Institute for Social Change

Social class, aspirations and cultural capital: a case study of working class children's plans for the future and their parents' involvement in life beyond the school gates

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The research explores the relationship between social class, children's occupational aspirations and parenting cultures associated with the realisation of these aspirations. Three claims are assessed within the context of a Year 4 class in a suburban primary school: firstly, whether working class children are less likely than their middle class peers to express an aspiration; secondly, whether children's social class influences the content of their aspirations, and thirdly, whether working class parents are less likely than middle class parents to adopt patterns of behaviour associated with the transmission of cultural resources that help children to achieve these aspirations. Qualitative and quantitative data is gathered from pupils, parents and teachers and is analysed using mixed methods to build a holistic picture of children's class backgrounds, home lives and hopes for the future, their parents' views of school and approaches to child rearing, and the attitudes and opinions of school staff. The research finds no relation between children's social class and their ability to express an aspiration, little relation between class and the content of children's aspirations, and little relation between class and cultural logics of upbringing. Two main suggestions are made for future research: firstly, that age effects related to the collection of data on aspirations need careful treatment; secondly, that cultural accounts of working class life would benefit from further analysis of the suburban context.

Acknowledgements

1. Introduction

1.1 The social mobility context

Clear disparities in relative rates of intergenerational social mobility between cohorts from different class backgrounds persist in Britain today (Goldthorpe 1987; Breen and Goldthorpe 1999; Goldthorpe and Mills 2008). The apparent rigidity of the relationship between class origins and class destinations can be expressed as the product of two similarly persistent features of the British education system: social class continues to govern educational outcomes, and educational outcomes in turn continue to govern class destinations (Goldthorpe 2003). The historic and persistent link between British children's social class and their educational attainment is now well documented (Goldthorpe 2003; DES 2005), and indeed officially recognised (Strand 2007). There is little evidence that the class-based attainment gap is closing at primary level (DES 2005), and at secondary level the attainment gap in terms of class remains the widest of all the forms of social stratification (Strand 2007). At the same time, there is little evidence that the effect of education on class destination is weakening over time (Goldthorpe 2004).

This research consists of two related phases which together aim to contribute to explanations of these observed trends in social mobility. Firstly, the relationship between young people's class backgrounds and their occupational aspirations is examined. These aspirations are taken to be an indicator of the extent to which young people aim for labour market destinations which would, *if realised*, deem them socially mobile. Secondly, the research assesses the relationship between young people's class backgrounds and their propensity to be endowed with the sort of cultural capital associated with the ability to accrue benefits from the education system; benefits that would in turn enable them *to realise* their occupational aspirations. In short, the way in which class affects both young people's desires for the future and their chances of realising these desires forms the basis of this study. The research engages with cultural explanations of the class-based gap in educational outcomes, having first considered the role that aspirations play in making these educational outcomes salient in relation to social mobility.

1.2 Aspirations

Aspirations and expectations refer to the beliefs a person has about their future trajectory. In sociological research, this trajectory normally relates specifically to beliefs about progress through the education system and ultimate class destination (Morgan 2006: 1529). A theoretical distinction can be drawn between expectations and aspirations, which identifies the former as 'realistic appraisals' and the latter as 'idealistic goals', although studies into aspirations and expectations tend to operationalise the two concepts identically (ibid.). As will be discussed below, the findings of this study suggest that despite a tendency to explore expectations and aspirations with the same types of question, interpretive distinctions between the two become apparent when these questions are faced by participants. Despite uniform operationalisation, a distinction in real terms between aspirations and expectations can therefore be reflected in the data.

All aspirations are desires (Gewirth 1998: 21) and are therefore clearly action guiding to the extent that human behaviour is goal-directed. As future situations for which individuals have a preference, aspirations therefore form part of the system of

motivations that lead to the adoption of certain actions over others as a part of utility maximising behaviour. Given that aspirations are action-guiding, and that occupational aspirations may target positions within the class schema which differ from an individual's class background, future goals are clearly important factors in considerations of social mobility.

In this context, it is important to recognise how social circumstances govern aspirations as a result of both conditioning and feasibility (Gewirth 1998: 33). Our sense of what is commonplace, alongside our knowledge of what is realistic, work together to govern our aspirations in ways that can render them important mechanisms for the reproduction of social stratification. Aspirations clearly have the potential to mediate between socioeconomic origins and destinations, but are themselves at least partially the product of social class identities. The first aim of this research will therefore be to examine whether or not children's social class background gives rise to the formation of particular patterns of aspiration.

Specifically, the research will consider occupational, rather than educational aspirations. The latter clearly mediate between social class origins and destinations – to the extent that an individual's social class is governed by their occupation, which in turn relies on their level of qualification – and educational aspirations have received recent attention in the British context (see Strand and Winston 2008). However, the analysis here will be directed towards occupational aspirations, with particular respect to recent similar research carried out in the Australian context in which Coates (2009) finds that parents' socioeconomic status is a significant determinant, firstly, of children's ability to voice an aspiration and, secondly, the occupational content of that aspiration.

1.3 Cultural capital and educational outcomes
The second focus of the study will be to examine class-based inequalities in educational outcomes. These have been accounted for by numerous factors including material circumstances (Savage and Egerton 1997), social capital (Coleman 1988; Bourdieu 1986; Stevens et al. 2007) and risk aversion (Goldthorpe 2002). The focus of this study will be to consider the role of culture.

A culturalist perspective entails, in its broadest sense, a focus on those aspects of the human condition that are transmitted socially. Within this perspective, cultural capital is a fundamental conceptual tool with which to examine the experiences of children within the education system in terms of the cultural inheritance they receive from their parents.

Cultural capital, like material, human and social capital, refers to particular resources that individuals can hold which operate to create value from a range of inputs. Material capital refers to assets that process a given material to create assets of a higher value, human capital refers to knowledge which can transform given data into higher value information, while social capital refers to networks of trust and reciprocity that can deliver a range of private and public goods as a function of an individual's social position. In turn, cultural capital refers loosely to the set of attributes an individual possesses that govern the way in which they both interpret social situations and frame their own behaviour. Cultural capital is thus a conceptual framework for addressing the semiotic capabilities of humans, as both recipients and

producers of symbols, and in particular their ability to both convey and interpret meanings from a symbolic basis in line with a particular set of norms. It is this socialised pattern of interpretive predispositions that collectively functions as an individual's cultural capital.

Specifically, it is not the possession of a particular quantity of cultural capital that determines an individual's ability to extract value from a given social situation, but their possession of a particular form of it – namely, a set of norms of interpretation and framing that are conducive to a mode of interaction with a resource-rich group in a way which signifies membership of that group. Cultural capital therefore refers to the value of the socialised systems of meaning that an individual possesses, relative to their ability to extract value from interactions with those defined by their access to certain resources. As Apple summarises, "the style, language, cultural dispositions… of dominant groups is the cultural capital that through a complex process of conversion strategies is cashed in so that their dominance is preserved" (1993: 600). This 'embodied' conception of cultural capital, as particular dispositions of mind and body, is accompanied by two other states identified by Bourdieu; 'objectified' cultural goods and 'institutionalised' educational qualifications, which function as representations of an individual's cultural resources (Bourdieu 1986).

