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**Social Class, Identities and Secondary
Schooling:
An Ethnographic Study in Two Schools of the
City of Buenos Aires**

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	5
Declaration	6
Abstract	7
Introduction	8
Organisation of the thesis.....	12
Chapter One: Social class, inequalities and the sociology of education	18
Introduction.....	18
The Argentinean field: Findings and limitations.....	20
The “socio-structural” tradition.....	21
The “socio-historical” tradition.....	26
The “socio-educational” tradition.....	28
“Identity/subjectivity turn”.....	33
British sociological perspectives: Educational inequalities and social class ...	37
“Political Arithmetic”.....	38
“Differentiation-Polarisation” Theory.....	40
“New Sociology of Education”.....	42
“Social class turn”.....	45
Conclusions.....	50
Chapter Two: With and beyond Bourdieu. Theorising the relationships between social class, identities and secondary schooling	52
Introduction.....	52
Bourdieu’s theoretical tool box and his analysis of educational inequalities ..	54
Social class, habitus, capitals, games and educational inequalities: some examples of Bourdieu’s research.....	67
Expanding Bourdieu’s concepts: Agency, schools, and cultural capital.....	72
Conclusions.....	80
Chapter Three: The social field of secondary schooling in Argentina and in the City of Buenos Aires	83
Introduction.....	83
The national system of schooling and its historical transformations.....	84
The consolidation and crisis of the myth of the meritocratic school (1890-1990).....	84
Secondary schooling and social fragmentation (1980s onwards).....	92
The game of secondary schooling in the City of Buenos Aires: Its players and rules.....	100
Conclusions.....	111
Chapter Four: Methodology, methods, and context	113
Introduction.....	113
Motivation and research questions.....	114

Epistemological underpinnings of my study: Ethnography and Bourdieu	116
Doing ethnography: From sampling to writing up.....	120
Sampling research settings	120
Describing the research sites High Mountain and Low Hill	124
Gaining initial access to High Mountain and Low Hill	131
Fieldwork relations, my multiple location(s), and ethical considerations .	134
Data collection techniques	139
Conclusion.....	153
Chapter five: High Mountain, Low Hill and institutional habitus.....	155
Introduction	155
The schools and the field of state secondary education	157
Middle class institutional habitus in changing scenarios	163
Institutional habitus and class identity making	171
High Mountain and middle classness.....	171
Low Hill, social ‘othering’ and educational exclusion	176
Conclusions	182
Chapter Six: Middle class habitus and the game of schooling in High Mountain.....	184
Introduction	184
Students’ habitus and the ‘compulsory’ nature of secondary schooling.....	185
Middle class habitus and the selection of High Mountain	190
Circuits of schooling: The elite, the good and the rest.....	191
Selection of state schooling as a cultural distinction mechanism	195
<i>Zafar</i> or how to play the game of schooling	198
Students’ culture and middle class identity making.....	209
Conclusions	218
Chapter Seven: Marginal and working class habitus and the game of schooling in Low Hill	220
Introduction	220
“Being somebody” and “being whatever you want to be”	221
School choice and the wandering process.....	227
The unskilled choosers	228
The diminished choosers.....	230
Marginal and working class habitus and the game of schooling	234
Bad players or the role of familial capitals and institutional habitus.....	235
Good players: Willing to play and familial support.....	241
Students’ cultures and class and gender identity making.....	246
Identity making and <i>mirar mal</i> , verbal abuse and fights	251
Conclusions	259
Concluding discussion.....	261

Schooling, students' experiences and inequalities: Problems, theories and methods	261
The game in the City and in the schools: A story of persistent educational inequalities	262
The meaning of secondary schooling for students and schools	265
School recruitment policies and families' school choice	269
The stakes of the game and students' abilities to play	273
Class and gender identity making, students' social relations and schooling	280
Further research	285
References	288
Appendices	314
A.1. Maps of the Americas and Argentina	315
A.2. Educational Statistics	316
A.3. Graph 1. Evolution of level of poverty and unemployment in the Urban Conglomerate of Buenos Aires from 1988-2002	319
A.4. School districts, percentage of poverty and repitients in secondary state schools. City of Buenos Aires	320
A.5. Student enrolments in High Mountain and Low Hill. 1997-2004.....	321
A.6. Plan floors of High Mountain and Low Hill.	322
A.7. School day at High Mountain and Low Hill.	324
A.8. Letter introducing myself to parents or legal wardens of students of all school years	325
A.9. List of interviewed teachers	326
A.10. Interview schedule for teachers	328
A.11. List of interviewed students in Low Hill and High Mountain	329
A.12. Young peoples' interview schedule	331
A.13. Copy of the agreement for the receipt of films and the use of the photographic material produced by students.....	332
A.14. Letter to parents asking for their authorisation to interview their children	333
A.15. Letter introducing myself to parents or legal wardens of third school year students selected to be part of the photo-elicitation interview	334
A.16. Survey to students.	335
A.17. Teachers' survey	338

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Of course, any mistakes, omissions or oversights are entirely my own.

Declaration

I confirm that this thesis is the author's own work and it has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Abstract

This study draws on Bourdieu's theory of social praxis and on sociological theories of identity making in order to better understand the relationships between social class and educational inequalities in secondary schooling in the context of the socially and educationally fragmented education system of the City of Buenos Aires (Argentina). I seek to respond to some of the key gaps in the Argentinean literature by examining the ways in which two secondary schools participate in the local state education system and how students from different social classes interact with the demands of these schools while producing their class and gender identities. This research makes a substantial contribution to the Argentinean field of Sociology of Education. This is in terms of studying the ways in which schools compete in the local state system, of examining the views of students about their schooling experiences, of engaging with ethnographic methods, and of critically using Bourdieu's analytical framework in connection with sociological perspectives on identity to make sense of the data collected. This thesis argues that social class is a powerful explanatory concept with which to understand inequalities between schools and different groups of students. Schools and students participated in the production and reproduction of their unequal positions in the educational field and did so with differential cultural, economic and social resources or "capitals". I present evidence of how these inequalities could be traced in the meanings attached by schools and students to secondary schooling; in the schools' recruitment policies and families' school choice processes; in students' abilities to recognise the "stakes" of the game of secondary schooling; and, finally, in the ways in which students' produced their class and gender identities in their relationships with peers.

Introduction

In Argentina, during the last three decades, state secondary schooling has undergone radical transformations. These changes have been shaped by a profound transformation of the Argentinean socio-economic structure, an unprecedented increase in social inequalities evident since the early 1990s, and recent educational reforms that have fundamentally altered its operations and structure.

This research aims to better understand the relationships between social class and educational inequalities in secondary schooling in the context of the (socially and educationally) fragmented education system of the City of Buenos Aires (Argentina) (Appendix 1). In so doing it addresses three interconnected questions. The first asks how schools as organisations participate in, contribute to or challenge the fragmented nature of the local state education system. Here I examine how individual schools deal with the demands and pressures of the local state education system and how their interactions shape schools' resource levels and teachers' social and cultural expectations towards their respective intakes. The second question examines how students¹ from different social classes (with differential economic, social and cultural resources) interplay with the demands of secondary school. I investigate how middle class and non middle class students view and experience secondary schooling. The final question explores how students produce their class identities within schooling and how class identities interplay with their orientations towards schooling.

¹ In Argentina, the word *estudiantes* is used to refer to secondary school students. The word *alumnos* is more frequently used to refer to primary school pupils. Hence, throughout this thesis, I use the word students instead of pupils to refer to Argentinean secondary school students.

To answer these questions this study adopts an ethnographic approach and critically draws on Bourdieu's theory of social praxis and on sociological theories of identity making. Following Bourdieu and Wacquant (2002), there is no method without a theory and every theory presupposes a methodology. I argue that ethnography is a particularly productive method for studying social practice from a Bourdieusian perspective, which its focus on "social space", "social games" or "fields", "social class", "habitus", 'capitals', and individuals' "sense of the game". Ethnography allows the recognition of both structural constraints on actions, as well as individuals' agency and abilities to be reflective and to challenge the circumstances they are in. Unlike other forms of qualitative data collection, ethnography encompasses the collection/production of a broad range of data on different dimensions and layers of the phenomenon under study. My daily participation in particular aspects of the schools' life provided fertile ground from which to gather/produce data on: i) the wider "field" of state secondary education in Argentina; ii) the ways in which schools played within it; iii) the social "game" that teachers and students played at their respective schools; and, finally, the ways in which students participate in the game of schooling from their specific class positions and with their habitus, resources and abilities to (within certain limits) be strategic, rational and reflexive. Being there and interacting with teachers and students allowed the identification of similarities and differences between the "games" of schooling played in the two selected secondary schools and, at the same time, between students' "sense of the game" and ability to deal with its educational and social demands.

This ethnographic study was carried out between March and early December 2004 in two state secondary schools with different socio-economic intakes and

educational reputation. Despite their differences, the schools shared a collection of buildings that were located in a middle class neighbourhood. High Mountain² offered nursery, primary, secondary and tertiary education. At secondary level, the school was quasi-selective. Low Hill only offered secondary schooling and its access was open. The schools occupied the same site and shared some wings of one building, some offices, halls, corridors, stairs, toilets and classrooms. Each school also had exclusive access to certain spaces such as their administrative areas, science and IT laboratories, and libraries. In terms of population, High Mountain had a majority of middle class students while Low Hill had a majority from non middle class families. Due to a lack of reliable socio-economic information about students' families in the school and in the City, I applied a survey to more than 60% of the population in the third school year at both schools. This survey confirmed that in High Mountain the majority of families were made up of professional and non professional middle classes. However, it also revealed that the third school year in the Low Hill was more socially heterogeneous than reported by teachers and authorities. According to my data, in the case of High Mountain, its middle class families could be associated with the "loser" sections of the middle classes (Svampa 2005). While the "winners", as Svampa (2005) calls them, consist of the professional middle class that have been included in modern and globalised sectors of the economy; the "losers" have been mainly employees and professionals of the state sector, self employed and shop keepers, administrative and clerical workers in the state or private sector in companies disconnected from the new informational and communicational structures that the global order favours (Svampa 2005). In the

² All the names of institutions and people are pseudonyms.

case of Low Hill, the majority of head of households came from non middle class families (57%). They worked mainly in non qualified manual jobs such as domestic workers. Only one out of four of the heads of the households was occupied in more traditional working class occupations (such as plumbers, weaver, painter and decorator, and baker). Regarding middle class heads of the households, the majority were non professional and could also be associated with the “loser” sections of the middle classes. One out of ten heads of families of students at Low Hill were unemployed.

Despite the schools’ internal socio-economic differentiations, I focused my analysis only on the middle class students of High Mountain and on non middle class students at Low Hill. In this way, I was able to compare how two different social groups of students dealt with the demands of their respective schools. I also focused my attention only on students in the third school year. By then, students were likely to have developed well-defined strategies for negotiating the network of requests, expectations, and rules of secondary schooling (Levinson 2001). Moreover, the third year of schooling is a pivotal year. At the end of this school year students had to decide which orientation they would follow during the last two school years of the secondary level.

Discussion in the following chapters highlights the ways in which this study adds to, and diverges from, existing educational research both in Argentina and in the UK educational research fields. My study contributes to these bodies of research in different but interconnected ways. In the case of the Argentinean field this study is embedded in contemporary research concerned with the social fragmentation of the school system and in the ways in which different social groups participate in secondary schooling. Moreover, it also explores issues of

students' identity and schooling. My research differentiates from the majority of Argentinean research traditions in theoretical, methodological, and substantive ways. It explicitly engages with an analytical framework that addresses the relationships between social stratification, class identity making processes and participation in secondary education; it also applies ethnographic methods; and, finally, it explores how different groups of students engage with educational and social demands involved in their secondary schooling. In the case of the British socio-educational research field, my study provides evidence that supports the argument in favour of unpacking the nature of schooling of the middle class (Power and Whitty 2006, Power *et al.* 2003) and of carefully looking at the composition and nature of the middle classes before jumping to overarching conclusions about their education, schooling and the type of class identities they produce. Moreover, my study adds to the well established collection of ethnographic studies about working class schooling but also suggests that UK based research needs to pay greater attention to recent transformations of economic and social structures³ in their conceptualisations of working class. In addition, the study contributes to a body of sociological research in Britain that has more recently engaged with Bourdieu's work.

Organisation of the thesis

The discussion is organised as follows. Chapter One maps out the key research traditions with regard to the relationship between social class and educational inequalities within the British and Argentinean fields of socio-educational research. As an Argentinean researcher studying in Britain, I locate my

³ Such as, since the 1970s, the growing female participation in the labour market, the feminisation of the service sector, their impact on traditional working class families, and growing recent processes of international migrations -legal or illegal- of families and their children to the UK. ✕

examination of social class and education in the City of Buenos Aires within different strands of British literature and in relation to central concerns of recent Argentinean research. I set out my intention to apply theoretical and methodological perspectives that have been fruitfully applied within the British field in order to understand certain aspects of the relationships between social class differences and educational inequalities that have been overlooked in the Argentinean context.

In Chapter Two I put forward my analytical framework that combines three interconnected sets of theoretical resources. Drawing on some of the conceptual tools offered by Bourdieu, I highlight the benefits of his social praxeology to understanding schools as regulated and regulatory social fields or games. Within this field, students play the game of secondary schooling, drawing on unequal resources and ‘feel for the game’ to deal with schools’ social and educational demands. Following on from this, I present a critical perspective on and extension of some of Bourdieu’s concepts (such as habitus, cultural capital, and his notion of social action as mainly rooted in unconscious and embodied dispositions) that help to illuminate schools’ roles as organisations in the production of the field of state secondary schooling and individual students’ agency and reflexivity when playing the game of schooling. Moreover, drawing on sociological frameworks of identity making, I stress the benefits of including in the analysis the production of students’ class identities (mainly through their self-conceptions and self-categorisations) to illuminate how students’ own reflexivity about their sense of place in the world contributes to their engagement with schooling.

Having contextualised the academic and conceptual frameworks within which this study is situated, Chapter Three turns to the description of the key features of the national and local education secondary systems. Here, I describe the national and local state secondary education system; contemporary and historic discourses about the nature of secondary schooling; and, in the case of the City of Buenos Aires, central regulatory mechanisms of school funding, teacher recruitment, assessment of student performance and institutional disciplinary mechanisms. This chapter highlights the nature of the explicit rules and regulations that constrain and shape central aspects of the game of schooling across local state secondary schools.

This contextual framework informs my selection of methods examined in Chapter Four, “Methodology, Methods and Context”. Here I detail my research design, its rationale and my epistemological grounding. Connecting the questions and analytical frameworks with the methods of research and analysis, I also situate my self in the research process while doing ethnography and applying a diversity of research data collection techniques. Moreover, I also consider ethical and epistemological consequences of my own location(s). I also portray the selected schools included in this study: High Mountain and Low Hill, outlining their location in the City; their physical and educational dislocation in two main areas of the building (the “historical” and the “new” one); and basic demographic data on their teachers.

In Chapter Five, I examine some features of the schools’ differential middle class institutional habitus. Drawing on the concept of “institutional habitus”, a critical examination of key features of the schools’ specific organisational ethos is presented. I describe key historical aspects of the schools in order to pin down

their different relative locations and resources within the local field of state secondary education. Then, I examine how the schools have recently reshaped some of their organisational practices in order to respond to diverse threats to their institutional survival. Moreover, I show how the specific middle class institutional habitus of the schools pervades teachers' dispositions and views about their schools' reputation and intake. This chapter argues that teachers' views about the socio-cultural proximity or distance between them and students evidenced both their diverse middle class institutional habitus and the nature of the game of schooling that High Mountain and Low Hill configured for their students.

A critical consideration of middle class students' relationships with the field of secondary school and the game of schooling produced in High Mountain continues in Chapter Six. This chapter argues that middle class students had organic relationships with the game of schooling in High Mountain and that they produced specific middle class identities in their relationships with peers and attitudes towards schooling. In other words, the majority of middle class students felt "comfortable", like 'fish in water', at High Mountain. To unpack these organic interactions, I firstly examine dominant third school year students' discourses about the meaning of secondary education. Then, I explore how middle class students interpreted the process of selection of High Mountain. Later, I investigate how middle class students share a collective logic of practice when dealing with the instructional and social demands of their teachers. I have called this logic *zafar*. Although not infallible, this educational common sense was in general effective in allowing students to successfully play the game of

schooling. The analysis of students' middle class and gender identity making within students' cultures follows.

Chapter Seven argues that the relationships between certain groups of non middle class students (those who accepted the legitimacy of the game) and their schooling did not follow a clear cut pattern. I have called these students the 'tryers'. In the case of these students, understanding the complex nature of their relationships with schooling involved careful considerations of their individual and family capitals; their willingness to be educated; previous educational trajectory; and the inability of the school to address its socio-cultural distance from them. This chapter also argues that non middle class students produced their class identities while playing the game of schooling and interacting with peers. I examine how participation in secondary schooling allowed students to produce a sense of themselves as valued and socially respected; how interactions with peers (in a highly conflictive environment) contributed to their class and, at the same time, gender identity making; and how they seemed entangled with different understandings of schooling and its legitimacy. To unpack the relationships between non middle class students and Low Hill, I firstly examine how groups of marginal and working class students viewed secondary schooling. Then, I consider students' views about the process of school choice. Thirdly, I investigate how different groups of students interplayed with Low Hill's institutional habitus and its game of schooling. I look at four cases to unpack the relationship between students' locations in the social space (defined by their family capitals); their school's habitus; and their educational participation and performance. Finally, I examine the central process of class and gender identity making within students' cultures.

In the concluding chapter, I bring to a close the story of the reproduction of educational inequalities that my thesis portrays, by highlighting the central arguments put forward in previous chapters and identifying some thematic threads. Here I briefly compare and contrast the ways in which the schools, middle class students and the 'tryers' participate in the production and reproduction of their differential positions in the secondary education field. In this way, I revisit the key findings of this thesis and make explicit the relations between them in order to recapitulate the complex story of persistent educational inequalities in the City of Buenos Aires (Argentina). To do so, I focus my attention on the meaning of secondary schooling for students and schools; schools' recruitment policies and families' school choice; the stakes of the game and students' abilities to play; and the production of class and gender identities within students' cultures. Furthermore, I map out the ways in which the findings and analysis of this thesis contribute to the field of Sociology of Education in Argentina and in the UK. Finally, I present possibilities for future research emerging from the focus, findings, analysis and boundaries of my research.

Chapter One: Social class, inequalities and the sociology of education

Introduction

Identifying and understanding the reasons behind unequal educational access, experiences, and attainment of different social groups has been a central concern within the sociological research agenda in Western developed and non developed countries (see for example: Ball 2006c, Breen and Jonsson 2005, Halsey *et al.* 1997, Lauder *et al.* 2006, Reay 2001, Reimers 2000b, Stromquist 2004, Torres 2003). In Argentina, since the 1970s, numerous studies have examined the nature of the educational participation and attainment of children and young people from different social groups mainly living in urban areas (see for instance: Braslavsky 1985, Cervini 2005, Mack 2000, Sautu 1994, Tedesco 2003, Tiramonti 2004c).

As an Argentinean researcher studying in a British university, I locate my research (and myself) in a permanent, although at times, difficult dialogue between these two different geographical and socio-educational fields. My research questions, methodological strategy and interpretations of the data are deeply intertwined with the different geographies or, probably more accurately, topologies of these intellectual, theoretical, methodological and political fields (Bourdieu 2000, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002, Kenway and McLeod 2004). In other words, my interest in the relationships between social class and educational inequalities in secondary education; my theoretical engagements with some of Bourdieu's conceptual tools; and, my qualitative methodological strategy have all been nurtured by a variety of sociological research traditions in the UK and Argentina and by contemporary socio-historical developments in the field of

Argentinean secondary education. This chapter critically examines key Argentinean and British research traditions that have examined the relationships between social and educational inequalities at secondary schooling in order to identify the theoretical and methodological gaps that this study fills and the contributions it makes.

Writing a review of a particular body of literature is a reflexive process of production and selection guided by the researcher's interests and questions (Hart 1998). Following Hammersley and Foster (2002), a review should encompass a systematic approach that needs to be, at the same time, pertinent, flexible and adaptable to the nature of resources available. Due to the differential nature and degrees of structuration of Argentinean and British socio-educational research fields⁴, I have followed different criteria to guide my search of material and its sampling.

For example, in Argentina, the lack of specialist journals in Sociology of Education and of virtual databases or catalogues has demanded a wider and less orthodox search than the one undertaken in the British case. In the case of Argentina, I visited the most important bibliographic archives within the City of Buenos Aires and I searched the official websites of a collection of governmental and non governmental international and national organisations.⁵ Moreover, I also searched for articles in digital peer reviewed journals.⁶ However, in the British

⁴ The fields of Argentinean and British sociological research about education are unequally structured. I argue that the British one is more structured and had clearer boundaries from other disciplines such as pedagogy, political science, and psychology than in the Argentinean case. One sign of the lesser degree of structuration of the Argentinean field is the lack of specialist journals in sociology of education.

⁵ Examples of these organisations are *Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales*, *Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales*, and *Instituto Internacional de Planeamiento educativo* (an organisation that belongs to the United Nations).

⁶ Such as 'Education Policy Analysis Archives' (EPAA), 'Revista Electrónica de Investigación Educativa', and 'Revista Iberoamericana de Educación'.

case, I followed a more traditional path. I included in my search all the journals at the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) under the subject 'education and educational research' and all the journals at the Sociological Abstracts database. Moreover, I browsed the British Journal of Sociology of Education. In both countries, the original searches led to the identification of additional studies, books, chapters and journals in my area of interest, which were also included in the review process. The selected period was mid 1970s up to 2006 and, due to the nature of my study, I have restricted my review to studies that focus on secondary schooling.

This chapter is split into two main sections. The first scrutinizes the four key research traditions that I have identified for the Argentinean case and the second examines the four research traditions in the UK case. They describe and analyse the relationships between social inequalities and educational access, participation and experiences. The first part spells out the key gaps that my research fills and highlights the ways in which previous analyses contribute to my own research design and methodology. The second part of the chapter points to the key British theoretical and methodological perspectives that have influenced my research questions, methodology and analysis. It also identifies how my research contributes to British debates and analytic perspectives.

The Argentinean field: Findings and limitations

In Argentina, unlike the UK, there are few, if any, systematic reviews of the field of Sociology of Education and the ways in which the relationship between social class and education at secondary level have been tackled.⁷ Hence, I organised the

⁷ The only identified partial and indirect accounts are the works of López (2002); Tedesco (1983b) and Feijoó (2002). The first two authors describe different kinds of educational research

materials according to the types of questions they have formulated, their theoretical assumptions and the nature of methods employed. This procedure led me to identify and name four main research traditions related to my own research interests in Argentina since the 1970s. The first tradition, which I have labelled the “socio-structural”, focuses on the relationship between the social structure and the differential educational opportunities and benefits of its social groups. The second tradition, the “socio-historical”, unpacks the role played by social groups in the emergence, development and diversification of the educational system and its secondary level. The third tradition, the “socio-educational”, describes and analyses the stratified nature of the secondary educational system. Finally, the most recent, the “identity/subjectivity turn” explores the connections between identity and subjectivity production of particular groups of students and their experiences within secondary schooling.

The “socio-structural” tradition

The first tradition, which I call the “socio-structural”, has antecedents before the 1980s (see Wiñar (1974), Eichelbaum de Babini (1965, 1967, 1972)). However, the majority of research in this genre has been produced from 2000 onwards (see for instance Cerrutti and Binstock 2004, Cervini 2005, Feijoó 2002, Herrán and Van Uythem 2002, Judengloben *et al.* 2003, López 2001, Riquelme and Herger 2001). This perspective looks at the relationships between social groups’ locations in the socio-economic structure and their differential access,

that looks at school failure and its associated factors both at primary and secondary education level. Feijoó offers a more systematic review of the Argentinean socio-educational research at initial, elementary and secondary education.

performance/school failure⁸ and/or permanence at the secondary level of education.

The great majority of these studies do not make explicit their epistemological and theoretical assumptions.⁹ In Argentina, this is also true of the wider field of sociology (Sautu 2003). However, as Sautu (2003) argues, every research study has its assumptions and views about how society works, which aspects should be looked at and how particular types of phenomena could be explained or interpreted. I argue that the quantitative studies in this tradition are mainly epistemologically grounded in positivism and/or post-positivism (Guba and Lincoln 1994, Sautu 2003). Their general silence regarding theoretical perspectives could be associated with their institutional location in agencies (both governmental and non governmental) committed to the production of 'objective' and summary knowledge to inform policy making that seems to interpret theory as bias rather than as perspectives from which knowledge is produced. The majority of studies in the "socio-structural" tradition, although focused on social stratification and its interaction with the education system, tend not to explicitly engage with wider theoretical debates about social class, social stratification, and its relations with education.

Within the "socio-structural" tradition, there are two main types of studies. The first, in line with the wider sociological field (Sautu 2003), is descriptive and quantitative accounts that portray the extension of particular educational phenomena such as levels of access and school failure across social groups

⁸ Studies in Argentina tend to focus on school failure (repetition and drop out) rather than on academic achievement in relation to national standards. The period 1997-2000, following broader international trends, was the first time that information on academic achievement was gathered by a national survey.

⁹ As exceptions see López (2001), Cervini (2003a, 2003b) and Dabeningo and Tissera (2000).

differentiated by diverse criteria such as poverty, levels of income and/or global volume of households' educational resources, or individual or households' educational vulnerability (see for instance Dabenigno and Tissera 2002, Judengloben *et al.* 2003, López 2001, Vázquez *et al.* 2004). These authors use data produced by various official organisations such as the *Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos* (National Institute of Statistics and Census) (INDEC). These studies demonstrate a negative association between low levels of education of heads of household and/or income with educational access, permanence and performance at secondary level. In many instances, these relationships are mediated by other intervening variables such as socio-demographic composition of household. For example, López (2001) maps the volume and nature of the social, economic and educational resources of families and their participation in the labour market in order to see how these factors impact on young people's own participation in the labour market and education. He uses national individual and household data of the Permanent Household Survey (May 1998). López' study argues that young people from families with lower educational capital are more likely to participate in the labour market which, in many cases, strongly hampers their participation in the educational system. López shows that levels of education appear more important today than 25 years before in determining levels of household income. In this sense, teenagers excluded from the educational system due to family constraints have greater difficulty improving their future quality of life (López 2001). López also shows how some groups of middle class families' vulnerable socio-economic conditions have worked against their children's participation in education.

Secondly, within the “socio-structural” tradition of research, only a minority of recent studies analyse the relationship between socio-economic and school factors to explain the differential educational achievement of diverse social groups (Cerrutti and Binstock 2004, Cervini 2003a, 2003b, Cervini 2005, Herrán and Van Uythem 2002). These studies analyse new data gathered by the Argentinean National Ministry of Education since 1997 about socio-economic variables, schools’ organisational features and students’ educational achievement in specific modules within representative samples of schools in primary and secondary education. Unlike the first type of research, some studies statistically test relations between different types of variables (Cerrutti and Binstock 2004, Cervini 2003b, Cervini 2005, Herrán and Van Uythem 2002). Cervini (2003a) provides an example of this recent but still marginal trend examining the effects of attending public or private schools on cognitive attainment (in Language and Maths) and on non-cognitive results (attitudes toward Mathematics and the educational and achievement expectations) of students in the last school year of secondary education in Argentina. He engages with Bourdieu’s theory of cultural reproduction and his insights (Bourdieu 1996, Bourdieu and Passeron 1990) into institutional segmentation of education as a reproduction strategy of the dominant classes to interpret the results of the multilevel analysis of quantitative data from the *Censo Nacional de Finalización del Nivel Secundario 1998* (High School National Census of 1998). Cervini’s main findings are: (i) the relative influence of schools on cognitive achievement is much higher than on non-cognitive results; (ii) there is no significant difference in Mathematical attainment between public and private schools, once socio-economic and cultural school composition are controlled for, while private institutions have a small

advantage over public schools in Language attainment; and (iii) the most important effect of the type of school (private or state) is demonstrated by the distribution of students' "success expectations". Cervini offers quantitative evidence of the social fragmentation of the Argentinean education system along a private/state school divide where private schools, when controlled by socio-economic status of its population, produced similar cognitive results to state schools and only scored higher in non-cognitive aspects such as educational aspirations. Following Bourdieu, this research argues that the private-state segmentation "has implied the safeguard of institutional spaces more oriented to strengthening and widening the differences of habitus rather than the cognitive elements of the school habitus" (Cervini 2003a: 26, my translation).

In sum, similar to the British "Political Arithmetic" tradition, this body of literature has produced considerable quantitative evidence of educational inequalities in terms of access, educational failure and performance amongst social groups and types of schools, and has identified a collection of socio-economic factors strongly associated with them. My study does not belong to this tradition but it has taken seriously its emphasis on families' socio-economic and cultural resources in understanding educational inequalities. In so doing, my study has applied some of the key findings of this tradition (such as the positive association between the educational level of heads of household and levels of students' educational access, participation and performance) to map social groups within the two secondary schools where my fieldwork was carried out.

After mapping out the central findings of the first tradition and its links to my own research, I now turn my attention to the "socio-historical" tradition that

provides a fundamental historical analysis of the development of the state education system.

The “socio-historical” tradition

This tradition comprises a small number of relevant studies from the mid 1970s up to the 1990s (Filmus 1999, Gallart 1983, Puiggrós 1996, Tedesco 1978, 1983a, 2003). These studies follow a historical narrative pattern (*esquema narrativo-histórico*) (Sautu 2003). They aim to unpack the socio-economic and/or political rationale behind the configuration, development, and social differentiation of the secondary school system (whether as a main focus or as part of the wider development of the educational system). In order to do so, these researchers identify which social classes or socio-political groups have been key players in the configuration of the system in terms of its objectives, structure, differentiation and curriculum content.

This research uses a variety of sources such as statistics; documents (official and personal); and sociological, economical, political, and/or historical bibliography. They are macro-sociological analyses that are close to historical research (Sautu 2003). The volume *Educación y sociedad en la Argentina (1880-1945)* by Tedesco (2003), for instance, offers a collection of studies about the role that the oligarchy and the middle classes have played in the development of the national education system for the periods 1880-1900; 1900-1930 and 1930-1945. He focuses on the social aspects and bypasses issues related to pedagogical traditions. Tedesco uses both statistical data and documents such as testimonies of policy makers, head teachers, and parliamentary debates. He argues that, during the nineteenth century, the development of the educational system in Argentina was used by the oligarchy to construct its hegemony and later by the

urban middle sectors to access the political system from which they had been excluded. In this view, the economic development of the country was only marginally related to the shape and nature of the education system (in particular at secondary and tertiary level). According to Tedesco, the political and social aspirations of different groups (mainly the agricultural dominant classes and the urban middle sectors) are seen as the main engines for the development of the system as well as for the resistance to its transformation. For instance, Tedesco's analysis considers the foundational period of the Argentinean education system between 1880-1900. During this time, the education system played the central political function of culturally assimilating and instilling respect for order in immigrants, and it was not specifically linked to the needs of the national economy. The education system grew considerably due to the political needs of the oligarchic regime whose political stability depended on the "education of the masses and the action of the local elites" (Tedesco 2003: 155). This political rationale fostered the generalist nature of education and its emphasis on encyclopaedism. In this scenario, secondary education lacked its own legal framework and was the target of wider political and social conflicts. Despite some efforts to create vocational programmes during this period, the prevailing function of secondary education (with the exception of the *Normal* schools) was preparing students for university. Tedesco argues that the emergent and growing urban middle classes played a central role in the prevalence of this traditional preparatory function of secondary schools. These social groups perceived the traditional educational system as a legitimate channel for their social and political aspirations. Gaining access to secondary school and the university facilitated growing urban middle groups participation in administrative positions

within the State bureaucracy; and configured a fertile ground for the production of the middle classes as a political class.

The “socio-historical” tradition offers my research an historical socio-economic context necessary to understand the contemporary meaning of secondary schooling for the teachers and students of the two schools that my study featured. Drawing on many studies of this tradition, Chapter Three examines the relationships between social classes, state and secondary schooling in order to unpack its contemporary meanings, and to assess the profound transformation it had undergone. Now I turn my attention to the more recent “socio-educational” tradition that describes and analyses different facets of the contemporary system of secondary education.

The “socio-educational” tradition

The third research tradition describes and analyses recent processes of fragmentation and/or segmentation of the educational system. Research within this genre analyses the ways in which sets of schools configure educational circuits and how this segmentation affects and/or is affected by different social groups (Centro de Implementación de Políticas Públicas para la Equidad y el Crecimiento (CIPPEC) 2004, Kessler 2002, Tiramonti 2004a, 2004b, Tiramonti and Minteguiaga 2004, Veleda 2005). The majority of literature explores how schools’ and families’ interests and rationales feed into each other’s definitions of their locations within a fragmented education system.

This tradition began during the 1980s with the works of Braslavksy (1985) and Braslavsky and Krawczyk (1988) in primary schools and Filmus (1985) and Krawczyk (1989) in secondary schools. During the 1990s, profound socio-

economic transformations, together with the implementation of a national educational reform, fundamentally altered secondary schooling and its historical meaning within the structure of the education system and wider society. Some authors argue that, in this new scenario, the term “educational system” does not describe anymore what goes on in schools and needs to be replaced by the notion of “educational fragmentation” (Tiramonti 2004c). In this view, schools and/or groups of schools constitute fragments defined as “self-referent space and the field is configured as a sum of these enclosed fragments with low or null articulation between them” (Tiramonti 2004c: 13, my translation).

According to this wider body of research, the fragmented nature of the educational system referred to a material and symbolic differentiation among schools that contributes to unequal experiences of learning and schooling that tends to favour, although not necessarily, the reproduction of the social advantages or disadvantages of their intakes. These authors have identified a variety of features that are produced by the fragmentation of secondary education such as: i) the meanings teachers and parents attach to secondary education; ii) the availability of human and material resources; iii) students’ educational achievements and their social and occupational aspirations; iv) family strategies towards schooling (including school choices); v) institutional strategies towards its intake (including views on the history of the school; vi) the role attributed to parents; vii) criteria for recruiting intake and teachers; viii) school actors’ views about quality of education, teachers and authorities’ roles and expectations; and, ix) students’ social relations and styles of sociability (Kessler 2002, Poliak 2004, Tiramonti 2003a, 2004b, 2004c, Veleda 2003, Veleda 2005).

The majority of the studies combine different qualitative (mainly interviews) and quantitative methods (CIPPEC 2004, Poliak 2004, Tiramonti 2003a, 2004b, 2004c, Veleda 2005). A number use only qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups (Kessler 2002). Some of this research also analyses documents of different types provided by schools. Studies engage with a wide range of interpretative sociological perspectives¹⁰ that contribute to the understanding of the profound social transformations of contemporary Argentinean society and how they have impacted on the configuration of the education system. However, they tend not to define their underpinning theoretical perspectives in relation to social stratification and social class and the ways in which they interplay with schooling. Instead, the emphasis is on concepts such as “social groups” and “socio-economic strata”.

The volume *La trama de la desigualdad educativa* (Tiramonti 2004b) illustrates this tradition. This is a collection of articles that explores different aspects and facets of the fragmentation of secondary education in the City and the province of Buenos Aires. In order to address the heterogeneity of the field of education, this study engages with diverse theoretical approaches and methods. Theoretically, the individualisation theories of Giddens and Beck (Giddens 1991), together with the theory of desinstitutionalisation of Dubet and Martucelli (1998) and Bourdieu’s theory of cultural reproduction, configure a fertile analytic framework for these studies. Some articles portray the nature of the fragmentation among schools while others analyse the strategies that particular social groups (such as the socio-economic elites) mobilize to reproduce their

¹⁰ Among the perspectives applied are Dubet and Martucelli’s (1998) theory of desinstitutionalisation of contemporary French society; Giddens and Beck’s theory of individualisation and risk society; Bourdieu’s theory of cultural reproductions; theories on the configuration of social and political elites; and policy sociology.

advantageous social positions through access to schools with high academic standards (see Tiramonti and Minteguiaga 2004, Ziegler 2004). Tiramonti and Mineguiaga (2004) analyse, in the context of the crisis of the historical functions of secondary schooling (as means of social selection and of preparation for the labour market), how school actors interpret secondary education purposes and meanings. The authors argue that school actors produce a multiplicity of views about secondary education's role and that the differences among these perspectives are not straightforwardly associated with social class differences. However, when used, the concept of social class is not defined. These views are also produced within specific collective and institutional arenas. Researchers argue that school actors, particularly parents, see the school as a space of instruction and socialisation; and formation of individuals' autonomy. Despite this commonality, different schools offer diverse visions of what learning is and how it should be promoted. For instance, parents, teachers and head teachers of elite schools implicitly recognise schools as the means of the social and moral reproduction of the social elite. Schooling, then, is linked to the production of social differentiation, "through the acquisition of particular cultural and social capitals" (Tiramonti and Minteguiaga 2004: 107, my translation), rather than with the production of a cultural homogeneity (whether encapsulated by the idea of nation or citizenship). Middle class (*sectores medios*) parents state that schools should *contener* (protect, support) their children through a pedagogy that engages students in the processes of learning. They stress the role that schools should play in the process of the autonomization of individuals through the acquisition of values and knowledge that promote students' ability to deal with a complex and changing reality. Finally, parents from low socio-economic sectors also highlight

schools' role in *contención* (protection, support). However, they mainly interpret it as protection in terms of “physical integrity” from a hostile and dangerous outside world.

In summary, the “socio-educational” tradition has gathered mainly qualitative evidence that points to different aspects of the fragmentation of the national state secondary education system. The majority of Argentinean sociological research has not looked at the ways in which students from different social groups deal with the educational and social demands of the game of schooling. Few analyses focused on how the middle classes have done this (Feijoó and Insúa 1995, Seoane 2003). However, no research has attempted to study how this fragmentation has influenced the experiences of schooling of different social groups of students with regard to their educational engagement, performance and students' cultures. My study is an attempt to fill this gap. This research focuses on students' views and practices and the different ways in which they deal with their school's educational and social demands. Furthermore, despite the conceptual centrality of social stratification within the “socio-educational” tradition, this body of literature does not attempt to theoretically define the concept of social class. My study contributes to this tradition by grounding the concept of social class in Bourdieu's theory of social and cultural reproduction. Moreover, the “socio-educational” tradition has not applied ethnographic methods to explore the ‘black box’ of schooling. Following a longstanding British research tradition in Sociology of Education, my study also addresses this methodological dearth. As examined in Chapter Four, ethnography offers a particularly fruitful methodological approach to better understanding the

relationships between students' subjective meanings and the objective conditions or structures in which they are produced and reproduced.

Having analysed the "socio-educational" tradition and located my research within its boundaries, the next section examines the central themes of the body of research which constitutes an 'identity/subjectivity turn', in order to identify the gaps that my study aims to fill.

"Identity/subjectivity turn"

In line with broader shifts and trends in sociology, the fourth tradition of the "identity/subjectivity turn" has emerged during the late 1990s. It has encompassed a variety of qualitative studies on students' experiences of schooling. They have focused on the production of students' social, educational and/or individual identities within schools' social relations and available social and educational discourses (Duschatzky 1998, Duschatzky and Corea 2002, Feijoó and Corbetta 2004, Kaplan and Fainsod 2001, Maldonado 2000, Seoane 2003).

Despite the centrality of the concepts of "identity" and "subjectivity", the majority of studies are not explicit about how they conceptualise these (see Bravin 2001, Duschatzky 1998, Kaplan and Fainsod 2001). This collective theoretical omission could be interpreted as another indicator of the low structuration of the field of Sociology of Education. Theoretically, they engage with a wide range of perspectives ranging from Bourdieu's theory of cultural production, post-structuralist psychoanalytic approaches, traditional and post-structuralist and post-modern approaches to identity, to the theory of recognition and distribution of Nancy Fraser. The majority of them opt for an eclectic

approach to theory and pull out theoretical tools of different kinds that help them to make sense of their data.

Within this tradition of research, I have identified one ethnography (Maldonado 2000). The rest of the literature encompassed qualitative methods, including interviews and participant observations, within one or more schools¹¹. Some studies have also applied surveys (Bravin 2001, Kaplan and Fainsod 2001, Seoane 2003). Kaplan and Fainsod (2001) and Maldonado (2000) illustrate important features of this tradition. Kaplan and Fainsod (2001) analyse the school trajectories of a group of pregnant teenagers or teenage mothers from *sectores populares*. They explore how these girls interpreted their experiences of schooling and how they are intertwined with their views about the future (both at educational and occupational level) and themselves. Researchers applied surveys and carried out interviews with 22 teenagers between 16 and 23 years old who attended secondary schools in the South of the City of Buenos Aires. These young women lived in neighbourhoods with high degrees of social and educational vulnerability. These authors argue that the condition of pregnancy and/or motherhood involved a certain degree of educational vulnerability which varies across institutions and families. However, being poor is the most persistent obstacle for the continuation of studies. The authors state that some pregnant teenagers and mothers interpreted school as a space of *contención* (containment/protection) and solidarity where they could behave like young people again and they are invited to imagine new possibilities and horizons. For many of these girls, the experience of schooling implied being recognised and named “as individual singular subjects” (Kaplan and Fainsod 2001). The authors

¹¹ Several studies do not specify their methodological design (see for instance, Gluz (2005)).

also identified examples of the school operating as a symbolic arena where alternative horizons were actively closed (promoting dropping out) for some girls due to the discriminatory discourse of some teachers. I would argue that for Kaplan and Fainsod (2001), implicitly and without any direct reference to theoretical perspectives about identity/subjectivity, experiences of school are seen as intimately linked to processes of identity making of these groups of teenage women. On the other hand, Maldonado (2000) offers an ethnographic account of one state secondary school with a socially mixed population in the commercial and administrative area of the city of Córdoba. She focuses her attention on two form classes in the last school year of secondary schooling. Maldonado's research explores the ways in which teenagers "select and classify each other, want and reject others, integrate or exclude themselves" (Maldonado 2000: 13) in order to see what kind of practices and representations they have about themselves and 'the other' (in this case, their peers). Unlike the majority of the studies, Maldonado explicitly demarcates her theoretical underpinnings and links processes of identity making and social stratification. She uses Bourdieu's key concepts of "habitus" and "capitals". She is particularly interested in unveiling how differential habitus (with its own ways of classifying and experiencing the social world) transform social and cultural diversity into inequalities due to its tendency to inscribe it within the order of 'nature' and not within the structuring and structured processes of social construction. Maldonado argues that the socio-historic configuration of students' form classes is central to understanding processes of collective and individual identity making. She describes how, within each school form class, students make and re-make social groups and how these processes are enmeshed within wider dynamics of social

class differentiation between the impoverished middle classes and the poor. With differential symbolic and material resources, these groups deploy everyday strategies to distinguish themselves from the 'others'. These strategies of distinction encompass a wide array of behaviours, views and even gestures and glances. Conflicts, confrontations and disputes among groups of students are interpreted, following Simmel, as ways of socialisation of teenagers within an educational institution with its own implicit and explicit pedagogic practices. Maldonado shows how these conflicts are also reflected in the use of the classroom space by different groups of students, with its distribution of desks and chairs and with its empty physical spaces. The author argues that the rationale between conflicts and friendships, similarities and differences regarding tastes and attitudes towards schooling of different groups are grounded in their different social locations and in social actors' permanent search for "equals" (*iguales*). Following Bourdieu, Maldonado argues that this search for equals tends to reproduce social groups and operates as social protectionism. She argues that students are interested in making social distances visible and to do so they mobilize their social and cultural capitals in matters not related to schooling.

In sum, the 'identity/subjectivity turn' has produced qualitative accounts of the relationships between the identity/subjectivity of different groups of young people and secondary schooling. However, to date there appears to be no research on the relationship between young peoples' experiences of schooling, their differential ability to deal with the school's demands, and the class identity making processes. My research attempts to fill that gap. It examines how students from different social classes produce and reproduce their class identities when dealing with the field of secondary schooling and the demands of teachers

and students' subcultures. Furthermore, the "identity/subjectivity turn" has in general not made explicit its theoretical assumptions and definitions with regard to the central concepts of identity and subjectivity. It is the intention of my research to contribute to this tradition by making explicit the sociological conceptualisation of identity that has guided my fieldwork and analysis (see Chapter Two). In addition, with the exception of the work of Maldonado (2000), the body of "identity/subjectivity" research has overlooked ethnography as a means of exploring students' experiences of schooling and processes of identity making.

After mapping the most salient research traditions in Argentina that have examined social class and educational inequalities, and addressing the key contributions of my research within this field, I now turn my attention to the British context. I identify the key perspectives that have influenced my research.

British sociological perspectives: Educational inequalities and social class

As stated above, as an Argentinean researcher studying at a British university, I also locate my study within the British field of socio-educational research. Different British traditions have influenced my research questions, methods and analytical tools. This section examines some of the key features of the four research traditions concerned with the relationships between social class and educational inequalities between the 1980s and 2006. Due to the existence of extensive reviews and analyses of the nature of the British field of Sociology of Education (Burgess and Parker 1999, Foster *et al.* 1996a, Gillborn and Safia Mirza 2000, Paterson 2001, Robbins 2004, Shain and Ozga 2001), I present only general features of each tradition and not detailed analyses of particular studies. Furthermore, I also highlight the ways in which some of them are linked with my

theoretical and methodological approaches. Finally, I point towards the contribution of my study to the British field of Sociology of Education.

The first tradition is that of “Political Arithmetic”, which emerged in the 1930s, which had its heyday in the 1950s and 1960s and continues to make contributions. A second tradition, the “polarisation-differentiation theory” emerged in the 1960s and was grounded in a collection of studies on the effects of students’ ability grouping in secondary schools. The third tradition began during the 1970s and has been called the “New Sociology of Education” which encompassed a harsh criticism of previous research, in particular the “Political Arithmetic” tradition. A fourth tradition emerged in the late 1980s and has flourished from the second half of the 1990s onwards. It has re-focused its attention on social class. Furthermore, it has examined the production of students’ class, gender, sexual and/or ethnic identities within secondary schooling.

“Political Arithmetic”

In the UK, during the first half of the twentieth century, educational inequality was the terrain of psychological perspectives that defined it as genetically determined and unequally distributed among social classes (Foster *et al.* 1996b). After the introduction of the tripartite education system in 1944, following the Butler Act, the Sociology of Education became the dominant perspective from which to conceptualise and research educational inequalities. “Political Arithmetic” was the first sociological perspective to explore education and its connections with inequality. This tradition has been rooted in the longstanding commitment to social democracy and in the conviction that policy making needs

to be informed by scientific knowledge in order to effectively tackle social and educational inequalities (Foster *et al.* 1996a, Heath 2000, Lauder *et al.* 2004).

This tradition has offered descriptive accounts rather than explanatory ones and it has produced “hard evidence to [test] theoretical speculation” (Heath 2000: 314). These studies have documented the significant correlations between, on the one hand, variables such as pupils’ social class, family size and social make up of the neighbourhood, and on the other hand, variables such as duration of educational career, educational attainment and admission to selective secondary and higher education (see for instance: Connolly 2006, Douglas *et al.* 1968, Feinstein 2006, Floud and Halsey 1962a, Floud and Halsey 1962b, Halsey *et al.* 1980, Westergaard and Resler 1975). In this way, these studies have mainly focused their attention on the structural features (whether cultural, social and/or economic) of working class families and communities to understand their educational disadvantages (Burgess and Parker 1999, Flude 1974, Foster *et al.* 1996a). However, researchers have defined the relationship between social class and education in different ways making the comparability of their findings problematic (Burgess 1986). These studies have tended to use official quantitative data from different surveys and have been grounded in a positivist epistemology (Bynner and Joshi 2002, Connolly 2006, Floud *et al.* 1956, Heath 1990, 2000, Heath and McMahon 1997, Lauder *et al.* 2004).

According to detractors, the attention paid by this tradition to the ‘deficits’ of working class families and individuals has contributed to: i) the reproduction of stereotypes already present in the educational system about working-class students and their families as lacking material resources, skills, dispositions, and/or knowledge and, ii) to the uncritical legitimization of processes of schooling,

in particular its organisation, transmission and assessment of knowledge (Bernstein 1970, 1971, Foster *et al.* 1996a).

In sum, the “Political Arithmetic” tradition has gathered quantitative evidence that has pointed to the centrality of families and their resources in understanding lower levels of educational performance of working class students in comparison to middle class counterparts. Although I do not follow the methodological approach of this tradition, the aim of my research is not to contest its general view. Rather it is my intention to critically integrate in my study this emphasis on students’ social, cultural and economic resources to better understand the relationships between students and secondary schooling in the two schools featured by my research. Drawing on Bourdieu’s work (Bourdieu 1977, 1985b, 1988, 1990, Bourdieu and Passeron 1990, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002), I incorporate the key criticisms made against the “Political Arithmetic” without disregarding its main contributions.

Now I turn my attention to the second British research tradition that has examined during the 1960s and 1970s the ‘black box’ of schooling.

“Differentiation-Polarisation” Theory

The second research tradition to which we now turn within the Sociology of Education has elaborated the theory of ‘differentiation-polarisation’ (Foster *et al.* 1996b). According to this theory (which stems from a collection of ethnographic studies in secondary schools during the late 1960s and 1970s), school processes of selection and allocation of students to different levels in subjects have discriminatory consequences for particular social groups such as working class, ethnic minority students, and girls (Foster *et al.* 1996a). In the case of working

class students, different authors have argued that their allocation in lower-level courses largely explains students' careers after secondary schooling and beyond compulsory education (Ball 1981, Burgess 1983, Hargreaves 1967, Lacey 1970).

The concept of "differentiation" refers to the allocation of pupils according to mainly academic and behavioural standards that are rooted in middle class values and the assumptions held by schools and teachers. The institutional disadvantage of working class students was evidenced not only by their over-representation in lower ability groups but also by differential student educational attainment and schooling experiences, and teachers' expectations. These studies argue that the process of differentiation could promote the development of pupils' subcultures that hold anti-school values, dispositions and behaviours (Ball 1981, Hargreaves 1967, Lacey 1970). This process is referred to as "polarisation" and signals the development of a self-fulfilling prophecy by which working class students achieve and behave according to the lower academic and behavioural expectations of middle class teachers in comparison to those held about their middle class counterparts.

Researchers use qualitative methods such as ethnographic observation, in-depth interviews, documentary analysis as well as quantitative techniques such as surveys and socio-metric analysis techniques to study social relations in particular schools (Foster *et al.* 1996b). These studies have been criticised for theoretical and methodological flaws. For instance, the seminal work of Ball (1981) was criticised for lacking clear conceptualisations of equity and social class and for not offering a sound justification for the way in which he operationalised social class (Foster *et al.* 1996a).

During the late 1960s and up to the late 1980s, the expansion and apparent consolidation of the comprehensive school system was accompanied by the decline of interest in ability grouping by researchers. From the 1990s onwards, renewed concerns to raise standards, together with educational policies that have promoted selective schooling and ability grouping within schools, have renewed the interest and debate about the selection and grouping of pupils (Ireson and Hallam 1999, 2001). Only a few research studies have focused on the effects of grouping by ability (Gillborn and Youdell 2000, Ireson and Hallam 2001). Many of these studies focus their attention on the relationship between ability grouping and educational achievement and how it is mediated by social class or gender (Boaler 1997a, 1997b, Gillborn and Youdell 2000). These studies have used both quantitative and qualitative methods (Boaler 1997b, Ireson and Hallam 1999).

The “differentiation-polarisation” tradition has scrutinized the ‘black box’ of schooling and investigated the impact of streaming on students’ educational careers and identities. In the context of my research, this tradition has focused my attention on teachers’ views and expectations regarding students’ abilities, attitudes towards schooling and subcultures. Furthermore, it has influenced my decision to include multiple methods within an ethnographic perspective.

Having examined the “differentiation-polarisation” tradition, its key findings and its influence on my work, the next section investigates the New Sociology of Education.

“New Sociology of Education”

During the 1970s, the Sociology of Education moved steadily towards explanations of educational inequalities that focused on the role of schools

(especially on the academic organisation, curriculum, and classroom interactions) in the reproduction of educational and social class differences. The “New Sociology of Education” (NSE) completed the shift begun by the previous tradition in terms of changing the focus of analysis from individual and social features of students to explanations that stressed the role of the education system (Blackledge and Hunt 1985, Foster *et al.* 1996a, Whitty 1977, Young 1971b).

This research tradition argued that school knowledge and curriculum reflected the dominant culture and were discordant with working-class culture. In this way, the NSE redefined the “social function of schooling as the social and cultural reproduction of regimes of inequality” (Wexler 1990:37). NSE’s central interest was the inequality between social classes and their differential ability to define what counts as legitimate knowledge to be taught at schools. The NSE was split into two competing perspectives (Foster *et al.* 1996a).¹² One focused on the functioning of the education system as a whole and was inspired by Marxist social theory that stressed the correspondence between the organisation and content of education system and the needs of social and cultural reproduction of the capitalist society (Althusser 1972, Bernstein 1971, Bourdieu and Passeron 1990, Bowles and Gintis 1976). The second approach, influenced by symbolic interactionism and phenomenology, analysed how teachers and students played an active role in the construction of the social reality of schooling and how school knowledge was selected and communicated, to whom and under what conditions (Burgess 1986, Esland 1971, Furlong 1976, Keddie 1971, Young 1971a). These studies privileged micro analysis of schools and classrooms in order to identify how educational processes contribute to working class

¹² For an account of the emergence, development and crisis of the NSE and its different socio-cultural and geographical roots see Wexler (1990).

children's educational failure (Blackledge and Hunt 1985, Shain and Ozga 2001). Although both streams of the NSE were engaged in the study of cultural reproduction through schooling, the micro perspective became more responsive to schooling as site of conflict, opposition and resistance (Wexler 1990). Critiques of the NSE have argued that this tradition was unable to see the non ideological elements of school knowledge (Young 1999) and the socially constructed nature of their own theoretical perspectives, neglecting its historicity and theoretical limits, to understand the unfolding of the New Right social movement in education during the 1980s (Wexler 1990).

This tradition has furthered an analysis of the ways in which schooling has been intertwined with processes of cultural reproduction. Following the NSE, the aim of my research has been to better understand how secondary schools and students in the Argentinean education system participate in the production and reproduction of social and cultural inequalities. Regarding the macro-perspectives within the NSE, my research has critically engaged with and expanded upon Bourdieu's approach in such ways that I use his approach to look also at micro-interactions between school actors (by using his concepts of "game", "habitus", "feel for the game" and "capitals"). Furthermore, like the micro-perspective within the NSE, my study is based on ethnographic work on schooling. Unlike the micro-perspective, my research did not focus on teachers' and students' classroom interactions (see Chapter Four).

The next section investigates the main features of the most recent research tradition and how it has influenced some of my research questions and analysis.

