

SCHOOLING INEQUALITY

Aspirations, Opportunities and the Reproduction of Social Class

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With a foreword by
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For my daughter Sheliyah.

I hope that we can build a more equitable education
system and society in your lifetime.

Jake's story: a journey to reflexivity

Introduction

Thus far, this book has presented research findings which have sociologically explored the patterns of inequality in the construction of aspirations and in the experiences of pupils attending three contrasting schools. I have highlighted the systematic and institutional structures and practices which serve to reproduce unequal relations within the field. Chapter 9 turns to the personal to provide a reflexive account of myself as a researcher from a working-class background and explores the deeply emotional process of conducting research closely tied to one's own trajectory and life experiences. Amanda Coffey in her influential book *The ethnographic self* writes that 'fieldwork is personal, emotional and identity work' (1999: 1, emphasis in original). She argues that fieldwork can often impact us more than our participants: 'The reality that the impact of fieldwork is usually greatest for us and not for our hosts should remain the firm reason why we should be open about our attachments to and emotions about fieldwork and our hosts' (Coffey, 1999: 37).

Coffey's words around the need to be open about these feelings point towards a central point in Pierre Bourdieu's work, one that all sociological researchers should aspire to achieve; that is reflexivity. The concept of reflexivity has taken on many forms in different contexts, including within Bourdieu's own work (see Grenfell and James, 1998, for a comprehensive overview of Bourdieusian reflexivity in educational research). As such it is important to be specific about the type of reflexivity I am embarking on. Bourdieu argues that reflexivity is about 'objectifying the subject of objectification' (Bourdieu, 2006 [2000]: 10). He writes: 'One should make it a rule to never embark on sociology, and especially the sociology of sociology, without first, or simultaneously, undertaking a self socio-analysis' (Bourdieu, 1993: 49).

What does it mean to conduct a self 'socio-analysis'? Coming from a sociological perspective, not a psychological or a psycho-social one, the process of self-analysis has been difficult. For me, what Bourdieu is directing us to do is to delve into our psyche and unpack the way in which this affects our *interests* and *interactions*. To understand how we are part of our research and indeed our research, in part, is a reconstruction of our own personal perspectives. It is about understanding that the 'scholarly gaze' (Bourdieu

cited in Wacquant, 1989) affects the outcomes of research, that findings are not *objective* truths, but rather in part manifestations of our subjectivities. In this reflexive account I unpack the way in which my own trajectory has impacted upon my work in terms of my interest in the topic as well as contributing to the development of a strong emotional attachment to one of my participants (Jake) and reflect on my attempt to ‘rescue’ him from a cold and uncaring educational institution. I consider how these experiences may have impacted the research and its findings while also reflecting on the detrimental effect it had on my health as it led me to question my role as a sociologist. I will begin by telling Jake’s story, followed by my own, before going on to revisit Jake’s story, paying particular attention to the affective dimension and unpacking my personal thoughts and feelings.

Jake's story

Before I even met Jake, a Year 11 boy from Eagles Academy, I was told by a teacher that he ‘should be’ an A/B grade student (his target grades were all As and Bs¹), but that he was currently working at D level. When I interviewed Jake in December 2014, he told me something similar; that he had been predicted As when he first arrived at the school and is told that he is fully ‘capable’ but that he ‘messes around’ too much in lessons so is not reaching his potential. For example, when discussing his desire to attend university, Jake told me: “I do like learning it’s generally one of my favourite things to do, and I’m very able ... and people tell me that I’m able they just don’t understand why I can be a bit of a tool sometimes, but I don’t understand myself sometimes” (Jake, Year 11, Eagles Academy).

