 166), but there is an emphasis on the reciprocal nature of peer learning, even though that might be more within the realm of 'empowerment for the tutors themselves' (Colvin, 2007, p. 166). Again, this has connections to the concept of functional friendships and aligns with the moral and educational imperatives of the study at NWC, because there is room for interpretation around what that 'expertise or knowledge' might be. For example, it could relate to expertise in social situations, instead of just academic content. And so, multiple definitions emphasise the dyadic nature of peer tutoring and encompass themes of reciprocity, curriculum enhancement and academic development, with an emphasis on structured but less formal learning. Language used to define peer learning has positive connotations, but it also takes on a functionalist perspective (Durkheim, 1964) in that there is an inter-reliance between tutor and tutee, as well as a dependency on the structures within the educational establishment, whether it be HE or FE.

When Boud et al. (2001) use the adjective 'instrumental', there is a reminder that learning is not incidental and has a specific purpose; additionally, Havnes's (2008) reference to 'pedagogical' anchors peer tutoring in a field which brings with it a set of assumptions and goals about the roles of tutors and tutees. Taking a broader look at these definitions, it is argued that peer tutoring triangulates more didactic forms of education in that it creates an interface between the two areas of formal class teaching and students revising independently. This being the case, there is scope to justify its place and purpose in an FE context, where the GCSE resit 'problem' prevails and a blame culture exists on an institutional and at policy level. It has already been noted that the definition used for this



research is: 'people from similar social groupings who are not professional teachers helping each other to learn and learning themselves by teaching' (Topping, 1996, p. 322) and it is posited that this is deliberately vague enough to encompass all forms of learning, whether they be in the cognitive and/or affective domain (Bloom, 1965). This takes into account the fact that although the initial intention of this research is to help GCSE students gain further curriculum knowledge, there is also a strong emphasis on gains for the A Level students, though these are not necessarily of an academic nature. Therefore, the main reason why Topping (1996) has been adopted for the purposes of this research is because in his definition, learning is indeterminate and can therefore be social and/or academic.

Peer tutoring cannot be as simple as putting students together and hoping that high quality learning will automatically happen. Although Whitman states there are up to five different types of peer tutoring, the two most common are 'near-peer' and 'co-peer' (Whitman, 1988, p. 5). Near-peers are usually students of a similar age, but the tutors are most likely to be a year or two ahead of the tutees and have demonstrated recent success on the course in question (Whitman, 1988). In HE this is also known as 'horizontal' (students are from the same year group) and 'vertical peer support' (older students support first years) and is used on undergraduate degree programmes (Black & Mackenzie, 2008, p. 3). The roles are clearly defined and although the peer tutor will achieve a level of success, possibly more in development of interpersonal skills, the main emphasis is on the tutee. Co-peers are at the same level and the students change roles of teacher and learner throughout their interactions, with an equal emphasis on what is intended to be learned from each other (Fitch & Semb, 1993). Another way in which Topping defines peer learning, is by building upon his 1996 definition, emphasising 'the acquisition of knowledge and skill through active help and support among status equals or matched companions' (Topping, 2005, p. 631), which is synonymous with near and co-peer tutoring. The addition of 'through active help and support' suggests this should not be a didactic or patronizing relationship and this is further reinforced by words such as 'equals' and 'companions.' However, it could be argued that the status of anyone taking on the peer tutor role bears a higher status than the tutee, if only due to the fact they have been identified as an 'expert' themselves and in possession of the necessary skills to help others. Duran (2010) has written about same-age and cross-age tutoring and these are the same as near and co-peer tutoring in all but name. Cross-age tutoring is deemed to be more popular in 'that it more closely fits within the traditional conception associated with the tutor taking the place of a teacher' (Duran, 2010, p. 48) and the fact that the peer tutor is seen to replace the teacher would in itself bring into question claims about 'status equals' (Topping, 2005, p.631). The 'near-peer' method fits well with A Level students tutoring GCSE English resit students at NWC because the students are most

likely to be one year apart in age, as well as recently having achieved success in their GCSEs.

The two most prominent ways to organise peer learning in HE, are schemes such as the Peer Assisted Learning programme (known as PAL/PALS in the UK) and Peer-assisted Study Sessions (PASS) (Keenan, 2014). The PAL/PASS programmes use 2nd or 3rd year university students as peer leaders to tutor small groups of students (in the same subject area) on year one of their undergraduate course, the idea being not only do they understand the course content, but they have also lived through and survived the transition to university, so there is a great deal of empathy, as well as subject specific knowledge (Keenan, 2014, p. 15). There is as much emphasis on the academic benefits for the PAL/PASS leaders as there is for the participants, because they are 'facilitators of learning...who mentally organise information before explaining it to students...helping to solidify their own understanding of it' (Micari et al., 2005, p. 70). Integral to the structure of these schemes is the element of collaboration and working in groups where there are one or two peer-leaders to each group (Keenan, 2014, p. 12). Looking more closely at Topping's peer tutoring studies, this model aligns with NWC because the A Level students have already demonstrated their ability to succeed in GCSE English; they are 'more able students helping less able students to learn in co-operative working pairs' (Topping, 1996, p. 322). However, it is important to note that this is only viewed in terms of GCSE English success and not in relation to social or academic ability in general. Being 'more' or 'less able' is subjective unless quantified against the A Level students having recently passed their GCSE English, with a grade B/L6 or above. Like Keenan (2014), Topping also discusses the fact that there are 'gains accruing from the tutoring process to the tutor' (Topping, 1996, p. 322) and there are opportunities to evaluate this within the interviews in the pilot peer tutoring study at NWC. The terms 'collaboration' and 'cooperation' are discussed frequently in literature concerned with peer tutoring and often the terms are used 'interchangeably' (Boud et al., 2001, p. 7), but collaboration is largely used to describe group work related to projects such as PAL/PASS which can run outside the classroom, usually in HE, when 'students generate knowledge together' (Fredrick, 2008, p. 444). This lends itself to a social constructivist approach (Vygotsky, 1978) where the process of working together is almost as important as the end task. As a subtle contrast, 'cooperation' can be seen as being used to highlight the practice of supplementary instruction by a peer, as opposed to a tutor, and this peer interaction is deemed as being more successful (Topping, 1992).

### ***Peer Tutoring Programmes in Higher Education***

The literature review of peer tutoring examines programmes/research carried out in HE and covers a wide range of themes, from how to organise peer learning programmes (Topping,

1994, 1996) to the behavioural, cognitive and sociocognitive theories that underpin them (Fitch & Semb, 1993). It was adopted by the British HE system in the 1990s (Green, 2011). Peer tutoring sits well within the domain of HE because there is a likelihood of participants possessing the skills needed, both academically and interpersonally; whereas, the potential for such schemes in FE could have been overlooked due to a perceived lack of maturity and/or lack of possession of the necessary skills needed for peer tutoring in students under the age of 18. There is an implicit requirement for peer tutors to be good role models in an academic and personal sense, having good knowledge about their subject specialism, but also in the ways they convey this to others. In the University Admissions Officer Report 2017, commissioned by ACS International Schools, Andreas Schleicher, Director of Education and Skills at the OECD, is quoted as saying:

The world no longer rewards people for what they know – Google knows everything – but for what they can do with what they know. Global education today needs to be much more about ways of thinking, involving creativity, critical thinking, problem solving and decision-making; about ways of working, including communication and collaboration. (Schleicher cited in ACS, 2017, p. 11)

Many aspects of what Schleicher has said are wholly relevant to education at every level, but it is significant that global education has been linked to 'communication and collaboration' and these are key skills required for peer tutoring. Of course, there are several ways in which these skills could be met at university through seminars and tutorials, but they are especially pertinent to peer tutoring, in that they go hand in hand with possessing emotional intelligence, which often cannot be taught explicitly (Giles et al., 2016). Yes, 'Google knows everything' but the value of this is very limited unless applied to context and with a specific purpose. In our contemporary society knowledge in its most basic form does not have as much power as it used to and it is tacitly understood within education that new ways of learning are required (Wheeler, 2019). Furthermore, Andrews and Clark (2011, p. 8) were commissioned by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to look at how peer tutoring enhances student success; they hypothesise that 'peer support impacts positively on students' experiences by engendering a greater sense of belonging both socially and academically' (Andrews & Clark, 2011, p. 8). The interest surrounding peer learning in HE is exemplified in the fact that a search of the HEA website using the term 'peer learning' brought up a total of 93 results, and yet the same phrase brought up no results on the Association of Colleges' website, highlighting there is a clear disparity between what is being researched and reported in both of these sectors.

While it has been posited above that HE students study in an environment, and with peers, which is conducive to peer learning, there are fundamental barriers in FE. Students in FE, who are now engaged in 16-19 study programmes, are less likely to receive high quality

teaching in maths and English, nor are they likely to be well prepared for the world of employment (Loader, 2018; Ofsted, 2014a). Additionally, these students, who could be potential tutors and tutees, are from Generation Z who have higher rates of reported mental health problems than previous generations, as well as low self-esteem (Barr, 2016). This may be compounded by feelings of social isolation and pressures from parents and teachers. Ironically, a report from the World Health Organization (2016, p. 37) found that 'Peer support can be protective in the face of stressors and has a direct positive association with well-being'; therefore, the inclusion of peer assisted learning in 16-19 study programmes could in fact counteract some of the social issues encountered in FE. Although it could be argued the reasons above are merely conjecture, in the absence of literature to support or contradict them, the hypothesis in this study that peer tutoring is not commonplace in FE because students are perceived as lacking the appropriate skills, stands as a logical starting point and problematises peer tutoring in FE. This is borne out by studies such as Berghmans et al., (2013) which looked at approaches to peer tutoring and the skills needed by the peer tutors themselves. By categorising the peer tutors into questioners, informers or motivational organisers, they were able to identify the ways in which the peer tutors not only used their own interpersonal skills but also the ways in which they scaffolded the learning during the sessions. What is also interesting about this study, is the way in which it addresses questions about 'whether unskilled peer tutors are capable of adopting high-quality strategies that constitute effective interaction' (Berghmans et al., 2013, p. 704), thus there is an emphasis on prior experience and training.

### ***Peer tutoring in the school sector***

Due to the dearth of literature on peer tutoring in FE, it is useful to examine what has been written about it in the school sector. Bearing in mind this literature review has already discussed how peer tutoring operates in HE, this section offers an insight into another sector, making it possible to review relatable content on either side of FE. In schools peer learning was mostly achieved by group work, which was advocated by *The Plowden Report* (1967) as a way of making use of teacher time in primary schools more cost-effective, because class sizes were often above the recommended number of 30. Topping (1992) picks up on the theme of cost-effectiveness of peer tuition in schools, citing studies by Russell and Ford (1983) and Tizard, Schofield and Hewison (1982) to show that 'cooperative learning methods (usually one-to-one peer tutoring) had greater effects than supplementary instruction by a resource teacher in a small group setting' (Topping, 1992, p. 152). The key factor here is that the ratio of learners to teacher/tutor shows the smaller the ratio the more effective this is, even to the extent that a peer can provide better support than a qualified teacher, if this is 1:1, as opposed to in a small group. Therefore, using the skills of existing students, instead of buying in more adult support is both cost-effective and potentially

shows better results overall. Topping (1992) also posits that the introduction of GCSEs in the 1980s impacted on group work and peer learning because there was more emphasis on continuous assessment and coursework than exams. How these groups function is of interest in that merely putting students into groups will have no impact unless there is some 'positive interdependence' (Topping, 1992, p. 151) and structure to them and there is a clear objective to set cooperative learning goals.

Literature also exists to show evidence that peer tutoring in the school sector has been in practice since the 18th century (TES, 2018). Thurston (2013) precisely traces its use as far back as just over 200 years ago to Bell and Lancaster, stating that by '1816, 100,000 students were learning this way. Peer tutoring then caught on in quite a few parts of the world' (Thurston, 2013, p. 5). The *TES* definition of peer tutoring is similar to that of HE, except that they refer to children instead of students/learners: 'Peer tutoring is children helping other children to learn. Sometimes older children help younger children, while other times more able children can help less able children of the same age' (TES, 2018). It aligns with Topping's definition of 'more able students helping less able students to learn in co-operative working pairs' (Topping, 1996, p. 322). The choice of language here, although similar in concept to HE, highlights a stark contrast in that the tutors and tutees are described as being 'more' and 'less able', which could have negative connotations, especially when labelling children from an early age, thus leading to the self-fulfilling prophecy, or Pygmalion effect (Rosenthal & Jacobsen, 1968), whereby perceptions teachers have of students can affect their performance, long term (Thompson, 2014, p. 461). Whereas HE peer tutoring focuses on peer tutors as 'facilitators of learning' (Micari et al., 2005, p. 70), in schools there is likely to be a more open acknowledgement of different academic abilities.

Some peer tutoring programmes in schools, both primary and secondary, focus on core subjects such as English and maths (Baiduri, 2017; Duran, 2010; Shamir, Tzuriel & Rozen, 2006; Thurston, 2013). Thurston (2013, p. 6) goes as far as stating that 'peer tutoring is one of the most effective ways of using school time'; this is because there are visible gains for both tutors and tutees in relation not only to the subject studied, but also improved confidence and better relationships in the classroom. Joubert said 'to teach is to learn twice' (Joubert, 1899, p.277), so taking this as being true, the gains for the peer tutors, as well as the tutees can be clearly seen. Tymms et al. (2011) focus on the fact that government attempts to raise standards with the national literacy and numeracy strategies had little or no effect on students' attainment in these subjects, and consequently, peer tutoring is used as one means to remedy this deficit. Moreover, Thurston (2013) points out that the peer tutor does not need to know all the answers themselves because in the role of a mediator, helping the tutees to work the answer out for themselves is part of the process.

## ***Social learning theory and peer tutoring***

Social learning theory is the theory most used in peer tutoring research (Clarkson & Luca, 2002; Coelho et al., 2014; David, 2015; Fitch & Semb, 1993; Havnes et al., 2016; Hodgson et al., 2015), therefore the peer tutoring research at NWC contributes to new knowledge because instead of following the usual theoretical standpoint, it operationalises Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 50). Nonetheless, it is important to think about social learning theory's impact on peer learning because there is merit in looking at what has gone before. It combines aspects of cognitive learning theory with behavioural learning theory and posits that learning happens as a result of environmental stimuli, created by others (Vygotsky, 1978). In short, people learn from one another: observation and subsequent modelling of behaviour is a measure of what has been learnt (Coelho et al., 2014; David, 2015). When conducting a review of social learning theory, it is possible to see why it has been so prominent in educational and psychological contexts. In relation to this research, and specifically from the educational perspective, interest focuses on the pedagogical aspects of peer learning, as well as potential wider gains for individuals involved. In a psychological context, there are opportunities to link dominant political agendas with practical factors such as cost-effectiveness, as well as goal seeking, motivation and 'the self' (Shute, 1992, p. 159). It is fascinating to consider the ideological implications of what appears to be a dichotomy between the notion of peer learning as cost-effective, self-serving and functionalist against something based around more altruistic motives, where gains for individuals (or self-actualisation) are secondary to those gained by wider society. The notion that producing an education workforce of student peers, able to collaborate with others to achieve wider goals, aligns with more contemporary attitudes to education, where communication and collaboration are valued over knowledge itself (Schleicher, cited in ACS, 2017).

One main limitation of social learning theory, and the reason it has not been applied to the peer tutoring project at NWC, is its reliance on the behavioural approach. Yes, it is true that the A Level peer tutors were deemed to be good role models, due to their scholastic habitus (English & Bolton, 2016), but at no point within the study has there been a use of reward and punishment (Bandura, 1977). As a result of this, there are several theorists, although influential, who, for the purposes of this study, have not been considered as relevant as others. For example, Bandura's (1977) studies focus on learning as a result of modelling and observation, which is not as pertinent to this case due to the structure of the study at NWC. Similarly, Piaget's (1964) theory of developmental stages has less significance in that it is predominantly child-centred and based on biological factors (Daniels, 2001), and this study took place in FE: a post-16 environment. That said, most sociocognitive theory is

centred on child development, and Piaget himself frequently noted the importance of social interaction (Daniels, 2001), but many of the core concepts are transferable to adults and young people (Fitch & Semb, 1993, p. 10) and the overarching principle is that learning is conceptualised as a social process (Havnes et al., 2016). 'Vygotsky (1978) is the major theorist among the social constructivists' (The University College Dublin, 2016) and this has already been discussed in relation to this study, when defining what peer tutoring actually is, because his work permeates the texts on peer learning. This is especially relevant to the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which Vygotsky defined as: 'the distance between the actual development level as determined by the independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or more capable peers' (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). The key factor with the ZPD is that any peer support is 'scaffolded' (Topping, 1996, p. 324), so that the more capable peer enables the right level of support during social interaction and this in some way stretches the learner's current thinking (Fitch & Semb, 1993). Vygotsky's theories differed from Piaget's due to the fact that Vygotsky believed social context and learning were concomitant, hence the significance of peers within this study, as the more knowledgeable other (MKO). The MKO can be an adult or older peer, but it can also be same or near age, as long as they are in possession of more knowledge about what is being studied. However, Fox (2001) challenges the aspects of social context and posits that Vygotsky's insistence on the shared construction of knowledge 'tends towards an implausible extreme' (Fox, 2001, p. 29). Daniels' work (2001) also opens up an area of importance in relation to reading Vygotsky, in that he writes about how several authors have 'noted the highly selective and partial reading of Vygotsky's writing that appears in the West' (Daniels, 2001, p. 9), resulting in a preoccupation with pedagogy, as opposed to 'a concern to understand the range and depth of the arguments' (Daniels, 2001, p. 9), and it acknowledged within this literature review that focus has been given to ZPD and MKO.

Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) posit that 'We need others to complement and develop our own expertise' (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 10) and it is significant to acknowledge this when thinking about how social learning theory applies to the context of peer learning. Returning again the ZPD, there are questions related to where the social aspects of learning sit within the pedagogical relationships (Daniels, 2001). Building upon Vygotsky's original concept, different researchers have interpreted ZPD in different ways (Lave and Wenger, 2002), with new models working to 'apply, extend and reconstruct Vygotsky's original conception' (Daniels, 2001, p. 59). In particular, Lave and Wenger (2002) focused on the interpretation of scaffolding and how this has influenced pedagogical approaches, whereby initial support is provided by the MKO, but performance later happens without assistance. This would apply to the peer tutoring study at NWC because the A Level peer tutors

provided support for the GCSE tutees during the 1:1 sessions, but ultimately the GCSE students had to work without that assistance during their exams. Hence, the social practice of learning becomes an internalised skill, which can be applied to the appropriate context, when required. It could be argued scaffolding was constructed in two ways at NWC: firstly, by the peer tutoring programme itself and secondly by the A Level peer tutors. Vygotsky did not specify exactly how the assistance within scaffolding should be applied and although this could be viewed negatively, due to the lack of clarity (Daniels, 2001), it can also be viewed as a positive in that it allows for different interpretations of scaffolding and how the ZPD can lead to social transformation (Lave & Wenger, 2002). Therefore, when analysing how social learning theory can be applied to peer tutoring programmes, it is clear to see how principles such as the ZPD underpin the 'integration in practice of agent, world, and activity' (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 50). Social learning theory informs the tutor-tutee relationship at NWC in the sense that agency is internalised through the choices the students made in relation to the content and structure of their 1:1 sessions. It is also manifested more widely as part of the peer tutoring programme's overarching emphasis on the benefits of learning from (and with) others, in academic and social contexts. The associated power and authority inherent in staff-student relations is minimised by the peer to peer contact; social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) are gained when participating in pedagogies to facilitate learning as a social practice.

## **Conclusion**

If then, literature shows that peer tutoring is widely used both in schools and the HE sector, and that peer learning can be used as an overarching term for several different programmes where additional support is offered (Gogus, 2012). It raises questions about why there is a paucity of research relating to FE, and why none of this so far has addressed the GCSE English and maths resit 'problem.' Topping (1992), as a major proponent of peer tutoring, has questioned whether the central principles of peer tutoring (namely a process where there are gains for the tutor, the tutee and to some extent wider society) have a secure place within education. 'Given the prevailing atmosphere of Victorian Social Darwinism, the assumption that upward mobility can only be at the expense of others is readily made. In such a climate, can cooperative learning possibly have any viable role to play?' (Topping, 1992, p. 151). This question can be viewed as contentious because the ideas within it deal with the notion of hierarchies and the survival of the fittest (Bachir Belmedhi, 2019; Degler, 2011), which further highlights the ways in which this is arguably exacerbated by policies such as the GCSE English and maths resit policy (CIFE, 2019; ESFA, 2019) and RPA (DfE, 2016, 2018c), resulting in some cases of students taking multiple resits. The fact that changes in the GCSE qualifications themselves, namely the removal of coursework from GCSE English (DfE, 2013), has led to an increase in resits (Ryan, 2019) shows that policy



changes have directly impacted on young people and the FE sector itself, leading to colleges such as NWC seeking out ways to improve their results. Fundamentally, though, published peer tutoring research does not claim to be the answer to this problem. Instead, it highlights the multiple benefits of cooperative learning, often with a focus on both academic and social gains (Fitch & Semb, 1993; Keenan, 2014; Micari et al., 2005), as well as promoting wider skills such as organisation, communication and developing confidence (Ford et al., 2015; Giles et al., 2016). Conversely, if peer tutoring is employed as a deficit model, there is a danger that it could strengthen stereotypes (Smit, 2010) dictating a narrative of failure, instead of one which adds value (Topping, 1994). When taking into account the available research into peer tutoring, there is certainly scope to see its relatability to FE, even though as of yet it is an under-researched field.

## **Chapter 2: Methodology and project design**

### ***Introduction***

The aim of this chapter is to describe the methodology taken for adopting a qualitative approach, using an interpretivist standpoint and a case study strategy. The chapter explains, in detail, why the case study approach was chosen, as well as outlining how the use of semi-structured interviews and diaries/records were used to generate raw data. Consideration will also be given to how a reflexive approach can be used to minimise power relations during interviews. Analysis of data, including periodic reviewing of transcripts, will show how a thematic approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was taken, in order to enable a more critical perspective. Before concluding the chapter, ethics is considered and BERA guidelines (2018) are followed.

A qualitative methodological approach that adopts an interpretive paradigm has been used (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). One case study site was chosen, involving a total ten student participants (five on a full time GCSE resit course and five A Level students in Y1 of their course), who started the project, and four managerial/teaching staff who had direct involvement in the peer tutoring programme. A pseudonym has been used to protect the identity of the case study site and for the purposes of this research it is called North West College (NWC). Initial contact was made with the site's Vice Principal (VP) in May 2016, through a post he had made on an online platform about the GCSE resit 'problem.' Setting up the research project was made more viable due to the fact that I had a previous professional connection with the VP; fieldwork ran from February 2017 to December 2017. It included the use of four semi-structured interviews, lasting one hour each, and these consisted of: a paired interview with GCSE students; a paired interview with A Level students; an interview with the three main staff involved in the project at NWC; and a paired interview with one GCSE and one A Level student. Nineteen tutorial diaries/records, as well as field notes from meetings and emails between myself, the VP, the Director of English and Maths and the Head of A Levels were also collated. Additionally, I collaborated with NWC in setting the peer tutoring programme up and created PowerPoints (see Appendix 4, 5 and 6), activities (see Appendix 7) and information sheets for the staff to deliver information and guidance (see Appendix 2) and brief training to the student participants; however, my only face to face contact with the student participants was during the interviews in June 2017 (see Appendix 1) and December 2017 (see Appendix 3).

## ***Philosophical standpoint***

### **The interpretivist paradigm**

Plowright (2011, p. 181) states that 'Philosophy does not determine the research methodology employed. It's the other way round: methodology determines the philosophy you might employ to explain your approach to undertaking research'. A researcher's assumptions and beliefs are not arbitrary and it is helpful for researchers to challenge these assumptions before selecting their approach. According to Cresswell (2013, p. 22) a philosophical standpoint can be 'hidden from view' or 'made explicit', with the latter being the more typical approach in doctoral dissertations. Additionally, Gray (2018, p. 21) states 'While ontology embodies understanding what is, epistemology tries to understand what it means to know' and by explicitly outlining the ontological and epistemological nature of this study, it enables it to be set within an open and reflexive framework. Williams (2000, p. 210) argues that interpretivism is often associated with qualitative research and encompasses strategies which 'interpret the meanings and actions of actors according to their own subjective frame of reference.' However, Myers and Avison (2002, p. 5) emphasise the point that although there is a connection, qualitative research is not synonymous with interpretivism and is affected by the 'underlying philosophical assumptions of the researcher.' The aim, therefore, is to take an interpretivist standpoint with the research questions, because they seek to explore a particular context, at a particular period in time, based on the subjective viewpoints of the participants involved. Their realities are socially constructed, so only by listening to what they have to say, can their understanding of what they have learned from each other, and their wider social networks, be heard. Morehouse (2012, p. 2) argues that interpretative research has 'three orientations (agency, action and meaning)' as its framework for educational research and this is a useful foundation for this study because individual agency is a key theme. Individuals and their actions, irrespective of what they are, have meaning, which stems from their interaction with others and this can help researchers to understand their social world. Throughout the research process, they become more conscious of this world, due to the connections they make with the researcher, who becomes located within it (Morehouse, 2012).

In the interpretivist paradigm, the ontological belief is relativist, based on the idea of 'multiple realities' (Cresswell, 2013, p. 20) and this aligns with the peer tutoring project because it is grounded in the multiple perspectives of the participants. If ontology can be defined as 'how you view and perceive the social world, its rules and structures' (Davies & Hughes, 2014, p. 25), the key word here is 'perceive' because this research sets out the subjective beliefs of its participants. Within an educational setting there will always be rules

and structures, but how they are applied and interpreted in the context of the peer tutoring study at NWC depends on their varied experiences. Their realities reveal the complex truths of their motivations and values, as well as any problems they encountered and how they dealt with them, through shared meanings.

This research has a subjectivist epistemology which explores 'the knowledge assumptions underlying the researcher's methodology, but also to those of the research' (Williams, 2016, p. 37). The knowledge of the researcher and the researched are inextricably linked and because of this, the study takes a largely inductive approach when new knowledge is gained together; thus, it is generated by the participants' descriptions and interpretations of their experiences. The best, and arguably the only way to do this effectively, is 'to conduct studies in the "field," where the participants live and work' (Cresswell, 2013, p. 20), which is why the peer tutoring research was undertaken at the NWC site and participants were subsequently interviewed in their normal environment. According to Thomas (2006, p. 241) this could be called a 'general inductive approach' because meaning is derived from the research objectives through analysis and presentation of the most significant themes. Human nature is both complex and fascinating, so having the opportunity to conduct one of the first studies into peer tutoring in FE is a privilege, in that it enables the exploration of participants' enculturation and socialisation in the micro and macro context of their educational goals. The research seeks to understand why peer learning happened in this context and learn more about the perceived impact of their ensuing social relations. What is educationally meaningful to them is meaningful to me and the contribution to knowledge gained from this study adds to what is known about the existing conventions of peer assisted learning, currently dominated by HE.

### ***Qualitative approach***

It is common for research in education to be conducted using qualitative approaches (Cresswell, 2013; Yates, 2004) because it affords the researcher a wealth of flexibility and yet has a set of distinctive characteristics. A selection of these characteristics, deemed most relevant to this study, are outlined below from Miles and Saldaq (2014):

- Qualitative research is conducted through intense and/or prolonged contact with participants in a naturalistic setting to investigate the everyday and/or exceptional lives of individuals, groups, societies, and organizations.
- The researcher's role is to gain a holistic (systemic, encompassing, and integrated) overview of the context under study: its social arrangement, its ways of working, and its explicit and implicit rules.

- The main task is to describe the ways people in particular settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situations. (Miles and Saldaq, 2014, p. 9)

It could be argued that research conducted in a college environment is concerned with the 'everyday' happenings for the participants because it is within their social field of education. Gaining knowledge about the 'explicit and implicit rules' of the peer tutoring study, and describing how it worked in practice for those who chose to be involved, casts light on how their experiences shape their beliefs.

Although qualitative research can be hard to define because it 'does not have a distinct set of methods or practices that are entirely its own' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 6), it does have a 'set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). The lack of prescriptive structures can be viewed positively when researching participants' perceptions because it allows more freedom and scope for interpretation. Qualitative research is inherently relevant to the social sciences due to the fact its features allow exploration of rich 'perspectives of the participants and their diversity' as well as 'reflexivity of the researcher and the research' (Flick, 2009, p. 14). Salient features of qualitative research are that it affords researchers the opportunity to capture real life experiences and intertwine them with existing theoretical frameworks, which in the case of this research is Bourdieu's *The Forms of Capital* (1986). With this in mind, Bryman (1984) attributes the philosophical foundations of qualitative research with the concept of *verstehen*, a Weberian term used to 'grasp or comprehend the meaning intended or expressed by another' (Elwell, 1996) and context is integral when finding this meaning.

When information is gathered from the field, qualitative researchers openly acknowledge and interrogate their own values and this axiological assumption typifies qualitative enquiry (Cresswell, 2013). Furthermore, using the interpretivist paradigm 'requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action' (Bryman, 2012, p. 712) or 'presenting the case from participants' multiple perspectives and meanings – including the possibility of challenging the researcher's original assumptions' (Yin, 2014, p. 220). By using a qualitative enquiry it enables an understanding of 'the rich and complex lives and opinions of the people we are researching' (Davies & Hughes, 2014, p. 26) and it is acknowledged that the 'researched can never be independent of the person researching it' (Pring, 2004, p. 45). To use a qualitative research design is to welcome a fully integrated reflexive approach, whereby the researcher's openness is a positive factor. By researching peer learning in an FE context, this project has sought to align an area of my own expertise (GCSE English resits) with the field of peer tutoring, which is largely associated with higher

education (Topping, 1994), thereby enabling the creation of new knowledge. The multiple perspectives of students and staff at NWC were examined reflexively, as the research progressed.

It is recognised that educational research is often criticised for its study of 'the messy reality of schools and classrooms' (Wellington, 2000, p. 6) but qualitative research is best equipped to capture this, due to its lack of prescriptive tendencies. It is debatable as to why peer tutoring is under-researched in the FE community, so the inductive nature of this study is particularly relevant here: a cogent discussion applied to a 'messy reality.'

## ***The case study approach***

### **The case study site**

NWC is a large FE organisation which has two main sites and two smaller vocational outreach sites, educating a total of approximately 8,500 students per year and prides itself on preparing students for university or work, via the delivery of multiple educational routes (Davies, n.d.). The research was based at one of the main sites which houses the GCSE and A Level full time courses. According to the last Ofsted report in 2015, the college is graded as 'Good' and at that time the borough had a population of 228,500, 88% of whom were classed as White Ethnic (Ofsted, 2015, p. 14), which could, in theory, impact on how the peer tutors and tutees perceive their own academic identities. The borough has a higher than average percentage of residents qualified to degree level and 74% of school leavers achieve five GCSEs A\* to C (new grades 4-9) compared to 53% nationally; conversely, NWC's feeder schools average a 55% pass rate, meaning that the college's student cohort is more in line with the national average. The 2015 Ofsted report also notes that GCSE English results, where students obtain a grade C or above, are better than the national average. In 2018 NWC was merged with another local college classed as 'Inadequate' by Ofsted, bringing a new set of challenges for senior leaders and college staff (Dobson, 2018).

### **The qualitative case study**

Case studies can be used in both qualitative and quantitative research but because of their inherent flexibility (Gray, 2018) they lend themselves to qualitative enquiry. Due to the fact there are no standardized techniques, this method requires researchers to draw on 'a wide range of skills and flexibility' (Yin, in Gray, 2018, p. 263). This is appealing within the context of the study at NWC because several aspects, such as exact choice of participants and delivery of the peer tutor/tutee training to A Level and GCSE resit students, were beyond my direct control and instead of this being an inhibiting factor, it afforded a more

versatile and holistic approach. A very useful piece of advice from Yin (2014) is that researchers should purely aim to report what they find and have the ability to adapt their research methods throughout the duration of the study. At the design phase he calls for 'careful craftwork' (Yin, 2014, p. 27), choosing a case 'that will most likely illuminate your research questions' (Yin, 2014, p. 28). In using the verb 'illuminate' Yin creates positive connotations for the case study method and as such sets the tone for this research. Linking back to NWC, in the sense that participants' perceptions are situated within an FE context, there is a clear association between the research questions and the chosen research method. This also relates to Trow's dictum that the method should reflect what is being researched (Bryman, 1984).

### **Justification of the case study model**

In the first scoping meeting at NWC, with the AP and his team, enthusiasm ran high and the project could have followed a practical action research (AR) framework (Denscombe, 2007). Additionally, whilst working in FE, I had used AR for my Master's degree in 2013, whereby I investigated the effects of using different types of group work in my own GCSE English classroom. I had an acknowledged bias towards this type of research; however, after the first scoping meeting, the VP withdrew from any direct involvement and devolved any future interaction between myself and NWC staff to the Director of English and Maths. This in itself was not a problem and seemed a logical step to take, but the Director became the gatekeeper to any contact with NWC and her own day to day responsibilities had to be her priority, meaning that she was not always easily accessible. Thus, notions of conducting action research were deemed less appropriate because in subsequent interactions, NWC could not guarantee that they would make any changes/implement new strategies after the study had finished. It was more an area of interest to them and they saw the benefit of exploring peer tutoring, to address the GCSE resit problem, as A Level student peer tutoring GCSE resit students was something they had not tried within their own college before. Yet again, the unpredictability of the research process is a prevalent theme and 'we must learn to live in the middle of things...and become adept at making do with the messiness' (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 176).

This research project crossed over the boundaries of HE and FE because it was conducted in FE by myself, a researcher who is employed in a HE in FE setting, undertaking an EdD qualification. Conducting educational research is considered as the norm in HE, indeed it is an integral part of my Senior Lecturer job role and it is acknowledged 'academics are the main handlers of knowledge in higher education' (Sousa, 2011, p. 56) and that 'doctoral research is a key mechanism through which academic knowledge is produced and reproduced' (Delamont, Atkinson & Parry, 2000, p. 2). Conversely, 'traditionally, college

staff have not engaged in research and have therefore not necessarily developed the required skills' (Minty, Weedon, Morss & Cannell, 2007), nor do they have the time or resources allocated within their demanding work schedule. Professional development is often related to a tutor's curriculum area and updating their own subject specialist expertise; when they do engage in research it is often takes the form of an action research approach because the FE sector is 'more practice based' (Appleby & Barton, 2008, p. 1). There is absolutely no suggestion that staff at NWC did not possess the skills to undertake an action research project to address their GCSE resit problem; nevertheless, during initial discussions it was acknowledged that they did not have the time to collect and analyse any data generated by the project, therefore having an external researcher conduct a case study on their site was of benefit to both parties. On one level, NWC had guidance in the setting up of this project, as well as not having to allocate staffing hours to collection and analysis of the findings; on a secondary, though equally important, level the research will contribute to the production of new knowledge for this doctoral thesis. If a community of practice is defined as 'participation in an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities' (Lave & Wenger, 2002, in Bathmaker & Avis, 2005, p. 50), therefore NWC (students and staff) and the researcher developed a new community of practice and this in itself advances the knowledge generated. Appleby and Barton (2008) posit that co-operation between FE and HE contexts can augment the research process, and thus:

creating interfaces and working spaces that are external to the boundaries set by the defined contexts in which we are employed is beneficial to us all. It becomes a space for us to examine our practice and share our ideas and empowers all of us in the process. (Appleby & Barton, 2008, p. 3)

This is important not only to the findings of the NWC peer tutoring programme, but also to the case study research strategy itself; pertinent especially in light of the fact I have had thirteen years' experience of teaching GCSE English in an FE environment prior to becoming a teacher educator and moving into HE in FE.

And so, before deciding on the use of case study, action research was carefully considered. According to Gray (2018, p. 321) there are at least three common features in AR:

- Research subjects are themselves researchers or involved in democratic partnership with a researcher.
- Research is seen as an agent of change.
- Data are generated from the direct experiences of research participants.

Context is key here and although there is a shared interest between myself and NWC, only the third point could link clearly to this research, as it would generate rich data based on 'direct experiences.' The fact that the research project did not promise to adhere to the cyclical process of AR was another contentious issue. McTaggart (1994, p. 315) refers to



this as an 'action research spiral', whereby 'The spiral recognises the explicit possibility of acting differently as a result of progressively learning from experience.' Despite being drawn to AR, this created yet another problem and whilst the 'messy' (Orr, 2009, p. 74) nature of research is acknowledged, this study cannot not do justice to AR. Ultimately, case study affords many opportunities for collaboration, but without the more defined boundaries of AR. Moreover, it is 'the phronesis of the academic researcher's offer' (Thomas, 2011, p. 33) and affords heuristic opportunities, which in turn enable greater reflexivity, which is a key argument for its use within the social sciences (Thomas, 2011).

### **The instrumental single case study**

Many peer tutoring studies use single case studies (Bowman-Perrott, Davis, Greenwood & Vannest, 2013). The justification for the use of an instrumental, single case study (Stake, 1995) approach for this research is primarily due to of the research being based on 'contextually rich events or phenomena, especially those which: may be queried using how or why questions; or where the researcher can exercise little control; and which focus on contemporary, rather than historic information' (Schell, 1992, p. 6). It is also deemed as an appropriate method for examining new phenomena, which in this instance was the application of A Level students peer tutoring GCSE students in an FE context at NWC. Thus, 'this design enables exploration of issues and testing of established points of view about these issues' (Bullough, 2015, p. 14). Although peer tutoring is not a new practice (Topping, 1996) the context of its application is. The theories behind peer tutoring are well-established and evaluated in HE (Topping, 1994); however, very little research has been conducted in an FE setting and the case study can seek to ask how and why this does, or does not occur. Harland (2014) proposes that it does not matter if the research explores educational systems or the practices of individuals; any single case is 'dependent on a specific social context in time and place' (Harland, 2014, p. 1116).

This research project is categorised as a unique instrumental case study (Stake, 1995). According to Yazan (2015) the three most prominent case study methodologists are: Robert Yin, Sharan Merriam and Robert Stake, but the case study methodology has been a dominant qualitative research method, especially in education, for several decades (Jupp, 2006). Yin's *Case Study Research Design and Methods* is now in its 5th edition (2014) and has been a seminal text since 1984. In the foreword to the book Campbell posits that Yin's 'insistence that the case study method be done in conformity with science's goals and methods is perhaps not surprising' (Yin, 2014, p. xviii) and this is borne out by Yazan's interpretation that 'Yin appears to aim at presenting the design and methods of case study and advocating the case study in social sciences as a legitimate methodology to conduct inquiries into a theoretical proposition' (Yazan, 2015, p. 136). The need to legitimize the

case study method stems from the fact it has often been criticised for its lack of specificity, or 'the degree of rigour expected of social science research' (Denscombe, 2007, p. 45) associated with positivist paradigms (Smith, 1983). Merriam asserts that 'Qualitative case studies share with other forms of qualitative research the search for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, an inductive investigative strategy, and the end product being richly descriptive' (Merriam, 2009, p. 39) which aligns concisely with the research study at NWC because the research questions are exploratory in nature. Furthermore, in case studies:

You do not start out with a priori theoretical notions (whether derived from the literature or not) because until you get in there and get hold of your data, get to understand the context, you won't know what theories (explanations) work best or make the most sense. (Gillham, 2000, p. 2)

Here there is a subtle conflict in that if the researcher is 'the primary instrument of data collection' (Merriam, 2009, p. 39), yet 'You do not start out with a priori' (Merriam, 2009, p. 39) knowledge, the inference is that outlining positionality and taking a reflexive approach to case study research is essential. With this subject in mind, it is evident why Stake does 'not pay as much attention to quantitative case studies that emphasize a battery of measurements of the case' (Stake, 1995, p. xi-xii), in that he advocates the methods outlined in his book for those who specifically study in the field of education. As current Professor Emeritus of Education at the University of Illinois, Stake is himself a researcher and an academic who lays out 'a palette of methods' (College of Education at Illinois, 2016, p. xii) which he personally prefers.