“Social class turn”

The fourth research tradition, which represented what I shall call the “social class turn”, emerged in the early 1990s and has continued to flourish. The renewed interest in social class was preceded by its marginalisation within Sociology of Education and wider sociological analysis during the 1980s (Crompton 1998, Savage 2000). Different factors contributed to this neglect such as the profound transformations of the socio-economic structure and labour market and a tide of managerial reforms of the state and educational system. Moreover, an official backlash against Sociology as a discipline, and the “new individualism” evident in post-modernism contributed to the demise of social class as an interpretive tool (Weiner 1997). At this time, educational research mainly focused on gender, sexuality and ‘race’/ethnic minorities (Arnot 2000, Foster *et al.* 1996a, Troyna 1993). Since then, feminism, post-structuralism and postmodernism have consolidated themselves as fertile theoretical grounds from which to interpret social differences and the making of gender, sexual and/or ethnic inequalities and identities within and through schooling (Arnot 2000, Epstein and Johnson 1998, Hey 1997, Mac an Ghail 1988, Troyna 1993).

At the end of the 1980s, the introduction of educational markets in England and Wales configured a scenario where schools had to compete for pupils and resources. According to the official rhetoric, parents would be able to choose the best school suitable for their children (Ball 1990, Brown 1990, Walford 1996, Whitty *et al.* 1998). Emphasis on choice, diversity, and accountability, together with a centralisation of the curriculum and decentralisation of school management, has profoundly altered the state education system and its values, funding, structure, content, organisational practices, and teachers, students and

parents' subjectivities and identities (Ball 2006b, Whitty *et al.* 1998). Sociologists of Education have turned their attention to these emergent developments and have investigated the implications of social class differences on families' relations with schools; on differential students' learning and educational experiences and on the configuration of social identities that hamper or facilitate students' educational engagement. For instance, the majority of the research focusing on families' school choice has been strongly influenced by Bourdieu's key conceptual tools (such as habitus, field, economic, social and cultural capitals, and distinction), and social exclusion theory (Ball 2003, Brown 2000). Several of them have re-worked some of Bourdieu's concepts.¹³ Despite these differences, they tend to conceptualize class in economic, social and cultural terms and map out class practices of families and students in relation to secondary schooling. The majority of this research has been qualitative.¹⁴ Conversely, analyses of identity production have been mainly shaped by feminist or post-structuralist perspectives such as those of Foucault and Butler (Archer and Yamashita 2003, Benjamin 2001, 2003, Reay 2002, Walkerdine *et al.* 1999, Youdell 2003a, 2003b). The exceptions are McLeod (2000), who uses Bourdieu to analyze subjectivity and schooling, and Power and Whitty (2002), who utilize Bernstein to examine young people's middle class identities.

Research focusing on family-school relationships have looked at parental involvement in the organisation of schools and their children's educational support (Reay 1997, Reay 2004a, Sullivan 2001, Vincent 2001, Vincent and Martin 2002) and have particularly investigated families' rationales, values and

¹³ See Reay's (2004a) reworking of cultural capital and Ball's (2003) critical engagement with Bourdieu's analysis of social class.

¹⁴ The exception is the work of Gorard and his associates (Gorard and Fitz 1998, Gorard *et al.* 2001)

strategies behind secondary school choice¹⁵ (Ball and Vincent 1998, Ball 2003, Carroll and Walford 1996). This research has showed that parents' dispositions, views, skills and strategies regarding their children's schooling are strongly shaped by their economic, social and cultural resources. Hence, the middle classes are seen to be more able than the working classes regarding this engagement with the institutional, social, and educational evaluative criteria of a school. Moreover, these studies have argued that choice has contributed to the reproduction and amplification of the educational advantages of the middle classes in detriment to the working classes and, in this way, the configuration of polarised school systems. However, few researchers have directly addressed the configuration of circuits or hierarchies of schooling (Ball *et al.* 1995, Gewirtz *et al.* 1995, Reay and Lucey 2004, Taylor 2001a, 2001b). They have identified a collection of aspects that differentiate schools such as school ethos and history; their educational reputation (good or bad; local or beyond); general educational attainment, students' recruitment policies (non selective, quasi or selective); the geographical origin of its population, and socio-economic intake.¹⁶ Reay's (2004a) study illustrates the body of research focused on the impact of social class on learning experiences. Reay shows how working class young people self-excluded from Gifted and Talented programmes due to their lack of confidence, sense of worth, and perceptions about their own abilities and possibilities. Finally, research about identity making in the new educational context shows how certain identities are produced and reproduced along gender, class and/or ethnic lines in the school (sometimes as part of youth sub-cultures) in such ways

¹⁵ Other examples of this rich body of research are Conway 1997, Gewirtz, et al. 1995, Gorard, et al. 2001, Reay and Lucey 2003, Walford 1996, Woods 1996.

¹⁶ See for example Taylor (2001b) who analyses quantitative data and supports the previous qualitative findings of Ball *et al.* (1995).

that young people's educational involvement is jeopardised. For instance, Archer and Yamashita (2003) indicate the complexity of inequalities and the multiple ways in which identities of 'race', class and gender interact to produce engagement and resistance. In their study, "masculinity" is conceptualised as embodied and is interpreted as "culturally entangled". White working class boys produce and negotiate their identities in the school through and between different discourses of masculinity, whilst also engaging with the appeal of the "bad boy" discourses. Many of these boys see the notion of being a "bad boy" as appealing, despite trying to distance themselves from it (in a context featured by structural inequalities of racism). In line with other research (see for instance Archer 2003, Frosh *et al.* 2002), this study shows how boys constructed their masculinities as "anti-schoolwork". The authors speculate that the persistence of resistance to school/work could be related to the high investments of boys in "globalised and diasporic discourses of masculinity that are grounded outside the education context in the local area" (Archer and Yamashita 2003: 129).

The "social class turn", together with recent examinations of class, ethnic and gender identities, have demonstrated the necessity of scrutinizing families' educational strategies and students' identities as aspects that contribute to and/or challenge the production and reproduction of educational and social inequalities amongst social classes. The intention of my study is to explore them in the Argentinean context with the aim of unpacking key features of the multi-layered process of social and cultural reproduction that takes place in schools. In this sense, my research has closely followed this British research tradition, not only in paying attention to school choice and class identity making, but also in interpreting the data gathered/produced.

After analysing how the British research traditions have shaped my research, I will now turn to the contributions that my study makes to the British field of Sociology of Education. Firstly, my study provides evidence in support of the argument to unpack the nature of schooling of the middle class (Power and Whitty 2006, Power *et al.* 2003).¹⁷ My research explores the schooling of a particular fraction of the Argentinean middle classes, which features material and cultural characteristics and the production of a specific kind of middle class identity. In this sense, my findings point to the necessity of carefully looking at the composition and nature of the middle classes before jumping to any overarching conclusions regarding their education, schooling and the types of class identities they produce. Moreover, my study adds to the well established collection of ethnographic studies of working class schooling but also suggests that British research also needs to pay more attention to recent transformations of the economic and social structure in their conceptualisations of the working class. Within my study, although the Argentinean economic and social structure differs dramatically from that of England and Wales, the presence of “loser” sections of the middle classes in High Mountain and of heterogeneous groups within the *sectores populares* (made up of ‘traditional’ workers and “marginal” ones) in Low Hill highlights the need to question essentialist accounts of “middle class” and “working class”. In this sense, clearer and more flexible conceptualisations of social class appear to be of paramount importance in understanding its relations with contemporary schooling (Power and Whitty 2006). In addition to this, my study both continues and departs from the British body of sociological research that has recently engaged with Bourdieu’s work.

¹⁷ Different researchers have pointed to the diversity within the middle classes (Ball *et al.* 2004) and the working classes (Vincent 2006) when analysing childcare and parenting.

Unlike mainstream research, I use Bourdieu to unveil some aspects of students' everyday negotiations with their schools. In this sense, my research shows that critical appropriations of Bourdieu also provide a rich framework for unpacking certain aspects of the 'black box' of schooling.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have examined how the complex relationships between social inequalities and educational access, performance and participation have been examined in the two different socio-educational research arenas in which my research is located. In both countries, mapping and explaining the persistence of educational inequalities in access, performance, and experiences across social groups have been paramount.

Firstly, I have demonstrated how my study is embedded in and makes departures from the four Argentinean research traditions I have identified. Following on from the "socio-educational" and the "identity/subjectivity" traditions, I explore educational fragmentation and students' identities making. However, in so doing, I also investigate under-examined aspects such as the ways in which educational fragmentation, schooling, students' class identities and educational experiences interplay. Moreover, I add to these traditions the explicit formulation of a theoretical framework that contributes to the understanding of their interactions from an ethnographic perspective.

Secondly, I have also examined how my research questions, analytical framework and research design have been influenced by British traditional and contemporary research. Ethnographic approaches to schooling together with the "social class" tradition have framed my theoretical and methodological choices.

They have provided useful ‘tools’ to explore the ways in which “social class” interplays with schooling in the two schools where my study was carried out. In addition, I have indicated how my study contributes to this field of research by stressing, as other British researchers have done, the need to unpack the notions of “middle class” and “working class”. Finally, my ethnographic study from a Bourdieusian perspective contributes to the British field by elucidating upon some advantages and potentialities of his central concepts for looking at the every day life of schooling.

The next chapter focuses on my appropriations of Bourdieu’s conceptual framework that I use to analyse how different social groups of students interplayed with the demands of schooling in two secondary schools in the City of Buenos Aires.

Chapter Two: With and beyond Bourdieu. Theorising the relationships between social class, identities and secondary schooling

Introduction

The previous chapter located my study and research questions within wider pre-existing bodies of knowledge produced in the Argentinean and British socio-educational research fields. It mapped the key research which examined the relationships between social class and the enduring (but also changing) social inequalities across classes or groups within their respective socio-cultural, economic and political contexts. This chapter presents my ‘thinking tools’ (Grenfell and James 1998) or the ‘toolbox’ (Ball 2003, Ramazanoglu 1993) that I used to make sense of that relationship in the context of my ethnographic study of two secondary schools in the City of Buenos Aires. These tools have been refined and adjusted during the process of my research and in ongoing dialogue with my data. As Bourdieu asserts (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002), theory and research are mutually generating and, against inductive and deductive classical scientific thinking, one cannot stand alone without the other. This chapter unpacks the collection of Bourdieusian concepts and critical perspectives that helped me to understand and interpret the data produced during my fieldwork. The methodological approach of my study, based on my theoretical framework, will be detailed in Chapter Four, “Methods, Methodology and Context”.

Bourdieu’s intellectual contribution to Sociology has been rich, varied, ambiguous and sometimes difficult to understand, and so my appropriations of his work are necessarily limited yet purposeful (Grenfell and James 1998,

Jenkins 2002, King 2000, Reay 2004b).¹⁸ In this sense, this thesis does not analyse the multi-layered and complex transformations and displacements of his concepts over time and across disciplinary fields (such as the arts, Cultural Studies, Sociology, Anthropology, Sports, Linguistics) (Brubaker 2000). Instead, this chapter identifies the key dispositions of his sociological habitus rather than ultimate definitions of its concepts (Brubaker 2000). Following Brubaker (2000:37), Bourdieu's concepts designate and infuse certain sociological dispositions, "a certain way of looking at the world" and doing research. To do so, the present chapter is split into two main parts. The first focuses on Bourdieu's key concepts (field, habitus, capitals and social class); how he has used them to analyse educational inequalities (at secondary and tertiary level); and his principle flaws according to his critics. In the second section, I examine the ways in which I have modified these Bourdieusian concepts within the context of my work. Following Brubaker (2000), I have applied certain general dispositions of Bourdieu's work (such as the concepts presented above) together with extensions and refinements of some of his concepts made by American and British researchers and myself. This critical appropriation of Bourdieu's work was done during the fieldwork and analysis, and contributed to illuminating relevant aspects or features that would have been otherwise invisible. In particular, the critical expansions of the concept of "cultural capital" (Lareau and Weininger 2003, Reay 2004a) and of "institutional habitus" (Everett 2002, McNamara Horvat and Lising Antonio 1999, Reay *et al.* 2001a, 2001b) have been central to my understanding of how social class is both embodied and performed by individuals and how schools as organizations mobilize collective

¹⁸ There has been a debate about the transferability of Bourdieu's concepts to different national contexts (Archer 1993, 2000, Robbins 2004).

class habitus that both shapes teachers' views about their students, and their organisational practices within the stratified field of secondary education in the City of Buenos Aires.

Bourdieu's theoretical tool box and his analysis of educational inequalities

To unfold Bourdieu's conceptual framework and his explanations of educational inequalities, it is necessary to first outline his epistemological project of overcoming or superseding the dichotomies (determinism/freedom; objective/subjective; structure/agency; theory/research; society/individual) that had traditionally characterized philosophical and sociological thought on human and social agency (Bourdieu 1987b, 1989, 1993a, 1993c, 1995a, Brubaker 2000, Grenfell and James 1998). Subjectivist and objectivist perspectives have persistently proved antagonist paradigms. They have alternatively focused on social actors or on social structures to explain human behaviour without being able to simultaneously grasp the dual nature of social life. Bourdieu offers a fruitful perspective from which to conceptualize the mutual interactions between the subjective and objective dimensions of the social world (Acciaioli 2000, Bourdieu 1992a, 1995a, Nash 2003, Swartz 2000). He argues that understanding the complexity of social life demands seeing objectivism and subjectivism not as antagonistic approaches, but rather as two necessary 'moments' of a new kind of analysis that aims to grasp the "double reality of the social world" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002: 11). His concept of "habitus" aims to mediate between "structural principles and cultural practice within and across specific fields" in order to construct a new theory of social practice (Nash 2003: 45).

Bourdieu defines habitus as "socialised subjectivity" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002) and, as such, it is the result of the partaking of social agents (Bourdieu's

term for referring to individuals) in different arenas or fields of social life and of the internalization of certain dispositions, categories of perception, perspectives, beliefs, feelings and ways of behaving (Bourdieu 1995a). In Bourdieu's (1996b: 2) words, habitus is:

generative schemata of classifications and classifiable practices that function in practice without acceding to explicit representations and that are the product of the embodiment, in the form of dispositions, of a differential position in the social space defined (...) by the reciprocal externality of positions.

Habitus is, then, a productive and embodied matrix of dispositions, categories of perception and classification of practices that allows social actors to participate in different arenas of social life (such as the arts, religion, secondary education, and the labour market) in such a manner that their practices tend to reproduce the objective structures or principles that regulate that particular confine of activity. According to Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002), the habitus is unconsciously acquired through socialization in the family from early childhood (Bourdieu 1977, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002).

However, habitus should not be understood as a "fixed way of being" (McLeod 2003). It is continually re-structured by individuals' practices with the outside world (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002, Reay 2004b). Bourdieu (1990: 77-78) argues that the habitus goes hand in hand with indeterminacy and vagueness and is "a generative spontaneity which asserts itself in an improvised confrontation with ever-renewed situations, it obeys a *practical logic*, that of vagueness, of the more-or-less, which defines one's ordinary relation to the world" (emphasis in

the original). In this sense, habitus does not simply refer to a process in which norms are imposed on the body, but also to the moment of living or praxis through these norms whereby mainly reproduction but also transformation is possible within the limits of the structures, “which are the embodied sedimentation of the social structures which produced it” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002: 9). As Bourdieu (1990: 116) succinctly puts it:

(...) habitus, as the product of social conditionings, and thus of a history (...), is endlessly transformed, either in a direction that reinforces it, when embodied structures of expectations encounter structures of objective chances in harmony with these expectations, or in a direction that transforms it and, for instance, raises or lowers the level of expectations and aspirations (which in turn lead to social crises proper).

Habitus has a trajectory, a past and a present, and, under particular objective conditions of the field, is able to reproduce or transform itself. When individuals and groups instinctively fit in a particular environment (whether an institution, social group or activity) and feel “as a fish in water”, they do not feel the weight of the water and they take the world and themselves for granted (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002: 127). In these situations, the habitus encounters a field that legitimates its dispositions, views, and practices. Hence, the habitus and the field have an “ontological complicity”, wherein the former configures “the source of cognition without consciousness, intentionality without intention, and a practical mastery of the world’s regularities which allows one to anticipate the future without even needing to posit it as such” (Bourdieu 1990: 11-12). This

ontological complicity implies that individuals' practices and classificatory judgements (such as lifestyle, preferences, and 'choices') are performed in accordance with the regulatory principles of the field without being the result of conscious or rational decisions. This practical mastery or logic is learned through prolonged exposure to those principles through embodied practice. Conversely, when individuals feel out of place or like outsiders, their habitus meets a field where their dispositions are useless, alien, rejected, and/or disregarded and where they are unable to activate their capitals. This lack of adjustment or fitness between the habitus and field allows Bourdieu to explain social change and transformation (whether at an individual or collective level).¹⁹

Bourdieu also points out that the operation of habitus regularly rejects or excludes particular practices and is associated with the unconscious production and reproduction of social identities. In this way, habitus "implies a 'sense of one's place' but also 'sense of the other's place'" (Bourdieu 1990: 131) that is tied into embodied dispositions, views and practices. This embodied nature of the habitus is expressed by the concept of bodily hexis that attempts to account for the ways in which meaning, social consciousness, and identity is inscribed into the body (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, Lovell 2000, McNay 2000a, Robson 2001, Skeggs 1997b). Consequently the most improbable practices within a particular group are unconsciously discarded as unthinkable while only a limited range of practices are possible, thinkable and desirable across social fields (Bourdieu 1990, 1992a). For instance, in *Distinction* (Bourdieu 1992a), Bourdieu shows how working class people and the bourgeoisie have different aesthetic

¹⁹ As an example of a process of collective transformation see the analysis of the Algerian working class in 1950s/1960s (Bourdieu 1990, 1995a) and of a process of transformation of the individual habitus see Bourdieu's socio-analysis of his own intellectual trajectory (Bourdieu 2000).

general dispositions that repel each other and are rooted in their own particular collective conditions of existence. On the one hand, the working class share an “anti-aesthetic disposition” in painting, literature, cinema and photography and emphasize the centrality of the representational content, which is the result of a general disposition of antipathy to formalism and formality, and engagement with the “real” and the substantial (Bourdieu 1992a, Brubaker 1985). On the other hand, the bourgeoisie’s aesthetic general disposition is detached from the world and other people. According to Bourdieu, both aesthetics are based on different material conditions and relations with economic necessity: lack in the case of the bourgeoisie and omnipresent existence in the case of the working class. The former could afford detachment while the latter cannot escape from the ordinary urgencies (Bourdieu 1992a, Brubaker 1985). These cultural differences operate as cultural distinctions and differentiations, as judgements of culture, whereby social identities are constantly produced and maintained through everyday practices (Bourdieu 1992a).

Bourdieu has conceptualised habitus as a multifaceted concept that operates at societal and individual levels (Bourdieu 1977, 1990, 1992a, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002). As Reay (2004b: 434) puts it: “A person’s individual history is constitutive of habitus, but so also is the whole collective history of family and class that the individual is a member of”. The concept of habitus is ambiguous and whilst sometimes Bourdieu stresses the degree of uniformity between members of a group, on other occasions he highlights the variety and difference among them and analyses the singularity of individual habitus (Bourdieu 1977, 1990, 1995a, 2000). When focusing on the coherence of a collective habitus, Bourdieu attempts to justify its existence by arguing that interactions between

individuals are never simply one-to-one relationships and the truth of the interaction is never completely contained within it (Bourdieu 1990, 1992a). According to Bourdieu (1990), a collective dimension of habitus is essential in recognizing that individuals contain within themselves their past and present position in the social space everywhere and at any time, in the forms of dispositions which are traces of their social positions. The attention on the individual habitus, on the other hand, is validated due to the uniqueness of individual histories (Bourdieu 1990, 1993b, 2000).

Social agents participate in differentiated social arenas or fields that are objectively structured. According to Bourdieu, habitus and social fields cannot exist independently. There is not one without the other: “the theory of habitus is incomplete without a notion of structure that makes room for the organized improvisation of agents” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002: 19). As Grenfell and James (1998) argue, habitus focuses on the subjective, whilst field does so on the objective aspects of social life. Bourdieu’s theory of practice discarded the general notion of society and replaced it with the concept “field”, arguing that the former is an “ensemble of relatively autonomous spheres of ‘play’ that cannot be collapsed under an overall societal logic, be it that of capitalism, modernity or postmodernity” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002: 17). For Bourdieu, society should be interpreted as a complex and multidimensional network of interrelated “games” rather than as a unified and homogeneous totality.

Fields constitute “competitive systems of social relations” that work according to their own particular rules or logic (Moi 1991: 1020-1021). They configure social spaces where there is competition and conflict around specific stakes (whether social, economic, or cultural capital) which are only acknowledgeable for those

who participate in them (Bourdieu 1989, 1993c). Moi (1991) argues that the main objective of the players of the field or game is to exert dominance and to gain legitimacy and authority within its boundaries. Bourdieu defines “legitimacy” as a symbolic value that demarcates what is recognised and consecrated by the field (Bourdieu 1988, Bourdieu *et al.* 1994). According to Moi, an action or institution is legitimate when it is dominant but misrecognised as such and, therefore, implicitly accepted (Moi 1991). Legitimacy involves, then, symbolic violence and its misrecognition. Symbolic violence refers to the successful imposition of certain values, views, demands and perspectives (classifications) that are interpreted as acceptable by those who are disadvantaged by them (Dillabough 2004). In this way, the dominated are incapable of recognizing their oppression and the violence exerted onto them. Legitimacy, then, implies both imposition of a “cultural arbitrary”²⁰ by a dominant group and its acceptance as rightful by the dominated one (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990).

Bourdieu argues that different players deploy mainly unconscious strategies²¹ to gain legitimacy in particular fields (Bourdieu 1988, Bourdieu 1996b). The players, however, rarely perceive their moves and strategies as such because “each field generates its own specific habitus” (Moi 1991: 1021) instilling in those who enter the game a system of perspectives and categories of appreciation and perception that are in tune with the played game. In other words, Bourdieu introduces here a new layer or facet to the concept of habitus that refers to those sets of beliefs, views and dispositions produced by a particular field and instilled

²⁰ This term refers to the arbitrary nature of culture. Arbitrary in the sense that culture is a contingent, historic, social and political product.

²¹ For a discussion about the concept of strategy in Bourdieu see Bourdieu and Wacquant (2002); Bourdieu (1990); Lamaison (1986); Bourdieu (1995a).

in participants, that propel them to play the game (Bourdieu 1993a, 1993c, Moi 1991). Hence, antagonistic players also share a common interest in the existence of the field and agree to play the game, whether to maintain dominance or subvert it (Bourdieu 1990, 1993c, Bourdieu and Passeron 1979). Therefore, a social field is regulated by its own habitus, by sets of “*unspoken and unspeakable rules*” (Moi 1991: 1022 emphasis in the original) objectified in players’ ‘feel’ or sense of the game, and by explicit or codified rules (such as legal frameworks) (Bourdieu 1990, Lamaison 1986).

The habitus or ‘feel’ for the game, the unconscious awareness of its logic and implicit rules, and the resources necessary to play are not evenly distributed among players (Bourdieu 1977, Lamaison 1986). The winners of the game are the ones who have been able to make the best moves to get what is at stake due to their ability to recognise its unspoken rules and the nature of the effectiveness of their resources or ‘cards’ to play in the power struggles within its confines. The kinds of resources players have depend on their relative objective positions in the field and the social space, and the determinations they impose upon the occupants, institutions or agents (Bourdieu 1995b: 73, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002). Bourdieu conceptualizes these determinations as ‘cards’ or available resources that he calls capitals (Bourdieu 1986b). Capitals are able to confer “strength, power and consequently profit” (Skeggs 1997b: 8) in social fields, enabling an analysis of the micropolitics of power. Bourdieu identifies four types of capital: economic, cultural, social and symbolic. Bourdieu’s conception of capitals is related to his model of social class based on capitals’ movements through social space or fields (Skeggs 1997). Economic capital includes wealth, income, financial inheritance, and monetary assets. Cultural capital can exist in

three forms: embodied, objectified and institutionalised. The first refers to durable systems of dispositions and categories of appreciation; the second refers to cultural goods (such as paintings, books, objects); and the third refers to educational qualifications. Social capital encapsulates those resources produced through interpersonal connections and group membership. Finally, symbolic capital refers to the form of conversion of the different types of capital into social recognition and legitimacy (Bourdieu 1986a, Skeggs 1997b). Differential social positions access specific volumes and compositions of capitals. Capitals carry with them access to or limitations to movement across the social space (Skeggs 1997). In this sense, Bourdieu's economic metaphors are helpful to understand how resources contribute to enable or restrain individual and collective trajectories (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002, Skeggs 1997b).²²

Social fields, as analysed above, have their own particular stakes and, for this reason, have a relative autonomy with respect to the whole social field and, therefore, generate their own legitimacy and authority. For instance, what is legitimate and valuable in the field of literature; may not be so in the secondary educational field. The general social field is a theoretical space where social agents' positions are allocated according to their global volume of capital, its composition (defined by the relative weight of the different types of capital possessed such as cultural, economic, social or symbolic) and its trajectory over time (Bourdieu 1986b, Bourdieu 1992a).

²² The concept of 'capital' has been criticised for reducing cultural and social relations and production into an economic rationality. Bourdieu was aware of this criticism and highlighted that the notion of capital contributed to make visible logics of practice in different fields based on diverse kinds of interests or stakes, whether economic, symbolic, social or cultural (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002).

Bourdieu's analysis of "social field" and "habitus" should be located within his wider interest in explaining the reproduction of social class structure and culture in French society (Brubaker 1985) and with the production of a universal system of thought applicable to examine the specificities of other national contexts (Bourdieu 1997, Robbins 2004). Bourdieu argues that social classes differ in terms of their conditions of existence, systems of dispositions (*habitus*) and power or capital. A social class is comprised by:

agents who occupy similar positions and who, being placed in similar conditions and subjected to similar conditionings, have every likelihood of having similar dispositions and interest and therefore of producing similar practices and similar stances. This "class on paper" has the theoretical existence that is that of theories (...). It is not really a class, an actual class, in the sense of a group, a group mobilized for struggle; at most it might be called a *probable class*.

(Bourdieu 1985b: 725 emphasis in the original)

Bourdieu argues that it is fundamental to distinguish the notion of class in itself from the notion of a class for itself. The former refers to the classes constructed by the analyst, while the latter refers to those social groups mobilised around common and particular interests with a shared political agenda (Bourdieu 1985b, 1989, 1990).²³ In this way, social class is an heuristic tool that refers to those individuals and groups who occupy relatively closed social positions in the wider social space measured by similar volumes and combinations of cultural, social

²³ Bourdieu takes this distinction from Marx (1897).

and economic capitals, and evolution over time of these two dimensions (Bourdieu 1989, 1993a, Swartz 1997). These “classes on paper” are made up by agents who have a similar habitus and a certain proclivity to come together in reality and to configure themselves into real groups. Alternatively, social classes could be “real groups”. “[W]hen they exist, even in a tenuous state (...) belonging to a group is something you build up, negotiate and bargain over, and play for” (Bourdieu 1990: 75). Here, Bourdieu’s perspective allows the identification of different kinds or states of “real groups” or classes. Firstly, his view contributes the recognition of a myriad of strategies (such as marriage, friendship, and consumption and preference patterns across cultural fields) involved in the dynamic production of a group identity / membership (such as the “petit bourgeoisie” and “working class” in Bourdieu’s analysis of the French social structure (1992a)). Secondly, Bourdieu argues that classes are only “real groups” when there is “political work of group-making” (Bourdieu 1990: 118) to give them mobilization and collective identity (Swartz 1997). In this case, social classes are the result of symbolic and political struggles whereby certain social groups are able to produce particular views about the world and themselves by which they define their social class identity as distinct from and, in conflict with, from other groups and classes (Bourdieu 1985b, 1989, 1990, 1995a).

Social classes are historically and socially produced and can only be mapped within specific cultural configurations. For example, Bourdieu (1992a) attempts to demonstrate that French society is structured around different social classes. In order to do this, he has to show that identified social classes have different conditions of existence, volume and structure of capital, habitus and life styles. With this purpose in mind, Bourdieu uses statistical data on conditions of

existence, resources, practices and preferences of different occupations. However, statistical analysis shows a low correspondence between occupations and lifestyles. Bourdieu attempts to explain this by arguing that within occupational groups there are other relevant class divisions such as age, sex, ethnicity and social origin that produce different conditions of existence and dispositions. In this analysis, class operates as a generic label for all social groups differentiated by their conditions of existence and corresponding habitus (Brubaker 1985). These classes are then constructs of the analyst and can be interpreted as Weberian ideal types.

Despite these difficulties, Bourdieu (1992a) also attempts to give a more general account of class and power structure in France. Here, two main groups of difference are central: those based on the total volume of possessed capital, and those based on the types of possessed capitals of different groups with a similar global volume of capital. By using these criteria, Bourdieu (1992) uses the traditional division of the society into the working, middle and dominant classes as appropriate to understanding general differences of power and privilege. Brubaker (1985) argues that, in the field of social stratification, Bourdieu's main contribution has been his study of "intra-class divisions" that allow him to differentiate between the middle and upper classes and, in between, other groups with intermediate volumes of economic and cultural capital (Brubaker 1985).

Bourdieu's perspective and concepts have been the target of a diverse and wide range of celebratory engagements and criticisms within various sub-disciplinary areas such as Sociology, Sociology of Education, and feminism (Calhoun *et al.* 1993, Fowler 2003, Hatcher 1998, Nash 1990, Reay 2004b, Savage 2000, Shilling 2004, Sullivan 2001). Criticisms have alternatively targeted the

foundations of Bourdieu's epistemological and theoretical project; or particular absences or problems. Among the former, authors have targeted the flawed nature of his epistemological project for being incapable of overcoming structuralism with the notion of habitus, which relapses into the objectivism which Bourdieu rejects (Archer 2000, Brubaker 1985, Di Maggio 1979, Jenkins 1982, King 2000, Nash 1990). King (2000), for instance, argues that in most writings Bourdieu holds on to a dualistic social ontology within which individuals are reduced to cultural dupes who act following unconscious dispositions of the habitus, which are determined by the social conditions in which the individuals live. In this sense, the underlying scheme of structure-disposition-practice which in turn reproduces the structure, appears to be unidirectional and gives human agency limited scope. However, as King (2000) also acknowledges, there is a second strand within Bourdieu's writings that provides a "way out of the structure-agency problem" (417). King points to the fruitfulness of his "practical theory" which insists that social reality results from a negotiation between individuals that cannot be reduced to timeless and static models.

Among the ad-hoc criticisms, the list of aspects under scrutiny is long and includes: i) the ambiguity, flexibility and vagueness of central concepts such as "habitus", "cultural capital" and "social class" (Brubaker 1985, Lareau and Weininger 2003, Reay 2004b, Shilling 2004, Sullivan 2001); ii) the lack of attention given to central forms of domination and exclusion such as racism, sexism, disabilism, homophobia and ageism (Dillabough 2004, Fowler 2003, Reay 1997, Sayer 2005b, Skeggs 1997b); iii) the overemphasis on the unconscious nature of the habitus and the disregard for the part played by

individuals' conscious, reflexive and critical understanding of their social interventions (Hatcher 1998, McNay 2000b, Sayer 2005b); iv) the ambiguity of the meaning of "school knowledge" as "cultural arbitrary", which at times seems to refer to cultural systems exclusively justified by their association with dominant classes, while at others refers to universal knowledge that does not depend on social class relations (Nash 2002, Nash 2003); v) the centrality of social reproduction and the incapacity to explain social transformation (Jenkins 1982, King 2000, Nash 1990); and, vi) the absence of a mediating concept that addresses the role of organisations in the production of social inequalities (Everett 2002, McDonough 1996, McNamara Horvat and Lising Antonio 1999, Reay *et al.* 2001a). Now that I have identified Bourdieu's key concepts and some central criticisms of his work, it is time to turn our attention to how he has applied his conceptual tools to particular analyses of educational inequalities.

Social class, habitus, capitals, games and educational inequalities: some examples of Bourdieu's research

Bourdieu used and developed his network of interconnected concepts throughout his career (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002, Reed-Danahay 2005, Robbins 1991). Much of this analysis was about education. This section examines three examples of this work: one related to secondary schools and the other two focused on higher education. Robbins (2004) associates the first with a structuralist period of Bourdieu's work, and the other two with his critical post-structuralist engagements. These examples show how Bourdieu's concepts have changed over time and how his later work on tertiary education also serves to analyse secondary schooling in a different richer light than his earlier work.

One of the earliest formulations of the concept of habitus was presented in the work of Bourdieu and Passeron (1990). Here, the authors put forward a theory of symbolic violence and show how the educational system is a central site for its enactment at a societal level. They argue that secondary schooling contributes to the cultural and social reproduction of inequalities between the dominant and dominated classes. The school inculcates, through explicit pedagogy, a secondary habitus that devalues the primary habitus of children from working class backgrounds while rewarding that of children from bourgeois families. Habitus is defined as the “principle generating practices which reproduce the objective structures” (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990: 33). In this way, children from a working class background have a greater chance of failure, and when this happens they internalize and interpret those failures as the result of their own inadequacy or lack of effort. The blame for educational failure is re-inscribed in individual students and not in the operations of the system or the work of the teachers. The school excludes children from the working classes thanks to the pedagogic authority held by the educational system, school and teachers and the relative autonomy of the education system from wider society. These elements are preconditions for the effective imposition of the dominant culture (cultural arbitrary) as the legitimate one. This imposition also depends on two main factors: i) the positive or negative dispositions towards the pedagogic action of the school, rooted in its objective value within different social markets and compared to other forms of non formal pedagogic actions, and ii) the cultural capital of the children - whose value varies according to the distance between the cultural arbitrary imposed by the school and the cultural arbitrary inculcated by the family of different groups or classes (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990).

Another example of Bourdieu's flexible and changing use of his concepts is *The State Nobility* (1996b). This analyses the nature and dynamics of the social field of the elite system of higher education of the *Grandes Ecoles* in France. Bourdieu uses both extensive and varied quantitative and qualitative data to support his argument. He looks at teachers' and students' practices within the *Grandes Ecoles*. Bourdieu identifies parallels between the mental structures and classificatory criteria of teachers and students with "primitive forms of classification" identified by Durkheim and Mauss (Reed-Danahay 2005). These criteria of perception and classification configure a common culture among teachers and students (Bourdieu 1996b). Participation in different activities such as attendance at induction seminars; inculcation of the legitimacy of the distant relationship between teachers and students and of the criteria used to distribute titles, certificates and prizes contribute to the production of a secondary habitus shared by teachers and students, who are incapable of recognising it. They feel either 'out of place' or very much 'part of the game' according to the distance between the cultural capital acquired in their original milieu and the secondary habitus of the *Grandes Ecoles*. According to Reed-Danahay (2005), in this analysis Bourdieu expands his notion of habitus emphasizing the role of implicit inculcation instead of explicit pedagogy that featured in earlier work.

A final example of Bourdieu's understanding of the complex process of production and reproduction of educational inequalities among social classes is *Homo Academicus* (1988). This is a sociological analysis of the French university field. Here, Bourdieu attempts to objectify the logic of the academic game as well as the different kinds of strategies that institutions and social agents deploy to accrue academic recognition and power. Bourdieu uses a range of

quantitative and qualitative data to unpack the social positions and relations among institutions and individuals and their positioning towards the academic and political worlds. Firstly, Bourdieu constructs and examines the structure of the university social field and the principles that organize institutional and social agents' practices. He identifies two contradictory principles of hierarchisation of institutions (faculties and disciplines) and individuals: social hierarchy and cultural hierarchy. The former corresponds to "the capital inherited and the economic and political capital actually held" and the latter refers to the "specific, properly cultural hierarchy, corresponding to the capital of scientific authority or intellectual renown" (Bourdieu 1988: 48). Bourdieu shows how the hierarchy of university institutions and disciplines reflects the relationships of power between "the field of economic power and the field of cultural power" (Bourdieu 1988:48) by showing how these institutions recruit their participants from different social fractions of the dominant class. In addition, Bourdieu argues that different positions in the social field are accompanied by two different lifestyles "so profoundly differentiated in their economic and cultural foundations, but also ethical, religious and political planes" (Bourdieu 1988: 49). These two different class habitus are expressed in a variety of practices and properties such as level of family integration (measured by the rate of divorce and number of children), political views, and within the academic field, in the production and reproduction of knowledge and alternative criteria of success (social competence or scientific competence). The terms "orthodoxy" and "heresy" reflect the two main position takings towards the academic order. Both groups contribute to the reproduction of the game by participating and legitimating their competition to get academic

rewards or obtain posts and by accepting the vision of an academic career with its rewards over time.

In these illustrations, it is possible to identify a move towards a wider concept of “habitus”, more emphasis on the concept of “social field” (understood as the “game”), and a more relevant and visible role of educational institutions in the production of social and educational inequalities. For example, “secondary habitus” referred first to the school’s explicit pedagogy and later also included educational institution’s implicit pedagogy. In the case of the concepts of “social field” and “game”, Bourdieu applied them in his analyses of higher education in order to unpack the particularities of socio-cultural and institutional contexts where university teaching and learning took place. Conversely the analytical perspective that underpins the earlier *Reproduction* did not recognise this kind of differentiation. I argue that the conceptual transformations evidenced in the last two examples involve a more dynamic and complex way to look at education than the earlier approach of *Reproduction* (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). In my study, I apply some of Bourdieu’s later theoretical formulations of certain concepts (such as habitus and fields/games) to explore the relationships between social classes and secondary schooling in order to examine the scope and validity of *Reproduction*’s core argument.

After presenting Bourdieu’s concepts, some key criticisms and the ways he has undertaken research on educational inequalities in secondary and tertiary education, it is time to look at how I rework certain conceptualisations in order to engage with some crucial criticisms of his work.

Expanding Bourdieu's concepts: Agency, schools, and cultural capital

Following Brubaker (2000), I adopt Bourdieu's theory of practice and concepts as sociological dispositions that offer "a certain way of looking at the world" (37) whose usefulness, nature, content and explanatory power need to be assessed empirically in specific contexts. In other words, the identification of the boundaries and stakes of the fields; the varieties and nature of habitus that interplay with them; and of the empirical content and relative value of different forms of capitals need to be examined within specific research contexts and not presupposed from Bourdieu's general theory of social practice. In this sense, ethnographic studies need to reconstruct the nature of the game played by social agents, identify its stakes and boundaries, and the kind of 'cards' players have and use in their moves and strategies.

A significant modification of Bourdieu's framework relates to the necessity, for my research, of addressing a more complex model of individual agency than the one offered by the general model of habitus, in order to recognise higher degrees of manoeuvre for social actors while engaging in everyday decision making processes.²⁴ Following Hatcher (1998), it is important to acknowledge conscious strategic actions rather than to automatically explain actions through the unconscious operations of the habitus. According to Hatcher (1998), Bourdieu also recognises this necessary distinction between habitus and rational and conscious computation as principles of social action. Bourdieu marginally addresses this distinction and states that habitus, under certain circumstances – such as crisis, where the adjustment between field and habitus is broken –, could

²⁴ For an account of the complexities of Bourdieu's model of cultural reproduction that emphasises its powers to explain change see Harker (1984). Although this model is useful, it does not emphasise enough the role of conscious and rational action in everyday social practice.

be overcome by rational decision making processes. In Bourdieu's (1990: 116) words:

not only can habitus be practically transformed (always within definite boundaries) by the effect of a social trajectory leading to conditions of living different from the initial ones, it can also be *controlled* through awakening of consciousness and socio-analysis (emphasis in the original)

Here, Bourdieu argues that habitus could be altered not only by change in the objective conditions that have produced it but also by conscious and reflexive social actions. In other words, rational strategic thinking can displace habitus and also change it (Hatcher 1998). Hence, rational and strategic decision making processes need to be incorporated into any framework that attempts to interpret courses of action within particular fields.

Secondly, following British sociological research on class identities and schooling, as outlined in Chapter One, I argue that students' class identities²⁵ need to be explored due to their potential role as a facilitator or obstacle in their participation in schooling. In this sense, unlike Bourdieu and following Skeggs (1997), I argue that class identities are not identical to their class positioning. Hence, it is relevant to explore students' class identities and how they produce them through their schooling, their orientations towards education and relationships with peers.²⁶

²⁵ Class identities are in general tied to other identities (such as gender, sexual, ethnic). However, as my research shows, sometimes they are more important than other identities to explain students' views of the game of schooling and their overarching 'feel for the game'.

²⁶ In the British sociological field, schooling has long been identified as a central cultural site for the production of (class, sexual, gender, ethnic, etc) identities (see for instance Willis 1981, Vincent 2003, Epstein and Johnson 1998, Mac an Ghail 1994).

To do so, it is necessary to have, first, a conception of class formation and class identity making as processes that involve both unconscious and conscious processes of distinction and differentiation from 'others' by which individuals and groups produce their group memberships and social class identities (Ball 2003, Savage 2000, Skeggs 1997b). In this sense, different studies of class practices have offered fruitful conceptualisations of the relationships between class location and class identity²⁷ as complex socio-cultural processes (Bottero 2004, Butler and Savage 1995, Lawler 2005a, 2005b, Savage 2000, Savage *et al.* 2001, Savage *et al.* 1992, Savage and Butler 1995a, Savage and Egerton 2000). In the field of education, Ball (2003: 6) offers a more dynamic conceptualisation of class identity than that of Bourdieu. The former highlights, like Bourdieu, the historical, local, relational and dynamic process of class formation which considers class positioning in the wider social space (determined by volumes of capitals and compositions). However, unlike Bourdieu, Ball also refers to central processes of cultural distinction and identity making whereby individuals and classes actively, and both consciously and unconsciously, define themselves against others who should be avoided, censored, and rejected. In Ball's (2003: 6) words:

Class (...) is productive and reactive. It is an identity based upon modes of being and becoming or escape and forms of distinction that are realized and reproduced in specific social locations.

Certain locations are sought out, others are avoided. We think and

²⁷ There has been a longstanding debate around the notion of identity in the UK (see for instance, Ashmore 1997, Bauman 1996, Castells 1997, Craib 1998, Crossley 2000, Giddens 1991, Jenkins 1996, Maynard 1995, Skeggs 1997) and in Argentina (see Arfuch 2002a, b, Vasilachis de Gialdino 2003, Wortman 2001). My interest focuses only on how social class analysis has engaged with the production of class identity. Hence, I do not present a detailed account on identity and the plural perspectives that have put forward its centrality (such as feminism, poststructuralist and postmodernist accounts, and symbolic interactionism).

are thought by class. It is about being something and not being something else. It is relational.

In this view, processes of seeking and avoidance of social locations involve both conscious and unconscious practices and views. In this way, processes of class formation are on-going, continuous, and traced at the level of individuals and groups' cultural distinction practices and views (both reflexive and non reflexive). While Bourdieu (1987a, 1992a) emphasises the unconscious nature of processes of individual and collective class identity making, I argue that it is necessary to look at processes of class identification, dis-identification, identity making and othering to grasp the complexities of the production of social class and how social actors actively engage in adjusting or resisting the social positioning they occupy (Ball 2003, Savage 2000). Unlike Bourdieu, I argue that asking students about their class identification and looking at the ways in which they consciously distance themselves from 'others' is also relevant to uncovering how identity making is done (Bottero 2004, Castells 1997, Gee *et al.* 2001, Jenkins 1996, Lawler 2005a, Savage 2000, Vasilachis de Gialdino 2003) and how it is linked with their schooling (Davies 1989, Reay 2002, Shain 2003). In my research, students' class identities (in terms of their self-conceptions and self-categorisations) are relevant to understanding how students' own reflexivity about their sense of place in the world contributes to their engagement with schooling.

As part of this elaboration of Bourdieu's account, it is also necessary to highlight that class position and class identity are not the same. While Bourdieu acknowledges that dispositions acquired as a result of social positioning imply that the occupant of a position makes adjustments to it, he does not explain the

processes by which “the adjustment is either made or resisted. Adjustment may not happen. There may not be a fit between positions and dispositions” (Skeggs 1997b: 81). Hence, “processes of (dis)identification from/with and (dis)simulation” (Skeggs 1997b: 13) of the social positions occupied and the subject positions available to social actors are the ways in which identities are produced as “coherent”. Subject positions are effects of “discourse and (*organizational*) structures” (Skeggs 1997b: 12, emphasis in the original). Skeggs uses the concept of subject positions to address how particular women become specific types of subjects. They are part of wider discourses that are shaped through institutional structures. In Bourdieusian terms, subject positions could be interpreted as available identities within a specific game such as “bright”, “hard working”, “nice”, “lazy”, or “cunning” (*vivo*) students within the game of schooling. Unlike Bourdieu, Skeggs highlights that processes of identity making, although dependant on capitals and access and restrictions across social fields, cannot be read off from individuals’ positions in the social space.

Thirdly, another modification needs to be made to understand the intricate nature of subjectivity and how this is “worked through at the level of motivation and self-understanding” (McNay 2000a: 72). McNay argues that the insights of a hermeneutic perspective of self-formation help to fill this theoretical gap. This work should highlight the “active role played by the subject in the construction of a coherent identity (...). A dynamic account of the process of self-formation also mediates the antinomy of stasis and change which dominates much thought on identity” (McNay 2000a: 73). McNay proposes to go beyond Bourdieu and to pay attention to the narratives that subjects produce to make sense of themselves without falling into the trap of postmodernist accounts that, on the one hand,

deny any coherence of the self and postulate the fragmented and ever changing nature of identities, and, on the other, focus on cultural and symbolic dimensions and disregard material and economic disadvantage and inequalities (Brooks 1997, Fraser 2000, Hall 1996, Maynard 1995, McNay 1999). In my study, students' narratives will be the central focus of my attention in order to understand how they make sense of their schooling experiences, identities and class location. McNay (2000b) points to Paul Ricoeur's work on narrative as a way to better understand the process of subjectification (becoming a subject). In this approach, the unity of the self is not imposed but is the result of "an active process of configuration whereby individuals attempt to make sense of the temporality of existence" (McNay 2000b: 27). Narrative is central in this process of self-formation (Arfuch 2002a, 2002b). The production of a "narrative identity" offers a more independent model of action and agency than the one proposed by post-structuralist accounts. According to McNay (2000b), the concept of "narrative identity" mitigates dualisms such as essentialist versus constructed notions of identity.

Fourthly, following Lareau and McNamara Horvat (1999), it is necessary to distinguish between the possession and activation of capitals or resources. People who have certain types of capitals and resources could choose to activate them or not, and they may differ in terms of their skills or abilities to activate them. In this way, cultural reproduction is not conceived as determinist but as a continually negotiated process where social actors have an important role to play (Lareau and McNamara Horvat 1999).

A fifth elaboration needs to be considered in relation to the concept of habitus in order to make visible the schools' role in the production and reproduction of both

the field of secondary schooling and wider social class inequalities. Different American and British educational researchers have expanded the Bourdiesian concept of habitus and have used it to study the influence of organizations and institutions such as particular universities and schools on their students' views, choices and experiences (Drummond 1998, McDonough 1996, McNamara Horvat and Lising Antonio 1999, Reay 1998a, Reay *et al.* 2001a). Although Bourdieu pays attention to individual, collective and field habitus, he does not use different terms to refer to class or institution/organisation based habitus. In this way, the concept of institutional habitus contributes to fill a terminological gap which facilitates the close up examination of certain features and dimensions of, for instance, school life that deeply affects teachers' and students' dispositions, views and practices (McNamara Horvat and Lising Antonio 1999). Reay *et al.* (2001a) argue that any definition of "institutional habitus" should encompass a complex amalgam of agency and structure and, following McDonough (1996), it should be interpreted as the influence of a cultural group or social class on an individual's practices as it is mediated through an institution. Moreover, Reay *et al.* (2001a) argue that the institutional habitus is an important variable that interplays with class, race and gender to influence secondary school and further education college students' experiences and choices of higher education institutions. Organisations are deeply influenced by class relations without being totally defined by them. In this way, they are part of social fields, immersed in the general field of power but they do have some degree of relative autonomy (Bourdieu 1993c, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002, Brubaker 1985). In turn, individual secondary schools should be seen as both social sub-fields where the game of schooling is played out in specific ways and as 'individual players'

within the social field of secondary education. Firstly, schools are arenas where the game of secondary schooling is played out by authorities, teachers, pastoral assistants, parents and students. In other words, schools produce and instil their own collective habitus, values and ways of appropriate thinking and behaving in their members (Blaxter and Hughes 2003, Bourdieu 1993c, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002, Moi 1991). Secondly, schools are also players within the field of secondary education and mobilize their social, economic, cultural and symbolic capitals in order to accumulate institutional prestige and resources. However, schools are located in a hierarchical social space of relative positions based on the volume and composition of their (institutional) capitals. In other words, schools could be seen both as games with stakes, players, and power relations and as players within the wider field of secondary education. Both perspectives allow us to recognise certain features and attenuate others. In my study, I pay attention to the schools as players and as social sub-fields.

A sixth extension of Bourdieu's perspective points to the relevance of students' cultures. From a Bourdieusian approach (Bourdieu 1988, 1993c, Bourdieu 1998, Lamaison 1986), it is necessary to unpack players' feel for the game in order to identify its unspoken and unspeakable rules. In so doing, attention should be paid to students' cultures and the particularities they add to the 'game of schooling' played in individual schools and to the ways in which students have to play it. Following Hammersley and Turner (1984), I define student cultures as those that students bring with them into the school, encompassing their class, gender and generational orientations which produce multiple subcultures. This loose definition encourages a look at how students' class, gender and generational

locations and relations intersect with schooling and the processes of identity making, without presupposing the prominence of either of them.

A final extension of Bourdieu's framework relates to the need for a more precise and rich definition of cultural capital to analyse educational inequalities in schools. Following Bourdieu's definition of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986), Lareau and Weininger (2003) propose an expanded version of the concept of cultural capital to be applied to the study of schools and educational inequalities. Their definition is grounded in contemporary qualitative British research and emphasizes the "micro-interactional processes through which individuals comply (or fail to comply) with the evaluative standards of dominant institutions such as schools." (Lareau and Weininger 2003: 568). This expanded concept of cultural capital encompasses both the institutional evaluative standards of the school (formal and informal expectations used by school personal to assess students and parents), and students and parents "dispositional skills or knowledge that differentially facilitate or impede their ability to conform to institutionalized expectations" (Lareau and Weininger 2003: 568) such as confidence in relation to the educational system, school knowledge and information about schooling. Reay (2004a) and Lareau and Weininger (2003) argue that empirical research needs to look at this dynamic relationship in order to grasp the form and contents of cultural capital in a particular milieu.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have examined the analytical framework that I apply to make sense of my fieldwork and I have offered critical elaborations of some of its concepts. I began unpacking Bourdieu's key concepts (field, habitus, capitals and social class); identifying the central critiques of his perspective; and by

exemplifying how Bourdieu applied his concepts to the analysis of educational inequalities. Bourdieu's key concepts provide the foundations for my analysis and the identification of its limitations highlights the need for further critical elaborations. Examples of how Bourdieu carried out educational research have served to illustrate how his concepts have changed over time and how the analysis of higher education has provided a richer and more flexible approach to studying secondary education than his previous structuralist analyses of education in the classic text *Reproduction*. In the second section of this chapter, I have made explicit the different re-elaborations or extensions in which I have engaged during my analysis of the data produced by my fieldwork. These extensions have addressed both critical views on certain aspects of Bourdieu's work and the limitations of the original definitions in relation to the specific task of interpreting my data. In this section, I have argued for the need to recognise reflexive aspects involved in processes of identity production and everyday decision making. Moreover, I have highlighted the need to critically specify and refine the concept of cultural capital in order to address the complex interplay between students' and schools' expectations and demands. In addition to this, I have argued for the usefulness of incorporating the concept of institutional habitus, which had the virtue of naming and making visible the role that institutions such as schools play as organisations in the production and reproduction of educational and social inequalities. Finally, the final section has pointed to the need to explore processes of class identity making without taking them for granted. Following Skeggs (1997), I have argued that class identity cannot be read from class position and in this sense, the relationships between both of them needs to be explored in socio-historical contexts in order to address

both resistance and adjustment made by social actors to their positioning in the social space.

Having introduced my theoretical framework, it is time to turn my attention to the main features of the game of secondary schooling in the City of Buenos Aires in order to contextualise the two schools of my study: High Mountain and Low Hill. The following chapter argues that recent educational policies have revealed both the end of the myth of state education as an inclusive and equalitarian force and the fragmented nature of its school system.

Chapter Three: The social field of secondary schooling in Argentina and in the City of Buenos Aires

Introduction

The previous chapter presented my ‘thinking tools’ and the theoretical framework that has guided both my data collection/production and analysis. I defined the central Bourdieusian concepts that my research uses together with my critical modifications and elaborations of some of them. Before turning to consider the methods of my research and briefly describing the research settings in Chapter Four, this chapter looks at the national and local socio-educational fields of my study, in which the research questions about social inequalities and schooling and the secondary schools of my study are located. This chapter applies the concept of the “game of secondary schooling” to portray the discursive, legal and material arenas where the two schools of my research, High Mountain and Low Hill, had to play for their resources, reputation and intakes. In Chapters Five, Six and Seven, I will utilize the concept of “game of secondary schooling” to refer to the particular social sub-fields that High Mountain and Low Hill configured in which teachers and students had to play.

This chapter examines the main role and stakes of Argentinean and the City of Buenos Aires state secondary education, and their relationships with the political and economic fields, their changing key players and their central discourses. This chapter is split into two main sections. In the first section, following Filmus (1999, 2001, 2001), I analyse the key educational developments of the field of national secondary education since the turn of the nineteenth century up to the present. The main reason for looking at the national level is that the education policies and system of the City of Buenos Aires until 1994 were mainly

determined by the central government.²⁸ The second section focuses on the secondary education field of the City of Buenos Aires from 1994 when it assumed control over all secondary schools in its territory. Due to its economic wealth and political animosity towards central government, the City resisted and mediated many of the major changes of contemporary national educational policy. This part describes key socio-demographic and economic indicators of the City, the structure and nature of its contemporary field of secondary education, and examines in detail the main educational policies and discourses.

The national system of schooling and its historical transformations

Relations between the educational field and the economy, labour market and political fields have changed over time affecting the former's boundaries, stakes, players, and positions (Bourdieu 1988, 1993a, 1993c, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002). The following analysis is split into two parts. The first, following Filmus (1999), studies three periods: the liberal-oligarchic State (1880-1939); the Welfare State (1940-1973); and the crisis of the Welfare State (1974-1983). The second focuses on the Post-social state (1983 onwards).

The consolidation and crisis of the myth of the meritocratic school (1890-1990)

During the liberal-oligarchic state (1880-1939), the Argentinean economic model was based on the export of agricultural and livestock production and land concentration. This promoted the development of State bureaucracy and services and the emergence of middle class sectors (Minujin 2004). Politically, this period was highly exclusionary and monopolized by the dominant economic groups.

²⁸ Before the transformation of the City in an autonomous jurisdiction in 1994 and the transference of the national secondary schools to the City, the municipality of the City created between 1990-1991 secondary schools called *Escuelas Municipales de Educación Media* (UNICEF 2005).

During this time, 6,000,000 immigrants came to Argentina (Minujin and Anguita 2004).

State elementary education was linked to the configuration of a national identity, social cohesion, and the construction of the state (Filmus 1999) whilst secondary schooling also had an economic function. Argentina's economic dependency on export and a European qualified labour force made the demand for highly specialised technical knowledge, trained by the education system, unnecessary. In spite of this, secondary education performed (despite its lack of a clear objective) two major tasks: i) it fed the state bureaucracy and the emergent service sectors (such as the transport, commerce and financial systems) with qualified workers, and ii) it selected those who would be part of the elite and would continue their studies at university (Filmus 1999).