During my time at Eagles Academy I often heard teachers refer to Jake as a ‘tool’,² something he had clearly internalised. I was told he is the class joker who will do anything to get attention. Some teachers believed that this was because he was working above the average classroom level so the work set often bored him. The school’s stance on Jake’s behaviour was that he is fully able to control it but makes a conscious decision to mess around. In Eagles Academy there was no concrete support structure for bad behaviour, unless a pupil was specifically diagnosed as having ‘learning difficulties’. Even if they were I came to understand that support tended to take a back seat to discipline. For example I witnessed a support worker waiting for a pupil to complete a detention before being allowed to take him for a counselling session.

Jake’s home life was not the most conducive to a productive learning environment. A lot of the problems he encountered out of school could have impacted upon his behaviour – or need for attention – within school. Jake lived with his single dad and three siblings (two younger). He told me in his interview that he does not have the best relationship with his mother.

I came to learn that she was on benefits and perhaps depressed. It seemed as though she had a lot of mental health problems and even attempted suicide during my time in the school. Jake's dad worked long hours and as such Jake was often responsible for taking his younger siblings home from school and looking after them. Jake told me during the interview that his dad had had a hard time at school due to having undiagnosed dyslexia. When I asked if his dad had been to university Jake said:

'No he did not ... he's always been dyslexic my dad so he's a very hands-on bloke he likes doing stuff like that, he wouldn't go to uni or everything cos he got a little bit mistreated in school because they didn't really know much about dyslexia back then, it wasn't well known – so I was told – so he just got looked at as stupid. He was in the lower set even though he had it in his head.' (Jake, Year 11, Eagles Academy)

During this interview I also learned that Jake had a deep desire to become an architect but did not have much information about how to reach his goal. This was a central focus point of my study so I was fascinated by the fact that, despite having a full-time careers advisor on site and having high 'target grades', Jake was not well informed on these issues. It appeared to me that Jake was not getting much support with regards to his 'aspirations' because the school did not believe he would achieve his target grades because he was 'lazy' and 'naughty'. As such, on visits to Eagles Academy, I started bringing in information for Jake about architecture and the route into it, something he was extremely grateful for.

Just before the Christmas holidays, I noticed that Jake was becoming increasingly down. He told me about how he was trying to improve his behaviour and get on with his work but that he was finding it hard to shake his negative reputation in the school. In addition to needing support with his pursuit of a career in architecture, I felt that Jake would benefit from an empathetic person to listen to him and understand his side of the various fights he would end up in with teachers. As such, at the beginning of the new term in January 2015, I met with Jake and asked him if he felt that it was helpful to talk to me. He told me that he did find it helpful, commenting that nobody really listens to him and he rarely has an opportunity to talk about how he's feeling and getting on. Following this, I spoke to Jake's head of year and volunteered to work with him once a week in a mentoring capacity. My offer was gratefully accepted on the condition that I was consistent.³ Thus I began to work with Jake on a weekly basis but this soon escalated to more than once a week and I made numerous visits to Eagles Academy outside of my fieldwork slots throughout January, February and March. Reflecting on the work we did in this time I feel that a lot of it was similar to the type of things middle-class parents would do with their

children, providing extra support facilitated by possession of the forms of capital necessary to successfully navigate the system.

Initially we began by working towards getting Jake a place at college. I helped him to fill in the application form, reminded him to attend the open day and helped him to prepare for the interview, including convincing teachers to write letters of support claiming that his ‘ability’ and ‘potential’ were not fully demonstrated by his current progress. Having established forms of capital I was able to influence this situation through understanding and drawing on the symbolic capital of the teachers to help Jake’s application. Following Jake securing this place at the local sixth-form college, I realised that he now needed to secure the grades to be admitted to the A levels he wanted – in particular, he was passionate about physics and wanted to study it as an A level. Central to this was that he required a B grade in maths GCSE. Despite having a ‘target grade’ of an A, his classroom work was of a D grade level. I was told by Jake’s personal tutor that although he was ‘naturally talented’ in maths he had been put off the subject due to conflict with his maths teacher. Thus I began to put a lot of effort into helping him to progress in maths. Using the physics A level and ultimately architecture as an incentive I continued to encourage Jake to begin to attempt some homework and revision for maths. I also set up an afterschool peer-led revision session, where I would come in and supervise while Jake and one of his friends Liam (another of my participants) did maths together.