The foundations of most qualitative case study research in the field of education are 'qualitative and hypothesis-generating, rather than quantitative and hypothesis-testing studies' (Merriam, 1988, p. 3); again it relates to this research project because of the inductive approach. It is naturalistic in nature because the peer tutoring case study is of interest in its own right; specific groups of GCSE and A Level students and their tutors and programme managers provide three discrete, but inextricably linked groups and offer a rich cultural context of an FE setting. The principal aim of this study is not to generalise its findings to other FE contexts, and yet the inductive approach was used to generate new ideas, (supported by empirical evidence from existing HE peer tutoring studies), with those ideas being of interest to any individual or organisation who is seeking alternative ways of dealing with the GCSE resit problem and/or interested in peer tutoring in FE. As Thomas (2001) states, case study is 'a heuristic or frame of analysis: a way of saying, 'Here is a way of looking at it' (Thomas, 2011, p. 27) and this is a helpful way of viewing this research approach.

Case studies are often used as a research strategy to solve or understand an existing problem (Merriam, 1988) and again this adds to the justification of using it as a method for this study. There is both a practical problem to address; i.e., students with a grade D (or new level 3) have to resit their GCSE English as a condition of funding (DfE, 2017b, p. 50), as well as a conceptual problem regarding the lack of research to show the impact of peer tutoring in an FE context. Booth, Colomb and Williams (2008) state that:

In academic research, a conceptual problem arises when we simply do not understand something about the world as well as we would like to. We solve a conceptual problem not by doing something to change the world but by answering a question that helps us understand it better. (Booth et al., 2008, p. 53)

Thus, a salient feature of using case studies to solve problems is that it enables a holistic research approach, grounded in a framework 'used in many situations, to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political and related phenomena' (Yin, 2014, p. 4). This study is realistic in that it does not seek to change practice or solve the problem; it seeks to learn more about the individuals who chose to participate and their perceptions of the education system in which they belong to.

The case study research method can be described as 'an 'approach' to research which has been fed by many different theoretical tributaries' (Torrance, 2005, p. 33) and it allows an exploration of participants' 'lived reality', 'retaining more of the "noise" of real life than many other types of research' (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2001, p. 3). This creates an ideal situation to gain answers to the research questions, as it is as much about the participants' perceptions of the peer tutoring programme, as it is about whether tangible skills were gained. A further connection can be made here to interpretivism, in that the absence or presence of causal relationships, and how they are manifested in this context, means things can be viewed from 'the perspectives of human actors' (Chowdhury, 2014, p. 433). It is a detailed snapshot of the study at NWC and the findings will therefore not be generalisable. Lack of generalisability is one of the main criticisms of the case study method (Thomas, 2011), but Stake (1995) broaches this under the category of 'Naturalistic Generalizations':

Case studies are undertaken to make the case understandable. Often, this case will be as important to its readers as any other case – they care about it; their interest in generalizing from this case to others is small...But people can learn much that is general from single cases. (Stake, 1995, p. 85)

Therefore, even though it could be argued this study has low external validity (Drew, Hardman & Hart, 1996), the findings from the pilot peer tutoring project at NWC will still be significant to other institutions dealing with the GCSE English resit problem. The emphasis here is on the potential links between the chosen study site and these institutions, building on the belief that a case study does not need to represent the wider educational landscape, but it can be relatable because of shared interests and goals.

Taking this idea forward, it is beneficial to explore the concept of relatability, or 'the extent to which the research is authentic or true to life' (Taylor, Sinha & Ghoshal, 2008, p. 28). Those working in similar FE environments and dealing with the GCSE resit problem could apply the research because they are in the same field of work. Similarly, Dzakiria (2012, p. 46) argues that qualitative researchers should not worry about the issue of generalisation, instead focusing on the research itself in a detailed and 'meaningful way'. This research project views relatability as a positive extension of Bassey's 'fuzzy generalisations [which] do not explicitly claim to apply to every case' (Hammersley, 2001, p. 220). However, it is acknowledged that this is not a solution to the problem of generalisation, and there are differences between generalisations drawn from qualitative and quantitative methodologies. As Thomas (2011, p. 26) points out, for 'the special generalisation of social science to be worth something, it must involve more than our everyday generalisations.'

## **Sampling techniques**

The research used purposive sampling and included five peer learning pairs. In purposive sampling participants are identified because they are 'known to enable a particular behaviour or characteristic relevant to the research' (Gray, 2018, p. 174), namely the study of peer tutoring in FE. It is strategic in that it was fixed at the outset of the study and criteria for selecting participants were established from the beginning (Bryman, 2012). The criterion applied for the student participants was that the GCSE students had already achieved a grade D in their GCSE English and the A Level students had a minimum grade B, because this ensured there was a defined starting point to use as a baseline to build from. Yin (2014) warns against using the term 'purposive sample' as it 'risks misleading others into thinking that the case comes from some larger universe or population of like-cases' (Yin, 2014, p. 44) but this could be disagreed with in relation to the study, because research shows there are no existing studies of peer tutoring programmes in relation to GCSE English and a 'case study design is another type of research that often requires a purposive sample' (Jupp, 2006, p. 244).

This sample consisted of five GCSE English resit students, all of whom achieved a grade D in their last exam and were not receiving any other form of supplementary tuition outside the timetabled GCSE classes. There were four female A Level students and one male, and three female GCSE students and two males. The age range across both groups of student participants was seventeen to twenty-one. No information about social class was collected at the initial selection stage, or subsequently; however, during the interviews this was alluded to when educational goals and family backgrounds were discussed. The peer tutoring pairs were chosen by the Director of English and Maths and the Head of A Levels,

based on their knowledge of the students' personalities and their educational/career goals. The GCSE students came from the same curriculum group and had all their timetabled lessons with the same English tutor(s). They had weekly 1:1 peer tutoring sessions, whereby the GCSE students chose what they wanted to study. Controlling these variables in this way gives internal validity, especially as a reflexive approach to the study was taken. Reflexivity is 'a practice which embodies a critique of its own situatedness' (Usher, Bryant & Johnston, 1997, p. 219) and this is a positive trait inherent in qualitative research. May and Perry (2013, p. 111) describe it as 'an iterative and continuous characteristic of good research practice' and it enables researchers to analyse their own positionality.

### **Gaining access to the case study site**

The case study site was chosen because of existing professional connections with the VP. He posted a blog on an online platform, where the only topic on the agenda was maths and English, or more to the point, the GCSE maths and English resit problem. Having taught GCSE English resit myself for thirteen years prior to becoming a teacher educator, the post gripped my attention and I opened up a dialogue with the VP in which we discussed the various approaches his college was taking to broach the problem he had identified. What began as a discussion about the problem and how staff and students within one organisation were willing to try new ways of dealing with it, grew into my research on peer assisted learning in the field of FE. In turn, this then became more about 'the perception that they have of the field depending on the point of view they take on the field as a view taken from a point in the field' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 101). Improving grades was, of course, at the heart of the research, because this was what the GCSE resit students needed to progress; and yet, what had started as something functional in nature evolved into something more hermeneutic, opening up opportunities to explore their perceptions and motivations.

### ***Research methods***

The research methods in this case study were semi-structured interviews, supplemented by peer tutoring session logs/diaries (see Appendix 8). There were two phases of data collection to the study: Phase 1, where the participants took part in the project and kept diaries of their tuition sessions and Phase 2, the conducting of semi-structured interviews with staff and student participants. The research methods added coherence to the study because in Phase 1 they generated data, which aimed to inform the choice of research questions in Phase 2, which allowed the exploration of the underpinning theoretical assumptions in the aim and research questions. At both phases there was a clear focus on the case study site and its participants. Due to the fact this study has some of its roots in

government policy (DfE, 2018b; Wolf, 2011), relating to GCSE resits, as well as established theories of learning, social class and cultural identity, the opportunity to draw these aspects together within a case study created 'fertile grounds for conceptual and theoretical development. Existing theories can be brought up against complex realities, and the very richness of the data can help generate new thinking and new ideas' (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2001, p. 7).

## Phase 1

Phase 1 could be described as the operational phase and there were five NWC GCSE English students who had previously achieved a grade D in their qualification, being 1:1 peer tutored by five A Level students who had achieved a grade B or above. NWC paired the students based on personality traits as well as consideration of wider educational goals. Initially, the staff participants selected a group of GCSE and A Level students and invited them to information sessions, after which they decided whether they wished to take part. At the outset of the study, the subjects studied at A Level were only noteworthy in their function of giving contextual information about the participants. In the table below, which provides more detail, student participants have been given pseudonyms to provide anonymity and maintain confidentiality.

Table 1: Student participant information

Name of peer tutor	Age	Subjects studied at A Level	GCSE grade	Which GCSE student are they paired with? Brief rationale (e.g. personality traits/ability)	A Level students' wider educational goals (any teaching ambitions?)
Paige	17 F	English Lit Psych History	A*	Chloe (F) Both learn through quiet reflection and consolidation after class	University for History, then teaching
Elizabeth	21 F	Biology Chemistry Maths	A	Grace (F) Both strong characters who learn through discussion and challenge	University Ophthalmics

Anila	17 F	Biology Chemistry Psychology	A	<b>Lucy (F)</b> Both want health care in future	University Medicine
Alice	17 F	Biology Chemistry Geography	B	Zachary (M) Both want a science career in the future	University Marine biology
Sanaz	17 F	Biology Chemistry Psychology	A	<b>Umar (M)</b> Similar background	University Dentistry

In Phase 1 of the study student participants met once a week for ten weeks, from February to May 2017, to undertake a one hour 1:1 peer tuition session, during which time they were asked complete informal research diaries to record what had been covered in each session. For the students, both tutors and tutees, this was mainly a way of recording what they covered in the weekly sessions, dealing with content and how they felt about what they had covered; in some ways this could be construed as a logbook, but for the purposes of this project the term 'diary' was used.

## Research journals/diary entries

Using diary entries as a research method is not a new concept, as it was used in 1939 by Sorokin and Berger (Vermaas & van de Wijngaert, 2005). One of the advantages of keeping a solicited diary (at the request of the researcher) is that 'respondents do not have to rely so much on their retention, valid data can be collected (Vermaas & van de Wijngaert, 2005, p. 123). Examples of where diaries have been used in prior research are Andrew Noyes (2004) at Nottingham University, who used video diaries as a method for exploring learning dispositions. Additionally, in their study of teaching reflexivity in qualitative research Gerstl-Pepin and Patrizio (2009, p. 299) used research diaries as an 'opportunity to engage others in the interpretation of data' and the conceptualisation of reflective notes, so there is an established field of its use. The diaries in Phase 1 of the study were intended to be a source of information which would enable the direction of the interviews with the students. Alaszewski (2006) writes about use of diaries in naturalistic research and the fact that they are often used due to pragmatic reasons, such as access to a specific case study site and/or the researcher's expertise in a particular field, which aligns with the research at NWC. In these instances, even a single entry 'can be used as a critical case study' (Alaszewski, 2006, p. 64) and even though each student participant was asked to record every single session with each other, if this did not happen consistently it was followed up with the interviews. For the staff participants a slightly different approach to

diary keeping was taken, mainly to avoid adding to their workload, but also because there would be the opportunity to conduct interviews in Phase 2 of the study. Unlike the student participants, their diaries did not need to be completed on a weekly basis; instead they were asked to record any observations about perceived changes in behaviour of the student participants within their GCSE English lessons, as well as reflections on the impact (if any) on their own workload/involvement in the study. In qualitative research studies the data collected should align with the research objectives and 'So, validity requires that the diary have relevant information, which enlightens the questions the researcher is dealing with, and be representative of events related to the questions' (Sá, 2002, p. 154). Unfortunately, the staff did not have time to complete any diary entries at all, so the data collected from this area came in the form of my attendance at their meetings and interviews with the Director of English and Maths, the Head of A Levels and the GCSE class tutor in Phase 2. This links back to the inherent problems of practitioner research and time constraints of being involved, especially as the site of study and the educational establishment were different to my own place of work. This was not deemed to be an inhibiting factor but it did reinforce the 'messiness' of doctoral research (Bailey, 2012) and the realisation that as a researcher from outside NWC, there were some things which would be beyond my control. Milligan (2016, p. 239) argues that it is common for researchers to take on 'different positionings', based on who we are interacting with at a particular time, so although it could be said I had many things in common with the staff, there were variations of 'insider-outsider positionings' (Milligan, 2016, p. 239) and I did not have the authority (or desire) to enforce the completion of staff diaries. I did, however, collect minutes from meetings, emails and PowerPoints from when information about the peer tutoring scheme was delivered to student participants, which underpinned the research methods. Another way of looking at this is what Carroll (2009), who used video reflexivity in her research into hospital power relations, calls the 'alongsider' (Carroll, 2009, p. 248); namely, a researcher who fosters a collaborative and honest approach to the research process, being 'involved with the messiness and multiplicity of social life' (Carroll, 2009, p. 248). It has subsequently been posited how this highlights the process of making the 'researcher's gaze explicit' (Atkins & Duckworth, 2019, p. 93) and can be associated with taking the emic perspective of a researcher who has close links and a vested interest in the area being studied. Overall, remembering the fluidity within the research context, there were times where an 'inbetween' approach was taken (Milligan, 2016, p. 235), whereby it was possible to circumnavigate 'the fixed and dichotomous notions of 'insiderness' and 'outsiderness' in conducting educational research (Milligan, 2016, p. 248).



## **Phase 2**

Phase 2 of the study took place during the second week of June 2017, on the same day, after the GCSE and A Level students had sat their exams, and in December 2017 for a follow up interview. It was planned that two focus groups would be conducted: one with the participant A Level peer tutors and one with the GCSE tutees; however, on the day only two GCSE students and two A Level students attended, so they became two separate paired interviews. Three of the four initial staff involved were also interviewed at this time (the Director of English and Maths, the Head of A Levels and the GCSE English class tutor) meaning access and representation was obtained from a range of stakeholders. The field was re-entered in December 2017 to conduct another interview with one participant GCSE tutee and one A Level peer tutor, who had been paired together throughout the peer tutoring study. Each of the four interviews lasted approximately one hour. Returning to the field in December 2017 added longitudinal strength to the thesis findings because it meant that student participants were interviewed straight after the peer tutoring project, whilst it was fresh in their minds, and after a six month interval, which gave them time to reflect. Lagarde (2011, p. 76) argues that using data in this way can deliver more 'robust results' and even lead to a reduction in researcher bias. Additionally, when researching within an organisation, Certo, Withers and Semadeni (2017) suggest that use of longitudinal data could afford researchers the opportunity to extend their application of theoretical frameworks, meaning there is consistency in approach and stronger theoretical underpinnings. Hence, even though this research was not a longitudinal study, in the traditional sense of repeated measures over years or decades (Taris, 2000), it can be argued there was a longitudinal approach in the paired interviews.

## **Paired interviews**

In June 2017 paired interviews were undertaken with two GCSE students, Chloe and Grace, and two A Level students, Paige and Anila, then in December 2017 a paired interview was conducted with one GCSE student and one A Level student. Both of the student participants in the December interview, Chloe and Paige, had previously been interviewed in June, but in the earlier interviews they were each separated out into GCSE tutee or A Level tutor pairs. Arksey (1996) believes that paired/joint interviews are useful when examining power dynamics and because this was one of the themes explored in the peer tutoring study, it was an advantage of using this method. It was also beneficial because it enabled a dialogue about how the student participants perceived the same event. Characteristically, paired interviews allow interaction between the interviewees and 'optimally, both interviewees should participate in the discussion that occurs during the interview as equitably as possible' (Wilson, Onwuegbuzie & Manning, 2016, p. 1551). Paired interviews can also be conceptualised as 'romantic' (Roulston, 2010, p. 217), whereby the interviewer outlines

their own interest in the study and 'recognizes, if not celebrates, the place of the researcher in the study.' This is concomitant with an interpretivist standpoint and subjectivist epistemology, through which the knowledge of the researched and the researcher are imbricated. The aim is to create an atmosphere 'in which genuine rapport and trust is established by the IR [interviewer] in order to generate the kind of conversation that is intimate and self-revealing' (Roulston, 2010, p. 217). When the interviewer and interviewees have not met before, as was the case with the student participant interviews in June 2017, 'the initial scene setting moments are crucial' (Schostak, 2006, p. 49); therefore, careful consideration was given (and will be discussed further in the ethics section) to the way I dressed, my use of body language and positioning within the room. Getting it right from the start, with a particular emphasis on presenting myself in an open and friendly manner, was deemed 'crucial' to the interview dynamics.

The second paired interview, which took place in December 2017, had the primary purpose of delving deeper into some of the themes which had been generated from the initial interviews in June. The student participants were selected on this occasion because I wanted to gain further insight into the perspectives of what I deemed to have been the most successful peer tutoring pairing, Paige and Chloe. They were the most successful pairing because they met regularly and consistently just with each other, whereas it was revealed in the June interviews that others had taken a more flexible approach; for example, Grace had been initially paired with Elizabeth, but spent a lot of 1:1 time with Anila. There was also a practical element too, in that both students were still at the college, so they were accessible, and when approached by the Director of English and Maths they were willing to be interviewed together. Looking deeper at their perceptions of power relations throughout the study was a specific area of interest. It allowed the re-framing and further elaboration on specific themes, in a context whereby the interview 'called out responses, [and] views that were continually checkable against each other' (Schostak, 2006, p. 50). This in itself drew out valuable insights into the interactions between Paige and Chloe, which could not have been obtained during one-to-one interviews. Although there are many advantages to paired interviews, there is a possibility that they may not be as genuine as individual interviews 'because they feel that they should be unified and tell the same story' (Wilson et al., 2016, p. 1555); yet, if the researcher is aware of this before conducting the interview, they can look out for changes in body language and adapt/reframe questions accordingly.

## **Group staff interviews**

The interview with key staff members involved in the study was planned to have been conducted with the Director of English and Maths, the Curriculum Leader for GCSE, the

Head of A Levels and the GCSE English class tutor, but the Curriculum Leader for GCSE English was not available in June 2017, as he was at another site when the interview took place. Although this was not ideal, it was not considered an inhibiting factor because the Head of A Levels had undertaken the day to day running of the peer tutoring project. The group staff interview allowed the collection of qualitative data, rich in capturing multiple perspectives across the managerial and teaching staff range. This was an important aspect of the study because depending on level of involvement and responsibility, it could have had a significant impact on their perceptions of the study's efficacy. Frey and Fontana (1991, para 12) state that group interviews can be used to "triangulate" the data of formal methodological techniques by adding to them the human element of the voices of multiple subjects' and this consideration informs the data analysis. The staff participants were able to corroborate or shed a different light on the answers given by the GCSE and A Level students. One of the benefits of formal group interviews is that they enable the interviewer to have a more involved role (Frey & Fontana, 1991) and considering, to some degree, the staff participants were my peers, it allowed me to utilise a more active role in this context. Platt (1981) believes that when interviewing your peers 'the interviewer is not anonymous but has a history and perceived characteristics, some of which may be directly relevant to the research topic' (Platt, 1981, p. 77). This was certainly the case with the staff participants because there was 'a history and perceived characteristics' (Platt, 1981, p. 77) on both sides due to contact in the field over the preceding twelve month period. I had initially planned to use the diary entries to help me devise the questions, but as staff diary entries were not available, the interview questions (See Appendix 1) reflected the progression towards answering the research questions (Galletta, 2013), as well as adhering to the nine different types of interview questions advocated by Kvale & Brinkmann (2009, pp. 135-136). A potential problem with this chosen research method is 'the interviewer effect' (Denscombe, 2007, p. 184) where the particular identity and personal characteristics of the researcher can affect the information the participants are willing to share, yet this has been addressed in the ethics section, by examining my positionality and taking a reflexive approach to this study.

## **Semi-structured interviews**

All four interviews conducted were conducted as semi-structured. In qualitative research one of the main types of interview used is the semi-structured interview, as it affords some scope for variation within a pre-designed framework and is therefore a versatile data collection method (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson & Kangasniemi, 2016). Interviewers have 'a list of questions or fairly specific topics to be covered...Questions that are not covered in the guide may be asked as the interviewer picks up on things said by the interviewee' (Bryman, 2012, p. 471). This affords flexibility for both the researcher and participants, whilst still ensuring

the research questions can be addressed. Getting the interview questions 'right' was a lengthy process because it required a balance between avoiding over-reliance on my own preconceptions, yet still allowing for 'alternative avenues of enquiry' (Bryman, 2012, p. 473). Other than initial questions to collect information about the participants, semi-structured interviews can be used to generate open-ended answers with greater importance being placed on opening up ideas pertinent to the interviewee (Denscombe, 2007). They also afford the opportunity to ask follow up questions, providing clarity for the interviewee, where needed, as well as maintaining flow and spontaneity (Kallio et al., 2016). The objective was to 'explore subjective meanings' (Gray, 2018, p. 381), in keeping with the relativist ontology of this study. It is recommended that questions are piloted before undertaking the actual interviews (Yin, 2014), but it was not logistically possible to do so with the case study site at NWC. In the month before the interviews, students were still undertaking the peer tutoring sessions, as well as revising for exams and staff were also busy with exam preparations. To ensure there was still rigour within the development of the questions, they were discussed at length during supervisions and refined according to feedback. In addition, the notion of researcher previous knowledge, in this case knowledge of GCSE resits, the FE sector itself and the application of Bourdieu's (1986) theoretical framework all underpinned the interview preparations (Turner, 2010). This can also be linked to the idea of insider status and the benefit of being more familiar with the educational field of research and the people within it (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015).

## ***Ethics***

As a theoretical concept, ethics can be traced back as far as ancient Greece (Parry, 2014) and relates to the morality of how a person behaves. The BERA guidelines (2018) recognise the aspirations of educational researchers who 'aim to extend knowledge and understanding in all areas of educational activity' (BERA, 2018, p. 3) and this is central to the practice of doctoral research. The guidelines are not intended to constrain approaches to research, rather they provide clarity where needed and align with the spirit of integrity inherent within educational research. Moreover, the framework provides protection for both the researcher and their participants, with an overarching purpose to do no harm as a fundamental part of the research process.

## **Informed consent**

Before the peer tutoring study began, prospective student participants were invited by the key members of NWC staff to attend a briefing meeting (one for GCSE students and one for A Level students). It was during this time that they consented to be part of the study and those under the age of 18 had a consent form (see Appendix 2) posted to their parents,

whereas those over 18 signed it themselves. There was also an element of the Director of English and Maths acting in loco parentis, as a gatekeeper, because the peer tutoring research sat within her remit. Additionally, consent was gained again before the interviews and I was able to re-explain the purpose of my research and how it would be used for my EdD, making sure I emphasised how important their contributions were: all of which was recorded in the transcripts. Piper and Simons (2011) believe it is vital that participants fully understand 'the purpose of the research and the consequences of them taking part' (Piper & Simons, 2011, p. 26) and this is reinforced by BERA in that 'voluntary informed and ongoing consent to be the condition by which participants understand and agree to their participation' (BERA, 2018, p. 9); however, above and beyond this, it was important to let them know how much I appreciated their contributions.

## **Confidentiality**

The use of pseudonyms used specifically for participants in social science research is 'dominant to the extent of being ubiquitous and rarely examined' (Lahman et al., 2015, p. 450), but it took time and significant thought to choose them, namely because it was important to reflect on the process of naming. Allen and Wiles (2016) argue that 'allocating pseudonyms to confer anonymity is not merely a technical procedure but has psychological meaning to both the participants and the content and process of the research' (Allen & Wiles, 2016, p. 2) and a conscious effort was made to ensure pseudonyms reflected the participants' gender and ethnic origin. Names were chosen, as opposed to numbers or letters, because it was deemed insensitive to use letters or numbers in relation to real people. Creswell (2013) reminds researchers that it is their responsibility to protect anonymity and the connotations of 'responsibility' have both moral and ethical implications which were adhered to. Moreover, Plowright, (2011, p. 156) states: 'The main focus is on ensuring that neither participants nor their organisations are named at any stage in the research. In addition, the information you provide in your report should not enable participants to be identified' (Plowright, 2011, p. 156), hence the pseudonym NWC was also used.

## **Right to withdraw**

BERA's ethical guidelines (2018) stipulate participants have the right to withdraw at any point during the research and that the researcher should provide their own contact details, both of which were done when consent was gained, prior to starting the peer tutoring project and the semi-structured interviews. As a researcher intending to do no harm, it is useful to consider the power you hold during interviews and throughout the whole research process itself. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) discuss the inherent 'power asymmetry' (Kvale &

Brinkman, 2009, p. 33), saying that 'issues of power have been little addressed' (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p. 33), in relation to qualitative interviews and in relation to the right to withdraw I would acknowledge that it would be difficult for participants to stand up and walk out. Bearing this in mind, and from an ethical point of view, using paired/group interviews is one method to address this. Furthermore, Barbour (2007) cautions researchers to 'examine our own assumptions about the degree of power we hold' (Barbour, 2007, p. 81) hence a reflexive approach to this research project was taken and my positionality examined, exploring a conscious analysis of any impact I might have.

### ***Positionality***

It can be argued 'that positionality, power relations and reflexivity are all central to conceptions of ethics and ethical research' (Atkins & Duckworth, 2019, p. 2), thus it is important that this is addressed. My previous working relationship with the VP stemmed from us both having taught on GCSE resit programmes, so there was a shared understanding of FE and the types of problems learners and their teachers encountered. Through our prior professional connection and my interaction with comments on the VP's post on an online platform, I was granted access to set up and study their experiences of the pilot peer assisted learning programme. The VP was already considering ways of overcoming the GCSE resit problem by piloting a peer tutoring programme, whereby local undergraduate students were brought in to tutor the GCSE students on a weekly basis, 1:1 and for approximately one hour at a time: this had been done before at NWC. After our initial discussions, I persuaded him to change this in favour of utilising the expertise of students within NWC, because this would afford the organisation more direct control of planning and delivery, as well as providing opportunities for their own A Level students. Additionally, the VP granted permission for me to use the organisation as a case study because of my expertise within the field of GCSE English; having taught the subject for thirteen years prior to becoming a teacher educator, it enabled me to evaluate the impact with a degree of insider knowledge. Having previously met the staff, and gained some generic prior knowledge of the student participants, I compiled background data, collected from Phase, 1 to inform the interviews and focus groups in Phase 2. Atkins and Duckworth (2019) believe that 'qualitative approaches position the researcher as the data collection instrument' (Atkins & Duckworth, 2019, p. 4) and it is useful to be reminded of this.

During Phase 2 it was my intention to put the student participants at ease during the group interviews by informing them of my thirteen years' experience of teaching GCSE English prior to becoming a teacher educator, which was also intended to establish some common ground and build a rapport. Evidence from a study by Ryan and Dundon (2008) found that 'solid rapport elicits superior quality data' (Ryan & Dundon, 2008, p. 443) and as I initially

thought I would only have access to the student participants on one particular date, there was no margin for error. Although I consider myself to be adept in putting young people at ease, because I am used to working with students in the 16-18 years age range, and as a teacher educator I frequently visit FE colleges, it is important to acknowledge that being interviewed is an unfamiliar experience and the student participants, in particular, might have been apprehensive. The fact that they were interviewed with their peers was also intended to reduce possible anxiety, but as 'most forms of qualitative interviewing are reliant upon the interpersonal skills of the interviewer' (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 71), it is something of pivotal importance and cannot be taken for granted. I greeted the participants with a smile and actively displayed positive body language throughout the interviews, as well as considering self-presentation and dressing professionally (smart but casual) and not wearing a suit, which could be deemed as too formal. Due to the large age gap between myself and the student participants I did not intend to try and 'blend in' with them; however, I did want to distinguish myself from their tutors at NWC in the hope that this would enable a more open dialogue and freedom of expression. Not having met them before, I positioned myself as 'the researcher': someone with a vested interest in what they had to say, but who would not judge what they did say. Additionally, this addressed the need for some 'level of detachment in the name of objectivity and scientificity' (Ryan & Dundon, 2008, p. 444) and avoid 'the risk of consensus and the creation of a situation where the interviewee seeks to provide information that is thought to be expected or wanted by the researcher' (Ryan & Dundon, 2008, p. 444). My own credentials as a researcher, undertaking Doctoral study at the University of Huddersfield had to be balanced with empathy for young people who had their own reasons for participating in the study and this was not to be underestimated when preparing for the interviews. I was aware of my own biography and how this influences behaviour (Russell, 2005). In alignment with Atkins and Duckworth (2019), I believe that 'research should never be merely a self-serving exercise, even (or especially) if your study is in partial requirement for an academic award' (Atkins & Duckworth, 2019, p. 82).

On one level, when looking at my positionality in relation to the interviews, I viewed the staff participants as my peers because we had shared values, experiences and goals; yet, I had a certain distance from them because we did not work together in the same organisation. This was viewed as an advantage in that I did not have to negotiate the 'varying degrees of intimacy...to segregate the formal and the informal interaction' (Platt, 1981, p. 79). All the staff participants were aware of the purpose of the study and I anticipated a high degree of reciprocity and co-operation. Apart from the labour intensity of conducting and transcribing interviews, another disadvantage is that it requires a certain amount of practice and skill. 'The interview process takes intense concentration, the ability

to listen, write and anticipate a future question all at the same time' (Drew et al., 1996, p. 175); nevertheless, having conducted interviews with my peers during a previous module on the EdD, I would assert that this was transferable to this context. Preparation is key, my a priori knowledge was an advantage and having already established earlier that good interpersonal skills were essential, these factors have been considered contemporaneously.

The peer tutoring research at NWC happened because of my personal interest in this field. It was driven by government policy on GCSE resits in English and maths (DfE, 2018b; Wolf, 2011) and the perceived problems this has created (The Guardian, 2014; Wilshaw, in Exley, 2016a), yet the creation of new knowledge arose because peer tutoring in FE, specifically on GCSE resit programmes, is an area where no other research exists. Over the years, accusations of 'partisanship' have been levelled at educational researchers (Tooley & Darby, 1998), but during the course of this research project I have aimed to actively embrace this notion as something positive, agreeing with Carr (2000):

Educational researchers cannot study education without some commitment concerning its purpose, value and goals. Although educational researchers may, and often do, study education without articulating any particular educational values and beliefs this should not be taken to indicate that such values and beliefs do not permeate their work. (Carr, 2000, p. 440)

In light of such beliefs, and coupled with the acknowledgement that researchers are in themselves data collection instruments (Atkins & Duckworth, 2019), positionality has been a central principle within this research. My own professional standing and the resources I accrued throughout my thirteen years of teaching on GCSE resit programmes, enabled me to resist any pressure to select out the more positive outcomes of the peer tutoring research, thus avoiding bias and maintaining validity. Yes, as a long standing FE practitioner, and a current teacher educator who works with trainees and FE colleges who deliver resit programmes, I had hoped to hear that the staff and students at NWC would perceive peer tutoring as having benefitted them; however, I was under no illusion that their narratives would also show the 'the messy reality of schools and classrooms' (Wellington, 2000, p. 6). In fact, this was welcomed because by taking a deliberately critical and reflexive standpoint, I ensured my years of FE teaching experience were used to accentuate all aspects of the research findings.

## **Conclusion**

Bearing in mind this research was initially driven by the need to respond to the implementation of government policy changes to GCSE English and maths (DfE, 2018b), choosing to undertake a case study at NWC was informed by several factors. Young (2000) argues that researchers should not become too absorbed by the detail of specific



government policy and reminds us we need to consider the purpose of educational practices and the inequalities which arise; by studying a peer tutoring programme it has enabled a clear focus on how one FE college attempted to balance policy with their own practices. Furthermore, Eisner (1992b) maintains: 'Different ways of seeing give us different worlds. Different ways of saying allow us to represent different worlds' (Eisner, 1992b, p. 14) and because peer tutoring in FE is uncommon (Topping, 1994) this research has brought to the forefront a different perspective on a well-established educational practice (Fitch & Semb, 1993; Keenan, 2014; Micari et al., 2005). A qualitative approach was taken to ensure there was some degree of flexibility (Cresswell, 2013; Yates, 2004), whilst having some structure which captured the ways in which staff and students at NWC managed and participated in the day-to-day experience of the peer tutoring programme. The study was split into two phases, the first being when the peer tutoring actually took place, in the spring/summer term 2017 and the second was when the interviews were undertaken in June and December 2017. Interviews were semi-structured to allow staff and student perceptions to be fully explored from a relativist ontological belief, based on the idea that 'multiple realities' (Cresswell, 2013, p. 20) could be revealed due to the different standpoints of those involved. It was deemed important to discuss researcher positionality in this research due to my own interest in the field of FE and particularly because of my experience of teaching on GCSE English resit programmes, prior to becoming a teacher educator, and also because working with trainees who are placed within FE colleges, teaching on these programmes, has kept my knowledge and understanding of the issues current. Although the study at NWC was specifically implemented for my EdD qualification, it has not been 'merely a self-serving exercise' (Atkins & Duckworth, 2019, p. 82), but a window into the motivations and beliefs of GCSE resit and A Level students and their teachers, as well as examining the benefits and challenges of peer tutoring in FE.

## Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

### ***Introduction***

This chapter will provide an introduction to Bourdieu's expansive *Theory of Practice* (Bourdieu, 1977) and use it as a framework to show how his ideas can be used as a 'toolbox' (Stahl, 2016, p. 1091) to analyse the data in this study. The research seeks to elucidate the perceived benefits, both educationally and personally, of being involved in the peer tutoring programme, as well as examining the related social networks and educational goals. By investing time and effort into participating in the study, the students at NWC created a programme whereby human capital, viewed from a micro-perspective (Duckworth, 2014), led to GCSE resit students accruing capital due to their deeper understanding of their GCSE subjects (knowledge), and for the A Level students by utilising their tutoring skills on their UCAS statements. Using Bourdieu's *The Forms of Capital* (1986) to analyse and frame the participants' accounts of their involvement in the research, I explain how the fields (social spaces) they inhabit impact upon their choices and beliefs. In brief, capital equates to 'labor' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 241) or power, the study of who possesses it and how it was accumulated. Bourdieu conceived the concept of cultural capital when trying to explain why there was an unequal scholastic achievement amongst children from different social classes, concluding that it cannot be based on natural aptitude alone. Thus, how cultural capital is accumulated, depends not only on innate academic ability, but also on investment of time and resources within school and the home, as well as investment of time or 'labor' which stems from devotion to study or educational action. This is particularly pertinent to the study at NWC because it explores how their involvement in the peer tutoring programme increases their productivity, opening up access to education and career choices which can enrich their lives. Cultural capital is the knowledge acquired through educational qualifications and family/life experiences and is influenced by economic capital (income/wealth); this in turn influences social capital, or the resources accrued as part of the networks in which we build relationships (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007, p. 119). The concepts of cultural, economic and social capital open up discussion of habitus and fields, particularly in relation to family and education as prevailing social networks. Habitus relates to who we are, what made us who we are and how we present ourselves within social contexts; it embodies our skills and dispositions and affects our cultural tastes (Bourdieu, 1977) and is often thought of in terms of our history, as individuals, as well as within our family or class (Reay, 2004a), pointing to the characteristic of it having both individual and collective tendencies (Duckworth, 2014). Bourdieu has referred to field using an analogy of the 'game' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007, p. 98) and how people understand its rules of operation within the various networks they operate within. The peer tutoring

programme at NWC created a new field of play in which the GCSE resit and A Level students had the opportunity to accrue cultural and social capital. At the outset of the study, the peer tutors (A Level students), were conveyors of knowledge and in possession of GCSE English grades higher than a B/level 6; therefore, it could be said they possessed more symbolic power than the GCSE resit students. However, by looking at education as a site whose standards 'are always shifting and changing' (Duckworth, 2014, p. 31) there is scope to explore how the students navigated this.

Owing to the fact that 'such notions as habitus, field and capital can be defined, but only within the theoretical system they constitute, not in isolation' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007, p. 96), full and careful consideration will be given to each of these concepts and their applicability to this study, so that relationships between students, teachers, parents and the education system itself can be analysed. Webb, Schirato and Danaher (2002) argue that two of the main benefits of using Bourdieu are his 'eclecticism' (Webb et al., 2002, p. 4) and that his body of work is 'derived from different theorists to transform bodies of knowledge' (Webb et al., 2002, p. 4), which 'give them a 'practical' or political edge' (Webb et al., 2002, p. 8). Frequently, they can offer a powerful, and often trenchant, dialogue of how young people's educational options and choices are inculcated by the academic/vocational dichotomy (Pring, 1995).

By using Bourdieu's theoretical framework it is also possible to see how the balance of power between the participants is perceived throughout the study and makes it possible to think about how both the peer tutors and tutees make sense of this. In taking the opportunity to interview a selection of the students and teachers involved in the study, they can reflect on how and why the balance of power, or 'rules of the game' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007, p. 98) and their position within it change, whilst bearing in mind the study's various operational contexts. Bourdieu's toolkit also frames the students' beliefs about their educational goals and attitudes to their social relations, with each other, their families and the education system. Building upon this, Bourdieu's work enables researchers themselves to examine their own positioning, as it presents a critical discourse around reflexivity which is:

both and at the same time a critical mise en abyme of the intellectual field in which it is embedded and within which it is produced, and an empowering tool for making sense of the social world and acting effectively upon it in a truly informed manner. (Deer, 2014, p. 198)

The metaphor of 'mise en abyme' is a complex one but to take it as a methodological concept it means that the researcher and the researched are inextricably linked by the research process itself, as well as highlighting how the researcher overtly looks at him/herself at every step of the way. Taking the concept further, it is like being able to see

an image within an image: you are always present in the research. This can also be linked to overcoming bias, the most difficult being 'that of the "theoreticist" bias inherent in the scholarly gaze itself' (Swartz, 2013, p. 24). According to Tyulenev (2014), 'Bourdieu wondered how the researcher's perception of reality influences the object of his/her study' (Tyulenev 2014, p. 182), hence, my own experiences, as someone who has worked within the education system since 2000, will influence this 'social world' (Deer, 2014, p. 198).

Bourdieu's own heavily documented background of growing up in rural France is often cited as a catalyst, or 'driving impulse' (Wacquant, 2008, p. 261), for his oeuvre in the field of social science and anthropology (English & Bolton, 2016); as someone who grew up with very little cultural capital, in the sense of how he himself came to define it in his essay *The Forms of Capital*, (1986), his life changed seismically due to his own education and he sought to challenge inequalities in a society he believed was fundamentally flawed, due to the social inequalities in post-war Europe 'a site of endless and pitiless competition' (Wacquant, 2008, p. 262). It could be said that Bourdieu's personal circumstances underlie the peer tutoring research at NWC, not only due to the importance of understanding why education was so integral to Bourdieu's life and work, but also because it serves as a reminder that it would be too simplistic to reify his oeuvre based on his own upbringing. Indeed, Bourdieu believed that people are moulded by several internal and external factors (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007), instead of solely being defined by one element in isolation. Where a person is born and the life experiences they have does not define them, yet it does form their habitus, initially shaped within the home, then further impacted upon by social structures such as school and access to wider social networks.