Different types of state schools operated as channels to diverse occupations and status groups. The national colleges (*colegios nacionales*) channelled the elite to university education; the normal schools (*escuelas normales*) trained mainly female future teachers coming from the middle classes or immigrant families with upward mobility aspirations; the commercial schools (*escuelas comerciales*) prepared future clerical and administrative workers; the agro schools (*escuelas agropecuarias*) offered basic training to rural workers; the craft schools (*escuelas de artes y oficios*) provided terminal education in specific crafts (such as carpentry and mechanics) to working class children; and, finally, industrial schools (*escuelas industriales*) recruited middle class students who received a degree of national technician and could continue by studying engineering at the university (Gallart 2002; Puiggrós 2003; Filmus 1999; Tedesco 1986). With the exception of the craft schools, which disappeared in the 1950s, the rest offered

different curricular modalities (*bachiller, comercial, técnica, and normal*) that remained practically untouched until 1941 when a common cycle of three school years was established, allowing students to change modalities (Gallart 2002).

Regarding the size and pace of growth of the field of secondary schooling during the foundational period, the first significant expansion began in the 1930s when the import substitutive industrialisation process started (Riquelme 2005)²⁹ (see Appendix 2, Table 1). The central state and the dominant alliance's interests mainly fuelled the expansion of education. However, the emergent middle classes and later the working class also affected its nature and expansion (Feijóo 1996, Filmus and Moragues 2003). The embryonic middle classes early identified education as a legitimate and effective channel for their participatory and upward social mobility aspirations, and for the constitution of a social identity that distinguished them from the immigrants, despite being mainly their descendents, and from the dominant classes (Minujin and Anguita 2004, Tiramonti 1998).³⁰ According to Filmus (1999), access to the educational system did not guarantee automatic mobility. However, it configured a solid base from which they could effectively demand wider social and political participation. On the other hand, the early working class movement (made up of socialist and anarchist components) did not assume the same positions towards the public education system and saw it as a means for dominating workers. This anti-state

²⁹ The analysis of much quantitative data is based on Riquelme's elaboration of data sources (2005). This is a unique study that compiled and analysed statistical information on some central aspects of the history of the secondary education system.

³⁰ Much literature at the time referred to the high social and educational aspirations of recently migrated groups for their descendents. See, for instance, Florencio Sánchez' (1953) theatre play "*M'hijo el doctor*", performed for the first time in 1903. This play illustrates how the emergent middle classes were producing 'new social types' such as the opportunistic politician and the university student who were able to use any means to achieve upward social mobility. These 'new social types' were descendents from the first wave of immigrants or from traditional rural families (García 2004).

school movement changed in early 1900s when the Workers General Union demanded the rise of the educational budget to tackle high rates of illiteracy (Filmus 1999, Puiggrós 1996, 2003).

In the second period, the Welfare State³¹ (1940-1973)³², the relationships between the field of secondary education and the labour market/economy changed. Education was defined as the central element of the economic and social development of the country. The basic features of the Welfare State were: i) the increased economic role of the state and the parallel growth of the state apparatus in areas such as services and production; and ii) the support of a social alliance made up of different groups benefited by the industrialization process (that included national industrial bourgeoisie and/or the working class). According to Filmus, it is possible to distinguish two main moments within this period: the Welfare Peronist³³ State (1945-1955) and the Developing State (*Estado desarrollista*) (1955–1973).

The Welfare Peronist state was grounded on a socio-economic alliance of the national bourgeoisie with the working class. It followed a policy of wealth redistribution to the poorest social groups of society and built up a dense institutional network to protect workers and the most vulnerable groups against different kinds of social risks such as illness, lack of housing and arbitrary employers. The Developing State (*Estado desarrollista*) was shaped by the interests of an alliance of social groups of foreign investors, producers of commodities and professional groups, who denied the political participation of

³¹ Different theoretical perspectives labelled this state in different ways, for example Populist State, Social State, etc. (Filmus 1999).

³² From the mid 1960s until the early 1980s, successive democratic and military governments were in office.

³³ Perón was the charismatic leader of this social and political movement.

the majority of the population by imposing a restricted democracy. This State maintained an interventionist role in the economy, in the context of declining economic growth, whilst withdrawing any social intervention (Torrado 2004).

Following Torrado (2004), the period 1945-72 (despite differences among sub-periods) was characterised by massive internal migrations from rural areas to the cities (with the parallel creation of urban employment); the expansion of enrolment numbers at all educational levels; the gradual devaluation of educational credentials (whether through the diminution of the income obtainable with a particular type of educational level or an increase in the educational level required to fill a particular post); and the centrality of education as means of upward mobility.

In the Welfare period, the substitutive industrialisation process triggered the diversification of the occupational structure which in turn demanded higher levels of education and work discipline, that only state education instilled (Puiggrós 2003, Mollis 1991). For instance, from 1945 to 1955, Peronist governments created different types of schools such as the industry school (*escuela fábrica*), workers' training schools (*escuela de capacitación obrera*), female professional training schools (*escuelas de capacitación profesional para mujeres*), and technical schools (*escuelas técnicas*)³⁴ (Wiñar 1979; Pineau 2004; Gallart 2002). These schools provided terminal education in crafts for young people and workers formerly excluded from the education system, without radically altering its original structure (Puiggrós 2003; Pineau 2004). The Developing State radically changed the centrality of state schooling in the distribution of knowledge. This process was reflected in the perceived decline of

³⁴ These replaced the craft schools (*escuelas de artes y oficios*) (Gallart 2002).

educational quality delivered by state schools, triggered by the steady growth of educational demand by the working and middle classes, the increase in enrolment across all levels of education and the lack of sufficient funding. Furthermore, the Developing State unified industrial and technical schools³⁵ (all their graduates could continue university studies); upgraded teacher training to tertiary education; and transformed *escuelas normales* (former teacher training institutes) into *bachilleres* that allowed continuing studies at the university.

Prior to the mid 1950s, national government and national state schools were the key institutional players in the secondary education field. During the Welfare State period, the numbers of students enrolled in the state sector had steadily increased. Its highest peaks of growth were in 1945 (due mainly to the creation of technical schools); in the period 1952/1955 coincident with the consolidation of the Peronist government; and during the 1960s with the Developing State (see Appendix 2, Table 1) (Gallart 2002; Riquelme 2005). During the period 1955-1965, however, the number of students enrolled in private schools tripled due to: i) changes in regulatory frameworks that authorised the creation of new private schools, and ii) the exit of fractions of the middle classes who perceived a decline in the educational quality of state schooling (Morduchowicz *et al.* 1999, Riquelme 2005) (see Appendix 2, Table 3).

The third period, the crisis of the Welfare state (1974-1983), also illustrates the changing relationships between the secondary schooling field and the economy and political fields. During the 1970s, there were clear signs of the exhaustion of the Welfare State, both at international and local levels. The redistributive policies found their limits in the continuing fiscal crises and in the rise of oil

³⁵ Its curriculum persisted until the early 1990s (Gallart 2002).

prices. In Argentina, the crisis of the Welfare State reached its peak in 1975 and featured high levels of inflation and economic recession that inaugurated a long term period of lack of investment, stagnation and de-industrialization (Filmus 1999). Different types of government (military and democratic) attempted to deal with the crisis.

During this period, according to Torrado (2004), the rate of growth of urban employment was slower than before, decreasing the previously high rates of social mobility. Moreover, while the expansion of the middle classes was concentrated in its autonomous groups (that were made up of members of the former working class and middle class groups who lost their previous salaried condition), the salaried middle class increased much less than before in a context where the devaluation of educational credentials worsened. Finally, the marginal stratum was the one that grew the most, which was made up of members of the former working classes who lost their previous occupations due to the process of de-industrialisation.³⁶

As in the UK at that time, in Argentina education was the target of harsh criticism. Unlike the UK, however, successive Argentinean governments explicitly emphasised the political rather than the economic role of education (Filmus 1999; Puiggrós 2003). According to Filmus, it is possible to identify three main sub-periods in which the goals and explicit stakes of education differed (1973-75, 1976-1983, and 1983-1989).

During the first sub-period (1973-1976), the left wing within Peronism defined the role of education as the promotion of social liberation (Puiggrós 2003).

³⁶ The marginal stratum includes non skilled salaried manual workers, non skilled self-employed, and domestic workers (Torrado 2004).

Educational expansion was interpreted as a means for promoting economic redistribution and building a consensus around the national programme of the Peronist government (Filmus 1999).³⁷ In the second sub-period (1976-1983), education was defined as a key tool with which to build the social order (Filmus 1999; Tedesco 1983; Tiramonti 1985). The military government wanted to re-establish the social and moral order and modernize the economy through economic liberalization and State restructuring.³⁸ According to Filmus (1999), the central state imposed strict regulatory mechanisms on practices and interactions between social actors at bureaucratic and school level and enforced differential repressive powers within institutions. For instance, the central state imposed strict controls over students' bodies and practices by strictly regulating students' clothes, hair style, and ways of addressing adults and authorities (Tedesco 1983). In the final sub-period (1983-1989), education was seen as key for democratizing Argentinean society and promoting participation (Filmus 1999). The return of democracy was insufficient, however, to solve the serious and terminal crisis of the Welfare State. The period culminated in high levels of inflation, increased social polarization and a decrease in economic activity (Minujin 1992). Braslavsky and Tiramonti (1990) identify key aspects of the educational policy of this period such as the legitimacy of the existence of student unions at secondary and university level and the elimination of exams to enter secondary schools and open access to universities. However, Filmus (1999) asserts that this government was unable to transform what schools should teach and to recognise the decline of the quality of education and the signs that pointed

³⁷ This policy affected adult education, agricultural education, and national universities and contained important pedagogic reforms.

³⁸ These transformations implied a decline in the centrality of industry in terms of employment, which, since then, has been concentrated in the commercial and service sectors (Gallart 2002).

towards the existence of segments of schools with unequal human and material resources for different socio-economic groups (Braslavsky and Krawczyk 1988, Krawczyk 1989).

In terms of size and growth of the secondary education field during the crisis of the Welfare State, there was a fall in the rhythm of expansion of students' enrolments up to 1980 and, after the return of democracy, an increase in all levels of education (Riquelme 2005). Regarding the modalities of secondary schooling, before the return of democracy, all of them significantly slowed down their growth. However, the industrial modality was the most affected: from a record growth of 17.8% in the period 1970/75 to a negative rate of variation in 1975-1980 (see Appendix 2, Table 2). After the return of democracy, enrolments in all modalities rose: *bachilleres* increased 7.9%; commercial schools 6.0%; and industrial schools 3.7% (see Appendix 2, Table 2).

Now I turn my attention to the Post-Social state period where the relationship between the fields of secondary education, politics and economy were again dramatically altered.

Secondary schooling and social fragmentation (1980s onwards)

By the end of the 1980s the crisis of the Welfare state was terminal. The state was seen as unable to satisfy the needs of the poorest sectors, to control the demands of corporations and social groups or to maintain full employment and to efficiently manage its enterprises (Filmus 1999, Isuani *et al.* 1990).³⁹ The deepening of the Argentinean Welfare state crisis unfolded within a global scenario, which threatened individual states' decision making abilities over their

³⁹ This crisis has its parallel in other Latin American states and in Europe and the USA (Portes and Hoffman 2003; Henales 2000).

economies and territories.⁴⁰ This transformation has been substantial with different authors using various terms such as “post social” and “neoliberal” to describe this type of state (Feldfeber 1997, Henales 2000, Tiramonti 2001b). It has been characterized by the abandonment of the state’s interventionist role in the economy, the transference of the organisation of economic development to the market, and the modernization of state administration through reduction of its employees and the decentralization of many of its functions (Filmus 1999).

Numerous researchers have attempted to explain the rationale behind the Argentinean educational reforms of the 1990s as well as their educational and social impact on different aspects of the education systems at national, local and school level.⁴¹ Among them, particular writers argue that the educational transformation mirrored the neoliberal restructuring reforms of the state and the economy that were undertaken at that time by the government in office. In this view, the reforms implied the narrowing of the role and responsibilities of the state and the concomitant greater privatisation of the education system (Vázquez and Balduzzi 2001, Feldfeber 1997). Other researchers have argued that the reforms should be thought of as complex phenomena that, rather than mechanically reflecting the nature of the economic and state reforms of their time, operated as intervening variables that reinforced or resisted wider trends such as the process of greater social polarisation, new governance of the education system, fragmentation of educational provision, and, finally, the

⁴⁰ This process of economic globalization has promoted high levels of economic and financial interdependency around the world lead by transnational corporations and non governmental organizations (Cohen and Kennedy 2000).

⁴¹ This transformation has been associated with the comprehensive reforms that took place in Europe during the 1980s (Tiramonti and Suasnabar 2001), which increased the years of compulsory education; linked education with economic needs and the development of a high skilled workforce; and stimulated the demand for access to the following level of education.

growing diversity of social actors, management styles and identities present in the system (Feijoó 2003, Tiramonti 2001b).

Two pieces of legislation reshaped the Argentinean educational system in the early 1990s: the Educational Transfer Law (*Ley de Transferencia Educativa*) (Senado y Cámara de Diputados de la Nación Argentina 1992) and the Federal Law of Education (*Ley de Educación Federal*) in 1993 (Senado y Cámara de Diputados de la Nación Argentina 1993). Both laws radically altered its governance, structure, funding, the nature of the curriculum delivered and the structures of accountability (Decibe 2001, Filmus 1999, Tedesco and Tenti Fanfani 2001, Tiramonti 2001a, 2001b). In line with broader global developments and recommendations of the international and regional organisations (such as the World Bank, UNESCO, OECD), these educational policies were developed under the umbrella of greater decentralisation, school autonomy and accountability (Decibe 2001, Reimers 2000a, Tiramonti 2001a).

The Educational Transfer Law devolved former national state primary, secondary and tertiary education institutions to provincial authorities. In other words, individual provinces (including the City of Buenos Aires) became key (although unequal) players within the educational field and had to directly fund, manage, staff and supervise state education at pre-school, primary and secondary levels. The Federal Law of Education established the respective administrative, financial and pedagogic responsibilities of the national and provincial governments.⁴² Moreover, it established that the National Ministry of Education

⁴² The law ratified the Federal Council on Culture and Education (*Consejo Federal de Cultura y Educación*) as the institutional mechanism within which to negotiate educational policies and established the Educational Federal Pact (*Pacto Federal Educativo*) as the mechanism for negotiating financial rights and responsibilities between the national and provincial states (Gorostiaga, et al. 2003; Tiramonti 1998).

was required to monitor the educational system by producing and evaluating data about educational quality and by giving financial and technical support to compensate for inequalities among regions or social groups (López 2002). This new model implied a “stronger centre with few (but strategic) responsibilities” (Gorostiaga *et al.* 2003: 4, my translation).

The Federal Law of Education also changed the structure of the educational system and raised the number of years of compulsory schooling. The new structure replaced the traditional system of three levels of education, which included three years of non compulsory nursery, seven years of compulsory primary, and five years of non compulsory secondary.⁴³ The extension of compulsory education meant ten years of compulsory schooling (including one year of nursery, seven years at the former primary level and two years at the former secondary level). According to Tenti Fanfani (2002), the raising of the school leaving age transformed the social role of secondary schooling into citizenship education (universal and non selective education oriented to every citizen) and eliminated its traditional role as a mechanism that promotes cultural distinction and contributed to effective upward social mobility. In other words, contemporary secondary schooling operates like the old primary school of the foundational period of the modern state.

The new educational law updated the curriculum content of the General Basic Education level, through the establishment of *Contenidos Básicos Comunes* (Common Basic Content). This involved the identification of the common curricula content that should be applied in all the provinces and schools.

⁴³ Currently and as consequence of this law, the new system is divided into nursery (from 3 - 5 years old), General Basic Education (from 4 - 14 years old) and Polimodal (multiple modalities) (from 15 - 17 years old).

Jurisdictions and schools have relatively high degrees of autonomy in redefining their curriculum based on their own particularities.

Regarding the nature of the governance of the national education system, Narodowski (2001) asserts that the educational transformation of the 1990s has continued a process started during the 1950s/1960s and has increased the private sector's powers and coverage. As seen above, prior to this, the state education system was highly centralised and monopolist. In this sense, the reforms of the 1990s have not changed the dual nature (public versus private) of the system, due to the incomplete character of the decentralisation processes. These processes, rather than increasing state schools' autonomy, have only involved a *provincialización*, that is, higher levels of autonomy at a provincial level without reaching schools (despite the pro autonomy rhetoric of the Education Federal Law). This process transformed provinces into formal key players and regulators of their own education systems. Nevertheless, due to political, technical and economic weaknesses of many provinces, the central government was able to impose on many of them its educational programmes at regional and school level (Tiramonti 1998). This move towards a greater centralisation, however, has shown its limits. During the 2000s, there has been evidence pointing at the inability of national government to shape and control the curriculum delivered across provinces and within them. In 2006, for instance, there were 54 different types or modalities of secondary schooling in the country (Rivas 2006). Different factors seem to explain this curricular fragmentation such as the variable ability of the central state to intervene in provinces' educational policies; the uneven technical expertise available at provincial level; the high variability of per capita

funding among provinces; and the relatively low salaries of teachers (CIPPEC 2004, Rivas 2006).

Provinces have followed different rhythms and methods when implementing aspects of these reforms (Galarza and Gonzalez 2000, Golzman and Jacinto 1999, Hirschberg 2002). After a decade of reforms, the majority of provinces have implemented the General Basic Education. Some have partially introduced the reform and only a few have not done so at all, such as the City of Buenos Aires, Neuquén and Río Negro. The enforcement of the new structure of the education system and, in particular, the General Basic Education was accompanied by profound institutional transformations at school level and high levels of differentiation of the education system among and within provinces (Rivas 2003). Evidence points to the fragmentation of the state education system where different groups of institutions seem to follow particular institutional profiles and recruit specific socio-economic groups who have radically different educational experience and who interpret schooling, its objectives and function in society in different ways (CIPPEC 2004, Kessler 2002, Tiramonti 2004b).

Numerous researchers have criticised the implementation of the Federal Law for its negative impacts on educational quality and equality (CIPPEC 2004, Golzman and Jacinto 1999, Minteguiaga 2000, Pitton 1997).⁴⁴ Educational transformation has promoted the effective inclusion of high numbers of young people from families of poor socio-economic background into secondary schools (López 2002, Riquelme 2005). For instance, during the 1990s, there has been a steady

⁴⁴ At the time of writing, the Congress passed a new National Education Law which will replace the Federal Law of Education. The new law will impose the traditional structure of primary and secondary education onto provinces (Serra 2006).

growth of the net schooling ratio⁴⁵ at the secondary level of education in the majority of the cities⁴⁶ (especially after 1998) (López 2002, Riquelme 2005). However, high levels of educational failure⁴⁷ at secondary level among low socio-economic groups have persisted (Riquelme 2005).

This educational fragmentation has been enmeshed in a context characterised by profound changes in the Argentinean socio-economic structure where a new and previously unknown phase of rising inequality started in 1992 and did not stop increasing until 2002 (Feijoó 2001, 2002, Lozano 2002, Svampa 2000c).⁴⁸ The restructuring of the economy started during the middle of the 1970s but accelerated in the mid-late 1990s. Growing levels of unemployment, sub-employment, and a precarious labour market were signs of a time when macro-economic stability and increasing economic activity operated alongside a reduction in jobs (both in the industrial and state sector), decreasing incomes and a deepening of inequalities between occupations and within them (López and Romeo 2005, Svampa 2005, Torrado 2003) (see Appendix 3, Graph 1). According to Svampa (2005), this restructuring fractured the middle classes into two main groups: the “winners” and the “losers”. The former have gained from the structural reforms of the economy while the latter have been impoverished due to high inflation of prices with stagnation of salaries, unemployment, sub-employment, and informal and/or precarious jobs for their family workforce

⁴⁵ The net schooling ratio reflects the proportion of the population of a certain age group that attend a particular level of education.

⁴⁶ The only exception has been the City of Buenos Aires (see López 2002)

⁴⁷ Educational failure refers to repetition and drop out. In secondary schooling, a school year must be repeated by students who do not pass a certain number of modules.

⁴⁸ In the Greater Buenos Aires, for instance, the rate of unemployment rose from 4.9% in October 1985 to 19% in October 2001 (López and Romeo 2005). The ‘poverty gap’ (*brecha de pobreza*) rose from 12.8% to 28.5% in the same period. The Greater Buenos Aires is made up of the City of Buenos Aires and 24 *partidos* or municipalities of the province of Buenos Aires (see Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos, 2005b).

(Kessler 2000, 2003, Lvovich 2000, Minujin and Anguita 2004, Svampa 2000a, 2000b, 2005). While the “winners” have been included in modern and globalised sectors of the economy and configure a highly skilled workforce; the “losers” have been:

employees and professionals of the public sector (...) who have been impoverished due to the reforms deployed by the neoliberal state in health, education and public companies. Self employed workers and shop keepers are in a similar situation due to their disconnection from the new communicational and informational structures that the global order favours (Svampa 2005: 35, my translation)

The social positions of the traditional working classes have also been shattered (Feijoó 2001, Svampa 2005). The transformations of the labour market since the 1970s (due to processes of systematic destruction of national industries, growing numbers of unprotected workers and worsening of general working conditions) have reconfigured the working classes into an heterogeneous myriad of social groups with different types and degrees of participation in the labour market and degrees of social inclusion (Feijoó 2001, Svampa 2005).

This new fragmented social scenario has unequally impacted on schools, teachers’ working conditions, and students’ conditions of learning due to increasing levels of teachers’ and students’ poverty (Aguerrondo 1993, Dirección de Información y Estadística 2000, Duschatzky and Corea 2002, Gobierno de la Provincia de Buenos Aires (GPBA) Dirección de Información y Estadística 2000). Several writers have documented how conditions of extreme poverty, structural unemployment, deficient diets, violence (in the family and/or in the streets) and children and young people’s need to undertake paid work have hampered and reshaped the nature of schooling in some primary and secondary

institutions working with low-socio economic groups (Feijoó and Corbetta 2004).

After mapping the historical relationships between the national secondary education field and the social structure, it is time to examine the particularities of the contemporary education system of the City of Buenos Aires.

The game of secondary schooling in the City of Buenos Aires: Its players and rules

In the City, the Federal Law of Education of 1993 has not been implemented. This is one of the few jurisdictions where the new education law has been fiercely rejected (Narodowski *et al.* 2002).⁴⁹ Since 1994, the City's high degree of financial autonomy from central government, together with the continuous political animosity of its local government (mainly supported by fractions of the middle classes) against the national administration, has helped to explain the effectiveness of its resistance to the implementation of the Federal Law of Education. However, this has not meant that the local education system has remained inert or has been unmoved by the national educational policies of the 1990s. For instance, the Educational Transfer Law in 1993 effectively ended a longer historical process of devolution of schools from the national to the local government. Moreover, the curriculum of several modules has been modified by the local government through the introduction from 2003 of a more prescriptive curriculum to be gradually used in certain modules; and by groups of teachers

⁴⁹ Only one study has focused on the nature of the educational system of the City during the 1990s. See Llinás 2004.

who, in their schools, have introduced marginal or more fundamental changes to what they teach in order to address national curriculum changes.⁵⁰

The City has historically been one of the richest jurisdictions of the country (Llinás 2004). In 2001⁵¹, for example, it had the highest gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (Llinás 2004), and the lowest level of poverty⁵² in the country (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos 2001, 2005a). It has had both the highest rate of GDP growth (1993-2000) and one of the higher growing rates of poverty (measured by income) and extreme poverty during the last socio-economic crisis (2001-2002) (Llinás 2004). In terms of unemployment, although the City has been affected by the profound economic crisis, its position is better compared to the rest of the provinces and the national means (Llinás 2004). In demographic terms, however, during the period 1991-2001, this jurisdiction was the only one whose population decreased 6.6% (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos 2001).

In educational terms, in 2004, the City of Buenos Aires had one of the largest state and private educational systems⁵³, which was made up of 549,748 students at elementary, primary and secondary levels (47 % in the state sector) (Secretaría de Educación del Gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires (SEGCBA) 2005a) (see Appendix 2, Table 5). State and private secondary education comprised 192,192 students (53 % in the state system) (SEGCBA 2005a). The ratio between

⁵⁰ One particular relevant influence for this informal and uneven transformation of the curriculum has been the resource-books used by teachers. According to many teachers who I interviewed in 2004, publishing companies adopted the changes demanded by the Federal Law of Education more quickly than the government of the City or any other key player in its secondary education field.

⁵¹ When available, I include data for the 2004 year of my field study. Otherwise, I present data of the closest year available.

⁵² Measured by the index of Unsatisfied Basic Needs and income levels.

⁵³ They have their own administrative and pedagogic directions and accountability mechanisms and they work as separate worlds (Llinás 2004).

numbers of students per school was much higher for the state sector than the private sector (722 students per school in the former and 241 in the latter). In terms of the curriculum, state secondary schools had a *Ciclo Básico Común* (Common Basic Cycle) of three years that established a common framework of modules across secondary schools during the first three school years.⁵⁴

Regarding the kind of institutional players (schools) of the state local system, secondary schools had different modalities or specialities according to the curriculum they delivered in the last two school years: *comerciales* (commercial); *técnicas* (technical); *bachilleres* (humanistic); and, *artísticas* (arts). There were six different types of secondary schools that offer *bachiller* and/or commercial degrees: *Liceo*, *Colegio*, *Escuela de Comercio*, *Escuelas Municipales de Educación Media* (EMEM), and *Escuela Normal*⁵⁵. The type of school *Escuela Industrial* offered technical education. A minority of them were specialist language schools and they had entrance examinations.⁵⁶ They, together with two state university secondary schools, were the only selective or quasi-selective schools of the state system. These schools were distinctive institutional players within the local system due to their good reputation, the nature of their socio-economic intake, the training of their teachers, and better material resources. There is a lack of statistical data about students' socio-economic background at school level. According to my research informants, the intake of these schools was mainly made up of fractions of the middle classes and, in the case of the most prestigious schools, also upper middle classes and a minority

⁵⁴ In the two schools featured in my research, this presupposed common framework appeared in a loose way and varied considerably across departments, modules and teachers.

⁵⁵ The *Escuela Normal* depends on a different administrative body than the rest of the local state secondary schools.

⁵⁶ At the time of the fieldwork, there were four *Normal* schools with language specialist status.

from the upper classes. Informants also reported that several schools (such as the EMEM) concentrated high proportions of students from socially and culturally deprived families in different school districts of the City.

Following Bourdieu (1998; 1993; 2002), I argue that there are some central rules of the local field of secondary education (such as school funding; regulation of evaluation of students' performance and regulation of their behaviour) that shape central aspects of schools', teachers' and students' learning conditions. For instance, in terms of funding, local government pay for salaries, major building maintenance and administrative costs of the schools. Schools only manage a small budget devolved by the City (that varies according to their size or number of students – small, medium or large -) through their *cooperadoras* (parents' association), that also collects their own funding through mainly non compulsory parents' contributions. There are few studies about the role of *cooperadoras* in secondary schools (Instituto Internacional de Planeamiento de la Educación 2002). In the schools featured in this study, there were significant differences between their *cooperadoras* in terms of levels of parents' involvement and the amount of economic and material resources they invested in the schools.⁵⁷

Regarding working conditions, the *Estatuto del Docente* (Teachers' Statute) (Municipalidad de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires 1985) and various modifications (see for instance Gobierno de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires 2001a, Gobierno de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires 2004) regulated teachers' recruitment, payment and working conditions. Individual schools and their head teachers could not recruit their teachers and they had no instruments with which

⁵⁷ High Mountain school had a richer and more active *cooperadora* than Low Hill. For instance, at different moments in the school year, High Mountain *cooperadora* paid for repainting the ground floor of the historic building; and bought desks and chairs. In the case of Low Hill's, the *cooperadora* was described by teachers as "almost non-existent".

to make teachers' work, pedagogy and ways of interacting with students accountable. In terms of curriculum, for instance, a 'secret garden' similar to that of the UK before the implementation of the National Curriculum (McCulloch 2000) operated in schools in a variable number of modules.⁵⁸ In the schools featured in this study, there were some groups of teachers working on the selection and updating of common curricular contents and ways of assessment. Other teachers worked alone, followed old programmes and did not interact with colleagues to discuss pedagogic and/or curricular issues.

Regarding the available mechanisms for regulating student behaviour, secondary schools have to configure their *Consejo Escolar de Convivencia* (Legislatura de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires 1999). The *Consejo* included representatives of teachers, pedagogic consultants/psychologists, pastoral assistants, students, students' union when the school had one, and representatives of parents or legal guardians. According to Law 223 (Legislatura de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires 1999: 1, my translation); the *Consejo* had to:

promote the democratic participation of all sectors of the educational community, according to their competence and responsibility, in the elaboration of and respect for the norms that regulate living together aiming at an harmonic working atmosphere for the pedagogic task.

The *Consejo* was responsible for the production of norms and sanctions and participated in the administration of punishments in cases of serious misbehaviour. According to teachers and pastoral assistants whom I interviewed, the implementation of the *Consejo* had taken away from them the ability to directly sanction students for serious misbehaviours. My research, like previous

⁵⁸ This has recently changed for the first and second school years in a few modules. The local government designed the curriculum for those years to be gradually implemented in schools. There are no studies about what has happened in schools following the implementation of this common curriculum.

studies, has identified the lack of legitimacy of Consejos; their incapacity to promote democratic understanding among head teachers, teachers and students and their inability to promptly deal with misbehaviour (Kessler 2002). Moreover, in the schools in my study, students in the third school year knew neither how the Consejo worked, nor what its goals and decisions were.

Finally, since the return of democracy, the methods of assessing students had changed (Consejo Nacional de Educación Técnica 1992, Dirección de Educación Media 1992, Dirección del Area de Educación Media y Técnica 1998, Dirección General de Educación Superior 2004, Ministerio de Cultura y Educación 1992, SEGCBA 2000). For instance, in 2004, students' performance had to be assessed per trimester. Students passed each module only if they had a minimum yearly average mark of six out of 10.⁵⁹ If they did not, they were required to sit exams for one, two or all of the trimesters of a module. The school year had two periods of two weeks each (in December and February) when students could attend non compulsory tutorial classes for the modules which they had failed. There were two periods of examinations: December and March. Teachers at the two schools in my study argued that this method of assessing had fragmented knowledge and its evaluation in such a way that has promoted students' instrumental perspectives about learning and achievement.

In terms of the size and coverage of the City education system, in 2001 it had one of the highest schooling net ratios (*tasas de escolaridad neta*) at the primary level and the highest at secondary level in comparison to other provinces (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos 2001). Regarding student performance (measured by rates of inter-annual promotion, repetition, drop out,

⁵⁹ In the last trimester, students have to have a minimum mark of six.

*sobre-edad*⁶⁰, and graduation), the City is also one of the best positioned in the country (Llinás 2004). It has almost always obtained the best results in educational performance tests carried out by the National Ministry of Education at primary and secondary levels since 1993 (Llinás 2004). The City's expenditure on education represented around 30% of its total budget (1991-2000) and per pupil expenditure in the state sector was among the three highest in the country (Llinás 2004).

Despite this generally favourable situation, the City is a jurisdiction featuring high levels of social inequalities and polarisation that are reflected in its socio-spatial organisation (INDEC 2005a, Fiszbein 1999). The divide between the north and the south of the City in terms of living conditions is not new (Prévôt Schapira 2002). As early as 1917, it was already being described in this way (Clarín 2000). These historical socio-territorial inequalities have been reshaped and deepened at particular historical times where economic restructuring in the City (such as processes of de-industrialization in the 1970s and 1980s and regeneration urban programmes of the 1990s) has impacted on its urban organisation and landscape (Gutman and Hardoy 1992, Prévôt Schapira 2002). In particular, since the early 1990s, economic liberalisation and flexibilisation together with structural adjustment reforms have promoted a notable renaissance of the real estate market (Prévôt Schapira 2002). According to Torres (2001), this boom was accompanied by growing residential dualisation. Other authors, like Prévôt Schapira (Prévôt Schapira 2002), argue that the City is more heterogeneous than in the past and that spatial distribution of poverty cannot be understood anymore in terms of clear cut enclaves, but more in terms of a

⁶⁰ *Sobre-edad* refers to those students who are older than the theoretical age group that should attend each school year.

phenomenon that emerges across neighbourhoods. In this complex urban scenario, between the 1991 and 2001 population censuses, *villas miserias*⁶¹ appeared repopulated and squats considerably increased in numbers. Moreover, the “new poor” (those who were poor in terms of their income but not in terms of their housing and living conditions and who in general are associated with sections of the middle class⁶²) challenged clear spatial and social differentiation by their (sometimes impossible) efforts to continue living in traditional middle class neighbourhoods. One indicator of the unequal housing and socio-economic conditions within the City is the levels of structural poverty⁶³ between the 21 school districts. In 2001, poverty levels ranged from less than 3% in the four wealthiest districts in the northwest of the City and around 20% in the three poorest ones situated in the southeast (INDEC 2005a) (see Appendix 4).

These socio-economic inequalities are reflected in the state education system in, for instance, the significant educational inequalities existent between and within school districts in terms of percentages of repetition and *sobre-edad* (see Appendix 2, Table 6). For instance, while the average rate of repetition of students enrolled at state secondary schools⁶⁴ was 15.6% in 2004, this indicator reached a maximum of 22.5% in district No. 19 (one of the poorest school districts of the City with 17% of its population in poverty) and a minimum of 5% in district No. 11 (with 5.2% of its population in poverty, one of the lowest levels

⁶¹ *Villas miserias* or slums appeared in the city in the 1940s and were ‘deported’ to the periphery during the last dictatorship (Prévôt Schapira 2002).

⁶² Since the late 1980s, a growing body of research has looked at the “new poor” in Argentina. See for instance Minujín and Kessler 1999.

⁶³ Measured by the index of ‘unsatisfied basic needs’.

⁶⁴ These statistics only consider schools that are under the control of the Department of the Middle and Technical education in the City. There is another Department that also runs schools that deliver secondary schooling (General Department of Superior Education).

of structural poverty) (SEGCBA 2005b).⁶⁵ Moreover, evidence of high inequalities between secondary schools is also apparent. For instance, in 2004, there were secondary schools with average levels of repetition higher than 20% that were located in school districts with high, low and medium levels of structural poverty (see Appendix 3). Although there is not much available data on the socio-economic composition of schools (Cervini 2002, Cervini 2005) (see Chapter One), statistics like the ones presented here seem to point to a heterogeneous scenario without offering enough information to assert the existence of a fragmented local system with clear cut circuits of schools that offered unequal educational opportunities. As seen in Chapter One, qualitative studies have pointed towards the existence of 'fragments' or groups of institutions with differential socio-economic intakes, institutional profiles and aspirations (Kessler 2002, Tiramonti 2004c).

In this heterogeneous socio-economic scenario, educational and social inclusion have been key priorities for the City Government. Before the transference of schools to the City and its transformation into an autonomous jurisdiction, the local government created a new type of municipal secondary school (EMEM) targeted at poor and excluded populations and featuring unique institutional mechanisms that attempted to address high levels of social and educational exclusion (Más Rocha 2005).

From the second half of the 1990s, the successive governments of the City of Buenos Aires have implemented numerous policies to increase educational

⁶⁵ There is not a perfect correlation between socio-economic conditions of the school district and repetition rates in state secondary schools (SEGBA 2005). This could be explained by different factors such as differential pedagogic models in schools, different socio-economic compositions of the state schools (there are no available data of students socio-economic levels at school level), or a combination of both (see Appendix 3).

inclusion at both primary and secondary education through different initiatives at regional and school level. In the case of secondary schooling, for example, the City has distributed bursaries to students from households with low incomes or from precarious living conditions (Gobierno de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires 2001b);⁶⁶ introduced ad-hoc educational support twice during the school year; sponsored school pedagogic projects that promoted first and second school year students' inclusion in the school; funded food distribution in those schools with relatively high levels of population from low socio-economic families; and financed the maintenance or construction of classrooms, laboratories or libraries in schools (Llinás 2004). Another example is *Zonas de Acción Prioritaria* (ZAP) (priority action zones) that involved different joined-up interventions from different social services such as health, education, and housing targeted at schools in deprived areas. In particular, at secondary level ZAP created the programs *Alumnas madres* (mother and students) that promoted the educational inclusion of teenage mothers and *Autoconstrucción Asistida* (assisted self-construction) that supported a group of students of a technical school constructing houses in its proximities. Moreover, the City has been the first jurisdiction to extend compulsory education until 18 years old in 2002, superseding the leaving age of 16 introduced by the Federal Law of Education of 1993. Finally, the legislative power of the City has also been recently proactive in the implementation of policies to foster equality of opportunities among girls and boys in state and private schools through the provincial Law No. 841 in 2000, which created the programme for ending gender stereotypes in school texts and didactic materials (*Programa para la eliminación de estereotipos de género*

⁶⁶ In 2001, the City distributed 7,000 bursaries and in 2003, 24,000 (Llinás 2004).

en textos escolares y materiales didácticos). Despite the variety of such programmes, only a small amount of research has tried to assess the nature, scope and impact on schools, teachers and students involved (Dirección de Investigación 2005, Gluz 2005).

All these social and educational programmes demonstrate a profound transformation of the local education system (Tiramonti 1998). Like the central state, the local government has implemented a collection of compensatory programmes targeted at vulnerable, ‘at risk’, and poor groups of schools, families and students. In the case of education, several writers have interpreted this “focalisation”⁶⁷ as a mechanism by which social inequalities have been redefined as deficiencies and lacks and not as “cultural configurations that demand a particular educational provision” (Tiramonti 1998: 109, my translation) and addressed their specificities. “Focalisation” evidences the definitive transformation of the Argentinean and local secondary education systems. Before, as described above, secondary schooling was based on a principle of universalism and homogeneity by which schools were conceived as homogeneous institutions with similar organisations and pedagogic methodologies that dealt with a diverse social and cultural population. “Focalisation”, together with signs of social fragmentation along geographical lines and many different types of schools ends the myth of state secondary schooling as an open and egalitarian arena where social groups mix and strive according to their talents and merits.

⁶⁷ Much literature analyses the phenomenon of “focalisation” of social policy (Oficina Internacional del Trabajo 2006). A few studies have looked at ‘focalisation’ in education (Duschatzky and Redondo 2000, Gluz 2005, Southwell 2002, Barreyro 2000, Duschatzky 2000, Más Rocha 2006).

Conclusions

This chapter has presented the national and local socio-educational contexts in which my main research interests and questions about social inequalities and schooling were rooted and where the two state secondary schools featured in this study were based. It has provided an historical overview of the national and local educational structure in Argentina since 1880 and the more recent fragmentation of its social and educational provision, which has been rooted in wider socio-economic and political processes.

In the first section, I have argued that up to the 1970s the expansion of the free state education system accompanied processes of economic growth and the development and internal differentiation of the middle classes. I also stated that, despite differences across types of schools and modalities, by the 1960s, all state secondary schools allowed their graduates to continue to university studies. Up to the 1970s, the idea of secondary schooling as an open and meritocratic channel to get to university and achieve upward social mobility was hegemonic and part of an Argentinean collective “unconscious” (Gallart 2002: 18). I showed how a long term process of de-industrialisation (initiated in the 1970s but accelerated since the 1990s) not only slowed down the upward mobility of certain groups of the middle classes but also pushed down groups of the middle classes and working classes. In this context, the state education system reflected signs of fragmentation between private and state sector, provinces, regions, and social groups in a context of persistent decline of the quality of education delivered.

The second section of this chapter has focused on the City of Buenos Aires which, despite the new Federal Education Law, has retained the traditional structure of the Argentinean education system (with its elementary, primary and

secondary levels). Although the City has enjoyed a privileged socio-economic and educational position, it has also played host to profound social and economic inequalities reflected in its spatial organisation and in its education system along the lines of sectors (public and private), socio-geographic regions, and schools. I have argued that, during the last decade, successive local governments have tried to counterbalance growing levels of social and educational inequalities by the implementation of policies (at regional and school level) aimed at promoting social and educational inclusion. These demonstrate a profound fragmentation of the education system, its institutional players and students.

After mapping the key educational policies and features of the national and local education system, in the next chapter I present my methodology, my location in the field and the schools where the fieldwork took place.

Chapter Four: Methodology, methods, and context.

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented the national and local socio-educational fields in which the two schools featured in this study had to ‘play’ for reputation, resources and intakes. This chapter presents my reflections on how I carried out my research and about the relationships between the process and the result of the research. It situates myself in the research process making me ‘visible’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002, Skeggs 1997b, Smyth and Shacklock 1998). In this sense, it presents my multiple and, sometimes, contradictory locations and positions in the social space and the social fields configured by the schools which I studied. This chapter also opens up the different layers of the research process in order to make my research accountable and to assume my epistemic responsibility and authority (Atkinson 1990, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002, Skeggs 1997b).

The first section examines my motivations for doing research about social class and educational inequalities in Argentina, my research questions and my reasons for doing ethnography. Subsequently, I focus on my methodology and how it was deeply interlinked with my analytical framework. Moreover, this part uncovers the historically, culturally, socially, and institutionally located nature of knowledge. The second section analyses the key features of my fieldwork. Firstly, I uncover the criteria behind the selection of the two schools, High Mountain and Low Hill, and I portray some of their key features. Secondly, I examine access and the role that my multiple identities played in either facilitating or obstructing my relations with respondents. Here I pay attention to ethical considerations that were paramount during and after the fieldwork. In the fourth section, I look at the different methods used for gathering data: participant

observation, different types of interviews, surveys, and documentary analysis. Then I briefly examine the process of leaving the field. Finally, I reflect on the process of data analysis and of writing an ethnographic account and how my dual role of translator (as ethnographer and as a foreigner who is a non native English speaker) shaped my analysis and its representation.

Motivation and research questions

As seen in the previous chapter, from its foundation and through to the 1970s, the Argentinean state education system operated as a powerful channel for individual and collective upward social mobility. My family and I illustrate the collective history of economic growth, processes of social inclusion, expansion of educational opportunities and the high aspirations of wide sections of the Argentinean society already analysed in Chapter Three. I am a sociologist from the University of Buenos Aires carrying out postgraduate studies in this country, the daughter of lower middle class non-professional parents, and the granddaughter of European peasants who migrated to Argentina at the beginning of the twentieth century escaping poverty and social violence. Conversely, since the 1970s, despite the persistence of high social and educational aspirations across Argentinean society, there has been a profound change of the socio-economic structure that involved the downward social mobility of important fractions of the middle and working classes.⁶⁸ The current configuration of the education system shows signs of the existence of dissimilar types of education for diverse types of students. From being a synonym of individual and social

⁶⁸ This lack of fit between a field and the dispositions towards the field is called by Bourdieu 'the hysteresis effect' (see Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002). High educational aspirations were the result of a particular configuration of the secondary education field and its relations with the labour market. Since the 1970s, that fit between aspirations and occupational projects began to fall apart. Despite the changing objective conditions, people's subjective aspirations (born from a previous state of the field) tend to persist till new experiences force them to redefine them.

progress, education is signalled as a central mechanism that promotes social inequalities (see Chapter Three). This distance between the collective history of Argentina and its dramatic present, together with the lack of knowledge of what goes on in state secondary schools in the City of Buenos Aires urged me to ask questions about how secondary education operates today and how it is experienced by different groups of students.

As stated in the Introduction, my research aims to better understand the relationships between social class and educational inequalities in secondary schooling in the context of the socially and educationally fragmented education system of the City of Buenos Aires. In so doing, it addresses three interrelated questions. The first scrutinizes how schools deal with the pressures and demands of the local state education system and how they participate in the production or challenge the fragmented state education system. The second question explores how students from different social classes interact with the demands of state secondary schools. The final question investigates how students produce their class identities within schooling and how identities interact with their orientations towards education.

These research questions are the crystallisation of a long dynamic and dialectic process by which research questions have been refined and transformed. They have been shaped over time in permanent dialogue with my initial analytical framework and my own theoretical re-elaborations as outlined in Chapter Two. They have also been influenced by the nature of the fieldwork and my ways of producing the field (Atkinson 1990).

To answer these questions this study adopts an ethnographic approach and critically draws on Bourdieu's theory of social praxis and on sociological

theories of class identity making (see Chapter Two). The methodological and theoretical perspectives are deeply interconnected and have been developed and refined during the research process (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002, Skeggs 1997b). In the next sub-section, I examine the organic relationships between the research questions, ethnography and its epistemological underpinnings.

Epistemological underpinnings of my study: Ethnography and Bourdieu

Ethnography refers to the participation of the researcher, openly or secretly, in people's everyday lives for an extensive period of time, examining what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions and collecting whatever data are accessible to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). Ethnography offers a means for researching a cultural site, focusing on meanings produced by social actors within the context of their culture (Burgess 1993, Fielding 1993, Hammersley 1992, Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). It refers to the researcher entering, and partly defining, a spatially and temporally bounded "field" or "case" where they participate, observe, register and attempt to interpret what they see, hear and feel in the process (Burgess 1993, Hammersley and Atkinson 1995).

As discussed in Chapter One, during the last four decades many researchers in the UK have extensively explored the relationship between social class and education from a qualitative perspective and, in particular, have used ethnographic approaches (Ball 1981, Ball *et al.* 1994, Ball *et al.* 2000, Burgess 1983, Lacey 1970, Willis 1981). In the Argentinean context, I have identified only one ethnographic study on students' social class identity making within a secondary school (Maldonado 2000). My decision to use an ethnographic approach was based on two main reasons. Firstly, I argue that ethnography is a

particularly fruitful method for studying social practice from a Bourdieusian perspective.⁶⁹ Ethnography allows an unpacking of the dual nature of social reality and, in this way, recognises both the structural constraints on actions and individuals' agency, their abilities to be reflective and to challenge the conditions they are in. In studying the relationships between social class and schooling, ethnography was appropriate to examine the ways in which teachers and students participate in the social "games" configured by their schools and the field of secondary education in which they were immersed. Although my access was restricted to the margins of the school (see sub-section Sampling in this chapter), 'being there' and interacting with teachers and students allowed me to unfold some key features of: i) the field of secondary education in the City; ii) the "game" of schooling at individual schools; iii) the similarities and differences between students' "sense of the game" and their ability to deal with its educational and social demands; and, iv) the ways in which students produced their class identities within and through schooling and how their class identities and orientations towards education interplayed.

Secondly, ethnography has offered particular advantages such as the collection/production of a wide range of data on different aspects of the "game" of schooling and its players, positions, views and positioning (Hammersley 2006, Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). Ethnography also involved producing, comparing and contrasting data from interviews with authorities, teachers and students; from participant observations in the every day lives in the schools; data from the application of surveys; and from schools' documents and records

⁶⁹ Bourdieu has carried out ethnographic studies, which have been central to the development of his theoretical tools (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002, Jenkins 2006, Reed-Danahay 2005, Wacquant 2004).

(Burgess 1993, Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). In this way, an ethnographic approach provided a wide range of perspectives about the “game” of schooling; its different players; and their strategies and effectiveness in playing it.

Regarding the epistemological status of ethnography, it is important to notice that, during the last three decades, ethnography has been the target of strong criticisms and heated controversies that, particularly in the field of social anthropology, have been received as challenges with regard to its epistemological foundations and legitimacy (Atkinson 1990, Hammersley 1992, 2006). In particular, traditional ethnographers’ convictions that their descriptions were a-theoretical and offered an holistic and accurate portrayal of the phenomenon under study have come under attack both in social anthropology and sociology (Atkinson 1990, Denzin 2003, Foley 2002, Hammersley 1992). Moreover, feminist researchers have argued that mainstream qualitative research has been permeated by positivism in the ways in which: i) it proclaims value free research, and ii) it objectifies research subjects as passive sources of information that can be mined in order to extract ‘true’ knowledge. In these ways, qualitative researchers and ethnographers not only fail to take responsibility for their accounts and interpretations, but they also deny to cultural ‘others’ the self-consciousness so appreciated in the analyst (Letherby 2003, Maynard 1994, Skeggs 1997b). I acknowledge and endorse these criticisms.

In so doing, following Bourdieu’s theory of social practice, feminist critiques of naturalistic and positivistic qualitative research and some critical perspectives within the ethnographic tradition in sociology and anthropology, I interpret field work and field relations as always embedded in power relationships (Hammersley 1992, Jordan 2003, Kenway and McLeod 2004, Letherby 2003,

Oakley 1981). In this sense, firstly, I understand that researchers produce and construct their textual interpretations of the social world under study from a particular position within social space, the academic field and the particular field under research. Researchers' positions, social identities, capitals, and epistemological and theoretical frames contribute to, but also hamper questions, methods, access to organizations, interactions, interpretations and representations (Bourdieu 2000, Kenway and McLeod 2004, Skeggs 1997b). As Skeggs (1997b) argues:

Researchers are located and positioned in many different ways: history, nation, gender, sexuality, class, race, age, and so on. We are located in the economic, social and cultural relations which we study. These positions inform our access to institutional organizations such as education and employment (...) (18)

Numerous ethnographers have illustrated how differential social identities have shaped the nature and scope of their fieldwork whether by facilitating and/or impeding fieldwork relations and, in this way, making visible the fact that researchers and their interpretation are necessarily culturally and socially situated (Andersen 1999, Coffey 1999, Letherby 2003, Puwar 1997). However, few have made explicit how their positions in the academic field and their theoretical allegiances are also deeply entangled in the ways they interpret, produce and inscribe in written utterances what they have experienced, selected and decided to include in their accounts and interpretations (Bourdieu 2000, Kenway and McLeod 2004, Skeggs 1997b). Researchers' reflexivity about her/his own positionality demands a look at these different locations to understand how knowledge has been produced, from which perspectives (in a wide sense) and to

what extent what they have produced is a valid and plausible account of what is under study. As Skeggs' (1997b), Bourdieu's (1993a, 2002), and Hammersley's (1992, 2000) diverse, but in this case convergent, perspectives argue, whilst representations are not totally arbitrary and may unveil something about their producers, they also represent something about the "experiences to which they lay claim" (Skeggs 1997b: 21).

Previous chapters have unpacked my location as an academic in the Argentinean socio-educational field (Chapter One) and the analytical framework (Chapter Two) that have oriented my fieldwork, the formulation of my research questions and production of answers. Now, it is time to look at how I did this ethnographic study.

Doing ethnography: From sampling to writing up

In this section, I first analyse the criteria behind the selection of the research settings and briefly depict the schools High Mountain and Low Hill. Then, I focus my attention on doing ethnography and address issues of access, ethical considerations and data collection techniques used. I later consider how I left the field. Finally, I reflect on my role as writer and (dual) translator during and after fieldwork.

Sampling research settings

Sampling is a relevant issue at different moments in the research process: when collecting data (case sampling, sampling groups within the case), when analysing data (material sampling and selection within the material) and when presenting findings (presentational sampling) (Bryman 2001, Burgess 1993, Flick 2002, Silverman 2000).

Ethnographers usually select settings and cases on the basis of interesting problems and the careful consideration of advantages and disadvantages of alternative locales; or due to the opportunity to research a setting and/or on the feasibility of carrying out fieldwork (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). Sometimes ethnographers focus their attention on a single case or on a small number of cases (Flick 2002, Hammersley and Atkinson 1995).

In view of the demanding and time-consuming nature of ethnographic fieldwork, the available resources and research questions, I decided to conduct fieldwork in two state secondary schools and focus the observations on the third school year. In line with previous ethnographic research (Bryman 2001, Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, Silverman 2000), the process of sampling schools and groups of informants within each school, was guided by different requirements, reflecting both specific theoretical and pragmatic considerations that emerged before and during fieldwork.

Firstly, in line with Argentinean research that suggests that secondary schooling is fragmented in terms of the quality of delivered education and nature of human and material resources available (Duschatzky and Corea 2002, Kessler 2002, Tiramonti 1998, 2003a), I selected two schools with different educational reputations within the state system and diverse socio-economic intake. In terms of the schools' levels of educational failure (measured by the percentage of repetition within the school population), High Mountain had only 5% of students who were repitients⁷⁰ and Low Hill had 27% of students in that situation (High

⁷⁰ Repitient is an approximate translation of the Spanish word *repetidor/a*. Unless stated, it refers to those students who have repeated at least one school year in high school

Mountain 2004; Low Hill 2004).⁷¹ Regarding the schools' socio-economic composition, according to authorities, teachers and pastoral assistants, High Mountain's students were mainly middle class while Low Hill's population came from lower classes and poor or marginal families.⁷²

Secondly, the selected schools were located in a collection of buildings and shared offices, corridors, and classrooms.⁷³ This shared location offered a unique opportunity to observe how teachers and students from unequal schools viewed and defined each other.⁷⁴ Moreover, the granting of access to the schools together with the practical convenience of being located in the same block was also paramount in their selection.

Thirdly, as this study centres its attention on young people's experiences of secondary schooling, I decided to focus the observations, application of surveys and interviews on teachers and students of the third school year⁷⁵ because by then, students were likely to have developed well-defined strategies for negotiating the network of requests, expectations, and rules of secondary schooling (Levinson 2001). Within the third school year, I focused my attention

⁷¹ On the one hand, Low Hill's level of repetition was 50% higher than the average of all the *Liceos* in the City (18.5%); three times higher than that of the *Normales* (6.2%); and around double the average of its school district (12%) and the total of the City (12.9%) (Secretary of Education of the City of Buenos Aires 2004). On the other hand, High Mountain's level of repetition was almost half of the average of all the *Normales* (6.2%) and of that of its school district and the City (Secretary of Education of the City of Buenos Aires 2004). Levels of repetition remained stable during all the school years in High Mountain (below 10%) and notably decreased from the first to the last school year in Low Hill (from 42% in the first school year to 8.2% in the fourth school year) (High Mountain 2004; Low Hill 2004).

⁷² Neither the schools or the local government produced information about the socio-economic status of students and their families. The only available proxy indicator of families' living conditions was the percentage of students who received bursaries: 13% in High Mountain and 53% in Low Hill.

⁷³ From its creation up to late 1950s, Low Hill occupied another building in a different neighbourhood. From the 1960s onwards, it had occupied several wings and floors of High Mountain's buildings.

⁷⁴ Six teachers also worked in both schools.

⁷⁵ Secondary schools in the City of Buenos Aires have 5 school years equivalent to years 7-11 in England and Wales.

on three form classes in each school, which each had different reputations amongst teachers and pastoral assistants in terms of their overall academic achievement and perceived behavioural standards.

