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

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

Keywords: Bourdieu; further education; higher education; lifelong learning; vocational education and training

‘College for all’: an international policy agenda

Increasingly in advanced capitalist countries, especially in the anglophone world, ‘College for All’ is promoted as a policy goal, and is creating wider participation in higher education (HE) for social groups who have not traditionally studied at the degree level. This policy is underpinned by a promise of improved returns for individuals over their

and Austria, distinct higher-level vocational education and training do not enjoy complete parity of esteem with traditional HE, but they are nonetheless valued, and do tend to lead to higher-level technician work and higher social and economic returns for graduates. In England, the focus of this paper, widening participation policies were initially aimed at expanding traditional HE. However, in practice, this expansion has become increasingly stratified, with differing types and locations of HE for differing social groups. It has led to considerable growth in vocational HE, franchised by universities but delivered in further education (FE) colleges, but current trends show that this largely leads to lower social and economic returns for individuals than university-based HE (Bathmaker, 2013).

A considerable strand of the literature on widening participation in England and the United Kingdom tends to approach such inequalities through a focus on student identity and behaviours, in terms of low aspirations, motivation or self-esteem; but such explanations, it could be argued, underplay the role of institutions and social structures in shaping students' experiences (Thomas, 2001). Ecclestone (2002, p. 122) is particularly critical of the ways in which a 'pseudo-psychological' perspective of 'fragile' learners can then become sedimented in institutional beliefs and practices, reproducing rather than counteracting inequality (2007). This paper therefore undertakes a very different kind of analysis. Starting from the narratives of managers, tutors and students in a major HE–FE partnership to widen participation, we draw on Bourdieu's sociology, and particularly his concept of field, to understand the mechanisms which operate to shape the trajectories of both institutions (universities and FE colleges) and students involved in HE and FE. We choose Bourdieu's framework in particular because it serves to reveal the competitive dynamics of social life, and in particular the production and reproduction of inequality. In doing so, we also seek to advance thinking about some of the ambiguities of Bourdieu's field theory through a hermeneutic dialogue between it and the data.

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

HE–FE partnerships in England

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

Partnerships with HE are thought to benefit FE colleges, staff and students, through expansion and diversification of provision, income-generation, raised status, staff

development opportunities in HE and improved progression routes, and to provide a ‘safe’

least understood parts of higher education... [and] should command more of our analytical attention' (2011: 147).

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

Bourdieu's notion of field

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

Central to Bourdieu's theoretical framework is a notion of social space as historical and relational (Bourdieu, 1996). Within the social space, agents – individuals, groups and institutions – are positioned relative to others in hierarchical orderings and at different distances from each other; they struggle over its goods and positions; and therefore the space is dynamic and shifts over time. Objective positions are distributed according to both the volume and the relative weight (akin to 'exchange rate') of economic and cultural capital possessed by their occupants (Bourdieu, 1986). At the same time, there is a process of agentic 'position-taking', of enacting the dominant 'rules of the game' and striving for advantage in relation to others. This creates a powerful but invisible logic of practice: a shaping of behaviour which is very difficult either to perceive or to resist. These practices are mediated by *habitus* – dispositions which are not only influenced by the social space, but also influence it in turn. Here, it is important to note that Bourdieu treats *habitus* primarily as a collective phenomenon, expressing the cultures of groups and institutions who share an affinity with one another (Hodkinson & Bloomer, 2000; Reay, 2004; Reay, David, & Ball, 2001). This provides a very different perspective on expressions of individual identity and behaviour: one which eschews interpretations of disposition and agency as matters of purely voluntaristic choice, whether on the part of particular people or particular institutions (cf. Thomson, 2010). All are obliged to play in relation to the established logic of the field, notwithstanding the bounded agency they may bring to their strategies for doing so.

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

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

As in the social space, it is not just the

colleges), together with employers and providers of information, advice and guidance. They were initiated and funded for 3 years by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), with the intention that they would become self-sustaining. Their main goal was to develop new vocational routes into HE to attract non-traditional students. Particular emphasis was given to recruiting mature learners in employment and responding to regional gaps in higher-level vocational and professional skills. The LLN was led by a post-1992 university ('New University'), and the HSC strand also included an élite 'Russell Group' university ('Old University') and a number of FE and sixth form colleges. For the evaluation, a qualitative case study approach, using Stake's 'countenance' model (2004), was adopted in four learning sites representing different types of HSC provision developed by the LLN:

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

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

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

- eighteen learners from six LLN and post-LLN programmes,
- twenty tutors and student support staff working with LLN learners and
- fifteen senior managers of LLN partner and associate partner organisations, including employers.