### ***Bourdieu in the context of GCSE policy***

In terms of education and practice Bourdieu's theories can be used as a means to explain the relationships between individuals and the social fields within which they operate: those being at home, in their previous school, in college and the study itself. This applies to everything from how the curriculum is structured, and its content, to the 'various forms of capital that individuals work to acquire and use to influence others' (English & Bolton, 2016, p. 73). The research project at NWC has currency in regard to curriculum content because it seeks to interrogate possible ways in which FE responds to educational policy and the changes this has brought about in the GCSE English curriculum: those being the requirement for students in FE to continue re-sitting their GCSE English and maths until they achieve a grade C/level 4 or above (Education & Skills Funding Agency, 2019). The students have accumulated/are accumulating cultural capital in its various forms, but predominantly embodied and institutionalized (Bourdieu, 1986). Additionally, by exploring the participants' habitus, here defined as 'a system of lasting transposable dispositions

which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions' (Bourdieu, 2000, pp. 82-83), it opens up opportunities to analyse notions of agency and social practices. All of this sits within the field of education, a distinct social arena with its 'own unique set of rules, knowledges, and forms of capital' (Social Theory re-wired, 2016), those being mostly relatable to cultural and social in the context of this study. What makes Bourdieu's theory intellectually stimulating and challenging in equal measure is that using his Theory of Practice requires 'a kind of dialectal thinking, which necessitates keeping at least one thing in mind while considering another' (Grenfell, 2014, p. x). In the peer tutoring study, the participants' perceptions of their involvement, and the consequences of their choices, both in school and in college, are juxtaposed with the capitals they accrue. This aligns with Grenfell's assertion that knowledge is not static; it could be said that to use Bourdieu's framework means you see knowledge as fluid, ebbing and flowing, depending on the field(s) inhabited. It can also be argued that Bourdieu's work is universal, a 'theoretical toolkit [which] is intended to work anywhere and everywhere' (Connell, 2007, p. 40); however, it is worth noting an awareness of the fact that Bourdieu's theories are built upon European perspectives, and thus relevant to this study, but also that they are derived from a social theory of his own research, as well as those of other European philosophers and social scientists.

### ***The Forms of Capital***

According to Bourdieu's *The Forms of Capital* (Bourdieu, 1986) capital exists in three forms: economic (income, property, wealth), cultural (educational qualifications, choices of leisure activities, personal dispositions) and social (networks). These forms will be discussed individually, but links between them will also be highlighted and related to the motivations, influences and goals of the participants in this study.

### **Economic capital**

Economic capital can be earned from employment or inherited from family (Bourdieu, 1986) and is a driver for the other forms of capital because it can be used to buy cultural capital and affect access to social networks. In the peer tutoring study economic capital is more notional than tangible because the student participants have yet to gain financial independence from their parents, so the connection here is vicarious. Moreover, the geographical area in which NWC is situated has a higher than average number of residents educated to degree level (Ofsted, 2015) and lower than average unemployment rates (Office for National Statistics, n.d.), so there is less social deprivation at the case study site. Data in relation to the social class of the parents was not collected as part of this study, however, this was alluded to during the interviews when the student participants were

asked if anyone they lived with had been to university (see Appendix 1). It is acknowledged that the parents' economic status can impact on the choices their children make when deciding what to study post-16 and indeed whether to continue in HE (Dodgson, 2004; McShane, 2003; Payne, 2003). Jarness (2017) identified a 'mutual antagonism' (Jarness, 2017, p. 362) between the preponderance of either cultural or economic capital, noting that even though money can provide right of entry to cultural gains, overall, having capitals denoting good taste and education, as opposed to wealth, is a significant factor. The imbrication of cultural capital and economic capital carries with it an implication of there being 'a return' (Sullivan, 2002, p. 157), often in the form of educational credentials. Bourdieu (1986) posits that those who possess economic capital can devote more time and effort to converting it to cultural capital, which makes sense because even though economic capital alone does not automatically confer status, it can be accumulated over time. One way to explain this further is to think about the term 'nouveau riche', meaning those who have acquired wealth within their own lifetime (for example a lottery win, or those who strived to earn it through their own business) as opposed to inherited, and they have not yet acquired the good taste associated with their level of income. It is debatable as to whether they would ever possess the capitals of those with hereditary wealth; however, they would certainly have the ability to use their economic resources to their own advantage. Orser (2004) points out that even if a person acquires economic capital, it would take some time for their levels of cultural capital to show an upward trajectory and in turn enculturate the habitus, so there is a symbolic correlation between cultural capital and status in society, which is not solely governed by wealth alone. As Bourdieu has identified, economic capital is immediately convertible to money and property, but can be taken away, whereas cultural capital in the form of institutionalised qualifications, are 'legally guaranteed' (Bourdieu, 1986, p.245) certificates which, once achieved, stay with the bearer for life. When considering the significance of economic capital to the peer tutoring study at NWC, there is less 'mutual antagonism' (Jarness, 2017, p. 362) due to the fact the GCSE resit students have opportunities to increase their cultural capital through their education, but whilst still living with their parents, they have yet to acquire economic capital in their own right. Furthermore, it is argued that the content of the GCSE English curriculum itself increases students' cultural capital, due to the inclusion of sources from different time periods and genres (AQA, 2018), opening up access to materials which most young people may not have the opportunity to discuss within their home environment. And so, the importance of economic capital within this study can be summarised as the way in which it is relatable to cultural capital, in the form of institutionalised educational qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986), and the possibilities this affords the GCSE resit students to enrich their lives. Economic capital could also be relevant in instances of peer tutoring programmes, depending on when the 1:1 sessions are timetabled; for example, some students have part-

time jobs and unless the sessions are calculated within their normal curriculum delivery, they may not be able to attend and therefore be disadvantaged.

## **Cultural capital**

When conceptualising Bourdieu's theory of capital and its distinctive features, Moore (2014, p. 99) argues that in relation to symbolic capital, it is important to understand how it can be both arbitrary and uniform. Symbolic capital is defined as 'the form that the various species of capital assume when they are perceived and recognised as legitimate' (Bourdieu, 1987, p.17) hence it could be thought of more in terms of 'an analogy' (Fowler, 1997, p.20) or legitimised form of the other capitals (Bourdieu, 1986). Unless both of these factors are taken into account, i.e. the arbitrary way that a person's class shapes their habitus and confers social advantage, yet this may not be given equal value in society, his ideas are no more than a social stratification theory and 'cultural capital is to all intents and purposes a synonym for "status" or habitus for "socialization" [adding] little to analysis beyond a shift in the lexicon' (Moore, 2014, p. 99). Negative as this may seem, when attempting to define cultural capital, which can indeed be abstract, it is a useful baseline entry to a broad and conceptually thought-provoking theory, especially when applied within an educational context. It goes right back to 'knowledge of the dominant conceptual and normative codes inscribed in a culture' (Jæger, 2009, p. 1946) and the way this knowledge perpetuates social hierarchies and levels of advantage, both in symbolic and material forms. Economic capital is 'at the root of all other forms of capital' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 250), and all the forms are inextricably linked. The interconnections mean that 'one form of capital can be transformed into another. For example, economic capital can be converted into cultural capital, while cultural capital can be readily translated into social capital' (Duckworth, 2014, p. 48). The three forms of cultural capital are:

1. Embodied – 'long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body' such as accent or dialect.
2. Objectified – 'cultural goods', for example books or pictures.
3. Institutionalized – 'educational qualifications.' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 242)

Educational qualifications are more self-explanatory, but it is worth noting that in turn these can denote the acquisition of power and authority. English & Bolton (2016) argue that cultural capital is the most difficult to quantify due to it being 'largely intangible' (English & Bolton, 2016, p. 57), unlike economic capital, which is much more visible because it relates to an 'accumulation of wealth and power' (English & Bolton, 2016, p. 56). For this reason, economic capital has relevance to this study in the long term achievement of participants' educational and career goals, as well as within social and educational fields. If social capital is membership of a group, 'not what you know but who you know' (English & Bolton, 2016,

p. 56) this could have some bearing on the study, namely because two different groups of students (GCSE and A Level) who may not normally mix with each other, formed membership of a newly created group at NWC.

One of the reasons why cultural capital is so relevant in contemporary times is that it is possible to recognise wealth and monetary gain with relative ease, as property and inheritance pass down from generation to generation, particularly when people obtain highly paid jobs. Bourdieu's theory looks beyond this and 'the transmission of cultural capital is, however, opaque, and is necessarily masked in a language of meritocratic achievement and hard work' (Savage, 2015, p. 50). The notion that it is 'opaque' alludes to its 'messiness' (Sullivan, 2002, p. 150) and the inability to mould the forms of capital into neatly accessible concepts. Yet it also helps to embody the fact that for Bourdieu, the impenetrable nature means it can mask forms of 'overt privilege' (Savage, 2015, p. 50), which if easily identified can be disputed, thus allowing its power to be challenged. Hence it could be said that the transmission of capital is oblique; it is both paradoxically ever present, in the form of enculturation, yet simultaneously invisible to those who possess it. Families who possess large amounts of cultural capital are indeed likely to live in relative financial comfort, but they are also likely to pass on the belief that educational success and qualifications come from hard work and perseverance (Jæger, 2009). Unlike money, property and titles, educational qualifications cannot be passed on from one person to another, they have to be earned but the ability to understand 'the rules of the game' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007, p. 98) confers an inheritance of sorts, which is imbued with a sense of entitlement. When children grow up around parents whose lives are rich in cultural and other forms of capital, they are unaware of how this impacts on their ability to gain social advantage, which again links back to its opacity. High status and social advantage are unequivocal rights for those whose lives are rich in cultural capital and this is arbitrary because 'the social conditions of its transmission and acquisition are more disguised than those of economic capital [and] it is predisposed to function as symbolic capital' (Bourdieu, 1986, p.244) .

### ***Embodied state***

Capital in the embodied state is characterised by corporal representation of the internal qualities and traits of a person, such as taste, body language and lifestyle choices (Moore, 2014, p. 102). At a surface level these are not assets that can be accumulated and exchanged for monetary gain (in the objectified state); however, 'all capitals are the products of investments and resources to be exploited: each form of capital can be transformed into another' (Bourdieu, 1993, cited in Zembylas, 2007, p. 450). Bourdieu's use of the simile 'Like the acquisition of a muscular physique or a suntan, it cannot be done at second hand (so that all effects of delegation are ruled out)' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 244)



consolidates the image of capital in the embodied state being assimilated within the self and it is interesting because the imagery in his example is somewhat trivial, but deftly enables a more contemporary understanding of its properties. Bearing in mind that the GCSE and A Level students are aged 16-18, it could be assumed they are what could be called a work in progress, a long way from the 'muscular physique': there is no expectation for them to have high levels of cultural capital in the embodied state. Yet they are products of a British education system whereby they have invested years of their time (albeit a mandatory requirement) in the National Curriculum, and particularly the English curriculum; as such, even though the GCSE students' efforts at school did not yield the results they had hoped for (grade C/level 4 or above), it would be logical to hypothesise that in their previous GCSE English studies they have worked on self-improvement, even 'in the absence of any deliberate inculcation, and therefore quite unconsciously' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 244). However, it is also worthy of note that to acquire the 'muscular physique' would require lots of time, effort and on some level pain; therefore, in no way would this be unconscious. By participating in the peer tutoring study, the GCSE students in particular committed to actively transforming their past experiences of the GCSE qualification into 'scholastic yield' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243).

Another feature of the embodied state of cultural capital is its hereditary nature. Bourdieu calls this 'the most powerful principle of the symbolic efficacy' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 245) because it depends on what is embodied in the students' family units and what has been transmitted to them over time within this social field. This is relevant to the second research question in particular: To what extent have social networks influenced the educational choices made by students in the programme? It is also linked to social class, in that children from families with strong cultural capital (more likely to be considered middle class) have had 'easy accumulation', unlike those from working class backgrounds. At this point there is a strong and obvious interplay with capital in the economic or objectified state due to the fact access to highbrow cultural activities, such as theatre and ballet, require not only material means to access them, but also embodied cultural capital (or taste). In Mike Savage's 'Social Class in the 21st Century' (2015) he analyses leisure activities in relation to money and a good education, as patterns of cultural capital, concluding that:

We are not implying that those who are less well-off and have few qualifications have no cultural interests, or simply sit passively at home all day. Rather, their cultural engagement is likely to be more informal, more neighbourhood and kinship-based, and is hence less likely to be something based around particular leisure activities such as going to a museum. (Savage, 2015, p. 106)

This relates directly to Bourdieu's theory because of the hereditary influences, both in terms of 'the period of embodiment needed to acquire [and] the means of appropriating it' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 246). Although social class was not explicitly measured within this

research, during the interviews student participants were asked if anyone in their family had connection between the student participants' educational goals and those within the family unit. Those social networks could also relate to experiences in secondary school and how they impacted upon subsequent educational choices.

### ***Objectified state***

Cultural capital in the objectified state is 'connected to objects- books, qualifications...etc' (Grenfell, Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 21) and is therefore strongly linked to economic capital. In the peer tutoring study this applies to GCSEs, A Levels and to some extent BTECs because they are the qualifications undertaken by the students. It could be argued that as with economic capital, this area has little relevance beyond the qualifications; however, it is important to note that by considering all the facets of Bourdieu's theory, it is possible to see the inter-relatedness with other forms of capital, should they arise.

### ***Institutionalized state***

Due to the fact this research project focuses on peer tutoring on GCSE English resit courses a discussion of the institutionalized state is pertinent and will enrich the research process. Bourdieu (1986, p. 250) sees it as 'the objectification of cultural capital in the form of academic qualifications' and 'With the academic qualification, a certificate of cultural competence which confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to culture' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 250). The GCSE students' primary aim in taking part in the research process is to improve their chances of achieving a grade C or above in their June exam, so there is a very clear emphasis on this 'certificate of cultural competence' because it will enable them to move on to higher level studies and/or gain employment. The qualification is 'General' and the standard achievement of a 16 year old (in England and Wales); it is not recognised in the same terms of capital compared to A Levels, degrees and so on. It could be classified as more of a gateway qualification, having value in its own right as proof of having achieved a national target, but also symbolically in that although there is no immediate conversion to economic capital, a student who achieves a grade 4/5 or above (equivalent to the old grade C) becomes one of the 60. 2% group of young people who are successful, as opposed to the other 39.8%, categorised as having failed (Adams & Weale, 2016). The capital becomes both objectified and embodied in that the institutionalized state itself is 'a form of objectification which must be set apart because, as...in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital it is presumed to guarantee' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243). Power relations become more explicit than implied and the field of education is a site of struggle for the 39.8% of students who may lack the scholastic habitus to succeed (English & Bolton, 2016). This highlights the importance of GCSE resit courses because without them, the 39.8% of

students who did not achieve a grade 4 or above, would be limited in their capacity to increase their grade to one which is highly valued by employers and educational establishments (Craggs Mersinoglu, 2019).

## **Social Capital**

The concept of social capital frames all other forms of capital in that it relates to how people interact within the groups they are part of. Being part of a group 'provides each of its members with the collectively-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 247). In the peer tutoring study at NWC a new group was formed, both in terms of the students collectively, and also in terms of the A Level tutors and the GCSE tutees. This form of capital relates more directly to research question 2. To what extent have social networks influenced the educational choices made by students in the programme? These networks are namely: family, school, college and the peer assisted learning group itself.

During the first round of semi-structured interviews in June 2017 the students were asked four questions which would lend themselves to enabling some form of analysis of their own and their families' social capital (see Appendix 1).

1. c. Where do you live?
1. d. Who do you live with?
1. e. Have any of the people you live with been to university?
2. d. What did your fellow students and parents say about you being involved (in the project)?

The purpose behind this was to generate ideas about the perceived impact any of the above could have on educational attainment, as well as allowing inferred meanings relating to inherent values of university education. Accessing university education is seen as a marker of success which often confers cultural capital (in all its forms) on those who gain educational credentials. If, as Duckworth (2014, p. 27) asserts, 'Bourdieu places family at the centre of social capital', then knowing more about the student participants' families is a small but integral part of this study.

Although no specific questions about school were posed during the interviews, it was a given that in discussing their educational choices, there would be some links to the school experience. English and Bolton (2016, p. 27) argue that schools 'represent places of conflict and friction culturally, socially, economically, and politically. In short, schools are not neutral agencies functioning in neutral social spaces.' This lack of neutrality could impact on

social capital insofar as they were given opportunities to discuss if and why school had influenced their post-16 choices.

NWC is seen as a social space where learning takes place within and outside of the classroom. The college staff participants formed a fundamental part of the college network in that they taught the students, paired them up during the programme and oversaw the day to day running. Their input was logistical, organisational and also intuitively focused on obtaining the best outcomes for the students. Yes, they were interested in seeing if by participating in the peer tutoring programme the GCSE students' grades would improve, but they were also driven to understand the perceived benefits for the A Level students, in terms of confidence building and enabling progression in attaining career goals.

Under normal circumstances GCSE and A Level students at NWC have little cause to mix socially, or otherwise, but by creating an opportunity to change this, the college could be seen as progressive and willing to broach the hierarchy of hitherto indeterminate GCSE and A Level status within the college. It is posited that this links to the hidden curriculum (Eisner, 1992a) when considering the unequal power relations between staff and students, then potentially between peer tutor and tutee. On the other hand, it could also be seen in a positive light due to the fact that some power and control of learning was handed over to the students, as opposed to being contained solely within the classroom. As has previously been discussed, peer tutoring/assisted learning programmes are usually the norm within HE (Topping, 1996) and by facilitating a programme at NWC the hidden curriculum is demonstrating that GCSE and A Level students can be trusted to work effectively together, without direct supervision of their tutors. In 'Schooling in Capitalist America Revisited' (Bowles & Gintis, 2002) Bowles and Gintis revisit their research from 1976 and argued that 'schools prepare people for adult work rules by socializing people to function well and without complaint in the hierarchical structure of modern corporation' (Bowles & Gintis, 2002, p. 1) and if this is the case, then it undermines the intentions behind the peer tutoring programme. Additionally, Duckworth (2014, p. 30) believes, 'teachers bring to the classroom the dominant cultural values and symbolic power related to their legitimate authority'; however, NWC created an opportunity to remove this, to some extent, by acknowledging the expertise of the A Level students.

### ***Habitus***

It could be said that habitus is the most contested of Bourdieu's thinking tools (Sullivan, 2002); nevertheless, its importance and relevance to this study is paramount. Bourdieu (1977) defines habitus as 'a product of history' and 'a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely

diversified tasks' (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 82-83). The word 'history' is particularly helpful here because it emphasises the idea of habitus being acquired over a long period of time, but it is also worth noting that it recognises circumstances of a person's birth, such as whether they are born into wealth or poverty (Duckworth, 2014). It informs who we are, what we do, as well as how others perceive us, and the way we perceive ourselves. As a concept, it is fascinating to think that those 'transposable dispositions' carry with them both positive and negative connotations, depending on access to cultural and other capitals. Additionally, this 'matrix' is the nucleus from which everything else emanates; it is an environment where cultural, social and political influences pervade.

Habitus is therefore ingrained in the reproduction of class structures due to the fact that our history is part of who we are; it influences whether a person remains within a certain class, depending on whether they were born with access to high or low levels of cultural and other capitals. For someone from the working class, and even though habitus is transposable, it is difficult to move in an upward trajectory without time and money. Bourdieu calls the ability to transform one form of capital into another 'conversions' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 255) and he alludes to the fact that it is easier for higher classes to do this than the working classes, because:

if the best measure of cultural capital is undoubtedly the amount of time devoted to acquiring it, this is because the transformation of economic capital to cultural capital presupposes an expenditure of time that is made possible by possession of economic capital. (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 255)

A vicious cycle ensues for the working classes due to the fact that they possess neither the time nor the money to access higher forms of cultural capital and habitus and the status quo prevails for subsequent generations. Bourdieu calls this cultural reproduction and his interest in this field initiated 'Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Thus, it can be argued that cultural capital is at the heart of the reproduction of social inequality and the education system feeds these inequalities, because it values success in the form of educational qualifications, which in turn enable access to better jobs and higher wages. Taking at face value the belief that 'family habitus varies by class, only middle-class or elite cultural resources can become cultural capital valued in society' (Tzanakis, 2011, p. 77), Bourdieu identifies schools (and teachers) as performing 'pedagogic action' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 3) which favours upper and middle class families and marginalises others. As has previously been stated, class was not explicitly examined in the peer tutoring study, nor was data generated to make claims about the student participants; however, in discussing their perceptions of their place within the education system I was able to formulate ideas pertaining to their habitus and the impact school had in its formation. Even though the GCSE students could be deemed as having failed within the education system, in that they did not achieve the required standard of a C

or above (now grade 4), by participating in the study, the pedagogic action performed by NWC was intended to provide positive outcomes for the students. This, in turn, could have a positive impact.

One of the primary considerations when interrogating the concept of habitus is that it is not static and can be 'both a lens through which everything in the social world is perceived and the set of principles governing an agent's response' (Thompson, 2011, p. 18). There are several key issues noteworthy for discussion in this short quote because the metaphor of the 'lens', when connected to perceptions, raises all sorts of issues related to a subjective view of individuals within the particular field under discussion. Furthermore, the habitus is 'successively re-structured' (Thompson, 2011, p. 18) as people engage with others within their social environments. This is both an advantage and a disadvantage of using Bourdieu's theory, because on the one hand there is much scope for practical engagement with new fields, but on the other it is more difficult to foster objective responses. It can be linked back to the idea of the 'mise en abyme' (Deer, 2014, p. 198), in that the history ingrained in the habitus is recursive: ever present even when something new is formed through cognitive construction.

### ***Structure versus agency – the perennial debate***

Webb et al. (2002) include a definition of agency in their glossary, relating it directly to Bourdieu's body of work. Agency is:

The idea that individuals are equipped with the ability to understand and control their own actions, regardless of the circumstances of their lives: usually termed 'intentionality' and 'individuality'. We exercise agency, for example, when we indicate our intention to vote one way or the other, or make choices to eat from a restaurant menu. For Bourdieu, the possibilities must be understood and contextualised in terms of their relation to the objective structures of a culture. (Webb et al., 2002, p. ix)

The staff and students involved in the peer tutoring study at NWC exercised agency when they made the choice to take part; yet it can be argued, due to the context of the research stemming from the government's policy on GCSE resits (ESFA, 2019), their choices were in fact heavily influenced by 'objective structures'. Ade-Ojo and Duckworth (2016) posit that government policy drives and shapes UK literacy practices and it could be argued this has impacted on GCSE English (and maths) resits and the way in which FE colleges feel pressurised to drive up results, whilst still doing the best by their students. The examples used by the authors in the above quote also allude to the fact that some of these choices can be mundane ('choices to eat from a menu'), as well affirming one's ideologies and wider influences in society ('our intention to vote one way or another'). It is impossible to assess a person's ability to control their actions without looking at context, especially if this control is

affected by 'the ability to understand' and 'regardless of circumstances'. The latter assertion, relating to circumstances, is deeply problematic because sometimes circumstances are beyond an individual's control. Savage (2015) uses the term 'precariat' (Savage, 2015, p. 53) to describe a class of people whose daily existence lacks predictability, security and lack of resources, so their circumstances act as a barrier that simply does not exist in middle and upper class families. Additionally, Sullivan (2002) challenges Bourdieu and is disparaging about his concept of habitus, given its 'messiness' (Sullivan, 2002, p. 150); she posits that he only uses it to try and solve the conflict between structure and agency. However, other prolific social scientists, such as Anthony Giddens (1984), have also made significant contributions to the debate and had their theories challenged (Stinchcombe, 2002; Taylor, 1989). For example, Giddens' structuration theory has been labelled as 'fundamentally non-propositional [because]...the 'structuration' approach fails to specify when there will be more voluntarism or more determinism' (Archer, 2010, p. 229) and thus adds to the perennial debate.

According to English and Bolton (2016) Bourdieu wanted to understand why a person's habitus led them to behave, unconsciously, in certain ways and respond to external forces, to examine 'how society functions without overt intervention' (English & Bolton, 2016, p. 28). If agency exists in the ability of an individual to make their own choices, then in what way are these subjective choices be influenced by external structures? Objectivism can be defined as 'the idea that people's actions and attitudes are determined by objective social structures such as those relating to class, ethnicity, gender and language' (Webb et al., 2002, p. xiv) and this aligns with Bourdieu's argument that 'habitus was not a destiny' (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 180). The idea of structure and agency being intertwined by multiple internal and external factors makes infinitely more sense than there being an 'either/or' scenario. Balances shift according to context and if we take on board Bourdieu's aim to know why people behave in certain ways when confronted by external forces, we can see the tacit nature of the habitus.

## **Fields**

The concept of field is central to Bourdieu's theory because it is imbricated with those of capitals and habitus, due to fields being 'domains where human action occurs in a struggle for capital' (Duckworth, 2014, p. 26) and also because 'habitus and field designate bundles of relations (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007, p. 16). Therefore, it is vital to think about how it relates to habitus and capital, when seeking to define it, because Bourdieu had stipulated that they are relationally linked:

A field consists of a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital), while habitus consists of a set of historical

relations “deposited” within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007, p. 16)

Field, then, is a social space where agents develop networks and compete for power. The use of the phrase ‘historical relations’ twice, in the above quote, is significant in linking field to habitus, as the habitus is formed by life experiences, both as children and adults. When considering ‘mental and corporeal schemata’, there is a reminder that the habitus is of the mind and body; it can be useful to see the inherent synchronic and diachronic nature of how the habitus forms and transposes, because the past and the present are ineluctable forces of influence. There is a certain fluidity to social spaces, in that the balance of power within them depends on context and interaction with a person’s habitus (English & Bolton, 2016), hence it is almost impossible to fully account for the multiple social activities, which shape any field, depending on how the ‘rules of the game’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) are interpreted and applied.

The field of Further Education is the primary one for this research and there are sub-fields within it: namely NWC as one specific FE college; the peer tutoring programme itself, and the fields created when the GCSE resit and A Level students were paired up for the 1:1 sessions. Bourdieu argued that the field of education is one of the main sites of inequality and is manifested through the curriculum and social class (Duckworth, 2014). Adding to the metaphor of the field as a game, Bourdieu inverts the idiom ‘fish out of water’ to being like a ‘fish in water’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007, p. 127) as a way of highlighting the ease with which dominant social classes inhabit the fields they encounter. Although social class was not analysed through the data collected at NWC, the concept of field was used to explore hierarchies in student participants’ perceptions of their academic and non-academic identity, as well as other emerging themes in the analysis chapter. The overarching principle of Bourdieu’s fields is that agents vie for capitals or power within them and these social spaces are sites of conflict (Swartz, 2013) which depend on the formation of the agent’s habitus to position them within it.

### ***Doxa***

As with Bourdieu’s other theoretical concepts, doxa is defined by the ways in which it affects and interacts with habitus and field (Deer, 2014). Bourdieu said doxa can be understood as ‘a set of fundamental beliefs which does not even need to be asserted in the form of an explicit, self-conscious dogma’ (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 16) and one of the key words here is ‘dogma’ because it is based on the notion that doxa goes unchallenged, due to the fact it is taken for granted and submitted to unconsciously (English & Bolton, 2016). I argue that the field of education is heavily imbued with doxic beliefs because of the impact of policy



decisions influencing the GCSE resit students and teachers who took part in this peer tutoring research study. This is not to say that policy change goes completely unchallenged, nor do educational professionals shy away from openly stating the problems it can cause, but there is still a tacit compliance in the resit process, even when those changes are widely perceived as having a negative impact on young people resitting in FE colleges (Wilshaw, in Exley, 2016b; Foster, 2019; Sellgren, 2020; The Guardian, 2014). Returning to Bourdieu's 'rules of the game' metaphor (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), when analysing the field it is possible to see how the unchallenged nature of the doxa would align with adhering to the 'rules.' According to Webb et al. (2002), compliance within education, and particularly in schools, is common due to those institutions displaying a 'doxic attitude' (Webb et al., 2002, p. xi), stemming from their unquestioned 'fundamental beliefs' (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 16). It is important to bear in mind that agents accept the doxa because of their habitus and where they are positioned in the field. If agents within the field of education feel powerless to elicit change, which they feel will benefit them, then it is understandable how the GCSE resit 'problem' remains an embodied perception inherent within the FE sector.

In relation to the academic and education systems, Bourdieu posited that they were 'a sort of ideological mechanism; they are a mechanism that produces an unequal distribution of personal capital, and they legitimate this production' (Bourdieu & Eagleton, 1992, p. 113) so those who are privileged have an advantage over those who are not. In using the concept of doxa, the ideological foundations of education are based on the unequivocal acceptance of what has also been deemed as arbitrary (Deer, 2014; English & Bolton, 2016) and 'we accept many things without knowing them' (Bourdieu & Eagleton, 1992, p. 113). If people do not question their shared beliefs, then the established social order cannot change, thus strengthening the power and influence of the doxa by mutually reinforcing the relationship between field and habitus (Deer, 2014). Thus, even though the power of the doxa is symbolic, its application to policy practice in the UK, for GCSE English and maths resits is nonetheless overtly visible; arbitrary decisions made by government agencies about what is best for young people, holds FE institutions accountable for something over which they are often powerless to challenge, resulting in colleges such as NWC trying different ways to combat this. Bridget Fowler (1997) used Bourdieu's term 'doxosophes' to describe traditionally powerful figures in society as 'expounders of legitimate knowledge' (Fowler, 1997, p. 31), and this could be generalised to policymakers in the UK. However, within the context of GCSE English and maths resits, it is perhaps more in keeping with Bourdieu's own insights (Boschetti, 2006) to see those policymakers as what English and Bolton (2016) describe pejoratively as 'policy wonks' (English & Bolton, 2016, p. 21): i.e. engaging directly with policy but potentially believing they are wiser than they actually are, when it comes to deciding on policy change. By interrogating the policy changes through Bourdieu's critical

lens, it is possible to see the changes as symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) because they create barriers to progression for the students. Schubert (2014) believes that the notion of symbolic violence is more prevalent in Bourdieu's work on education than in his other areas of study; this being the case, the focus on those policy changes leading to the peer tutoring research at NWC sheds light on an area of conflict, which has thus far not been successfully contested.

## **Conclusion**

Bourdieu's 'theoretical triad –field, capital and habitus' (Swartz, 2013, p. 26) can be used as a valuable framework when undertaking educational research. When operationalised for the purposes of the peer tutoring study at NWC, the framework serves to show how the perceptions of staff and students were shaped by GCSE English and maths policy drivers. Based on the premise that peer tutoring is already well-established in HE (Topping, 1996), and by viewing the central principles as ways of making positive gains for both the tutor and the tutee (Topping, 1994), there is scope to analyse the student and staff narratives from multiple perspectives. Due to the fact the peer tutoring programme originated from a desire to help the GCSE students gain cultural capital in the form of educational qualifications/credentials (Bourdieu, 1986), it points to the importance within education of cultural capital in its institutionalized state and the presence of the motivation to meet personal and national GCSE targets. Social capital, stemming specifically from the relationships built within this peer tutoring study, creates new networks which although initially founded on unequal power relations, have the scope to highlight the transposable nature of the habitus (Bourdieu, 2000). Researching the field of education, and more precisely NWC, sitting within the field of FE, highlights the intractable demands placed on students and staff by policymakers (Sellgren, 2020). The struggle for access to capital within the field of education makes possible to analyse the shifts in power during the 1:1 tutoring sessions, as well as foregrounding the difficulty in finding a balance between structure and agency. If agency is being able to make your own choices, whilst considering how these choices are influenced by external structures, then the peer tutoring study at NWC could be seen as a prime example of how and why individuals act as they do. The influence of structures such as school, the family, college and the peer tutoring programme itself all converge in a cultural space inhabited by the staff and students, but the perceived impact on the students is especially interesting to observe.

## Chapter 4: Analysis

### *Introduction*

This analysis chapter deals with three main themes: failure and success; academic vs. non-academic identity, and structure and agency. The subsequent application of Bourdieu's theoretical concepts of field, capital and habitus as 'thinking tools' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 50), enables a certain level of flexibility in the interpretations made, because they can be thought of as guiding principles, used in a practical and theoretical sense to understand the actions of the participants. They have been applied across all three themes to the testimonies of individual students and their teachers, when discussing social groups created by the peer tutoring project, and when considering the organizational context where the research took place. In taking a Bourdieuan approach, it has been possible to operationalise his key concepts in the issues interrogated within this research. By using Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' to analyse and critique the research, a theoretical framework was applied, whereby it was possible to interpret the participants' underpinning decision making processes and social relations; in turn, this brought to light new knowledge in relation to peer tutoring on a GCSE resit programme in one FE college.

Bourdieu's definition of habitus as 'a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 82) anchored the impact of prevailing government policy upon young people studying in FE, in that it shaped participants' histories and opinions of how they are positioned within the education system, due to a GCSE resit policy, which stipulates students with a grade 3/old grade D or above must retake it, as a condition of funding (ESFA, 2019). The concept of habitus does not operate in isolation because it is situated in what Bourdieu refers to as a 'field', otherwise known as the 'rules of the game' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). The metaphor of the game is frequently used by Bourdieu to emphasise the struggle for specific resources, namely capitals, within a social space, which in the context of this research was an FE college. According to Odabaş and Adaman (2018), 'while the habitus reshapes the field through cognitive construction, through senses and values, the field conditions the habitus of the agent by determining the position of the agent in relation to the position of others in the field' (Odabas and Adaman, 2018, p. 313). How actors, or agents (i.e. GCSE and A Level students) perform within fields is determined by their accumulated cultural capital, which depends on their ability to draw upon a range of embodied strategies, inherited from their upbringing. Cultural capital, in the form of institutionalised educational qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986) and social capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007) evidenced by changed

responses to interactions with peers, and for one A Level student, in wider social settings, have been integral in explicating perceptions of failure and success, both in relation to GCSE qualifications and involvement in the peer tutoring programme itself. New social capital was created because the GCSE and A Level students struck up what I have described as 'functional friendships', operating in a new community of practice (Wenger, 2007) to revise prior knowledge, learn new knowledge and make social bonds within their educational institution. For the purposes of this research, the term 'functional friendships' is defined as: a purposeful relationship between peers, which is motivated by a mutually beneficial bond, or shared goals, and lasts until the purpose of that relationship has been fulfilled. This will be explored in more depth in the analysis of the 'Structures' theme.

Additionally, some understanding of the participants' doxa, known here as 'a set of fundamental beliefs', or common sense, (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 16) about their place within the field of education, opened up a discourse surrounding immutable attitudes towards failure and success in relation to what are deemed to be 'good' GCSE grades. Doxa, in an interview context, is said to produce knowledge 'about people's experiences, desires and opinions...which are often very interesting and important to learn about' (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p. 36) and this sits at the heart of this research project, because it aims to investigate the participants' perceptions of being involved in the peer tutoring programme. Moreover, doxa has a specific relevance within education and Bourdieu believed it is formed by ideology:

I could say that all the academic systems, all the educational systems, are a sort of ideological mechanism; they are a mechanism that produces an unequal distribution of personal capital, and they legitimate this production. Such mechanisms are unconscious...The social world doesn't work in terms of consciousness; it works in terms of practices, mechanisms and so forth. By using doxa we accept many things without knowing them, and that is what is called ideology. (Bourdieu & Eagleton, 1992, p. 113)

Within the 'Perceptions of failure and success' theme, the analysis of the interview transcripts shows how participants' experiences are framed within government level GCSE resit policy decisions, as well as those mechanisms within NWC, which are intended to provide gains in cultural capital for both GCSE and A Level students. Doxa is also pertinent on the basis that there is a tacit acceptance of the GCSE resit policy at NWC and I contend that symbolic capital should be considered alongside cultural capital because 'both dominant and dominated are subjects of an encompassing system that is itself structured around a hierarchical system' (Steinmetz, 2013, p. 117). Honour and prestige can be both given and taken away, based on educational qualifications achieved by individuals and in terms of the way schools and colleges are measured by their overall exam results: i.e. failure or success.

## **Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts**

The research methodology used for this study was a single case study and semi-structured interviews were used to generate data. The mode of analysis utilised Braun and Clarke's (2006, p. 87) six phase guide to thematic analysis which provided a framework, rather than a prescriptive process. During the analysis phase each of the stages was followed and each was important in helping to define and name the three final themes.

Familiarisation with data began as soon as the interviews had taken place. Due to the fact these were undertaken mid-June, it was possible to listen to the three initial interviews again and make notes on each, within ten days of the interviews taking place. Over the summer period 2017, the interviews were transcribed by one of the administrative team at my place of work; she was recommended by a colleague who was also undertaking an EdD. The reason for choosing to have them transcribed was entirely practical, in that with almost three hours of interviews to transcribe it was a better use of time to utilise specialist services. Once copies of the transcripts were received in September, it was possible to become immersed in the data due to printing them out and repeatedly reading and annotating them, manually. Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis particularly lent itself to the use of manual coding devices and pulled the results together with a high degree of flexibility, whilst undertaking a line-by-line reading of the interview transcripts and really interrogating what was said.; this was done 'in an active way - searching for meanings, patterns and so on' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 16). Once the fourth interview was undertaken in December 2017, all four transcripts were returned to periodically, until formally beginning the coding process in July 2019.

When generating the initial codes, any key words/phrases that related to the research questions, were identified and underlined, in addition to highlighting anything else that stood out, or was repeated across the four transcripts. Leading on from the manual familiarisation with themes, manual coding began in the form of creating a table in which there were 103 codes and a record of how many times the codes came up, in each of the four interviews. Having so many codes in the early stage is actually considered good practice because 'you never know what might be interesting later' (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 19). This can be best thought of as the organisational phase, as the data was sorted into 'meaningful groups' (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 18). Analysing line-by-line is recommended by Harding (2013, p. 83) who cites Rapley (2011, p. 280) when advising that 'at this stage, it may be useful to underline key phrases or make a note of what is of interest in order to assist in the process of thinking holistically about the data.' Although this can be deemed as a 'laborious task' (Basit, 2003, p. 145), I did not deem it so, especially as the data from the semi-structured interviews was rich, personal and enlightening.

Braun and Clarke state that a 'theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 10) and the patterns are derived from the coding stage. Themes can also be defined as 'features of participants' accounts characterising particular perceptions and/or experiences that the researcher sees as relevant to the research question' (University of Huddersfield, 2020) and the idea they can derive from a person's perceptions is relevant, when acknowledging that as a researcher you are responsible for generating the themes. When searching for themes, Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasise how this stage re-focuses the analysis phase and in order to do this further tables were created from the coding, whereby it was possible to see how the codes were collated into broadscale themes.