Finally, in order to further analyse the relationship between students' social positions and secondary schooling, I selected boys and girls according to their previous educational trajectory and social class.⁷⁶ Educational trajectory is defined by the presence or absence of experiences of educational failure at secondary schooling. Educational failure includes both experiences of repetition and of drop out. Students from different social classes were initially identified using data from my survey (see sub-section Survey in this chapter). Following both Argentinean and international literature about the operationalisation of social class (see for instance Savage 2000, Torrado 1992, 2003), social class was provisionally operationalised as a combination of the occupation of the head of the family and his/her level of education. In my research, the label "middle class" refers to students from families whose head had a non-manual job (whether as employee or self-employed worker) and who, in the majority of cases, had at least completed secondary schooling. The majority of middle class families in High Mountain belonged to what Svampa (2005) has called the "loser" sections of the middle classes (see previous chapter). In Low Hill, the label "working class" indicates students from families whose head had skilled and non skilled manual jobs in the formal sector of the economy (whether as employee or self-employed worker) and who, in general, had completed primary schooling. Finally, the label "marginal" points to students from families whose head had

⁷⁶ I followed the proportion that these different categories had in the respective schools' population to decide the relative weight that each of them would have in my intentional sample of students in each school.

non-skilled manual jobs in the informal sector of the economy (whether as employee or self-employed worker) who, in general, had not completed primary schooling.

In terms of sampling of times and places (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995), I selected different time slots during the school week (before the entrance, during the entrance, the first half or the second half of the school day, during their exit, during break time, after the school day in the entrance doors of both schools), diverse kinds of events during the school year (such as school events and beginning of the school day) and different floors, playgrounds, classrooms, pastoral assistants' offices, and terraces (in particular, those of the second and third floors of the "new" building).

Describing the research sites High Mountain and Low Hill

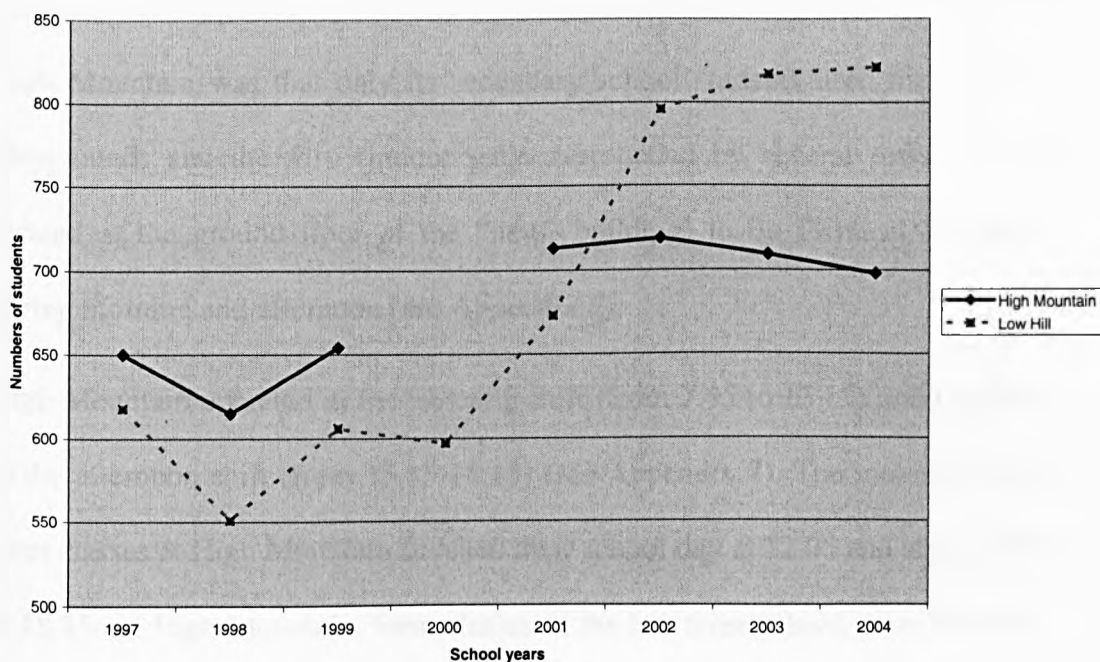
High Mountain was a *Normal* school and Low Hill a *Liceo*.⁷⁷ They were located in a middle class neighbourhood at the northeast of the City of Buenos Aires. During the period 1991-2001, these schools were in a school district that lost 16% of its total population (INDEC 2005a). In 2004, compared to the rest of the school districts of the City, High Mountain and Low Hill's school district had a middle level of structural poverty (7.1%, INDEC 2001) and comprised quite diverse neighbourhoods in terms of their social composition (ranging through upper, middle, low and deprived areas) (INDEC 2001). According to the schools' statistics, roughly 90% of their students came from the City of Buenos Aires and the rest from the province of Buenos Aires (High Mountain 2004; Low Hill 2004).

⁷⁷ See previous chapter for a description of these types of schools.

In 2004, High Mountain offered nursery, primary, secondary and tertiary education. At secondary level, the school was quasi-selective.⁷⁸ Low Hill was a secondary school and its access was open. At the beginning of 2004, the secondary school of High Mountain had 696 students enrolled; of which 65% were girls (High Mountain 2004). Low Hill, on the other hand, had 810 students and 60% were girls (Low Hill 2004). During the last 7 years, the numbers of students enrolled in the schools has increased. This growth has been more significant and steady in the case of Low Hill (see below Graph 1). From 1997-2004, the total population of Low Hill has increased almost 33% and that of High Mountain was only augmented by 7% (see Appendix 5, Table 1 and 2). In Chapter Five, I analyse the reasons behind these differential levels of recruitment and explore how they were linked with their different types of middle class institutional habitus.

⁷⁸ Students who did not do the primary school in the *Normal* had to take a language entrance examination. Those who passed a variable minimum score were able to enrol in the school.

Graph 1. Evolution of numbers of students in High Mountain and Low Hill. 1997-2004⁷⁹



As mentioned above, these schools occupied the same block and shared some wings of two buildings (teachers and students call them: the “historic” and the “new” buildings⁸⁰) (see Appendix 6). During the fieldwork, it was apparent that both schools had different control over buildings and spaces. Power relations are deeply entangled in the organisation and use of spaces and reflected in the freedom and restrictions of people’s movements (McGregor 2004). High Mountain legally owned the entire block and used the great majority of space in the “historic” and “new” buildings. In the case of the secondary education, High Mountain and Low Hill shared classrooms, offices, and corridors in both buildings but they also had exclusive access to certain spaces such as their

⁷⁹ To create this graph I use data from the Initial Enrolment Surveys of High Mountain and Low Hill (1997-1999), (2001-2003) (Secretary of Education of the City of Buenos Aires 1997, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003) and the Yearly Educational Surveys of High Mountain and Low Hill for the year 2004 (Ministry of Education and Culture 2004). Although these surveys are applied at different times of the year (the former the 31st of March and the latter the 30th of April), the change of enrolments during this period has been historically low.

⁸⁰ The “historic” building preserved the original architectural features of the school in the 1880s and the “new” one was built up during the last dictatorship from 1975-1981.

administrative secretary's office, chemistry and computer laboratories, and libraries (see Appendix 6). Another example of the wider access to spaces of High Mountain was that only its secondary school students used the outdoors playgrounds and the *foso* (indoor patio surrounded by several rows of seats located at the ground floor of the "new" building) to do Physical Education during morning and afternoon (see Appendix 6).

High Mountain operated in the morning shift (from 7.45 to 13.15) and Low Hill in the afternoon shift (from 13.15-18.15) (see Appendix 7). The majority of the form classes at High Mountain finished their school day at 12.05 and at Low Hill at 18.15. At High Mountain, form classes in the last three school years had extra lesson time two or three days per week when their exit clashed with the Low Hill students' arrival. Almost every day, from 13.15 to 13.25, groups of students of High Mountain and Low Hill met at the main stairs of the "new" building while trying to get out or into their classrooms. These encounters were, in general, quite chaotic and pastoral assistants of both schools attempted to stop students running up and down the stairs.

Despite being located in the same buildings, walking around the corridors of these schools was a very different experience. In High Mountain, students seemed to move around with much more freedom during and after the school day than in Low Hill. For instance, it was usual to find High Mountain's students in playgrounds, toilets and corridors when lesson time had already started. This was rare at Low Hill. In the case of Low Hill, students' movements were more restricted. Unlike High Mountain's counterparts, they could not use the terraces of the "new building" despite high temperatures during spring and summer time. Moreover, during breaks, in contrast with students in High Mountain, it was rare

to find Low Hill's students in a different floor to that of their classrooms. During free time, lessons, breaks and after the school day, High Mountain boys played football, girls and mixed groups played volleyball, and/or hung out in the outdoor patios between the "old" and the "new" buildings and the *foso* (see Appendix 6).

In terms of the maintenance of the building, at the beginning of the year classrooms were newly painted. After the start of the school year, walls in the classrooms and toilets and in several corridors began to display graffiti, drawings of all sorts, names (of people, rock bands), insults, often targeted at particular students or to groups of students who lived in different neighbourhoods. Desks and chairs were, in general, damaged (students wrote poems, songs, formulas and fact notes on them). The third school form classrooms (located in the third floor in the case of High Mountain and in the second and third floor in Low Hill) did not have curtains or blinds and in some of them students and teachers struggled to work due to the strong sunlight. In at least two form classes in both schools, students had to look for chairs when the school day started. Air circulation fans did not work and during the spring and summer time there were plenty of hot days (over 30° Celsius).

Adults and young people did not share toilets. While those of adults were clean, students' female toilets did not have the same standards of cleanliness. They had graffiti, damaged doors, and in one toilet the taps did not work properly during the majority of the school year. Toilets did not have basic resources. Although a major concern was preventing the smoking of cigarettes and marijuana in both schools, only in Low Hill, during breaks, were toilets 'guarded' by at least one pastoral assistant.

Between these schools, there were differences in levels of resources and equipment available. For instance, High Mountain had an impressive old library (with almost 13,000 books and several dozens of journals) and it was open from 8.00-22.15. Conversely, Low Hill did not have its own library until 2004. Up to then, the library did not have a fixed location and was defined by teachers as ‘mobile’ (books were safeguarded in different rooms and access to them was difficult and variable). In 2003, Low Hill constructed its library together with the new computer and physics and chemistry laboratories, and a video room where the former garage of High Mountain was. Low Hill’s library had around 5000 volumes but an unknown number of them were lost in different moves. It was only opened during part of the school day (13.15-17.00).

Regarding teaching staff, in 2004 High Mountain had 116 teachers, of which only 12 were male, and Low Hill had 156 teachers, of which ten were male.⁸¹

According to one of my surveys, more than a half of teachers in the schools were over 50 years old, followed by those who were between 40 and 49 years old.⁸²

Around half of the teachers in both schools stated that they had been teachers in the school for more than 16 years. In Low Hill, one quarter of teachers stated that they had worked at the school between 11 and 16 years; while in High Mountain the same proportion of teachers stated that they had been working between 6 and 10 years. The majority of the teachers surveyed worked in the third school year (72% in Low Hill and 56% in High Mountain). The fragmented physical nature of the schools implied that those teachers who only worked with form classes in the “historic” building did not have the opportunity to interact with other teachers

⁸¹ The pattern of an overwhelming majority of female teachers has been historically similar in the *Liceos* and *Normales*.

⁸² I applied a survey to a group of teachers in both schools. The schools did not provide information about their age (see sub-section about Surveys in this Chapter).

in the staffroom. The official staffroom (which lacked any identification as such) was on the second floor of the “new” building. It was a small room of three by three metres. Some teachers were regulars of the staffroom (in both schools I identified at least 15). They spent breaks and free time lessons talking to colleagues or working. The staff room was a meeting place for certain groups and cliques rather than a staff room that all teachers visited. In High Mountain, there was also an ‘unofficial’ staff room where a small group of teachers preferred to gather (this was located in one of the chemistry laboratories on the third floor).

My fieldwork was carried out during 9 months (from mid- March 2004 until mid December 2004).⁸³ The duration of the fieldwork was sufficient to become familiar with the every day life of the research setting without becoming ‘over-familiar’ or develop ‘over-rapport’ (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). I started to visit the schools the second week of the school year (March) and I finished my visits during December exam time. I visited schools at least two days per week from March to August and up to a maximum of four days per week in September and October. Each visit was variable in terms of duration but never was shorter than half a school day.

Now I examine how I gained access to both schools before and during my ethnographic work.

⁸³ The school year in the City of Buenos Aires runs from March to March. This school year includes winter and summer holidays as well as three periods of examinations in June, November and February. During November and February, the schools organise two week of tutorials for the students who have to take examinations.

Gaining initial access to High Mountain and Low Hill

Before carrying out my research, I did not have any formal relationships with secondary schools. When preparing the project, I compiled a list of people who I knew were working in or were related to secondary schools both in the City of Buenos Aires and in the Province of Buenos Aires. In September 2003, I interviewed all these informants.

After assessing geographical accessibility; potential personal risks; financial costs involved, and time needed to get to the schools involved; pros and cons to analyse relationships between social class and schooling (see previous section about sampling); I decided that High Mountain and Low Hill would be suitable research sites.

In September 2003, I had my first interview with the *Rectora*⁸⁴ of the *Normal* High Mountain. It took place in her impressive big office furnished with antique furniture located on the first floor of the “historic” building. The interview was formal and friendly and the *Rectora* was surprised and delighted to know that a researcher based in an English University wanted to do research in High Mountain. In the case of the *Liceo* Low Hill, I also had an interview with the head teacher (Juana) in her small and cramped office. She was polite but did not show any particular interest in my research. After a brief conversation about my tentative request to do my research there, Juana assured me that I could work in Low Hill if I wanted to. In Juana’s case, the references provided by my contact seemed the only reason why she initially offered access to the school.

⁸⁴ *Rector/a* was the senior authority of the *Normal*, which encompassed elementary, primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education.

Following my preliminary visits in September 2003, I kept in touch from the UK with High Mountain and Low Hill via phone calls with the *Rectora* and the head teacher. In early February, I phoned them and I confirmed that I wanted to work in their schools. After this time, the negotiations for getting effective access to the schools differed quite strikingly. In High Mountain, access was a quite straightforward process. Firstly, it implied asking for authorisation to research in the school to the Director of the *Normal* schools in the City.⁸⁵ When the school year started, the *Rectora* introduced me to key members of staff of the secondary level within the *Normal*.⁸⁶ The *Rectora* asked the head teacher to inform all parents of my presence in the school. This was done at the end of March by sending an official communication to all parents of the school. Immediately after, I asked permission from the head teacher to introduce myself to the different form classes, which was granted.

Parallel to my initial phone calls to the *Rectora* in February, I phoned the head teacher of Low Hill. When I informed her that I had decided to work in the *Liceo* she seemed hesitant and she asked me to call her back in March. I did that and I asked for permission to start my fieldwork. She suggested postponing my visits until the beginning of April because pupils were still enrolling. I insisted that I wanted to go to the school and she reluctantly accepted to see me on the 19th of March 2004. In the meeting, she seemed rather annoyed by my presence. From that moment onwards, I started to talk to different people in a rather disorganised way. By chance I bumped into the Vice-Director/Deputy Head of the school who wanted to know who I was and warned me that I would need a letter of reference

⁸⁵ I presented my curriculum vitae, a letter of presentation, my supervisor's letter of reference, and a brief summary of the research initial aims.

⁸⁶ Such as its head teacher (the 'Vice-Director'), the Heads of Departments, Head of Pastoral assistants, and pedagogic advisors.

from my supervisor. Five minutes previously, the head teacher told me that this was not necessary. The lack of communication between the head teacher and her deputy head signalled the absence of clear school policies regarding authorising researchers to get into the school and the complete lack of interest of Juana, which was characteristic of our relationship during the whole of the fieldwork. During fieldwork, I only contacted her when that was absolutely necessary (such as when I needed her authorisation for applying surveys) (Burgess 1993, Burgess 1982).

My initial access to the schools reflected different kinds of institutional dynamics and obstacles that provided me with some clues about the social organisation of the studied settings (Burgess 1993). These processes had initially affected my position in the settings. In this sense, access is not only a precondition to doing research but also affects the reliability and the validity of research findings (Burgess 1993, Delamont 2002, Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). In High Mountain, despite serious conflicts I later discovered between the *Rectora* and the head teacher of the secondary level, my formal introduction to key members of the staff, with the concomitant recognition of my role as researcher within the school, together with my good rapport with the head teacher favoured my access to different groups of teachers and pastoral assistants and to documentary sources. In Low Hill, on the contrary, the lack of rapport with the head teacher, her elusive style of leadership⁸⁷ as well as the absence of any formal introduction to teachers complicated my recognition as researcher and I had to negotiate access to staff rooms, meetings, school events and adults on an everyday basis

⁸⁷ Later, I learned from teachers, pastoral assistants and psychologists that the head teacher preferred not to intervene in anything regarding school matters. Many agreed that she had had difficult times as head teacher in the past and her inaction was as a direct consequence of this.

with the fear of being caught making mistakes. This sense of unease and uncertainty only disappeared after the second part of the school year.

Now I turn my attention to how my identities impacted on fieldwork relations (both opening up and closing down access and interactions).

Fieldwork relations, my multiple location(s), and ethical considerations

During the duration of the fieldwork (whether doing participant observation, interviews, applying surveys or asking for documents), I negotiated (in more or less explicit ways) with teachers, pastoral assistants, and students my presence and access to their working and social worlds. Access in ethnography is an ongoing process that can never be taken for granted (Bryman and Burgess 1999, Burgess 1993, Burgess 1982, Denzin and Lincoln 1998). The every day craft of fieldwork relations was deeply entangled in the ways in which my gender, age, professional status, and social class were interpreted by different social actors during the school year (Andersen 1999, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002, Coffey 1999, Kenway and McLeod 2004). Being a white professional, heterosexual, middle class woman in her thirties with a current perceived able body contributed to, but also precluded, my access to schools and certain groups of students and adults. Some of these social identities were more relevant than others with certain groups and at certain moments before and during the fieldwork. Moreover, over time some identities were accepted while others persisted in being problematic. In my study, identities carried different effects when interacting with adults and groups of students in High Mountain and Low Hill.

In my relations with adults, fieldwork relations ranged from open acceptance and trust to avoidance, mistrust and annoyance. I crafted good relations with a

considerable number of teachers in both schools and the majority of pastoral assistants in High Mountain. In Low Mountain, my relationships with many pastoral assistants were difficult during the majority of fieldwork. My multiple identities and locations in the social world deeply affected the way I was (un)able to interact with them. Some perceived my status as a student in an English university as suspicious, awkward, or undesirable. The sub-chief of pastoral assistants in Low Hill, for example, challenged my interest in doing research in the school the day we met 'You should do research in England and learn what is good so we could use it. I don't see the point in doing research here, really!' (Fieldnotes, 20/04/06). Her negative reactions helped me to decide not to select the school year with whom she was working. Yet, being a middle class female student facilitated my interactions with certain groups of female teachers in High Mountain and Low Hill. In general, in the former, teachers were happy to talk with me during break time, in the corridors and in the staff room, and over time I developed strong relationships with a small group of female teachers who were always willing to help and share their views about their work. In Low Hill, rapport with teachers took more at time but was achieved after half a year of visits, small chats and participation in collective events such as school acts, staff meetings, and social events.

In my relations with students, my social locations and identities also played a central part in the production of the field (Atkinson 1990, Padfield and Procter 1996, Puwar 1997, Song and Parker 1995). In both schools, I was able to build up caring, trusting and lasting relations with different groups of middle class girls and boys in High Mountain and non middle class groups (mainly girls) in Low Hill. In particular in High Mountain, students appreciated being listened to in an

institutional context where they felt that their voice did not count. My social proximity with middle class students helped me to be recognised as 'friendly' and likeable (Bourdieu 1990). Being perceived as 'nice' and as someone who always said hello to everybody also helped me to slowly build up relationships with groups of girls and boys from non middle class families. They were surprised that, despite being an adult, I always actively looked for their company and that I was interested in them. Our social distance did not seem to be a problem after a while when they 'knew' that I cared about them. However, I had insurmountable problems in approaching particular groups of students in both schools. For instance, in High Mountain, I could not interact with a small friendship group of working class girls of one form class. In Low Hill, I could not start or sustain interactions with different groups of non middle class boys. In the case of the non middle class girls in High Mountain, my friendliness with middle class students in their form class probably hampered my attempts to relate to them. They made up a very close friendship network. For them, my ability to talk with different groups in their form class probably operated as another marker of my social distance and difference from them. In the case of Low Hill, being an adult woman who was constantly at the time interacting with different groups (including some of their 'victims') was an insurmountable obstacle to interacting with boys who had records of misbehaviour, appeared to be disengaged from schooling, and performed an aggressive masculinity. My attempts to talk to them were resisted in more or less subtle ways such as avoiding eye contact when I entered the room and rejecting or repeatedly postponing my requests for interviews.

Following the general guidance of professional associations in the UK (British Educational Research Association 2004, British Sociological Association 2002), relationships with adults and young people were always enmeshed in ethical considerations. For instance, I reflexively looked for different ways to ask for explicit consent from teachers, students and pastoral assistants to participate in the research (British Sociological Association 2002). However, many times, this was unattainable. In particular, when doing participant observation in the schools, I walked around the school and observed adults and young peoples' interactions and behaviours whether they accepted my presence or not. As Robinson and Kellet (2004) remind us, in particular, young people in institutions like schools tend to be 'captive subjects' of researchers due to their inability to express their perspectives, views and desires regarding their participation in the research. To counteract this, I introduced my research interests and background to as many people as possible. For example, I introduced myself to all form classes in both schools in April 2004 when I distributed letters for their parents informing about my presence at the school (see Appendix 8). As part of my ethical considerations, I always guaranteed confidentiality (whether in written or oral forms) to both adults and young people. They were aware that their conversations and my observations were not going to be disclosed (unless in exceptional circumstances such as neglect and abuse) and when I would later use them, I would grant the anonymity of people and institutions.

I paid special attention to the differences and similarities of doing research with adults and young people. A growing body of literature points at the necessity of carefully considering the implication of working with young people and children (Christensen and Prout 2002, Lewis *et al.* 2004, Morrow and Richards 1996,

Punch 2002). A variety of perspectives exists, such as treating young people like adults or considering them as completely different from them and in need of special handling.⁸⁸ In my study, following Christensen and Prout (2002), I consider that there is an ethical symmetry between adults and young people. Like adults, children and young people are social actors and participants in social life, with their particular voices and views. 'Ethical symmetry' implies that the researcher assumes the same ethical considerations and responsibilities when doing research with adults or children. However, when differences between them arise, researchers should address them. Ethical symmetry, however, does not imply a presumption of equality between researchers and young people. Like when working with adults, power relationships between me and the young people were always present (Mayall 2000, Robinson and Kellet 2004). As seen above, my social class, gender, professional identity and my peculiar location of being an adult without authority in the school were interpreted in different ways and impinged on different social and cultural relations that made me sometimes powerful (for instance, when I could continue 'intruding' in pastoral assistants offices, despite the rejection of many) and other times powerless (for example, when I could not overcome the profound distance between me and the "bad" boys of Low Hill). Paramount to my research was the consideration of different ways of enabling children to protect their own interests and agendas through the research (see next sub-section to see how I did this). The next section examines the different data collection techniques that I used.

⁸⁸ See Christensen and Prout (2002) and Punch (2002) as illustrations of contrasting perspectives.

Data collection techniques

The fieldwork consisted of participant observation, with different degrees of participation (Spradley 1980); informal and formal semi-structured interviews with teachers and students; photo-elicitation interviews with students; the application of two surveys; and the examination of a range of public, semi-public and private texts (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995) (see Table 1 below for an overview of data collection techniques used). The data produced comprised observational notes, interview notes and transcripts, completed questionnaires, and documentation. In the following sub-sections, I briefly analyse each of these techniques in turn.

Table 1. Overview of data collection techniques used during the fieldwork

Data collection techniques	Low Hill	High Mountain	Both schools
Observations (March-December 2004)	93 calendar days	95 calendar days	N/A*
Group interviews with students (June-November 2004)	5	10	N/A
Interviews with girls of the third school year (May 2004-March 2005) **	13	8	N/A
Interviews with boys of the third school year (May 2004-March 2005)**	14	11	N/A
Individual interviews with teachers (September 2003-December 2004) **	16	12	9
Group interviews with teachers (September-December 2004)	2	1	0
Interviews with psychologists (May-December 2004) **	3	3	N/A
Interview with school authorities (September 2003-November 2004) **	2	3	N/A
Photo-elicitation interviews with girls (3rd school year) (November 2004)	5	4	N/A
Photo-elicitation interviews with boys (3rd school year) (November 2004)	6	5	N/A
Survey to students of the third school year (early July 2004)	125	101	N/A
Survey to teachers (September 2004)	23	38	Unknown
Documentary analysis (school stats, students' records, documents, signs on boards, leaflets, adverts, etc.) (March 2004-March 2005)	30	35	15

*Not applicable.

** Some individuals were interviewed more than once.

Participant observation

Participant observation was an important method (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). I assumed the role of observer and participant of a diverse range of situations during the school week and year. For instance, I observed school acts; informal and formal staff meetings; pastoral assistants' everyday work; break times in classrooms, corridors, terraces, stairs and indoor and outdoor patios; free time lessons with students (in and outside classrooms); before and after school (in the stairs of both schools' entrances). I observed a few lessons with the same teacher in both schools at the end of September. Although I wanted to observe some more lessons in both schools, different factors contributed to my decision to not include observations of lessons. Firstly, schools in the City of Buenos

Aires were not used to welcoming researchers.⁸⁹ Educational research does not have the contemporary status, acceptance and frequency it has in the UK. In High Mountain and Low Hill at the time of the fieldwork, classrooms were the 'secret garden' of teachers (see Chapter Three) and within their boundaries they were autonomous in defining content, methods of delivery and assessment. My lack of previous contacts with teachers and my perceived role as 'outsider' (as a sociologist, as a student, as a non-teacher) postponed the negotiations with individual teachers to gain access to their classrooms.⁹⁰ In particular in Low Hill teachers were suspicious of my presence and it took a lot of time to be recognised and accepted. This hampered the observation of classroom interaction. Secondly, students of the third school year had 12 teachers. Students' views of teachers varied quite strikingly, ranging from 'friendly' and 'inspirational' (in the minority of the cases) to 'authoritarian', 'unfair' and 'boring'. Teachers' pedagogic styles, frameworks, training and ways of coping with misbehaviour were also different. Observing different teachers with different styles would have implied serious difficulties in terms of any kind of comparability within and between schools. Following one course across modules, due to lack of formal procedures that 'imposed' my presence on lessons would have been impossible. By September, I was accepted by sufficient teachers in both schools to have successfully asked to observe lessons. However, at this time of the year, I decided that it was too late to make classroom

⁸⁹ During 2004, the Secretary of Education of the local government distributed, for the first time, forms and procedures to be used in the schools and to be presented to the local authorities to be authorised. Neither High Mountain nor 'Low Hill' followed these procedures, as shown in the section about gaining access.

⁹⁰ In the *Normal*, observations of lessons were common. In these institutions, students of teachers' training courses observed lessons. However, they were invited by Heads of departments and in general the same teachers to do the observations.

observations. Instead, I focused my energies on doing different types of interviews with teachers and students in both schools.

I carried out participant observation in line with an established ethnographic tradition in Sociology of Education in the UK, as mapped out in Chapter One, in which research diaries have been part and parcel of the data collection process.⁹¹ They constituted an important data source, mediated through my partial and situated interpretations and ways of producing the field (Atkinson 1990, 1992). I began keeping a diary in September 2003 and finished in December 2004. I used it to record my observations, thoughts, what I was seeing, feeling and hearing in both High Mountain and Low Hill (Burgess 1981). I included descriptions of interactions, settings, people, and transcripts of informal conversations (what Burgess calls “substantive” observations (1981)). These notes were often mixed with “methodological” comments (Burgess 1981) where I reflected about how my presence, ways of performing, addressing people and phrasing questions may have influenced what I saw and heard, and how I interpreted it. Many times, it was difficult to write fieldnotes immediately so I had to postpone this until I was travelling home or when I escaped to nearby cafés to have some time out from the field. I also used research diaries to write down summaries of theoretical and substantive literature that I was re-reading at the time; trying to make provisional connections with what was going on in the field. I also made “analytic notes” (Burgess 1993) recording an ongoing and dialectic process by which I rehearsed different interpretations of what I observed and I re-oriented and focused my

⁹¹ They comprise 15 125mm by 200mm spiral bound notebooks with 80 double-sided pages of handwritten text in each book. I also used word files to make memos, thematic coding of observations and analytical notes about my observations. I began with one diary and then in April I decided to keep two different diaries: one for my observations in High Mountain and the other for those when I was at Low Hill.

observations, interviews, surveys and documentary search in order to redefine my previous explanations. As Delamont argues (2002), fieldnotes work as mediators between fieldwork relations and the researcher and her audience. My research diaries comprised different kinds of comments and approximations of what was happening in the field. This 'messiness' reflected the complex, ongoing, embodied and situated nature of doing ethnography and producing knowledge (Atkinson 1990, 1992, Atkinson and Hammersley 1998, Coffey 1999).

Interviewing

Interviewing teachers and students was also a key data collection technique.⁹² It was paramount to understand teachers' views about the game of schooling, its stakes and the ways in which different groups of students dealt with their demands and expectations. The extensive use of interviews with students also corresponded to my central concern in unveiling dispositions, practices and perspectives about the 'game' of schooling. Moreover, their testimonies were crucial to better grasp their families' locations in the wider social space, as well as the identification of the mobilization of material, social and economic resources in their educational trajectory.

I carried out different types of interviews: informal, semi-structured, and photo-elicitation⁹³ (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, Hurworth 2003). Informal interviews were spontaneous and, in general, unrecorded exchanges with adults and young people whether in corridors, classrooms, offices, and in the school's surroundings. I carried out opportunistic and pre-planned group interviews with

⁹² Whilst I did more interviews with school psychologists, authorities of the school and pastoral assistants, due to lack of space, I focus my attention on teachers and students' interviews.

⁹³ Photo elicitation refers to the use of photographs as stimulus during a research interview (for an examination of this data collection technique see Hurworth 2003, Harrison 2002, Clarke-Ibañez 2004).

students in both schools (two in Low Hill and three in High Mountain), which, with the students' permission, I recorded. The former were spontaneous conversations and relaxed interactions where teachers and students expressed feelings, opinions, and asked for advice or support. From the beginning of my visits to schools, they configured central aspects of the everyday craft of fieldwork relations and they operated as fertile ground to build up rapport with adults and young people and to identify those willing to be part of the research. The pre-planned group interviews with students were more frequent with High Mountain students. Several times, they asked me to be interviewed. The rest of the interviews were pre-planned and, in the great majority of the cases, recorded and transcribed.⁹⁴

I carried out 16 semi-structured interviews with teachers of the third school year in Low Hill, 12 with High Mountain's teachers and 9 with teachers who worked in both schools (see Appendix 9). I did only two group interviews with teachers in Low Hill and one in High Mountain. All were semi-structured in that I pre-prepared a list of questions or themes I was interested in addressing as starting points (Appendix 10). We covered the majority of the topics of my interest and many times teachers were able to change the direction of our conversations. Interviews had a variable duration ranging from half an hour to almost two hours. Teachers' busy teaching schedule meant that several interviews had to be interrupted and continued on other occasions. The majority of the interviews with High Mountain's teachers were done in nearby café-bars. In the case of the Low Hill's teachers, the locations of our interviews varied from classrooms, the staff

⁹⁴ Only two teachers and two students did not want me to record our encounters. In the rest of the interviews, using the tape recorder seemed awkward for only a few minutes, after which the great majority of adults and all young people seemed to forget that the tape recorder was between us.

room, and bars. When the interviews were outside the school, teachers had more time and engaged more fully in our conversations. I re-interviewed some teachers, which allowed me to further explore themes which had previously emerged and also ask questions about particular students. In the beginning, a few teachers in Low Hill only reluctantly accepted being interviewed. They made clear that I was an outsider. Relations of power between researcher and research subjects are always part of the fieldwork (Bravo-Moreno 2003, Briggs 2002, Kvale 1996, Kvale 2006, Stanley and Wise 1993).

Regarding the pre-planned exchanges with young people, I carried out two different types of interviews: semi-structured and photo-elicitation. Overall I did 55 semi-structured interviews with individuals from both schools (see Appendix 11 and 12) from April 2004 to March 2005.⁹⁵ In early August 2004, and after applying a survey to students of the third school year in early July (see next subsection for details), I focused my interviewing on students with different educational trajectories and from different socio-economic backgrounds. Before asking to be interviewed, the majority of students already knew me and they were used to seeing me around, saying hello and kissing everybody with whom I interacted.⁹⁶ When I invited them to participate in the research, the great majority agreed. During the interviews, I asked students to select the names they wanted me to use.

⁹⁵ Despite the fact that my fieldwork finished in December 2004, I did follow up interviews with different groups in March 2005 to see how they did in their exams and if they passed the school year.

⁹⁶ Kissing is a common method of greeting between adults, between young people and between the two groups. However, school authorities, teachers and the great majority of pastoral assistants do not kiss their students. I was one of the few adults within the school, with whom they could exchange kisses. This affectionate way to greet was welcomed by boys and girls as sign of my recognition of them as equals.

Photo-elicitation interviews were carried out with a sub-sample of interviewed students. This type of interview refers to the use of photographs as stimulus during a research interview. The aim is to trigger responses and memories and unveil participants' attitudes, views, beliefs, and meanings, or to investigate group dynamics (Harper 2002, Hurworth 2003, Prosser 1998). Following previous research with young people that have used photo-elicitation (Harper 2002, Hurworth 2003, Prosser 1998), I asked students to take photographs of their every day lives.

I used photo-elicitation for different reasons. Firstly, it offered an opportunity to expand the participation of students beyond the role of traditional interviewees and research subjects (see Harper 2002; Prosser 1998; Bolton, et al. 2001). Taking photographs provided students with the opportunity to take more control over the interview schedule. In this way, they assumed a more active role in the research process than traditional interviews allow (Clarke-Ibañez 2004, Harrison 2002, Hurworth 2003). Secondly, I wanted to know about their families and their positions in a changing socio-economic structure (see Chapter Three). In my research, photo-elicitation revealed access, opportunities, and disadvantages that would have been difficult to assess solely from a face to face interview (such as housing conditions, lifestyles of the family, consumption patterns, etc.). Finally, photo-elicitation opened up the possibility of me being 'surprised' by students' agendas and ways of seeing their own social worlds (Willis 1980).⁹⁷

⁹⁷ I analyse the advantages and disadvantages of semi-structured and photo-elicitation interviews in a Conference paper presented at Oxford Ethnography and Education 2005 (see Meo 2005). From my initial comparison of both types of interviews, I would argue that photo-interviews in my study had four major advantages: they contributed to richer data about similar topics; they reinforced what was already stated in the traditional interview; they offered a closer look at what and whom participants considered important; and they enhanced the participation and control of interviewees. Of course, not all the photo-interviews had all these advantages in full.

As part of the photo-elicitation exercise, I selected nine girls and eleven boys according to their previous educational trajectory and the educational background of the head of the household.⁹⁸ Students enthusiastically agreed to participate. I provided them with cameras and one film of 24 photos.⁹⁹ I explicitly asked them to not take photographs in school time. With this warning I tried to avoid any potential problems that photographing at the schools could give to them and/or to my fieldwork, such as interrupting lessons for taking photographs. Moreover I also designed a 'contract' where I included a description of the general task that students had to do and where I explicitly stated the time frame of the requested task, the students' ownership of the camera, photographs and negatives, and my request of permission to use their photographic material (see Appendix 13).

The majority of semi-structured and photo interviews carried out with students were located in nearby cafés. The school did not have available spaces to perform them. After students agreed to be interviewed, I sent a written request of authorisation to their parents where I specified what we would do, the locations of our meeting and my personal contact numbers in case they needed more information (see Appendixes 14 and 15). Interviews lasted from one hour to two hours. Students enjoyed chatting with me. Non middle class girls were more difficult to interview compared to the rest of students. At the beginning they were

⁹⁸ In order to define my sub-sample of photographers, I used data from my own survey to third school year students in both schools. Firstly, I identified the relative weight of the maximum educational level of heads of households in each school for the third school year. Then, I identified the proportion of repitients in the third school year according to school statistics and my own survey. With this data in mind, I intentionally selected groups of girls and boys according to the educational level of the head of their household and their conditions of repetition (repitient or not).

⁹⁹ The cameras and the development of films were paid for by assistance from the 2004 Brian Simon Award (British Educational Research Association) and the 2004 Support Fund of the British Sociological Association.

more shy and seemed uncomfortable. However, after some 'small talk', they became talkative and relaxed. Photo-interviews were longer than semi-structured ones. They allowed the exploration of topics initially not included in the interview schedule such as sexuality, family history, and students' views about music and urban youth tribes in and outside schools.

The location of the interviews with students and the fact that I always invited them to have a drink contributed to their feeling of being taken seriously (as adults). Despite this apparent 'symmetry', I was aware that my position of authority could have forced them to answer or to continue the interview when they did not want it. To address this, I repeated several times during each encounter that they could leave the interview at any time and that they only had to answer the questions that they wanted to or felt comfortable with. In general, students shared with me much more than I expected. A few of them surprised me with intimate confessions of current or past personal problems and traumas.¹⁰⁰ When the problems were contemporary, I assessed if they were receiving any professional advice and, when they did not, I found out where they could go (whether in or outside the school) and I encouraged them to ask for help and advice.

The next section examines the students' and teachers' surveys applied in the two schools featured by this study, their aims and scope.

Surveys

In both schools I applied one survey to students in early July 2004 and one to teachers in September 2004. I asked for authorisation to distribute the student questionnaire in lesson time in both schools during different days of the second

¹⁰⁰ Only a minority of students (all from Low Hill) shared these kinds of situations. The most dramatic ones were pregnancy, and the rape and sexual abuse of two boys.

week of July 2004. The schools' authorities granted it and with the support of pastoral assistants and teachers, I distributed the questionnaire in three form classes in High Mountain and in four in Low Hill. I applied the survey to more than 60% of the population in the third school year (101 students in High Mountain who represented 70% of the school year; and 125 students in Low Hill who represented 63%). Every questionnaire distributed was filled in. The students' survey gave me basic socio-economic and educational data not available within the school (see Appendix 16). This survey allowed me to: i) produce data about families' locations in the social space, and ii) select samples of students to be interviewed at different stages of the study.

Regarding the teachers' surveys, in both schools I distributed the questionnaire after staff meetings in the school in September 2004. In the case of High Mountain, I had a higher response rate than in Low Hill (38 and 23 respectively). In the former, the staff meeting lasted for a whole morning and the majority of teachers completed the questionnaire that day. Only a few gave it back to me later during that week. In Low Hill, I distributed the questionnaire after a short meeting and when teachers were leaving. I had to chase teachers (sometimes with the help of pastoral assistants) to recover questionnaires. The response rate represented around 40% of teachers in High Mountain and 25% in Low Hill.¹⁰¹ The teachers' survey collected information on their families, class location, professional careers, as well as views about secondary schooling in general and within their respective schools (see Appendix 17). It provided me with basic data

¹⁰¹ After applying this survey, I was disappointed at the relative low rate of response. At the same time, teachers were filling forms for a Census organised by the Ministry of Education. They only made negative comments about the survey and were suspicious about how and who was going to use that data. In that context of general mistrust of surveys, I consider that the response rate to my survey was acceptable.

about the socio-economic background of teachers and also enabled me to assess if some views expressed during interviews were exceptional or illustrations of wider teachers' viewpoints.

I input the filled questionnaires from both students and teachers into database files and I processed them with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences. I performed a descriptive analysis of the major variables of both surveys and produced two Bulletins to distribute among students and teachers in November 2004.¹⁰²

Documentary evidence

The collection and analysis of documentation also constituted a key method. Numerous semi-public, public and private texts were part of the field. Examples of these kinds of documents are: school records of students' attendance and educational performance; school statistics; letters sent to parents by school authorities or teachers; banners and signs on public display boards at each school; poems, information and drawings displayed on the board of the *Asamblea*¹⁰³; documents produced by the school such as the *Reglamento de Convivencia* and the *Proyecto Educativo Institucional*; the official and unofficial websites of High Mountain;¹⁰⁴ information about different teachers' unions and different activities of their members (such as strikes, claims, etc.); leaflets of all sorts displayed on the external and internal walls of the offices used by the

¹⁰² The elaborations of the Bulletins together with a conference presentation in 2005 in High Mountain were the two ways I found to share bits of my initial analysis. Unfortunately, I have not had time to go back to schools to show the results presented in my thesis. I plan to go back to the schools in 2007 where I will organise workshops with teachers to discuss further my analysis and findings.

¹⁰³ Small group of students who engaged with different sorts of activities at the school. They labelled themselves *Asamblea* because their organisation, unlike traditional students' unions, was horizontal.

¹⁰⁴ These were websites done by students where they published photographs, had discussion forums and information about the school. The sites that I identified did not last for very long.

psychologists of the schools. I had to copy these pieces in my fieldwork diaries. On a few occasions, I could get hold of copies of what was displayed.

Leaving the field

The decision of when and how to end the ethnography was mainly determined by the end of the school year. However, I had prepared for this in the sense that I checked that I had all the data I needed, I organised my strategy for saying goodbye to different groups and I had planned different ways in which to keep in touch with teachers and students. I knew that I wanted to do follow up work with different groups of students to find out if they passed the school year. I had a positive ending to the fieldwork. It gave me the opportunity to reassess fieldwork relations and to confirm that I had developed trusting and caring relations with many teachers, students, and pastoral assistants.

After leaving the fieldwork, I completed the transcription of all interviews and I used the software ATLAS.TI to code them together with a sample of entries of my research diaries. The process of coding involved the identification of key themes, views and patterns related to my broader study questions that emerged across materials. Coding began during fieldwork and started with the introduction of general codes or categories that were later redefined (such as the general code of 'students' views of teachers' into the codes 'good teacher', 'bad teacher', 'neither here nor there'). The inclusion of more cases and the comparison and contrast between them helped me to: i) break down or link categories, ii) re-orient data collection in order to gather additional data; and iii) revisit, refine and/or change my research questions. As I have already indicated, research diaries were also sites of preliminary analysis that also guided data collection and the redefinition of my research questions. Successive coding and

analysis of the qualitative data involved a permanent dialogue with my analytical framework and the pertinent Argentinean and British literature. Alongside this coding, I identified possible connections between categories that let me draft different alternative interpretations and stories about what was going on in the field. The qualitative analysis was part of an iterative set of processes that started during the fieldwork and did not stop until its final representation in this thesis.

Writing ethnography and doing translation

Atkinson has analysed the textual nature of ethnography and how ethnographers construct and produce 'reality' in the form of an ethnographic story (1990, 1992). He puts forward a strong argument about the process of writing ethnography as socially constructed and embedded, which follows certain rhetorical forms and devices to portray plausible and valid interpretations. In other words, ethnographic texts are socially produced and they produce social meaning.

Moreover, ethnographies are particular types of texts that could be assimilated to translations. Following Churchill (2005), like the act of translating a text from one language to another, ethnography converts observations carried out by the researcher into written reports. Like any translation or communication act, ethnography is intrinsically unable to "fully enter the consciousness of another and thereby definitively know the other's meanings and motivations" (Churchill 2005: 22). In other words, ethnography is as flawed "as the exchange of words and gestures between any two human beings" (Churchill 2005: 23). However, due to its interpretative nature, it is also one of the most reliable and rigorous methods of capturing the nature of group life and social structure (Churchill 2005).

At all stages of my study I have been attentive to locating myself as researcher in the field, as an author and translator who is always making choices of words, phrases and narrative techniques to represent the social world for an audience. Being a non native English speaker has contributed to this constant awareness of my role of translator of my mother tongue but also some of my country's cultural clues and my experiences in the field to an audience from a different intellectual and cultural geography.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined my decision to carry out an ethnographic study of two state secondary schools in the city of Buenos Aires. In particular, I have considered the methodological implications of ethnography. I have analysed the relationships between my research questions, theoretical framework and methodology, pointing at its organic and dialectical nature. This chapter has mapped out the processes of sampling the schools and people; and has provided some background information on High Mountain and Low Hill and their immediate geographical, spatial and social environments. Then, I detailed the processes of gaining access to the schools, which encompassed on-going negotiations with people in the research settings. The discussion here has focused on how my multiple identities have impinged on my fieldwork relations and have demarcated the boundaries of the field. Following from this, I have examined the ethical considerations that were paramount during fieldwork. Then, I have examined the different data collection techniques used throughout fieldwork. The discussion in this section focused on how I used them; what kinds of challenges they involved; and, how I addressed them. Besides, I briefly reflected on the process of leaving the field and how then I started with a more systematic

analysis of the qualitative data gathered in the schools. Finally, I acknowledged the constructed, partial and located character of the ethnography as a text. Throughout, I have attempted to recognise the embodied and socially embedded nature of the produced knowledge. Recognising my role as linguistic and cultural translator had grounded my epistemic responsibility and authorship in my multiple locations in the academic, institutional and social worlds in which I am immersed. Although partial and located, my ethnographic account attempts to represent something that is not totally arbitrary, that represented me but also the experiences of those whom I studied. It aims to unpack key patterns in the operations of the game of secondary schooling in two state schools of the City of Buenos Aires that would serve to further explore and examine how secondary schooling has been recently reshaped.

The next chapter begins unfolding the nature of the game of secondary schooling played by High Mountain and Low Hill in the context of a fragmented state school system.

Chapter five: High Mountain, Low Hill and institutional habitus

Introduction

After having described my methodology, research methods, and the two schools where this study was carried out, I now turn my attention to how the schools' institutional habitus contributed to the production of educational inequalities within the field of secondary education and how it shaped High Mountain and Low Hill's teachers' views about their intakes. In Chapter Two I defined institutional habitus as the influence of a cultural group or social class on an individual's practices as it is mediated through an institution (Drummond 1998). Institutional habitus instils values, attitudes, dispositions, assumptions, views, and practices on authorities, teachers, pastoral assistants and students. Moreover, institutional habitus maps the contours of what is thinkable and unthinkable in any given social setting; what is acceptable and unacceptable; and what is relevant and irrelevant within the school's boundaries and beyond (McDonough 1996, McNamara Horvat and Lising Antonio 1999, Reay *et al.* 2001a, Thomas 2002).

Unveiling schools' institutional habitus allows the identification of how High Mountain and Low Hill attempted to reproduce their relative positions and institutional capitals (whether economic, cultural, social or symbolic) within the changing local field of secondary education. Moreover, analysing schools' institutional habitus shows how, while attempting to reproduce themselves, they contribute to the inclusion and/or exclusion of different social groups of students. This examination illustrates how schools instil certain dispositions, views and values in teachers, facilitating and/or hampering the participation of particular social groups of students.

In order to unveil the institutional habitus of the two schools concerned, I briefly examine their historical trajectories. In turn, I analyze how the schools reshaped some of their organisational practices¹⁰⁵ in order to respond to threats to their institutional survival and changes in their populations. In so doing I argue that, during the last 15 years, High Mountain and Low Hill have actively sought the reproduction of their relative positions in the field of secondary schooling and have manifested their dissimilar middle class institutional habitus in this process. Finally, I demonstrate how the diverse middle class institutional habitus of both schools pervades teachers' dispositions and views about their working lives, and the reputation and intakes of their respective institutions. Both schools have historically been enmeshed in the meritocratic discourse intertwined with the expansion of secondary schooling, its promises of upward social mobility and social class conversion (see Chapter Three). However, the institutional habitus of High Mountain was rooted in the middle classness of its teachers, its current and preferred middle class intake and in their common views of secondary school as part and parcel of a longer socio-educational trajectory (which included the expectation of continuing university studies). Although the institutional habitus of Low Hill was also entrenched in the middle classness of its teachers, it had been also defined by the historical social distance between its teachers and its traditional population. This chapter draws in particular on teachers' views and on documentary analysis.

¹⁰⁵ Following Thrupp (1999), organisational practices are all those activities 'which support the instructional work of schools indirectly by keeping them running smoothly and safely' (Thrupp 1999: 37) such as monitoring truancy, addressing social needs, maintaining buildings, organizing assemblies and meetings.

The schools and the field of state secondary education

As seen in Chapter Four, High Mountain was a *Normal* school and Low Hill a *Liceo* school that were located in the same collection of buildings. Their past and presents have been historically intertwined. Although there is a dearth of literature about the nature and features of the *Normal* and *Liceo* schools in Argentina and the City of Buenos Aires, informants within the local education system pointed to the historical and contemporary social differences between them since their inception. The *Normal* High Mountain, created in 1874, was initially embedded in cultural values instilled by the state policy of the dominant classes that aimed to produce a social order where everybody (in particular immigrants) needed to be ‘civilised’ and, therefore, assimilated to the dominant culture (see Chapter Three). The *Normales* mainly attracted young women from the middle class, members of the former dominant sectors and lower classes who wanted to follow a professional career otherwise not available to them. In the case of the *Liceo* Low Hill, its creation in 1942 accompanied the expansion of secondary education in the City and mainly gathered girls from low socio-economic families. In this sense, it could be seen as part of a wider socio-educational policy and discourse that aimed at including the “respectable poor”¹⁰⁶ such as daughters of domestic workers and concierges. However, despite differences, the *Normales* and *Liceos* clearly fell behind contemporary elite state schools for boys (Fernández 2001).

¹⁰⁶ In this analysis, I follow Castel’s (1997) concept of “respectable poor”. In his analysis of the development and crisis of the salaried society in France, Castel argues that social policy under the modern state has been produced as an inclusive mechanism exclusively targeted to those who were poor but decent, respectable and respectful of the law. Historically, they had been clearly differentiated from those who were the ‘dangerous classes’ and individually and/or collectively had challenged the social order. This analysis had similarities with Skeggs’ (1997) study on the working classes in England.

Throughout their history, both High Mountain and Low Hill's institutional habitus have gone through dramatic transformations tied to socio-cultural and political changes and redefinitions of the secondary education field of the City. Different educational policy changes challenged and effectively altered their historical identities as girls' schools with their particular educational aspirations; hierarchical models of teaching and managing; and traditional gender regimes (Argentina -Ministerio de Educación y Justicia 1989, Morgade 1998, Sarlo 1998). For instance, the transformation of secondary education into mixed education (middle 1980s);¹⁰⁷ the implementation of a common curriculum in the first three school years (1989); and the legitimacy of students' unions (1985) were triggered by wider democratic and socially inclusive tides in society in general and in education in particular. As described in Chapter Three, all these curricular, procedural and administrative changes made High Mountain and Low Hill more like the majority of the secondary schools in the City in terms of target population and curriculum offered in the first three years.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, other processes such as the decentralisation of the national schools (early 1990s) changed the bureaucratic status of the *Normales* and *Liceos* which became dependent on the local government.

High Mountain and Low Hill have always competed for resources and intakes within a heterogeneous educational field. However, they have been in different relative positions to negotiate these processes. Historically, High Mountain had more institutional capitals than Low Hill. For instance, despite alterations in their

¹⁰⁷ Despite pressures towards wider democratisation of schooling, only a few elite schools were able to maintain their single sex status after this.

¹⁰⁸ Differences remained between these types of schools in terms of what kind of specialisation was offered in the last two year of schools and in terms of their historical prestige and recognition in the City.

respective volume of capital over time, High Mountain had economic, social, and symbolic capital that Low Hill lacked. The former had a three storey, nineteenth century building and a four storey building constructed in the 1980s; it had participated in an influential network of *Normales* since its inception; and it had educational prestige both at the national and local level. Conversely Low Hill did not own buildings, had not built up alliances with other schools and had a reputation in the local education system of not being as good as High Mountain. These differential resources contributed to the higher bargaining power of High Mountain. For instance, the *Normales* were able to negotiate some aspects of their forced decentralisation such as the preservation of their academic unit¹⁰⁹ and their regulation by a special governmental unit. Low Hill, on the contrary, was administratively equalised to local mainstream schools.

At the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, both schools shared a common dramatic fate. Longstanding lack of national funding to maintain the historic building created appalling working conditions for teachers and students.

As Mara, a female Geography Teacher at Low Hill, told me:

The historic building was in a dreadful condition. Broken walls; there were holes between classrooms; some lights fell on a group of students; we didn't have windows; we didn't have anything (...) I can't really describe you all that we went through. We had live wired running across the walls! (...) We (teachers) didn't have toilets. We had to go to cafés nearby (...)

(Interview, 15/6/04)

These schools had different ways of dealing with this situation which significantly affected enrolment numbers, staff morale, teaching and learning. High Mountain, in 1991, redefined its curricular profile as a foreign language

¹⁰⁹ This meant that *Normales* could preserve their control over their elementary, primary and secondary levels despite attempts to fragment them

specialist school.¹¹⁰ This, following Bourdieu (1988, 1996), could be interpreted as an institutional strategy to distinguish itself within the educational field. According to some teachers, the school wanted to attract better students (in socio-educational terms) than those they were receiving at that time (who were seen as an extraneous population to the one that traditionally attend this school).

Fabiana, a female Maths teacher, explained this process:

Fabiana: The school had a dreadful time when we didn't have enough students and when they came from the Vacancies Relocation Centre (*Centro de Reubicación de Vacantes*) (...). The educational level of the school declined because, at that time, *chicos*¹¹¹ with learning difficulties entered, and well, we had to deliver less difficult content because they couldn't cope. (...)

AM: At that time, was there any entrance examination?

Fabiana: No, there wasn't. Well, later the school became *Lenguas Vivas* (Foreign language specialist) (...) and then, well, we have an agreement with other *Lenguas Vivas* to accept those who couldn't pass their exams (...) all of this has helped to attract more academically able students (...)

(Interview, 12/10/04)

This distinction strategy involved the introduction of foreign language examinations to select an important part of High Mountain's population and an informal agreement with state elite schools to receive students who did not have high enough scores to get into them. Following British analyses of the operation of educational markets (see for instance Ball and Vincent 1998, Ball 1993, 2003), both the existence of the language entrance examination¹¹² and the agreement with other elite schools could be interpreted as screening devices to identify both students' and families' cultural capitals.

¹¹⁰ At this time the *Normales* were national schools.

¹¹¹ The word *chicos* is widely used by adults and young people. *Chicos* is plural and is in masculine. However, this word could refer to both boys and girls or only to a collective of boys. *Chico* refers to a young boy; *chica* refers to a young girl.

¹¹² The great majority of state schools did not have entrance examinations.

According to some teachers, this re-labelling of the school contributed to an increase in enrolment and helped the school to regain its traditional middle class population.¹¹³ This change in High Mountain's recruitment policy expressed its ability to mobilise its social and cultural capitals and to redefine its educational profile in order to attract middle class students and dissuade other social groups from entering. Moreover, this new policy reflected both High Mountain's particular middle class institutional habitus and its perception of the change of population at the beginning of the 1990s as a threat to its historical institutional prestige and identity.¹¹⁴

In the case of Low Hill, the dreadful working conditions and low numbers of students in the early 1990s, together with the lack of relative institutional capitals, contributed to an open door recruitment policy. At that time, according to some teachers and one psychologist, the majority of the school's population did not choose Low Hill and it was transferred by the Vacancies Relocation Centre of the City (*Centro de Reubicación de Vacantes*). From the mid 1990s onwards, Low Hill accepted a higher proportion of students with previous educational failures, serious behavioural problems, and a history of drug and alcohol abuse. Teachers described this new type of student as not matching the profile of students that Low Hill had historically attracted: young people from low socio-economic groups who had the expected theoretical schooling age; had some sort of family support and were respectful to teachers. Rosalía, a female

¹¹³ There is no available statistical data to corroborate this statement. As defined in Chapter Three, *sobre-edad* refers to those students who are older than the theoretical age group that should attend to each school year. However, from 1997 onwards, it is possible to identify a clear trend of enrolments where more than 90% of students did not have *sobre-edad*.