In commissioning the evaluation, the LLN had asked us to focus on the development of learner identities and processes of vocational 'becoming', so interviews with students lasted up to 90 minutes, adopting a 'life history' approach to reveal both lifelong and lifewide aspects of their journeys. The samples from each site were very small, given the limited funding for the research (usually two or three students and one or two tutors). We requested student samples representative of different social backgrounds (gender, class and ethnicity) and routes into the programmes, and the LLN required us to work with tutors to select these, possibly biasing some of the data favourably to the initiative. Given that participation was voluntary, via a process of informed consent about the evaluation project, it may also be that the element of self-selection included students with particularly strong views about their programme, for or against. Whilst the samples were broadly representative of the cohorts in terms of gender and class background, no minority ethnic students volunteered to take part in the research. The sample, then, was not so much as a purposive sample as an opportunity sample. Ideally, with more resources, it would have been useful to interview students more than once, throughout the course of their studies and beyond. If we had had sufficient time, it would also have been helpful to conduct observations of teaching and study support sessions, and of students' learning at home, in the workplace and online, as part of a broader ethnographic study. In many respects, our data provide only a limited snapshot of an initiative that was clearly evolving. However,

following Dorothy Smith’s feminist sociology of knowledge (1990, 2005), we would argue that the perspectives of those we interviewed offer us a *point d’app i*, a point of leverage, on the ‘regimes of ruling’ which order everyday social practices within institutions and coordinate the doings of those within them in ways which go beyond the immediately local. Like Bourdieu, she insists that institutions and their operations do not exist apart from the actions of people who enact them at different levels. We are therefore confident that our data allow us to analyse these processes robustly, in spite of its other limitations.

We transformed the data using methods of narrative synthesis (Colley, 2010; Moustakas, 1990). We used techniques of employment (Polkinghorne, 1995) to construct an account of the interaction between institutional cultures in each LLN programme studied, and the trajectories of students into, within and (where possible, though this was not always the case) beyond them. In this paper, we focus on the two most disparate sites, which highlight most strongly (although not exclusively) different institutional cultures and student experiences: the Year 0 programme, and the FD in Integrated Practice (see Table 1(a) and (b) for each of these routes). We therefore draw largely on data generated with tutors, support staff and students in those sites.

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

Year 0: grooming more advantaged learners for success

Year 0 provision was available for allied health sciences (nursing, occupational therapy, orthoptics, physiotherapy, diagnostic radiography, radiotherapy), and for dentistry and medicine. The last two of these, in particular, are degrees which are heavily

Table 1. (a) Year 0 route. (b) Foundation degree route.

	Located in	Nature of provision
(a)		
First year	Sixth form college	Intensive access course in: Allied health sciences (one of: nursing, occupational therapy, orthoptics, physiotherapy, diagnostic radiography or radiotherapy) or medicine or dentistry
Progression	Old University	Degree course of 3 (allied health sciences), 5 (medicine), or 6 years (dentistry), leading to full qualification in the same subject
(b)		
First year	Further education college	Foundation degree in integrated healthcare practice Year 1
Progression	New University	Foundation degree in integrated healthcare practice Year 2
Progression option	New University	Bachelors’ degree in healthcare practice Year 3 ‘top-up’

oversubscribed throughout the United Kingdom, with around 60 applicants for each place in medicine, for example. Recruitment is therefore both highly selective and politically sensitive. Old University managers spoke about the threat of legal challenges from parents or schools to widening participation initiatives that might include any relaxation of entry requirements. Given the government's emphasis on widening participation, the LLN funding allowed Old University to allot a small number of additional student places for Year 0 students which would, in any case, not be available to 'traditional' entrants, thus avoiding political controversy. Our impression was that this was an initiative that was not being widely publicised precisely because of its political sensitivity.

Year 0 programmes were delivered in a sixth form college, a type of further education (FE) institution which tends to exhibit a 'subtle elitism'

requirements for Year 0, in terms of work experience and team-working skills, were too similar to those for direct entry into Year 1 of the degree; that this was unrealistic and unfair; and that Year 0 students should have a year to develop these requirements, with the college's support. However, the university staff explained that they had to be 'stringent', as it was not in learners' interests to be taken on if they might not succeed.

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

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

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

[The college tutors] really wanted you to get there, they really wanted you to succeed and they were like pushing you forwards, saying 'You can do this', 'Do you need extra time?' or 'Go over it again if you want', and you know, 'Oh, don't worry, come and see me after class or at lunchtime, and we'll go through it again if you need to'. (Hannah, Year 0 Cohort 1, Radiotherapy Student, Old University)

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

Foundation Degree students: warm, breathing but unwanted?

The FD we studied was related to work with children and young people, offered through a blend of part-time attendance, distance learning and work-based learning. Its entry requirements were Level 3 qualifications³ or equivalent prior learning. All of the students in our sample were already volunteering or employed in the area of children's care and education at technician level, with Level 2 or 3 vocational qualifications, although some were also managers of service centres, employing and supervising other staff. Most hoped that the FD would lead to career promotion. Their parents and spouses worked in craft or semi-skilled occupations, and all except one (whose mother is now a mature student in HE) were the first in their family to go to college. For almost all of these students, aspiring to HE was something they had 'never ever dreamed of'. Most had had quite negative experiences in compulsory schooling, including some literacy problems, and had failed in their 16+ examinations. They had had no encouragement to succeed at school or remain in post-compulsory education.