In terms of class-based inequalities in the education system, cultural capital effectively captures an important aspect of the difficulties with which working class children interact with the formal learning environment. Middle class parents create a learning-apt environment for their children, at the same time that middle class professionals largely dictate curricula and teaching methods, such that the child rearing practices that are inculcated in middle class homes are also those that best prepare children for the specific mode of formal learning that is found in schools. In short, working class children lack the particular cultural capital required to integrate with, and succeed within, the middle class environment of the school (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990).

The importance of cultural capital in maintaining systems of stratification has been accentuated by middle class responses to the transition to more flexible and insecure labour markets alongside policies designed to overcome class barriers to education and work. Within the domain of the family, Bourdieu argues that the importance of cultural capital increases as the middle class are increasingly proscribed from transmitting the more 'overt' forms of capital to their children for their benefit (1986: 46). As Brown et al. argue "the breakdown of economic nationalism, the demise of bureaucratic careers and the attendant risks of downward mobility have led the middle classes to reassert their vested interests in an attempt to maximise the reproduction of their class advantage" (1997: 15). Exploiting the interconvertibility of the various forms of capital, the middle class are increasingly transmitting their advantage by means of socialised norms of behaviour that can be 'cashed in' later by their children through interactions with those who have access to resources.

The point being that the 'gatekeepers' of society's resources also extend an influence over the norms of interaction that permeate the formal institutions of society, including the school. As Giroux argues, "pedagogy is, in part, a technology of power, language, and practice that produces and legitimates forms of moral and

political regulation that construct and offer human beings particular views of themselves and the world" (1992: 128). Given the postmodernist insight into the partiality of all discourses, it becomes clear that the formal learning environment is far from a power- and value-free environment. Once this is accepted, the potential for contestation between teachers' and pupils' patterns of meaning and their transmission becomes evident. Crucially, this contestation does not take place on a level playing field. As Brown et al. argue, "both within and outside the formal education system, there are social forces which weigh systematically against working class children in respect of those types of learning which make for educational success and subsequently for advantageous occupational placement" (1997: 32). This inequality is solidified by the fact that the 'rules of the game', in terms of expected patterns of teachers' and pupils' behaviour, are often 'invisible' (Bernstein 1975; Delpit 1993).

Variance between the type of cultural capital required to get by outside of school, and that required to operate successfully within it, is most marked in the case of working class children. In the British inner-city context, Evans (2004) notes the mismatch between the expectations placed on children in the formal learning environment, and those that children create for themselves in their social lives. For Evans, much of the difficulty working class children face in achieving at school is due to their defaulting to the playful and competitive modes of behaviour that are so crucial to their social networks of respect and hierarchy outside of school. Day-to-day life on the estate can place demands on boys in particular to grow up in an assertive and often aggressive way. Inside school, the basic requirements to sit still, obey the authority of an adult figure and see the learning process as an integral part of their upbringing and development are alien to many children.

This research focuses specifically on the role that parents play in transmitting certain forms of cultural capital to their children. The role of parents, in making educational choices on behalf of their children and creating the home environment to which they return at the end of the school day, is a key factor in any examination of children's interactions with the education system.

The cultural barrier working class parents perceive between themselves and the education system is well documented by Reay and Ball (1997), who draw attention to how memories of personal failure can affect working class parents' attitudes towards school; attitudes which can then be adopted by their children. It is important to be clear about the way in which this cultural detachment from the education system plays out, however. Devine notes how parental support in achieving educational success is present in families from a range of class backgrounds (2004: 70-71). As Lareau (1987; 2003) notes, instead of a poverty of aspirations it is the tendency of middle class and working class families to adopt different 'cultural logics' of child rearing that account for class-based inequalities in children's educational outcomes. It is this mechanism of intergenerational transmission of cultural capital that will be explored here.

Lareau outlines two cultural logics of upbringing: one of 'cultivated development' which tends to be adopted by middle class families, and one of 'natural growth' which tends to be adopted by working class families. These cultural logics comprise behavioural elements as diverse as standards of interaction with children (directive-

versus reasoning-based), a child's degree of autonomy over their play and the amount of time children spend interacting with adults outside of the family: behaviours which are in turn defined by belief systems shaped by life experiences, as well as the hard reality of available resources (2003: 250-1). Children brought up under these two logics bring different forms of cultural capital to the formal learning environment, and this sets up an inequality in the ability of working class and middle class children to interact beneficially with school. Lareau's account of class-patterned cultural logics of child rearing will be the focus of the second section of the research.

2. Research Hypotheses

The research proceeds from three hypotheses. Hypotheses 1) and 2) are formulated around the claims of the literature on class and aspirations and Hypothesis 3) is formulated around the claims of the literature on class and cultural capital.

> *1) Working class children are less likely than middle class children to voice an aspiration when prompted.*

> *2) Working class children who voice aspirations are most likely to refer to working class occupations.*

> *3) Working class parents are less likely than middle class parents to bring up their children under a cultural logic of cultivated development.*

In this way, social class is hypothesised to play a significant role in both determining children's aspirations and governing the extent to which they are exposed to cultural codes that positively influence their chances of achieving these aspirations.

3. The Research Site

Watermead School[1] is a community primary school located in the suburbs of a large UK city, roughly on the boundary along which the conurbation gives way to a more dispersed pattern of urban areas, villages and open space. The village in which the school is located has a historic centre, but experienced a significant degree of post war development: today it is bounded by a large airport, a motorway and an arterial road.

The school was selected as the site for this research on the basis of the characteristics of its intake and its spatial location. Firstly, a significant proportion of the school's pupils are of working class background, but the intake nonetheless remains mixed, allowing a limited comparative context to be adopted. Secondly, the school's location allows the suburban working class context to be studied, in contrast to the inner-city focus of recent similar studies (Lareau 2003; Evans 2004; Strand and Winston 2008) and government policies, such as the 'City Challenge' launched by the Department for Children, Schools and Families in 2008.

The ward in which the school is located is designated by the local Borough Council as being an area of multiple deprivation. 24% of housing is socially rented, compared with a borough average of 12%, and a 'New Start' project has been initiated by the Borough Council, working in conjunction with a housing group to substantially redevelop the former social housing stock as part of its 10-year Community Plan. The socioeconomic structure of the ward is also a defining feature within the wider context of the Borough: 27% of people aged 16-74 are in service class jobs compared with a borough average of 34%, while 21% are in working class jobs compared with a borough average of 16% (ONS 2001).

Watermead's intake is ethnically diverse and of mixed gender. The school has around 400 pupils on roll, catering for ages 3-11. The proportion of children entitled to free school meals is above the national average (Ofsted 2007).

Initial discussions with the Head and Deputy Head led to the selection of a Year 4 class of twenty-four children, primarily on the basis of its class mix. Of the 17 children in the class for whom survey data were collected, 13 were from working class backgrounds. This mix allows a sufficiently detailed examination of the experience of working class children without denying the opportunity for some degree of comparison with children from middle class backgrounds.