¹¹⁴ Although in a different context (see Chapter Three), High Mountain demonstrated similar features to some schools analysed in British analyses focused on the operations of the educational market (see for instance Ball *et al.* 1995; Gewirtz *et al.* 1995; Ball 2006). In the City of Buenos Aires, although there was not an educational market like the British one, some state schools such as High Mountain were immersed in competitive strategies for intakes against other schools.

geography teacher at Low Hill, illustrates this change of population and the perceived distance between the school and its 'new' students:

The educational level of the students in this school has always been a bit lower than that of other schools in the area (...) at that time, we didn't have so many students with *sobre-edad* and fewer students were completely uninterested, like now. I don't mind having a student of 20 years old if they come to study, but if the student of 20 years old commits the same mistakes they committed last year and the year before (...) this type of *chico* comes here and thinks that this is a social club (...) I don't want that type of student.

(Interview, 6/11/04)

Like Rosalía, many teachers viewed this new type of student as "uninterested", "difficult" and "troublesome", who treated the school as a "social club" where they "could meet friends", "be safe", "get a bursary", and "a free meal". Teachers highlighted social and cultural differences between the previous and present school population and between the latter and teachers' collective expectations. The social and cultural distance between schools and non middle class students has been widely identified in socio-educational research as linked with lower levels of achievement of working class students (see Ball *et al.* 1995, Bourdieu and Passeron 1990, Flude 1974, Reay 2001, Whitty 2001, Willis 1981). Teachers' views about Low Hill's students could be seen, on the one hand, as an expression of the specific middle class institutional habitus of the school, and, on the other, as indicative of the profound threat and challenge that these 'new' students represented. Here, unlike in High Mountain, the middle class institutional habitus of Low Hill is rooted in the school's historical identity as a school for the "respectable poor" (Castel 1997) and in its middle class teachers' values and views towards students' behaviours and their expectations regarding students' automatic acceptance of the school's legitimacy.

After analysing the schools' differential abilities to deal with the recruitment crisis and the profound impact that this had on schools' intake, I turn my attention to the reshaping of the schools' organisational practices.

Middle class institutional habitus in changing scenarios

Both High Mountain and Low Hill were effective, from the 1990s onwards, in attracting a greater numbers of students and, in this way, safe guarded their survival. However, as seen above, they attracted distinctive populations with different educational needs. Here, I analyse some transformations of whole-school organisational practices performed during the 1990s and 2000s that, on the one hand, portrayed attempts to address perceived changes and, on the other, revealed their different middle class institutional habitus confronted with notably different challenges.

From the 1990s onwards, High Mountain had promoted new organisational practices and altered various aspects of the formal and non-formal curriculum offered. One example was the introduction in 1997 of a module called "methodology of study" in the formal curriculum of the first school year. This aimed to ameliorate a perceived increase in students with learning difficulties during the first and second school years. Another example of changing organisational practices was the establishment in 1997 of two optional vocational labour training courses and one special career service module for students in their final school year. The school also offered extra-curricular support in key modules of the first three years (i.e. in Maths, Spanish and Literature, and Physics) after school. Moreover, it offered training to take international language examinations outside the school and to participate in national Maths competitions. The *Rectora*

at High Mountain, María Verónica, described this steady transformation of the school's organisational practices and its rationale:

The school has grown quite considerably during the last few years. The school has occupied more time and space in the afternoon. It has grown because social circumstances have changed. Students need many things that, before, they obtained outside the school (...) well, we have courses to help our students to get jobs when they finish the school, like the course for being a pastoral assistant; this lets students get a job while attending university or, well, in the case of the girls, we have the classroom assistants course (...) We have a multitude of workshops and courses, including theatre and educational support in particular modules (...) where they receive the support they need.

(Interview, 02/08/03)

At the time of the fieldwork, there was a general perception that many middle class families were losing their previous historical economic advantages and were unable to pay for extra educational support for their children. As seen in Chapter Three, in Argentina these new perceived needs of middle class families in High Mountain could be interpreted as characteristic of what Svampa (2000a, 2005) has labelled the "loser" groups within the middle classes. The "losers" were those occupational groups (such as public sector employees and professionals, self employed and shop keepers disconnected from the new informational structures) who had been impoverished by recent processes of economic restructuring (Svampa 2000, 2005; Minujin and Anguita 2005). Moreover, teachers agreed that there were signs of general worsening of students' educational performance associated with a wider educational decline of primary schooling. Finally, in line with recent Argentinean research about the devaluation of educational credentials in the labour market (Filmus *et al.* 2001, Filmus and Moragues 2002, 2003), the *Rectora* and many teachers stated that the secondary school certificate was not enough to guarantee a smooth integration

into the occupational market. Hence, High Mountain began to offer additional job qualifications to enable students to compete for future jobs after their graduation, which they imagined as part and parcel of students' future lives while undertaking university degrees.¹¹⁵

This redefinition of High Mountain's organisational practices, like its recruitment policy, shows the school's attempts to adapt to the new socio-economic and educational circumstances of its middle class population and the school's ability to use available local government funds. On the one hand, similar to British research findings on educational markets (see for instance Ball 2003, Ball *et al.* 1995, 1996, Reay 2001, Reay and Ball 1997), the new organisational practices manifested the school's willingness to distinguish itself from other state schools and to become more responsive to perceived middle class students' educational needs. On the other, this reshaping of institutional practices reflected the school's ability to get funds from local government programmes that were mainly targeted at students from low socio-economic families (see Chapter Three). In this sense, High Mountain was able to redefine the local policy of social inclusion or *contención* in terms of its mainly middle class population and its perceived particular social needs and demands. All these organisational changes, including a more selective recruitment policy, reflected High Mountain's specific middle class institutional habitus. In this sense, High Mountain produced a particular middle class institutional habitus when mobilizing institutional capitals in order to attract middle class families and students and, in so doing, developed strategies of cultural distinction within the segmented field of secondary education.

¹¹⁵ Combining study and work characterised the university career phases of many within the middle classes.

In the case of Low Hill, in order to deal with higher numbers of older students, with experiences of educational failure, behavioural and learning problems, this school also reshaped different organisational practices which had been financially supported by the local government as part of its retention or inclusive policy (CIPPEC 2004, López 2002) (see Chapter Three). One example of this reshaping of organisational practices was the creation of the Orientation Department (OD) in 1997 (which until 2001 included one psychologist and from 2001 onwards increased to two, for a population at that time of around 600 students). The creation of the Department sought to open up a space for teachers and students to deal with mainly social and behavioural problems. The OD's creation followed Low Hill teachers' requests for local government financial support and advice in dealing with the new school population. The OD promoted, for instance, meetings with individual students to assess their social and educational needs. In 1998, the OD created a pastoral system so that each form of the first and second school year had its own tutor. During interview, one of the school psychologists, Marga, described the tutor's role, the difficult circumstances that many students had to confront, and the main aim of the Orientation Department:

Tutors have to care about students. For tutors, it's not the same if they live or die. (...) The tutor system wants to include students who don't match the ideal student that many teachers still have in mind (...) maths, literature, they are part of the our project but, at the beginning, it's not our priority (...) we want *chicos* to choose to live and then try to make them choose the school.

(Interview, 15/5/04)

Here, Marga refers to the more general lifestyle of some *chicos* sometimes involved in illegal and dangerous activities because they had to in order to

survive.¹¹⁶ These ‘new’ students did not match the ‘ideal’ student that Low Hill’s teachers wished to have. Moreover, Marga describes the OD’s aims as primarily social and only secondarily educational. In this sense, although its creation was rooted in the school’s traditional middle class institutional habitus and in its inability to deal with the ‘new’ students, the OD promoted the emergence of an alternative view about the school and its social function that was rejected by the majority of teachers and pastoral assistants.

Further illustrations of the transformations of organisational practices were i) the introduction in 1999 of age as the main criterion for allocating students to the first and second school year and ii) an agreement with the local government to regulate the size of these form classes according to the age group of students (in such ways that those form classes with older and repitient students should be smaller).¹¹⁷ Low Hill introduced the age criterion as a school-based initiative, which allowed for the distribution of students according to their previous educational trajectory. Before this, students were allocated randomly to different form classes. Teachers argued that the age allocation criterion and size reduction of form classes were necessary in order to address differences of educational trajectories, behavioural problems and learning needs.¹¹⁸ This original experience of streaming of students, which has been widely studied in Britain (Ball 1981, Boaler 1997b, Hargreaves 1967, Ireson and Hallam 2001), did not have recorded

¹¹⁶ As seen in Chapter Four, there were not statistics about students’ socio-economic background. However, as noted before, Low Hill had a relatively high percentage of students receiving bursaries which is one indicator of low levels of family incomes and income poverty.

¹¹⁷ The agreement stated that classes with older students should have a maximum of 15 students.

¹¹⁸ Low Hill had received older populations before and teachers and the Orientation Department saw this distinction among age groups as fundamental to addressing their respective needs.

antecedents in Argentinean secondary schooling before the late 1990s.¹¹⁹ Despite attempts to implement these criteria and the explicit but informal support of the school district supervisor and teachers, Low Hill was able to apply both only once, due to local government pressures to accept all students sent to the school. Hence, with the exception of the 1999 cohort, form classes with older students had a similar size to those with younger students and, in several cases, the latter were mixed. Teachers recalled the 1999 cohort as a unique success story of this new allocating criterion. Laura, an Accountancy teacher, reflects several teachers' views about the experience:

(...). We organised a first school year form class with 15 *chicos*, *chicos* who repeated, *chicos* of 18 years old, *chicos* whose legal guardians were judges, who lived far away from families.(..) I think only a few reached the fifth school year (...) Well, we did have a very good response, independently of whether they failed or not to complete the secondary. We did include them in the normal routine of a *chico* when they go to school (...) I think that that was an achievement, independently of whether they finished the secondary school.

(Interview, 9/12/04)

Many teachers identified the first cohort of students of this project as an achievement. However, according to several teachers, only one of all its students reached the fifth school year. 'Achievement', in this case, seemed to be measured by social integration and lack of serious behavioural problems or challenges to teachers' authorities and frames. 'Achievement' did not imply educational success or getting educational credentials fundamental to compete in a fragmented and exclusionary labour market (Tenti Fanfani 2003a). Following British studies on ability grouping (Ball 1981, Boaler 1997b, Hargreaves 1967,

¹¹⁹ During my pre-field phase I recorded similar attempts in one E.M.E.M. of the City of Buenos Aires (see Chapter Three). However, I have not identified any Argentinean research about secondary schooling that documents similar kinds of processes.

Ireson and Hallam 2001), this local version of success seems to reflect Low Hill's teachers lower expectations for older and non traditional students. It seems that the middle class institutional habitus of Low Hill permeated teachers' diagnoses and their specific ways of assessment that strongly differed from those they applied to middle class students from other schools. In 2004, teachers frequently mentioned (whether in staff rooms, institutional whole school meetings or corridors) this forced mix of population and class size as the main reasons for their failure to deal with first and second school year students and as directly associated with, in the first three school years, difficult working conditions for teachers and, as seen in Chapter Four, high levels of educational failure.

This reshaping of organisational practices reflects Low Hill's difficulties in attracting its own intake; its attempts to deal with a new population; and the pressures that the local government exerted on its recruitment policy. Firstly, the relative lack of institutional capitals of Low Hill, together with the ongoing necessity of increasing student numbers, impeded the development of any strategy to select its intake. Secondly, teachers argued that local government's pressures towards including the new type of students were apparent in: i) a lack of support for the school's decision to diminish class size in form classes with older students; and, ii) the schools' lack of powers to make decisions over students' exclusions¹²⁰ (which was possible before the last return of democracy in the early 1980s). Teachers named the overarching local educational policy on

¹²⁰ Exclusions of students from schools were possible only in very extreme cases. For the majority of the behavioural problems, there was a collection of measures such as meetings with the *Consejo de Convivencia* where students were offered to sign agreements of good will to behave; postal or personal contact with parents; or temporary exclusions (see Chapter Three for a description of the *Consejo de Convivencia*).

inclusion as *contención* (protection, support, physical containment). They critically interpreted it as an attempt to keep problematic students in the school, to the detriment of other students' learning and/or permanence in the institution.

Rosalía, a female Geography teacher, illustrates this view:

I am worried that many students should be punished promptly, and not just in October (...) Those students who in April are already identified [the school year begins in the second half of March] as problematic, those who come here without wanting to do anything, those who come here with bad records and don't change (...) All these students are kept in the school because it's better for the City government that they are here than in the street. (...) And the good students, well, their parents say 'am I going to leave my child with this group of *chicos*?' and well, they take their children to another school.

(Interview, 7/12/04)

Transformations of the organisational practices evidence the distinctive middle class institutional habitus of Low Hill, showing how the school and its teachers recognised the existence of a social and cultural 'otherness' within its physical and symbolic boundaries. Although the school was used to dealing with the "respectable poor", the inclusion of older students with serious learning and behavioural problems clearly demonstrated: i) Low Hill's middle class expectations regarding appropriate students' social and educational dispositions, and ii) the clash between the traditional population of Low Hill and the new population that the school had accepted in order to survive, which included members of the 'dangerous classes' (Castel 1997, Skeggs 1997c, 2004). The perceived social proximity between schools and their teachers and their respective intakes is analysed in the following section.

Institutional habitus and class identity making

In terms of teachers' discourses in each school about their location in the wider field of secondary education and their population, this section argues that teachers' views evidenced the schools' middle class institutional habitus, which facilitated or hampered the participation of certain social groups of students.

High Mountain and middle classness

The *Rectora*, the Head Teacher, and the majority of teachers at High Mountain agreed that it was a good state school. Moreover, the majority of teachers argued that the school had a good level of education compared to other state schools but it had experienced a considerable academic decline along with Argentinean education more generally.¹²¹ Camila, a female Language Teacher, clearly illustrated this point:

In the City, this school is considerably in demand (...) it has a longstanding prestige. Of course, the educational level has abruptly fallen during the last 20 years. (...) However, it keeps a certain educational level. Nothing like what it was but, within the state system, the Argentinean school, it still keeps certain level of academic demands. There are many students who have to leave because they cannot follow the pace of the school.

(Interview, 16/07/03)

Camila, like many teachers, believed that High Mountain preserved a privileged position within the field of education, attracted many (middle class) students and excluded those who were not able to follow the school's academic demands. Drawing on Gewirtz *et al.* (1995), High Mountain's entrance examinations (as seen in the previous section) and the prohibition of re-enrolling students who had repeated twice, could be respectively interpreted as mechanisms of "formal" and

¹²¹ This diagnosis is widely shared by academics, journalists, teachers' unions and policy makers (Confederación General de los Trabajadores de la Educación de la República Argentina (CTERA) 2002, 2003; Feijóo 2002; Lozano 2002; Tiramonti 2004).

“informal” selection of its intake. The former was used to select and ‘screen’ middle class students and the latter to maintain a minimum academic level considered acceptable by the school. Hence, the authorities and teachers viewed the school as still able to distinguish itself from other state schools and to regulate its general academic level.

Teachers, in particular, highlighted the positive personal qualities of the *chicos* of High Mountain as a central feature of the school. All teachers that I spoke to agree that students were “good”, “nice”, “polite” people and some highlighted that they were academically able. From a Bourdieusian perspective (Bourdieu 1990, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002), teachers perceived students as ‘fitting in’ to the school’s fundamental values and expectation.¹²² Daniel exemplified High Mountain teachers’ views about their students.

I do believe that people in this school have a lot of potential, we work with average *chicos* (...) they are not bad people, we don’t have high levels of aggression towards teachers, you can work, they are friendly (...) you have teachers who feel that they belong to the school, that’s great. Everybody says ‘good morning’ ‘good afternoon’. They wave at you and recognise you. You can quickly create ties with them, which doesn’t happen in other schools where you have hostile relations with students and also with teachers (...) I think that these are important values in this school. I do believe that if a *chico* comes and wants to study, he could make the most of it.

(Interview, 3/11/04)

In this view, the ‘niceness’ and ‘friendliness’ of High Mountain’s students referred to a lack of serious behavioural, socio-economic and educational problems, which were portrayed by the media and academic discourse as part and parcel of the everyday life of many state schools that attracted students from

¹²² As noted in Chapter One, assessing the socio-cultural distance and ‘fitness’ between schools and their intakes has been a fruitful approach in the British field of socio-educational research (see Reay et al. 2001a; Horvat and Lising Antonio 1999).

low socio-economic families (Feijoó 2002, Kessler 2002, Tenti Fanfani 1992, 2003a).

High Mountain teachers were used to having “good” and “nice” people and they expected the school had to attract this type of students. Teachers were immersed in an organisation where their students were perceived as likeable. Following sociological analysis of class identity making and its cultural and moral components (Lawler 2005a, 2005b, Reay 2005, Sayer 2005a, 2005b), this collective expectation could be interpreted as mainly rooted in the particular middle class institutional habitus of High Mountain, which had historically defined its population as socially and culturally close and recognisable and, hence, as morally acceptable and desirable. As seen in the second section of this chapter, High Mountain had actively sought middle class students.

Teachers’ emphasis on the personal qualities of the students could be seen as contributing to the production of students’ middle class identity as ‘desirable’ and normal against an imaginary ‘other’ who lacked middle class qualities (Ball 2003, Bottero 2004, Crossley 1996, Lawler 2005a, 2005b, Savage 2000, Skeggs 1997b). This ‘otherness’ could be associated with young people from low socio-economic groups who had been recently included in secondary education (see Chapter Three) and actively dissuaded from entering High Mountain. Teachers’ emphasis on middle class students’ qualities had always had a symbolic referent (although in silent and subtle ways) to a social and cultural collective ‘other’ featured by its opposite attributes such as “not being nice”, “uneducated”, “unfriendly”, and “hostile”. From a sociological perspective on collective identity making (Jenkins 1996, Reay 1998b, Savage 2000, Savage *et al.* 2001, Sayer 2002), High Mountain operated as a symbolic arena where middle

classiness was valued and appreciated and, at the same time, produced as different and distinctive from others who were undesirable and unrecognisable.

Teachers at High Mountain also agreed that, despite their academic potential, the majority of the students were not interested in academic achievement. They simply wanted only what was necessary to pass and, in general, they did not want to distinguish themselves through academic achievement. However, they also stated that the majority of students wanted to go to university and agreed that their parents had similar aspirations for them. Camila, a female Language teacher, and Liliana, a female History teacher, illustrated the teachers' views about students' lack of interest in academic excellence.

AM: How do students relate to marks? Are they competitive?

Camila: No. There are few exceptions. The majority only want a six (the minimum mark to pass an exam). They want to *zafar*¹²³ studying the least necessary. That's the ideal: the guy who gets six and does not study too much. There are a few competitive students. The key word is *zafar*, that's the key word, *zafar* (...) the *chico* who wants to learn or get high marks is rejected, treated as an alien, he's stupid.

(Interview, 16/7/03)

Liliana: If you talk to them (...) they say 'I don't understand but *zafó*? [do I pass anyway?] Well, we've convinced them that not understanding is OK, or it's cool to say that you don't understand anything. It's a social problem, it's a problem of a society that has certain standards (...) The problem is that it's a society where all the values are related to the quickest *zafé*. It's the law of the minimum effort (...) to make an effort is stupid, because it's really stupid, today the one who succeeds is the one who *zafa*. It's a serious concern.

(Interview, 7/9/04)

¹²³ I could not find a word to translate this. Its meaning in this context is to do just the minimum necessary to pass.

Teachers agreed that the disposition towards *zafar*¹²⁴ negatively affected students' overall educational performance, learning and academic engagement. In other words, and unlike the British confident and entitled middle class (Ball 2003, Power *et al.* 2003, Savage 2000, Skeggs 1997b), High Mountain's students seemed not to invest too much in the instructional game.¹²⁵ Teachers saw their students as able to pass school year without academically engaging in the majority of the modules. The majority of teachers argued that the culture of *zafar* was the result of profound changes at societal level that, mainly from 1990s onwards, the school and teachers had to deal with. In this sense, teachers (in agreement with academics¹²⁶) asserted that, in Argentinean contemporary society, economic or social success was not culturally linked with effort and academic achievement, as in the past (see Chapter Three). In this view, neither the school nor teachers appeared to be explicitly linked with the production of the culture of *zafar*. In Chapter Six, I look at how students experienced *zafar* and how it constituted a 'common sense' strategy to deal with teachers' uneven demands and frames.

High Mountain teachers' views about their students reflected the specific school's middle class institutional habitus and revealed the social and cultural proximity between the school and teachers and their students. Moreover, teachers positively valued working with students who were, above all, "good" people, despite the profound gap between their views on students' lack of interest in learning and the school's history of high academic standards and effective

¹²⁴ *Zafar* is an infinite verb. *Zafé* and *zafó* are the first person singular of the verb *zafar* in past tense and in the simple present respectively. *Zafa* is the third person singular.

¹²⁵ This is similar to what British researchers have found regarding working class boys not wanting to appear as achieving or valuing education (Archer 2003, Archer and Yamashita 2003, Francis and Skelton 2005, Mac an Ghail 1994).

¹²⁶ For a discussion about the centrality of corruption and illegality in the configuration of social ties in Argentinean society see Isuani (1996); Sautu (2004a; 2004b).

discipline (which was in general associated with the recent past before the return of democracy). Having considered the middle class institutional habitus of High Mountain and teachers' views about the school's intake, it is time to turn my attention to Low Hill, its teachers' views about the school, its reputation and intake.

Low Hill, social 'othering' and educational exclusion

The majority of teachers at Low Hill agreed that the school was not one of good repute in the local system and that it was well known by many students for its bad reputation. Teachers understood that for many students Low Hill was an easy alternative or the last resort. In Mara's (a female History and Civic Education teacher) words:

The other problem is the reputation of the school or what students say about what others say about the school. This school is perceived as a place where those without hope go (...) The reputation circulates among teenagers, for instance, when they go out to dance and people ask: 'what is your school?', ah! Is it Low Hill?, yes, yes, in that school it is easy to pass, you can smoke there and hide yourself because there are a lot of odd corners' (...) This is a school that, in the school district, is considered as one of the worst schools because of its intake, the social situation of the students, the fact that they come from far away, or from slums, or from squats. (...)

(Interview, 1/11/04)

Many teachers agreed that the school's bad reputation was mainly tied to the socio-economic and cultural background of many of its students, which negatively impacted on its educational status within the state field of secondary schooling. Teachers pointed to important differences between Low Hill and other state schools where they currently worked such as different depths of analysis, activities, levels of difficulty in their assessment, and levels of engagement with set tasks. Few teachers who worked in both High Mountain and Low Hill stated

that they delivered the same curriculum in both schools.¹²⁷ However, they accepted that there were differences in the pace of learning, level of understanding and the degree of difficulty of exams between the students of both schools. Consuelo, a female Maths teacher, summarised the dominant perspective and offered a clear description of the unequal nature between state secondary schools in the City:

The academic level of those who graduate in Low Hill is very mediocre. I would tell you that, in general, [Low Hill] students can't enter university and if they do, they would need twice the time to complete each university year. Only those who are very persistent and work very hard could reach university. They need the first time to adapt to the university and the second to learn all that they listened to during the first time. (...) I like working in the school 'Against the stream', which is a *Normal* school. I only work there five hours a week and also in the 'Great Thinkers' National College¹²⁸ in the entrance course. If I don't do that, I will intellectually sink (...) why does the *chico* from 'Against the Stream' enter the university without problems while the *chico* from Low Hill doesn't? Well, I give 20 exercises there and the day after, the exercises are solved. There is a supportive family that ensures that the *chico* does their homework and if the *chico* can't do it by himself, his family will pay for a private tutor or the father sits down with him. We don't have this here.

(Interview, 7/12/04)

Consuelo identified Low Hill as having a lower academic level than schools such as the *Normal* 'Against the Stream', mainly made up of middle class students. In line with recent Argentinean research about educational fragmentation (Kessler 2002, Tiramonti and Minteguiaga 2004), Consuelo's description illustrated some dimensions of the unequal nature of secondary schooling such as differential students' dispositions, knowledge, skills and future socio-educational routes. Moreover, Consuelo also clearly identified social class markers between the majority of Low Hill's students and families and those of the other school where she worked. She argued that, unlike students of elite state schools, the majority of

¹²⁷ Seven teachers worked in the two schools in a variety of modules such as English, French, Physics and Chemistry, History, and Civic Education.

¹²⁸ This is a state university elite secondary school.

Low Hill's students did not have adequate dispositions towards school homework and lacked economic and educational family support. The same kinds of differences between groups of students were recognised by teachers who also worked in "good" state schools and in Low Hill –including those who worked in Low Hill and High Mountain. Like Consuelo, they all pointed to the differences in cultural and economic capitals between the majority of the families and how they negatively impacted on students' learning and educational achievement. However, from a critical socio-educational perspective (Ball 1981, Bourdieu and Passeron 1990, Young 1971b), this informal 'deficit theory' could be interpreted as a structural impossibility of the school recognising the role that schools, teachers and the curriculum played in producing educational failure or low performance.

The social and cultural distance between the school and its students was also reflected in the Institutional Educational Project 2000, which had not been updated at the time of fieldwork. The Institutional Educational Project was a written document that individual schools had to produce and update yearly to state their institutional goals and priorities.¹²⁹ It presents dominant institutional perspectives on the school's population and its problems:

Students who do not want to learn; students with learning and behavioural problems (around 70%); incomplete families; parents in full time jobs who are not able to attend meetings when requested; students who work (15%); unemployment; (...) students with low levels of symbolic resources; students with previous educational failure; students with *sobre-edad*.

(Low Hill 2000: 3)

Here, Low Hill students are portrayed as coming from low socio-economic backgrounds; having 'incomplete' and unsupportive families; with low linguistic

¹²⁹ The nature of the institutional projects, despite common frameworks, is quite variable. In the case of High Mountain, for example, in 2004, it only stated pedagogic strategies to deal with problems of literacy.

capital; lacking motivation to learn; and with previous experiences of educational failure. The socio-cultural 'distance' between students and their families and the school's (family, linguistic and attitudinal) expectations appears again. From a Bourdieusian perspective (Bourdieu 1990, 1993c, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002), the Institutional Educational Project could be seen as an example of how Low Hill perceived its students as lacking those skills, attitudes, dispositions and behaviours necessary to play the game of schooling. Students' habitus are described as clashing with the institutional habitus of Low Hill and as not 'fitting in' to the social, behavioural and academic evaluative criteria of the school (Lareau and Weininger 2003, McNamara Horvat and Lising Antonio 1999, Reay 2004a, Thomas 2002).

This perceived lack of 'fitness' reflected the distinctive middle class institutional habitus of Low Hill that permeated teachers' views about students, their problems and potentialities. As indicated above, Low Hill's middle class institutional habitus was of a different kind to that of High Mountain. In Low Hill, teachers had different expectations towards their population than when they were working in elite and good state schools. Historically (as seen in the second main section of this chapter), Low Hill had recruited young people from lower socio-economic groups who had the expected theoretical age for attending secondary school and who were perceived as accepting teachers' pedagogic authority. In this sense, teachers were used to, and wished to have, 'traditional' students who, in Bourdieusian terms, accepted the rules of game of schooling and, despite their non middle class origin, did not challenge the nature of schooling (Bourdieu 1988, 1990, 1995a).

Together with this constant emphasis on the distance between the school and the majority of students, Low Hill's teachers agreed that the school population was heterogeneous and fragmented both spatially and educationally. In this sense, they argued that the majority of problematic students were concentrated in the first three school years, which comprised – in 2004 - more than 75% of Low Hill's population. In this sense, some teachers, and many pastoral assistants argued that Low Hill operated as two schools in one. Martina, a female Geography teacher, portrayed this striking contrast:

(...) The population who start in Low Hill and the population who finishes here are very different. I mean, there is an abyss between the ground floor (where the classrooms of the fourth and fifth school years are) and the school in the second and third floor (where the classrooms of the first to the third school year are). This school is spatially extended and it behaves like two different schools (...) There is a decrease of students numbers in the first and second year and, then, again in the third year (..)

(Interview, 18/08/04)

The 'two schools' that Martina mentioned occupied different institutional spaces. The population with lower overall educational performance, worse behaviour and bigger form classes occupied the second and third floors. The 'better' students occupied the ground floor and belonged to the fourth and fifth school years. According to teachers, these students were those who had entered Low Hill without learning and/or behavioural difficulties and had not been "contaminated" by the "problematic", "disengaged" and "challenging" students.

Low Hill's threatened middle class institutional habitus, with its inability to deal with 'new' students' needs and particularities, also had pervaded teachers' views about methods of dealing with students who did not 'fit in' with the schools' social, behavioural, and educational expectations. Among 'new' students, teachers recognised two main groups: those who challenged and those who did

not challenge the social and educational written and unwritten rules of the game (such as being “polite”, “nice”, “educated”, “quiet”, “obedient”, “correct”, “doing homework”, “making an effort”). Teachers argued that many students who did not challenge their authority were usually also disengaged from school work and tended to reiterate previous mistakes.¹³⁰ On the other hand, teachers viewed students who challenged the rules of game as common obstacles (in the majority of form classes in the first three school years) to achieving a “working consensus” during lessons and as damaging the rest of the students’ learning (Goffman 1990a). The majority of teachers I spoke to recalled examples of students or groups of students who systematically jeopardized their lessons. Vera, a Language and Literature teacher, summarises how many teachers dealt with misbehaviour and how they facilitated students’ exclusion from lesson activities:

There are *chicos* who don’t want to study and they are bothering all the time, they make jokes, they throw things and when I ask them why they do these kinds of things well (...) they say ‘I’m not interested in the school’. Well, what sort of contract can you make with that *chico*? Well, ‘you don’t care? OK. Would you like to repeat [the school year]? Well, OK, that’s your problem, sit down and shut up.’ Why are they coming to the school? (...) I think that this kind of *chicos* need other kinds of institutions. The state has to support and assist them but whilst not damaging those who do want to learn (...) Sometimes I honestly don’t know what we are doing here.

(Fieldnotes, 22/06/04)

In keeping with findings from research into teachers’ coping strategies (Meo and Parker 2004, Stebbins 1980, Woods 1979), the majority of teachers looked for strategies through which those who did not want to study were asked to be silent and not interrupt lessons. In general, trying to isolate students who challenged teachers’ authority and pedagogic frames was a common tactic that followed a

¹³⁰ Teachers’ views could be seen as influenced by the ‘cultural deficit’ theory where the family or the individual is blamed for low educational performance (see Chapter One).

period where teachers attempted to establish a working consensus by talking and trying to convince problematic students about the benefits of their participation in lessons (Goffman 1990a). Teachers' feelings of frustration, anger and anxiety accompanied these initial negotiations. After this phase (that could last months or weeks depending on teachers' flexibility and pedagogic frames and form class composition), teachers argued that they only worked with those students who were interested.¹³¹ In this way, the threatened Low Hill middle class institutional habitus had made it unthinkable for teachers to imagine alternative ways of dealing with non-traditional students other than accepting their disengagement and misbehaviour. Moreover, the majority of teachers interpreted educational failure as the exclusive responsibility of students. In this way, they were unable to reflect on how their ways of working; the lack of extra-educational support for students; the small size of the Orientation Department; and the lack of professional support from the local government also played a central part in students' educational failure (López 2002).

Conclusions

This chapter has sought to analyze the different middle class institutional habitus of High Mountain and Low Hill and how it pervaded both whole-school organisational practices and teachers' views about their schools' intakes. I have argued that the schools had differential institutional habitus which were historically shaped and they had unequal locations and volumes of (economic, social and symbolic) institutional capitals within the local field of state secondary schooling. I have also argued that the schools have been able to deploy differential institutional strategies to deal with the serious and common

¹³¹ I observed that, in four out of six third school year form classes, many problematic students had left the school during the school year which reduced the pressures on teachers.

recruitment crisis of the early 1990s and to adapt to the perceived needs and challenges of their intakes. While High Mountain was able to reshape many organisational practices to attract middle class families and students and to attend to their perceived needs, Low Hill was immersed in a situation where it had to accept students who did not match its social, behavioural and educational standards. Finally, I have argued that the schools' middle class institutional habitus also permeated teachers' views about their students and problems. In High Mountain, teachers viewed middle class students, despite their common lack of interest in modules and their tendency to do simply the minimum to pass, as socially close and intelligible and, therefore, morally acceptable and desirable. In Low Hill, however, teachers viewed their intake as made up of a complex amalgam of 'traditional' and 'new' students. While the former were seen as 'fitting in' with school and teachers' collective expectations; the latter were in general associated with challenges to teachers' pedagogic authority that hampered other students' learning. Low Hill's middle class institutional habitus permeated teachers' incapacity to think of alternative ways of dealing with students with learning and behavioural problems apart from attributing their failure to individual or family factors and/or isolating them within lessons in order to continue teaching to the rest of the form class.

Having analysed schools' institutional habitus and the ways in which they shape organisational practices and teachers' view, the following two chapters depict how students' habitus interplayed with the schools' institutional habitus and the games of schooling that they configured. I begin with Chapter Six which portrays continuities between middle class students' habitus and High Mountain's institutional habitus and its game of schooling.

Chapter Six: Middle class habitus and the game of schooling in High Mountain

Introduction

As we have seen in the previous chapter, High Mountain had a specific middle class institutional habitus evidenced by its active recruitment of middle class students; by the reshaping of its organisational practices in order to respond to new perceived needs of its middle class students; and by the positive ways in which teachers viewed their students, despite their general lack of academic engagement and perceived underperformance. This chapter depicts how middle class students¹³²: i) interplayed with the sub-field of secondary education and the game of schooling at High Mountain and ii) how they produced their class identity through othering certain groups of students at High Mountain and Low Hill. In so doing, it examines how their middle class habitus became 'active in relation to the field' (Reay 2004b: 432). I analyse different moments, views, and classifications of groups and individual students in order to objectify their class views and practices towards the game of schooling (which, as seen in Chapter Five, included but also exceeded the school's institutional habitus). This chapter analyses four 'movements'¹³³ of students' middle class habitus in their interactions with the game of schooling: i) meanings attached to secondary schooling; ii) students and their parents' rationale behind the selection of High Mountain; iii) students' 'logic of practice' to deal with the game of secondary schooling; and, finally, iv) students' symbolic production of their middle class identity within the students' culture of the school. This chapter argues that middle class students and their families had organic relations with High

¹³² As stated in Chapter Four, High Mountain also had a minority of non middle class students. This chapter only focuses on middle class students. Hence, I will refer to them as students.

¹³³ Reay (2004a) uses the expression 'movement of habitus' to refer to the engagements of the habitus with a field.

Mountain's institutional habitus, its game of schooling, and its students' cultures. The first section looks at the third school year students' dominant discourses on the meaning of secondary education. It argues that, in keeping with previous Argentinean research, the majority of students saw secondary schooling as a compulsory and unavoidable stage of their lives. The second section explores how students and their parents interpreted the process of selection of High Mountain and argues that the majority of students and their families actively sought it as positional advantage strategy and class identity making device within the limits of their available resources. The third section portrays the nature of the collective logic of practice of *zafar*, which refers to students' dispositions and practices towards teachers, learning and academic achievement. It argues that middle class students shared a common educational sense by which they flexibly attuned their dispositions and practices to teachers' expectations and frames. The last section examines how the production of students' middle class and gender identities was entangled with disgust towards the upper and lower classes. This section argues that students' cultures at High Mountain contributed to their production as "middle class".

Students' habitus and the 'compulsory' nature of secondary schooling

As seen in Chapter Three, secondary schooling had only been made compulsory in the City in 2000. Despite its new legal status, numerous groups of students had not completed this level of education and struggled to continue in the education system. In this way, unequal levels of participation and completion of secondary schooling have continued over time and across diverse socio-economic and educational scenarios (CIPPEC 2004, Filmus 1999, Filmus *et al.* 2001, Filmus and Moragues 2002, López 2002).

From the inception of the education system up to the present, attending secondary education and even higher education had been part of middle classes social and cultural identity making and, I would argue, habitus (Kessler 2003, Minujin and Anguita 2004, Svampa 2000a, 2005) (see Chapter Three for further analysis). In High Mountain, middle class parents saw secondary education as fundamental for their children's personal, social and educational development and occupational future. From a Bourdieusian perspective (Bourdieu 1989, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002), schooling was seen as a central site for accruing cultural capital (in its institutionalised, objectified and embodied forms) and implicitly recognised as an important means for the middle class's social and cultural reproduction. Stella, a female student, illustrates this collective disposition of middle class parents to see secondary schooling as compulsory:

If I tell my parents that I want to quit the secondary school, well, we couldn't live under the same roof anymore! (laughs) They wouldn't let me do it. That's for sure! Although they see a lot of problems in education and many times they disagree with some teachers and the way they teach, well, they think that the school is very important for my future and, of course, for going to the university (...) They know that school is important to learn, to socialise with other people, (...) and to be critical about society. School gives you an important base for your future (...) My parents and I think the same, really (...)

(Fieldnotes, 10/08/04)

The majority of parents had completed secondary schooling and a high percentage also had university degrees. Parents could not imagine that their children would want to leave secondary school and if they did, would give fierce resistance. In Bourdieu's terms (Bourdieu 1990, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002, Reay 2004b), parents had internalised secondary schooling as compulsory and inevitable for their children. Moreover, Stella shows how she, like her parents, had incorporated the legitimate nature of secondary schooling by highlighting its

central social functions: sociability; socialisation; and acquisition of cultural capital (both in its embodied and institutionalised forms).¹³⁴ In line with Argentinean research about secondary schooling for the middle classes (Kessler 2002, Tiramonti and Minteguiaga 2004), Stella illustrates how young people at High Mountain viewed schooling as a fundamental stage of her own personal, social and educational development.

Like Stella, many middle class students expressed that they 'knew' and/or 'felt' that they 'had' to go to secondary schooling independently of their contradictory and, sometimes, negative feelings towards schooling. In this sense, they too had effectively internalised its compulsory social nature. Mariela, a female student, and Yunco, a male student, illustrated this by highlighting different aspects of middle class students' collective disposition and views:

Mariela: I don't like coming to school. It's not fun to wake up every day at 6.00 am and then come back at 5.00 pm (...)

AM: If your parents told you that you could quit if you liked, what would you do?

Mariela: I would still go to school. (...) because I feel obliged to, I mean, if my parents told me that I have the choice, inside me I would still feel obliged to go because I could be like everybody goes and not me.

(Interview, 29/11/04)

Yunco: (...) I don't think that secondary school is very important, really. It just opens your way to the university, nothing else, it's like primary school (...) It's just a base.

AM: What do you mean?

Yunco: Well, they teach you maths and language. They teach you the basics so in the future you could use them in whatever you choose to do.

(Interview, 15/10/04)

¹³⁴ Dubet and Martucelli (1998) argue that these three functions are the most important ones of modern schooling.

Mariela states that going to secondary school was something that she “felt” that she had to do and that was embodied (she felt it “inside her”). From a Bourdieusian approach, this could be seen as an expression of her middle class habitus ‘in movement’ (Reay 2004b). Mariela is trying to objectify her own middle class internalised disposition to see secondary schooling as compulsory. Moreover, when she states that she does not want to miss out what “everybody” like her does, she reveals the collective and middle class nature of this disposition. Yunco, on the other hand, refers to the school as a “base” where one might acquire only essential cultural capital (as knowledge but also as educational credentials) that would be valuable if exchanged in the future within the field of higher education. In this way, like many middle class students in High Mountain and as some Argentinean research shows (Kessler 2002, Minujin and Anguita 2004, Tiramonti 2004b), Yunco viewed secondary schooling as a necessary and inevitable stage in his future socio-educational career, but of limited intrinsic value.

In the context of general socio-economic decline, the historical middle class disposition towards secondary schooling as compulsory, however, was redefined by students’ attuned perception of a lack of fit between the possession of educational credentials (both at secondary and tertiary level) and economic and social rewards, which had been identified by Argentinean academics since the 1970s (Tenti Fanfani 1996, 2003a, Torrado 2003) (see Chapter Three).

Xole: (...) This guy (one classmate) told me something like 'when you finish school, you look for a job, you study, you finish and then you have a job' and it's not like that, you can study (...) but it will probably take you some time to get a job and well (...) My dad says the same, OK, it's OK to study, but don't tell me that as if it's easy because it's not. First, you have to go to the university (...) It's not like I have the degree and I am a doctor, it's not like that because there are three thousand more like you; (...) some of them –because they are doctor's children- will be hired before you just because of that (...)

(Interview, 21/08/04)

Tamus: If you don't complete the secondary school, it's very hard to get a job; if you have finished secondary school and the university, it will be also very hard to get a job, I mean, here, I don't know in other countries, but here it's really difficult to get a job.

(Interview, 15/9/04)

In line with Argentinean research about recent processes of downward mobility of the middle classes (Minujin 2001, Minujin and Anguita 2004, Minujin and Kessler 1999), Xole and Tamus illustrate middle class students' perspective about education (both at secondary and tertiary level) as not operating as an autonomic means for upwards social mobility or for reproducing their relative social positions like it did for their parents. They highlight the break of the lineal progression between having educational credentials and getting jobs. Moreover, Xole illustrates how social capital was perceived by many students as more important to get a job and progress in one's chosen occupation than the accumulation of institutionalised cultural capital (in the form of higher educational credentials). Following Tenti Fanfani (1996) and Bourdieu (1992a), the majority of High Mountain's students were aware of the devaluation of secondary education certificates both as positional good and as distinction

strategy within the labour market (due to both the compulsory and extended nature of secondary education with its concomitant devaluation and the recent restructuring and polarisation of the field of labour). In this sense, drawing from Filmus and his associates (Filmus 1999, 2001, Filmus *et al.* 2001, Filmus and Moragues 2003, Minujin and Anguita 2004), High Mountain's middle class students viewed secondary schooling more as a potential 'parachute' to alleviate the collective social decline that their social class had been suffering during the last three decades rather than a 'trampoline' to future socio-educational and occupational success, like the preceding generations had.

Middle class students and parents had internalised the compulsory nature of secondary schooling. However, this general disposition and view does not say anything about their preferences for particular institutional schools. In the next section, I explore parents and students' rationales behind the selection of High Mountain.

Middle class habitus and the selection of High Mountain

Recent British sociological research has identified choosing a school as a central juncture where familial habitus emerges (Ball and Vincent 1998, Ball 2003, Ball *et al.* 1995, 1996). Following these analyses, both the inclusion and exclusion of certain types of institutions as alternatives to be considered also reflect families' habitus and volume and composition of their capital, and parents and students' views about themselves and others within and beyond the educational field. In this study, students argued that the selection of High Mountain was related to its "good" reputation and "state" status. Firstly, I scrutinize what "good" school meant for students. Due to analytical reasons and lack of space, I focus my attention on those who had decided as their first option to go to elite state

secondary schools. Among my interviewees, this was the biggest group and it also offered the richest account of i) the meanings of a “good” school; ii) the operation of the local state system of schooling, and iii) the structure of opportunities within which High Mountain middle class students and parents made their choice of school.¹³⁵ Secondly, I explore the reasons behind the majority of middle class students’ emphatic rejection of private schools. This section argues that High Mountain’s educational reputation (its symbolic capital, a central aspect of its institutional habitus) and its ‘state’ nature fitted in with middle class parents’ educational aspirations and their search for relative educational advantage for their children.

Circuits of schooling¹³⁶: The elite, the good and the rest

Many students stated that their parents wanted to send them to elite state schools in the City. To get into these schools, students had to pass difficult entrance examinations. Following British research about the educational market (see Ball, et al. 2002; Ball 2003; Ball *et al.* 1995), High Mountain students’ and their parents’ initial preference for elite schools could be interpreted as an (implicit) ability to recognise entrance examinations as ways of socially and culturally selecting schools’ intake (see Chapter Five).

The majority of interviewed students stated that they failed to enter elite schools, either because they had decided to quit while doing the entrance examination course or because they had not got high enough scores in their exams. Tamus and Stella, female students, illustrate the former group and Martín, a male student, the latter.

¹³⁵ Two of the groups consisted of those who wanted to attend private schools but could not do it due to economic restrictions; and those who preferred High Mountain as their first choice.

¹³⁶ Expression taken from Ball *et al.* 1995.

AM: Why did you come to High Mountain?

Tamus: I had tried to enter the school 'Intellectually Privileged'. In the second exam I said No, it's over! I did not want to study anymore. (...)

Stella: (...) I did the same entrance course (...) My dad wanted me to go there. After the first exam, I told my dad 'I don't want to go to this school' (...)

Tamus: (...) My mum looked for schools. There were three alternatives: High Mountain, the 'Flag' and the 'Progress' (all of them state schools). My mum told me that the 'Flag' wasn't really an option because I didn't have to take any exam to enter. (...) My mum wanted something that showed that the school had a better level of education. She didn't like where the 'Progress' was located. The only option was High Mountain.

Stella: My mum also thought that the options were the *Normal* school 'Progress' and High Mountain (...) and I didn't like the neighbourhood of the school 'Progress' (...) and well, I am here.

(Interview, 15/9/04)

AM: Why did you come to this school?

Martín: Well, it was by chance. I took the entrance examination in 'Aim Higher' (...), I needed 30 centimes more in my average score (...) I had 5.20 and the minimum score was 5.50 (...) the people who did not get high enough scores to enter 'Aim Higher' had to come to these schools, 'Progress', 'Aspiration' and High Mountain (all of them are Normal schools). They are like branches, subsidiaries, you know? (...)

(Interview, 26/10/04)

Tamus, Stella and Martín illustrate two typical ways of choosing High Mountain when students failed to enter into their first school choice. The girls signal the pro-active stance of middle class families to look for "good" alternatives to their first educational choice; and, how their families had to make choices within a hierarchical local state secondary education system. Martín, on the other hand, illustrates how the process of selection of High Mountain was mediated by the

intervention of an elite state *Normal* school that channelled those who failed in its entrance exams to “good” schools like High Mountain.

Tamus, Stella and Martín, like their peers, agreed that their selection of High Mountain was mainly based on having ‘better educational quality’ or being a “good” school. The girls show that students and their families defined “good” schooling in a rather loose way. Being “good” was something that students and their families could only define as a relational quality. In a perceived stratified system where there were not public indicators to compare schools (such as in the British educational quasi-market), High Mountain middle class families and students constructed their own ‘ranking’ of state schools. Like the middle classes of the British educational market (see Ball, et al. 2002; Ball 2003; Ball *et al.* 1995), High Mountain families recognised a clear hierarchy: the elite university and the best *Normal* schools at the top (which were their first choice); followed by “good” schools like the *Normales* High Mountain and ‘Progress’, which had less difficult entrance exams but still were able to academically select part of their intakes; and, at the bottom, the schools where anybody could enter. Similar to the contemporary British middle classes (see Ball, et al. 2002; Ball 2003; Ball *et al.* 1995), High Mountain families and students clearly identified entrance examinations as a simple but effective criterion to measure educational prestige and social distance among local state schools and, therefore, to assess their academic and social selectivity.

Martín offers a different example of how middle class students and their families selected High Mountain. Like him, many students were recommended to go there by the elite school ‘Aim Higher’. In this case, middle class students and families accepted ‘Aim Higher’s assessments on the nature of the field of education and

the differential worth of the schools. Following Bourdieu (1988, 1994), the educational reputation of 'Aim Higher' (its symbolic capital) involved educational legitimacy within the field of state education. Whether or not students and families knew High Mountain before enrolling, they accepted 'Aim Higher's' advice to continue studying in High Mountain as valuable and authorised. In these ways, Tamus, Stella and Martín and their parents were able to recognise and value the middle class institutional habitus of the school and some of its distinctive features such as its academic and socially selective recruitment policy and its symbolic capital or prestige within the state education field (whether due to parents' direct knowledge or due to its consecration as "good" by other elite state schools).

These students also exemplified the limited range of choices that the majority of middle class parents had in mind when looking for "good" schools. As the above extracts illustrate, families and students could not imagine many viable alternatives to their first choice of school and they could only contemplate a few state schools in the City. For the majority of students, private schools did not even appear in the alternative list of schools. They stated that their parents asked friends and family to find out more about good schools and, in this sense like the British middle classes (Ball and Vincent 1998; Ball 2003; Vincent 2001), they activated available social capital. However, unlike the contemporary British middle classes, parents and students did not deploy sophisticated school selection strategies such as visiting various schools, asking for interviews with head teachers, and gathering institutional information.

Selection of state schooling as a cultural distinction mechanism

As seen in Chapter Three, public/state education had been historically associated with the emergence and development of the middle classes and, I would argue, their identity (Filmus 1999, 2001, Tiramonti 1998). The majority of students made explicit and spontaneous negative comments about private schooling. Maka and Xole (female students) and Pablo (a male student) illustrate this view:

Maka: (...) My mum told me that here (in the City of Buenos Aires) you have much more, I mean, education is better. It wasn't about paying or not paying fees. My mum has always preferred state schooling. It had to be public or public!

AM: Why do you think that state schools are better than private ones?

Maka: My mum thinks public schools are better and I do believe that they are better too (...), I have a friend who goes to a private school and he failed in one module (...). Well, his teacher gave him the exam questions beforehand! I mean... it's unbelievable! You would never have something like that here!

(Interview, 23/11/04)

Xole: (...) I do thank that my parents didn't send me to a religious or private school. I wouldn't have felt comfortable there (...) I was born for a public school!

AM: Why do you think that?

Xole: (...) I had always had the impression that, in private schools, there was a sort of brain washing going on (...). Besides, I like to use what everybody uses, (...) I like to be normal, I don't want to be above or below, I want to be in the middle (..) I don't like people who are arrogant and say 'I go to private school!'

(Interview, 26/11/04)

Pablo: If you go to a private school, you are not going to know stories like you know in High Mountain (...), if you go out to the street you won't be scared because you know that you can manage, but in a school where people have lots of money, they would ask (...) 'Why is that person sleeping on the streets?' (...) 'Why is this boy asking for

money?' Well, you learn these types of things in High Mountain.

(Group interview, 5/10/04)

These students point to the lower educational level of private schools and poorer cultural and social skills of their intakes. Maka illustrated how private schools were seen as providing a worse education than public schools mainly due to moral corruption, which could be related to perceived private schools' economic rationale whereby students were seen as 'clients' that had to be pleased. Both Xole and Pablo illustrate how private schools' students were 'brainwashed' and ignorant. Like many students, they point to the lack of socio-cultural awareness of social difference and inequalities amongst private school students and their inability to interact with those who are unlike them. They highlighted the socially diverse nature of public schooling as one of its central features. As seen in Chapter Three, this view has been part and parcel of the configuration, expansion and crises of the state education system and the middle classes (Sarlo 1998, Svampa 2000a, 2005, Tiramonti 2003b, 2004c, Tiramonti and Minteguiaga 2004). Historically, public schooling has been discursively produced as a social space where different social groups mixed and interacted as equals (Sarlo 1998, Svampa 2005). In High Mountain, despite its high level of social homogeneity, many middle class students and their parents still viewed public schools as socially diverse and, hence, as the antithesis of private schools. Tiramonti (2004c) and Kessler (2002) have also identified low middle class families who adopted a pro-public stance in their selection of school based on their political views of state schooling as a symbol of social integration and cultural diversity.

Xole also illustrates a positive identification with the middle classes both in social and cultural terms and articulated a strong connection between being in the “middle” and not attending private schools. This was a common attitude amongst students. She illustrates many instances in which students manifested a rejection of upper social groups, a distance from those ‘below’ and their content with being “normal”. As Savage (2000) demonstrates in the case of Britain, students’ sense of self identity was linked to a claim of ‘normality’ that manifests a double reaction against both ‘above’ and ‘below’. For them, being middle class was something to be proud of, in a context where wealth is generally associated in the media, academia, and in literature with corruption and abuse of power (Isuani 1996, Minujin and Anguita 2004, Nino 1992, Verbitsky 1991, Weyland 1998). Drawing on sociological perspectives on class identity making (Savage 2000, Savage *et al.* 2001, Sayer 2002, 2005b, Skeggs 2004), I argue that being in a public/state school was a moral statement, classificatory judgment and cultural strategy of distinction that operated to demarcate a clear social boundary between ‘them’ (the socio-economic elite and the ‘winner’ sections of the middle class) and ‘us’ (‘the middle class’). It seems that being in a public school still had (for families and students) a positive symbolic value and implied the recognition of social sameness and differences within and beyond the education field (Ashmore and Jussim 1997, Jenkins 1996, Marshall 1998).

After unfolding the reasons behind the selection of High Mountain, it is time to turn our attention to how middle class students played the game of schooling and what kind of educational common sense they had collectively internalised and reproduced to deal with its variety of demands and expectations.

Zafar or how to play the game of schooling

High Mountain was a unique arena, like any school, in which to play the game of secondary schooling. As argued in Chapter Two, the game of schooling refers to the explicit and implicit rules that governed secondary schooling in a particular geographical locale (such as the City of Buenos Aires) and in a particular school.¹³⁷ This section focuses on what goes on in High Mountain and shows how middle class students had learnt to play the game of schooling. Secondly, I identify three types of school identities available to students that let them make sense of their attitudes towards teachers, school work and performance. These identities were fostered by different aspects of the field of secondary education and, in this sense, they reflected its legitimate stakes and more effective ways of playing the game.

Following Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1988, Bourdieu 1995b, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002, Lamaison 1986), the majority of middle class students were 'good' players who recognised what was at stake and what the game demanded and required. Evidence of third school year students' 'feel for the game' were the facts that i) nine out of ten did not have previous experiences of educational failure during their secondary school (High Mountain 2004b); ii) nine out of ten had not received any severe sanctions¹³⁸ from teachers or pastoral assistants (High Mountain 2004a), and iii) around 84%¹³⁹ students passed to the next school year

¹³⁷ Among the former, in the case of the City of Buenos Aires, I have included local government and school rules about assessment of educational performance and behaviour (see Chapter Three). Among the implicit rules, I have included the school's institutional habitus, teachers' pedagogic frames and behavioural expectations, and students' cultures (see Chapters Two, Three and Five).

¹³⁸ There were different categories of sanctions available in state secondary schools: *firmas* (signature), *apercibimiento*, and *suspensión* (suspension). Only the last two categories were registered in students' records. The term 'severe sanction' refers to them.

¹³⁹ Statistics, as Bourdieu asserts (Lamaison 1986), reflect a regularity of the game of secondary school as it was played by teachers and students.

(High Mountain 2004a) (for more data about students' performance see Chapter Four).

Following teachers' and students' comments and explanations, I have named this 'feel for the game' *zafar*. *Zafar* is the underpinning principle that regulated the majority of middle class students' educational engagement and, therefore, their strategies to deal with educational and behavioural institutional expectations. This logic of practice involved acute perceptions of teachers' behavioural and educational expectations without ruling out misbehaviour or low educational achievement.