During this time we were also working towards setting up a work experience placement in a big architecture firm, something I was able to organise through my personal contacts. Throughout my time in the school I felt that Jake’s passion for architecture could have been mobilised as a route to engaging him in education; something which was not done. For example I recall a session with Jake where I explained to him that maths – which is central to architecture, was in fact central to music (something he appeared to be disengaged from). He was intrigued and clearly wanted to understand more about this connection. Thus I began to use his passion for architecture as a hook where possible to motivate and excite him; arguably drawing from a form of critical and engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994). Organising a work experience placement was central to this. I also made a large revision timetable with Jake where I set up a gold star reward system and agreed to treat him with architecture-related things. For example, I said that I would take him to the ‘Architecture Centre’ when he had ten gold stars.

Alongside my work with Jake in an academic capacity, I began to take on more and more of a pastoral role. Understanding that he had a difficult relationship with his mother and a father who was extremely strict (in line with the school) I recognised and understood Jake’s need for a caring and compassionate mother-like figure. This is something Jake’s English teacher

had similarly understood and employed when working with him. She told me that he does not respond well to being disciplined and that what he needed was extra care and attention. I noticed that Jake would often become really down if he was in trouble, this would have a knock-on effect on his motivation to put in effort in the classroom. As such, when I came in to see Jake I would often try to lift his mood and went out of my way to help him organise minor things that often led him into conflict with teachers. For example, I bought him a pack of pens and helped him to get a new school dinner card. In what was to become my final week in Eagles Academy, Jake was on a downward spiral with his behaviour and as such was continually being punished and then being punished for missing old punishments. I was aware that Jake's home situation had deteriorated and his mother had attempted suicide. Nevertheless the school continued to discipline Jake for his behaviour, seemingly unaltered by this knowledge. I recall defending his actions to his head of year on this basis and he responded: "Most of our kids have problems at home but they get over it and get on with it." During this difficult time I felt that the consistency of my empathy, care and support was extremely important and helpful for Jake. However this relationship began to cause conflict within Eagles Academy as it appeared to some teachers to be functioning in contradiction with their discipline regime.

On 16 March 2015 I went into Eagles Academy to find that Jake was in a lot of trouble for walking out of school the previous week. When I discussed the details of this with him he told me that he had been in a fight with a girl who had ripped his shirt off him. Since both of his buttons had already fallen off his blazer he had no way of covering up his bare chest and was deeply embarrassed so he ran home to get a new shirt. The next day when I visited Jake, I brought a needle and thread and sewed two new buttons on his shirt. He was so chuffed and buttoned it up immediately, telling me that he couldn't remember the last time he was able to do that. This moment illustrates how deeply involved I had become with this young boy. I cared so much, not just about his academic progress, but also about his wellbeing and emotions.

Monday 23 March 2015 was the last day I went into Eagles Academy. By this point the school had begun to use me as a weapon. Recognising that Jake wanted to see me when I came in, they attempted to use this as a strategy to curb his bad behaviour. They told him that he could not work with me unless he had had his report card signed. In a similar vein to how I noted the support worker being treated, I was not allowed to take Jake out of detention and had to negotiate hard to remove him from isolation. On 19 March 2015 I arrived at Eagles Academy to find that Jake had again walked out of school, and the head of Year 11 at this point told me he wanted me to stop working with Jake as I "was not improving his behaviour". It seemed that this was to be his ultimate punishment for continually misbehaving.

Upon leaving Eagles Academy I offered Jake and his father my support outside of school. This way I felt I would not interfere with his in-school behaviour or come into conflict with teachers but would be able to continue to support Jake with his revision and work experience. I felt that my role outside of the school's boundaries would help me to use my resources the best way possible, drawing on all of my capital to help Jake succeed. However this was stopped abruptly after our first session as the school decided it was not allowed to continue due to reasons related to 'child protection' as they (for no reason that was ever explained to me) decided I was a potential 'risk factor' in his life!