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[1] Fictitious name

4. Data and methods

A mixed methods approach was adopted during data gathering, consisting of participant observation, participatory learning, focus groups, interviews and the gathering of small-n survey data. The primary goal of such an approach was to be able to address the research hypotheses holistically, with data on the experiences of children, parents and teachers alike. The methods are examined below in accordance with their application to each of the specific research hypotheses:

4.1 Hypothesis One – voicing of aspirations

In order to give the children an opportunity to think about and express their aspirations for the future, a one-hour drawing exercise was set as part of the time allotted in the curriculum for art. 16 children had consent for their drawings to be used in the study. Children were presented with the question: *"What do you want to be when you are older? How will the things you learn at home and the things you learn at school help you to get there?"* They were then asked to draw a picture, using text as desired, to answer this question. The pictures were then analysed to assess which children had coherently formulated and expressed an aspiration.

The task was designed to follow the principles of participatory learning (Baskerville and Wood-Harper 1996; Chambers 2007a), firstly by being democratic and secondly by being non-extractive. Firstly, the task allowed the children to express themselves using the medium with which they felt most comfortable: most children chose to do a drawing; some used text; many were keen to come and talk to the researcher and the teacher directly about their thoughts. By giving the children a degree of freedom over how to express themselves, and by moving around the classroom to talk to every child during the task, the aim was to address the double meaning of Chambers' question – "who counts?" (Chambers 2007b: 8) – in one sense by allowing everyone an equal opportunity to contribute, and in another by allowing the children to take some control over the research process itself. Secondly, the task was designed to be non-extractive; an opportunity for the children to think about an important aspect of their lives (and thus reflexively learn), as much as being a chance for the researcher to learn about the children as a piece of social research.

In order to test the hypothesis, data on the children's class backgrounds was gained from a survey of their parents. As part of the process of gaining consent for the children to participate in the study, questionnaires were sent to the parents/guardians of each child in the class under observation, with a return rate of 70%. The primary function of the questionnaire was to ascertain parents' present occupations, as a means of determining the class background of their children. Once this class was known, the relationship between class background and ability to express an aspiration could be ascertained. Given the small size of the sample (17 cases), social class was operationalised along a simple middle class/working class binary. Firstly, occupations were recorded (where parents were currently working); secondly, these occupations were assigned to the 7-category Goldthorpe schema; thirdly, these seven categories were collapsed into two by assigning the professional/managerial service classes I and II to a 'middle class' category, and the

intermediate classes III, IV and V and working classes VI and VII to a 'working class' category.

Parents who reported being unemployed were also categorised as working class, as in the National Statistics Social-Economic Classification (NSSEC) (Rose and O'Reilly 1998: 22). In the case of this research, such an assumption is based on the relative levels of job security associated with the service employment relationship and the labour contract relationship that respectively typify the middle and working classes.

Fourthly, where two parents completed the questionnaire (in 9 out of the 17 cases), the father's class was taken as the family's class, following the convention used in mobility research (Goldthorpe 1987). Where the father did not respond, the mother's class was taken as the family's class. Table 1 shows the results of the process.

Table 1 showing the occupations and class designations of individual parents and families

Relation to child	Occupation	Goldthorpe Class	Class	Family Class
Mother	Unemployed	-	Working	Middle
Father	Quantity Surveyor	1	Middle	
Mother	Chef	2	Middle	Middle
Father	Stock Manager	2	Middle	
Mother	Unemployed	-	Working	Working
Father	HGV Driver	6	Working	
Mother	Security	7	Working	Working
Mother	Unemployed	-	Working	Working
Mother	Unemployed	-	Working	Working
Father	(not specified)	-	Working	
Mother	Gaining Social Work qualification	2	Middle	Middle
Mother	Teaching Assistant	3	Working	Working
Father	Postman	6	Working	
Mother	Unemployed	-	Working	Working
Mother	Unemployed	-	Working	Working
Mother	Unemployed	-	Working	Working
Mother	PA	2	Middle	Middle
Father	IT Administrator	2	Middle	
Mother	Teaching Assistant	3	Working	Working
Mother	Customer Service Manager	2	Middle	Working
Father	HGV driver	6	Working	
Mother	Sales Floor Assistant	3	Working	Working
Father	Carpenter	6	Working	
Mother	Carer	6	Working	Working
Mother	Unemployed	-	Working	Working
Father	Unemployed	-	Working	

Once the children's class had been determined in this way, it was possible to examine the relationship between children's class background and their ability to voice an occupational aspiration.

4.2 Hypothesis Two – content of aspirations

The children's drawings were then analysed for their occupational content, and were assigned a corresponding class. All children made clear reference to an occupation which could be identified with a particular category in the Goldthorpe schema. These categories were then collapsed into a middle class/working class binary in the same manner as with parents' class. Table 2 shows the aspirations expressed by the children, along with the class to which they were assigned.

Table 2 showing the aspirations expressed by the children, the 7-category Goldthorpe class and corresponding middle/working class category to which the aspirations were assigned

Aspiration	Goldthorpe Class	Class
Teacher (x4)	1	Middle
Speech and Language Therapist	1	Middle
Dancer/beautician	6	Working
Dance instructor	6	Working
Policeman	1/2	Middle
Footballer (x2)	1	Middle
Fashion designer	1	Middle
Hairdresser	6	Working
Soldier/banker	2	Middle
Model/dancer	6	Working
Vet (x2)	1	Middle

The class of children's aspirations could then be compared with their class background, and the relationship between parent's class and child's aspiration class subsequently analysed. Qualitative Comparative Analysis was used to explore in detail the various combinations of conditions, including parents' class, which are linked to a child having a middle class aspiration.

4.3 Hypothesis Three – cultural logics of upbringing

Lareau (1987; 2003) argues for the existence of two 'cultural logics' of child rearing – a culture of *natural growth* that tends to be adopted by working class parents, and a culture of *cultivated development* that tends to be adopted by middle class parents. As discussed above, cultural logics of child rearing are defined by a number of elements from the way children spend their free time to the types of conversations children have with adults. Three indicators of the cultural logics underpinning children's upbringing were developed here, based on elements drawn from Lareau's conceptualisation.

4.3.1 Parental involvement in children's education
The first indicator was designed to capture the level of involvement parents have in their children's education, and was constructed from questionnaire data. The questionnaires contained a battery of four questions relating specifically to the educational support parents give to their children: *"are you a member of a parent-*

teacher association?"; "do you help your child with homework?"; "do you talk with your child about how they are doing at school?"; "do you read with your child at home (other than for homework purposes)?". Positive answers to these questions were taken as an indication of the presence of a culture of cultivated development. Acknowledging that parents may be motivated to give the 'right' answers to these questions (for example, to state that they read to their children when in fact they do not) children were asked during the focus groups (considered in more detail below) whether they were read to at home, in order to verify their parents' answers. This proved to be a valuable exercise, as three children indicated that their parents did not read to them, contrary to their parents' survey responses. The children's responses were given precedence, as the motivation to give a false positive response is less clear in their case.