Before reviewing the themes, they were set aside for over a month to see what was evolving through fresh eyes. This also aligns with the fact that data analysis is an iterative process and ensured consistency in the initial themes and the ones kept during the review phase (Colvin, 2007). By this stage, ideas had emerged on how they fitted together and 'the overall story' they were telling (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 21). According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 225), 'researchers are not neutral; they have their own values, biases and world views, and these are the lenses through which they look at and interpret the already-interpreted world of participants'; hence it is acknowledged this analysis is just one possible lens through which to view the data, already highlighted as something which is one set of ideas from the participants at North West College (NWC, 2019). Additionally, Ryan and Bernard (2003) posit that:

themes are abstract (and often fuzzy) constructs that link not only expressions found in texts but also expressions found in images, sounds, and objects. You know you have found a theme when you can answer the question, What is this expression an example of? (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 87)

The themes extracted from the data are informed by my interpretations: i.e. the 'lenses' they are seen through are the researcher's own. Ryan and Bernard's description of themes as 'often fuzzy' perfectly aligns with the research overall, in that it highlights the ambiguous nature of qualitative research, which presents possibilities, not absolutes, especially as the themes selected stem from the participants' perceptions. Hence, a reflexive approach was adopted in line with Bourdieu's stance on the need to address and deal with the effects of 'the scholarly gaze' (Swartz, 2013, p. 24), as well as the acknowledgement of what Lather refers to as 'the condition of possibility of a different kind of thinking about representation' (Lather, 1996, p. 539). Although reflexivity can be thought of as 'profoundly paradoxical' (Perselli, 2008, p. 230), due to the fact researchers try to balance their engagement with their subject, alongside aiming not to assimilate or consume it, this can be viewed as an

intellectual challenge, rather than a research trope. Alongside this, Segall (1999) posits that different researchers will inherently produce different interpretations of the same events and this is now widely accepted. In light of the fact this peer tutoring study is inductive, once the analysis turns into findings, researcher bias will be addressed when making research claims, taking into account the imbricated nature of operationalising Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' and the wider concept of reflexivity. In simple terms, 'What are my biases? What is my position in the social space and how does this affect my questions, assumptions, concepts and methods' (Everett, 2002, p. 76). When defining the themes, the tutorials with my supervisor were integral, because they challenged me to explain why I had chosen those particular ones, therefore addressing bias and positioning was part of the final refinement process. Being able to clearly define what they are and what they are not (Braun & Clarke, 2006) ensured that the final three chosen were concise and encapsulated what had emerged from the data.

## ***Failure and success***

### **Introduction**

In defining this theme, failure and success is driven by the students' feelings and motivations, often resulting in either a sense of achievement when they have been successful, or disappointment when they feel they have failed. The students' and staff's judgements about failure or success were based upon whether the student passed or failed their GCSEs at grade 4/C or above, as well as the failure or success of the peer tutoring pairings. For the purposes of this research, self-doubt and a lack of confidence were classed as failure. Success was also attributed to increased levels of confidence, both in relation to feeling able to pass the GCSE exams and personal growth, though this was more so for the A Level students. The findings highlight how the students are positioned in the field of education and how the accrual of certain qualifications enables academic progression (NWC, 2019; Ofqual, 2013, 2015). This theme focuses on how the participants viewed their involvement in the peer tutoring scheme, in terms of whether they were able to meet their wider educational goals, as well as the more imminent objective of increasing their GCSE grades to a level 4 or above. It also provided some insight into dominant discourses of personal failure and success, including those from their secondary school education. The acquisition of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), in the institutionalized form of objectified academic qualifications, was deemed to be a significant indicator of failure or success, because fundamentally it defined the participants' roles as a tutor or a tutee. The A Level students possessed higher levels of cultural competence, due to them having achieved good GCSE qualifications (grade B/6 or above), so they undertook the role of tutors, whereas the GCSE resit students had 'failed' to achieve the desired grade 4/C and became tutees. For

the purpose of this analysis, it is important to note that staff and students use the words 'mentoring' and 'mentors', instead of tutoring or tutors. I chose not to correct them throughout the interviews because that would have undermined the relationship I had built with them. Additionally, if mentoring can be defined in terms of someone who has expert skills providing guidance to someone who is still refining theirs (Lane, 2012), it is possible to see why they might use these categorisations with their own students.

### **Failure, self-doubt and lack of confidence**

Perceptions of failure in relation to one of the peer tutoring partnerships was highlighted in the staff interview and supported by a personal communication from Alice. Alice (A Level) and Zachary (GCSE) met twice, once to get to know each other and once to get started, but the A Level tutor, Barbara, reported that Alice told her:

Barbara: he just keeps saying he can't do any of it! (Staff transcript, 12.6.17)

Alice's statement, submitted for the purposes of this research, explicitly says she was 'disappointed' as she was keen to participate in the peer tutoring scheme:

Me and Zachary met twice, 1 to get to know each other, 2 to start the mentoring. Unfortunately, I found it hard to help Zachary as he could not really say what he needed help with and when I asked him he just said "I just don't get any of it". He wasn't very keen to meet regularly and I was disappointed, as I would have liked to do this. (Alice, personal communication, June 2017)

Barbara went on to make a connection between what Zachary had said, in contrast to other students who were more able to pinpoint and articulate their areas of weakness:

Barbara: Something I've learnt really, even after many years of teaching, is the value of getting students to admit the difficulties they're having and the difficulty of doing that. (Staff transcript, 12.6.17)

This was reinforced by the Director of English and Maths, Heather, who summarised by saying:

Heather: It's admitting failure. (Staff transcript, 12.6.17)

Hence, failure in this context is twofold: firstly, in the breakdown of the tutoring partnership itself and secondly due to the reasons behind it. This could stem from a flaw in the tutor-tutee relationship and a lack of strength in the interpersonal tie. Within a dyadic relationship, Granovetter (1973) argues that 'the strength of a tie is a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding) and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie' (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1361). As Alice and Zachary only met twice, they did not build a tie, let alone strengthen it and whereas other pairings were able to achieve reciprocity, this was not the case here.



Ironically, Zachary was able to admit failure, but by stating he could not do 'any of it', Alice did not have the experience or knowledge of teaching strategies which had the potential to engage him: her frustration was evident from the statement she made and reinforced by her A Level tutor, Barbara. I contend that other factors are at play here, because Zachary and Alice had no existing peer relationship and may not have gelled with each other. It is also possible that unlike some of the other peer pairings, they needed more support from staff to establish the tutor/tutee relationship. It could have been due to an inability to communicate with each other, so discourse was inhibited. In relation to this study, Zachary's tendency to repeat that he could not do 'any of it' was a strong contributory factor of the failure of the peer tutoring pairing and was the reason why Alice became frustrated. Their experiences had a knock-on effect on their confidence in each other, showing how the dyadic relationship depends upon the tutor and the tutee being able to remain objective, as opposed to subjective. Existing structures, namely Zachary's perception of his lack of ability to understand any of his GCSE English course, created a barrier to his potential to learn with his peer tutor; therefore, in this particular instance his habitus remained resolutely unchanged (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Although this was perceived as failure, it is also possible to view Zachary's actions as a means of showing that individual agency can outweigh structure, especially when entering a new and uncertain field. Another way to theorise this situation is to consider the relevance of the linguistic habitus (Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991) because it is highly unlikely that Zachary did not understand any of his GCSE English studies. This in itself can be interpreted in two different ways: firstly, Zachary's linguistic habitus was not sufficiently developed to cope with the new context in which it was expected to function; or secondly, it could be a deliberate act of agency, whereby repetition of the same phrase meant that he could opt out of the peer tutoring programme, without making a direct withdrawal: most likely, it was aspects of both. Either way, the new social structure of the peer tutoring programme highlighted the tension between the two individuals participating and by applying Bourdieu's theoretical concepts, it has opened up a deeper understanding of what was initially perceived as a more deterministic act. Ironically, according to Reay, Bourdieu's concept of habitus has been criticised 'mainly on the basis of its latent determinism', but in this instance habitus has been used as a conceptual tool in 'an attempt to transcend dualisms of agency-structure, objective-subjective and the micro-macro' (Reay, 2004a, p. 432). Additionally, Bourdieu himself refuted these claims (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) on the basis that people's actions are shaped by multiple internal and external factors.

Although there was no sense of frustration from the staff perspective, in relation to Zachary and Alice's pairing, the Head of A Levels, Barbara, did express regret:

It makes me wish I'd pushed Alice and Zachary a bit more now, because I understood Alice's point of view, that he just wanted to go through this and just go

through that, he just wanted the answers. But even that might have been more useful to them than abandoning the project really. (Staff transcript, 12.6.17)

The inference in this extract is that Barbara has supported their decision not to continue with the peer tutoring sessions, mainly due to Alice being 'disappointed'; however, there is a clear acknowledgement that both would have benefitted had they been 'pushed' to keep it going. The word 'abandoning' has connotations of failure because of the choices made by this peer tutoring pair: they both walked away, when with perseverance and more encouragement from staff it might have worked. Zachary and Alice perceived this peer tutoring pairing as failure, due to agentic reasons in choosing not to meet again after the second session. The Head of A Levels perceived this as failure on two levels: in the first instance it was because Zachary and Alice stopped meeting and in the second because she did not provide additional support and encouragement. By not pushing Zachary and Alice to meet, the additional support they needed was missing; this is structural due to the fact Barbara is Head of A Levels and main contact for the peer tutoring scheme within NWC. As Alice's A Level biology tutor, Barbara had direct contact with her and additional time spent to understand the demands of the peer tutoring programme could have prevented the failure of this peer tutor pairing. This is borne out by Keenan (2014) who found that some tutees had a tendency to misinterpret the role of the peer tutor and were then disappointed when the peer tutor did not simply give them all the answers. When conceptualising peer learning, Hodgson et al. (2015) note the importance of inter-individual identity. The misinterpretation of the peer tutor role is significant because whereas Zachary's expectations appeared founded on behaviourist principles (Skinner, 1974), whereas Alice and NWC staff conceptualised their roles in a more constructivist manner (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, effective learning in this context 'is about conceptual change, not just the acquisition of information' (Biggs & Tang, 2007, p. 21). Additionally, this highlights the fact that 'the vast majority of peer tutors are generally unskilled or do not have a lot of didactical experience' (Berghmans et al., 2013, p. 705) and as such, there is more chance of success if peer tutors have been given more in-depth training.

There is evidence from the interview with the two GCSE students that Chloe had doubted her ability to pass her GCSEs since she was in year 7:

Well, I was surprised that I passed most of my GCSE's because I always thought from year 7, oh I'm not going to, but I won't worry about it until I got there. I actually did pass most of them, I only failed two. Erm and so I was surprised that I passed them! But I only just passed them, with C's, I didn't get anything higher and I know that to do A Levels, you have to be getting B's and A's and I'm just not going to get that. (GCSE transcript, 12.6.17)

Although Chloe passed all her other GCSEs at grade C, this was perceived as failure by herself because it did not give her the required grades to go straight onto a Level 3 A Level

or BTEC course. This perception is complex and has been explored in more depth in the analysis chapter, Academic vs Non-academic Identity; however by applying Bourdieu's definition of doxa, understood as 'a set of fundamental beliefs which does not even need to be asserted in the form of an explicit, self-conscious dogma' (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 16). Chloe outlines common beliefs about what measures as success or failure within and beyond the school system, in relation to her GCSE qualifications. According to NWC's A Level entry requirements (NWC, 2019), 5 GCSEs, including English and maths, at grade 4/5/6 (subject dependent) are required in order to enrol. The same 5 GCSEs entry requirement applies to their BTEC L3 Extended Diplomas, and include English and maths, but they are specified as needing generic grades 4-9 and are not subject dependent. The inclusion of English and maths in the English Baccalaureate school league tables (DfE, 2019) dictates the entry requirements for Level 3 studies in the UK, leaving students like Chloe feeling as if they have failed. Yet, when Chloe stated that she 'only just passed them with Cs', there is a further sense of failure because none of her grades were higher. This could be related back to how much cultural capital a person has (Bourdieu, 1986), and the way that the new grading system of 1-9 has a specific emphasis on the higher grades. According to Ofqual it 'has more higher grades compared to the old A\* to G grades, to give sixth forms, colleges, universities and employers the opportunity to better distinguish between students of different abilities' (Ofqual, 2019), which alludes to an elitist system of selection, where the power lies within educational structures.

During the interview with the GCSE students, Grace shared her thoughts about why so many students failed GCSEs in maths and/or English. Although failure in this instance is attributed to the exam system, it could be theorised that this is masking feelings of self-doubt; it is almost a defence mechanism, whereby failure in the exam is based on the difficulty of the revised examination syllabus:

Grace: I personally think that they are making GCSEs a lot harder than they need to be. Yeah, a lot harder, like with the maths, I heard rumours that they'd added A Level stuff into the maths, because if someone failed their maths and they've got to be doing like stuff that's borderline A Level, that's ridiculous. (GCSE transcript, 12.6.17)

Here Grace questions the validity of the maths GCSE, placing blame for failure to achieve the desired grade not on students but on the qualification itself. She sees the chances of passing a maths resit as unrealistic because the new GCSE specification, first taught in 2015 and examined in 2017, contains 'stuff that's borderline A Level', which to her is 'ridiculous.' Initially, this can be perceived in a negative light, Grace is a young person making excuses for her generation finding it difficult to pass their GCSEs, but conversely it could also be seen as empowering. In highlighting the changes to the GCSEs she demonstrates 'resistance capital' (Duckworth, 2014, p. 88), in that she resists the notion that the content

of the exams is actually appropriate. Having the confidence to articulate her opinions shows some resistance towards a system which has already been deemed problematic (DfE, 2017a). Although Grace did not elaborate on the 'rumours', there is evidence that the notion of GCSEs becoming harder is perpetuated by the press and on social media (ITV News, 2018; Riley, 2018; Turner, 2018), as well as by Barnaby Lenon (n.d), chairman of the Independent Schools Council who said 'They contain questions of a level of difficulty that we have not seen since the abolition of O levels in 1987' (cited in Pells, 2017).

Nevertheless, Ofqual has denied this will have an impact on the grades achieved:

We have seen quite a few comments about new GCSEs being 'too hard', or similar, as pupils take mock exams. The new GCSEs do have more challenging content – set by the Department for Education – than previously, but they are designed to be as accessible to the same range of student abilities as before. (Ofqual, 2018)

Furthermore, in the same article, Ofqual stated they 'make sure that it is no more difficult to get a particular grade from one year to the next in any GCSE or A level' (Ofqual, 2018). The 'more challenging content' is what Grace likens to 'borderline A Level' and to her, this is why students fail their GCSEs, yet this is not borne out by pass rates which increased by 0.4% in 2019 (Richardson, 2019).

The way that Grace and Chloe perceived personal failure, both in relation to the structure of the new GCSE examinations and their own abilities, possibly stemmed from their failure to accrue these integral qualifications first time round. However, it could be posited that this is too simplistic, if considered solely in light of their own agency. Young people who do not get the desired GCSE grades first time around can find it difficult to transition to FE. There is literature to support the notion that this is an education failure and not an individual one (Atkins, 2008; Smit, 2010) because the resit policy is built on a deficit model, which in turn reinforces negative stereotypes surrounding those students who have not met the desired grade. Ultimately, it is more nuanced than this and is an interaction of the two: the structure of the GCSE resit policy and the individual agency of those participating in the peer tutoring programme. According to the GCSE resit students they were led to participate in the peer tutoring programme at NWC, at the suggestion of their tutors, in the hope that the 1:1 peer support would increase their chances of passing second time around:

Grace: Erm, we both became involved because we were chosen, it wasn't really a 'who wants to participate?'

Michelle: Okay, so you were chosen, and if you were chosen, what's the purpose of the programme? When you were chosen for it and you agreed to do it, what were you told about what the purpose of it is?

Grace: To boost our grades in English, so we would definitely secure the grade we need.

Michelle: Right, okay, would you agree with that then, Chloe?

Chloe: Yeah. (GCSE Transcript, 12.6.17)

Grace's assertion that being part of the peer tutoring programme meant they 'would definitely secure the grade we need' was verified by Chloe, albeit in their words, not those of the NWC staff. Despite this, only Grace and Chloe themselves could secure the grades they needed in the resit exams and peer tutoring would be just one factor overall, albeit a factor which Grace saw in terms of them having an advantage over other GCSE resit students:

Grace: at the end of the day, it's extra support and we're all in the same boat.  
(GCSE Transcript, 12.6.17)

Nevertheless, if the GCSE students believed so strongly in the peer tutoring programme as tool to help them pass, it aligns with one definition of peer tutoring as 'a pedagogical tool to promote curriculum learning' (Havnes, 2008, p. 193), and subsequently this could have impacted on their levels of confidence to pass second time around. Hodgson et al. (2015, p. 580) explored the conceptual background of peer learning in relation to 'a strategic or achieving approach', whereby the overall purpose is to attain the best grades, and in the peer tutoring programme at NWC both Grace and Chloe conformed to this belief. Furthermore, when Grace used the metaphor 'we're all in the same boat' she alluded to a sense of collective 'resistance capital' (Duckworth, 2013, p.88), in that the mutual academic and social investment of the time invested within the peer tutoring sessions 'increases the scholastic yield from educational action' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243).

The A Level students lacked confidence in their ability to tutor effectively because the GCSE English specification changed the year after they sat their own GCSEs (Ofqual, 2015). It became 100% exam only and so the structure was different:

Paige: Erm, for me because our GCSE English was different to this one, so if it wants to be focused primarily on English, or just English involved, I'd feel more confident actually being taught the paper a bit more than we were. We were given a copy of the paper and a copy of the mark scheme, but it wasn't the same. You know I didn't always feel completely confident in saying 'this is how you should answer the question', it was always 'I think this is how you answer the question 'do you want to ask your teacher, just to double check?'' but other than that I think it worked out well.

Michelle: Okay. What about you, Anila?

Anila: That was a very good point, because we did a completely [different paper] at GCSE, my paper was different, so I had to sort of accustom myself to this new GCSE paper. (A Level transcript, 12.6.17)

The A Level students were given some relevant resources by their own tutors, but they did not feel confident because they were not 'taught the paper.' Despite the fact they did not feel confident, they managed to accommodate this by deferring final responsibility to the GCSE class tutor to 'double check' and adapting to the changes themselves. In a report for the Higher Education Academy, Keenan (2014) found that in survey responses 97.6% indicated the training provided to peer tutors was 'considered to be very important'

(Keenan, 2014, p. 12). Keenan's report found evidence to show that HE peer assisted learning programmes were more well-established and resourced; some, peer tutors in those contexts received one or two days training, plus weekly face to face update meetings. This is also supported by Topping (1992, 1994, 1996, 2005) and Giles et al. (2016, p. 6), especially in relation to 'weekly debriefs.' Although a training session for the A Level students did take place (see slides and materials in Appendix 4 and 6), the interview data suggests that this was not sufficient to build their confidence to the degree that they were able to claim autonomy within their tutoring role. The Head of A Levels, Barbara, also met with the A Level students but this was not necessarily on a weekly basis and was more ad hoc, as opposed to a standardised approach. Therefore, the importance of initial training and the need for ongoing support has significant implications for peer tutoring programmes in FE, if peer tutors are to feel confident in their roles. Berghmans et al., (2013) advocate a three tier approach to training for the peer tutors, covering generic tutoring practices, discussion with class tutors regarding specific course content, and ongoing feedback sessions throughout the tutoring process, in order to 'discuss their tutoring experiences and challenges with the coordinator, both individually and in group' (Berghmans et al., 2013, p. 707). This was only loosely applied at NWC and moving forward, there should be a more unified approach to ensure they had higher levels of confidence.

The A Level students' lack of confidence was reiterated by the Head of A Levels and The Head of English and Maths. Again, this was largely attributed to the changes in the GCSE English specification, but they also reflected on how they themselves deliberately gave the students autonomy:

Barbara: Another thing, which we said to you at the beginning, was the students were very nervous because it was a different spec. I don't know if they said that to you.

Michelle: The A Level students did, yes.

Barbara: Yeah, because it wasn't the same specification they'd followed themselves, we had a bit of confidence building to do there about, it's your skills, it's your maturity, it's just your time and attention. I think the best relationships worked, where they just let the students work their own ideas out themselves, rather than have masses of input. At the beginning they thought they were mini-teachers, didn't they?

Heather: I think what we've learnt from it as well, one of the things we were talking about, the good English Lit students who are helping these students, don't necessarily know the answers that these GCSE students might want. So, if we were going to roll it out, we would need to do some pre-planning with the kind of mentors to help them I think. Whereas we kind of, in the nature of how we wanted it to work, we let them get on with it, we wanted it to be kind of student-led, which is brave. (Staff Transcript, 12.6.17)

This transcript extract shows how the staff placed a lot of trust in the abilities of the A Level students. Even though they knew they were 'very nervous', the staff let them 'work their own ideas out themselves, rather than have masses of input.' On one level this conflicts

with the amount of support and training the A Level students felt they needed, and it could be perceived as a high risk strategy to let nervous students, who openly declared their lack of confidence in tutoring for the new specification, take on the role of 'mini-teachers.' However, on another level it also validates how the staff made the right decision, due to the A Level students being able to accustom themselves to the new specification. Ultimately though, Heather, The Director of English and Maths, alludes to the fact this peer tutoring scheme would have benefitted from more 'pre-planning' because if they were to take it forward they would change it to incorporate more structure for the peer tutors (or mentors as they are referred to above). That said, there appears to have been a specific agenda to make the scheme 'student-led.' In describing this decision as 'brave' Heather infers that it is difficult for staff to hand over control to the students, especially as this was the first time NWC had used A Level students to peer tutor GCSE students. It could be argued these decisions made by NWC staff have shaped the A Level students' habitus because it is 'transposable' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 82) and this is due to the students' understandings of their responsibilities as 'mini teachers.' Although initially fearful they would not be able to fulfil this role, owing to the change in GCSE specification, the staff's willingness to take a risk, and trust in the ability of students to operate autonomously, was mutually beneficial. Bourdieu believed that 'mental structures do not simply reflect social structures. The habitus and field maintain a relationship of mutual attraction' (Bourdieu & Accardo, 1999, p. 512) and during the peer tutoring project at NWC the students' ability to use comparative mental structures (i.e. work on the similarities between the old specification and the new) may have altered their habitus within this particular field.

The students' lack of self-confidence was also perceived by staff as a barrier when they were setting up the peer tutoring programme, not only in relation to change in the GCSE English specification, but also working with a peer they did not know, on a one-to-one basis:

Michelle: Again, you've kind of talked about this but what were the difficulties in setting it up?

Barbara: I think student confidence was a massive thing...

Heather: Yeah, they didn't want to have to sit with someone they didn't know, they were very scared of the one-to-one and the confidence about the new spec that was a real problem. (Staff Transcript, 12.6.17)

The Head of English and Maths, Heather, here addresses the apprehensions young people feel about being in close proximity with peers they do not yet know. However, research suggests paired 1:1 tutoring is effective because it creates a better environment for keeping on task, as well as ensuring the tutor and tutee are more aware of their responsibilities towards each other (Topping, 1994). The fact that staff helped the students involved in the peer tutoring programme to overcome their nervousness and lack of confidence,

demonstrates a belief in its underlying principles and their experience in working with the 16-19 age group. When analysing Barbara's and Heather's use of language, the adjectives 'massive' and 'scared' emphasise their perceptions of the scale of the obstacles the A Level students had to overcome, in relation to their initial lack of self-confidence; both with reference to apprehensions surrounding the new GCSE English specification and working with different peers, in a new and unchartered educational context. Yet rather than these barriers becoming inhibitors to success, most students did manage to navigate their way through them, gaining in confidence as part of the process and it appears there were benefits to the scheme being student-led. Moreover, it enabled distribution of capital in its symbolic form (Bourdieu, 1986), because these participants recognised and gave value to overcoming apprehensions in order to take on the role of a 'mini teacher.' In a sense, the A Level students' fears about teaching the new specification were normalised by their teachers, as 'it is not unlikely that peer tutors, who are novices, experience various insecurities and concerns about their role' (Berghmans et al., 2013, p. 706), largely because their motivation to take part outweighed their fear of getting it wrong.

### **Success, personal growth and gaining in confidence**

To coin a metaphor used by Barbara, the Head of A Levels, being involved in the peer tutoring programme meant that students were able to 'walk a bit taller' (Staff Transcript, 12.6.17) and there are many examples of this throughout all four of the interviews. Barbara reported a conversation with Anna, the students' GCSE English tutor:

Barbara: She said she wasn't really sure in terms of their skills, whether they'd passed/progressed or not. But she said that Chloe was growing in confidence and that was really clear. (Staff transcript, 12.6.17)

Bearing in mind that at the time of the staff interview (June 2017) Anna had been teaching the GCSE students for a full academic year, her assertion that Chloe's growing in confidence 'was really clear' is a significant finding. According to Chloe's tutor, her earlier self-doubt (GCSE Transcript, 12.6.17) was less apparent after being involved in the peer tutoring programme and this was also verified by Chloe and Grace themselves:

Grace: Err, yes I feel like just having the 1:1 and just being, you know, I personally learn better just talking 1:1, so for me it did work well and did help with my performance.

Michelle: Would you say that was then both in the classes, so you'd had tuition and then when you went into class, you actually felt a bit more confident in what you were doing?

Grace: Yeah, definitely.

Michelle: Erm, I know you've only just done the exams, but did you feel any different in that exam as far as confidence went?

Grace: Yeah, I'm more confident, erm, yeah.

Michelle: Okay.



Chloe: Yeah, pretty much the same. That last [English] exam went well, so I guess some of the knowledge contributed would have been from the sessions. (GCSE Transcript, 12.6.17)

This extract relates to confidence in performance in the 1:1 sessions, subsequent GCSE classes and the GCSE English exam, as opposed to what Barbara describes as: 'walk[ing] a bit taller.' Here the definition of success understanding the content of the GCSE classes better and finding the GCSE exams easier. It links back to the GCSE students' reason for participating in the peer tutoring programme so they could 'definitely secure' the grades they needed to give them cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), in the institutionalised form of educational qualifications. According to Reay, 'what all Bourdieu's capitals share is that each requires, and is the product of, an investment of an appropriate kind and each can secure a return on that investment' (Reay, 2004b, p. 74). This being the case, there is evidence of a functionalist perspective whereby individuals' actions have a rational purpose: they are a means to an end (Williams, 2016), which contrasts with the findings from the A Level students' perspectives, especially for Paige, whose experience in relation to gaining in confidence was the most transformative.

Topping is a major proponent of peer learning and he believes that peer tutoring should 'add value to the educational experience for both tutor and tutee' (Topping, 1994, p. 11); when analysing the findings from the peer tutoring programme at NWC, this is borne out by the progressive or incremental instances of gaining in confidence (Ford et al., 2015; Giles et al., 2016). Paige was paired with Chloe in the peer tutoring programme and in response to interview question 3b) Did it improve your confidence in any way? (see Appendix 1), the following discussion took place:

Paige: Yeah, my sister's commented on it apparently, saying that I'm a lot more confident than I was. Erm, I don't know, I think it's just sometimes you struggle to speak to a peer you may not necessarily know, because it's just the whole, you know, judging and prejudiced thing with our age. No, but it really helped getting to know somebody else and then getting to know a few of her friends. Some of them were doing this programme, some of them weren't, but I got to know them as well and it was nice, just getting to know other people at college. You don't know everyone at college, it's really different to high school. Erm, so it was nice to know a few more people.

Michelle: What did your sister say?

Paige: She said I'm a lot more confident now than I used to be, erm, just in general, like in shops, I'll speak to the man behind the till more than I used to. I'm just more extroverted now, than I used to be!

Michelle: Right, so would you have described yourself as being quite shy before then?

Paige: Yeah, I was really, really shy. I wouldn't like open up to anyone, unless I knew them really, really well. Yeah, so I'm different now, but it's a good/happy different. (A Level Transcript, 12.6.17)

In this extract Paige related her growth in confidence to feeling more comfortable talking to peers of a similar age, which had previously been a barrier due to her being 'really, really shy.' Although this barrier inhibited development of relationships with people of her age, there is no suggestion it acted as a barrier to her future engagement and educational outcome success, as Paige achieved high grades in her GCSEs and had friends she knew 'really, really well.' However, without the peer tutoring programme she would not have had cause or legitimate opportunity to interact with the GCSE students. Paige's fear of the 'judging and prejudiced thing' within her age group was overcome by spending time with Chloe and her friends, thus peer learning took place on an interpersonal level, as opposed to on a subject knowledge-based level with Chloe and Grace (GCSE Transcript, 12.6.17). Moving on from Paige's 'struggle to speak to a peer' to her finding it 'nice to know a few more people' demonstrates a major breakthrough with her levels of confidence and is what I have deemed to be a 'functional friendship' because it only existed during the peer tutoring programme. Indeed, this has transposed from the college environment to wider social interactions with 'the man behind the till' and thereby given her access to social capitals (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007), previously impeded by her shyness. Additionally, the antonyms in Paige's language, for example in her use of the words 'shy/extroverted', shows a discourse of self-awareness and self-belief, especially as the differences she (and her sister) noticed are 'a happy/good different.' Perhaps the most significant realisation for Paige, though, was the realisation she could carry her new-found confidence forward in her future career:

Paige: I've always wanted to go into further education, teaching-wise, and this has proved that I could do it. That's given me confidence in myself, that I could actually teach, erm, so I'm happy! (A Level Transcript, 12.6.17)

Research such as this peer tutoring programme at NWC is small scale and while the findings are not generalisable, they are no less significant, or relatable to young people in further education (Taylor et al., 2008). Paige's experience is testament to this, an authentic realisation of her own capabilities and the positive impact this can have on her goals. This provides evidence for RQ3: What perceived impact does being involved in the peer tutoring programme have on students' educational goals and social relations? There is also evidence from the staff to corroborate it, in terms of Paige's experience and more broadly in terms of what they observed during the weeks the peer tutoring programme ran. Deliberate consideration has been given here to Paige's individual agency because this chapter has enabled the analysis of perceptions, whereas others, such as Structures, consider external factors in more detail.

When discussing the potential for personal growth, Heather and Barbara noted that although students like Paige were confident in their own knowledge and understanding of

GCSE English, most 17 year olds are not confident in themselves (Staff Transcript, 12.6.17). They were very interested when I recounted what Paige had said regarding her improvement in confidence during the interview with the A Level students, prompting Barbara to link the A Level students' growing confidence to burgeoning leadership skills:

Barbara: I do think, because I teach Anila and Sanaz and Elizabeth, who are in that group and they certainly see themselves more as a leadership role, because they practise those skills...Some of them were doing their sessions [peer tutoring 1:1s] in the biology lab, because it happened to be empty at the time, and one of the GCSE students had come in to one of the A Level students and asked 'oooh, can you show me how to focus that microscope?' She didn't know herself, but she [A Level student] thought 'I'm going to have to focus this microscope, or I'm going to have no credibility at all!' and she actually, for the first time, focused the microscope herself. If you're in that caring role, you go beyond your own ability, you push the envelope, because you have to, in order to protect or encourage the other person. So I've certainly seen that with the ones I teach and sadly I don't teach Paige, that is great sadness to me. (Staff Transcript 12.6.17)

The A Level student's decision to 'push the envelope' was an attempt to save face with someone who looks up to her and the sense of needing to be credible meant that she learned a new skill herself, thereby testing her own ability and achieving success. This may seem like a trivial achievement, but it is far from that. The fact she was asked for help by her GCSE tutee ignited her leadership skills and subsequently enhanced this relationship. I argue that for the A Level students, being involved in the peer tutoring programme has begun to influence their habitus positively, because the A Level students' perceptions of themselves as learners is being restructured to one of a caring/teaching role (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). The way they see themselves, when relating to the outside world and/or other students, has been positively reinforced by their increased cultural and educational capital, thus, it could also be argued, adding value to the peer tutoring programme and the A Level students who participated.

## **Conclusion**

Through the analysis of the participants' perceptions of failure and success it has been possible to uncover some key ideas about peer tutoring on the GCSE resit programme at NWC. The interview findings suggest the government's GCSE resit policy promotes the doxa (Bourdieu, 2000) that any GCSE achieved, which is below a grade 4/C is perceived as failure. GCSE resit students have been socialised to accept the help of their peers, in order to improve their chances of achieving the desired GCSE grades. Even though participation in the project was on a voluntary basis, and the purpose was to provide support to ensure the GCSE students could reach their educational goals, the shared belief within this educational field was that success for the GCSE students was measured as cultural capital in the institutionalised form of educational qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986). The successes for the A Level students were largely attributed to subtle changes within the habitus (Bourdieu &

Passeron, 1990), such as increased levels of confidence and willingness to go beyond their own perceptions of their abilities.

## ***Academic vs non-academic identity***

### **Introduction**

The Academic vs non-academic identity theme examines students' beliefs regarding what is and what is not perceived as academic and is central to the key findings of this study; it applies to personal experiences, as well as within the wider field of education. Data from the staff interview has not been included because it was not discussed in any specific detail and has already been examined in the 'Perceptions of failure and success' chapter. In relation to this research, students largely defined themselves and others as being academic if they got 'good' passes first time in their GCSEs and took A Levels, instead of BTECs, once they had left school. Dictionary definitions link academic identity to institutions of study, as well as individual personal traits (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020; Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, 2020) and as a starting point, this broadly introduces what is, in fact, an ontological concept, in that although it can be related to gaining 'good' academic qualifications, it is abstract in nature and is therefore much more complex. Quigley (2011) believes that being academic is a shifting concept that cannot easily be defined, especially as it can differ for each person, and be influenced by multiple factors such as age, race, class and gender (Archer, 2008). In light of this, although students within the research study at NWC, did see themselves as being either academic or non-academic, this is an unhelpful and dangerous dichotomy because it could be an inhibitor of educational progress. Additionally, Dunham (2016, p. 2) posits that 'Student academic identity refers to the appropriation of academic values and practices within a sense of self, reflecting the willingness and commitment to the practices of the academic community' and this can be applied to Bourdieu's conceptual framework because the notion of capital, field and habitus encompass the subjective and the objective.

Failure to reach government targets of attaining 5 GCSEs, including maths and English, at level 9-4 (old grade A\*-C) led to GCSE resit students, who participated in this research, perceiving themselves as being non-academic, as opposed to seeing their GCSE results as one element of their longer educational experience. This prompted discussion surrounding the hierarchical nature of qualifications in the UK, based on the influence schools and teachers have on this, as well as how the A Level qualifications themselves are structured, acting as a barrier for some students and highlighting the academic/vocational divide. In terms of A Levels, barriers exist because colleges set entry requirements adhering to government targets of 5 GCSEs at level 9-4, including maths and English, but at North West

College (NWC) these are subject dependent and some require a level 5 or 6 (NWC, 2019), whereas L3 BTECs require the 5 same GCSEs at level 9-4, without higher specified grades. Bourdieu's theoretical concepts of field, capital and habitus have been used as 'thinking tools' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 50) to operationalise data collected during the interviews with NWC students, so that this research can be theorised, whilst articulating perceptions and experiences. In terms of how this research contributes to new knowledge, no current other research into peer learning in FE, and particularly in relation to GCSE resits exists; nor have Bourdieu's concepts been used to explore how forms of capital influenced participants' perceptions. Building upon Bourdieu's capitals, the notion of educational capital (Howard, McLaughlin & Vacha, 1996) has been utilised to explore how schools and families can impact upon the range of qualification and career choices (or lack of choices) deemed as viable. Furthermore, this highlights inequalities related to academic capital, or prior educational achievement, and what this means in terms of students' perceptions of whether or not they have an academic predisposition (Naidoo, 2004). Feeding into the hierarchy of qualifications and how this grants or limits access to educational capital, highlighted, in some instances, a contradictory emergence of attitudinal responses, regarding claims of who is perceived as academic and who is not.

## **Hierarchy of qualifications**

A hierarchy is a system of classification which places things in order of importance. It can be argued that the field of education has a hierarchical structure because the individuals and organisations who operate within it occupy either dominant or subordinate positions (Naidoo, 2004), based on their access to cultural capitals. Educational qualifications are institutionalised forms of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), symbolising competence and expertise; they can be further classified as academic capital, in those instances where possession of these resources (or capitals) leads to them being 'instruments of reproduction' (Naidoo, 2004, p. 458). Furthermore, Duckworth (2014, p. 188) argues that 'hegemony seeps through the very fabric of an education system which is deeply aligned to a global neo-liberal market place, with competition at its helm' and this infers that competition is a key driver, not only for the individual but also in worldwide hierarchies. Hierarchies exist and are perpetuated, due to the resources available to individuals and how they are positioned in the field, in relation to others. Crucially, according to Bourdieu (1986, 1990), the power relations within these fields provide access to or limitations upon the forms of capital acquired. The two GCSE resit and two A Level students who took part in the interviews disclosed their belief that within the hierarchy of qualifications, GCSE resits were at the bottom and A Levels at the top; overall, BTECs were not deemed as being prestigious qualifications, nor were they perceived as appropriate for academic students. This was largely driven by what the students were told in school about studying in further education

and guidance on what students should study is dependent on their categorisation within school ability sets:

Paige: Top sets, what are you told to do? A Levels. What are you told to strive for? A Levels. Don't do anything else, don't do an apprenticeship, don't do a BTEC, do A Levels. (GCSE & A Level transcript, 7.12.17)

Teachers (and sometimes parents) set a course for young people's studies, directing them towards academic (A Levels) or vocational courses (BTECs and apprenticeships), thereby perpetuating the opinion that students in the top sets should only do A Levels. In the interview extract above, Paige uses the verb 'told'; this has an instructional tone, and strongly infers that there was no other choice available to her. Her use of the phrase 'strive for' is poignant in this context because it connotes a struggle, which is tacitly accepted in the study of A Levels (Cuff, 2017; Gorard & Smith, 2007).

To understand better how the hierarchy of qualifications may have come to exist, it is helpful to look at the history of A Levels and BTECs in more depth. A Levels replaced the Higher School Certificate in 1951 (Boyson, 1996) and since then they have been referred to as representing the 'gold standard' of educational attainment (Payne, 2000; Politics.co.uk, n.d; Stewart, 2014). Until 2000 A Levels were exam only based and were a single unit qualification, sat at the end of a two year course. Curriculum 2000 led to the introduction of AS Levels at the end of Y1 and A2 units at the end of Y2. The A Level became an entirely modular based curriculum and students could resit modules a number of times (Parliament.uk, 2003). In 2014, the then Education Secretary, Michael Gove, announced reforms for both GCSEs and A Levels. He said this would 'address the pernicious damage caused by grade inflation and dumbing down, which have undermined students' achievements for far too long' (DfE, 2014) and once again, A Levels returned to largely exam only assessment, at the end of a two year period. Hence, despite A Levels being held up as the 'gold standard', the qualification is not without controversy, and accusations about grade inflation have existed for decades (Boyson, 1996; TES Editorial, 2019). However, Gove's call for change did not align with research conducted by Ipsos MORI on behalf of Ofqual, where confidence in A Levels remained high for both teachers and students (Ipsos MORI, 2012), which is possibly why the qualification is still held in high esteem in schools, sixth forms and colleges. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990, p. 145) posit that the purpose of exams is to offer a more equal form of assessment, because everyone sits the same test at the same time. Therefore, they have a 'functional weight within the educational system' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 145); and yet, they also acknowledge that exams serve a 'traditional function of conserving and transmitting a culture inherited from the past' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 145), so Gove's assertion that the return to exam based

assessment is for the benefit of the students undertaking it, could be deemed as somewhat egregious.