Reflecting on this experience I am aware that my passion and commitment towards helping Jake was largely related to who I am as a sociologist, but also due to my background and the issues I have faced myself. The next part of this chapter will visit my own personal story before going on to provide a reflexive analysis, considering the impact of this experience on my relationship with the school, my fieldwork and my own mental health.

Jessie's story

I grew up in a relatively deprived area of Bristol with my mum who was a single parent and disabled. We survived on a very limited budget supplied by the welfare state. Although we could never afford a holiday, we often ran out of electricity and I rarely got any brand-name clothes (except for those bought in a charity shop) I recall a very happy childhood. My mother also grew up in a working-class family in London. She had a terrible experience of schooling due to developing narcolepsy⁴ as a teenager, something which, at the time, was not recognised. She was thus labelled as 'lazy' and put in the bottom sets of all subjects where she recalls having terrible teachers and subsequently failing her exams. My mum watched her own mother work every day in an exclusive department store where wealthy customers looked down on her. She would then return home and cook and clean for the family. Through witnessing this, alongside her own traumatic experience of school, my mother began to feel that the system was unjust. During the early 1980s she became mobilised by the feminist movement and, I would argue, the self-education which came along with it inculcated within her a degree of cultural capital and a feeling of empowerment. When I was born my mother was determined to be active in my education and ensure that I had a better experience than she did. Though I was born in London and spent my early years living with my nanna, my mum decided to move us to Bristol when I was four years old as she wanted me to attend the Bristol Steiner School. The Steiner school is an alternative form of education based on the work of Rudolf Steiner who famously wrote:

We should not be asking, what does a person need to know or be able to do in order to fit into the existing social order? Instead we

should ask: what lives in each human being and how can this be developed? Only then will it be possible to direct the new qualities of each emerging generation into society. Society will then become what young people, as whole human beings, make out of existing social conditions. The new generation should not simply be made to become what present society wants it to be. (Rudolf Steiner, cited in Bristol Steiner School, 2015)

This is clearly in direct opposition to mainstream education; the ethos and approach of Eagles Academy functions more along the lines discussed by sociologists such as Bowles and Gintis (2011 [1976]) to serve the purpose of capitalism by constructing the types of workers necessary for a particular social order. Although at the time you had to pay for Steiner schools, they offered means-tested fees depending on your situation and also allowed you to pay what you could when you could. As such my mother did not have to pay much but nevertheless ended up in debt to the school for years to follow. The Steiner ethos meant that teachers respected pupils and treated them as equal individuals; they rarely raised their voices. There were no strict rules, no one wore uniform and we addressed the teachers by their first names. In this school I developed an enormous amount of confidence. I did not feel the weight of authority nor feel restrained or restricted by regulation. Basil Bernstein might argue that this was a form of 'invisible pedagogy', in which school rules and restrictions were in place in implicit rather than explicit ways (Bernstein, 1990).

At that time the Steiner school did not offer GCSEs, thus I entered mainstream education in Year 9. The state school I went to was quite a 'rough' school given the area we lived in; having a high proportion of young people on free school meals (including myself) and having relatively low GCSE results. However, it was quite small and friendly. When entering this school, although I was quite 'bright' and 'able' I quickly became a 'naughty' child. I objected to the 'visible pedagogy' (Bernstein, 1990) and authoritarian structure of the education system and was often provoked by teachers being disrespectful.⁵ I recall a science lesson where the teacher asked me to remove my bag from the desk which I refused to do because I did not want it to get dirty on the floor. She proceeded to throw my bag on the floor herself; so I walked out. Despite such rivalry with teachers we had some allies, some who cared and understood our experiences. In particular the school had two fantastic and empathetic learning support mentors, Gary and Lloyd. When we used to be kicked out of lessons, they would often collect our work and bring us into their room to finish it so we would not miss out on learning. They often joked around with us, seemingly more on our level, and they were similarly dissatisfied by the relentless rules of the education system. They often turned a blind eye to 'bad behaviour' and were more concerned