4.3.2 Parental involvement in children's free time
Data from focus groups and participant observation were used to construct a second indicator of cultivated development: whether or not children's free time is primarily spent taking part in parentally planned activities. The researcher assumed the role of teaching assistant for the duration of the research, creating a number of opportunities to gain knowledge of children's hobbies and pursuits outside school, both through discussion with the children and by listening to their discussions with each other. Data on children's free time were also gathered more formally during a series of four focus groups, during which the question *"What do you do in your free time?"* was posed. Each focus group consisted of three children, of mixed class backgrounds. Given that more outspoken children can overpower quieter children in a focus group context, but can also play a role in generating a conversational atmosphere, the teacher gave advice on which children would be most suitable to group together. The focus groups were conducted in the school's outdoor nature area, to distance the activity somewhat from the formal associations of the school building.

4.3.3 Children's interactions with adults
Finally, participant observation was used to gather data for a third indicator of cultivated development: the extent to which children can engage in conversational interactions with adults. This was taken as a proxy for the extent to which they converse with adults at home as equals – itself a component of cultivated development.

Using these three indicators of cultivated development, it was then possible to ascertain the relationship between parents' social class and their propensity to adopt particular patterns of behaviour identified with the transmission of educational advantage. As well as descriptive statistics to indicate the prevalence of each indicator amongst the working class and middle class parents in the sample, QCA was used to examine in detail the conditions – including parents' class – that are linked to the adoption of a particular cultural logic of child rearing.

5. Findings

5.1 Hypothesis One – voicing of aspirations

All 16 children who were available to take part in the drawing task were able to clearly express an aspiration for the future; amongst the children in this sample there is no association between social class background and ability to express an aspiration. Working class children were as likely as middle class children to respond to the question set, and, indeed, all children responded. As a result, the hypothesis that a child from a working class background is less likely than a child from a middle class background to articulate an occupational aspiration is not supported here.

The discrepancy between these findings and those of Coates (2009), on which the first hypothesis is based, may result from a difference in methods. Coates' research is quantitative with a large sample (N = 7031). Data is taken from the Social Futures and Life Pathways ('Our Lives') longitudinal dataset, constructed from a questionnaire completed by 12-13 year-old respondents. Data on aspirations is taken from a question which asks: "What kind of job would you like to have?"

Firstly, Our Lives respondents would have considerably less time to think about and answer the question than the children in this research, and are also more constrained in the form of response they adopt. These factors could contribute to a degree of non-response. Secondly, 12-13 year-olds are more likely than 8 year-olds to interpret a question on future occupations in terms of expectations (realistic goals) rather than aspirations (idealistic goals), as part of the process of growing up. Moreover, such constraints are more likely to be felt by working class children as they become aware of the structural impediments to the realisation of their aspirations. Coates argues that the 12-13 year-old bracket is a "perfect time between relative naivety of the social world and a time when socioeconomic aspirations first are formed" (2009: 11). However, the research here suggests that children have coherent occupational aspirations as young as 8, and therefore that the trade-off between directing aspiration research at children who are old enough to voice aspirations, but young enough to interpret a question on aspirations in a sense that is free from limiting considerations, is in fact better met by a younger sample. Non-response may be more likely among working class children in Coates' research because the characteristics of her sample direct it towards a study of expectations, rather than aspirations.

The data gathered here indicates more than the absence of a relationship between children's class background and their occupational hopes for the future, however. Forming a response to a question about aspirations naturally involves some degree of indecision, and the drawing task allowed the children's iterative thought processes to be observed. This permitted valuable insights into the factors that influenced their choice of aspiration. Significant among these factors was the peripheral role of class: there is evidence that at the individual level, among the 8 year-olds studied here, some children's goals were formed entirely independently from considerations of class, as Fig. 1 demonstrates.

Fig. 1 One child's expression of their aspirations, apparently free from class considerations. Within the Goldthorpe schema a teacher would be allocated to Class 2 (lower grade professional) and a hairdresser would be allocated to Class 6 (skilled worker). For this child, the two aspirations are equally valid.

This finding serves as a reminder that while phenomena such as children's occupational aspirations can be analysed in terms of their class content, it cannot be assumed that the children themselves necessarily see their occupational aspirations in similar terms.

Two strengths of this research design; the consideration of age effects and the expressive freedom given to the research participants, in turn deliver two clear findings. Firstly, when the object of study is aspirations proper, little variation exists between the propensity of working class and middle class children to express their future goals. Secondly, considerations of class appear to play little role in the process by which the children studied here reached their choices of aspiration. The strength of this research design over quantitative studies such as Coates' is that a constructivist perspective can be adopted: the data gathered indicates not only what the children's aspirations are, but how they came to reach them. In both respects, class is found to play a marginal role.

5.2 Hypothesis Two – content of aspirations

Of the 16 children for whom it was possible to determine their parents' class and who also completed the drawing exercise, 7 expressed aspirations that mirrored the social class of their parents: 3 middle class children expressed middle class aspirations and 4 working class children expressed working class aspirations. Meanwhile, 9 children expressed aspirations with a different class basis to that of their parents. All were children of a working class background who expressed a middle class aspiration during the task. Table 3 shows the distribution of aspirations by class background.

Table 3 showing distribution of class content of children's aspirations by their class background. Numbers in brackets show the total number of working class and middle class children in the sample for whom data on both aspirations and parents' class existed

	Class of aspiration	
Class background	Working	Middle
Working (13)	4	9
Middle (3)	0	3

If a strong association existed between class background and the class content of children's occupational aspirations, the expected pattern would be for the top left and bottom right cells of the table to be populated with the number of working class children and middle class children in the sample, respectively. While this is the case for children of middle class background, the prominent feature of the table is the 9 children of working class background who have middle class aspirations. From this analysis of descriptive statistics, the relationship between class background and the occupational content of children's aspirations seems strong amongst middle class children, but weak amongst their working class peers.

To examine in more detail the combinations of conditions linked to a child having middle class aspirations, qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) was used[2]. A crisp-set approach was adopted, necessitating the binary recoding of the variables in the dataset (see Appendix) before being analysed using fsQCA software.

The outcome (a child having a middle class aspiration) was modelled as a function of seven conditions:

1) Class of the parents
2) Extent to which parents believe their child is enjoying school
3) Parent membership of PTA
4) Extent of parental help with homework
5) Extent to which parents talk to their child about how they are doing at school
6) Whether or not parents read to their children
7) Age at which parents left education

The results of the analysis were as follows[3]:

	raw coverage	unique coverage	consistency
chldenjoy	0.42	0.33	1.00
CLASS	0.25	0.08	1.00
AGELEFTED	0.50	0.33	0.86
solution coverage:	0.92		
solution consistency:	0.92		

This indicates that there are three paths to the outcome of a child having middle class aspirations:

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[2] QCA (see Ragin 1987) uses a set-theoretic approach to explore how conditions combine in various ways (configurations) to generate numerous pathways to an outcome, and is able to carry out such analysis even on data composed of a small number of cases, where statistical approaches would be unsuitable.

[3] Absence of a condition is indicated by lower-case letters; the presence of a condition by upper-case letters. Variables and coding are described in the Appendix.