In contrast to the long-established A Level, BTECs were introduced by, and named after, the Business and Technology Education Council in 1984, as vocational or work related courses. They followed a more practical approach to learning (BTEC Jobs, 2020) and were designed to provide flexibility and progression opportunities in vocational subjects such as Health and Social Care and Construction. As such, they are now well-established qualifications, popular in both sixth forms and FE colleges, seen as enabling access to HE courses and/or leading directly to employment (Burgess & Rodger, 2010). In a research report, commissioned by the UK government on 14-19 qualifications, Burgess and Rodger (2010, p. 35) 'use the term "vocational learners" to describe HE students who applied for or entered their course with predominantly vocational qualifications (primarily BTECs). "Traditional learners" are their counterparts possessing academic qualifications (primarily A Levels).' This is, perhaps, where the crux of the divisions lie: although both qualifications can lead to HE courses, the route the students took, was either 'traditional' (i.e. academic) or 'vocational', and as such, this categorises them in different ways. In 2018 BTECs underwent some curriculum changes to provide more parity with A Levels, those being: more external assessment, only one opportunity to resit a unit and a synoptic assessment, as evidence 'that a student can use all of the skills, techniques, concepts, theories, and knowledge they have learnt' (UCAS, 2020). This required evidence of learning and assessment explicitly refers to concepts and theories, both of which can be associated with academic study, and as Paige (A Level student) succinctly said to Chloe (L3 BTEC student), 'But you are academic, you are' (GCSE & A Level transcript, 7.12.17). This is another example of 'resistance capital' (Duckworth, 2014, p.88), yet it is Paige who asserts it on Chloe's behalf. Rather than viewing this as patronising, or disempowering for Chloe, it gives insight into how by working together, peers can affirm the development of aspects of a scholastic habitus (English & Bolton, 2016) in ways that teachers cannot.

Hierarchies were also manifested within this research when the GCSE students outlined the type of peer tutor they preferred and the courses they wanted them to be chosen from. Grace, in particular, stated a strong preference for peer tutors being selected from A Level courses, as opposed to BTECs:

Grace: I personally prefer it if they've done A Levels, because I know they've got the academic ability; and I know they're high enough so like, I'm not treading on their toes as it were! Like, I can't tell them something that they don't already know; if it's a BTEC then we already have the same, most people don't choose a BTEC, the fact that they're doing a BTEC, rather than an A Level isn't out of choice. (GCSE transcript, 12.6.17)

Although Grace conflates GCSEs and BTECs, irrespective of the fact that any potential peer tutor at NWC would be on a L3 course, she does clearly state that only A Level students have 'the academic ability' and are 'high enough'; this value judgement links to RQ2: What factors affect GCSE and A Level student motivation to take part in a peer tutoring programme at one FE college? Grace was motivated by the fact she received tuition from an A Level student, as opposed to a BTEC student, because she perceived A Level students as having more cultural capital in the institutionalised form of specific and prestigious educational qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986). Here, Grace perpetuates the notion that A Levels are the 'gold standard' and in being able to study them, the peer tutors' academic capital places them above the GCSE resit and BTEC student in this hierarchy. Grace did not want someone who she perceived to have 'the same' as her: she actively wanted someone 'high enough.' This also highlights what Fowler (1997, p. 21) calls the 'fuzziness of polythetic thought', in that for Grace, it is essential for an A Level student to be a peer tutor, but in theory, anyone who has already achieved a 'good' GCSE pass, and is motivated to be a peer tutor, would still possess all the attributes needed. Thinking back to what Paige said about the way schools encourage students in the top sets to study A Levels instead of BTECs, it shows how Grace has also been inculcated to perpetuate the belief that students who study A Levels are academically superior to those who study BTECs. This can also be linked to literature relating to Vygotsky's (1978) social learning theory and the concept of the more knowledgeable other (MKO), but Grace's personal preference for peer tutors to be undertaking A Levels adds another strata to the hierarchy.

Even though the interview data shows that a hierarchy of qualifications exists, some contradictory perceptions emerged relating to the fact that although A Levels are deemed to be more academic, BTECs can enable students to enter university degree courses and access the same careers. This is especially evident in the following extract:

Chloe: If I pass the [BTEC L3] course, I'm still going to go to university, like what you'll be doing, so it's the same. I think people look at it like BTECs are lower than A Levels, but it isn't, it's just a different way of doing it and getting the grade.  
 Michelle: It interests me, the fact that it can be perceived as being lower than A Levels.  
 Paige: It is if you speak to some of the other students around college.  
 Chloe: Yeah, it is.  
 Michelle: Why do you think that is? Who puts that in people's minds? Where does that come from?  
 Chloe: I don't know, I feel like the way I see it, like, the smart people do A Levels and the not so smart people do BTECs. That's how I see it, it's how I've always seen it. (GCSE & A Level transcript, 7.12.17)

Hence, it appears that it is not the level of qualification brought into question here, but the type of qualification. All level 3 qualifications are the stepping stones for higher education studies and yet, according to Paige and Chloe, 'smart people' do A Levels and 'not so smart



people' do BTECs. This is an interesting concept here because in terms of the acquisition of educational capital, it does not depend on the place of study; i.e. there is a notion that sixth forms can be perceived as 'tribal totems' (Wilby, 2016) with more prestige than FE colleges, such as NWC. Moreover, Paige and Chloe's inferred lack of bias against FE, could be said to undermine the general perception of FE's association with vocational qualifications and having 'less prestige than (supposedly) equivalent academic qualifications conveys a 'down market' image' (Foskett & Lumby, 1999, p. 134). Although Paige and Chloe would agree with the vocational v. academic divide, as long as a person studies A Levels instead of BTECs in an FE college, they are still classified within the hierarchy of qualifications as being 'smart.' Chloe is unable to articulate exactly why she thinks only 'smart' people can do A Levels, yet she is vehement in her assertion in that she has 'always seen' it like that; in contrast, Paige attributes it to speaking to her peer group. Chloe's interview responses show contradictory thought, in that she says she is going to university like Paige, 'so it's the same', but she cannot see herself as 'smart' because she is doing a BTEC. Bringing this back to Bourdieu's concept of educational capital, as measured by attainment of qualifications, this reinforces how academic (smart) and non-academic (not so smart) categorisation has been normalised and accepted (Bourdieu, 1996), in this context. Chloe's agentic statement 'I'm still going to go to university, like what you'll be doing', shows her capacity to claim her place in HE; her perceived lack of academic capital, inculcated by her experience in the education system so far, is a barrier she believes she can overcome. Additionally it is argued that Chloe's statement resists disempowerment and demonstrates 'resistance capital' (Duckworth, 2014, p. 88) in that although her school experiences have led to her not feeling 'smart' enough to do A Levels, she understands that her L3 BTEC will enable her to go to university like Paige. The tone of Chloe's statement 'I think people look at it like BTECs are lower than A Levels, but it isn't' is authoritative, showing her ability to contextualise her FE studies, based on how they grant her access to HE. She can see the 'scholastic yield' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243) not only in relation to her GCSE results but how this also extends to her L3 course and beyond. Chloe clearly understands the need for scholastic investment in her own education.

### **Educational capital - being 'A Level smart'**

Bourdieu argued that educational capital was a form of cultural capital, due to the fact it can be 'inherited from the family or acquired at school' (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 13). He noted the connection between cultural practices and educational qualifications, as well as the way social origins factor into the equation. Within the research conducted at NWC, social class was not measured, hence for the purposes of this analysis, Bourdieu's concept of educational capital has been operationalised to interrogate how the education system, and subsequently the students within it, measured themselves as being academic or non-

academic. As has previously been discussed, there is evidence to suggest that there is a hierarchy of qualifications, where A Levels are at the top and GCSE resits are at the bottom; however, even though L3 BTECs confer the same points for entry onto HE courses, the students perceived those courses as being suitable for people who are less academic. In the not too distant past, even HE institutions themselves have been guilty of failing to understand BTECs, favouring the more well-established and familiar A Levels (Newman, 2008), so it comes as no surprise that young people could imbibe this hierarchical stance themselves. It appears that GCSE resits are not recognised as qualifications which have any academic credibility:

Chloe: I think it's because, doing what we're doing, to me is (not in a bad way) but the lowest you can do, because we're having to resit things. (GCSE transcript, 12.6.17)

Due to the fact Chloe was resitting her GCSEs, not having gained the English and maths grades she needed first time round, she described GCSE resits as 'the lowest you can do.' It could be inferred from 'not in a bad way' that Chloe is asserting 'resistance capital' (Duckworth, 2014, p.88) because even though undertaking GCSE resits is not their ideal choice, the need to resit those qualifications is acknowledged as a stepping stone to her goal of completing a L3 BTEC, then going to university to become a primary school teacher. Viewing GCSE resits as stepping stone qualifications, as opposed to 'the lowest you can do' may be one way to award them more educational capital because Grace also conceded how gaining them would enable her to progress:

Grace: The apprenticeships are quite hard to get onto as well, so because I'd be 18 then anyway, I'd just go to uni if I didn't get onto the apprenticeship. Because I'd have the qualifications, if I get my maths and English. (GCSE transcript, 12.6.17)

There is a sense of irony in that the very qualifications/courses deemed to be the least academic are the core ones which open up opportunities for L3 studies, higher apprenticeships and degree courses, yet using Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' to look at the underpinning ideas, it shows how Grace's thought process may have developed. The GCSE educational qualifications in maths and English are tacitly regarded as making her more 'technically competent' (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 414), thereby bestowing educational capital, even if this is not fully recognised. For both Chloe and Grace, in achieving their GCSEs in maths and English, these qualifications can be converted to academic credentials which facilitate their progress to L3 and HE, but unlike A Levels, the GCSE students did not view them as 'smart.' Here is another example of the importance of GCSE resit courses and the potential they have to afford students the opportunity to overcome the barriers they had by not achieving a grade 4 or above.

The GCSE resit students at NWC believed that the way you want to learn, and how you are assessed, was a factor in choosing to study A Levels or BTEC L3. They were also influenced by family members who had previously completed L3 studies and whether they perceived one course to be easier or harder than another:

Chloe: Yeah and obviously a BTEC is probably more, maybe a bit easier, I just think A Levels, they're not for me.

Michelle: Okay, can I ask you both about A Levels? Your perception of them, you've said that, they're not for you and you've thought the BTEC is easier and that's a really honest and truthful, erm, answer to that question I think. But what's so hard about A Levels then? In your perception, why are they hard?

Grace: I think it's fair to say I'm not naturally academic, yeah, so we both like... I'm quite dyslexic, so for me, it's just like, I can comprehend all the work, just actually getting it in, getting the writing done, everything is just like too much.

Chloe: I've seen like my brother did A Levels, he's very smart, and the amount of work that he was putting in for A Levels and my friends are going through it right now and... it's hard. I just can't... you know, I just can't do that, I'm just not that smart. (GCSE transcript, 12.6.17)

As with other extracts from the transcripts, Grace and Chloe have identified barriers to studying A Levels, based on if they believe themselves to be academic ('smart') or not. For Grace, being 'quite dyslexic' has a connection with being 'not naturally academic', especially as she thinks there is a lot of writing involved in the A Level courses. The disconnection here between understanding the A Level work itself and being able to express that in writing opens up questions about accessibility within the A Level syllabus, as well as the support available for dyslexic students at NWC, but because this research focuses on students' perceptions, the emphasis remains on what they believe to be true and how this has influenced their choices for L3 study. Central to this is Bourdieu's concept of habitus (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), since habitus can be used to explore why Grace and Chloe acted and felt the way they did. For example, Grace took ownership of her dyslexia and it became part of her habitus, embodied in the way she has chosen not to study A Levels. The same can be applied to Chloe's decision too, in that she does not view herself as 'smart' enough to study A Levels, in part because her brother did them and he had to put in what Chloe alludes to as excessive amounts of work. Chloe also stated her 'friends are going through it right now' and this infers they are having a difficult time coping with the demands of A Levels: they are perceived as something to be endured, as opposed to prestigious qualifications. On balance, both Grace and Chloe assessed their own academic abilities against their past experiences of education (needing to resit their GCSEs), educational barriers such as dyslexia and the influence of family members; despite the fact that the habitus is durable and transposable, they did not feel at ease with studying A Levels and felt they would be more like 'fish out of water' in this educational field of study (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

In the GCSE interview with Grace and Chloe, they spoke about the work involved when undertaking A Levels and it is, perhaps, this depth and breadth of work that means A Levels confer more educational capital than L3 BTECs. Taking this idea further, Paige connected the amount of work required with top GCSE grades to preparedness for A Levels; in doing so, she alludes to the advantages of being able to balance the workload itself with the inherent traits of a scholastic habitus (English & Bolton, 2016). A person's scholastic habitus is formed by their experiences in the home and school, and how this leads them to value their education, enabling them to make informed choices about the qualifications they take and the institutions in which they study. Furthermore, it is not just the way someone progresses through the levels of academia, but the 'development of an approach to education and seeing it as having 'value' – and leads to viewing some routes through education as being the preferred or natural choices' (English & Bolton, 2016, p. 59). It could be argued that those students with predicted high GCSE grades, who go on to achieve them, make the 'natural' choice to study A Levels and those who meet the minimum required pass standards of L4/L5/grade C are steered towards BTECs:

Paige: A Levels have higher grade boundaries, because of the amount of work you have to put in. I'm sure you have to put a lot of work in at GCSE's, but if you come out with A and above at GCSE, you've put in a lot of work. You have to have done, so from that point of view then they think 'you got those grades at GCSE, you'll put in the same amount of work at A Level', but it's so much work. It's pure dedication and if you don't necessarily like sitting in a classroom, or sitting in front of a book for long periods of time, you're not going to like A Levels; that's the difference. Level 3 BTEC is the same qualification, it'll get you into university, it's just a different route. (GCSE & A Level transcript, 7.12.17)

In *The Forms of Capital*, Bourdieu (1986) stated that capital was an accumulation of labour, denoting the fact acquiring it takes time and effort. This being the case, A Levels and L3 BTECs should confer the same amount of educational capital because they are both two year courses, which enable progression to HE and/or certain types of more skilled employment. Paige made the point that 'Level 3 BTEC is the same qualification...just a different route' and this is factually correct; however, it seems as though she believes 'sitting in a classroom, or sitting in front of a book for long periods of time' is what sets A Levels apart from L3 BTECs, and the type of qualification, as opposed to the level, can be perceived as significant. There is evidence to support this belief on the NWC website because course searches show up differences in the study requirements for A Levels and L3 BTECs. For example, A Levels stipulate that each course will require five hours' onsite study and four to five hours independent study per week, equating to 27-30 hours in total (NWC, 2020). In contrast to this, an equivalent L3 BTEC Extended Diploma does not specify the study time, unless placements are involved. Therefore, it could be that the academic identity attached to A Levels, stems from the 'pure dedication' and 'sitting in front of a book for long periods of time', including periods of independent study. However, Bourdieu (1986)

argued that the accumulation of capitals could not be attributed to a person merely having academic ability or investing time and effort in their own scholarly activity; he believed there was a 'necessary paradox' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243) and hypothesised that academic ability or natural talent, still depended on 'domestic transmission.' In other words, any form of natural intelligence can only flourish within the right kind of home and educational environment: there is no such thing as being born 'smart.' For students like Paige, who was in the top sets at school, she was nurtured to believe that she could and should do A Levels; this then formed her scholastic habitus. In terms of the peer tutoring research at NWC, this scholastic habitus was viewed as an asset, both by the staff who identified her as a peer tutor and the GCSE resit students who only wanted to be tutored by A Level students. Linking back to the literature on peer tutoring, Paige was perceived as a good role model and the structure of the programme at NWC forms parallels with Topping's definition of 'more able students helping less able students to learn in co-operative working pairs' (Topping, 1996, p. 322). Thus, the peer tutors become part of the environment which shapes the scholastic habitus.

In terms of the dynamic that the tutor and the tutee bring to the partnership, in relation to cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), research supports the notion of Topping's 'co-operative working pairs' (Topping, 1996, p. 322). More recently, The Education Endowment Foundation (2018) conducted a meta-analysis of nine existing studies into peer learning in schools and has its own definition to frame their summary:

Peer tutoring includes a range of approaches in which learners work in pairs or small groups to provide explicit teaching support. There are two main types of peer tutoring: same age and cross age. In cross-age peer tutoring, an older learner takes the tutoring role and is paired with a younger tutee or tutees. There are also a number of same-age approaches such as Reciprocal Teaching, where learners alternate between the role of tutor and tutee, and Peer-Assisted Learning. The common characteristic of all these approaches is that learners take on responsibility for aspects of teaching and for evaluating the success of their peer or peers. (The Education Endowment Foundation, 2018, p. 3)

The definition encompasses several features of peer tutoring previously discussed, but its tone is more in line with HE practices, as there is no categorisation of students as 'more' or 'less able'. The 'range of approaches' provides some flexibility for schools who wish to implement peer tutoring programmes; however, Reciprocal Teaching is an interesting concept, but it would not apply when implementing peer tutoring on GCSE resit programmes, mostly because the roles of tutor and tutee stay the same and are clearly delineated, based on the expertise of the A Level students and the needs of the GCSE students. Where this definition still applies to the programme at NWC, is that learners worked in pairs and the A Level students provided 'explicit teaching support.'

Research shows that having a positive sense of academic identity has a correlation with prior academic success (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000); these types of students 'make efforts to learn and grow, and they begin to interact with both faculty and fellow students in productive ways' (White & Lowenthal, 2011, p. 299), which could be one of the reasons that Paige and Anila chose to become peer tutors. Hsiao, Brouns, Bruggen, and Sloep, (2015, p. 501) found that there were 'additional cognitive benefits to students' own learning (e.g. they could ask themselves thought-provoking questions)', suggesting personal reflection is a bi-product of being a peer tutor. The ability to self-reflect is also a characteristic of a strong academic identity (White & Lowenthal, 2011) and this is outlined in the interview with the A Level students at NWC:

Michelle: Would you recommend being part of the peer tutoring programme to anybody else, having done it yourselves?

Paige: Yeah.

Michelle: Why?

Paige: Because it was helpful and it was enjoyable, like A Levels are stressful, very stressful and it was just nice in some ways to actually stop focusing on your stress and help someone else cope with theirs and in you doing that and trying to calm them down, you've calmed yourself down. It made you realise that what you were saying is what you should listen to yourself! So, yeah, I would recommend it.

Michelle: Okay, Anila?

Anila: Err, yeah, I'd definitely recommend it. Anything to do with helping other people to understand something better, it's definitely something I'd recommend. It's definitely something I would do again, it helps everyone, like you said, they benefit from receiving support from someone who isn't their teacher, but who's gone through what they've gone through really recently. I would receive support as in, I would calm myself down. (A Level transcript, 12.6.17)

Both Paige and Anila reflected on the fact they perceived A Levels as being stressful, but by helping others they found an outlet to stop focusing on themselves: this was a calming influence. There is further evidence to show this incidence of altruistic behaviour from the peer tutors is common to peer tutoring programmes. In a study by Andrews & Clark (2011), they found that the most common reason for becoming peer tutors was wanting to help others and having a desire to 'put something back' (Andrews & Clark, 2011, p. 61) into their institution of study. Additionally, the peer tutor role gives a position of responsibility, which can impact positively on their employability skills. Paige and Anila's comments infer that the GCSE students felt stressed at having to undertake resits, so being good role models by 'help[ing] someone else to cope with theirs' has positively impacted on the peer tutors' acquisition of educational capital (Bourdieu, 1996) and scholastic habitus (English & Bolton, 2016). This was reinforced by the fact Paige reported she included her involvement in the peer tutoring programme on her UCAS statement:

Michelle: Did you, on your personal statement, did you mention being involved in the programme?

Paige: I did, yeah. (GCSE & A Level transcript, 7.12.17)

In relation to literature supporting the use of peer tutoring programmes, Topping (1996, p. 322) said there should be 'gains accruing from the tutoring process to the tutor', thereby explicitly stating it is not a one-sided process. It could be said Paige's habitus is situated within the newly-created field of the peer tutoring programme, a social space whereby she was able to give and receive help; in other words, she was a 'fish in water' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007, p. 127).

The way that students are directed at school to make choices, could be seen as one way in which their academic or non-academic identity is formed because the habitus is shaped by a person's environment (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Young people are guided by their teachers and families, even if they make the final decisions themselves (Foskett, Dyke & Maringe, 2008; Payne, 2003). Although class was not overtly considered as a factor within this research, it has been found that even though all students, regardless of class, rely on their teachers to help them make choices, working class students 'tended to rely much more on schools and colleges to provide the information they needed' (Hemsley-Brown, 1999, p. 95). The students interviewed at NWC all reported some level of discussion with their parents about their choices; however, school influence was explicitly singled out as being a key influencing factor:

Chloe: You're pushed towards certain things in high school.

Michelle: Does it make a difference on what parents or family at home say about that as well?

Paige: Slightly, I mean, I was always told that I'd probably enjoy A Levels. My sister told me 'you won't enjoy A Levels' but then I suppose it always comes down to that it's your decision, you know do what you want. But I can only speak from what I've been told.

Michelle: Would you change that then? Do you think that schools have a responsibility to say it is different?

Chloe: I think schools need to, instead of saying to the top sets do this and to the lower sets do BTEC, it should be taught that A Levels are one way of doing it and BTEC is another way of doing it. It's just depending on how you'd like to work, how you learn better; if you want to do more coursework based, less exams or you just want to do exams and no coursework. It should be taught like that, you know. (GCSE & A Level transcript, 7.12.17)

Payne (2003, p. 2) found that parents do play a significant part in their children's choices and other family members, especially brothers and sisters, are 'useful sources of information about post-16 options.' Looking at what Paige said, it is possible that her parents or teachers in school 'always told' her that she would enjoy A Levels, because she was predicted high GCSE grades and was perceived as being academic: for her, those decisions are 'preferred or natural choices' (English & Bolton, 2016, p. 59). Despite the fact her sister told her 'you won't enjoy A Levels' she still went ahead to study them at NWC, hence in this particular instance, she most likely took the advice of her parents and/or teachers than her sister. Whether she would enjoy the A Level course or not, was not a

contributory factor and this could be due to the fact she already had a strong academic identity, having already been successful in school. Chloe stated students are 'pushed towards' making their post-16 choices by their high schools; when coupled with her response to the question about whether schools should change that, she was emphatic in her assessment of what their responsibility on their guidance should be. For her, she wanted schools to portray A Levels and BTECs as having parity, placing emphasis on a student's choice on how they prefer to be assessed, as opposed to whether one course is more academic than the other. This being the case, there would not be such a hierarchical structure to the qualifications in the UK and the notion of educational capital (Bourdieu, 1996) would be more egalitarian in nature; yes, it would still be shaped by home and school environments, but in theory, it would not limit access to certain students. In turn, this could lead to a shift in how a young person's academic identity and subsequent scholastic habitus is formed (English & Bolton, 2016).

## Conclusion

Overall, there was a consensus between the GCSE resit and A Level students at NWC that if you were in the top sets and predicted 'good' GCSE grades, you were encouraged to undertake A Levels; according to the students, this was in part due to the influence of school teachers, but there was also a perception that A Levels are suited to those people who are more academic. Students who deemed themselves to be less academic felt that L3 BTECs were the right choice for them, but they were still aware that BTECs carried enough points and were equivalent when applying to university. Even though students openly stated that they knew L3 BTECs and A Levels were 'the same' but 'just a different route', there was a sense of needing to justify this. Both Chloe and Paige said they wanted to be teachers, but it could be argued there was a disconnection between ambitions for HE study and academic identity. This is exemplified in the following extracts, directed at Chloe, who did not see herself as 'A Level smart':

Michelle: ...I look at you Chloe and you are academic.

Chloe: Am I? (GCSE & A Level transcript, 7.12.17).

Paige: But you are academic, you are (GCSE & A Level transcript, 7.12.17).

Grace: You are smart (GCSE transcript, 12.6.17).

Of course, this research was undertaken as a small scale case study, and therefore the perceptions of a few students cannot be generalised; however, having looked at the hierarchy of qualifications in the UK, and the preference for A Levels (Politics.co.uk, n.d; Stewart, 2014) amongst themselves and their peer group, it is easy to see why students such as Chloe possess so much self-doubt, in relation to academic ability. It is acknowledged that the preponderance of data within the interviews relating to these hierarchies was unexpected, yet it emerged as a recurring theme, which merited discussion,



because the students were so candid in their perceptions of their identities within then hierarchies. Arguably, national policy reproduces what is believed to be credible knowledge and consequently this impacts on organisations and individuals operating within the education system. Bourdieu (1986) theorised that educational qualifications are institutionalised forms of cultural capital and this research highlights, in relation to the peer tutoring project at NWC, there is a link between the qualifications students undertake and the formation of an academic, or non-academic identity, which in turn may shape their future educational choices. The wider implications of this research, based on the ensuing perceptions of identity, could be said to highlight an education system which normalises the formation of these identities. This being the case, when young people navigate the field of education, their position in this field 'can influence symbolic capital and power and also influence the possibilities open for their future trajectories' (Duckworth, 2014, p. 186), meaning that it is hard for them to overcome self-doubt.

## ***Structure and agency***

### **Introduction**

The structure and agency debate, within the social sciences, is centrally concerned with understanding whether people's actions are driven by external societal factors (structures) or whether individuals (agents) act by using their free will (Giddens, 1984). In turn, this debate considers how power is distributed and the relationship between objective and subjective forces (Dowding, 2008). This has relevance to the research undertaken at NWC because the peer tutoring programme was an external structure, which was put together to meet the needs of the individuals who chose to participate. Due to the fact a person's habitus is formed by internal and external drivers, this concept is utilised when interpreting staff and student perceptions and how it shapes the students' habitus. Some of Bourdieu's critics viewed his theory of habitus as too 'deterministic' (Reay, 2004a, p. 432), but Bourdieu argued that people's actions are shaped by multiple internal and external influences (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007); therefore, his aim was to 'transcend dualisms of agency-structure, objective-subjective and the micro-macro' (Reay, 2004a, p. 432). By listening to what staff and students at NWC had to say about how objective social structures such as family, school, college and the peer tutoring programme itself influenced their perceptions, and agentic thought, it was possible to gain insight into the decisions they made. For the students, those decisions related to their participation in the peer tutoring programme, as well as their higher education and future career choices. This enabled the analysis of the interview transcripts to operationalise Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 50), staying true to his belief that consideration should be given to both objectivist

and subjectivist standpoints, and the relationship between the two. On one level the most significant structure in this research is the peer tutoring project itself, because this created a new social structure, or 'functional friendships' a new term created specifically for this peer tutoring research. GCSE resit and A Level students were brought together in ways that would not have happened without the new social structure. This structure is one which has the subversive potential to flip the usual dynamics of labour and power (Bourdieu, 1986) within peer tutoring. Subsequently, this afforded opportunities to explore the influence of other important structures, such as family, educational policy and FE organisations themselves.

## **Structure**

Family is defined as parents or siblings, with whom the GCSE and A Level students were still living at home with, but it also included siblings who were away at university. Bourdieu's concept of the social field can be applied in this context because the family is a site where parents transmit their cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1990). There is also a link to Nowotny's (1981) work on emotional capital which she defined as 'knowledge, contacts and relations as well as access to emotionally valued skills and assets, which hold within any social network characterized at least partly by affective ties' (Nowotny, 1981, p. 148). Grace and Chloe, the GCSE resit students who were interviewed, had an older sibling at university, whereas the A Level students, Anila and Paige, were the eldest in their families, so would be the first sibling to go. Anila was the only student whose parents had been to university and they were both paediatricians. The reason this information is relevant to the peer tutoring research at NWC is because the use of Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 50), as a theoretical framework, enabled the analysis of their perceptions of the project, as well as how it impacted on their educational goals and social relations. The importance of family influence aligns with Bourdieu's definition of habitus as 'a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 82), in that family has the potential to shape and influence young people's decisions, in addition to forming their scholastic habitus (English & Bolton, 2016) and perceptions of what it means to be academic, or not. It was interesting to note that Paige and Anila's parents were able to see how being involved in the peer tutoring project would benefit their children:

Michelle: What did your fellow students and parents say about you being involved in this peer tutoring programme?

Paige: Erm, my parents were really happy about it, they said it looked good in university. Fellow students were interested, I remember I'd always have to leave my supervised study to go and help Chloe and they were all really interested and wanted to know how I'd gotten involved in it.

Anila: Erm, my parents were pretty impressed because I'd done some stuff like this before and they encouraged me to carry it on and it kind of helped me improve my

revision techniques, so now I usually sort of teach biology or chemistry or psychology to one of my siblings and if they understand it then I understand it. It helps me improve parts that I don't get, or that I need to work on, because the teacher needs to know the subject really well. (A Level transcript, 12.6.17)

It could be possible that Paige's parents saw the link between the tutoring itself and the higher level study skills needed for university, on top of the fact that Paige would later use the peer tutoring as evidence on her UCAS personal statement. This links to Boud et al. (2001, p. 4) assertion of peer tutoring being an 'instrumental strategy.' The peer tutoring at NWC was classed as 'near peer', where students are a similar age, but the tutor will have recently achieved success on the course they are tutoring on, (Whitman, 1988, p. 5), or 'vertical peer support', where older students support those on the first year of their course (Black & Mackenzie, 2008, p. 3). The inference here is that the peer tutors have the skills to pass on their knowledge to their younger peers, and this is supported by the project at NWC. Furthermore, one aspect of the 'instrumental' component is that there are also 'gains accruing from the tutoring process to the tutor' (Topping, 1996, p. 322). The use of italics as emphasis in 'to the tutor' is significant because in the interview extract above, Paige and Anila were both aware of how the project would benefit them. The fact Anila's parents were 'pretty impressed' by her involvement can be viewed as a twofold benefit for their family unit. Firstly, Anila herself improved her own revision techniques, and secondly, she has begun to teach her own siblings, across a range of subjects. The first aspect is borne out by Whitman's Education Report 'Peer Teaching: To Teach is To Learn Twice' (Whitman, 1988), due to the fact the cognitive processes used to study for a test are different from those used when an individual revises for a test. The second benefit is Anila's transferable skills, which increased the potential for her siblings' academic success, due to the home tuition she gave them.

The influence of parents was also evident in the A Level students' choices regarding university, to some extent in relation to their courses and places of study, but also whether to move away or stay at home. These decisions are central to young people's life choices, as teenagers are most likely to be influenced by their parents when making decisions about entering HE (Dodgson, 2004; McShane, 2003; Payne, 2003). Furthermore, this could be seen as one way that objective social structures, namely the family, influence their children's engagement with higher education. Bourdieu, who challenged dualistic notions of objectivity and subjectivity, was 'against the false oppositions which have shaped theoretical thinking about the social world' (Layder, 2006, p. 194) and believed that 'the two orders are tied together through actual social practices, wherein objective social relations are produced and reproduced within particular situation' (Layder, 2006, p. 194). Both Paige and Anila said they would be applying to Manchester, as their first choice, Paige to study History and Anila to study Medicine (A Level transcript, 12.6.17). For Paige, staying

at home would make financial sense (A Level transcript, 12.6.17), as well as being a help to her mum, with her two younger sisters:

Paige: If I had to stay at home, it wouldn't be a bad thing, let's put it that way. I mean, it would be helpful for my Mum, she wouldn't be stressed. (A Level transcript, 12.6.17)

Paige's actions do, however, appear to be altruistic, in that she said 'If I had to stay at home' (my emphasis); this sounds as if she would prefer to be studying away from home, yet due to financial and family responsibilities, she would most likely live at home during her HE studies. For Anila, her family situation is further influenced by her parents' fears for her safety:

Anila: Erm, I'd say for me, it's more that my parents are scared to let me go somewhere far away and it would be for five years at least. So that's an incredibly long amount of time and finance will play a lot into it, because I don't think I'd be able to manage it that well if I was on my own. So, having my parents' help will be really useful and since both my brothers are a year younger than me, well, one of them is also doing A Levels, but he's at a different school and my other one is doing his GCSE's, we're all going to have to be at uni at the same time, so it's going to be really expensive for my mum and my dad, so I guess staying at home is best. It's ideal for everyone, I guess (A Level transcript, 12.6.17)

During the interview, Anila was not pressed to disclose why her parents were 'scared' about her moving away to university; this was a conscious decision, made at the time, to ensure she did not feel uncomfortable with any of the questions. However, there is a discernible association between her parents' apprehension about her being away for at least five years (to study Medicine) and the fact she feels she needs their help because she did not think she could manage on her own. As with Paige's response, there are altruistic tendencies identifiable here, relating to finances and the inference of caring for her younger siblings; nevertheless, it is possible that cultural factors came into play, due to Anila's strong Muslim heritage and being female (Jacobsen, 2011). She had previously spoken about attending the Mosque and studying Arabic:

Anila: Arabic is my first language, my mother-tongue, so I'm okay with it and we have a tutor that comes over every week or something, and we go over past papers and things. It's mainly just like, exam techniques, I know the Arabic. (A Level transcript, 12.6.17)

It is presumed that Anila was born in the UK, because she gave no indication otherwise, yet she stated that her 'first language' was Arabic, which could be seen as reinforcing her strong cultural heritage. This is an example of embodied cultural capital, due to it having been inherited from her parents, and acquired over time, through socialisation at home and Mosque (Bourdieu, 1986). Franceschelli and O'Brien (2014) developed the concept of 'Islamic capital' and posited that when studying religious transmission, 'Bourdieu's theory of social practice and cultural capital, which particularly captures the interplay between individual agency and the social world' (Franceschelli & O'Brien, 2014, p. 1191), is an

effective framework 'to capture the dynamics between parents and their children' (Franceschelli & O'Brien, 2014, p. 1190). During the interview, Anila also said psychology was 'absolutely her favourite thing' and was hoping to do a combined degree, with Medicine, before stating:

Anila: I am interested in Medicine, but they're more pushing it like 'keep on the tradition.' (A Level transcript, 12.6.17)

Within her family, there is a tradition of becoming doctors and this was a significant factor when Anila was thinking about her HE choices. In her column for *The Guardian*, Srivastava (2016) wrote that unless a person is driven from within to become a doctor, it can be an unrewarding career. As a doctor herself, Srivastava is wary when parents approach her for advice, about entering the profession, because the motivation should come from within the individual. Her advice to 'pushy parents' is:

...if your reluctant child has a parent who desperately wants him to study medicine, step back for a moment and consider the statistics. Forcing your child to become a doctor might turn out to be the worst parenting decision you ever made. (Srivastava, 2016)

Anila's internal conflict is almost palpable, especially knowing her true passion lies in studying psychology. There is no suggestion within this research that Anila's parents are pushing her to become a doctor because they are Muslim; indeed, in some ways it goes against traditional values of women's roles as mothers and educators (Franceschelli and O'Brien, 2014). However, it could be related more pertinently to Bourdieu's notion of the family spirit, namely 'that aim to produce, in a kind of continuous creation, the obliged affections and affective obligations of family feeling' (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 68), so although Anila's heart lies in the field of psychology, she will place her parents' wishes above this to study within their field of medicine. Her subjective personal preferences are pervaded by the objective social structures of the family and their cultural traditions. Overall, for both Paige and Anila, family was very important in their decision making process and it overrode their own aspirations and in this research study there was no evidence to suggest that the relationships built by the peer tutors and tutees had any impact on their HE choices; however, because the GCSE students perceived the A Level students as having a strong scholastic habitus (English & Bolton, 2016) it contributed to cementing Paige and Anila's academic identities.

As well as family, other structural factors affected the participants in the peer tutoring project. NWC is an educational structure in itself, but then the peer tutoring programme sat within it to create a new field where people who would not normally interact with each other, had the opportunity to do so. In the staff interview, Heather, The Director of English

and Maths, gave her thoughts on the college and its networks, emphasising how the social aspects of the peer tutoring project probably outweighed the academic:

Heather: I think what Barbara mentioned about that liaison between the different groups, because with the GCSEs a number of them are going up into A Levels, so it creates those kind of bonds already, then understand how the college works and I think those networks are really important. I think from a subject point of view it does help them academically, but socially is probably the biggest: that's really important. I think that we struggle with getting students involved in things outside of the classroom and this is an easy way of doing it. Well not easy in terms of managing it, but it is a manageable way; it's subject-related and work experience-related as well. So I think there's lots of gains from that point of view. (Staff transcript, 12.6.17)

Here, Heather made some insightful comments about course structures, student progression and extra-curricular activities within the college. Prior to the peer tutoring project, it seems there were few opportunities for the GCSE and A Level students to interact, unless they had already formed friendships at school. This could be perceived as a failing within the college structure, but realistically there can be divisions between different subject areas, age groups and courses (Hyland & Merrill, 2003). Although Chloe and Grace, the GCSE students who were interviewed, did not want to go on and study A Levels, Heather reported that this was a target for some GCSE resit students and she introduced the notion of making 'bonds', which would help them make the progression more seamlessly. It was inferred that 'how the college works' is not explicitly taught and students new to FE could have difficulty in making the transition, without the 'bonds' or 'networks.' If students are reluctant to mix with each other outside the classroom, it could be argued that college staff (as representatives of the organisation) have a responsibility to find ways to help students integrate. In light of this, enabling students from different year and course groups to mix, created new groups and therefore gave students access to social capital, which Bourdieu defined as 'possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 247). Bearing in mind the social aspect of college life was deemed 'really important', especially for GCSE resit students wanting to progress to A Levels (and perhaps L3 BTECs), even though the peer tutoring project was short term, there were perceived longer term benefits. Heather also briefly reflected on the management of the peer tutoring project at NWC and concluded that the difficulties inherent in managing it were outweighed by the 'gains', which highlights NWC's prioritisation of students' social needs, over managerial responsibilities. Moreover, Heather's use of the word 'liaison' is pertinent in that it connotes making mutual connections and cooperation on both sides, from the GCSE and A Level students involved. This example of social capital goes against Bourdieu's assertion that it can be used as a form of social control, or to keep various groups apart (Savage, 2015), in that at NWC the goal was to achieve access to wider networks and create student bonds. Boud (2001) emphasised the value of peer learning as a pedagogical structure, and the benefits for those

students involved, but also noted the irony, in that it has to be organised by teachers, in order for it to be effective (Havnes, 2008). Overall, Heather's ability to view and contextualise all the facets of the peer tutoring project at NWC is something to be expected as part of her role within the college; however, it is interesting to see her perception of how the main benefit of peer tutoring was social, not academic.

The social aspects of the peer tutoring project led to the coining of a new term, 'functional friendships', used to describe the social interactions between the GCSE and A Level students. Functional friendship is defined as: a purposeful relationship between peers, which is motivated by a mutually beneficial bond, or shared goals, and lasts until the purpose of that relationship has been fulfilled. During and shortly after the project, when the interviews took place in June, there were stark differences in the attitudes towards the notion of whether the GCSE and A Level students became friends with each other, namely the A Level students largely felt they had become friends with the GCSE students, but the GCSE students saw the relationship with their A Level peer tutor as being more functional in nature:

Paige: I think for me and Chloe it was more a friendship and I think that helped, because there wasn't the pressure of it being a teacher/student. It was a more relaxed environment and I think she benefitted from that, because it wasn't really high pressure, and if she ever did get something wrong, she didn't feel as disappointed as if your teacher came over and told you. Erm, it's just put us more at ease, if we looked at it more as a friendship, helping a friend, rather than a teacher helping a student.

Michelle: Okay, Anila?