that we got an education. Gary and Lloyd were the first of many ‘significant others’ who throughout my life have believed in, encouraged and supported me in numerous ways. On reflection, I can see that this positive experience with Gary and Lloyd played a large part in the relationship I consciously developed with Jake. I felt that it is those individuals who get behind you and believe in you who have a lasting impact on your life and can often be a motivation to succeed.

I managed to leave school with decent GCSEs (despite the predictions of my teachers) and went on to study A levels at the local further education college. An important moment in my story which must be mentioned is when my good friend from school, Rochelle, attempted to get into the same college as me to do maths A level but was turned down as she had achieved a C at GCSE maths and not a B. I remember feeling that this was a huge injustice as Rochelle was the best mathematician I knew. I was quite good at maths and was in the top set at school but I hated my maths teacher and could not understand her method of teaching. The only reason I managed to get a B myself was because of Rochelle’s help in class as she attempted to teach me what our teacher could not. I remember Rochelle having missed a lot of classes due to problems outside of school and this resulted in her lower grade, not because she was not capable. I remember pleading with the teachers at college to let Rochelle in, telling them that she was really, really good at maths. When we were unsuccessful I felt really confused and let down. This moment in my story marks a crucial point where, feeling like something was deeply wrong with the education system, I began to question its legitimacy, a fire which was only to be fuelled by studying sociology. Reflecting back on this now I understand that if Rochelle had been to a middle-class school or had middle-class parents, it is likely that she would have been allowed into the college as someone would have phoned them and argued her case for her. Young people’s voices (and especially young working-class people’s voices) are rarely heard or taken seriously.

While this is far from a comprehensive life story, the overview just given serves to illustrate some important parts of my own background and experiences in the education system. These moments in part inform how I see society and also make up who I am as a sociologist, they point to where my passions lie, what I believe in and why. As should now be clear, my own story and many of my experiences and struggles resonate deeply on many levels with Jake’s story. For example, my experience with a difficult maths teacher and the success of peer-led learning; my failure as a teenager to be able to rescue Rochelle from a derailed trajectory and my connection to Jake’s family situation – being a young carer and having a parent who had experienced a difficult education themselves. As I have come to learn through my reflections, these points are crucial to understanding my motivations to fight for and try to save Jake from the cruel and unequal education system.

These moments in my story are also intricately tied to my motivations to become a sociologist, and this – my sociological awareness – in turn underlies my attempts to rescue Jake.

Jake, to me, appeared to exemplify many sociological issues all tied into one. He had been a victim of labelling by the school as a naughty child and was struggling to shake this reputation and be allowed to transform himself. He was experiencing difficult circumstances outside of school related to poverty which impacted upon his ability to learn and be 'well behaved'. He had self-esteem issues as he was often told he was not good enough, his needs outside of school were not being fully met, yet he was expected to be able to learn in school. His working-class sense of humour and banter were not valued within the middle-class education system, which powerfully asserts middle-class culture as the only legitimate form. Thus, without any consideration of the difficulties he was facing in his life, Jake was constantly being disciplined and punished. He was not getting the support that he needed for his problems, but rather he was continually in trouble. He was sensitive and was often upset or discouraged by this which subsequently had a negative impact on his work. His dad was constantly being informed of his antics but did not have the confidence to challenge the system, instead he believed everything they said and often disciplined Jake further.