1) Absence of parental belief that their child is enjoying school
2) Parents are middle class
3) Parents left education at 17 or older

Consistency expresses the degree to which the cases (in this research, cases being children) sharing a given condition or combination of conditions (e.g. 'parents are middle class') agree in displaying the outcome in question (in this case, 'child has middle class aspirations'). Consistency therefore indicates the extent to which the cases displaying a given causal combination constitute a subset of the cases displaying the outcome (Ragin 2006: 292). A consistency threshold of 0.8 was set before analysis, establishing a lower limit on the degree to which causes (or configurations of causes) could be deemed sufficient conditions for the production of the outcome. All three sets of conditions identified by the analysis have high consistency, meaning that the cases that share each of these conditions always (for consistency scores of 1), or almost always, display the outcome (middle class aspirations). The conditions *chldenjoy* and *CLASS* are perfectly sufficient.

Coverage indicates the degree to which a cause or causal combination 'accounts for' instances of an outcome – it gauges empirical relevance or importance (Ragin 2006: 292), particularly when there are several paths to the same outcome, as there are here. In this way, Schneider (2006: 69) suggests that coverage indicators can be seen as conceptually similar to the R^2 values of regression models. For the model above, the overall solution coverage is high; the three causal conditions identified – *chldenjoy*, *CLASS* and *AGELEFTED* – account for almost all instances of children having middle class aspirations.

There is little theoretical basis for presupposing the presence of the first condition – a parental belief that their child is enjoying school only a little – in the outcome that a child has middle class aspirations. An analysis of the dataset does nonetheless confirm that all five children whose parents stated were enjoying school only a little, had middle class aspirations – and that *chldenjoy* is therefore a perfect subset (sufficient condition) of the outcome. Little significance can be drawn from this result.

The remaining pathways – parents being middle class and parents having left education at 17 or older – are more predictable conditions of children having middle class aspirations. They are also clearly related, as middle class (professional/managerial) occupations generally require A-level or higher qualifications, which are gained by remaining in education beyond 16. As discussed above using descriptive statistics, there is a strong relation between class background and aspirations in the case of middle class children – hence the identification by QCA of 'parents are middle class' as a perfect sufficient condition of having middle class aspirations. However, the condition is clearly not necessary, as displayed by the nine working class children who also had middle class aspirations. The middle class aspirations of these nine working class children also demonstrate that being working class is not sufficient for having working class aspirations; plenty of children were working class and had middle class aspirations.

Despite this high proportion of working class children in the sample who had middle class aspirations, a working class background was not identified by QCA as a path to the outcome. Fig. 2 shows that 9 out of 13 working class children expressed middle

class aspirations, leaving around 30% of the set of working class children outside the set of children with middle class aspirations. This brings the consistency of *class* to around 0.7 – below the threshold of 0.8 set before analysis. Thus, while QCA is a useful tool to identify those configurations of causes that are most common in cases of the outcome, the fact that a working class background is not identified as a path to middle class aspirations does not entail that a significant proportion of working class children did not, in fact, have middle class aspirations.

In summary, descriptive statistics suggest a relationship between class background and the class of children's aspirations to the extent that cases of middle class children were found to be a subset of the cases of middle class aspirations, and cases of working class aspirations were found to be a subset of the cases of working class children. Thus Coates' claim that "socioeconomic origins are important for accounting for occupational aspirations" (2009: 22) is supported in the sense that the middle class children studied here only held middle class aspirations, and working class aspirations were only held by working class children.

However the more empirically significant finding, given that the majority of children studied were from a working class background, was that over two thirds of these children expressed middle class aspirations. Overall, this finding places doubt on the existence of a particularly strong relationship between class background and a child's occupational aspirations.

QCA confirms the descriptive statistic that a middle class background is a sufficient condition for a child having middle class aspirations, but even when combined with the age at which parents leave education (which is itself closely related to class), these two conditions account for little more than 40% of cases of the outcome. On its own, middle class background has little empirical significance (a coverage of .08). In any case, the identification of a middle class background as a sufficient condition for a child having middle class aspirations does not detract from the empirical significance of the 9 working class children who had middle class aspirations.

5.3 Hypothesis Three – cultural logics of upbringing

The analysis now turns to consider whether working class and middle class parents adopt different cultural logics of child-rearing (Lareau 2003: 238). Specifically, the aim is to assess whether working class parents are less likely than middle class parents to adopt particular patterns of behaviour identified with the transmission of educational advantage. The analysis was run in three stages, each of which was designed to capture a different element of Lareau's cultural logic of cultivated development. Firstly, parental involvement in their children's schooling was assessed using QCA. Secondly, parental involvement in planning their children's free time with activities was assessed using data from focus groups and participant observation. Lastly, these same data sources were used to assess children's conversational abilities, as a proxy for the types of interactions they have with adults in the home.

5.3.1 Parental involvement in children's education
Firstly, QCA was used to analyse the relationship between parents' social class and their involvement in their children's schooling. The dataset contains four relevant measures: membership of PTA; help child with homework; talk with child about

school; read with child (other than for homework purposes). The distribution of these behaviours in the data is shown in Table 4.

Table 4 showing the distribution of behavioural indicators of involvement in children's schooling, by parents' social class. Numbers in brackets show the total number of parents in each class category

Social class of parent	Indicator of involvement in schooling			
	Member of PTA	Help with homework	Talk with child about school	Read with child
Working class (13)	0	13	12	11
Middle class (3)	1	3	3	2

From these descriptive statistics alone, it is clear that the first set of behavioural practices associated with cultivated development are not restricted to the middle class parents in this sample. PTA membership aside, there is near-universal practice of the various indicators of schooling involvement, amongst middle class and working class parents alike. Such findings are in contrast to those of Lareau (1987; 2003) who finds a clear distinction between rates of parental involvement in their children's schooling between working class and middle class families. Although this initial analysis reveals there is no significant class boundary to parents' involvement in their children's schooling in this sample, QCA is again used to examine which configurations of factors are sufficient conditions for the outcome.

A composite indicator of cultivated development was constructed from the information on helping with homework, talking to children about school and reading to children. Given the limited variation in these practices, a strict measure was adopted whereby cultivated development was only deemed to be present in a case if all three practices were adopted.

This indicator of cultivated development was then modelled as a function of three conditions:

1) Parents' opinion of school
2) Age at which parents left education
3) Parents' social class

With a consistency threshold of 0.75, the results of the analysis were as follows:

	raw coverage	unique coverage	consistency
agelefted	0.54	0.31	0.78
OPINIONSCH*class	0.62	0.38	0.89
solution coverage:	0.92		
solution consistency:	0.86		

This indicates that there are two paths to the outcome of cultivated development:

1) Parents left education at 16 or younger
2) Parents are working class and liked school

The trend identified in Table 4 above – that involvement in schooling, usually associated with middle class parenting, is present on both sides of the class divide – is reinforced by the outcomes of the QCA. A parent being working class and having a positive opinion of their own school experiences is a sufficient condition for them being involved in their child's schooling.
That parents having left school at 16 or younger should be identified as a path to the outcome is rather more difficult to interpret, although two possible explanations can be offered.

Firstly, it was still relatively commonplace, compared to today's levels, for men and women born in 1970 to leave school at 16[4]. The experience of not gaining further or higher education at a time when the labour market was shifting to post-Fordism and its increasing demands for education and upskilling (Brown and Lauder 1996) may well have instilled parents who did leave school at 16 with a particularly strong sense of the penalties of doing so. It would be reasonable to expect this awareness of the realities of being 'left behind' by structural changes in the labour market to feed into a desire to raise one's children in a way that increases their chances of staying in education beyond 16.