Similar to Seoane's (2003) findings in four secondary schools in the Province of Buenos Aires, middle class students in High Mountain shared certain dispositions and views towards the game of secondary schooling. With few exceptions, they did not aspire to have high marks and to excel academically. They had internalised that secondary schooling was not about successful educational performance. Their main objective was passing school years and getting the educational credential for studying whatever they liked. The word that many middle class students recurrently used to refer to these general disposition and views about secondary schooling was *zafar*.¹⁴⁰ Marcela and Anto (female students) and Federico (a male student) illustrate the meanings of *zafar*:

¹⁴⁰ Seoane (2003) refers to this process as '*cultura del zafe*' (the culture of *zafe*).

AM: How do you manage studying?

Marcela: Well, I don't study much, really. (...) I almost never study (smiling)

AM: But how did you pass school years? (...)

Marcela: *Zafando*¹⁴¹.

AM: This school year you passed eight modules and you had to take exams of three modules.

Marcela: *Zafé* (...), sometimes I used *machetes* (cheating), and there was a time when I did study Maths (...) and I didn't study English (...) What we see here I had learnt it before (...) and in Civic Education we only had to do *trabajos prácticos* (special home assignments) and that was easy, (---) the Language teacher gave me and my best friend higher marks and more opportunities (...) we are her favourite students (...)

AM: What happened in the modules that you have to take exams? (...)

Marcela: (...) In these modules, you have to study. Maths is studying and practicing. There is no other way (...) For accountancy you also have to study (...) I didn't understand the practical stuff (...)

(Interview, 2/11/04)

Anto: Well, the Argentinean *zafa*¹⁴², I mean, I say Argentinean people because I don't know people who live in other places (...) well, I also include myself in this group (...)

AM: But what does this mean at the school?

Anto: Well, if you pass with six, you try to get a five point fifty cheating, and well you hope that the teacher rounds your mark up so you could get a six.

AM: But is this common?

Anto: Well, yes, the day that we work in the school we say: 'we are so tired!' and we don't say 'cool, we've done something today'

AM: But why is that? (---)

Anto: Well, I don't know, well, many times it's much more interesting to spend time with friends and have a laugh, you know?

(Interview, 15/11/04)

¹⁴¹ *Zafando* is the present continuous of the verb *zafar*.

¹⁴² *Zafa* refers to the third personal singular of the present tense.

Federico: Well some people just try to get a six (the minimum score to pass) and nothing else, (...) some are conscientious, I mean, the conscientious ones are those who study to try to understand (...) I think that you have to find a balance between the two. On the one hand, I am interested in certain things and I want to learn them (...). But I am not interested in other modules, well, in these, I want to *zafar* with a six because I don't really have any option, do I?

(Interview, 12/12/04)

In Spanish, *Zafar* has several meanings such as: “releasing from a commitment or obligation”; “to escape or hide in order to avoid an encounter or risk”; and, “to avoid something that annoys you” (Real Academia Española 2001). In High Mountain’s context, as Marcela, Anto and Federico illustrate, *zafar* refers to a particular application of these meanings to the school context. Firstly, Marcela illustrates how *zafar* referred to a combination of dispositions, views and practices towards school work and modules. Like the majority of her peers, Marcela passed the school year and she took exams of two modules in December. From a Bourdieusian perspective (Bourdieu 1990, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002, Lareau and Weininger 2003, Reay 2004b), Marcela was able to mobilise different sorts of embodied cultural capitals. Examples of this were her ability to deal with the majority of modules; her lack of a need to study ‘too much’; her likeability to teachers which could be associated with cultural and social proximity; and previous knowledge accrued outside the school. She also engaged with specific school strategies (like cheating) in order to fulfil teachers’ variable expectations and demands. However, when reflecting about the modules where she failed, Marcela stated that they were difficult and that she ‘had to study’. In these cases, her wider strategies to deal with modules proved unsuccessful and she could not *zafar* or escape from the risk of failing. Anto, on the other hand, inscribed *zafar* in a wider socio-cultural context. Like many

teachers (see Chapter Five), Anto perceived *zafar* as a cultural feature that permeated institutions and individuals' dispositions and views across different fields. Here, she asserted that the overriding aim was trying to do the minimum to pass and not to invest much time and effort in studying and/or learning. Similar to some British and Argentinean research (Seoane 2003, Woods 1979, 1990), cheating was a frequent and legitimate strategy that many students frequently used with some teachers.¹⁴³ In this case, *zafar* means to release students from doing something that annoys them and that they did not particularly like or enjoy as much as, for instance, 'chatting with friends'. In line with many British analyses (Corrigan 1979, Woods 1976, 1979, 1990), Anto illustrates many instances where middle class students argued that "being with friends"; "having good time"; and "having a laugh" was the most important thing and what they enjoyed most at the school. Here, Anto points to a tension between the school and teachers' expectations and students' cultures. Moreover, Anto also points towards the arbitrary aspects of *zafar*. Students many times referred to 'luck' and 'hope' when they talked about their performance in certain modules. Here, *zafar* also implied non rational expectations. From a Bourdieusian perspective (Bourdieu 1990, Lamaison 1986), *zafar* could be interpreted as embodied dispositions. *Zafar* was sometimes possible because students were 'lucky' rather than pro-active in dealing with teachers' demands and expectations. Anto also identifies a general climate where effort, learning and studying was perceived mainly as obligation. Many students stated that they were 'bored' at school and tired after the school day, lacking the motivation to study or do homework. In line with British socio-educational research (Hargreaves

¹⁴³ Students used different kinds of techniques to cheat such as tiny papers with bits of information to be used in exams, and writing formulas or information on their school desks and chairs with small letters.

1967, Woods 1976, Woods 1983a, Woods 1990), boredom, tiredness, annoyance, and lack of enthusiasm with the majority of modules was frequent among third school year students. This concurs with teachers' views about middle class students' underperformance and lack of interest in the majority of the modules (see Chapter Five).

Federico however offers a slightly different version of *zafar*, which was something that he did when he disliked modules. In this view, *zafar* was a localised rather than a general disposition and view towards schoolwork. *Zafar* was necessary when students viewed modules as “dull”, “useless”, “outdated”, “boring” or “irrelevant” and/or when students disliked their teachers for being “unfair”, “authoritarian”, and/or a “bad teacher”. Similar to Argentinean research about middle class students' academic engagement (Feijoó and Insúa 1995, Seoane 2003), Federico illustrates how High Mountain students were aware that, in a variable number of modules, they only tried to get the minimum mark (six) to simply pass. In a minority of modules, Federico studied and cared. *Zafar* refers here to avoid the risk of having to take exams in December and/or March and reflects a clear instrumental approach to some modules and aspects of school work.

Zafar, therefore, was associated with an overarching instrumental approach to schooling and the majority of modules and/or with localised views and practices within particular modules. These examples show different aspects of this common ‘feel for the game’. As in Seoane's (2003) findings, High Mountain's students shared a common sense where *zafar* - with its detached view of the game of schooling; its instrumental approach to marks and some modules and its emphasis on passing rather than on learning - regulated their methods of dealing

with educational performance and school work. Following Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1977, 1990, 1993c, 1996), without being able to clearly define what *zafar* is, middle class students are able to spell out some key features of their school habitus, which encompassed diverse dispositions to understand their relations with knowledge, school work and educational performance.

Students' sense of the game, as seen in the case of Marcela and Federico, was associated with their collective and individual abilities to recognise different teachers' behavioural and educational expectations. In other words, they had embodied cultural capital that let them engage with teachers' variety of frames (Lareau and Weininger 2003, Reay 2004b). In our conversations and their everyday interactions, middle class students expressed a common understanding of who the "bad" teachers were; who were the "best" ones; and who were "good people" but were either unable to manage misbehaviour or be consistent in their methods of delivering lessons. They were able to recognise a variety of teachers' frames (Blackledge and Hunt 1985). The majority of middle class students shared a collective matrix through which to interpret their teachers and recognise their different frames. For instance, students were able to recognise with whom they did not learn, who gave them little room for manoeuvre due to their authoritarian styles, and which lessons were "challenging" and "difficult" and demanded more attention and engagement; and those in which they could "play silly" and misbehave, without the risk of receiving sanctions or low marks. This collective matrix was part and parcel of students' sense of the game and their effective interpretations of what went on at the school. Xole (a female student) and Yunco and Cuky (male students) illustrate this collective disposition to

recognise a variety of behavioural and educational frames and students' ways of interacting with them:

Xole: One of the worst teachers is Mrs. Sarraceno (...) We copy everything that is in the book into our notebook! I swear (...) In her lessons, you have to pretend that you are working. You could be copying or writing a letter (...) but the lesson cannot be chaos because she doesn't like that. (...) She could sanction you if you misbehave. (...) We know that to get higher marks we need to use colours when copying a drawing (...)

(Fieldnotes, 25/08/04)

Yunco: Well, she is the best teacher. Firstly, she knows how to teach. Secondly, (...) she asks you questions and she makes you think all the time. (...) She told us the rules at the beginning: 'The lessons have to be like this and, we can have a laugh too, we can enjoy ourselves but it has to be like this' (...) she said: 'you talk when I say so, you have to raise your hand to participate, I don't like noise, when one person speaks, the rest listen, you have to listen to your classmate, I come here to give serious lessons, we arrive on time' (...).

(Interview, 15/10/04)

Cuky: With this teacher, we were *boludeando* (playing silly) all the time; and well (...) we didn't pay attention. We knew that with this teacher we could *boludear*. We knew that nothing would happen. I mean, I don't know if she is a bad teacher because, maybe, if we had paid attention, we would have understood something (...) but well, we didn't pay attention.(...)

(Interview, 15/11/04)

As Cuky and Xole illustrate, this collective ability to recognise teachers' diverse pedagogic styles and educational and behavioural expectations did not rule out misbehaviour (both at a form class or individual level). Different British ethnographic research has shown how misbehaviour is part and parcel of secondary schooling (Davies 1984, Lawson 1991, Woods 1979, 1990). In all the form classes where I worked, only a few students got serious sanctions (High

Mountain 2004a). In this way, according to teachers and students, episodes of misbehaviour were usual (especially with some teachers) but remained at levels that were acceptable for teachers with different and even antagonistic pedagogic styles. In other words, middle class students had the 'feel for the game' and were able to deal with differential behavioural expectations without jeopardizing their permanence at the school (Lamaison 1986).

Moreover, students had an irregular educational performance during the school year. In many cases, their marks were higher during the first term and lower during the second and they made efforts in the final term to compensate their low performance and avoid taking exams. The majority of middle class students were able to improve their educational performance without being able to pass all school modules before the exam period of December. The majority had to take at least one partial exam in December and, as said above, were able to pass the school year. Having to take exams in December and/or March¹⁴⁴ was common and perceived as part and parcel of secondary schooling. In this sense, the disposition to *zafar* did not imply perfect adjustment of students to all teachers' educational expectations and involved different degrees of risk taking. Romina illustrates how rare it was to not take exams in December and/or in March:

Something that I don't like is that *chicos* who have a lot of exams to take in December and March, well, they are considered cool. (...) Or well, if you smoke you are a rebel. Well, if you don't have to take exams, you are a *traga* (people who swallow everything), that's bullshit, I don't have to take any exams but it was difficult and I just had enough marks to pass, not in all the modules, but in maths, physics and chemistry, in accountancy, it was difficult. I am not a *traga* who spends all the time studying. That's a lie. Well, if you have to take a lot of exams, you are really cool (...) that's how it is, maybe those who have to take exams don't think that is cool and they probably feel bad about

¹⁴⁴ See Chapter Three for data about the local exam system.

that, but the rest, the rest thinks that if you have to take exams and you smoke you are really cool.

(Interview, 29/11/04)

Here Romina signals that having low educational performance over the school year was perceived as “cool”, “rebellions” and collectively desirable. In this sense, the main stake of the game was passing without studying ‘all the time’ or, at least, without appearing to have to spend too much time studying and being a “conformist” with adult rules and expectations –both in and outside school (Tenti Fanfani 2000a, 2000b). For students, it was paramount not be labelled as *tragas*, as one of those who ‘follow adults without asking questions’ and were perceived as being unable to balance the school’s obligations and youth culture, which have coexisted in tension since the crisis of the traditional secondary school. Numerous studies have pointed towards the clash of expectations and demands between the school’s culture and the students’ culture (Mac an Ghail 1994, Tenti Fanfani 2000a, 2000b, Youdell 2003b, Willis 1981). From students’ perspectives, the winners of the game were those who were able to successfully juggle both social worlds.

The majority of middle class students who had to take exams in December and/or March were able to mobilize different resources (economic and cultural) to be able to pass enough modules to complete the school year. Norberto illustrates how the majority of middle class students dealt with exams:

AM: How many exams did you have to take?

Norberto: Four in December. I passed two in December and I only have two for March.

AM: How did you manage to pass these two?

Norberto: Well, *me puse las pilas* (I worked hard). It wasn't that difficult though. I knew that I had to memorize to pass biology and I did so. I studied for history but not for 'Language and Literature' and for 'Accountancy'. Language is easy and Accountancy is boring. (...) I didn't study (...) and I didn't pass in these modules.

(Interview, 23/12/04)

As Norberto exemplifies, the majority of students made an effort by studying or memorizing. Others studied with friends and attended private lessons both during the school year and during exam time. In this sense, they mobilised embodied dispositions, skills, views and practices in order to achieve, when it was necessary. Like Anglo-American research about middle class students' ability to deal with school demands (Lareau and Weininger 2003, Reay 2004b), High Mountain students showed how to play the game but also demonstrated that the game was a risky one. Norbert knew that he had to invest time in studying for the exams and he was able to manage the risk (without being able to pass all the modules) and pass the school year. Norberto was labelled by teachers as "*vago*" (lazy) and "very intelligent". In this context, Norberto was able to *zafar*.

Many students identified with the identity of '*vago*'; and several students (the majority girls) stated that they were *buenos* (good) students. Sometimes students alternatively claimed the identity of *vago* and *buen* students for making sense of their behaviour in different modules. *Vago/a* refers to low motivation, lack of academic engagement, and little commitment to school work whether in lessons or at home. Mainly girls stated that they were good (*buen*) students and they

referred to their good behaviour at lessons rather than their educational achievement. Those who labelled themselves as *vagos* and/or *buenos* students varied in their educational performance and ranged from small groups with high numbers of exams to take in December/March to those who only had one exam to take. Despite similarities in educational performance and dispositions to *zafar*, girls and boys differed in the ways in which they interpreted having to take exams. In general, however, girls experienced exams as stressful and annoying and something that boys tended to manage better than them.¹⁴⁵

After analyzing how middle class students interpret school work and educational performance, I turn my attention to the ways in which they defined their middle class identities against other groups of students both from High Mountain and Low Hill.

Students' culture and middle class identity making

This section argues that the organic relationship between middle class students and High Mountain could also be traced through the central role that social relations among students had in the production of their middle class identities. British educational research has argued that friendship groups and rivalries between students are engrained in the production of students' collective and individual class and gendered identities within school (see Chapter One). Here I focus on how certain types of students' rivalries contribute to the production of students' middle class identity as valuable and positive.

According to sociological research about class identity making (Jenkins 1996, Lawler 2005a, Savage 2000, Skeggs 1997b, Vasilachis de Gialdino 2003), 'being middle class' was about explicit self categorisations by students, everyday

¹⁴⁵ British research has identified similar trends (see Arnot, et al. 1999; Arnot and Phipps 2003; Foster, et al. 1996; Gordon 2003).

differentiations from 'others' and regular recognition from others of who they were. When asked about their families' social class position, students classified themselves, and the majority of students at High Mountain, as "middle class".

Maka, a female student, illustrates this point:

AM: Do you think that in Argentinean society there are social classes?

Maka: Yes, (...) there is a bit of everything (...) I believe that it's wrong that there is a bit of everything, I mean, it's like there is a lot of difference because some people don't have a place to sleep and there are others who don't even care for those who don't have anywhere to sleep. Well, *maybe* that person has money because he's worked very hard all his life, that's ok, but it's wrong that there is so much difference (...) because you have middle class, upper middle class, high class, poor and very poor, I think that the difference is wrong. (...) I would like that everybody was the same (...)

AM: What social class is your family? And High Mountain's students?

Maka: We are middle class

(Interview, 23/11/04)

Unlike the British context where some researchers had found ambivalence, defensiveness and indifference towards class identification (Payne and Grew 2005, Savage 2000, Savage *et al.* 2001), the High Mountain's middle class students were ready to identify themselves with the "middle classes". In the above extract, Maka exemplifies a widespread feeling among groups of students of the unfairness of Argentinean society. In this particular context, "being in the middle" was, as I argued before regarding the state/private divide, a moral statement. It was about not being in either of the two extreme poles of society. Following Skeggs (1997a) and Sayer (2005a, 2005b), "being in the middle" was perceived as having more value and recognition and it was portrayed as an ideal situation. Middle class students operated a symbolic distinction from both dominant classes and working and marginal classes (that were assimilated with

the “poor”) from their value reference system (Bottero 2004, Bourdieu 1992a, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002, Skeggs 1997b).

Drawing on Vasilachis de Gialdino’s (2000; 2003) and Jenkins (1996) analysis of mechanisms of identity making/production, students produced their ‘middle class’ identities by two other main symbolic and discursive operations: assertion and opposition. Assertion and opposition were subtle rather than explicit mechanisms that were related to clothing, objects and family lifestyles.¹⁴⁶ Xole, a female student, illustrates what kind of economic and cultural resources were tied to the idea of ‘being from the middle class’ and how this could only be defined in opposition to others.

Xole: The families of High Mountain’s students (...) I think that the majority are middle class (...) well, everybody, more or less, has the same kind of stuff, they buy the same brands (...). You notice that everybody has the similar type of paper, similar type of folders, (...) and well, you can see that the term *cheto* is related to that, they have more expensive stuff (...) You can also see that (...) with clothing. (...) but everybody has more or less the same type of backpack, \$14, \$15 pesos.

(Interview, 31/8/04)

From a Bourdieusian approach (Bourdieu 1986, 1992a, Brubaker 1985), here it is possible to see the different aspects involved in ‘being middle class’ such as relative volumes of economic capital and some aspects of its consumption patterns. Xole talks in detail about brands of stationary and clothing as social markers that differentiated middle class students from upper middle class students: *los chetos*. In many interviews and informal encounters, boys and girls expressed their strong rejection of the *chetos* as a collective and, in the third school year, of the *chetas* (a group of girls from one form class) (Vasilachis de

¹⁴⁶ Students also pointed at differences among middle class students based on musical tastes and clothing.

Gialdino 2000, 2003). Walking around the school, I observed many instances where different groups of (mainly) girls and boys made negative comments (including insults, jokes and telling anecdotes of how silly they had just been in a lesson) or looked down on *chetas*. These frequent negative comments were tainted by feelings of anger, rage, and hate. Rodrigo and Cuky (male students) and Maka (a female student) illustrate this wide spread negative attitude towards *chetas*:

Rodrigo: They don't know anything more than mobile phones, how to spend their fortune, how to use their father's credit card (...) and clubbing. (...) The most important needs of a *cheto* or hollow.

(Interview, 26/10/04)

Maka: (...) There was this rumour in the third school year that this group of girls (*las chetas*) were guessing words and they had to say one country and one of them said 'Europe', I mean, you are *hueca* (hollow), you can't say that! (...) But well, anybody could say that, it's not just because you wear 'Fantasy' (fashionable and expensive brand) clothing. Anybody who wears tracksuits could say that, but I mean, everything is together: clothing, having a mobile, everything. She doesn't know if Europe is a continent or a country (...)

(Interview, 30/09/04)

Cuky: The *chetas* think that they are the best, they are the most popular, the most intelligent, and everything and they aren't! (---) they are *boludas* (stupid). I don't like any of them.

(Interview, 15/11/04)

Rodrigo and Maka present the main social and cultural markers of the *chetas*: having economic capital but lacking cultural resources. Again, as when middle class students emphasised their difference from private school students, ignorance and wealth are represented as negative features deeply associated with corruption in wider society, from which many middle class students sought to distance themselves. Cuky illustrates those instances in which students

mentioned that *chetas* thought that they were superior and were despised for that. Following Reay (2005), middle class students' rejection could be interpreted as 'classism' and 'class envy' and an effective means of students' middle class identity making as non-ignorant and non-shallow and, therefore (as seen in the previous section), as able to value some aspects of school knowledge and education to be used in their future personal and working lives. Moreover, this rejection of the *chetas* and *chetos* could also be interpreted as ways of producing particular kinds of middle class femininities and masculinities as the 'norm' against which the *chetas* and *chetos* were seen as 'superficial' and investing too much in their physical appearance.

Middle class students also defined themselves against students from Low Hill. Spontaneous comments against the students from Low Hill were rare (although several teachers who worked in both schools recollected negative remarks from High Mountain's students against Low Hill's during lessons). When directly asked about what they knew about Low Hill students, middle class students referred to them using words such as *patoteros* (rowdy); *chorros* (thieves); *villeros* (derogatory word referring to people who live in villas (slums) or who come from marginal groups) and, *cumbieros* (term that refers to a particular musical style associated with popular sectors) (De Gori 2005, Duschatzky and Corea 2002, Margulis 2003, Rubinich 2000). In this case, Low Hill's students were portrayed as having a different type of social 'otherness' that middle class students distinguished themselves from.

Following sociological literature about social identity making (Lawler 2005a, Margulis 1999, Skeggs 1997a, 1997b), social and cultural processes of 'othering' are subtly and routinely crafted and, sometimes, difficult to grasp. For instance,

Cuky (a middle class male student) shows how 'otherness' was about something that you could 'see' without being able to clearly objectify what it was about:

I see Low Hill's students like, I think that they are *villeritos* who dress like *chetos*, haircuts, their trainers, with the best top, with everything, and there are also *villeritos* who are dressed like *villeritos*, they had the *Topper* [cheap brand of knickers], they had the wide trousers, (...) I mean, if a *villerito* wears silver trainers (fashionable trainers), (...) if he wears jeans, for instance, you see his face and you can see that he is *villerito*.

(Interview, 15/11/04)

Embodiment is a central aspect of habitus (Crossley 2000, McNay 2000a, 2000c, Nash 1999, Reay 2004b, Shilling 2004, Swartz 2000). In this case, Cuky was able to make explicit the cultural matrix that middle class students routinely and unconsciously applied to understand and produce social difference both inside and outside the school. From a Bourdieusian approach (Bourdieu 1985a, 1995a, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002), the corporeal 'hexis', how you move, how you 'look', what kind of face you have, how you dress (not necessarily *what* you wear) are social markers that actors read in everyday encounters and help them to locate and value 'others' and themselves (Ball 2003, Bourdieu 1992a, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002, Lovell 2000, McNay 2000b, Reay 2004b). Cuky shows how *villeritos* configured a clear cut group that could not deny who they were, whatever they did to mask what was perceived as their social identity. According to my observations, *villeritos* had in general darker skin, which following Margulis' (1999) analysis of Argentinean society had historically operated as negative physical capital that revealed both low volume of economic, cultural and social capitals and marginal objective positions within the social space. Having darker skin has made people the target of racism since the inception of the Argentinean nation-state and it had been one of the "main factors of the

social institution of the ‘other’, the outsider, and the illegitimate” (Margulis 1999: 143, my translation).

Stella and Tamus also illustrate other aspects of this process of ‘othering’ of *Low Hill’s* students. In the following extract, they give examples of frequent anti-social behaviour¹⁴⁷ amongst Low Hill boys in the school, identify Low Hill students’ musical tastes and openly express their disgust for Low Hill girls and their hyper-heterosexuality (Lawler 2005a, 2005b):

AM: What are the students of Low Hill like? (...)

Stella: Well, they are more *patoteros* (rowdy)

Tamus: (...) It’s like the school is different when they are not there (...) I’ll give you an example, something that happens everyday, you are doing PE and they spit at us from the stairs of the first and second floor (...).

AM: How do Low Hill boys get on with the boys at your school?

Tamus: They insult each other.

(...)

AM: Are Low Hill’s students like you?

Stella: No (...) they like *cumbia* (musical rhythm associated with working and marginal classes), they are that sort of people (...).

Tamus: I think that they have a different mentality (...) I don’t know if it’s because economically, I mean, it’s something that I don’t care about, but, for instance, what she said about the music, I like *la cumbia* but it doesn’t mean that I am going to dress like them (...)

Stella: Yes, they wear skirts up to here (signalling her neck with one of her hands) (...) For instance, we had a friend, Clara, she came to High Mountain, she was more or less OK, reasonably dressed for the school and now she is in Low Hill and she’s changed and you can see her wearing miniskirts, boots, make up, really bad. If you look, you will see that they are all like that.

(Group interview, 15/9/04)

¹⁴⁷ Although I did not witness these events, I did see, on a few occasions, some Low Hill boys whistling at High Mountain’s girls from the stairs.

Sharing spaces (inside the schools' buildings) was an important factor in High Mountain students' views of Low Hill. Like Tamus and Stella, many High Mountain girls and boys perceived Low Hill boys as impolite, aggressive and belligerent. In this way, many middle class students distanced themselves from aggressive forms of femininity and masculinity associated with social class differences. However, only girls expressed their disgust for girls' hyper-heterosexual performances at Low Hill, which were seen as inappropriate for school. Furthermore, Low Hill students were seen as having musical and clothing tastes associated with low socio-economic and marginal groups. Following Lawler (2005a) and Reay (2004b), the process of 'othering' was grounded on social, cultural and gender differences. In this way, High Mountain students operated symbolic and cultural distinctions central to their production as middle class boys and girls (Bourdieu 1992a, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002, Skeggs 2004).

Finally, many of High Mountain's middle class students distinguished themselves educationally from Low Hill's students. Low Hill was mentioned as a "bad", "disastrous", "violent" and "chaotic" school where "everybody does what they please". Here, social and cultural distance from Low Hill's students appeared profoundly entangled with students' views about the unequal educational nature of schooling in the City. The following extract offers an example of how middle class students viewed Low Hill's students as culturally, socially, and (through a metaphor) racially distant and as having an inferior secondary schooling in terms of its academic and behavioural standards.

Julio: Low Hill is a disaster.

AM: What are the *chicos* of Low Hill like?

Martina: Well, many *chicos* of Low Hill had repeated here and

Fabiana: They go to Low Hill because it's easier

Martina: It has less educational quality

(...)

Xole: Yes, I remember Jorge, he repeated in High Mountain and in Low Hill he always had 10!!

(...)

Julio: It's like a school from a Hollywood movie

Martina: Yes! It's like a school from a movie, but a school for black people. As far as I see on the TV, black people are excluded and they go to schools for black people, right?

Fabiana: Yes, all black, all with weapons

(...)

Martina: Yes, and black people don't study and they pass (...).

(Group interview, 9/09/04)

This comparison represented a hyperbole of the majority of middle class students' perception of Low Hill's students as mainly socially, culturally, and racially different and distant. Black people are quite rare in Argentina and this comparison let students objectify a racial difference between them and Low Hill's students for which there were no available terms.¹⁴⁸

Despite the substantive differences between the 'othering' of upper and low classes, middle class distinction strategies were accompanied by disgust, which is "judgements of culture" put into effect (Skeggs, 1997: 118). Disgust, as Lawler convincingly argues (2005a), is at the very core of subjectivity making. Lawler asserts that amongst those who are disgusted: "their very selves are produced in

¹⁴⁸ There are no academic terms to distinguish minority ethnic groups (with the exception of indigenous groups) (Margulis 1999). In everyday language, people refer to non white persons using the names of their presupposed nationalities such as *Paraguayos* (people from Paraguay) or *Bolitas* (derogatory word to indicate people from Bolivia).

opposition to ‘the low’ and the low cannot do anything but repulse them.” (Lawler 2005a: 430). However, in the case of the High Mountain students, disgust also operated as a central device to distance themselves from those ‘above’ and it was also intertwined with processes of gender identity making.

Conclusions

This chapter has sought to examine four distinctive illustrations of students’ middle class habitus in ‘movement’. It has argued that High Mountain students and their families had organic relations with the game of secondary schooling in the City and at High Mountain, which were manifested in students’ views about secondary schooling, the process of school choice, the ways in which students’ dealt with teachers’ demands, and in the centrality of peer relations in the production of middle class and gender identities. In so doing, I have demonstrated that middle class third school year students interpreted secondary schooling as a compulsory stage in their lives for their future socio-educational and occupational development. I have also shown that the selection of High Mountain fitted in with students’ middle class families’ educational aspirations and operated as a means of class identity making for both families and students. Middle class students shared a common disposition to *zafar* that underpinned their views and practices towards modules, learning, school work and educational performance. Here I have portrayed *zafar* as referring to middle class students’ general dispositions and views towards teachers, learning and performance. I have interpreted *zafar* as a logic of practice that propelled students to recognise differential teachers’ frames; to assume an instrumental approach towards the majority of modules, school work and marks; and to engage in risk-taking behaviour. Finally, middle class students’ production of

their class and gender identities has been described. Here, students' social relations appeared as a central locus of identity making in which disgust operated as a key mechanism in reasserting and producing middle classness as 'normal', 'ordinary' and worthy.

The next chapter examines how marginal and working class students interplayed with the game of schooling in Low Hill whilst producing their class and gender identities and reinforcing their views on secondary schooling.

Chapter Seven: Marginal and working class habitus and the game of schooling in Low Hill

Introduction

As I have argued in Chapter Five, Low Hill had a middle class institutional habitus that had been threatened by an increase in its 'non traditional' students (those who were older, had experiences of educational failure and learning and/or behavioural problems). I have argued that despite attempts to reshape some central aspects of its institutional practices, the survival of Low Hill's middle class institutional habitus was reflected in its teachers' profound professional identity crisis and the persistence of high levels of educational failure amongst students (see Chapter Four and Five). This chapter turns its attention to 'traditional' and 'non traditional' students of the third school year from working class and marginal families.¹⁴⁹ The analysis is focused on students who had positive views and attitudes towards schooling and did not have serious behavioural problems. I will name these students the 'tryers'. This chapter examines the ways in which the 'tryers' interplayed with the field of secondary education and Low Hill's institutional habitus and game of schooling. Moreover, it examines how groups of students produced class and gender identities through everyday acts of embodied symbolic violence ranging from aggressive looks, threats and fights, and how these identities were linked to their educational participation. This chapter, like the previous one, which looked at the case of High Mountain, analyses four distinctive 'movements' of students' habitus in relation to the field of education and Low Hill. Firstly, I analyse how students viewed attending and completing secondary schooling as central for the production of their social identities as different from those of their families and

¹⁴⁹ See Chapter Four for a description of the main features of these two social classes.

social class. Secondly, I consider these students' views about the process of school choice. I argue that Low Hill's marginal and working class families were unable to mobilize their cultural capitals to select a school due to students' repetition or their families' recent migration. Thirdly, I investigate how different groups of students interplayed with Low Hill's game of schooling. I look at four cases to unpack the relationship between students' locations in the social space (defined by their families' capitals); their school habitus or sense of the 'game of schooling'; and their educational participation and performance at Low Hill. I argue that social class and familial capitals together with the nature of Low Hill's institutional habitus were important factors in understanding some students' participation and performance. However, students' agency and ability to adapt to changing scenarios and to internalize the school's habitus were in some cases more crucial. Finally, the last section focuses on how students' social relations, as a locus of processes of class and gender identity making, linked with diverse attitudes towards educational participation.

“Being somebody” and “being whatever you want to be”

Independently from their previous educational trajectory, the 'tryers' highlighted that for them, being at and completing secondary school was very important for their sense of personal and social identity. I identified two different, although related, hegemonic discourses around meanings of secondary schooling. One emphasised the centrality of schooling for “being somebody” and the other highlighted secondary schooling as a material and symbolic platform for “being whatever you want to”. This section unpacks these discourses and how they were entangled in girls and boys' views about secondary schooling.

In line with what existing Argentinean research has shown (Borzese 2003, Duschatzky 1998), Low Hill's students associated schooling with central processes of identity making. "Being somebody" was a statement typically made by boys and girls from non middle class families. Unlike their middle class counterparts both at Low Hill and High Mountain, reaching and/or finishing secondary school challenged their families' educational trajectories. Their participation in schooling to this level, as seen in Chapter Three, was the result of recent processes of expansion of the secondary education system (Feijoó 1996, López 2002, Tenti Fanfani 2003b). This emphasis on "being somebody" could be seen as reflecting their families' low levels of capital as well as high aspirations for intergenerational mobility and improvement. From a Bourdieusian perspective (Bourdieu 1992a, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002), the 'tryers' interpreted secondary schooling as a cultural marker that would distinguish them from their families and class. Yutiel, a male student, and Yeyu, a female student, at Low Hill, illustrate this view and describe how it was intimately linked with aspirations of socio-economic progress and cultural processes of distinction:

Yutiel: (...) If you study and study, some day we are going to be something because if you don't study you are nothing, well in inverted commas, because you can be, but if you don't study, you can't be someone, because if one day someone asks you, for instance talking with your friends, they ask you 'what do you know about the May revolution?' and well, you won't know and you will feel bad, uncomfortable, like *sapo de otro pozo* (a frog from a different pond), because if you don't know anything related to the school it's like it was pointless.

(Interview, 19/11/04)

Yeyu: I do believe that school is really important (...) you finish school and you know that you get rid of a problem, and you know that you could choose whatever you want. (...) I mean, it's important to be somebody, for instance, I want to be a photographer. You can study, you are going to be asked to have completed secondary school,

they are going to ask you that (...) then you will know that it was something worthwhile, I mean, that it will help you, it will help you to keep progressing

AM: Do you think that without secondary schooling you won't be able to progress?

Yeyu: (...) I don't know if you can't progress, I mean, if you progress it will mean to be an employee of someone to whom you have to clean their floors or toilets, I don't know if many people like that, many don't have options, but if you can look for something better, you have to do it.

(Interview, 23/11/04)

Yutiel belonged to a marginal family and Yeyu to a vulnerable working class one.¹⁵⁰ Their fathers worked in unskilled manual occupations (a rural worker and dustman respectively) and their mothers were housewives. Yutiel and Yeyu's parents and their older siblings did not complete secondary schooling. Yutiel was in a more vulnerable¹⁵¹ situation than Yeyu because he lived alone in the City and only sporadically received economic support from his family. Drawing on Bourdieu and sociological analysis of identity making, Yutiel's and Yeyu's views reflected the centrality of completing secondary schooling for their personal identity and cultural distinction from their families and class (Bourdieu 1992a, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002, Lawler 2005b, Wexler 1991). In the case of Yutiel, he enrolled at Low Hill in 2004 and he had just migrated from a small rural town in the province of Córdoba. He associated schooling with "being somebody" and with not being "ignorant". He did not want to feel "uncomfortable" or "bad" in the future due to his lack of knowledge (cultural capital) that others would have. Yutiel viewed schooling as a means of accruing

¹⁵⁰ In the history of the family, Yeyu's dad had had different occupations and had gone through situations of extreme poverty. The term vulnerable reflects this ambiguous class location of this family.

¹⁵¹ I follow Castel's (1997) definition of vulnerability. Vulnerability includes a wide and diverse range of social situations wherein individuals' social integration and participation in the labor market have been damaged, declined or been lost. In Argentina, this concept has been used by several authors (see Minujin (2001)).

cultural capital fundamental for distinguishing himself from those who did not have it (such as his parents, brothers, relatives and neighbours from his small town). Drawing on Lawler (2005a), Yutiel's worries of feeling bad could be interpreted as fears of being rejected and considered as morally disgusting to others whom he respected and looked up to. He wanted to 'fit in' to a geographical, social and cultural context where he did not belong and attending a secondary school at the City of Buenos Aires was a central locus for reshaping himself and for being accepted and respected.

In the case of Yeyu, she also explicitly referred to the central role of secondary education for "being somebody" and linked it with her occupational future. Like all the interviewed 'tryers', she argued that secondary school was necessary to get better jobs and "progress". In the above extract, Yeyu had a clear conviction that schooling would let her do "whatever you want". Yeyu stated that secondary schooling was the way out of low paid and low valued manual jobs such as that of a domestic worker. Her mother had worked from a very young age as a domestic worker to support her family. Yeyu, and in particular her mum, wanted her to have more opportunities and better chances than her family and older siblings. Yeyu was convinced that secondary schooling would allow her to break that cycle of accumulative restrictions at family and individual levels. Following Bourdieu (2000, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002), secondary schooling was perceived as the means of overcoming her class habitus, her social and economic restrictions. Yeyu perceived it as a means of potential personal and, in Bourdieu's terms (1996), capital "conversion". The latter referred to the probable future transformation of the cultural capital accrued during secondary schooling into economic and symbolic capital.

While Yutiel wanted to be an actor, Yeyu dreamed of being a photographer. Unlike British research findings regarding career aspirations of working class young people (Ball *et al.* 2000, Reay 2001, Willis 1981), Yutiel's and Yeyu's aspirations illustrate how many non middle class boys and girls (with similar or slightly higher volumes of family capitals) wanted to have some kind of profession after finishing high school. Many of them mentioned a range of higher education and vocational degrees, and related occupations, as possible future career paths. The girls aspired to be surgeons, nursery teachers, paediatricians, primary and secondary school teachers, nurses, accountants, psychologists, or nutritionists. Amongst the boys, their aspirations were to be: graphic designers, disk jockeys, web site builders, journalists, footballers, and to do IT related degrees. None of the students wanted to have similar occupations to those of their parents. A minority did not know what to do after secondary schooling. The majority of students' narratives about their future emphasised the role of secondary schooling as facilitating them to do "whatever they want" and to have aspirations of getting professional qualifications that, in general, were alien to their families, relatives and closest friends. In Bourdieu's terms, they did not have a clear sense of their place and dared to dream of professional careers and paths that, in general, they had only known through the mass media, a few friends or relatives (Bourdieu 1985b, 1987, 1992a, Bourdieu and Passeron 1979). However, despite this apparent contradiction, from a Bourdieusian perspective, students' optimistic views were enmeshed within a historical discourse about education as a legitimate way of cultural differentiation and upward social mobility (Kessler 2003, Svampa 2005). As seen in Chapter Three, secondary schooling itself was historically born out of this promise and was effectively

entangled in the configuration and widening of the middle classes up to the 1970s (Minujin and Anguita 2004, Svampa 2005, Torrado 2003). In this sense, these working class and marginal students had internalised dispositions and views about education that had been produced in previous historical periods.¹⁵² However, this did not imply that students were oblivious to the serious problems that they would face in the labour market and, in that sense, their views about the centrality of secondary education were attuned to the labour market demands. As Yeyu (a female student) and Juan (a male student) asserted:

AM: What do you think about the economic situation of the country?

Yeyu: Well, the situation is difficult, very difficult. I am not sure if this is my view or it is how it is. My dad knows some people with professional titles who work as a dustman like him. One is an architect who works as a dustman. I mean, even if you study, you won't know if you are going to be ok.

(Interview, 28/09/04)

Juan: Yes, finishing secondary schooling is important for getting a job and it's also important if you want to continue studying

AM: Why do you think that secondary school is useful for getting a job?

Juan: Well, today they ask you for the educational certificate to give you a job stocking cans of beans in a supermarket. I mean, you need a secondary certificate for everything. If you don't have it, well, you won't have any kind of job (...).

(Interview, 13/09/04)

Juan and Yeyu exemplify the majority of students' awareness of difficulties that they will face when trying to enter the labour market. Yeyu points to clear signs of the imperfect association between qualifications and social and economic

¹⁵² As mentioned in Chapter Four, Bourdieu calls this lag between habitus and field 'hysteresis' (see Bourdieu and Waquant 2002; Brubaker 1995).

rewards and Juan identifies the deflation of the value of secondary schooling as a positional good in the labour market. In line with Argentinean research about the relations between education and work (Filmus 2001, Tenti Fanfani 2003a), these students exemplified how working class and marginal students' hopes of social mobility and progress were grounded on historical educational and cultural discourses, which were mixed with anxieties about their future and their life chances.

After unpacking the centrality of secondary schooling in the narratives of the 'tryers', it is necessary to look at how their dispositions and views towards education were related to their families' school choice practices and their respective capitals.

School choice and the wandering process

The great majority of the 'tryers' retold the same general story. Looking for schools was an uncertain and complex process that involved going to different state institutions and being rejected several times due to lack of vacancies. I call this process 'wandering'. Following Bourdieu (1986, 1992a), marginal and working class families' 'cards' (their economic, cultural and social resources) were scarce or ineffective for selecting a school. Wandering reflects this relative insufficiency of capitals to deal with the operations of the state secondary system in the City. This section examines how two main groups of Low Hill's students and their families became trapped in a wandering strategy: those who had the lowest levels of economic, cultural and social capitals and those who had relatively higher levels of cultural capitals but which had been devalued due to students' repetition or their families' recent migration.

Isabel and Aspacía illustrate how students from marginal families were unable to choose any school. They started secondary school at Low Hill and enrolled there in 2002. Their families had relatively low levels of economic and cultural capitals, assessed by their living conditions¹⁵⁴, and occupations and educational levels of their members. Isabel's dad was a construction worker and over the last decade had gone through long periods of unemployment interrupted by unstable and short term unskilled manual jobs (*changas*). Her family mainly lived on social benefits. Aspacía's mum was a domestic worker and her uncle was a security guard. None of their parents had completed secondary school. Isabel's older siblings dropped out of secondary schooling and Aspacía's sister had repeated a school year. Regarding the selection of the school, Isabel and Aspacía stated:

Isabel: I couldn't enrol anywhere else. (...) When I was in the last year of primary school, some people from 'The Patriot' came and gave us information about the school and how you had to dress (...) I didn't pay much attention, and I said to myself 'I'll enrol later'. Well, then, there were not vacancies, not in that school nor anywhere else. (...). It was early March (...) In others, you had to pay a fortune per month and by chance we came here (...) there were vacancies here.

(Interview, 14/9/04)

AM: Why did you come to this school?

Aspacía: Well, at the beginning I didn't want to come here. I wanted to go to 'Red Flag'. I tried to enrol there in March but there were no vacancies. (...) This school had an awful appearance (*aspecto horrible*).

AM: What do you mean?

¹⁵³ Gewirtz et al. (1995) identify three types of school choosers: the "skilled", "semi-skilled" and "disconnected". Although the "disconnected" share features with the "unskilled" choosers of my study (such as their disconnection from the operations of their education systems), I found more differences than similarities that led me to create a new category.

¹⁵⁴ Isabel lived in a precarious house in a *villa miseria* (slum) and Aspacía in a one bedroom flat in a low middle class neighbourhood. Isabel lived with her parents and seven siblings; Aspacía with her mum, uncle and older sister.

Aspacia: Well, if you look at the school, you could easily notice that it's a shitty place.

AM: Why?

Aspacia: Well, it has bad people who take drugs and everything at the entrance door.

(...)

AM: Why did you want to go to 'Red Flag'? Did you know it?

Aspacia: Yes, I knew it from the outside, I really liked that they had a uniform (...). It's nice (...).

(Group interview, 08/09/04)

In these cases, students and their parents did not choose Low Hill. Although they expressed their wishes to attend another state school, students had to go to Low Hill due to a lack of vacancies in other state schools. While Isabel received some information about secondary schools in the last primary school year, Aspacia knew her preference only 'from the outside'. In the case of Isabel, she 'didn't pay much attention' to information about enrolment in 'The Patriot' and she and her dad started to look for a school when it was already too late. A lack of economic capital ruled out attending private schools. On the other hand, Aspacia did not have educational information about her preferred school. She only knew that its students wore uniforms. For her, this was a cultural marker that served as an indicator of a "nice" school where she would have liked to belong.¹⁵⁵ Moreover, Aspacia stressed that she thought that Low Hill was a "shitty" school where she would have preferred not to go. She, unlike Isabel, was quite alone in the process of selecting school. Despite differences, these students shared two main features. Firstly, they enrolled too late and were unaware of the long-term planning involved in choosing a school. Following Bourdieu (1977, 1990, 1992a) and similar to British research on school choice (Ball 2003, Conway 1997, Hatcher 1998), this late realisation could be interpreted as an expression of a particular

¹⁵⁵ In fact, 'Red Flag' has a good reputation within the state school system.

class habitus featured by the lack of certain dispositions, views and perspectives necessary to engage with the process of school choice in the stratified local state secondary system. Secondly, in keeping with British research (Ball 1993, 2003, Ball *et al.* 1994), school choice appeared as a social process tied to familial capitals and class habitus. Unlike their middle class counterparts at High Mountain, the girls (who had lived and studied in the City) and their families did not have a clear sense of hierarchy among state schools according to their educational status and their differential academic and social selectiveness. They were looking for a secondary school, not a 'good' or 'elite' one. Aspacia had some intuition about these inter-school differences but she and her family were unable to convert it into cultural capital that could be effectively exchanged when choosing a school. In summary, following Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1990, 1992a), these students and their families' dispositions and views were out of sync with the operations of the local secondary school system and they were forced to wander about for a school.

After looking at this group with low volumes of family capital, it is time to focus my attention on working class students whose family and/or individual cultural resources were devalued, due to students' repetition or their family's recent migration.

The diminished choosers

Migration or repetition just before enrolling at Low Hill put many working class families in situations where they did not have much space to manoeuvre when selecting a new school. In these cases, the new situation devalued working class families' cultural capitals and hampered their ability to select a 'good' school. The cases of Javier and Natu illustrate these processes.

Before entering Low Hill, Javier (male) and Natu (female) attended state schools at the City and at the Province of Buenos Aires respectively. In the case of Javier, his former school had a good educational reputation in the system. According to Natu, her former school was a “good” one. They were from working class families. Javier’s father was a truck driver and Natu’s was a doorman. They had permanent contracts and had access to health insurance¹⁵⁶. Regarding their educational trajectory, while Javier realised that he was going to repeat a school year in March 2004, Natu had been one of the ‘best students’ at her former school and had to migrate to the City in September 2003. Javier’s former school forbade him to re-enrol.¹⁵⁷ Repetition and migration, respectively, forced them and their families to ‘choose’ a school. In their words:

Javier: They (the school) told me that I couldn’t go back because I misbehaved a lot (...) My mum was really upset. (...) I had to look for a school (...) We asked in Red Flag school but they did not accept repitients (...) We didn’t know what to do. I came here because a neighbour told my mum that I could come here. He knows someone who’d come here (...) they told me that I could enrol. (...)

(Fieldnotes, 3/11/04)

Natu: Before, I went to a state school in the province. I couldn’t go to a private school anymore because the economic situation of my family was really bad. My mum and I chose that school. We’ve been told that it was a good school (...) When I came to the City, Low Hill was the only school that had vacancies and did not ask for entrance exam (...) it’s quite close to my house (five blocks). We went to many schools before Low Hill but there weren’t vacancies or I had to take the bloody entrance exam. I was afraid that I couldn’t pass. The (educational) level of my former school was lower. (...)

¹⁵⁶ The Argentinean health system is divided into three kinds of providers: the state, *obra social* (usually depends on workers’ unions) and the private sector. The first is free and universal; the second corresponds to workers in the formal labour market; and the last is targeted to its clientele. The state sector provides mainly services for the most vulnerable people in society.

¹⁵⁷ In some state schools there were a maximum of two repetitions as a limit for being re-enrolled.

At the *Centro de Reubicación de Vacantes*, they told me that the school was good.

(Fieldnotes, 8/08/04)

These students illustrate how working class families did not have the necessary economic capital to deal with the novel situation triggered by Javier's repetition and Natu and her family's migration. They did not consider private schools as a viable choice. Javier's situation shows how repeating a school year in March in a "good" state school could put working class students and their families in a difficult situation where they were unable to use available cultural resources. Unlike some British research on the school choice of working class families (Gewirtz *et al.* 1995, Reay and Ball 1997), Javier and his mum felt disempowered and alone in the process of selecting a new school and were forced to wander about for it. After being rejected from 'Red Flag' school, his mum got information about Low Hill from a neighbour (not a friend, relative, teacher or the government) and enrolment there was their last option. This mobilization of social capital demonstrates the low density of Javier's family's social networks. Moreover, at this particular juncture, his family was unable to mobilize the cultural resources that they had previously used in the successful enrolment of Javier at his former secondary school. As noted in Chapter Six, being able to get into a 'good' state school demanded information and knowledge about the system, its hierarchies and operations (including knowing about requirements whether bureaucratic, legal or educational) (Kessler 2002, Tiramonti *et al.* 2002).

Natu illustrates how many working class students' migration devalued their families' cultural resources and knowledge about the operations of the school system. At her former town, Natu went firstly to a "good" private secondary

school that she had to leave due to economic crisis and then attended what she and her mum considered a “good” local state school. In the City, they had to find out what kinds of options were available. After visiting many schools, Natu and her mum decided to go to Low Hill. As in the case of the rest of the students, Low Hill was the only school that had vacancies when she enrolled (September 2003). Moreover, Low Hill did not have entrance exams. Natu was not confident of her ability to tackle entrance exams. She thought that the City’s schools were better than her former one. She drew this view from educational discourses produced by teachers, students, parents, the media and academics that described secondary schools of the City as better than those of the province of Buenos Aires (Kessler 2002, Tiramonti 2004a, Tiramonti *et al.* 2002). She felt that her cultural resources were not going to be enough to pass entrance exams. Hence, Low Hill appeared to be a safe and geographically convenient option. Natu and her mum had to accept the official perspective on Low Hill (‘they told us it was a good school’) and did not have any “hot” knowledge (Ball and Vincent 1998) about it, its intake, educational reputation, and the operations of the hierarchical local educational system. Natu and her family’s cultural resources were devalued when dealing with the City school system.

After analysing the process of wandering to select a school, I now examine how different students interplayed with the game of schooling of Low Hill. The next section shows how levels of familial cultural capital and the institutional habitus were central factors, although not the only ones, necessary to understand different strategies to deal with teachers’ variety of educational and behavioural demands.

Marginal and working class habitus and the game of schooling

Both High Mountain and Low Hill configured games of secondary schooling where students were not propelled to academically excel or distinguish themselves through educational achievement and where they tended to assume a speculative approach to marks (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002, Lamaison 1986). Unlike High Mountain, however, the fragmented nature of Low Hill's intake, together with its heterogeneous educational performance, precluded any general grasp of the 'feel for the game' of schooling as was possible at High Mountain (see Chapter Four). Moreover, unlike at High Mountain, students' views about teachers also differed significantly. In some form classes, students' perceptions of the same teachers could also vary hugely. Some students praised certain teachers and their "strict" styles while others despised them. Social relations among students in different form classes also differed a lot: from "good" groups to extremely problematic and confrontational ones (towards teachers and among students). At Low Hill, groups of students seemed to have different degrees of recognition of and engagement with the rules of the game of schooling, that were strongly mediated by their families' economic, cultural and social capital and their willingness to 'be educated'. In this section, I examine two different types of relations with Low Hill's game of schooling. Firstly, the cases of Yutiel (a non traditional student) and Natu (a traditional student) allow me to analyse how marginal and working class families' low cultural and/or economic capitals together with an 'unwelcoming' institutional habitus contributed to students' inability or difficulties in playing the game of schooling. Secondly, the cases of Isabel (a traditional student) and Omar (a non traditional student) allow me to unpack how the 'tryers' could develop a 'feel for the game' and learn to deal

with teachers' differential pedagogic frames, despite the relative low levels of family capitals. In these cases, students' agency and willingness to 'be educated' and to engage with the game of schooling, together with their familial emotional and economic support, were central to understanding their successful educational performance (Nash 2002).

Bad players or the role of familial capitals and institutional habitus

As detailed before, Yutiel and Natu had migrated to the City just before enrolling at Low Hill. Their families had differential volumes of capitals, compositions and social trajectories (Bourdieu 1989) and they had diverse experiences of schooling at Low Hill. At the time of the fieldwork, Yutiel lived alone in the City and came from a very poor rural marginal family. Natu came from a working class family. Her family had undergone periods of economic hardship. Regarding familial cultural resources, only Natu's step father had completed secondary schooling. Both students valued secondary education highly as a key mechanism of their identity making and 'becoming whatever you want'. Natu wanted to be a Maths teacher or a paediatrician and Yutiel, as mentioned before, aspired to be an actor. Yutiel¹⁵⁸ and Natu said that they were "good" students at their previous school. Both asserted that they felt happy and integrated at their former secondary schools and that their teachers liked them.

Regarding Yutiel and Natu's dispositions and views about their educational engagement and performance, both struggled to talk about them. When asked, they offered different versions. Yutiel, firstly, asserted that he repeated because 'I promised Yanina (a female friend of Yutiel) that I would repeat to be with her next year'. Later, he started to identify a collection of factors that were beyond

¹⁵⁸ Yutiel repeated two school years in primary school.

his control and contributed to his educational failure and disengagement. Natu, on the other hand, underlined her individual responsibility. Firstly, Yutiel's views:

AM: You've told me that you didn't do much at school? Why do you think was that?

Yutiel: (...) In my town I woke up at 6.00 in the morning. My mum woke me up, she made me study. I was at the school at 8.00, (...) I was very responsible (...) but now, (...) my mum isn't here (...), I don't have my friends, we studied together (...)

Yutiel: (...) Some teachers don't explain. They explain once and I can't understand if they only explain once.

AM: But did you ask questions when you didn't understand?

Yutiel: Well, it embarrasses me (...) I know how to read very well but reading is embarrassing to me. (...) I don't know why, it's like the laughter of others really hurts me and makes me feel bad. That's why I prefer to not say anything. (...)

(Interview, 11/11/04)

Yutiel: One thing that didn't help me was that what in Low Hill you learn in the third school year, in my school you will learn it in the fifth school year. I really struggled (...) I was alone, I couldn't adapt (...) I was really worried because I didn't have money for paying the accommodation (...) I was anxious thinking about this and that.

(Interview, 02/03/05)

Following Lareau and McNamara Horvat (1999) and Lareau and Weininger (2003), being alone without his mother and family stripped Yutiel of vital emotional, practical and economic support that had helped him to fulfil his school and teachers' educational demands and expectations. In line with Morrow's (2001, 2003) analyses, Yutiel lacked social capital from which he could draw any help and support in educational issues. His closest friends at Low Hill, although very important in terms of emotional support, were as disengaged from the school as Yutiel, and 'had a laugh' whether they attended or truanted.

His low levels of economic, cultural and social capitals corresponded with his lack of central dispositions for coping with schooling such as, drawing on Nash (2002), discipline, dedication, time management and organisation skills. Furthermore, coming from a school of the Interior was perceived as an educational disadvantage. This was a common theme for girls and boys of different social groups who had migrated to the City just before entering Low Hill. Students like Yutiel had to deal with dramatic differences between schools in terms of what was taught, how it was taught, as well as variations in teachers' expectations regarding students' previous knowledge and appropriation of interrelated subjects. These students' difficulties illustrate one aspect of the long lasting impact of educational fragmentation that has been overlooked by Argentinean research (Kessler 2002, Krawczyk 1987, Tiramonti 2004a, 2004c). Paralleling what sociologists of education have argued elsewhere (see Bourdieu and Passeron 1990, Tenti Fanfani 2003b, Willis 1981), Low Hill teachers in different subjects imposed their educational frameworks on all students, without considering their socio-cultural diversity. Furthermore, Yutiel did not ask for help or support from his teachers or anyone at the school and he was unable to identify free extra curricular courses that were offered at the school by a non governmental organisation. The school's institutional habitus, on the other hand, did not address situations like Yutiel's and did not offer any kind of educational support for third school year students. Moreover, he did not feel entitled to ask questions in lessons; his feeling of embarrassment was overwhelming. Here, following Reay (2005), Yutiel's feelings manifested his class habitus. This lack of confidence and entitlement was aggravated by being bullied by a group of boys in his form class. Over several months Yutiel and a couple of his friends

were the target of insults, aggression and offensive drawings both in and outside of lessons. He was bullied for being seen as gay and did not feel supported by the majority of teachers.