All of these issues meant that when I met Jake and came face to face with an exact example of everything that is wrong with our school system, I immediately became angry for him and passionate about helping him to fight the system where the odds were stacked against him. I remember talking to him about sociology as I attempted to explain to him why I cared about helping him reach his goals. Taking the lead from Bourdieu's ideas around public sociology, I felt that the discipline could help Jake to understand his own oppression such that he could interpret his struggles and suffering in line with structural inequality rather than as outcomes of individual failure (Bourdieu, 2012). In contrast to my inability to help Rochelle, I felt that I could actually help Jake. I saw a way to use all of my established forms of legitimated cultural and social capital to intervene and have a real meaningful impact. I felt that helping this child was part of my role as a sociologist who is passionate about making a change in young people's lives. Pierre Bourdieu in the documentary *La Sociologie est un Sport de Combat* famously described sociology as a combat sport: 'I often say that sociology is a martial art, it can come in handy. ... Like all the martial arts, you use it in self-defence and using it for foul play is strictly forbidden' (*La Sociologie est un Sport de Combat*, 2001: 00:17:07–00:17:20). Burawoy, further developing these ideas around the combatant nature of sociology, maps the field arguing that there are two forms of sociology: the dominant one being that of professional sociology, a strand which seeks to work with policy, serving the interests of the dominant classes. At the other end of the spectrum is the subordinated

strand of the discipline – critical sociology which aims to be public, serving the interests of the dominated classes (Burawoy, 2014).

While these forms are intricately related, I feel that I fall more on the side of the public, critical sociologist as my main concern is to challenge systems of power in the name of equality. In opposition to the often cited ethical question of whether your research will have any effect on the participants (implying that we should attempt to go in and come out without leaving any mark), I have always felt that a large part of the ‘impact’ that research has is its ability to benefit its participants. I built into my research design a note that I would ‘offer something back’ to those in my research and felt that this opportunity to support Jake would go some way to making a change through my research. However as I discovered the system is too powerful to be changed in this way. While Jake’s story as set out here was purposefully factual,⁶ the next section returns to it, incorporating *my* perspective, thoughts and feelings during the battle with the school and the result this had on my psychological wellbeing.

Resisting the un-resistible: fighting the system from within

They have made me feel like a naughty child who needs to be disciplined. I feel unwelcomed in their spaces. When I go into the hall I don’t feel welcomed, the teachers don’t want to talk to me. They smile at me through gritted teeth a lot of them, some of them just don’t have time to talk but others? I feel like they are always watching me like they watch the kids. I am inside the belly of the beast, the heart of the panopticon. This school is built like a prison and behaves like a prison and I am not conforming to their regime of discipline and punishment. They only see good and bad which should be rewarded with positive or negative. They see me as a positive being rewarded to a bad egg, to a naughty child who is ‘wrapping me around his finger’. They don’t like naughty children getting attention and that is what I am doing.

(Fieldnote, 21 March 2015)

The weeks leading up to me leaving Eagles Academy had been difficult, the school felt to me like a ticking time bomb and I was caught in the middle. As the school continued to discipline Jake I began to fight. I had clearly aligned myself with him and as such the teachers began to become increasingly suspicious of me – and I towards them. Howard Becker famously argued that sociologists cannot be neutral, they unavoidably take sides; he suggests that the real question is ‘whose side are we on?’ concluding that sociologists usually side with the underdog (Becker, 1967). In Eagles Academy I made no apology for taking Jake’s side – something which puzzled the teachers. My relationship with the head of year deteriorated and he became irritated and

angry with me. In taking Jake's side I was dismissing the traditional 'hierarchy of credibility' (Becker, 1967) which would position the professionals' (teachers') perspectives and truths of a given situation as superordinate to that of the child (Jake). Becker writes: 'By refusing to accept the hierarchy of credibility, we express disrespect for the entire established order' (Becker, 1967: 242). My alignment with Jake then appeared as an act of disrespect to the institution.