Secondly, the identification of parents having left education at 16 or younger as a sufficient condition for their children being brought up under a cultural logic of cultivated development may partially result from the socialising effects of government policy. Gewirtz (2001) argues, with concern, that New Labour's focus on promoting a 'culture of achievement' is based around "a massive investment in an ambitious programme of re-socialization and re-education, which has as its ultimate aim the eradication of class differences by reconstructing and transforming working-class parents into middle-class ones" (2001: 366). It may be that this policy has achieved a certain degree of success, and that working class families are beginning to adopt the cultural logic of cultivated development when bringing up their children, as a result of

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[4] According to the British Cohort Study, the proportion of women and men from the 1970 cohort (a reasonable estimate of the year in which the parents of the children studied here would have been born) leaving school at 16 or under was 42% and 49% respectively (Fitz et al. 2006: 76). 9 out of the 16 children studied here had one or two parents who had left school at 16 – broadly in line with these national averages.

their exposure to an education system which rewards those who interpret the role of parent as one defined by a common middle class standard.

The first stage of the analysis does not find any evidence for the claim that middle class parents are more likely than their working class counterparts to adopt a cultural logic of cultivated development, at least in relation to involvement in their children's schooling.

5.3.2 Parental involvement in children's free time

The range of extra-school activities the children were involved in was made apparent on a number of occasions. During an exercise to collect information on the sports clubs and classes children were involved in outside school, 17 different memberships of clubs were revealed, ranging from dancing and football to karate and kickboxing. More generally, discussions with the children during class and break times frequently revolved around their extra-curricular pursuits, which ranged from sports to Cubs and drama groups. The key finding in relation to the hypothesis was that the working class children in the class were just as likely as their middle class peers to report their involvement in these activities.

In a similar vein, one of the primary themes during the focus groups was to ask the children: "What do you do outside school?" and at times Lareau's ideal types of child-rearing, in which working class children tend to play outside on their own or with friends, often inventing their own games, while middle class children tend to take part in a range of scheduled activities, were clearly identifiable in the responses given. What was not clear, however, was any sense in which these ideal types mapped onto children from particular backgrounds. For example, one girl from a working class background described a typical evening, which seemed to align closely with a working class cultural logic:

"I go home and I get dressed and stuff and then I go out round the block with [my friend]… cos I've got garages round my place. I go on my bike round the garages and sometimes I go to the shops on my own."

Meanwhile another girl, also from a working class background, referred clearly to a middle class cultural logic when describing her weekend routine:

"I do dancing on Saturdays, and on Sundays I have to go with my Dad to my brother's football, and then every other day when I get home from school I have to do my homework, and then I go out, and then I have to come back for my hour's learning."

Such an account, referring to a busy schedule of parent-planned activities alongside strictly allocated time for home learning, reinforces the sense in which many of the working class children studied here have home lives that display one of the core traits of the ideal-typical middle class cultural logic of cultivated development. Clearly, from the quotes above, some do not. However, the number of working class

children who seemed to have activity-rich home lives was significant and, on the basis of Lareau's findings, unexpected.

5.3.3 Children's interactions with adults

A third and final element of the cultural logics of child rearing was considered during the fieldwork: children's conversational abilities, as an indicator of the extent and type of interactions children have with adults from both within and outside of the family. Lareau notes how middle class children, through contact with a myriad music teachers and sports coaches, "have extensive experience with adults in their lives with whom they have a relatively contained, bureaucratically regulated, and somewhat superficial relationship" (2003: 244). Such relationships, she argues, carry with them opportunities to learn the art of shaking hands, making eye contact and responding to conversation with strangers. Middle class parents also tend to reason with their children and converse with them as equals, whereas working class parents tend to issue directives to their children, who spend much of their free time alone or with friends rather than in the company of adults. As a result of these differences in the opportunities for children to interact with adults, the two cultural logics of child rearing can produce noticeable differences in children's ability to converse with adults. This becomes apparent in the classroom, and as the teacher noted during a break time discussion with the researcher:

"You can tell by the way the kids speak to you what their home environment is like: some of them will hold a conversation with you; others will just talk at you."

The researcher experienced this contrast. Some children would enter into conversations with school staff in which they listened and framed responses, while others tended to communicate via short questions or a series of assertions. Participant observation over the two week period indicated that most children in the class, with the exception of two or three of the working class children and one of the middle class children, seemed to adopt such a conversational style. This suggests that most of the children studied here – working class and middle class alike – do not spend much time at home conversing and reasoning with adults as equals; a key component of Lareau's cultural logic of cultivated development. When asked about the principal characteristics of the intake at the school, the Head seemed to corroborate:

"I would say it's deprived linguistically particularly, and I think that's a big barrier to children's learning in our school: they haven't got a rich linguistic background or environment."

Two important conclusions arise. Firstly, if conversational ability is taken as a proxy for the types of interactions children are having with adults at home, and subsequently as an indicator of the particular cultural logic of child rearing that exists there, then once again it seems that cultural logics do not map onto class background: the middle class and working class children studied here demonstrated a similar tendency to talk at, rather than converse with adults.

Secondly, if the conclusion from the evidence on conversational ability is that most of the children here experience a cultural logic of natural growth, then this conflicts with the evidence gathered above in relation to parents' involvement in their children's education and provision of activities, which both indicated the near-universality of the cultural logic of cultivated development. In short, different indicators drawn from the various elements of Lareau's concept of cultivated development give conflicting results: they claim simultaneously that the children studied here do, and do not, experience the cultural logic of cultivated development. Indeed, it was the children's tendency to eagerly assert or question rather than converse (itself an indicator of a working class culture) which allowed the researcher to gain such a detailed appreciation of the children's active home lives (which in turn indicated the prevalence of a middle class culture). To pick up again on the point made by the teacher, but also to rephrase it in light of the evidence here, it seems that you can tell by the way children speak to you what *some elements* of their home environment are like, but not others. If different elements of Lareau's concept of cultivated development covaried, as indeed they should as different elements of one phenomena, this would not be the case. The conceptual validity of Lareau's notion of cultivated development may be open to question.

Despite the overarching observation of the children's conversational abilities, there was some clear evidence of their skill at reasoning with each other to resolve disputes. On a number of occasions a dispute that had taken place at break or lunchtime would be brought back into the classroom, at which point the teacher would ask the children involved to take themselves to a corner of the classroom and resolve matters between themselves. On the majority of occasions matters were successfully and swiftly resolved through this process. Rather than see such behaviour as a demonstration of reasoning skills children have learnt at home, and therefore as an indicator of cultivated development which tempers the conversational observations made above, however, it seems more accurate to attribute this mode of comportment to the influence of school. As the Head remarked, such strategies of behaviour management form a central element of the school's role, and if anything are driven by an objective to inculcate in the children norms of behaviour that will be advantageous in a social context and which are generally lacking at home:

"All the time we're trying to model the kind of behaviour that will help [the children] when they go beyond our walls: into secondary; into society… we take it beyond the family structure and we begin to take them, in a safe way, into an environment where they mix with lots of other different people with different views, and they've got to negotiate it, haven't they? And we, I hope, give them the structure to do it."