AM: What did teachers do when this group was aggressive towards you?

Yutiel: Teachers didn't say anything. (...) One teacher really helped me. She is the Geography teacher (...) one day I told her that one boy was bothering me, and then, the next lesson, well, she was looking for tiny things to punish him with all the time without letting him notice that it was because of me (...) There were a few teachers who helped me (...) but others did not care (...) the Economics and Accountancy teacher, well, I have to defend her. This group was laughing at her all the time.

(Interview, 9/12/04)

Yutiel's vulnerable economic and emotional situation; his lack of confidence; being bullied; and the school and teachers' inability to identify and deal with students' educational disadvantages and bullying impeded him from voicing his difficulties, favoured his disengagement and clearly hampered his educational opportunities.

Unlike Yutiel, in Natu's narratives family and school did not play a central part in understanding the reasons behind her failure to pass the third school year. Natu had been at Low Hill since the last term of the second school year in 2003. Like Yutiel, she stated that entering late and coming from a school with a lower educational level hampered her educational performance (Poliak 2004, Tiramonti 2003b). From being the "best" student at her former school, in Low Hill she became one of the "worst" who struggled to pass. When reflecting on the reasons for her repetition in the third school year, unlike Yutiel and his previous narrative, Natu emphasised her individual responsibility:

AM: How do you explain your low performance?

Natu: Well, it depends if I like the module or not. It's not about the teachers, well, the exception is the history teacher (she was also the teacher of Civic Education) who I hate (...) I've never liked history. (...) I didn't work enough in those modules which I didn't like (...) I love biology and maths and I had good marks (...).

AM: Why did you think that you've repeated?

Natu: Well, I have to take exams of all three terms in history, civic education, and geography (...) these modules were too long and very difficult.

AM: Did you have to take more exams?

Natu: Yes, I also had to take one term of physics/chemistry but I passed, and a term of Economics and also passed. I didn't pass English (...) English is very complicated. (...) I did my homework but I never understood.

(Interview, 30/03/05)

Natu: The other day Tiago (her boyfriend) explained Civic Education to me (...) He explained with his words and I understood. Many times, you have a photocopy, you read but you don't understand the words (...) they use a vocabulary that a teenager doesn't understand (...) It's not that I don't try. The other day, I told my mum 'I'll study history, (...) I'll read it and I'll understand it'. When I was reading, I couldn't finish and I said to myself 'shit, I don't understand anything'. I mean, unfortunately my mum cannot help me. She didn't finish school. (...) My stepfather helped me a bit sometimes.

(Interview, 12/09/04)

Natu stated that doing well at school was mainly related to her "interest" and "work". In this account, her underperformance was mainly related to not trying "enough" in modules she did not like or found useless or uninteresting. However, when referring to the modules where she failed and to the ways in which she coped with school work, Natu expressed that they were "difficult to understand", "complicated" and "too long" and she felt frustrated by this. Her narrative swings from being the only one responsible for her failure to acknowledging that she had problems to grasp certain concepts and words, understanding long (History) texts

and English. Natu also stated that she only asked questions to certain teachers and when she felt “comfortable”. In the case of History and Civic Education, despite her doubts and questions, she did not participate or ask due to her bad relationship with this teacher who “I hate” and who “treats me and many classmates as ignorant”. Moreover, Natu’s family’s low levels of cultural and economic capital blocked potential alternative sources of support, both at home and from private tuition. Her narrative reflects that she had accepted that she was to blame for her educational failure and that lack of support at home and at school were not paramount to understanding her problems in certain modules. Natu’s views were quite common among non middle class students who had failed. Following Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) and British researchers (Benjamin 2001, Reay and Wiliam 1999), students had internalised the notion that educational failure was an individual and private problem and not a social or educational one. Natu and many students contributed to legitimise school and teachers’ discourses about educational failure as mainly rooted in individuals’ attitudes, lack of motivation and interest. Natu did not have alternative ways to accrue valuable knowledge (like the Basic English grammar she had not received in her previous school) and skills (such as study and organisation skills) necessary to pass the modules she failed. In summary, from a Bourdieusian perspective (Bourdieu 1990, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002, Reay 2004b), although Natu was able to deal with the educational demands of the majority of her teachers and performed well, she did not have dispositions and views that allowed her to demand or look for educational support to compensate her long term difficulties with particular modules and study techniques and, in this way, she was not as good a player as the game of schooling required her to be. Having

analysed why two bad players were unable to deal with the schools' demands, I now analyse how Isabel and Omar were able to play the game of schooling and how that was intimately linked with their class conversion identity making project.

Good players: Willing to play and familial support

Isabel came from a marginal family and Omar from a working class family. Omar's family was in a better economic situation than Isabel's. Omar's dad had a permanent position as a doorman in a private building while Isabel's family, as seen before, were unemployed and lived on social benefit. Regarding their cultural familial capital, none of their parents had finished high school. Despite the economic situation of her family, Isabel did not have to work like her siblings and received both emotional and economic support (to pay for transport, food and photocopies) from her parents.¹⁵⁹ Due to her family's low income, she also received a yearly bursary from the national government. Omar and Isabel's parents wanted them to finish secondary school. However, their educational trajectories differed. Isabel had always performed well at primary and secondary school; while Omar, whose objective social position was better, had repeated twice at secondary schooling, at High Mountain, and since then he had performed well at Low Hill.

Regarding students' ways of dealing with teachers and school work, Isabel and Omar stated that they 'knew what to do' when dealing with different teachers and modules. In Bourdieu's terms (1990), this habitus or implicit and sometimes unacknowledged understanding was the result of a long process (in the case of

¹⁵⁹ According to both quantitative and qualitative studies, young people from poor households like Isabel's are more likely to do paid work than those from non poor households (see López 2001).

Omar, it includes his two repetitions) where they had learnt to recognise teachers' expectations and demands; and had accrued cultural capital valuable at the school. Firstly, Isabel's ways of playing the game of schooling and her methods of dealing with some of its implicit rules:

Isabel: (...) In the first year, I was always with two classmates. They weren't very conscientious students, but I was not influenced by them (...). I did my own stuff, what I had to do (...) But, it was fine, I coped. Besides I talked to Silvio (former primary school teacher), I talked to him a lot, I always asked him for help, he always helped me with modules (...) In Maths, in the three terms I failed (...). I really struggled. (...)

AM: What did you do to pass then?

Isabel: I had to study a lot

(...)

Isabel: In the second year, I did very well (...) I didn't have any problem with any module (...) I had very good teachers (...) In the second year, I started to talk to the girls (her friends). We get on very well, we help each other.

AM: What about the third school year?

Isabel: I didn't have any problems.

(Interview, 15/12/04)

Isabel: In geography, I didn't do well in written exams. I had very low marks

AM: What was the problem?

Isabel: Well, I couldn't study everything. But I've passed.

AM: What did you do?

Isabel: (...) In the first term, my average wasn't good enough. One day, she called another girl (...) I answered the questions because she didn't know. Then I stopped because my friends told me off, (...) the teacher asked me 'Did your batteries run out? Come here' (...) I marked everything on the map and she gave me an eight.

(Interview, 4/12/04)

Isabel's narratives always emphasised her independence and agency in terms of educational matters. In the first school year, Isabel already knew 'what she had to do' to pass, despite having close friends who were not able to cope with teachers'

demands. Although she had already embodied at her primary school important dispositions, views and behaviours to effectively interact with Low Hill's institutional habitus, the first school year was the most difficult one. She recognised that she struggled in Maths. Unlike Yutiel and Natu, she was able to ask for help in and outside the school. Silvio, her former primary teacher, was a central figure who notably enriched Isabel's social capital (Morrow 2003). This relationship let Isabel accrue cultural capital (in the form of knowledge, books, explanations, advice, and information about how the school system worked) central to dealing with secondary school teachers' demands and modules' difficulties (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002, Lareau and Weininger 2003, Reay 2004a). Moreover, her girl friends (made in the second school year) were also part of Isabel's social networks that she activated in the case of school problems (Morrow 2003, Raffo and Reeves 2000). Isabel recalled that she went to Low Hill's extra curricular Maths lessons available only for first year students. Here, the Low Hill institutional habitus offered possibilities for students to engage and improve in particular subjects. In Isabel's case, she was attentive to the extra support available at the school and had enough confidence to join in. Isabel was able to compensate for her family's low levels of cultural capital by mobilising the few resources she had. This disposition to ask for help in educational matters both in and outside the school, together with Isabel's ability to recognise and use available opportunities, reflected her willingness to 'be educated' and to accept the school curriculum, teachers' pedagogic frames and ways of assessment as legitimate. In line with Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) and Nash (2002), students' acceptance of the legitimacy of teachers' pedagogic action was critical to students' possibilities of

educational success. The second transcript extract shows that Isabel had dispositions and performed certain practices that, following Bourdieu (1990), let her 'fit in' with her teachers' frames and expectations. In this case, she did not particularly like this teacher. Similar to many students in her form classes, she considered this teacher as "very strict" and "unfair". Despite this, Isabel was able to play according to this teacher's rules and showed commitment and interest when necessary (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990, Nash 2002).

When Omar started secondary schooling, unlike Isabel, he did not know how to cope with school and teachers' demands. At High Mountain, he repeated twice the first school year because he "didn't study much" and he spent all the time "playing football in a Club, because my dream was to be a footballer". At Low Hill, he realised that before "he was stupid" and he learnt "the mechanics of the school" and how to be "a student":

When I repeated for a second time, I had to decide between continuing studying and playing football. (...) I knew that the school was my future. (...) In the first school year (at Low Hill), at the beginning we were 20 (...) only six or seven passed. I mean, this school is not easy. You have to work (*ponerle voluntad*) because they're not going to give you good marks for nothing (...). In the second year, it was the same (...) I've learnt the mechanics of the school (*mecánica del colegio*), if I have homework, I'll do it after the school day (...) In the first school year (at Low Hill), I had to take exams in two terms of biology and history. (...) For biology I studied for two weeks (...) I took the exam and I got a nine (out of ten). (...) I told myself 'I should have done this two years ago, passed all the modules and returned home happy' (...) I felt that I was stupid (...)

(...)

I also throw chalk in the classroom once in a while, I probably misbehave a bit during breaks like any *chico*, but when the teacher comes you have to stand up, you have to fulfil the role of student. Half of this form class pays attention, we listen, we participate in lessons (...). In the classroom, you listen and if you don't listen that's OK but you should not talk to your classmate because you are annoying others (...).

(Interview, 20/08/04)

Omar's account emphasised his rational decision to invest in schooling rather than football, and ability to 'convert' himself into a good student who was able to recognise and accept the legitimacy of i) the implicit and complex normative framework that underpinned teachers' and students' interactions; and, ii) the exclusionary nature of secondary schooling with its filtering process (Hatcher 1998, Woods 1983b). Learning to play the game was a painful and long term process which encompassed his two repetitions, leaving High Mountain and his life time friends, and agreeing to go to "a bad school" like Low Hill, which he previously perceived as socially and educationally distant and inferior. However, Omar's subsequent educational achievements at Low Hill made him "happy" and were experienced as something that made him proud. Omar viewed both his failure and his conversion as results of his individual choices. His second repetition was a life turning point where he decided to actively engage with what he had learnt about teachers' expectations and demands regarding behaviour, participation and school work. Playing the game of schooling at High Mountain and failing to succeed had allowed Omar to acquire a practical knowledge about how to be a student who performs well. In learning the "mechanics of the school" (its 'how to'), he had learnt how to perform and be "a good student". Omar was able to unearth a collection of dispositions, attitudes, knowledge, practices, and even bodily behaviour necessary to be "a student" such as "being respectful"; "standing up when the teachers enter the room"; "paying attention"; listening or, at least, pretending to listen to teachers; contributing in lessons; doing homework as soon as you get home; and, studying when necessary. In this way, Omar was able to objectify teachers' expectations regarding students' behaviour and participation during lessons and the practices that many of his

classmates regularly performed or challenged. In other words, he was able to describe central aspects of the school habitus and its rules (Bourdieu 1990, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002, Lamaison 1986, Moi 1991).

In Omar's accounts, his family was central in terms of emotional and, I would argue, economic support (he did not need to work while studying). Drawing on Argentinean research (Dabenigno and Tissera 2002, Herrán and Van Uythem 2002, López 2001), without his family's economic security, Omar would have found it hard or even impossible to continue studying. Finally, his views locate Low Hill as a stage on which he had to perform. Here, the school, its teachers and rules of the game are accepted as legitimate and unquestionable and both Omar's failure and success were perceived as his problem or achievement (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990).

Despite their relative low levels of familial capitals, both Isabel and Omar illustrate how the option given by their parents of not doing paid work, their families' emotional support and students' willingness to 'be educated' and to be 'somebody' were paramount to understanding their resilience and ability to learn the rules of the game that Low Hill offered to them.

After investigating diverse relations between the 'tryers' and the game of schooling at Low Hill, the next section focuses on a central process of class and gender identity making within students' cultures.

Students' cultures and class and gender identity making

This section examines the identification of the 'tryers' with the middle classes and their distancing from those who were socially excluded and those who were rich. Then I explore how central aspects of students' cultures in Low Hill such as

mirar mal (aggressive staring), verbal abuse and fights operate as ways of performing and producing class and gender identities.

As seen in the previous chapter, class identities are about explicit students' self categorisations, every day differentiations from 'others' and habitual recognitions from others of who they were (Jenkins 1996, Lawler 2005b, Savage *et al.* 2001, Skeggs 1997b, Vasilachis de Gialdino 2003). The 'tryers' claimed positive class identities for them and their families that were remote from their families' social, cultural and economic trajectories and objective social positions (Bourdieu 1985b, 1989, 1992a). Isabel, who came from a marginal family and lived in a *villa miseria* (slum), and Juan, who belonged to a working class family, illustrate this identification with a vague middle class identity:

Isabel: Social classes? D'you mean, low, middle and high class?

AM: Yes, with which group do you identify? (...)

Isabel: I don't know why they classify people in this way
(...)

Isabel: Maybe those who are from the low class are the ones who don't have anything, not even to eat, is it something like that?

AM: I want to know what you think (...)

Isabel: Well, low class are those who live in the streets, for instance, the *cartoneros* (people who live on what they can find in garbage bins), and in the high class, well, famous people, those who have money, politicians, all of them.

(...)

AM: How do you see yourself? (...)

Isabel: Middle class, because it's not like I don't have anything. I have enough to survive.

(Interview, 3/04/05)

Juan: Social classes? The proletariat, bourgeoisie, I remember from history (...) you have the low class which is made up of those who are unemployed, who work doing changas. Middle class are those who have professional career, lawyer, doctor, who have a craft. Then, you have the high class, who are all the thieves from above.

(...)

Juan: (...) Social classes differentiate themselves according to the money you have and the properties you have

AM: In which class do you locate yourself? (...)

Juan: Low middle class, (...) it's not like I have too much but I have what I need, (...)

(Interview, 01/04/05)

In the case of the 'tryers', they claimed a middle class identity and, implicitly, distanced themselves from the "poor", "low class" or "working class". Historically in Argentina and the UK, the identity of "poor"/ "low class"/ "working class" has been discursively and materially produced by the state's social policies and the media as having negative symbolic value and associated with dependency, powerless and lack of initiative (Duschatzky 2000, Duschatzky and Redondon 2000, Skeggs 1997a, 1997b, Vasilachis de Gialdino 2003). When asked about social classes, Isabel questioned hegemonic ways of understanding social class differences without being able to explain why. Later, when she had to locate herself, she distanced herself from those who are seen as marginal, powerless and struggling for their lives like the *cartoneros*. Without words, she was also rejecting the negative identity of *villera* which is attributed to those who, like her, lived in *villas miseria* (slum) (Crovara 2004, Gimenez and Ginbili 2003, Goffman 1990a). Isabel reworked the meanings of being middle class and defined it as "having something" and "enough to survive". Here, she emphasised her family's ability to cope (despite its low economic, cultural and social capitals) with very difficult economic circumstances, rather than their struggles,

'deficits' and needs. Unlike her middle class counterparts at High Mountain, Isabel did not associate being middle class with particular lifestyles and consumption patterns. For her, being part of the middle class meant being included (materially but also socially) in an exclusionary society where the middle classes had been shrinking and the polarisation between the rich and poor had rapidly grown (as seen in Chapter Three). Isabel's efforts and willingness to play the game of schooling, her ability to be a 'good' student, and her desire to be 'whatever she wanted to be' were part of Isabel's class identity making and her symbolic resistance to categories (such as "poor", "*villeros*", "marginal", "undeserving", "*vagos*" (lazy), "*negros de mierda*" (shitty blacks) that others (including media discourses, literature, and some of her teachers) had persistently tried to impose on those who have low levels of capitals and occupied social locations that make them highly vulnerable to processes of social exclusion (Crovara 2004, Gimenez and Ginbili 2003, Skeggs 1997b, 2004, Vasilachis de Gialdino 2003).

Juan, like Isabel, located himself and his family within the middle classes. His objective social location was more ambiguous than Isabel's. His father was a waiter at a restaurant and his mum was self-employed at home and worked producing bio-degradable material for a hospital. Juan's parents were divorced and since 2003 he had lived with his dad in a *pensión* (cheap hotel) in the City. His mum owned her house located in a low middle class residential area of the province of Buenos Aires. When asked about the existence of social classes, like all the students, he recognised major inequalities between groups. Like Isabel, he associated the low classes with those who were excluded from the labour market and those who were vulnerable and had unstable and precarious jobs. Unlike

Isabel, Juan acknowledged fundamental occupational, cultural and educational markers that have historically distinguished the Argentinean middle classes (Bagu 1949, Germani 1950, Minujin and Anguita 2004, Torrado 1992). However, he also stressed that material aspects were key factors in recognising differences amongst social classes. When asked about his own location, he stated that his family was low middle class due to its ability to always give him what he needed. Again, being middle class was a positive self identification with those who were included in society and were perceived as different from those 'above' who illegally accrued wealth and power (Ansaldi 1996). Juan's class identification was about asserting his family's and his own moral value and worth (Lawler 2005b).

Juan (like the majority of students in both schools) did not even consider working class as an available identity. In Argentina, the working class identity was displaced during the 1940s by other social and political identities such as *peronista*, *popular* (coming from the people), or *pueblo* (people) (Svampa 2005). Being *peronista* or part of the People implied a strong and explicit political rejection of the high and middle classes as social and political actors but also incorporated social aspirations to mimic middle classes' lifestyles (Svampa 2005). However, the systematic reduction of national industries and a worsening of general working conditions since the 1970s had reshaped *sectores populares* into an heterogeneous myriad of social groups with different types and degrees of participation in the labour market and degrees of social inclusion, that were impossible to aggregate into any kind of clear cut collective identity (Feijóo 2001, Svampa 2005). Like Juan's parents, adults in students' families had manual occupations as employers or were self-employed in mainly the service

sector (like plumbers, painters, builders) with different types of labour contract. For them, the working class did not appear as an available collective identity that they could positively identify with. In this scenario, being in the middle (despite not sharing educational and occupational status, and lifestyles with the traditional middle classes) was the only acceptable and positive class identity that they could symbolically engage with, both to be recognised as valuable to others and as morally better than those who were 'above' (Sayer 2005a, Skeggs 1997b). In line with Savage (2000) and similarly to the middle class students of High Mountain, the 'tryers' linked "being middle class" with a claim to being 'normal' and 'ordinary'

After examining the rationale behind the 'tryers'' identification with the middle class, I now look at how students' conflicts outside the classroom context were central for their class and gender identity making.

Identity making and mirar mal, verbal abuse and fights

In Low Hill, students referred to the prevalence of *mirar mal* (aggressive staring) and different types of bullying mainly among students (including verbal abuse and fights in and out the school). Boys and girls from different social groups mentioned episodes where they witnessed or experienced situations of verbal abuse. A few times I was a direct witness of these types of events. Teachers mentioned several episodes where female and male students were caught up in fights in classrooms. Pastoral assistants also mentioned fights outside the school (whether at the entrance door or in the park nearby). Here, I look at two illustrations of how *mirar mal* and verbal abuse were embedded in wider multilayered and complex processes of students' class and gender identity

making. In these situations, students felt alone and almost never asked for adults' support, advice or help.

The majority of students from marginal and working class families associated *mirar mal* and verbal abuse with differences in clothing, musical preferences, and competition between girls and boys for their real or desired heterosexual partner. In line with British research (Ball 1981, Connell 1989, 1995, 2002, Haywood and Mac an Ghail 2003, Mac an Ghail 1994, Willis 1981), conflicts and abuse in Low Hill also emerged due to challenges to heterosexuality as the norm, and, regarding school matters, to antagonistic views of schooling and teachers. There were two main types of conflicts: those among students who did not know each other; and those among students who were also class mates. Yeyu provides a useful illustration of the former and Sebastián and Omar (male students) of the latter.

Mirar mal and verbal abuse took place between girls and boys (whether when they were alone or with peers) at the corridors, stairs, and toilets. Drawing on Lawler's (2005b) and Skeggs' (1997b) analysis of class identity making, *mirar mal* could be interpreted as a form of censorship, judgement and negative valuation. Yeyu shows how *mirar mal* and verbal abuse were routine ways of regulating other students' behaviours, clothing and even desires and imposing particular views as the legitimate ones. Following Bourdieu's definition of symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Eagleton 1992, Swartz 2003), *mirar mal* and abuse could be interpreted as an example of this kind of violence. In Yeyu's words:

AM: You've said that there are some girls who are *machonas* (tomboy) what do you mean by that?

Yeyu: Well, *machonas* I call them *villeritas*. If you look at them, just a second, well they start to *mirar mal*, they already want to kick you, I mean, even if you haven't *mirar mal* at them.

AM: Are these kinds of girls in the school?

Yeyu: Yes, yes, quite a lot.

AM: Have you ever had trouble with girls like this?

Yeyu: Yes, in the first school year, in the second school year.

AM: What happened?

Yeyu: Well, in the first school year, it was about a boy (...) he was her boyfriend, but it's not like I did anything, I mean, I just liked him. She found out that I liked him. I mean, I've never talked to the guy, nothing. (...)

AM: What did she do?

Yeyu: She *miró mal*, she was always chasing me, she wanted to talk to me, well, she said that. One day a classmate defended me and she told her that she should not bother me anymore because she was going to kick her. I was scared. I did not know how to fight. I did not how to defend myself (...)

(Interview, 23/11/04)

The anxiety, stress and anguish behind this story does not really emerge from Yeyu's words. Her tone of voice, her looks and facial expression did. Yeyu's view about these social encounters with this unknown girl at the school offered her the opportunity to define herself against a type of girls quite common in Low Hill. As analysed before, Yeyu came from a vulnerable working class family. In her narrative, she established a symbolic equivalence between *machona* (tomboy or laddette), *villerita* (a female who lives in a *villa miseria* or slum) and *mirar mal*. These associations were quite common among the 'tryers'. *Villa miseria* has been portrayed and produced by dominant discourses as places characterised by illegality; lack of hygiene, acceptable living conditions, and education; crime; irrationality and excess (Crovara 2004, Gimenez and Ginbili 2003). Drawing on

sociological research about identity making (Jenkins 1996, Lawler 2005a, 2005b, Sayer 2005a, 2005b), we can see that Yeyu drew symbolic and moral boundaries between her and them. Being *machona* and *villerita* was interpreted as having a negative identity and low moral value. When asked about the meaning of *villerita*, Yeyu stated that she was not referring to people who actually lived in *villas* (slums) but to the ways in which these girls behaved. Yeyu condemned both this masculine femininity and its associated assumed social marginality. Yeyu defined herself against these girls. In her view, poverty was not a synonym of lack of moral values or worth. Like Skeggs' (1997b) working class women, Yeyu wanted to differentiate herself from those who were seen as dangerous, threatening and undeserving. Different discourses have historically defined a *villera* identity as 'that which is made up of features that reclaim, from a territorial scene (the *villa*), the urban banditry, domestic violence and the consumption of cheap drugs' (De Gori 2005: 366, my translation). However, hegemonic discourses interpreted this identity as an 'otherness' associated with amorality and a-sociality that should be despised or discarded (Crovara 2004, De Gori 2005, Gimenez and Ginbili 2003). Yeyu stressed that the *villeritas* were unpredictable and threatening. In this case, she was defining her class and gender identity against an imaginary 'undeserving' poor (Castel 1997) who transgressed traditional femininities and middle class sociability rules at the school (Epstein and Johnson 1998, Jackson 2006). At school, Yeyu was quite shy and only interacted with a small group of girl friends from her form class. She always wore a white smock, eye liner and jewellery. She spent the majority of her free time in the classroom or in the corridor beside it. Her movements at the school, like those of her girl friends, were curtailed (Gordon and Lahelma 1996).

In all third school year form classes, I recorded common stories of verbal abuse (both girls and boys were involved) and five fights among students (the majority between girls) in their classrooms. Sebastián and Omar, working class boys, illustrate how insults, verbal abuse and fights reflected different subject positions regarding class, gender and student identity making processes within their form class:

Sebastián: well, they call me *gato*, *puto* (derogative slang words for a gay man), whatever, I've just tried to ignore them (...).

(...)

Sebastián: Marcela and Tatiana (girls) are troublemakers (*problemas*). Esteban (a boy) and Tatiana always make insults, they are always bothering, well, they are the ones who bother all the time, who bother in lessons. (...) They live for *jodiendo* (messing around) (...)

(...)

Sebastián: They are like that because, how can I say? There are differences in thought about stuff, about music (...) silly things, or because this group of girls want the other group to shut up and stop annoying people (during the lesson) and well, the other group will immediately react (...) for instance, Economics is a disaster, they are always *tirados* (lying down) on the teacher's desk, (...) they are always bothering. Well, sometimes, you are fed up and you ask for silence. Miranda asked for silence once and well, that was enough for them to start insulting each other (...)

AM: Does this happen during lessons?

Sebastián: Yes

(...)

AM: How do teachers react?

Sebastián: Well, they say 'shut up', no more than that
(Interview, 17/11/04)

Omar: Well, Marcela and Tatiana, well you can tell how they are just listening to them 'what's the problem with you, *loco?*' (Imitating their aggressive tone, their facial and body postures) You can tell by the way they talk in the classroom, you could see who is *villera* and who isn't.

(...) I mean you are educated or you are *villero*, there is nothing in between (...) the majority of them don't care about schooling. Why? Well, because if you are educated you know that you go to school to study.

(Interview, 20/11/04)

In this form class, boys and girls told stories of ongoing verbal abuse between students (in the case of Sebastián, he was the victim of homophobic bullying), and continuous challenges to lessons' working consensus with different teachers (reaching extremes with one old female teacher in two modules).

These stories reflected the distance between two main groups of students in the form class: those who accepted teachers' behavioural and educational frames (like Sebastián and Omar) and those who challenged teachers and despised other students for being 'silly', for denouncing their misbehaviour to the head teacher, for wanting to shut them up, and for taking the teachers' side. The routine conflicts among these two groups of students culminated in a fight between Tatiana (a female student) and another girl from Sebastián's and Omar's form class two weeks before the school year finished. These two groups were made up of girls and boys and the majority were non traditional working class students: they were older, had experiences of repetition and had not started their secondary school at Low Hill. At least half of them were newcomers in 2004. Sebastián and Omar (also non traditional students) point to differences between them and the 'other group' in terms of musical tastes, ways of talking and addressing others, attitudes towards teachers and authorities, and polite manners. Like Yeyu, Omar referred to Tatiana and Marcela as *villeras* and associated them with defiant and aggressive dispositions when interacting with peers. He highlighted that members of this other group were *villeros* and that there was something about the way they talked and performed (the words they used and the ways they rejected

schooling) that made them a distinctive group from which Omar, Sebastián and their friends wanted to distance themselves (Bourdieu 1985b, 1989, 1992b). Tatiana and Marcela were described as assertive, belligerent and cheeky in their interactions with some students and teachers, they enjoyed swearing and seemed 'ready to fight' at any minute. Esteban had gained the reputation in the school of being a troublemaker who was transferred from another form class due to his bad behaviour and confrontational attitude. Drawing on sociological analyses of class and gender identity making (Devine *et al.* 2005, Jenkins 1996, Skeggs 1997b), *villeros* and *villeras* can be characterised as both unwanted and disregarded class positions and identities; particular types of performed masculinities and femininities; and antagonistic dispositions and views towards teachers' authority. As analysed before, in the social imaginary *villeros* refers to marginal poor social groups usually associated with a-sociality and criminality (Crovara 2004, Gimenez and Ginbili 2003). Here, despite the relative objective social proximity between Omar and Sebastián and the 'other group', the former wanted to distinguish themselves from the dangerous, aggressive, and confrontational otherness that *villeros* as a stigmatised collective identity represented (Crovara 2004). Moreover, Omar and Sebastián were judgemental of the macho lad masculinity performed by boys like Esteban and the new masculine femininity displayed by girls like Tatiana and Marcela (similar to the one performed by laddettes in the British context) (Haywood and Mac an Ghail 2003, Mac an Ghail 1994). Omar and Sebastián performed different types of subordinated masculinities within the school (Haywood and Mac an Ghail 2003, Mac an Ghail 1994). Omar had a low voice and firm manners, always wore a white smock, was respectful to teachers and fellow classmates, and was recognised as a good

football player. He got on very well with everybody in his form class. According to him, he was seen by *villeritos* as *pillo*, which meant cunning and able to be respected without getting into trouble. Sebastián, on the other hand, was verbally abused during half of the year for being perceived as gay. Unlike Omar, he performed a softer version of masculinity. He dyed his hair, wore low waist trousers and tight t-shirts, and he had polite manners with teachers and students. In Omar's view, *villeros* and *villeras* were also associated with a lack of education, disrespect for teachers' authority and disengagement from schooling. Unlike them, both Omar and Sebastián and their friends, despite having experienced educational failure, respected teachers' authority. The majority of the "other group", the *villeros*, repeated the third school year and were seen by teachers as "unbearable", "rude", "disrespectful", "aggressive", and "insolent". The exception was Tatiana. Despite her aggressive dispositions, she studied and was able to pass the third school year and to avoid direct confrontation with the majority of teachers.

These stories illustrate how verbal abuse, aggression and fights were tied into complex processes of identity making where different class, gender and student subject positions were available and taken up in complex ways (McLeod 2000, Skeggs 1997b, Youdell 2003a, 2003b). Moreover, these cases evidence how class and gender identity making were linked to different orientations towards education and the game of schooling, which promoted or hampered the acceptance of the legitimacy of the game of schooling and students' misrecognition of some central aspects of the school's symbolic violence.

Conclusions

This chapter has sought to highlight the ways in which marginal and working class 'traditional' and 'non traditional' students interplayed with the field of education, the game of schooling at Low Hill and its student culture. I have focused my attention on the 'tryers', those who had overall positive views and attitudes towards schooling and did not have serious behavioural problems. This chapter has argued that the 'tryers' had complex relations with the game of schooling in the City and at Low Hill, that were intertwined with processes of class and gender identity making. Primarily I have looked at four distinctive 'movements' of students' habitus in relation to the field of education and the game of schooling: views and dispositions towards secondary schooling; selection of Low Hill; playing the game of schooling by different groups with differential volumes of familial capital; and, finally, students' conflictive relations as central scenarios for their class, gender and student identity making. I have argued that the 'tryers' perceived schooling as a central place for their class identity making and their differentiation from their families. However, it has been noted that they were unable to select any secondary school in the City and had to accept Low Hill as their last option. Moreover, while marginal families lacked relative and absolute capitals to engage with the operations of the local system, the working class families of those interviewed had higher relative levels of capitals but there were devalued due to their children's repetition or their recent migration to the City. Furthermore, I have established that, although the level of family capital was important, the nature of the institutional habitus as well as students' agency and willingness to be educated were crucial to understanding educational participation and performance. Finally, I have

demonstrated how marginal and working class students engage in complex processes of identity making. They saw themselves as middle class in a polarised social context where being in the middle was seen as valuable and desirable. However, in their everyday interactions, these girls and boys had to define their identities with and against other students who shared similar positions in the social space and, in so doing, they took up different class and gender positions that were not straightforwardly linked with their ability to deal with the demands and expectations of the game of schooling. In other words, the 'tryers' had to shape their class and gender identities in their relationships with peers and, in this process, the 'tryers' both reinforced their positive attitudes towards schooling and misrecognised the different ways in which the game of schooling imposed rules on them that fundamentally disadvantaged them in both educational and social terms.

Having analysed Low Hill students and their relations with the game of schooling, the next chapter pulls out the central threads of comparison between the High Mountain and Low Hill institutional habitus, games of schooling and the ways in which their respective students dealt with their views, expectations and demands.

Concluding discussion

My main aim for this thesis has been to provide an analysis of the operations of the fragmented secondary education system in the City of Buenos Aires and the ways in which different socio-economic groups of students interplayed with it. In so doing, I add my view to the increasing dissatisfaction expressed in response to the variety of signs that point towards a steady growth of educational inequalities across regions, schools and social groups. In the following brief discussion I bring to a close the story of the reproduction of educational inequalities that I have portrayed, by mapping out the key arguments put forward in previous chapters and pulling out some thematic threads. Moreover, I identify the ways in which the findings and analysis of this thesis contribute to further knowledge in the field of Sociology of Education in Argentina and in the UK. Finally, I examine possibilities for future theoretical and empirical research emerging from the limitations and focus but also from the findings of my own research.

Schooling, students' experiences and inequalities: Problems, theories and methods

Identifying and explaining educational inequalities across social groups has been a central concern for the Sociology of Education in both developed and under developed countries. Argentinean research has focused its attention on differential access, participation and performance of a diversity of social groups since the 1970s. Recent processes of education reform, together with profound transformations of the socio-economic structure, have configured a scenario of growing educational inequalities within and between provinces, schools and groups of students. Within this context, this thesis has sought to address three main concerns: schools' methods of participation within and production of the

field of secondary schooling in the City of Buenos Aires; middle class, marginal and working class students' ways of interplaying with the game of schooling in the City and in their schools; and the complex ways in which students' social relations intersect with processes of class and gender identity making and schooling. Considering these three interconnected questions has called for a focus on different levels of analysis: the field of secondary schooling in the City and the game of schooling in each school. This focus has informed my selection of an ethnographic approach and my use of a variety of data collection techniques such as participant observation, interviews, surveys and documentary analysis. Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of social practice and critical elaborations of some of his central concepts and foundations, I have outlined a theoretical approach attentive to the complex and multilayered relationship between social class and schooling. This framework provides a useful 'toolbox' for understanding questions of social class, schooling and identity making and, thereby, addressing the key questions of my research across multiple sites of investigation. In this way, the research problems, the methods and theories have been developed as part of the same organic process.

The game in the City and in the schools: A story of persistent educational inequalities

Although some Argentinean analysis has focused on educational fragmentation and students' identity making in secondary schools, it is only beginning to address the complexities and impact of educational fragmentation. As seen in Chapter One, analyses to date have portrayed different sorts of inequalities across provinces, schools and social groups. However, such research has not examined the role played by schools in the production of inequalities and, in general, has

portrayed schools as passive reflections of socio-educational processes that operated beyond their control and intervention. Furthermore, Argentinean research has not looked at how educational fragmentation shapes students' experiences of schooling, their educational engagement and performance, and how it interplays with the production of class and gender identities. My research has examined the role of two schools in the production of the field in the City of Buenos Aires; the views and practices of students from different social groups with regard to the game of schooling; and the ways in which they produce their class and gender identities through schooling and students' cultures.

Drawing insights from Bourdieu, the sociological analysis of identity making and my own findings, I have put forward the argument that social class is a powerful explanatory concept with which to understand inequalities between schools and groups of students in the City of Buenos Aires. The centrality of social class has been demonstrated when analysing: i) the role that individual schools played within the game of schooling in the City; ii) how the schools' institutional habitus shaped teachers' views about their students, behaviours, and potentialities; iii) the ways in which middle class, working class and marginal students played the game of schooling in their respective schools; and iv) how students' class identities were shaped through schooling (both in their relations with peers and through their educational participation). Throughout this work, I have engaged with a material and cultural conceptualisation of social class (Ball 1993, Bourdieu 1985b, 1992a, 1993c, Savage 2000, Skeggs 1997b). Drawing on Anglo-American elaborations of the concept of institutional habitus, I have demonstrated that schools as organisations are influenced by social class and that they participate in diverse ways in the production and reproduction of their

relative positions (mainly defined by reputation, intakes and resources) in the field of education and of their intakes' educational and social advantages and disadvantages. Moreover, I have provided supporting evidence to the British strand of critique showing how social class is embodied, dynamic, relational and operates at both conscious and unconscious levels in students' and their families' ways of dealing with the multilayered nature of the field or game of secondary schooling in the City. In this way, this thesis serves as a valuable contribution to the Argentinean research agenda, providing empirical analysis that not only nurtures the ongoing project of critically researching the nature of contemporary educational fragmentation, but also offers insight into class experiences of circuits of schooling in relation to the specificities of the cases under study.

What has unfolded from the findings presented here is that schools and students participate in the production and reproduction of their differential positions in the educational system and do so with unequal 'cards' and capitals which locate them in distinctive conditions when dealing with the demands of the game of secondary schooling in the City and in the schools. Throughout the thesis I provided evidence of this when analysing the meaning of secondary schooling for students and schools; schools' recruitment policies and families' school choice; the stakes of the game and students' abilities to play; and the production of class and gender identities within students' cultures.

In the next sub-sections, I turn my attention to each of these aspects in order to explicitly compare and contrast the schools in which this study was carried out and their respective groups of students, which I have separately analysed in previous chapters. I revisit under a slightly different light the key findings of this thesis and make explicit some connections between them in order to summarise

the multifaceted story of persistent educational inequalities that my study has presented.

The meaning of secondary schooling for students and schools

In line with Argentinean research (Kessler 2002, Tiramonti 2004c), my study has showed that the meaning of secondary schooling varied for different social groups of students and schools. In addition, I have provided evidence which suggests that schools' institutional habitus (in subtle, implicit and routine ways) also served to reinforce or weaken students' views on the meaning of secondary schooling and their future career aspirations.

Although all the marginal, working and middle class students tied secondary schooling to the production of their identities, in the case of the 'tryers' of Low Hill this relationship appeared stronger. For middle class students in High Mountain, secondary schooling was something that you 'had to do' and middle class students held a doxic attitude towards its completion (Bourdieu and Eagleton 1992) (see Chapter Six). The majority of the 'tryers' did not see schooling just as a stage for their long term educational and personal development. They interpreted secondary schooling as an obstacle or barrier that, once overcome, would open up life chances that had not been available to their parents and siblings. In this way, they appeared to see secondary schooling as a vital resource for their cultural distinction and differentiation from their family and class and for the production of their identities as valuable and respectable.

In my study, despite their differential objective positions in the social space, the majority of middle class students and the 'tryers' associated the meaning of secondary schooling with the possibility of pursuing university careers. The great majority of students in both schools wanted to continue studying after

completing secondary school. In contrast to what Bourdieu would have predicted (Bourdieu 1992a, 1995a, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002) and what some British research has shown (Ball *et al.* 2002, Ball *et al.* 2000), my study showed that all these students' imagined futures were strikingly similar. Following Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1988, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002, Wacquant 2004), the similarities between middle class students and the 'tryers' educational aspirations could be explained by, as mentioned in Chapter Seven, the hysteresis effect, which refers to the lag between dispositions and views and the field that produces them. The 'tryers' had internalised dispositions and views on secondary schooling that corresponded to a previous historical state of the field of secondary education. As seen in Chapter Three, Argentinean secondary schooling operated as a mechanism of effective upward mobility of wide sections of the middle classes before the 1980s. The 'tryers' in Low Hill were the first generation in their families to reach secondary schooling. They and their families had internalised the historic educational discourse that emphasised the meritocratic nature of secondary schooling, its centrality to getting a better job than previous generations and to reaching higher education (Dussel 2004, Tenti Fanfani 2003b).

Drawing on the concept of institutional habitus (McDonough 1996, Reay *et al.* 2001a, 2005) to unveil how social class influenced schools' organisational practices and teachers' views, I showed that High Mountain and Low Hill configured cultural sites wherein views, expectations and aspirations about students' schooling and, in more or less implicit ways, about their futures, were also produced and made available to students as potential paths to follow. I argued that schools instilled versions of what could be possible through, for

instance, the schools' organisational practices and teachers' views and expectations regarding students' performance and abilities. While in High Mountain the middle class institutional habitus reinforced its students' educational views about the meaning of secondary schooling, at Low Hill the middle class institutional habitus did not correspond to the views and aspirations of the majority of the 'tryers'. This profound difference between schools was demonstrated by teachers' differentiated views about their students and the schools' organisational practices.

The majority of High Mountain teachers expected that their students would continue with university studies and, in this sense, viewed secondary schooling as part of students' longer educational trajectory (see Chapter Five) (a minority asserted that many students, despite their aspirations towards continuing university studies, would struggle with the academic level of the university). On the contrary, the majority of Low Hill teachers expected that only a minority of their students would continue to university studies. Teachers agreed that the majority of Low Hill students lacked the basic literacy and numeracy skills to complete secondary schooling and that they were fated to repeat the same school year several times or to drop out of school.

As examined in Chapter Five, High Mountain's reinforcement of its students' educational and occupational aspirations was also reflected in different organisational practices, such as the provision of an optional career service module during the last school year (where students accessed information on different university degrees and learnt techniques to be reflexive about their future career choices) and some extra-curricular activities to match the imagined future of their middle class intake as future part-time workers and university

students. In the case of Low Hill, its middle class institutional habitus did not offer support to its students who wanted to continue studying after completing secondary schooling. As seen in Chapter Five, Low Hill's institutional habitus attempted to address the educational needs of its mixed population during the first two school years. The main objective of these changes (such as inclusion of a tutor system and attempts to reduce form class size) was to facilitate the inclusion of students from vulnerable and poor families with experiences of repetition and *sobre-edad*. Persistent high levels of repetition and drop out rates pointed to the failure of these initiatives. However, neither Low Hill nor its teachers performed any alterations to the curriculum or organisational practices aiming to smooth students' future career choices¹⁶⁰ or their ability to deal with future university demands. During the last three school years of schooling, the extra social and educational support for students in the school was almost non-existent¹⁶¹ and implied that students did not receive advice and support to make career choices, training in specific skills, and opportunities to get extra educational certificates that could help them to compete in the labour market. High Mountain did offer, as seen before, this kind of support, although it did not have any mechanism to formally assess the impact on graduates.

Having examined how the relationships between students' meanings of secondary education and schools' institutional habitus interplayed, I now revisit how the schools deployed differential strategies to attract their intake and how

¹⁶⁰ I only identified one brief course of four hours on career choices for third school year students. This course was organized by people from the Secretary of Education of the Government of the City of Buenos Aires. After 2004, I maintained correspondence with several students during the last two school years and students stated that they did not receive any support in the process of deciding future educational careers.

¹⁶¹ At the end of 2004, the school began offering educational support to those students who, having completed secondary schooling, could not graduate.

middle class students and the 'tryers', together with their families, had differential resources to choose them.

School recruitment policies and families' school choice

My study has argued that High Mountain's and Low Hill's recruitment policies and families and students' school choices contributed to the production of "circuits of schooling" (Ball *et al.* 1995) within the state school system of the City of Buenos Aires. In this way, my study brings to the pre-existent Argentinean literature on educational fragmentation the identification of how schools were or were not able to select different kinds of socio-economic intakes and how middle and non middle class families and students engaged with processes of school choice.

My study has demonstrated that High Mountain and Low Hill were two different types of players with different middle class institutional habitus within the social field or game of secondary schooling in the City of Buenos Aires. In this sense, similar to British research findings about educational markets (Ball 2003, Conway 1997, Gewirtz *et al.* 1995) and Argentinean research about educational fragmentation (Tiramonti 2004c, Veleda 2005), High Mountain and Low Hill appeared to belong to different "circuits of schooling" (Ball *et al.* 1995) for different kinds of population. While High Mountain had institutional capitals to compete for their intakes (with mainly state schools), Low Hill assumed the status of a 'sink' school where students with high levels of educational failure and/or from families with low volumes of capital were 'dumped' by the school system. This is the argument of Chapter Five.

Adding to the body of the Argentinean literature on the fragmentation of the education system and, similar to Veleda (2005), I have presented examples

pertaining to the relevance of the schools' active (although differential) role within the field of secondary schooling. The concept of "institutional habitus" was used to illuminate this. High Mountain's middle class institutional habitus was manifested in its active search for middle class students and in the organisational practices it deployed during the 1990s in order to attend to its intake's perceived educational needs. Conversely, Low Hill's different version of middle class institutional habitus, together with low levels of institutional capital, contributed to its incapacity to academically select its population. It had to accept students from any school without any educational requirement or age limit during almost any part of the school year (which was quite unusual for High Mountain) (see Chapter Five). Low numbers of students at the beginning of the 1990s, together with a local educational policy that aimed at including young people from poor families in secondary schooling, contributed to its open door school policy (see Chapters Three and Five).

The differential nature of these schools' participation in the game of schooling in the City was mediated by their unequal levels of institutional capitals that impacted on, for instance, their abilities to retain or exclude students throughout secondary schooling. High Mountain had a high level of internal homogeneity in terms of students' age and educational performance by school year. The great majority of students had the theoretical expected age for their school year and they did not have previous experiences of educational failure. Furthermore, High Mountain had a relatively stable population (in terms of numbers but also academic performance), with similar numbers of students from the first up to the last school year. Conversely, Low Hill's incapacity to select and retain its population was evidenced by i) its mixed intake in socio-economic and

educational terms, ii) its mixed population in terms of age groups who attended to the same school year; and iii) its inability to keep stable enrolment numbers across school years. As examined in Chapter Four, the majority of Low Hill students came from working class and marginal families and a minority from the middle classes; and around 45% students had at least one experience of repetition. In terms of the school's enrolment levels, they dramatically diminished from the first to the fifth school year (Low Hill 2000, 2004).

As seen in Chapter One, few Argentinean studies have examined school choice processes (Veleda 2005). I have not identified any that examines it from the perspective of students and that focuses on processes of school choice by marginal and working class families. My study contributes to this body of research by examining the ways in which social class impacted on families' abilities to 'choose' a school. In my analysis of students' views about school choice, I have provided evidence of differential levels of cultural capital amongst marginal, working and middle class families and how they strongly influenced the diverse ways of interpreting the operations, hierarchies and (bureaucratic, administrative and educational) demands of the local state school system. Similar to findings from British research on school choice (Ball and Vincent 1998, Ball 2003, Ball *et al.* 1995, Gewirtz *et al.* 1995, Reay and Ball 1997), my study has shown that middle class families and students had more resources or 'cards' than the 'tryers' when selecting a school.

Middle class familial cultural and economic capitals were able to recognise an unofficial but effective ranking or hierarchy among local state schools; to distinguish High Mountain from all state schools as a "good" one; to identify the bureaucratic procedures of enrolling their children, and to provide extra

educational support for taking the entrance examination if needed. However, as examined in Chapter Six, High Mountain middle class families had limited cultural and economic cards. They belonged to the 'loser' sections of the middle class and they did not have many viable schools in mind when deciding where to send their children. For many families, High Mountain was the second best to the elite state schools that they preferred. In line with Argentinean research (Tiramonti 2004c), confidence in the state system and its public nature together with low levels of economic capital restricted middle class families' viable choices to a small number of institutions similar to High Mountain.

In the case of Low Hill, on the contrary, working and marginal families and students had low volumes of capital that hampered, in different ways, their opportunity to choose a school. In the case of marginal students, their families did not have enough cultural, economic and social capitals to recognise the unequal nature of the state education system, to recognise "good" schools, and to be aware of the bureaucratic and administrative requirements for enrolling their children in them. In the case of many working class students, however, my research showed that they had more cultural cards than their marginal peers. However, due to alterations in their circumstances (such as the repetition of students or the migration of families), working class families were: i) unable to activate their pre-existent cultural cards to choose a school; or ii) were in possession of devalued cultural cards that did not help them to interpret the hierarchies and operations of the local system.

After examining one aspect of schools' and families' role in the production of circuits of schooling, and the striking differences between the cultural and economic cards of diverse social groups when choosing schools, it is time to

summarise what I found with regard to students' ways of playing the game of schooling in High Mountain and Low Hill.

The stakes of the game and students' abilities to play

The majority of Argentinean sociological research has not looked at the ways in which students from different social groups deal with the educational and social demands of the game of schooling. Only a few analyses have focused on how middle class students have done so (Feijoó and Insúa 1995, Seoane 2003). Drawing on Bourdieu's central concepts of "game", "habitus", and "capitals" (1988, 1993c, Lamaison 1986, Moi 1991) and on Lareau's and Weininger's (2003) elaboration of the concept of cultural capital, my thesis has argued that marginal, working and middle class students had different levels of cultural, economic and social capitals to be able to cope with the game of schooling in their schools. Here the focus of the analysis was on students as players and their abilities to recognise the rules and stakes of the game of secondary schooling and to mobilize cultural, economic and/or social 'cards' in playing it. Furthermore, unlike the British contemporary education system (Benjamin 2001, Gipps and Murphy 1994, Hall *et al.* 2002, Reay and Wiliam 1999) and in line with a limited body of Argentinean research (Feijoó and Insúa 1995, Seoane 2003), I have argued that the majority of students at both schools lacked interest in excelling academically and they were only interested in passing the school year without appearing to be investing 'too much' in education.

While the majority of middle class students successfully engaged with the implicit and explicit rules of the game of schooling in High Mountain, only some 'tryers' were able to recognise the rules of the game and to mobilize enough cultural and economic 'cards' to effectively deal with their school's institutional

habitus and teachers' demands and pedagogic frames. Following Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1988, 1990, Bourdieu and Passeron 1990, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002, Lamaison 1986), I have showed that social and cultural distance or proximity between the games of schooling in High Mountain and Low Hill and their students' social class contributed to explain their differential potential to learn how to play the game of schooling. In other words, the central core of *Reproduction* (see Chapter Two) serves to illuminate some central aspects of schooling in the two schools where this study was carried out.

In line with the limited Argentinean research (Feijoó and Insúa 1995, Seoane 2003), I have identified *zafar* as part and parcel of the schooling of students from the 'loser' sections of the middle classes. In addition, drawing on Bourdieu's key concepts, I interpreted *zafar* as an effective 'feel for the game' of secondary schooling. In High Mountain, middle class students had incorporated the ability to recognise the objective instructional and social requirements and constraints of the game of schooling and had become successful players who adopted an instrumental approach to modules and to their educational performance. This sense of the game was not infallible and it was unevenly distributed among groups and individuals (Lamaison 1986) in the school. A minority of middle class students' feel for the game failed and their educational participation was affected, leading to situations of educational failure or even formal exclusion from the school.

Conversely, in Low Hill, there was not a collective feel for the game across groups of students of the third school year. While some 'tryers' were unable to deal with their teachers' social and educational demands, others learnt (sometimes through several experiences of repetition) the rules of the game. As

seen before, being at secondary school was a central part of the 'tryers'' personal identity making and they accepted the legitimacy of the game of schooling. I have argued that several interrelated factors hampered students' abilities to recognise and deal with the rules of the game such as i) low levels of familial economic support; ii) low levels of embodied cultural capital, in the form of the cognitive or the non cognitive skills necessary to deal with teachers' educational demands in modules; iii) the non-existence of institutional mechanisms to identify students' previous levels of knowledge across modules (or at least in some of them) aiming at improving pedagogic practices; iv) the lack of any extra educational support for students of the third school year; and v) schools and teachers' inability to deal with cases of homophobic bullying, violence and bullying amongst students.

I have also presented evidence with regard to many 'tryers'' resilience and ability to overcome disadvantageous family circumstances. Bourdieu recognises the existence of exceptional individuals who could convert their class habitus (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979, 1990). My study offers empirical evidence of how some marginal and working class students were able to deal with the particular features and demands of the game of schooling. These students not only had the basic economic support of their families, which was crucial to remaining at school, but also wanted to 'be educated' and to distance themselves from those who challenged school, teachers and pastoral assistants' authority. They showed that they could be 'good' players and learnt to differentiate among teachers' frames and expectations. Many times, students' repetition of the same school year was part and parcel of a long and painful process of 'learning' and internalising the rules of the game of schooling. In this way, the 'good' players

showed levels of reflexivity and the ability to make rational decisions to continue schooling despite previous failures. In line with Hatcher's (Hatcher 1998) critique of Bourdieu, my thesis has demonstrated that reflexivity and rationality can play a central role in understanding social agents' participation in fields or games such as education.

Unlike the British contemporary education system (Benjamin 2001, Gipps and Murphy 1994, Hall *et al.* 2002, Reay and Wiliam 1999), this thesis has presented evidence of the non competitive nature of the game of schooling, wherein the majority of students (independently of their social class or school) lacked interest in excelling academically. The majority of girls and boys had learned that getting good marks was not always valued within the school (by the institutional habitus¹⁶² and also by their peers), within the wider educational system or labour market. Neither middle class students nor the 'tryers' wanted to strive for better marks and instead were only interested in passing the school year. The widespread rejection of those who were interested in getting good marks, the *tragas*, reflected the nature of the game of schooling as one wherein the 'winners' were those who were able to simultaneously deal with the demands of school and youth culture (Tenti Fanfani 2000a).

It seems that the field of state schooling in the City propelled students to see secondary education certificates as if they were of equal value, whether for entering universities or for getting good jobs. Throughout the thesis, I have identified different features of the game of schooling that could be associated with students' lack of competitiveness and their appreciation of the knowledge offered by the school. There were some factors associated with the operations of

¹⁶² Traditional rituals, relating to the reward and distinction of the best students, appeared in crisis in both schools. This crisis was manifested in the lack of ceremonies where, for instance, students' academic performance was praised or recognised.

the game in the City but there were also others linked with the relationships between secondary education and the higher education and labour market fields (see Chapter Three). For instance: i) the fragmented nature of module assessment that seemed to contribute to a segmented appropriation of knowledge and an instrumental approach towards marks; ii) tensions between different expectations of school culture and youth culture (Tenti Fanfani 2000a, 2000b); iii) a lack of accountability in terms of what teachers taught and how they did it; iv) the fact that any graduate of secondary schooling could potentially study in any state or private university; and v) students' views on secondary education credentials as of equal value when applying for jobs. All these factors propelled students not to strive to improve their educational performance but to do the 'minimum to pass', which was embodied as an effective *zafar* in the case of middle class students, but which was more difficult to achieve in the case of marginal and working class students.