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

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

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

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

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

We started individually ringing up the university, and asking when we were supposed to come back, and myself and two other girls kept in touch during the holidays, and all rang the

university at different times, and realised that we'd all been given completely different information. (Rosie, Year 2 FD, New University)

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

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

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

Every lesson, they will say, 'Is this to do with the assignment?', and you have to say, 'Yes', and get them to listen, which seems a bit basic, really. I don't know if it's their backgrounds,

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felt that Year 2 of the course had not been a good experience. Students felt that none of the tutors were ‘seeing the bigger picture’ or listening to their concerns, and a number were considering dropping out. Moreover, as others have reported (Dunne, Goddard, & Woodhouse, 2008; Fenge, 2011), second-year FD students were worried about career progression, feeling that they were performing better and taking on more responsibility in their jobs, but without any prospect of increased salary or promotion. This underlines the way in which the FD may contribute to upskilling in these sectors, but also that it may do so in an exploitative way which does not reward individuals who have enhanced their own capacities. They are, one might say, running up the down escalator of the knowledge economy.

Using Bourdieu’s field analysis to understand HE–FE partnerships

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

Earlier in this paper, we noted that, within the overall field power, the fields of economics and politics dominate the field of education (Thomson, 2010), which itself functions to replicate the inequalities of the social space (Bourdieu, 1988; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Although HE and FE could each be seen as sub-fields of the broad field of education, for the heuristic purposes of this study, we choose to treat them as fields in themselves. We consider institutions within them as sub-fields, which cluster together according to their relative positions (and hierarchically organised distance from other clusters of institutions) within their respective field (see Figure 1).

At the level of fields, HE occupies a privileged position vis-à-vis that of FE: we have already noted its greater resources, autonomy and kudos, as well as its power to control and award higher forms of cultural capital to students, in the form of bachelors’ degrees. However, that does not render HE immune from the dominating influences of the fields of economics and politics: it no longer enjoys the degree of autonomy it enjoyed in Bourdieu’s day (Deer, 2003). Indeed, by widening the market for HE students to FE – including, since the completion of our project, the conferment of degree-awarding powers

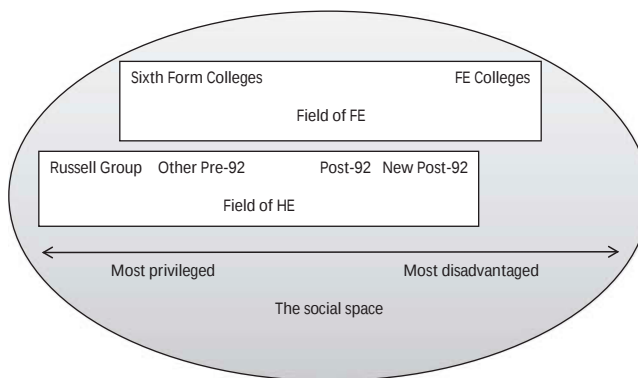


Figure 1. The social space, its homologous fields of HE and FE and institutional sub-fields.

to some large FE colleges offering HE programmes – economically instrumental education policies have opened up a sphere not only of collaboration but also of competition between the two fields. We shall return to this point slightly later, to discuss the ways in which collaboration and competition are differentially distributed across both fields, and between sub-fields within them.

At the level of sub-fields, [Figure 1](#) also traces positions within fields, and the relative distances between sub-fields. The elite Russell Group university is most widely separated from the post-1992 New University, which was itself only recently formed as a university. Likewise, a sixth form college is widely separated from the FE college. Given the homologies of these sub-fields with the social space, each is also associated with student cohorts that themselves are distanced from each other in the social space. The data show that the more privileged institutions in both fields attract a more advantaged type of student, with more economic as well as cultural capital: funding to support themselves while studying, academic ‘A Level’ qualifications, long-term aspirations to enter HE, and work experience that, in one way or another, gives them the social credentials to do so through the highest-status route within the LLN. There is immanence in their ‘second chance’ prospects of success in their transition to HE and of upward social mobility thereafter. Old University meet their widening participation targets without political controversy, and sixth form college enhances its reputation for high-status destinations for its students. There is therefore an homologous ‘win-win’ position-taking for the more advantaged institutions, staff and students.

By contrast, those with little economic capital, few prior qualifications and lower-level work experience find themselves able to access HE only through the lower-status FD route initially based in an FE college (a sub-field of lower status in the field of FE), with

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threaten the field-specific relationship between them, which is a division of labour in which the college prepares ‘suitable’ students for entry into the university.

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

The data on which we base this tentative analysis are, as we have earlier acknowledged, limited, particularly with regard to the size of our samples. But as Thomson (2010)

Conclusions

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

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

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Notes

1. Given the potential identifiability at the time of the institutions and staff involved, we decided to embargo publication of our data for 5 years. However, from our continued involvement in FE

2. 'A Levels' are traditional, academic qualifications taken usually at the age of 18, and geared mainly towards university entrance.
3. Level 3 vocational qualifications are supposed to be comparable to 'A Levels'

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