To summarise the findings in relation to the third indicator of cultivated development, most of the children studied demonstrated conversational styles that would suggest a home environment in which children are given directives rather than speaking with adults as equals on a regular basis. There is evidence that the children are able to reason with each other, and with school staff, to resolve disputes, but these behavioural patterns seem in large part to have been instilled through the formal learning environment.

It therefore seems that the various elements of a cultural logic of child rearing are not necessarily a homogeneous package: the children's experiences and behaviours seem to demonstrate the influence of cultivated development with respect to being read to, asked about school, helped with their homework and taken to numerous activities, in tandem with the primacy of the role of natural growth with respect to their conversational modes. As noted above, this finding raises important questions as to the conceptual validity of Lareau's notion of cultivated development.

Overall, there is no strong evidence here of a relation between social class background and a particular cultural logic of upbringing. Perhaps the most striking finding is that two central aspects of cultivated development – parental involvement in their children's education and free time – are common among working class as well middle class families. This strongly counters the findings of Evans (2004) and Lareau (1987; 2003).

6. Discussion

Three hypotheses were assessed: firstly, that children's ability to voice an occupational aspiration is influenced by their parents' social class; secondly, that the content of children's occupational aspirations is influenced by their parents' social class, and thirdly, that working class parents are less likely than middle class parents to bring up their children under a cultural logic of cultivated development.

6.1 Hypothesis one – voicing of aspirations

No evidence was found for the first hypothesis, that children's ability to voice an occupational aspiration is influenced by their parents' social class. Working class children were found to be just as likely as middle class children to articulate an occupational goal for the future. The data also indicated that considerations of class were peripheral during the children's process of reaching a decision about their occupational aspirations. It was suggested that the discrepancy between these findings and the claims of the literature on which the hypothesis is based may be due firstly to the participatory methods adopted, and secondly to age effects.

Firstly, limitations in the amount of freedom children are given over the time and methods they have to respond may help to contribute to non-response. As Fig.1 demonstrates, children reach their choices of aspiration through a deliberative process which involves a degree of indecision. The more time they are given to respond, and the more freedom they are given over the form of their response, the more likely children are to be able to form and express an occupational goal. This may explain the full response rate in this study, compared to the non-response present in larger quantitative studies.

Secondly, the age of the children studied, and the subsequent likelihood of particular interpretations of the question on future plans, may also be an important factor. It is suggested that older children are more likely to interpret a question on future goals as relating to 'realistic' expectations rather than 'idealistic' aspirations. This effect is likely to be more pronounced among working class children as they become aware of the structural constraints to the realisation of their aspirations. That non-response was no more likely among working class children in this study may therefore be due to the research being carried out with 8 year-olds in comparison to the 12 year-olds consulted in the Australian research on which the research hypothesis is based. 8 year-olds are more likely to frame their responses in terms of idealistic goals, free of considerations of structural constraints. This research does not dispute the claim that social class becomes significant in the formation of children's expectations of future occupations, but it does suggest that the process by which class becomes significant in this way commences earlier than some researchers may believe. By the age of 12, it may already be in place. It also suggests that there may be more basis to the distinction between aspirations and expectations than some allow in their operational definitions (Morgan 2006).

6.2 Hypothesis two – content of aspirations

The second hypothesis, that the content of children's occupational aspirations is influenced by their parents' social class, was not strongly supported. Although middle class children only had middle class aspirations, and working class aspirations were only held by working class children, the most empirically significant finding was that

over two thirds of working class children expressed middle class aspirations. Qualitative comparative analysis did identify a middle class background as a sufficient condition for a child having middle class aspirations, but this condition covered less than 10% of cases of children who had such aspirations. Overall, the relevance of class in governing the content of children's aspirations was low. Again, this finding does not dispute the claim that class may become significant as children grow older, but it does suggest that at a young age its role is negligible.

6.3 Hypothesis three – cultural logics of upbringing
The third hypothesis, that working class parents are less likely than middle class parents to bring up their children under a cultural logic of cultivated development, was also not supported by the findings here. Three indicators of cultivated development were adopted: the degree to which parents are involved with their children's schooling; the extent to which children's free time is structured by activities planned by parents, and the extent to which children converse with adults in a way that suggests a home environment in which they talk and reason with parents as equals.

There was no variation by class in the distribution of parental behaviours associated with the first indicator: reading to children, talking to children about school and helping with homework were near-universal practices amongst working class and middle class parents alike. The second indicator also displayed little tendency to stratify by class; working class and middle class children appeared to take part in a wide range of activities planned by their parents. While some children described free time that indicated a culture of natural growth, the majority of working class children reported the influence of cultivated development on their free time. The final indicator of cultivated development was distributed somewhat differently: few children from either working class or middle class backgrounds displayed a conversational style with adults, suggesting the near-universal influence of natural growth on this aspect of children's home lives. While children demonstrated a clear ability to reason with each other to resolve disputes, this appeared to be due to the influence of the formal learning environment rather than home life.

While this finding did once again question the stratification of cultural logics by class, it disagreed with the other two indicators as to the particular cultural logic that is present in the children's homes. It may be that the components of Lareau's cultural logics do not always covary: a single household can display 'middle class' tendencies in one respect and 'working class' tendencies in another, calling into question the conceptual validity of Lareau's typology. It can be concluded from the findings in relation to the third hypothesis that social class does not appear to influence parents' propensity to adopt particular behaviours that assist children's advancement through the formal education system. The most significant finding was that working class parents were as likely as middle class parents to be involved in their children's schooling and to plan their free time with activities.

7. Conclusion

Overall, the research appears to question the posited links between social class, children's future goals and parents' norms of upbringing, to the extent that the effect of class on these aspects of life was found to be insignificant among the 8 year-olds at this suburban primary school.

These research findings are in stark contrast to the hypothesised links between children's social background, aspirations and home life. Social class appears to be insignificant in shaping the aspirations of the children studied here and the child rearing practices of their parents. This contrasts with the large body of literature which emphasises the significance of class in relation to aspirations, home life, educational attainment and social mobility more broadly. Perhaps most surprising is the failure of the data to conform to Lareau's class-based ideal types of child rearing. Even the most valid typologies confront cases which evade their classificatory schemas, and it would be unfair and sociologically obtuse to expect every working class and middle class child in this sample to have parents who precisely map onto Lareau's respective cultural logics. However, the degree of non-conformity present in this data between children's social backgrounds and a particular cultural logic of child rearing is stark. At the very least, this calls into question the usefulness of Lareau's typology as a descriptive tool in this context. The fact that different elements of cultivated development were not always found to co-vary raises a more serious concern about the conceptual validity of her notion of cultivated development in general.

At the core of the disparity between the research hypotheses and the findings of this study, it is suggested, are two defining characteristics of the research site: the age of the children studied, and the suburban location of the school.