This thesis has offered different kinds of evidence with regard to students' misrecognition, in both schools, of the different ways in which the game of secondary schooling hampered (in diverse ways) their educational opportunities. Drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of misrecognition and symbolic violence (Bourdieu 2000, Bourdieu and Eagleton 1992, Brubaker 1985, McNay 2000c, Swartz 2003), in the case of High Mountain students, the common sense of *zafar* helped middle class students to cope with teachers who had different frames, delivered more or less updated and relevant curricula, applied differential assessment methods, and were not accountable to their parents, colleagues and the school's authorities. In this sense, *zafar* was part of the game played by many teachers too. Several teachers, according to many of their colleagues, students

and my observations, did the minimum to fulfil their professional roles and, for instance, delivered outdated curricula, arrived late for lessons, and worked in isolation (avoiding the guidelines of their respective Departments) to deal with students' pedagogic or behavioural problems. In this way, I argue that *zafar* also implied that students did not learn much in a number of modules due to: i) the existence of variable educational standards because of the lack of accountability of what knowledge was taught and how it was taught (see Chapter Three); ii) the persistence of a variety of assessment methods that promoted memorising content (see Chapter Six); and iii) the lack of effective administrative mechanisms to replace teachers who were absent during long periods of time.

Zafar also contributed to students' apathy regarding the majority of modules and their acceptance of what went on in the school as 'natural'. Boredom, "being always tired", "not wanting to do anything", "always being late", "talking all the time in lessons", teasing teachers' and "reading other stuff" could be understood as middle class students' ways of challenging and resisting what went on in and outside the lessons in High Mountain. All girls and boys told stories about the subtle ways in which they carved out their own space whilst in lessons. Although all these ways of 'having a laugh' have been identified as part and parcel of schooling (Hammersley and Woods 1976, Willis 1981, Woods 1976, 1990), I argue that in High Mountain these individual and collective expressions of resistance (which only rarely attracted sanctions) were entangled with *zafar*, the particular nature of the field of secondary schooling in the City of Buenos Aires, and the relatively low cultural and economic capitals of the loser sections of the middle classes who studied in this school.

In the case of Low Hill, this thesis has provided supporting evidence to advance the argument that the 'tryers', independently of their ability to succeed educationally, also contributed to the production of the game of schooling and to the educational disadvantages that they, both individually and as a collective, experienced. Like High Mountain students, although in different ways and with unequal impact on their education, Low Hill students also misrecognised the ways in which the game diminished or hampered their educational opportunities. Firstly, following Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1988, Bourdieu and Eagleton 1992, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002), the 'tryers'' acceptance of the legitimacy of the game and the pedagogic action of the school implied that they interpreted the high levels of educational failure in the school, as well as the 'filtering' process from the first to the last school years, as 'natural' and integral to secondary schooling in Low Hill. Moreover, like High Mountain students, the 'tryers' had to deal with a variety of educational standards due to the lack of accountability of the curriculum and teaching methods. In addition, as Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) argued, the 'tryers' tended to individualize their academic successes or failures and to misrecognise the social conditions of their production. For the majority of the 'tryers', their educational performance was mainly the result of their commitment, interest, and responsibility. None of them was able to identify other factors involved in their learning and educational difficulties such as: i) the lack of extra-educational support in the school and at home; ii) the serious and visible difficulties of many teachers in dealing with their educationally heterogeneous form classes; iii) the inability of the school, teachers and pastoral assistants to deal with cases of violence, discrimination and verbal abuse amongst students; iv) the negative effects of educational fragmentation on the

levels of embodied cultural capital of numerous students, which critically hampered their opportunities to cope with teachers' demands and expectations; v) local government pressure to enroll as many students as possible, which hampered the improvement of teaching and learning conditions by keeping form classes large; and vi) the lack of teaching support or training in dealing with the complex socio-educational scenario that Low Hill configured.

After examining the nature of the game of schooling and how middle class students and the 'tryers' played it, I sum up the argument put forward in this thesis with regard to the centrality of processes of identity making in understanding the reproduction of social class and educational inequalities.

Class and gender identity making, students' social relations and schooling

Argentinean research has focused on some aspects of students' identity making (Duschatzky and Corea 2002, Kaplan and Fainsod 2001, Maldonado 2000). However, as seen in Chapter One, to date no research on the relationship between young peoples' experiences of schooling, their differential engagement with the game of schooling and processes of class identity making appears to have been done. My study has added to the "identity/subjectivity" tradition by examining how students from different social classes produced and reproduced their class identities when dealing with the field of secondary schooling and the demands of teachers and students' cultures. In so doing, I have engaged with the sociological frameworks of class and gender identity making, together with studies on these processes in schooling (Jenkins 1996, Lawler 2005b, Reay 2002, Savage 2000, Skeggs 1997b).

Keeping in line with recent British analyses on class and/or gender identity making in schools and beyond (Jenkins 1996, McLeod 2000, Reay 2002, Savage

2000, Skeggs 1997b), this thesis has demonstrated that processes of identity production were central to students' experiences of schooling. These processes appeared immersed in every day conscious and unconscious processes of identification with and dis-identification from other social groups from 'above' or 'below'. Middle class students and the 'tryers' interpreted secondary schooling as part and parcel of their personal and social identity making. Furthermore, schooling operated as a site wherein class identities were entangled with processes of gender identity making and with students' views and attitudes towards schooling.

As seen in Chapter Three, Argentinean secondary schooling had played a central role in the historic production of the 'middle class' as a collective identity. This study demonstrates that High Mountain students' class identity making emerged in different 'movements' of their class habitus such as students' doxic attitude towards secondary schooling and its 'natural' and socially compulsory nature; their families' ability to select a "good" state secondary school; students' collective educational common sense of *zafar*; and their 'othering' of the *chetos* and Low Hill students (see Chapter Six).

Middle class students had internalized secondary schooling as part of their socio-educational trajectories and as something that 'everybody does'. In this way, they misrecognised the unequal social nature of secondary schooling in terms of access and educational performance whilst normalizing their experiences as unavoidable. Adding to the small body of Argentinean literature on school choice (Veleda 2005), this thesis has argued that both students and their parents classified themselves as middle class by choosing High Mountain. In this way, they manifested their embodied cultural capital in understanding the hierarchical

nature of the local education system and they produced their class identity as morally superior to those who attended private schools, who were associated with the upper classes. Moreover, following Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1993a, 1993c, Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002), middle class students' 'feel for the game' could be interpreted as an implicit and unconscious engagement with the production of a particular type of middle classness. This could be linked with the embodiment of cultural skills that facilitated individuals' adaptability to uncertain or changing contexts, in which criteria for rewarding and sanctioning were fuzzy. As High Mountain teachers and students stated, in the contemporary cultural climate of Argentinean society those who succeed are those who know how to *zafar*. Finally, similar to Maldonado (2000), my analysis has offered evidence of the centrality of students' peer relations to better understanding the production of middle class identity making in the school. In addition to the "identity/subjectivity turn", my findings not only point to the interplay between processes of class and gender identity making among middle class students, but also to the link between the production of middle classness and particular views towards secondary education, school choice, school work and peers. Furthermore, my study has showed how High Mountain's middle class institutional habitus reinforced students' views on 'being middle class' as recognizable, respectable, and morally superior.

My thesis also contributed to the "identity/subjectivity turn" by unpacking central processes of class and gender identity making of the 'tryers' as they did this through positively engaging with the game of schooling and in their interactions with peers. I have offered evidence of the centrality of schooling for the 'tryers' in terms of their personal identity and sense of worth and

respectability. The 'tryers' used secondary schooling as a central locus of their dis-identification from the 'dangerous', and 'a-moral' poor that they associated with the *villeros* or *cumbieros* in Low Hill. In keeping with Skeggs (1997) and her critique of Bourdieu's take on identity making, the 'tryers' offered an empirical illustration of how class position and class identity are not the same. In other words, the latter cannot be interpreted as a simple reflection of the former. In Low Hill, the 'tryers' and the *villeros* had similar class positions. However, their class identities were produced as antagonistic. For the 'tryers', to have the opportunity to play the game of schooling (unlike previous generations) was seen as a unique opportunity that opened up alternative potential futures otherwise unthinkable. The 'tryers' had internalized schooling as an effective cultural mechanism of distinction. In this context, their positive attitudes towards schooling, their rejection of those who challenged the game of schooling and teachers' authority, and their identification with the "middle class" operated as symbolic mechanisms to produce their class identities as morally valuable, acceptable and different from those 'above' (associated with moral corruption) and those 'below' (seen as socially excluded and culturally marginalized). In this way, the 'tryers' were engaging with Low Hill middle class institutional habitus and their ever-present emphasis on distinguishing between the 'respectable' and 'undeserving' poor. Furthermore, particular types of masculinity and femininity were entangled with these processes of class identity making. Here I presented evidence of how boys and girls from marginal and working class families avoided certain subject positions (such as *machona* and *villero*) and carved out their own versions of masculinity and femininity.

Regarding my contributions to the British field of Sociology of Education, my study provided evidence that supports the argument in favour of unpacking the nature of schooling of the middle class (Power and Whitty 2006, Power *et al.* 2003).¹⁶³ My research explored the schooling of a particular fraction of the Argentinean middle classes. My findings pointed to the necessity of looking carefully at the composition and nature of the middle classes before jumping to any overarching conclusions regarding their education, schooling and the types of class identities they produce. My study adds to the longstanding tradition of ethnographic studies of working class schooling but also suggests that British research would benefit from paying more attention to recent transformations of the socio-economic structure in their conceptualisations of the working class. Within my study, although the Argentinean economic and social structure differs radically from that of England and Wales, the presence of ‘loser’ sections of the middle classes in High Mountain and of heterogeneous groups within the *sectores populares* in Low Hill, highlighted the necessity to question a-prioristic accounts of “middle class” and “working class”. In this sense, in line with recent British analyses (Power and Whitty 2006), more flexible and clearer conceptualisations of social class appear to be of paramount importance in interpreting its relations with contemporary schooling. Finally, my research shows how critical appropriations of Bourdieu can also provide a fruitful framework for unveiling certain aspects of the game of schooling played by schools, teachers and students from an ethnographic perspective.

Summing up, this thesis has presented a rather bleak story of persistent inequalities between schools and social groups. This is a story about the ways in

¹⁶³ Different researchers have pointed to the diversity within the middle classes (Ball *et al.* 2004) and the working classes (Vincent 2006) when analysing childcare and parenting.

which schools and students are embedded in social and cultural relations that they (unequally) contribute to produce, reproduce but also challenge in creative and mainly individualistic ways.

Thus far I have highlighted some of the significant contributions this thesis offers a critical understanding of contemporary educational inequality in the City of Buenos Aires and to current debates in Sociology of Education in the UK. My final comments attend to some of the possible ways in which the findings and analysis presented here might be taken forward.

Further research

In telling a tale of persistent educational inequalities across schools and groups of students I do not wish to propose that a story of resistance is not there for the telling. Throughout this study, I have identified different ways in which 'resistance' may be experienced by different groups of students in High Mountain and Low Hill. However, focusing on the game and on the players who accepted its legitimacy has involved overlooking other groups of students such as middle class students who were unable to *zafar* and the *villeros* and *villeras*. More detailed observations and analysis need to be done to unpack the ways in which these groups interpreted the game of schooling and the rationale behind their disengagement and 'resistance' to their schools and teachers' social and educational expectations. There are possibilities for interesting and important ways forward through an examination of the ways in which these groups made sense of their experiences of schooling and how these were related to their class habitus and sense of class and gender identities. This would demand further ethnographic research focused on one or two groups of these students allowing

more in depth knowledge of their views and practices towards education, their schools, school work, and their relations with peers.

Other productive ways to continue my own research would be to follow up the students who have participated in this study after completing, or at the time they should have completed, their secondary schooling. My study has examined students' engagements with schooling and their sense of class identity during the third school year. However, as some researchers (McLeod 2000) have convincingly argued, the relationships between schooling and subjectivity need to be studied over time. This would allow recognition of how the multilayered and complex nature of young people's lives impacts on their ways of engaging with schooling, their future life chances and their sense of personal identity. This would contribute to a deeper understanding of how students produce and negotiate their identities over time and across social fields.

Furthermore, a closer examination of teachers' social and educational frames would contribute to our understanding of how the implicit rules of the game are produced in teachers' and students' everyday interactions in the classroom setting. The centrality of teachers' views and practices (although explored in this thesis) needs to be further scrutinized in order to enrich the knowledge about the social and professional conditions of production, reproduction and resistance to the rules of the game of secondary schooling within the schools. This line of inquiry would follow a longstanding British research tradition that is, up to now, almost non-existent within the field of Sociology of Education in Argentina.

As said before, the main motivation for doing this research was my dissatisfaction with the increasing educational inequalities and my need to better understand how they were produced, reproduced and/or resisted. Although the

story of my research stresses the reproductive nature of the education system, it is my hope that it makes a useful contribution not only to the field of Sociology of Education in Argentina but also to the ways in which a different future education system and a society could be imagined.

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Appendices

A.1. Maps of the Americas and Argentina.

North and South America



A.2. Educational Statistics

Table 1. Secondary schooling enrolments by modalities and year (numbers and percentages). Argentina. 1915-1994.

Years	Total	Bachillerato	Normal*	Comercial	Industrial	Other
1915	33.100	11.100	10.600	3.600	1.800	6.000
	(100)	(33.5)	(32.0)	(10.9)	(5.4)	(18.1)
1920	48.500	18.300	16.500	4.900	2.300	6.500
	(100)	(37.8)	(34.0)	(10.1)	(4.7)	(13.4)
1925	61.000	22.300	17.500	6.500	3.800	10.900
	(100)	(36.6)	(28.7)	(10.7)	(6.2)	(17.8)
1930	85.700	31.000	23.400	8.700	6.300	16.300
	(100)	(36.2)	(27.3)	(10.2)	(7.4)	(19.0)
1935	104.900	41.000	24.400	11.000	9.200	19.300
	(100)	(39.1)	(23.3)	(10.5)	(8.8)	(18.4)
1940	153.100	46.500	45.400	18.900	16.300	26.000
	(100)	(30.4)	(29.7)	(12.3)	(10.6)	(17.0)
1945	201.200	62.300	50.300	27.900	26.700	34.000
	(100)	(31.0)	(25.0)	(13.9)	(13.3)	(16.9)
1950	323.500	75.900	62.500	52.100	69.300	63.700
	(100)	(23.5)	(19.3)	(16.1)	(21.4)	(19.7)
1955	471.900	110.700	97.300	83.300	86.400	94.200
	(100)	(23.5)	(20.6)	(17.7)	(18.3)	(20.0)
1960	563.000	150.700	138.200	106.300	91.800	76.300
	(100)	(26.8)	(24.5)	(18.9)	(16.3)	(13.5)
1965	789.100	118.600	184.900	178.700	113.500	133.400
	(100)	(22.6)	(23.4)	(22.6)	(14.4)	(16.9)
1970	974.800	403.300	600	271.100	148.000	151.800
	(100)	(41.4)	(0.0)	(27.8)	(15.2)	(15.6)
1975	1.243.058	454.194	...	411.916	335.056	41.895
	(100)	(36.5)		(33.1)	(26.9)	(3.3)
1981	1.366.444	528.140	...	446.736	317.704	73.864
	(100)	(38.7)		(32.7)	(23.2)	(5.4)
1985	1.683.520	715.518	...	564.809	367.026	58.217
	(100)	(42.5)		(33.5)	(21.8)	(3.5)
1994	2.144.372	964.035	...	591.109	413.186	175.942
	(100)	(45.0)		(27.5)	(19.3)	(8.2)

*Normal education has not registered graduates after 1970. That training was upgraded to non university tertiary education.

**Other: in 1994, this category includes pastoral, agropecuary and other unspecified categories.

Source: Riquelme (2005)

Table 2.
Secondary schooling enrolments. Accumulative variation rate (percentages)
according to modalities. Argentina. 1915-1994.

Years	Total	Bachillerato	Normal*	Comercial	Industrial	Other
1915/20	7.9	10.5	9.3	6.4	5.0	1.6
1920/25	4.7	4.0	1.2	5.8	10.6	10.9
1925/30	7.0	6.8	6.0	6.0	10.6	8.4
1930/35	4.1	5.8	0.8	4.8	7.9	3.4
1935/40	7.9	2.5	13.2	11.4	12.1	6.1
1940/45	5.6	6.0	2.1	8.1	10.4	5.5
1945/50	10.0	4.0	4.4	13.3	21.0	13.4
1950/55	7.8	7.8	9.3	9.8	4.5	8.1
1955/60	3.6	6.4	7.3	5.0	1.2	-4.1
1960/65	7.0	3.5	6.0	10.9	4.3	11.8
1965/70	4.3	17.7	-68.2	8.7	5.5	2.6
1970/75	5.0	2.4		8.7	17.8	-22.7
1975/80	1.6	2.5		1.4	-0.9	9.9
1980/85	5.4	7.9		6.0	3.7	-5.8
1985/94	2,6	3,4		0,5	-1,3	13,1

Source: Riquelme (2005)

Table 3.
Secondary schooling enrolments. State and private sector (numbers).
Argentina. 1952-1999.

Year	Total	State	Private
1952*	353.973	280.576	73.397
1955*	453.519	369.333	84.186
1960*	561.118	412.236	148.882
1965*	782.706	531.980	250.726
1970*	974.167	650.198	323.969
1975*	1.243.942	860.714	383.228
1980*	1.323.250	915.859	407.391
1985*	1.683.520	1.190.538	492.982
1987	1.859.325	1.329.647	529.678
1988*	2.047.183	1.460.379	586.804
1994	2.144.372	1.468.408	675.964
1996	2.594.329	1.885.096	709.233
1997	2.463.608	1.765.038	698.570
1998	2.539.749	1.829.849	709.900

* Fernandez, A. M., Lemos M. L. y Wiflar, L. (1997)
 Source: Riquelme (2005)

Table 4. Secondary schooling enrolments. Accumulative variation rates of enrolments. State and private sector (percentages). Argentina. 1952-1999

Year	Total	State	Private
1952/55*	8.6	9.6	4.7
1955/60*	4.3	2.2	12.1
1960/65*	6.9	5.2	11.0
1965/70*	4.5	4.1	5.3
1970/75*	5.0	5.8	3.4
1975/80*	1.2	1.2	1.2
1980/85*	4.9	5.4	3.9
1985/88*	6.7	7.0	6.0
1988/94	0.8	0.1	2.4
1994/99	4.0	5.2	1.0

* Fernandez, A. M., Lemos M. L. y Wiflar, L. (1997)

Source: Riquelme (2005)

Table 5. Enrolments according to type of school and level of education in the City of Buenos Aires. 2004.

Educational Level	Total	State schools	Private schools**
Elementary school*	97.288	48 %	52%
Primary school	260.270	58%	42%
Secondary school	192.192	53%	47%

Source: Annual survey 2004. Provisional Data. Government of the City of Buenos Aires. Institute of Statistics and Research Department.

*Those state elementary schools that have headquarter and annex/es have been counted as only one school.

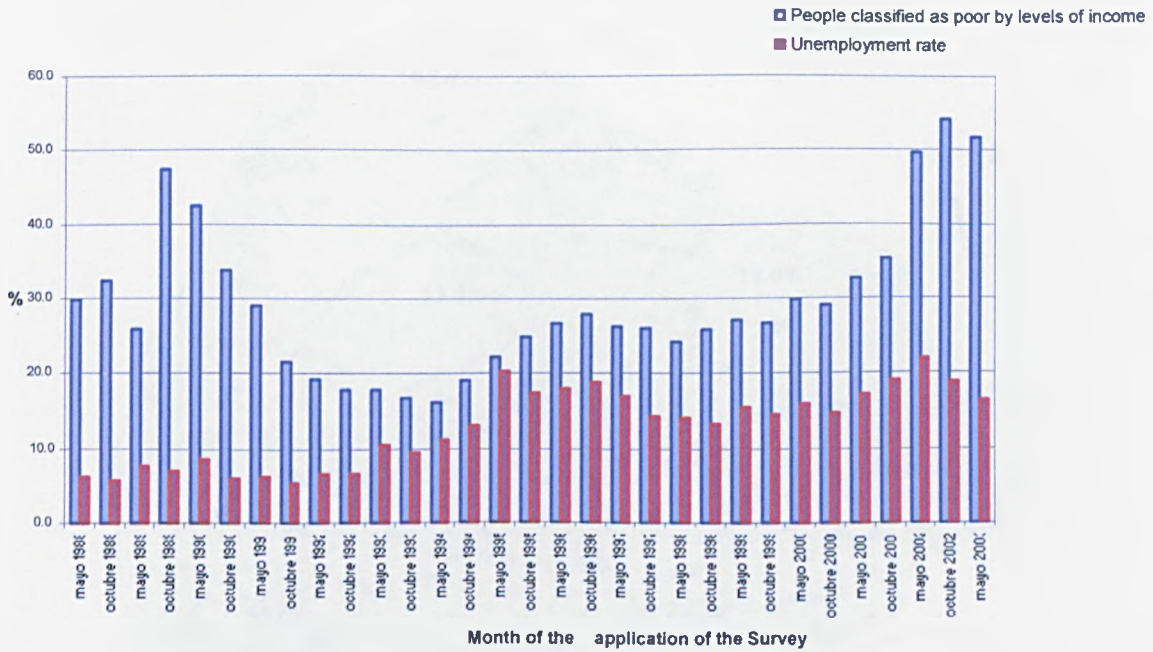
**It includes both religious and secular schools. Religious schools receive funding to pay salaries from the local government.

Table 6. Percentage of repitients and students with sobre-edad by school district. City of Buenos Aires. 2004.

School District	% of repitients	Sobre-Edad
Total	8,6	43,3
1°	8,3	42,9
2°	12,1	52,4
3°	8,6	61,1
4°	13,6	49,1
5°	11,6	44,6
6°	8,4	40,1
7°	12,5	48,0
8°	8,2	42,2
9°	6,3	50,4
10°	5,3	35,3
11°	6,6	39,8
12°	7,2	31,7
13°	10,1	31,3
14°	8,7	38,5
15°	12,6	57,3
16°	4,0	25,6
17°	7,0	36,9
18°	7,4	29,3
19°	10,5	61,7
20°	4,4	66,5
21°	8,2	48,4

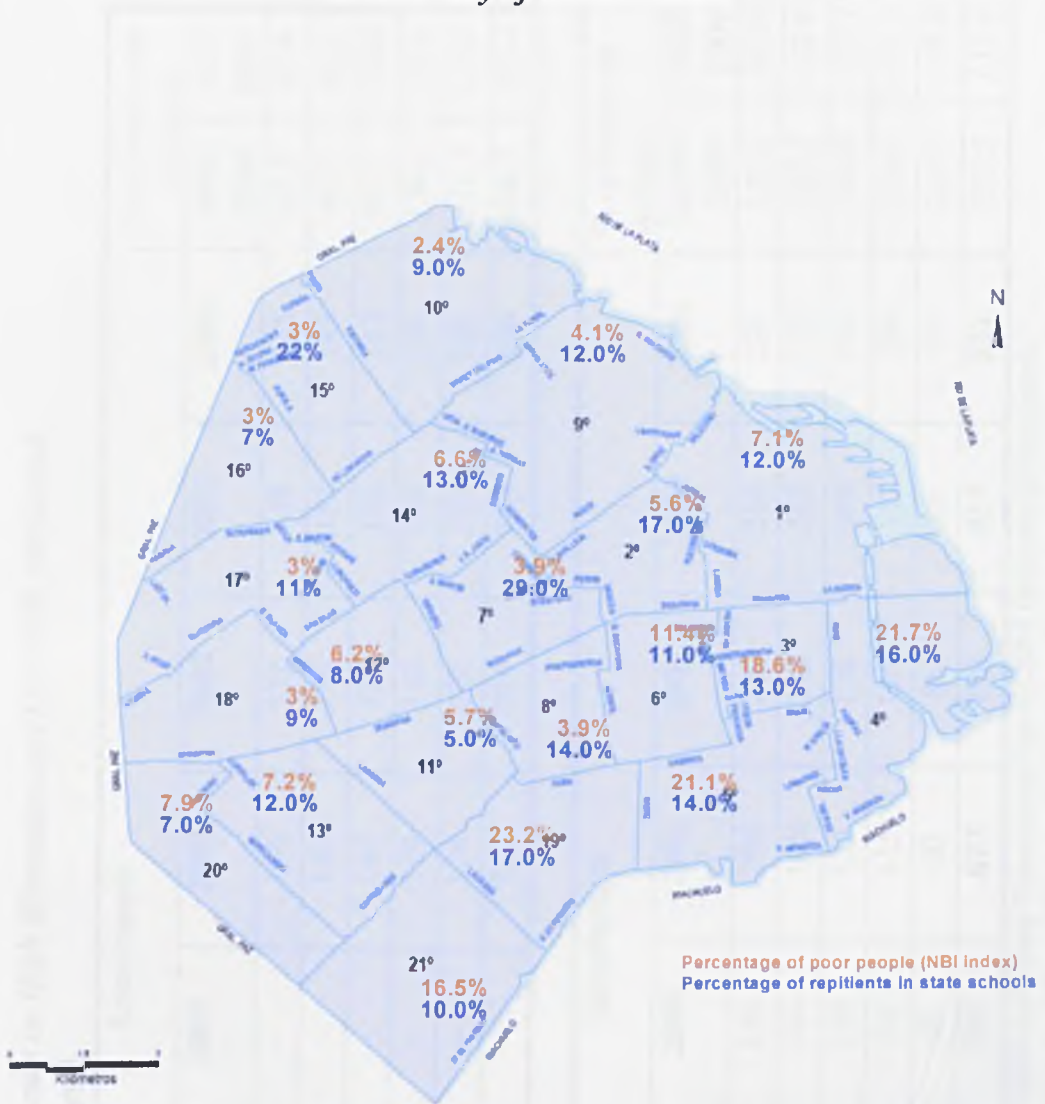
Source: Annual survey 2004. Provisional Data. Government of the City of Buenos Aires. Institute of Statistics and Research Department.

A.3. Graph 1. Evolution of level of poverty and unemployment in the Urban Conglomerate of Buenos Aires from 1988-2002



Source: INDEC. Encuesta Permanente de Hogares

A.4. School districts, percentage of poverty and repitients in secondary state schools. City of Buenos Aires.



Data source: Annual Survey (2004) (Secretary of Education of the City of Buenos Aires) and the National Census 2001 (National Institute of Statistics and Census (INDEC))

A.5. Student enrolments in High Mountain and Low Hill. 1997-2004.

Table 1. Student enrolments in High Mountain, 1997-2004

School year	Enrolments								% of inter-year variance	
	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	1999-2004	1997-2004
1st	175	163	155	-	166	172	149	145	93.5	82.9
2nd	161	157	150	-	140	158	152	145	96.7	90.1
3rd	106	94	153	-	142	128	152	143	93.5	134.9
4th	103	113	100	-	139	132	135	139	139.0	135.0
5th	105	88	96	-	126	129	121	126	131.3	120.0
TOTAL	650	615	654	-	713	719	709	698	106.7	107.4

Table 2. Student enrolments in Low Hill, 1997-2004.

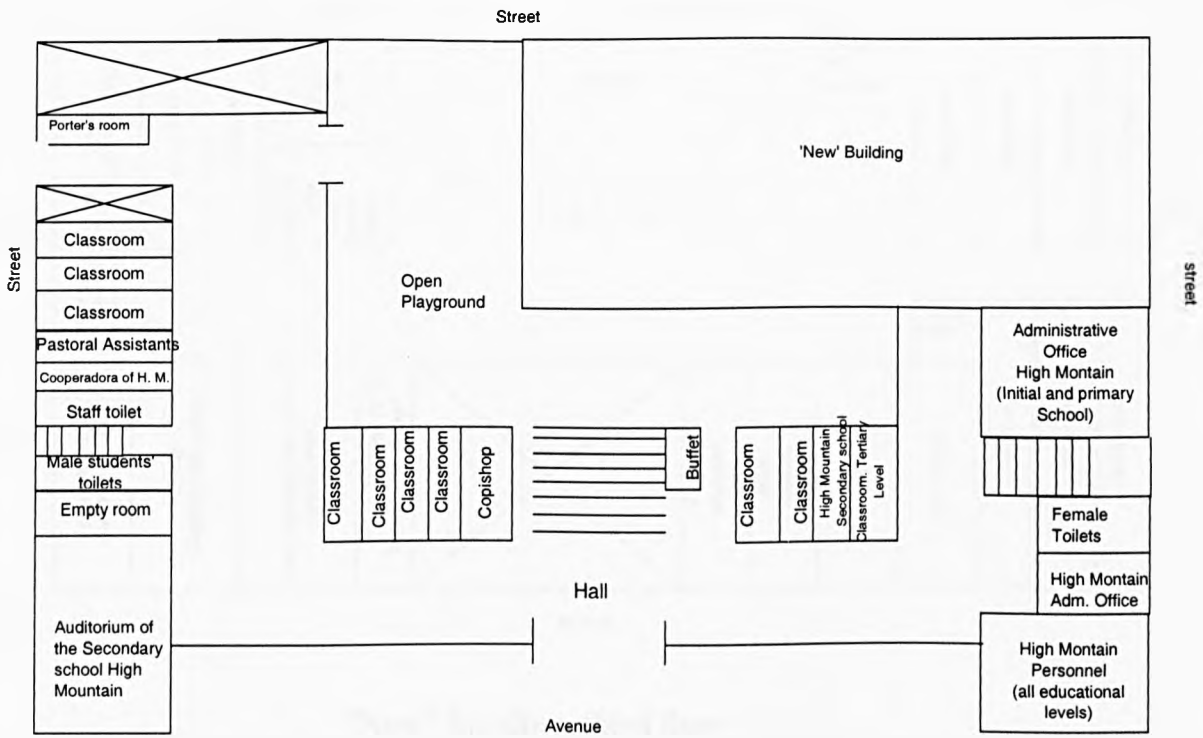
School year	Enrolments								% of interyear variance	
	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	%1999-2004	1997-2004
1st	210	425	188	186	200	220	218	226	120.2	107.6
2nd	153	0	184	144	165	203	210	202	109.8	132.0
3rd	102	0	108	130	133	158	169	191	176.9	187.3
4th	93	72	69	78	115	129	132	109	158.0	117.2
5th	60	54	57	59	60	86	88	93	163.2	155.0
TOTAL	618	551	606	597	673	796	817	821	135.5	132.8

Data source: My own elaboration from Initial Enrolment Survey (1997-2004) and Yearly Educational Survey 2004 (Ministry of Education).

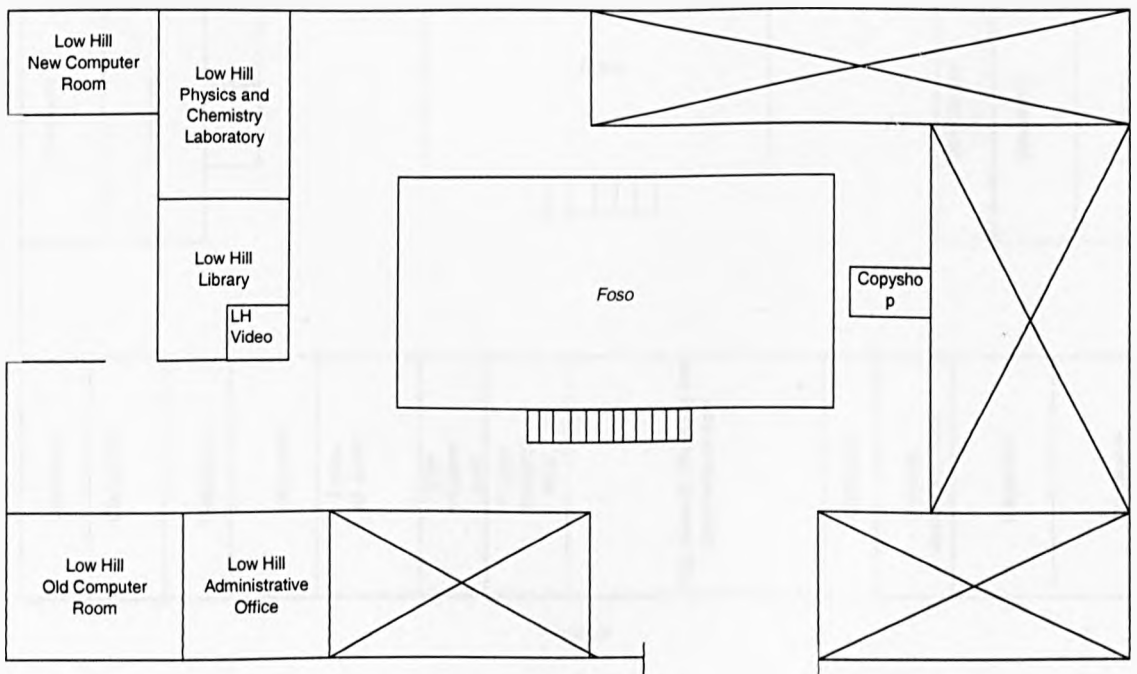
Although these surveys are applied in different times of the year (the former the 31st of March and the latter the 30th of April), the change of enrolments during this period has been historically low.

A.6. Plan floors of High Mountain and Low Hill.

"Historic" building, ground floor



"New" building, ground floor



A.7. School day at High Mountain and Low Hill.

High Mountain

7.45 to 8.25 lesson time (LT)
8.25 to 9.05 (LT)
9.05 to 9.15 BREAK
9.15 to 9.55 (LT)
9.55 to 10.35 (LT)
10.35 to 10.45 BREAK
10.45 to 11.25 (LT)
11.25 to 12.05 (LT)
12.05 to 12.45 (LT)*

Low Hill

13.15 to 13.55 (LT)
13.55 to 14.35 (LT)
14.45 to 15.25 BREAK
15.25 to 16.05 (LT)
16.05 to 16.15 (LT)
16.15 to 16.55 BREAK
16.55 to 17.35 (LT)
17.35 to 18.15 (LT)
18.15 to 18.45 (LT)*

* Only once a week third school year form classes have lessons at this time.

A.8. Letter introducing myself to parents or legal wardens of students of all school years

Buenos Aires, 24 March 2004.

Dear Mother, Father or Legal Warden,

My name is Analía Meo. I am a sociologist at the Universidad de Buenos Aires and I am conducting research on secondary schools in the City of Buenos Aires for the University of Warwick (England) as part of my post-graduate studies. During this school year, I will participate in the everyday life of the school aiming to know the opinions of authorities, teachers, students and parents about education. Moreover, I am interested in knowing the features of friendship groups and how they relate with students' participation in schooling. I have been authorised by the Head teacher of the School and by the Secretary of Education of the City of Buenos Aires to do this research.

In order to do this research, I will request interviews with some students, their friendship groups and their families. I will also request some students to fill in questionnaires with information about their schooling and families.

The ethical principles that guide my research are respecting the anonymity of the persons who collaborate in my work and guaranteeing the complete confidentiality of the information gathered. To do so, I commit myself not to discuss with third parties the conversations that I have with adults and young people. At the same time, I commit myself to eliminate all the data that allow the identification of the people and the school in all the publications or reports that result from this work. In every case, I will ask for the explicit consent of both parents and students to participate in the interviews. Finally, the results of this research will be shared with the participants of this study and will be published in different types of publications.

I would like to thank you in advance for your collaboration, and please do not hesitate to contact me and/or the authorities of the school if you would like more information about my work experience and my current work at this school.

Yours sincerely,

Analía Inés Meo

A.9. List of interviewed teachers

Table 1. Low Hill teachers according to their gender, age, position, and type of interview.

Name	Gender	Age	Position	Individual interviews	Group interviews
Juana	f	60s	Head teacher	2	
Patricia	f	50s	Vice-deputy	2	
Vera	f	60s	Language and Literature teacher	2	1
Mariela	f	30s	Language and Literature teacher	1	
Mara	f	40s	History and Geography teacher	2	2
Esther	f	40s	Maths teacher	1	
Consuelo	f	40s	Maths teacher	3	1
Laura	f	50s	Accountancy teacher	2	
Rosalía	f	60s	Geography teacher	2	
Carmen	f	40s	Chemistry teacher	1	
Martina	f	40s	Geography teacher	1	
Romina	f	40s	Psychologist	1	
Daniel	m	30s	Pastoral Assistant	2	
Pablo	m	30s	Pastoral Assistant	2	
Marga	f	40s	Psychologist	2	

Table 2. High Mountain teachers according to their gender, age, position, and type of interview.

Name	Gender	Age	Position	Individual interviews	Group interviews
María Verónica	f	60s	<i>Rectora</i>	1	
Rosa	f	60s	Vice-Deputy	2	
Amparo	f	60s	Psychologist	2	
Alicia	f	40s	Psychology teacher	1	
Camila	f	40s	Language and Literature teacher	1	
Mónica	f	40s	Maths teacher	1	1
Liliana	f	60s	History	1	
Fabiana	f	40s	Maths teacher	1	
Daniel	m	30s	French teacher	2	
Nancy	f	40s	Maths teacher	1	1
Silvina	f	50s	English teacher	1	
Ernestina	f	50s	Language and Literature teacher	1	
Raquel	f	30s	Maths teacher	1	
Aurelia	f	60s	Civic Education teacher	1	
Karen	f	40s	Pastoral Assistant		1
Catía	f	50s	Pastoral Assistant		1

Table 3. Teachers who work in Low Hill and High Mountain according to their gender, age, position, and type of interview.

Name	Gender	Age	Position	Individual interviews	Group interviews
Rodrigo	m	50s	Physics and Chemistry teacher	1	
Karina	m	40s	Physics and Chemistry teacher	1	
Samira	f	60s	History and Civic Education teacher	2	
Luisa	f	60s	Civic Education, History and Accountancy teacher	2	
Angelita	f	40s	English teacher	2	
Paula	f	40s	French teacher	1	

A.10. Interview schedule for teachers

- Teaching career (years as school teacher; training; etc)
- Have you ever worked in other schools? If so, what kinds of schools? For how long? How do they compare to this school?
- For how long have you been working in this school?
- How does your Department work?
- History of the school. What are the key moments? Key educational policies? Explore teachers' views about different moments and how they have impacted on their practices.
- What kind of population does the school gather? (Where do they live? How are their families? What do you know about their families?)
- Who defines the curriculum of your module?
- How do you decide what contents to include or not?
- Are there differences between what you teach amongst class forms? What do you know about their families?
- What are the school years you teach in this school?
- What are your students like?
- What are your central concerns as teacher of this school?
- How do you assess your students?
- Do you interact with parents? Why and when?

A.11. List of interviewed students in Low Hill and High Mountain

Table 1. Interviewed Low Hill students according to their gender, age, condition of repetition, social class and type of interview.

name	gender	age	condition of repetition (repitient - non repitient)	social class (Marginal, Working and or Middle class)	individual interview	group interview	photo-interview
Sol	f	17	r	M.C.	2		1
Natu	f	15	nr	Working class	2		1
Isabel	f	15	nr	Marginal	2	1	1
Sabrina	f	17	r	Working class	1		
Ana Marta	f	15	nr	Working class	1		
Paula	f	16	nr	Marginal		1	
Aspacia	f	15	nr	Working class		1	
Geraldin	f	17	r	M.C.		1	
Javier	m	16	r	Working class	2		
Romina	f	17	r	M.C.		1	
Sebastián	m	17	r	Working class	2		1
Omar	m	18	r	Working class	3		1
María José	f	16	nr	M.C.	1	1	
Tatiana	f	16	nr	Marginal		1	1
Santiago	m	16	r	Working class	1		
Juan	m	16	r	Working class	2		1
Maxi	f	17	r	Marginal	2	1	
Yutiel	m	17	Nr	Marginal	2		1
estela	f	15	-	Marginal		1	
maria	f	15	Nr	Working class	1		
Yeyu	f	17	r	Working class	2		1
Flor	f	16	r	M.C.	1	1	
Mateo	m	16	r	M.C.		1	1
Marina	f	15	nr	Working class	1		
Guido	m	16	r	M.C.	1		1
Estanislao	m	18	r	Working class	1		
Marcela	f	15	nr	Working class		1	

Table 2. Interviewed Low Hill students according to their gender, age, condition of repetition, social class and type of interview.

name	gender	age	condition of repetition (repitient - non repitient)	social class (Marginal, Working and or Middle Class)	individual interview	group interview	photo-interview
María Chain	F	17	nr	M.C.		1	
Xole	F	15	nr	M.C.	2	1	1
Federico	m	15	nr	M.C.	1	1	1
Norberto	m	15	nr	M.C.	3	1	1
Tamus	f	15	nr	M.C.		2	
Stella	f	16	nr	M.C.		2	
Maka	f	16	nr	M.C.	2	1	1
Marcela	f	15	nr	M.C.	1	1	1
Mariela	f	15	nr	M.C.	1	1	
Manuelita	f	15	nr	M.C.	1		
Anto	f	15	nr	M.C.		1	1
Cuky	m	15	nr	M.C.		1	1
Pablo	m	15	nr	M.C.		1	
Sebastián	m	15	nr	working class		1	1
Jimena	f	17	r	M.C.	1	1	
Julio	m	15	nr	working class	2		1
Liliana	f	15	nr	M.C.		1	
Martín	m	15	nr	M.C.	1		
Fabiana	f	15	nr	M.C.		2	
Agustina	f	15	nr	M.C.		1	
Fabiola	f	15	nr	M.C.		1	
Actinio	f	15	nr	M.C.		1	
Yunco	m	16	r	M.C.	2	1	
Lucho	m	15	nr	M.C.	1		
Marcia	f	15	nr	M.C.		1	

A.12. Young peoples' interview schedule

- Tell me about yourself... (age, family members, occupations, education, housing)
- Tell me about your primary education (type of school, educational trajectory)
- Why did you come to this secondary school?
- How are the *chicos* who come to this school? their families?
- How would you describe your school?
- What do you like about your school? Why?
- What do you dislike about your school? Why?
- What would you like to change in your school? Why?
- What do you learn at school?
- How was your schooling during the first three school years? (performance, behaviour, friendship groups)
- Which modules do you think are the most important during the first three school years? Why?
- Which modules do you like the most? Why?
- How are your teachers of this school year? Better or worse than before? Why?
- How is the pastoral assistant of your form class?
- What do you think about the authorities of the school?
- Explore differences between teachers
- How do your teachers get on with your form class? And with you?
- What is the composition of your form class?
- Are there different types of students?
- Is it important to do well in modules? Why?
- How are boys and girls in the school? Are they different? In which ways?
- Do you think that there is violence in your school? Of what sort? Why?
- Do you know that there are other schools in this building? What do you think about High Mountain or Low Hill? What do think about its students?
- How is your form class?
- Do you have friends in and/ or outside school?
- Do you know what the Student union is? How does it work?
- Do you know what the *Consejo de Convivencia* is?
- What do you do after the school day? Where? With whom?
- What would you like to do when you are not in the school?
- Do you think that it is worthwhile to come to the school? Why?
- Do you think that you are going to finish secondary school?
- What would you like to do when you finish secondary school? Why? How did you come up with this idea?
- How do you imagine yourself in your twenties?

A.13. Copy of the agreement for the receipt of films and the use of the photographic material produced by students

"I would like that you tell me about you and your life through photographs"
Please take the photographs before or after school time.

Agreement for the receipt of films and for our next meeting:

1. Please take photographs during the next 7 days from the and return the film on so I could send it for developing
2. On I will give you the developed film and we will meet up to chat about your photos.

Agreement between Analía Meo and for the taking of photographs and the reproduction of the images taken

1. (name of the student) agrees to take the photographs of a 24 photo film (bought by Analía) during the 7 consecutive days from the day and to meet up at least once to talk about the photographs.
2. Analía Meo recognises the copyright of (name of the student) for the photographs taken in the context of this research.
3. In the following, (name of the student) expresses if he/she authorizes Analia to use their images in different publications and situations:

Use of the images	Type of Authorization (tick the correspondent option)			
	I authorize Analia to use any of my photos	I authorize Analia to use all the photos with the exception that people appearing should be made anonymous	I authorize Analía to use only the following photographs	I don't authorize Analía to use any of my photos
In Analía's PhD thesis				
In papers presented in national conferences or scientific meetings				
In papers presented in international conferences or scientific meetings				
In articles in national specialist journals				
In articles in international specialist journals				
In articles in national magazines or newspapers				
In books dedicated to sociology of education or education				
In websites of academic content				

4. Analía commits herself to communicate the results of her work to and to ask for permission if she plans to publish images in means that are not explicitly included in this agreement.
5. The work of Analía Meo is strictly confidential and anonymous. In other words, she will not share with anybody the information that emerges in the interviews and she will use pseudonyms to refer to people and school.

Name of the student: Analía Meo
Signature: Signature:

Buenos Aires, October 2004.

A.14. Letter to parents asking for their authorisation to interview their children

Dear Mother, Father or Legal Warden,

My name is Analía Meo. I am sociologists at the Universidad de Buenos Aires and I am doing a research at this school about teenagers' identities and secondary schooling. This research is part of my postgraduate studies in the University of Warwick (England) and it has been authorized by the head teacher. Since the beginning of the year I frequently visit the school and I talk to teachers, pastoral assistants and students from different form classes. As part of my work, I am selecting a small group of boys and girls of the third school year to talk individually and/or with friendship groups to know more about their perspectives about the school, their schooling, their identities and interests.

I have selected your son/daughter as part of the group of students that I would like to be part of my research through individual or group interviews about their everyday life.

In relation to the interviews, unfortunately, free time at the school is very limited. Hence, I would like to ask you permission to have at least one interview with your son/daughter outside the school and the school day. The day and the time of the interview will be agreed according to the possibilities of your son/daughter. The place will be ESTELA BAR (Pedro Alvarez Street, between Peru and France Avenues) or, alternatively if it is crowded, in the bar VIOLETAS BAR (Fantasy Street and Recoleta Avenue).

It is important to remind you that the nature of my work is anonymous and confidential. In other words, I will not share with anybody the information that results from the interviews and I will use pseudonyms in every publication that I write.

I commit myself to give you and your son/daughter the results of my work. I do really appreciate your collaboration and, please, do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions, wants to meet me or ask for my academic and professional background.

You could contact me at my home (XXXXXXX) or you could send me messaged by email XXXXXXXXXX.

Yours sincerely,

Analía Inés Meo

Nacional Identity Card XXXXXXXXXX

..... (name of the Mother, Father or Legal Warden) authorize my son/daughter to talk to Analía Meo and to participate in her research about school and adolescence.

Signature of the Mother, Father or Legal Warden:

Name and Surname of the Mother, Father or Legal Warden:.....

A.15. Letter introducing myself to parents or legal wardens of third school year students selected to be part of the photo-elicitation interview

Dear Mother, Father or Legal Warden,

My name is Analía Meo. I am a sociologist at the Universidad de Buenos Aires and I am conducting research at this school about teenagers' identities and secondary schooling. This research is part of my postgraduate studies in the University of Warwick (England) and it has been authorized by the head teacher. Since the beginning of the year, I have frequently visited the school and I have talked to teachers, pastoral assistants and students from different form classes. As part of my work, I am selecting a small group of boys and girls of the third school year to talk individually and/or with friendship groups to know more about their perspectives about the school, their schooling, their identities and interests.

I have selected your son/daughter as part of the group of students that I would like to be part of my research through individual or group chats and taking photographs of their everyday life.

In relation to the interviews, unfortunately, free time at the school is very limited. Hence, I would like to ask your permission to have at least one interview with your son/daughter outside the school and the school day. The day and the time of the interview will be agreed according to the availability of your son/daughter. The place will be ESTELA BAR (Pedro Alvarez Street, between Peru and France Avenues) or, alternatively if it is crowded, in the bar VIOLETAS BAR (Fantasy Street and Recoleta Avenue).

Regarding the participation of your son/daughter as photographers, the British Sociological Association has given me funding for buying photographic cameras, films and developing them as part of my research. I will give your son/daughter one Polaroid photographic camera with a film of 24 photographs to take photographs of his/her everyday life during a week. Your son/daughter will keep the photographic camera and will be the owner of the photographs that he/she takes. With that material, we will meet up to talk about your son/daughter's interests. Moreover, I will ask him/her written permission to use his/her images in my research.

It is important to remind you that the nature of my work is anonymous and confidential. In other words, I will not share with anybody the information that results from the interviews and I will use pseudonyms in every publication that I write.

I commit myself to give you and your son/daughter the results of my work. I do really appreciate your collaboration and, please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions, want to meet me or ask for my academic and professional background.

You can contact me at my home (XXXXXXX) or you can email me at XXXXXXXXXX.

Yours sincerely,

Analía Inés Meo

Nacional Identity Card XXXXXXXXXX

..... (name of the Mother, Father or Legal Warden) authorize my son/daughter to talk to Analía Meo and to participate in her research about school and adolescence.

Signature of the Mother, Father or Legal Warden:

Name and Surname of the Mother, Father or Legal Warden:.....

A.16. Survey to students.

Hi,

As you probable know, I am doing a research Project in secondary schools of the City. I would like to ask you fill the survey attached below. With this information, I will be able to know a bit better the groups of studen within form classes and some data about your families.

I am asking you to include only the initials of your name and, at the end, those of your classmates. I would like ho friendship groups are made of.

Many thanks for your help.

Analía

Survey to students of the School

Please, answer the questions with clear handwriting and let me know if something is not clear. Thanks!

1. Your first name and the initial of your surname:

2. Age:.....

3. Nationality:

4. Do you live in the City or in the Province of Buenos Aires?

5. How many people live with you?

6. Do you have health insurance? Please, circle the correct answer

YES NO I DON'T KNOW

7. Select the person that you consider the head of your household and write their first name (not surname)

Name:



I would like to ask you some information about the person you have chosen as head of your family



8. What is his/her educational level? Please, circle the correct answer.

Never assisted to school

Incomplete primary education

Complete primary education

Incomplete secondary education

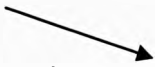
Complete secondary education

Incomplete higher education (including university and non university studies)

Complete higher education (including university and non university studies)

9. The person you have chosen as head of the household:

Does he/she work? YES NO I DON'T KNOW



If you answer YES, I ask you to answer the following questions.

a. **What kind of job the head of the household does? (for instance, waiter, accountant, florist)**

.....

b. **What kinds of task that he/she perform when working?**

.....
.....

c. **What does the place where he/she works do? (producing goods, selling products)**

.....

d. **As part of his job, does she/he give order to other people?**

.....

10. The person you have chosen as head of the household (Please, circle the correct answer):

Is he/she studying? YES NO I DON'T KNOW

Is he/she housewife? YES NO I DON'T KNOW

Is he/she a pensioner? YES NO I DON'T KNOW

Does he/she have a job? YES NO I DON'T KNOW

Is he/she looking for a job? YES NO I DON'T KNOW



If you've answered Yes, for how long is he/she looking for job?

11. At home, do you have (Please, circle the correct answer):

TV? YES NO I DON'T KNOW

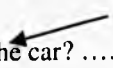
Refrigerator? YES NO I DON'T KNOW

Refrigerator and freezer? YES NO I DON'T KNOW

Freezer separate unit? YES NO I DON'T KNOW

Car? YES NO I DON'T KNOW

If you've said Yes, what is the model and year of the car?



12. In which year you entered this school? (Please, circle the correct answer):

- 1999
- 2000
- 2001
- 2002
- 2003
- 2004

Have you ever repeated a school year in the secondary school? (Please, circle the correct answer):

YES NO

13. What do you like of your school?

.....
.....
.....

14. What do you not like of your school?

.....
.....
.....

15. Please, write down the first name and initial of the surname of the three classmates that you would choose to talk during breaks. Please, complete the names in the order that you would choose them.

- a) FIRST CLASSMATE
.....
- b) SECOND CLASSMATE
.....
- c) THIRD CLASSMATE
.....

16. Please, write down the first name and initial of the surname of the three classmates that you would choose to do school tasks. Please, complete the names in the order that you would choose them.

- a) FIRST CLASSMATE
.....
- b) SECOND CLASSMATE
.....
- c) THIRD CLASSMATE
.....

17. Please, write down the first name and initial of the surname of the three classmates that you would choose to do any activity outside school time. Please, complete the names in the order that you would choose them.

- a) FIRST CLASSMATE
.....
- b) SECOND CLASSMATE
.....
- c) THIRD CLASSMATE
.....

18. Please, write down the first name and initial of the surname of the three classmates that you would not choose to talk during breaks.

.....

A.17. Teachers' survey

Dear teacher,

You probably know me. If we have not had the opportunity to talk before, let me introduce myself. I am a sociologist and I have been conducting research in the school since March. I would like to know your opinions and concerns as a teacher of this school. I know that Normal¹⁶⁴ is going through important institutional changes. Hence, I ask for your opinions before the arrival of the new head teacher. This information is confidential and anonymous.

I do really appreciate your collaboration and I will send you the results of my work in the future.

Sincerely yours,

Analía Meo

Please complete the following information with clear handwriting and do not hesitate to contact me if any question is not clear.

1. Sex (tick the right answer)

Female

Male

2. Age:

3. Number of people living in your house: -----

4. Educational Degree (tick the right answer)

Magisterio Nacional

Profesorado de nivel terciario

Título universitario habilitante

Profesorado de nivel universitario

Secundario completo

Otro

5. Please fill in the following table with information about your work as teacher in this school.

Type of posts in the school

Number of teaching hours

Number of non teaching hours

Permanente

Docente Suplente

Docente Interino

¹⁶⁴ There were two questionnaires. One for each school. The questions were the same.

6. Please indicate the total number of hours that you work in other schools

7. Is teaching your main job (whether for the number of hours or level of income)?

YES

NO

8. Does your job as teacher represent the majority of the incomes of your household?

YES

NO →

If your income is not the highest in the household, what is the occupation of the person who contributes more to the total income of the household?

.....
.....

9. School years where you currently teach (tick the right answer)

1st

4th

2nd

5th

3rd

10.

11. For how many years have you been a teacher? (tick the right answer)

1 year or less

11 to 15 years

2 to 5 years

16 to 20 years

6 to 10 years

21 years or more

12. How many years have you worked as a teacher in this school? (tick the right answer)

1 year

11 to 15 years

2 to 5 years

16 to 20 years

6 to 10 years

21 years or more

13. Are you satisfied with your work as a teacher in this school? (tick the right answer)

Very satisfied

fairly satisfied

Satisfied

Unsatisfied

Very unsatisfied

14. In your opinion, what are the goals of secondary schooling?

15. In your opinion, what does the secondary schooling of this school offers to its students?

16. What concerns you as a teacher of this school?

17. How are the students of this school?

17. Please tick if you completely agree, agree, disagree or completely disagree with the following comments.

In the Normal	Completely Agree	Agree	Disagree	Completely disagree	No answer / Don't know
There is " <i>contencion</i> " but not transmission of knowledge					
The teacher's authority is respected by the majority of students					
First year students start secondary schooling with the necessary skills and knowledge					
Students see the school as a club					
Male and female students are very similar in their behaviour, engagement with schooling and academic performance					
Majority of parents are interested in the education of their children					
The school is open to the participation of the students?					
The " <i>Consejo de Convivencia</i> " contributes to the resolution of conflicts in the school					
The existence of a student union is positive to the school					
After completing secondary school, graduates of this school are ready to attend university					
Students from this school receive effective citizenship education					
The education in the school has worsened during the last decade					
The working conditions of teachers have worsened during the last decade					

18. To what extent does the behaviour of the students of Normal respond to the following values? Please tick the right answer.

Values	To a great extent	To some extent	To no extent	No answer / Don't know
Responsibility				
Honesty				
National identity				
Generosity				
Respecting adults				
Social commitment				
Freedom				
Respecting cultural difference/diversity				
Respecting democracy				
Participation				