As I reflect on this time I am struck by the enormous amount of emotion work which I underwent. This was not just in the sense of the energy exerted through arguing with the school, but also due to a 'habitus tug' (Ingram, 2011). I recall working extremely hard to present my working-class self to the young people in Eagles Academy, to enable a mutual understanding and greater levels of trust. Meanwhile I was also working to remain perceived as professional when interacting with teachers (something which, in dominant discourse, is synonymous with being middle class). This became increasingly difficult as when my emotions increase in intensity, my working-class self becomes especially prominent in all situations. This line was often blurred as when interacting with the young people in front of the teachers they may have seen me tolerating, or at least not telling the pupils off for, 'messing around' in hallways and so on. This was likely coupled with the teachers perceiving me more and more as a young, undisciplined person who they could not control. This was the first time I really felt my habitus collide and conflict as I struggled to maintain and manage both parts of it at the same time.

When Eagles Academy requested that I cut all ties with Jake I was deeply hurt and this moment marked the beginning of a mental breakdown for me. I reflected on a promise I had made to Jake which I was now being forced to break, that I would come in once a week until he had finished his exams. I had made this promise during one of the maths sessions where Liam had told me how much they valued the consistency of my support, saying that most of their teachers disappear and let them down. During this session I had also told Jake that we would postpone maths work until after the mock exams to which he responded by requesting that I still come in to see him as talking to me was helpful. I felt like all of my hard work had been trampled over by Eagles Academy and was shocked at their accusation that I was not helping Jake's behaviour. I felt like they were ignoring all the progress he had made in other ways. At this point I understood how our education system does not work and I was angry. Eagles Academy had no time for 'care' and appeared suspicious of any kind of love, attention, empathy and support directed at any pupil deemed too naughty.⁷ Understanding that the institution of education was not the place for caring people, that my attempts to fight the system from within were not working, I attempted to fight the system from without – reverting to the home as a place to continue to support Jake. However upon

realising the school had the power to override this arrangement, overruling Jake's father on the grounds of 'child protection', I spiralled into a deeper breakdown. Following a long and arduous argument with the school over this issue, with little communication or reasoning being provided, I felt as though they just wanted me to disappear. I was cornered into respecting the school's request in order to protect my reputation as a researcher such that I would be able to tell this story so others could learn from it.

At this point I began to lose faith in sociology; I felt that we had a responsibility to intervene to try to make a better society, not just to write about it. I felt I was being banished back to my ivory tower. This critical sociological purpose often brings the sociologist into conflict with society as it disrupts and critiques the foundations and ideologies underlying the establishment itself (Burawoy, 2014). I felt like I had been overpowered by the institution, I felt overwhelmed and an enormous sense of injustice, helplessness and frustration. If, as Bourdieu suggests, sociology is a combat sport (*La Sociologie est un Sport de Combat*, 2001), I must have been practising it wrong. I felt ill-equipped to protect or defend myself with it. I lost control and I cried and cried and cried. I was unable to eat or sleep and began to question everything I had done. I felt like I had lost myself and did not know who I was anymore. As I began to reflect on this period I came to understand it as a process of mourning. I was mourning for I felt like I had lost someone I cared about and had no chance to say goodbye.

It is possible to argue that Eagles Academy's use of the term 'child protection' was more about 'school protection'. It seems as though this was never about protecting the child as I was quite clearly posing no harm to Jake, rather I was questioning the harm inflicted by the school. Such a term is an automatic catch-all which serves to close down any uncomfortable questioning of the school's system. It is, in a sense, 'going nuclear'. Furthermore, the concept of 'child protection' is extremely narrow, what about the child's *wellbeing* and rights? While the school informed me that they would tell Jake that our out-of-school arrangement was 'suspended' I was never to gain any closure by saying goodbye to him myself or indeed be reassured that anyone had informed him why I had disappeared so abruptly from his life without explanation.