As discussed previously, the decision to direct this research towards 8 year-olds was based on a desire to study children's aspirations at a stage in their lives at which an awareness of the constraints to their realisation will be less developed. In short, the intention was to study idealistic rather than realistic goals. The divergence between the findings here, that social class appears to have no significant influence on children's aspirations, and other studies that do find evidence of such an influence, was explained by the older age of the children involved in these studies. As children age they will increasingly begin to see future goals in realistic terms, at which stage a consciousness of the structural barriers in the way of working class children will begin to be realised. It seems that this consciousness of the realities of class membership, and the way in which they place constraints on the viability of aspirations, begins to form at some stage between the ages of 8 and 12. Given the role that aspirations play in social mobility, the latter stages of primary school would therefore seem to be a crucial stage at which children's goals for the future, and their resulting long-term life chances, can become constrained by social-structural influences.

The working class is clearly a group whose internal characteristics vary greatly, and of the many factors upon which the specificities of working class life are contingent, the spatial relation to the city is important. Although the US studies of Gans (1967)

and Berger (1961) showed the notion of an ideal typical 'suburban' way of life to be largely mythical, and that the spatial relation to the city does not have uniform social effects from one suburban location to another, this is not to say that in the context of an area-specific case study particular social and cultural forms cannot result from the lived realities of the physical environment. Many studies of working class life have focussed on the inner cities (for example Evans 2004; Lareau 1987, 2003) and their descriptions and definitions of working class life are therefore bound to this particular context. This study suggests that working class life in the suburbs can differ in important ways: the suburbs seem to present different challenges and opportunities to parents, which are reflected in their cultural logics of child rearing.

For instance, in the extent to which parents schedule their children's free time with activities, the suburban working class parenting studied here was found not to match the ideal type of natural growth which Lareau associates with working class families. This may be because the particular suburban situation studied here represents an altogether different environment for children to grow up in than that of the inner-city estate. The suburban streets around Watermead, even those in its areas of social housing, are not clearly bounded like those of an inner-city estate, where children tend to play and socialise within the clearly demarcated boundary between the estate and the city beyond. In this respect, the suburbs can present parents of young children with a problem: it is less easy to allow children in the suburbs the freedom to play unsupervised, as the boundaries between the estate and the city that help to limit the realm of play of urban working class children do not exist in the suburban environment. It may therefore be that parents' efforts to provide activities are a response to the unsuitability of the suburban environment for unsupervised play.

This impetus to provide children with structured free time may function alongside the availability of social networks through which information about activities can be sourced. Inner-city estates are often characterised by high levels of social capital between residents but little bridging capital with those outside the estate. Compared with the more fluid boundaries of the suburb, the clear physical parameters of the estate may contribute to the phenomenon whereby "social exclusion is almost entirely an urban problem" (Power and Wilson 2000). From speaking to the children about their free time, it became clear that many of them travelled to neighbouring towns to take part in activities, reinforcing the sense in which life in this particular suburb is not strictly bounded by the limits of the village in the way that many aspects of inner-city life can be tethered to the estate. This increases access to a range of activities that may not be situated locally. Other artefacts of working class life that are common in the suburban context but more unusual in the inner-city, such as car ownership, may also be significant in this way.

The suggestion here is not that working class life in either the suburbs or the inner-city is uniform. However, it is proposed that on a local scale the physical environment can have important social effects which in turn shape cultural logics of upbringing, and this may explain some of the differences between the home lives of the working class children studied here and those of the children observed in inner-city studies.

By assessing the basis of cultural explanations of the class gap in educational attainment alongside accounts of class-based patterns in children's aspirations, this research is situated within the continuing discussion of the disparities in relative

social mobility that exist in Britain today. That the research finds little evidence of class-based patterns in aspirations or cultural logics of upbringing does not deny the enduring importance of social class in stratifying educational outcomes. Rather, the characteristics of the research site indicate, firstly, that class-based inequalities in aspirations seem to really gain significance as children leave primary school and, secondly, that working class life in the suburbs can vary in important ways from working class life in the city. To be of maximal worth, research into the class barriers to educational attainment must consider the full range of contexts that exist beyond the urban comprehensive, and the findings here suggest that the suburbs and their primary schools are important sites for future study.

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9. Appendix

QCA Codebook

<u>Variables</u>

chldname	Name of child
chldID	Numeric identifier
class	Class of family – governed by father's class where available
aspbasis	Basis of child's aspirations
aspclass	Indicates whether child's aspiration is middle class or working class
classdiff	Indicates whether class of aspiration differs from parents' class
chldenjoy	Extent to which parent/guardian thinks their child is enjoying school
pta	Parent/guardian membership of Parent Teacher Association
helphwk	Parent/guardian helps their child with homework
talkchld	Parent/guardian talks to child about how they are doing at school
readchld purposes	Parent/guardian reads with their child, other than for homework
agelefted	Age at which parent/guardian left education
opinionsch	Parent/guardian's opinion of school as a child

<u>Variable values (binary recodes)</u>

chldname	(string)	
chldID	(random)	
class	1	family is middle class
	0	family is working class
aspbasis	1	child primarily refers to parental/family influence over aspirations
	0	child primarily refers to other/no clear influence over aspirations
aspclass	1	aspiration is middle class
	0	aspiration is working class
classdiff	1	class of aspiration differs from class of parents
	0	class of aspiration does not differ from class of parents
chldenjoy*	1	a lot
	0	a little
pta**	1	one or both parents is PTA member
	0	neither parent is PTA member
helphwk*	1	parents help with homework
	0	parents do not help with homework
talkchld*	1	parents talk with child about school
	0	parents do not talk with child about school

readchld**	1	one or both parents reads with child
	0	neither parent reads with child
agelefted^	0	16 or younger
	1	17 or older
opinionsch^^	1	liked school
	0	did not like school

Notes

*For the variables *chldenjoy, helphwk* and *talkchld* each child's parents gave a unanimous response (i.e. the mother's response matched the father's response). Therefore a single variable value was assigned to each child by merging the identical values of each parent's response.

**For the variables *pta* and *readchld*, responses between parents were not always unanimous. A single variable value was allocated to each child on the basis of logical disjunction (logical OR). For example, *pta* was assigned a positive value if either the mother or the father is a PTA member, or both mother and father are PTA members. Similarly, *readchld* was assigned a positive value if either the mother or the father reads to their child, or if both mother and father read to their child.

^For the variable *agelefted*, responses between parents differed in some cases (mothers and fathers left school at different ages). In order to capture the full range of variation in the dataset, in which most parents left school at 16, a single value was assigned to each child according to the *highest age* of school leaving between their parents. For example, if the mother left school at an older age than the father, her response was assigned.

With a single value of 1, 2 or 3 assigned to each child in this way, the variable *agelefted* was then recoded into a binary as follows, again with a view to retaining the maximal degree of variation in the dataset:

Left school at 16 or younger = 0
Left school at 17 or older = 1

^^The variable *opinionsch* was recoded as a binary as follows: where parents had a unanimous opinion, that value was taken. Values of 1 and 2 were then recoded as '1' for 'liked school', and values of 3 were recoded as '0' for 'did not like school'. Where parents were not unanimous, the following recodes were carried out:

1 and 2 → 1
1 and 3 → 0
2 and 3 → 0