Anila Erm, I'd say the same, we built a friendship, so for the first session it was more of an introduction. When Grace came, when she was first introduced, we were sort of talking about awkward stories, so she kind of walked in on a very funny situation and we got to know each other as friends, but it was more not proper friends, just good friends in college. If that makes sense? (A Level transcript, 12.6.17)

It is likely that as the A Level tutors, Paige and Anila were trying to ensure they were not perceived as exerting power over their GCSE tutees. Having already proven themselves academically, they practised their social skills and showed a genuine warmth and desire to help their tutees. Paige was emphatic in her interpretation of her relationship with Chloe being a 'friendship' and this shows her attitude towards her tutoring role. She wanted to take the pressure of resitting GCSEs away from Chloe, as well as creating a more informal environment for her to study. Seeing herself as different from a teacher is also significant, perhaps due to the fact that she herself is still a student, being taught by staff at NWC. This attitude aligns with a case study undertaken by Colvin (2007) who found that some of the peer tutors felt it was hard to define the peer tutor role. One of the participants questioned whether the role even exists, stating 'it comes down to being more personable with everyone and just sort of being friendly and open to asking and answering questions together' (Colvin, 2007, p. 173). Similarly, this could be related to emotional capital

(Nowotny, 1981) or basic emotional intelligence and the need to empathise with another human being, knowing that tutees bring 'personal issues, feelings and preoccupations' (Coelho et al., 2014, p. 320). On the other hand, Anila was aware of the difference between 'proper friends' and 'good friends in college', meaning there was an understanding of the fact that there can be different forms of friendship. This aligns more with the notion of a functional friendship, existing only because of the peer tutoring project, but still having a legitimate purpose. Due to the fact the peer tutoring pairs were artificially created, students had to work with those they may not have necessarily chosen to become friends with, and this has been identified as a professional benefit in more recent studies (Giles et al., 2016).

Despite the differences in perception of friendships within the peer tutoring project, there is no suggestion that the GCSE students did not get along with the A Level students; however, they saw them as serving a very specific purpose, academically, to support them in achieving the GCSE grades they needed for progression to L3 courses:

Grace: I mean, I think with our course, I mean, 'cause not a lot of people do it, we are just sort of restricted to our classes and friends. Erm, so yeah, you know, I didn't really make friends with her [Anila], but yeah socially, it was sort of like that.

Chloe: I met someone new, but I wouldn't say a friend, I'd say an acquaintance [Paige].

Michelle: So, it's more of a kind of professional relationship that you...

Grace: But at the same time she never like patronised me, not that I'm saying teachers are patronising, but it was like she just, I didn't see her as a teacher, just more of someone like a buddy to help me. (GCSE transcript, 12.6.17)

It could be said that Chloe and Grace are more aligned with the overarching purpose of peer tutoring, namely, to work collaboratively with others and 'add value to the educational experience for both tutor and tutee' (Topping, 1994, p. 11). They used terms such as 'acquaintance' and 'buddy', alluding to the advantages of working with others, but openly stating that this was not friendship. The benefits may be thought of as social interactions outside their GCSE resit cohort and working with someone other than their teacher, who brought another dimension to their learning experience. The inferred benefit to the peer tutors is their newly acquired status in having the academic knowledge and interpersonal skills required by the GCSE students and the ability to work with them in non-patronising ways. Returning to Bourdieu's view on 'the mutual interdependence of social constraint and individual action, of structure and agency' (James, 2014, p. 159), it shows how the structure of the peer tutoring project interacts with the agency of the participants. The binary oppositions of tutor/tutee became something more malleable, whereby the students found their own ways of negotiating the rules of the game and emphasising the 'dynamic nature of field' (Bathmaker, 2015, p. 66).



Six months later, in the follow up interview with Chloe and Paige, we returned to the theme of friendship and there was more of an acknowledgement on both sides that all the relationships built during the peer tutoring programme had indeed been more transient. One of the benefits of taking a Bourdieuan approach to research is the encouragement of reflexivity and addressing the 'scholarly gaze' (Swartz, 2013, p. 24). After familiarising myself with the transcripts from June, which became part of the iterative data analysis process, I was drawn towards the notion that friendships had been functional. I also wanted to explore the differences in how relationships had been perceived in the earlier interviews, but was mindful of the ethical implications of sharing what had emerged from the data, namely that the GCSE students had never viewed them as friendships:

Michelle: Okay, do you mind telling me who you're still in touch with and in what context?

Chloe: Like, I'll speak to them every now and again, through message. I don't necessarily meet up with them, but over message I speak to them a few times.

Michelle: Is that because before you were obviously on the same GCSE programme, but now...

Chloe: We're doing separate courses, yeah.

Michelle: Yeah, you've moved on to different courses. Okay, what about you, Paige?

Paige: I'm not particularly, no, I'm not sure where the other mentors went, but no, I don't really keep in contact with Chloe anymore. We still have each other on Snapchat, but we don't really speak.

Chloe: You're friends almost. (GCSE & A Level transcript, 7.12.17)

Chloe's use of the term 'friends almost' serves as a poignant reminder of the short-lived nature of the relationships formed during the peer tutoring project. From the above extract, it seems that this also applied to relationships within the GCSE resit cohort and within the group of A Level peer tutors. Although contact was maintained through social media, there had been no face-to-face contact; therefore, there was no longer a purpose for them to keep in touch. This supports my definition of functional friendships as: a purposeful relationship between peers, which is motivated by a mutually beneficial bond, or shared goals, and lasts until the purpose of that relationship has been fulfilled. It is argued that the ephemeral nature of the relationships is a positive aspect of the project, bearing in mind peer tutoring can be theorised using Vygotsky's social learning theory (1978). In particular, this can be applied to the concept of scaffolding and the zone of proximal development (ZPD), because the peer tutoring project itself and the students who participated, were no longer needed in this particular context, so the staff at NWC removed this structure once the GCSE students had resat their exams in June.

Throughout the duration of the peer tutoring project, NWC staff were also aware of the boundaries that the GCSE students had put in place, pointing to the view that the GCSE students could seemingly have had more control over the relationships they formed than their A Level peer tutors, thereby highlighting the relation between the social structure of

the peer tutoring project and the students' agency. This became apparent when Barbara, the Head of A Levels, and Anna, the GCSE tutor discussed a particular incident, which occurred between an A Level tutor and GCSE tutee. What was intended as a kind gesture, had been interpreted as something beyond the scope of the project:

Barbara: That's just reminded me of an incident when one of them said to me her mentor had offered her a lift home and she thought 'oh, what am I going to do?'

Anna: It's stepping over that boundary!

Barbara: That was really, I said 'god, did you think you'd crash?!' she was trying to make light of it, but I don't know if she didn't want her to see her home. Getting in the car with her was going too close proximity. (Staff transcript, 12.6.17)

In this extract, Barbara has used the term 'mentor' instead of tutor, but the overall idea was that a GCSE tutee had felt uncomfortable when offered a lift home from her A Level peer tutor. In analysing this extract, it is useful to operationalise the concept of relational fields (Bourdieu, 2001), where 'boundaries themselves are frequently contested' (Swartz, 2013, p. 30). The rules of the game within the field of the peer tutoring project at NWC were transgressed when the A Level peer tutor offered the GCSE tutee a lift: it took the relationship outside the boundaries of the college environment. The rules, or 'the 'basic norm' that determines the 'stakes' involved, is referred to by Bourdieu as the field's *nomos*' (Schmitz, Witte & Gengnagel, 2017, p. 52) and offering a lift was not perceived as the norm in this case. Due to the fact the peer tutoring field was newly formed, the offer and refusal of a lift were defining moments. It has been argued that stances like this are not arbitrary and by 'normatively defining what is right or wrong in a field, the *nomos* reflects relative power positions in the field' (Goetze, 2017, p. 196), hence it could be said that the GCSE tutee had more power here, by deciding to exclude contact outside college from the field of the peer tutoring project. This is supported by Bourdieu's argument that social spaces are constructed based on subjective and objective realities; therefore, 'points of view depend on the point from which they are taken, since the vision that every agent has of the space depends on his or her position in that space' (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 18). There is also a link here to functional friendships, in that the A Level peer tutors largely saw themselves as having made friends with their GCSE tutees, but the GCSE tutees saw the relationship as being more transactional.

## **Agency**

Agency is best understood by relating the concept to how people make decisions about their lives; this, in turn, can be linked to Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* (Hemsley-Brown, 1999). This is because *habitus* 'encapsulates the ways in which a person's schematic beliefs, ideas and preferences are individually subjective but also inevitably permeated by the objective social structures and cultural or sub-cultural traditions in which that person lives' (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996, p. 146). One example of where the agency of the

GCSE students, Grace and Chloe, prevailed over the format of the peer tutoring sessions, was when they spoke about their learning preferences. They were acutely aware of what worked best for them, within the peer tutoring project, and as such, they made the choices about what they wanted to study in each session:

Grace: Erm, it would range from where I wanted to look at, as in what I felt I needed to work on and she'd just help me.

Chloe: Erm, mine was probably about 45 minutes and again, just did what I wanted to do. (GCSE transcript, 12.6.17)

It could be argued Grace and Chloe retained the power within the sessions with their A Level peer tutors because they made the decisions about what subject content to study. On the surface, it might have been thought that the A Level peer tutors would have exerted more control within the sessions, due to them having a stronger academic identity and scholastic habitus (English & Bolton, 2016), yet both Grace and Chloe use the phrase 'where/what I wanted', meaning they had the final say over what was covered and the power to determine what happened. Here we can also see an example of the subversive nature of the functional friendships they formed because instead of the A Level students leading the session and completing the session logs, as originally planned, 'scholastic yield' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243) was conferred in a way which challenged the doxa of academe. Grace and Chloe could be perceived as having lower cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) due to resitting their GCSEs, yet they had the power to direct what happened in the 1:1 sessions. This is despite the fact that the interview responses revealed the GCSE and A Level students believed there was a hierarchy of qualifications, within NWC and more widely, where GCSEs were at the bottom and A Levels at the top. If the field of education is 'profoundly hierarchized' (Thomson, 2012, p. 71) and agents occupy either dominant or subordinate positions within it (Naidoo, 2004), there is evidence from the research at NWC to support Bourdieu's (2001) idea that there is still the possibility of agency and change inside that particular field, because people are not pre-programmed like machines, or governed by the laws of physics (Thomson, 2012). Additionally, they showed their agentic thought when discussing why they attended the peer tutoring sessions, but their friend Lucy did not:

Chloe: I think they probably thought we'd make sure Lucy came and we did try, but she just wasn't having any of it.

Grace: In all fairness, they did ask us would we want to do a group session and not individual, but for us to get any actual benefit from it, it'd be better for us to do individual, because we're not going to get any work done if we're all together are we?

Chloe: I think it was just more up to Lucy, if she was, I mean, we could only say so much to her and she just wasn't having any of it. (GCSE transcript, 12.6.17)

Chloe's and Grace's responses infer that 'they', i.e. the staff at NWC, believed the GCSE students shared a collective habitus (Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991), whereby there would be a level of group solidarity within the social space of the peer tutoring project. However, Lucy

'wasn't having any of it' and their influence over her did not outweigh her own agency, whereby she did not see the value of peer tutoring on the GCSE resit course in the same way that they did. Although Chloe and Grace tried to exert their influence over their friend, this field was a site of struggle and did not lead to a successful outcome in this particular context (English & Bolton, 2016). Bourdieu (1998) welcomed difference and the interplay between subjective-objective structures, therefore these notions can be related to the research at NWC, because regardless of the GCSE students' shared characteristics, they were not the same; treating them as such would 'obfuscate difference' (English & Bolton, 2016, p. 32) and deny the individual agency of Lucy's decision not to take part. Not having had the opportunity to interview Lucy, means I am unable to make assumptions about why she stopped attending (it was reported that she did in fact attend one session, along with Grace), but the implication is that she did not see the benefit, in the same way Chloe and Grace did.

### **Agency and the 'messy reality' of research diaries/1:1 peer tutoring session record logs**

During the 1:1 sessions it was planned for the peer tutor and tutee to complete a session log (see Appendix 8), detailing what they had covered from the English GCSE curriculum. Staff at NWC submitted a total of nineteen session logs as part of this research; however, the interview data brought to light some significant inconsistencies, in that the GCSE students, particularly Grace, said that they had never seen the session log, either during the 1:1 or afterwards, and were unaware of its existence, so the GCSE students were not given the opportunity for agency here:

Michelle: Do you remember the session log where you had to decide what you were doing, I think it was the peer tutor who filled that in? Do you remember seeing a session log?

Grace: No. (GCSE Transcript, 12.6.17)

The inconsistency relating to the planned completion of the research logs was also verified by Barbara, the Head of A Levels, who was in charge of the day to day running of the peer tutoring programme:

Michelle: The tutorial record log, can I just ask you about that and did you have any difficulties getting the students to use it?

Barbara: We did, yeah. I sat down with the mentors every couple of weeks and we tried to record it but it was (hands up) after the event. (Staff Transcript 12.6.17)

The inference here is that the tutorial records added an extra layer of bureaucracy for the students and staff, hence they were not utilised as they were initially meant to be; that is to say as a way to collect valid data in the way set out in the methodology: the aim being that the students did 'not have to rely so much on their retention' (Vermaas & van de Wijngaert, 2005, p. 123). This could also be why the record logs were very sparsely

completed and contained minimal information, because they were viewed by participants as an additional task, instead of a source of research data. If they had been utilised in the way they had been intended, this could have generated more data in relation to how the peer tutor had scaffolded the learning during the 1:1 session (Berghmans et al., 2013).

Alongside this, the A Level students, Anila and Paige, had conflicting views in that what reportedly worked in one peer tutoring pair did not work in another:

Michelle: So, thinking about the session log, you know that you had to fill in, was it useful or not? I want you to be really honest, I'm going to come to you first for this, Anila.

Anila: Erm, it was helpful, it kind of gave me a better idea of what I should do and what I've done and what I haven't done and I can do better for next time. So, it was like a weekly review of what we'd done, so I really liked it.

Paige: If I'm being honest, we didn't use it because we were only given one, for the whole programme and it's because we didn't end up doing English for the whole eight weeks, which is what we were expected to do. She struggled with Science and I did triple Science at GCSE, so I was okay with Science and I helped her along with that. (A Level Transcript, 12.6.17)

Even though Anila said she found the logs helpful, her description of them as a 'weekly review' does not align with Barbara's disclosure that they were done retrospectively 'every couple of weeks.' In light of what was said about the 1:1 record logs during the interviews, the most significant factor here is that qualitative educational research does not have prescriptive tendencies and is likely to study 'the messy reality of schools and classrooms' (Wellington, 2000, p. 6). It also shows that contrary to what Wilson et al. (2016) said, regarding the tendency for interviewees to tell a unified story, it was not always evident in this study. Moreover, as this study took an inductive approach, meaning that conclusions are drawn once the data has been collected, there was always a possibility that the participants would be flexible and show agency when given the autonomy to do so. Paige and Chloe also demonstrated their agency in that although they were meant to revise English, they added science to their 1:1 sessions because it met Chloe's wider needs, thereby adding to the 'messy reality' of this research. Hence, instead of interpreting the inconsistencies in a negative light, it has been possible to apply Bourdieu's concept of the habitus as 'transposable dispositions' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 82), to see how NWC staff and students were autonomous in their actions. Furthermore, this again challenges notions of power and conferment of 'scholastic yield' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243), in that Chloe and Paige chose not to stick to the brief of solely covering English in their 1:1s. Academic investment in two subjects, as opposed to one, was something that increased Chloe's cultural capital and flipped the power balance by the way in which this gave her a more developed scholastic habitus (English & Bolton, 2016).

## **Conclusion**

To conclude the analysis of structure and agency, it has been possible to operationalise Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 50), in order to explore the structural and agentic dimensions of how the participants perceived their involvement in this research and the impact it had upon them. Social structures such as the family and the networks created by the peer tutoring project itself, influenced the GCSE and A Level students to make choices regarding their future studies and describe how they felt about the relationships they built with each other during and after the peer tutoring took place, and on how they felt about themselves and others. Unsurprisingly, there were stronger affective ties within the family than in the relationships between the GCSE and A Level students; hence the concept of functional friendships was evident, especially when the GCSE students talked about their connections with the A Level students. When looking at the newly created field of the peer tutoring project, it was enlightening to see how the power relations were not interpreted in the same way qualifications were hierarchized. This was because although the A Level students were perceived as having higher levels of academic capital (Naidoo, 2004), it was the GCSE students who set the agenda for their tutoring sessions and set the boundaries for their interactions with their A Level peer tutors. Bourdieu acknowledged the tension between structure and agency (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007) and believed his concepts of capital, field and habitus could be applied in ways which would acknowledge this tension, seeing the interplay between the two, instead of polarized dualisms. One of the main benefits of this, when applied to this research, is that the social structures in the home and at NWC did indeed shape the habitus of the GCSE and A Level students, but they asserted their agency in different ways, depending on the levels of their affective ties and how they chose to conduct the 1:1 sessions.

## ***Analysis conclusion***

In this chapter the following themes have been analysed and discussed: failure and success, academic vs. non-academic identity, and structure and agency. The findings show how the students at NWC sometimes thought of themselves in positive or negative lights, in accordance with their views on their place within the education system as a whole and more specifically within their current FE setting. Staff testimonies highlighted the ways in which some students were perceived as being more confident either academically or socially, but they also acknowledged the challenges of setting up and monitoring a peer tutoring scheme, broaching its failures and successes. Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 50) were operationalised to interrogate the dynamics of peer learning in the specific field of NWC; they worked as a critical lens because his body of work can have 'a 'practical' or political edge' (Webb et al., 2002, p. 8). For example, cultural capital in the institutionalised state of educational qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 242) permeated the themes in multiple ways,

due to the fact that the genesis of the peer tutoring research stemmed from GCSE English and maths resit policy (ESFA, 2019), as well as being impacted by the changes to the GCSE assessment structure itself (DfE, 2013). Alongside this, using notions of social capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007) to explore the networks, old and new, in which the students lived and studied provided opportunities to understand how students' habitus (Bourdieu, 2000) were shaped, and how this in turn influenced their identity as academic or non-academic, thereby reinforcing the academic/vocational divide (Burgess & Rodger, 2010) and hierarchical nature of education (Naidoo, 2004). In addition, the concept of habitus was useful when considering the students' power and control within the peer tutoring project, looking at how structure and agency, or the relationship between objective and subjective forces (Dowding, 2008), influenced the fields which they inhabited (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007).

Overall, it has been fascinating to consider the ideological implications of what appears to be a dichotomy between the notion of peer learning as cost-effective, self-serving and functionalist, against something based around more altruistic motives, where gains for individuals (or self-actualisation) are secondary to those gained by wider society. This is clearly a complex issue and viewing peer tutoring as a dichotomy blurs the central idea of peer tutoring in simple terms, namely 'people from similar social groupings who are not professional teachers helping each other to learn and learning themselves by teaching' (Topping, 1996, p. 322). On reflection, narratives which polarise the themes explored within this chapter only serve to show how a person's habitus leads them to behave instinctively, in various ways, when responding to external forces. Although it has been posited that Bourdieu was motivated to understand the instinctive aspect of the habitus in order to examine 'how society functions without overt intervention' (English & Bolton, 2016, p. 28), undertaking the research at NWC has made it possible to analyse how government policy, arguably an 'overt intervention', has in fact influenced the students and staff who participated, by showing their potential to exert agency within the structure of this new and innovative peer tutoring study. Looking at peer tutoring in FE as a functional friendship, defined here as: a purposeful relationship between peers, which is motivated by a mutually beneficial bond, or shared goals, and lasts until the purpose of that relationship has been fulfilled, this research has built upon the established work of Topping (1992, 1994, 1996, 2005) and Keenan (2014), enabling a broader perspective for use within the field of FE.

# Conclusion

## ***Introduction***

The final chapter of this thesis draws together the key findings of the small scale peer tutoring research at NWC and explains how it has contributed to new knowledge, as well as identifying opportunities for further research. The contribution to new knowledge is twofold: practical and theoretical. This instrumental single case study addresses the gap in peer tutoring research in the FE sector and adds to the debate on the issues faced by FE colleges who are dealing with large numbers of maths and English resit students (Greatbatch & Tate, 2018; Higton et al., 2017; Ryan, 2019). It uses four semi-structured interviews and research diaries for collection of data, in a ten month two phase study. The study recommends peer tutoring as an effective strategy which has institutional and social benefits and has coined the new phrase 'functional friendships' to define and categorise how peer tutoring operated in an FE context. Bourdieu's concepts of capitals (Bourdieu, 1986) and habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) were integral to understanding how and why some peer tutoring pairs were successful and others were not, in addition to showing how they operated in this particular field of education. The application of Bourdieu is in itself an innovative approach because peer tutoring sits largely in the realm of HE and is mostly theorised by applying social learning theories (Havnes et al., 2016; Hodgson et al., 2015). The closing reflections highlight the importance of educational research, both to the researcher and the researched.

## ***Main findings***

National policy for GCSE English and maths resits (ESFA, 2019) has led to higher numbers of students needing to take resits in FE colleges. For example, in 2018, 148,986 learners aged 17-plus resat GCSE English language and for maths GCSE there were 161,139 (Ryan, 2019). As a result of this, some FE managers have sought to find different ways of providing additional support for their students and at NWC one of their strategies was the peer tutoring programme.

As a direct consequence of this research, the phrase 'functional friendship' has been coined and defined as: a purposeful relationship between peers, which is motivated by a mutually beneficial bond, or shared goals, and lasts until the purpose of that relationship has been fulfilled. Within this relationship, the emphasis on sharing a specific purpose and sense of mutuality, has the potential to invert power relationships, which are often inherent in peer tutoring (Topping, 1996). In this particular context it challenges the doxa of academe due to the perception of the GCSE resit students as equals, despite their lower cultural capital



(Bourdieu, 1986). Power aside, there should also be gains for the peer tutors, whether that be using their experience to enrich their UCAS statement, and/or becoming more confident in social situations. The new phrase focuses the importance of the formation of effective dyadic relationships, as a key factor when creating effective peer tutor-tutee relationships; subsequently, this research recognises the importance of those ties, or functional friendships. In a context where both the GCSE resit student and the A Level student are driven by the desire to increase GCSE grades, as well as being able to see the benefits of attending peer tutoring 1:1s, the peer tutoring pairs can be perceived as working successfully. Granovetter (1973) argues that 'the strength of a tie is a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding) and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie' (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1361) and as such, the mutually beneficial bond and shared goals of the functional friendships presented the students with opportunities to form those ties. In order to explicate how the functional friendships were formed, sustained and categorised within a peer tutoring situation, Bourdieu's *The Forms of Capital* (1986), were operationalised alongside the notions of habitus and field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007, p. 96). Although it is not uncommon to use Bourdieu's theories when undertaking educational research (English & Bolton, 2016), no literature has been found to show how Bourdieu can be specifically operationalised within the field of peer tutoring, where the tutors and tutees meet outside the classroom.

The peer tutoring project impacted on the students in several ways, but the main one was gaining in confidence and this has been identified as a major theme within this research project. Confidence can relate to feeling more able to cope with the subject content of the GCSE exams, or feeling at ease in social situations, which would otherwise have been difficult, prior to forming their functional friendships. When A Level students provide 1:1 peer tutoring for GCSE resit students it can increase the GCSE students' levels of confidence related to subject specific knowledge and qualifications (institutional capital) and in relation to feeling more confident on a personal level (social capital) (Bourdieu, 1986). Increased social capital stems from the creation of new opportunities for GCSE resit and A Level students to mix together, removing structural boundaries within their educational setting. This led to students and staff reporting that the students who participated found it easier to speak to each other and developed a mutual respect for how the peer tutoring process had facilitated this. For the A Level students this was also recognised in the metaphor coined by Barbara (the Head of A Levels), who acted as the main operational coordinator, as 'walk[ing] a bit taller' (Staff transcript, 12.6.17) because they had risen to the challenge of supporting their peers like 'mini-teachers.' For the GCSE resit students their increased confidence related more to the acquisition of knowledge which they believe improved their exam performance and this subsequently enabled most of them to accrue cultural capital

(Bourdieu, 1986), creating positive gains in relation to their future career choices and educational goals. It is also important to note the value of GCSE resit courses themselves and the way that FE plays an integral part in opening up opportunities for those who are motivated to improve their attainment level (Higton et al., 2017; Ireland, 2019).

Furthermore, one benefit of A Level students providing 1:1 peer support sessions for GCSE resit students is that in successful working pairs GCSE students' English grades can increase to a grade 4 or above (old grade C). A Level students can benefit from tutoring GCSE resit students because the tutoring process enables them to reflect on their own learning and wider career goals. When A Level peer tutors and GCSE tutees are given the autonomy to decide the content of the 1:1 sessions, the GCSE students are empowered to make choices regarding what they study. The peer tutoring research at NWC started as a supplement to their English lessons, but as the students got to know each other they created opportunities to cover resit subjects such as maths and science too. The way in which students adapted the tutoring to suit their needs has not been viewed as a flaw in the research, but as evidence of young people showing their ability to be creative and innovative, scratching at the surface of their silence at a time when their educational choices can have far reaching effects.

Even though there are several benefits to peer tutoring, this research found there are also fundamental challenges of implementing a peer tutoring programme in an FE college and that the students had firm views on academic vs non-academic identity can become polarised in educational settings. The main challenges are that it requires additional staffing to provide training and ongoing monitoring and support for peer tutors and tutees, in addition to the logistics of timetabling the 1:1s. This points to the need for a 'buy in' from senior managers so that staff are given the time to set it up and provide ongoing support to the students involved. That said, it is important to remember how this research has highlighted some ways in which giving students autonomy led to them making decisions for themselves, with GCSE students taking the tuition they felt they needed, as opposed to what was initially offered (English). In relation to academic vs non-academic identity the findings were more demoralising than unexpected. The students' views reinforced the academic and vocational divide, pointing to the influence of schools in the formation, or lack of formation of a scholastic habitus (English & Bolton, 2016).

The students' interview testimonies brought to light an unexpected and deeply rooted emphasis on the hierarchies within education, particularly when discussing the UK qualification system, and even though this was not a planned element of the research at NWC, it is nonetheless a key finding. Existing structures, often created by policy drivers and

entry requirements (Ofqual, 2013), can either limit or grant access to qualifications; this begins to emerge at school, when students are directed towards vocational or academic courses for post 16 study (Payne, 2000). The current GCSE resit policy (ESFA, 2019) upholds the doxa (Bourdieu, 2000) that any grade below C/level 4 holds little or no value and this can be the linchpin of how academic or non-academic identities are formed. Hierarchies then lead to the formation of structures where individuals occupy dominant or subordinate positions (Naidoo, 2004) and because of these positions students' perceptions can become polarized (Pring, 1995). This became apparent within this research when the GCSE students noted their preference to have A Level students as their peer tutors, because A Levels have more prestige due to them being the 'gold standard' of educational attainment (Stewart, 2014). Social structures, such as the family, also contribute to hierarchies in that parents/and or siblings influence young people's choices. Due to the strong affective ties formed within these relationships, they make choices about whether to study BTECs or A Levels, in addition to decisions about what to study in HE and the career choices beyond that. This relates to what Bourdieu called the 'family feeling' (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 68) where obligations to family wishes inform the decisions that they make. The notion of the scholastic habitus (English & Bolton, 2016) pervades the hierarchies, perpetuating existing structures and informing agentic thought, due to the ways in which the habitus is formed by their experiences at home and school. Operationalising Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 50), when interpreting the findings related to perceptions of the hierarchies in education, was integral to forming the conclusions on peer tutoring in FE, in that by considering them as guiding principles, they provided a practical and theoretical lense with which to reflect.

### ***Contribution to new knowledge***

This is the first case study of peer tutoring in Further Education to focus on the GCSE resit 'problem' (The Guardian, 2014; Wilshaw, in Exley, 2016a) created by government policy which has led to an increased number of students needing to retake English and maths (ESFA, 2019). It has contributed to the creation of new knowledge in several ways, bringing to light the merits of peer learning and the possible benefits for both the peer tutor and the tutee. From the search of relevant literature it is evident that peer tutoring programmes are well-established in HE (Fitch & Semb, 1993; Keenan, 2014; Micari et al., 2005) but there is a dearth of research surrounding peer tutoring in FE (Topping, 1994). No other research about how peer tutoring can be used as an additional support structure on GCSE resit programmes has been published. Furthermore, major studies of peer tutoring programmes in HE theorise their research within the overarching framework of social learning theory (Clarkson & Luca, 2002; Coelho et al., 2014; David, 2015; Fitch & Semb, 1993; Havnes et al., 2016; Hodgson et al., 2015), whereas this study has operationalised Bourdieu's

'thinking tools' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 50) to analyse the perceptions of staff and students at North West College. By using Bourdieu in this way, the research has provided a unique analysis and contributed to providing a greater understanding of the significance of structure and agency and its relevance to peer tutoring, in the sense that it has been possible to see how structures such as the family, college environment and peer tutoring pairs, have impacted on the perceptions and actions of students and staff at NWC. It could help other researchers when undertaking their own studies, due to the fact Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 50) enable an analysis of the potential for wider social impact, as opposed to focusing on the social aspects of the learning process itself, which is the main emphasis in theories such as Vygotsky's (1978). Wider social impact can be anything from access to social capital by the formation of new networks beyond their existing friendship groups (Choudry, Williams & Black, 2017), to the development of attitudes where it is believed that one of the 'most powerful teaching resources' (Moliner & Alegre, 2020, p. 2) is students themselves.

By using Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 50) to theorise peer tutoring in the context of FE, this research offers new ways in which to explore its pedagogical and social value. The benefits of framing this research within Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus and field allowed the exploration of identity, structure, and agency, in ways that social learning theory does not. For example, in the broadest sense, social learning theory (Bandura, 1977; Piaget, 1964; Vygotsky, 1978) emphasises the significance of child development and social interactions which remain rooted within the classroom. Often, the MKO (more knowledgeable other) who provides scaffolding support (Vygotsky, 1978) in the ZPD (zone of proximal development) is an adult, or a peer with a more explicit power status, which might be the case in schools and HE: schools because of teacher involvement, and HE because after initial training and instruction, peer tutors can become PASS (Peer-assisted Study Session) leaders responsible for multiple groups of undergraduate students (Keenan, 2014). Although this does have some value for the peer tutoring research at NWC, it does not go far enough to explore the complexities of FE and the students who inhabit this field of study. For example, the peer tutoring research at NWC was driven by GCSE policy changes (ESFA, 2009; Ofqual, 2013) and this in turn raises questions about access to cultural capitals (Bourdieu, 1986) and inequalities in the field of education (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007), whereas social learning theory only served to explore aspects of knowledge transfer within the tutoring sessions. Fowler (2020) argues that Bourdieu's sociology 'has consistently possessed a rich subtext that offers theoretical resources for analysing actors' critique' (Fowler, 2020, p. 441) and in the context of peer tutoring, it is posited that these 'theoretical resources' add more value than those provided by social learning theory.

The concept of capital has been integral to understanding how the habitus is formed, in that cultural capital in the institutionalized form of educational qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986) shapes a person's educational and career goals. Taking Bourdieu's definition of habitus as 'a product of history' and 'a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks' (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 82-83) supported the analysis of the GCSE and A Level students' perceptions in ways that social learning theory could not, because it enables an acknowledgement of 'history', as well as recognising the significance of interactions in the here and now. This is especially the case when some GCSE resit students exerted their agency in deciding not to continue with the peer tutoring programme, compared to those who saw the benefits of peer tutoring and chose to continue. Ironically, even though social learning theory has the word 'social' in its title, it cannot be operationalised in the same way as Bourdieu's social capital (Bourdieu, 1986), because whereas social capital lends itself to explaining relationships within structures such as the family, educational institutions, and society more broadly, social learning theory is preoccupied with pedagogical gains and biological factors (Daniels, 2001). It is noted that social learning theory conceptualises learning as a social process (Fitch & Semb, 1993) but it does not go far enough, when researching peer tutoring in the field of FE, due to its lack of flexibility in providing the critical lens afforded by Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 50).

Within the peer tutoring group itself there was an opportunity for the students to form new social peer networks for the duration of the study (and possibly beyond). The relationship between the GCSE and A Level students is encapsulated by the term functional friendship, in that it bore several friendship traits, such as good will, rapport, solidarity and understanding; however, it was functional in that it was artificially created for a specific purpose and period of time. The social capital gained throughout the study was increased due to the extension of the students' social networks and their ability to mobilize their new connections (Bourdieu, 1986) in mutually beneficial ways. How these relations are enacted in practice, matters both in the moment and as a process of reflection.

As a direct result of this research project, the phrase 'functional friendship' has been created. This new phrase makes clear the fact that the relationships between peer tutors and tutees have to be strong in order for the pairings to work, but they can also be transient in nature, perhaps due to the peer tutoring social structure being created artificially and for a specific purpose. This being the case, it could be seen merely as 'a far more instrumental strategy in which advanced students, or those in later years, take on a

limited instructional role' (Boud et al., 2001, p. 4). Yet bearing in mind this definition of functional friendships is very much centred on relationships, bonds and shared goals, it is also aligned with the kind of peer learning that Topping (2005) refers to as 'the acquisition of knowledge and skill through active help and support among status equals or matched companions' (Topping, 2005, p. 631). The notion of peer tutoring as a functional friendship builds upon Topping's definition, with the addition of its emphasis on the mutually beneficial bond created during the peer tutoring 1:1s, as well as acknowledging the transient nature of that bond. The development of functional friendships as a new concept, is justified by the data in the analysis chapter because it spans all three of the main themes: failure and success, academic vs. non-academic identity, and structure and agency. In analysing these themes it emerged that the GCSE students led the way in how they perceived their relationship with their peer tutors as more functional in nature. For example, whereas Chloe used the phrase 'friends almost' (GCSE & A Level transcript, 7.12.17), her peer tutor, Paige, said 'I think for me and Chloe it was more a friendship' (A Level transcript, 12.6.17), indicating the goal-orientated aspect was prominent in the GCSE students' responses.

Bearing in mind what has been learned from the peer tutoring research at NWC, if FE practitioners are considering using peer tutoring programmes within their organisations, they would need to consider the benefits and limitations of doing so. The benefits are that peer tutoring provides scope for consolidation and development of subject knowledge, as well as opening up access to broader social capitals (Bourdieu, 1986). However, the limitations relate to the logistical planning aspects and also to staff utilisation for overseeing the smooth running. The GCSE students involved in the study at NWC reported being confused about how and why they had been chosen to participate, and this contrasted with the A Level students who felt more well-informed. Although information and brief training was provided (see Appendix 4, 5, 6 & 7), it is proposed that this should be more robust for the tutees, in order to ensure they are fully equipped to manage their own involvement in the peer tutoring programme. Teaching staff who know the prospective tutors and tutees will need to think carefully about matching students, based on their personality traits and subject knowledge, so that the functional friendships can be formed.

### ***Recommendations for future research***

As a result of this current research, it has been possible to identify how peer tutoring could add value within FE settings, from the ways in which it may increase confidence when preparing for exams and for some students in social contexts too. There is also scope to pick up on student perceptions of their binary attitudes towards having an academic or non-academic identity; it would be interesting to develop this research, specifically within the field of peer tutoring, but also to explore how prior educational experiences have

contributed to the formation of these identities. Social learning theory alone would not provide the means of exploring student identities, especially in terms of FE, where there can be a more pronounced academic/vocational divide (Baker, 2020; Burgess & Rodger, 2010). This could initially take place in settings where BTEC L3 students are also included as peer tutors, as well as A Level students, because this may well begin to challenge the existing narrative surrounding the academic/vocational divide (Payne, 2000). There has already been some interest in this peer tutoring research from an ex-colleague who is Head of Skills Pathway (ESOL, English & Maths FS) and now works at a college in London. The prospect of including ESOL and Functional Skills students in peer tutoring programmes would also increase the reach of the research to adults, above and beyond a HE setting, maximising opportunities to increase the social and institutional capital (Bourdieu, 1986) of those involved, through the potential it affords in relation to raising student confidence in their English and maths skills, as well as the wider benefits of inter-departmental and cross-college collaboration. A serious consideration when offering peer tutoring programmes, especially in FE, would be how and when the 1:1 sessions are timetabled, so that students who need to undertake paid work alongside their curriculum studies, are not disadvantaged.

Furthermore, if peer learning is integrated at grass roots level, seen purely as another form of teaching and learning, it could challenge existing cultures within FE, and colleges could implement peer tutoring because it supports pedagogy more broadly (Moliner & Alegre, 2020). The foreword of Frank Coffield's report for the Learning and Skills Network, (2008) best illustrates the point being made here, when he asked college principals and senior managers: 'If you focus on teaching and learning at your college, will the rest of the business fall into place?' (Coffield, 2008). He went on to explain what teaching and learning meant to him:

For me, teaching and learning are not two distinct activities, but intertwined elements of a single, reciprocal process, or, if you like, the two sides of one coin; perhaps they could be described as a double-sided, interactive process which transforms both tutor and learner. (Coffield, 2008, p. 8)

Although Coffield was speaking about tutors and learners in a conventional sense, the same concept can be applied to peer tutors and tutees; that is to say by taking a nuanced approach to teaching and learning, it can be applied more widely to encompass different kinds of tutors and learners. It is noted that there would be implications for CPD here because staff would benefit from training in how to design and implement peer tutoring programmes (Moliner & Alegre, 2020). Peer tutoring is also a reciprocal process and learning happens through those social interactions; this research has found that sometimes it leads to positive experiences, such as increased levels of confidence, but sometimes the peer tutoring pairs did not gel. However, the benefits outweigh the chance of some students exerting their agency and their right to choose not to be involved. If principals and senior

managers were to be asked the same question, but this time with an emphasis on peer teaching and learning, this research proposes that FE colleges can bestow the chance for their students to learn in multiple ways: providing the scaffolding for this does not need to be the sole responsibility of tutors: this is key and has the potential to invoke different pedagogical practices. Bearing in mind how 2020 has been a year which has massively affected the education sector, due to Covid 19's long-term impact on individuals studying and working within it (Schleicher, 2020), there has been a shift to online and blended learning (Nuffield Foundation, 2020; QAA, 2020). Although there are some perceived benefits to this new way of learning (JISC, 2020), research suggests that 62% of young people surveyed during lockdown experienced feelings of loneliness more than normal (Royal Society for Public Health, 2020), pointing to them being more vulnerable to poor mental health. However, given that the majority of young people are confident with digital technology and willing to connect with people virtually (Royal Society for Public Health, 2020), if peer tutoring programmes were already in place, there would be scope to carry these on irrespective of restricted access to sites of study (albeit bearing in mind the need for consideration of safeguarding and GDPR). Peer tutoring has more to offer than academic input (Keenan, 2014; Micari et al., 2005; Topping, 1996), and the benefits of this, in times of unprecedented social isolation, could have a positive effect.