I later learned that Jake did not attend his work-experience induction day and am convinced that this is due to our work being abruptly stopped. The last time I saw him he did not have enough information and did not feel ready for the day. For many working-class young people whose habitus does not feel a sense of ease in a middle-class field, such an experience is daunting. Jake told me that he was worried about the day but I had promised that during our next session we would prepare for it including doing some research together and formulating some questions. As he lived on the other side of the city to the architecture company I also suspect that he would

have been unable to find his own way there without support. While some people (and indeed Eagles Academy) would adopt the stance that it was Jake's responsibility to get himself there and indeed he should demonstrate independence and a willingness to 'sort it out' himself, I would argue that the support I was offering Jake was similar to the practices of middle-class parents which serve to maintain and reproduce inequality as all young people are presented and compared equally as having independently achieved while some receive more (hidden) support than others.

Conclusion: Is anyone *not* OK?

This title is taken from a fieldnote I wrote during this difficult time where I posed a series of questions to myself: Is the child OK? Is the school OK? Is my supervisor OK? Is anyone *not* OK? To which I had to respond, yes, I am not OK. Research ethics processes and discussion often underestimates the effect of research on the researcher. As this chapter has demonstrated, my research journey has shown me the importance of ethics for the researcher. Through the process of conducting a study so closely related and intertwined with one's personal background you may confront your demons and ultimately get burnt. By becoming emotionally involved in my research through caring about Jake I learnt the true meaning and need for reflexivity. Due to my own initial Steiner education I was not used to being in conflict with such a powerful institution, thus my battle with Eagles Academy caused me profound distress. However I am confident that I gained a deeper insight because of it. Through this experience I truly felt the full force of what it must be like to be a working-class boy in an authoritarian academy school, where rules are rigid and exceptions are not made, where your culture is disregarded and your home circumstances ignored, where you cannot challenge authority and are often made to feel small, insignificant and powerless. Such an experience was intensely painful yet ultimately powerful as it highlighted where my passion and anger lies and motivated me to keep going.

In light of this reflexive account, I would argue that subjectivity is central to the research process. As researchers we might not consciously set out to take a side in the sense that Becker (1967) appears to advocate for, but through the research journey we inevitably end up taking a side, forming an allegiance or a support for a position. These allegiances, though, are not fixed, but rather fluid and ever evolving; in a sense it could be argued that they are transformed by the uncovering of knowledge and truth. Thus perhaps the researcher's subjective emotions are themselves a deep form of objectivity as they appear and appeal to our instincts to help our fellow human beings and are able to adapt as the truth of who the real victims are evolve. This chapter has started a reflexive conversation about my own

relation to the research and to Jake, but this should not be the end. Grenfell and James (1998) eloquently sum up the nature of reflexivity when they write: 'Reflexivity is, by definition, endless. Given the will and the resources, it should be possible to continue to refine an analysis of one's relation to the object of study time and again' (1998: 144). Thus while it is a continual project, the reflexive insight provided in this chapter has helped to form the foundations for a strong, honest and robust theoretical analysis.

Through being open and reflexive about what happened to me I have been able to somewhat detach myself from Jake's story. Arguably this chapter itself is only a partial truth as it is a recollection of a story as told by me. Phil Hodgkinson argues: 'We are not trapped by our past, partly because the past changes as we re-story it from the present' (Hodgkinson quoted in Grenfell and James, 1998: 145). My ability to recover from the trauma I experienced was enabled as I reconciled some unresolved issues through the way in which I have re-experienced and re-told the story. I do not claim nor wish to be completely emotionally free from my memories of Jake. Nevertheless a partial detachment has meant that the vast majority of this book is not merely about Jake. His story needed to be told and indeed is indicative of the central argument of this book. It is a case study, an example of the way in which the education system, through its practices, renders some more or less likely to succeed than others. However the previous chapters of this book tell the story of the rest of my participants, they engage with young people from all years, careers advisors and institutional systems. Jake's story was a large part of the inspiration for the main focus of the analysis, this is not a weakness as Jake was one of my participants. My interest in his life stemmed from the initial focus of this project and through my accidental ethnography I came dangerously close to the heart of the problem. I saw it, experienced it and felt it. And here I have written about it.