### ***How capitals operated in this specific peer tutoring field***

According to Reay (2004b), 'what all Bourdieu's capitals share is that each requires, and is the product of, an investment of an appropriate kind and each can secure a return on that investment' (Reay, 2004b, p. 74) and it could be argued that this supports the concept of peer tutoring being defined as functional friendships. The principles behind the notion of functional friendships and their association with peer tutoring, are illuminated by the way in which Bourdieu's capitals (Bourdieu, 1986) can be linked to the contrasting identities of the A Level tutors and GCSE tutees. Cultural capital operated within this specific field in the institutionalised form of the educational qualifications undertaken by the students and in the social form because this research posits that peer tutoring added 'value to the educational experience for both the *tutor and tutee* [original emphasis]' (Topping, 1994, p. 11). Additionally, symbolic capital was evident due to the ways in which students identified themselves and others as being academic or non-academic, highlighting the hierarchy of qualifications within the English education system. The dichotomous nature of their perceived identities reinforces the narrative that underpins a belief system whereby A Levels are for academic students and BTECs are for non-academic or vocational students. Ironically, these 'academic/vocational dualisms' (Payne, 2000, p. 359) were perpetuated by the students themselves; however, I contend that the binary way in which the students felt about being academic or non-academic was not of their own making. Payne (2000)



maintains that Conservative policy is at the heart of A Levels being seen as the 'gold standard' of the English education system and this being the case, there is scope to see the students' views as stemming from them learning their place within an education system which perpetuates latent symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). If students feel judged and labelled by their prior educational experiences in school, it can lead to the self-fulfilling prophecy, or Pygmalion effect (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968), which 'proposes that the perception that a teacher has of a student will affect the student's performance' (Thompson, 2014, p. 461). Thus, it comes as no surprise that this stays with them when they enter FE. Additionally, Duckworth and Smith (2018) argue that 'the current further education system in the UK is as or more susceptible to the hegemonic and structuring ideas that impose meanings and curricula on students in ways that do not best serve their interests' (Duckworth & Smith, 2018, p. 6) and it would be wrong not to acknowledge that this, alongside government resit policy, was a key driver for this peer tutoring research having been undertaken.

Despite this research's beginnings as a response to a 'problem' which was arguably created by government policy, situating the research within a Bourdieuan theoretical framework has enabled the analysis of data collected from the interviews to find several positive outcomes because the 'analytical advantage of drawing on Bourdieu is the emphasis on the relational and dynamic aspects' (Ihlen, 2018, p. 4). It is relational in the sense that the peer tutoring project created a social space where the students were actors, positioned in relation to each other as peers and within the field of education as a whole. The dynamic aspects are derived from the ways in which power relationships shifted throughout the peer tutoring 1:1s creating opportunities for the GCSE students to exert some control over their own learning experience and for the A Level students to strengthen their scholastic habitus (English & Bolton, 2016).

## **Conclusion**

The genesis of this peer tutoring research was borne out of GCSE maths and English resit policy changes (ESFA, 2019) and the perceived problems that this created (The Guardian, 2014; Wilshaw, in Exley, 2016a) within the FE sector. However, it grew organically into being more about young people who were navigating a hierarchical and hegemonic education system (Duckworth, 2014; Naidoo, 2004), which is inherently biased towards those who have a stronger academic identity and robust scholastic habitus. By analysing the themes that emerged from the interview transcripts, it became clear that the concept of identity and notions of power underpinned the main findings. When given the autonomy to shape the peer tutoring sessions, the GCSE resit students, with the cooperation of their A Level peer tutors, took advantage of the peer tutors' broader curriculum knowledge and

utilised this in ways that had not been set out at the start; i.e. this research started as peer tutoring for GCSE English, but they covered other subjects, by mutual agreement. They formed 'functional friendships' to learn from each other, often in different ways, but with positive outcomes in relation to improved confidence. The peer tutoring project suited their own purposes, and notwithstanding the fact that it was a social structure newly created just for them, they did manage to take agency and see potential for a wider remit. As such, the peer tutoring study cannot be evaluated solely on whether the GCSE resit students achieved a grade 4 or above in their GCSE English exam sat in June 2017. Yes, gaining a grade 4 or above was what the staff and students at NWC aspired to, and the achievement of this is no trivial matter. Yet as this research sought to generate new knowledge surrounding peer tutoring in the field of FE, unpacking their dynamic thoughts and embracing the 'messy reality' (Wellington, 2000, p. 6) of educational research, it has begun to challenge the doxa that HE has the monopoly on peer tutoring.

## ***Reflections***

When considering the implementation of new practices in educational settings, it can be argued that undertaking research is an integral process (English & Bolton, 2016). However, as the case study at NWC has shown, the day-to-day work pressures on FE staff make it almost impossible for them to do this alone. This is one of the reasons why collaboration with researchers in HE settings fosters partnerships which have the potential to show that students in further education have much to contribute, when given a platform to do so. According to Yin (2014), case studies are ways of 'presenting the case from participants' multiple perspectives and meanings – including the possibility of challenging the researcher's original assumptions' (Yin, 2014, p. 220) and on reflection, the GCSE and A Level students certainly challenged my original assumptions about who would have the most power in the 1:1 peer tutoring sessions. They also showed me how, when given the right environment to do so, young people have the potential to shape their own educational goals and social relations, demonstrating their agency in the ways they opted in or out of participating. The peer tutoring research at NWC was not 'done to' the students; it was set up by myself and staff, then the students were given the autonomy to make it work for themselves, or in some cases walk away from the project.

When reflecting on the review of literature surrounding peer tutoring, there is still a dearth of research relating to FE: this research has begun to address this. I have posited this dearth could be due to the fact that peer tutoring sits traditionally within the HE sector. Moreover, there is an inherent emphasis on the need for those participating to show independence and a degree of emotional intelligence which cannot be explicitly taught (Giles et al., 2016), so perhaps this is deemed to be lacking until someone has started university.

And yet, if achievement of this is viewed in terms of how peer tutoring can contribute to the building of confidence, both social and academic (Andrews & Clark, 2011), then the students at NWC showed that in the successful peer tutoring pairs (where they formed functional friendships and contact was regular and mutually beneficial) there is a place for it in FE. With careful planning and a buy in from staff and students, there is no reason why peer tutoring could not help to form a new paradigm of learning in FE, one which links closely to the transformative effects inherent in Coffield's view of teaching and learning (2008). The notion that planned socialisation between hitherto separate groups can generate multiple benefits is not an alien concept within education, so almost by default, implementing peer tutoring within FE structures could help 'the rest of the business fall into place' (Coffield, 2008).

Thus far, I have reflected how educational research impacts on those being researched, but as this research is framed by Bourdieu's theoretical concepts (Bourdieu, 1990) there is a place for reflection about its impact on the researcher too. From the outset, I utilised rigorous methodological procedures to show that students in an FE setting had the skills and attributes to engage with peer tutoring effectively, to help solve the GCSE resit 'problem' (The Guardian, 2014; Wilshaw, in Exley, 2016a). Although this was informed by my own experience of GCSE resit programmes, which spanned thirteen years and encompassed multiple policy changes, it was important to balance this alongside management of my positionality. Not achieving GCSEs in maths and English at grade C/4 can put barriers in place, which inhibit progress and attack the self-esteem of those people affected and this research became a way of exploring this. By being reflexive, I addressed the idea of 'insider-outsider positionings' (Milligan, 2016, p. 239), especially when relating to the staff at NWC, with whom I share many ideological principles. In embracing the fluidity and messiness of educational research (Wellington, 2000) I saw myself mostly as an 'inbetweenner' (Milligan, 2016, p. 235) and aimed to avoid the dichotomy of 'insiderness' and 'outsiderness' (Milligan, 2016, p. 248). When discussing reflexivity, Carroll (2009) used the term 'alongsider' (Carroll, 2009, p. 248) and at the heart of this is the notion that the research process has to be collaborative and above all, honest. In turn, this ties in with making the 'researcher's gaze explicit' (Atkins & Duckworth, 2019, p. 93) and being secure in my own understanding of my etic viewpoint.

Moving on to the personal and professional effects of how the EdD course and this peer tutoring research project have impacted upon me, it would be an understatement to say they have been profound. Throughout the research process I have frequently battled the imposter syndrome (Clance & Imes, 1978), questioning my ability to do what it takes to earn the title of Dr Michelle Whitehead, whilst doing justice to everyone at NWC. At times, I

have also hidden behind the label of 'novice researcher' (Kalman, 2019, p. 345) and undermined my own abilities as a writer, finding it hard to translate constructive feedback into my own words. However, I have been able to rationalise some of these feelings by applying Bourdieu's theoretical concepts to my own social and educational origins and trajectories, recognising their significance to my real world experiences.

I grew up in what could be described as an erratic family background; although I did not always realise it at the time, I lived through periods of poverty and extremely disruptive circumstances at home. Fortunately, school and the friendships I made there (some of which are still as strong as ever today) were a welcome escape for me and I formed networks which gave me access to social capitals (Bourdieu, 1986), albeit in a largely working-class community in Blackpool. The value of education was never discussed or celebrated in my family, but despite this I excelled at primary school, passed my O Levels and went on to study A Levels at Sixth Form. However, whereas I had been able to pass five O Levels and one CSE grade 1 with the bare minimum of revision, A Levels meant developing a new standard of engagement and I did not possess the scholastic habitus (English & Bolton, 2016) to succeed, at that time. I remember vividly one of my teachers saying that if I applied myself I might 'make a good administrator', and as several of my peers went off to university, I became an insurance clerk, married one of the office managers and had three children by the time I was 26; it could be argued this broke the cycle of my dysfunctional family background, but it also conformed to what my teachers had predicted, in relation to a lack of educational attainment and became a self-fulfilling prophecy (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Despite being able to access economic, cultural and social capitals (Bourdieu, 1986) and finding contentment and fulfilment in motherhood, I became quietly frustrated, observing my new family and old friends achieve great success in the fields of accountancy, insurance, education and business. This is what prompted me to enrol onto an A Level English Language night course at a local FE college, thereby enabling me to begin forming the scholastic habitus (English & Bolton, 2016), which was absent from my previous experience of education. Achieving success in one A Level led to me undertaking another one, followed by an English degree, a PGCE, two GCSEs, an MA Education and becoming an FE English lecturer, GCSE programme leader, then teacher educator. Not only have my educational qualifications, namely institutionalised forms of cultural capital, shown a sharp upward trajectory, they have also been emancipatory, due to the way they opened up access to a teaching career that is rewarding personally, professionally and financially. Even in times when the stability of mine and my children's home life was under threat, my career and earning capacity, coupled with support from my employer ensured our financial security was protected. This also highlights the transposable nature of the habitus (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), in that mine has undergone a seismic

shift, becoming all the more prized because I struggled to earn it myself. Sheer tenacity and determination, shaped by survival through adversity and the knowledge that hard work does pay off, have given me the high level of academic resilience (Kannangara et al., 2020), needed to write this EdD thesis. What began in 2015 as a qualification where I felt I was following in the wake of my fellow teacher educators, has ended with me starting to lead peer tutoring research in FE. Like some of the students who participated, it could now be said that I 'walk a bit taller' (Staff Transcript, 12.6.17) and can see educational research through a reflexive lens. This lens showed me that the research process is often 'messy', but this is to be welcomed because we are working with real people in dynamic and complex settings.

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# Appendices

## ***Appendix 1: Interview questions June 2017***

GCSE students

1. Tell me a little about yourself
  - a) What's your name?
  - b) How old are you?
  - c) Where do you live?
  - d) Who do you live with?
  - e) Have any of the people you live with been to university?
  - f) Which courses are you studying at college?
2. Tell me about the peer tutoring programme,
  - a) How did you become involved in the programme?
  - b) What is the purpose of the programme?
  - c) What do you do in the tutoring sessions? Talk me through an example of one of the sessions.
  - d) What did your fellow students and parents say about you being involved?
  - e) What input did your tutors have?
  - f) When and where did the sessions happen?
  - g) How many times did you meet?
  - h) How did you manage your time?
3. Tell me what was good about the peer tutoring programme,
  - a) Did it help you with academic performance in your GCSE English classes?
  - b) Did it improve your confidence in any way?
  - c) Would you recommend it to someone else?
4. What were the challenges of being involved in the programme?
  - a) Was the session log form useful or not?
  - b) Did you ever think of giving up?
  - c) How could it be improved?
5. Can you describe the relationship you built up with your peer tutor?
  - a) How were you paired up with each other?
  - b) Why were you paired with each other?

6. What does the future hold for you?
  - a) Where do you see yourself in one year?
  - b) Where do you see yourself in 3 years?
7. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me?

#### A Level students

1. Tell me a little about yourself,
  - a) What's your name?
  - b) How old are you?
  - c) Where do you live?
  - d) Who do you live with?
  - e) Have any of the people you live with been to university?
  - f) Which courses are you studying at college?
2. Tell me about the peer tutoring programme,
  - a) How did you become involved in the programme?
  - b) What is the purpose of the programme?
  - c) What do you do in the tutoring sessions? Talk me through an example of one of the sessions.
  - d) What did your fellow students and parents say about you being involved?
  - e) What input did your tutors have?
  - f) When and where did the sessions happen?
  - g) How many times did you meet?
  - h) How did you manage your time?
3. Tell me what was good about the peer tutoring programme,
  - a) Did it help you with academic performance in your GCSE English classes?
  - b) Did it improve your confidence in any way?
  - c) Would you recommend it to someone else?
4. What were the challenges of being involved in the programme?
  - a) Was the session log form useful or not?
  - b) Did you ever think of giving up?
  - c) How could it be improved?
5. Can you describe the relationship you built up with your peer tutee?
  - a) How were you paired up with each other?

- b) Why were you paired with each other?
- 6. What does the future hold for you?
  - a) Where do you see yourself in one year?
  - b) Where do you see yourself in 3 years?
- 7. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me?

#### Staff

- 1. Tell me about yourself,
  - a) What's your name?
  - b) What's your role at the college?
  - c) How long have you worked here?
- 2. What was your role in the peer tutoring project?
- 3. How were the students paired up?
- 4. What benefits have you seen by running the peer tutoring programme?
  - a) For the GCSE students.
  - b) For the A Level students.
  - c) For the staff.
  - d) For the college.
- 5. What challenges have organizing and implementing the programme presented for staff?
  - a) Difficulties setting it up.
  - b) Rooming.
  - c) Getting students to use the tutorial record log.
  - d) Timetabling
- 6. If you decide to take the peer tutoring scheme forward next year, what changes, if any, would you make?
- 7. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me?

## ***Appendix 2: Briefing sheet and consent Form***

What is the research about?

It is for Michelle Whitehead's Doctor of Education studies, looking at the benefits and challenges involved in a peer assisted learning programme. GCSE English resit students have a weekly tuition/revision session with an A Level student. This will take place between February and May 2017.

Why have I been invited to take part?

We would like to hear about the experiences of students and staff participating in and managing the peer assisted learning programme.

Do I have to take part?

No, you have been selected because the peer assisted learning programme is being piloted at your college.

What will I do if I take part?

- Peer tutors and peer tutees will meet weekly to revise materials and topics covered in GCSE English classes.
- The researcher will provide student participants with a progress sheet/record of activity log, which should be updated after each tutoring sessions.
- Student participants will take part in a focus group interview in June, after the GCSE English exams have been sat. There will be one for the GCSE students and one for the A Level students.
- Staff participants will be interviewed on a 1:1 basis, or in a group between June and September 2017, at a time deemed convenient for both the researcher and the member of staff.

What are my rights?

- You can withdraw from the research at any time.
- Any information given by you will be stored following the Data Protection Act 1988. All information will be anonymised, so it cannot be linked back to you.
- You can have a copy of the interview transcript if you request one.
- You will have the opportunity to see the results of the study before the submission of the researcher's Doctor of Education thesis.

What will happen to the results of this research?



The results will be analysed for Doctor of Education research & scholarly activity purposes only.

Do you have any questions before you begin the peer tutoring programme?

- You can contact [michelle.whitehead@oldham.ac.uk](mailto:michelle.whitehead@oldham.ac.uk). Tel: 0161 344 8806
- Peer tutors and tutees can also speak to college staff, as well as the researcher.

## Consent to participate in research form

Title of research: A case study to investigate the impact of peer assisted learning on GCSE English resit courses in a Further Education organisation.

Name and contact details of Researcher:

Michelle Whitehead, UCO, University Way, Oldham, OL1 1BB, 0161 344 8806

Name of Participant:..... (please print)

1. I have read and understand the briefing guide provided for the above named study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that participation is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw at any time.
3. I agree to take part in the above study.
4. I agree to keep a progress log/record during the study and submit this to the researcher for analysis.
5. I agree to the interview/focus group being audio recorded.
6. I agree to anonymised use of quotes for research and scholarly activity purposes.

.....

Participant signature

.....

Date

.....

Researcher signature

.....

Date

### ***Appendix 3: Interview questions December 2017***

Follow up research questions 6.12.17

1. Tell me a little about yourself,
  - a. What's your name?
  - b. How old are you?
  - c. Which courses are you now studying at college?
2. Have you stayed in contact with anyone else involved in the peer tutoring programme?
3. How did you feel when the GCSE results came out?
4. What impact, if any, have those results had on your studies in this current academic year?
5. I've drawn several themes from the interviews I did in June (e.g. **confidence, control/power, validity/hierarchy of qualifications, functional friendships**) and I'd like to explore them by conducting the interview in a less formal way and asking you think about the programme and imagine you are in charge of planning it. What would it look like? You can use the paper and pens to draw it out if you like.

Ask about their perceptions of my themes, if they don't come out in the planning activity.

- Confidence
- control/power,
- validity/hierarchy of qualifications
- functional friendships

## Appendix 4: Overview of peer learning study at NWC PowerPoint

# GCSE English

## Peer Assisted Learning for Students



2

### What is Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) ?

- PAL stands for **Peer Assisted Learning** and is a way of revising what has been studied in GCSE English classes.
- Its purpose is to support the learning experience through **collaborative discussion/revision** and involves **AS Level students** working with **GCSE students** once a week.
- It's students supporting Students.



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## How Does It Operate?

- The content of the peer tutoring study sessions will be set by the GCSE tutors.
- It's about **revision and discussion**, not being told the answers.
- It's an active process and involves **learning by doing**.
- It's a **safe place** to talk about learning needs.
- It's not a replacement for attending classes – it is there to **back them up**.
- It's informal, **friendly** and supportive.

Writing to Persuade  
DAFORREST



4

## How PAL Operates (cont'd)

- **Embedded:** sessions are **timetabled** outside classes and run weekly
- **Supports learning:** emphasis on **1:1/1:2** and co-operative learning
- **Supplemental to teaching:** subject content drawn from existing class materials ( notes, workbooks, textbooks, etc.)



5

## 5 Intended Outcomes of PAL

PAL intends to help GCSE students:

- **adjust** to the demands of resitting GCSE English
- acquire a **clearer view** of subjects and texts covered in class
- develop their **independent learning** and study skills to meet requirements of the curriculum
- **enhance** their **understanding** of the subject matter of their course through collaborative discussion
- **prepare better** for **assessed** work and examinations

# 1,2,3,4,5

6

Most current PAL research is conducted in universities. A student study in Bournemouth found:

- 61% said PAL helped **develop** their study & learning **skills**
- 66% said PAL helped their **understanding** of the subject matter of their course through group discussions
- 77% said PAL helped them **prepare** better for examinations



## Qualities of a Peer Tutor

7



- **Competent** performance in their GCSE studies –grade B or above.
- **Empathy** with the student experience (especially having recently sat the GCSE English exam).
- An interest in **people** and how they learn.
- Good **communication**, listening and interpersonal skills.
- Good self **organisational** skills.
- Ability to **model** and demonstrate good study habits.
- Possession of other **qualities** such as reliability, credibility, commitment, honesty and approachability.

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- Offer **weekly peer tutoring sessions** from February to May.
- Make students aware that the sessions are a **supplement** to lessons and not a replacement.
- **Demonstrate good study habits** and learning strategies to students attending the sessions.
- Attend the PAL **training**.
- Maintain regular **contact** with the GCSE tutor.
- Take part in a **focus group** to discuss experiences of the peer learning programme, after it has finished.
- Complete **weekly records** of what you have covered, using the record/logbook provided.
- Maintain a **professional attitude** on issues such as confidentiality.



## Training

- Peer tutors benefit from a training session to prepare them for their role.
- This **training session** takes place over one day in January.
- In addition, peer tutors also receive **on-going guidance** to help them to develop strategies to strengthen interpersonal skills.
  - Self-esteem, learning confidence and **active listening**.
  - Voice and body language for **personal impact**.
- The **skills** and experience gained as part of the training and the role itself are **valuable and transferrable** to a wide range of careers.



## Benefits for peer tutors

- Receive **valuable training**, focusing on personal skills such as leadership, teamwork, interpersonal communication, facilitation and coaching skills
- Increase your **confidence**, especially in situations when teamwork is required to attain a goal
- Gain valuable experience to **enhance your CV/personal statement**
- Be able to share your **subject knowledge**
- Enhance your **employability**





## Benefits for peer tutees

- Opportunity to **revise** the subjects covered in class.
- Improve your **confidence** about GCSE English.
- **Talk to someone** who has recently achieved their own GCSE qualification.
- Develop **independent learning** skills.
- Improve your **speaking and listening** skills.



## ***Appendix 5: A Level peer tutor training PowerPoint***



### Objectives

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- Analyse your own perceptions of peer tutoring
- Begin planning how to structure peer study session
- Explore potential problems and how to deal with them



## Starter activity

- How would you define peer tutoring?
- Why did you decide to get involved in the peer assisted learning programme?
- What personal goals do you hope to achieve?



## Peer tutoring

- Peer tutoring is characterized by specific role-taking : one person has the role of tutor and the other (s) has the role of tutee. (Topping & Ehly, 1998).
- It is linked to social constructivist theory where learning occurs due to 'collaboration with more capable peers' (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).



## What skills do I need?

- Empathise with the students and their circumstances – you recently sat your GCSE English.
- Be a facilitator not a spoon-feeder!
- Good time keeping and organisation.
- Be a role model – what study and revisions techniques do you use?  
Demonstrate a positive attitude to studying.
- Use technical language related to English studies – simile and metaphor etc.



## How could I structure a 1 hour session?

1. Introduction, set positive tone (2 mins)
2. Ask GCSE student to summarise what they covered in class this week – what do they already know about this week's topic? (5 mins)
3. Set a goal/objective for this week's session – do this collaboratively as you will need to help. Write the goal (s) down in the session log. (5 mins)
4. Go over the content needed to meet the goal – mind maps, note-making, discussion, class notes, GCSE Bitesize. (35-40 mins)
5. Get GCSE student to summarise what they have learned and record on the session log. Did they meet the goal (s)? (5 - 10 mins)



## Non-verbal communication and active listening

- Studies say that between 60%-90% of communication is non-verbal, so be aware of this during your sessions.
- Be positive (smile!)
- Make eye contact
- Don't interrupt
- Sit next to, not across from each other
- Observe personal space and don't sit too close/far away – ask if you're not sure!



## Scenarios for discussion – how would you deal with them?

1. The GCSE student is very shy and you are having trouble getting them to talk freely.
2. The GCSE student is distracted by messages on their mobile phone.
3. You don't feel confident about the topic they want to cover in today's session.
4. The GCSE student doesn't know the answer to any of your questions/keeps answering incorrectly.



## Scenario suggestions



1. Take a step back and make time to build a rapport before moving on to study.
2. Make a point of putting your phone on silent at the start of the session, put it in your bag and ask them to do the same.
3. Research the topic together or suggest you come back to it next week and do something else today.
4. Have you asked the question clearly enough? Let them tell you what they don't understand and above all else, don't get frustrated!

## **Appendix 6: GCSE peer tutee training PowerPoint**

# Peer Tutee Training Session

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GCSE English

## Objectives

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- Discuss your own perceptions of peer learning
- Begin planning how to set goals in a peer study session



## Starter activity

- How can the peer assisted learning programme benefit your GCSE studies?
- What personal goals do you hope to achieve?



## Setting a goal for persuasive writing

- Source text: volunteering in the local community for Help the Homeless.
- Your goal for a session could be to write example sentences for AFOREST

- A – alliteration, anecdotes
- F – forceful phrases, facts
- O – opinions
- R – repetition, rhetorical questions, reader focus (personal pronouns), reliable source
- E – exaggeration, emotive language, examples
- S – statistics, shock tactics, structure
- T – threes



## Setting a goal for PEE

- Find 5 quotes from this week's lesson and write PEE sentences for each one.

- Try and provide **three** supporting ideas in your paragraph.
- For **each supporting idea** follow this model:

**P.E.E.**

**- POINT - EXAMPLE - EXPLAIN**

Write your point. Provide your evidence. Explain how this evidence proves your point.

**NOTE:** Not every supporting idea can be explained entirely in one sentence, you could need **two or three**.

## Peer tutoring

- Peer tutoring is characterized by specific role-taking : one person has the role of tutor and the other (s) has the role of tutee. (Topping & Ehly, 1998).
- Unlike mentoring, which is usually more about personal and social guidance, it is concerned with subject specific content – in this case GCSE English.



## What skills do I need?

- Be yourself – you're working together with a peer who has recently passed their own GCSE English.
- The sessions are guided by what you want to revise from your GCSE English classes – be active and set your own goals for each session!
- Be prepared – good time keeping and organisation.
- Demonstrate a positive attitude to studying.



How will the 1 hour session be structured?

1. Introduction – a quick 2 min catch up.
2. Summarise what you covered in class this week – what do you know about this week's topic? (5 mins)
3. Set a goal/objective for this week's session – do this together as you will need to help. Write the goal (s) down in the session log. (5 mins)
4. Go over the content needed to meet the goal – mind maps, note-making, discussion, class notes, GCSE Bitesize, **build up to writing short paragraphs**. (35-40 mins)
5. Summarise what you've learned and record on the session log. Did you meet the goal (s)? (5 - 10 mins)

## Getting the most out of the session

---

1. Don't be shy – get to know your peer tutor as quickly as possible!
2. Put your mobile phone on silent if you think it will distract you.
3. Think about what topics YOU want to cover – it's your session and your choice.



## ***Appendix 7: Active listening techniques***

Paraphrasing:

- I think what you're saying is that...
- So, in other words do you think...?
- Ok, if I understand correctly, you think that...

Ways of getting a response:

- This is what...says, what do you think?
- What are your thoughts about...?
- Do you agree or disagree with...?

Steering in the right direction:

- I see what you mean but maybe we could try...
- Ok, I understand your point but we might think about...
- Shall we see if this idea works?



### ***Appendix 8: GCSE peer tutoring session log (template)***

GCSE peer tutoring session log Tutor name:

Tutee name:

Date and time of session:

Summary of what was covered in GCSE class:	Goal (s) for today's session:	Tutor comments:	Tutee comments:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li><li>•</li></ul> <p>What do you want to revise/cover today?</p>	<p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>Which strategies did you use? E.g. mind maps, GCSE Bitesize</p>	<p>1. Have today's goals been met?</p> <p>2. How do you know this?</p>	<p>1. How confident do you feel about what you have covered today?</p> <p>2. What else do you need to do to revise today's topic further?</p>

### **Appendix 9: GCSE peer tutoring session log (completed)**

GCSE peer tutoring session log Tutor name: Paige Tutee name: Chloe

Date and time of session: 18 April 10.30-11-30

Summary of what was covered in GCSE class:	Goal (s) for today's session:	Tutor comments:	Tutee comments:
<p>What do we mean by synthesizing two texts</p> <p>What do you want to revise/cover today?</p> <p>I want to look at two texts and try to find ideas that link them</p>	<p>1 . Find links between 2 texts that are not obvious</p> <p>Which strategies did you use? E.g. mind maps, GCSE Bitesize Highlighting in each text any words or phrases they have in common.</p> <p>Summarizing each text and then bringing them together To look for similarities and differences</p>	<p>3. Have today's goals been met?</p> <p>I believe so .</p> <p>4. How do you know this?</p> <p>Hannah was able to isolate common themes in the two texts with minimum help</p>	<p>3. How confident do you feel about what you have covered today?</p> <p>Feeling more confident</p> <p>4. What else do you need to do to revise today's topic further?</p> <p>I need to look at more texts .</p>

## Appendix 10: Coding records

### 10.08.19

Code/theme	GCSE	A Lev	Staff	GCSE/A
Humour/laughter	x	x		
Peer learning	x	x		
Research itself	x			
Family	x	x	x	
Qualifications	x	x		xx
Agency/lack of	x	x	x	
Power/student control	x	xx		xxx
Time/of sessions/consuming	x	xx		xxxx
Value	x	x		
Educational capital	x			x
Self-doubt	x			
Study environment/rooms	x	x	x	x
Timetables	x		x	xx
Confidence	x	x	x	
Respect	x			
Recommendations	x			
GCSE experts	x			
Understand own learning	x			
Life skills	x			x
College courses	x			
Traits/attributes	x		x	x
Hierarchy of quals	x			xx
Confusion	x			
Employment/professions	x	x		
Qual difficulty	x	x		
Maths	x			
Motivation	x	x		
Relationships	x		x	xx
Structure of peer session	x	x	x	
University		x		
Arabic		x		
Tutors		x		
Purpose		x		
Communication/interaction with peers		x	x	x

Good GCSE grades		x		
Spelling		x		
Activities outside college		x		
Teaching		x		x
Independence		x		
Initial meetings		x		
Revision plan		x		
Subject knowledge		x		
Friendship		x	x	xx
Prior knowledge/experience/transfer		x		x
Stress		x		
Near age learning		x		x
Session log	x	x	x	
Different realities		x		
Tutor different subjects		x		
Contact outside session		x		
Training need		x	x	
Personality match/pairings		x	xx	x
Pressure – self/parents		x		
Tradition/culture		x	x	
Family burden/responsibilities		x		
Finances		x		
Parent control		x		
Career choices				x
Roles/support			x	
Facilitation			x	
Nurture			x	
Character			x	
Logistics			x	
Convenience			x	
Gender			x	
Organic process			x	
Personal growth			x	
New specification			x	
Leadership			x	
Autonomy			x	
Credibility			x	
Socialisation			x	



Reflection			x	
Research/scheme criteria/set up			x	xx
Failure			x	
Networks			x	
Benefits			x	x
Enrichment			x	
Narrative			x	
Responsibility			x	x
Boundaries			x	
Social media				x
Feelings				x
Impact				x
Progression				x
Personal statement				x
Intimidated				xx
Planning				x
Commitment				x
Concentration				x
Range of peer tutors				x
Differentiation				x
Revision				x
Maturity				x
Deadlines				x
Academic				x
Degree				x
Theory/course content				x
Assessment				x
Perceptions of A levs/BTEC				xx
Influence of school teachers				xx
Positivity				x
Top set/lower set				x
Get to know each other				x

## 18.08.19

Code/theme	GCSE	A Lev	Staff	GCSE/A
Peer learning	x	x		x
Near age learning		x		
Research itself	x		x	xx
Research/scheme, criteria/set up				
Recommendations				
Value (of project)				
Family	x	x	x	
Family burden/responsibilities		x		
Pressure self/parents		x		
Parent control		x		
Qualifications	x	x		xx xx  xx x
Hierarchy of qualifications				
Qual difficulty				
Perceptions of A levs/BTEC				
Educational capital				
GCSE Maths				
Good GCSE grades				
Power/student control	x	xx	x	xxx
Autonomy				
Agency/lack of				
Time/of sessions/consuming	x	xx	x	xxxx xx  x
Timetables				
Logistics				
Study environment/rooms				
Session log				
Structure of peer session				
Self-doubt	x	x	x	xx
Confusion				
Stress				
Failure				
Intimidated				
Confidence	x	x	x	
Personal growth				
GCSE experts	x	x		
Subject knowledge				

Prior knowledge/experience/transfer		x		x
Understand own learning	x			
Life skills	x			
Reflection			x	
College courses	x			
Employment/professions	x	x		
Career choices				x
Motivation	x	x		
Relationships	x		x	xx
University		x		
Degree				x
Personal statement				x
Tutors		x		
Purpose		x		
Communication/interaction with peers		x	x	x
Get to know each other				x
Friendship		x	x	xx
Activities outside college		x		
Arabic		x		
Teaching		x		x
Differentiation				x
Independence		x		
Initial meetings		x		
Different realities		x		
Tutor different subjects		x		
Range of peer tutors				x
Contact outside session		x		
Boundaries			x	
Training need		x	x	
Personality match/pairings		x	xx	x
Character			x	
Gender			x	
Tradition/culture		x	x	
Finances		x		
Roles/support			x	
Facilitation			x	
Nurture			x	
Convenience			x	

Organic process			x	
New specification			x	
Leadership			x	
Credibility			x	
Responsibility			x	
Socialisation			x	x
Social media				
Networks			x	
Benefits			x	x
Enrichment			x	
Narrative			x	
Feelings				x
Impact				x
Progression				x
Planning		x		x
Revision				x
Deadlines				x
Revision plan				
Commitment				x
Concentration				x
Maturity	x		x	x
Positivity				x
Traits/attributes				x
Respect				
Academic				x
Theory/course content				x
Assessment				x
Influence of school teachers				xx
Top set/lower set				x

Next part of the process was to look at each initial code and see if I can match it up with others.

Continue grouping codes together.

## 27.09.19

Code/theme	GCSE	A Lev	Staff	GCSE/A
Peer learning	x	x		
Near age learning		x		x
Research itself	x			
Research/scheme, criteria/set up			x	xx
Recommendations				
Value (of project)		x		
Family	x	x	x	
Family burden/responsibilities		x		
Pressure self/parents		x		
Parent control		x		
Qualifications	x	x		xx
Hierarchy of qualifications				xx
Qual difficulty		x		
Perceptions of A levs/BTEC				xx
Educational capital				x
GCSE Maths				
Good GCSE grades		x		
Power/student control	x	xx		xxx
Autonomy			x	
Agency/lack of		x	x	
Time/of sessions/consuming	x	xx		xxxx
Timetables			x	xx
Logistics			x	
Study environment/rooms		x	x	x
Session log		x	x	
Structure of peer session		x	x	
Self-doubt	x			
Confusion				
Stress		x		
Failure			x	
Intimidated				xx
Confidence	x	x	x	

Personal growth			x	
GCSE experts	x			
Subject knowledge		x		
Prior knowledge/experience/transfer		x		x
Understand own learning	x			
Life skills	x			
Reflection			x	
College courses	x			
Employment/professions	x	x		
Career choices				x
Motivation	x	x		
Relationships	x		x	xx
University		x		
Degree				x
Personal statement				x
Tutors		x		
Purpose		x		
Communication/interaction with peers		x	x	x
Get to know each other				x
Friendship		x	x	xx
Activities outside college		x		
Arabic		x		
Teaching		x		x
Differentiation				x
Independence		x		
Initial meetings		x		
Different realities		x		
Tutor different subjects		x		
Range of peer tutors				x
Contact outside session		x		
Boundaries			x	
Training need		x	x	
Personality match/pairings		x	xx	x
Character			x	
Gender			x	
Tradition/culture		x	x	
Finances		x		
Roles/support			x	

Facilitation			x	
Nurture			x	
Convenience			x	
Organic process			x	
New specification			x	
Leadership			x	
Credibility			x	
Responsibility			x	
Socialisation			x	x
Social media				
Networks			x	
Benefits			x	x
Enrichment			x	
Narrative			x	
Feelings				x
Impact				x
Progression				x
Planning		x		x
Revision				x
Deadlines				x
Revision plan				
Commitment				x
Concentration				x
Maturity	x		x	x
Positivity				x
Traits/attributes				x
Respect				
Academic				x
Theory/course content				x
Assessment				x
Influence of school teachers				xx
Top set/lower set				x

Continue grouping codes together.

Possible Main Themes:

1. Latent and manifest power
2. Social structures (e.g. family, school and college)
3. Functional friendships

4. Perceptions of success and failure
5. Academic vs non-academic identity
6. The logistics of peer tutoring sessions



## 16.10.19

### ***Latent and manifest power***

Power/student control
Autonomy
Agency/lack of
Parent control
Contact outside session
Boundaries

### ***Social structures***

Family
Family burden/responsibilities
Pressure self/parents
Parent control
Tradition/culture
Gender

### ***Functional friendships***

GCSE experts
Subject knowledge
Prior knowledge/experience/transfer
Communication/interaction with peers
Get to know each other
Friendship
Contact outside session
Boundaries
Peer learning
Near age learning

### ***Perceptions of success and failure***

Self-doubt
Confusion
Stress
Failure
Intimidated
Confidence
Personal growth

Pressure self/parents
-----------------------

### ***Academic vs non-academic identity***

Qualifications
Hierarchy of qualifications
Qual difficulty
Perceptions of A levels/BTEC
Educational capital
GCSE Maths
Good GCSE grades
New specification
University
Degree
Personal statement
Influence of school teachers
Top set/lower set

### ***The logistics of peer tutoring sessions***

Planning
Revision
Deadlines
Revision plan
Time/of sessions/consuming
Timetables
Logistics
Study environment/rooms
Session log
Structure of peer session
Peer learning
Near age learning
Initial meetings
Different realities
Tutor different subjects
Range of peer tutors

## 27.03.20

### ***Final themes***

Failure and success

Self-doubt
Confusion
Pressure self/parents
Confidence
Personal growth

Academic vs non-academic identity

Hierarchy of qualifications
Perceptions of A levels/BTEC
Educational capital
Top set/lower set
New specification
University degree/Personal statement
Influence of school teachers

Structures

Family
Social
Power
Functional friendships
Tradition/culture
Agency

## Appendix 11: GCSE & A Level transcript 7.12.17

### GCSE & A Level FOLLOW UP

and TRANSCRIPTION.

MW: Obviously, I know who you are because I invited you back here- but can you for the purposes of this tape and for the fact that it'll be transcribed afterwards, just say who you are, how old you are and for now which courses you are studying at the college...

█: Okay. I'm █, I'm 17 and doing A-Level Psychology, History and English Literature.

█: I'm █, I'm 17 and doing Childcare (Level 3).

MW: I remember you were going for that from the last interview. Okay, so a few, erm, specific questions- they might not seem as targeted as last time, but that is because I've already got quite a bit of information from you. It really is just following up on a few things that I pulled out of it. So first of all, I was just wondering if you'd stayed in contact with anybody from the peer mentoring scheme, the peer tutoring scheme. Are you still in touch with anybody from say the GCSE side and/or the A-Level side?

█: In class, who you were with in class...?

MW: Just in any way shape or form. Anyone who was involved in the peer tutoring project, are you still in touch with them. It could be in class- do you still see them, is what I'm really getting at?

█: Yeah, I speak to a few people from my class and they were involved in it, but with different people. - different peer tutors

MW: Okay, do you mind telling me who you're still in touch with and in what context?

█: Like, I'll speak to them every now and again, through message- I don't necessarily meet up with them, but over message I speak to them a few times.

MW: Is that because before you were obviously on the same GCSE programme, but now...

█: We're doing separate courses, yeah.

MW: Yeah, you've moved on to different courses. Okay, what about you, █?

█: I'm not particularly, no- I'm not sure where the other mentors went. But, no, I don't really keep in contact with █ anymore. We still have each other on Snapchat, but we don't really speak.

Only in touch on Snapchat = notion of functional friendship  
FUNCTIONAL FRIENDSHIP

moved into different fields

MW: Until now! Right, okay. Did [redacted] - she was going to go on to the course, wasn't she? Well, she was going to work...

[redacted]: Yeah, she wanted to do a course in like, <sup>water</sup> ~~whales~~ or something- but is now doing Health and Social Care (Level 3).

MW: Is she? Right, so a similar course to you? I did wonder because she'd had a few options, hadn't she? Okay. Again, to both of you- but maybe a little bit more to you, [redacted] because I do know what the GCSE results were. Congratulations!

[redacted]: Thank you.

MW: How did you feel when the GCSE results came out?

[redacted]: I was just really happy that I passed my English that was my main one.

MW: Cause you got a Level 5, didn't you? That's the high <sup>5</sup> ~~5~~, they were saying that a Level 4 was what you needed to get onto the course- but you actually got a Level 5. So, very well done. How did you feel when you heard that the results had come out and that people you'd been working with had achieved?

[redacted]: I felt really happy for her, because like, I remember getting my GCSE results and getting the grade you wanted was a good feeling. I knew she wanted to progress on to childcare, so I was just really happy for her.

MW: So, GCSE results day was a really good day?

[redacted]: Yeah.

MW: I got the results of everybody who'd been involved at various points and know that some were more successful than others, did you speak to anyone else who was involved?

[redacted]: Yeah, I spoke to a few people- one of my friends didn't get her Maths, erm, but [redacted] got hers, which was good. [redacted] got what she needed in maths too.

MW: Yeah, because you'd done- even though when we first started it had been provisionally just English, you said that you'd done bits of all sorts of things, because you felt that you'd got the expertise...

They changed the way this operated & adapted to suit their own needs so had agency.

ACHIEVEMENT

FEELINGS

EDUCATIONAL CAPITAL

L3 H&SC

COURSES

[redacted] stayed in college

[redacted] Happy she passed English as 'main one'

HIERARCHY

Educational capital

Lots of positive language at gaining L5 in English

ACHIEVEMENT

Yeah, we went over Science as well, didn't we? Science was another one that we did. Erm and I know a different mentor did Maths. Erm, so it ranged...

**MW:** Yeah. So overall, although it started off as the English, you'd found your own way into doing different things, that's good. I was really pleased when [redacted] sent the results through, well done all of you really. What impact (if any) coming firstly to you, [redacted], have those results had on your studies this academic year then? So getting the GCSE results that you did, what impact would you say that that's had on your education?

[redacted]: Well, it's made me able to progress onto the course I want to do. Which has made me a step closer to what I want to do for a career, err, so it's massively helped me just get onto what course I want to do really.

**MW:** Is your career still the same?

[redacted]: Yeah.

**MW:** Go on, explain again, what's your career goal...

[redacted]: I want to be a primary school teacher.

**MW:** Just double-checking that it hadn't changed in the last five months or so. It might sound a bit strange asking you this, but I do still want to ask you, [redacted], if knowing that the results were good- if it's had any impact on you educationally, or maybe even if being involved in the project... did you do AS Levels? Or did you not do them? Some colleges still do AS Levels as a benchmark, even though I know you're on the new system. Did you do that here?

[redacted]: Yeah, we did do the AS Levels. Erm, it made me realise that I do actually want to go into teaching. So it is making me work harder to get the grades I need for university, erm, it helped me manage time better- we've just finished our personal statements and managing those alongside studies is stressful to get them done.

**MW:** Did you on your personal statement, did you mention being involved in the programme?

[redacted]: I did, yeah.

IMPACT

Progress  
Academic

Impact of GCSE results on [redacted]'s education

CAREER

'massively helped'

wants to be a primary teacher

TEACHING

Did the results in GCSE help?

TEACHING

TIME MANAGEMENT

PERSONAL STATEMENT - linked to tutoring

PERSONAL STATEMENT

Scheme helped [redacted] to realise she wants to teach - also helped with personal statement

## Programme of mutual benefit to A Level & GCSE

**MW:** Yeah, because that was one of the other things that we said was that the programme needed to benefit people mutually. So something tends to work if both parties get something from it. Okay, so you were able to use it in your personal statement. One of the other problems that people will sometimes say is that being involved in something like this, for the A-Level student could take away from your own studies, thinking about the amount of time that you have to put in.

MUTUAL  
BENEFITS

TIME

Time constraints of

Best for A Level in form time

Potentially. But realistically, we did it in form time- and it coincided with your form time, didn't it- and realistically the amount of work we get done during form time wasn't a lot. Especially if you didn't have course work to do, which we didn't. So it didn't take away from any of my revision time, so it was okay.

programme

OK if it doesn't take away

WHY am I talking so much?? AGAIN!

**MW:** Right, okay, no problem. Now there the main set initial questions that I had and I just wanted to share with you some of the themes and the main ideas, when I've analysed all the transcripts.

OK because I'm

THEMES

Themes that have come through- without sounding patronising, are you both okay when I talk about themes? You know what I'm getting at, sorry I just wanted to make sure that I wasn't rambling at you. Err, the themes that came out were: confidence, whether that was confidence in yourself as a person or in your academic abilities, or a bit of both. Control was another one, now control- you weren't using the word control, but thinking about who did what and when and who said you'd be doing what and when. So that's where the control or even power is one of the themes that comes

CONFIDENCE

CONTROL

POWER

informing them

about

last interview

out there. Something else that came through quite strongly from the interviews were a hierarchy of qualifications that you thought about various kinds of qualifications, such as GCSE's, such as BTEC's

HIERARCHY OF QUALIFICATIONS

and such as A-Levels. That came through very strongly as well and another thing that came through

was thinking about the actual process of peer tutoring or mentoring and those relationships that a mentor and a mentee have. I came up with a term, called 'functional friendships', some of the things you said had elements that would fall under a friendship category. As you were talking about things

FUNCTIONAL FRIENDSHIP

differed than with a teacher

like saying that you distinguished between the peer tutor and an ordinary teacher and how it was

beneficial to have a peer tutor and in distinguishing between that and a teacher- a formal teacher-

some of the elements of it were more like a peer friendship. But then there were other elements of

## BOTH THERE TO DO A JOB... FUNCTIONAL

it that made it very functional, that you were both there to do a job. So I've invented that term 'functional friendships', so it might crop up in my thesis quite a lot, because at this stage I am still looking at everything, doing the research in even more detail, before I go away and write it up. So, I want to draw on those themes- I've told you about them now, just so you know that's where I'm going to be going. They're the sort of things I'm looking for, from other conversations- but what I also wanted to do was to ask you both, if you were in charge- if this programme was to run again and basically [REDACTED] (you know, who's the director) and [REDACTED] (who you know quite well) had said actually you're going to put this scheme together, because you're the experts and you're in charge of it. I'd like to know how you, if you two were given that job, how you would organise it- what would it look like to make it successful? I have got blank paper in case you're the sort of people who need to write things down or make a diagram- but you don't have to, you can just talk if you want to? I just want you two to almost decide together what it would look like, so imagine you're setting up a peer tutoring scheme, perhaps to start next September- because I know that was a thing that both parties had said, that you would have it up and running from September. But if you had to imagine that you're consultants or that you are going to run it next year, I'd like you two to tell me what it would look like and how it would be organised? I know it's a challenging question, but...

[REDACTED]: Erm, the criteria that we obviously met to be picked for it, would we use that? The key thing is- making sure that you can build a friendship.

A LEV - build a friendship  
FRIENDSHIP

**MW:** Can you talk through that criteria again? Just remind us what the criteria was, if you were going to stick to it- imagine I don't know anything about it, yeah? Tell me what this would look like?

[REDACTED]: Erm. I feel like it's better to know the person a little bit, before you start working with them- do you know what I mean, to get to know them, before you start working with them? I don't know, from my point of view it can feel a little intimidating, in a way- because I've not got it and they do. It didn't feel like that, but it could feel like that, potentially. So if you know them a bit better and you're friends almost, it's a bit easier to do the work.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

USE FEEL INTIMIDATED

you're friends,  
almost

FUNCTIONAL  
FRIENDSHIP

5

WHAT WOULD THE SCHEME LOOK LIKE IF THEY ORGANISED IT?

PLANNING

SHOULD KNOW THE PERSON BEFORE YOU WORK WITH THEM



[redacted] was told [redacted] way, 'hard working' & 'willing to put in all the work'

When we were first getting paired together, I got told previously that you were hard working and that you wanted to get the grades and you were willing to put in all the work. That helped and I guess that's part of the criteria, that you're actually willing to work hard and put in the work and

then from my side it would be that I do have a degree of understanding. You know, I got it and I have the attributes needed to pass on that knowledge to someone else. [redacted] deems herself to have 'attributes'

MW: What would those attributes be? When you say you've got the attributes to pass that on, what

do you think they are?

[redacted] I'd like to think I'm friendly, erm, good communication, being able to build up a good rapport.

MW: Yeah, because they're very inter-personal skills, aren't they? So, can you remember what the

criteria was- because there was an initial criteria that you should have had a certain grade for your GCSE and you should have had a certain grade for A-Level. Can you remember what they were and would you stick to them?

What do you mean, to get onto the courses?

MW: No, in order to be part of this scheme- can you remember what...

Were you told?

I wasn't told.

I was approached by [redacted] e...

Yeah, that was one of the things, was communication- I said last time, there wasn't much communication about it. So, yeah, that was one of the things we weren't told about.

I got asked if I wanted to do it. I said yes. We all got invited to that meeting thing and then it was

like 'right, we'll let you know who you're paired with' in a couple of weeks- and then two weeks

later, I met [redacted].

MW: Because initially, so the research had validity and I could have a starting point, what I'd said is we're looking for people who'd got a 'D' at GCSE, knowing that it was bumping you up just that little bit. What we'd also said was that for the peer tutor to have a minimum of a 'B' at GCSE, sometimes you can get a 'C' and you may have just scraped through. It's still a 'C' but we knew that, or rather I

I explain criteria 6

# SCHEME CRITERIA

knew that if you'd got a 'B', you had to have gone above and beyond a standard. So that's what I meant by a criteria that was in place- so the GCSE student had just missed out, if you like and the A-Level student had got quite clearly a good GCSE grade. So what do you think about that now that you know that that was the criteria, because that was my criteria- would you open it out more broadly? Would you change that? I mean you've got free reign to do whatever...

**[Redacted]**: Probably not, I'd stay with that one.

**[Redacted]**: Yeah, it's realistic, to get someone from a 'D' to a 'C'- and if you get a 'C' GCSE, it's good. But then to be able to pass on that knowledge...

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

repeated from previous page

**[Redacted]**: I couldn't do that, if I got a 'C'. I couldn't do what you did, I wouldn't have as much knowledge as you do in it.

knowledge now added to skills needed for later

**[Redacted]**: So, it would be helpful to have that 'B' or above in English.

**MW**: So, that then is the entry criteria. So the starting point would be people who are involved in the programme, would be people who'd got a grade three, wouldn't it? You'd be looking really at people who'd got either a 'B' from a couple of years ago or a level six now?

**[Redacted]**: I mean it depends how long a time you have, because we didn't have that long- was it six weeks?

**[Redacted]**: Yeah it wasn't a long time.

**[Redacted]**: But if you're starting it from September...

Reiterate to start in September

**[Redacted]**: Yeah, we definitely could do better.

**[Redacted]**: ... you could maybe if someone got a high 'E', you could maybe include them as well?

**[Redacted]**: Yeah.

Start changing criteria if they have larger - it gets lowered

**[Redacted]**: It all depends on how much time you have, what timetables you have...

**MW**: Well, again- if you've got free reign with the timetables, so we're saying then (just to recap):

you'd have an entry criteria, you wouldn't just say anyone can do it irrespective of what grade

you've got. Largely speaking, it would be a level three and you would have people who'd got a grade

'B' or a level six under the new system. But, maybe we'll come back to thinking about how you might

I summarise again what they have said

modify that- so you'd start it in September, but what would the ideal timetable be like? What would

it look like? How many hours would you have them, if you had free reign to organise this?

2 hrs plus [redacted] : Maybe do two hours a week, I don't know- we only did one. Maybe if we did two...?

surely  
unSURE

[redacted] : That was the way our timetables fell, wasn't it? We wouldn't want either party to feel like they  
don't want to miss lesson time so this is added on  
were missing out on lesson time. That's the key thing, so if you did it where it was during free time

and form was perfect for us, because it did cross over... we did have that hour...

FREE TIME  
FORM PERIOD

MW: How long is form?

[redacted] Form is basically something we have to go to and it's usually for- this year, it's changed- it starts  
at 12:30 and it finishes at 15:00. Like, it depends on your tutor- some tutors let their form go early.

Some- I don't know what it's like for you?

FORM PERIOD 60-90  
MINS

[redacted] Err, well we only have like, an hour or so for ours.

MW: Which day is that on, did you say?

[redacted] Mine is Friday afternoon.

ON DIFFERENT DAYS

[redacted] Mine is Thursday afternoon.

[redacted] So, it's basically where we go through set things that the college want us to go through, such as  
values or day-to-day issues that need to be addressed. Then the part after that, the last hour/hour and  
a half, you do your own work. So last year when it was that time, that's when we'd meet up, erm  
and we'd do some work. THEY GOT OUT OF FORM TO DO  
TUTORING

[redacted] I think it's hard with A-Levels because their timetable was a lot busier than what mine was last  
year, I had loads of spare time and a day off. Whereas this year, doing what I'm doing, I couldn't fit  
something like that in. You know- and I'm sure you couldn't this year because of everything you've  
got to do in the second year. It's just to fit all that in would be quite hard, I think.  
GCSE HAD FREES & A DAY OFF  
TIME TABLING

MW: Right, okay. But in an ideal world, if we were to say right part of the value of this college is that  
we are going to use or offer that opportunity of students who've got these grades at GCSE, erm, to  
other students because we know that largely that if both parties do meet and both parties are

A LEV

NO TIME  
IF ON  
BTEC  
or Y2  
ALEV

willing to put the effort in, largely it does work. How would you go about it? So you said form and/or the time afterwards.

Probably, I'd say 50 minutes- then a 10 minute break and then if anyone wanted to do some more afterwards... go for a break and if you don't carry on that's 50 minutes done a week. Erm, it's

just about concentration, isn't it- because GCSE can be a bit tiresome, especially when you don't want to re-do it. I know from the mentee's point of view, they didn't like GCSE English, they didn't want to do it. So actually, like, trying to get them to concentrate- so yeah, 50 minutes...

Yeah. For me, like, because I'd done it the year before- I feel like I'm repeating a lot of the stuff. Cause I'd just missed out on a 'C', I felt like I already knew a lot of it- so I could see that from

people's point of view it'd be boring and you're already doing three/four hours already in class, then going doing another hour/45 minutes with someone else. It's just tiring.

MW: So, do you think then extending it then, like most of you did anyway to do different GCSE subjects?

Yeah.

MW: Rather than say 'this is just about GCSE English', you could have that almost as an entry criteria

to have a certain level of understanding of various things, but having people who are flexible. You know, a pool of tutors almost that you could tap into and do all of the subjects?

Yeah, because I felt like I needed more help with Science than English. So, err, we did Science.

I did Triple Science GCSE, so it was alright... but if she'd asked for my help with Maths- I did well at GCSE Maths, because I did it every single day and I hammered through it. Now, I can barely

remember any of it, because I haven't practiced it. Yeah, so having a range of tutors who can do a range of subjects would be valuable.

MW: Okay, so again, to recap- you'd have some kind of entry criteria, you'd have it for about 50 minutes a week, but rather than it be just one subject, you'd try to incorporate all the needs of the GCSE resit course. That might mean that at some points you'd work with different mentors.

had said 2 hrs p-8

Tiring changed from 2 hrs to 1 hr 45 mins

Range of tutors

I recap again

why do I do this??

says 50 mins

TIME

Perception they don't like GCSE

CONCENTRATION

Are they?

here? Or thinking aloud?

Contradicting

I lead Q here to extend to other subjects knowing that's what they did themselves

Am I leading their ideas?

Range of tutors, doing a range of subjects

- 1) Entry criteria
- 2) 50 mins plus
- 3) Range of subjects & tutors

## INFERS DIFFERENTIATION

Perhaps. I think at first it would be a good thing to sit down and talk and actually figure out what the mentees actually want and what they need and what kind of person they are. Do you know what

I mean? Some people can't sit for a long amount of time and be constantly revising; some people can't do it, but others can. So it's just figuring out what kind of person everyone is, then you can

work that timetable around in that sense, because I know sometimes a lot of teachers and tutors <sup>VISION TECHNIQUE LINKED TO TIME</sup> recommend revising for about half an hour, taking a break and then revising again. If you have to do <sup>30 MINS THEN BREAK</sup> it that way, then you have to do it that way- but then you need the larger slot, to get in the same

amount of time as someone who can sit for a straight 50 minutes. So it's just, like, talking- communication, it's important!

COMMUNICATION SKILLS IMPORTANT

MW: So, how... you said you'd like to know people first, before you get paired up. Again, how would you do that? How would you organise that? If you've got the programme itself structured from September, entry criteria and 50 minutes a week, possibly in some sort of form time. What would your ideal be to the pairings then?

Erm, when we first went into that room and we were told about it all, they didn't really... they didn't put us together and let us talk or anything. We sat on one side and they sat on the other side

and we weren't told at that point who are pairs were and it would have been good if we'd known that we could have sat for five minutes and spoke to each other. But we didn't get that, we got told we'd know in a couple of weeks and then it was the first session that we met up. We should have had that time to know and speak to each other first.

MW: So, would you still have the tutors do the pairings or if you had complete control of this, how would you make those pairings, what would you actually do?

I'd get tutors that were good across the board that could do everything relatively well- if there's someone that desperately needs help in one subject, then there's someone who's really good at teaching that and push them together more. But if the relationship really wouldn't work then there's no point forcing it, because no one will benefit- the mentee won't learn. But then if you got a group of people who were good across the board, then it's a case of seeing who clicks in that kind of sense.

10

RELATIONSHIPS

All A level students have range of subjects & subjects needed, then

So if you get everyone together and have a nice, informal chat – just get together kind of thing and then the mentees can pick who they're comfortable with teaching them, to benefit them really. <sup>CONTROL TO TUTEES</sup>

MW: So, how would that work then if you have five mentees, who all wanted one mentor?

It's a problem, but we're at an age now when we should be able to be mature- and if it's for one particular subject and say that mentor's really good, I should hope that the mentees would be mature enough to step back and go 'okay, that's alright'. <sup>MATURITY IS A SKILL</sup> They would have to share!

MW: Right, okay, so what input would the teachers here need to have- or the organisers, you know as [redacted] did quite a lot? What would you need them for, what would they need to do, what would their input in this be?

I think that thing that we had at the start where we were all in the same room, that's <sup>TEACHERS ORGANISE THE INITIAL MEETING</sup> important, because everyone needs to know what it's about. <sup>Need for information early on</sup>

Having somewhere to do it, obviously whenever we met up, we'd have to go to the staff room- to ask [redacted] where we're doing it. <sup>They didn't have a regular room - relied on [redacted] to do it</sup>

MW: So, in an ideal world again, where would it be? You know the organisation, you know the college- if you could choose somewhere, where would be the environment that's best for you?

Somewhere quiet, in the library- maybe that room in the back? Which is blocked off and completely silent in there. Maybe there, because there are no other distractions. <sup>Need silence, no distractions</sup>

MW: Could you have more than one pair in a room at a time, or would it be distracting if you had something going on there and something else going on there?

It'd be alright if there was another pair across the room, I think it'd be okay. <sup>OK to have more than 1 pair in room</sup>

I'd be okay with that, especially if it was different subjects it wouldn't be an issue. <sup>BOTH NURSE ON THIS</sup>

MW: Is there anything else that you can think of about how you would have it structured? What you would do, what sort of input would be needed? Above and beyond what you've already said. When would it- so exactly when in September would it start? When would this meeting- you know the one you said the tutors organised- when would that happen?

<sup>when would MEETING HAPPEN?</sup>

quite clear as when she'd start it

Probably like the end of September, so once you've started- because obviously the college starts late, like mid-September – as soon as everyone is in college, they need to select who they want to work with and try and get it done, so everyone's starting in October. Sooner the better, I think.

MW: Okay, what do you think

Agrees with

Mid-September we start, have a week or two to settle in and get names together of both the mentors and mentees. You have that meeting, you talk and then you let people mingle- see what comes of it. Erm, if necessary you could write down names on a page as to who should be paired with who; then hopefully be second or third week in October, we'd be pretty good to go.

MW: Mm-hm. So you'd be up and running before the October half-term then?

BEFORE  
OCTOBER  
HALF  
TERM

Fingers crossed.

START

MW: Yeah, in an ideal world you'd have met once or twice before then. So when you come back after the half-term, you'd already know whether something's working...? Maybe have an opportunity to change things should you need to. Okay, so if it starts then, when does it finish?

I'd say a few weeks before the exam? I think we had some in May and some in June, I can't remember.

MW: They usually start in May.

I think I had some in May, so maybe until April?

Yeah, March/April- depending on how comfortable the mentee feels?

goes  
into giving  
mentee  
choice of  
when to  
finish  
tuition

I think if the mentee wanted to do it right up until the exams, then do it right up until the exams. But if not, maybe until April? So we have a few weeks before the exams.

So, that would give us a good 6/7 months.

How long did we have? Did we start in February?

MW: It was February when you had that meeting, yes.

It probably didn't start for a few weeks after that, so...

MW: I think you had about 8 weeks.

They had 8 weeks

Timing

They  
want  
6/7  
month  
preparation



█: No, it wasn't long enough at all, was it?

They felt it  
went quickly

█: No, it didn't feel like it.

MW: Okay, so- who- would it be purely the mentee who made that decision on when that stopped?

█: Yeah, I think when they feel comfortable and they feel ready to take the exam- if not, then carry on. Mentee has control CONTROL

MW: What impact, if any, would you say- would you still keep it as the A-Level tutors being in their first year, in that old AS year? Or would you include that second- go on, explain why?

█: Second year, if there is coursework for your course, most of the time you do it in your second year and it gets very busy and there's a lot of DEADLINES to meet. First year, I know now with this new scheme, you don't have end of year exams. There's no pressure for the AS students, so that's why it would be beneficial for the mentee, because they can take more of the attention of the mentor- THINKS ABOUT MENTEE there's no real need for the mentor to revise themselves. Erm, whereas at A2 you have UCAS applications, you have deadlines to meet for coursework, then you have exams.

MW: So, it would be a little too much high-pressured.

█: Yeah, if the wrong person was picked to mentor you.

-again, thinking about impact on mentee if mentor too busy

MW: Yeah, they could possibly... crumble... and I suppose there's the argument that you're another year removed from having done the qualification yourself as well. So it would ideally be better if you've got that nearer peer group. One of the other things that came up was the fact that the GCSE students (█ and yourself) were really, really clear and you have alluded to this at the start as well, that you wanted it to be A-Level students doing the tutoring and not necessarily students on a BTEC course. Do you still feel the same way about that?

█: Erm, being on the first year of a BTEC course is very busy- I get a lot of work and a lot of assignments, literally from a month in. So like I said, I couldn't make time to do it with somebody- I feel too much pressure. I'd want to be concentrating on my own work, I know it sounds selfish. I know A-Levels are busy as well, so that's why it's hard- because I wouldn't choose to do it if I was asked, because I just wouldn't have the time.

█ wouldn't be a mentor as she has too much coursework on BTEC 'selfish'

Why run a less system  
to mentee in favor  
of their scheme

A-LEVEL  
BTEC



## HIERARCHY OF QUALS

**MW:** One of the other things that came out, was this hierarchy of qualifications- we were talking about GCSE's and A-Levels and you'd perceived GCSE's as not being as academic in their own right and that A-Levels were this thing that was held up. What do both of you think about that now? What do you think about the differences in qualifications, in GCSE's and BTEC's and A-Levels? You both want to go into teaching, so <sup>your</sup> your end goal is the same- albeit I know you were thinking sixth form and you were thinking primary. You'd both still be doing a B-ED or a degree and then PGCE afterwards- so your end goal is the same, it's just your route is quite different. What do you think about that? Why are A-Levels deemed to be harder?

*Sounds self-certain*  
[redacted]: I couldn't do A-Levels, I just couldn't- I used to watch my brother, he's at uni now and to see how much work he put in to it- not that I wouldn't put the work in, but the actually level and how much work it is would be too much for me. I just know that. I'm not academic, I only got 'C's at GCSE, I'm sure you got 'A's and 'B's, I just feel like it wouldn't be for me at all.  
*can't do A-Levels*  
*I'M NOT ACADEMIC*  
*Specimen 9/10*  
*can't do C*

**MW:** But don't you think that being a teacher is academic?

[redacted]: It is, yeah, but I want to do the very low year 1/2 teaching...  
*Is this a naive understanding of teaching? Early as it's low level in primary*

**MW:** But to do a teaching degree, you'll do- whether you do a degree to teach in a primary or a degree to teach in a sixth form, the sort of theory behind it all and what you do in teaching training will be the same.

[redacted]: Yeah, I know.

**MW:** It will be the same, whether you're looking at behaviourist or humanist theories, it's just the same. No matter what you do. What are your thoughts on the hierarchy of qualifications and what [redacted] thinks?

[redacted]: it depends, other people are deemed to be more academic- but I don't think there's any difference in the qualifications. A level three is equivalent to A-Levels, you just work a different way...  
*QUAL EQUIVALENCE*  
*more PERCEPTIVE? MATURE?*

[redacted]: Yeah, which is a better way for me to do it. Like, yours is all exams...

[redacted]: Mine is exams and coursework.

*Quals same, you work in a different way*

*only difference with BTEC is no exams?*



so she does have exams but not as many

●: Whereas I seem to struggle in exams- mine is all assignment and then I only have two exams at the end of the year.

EXAMS / COURSEWORK

MW: So it's more then- I'm trying not to put words into your mouth here, because I have strong

opinions as well about things like this- but it's not necessarily about being academic and non-

academic, it's the assessment at the end almost. You were saying only a few minutes ago, you

probably wouldn't be able to be involved in this programme now, because of the actual amount of

work you've got to do. Whereas an AS student probably would be able to make the time for it, so it's

more about what that assessment at the end is, i.e. you're doing lots and lots of coursework than an

exam, is it?

if you get As at GCSE & make some award

● A-Levels have higher grade boundaries, because of the amount of work you have to put in- I'm sure you have to put a lot of work in at GCSE's, but if you come out with A and above at GCSE, you've

put in a lot of work. You have to have done- so from that point of view then they think 'you got

those grades at GCSE, you'll put in the same amount of work at A-Level'- but it's so much work. It's

pure dedication and if you don't necessarily like sitting in a classroom, or sitting in front of a book for

long periods of time, you're not going to like A-Levels; that's the difference. Level 3 BTEC is the same

qualification, it'll get you into university, it's just a different route.

MW: I mean, I would say that that jump from GCSE to A-Level is actually harder than the jump from

A-Level to degree.

TEACHERS PUSH L3 QUALS

● They don't prepare you for the jump from GCSE to A-Level at all, my sister's just about to start

here actually- doing level three in Early Years, she wants to do that. I have told her about the jump

between GCSE and A-Levels, because all of her teachers are pushing her towards it, as she is a high

achiever- but it's not for her. She doesn't like sitting in front of a book in a classroom for hours on

end, she can't do it.

The way A levels are taught! Really?

MW: So really, that does again boil down to often the way that A-Levels are structured, the way that

they're assessed and certain elements of it and the way that they're perceived. It's almost as if when

you get certain grades at GCSE, you go down one route, or you go down another route. You can do

PERCEPTIONS OF A LEVEL

perception & receiving  
3 quals

not the case for [redacted] either  
with high grades but chose BTEC

A-Levels at grade 'C', I know some subjects say you've got to have a 'B' - but largely speaking,  
normally you can get on and do A-Levels with a 'C'. I think some of the Sciences or perhaps Maths  
sometimes-

what's this based on?

[redacted] I think most people who do A-Levels get 'B's and 'A's, to be honest.

Resitting maths  
on A level  
course

**MW:** Again, it might depend on the organisation...

[redacted] But, there is a girl I know who had to re-do her Maths and she's doing A-Levels, she's the same  
point as me. She'll be leaving next year and she had to re-do her Maths.

**MW:** Yeah, she might have had everything else and then could have just had that gap, people do  
miss things out...

[redacted] It is possible.

**MW:** Yeah. Okay, so that notion of what it would look like and you have explained for me in a little  
bit more detail about that hierarchy- because I am really interested in the way that you perceive  
qualifications. Also the way that getting certain qualifications, where that sends you and how much  
choice you feel that you have in that and also the way that education itself can sometimes  
pigeonhole people based purely on that qualification that they've got. I personally don't know  
whether that's right or that's wrong and how much choice students themselves have.

QUALIFICATIONS

[redacted] It's just the perception, isn't it? It's not been updated, it's just not voiced enough that certain  
BTEC's can get you to university, people don't always believe they can. So people don't do that, they  
go to do A-Levels, they try and don't do as well- and then they feel bad.

[redacted] Yeah. I didn't know about BTEC's before doing the course, I didn't know how much work it was-  
because it is a lot of work and you get the same- like, mine is equivalent to three A-Levels. So it's a  
lot of work, it's just a different way of doing it.

A LOT OF WORK, DIFFERENT  
WAY OF DOING IT

**MW:** Yeah and you can get Distinctions and Distinction\*'s, can't you and those points can rack up  
rapidly...

Summary  
of  
BTEC AP-  
is it  
worth  
that  
keep  
doing  
them?  
Or am  
I seeking  
clarification

A-Level/BTEC

'Keep coming back to this (different way of doing things)

█ If I pass the course, I'm still going to go to university- like what you'll be doing- so it is the same

I think people look at it like BTEC's are lower than A-Levels; but it isn't, it's just a different way of doing it and getting the grade. WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE?

MW: It interests me, the fact that it can be perceived as being 'lower' than A-Levels.

█ It is, if you speak to some of the other students around college-

Students themselves

█ Yeah, it is.

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF BTEC/A-LEVEL

see BTEC as

MW: Why do you think that is? Who puts that in people's minds? Where does that come from?

█ I don't know, I feel like- the way I see it, like, the smart people do A-Levels and the not so smart people do BTEC's. That's how I see it, it's how I've always seen it. CONTRADICTION \* \* \*

contradicts herself - she's just said it's the same.

MW: Where do you think that came from?

█ I just don't think in school you're told that if you do a BTEC, it can be worth three A-Levels.

█ Top sets, what are you told to do? A-Levels. What are you told to strive for? A-Levels. Don't do

BTEC worth 3 A levels

anything else, don't do an apprenticeship, don't do a BTEC- do A-Levels. That's where it comes from,

TOP SETS DO A-LEVELS - 'TOLD' TO STRIVE FOR IT so then you automatically think- so the lower sets are told to think of BTEC's and they're told to do

something different. Even if they're getting 'C's, they're still told to do something different- because

more than likely, the teacher will think that they will struggle if you do A-Levels. IF YOU GET A C TEACHERS TELL YOU YOU'LL STRUGGLE WITH A-LEVELS

█ You're pushed towards certain things in high school.

MW: Does it make a difference on what parents or family at home say about that as well?

█ Slightly, I mean, I was always told that I'd probably enjoy A-Levels. My sister told me 'you won't

enjoy A-Levels'- but then I suppose it always comes down to that it's your decision, you know do

want you want. But I can only speak from what I've been told...

MW: Would you change that then? Do you think that schools have a responsibility to say it is

different? I look at you and you are academic-

Unsubtle emphasis on reading study than practical pursuits

█ Am I?

MW: Yeah, you are- your perception of what academic is- I mean, I'm a teacher educator, I teach

teachers how to teach lots of different subjects. If you are studying, if you have educational goals, I

Academic - relating to education, research or scholarship in excellent or scholarly pursuits

REALLY IMPORTANT FACT! Fixed mindset?

Why do I find it difficult to hear this from a young person?

SCHOOL INFLUENCE

Being academic to [redacted] is a perception

would argue that you are academic- but I think it's your perception, or as you said a school perception that then makes you think that something is one thing and A-Levels is another...

Tor set  
lower  
set

[redacted]: I think schools need to- instead of saying to the top sets do this and to the lower sets do BTEC,

it should be taught that A-Levels are one way of doing it and BTEC is another way of doing it. It's just

depending on how you'd like to work, how you learn better- if you want to do more coursework

based, <sup>should be</sup> less exams or you just want to do exams and no coursework. It should be taught like that, you know... <sup>Taught in schools about how you like to learn & be assessed</sup>

[redacted] There is the exception to some careers- like medicine, you need A-Levels, certain jobs like that you do. But childcare, for example, you can go down BTEC or you can do A-Levels. So it all depends

but- when I was mentoring [redacted] she was fine with English- I think she had a mean examiner who picked up on the spelling. <sup>Tutor positive to Tutee</sup>

[redacted] No, my spelling wasn't on point.

[redacted] But everything else was, so I think you had a mean examiner.

[redacted] I was surprised that I didn't pass English, everyone said I would. I was getting 'B's in some mock exams and it was always Maths that I thought I wouldn't pass, but I did pass Maths and didn't pass English.

[redacted] The knowledge was there...

[redacted] I think I proved that I was capable, I didn't get a four, I got a five. I don't know what it was.

[redacted] Maybe it was pressure on the day, it's what some people don't take it into account- if you fail

your GCSE, it could just be mucking up on the day. I did with my AS grades, everyone was shocked,

everyone thought something had gone wrong with marking- but it hadn't I know what it was. But

you are academic, you are.

MW: Do you mind me asking about your AS grades? You don't have to if you don't want to.

[redacted] History I thought I did okay in, I got a 'C', same in English. English, I knew it was poetry- I messed

up on it basically, I don't know what happened. History... I don't know, I went through it with my

History teacher, she said it could have been that you were writing too quickly and you were too

AS English &  
History

18

Got C's in AS &  
predicted higher

FOR A STUDENT WITH AS AT GCSE, IT  
MUSSES CONFIDENCE GETTING C AT AS

vague on some points, something like that. But it messed up my confidence actually, for the first couple of months of this year.

CONFIDENCE knocked through exam results

MW: So that was just one other thing that I was going to ask about, because confidence was a theme that had come up, both in relation to how being involved in the mentoring programme. I know you said that it had made you more confident as a person. You mentioned that your confidence had been knocked, but that was more to do with the exams. Would you add anything in confidence, would you say that you've slipped back into being a bit quieter, or...?

STILL MORE CONFIDENT OVERALL

I think I'm a bit louder than I used to be! So, yeah, the knock of confidence was my own fault. It was to do with my exams, it was nothing to do with mentoring [redacted]. Erm, so...

MW: Okay. So do you feel more confident in anyway, whether that be as an individual or in your academic abilities?

[redacted] was already confident

Erm, I'd say I'm quite a confident person anyway- especially with my friends, I'm quite loud.

Yeah, I feel like I'm quite confident- but it probably did help, yeah.

but it 'probably' helped being part of PALS

MW: Is there anything else that either of you would like to tell me or ask me, that you think I might have missed or...? Anything else you think that I should go away and research?

Make sure the mentees definitely want to do it.

[redacted] says

MW: Okay.

motivated mentees

GCSE students need to 'want' to do it

There were instances where the mentors/mentees, didn't show up.

I think that was down to like, it wasn't really explained very well- we wasn't told what we were doing, I don't even remember it that well. One day we all just got pulled out and given a letter or something- it wasn't really explained to us very well and I know through people doing it in the class,

INTIMIDATED

it was more like people who were doing A-Levels and we're doing GCSE's again. It was sort of, you know, being slightly intimidated.

thinks some didn't do it because it hadn't been explained

Was there a condescending attitude towards you?

hi-phrases & interprets what [redacted] says?

MOTIVATED MENTEEES

SCHEME SET UP

Really?

1) Scheme wasn't explained well  
2) A-Level students felt intimidated - by whom?

Yeah. So one: I feel like it wasn't explained to us very well. Two: people probably felt like that a little bit. So if you knew them a bit more, then it might have been a different story, because they'd feel more confident and think 'yeah, I can see that they're there to help'.

MW: Mm, I know [redacted] in particular she was adamant that it had to A-Level students that did the mentoring because they had what she wanted. She felt that they had those skills and that she wouldn't have been flexible in that. It was almost like the A-Level students had proved themselves in

a certain way, by being on the A-Level course and she had in particular had said 'yes, I want it to be

A-level students'. So really it still needs to be in that criteria, that they both said that at the start-

what you're saying is that so you're not intimidated. But again, if there wasn't this sort of division

between BTEC and A-Level, if it was different- you know, the same but different, I know that sounds

very strange, then do you think you'd feel as intimidated?

*felt intimidated because A-Levels have elevated status*

Erm, yeah if A-Levels weren't seen (in my eyes) as better than a BTEC, then it might be

different. But I think it worked well with A-Levels the first year, because they'd have more time than

someone doing a BTEC, when there's so much work- assignments thrown at you and everything. So I

think it would work better with someone on the first year of A-Levels, than someone on the first

year of BTEC.

*INFORMAL CONTACT AT START*

MW: But having that more sort of informal contact at the start, would make things quite different

from your point of view? Did you ever find it intimidating at all, from the A-Level aspect? One of the

themes that came through was this notion of power- who has the most power in all of this? It might

be a strange thing to think about, but can you quickly think about that notion of power? Who had

that power-?

*WHO HAD MOST POWER*

: Out of us two?

MW: In the whole process?

: The mentee.

*reinforces previous points about mentee having most control / power*

MW: You think the mentee had the most power?



[redacted] felt responsibility & 'nervous'  
as she wanted [redacted] to pass

[redacted]: We gave them the tools to help them, whether they use them that's a different thing- the power's in their hands, in that sense. I didn't feel intimidated, I felt almost nervous- because I wanted you to pass, I didn't want you to go through this process and then not get the grades you wanted. *talking directly to [redacted]*

MW: So you felt some responsibility? *RESPONSIBILITY*

[redacted]: Yeah, definitely- but I was just happy for her, that she did good- it was pure happiness for her.

MW: Between the two of you, when you were actually doing the sessions, what was that balance of power? *BALANCE OF POWER DURING SESSIONS?*

[redacted]: I asked H [redacted] what she wanted to do.

[redacted] *wanted to be asked what she*  
[redacted] Yeah, it was whatever I felt like- mostly it was Science, because I felt fine with English, so it was *wanted to do*  
mostly going through that. Yeah, I think it was important for us to be asked what we wanted to do.

*She wanted to work on Science more*  
Rather than it just be based on English, because English wasn't something I wanted to work on, it

was Science. But I know for other people it might have been English...

[redacted] In the first session we were going through your book- because she gave me a book to read  
*main area for development is spelling, she'd*  
through, that they were doing in class- and I said you know how to paragraph, you know how to

form a point it was just spelling. So we'd do Science and occasionally say 'how do you spell this word?' We'd do it like that instead. So that, I guess, was me having the power- because she'd decide  
*SCHOLASTIC TEACHING METHODS. EMBEDS*  
*SPELLING IN SCIENCE*  
fundamentally what we'd do, but then I'd decide what we'd do within that.

MW: What about the teachers in power, in terms of who would be partnered with who- how do you feel about that?

[redacted] I think that we were picked quite well together, I don't know about anyone else and I don't know how the teachers did it, I don't know how it worked but I don't know how it worked with anyone else. *Don't know how they were paired up*

[redacted] As [redacted] said I don't know how it worked for the teachers here, but for me we were just told here is your pair, this is when you'll start- go!



**MW:** That's why you would- it was from learning from that, that would make you do things differently next time around- you would say to people 'we need you to do it like this'. Right, well thank you very much- we've been here about an hour again, that flew past quite quickly, I'm mindful not to keep you much longer. But I do really appreciate you coming back and speaking to you again and letting me- we've discussed some of the same things, but I think you can see that I've dug a little bit deeper into some of them and to just find out as much from you as I can. But mainly around those themes we mentioned there about confidence, <sup>(1)</sup> power <sup>(2)</sup> and hierarchy <sup>(3)</sup> of qualifications and also of this notion of a 'functional' <sup>(4)</sup> friendship' about how the pairings actually work from what you've said- I'll be pulling them together under those themes.

*I summarise again*

(End of audio.)