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Operationalizing Bourdieu on Capitals: A Discussion on ‘The Construction of the Object’

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Introduction

In this paper we consider some of the issues that arise in attempting to operationalize Bourdieu’s ideas on capitals in empirical research. The paper arises out of a discussion between two research teams: the Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion (CCSE) project based at The Open University and Manchester University,¹ and the Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group (Families Group) programme of work based at London South Bank University.² The research teams were brought together under the auspices of the ESRC’s Research Methods programme.³ The purpose of our discussion was to exchange ideas and experiences about researching capitals and putting theoretical ideas into practice, with specific foci on social and cultural capitals, and, in particular, on Bourdieu’s work. Here we detail the issues that formed the main preoccupations of the discussion about operationalizing Bourdieu’s ideas methodologically.

Firstly we briefly consider the key theories concerned with social and cultural capitals, contrasting Bourdieu’s ideas with those of Coleman and Putnam. We reflect about their methodological implications. Secondly, we outline the concerns of the two projects that are empirically investigating these capitals. Following on from this, we consider how we have applied our investigations of capitals, in particular

¹ The CCSE project is being developed with ESRC funding (award no. R000239801) by teams of researchers from the Open University and the University of Manchester. The project started in March 2003 and it is planned to run for three years. The award holders are Tony Bennett, Mike Savage, Elizabeth Silva and Alan Warde. The research fellows are David Wright and Modesto Gaio Cal. Yaojun Li also assisted with the proposal and the first months of the project’s investigation.

² The Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group (award no. M570255001) programme of work has been funded for five years, and began in January 2002. The award holders are Rosalind Edwards, Janet Holland, Harry Goulbourne, John Solomos, Irene Bruegel, Claire Callender, and Jeffrey Weeks. In addition, there are currently 11 researchers working on the three strands of the programme: Ethnicity, Education & Employment, and Intimacy.

³ The research workshop ‘Defining Capitals: methodological challenges’ was held on 07 October 2003 at the Open University in Milton Keynes. Angela Dale, Research Director of the ESRC Research Methods Programme, was the key initiator of the workshop planning. We would like to thank her, as well as all the participants, which included: Linked to CCSE: the award holders and research fellows, Fiona Devine and Kath Woodward. Linked to the Families Group: Rosalind Edwards, Janet Holland, Harry Goulbourne, Irene Bruegel, Anne Gray, Helen Lucey, Rachel Thomson and Susie Weller. From the Office of National Statistics, Socio-Economic Inequalities Division (ONS): Rosalyn Harper. From the Research Methods Programme advisory board: Julia Brannen and Lynn Jamieson.

focused around Bourdieu's notion of 'the construction of the object', around two key issues: (1) the implications of defining capitals, resources and assets, and (2) the challenges of using multi methods.

Social and cultural capitals, and methodological directions

The Bourdieusian approach encompasses three fundamental forms of capital: economic, social and cultural. All of these forms can be sources of social advantage and social class differentiation.

Controversies have, however, arisen over which one of the three plays a more important or causal role in processes of inequality and disadvantage, or in what sorts of combination.

Bourdieu (1997) himself appears to place economic capital at the root of other capitals, although he regards each form of capital as possessing its own dynamic, as well as varied possibilities of 'packaging' different levels and types of capitals, as we further note below. From a position that also places economic capital as key, but in a more deterministic way, John Goldthorpe (1996) has argued that participation in culture depends on economic position rather than on taste and judgement, within a framework that views economic capital as more significant than cultural capital in allowing individuals to mobilize resources.

In contrast to this, key theorists of social capital see it as highly consequential for social inequalities. James Coleman (1990) sees social capital as mitigating the effects of economic disadvantage. He identifies social capital as obligations and expectations, information potential and norms and effective sanctions, which are generated within and outside of families, and produce human capital (educational achievement, which falls within Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital). Parents invest in their children, which enables those children to increase their human capital, which then enables them to gain greater economic rewards. Parents also interact with other people in the community, which creates a dense social structure of norms, extensive trust and obligations between home and school that supports them in their childrearing and ensures community cohesion. This social structure is undermined by, amongst other things, 'non-traditional' family forms, reliance on welfare benefits and youth culture, leading to a loss of social capital.

Robert Putnam (2000) has made similar causal claims stressing social capital – comprising networks, norms and trust - as the key driver for social inequalities, social cohesion and democratic involvement.

He poses social capital as a distinct form of public good, embodied in civic engagement and having consequences for democracy and economic prosperity. He highlights self-sustaining voluntary associations as creating and supporting the 'bridging' social capital that enables people to 'get ahead'. Decline in people's involvement in voluntary associations has led to a decline in social capital, and thus increasing social and economic inequality. In his more recent work Putnam (2003) has also posited a link between high ethnic diversity and low levels of social capital and economic equality in communities and societies.

In contrast to Coleman and Putnam, Bourdieu sees a more interdependent relationship between the three forms of capital. Also, his understanding of social capital is different from theirs. Bourdieu sees social capital as a resource or asset derived from social connections that can be cashed in terms of social mobility. Setting up the original frameworks for theorizing 'capitals' Bourdieu (mainly in *Distinction*, 1984) argued that possession of different sorts - and of different levels of particular sorts - of capital place people differently in the social hierarchy. A classic example is the comparison between teachers, who have high cultural capital and low economic capital, and industrialists, who possess low cultural capital and high economic capital. These two groups have different capabilities of drawing from and generating resources, and are differently placed in the social class structure.

Crucial to Bourdieu's thinking about capitals is the idea that we live simultaneously in multiple synchronic fields. In this conception the three forms of capital interact in different ways, diversely affecting social positions. People have packages of capitals rather than having or not having a certain type or another. These processes work in different directions and they are continuously transferred, as well as being transformed. This would mean that it is impossible to single out one form of capital and a framework of interrelationship between capitals. Clarity is necessary about the workings of different capitals. Economic capital does not work like cultural capital or social capital. We accumulate and invest in all forms of capital, yet the effects of accumulation and investment are not the same throughout. In addition, they must be thought of not simply in terms of accumulation or investment processes because power and control are conferred and legitimised through particular possessions of capital.

Coleman's and Putnam's conceptions of the mechanics of social capital are quite specific, even formulaic, and this makes them easily amenable to empirical investigation, particularly through surveys.

Following Coleman leads to a focus on family form, educational qualifications and school type, while following Putnam means investigation of levels of trust and of voluntary association involvement, and the social characteristics of individuals or communities (for example, in terms of class, ethnicity, and/or gender). Seeking to operationalize Bourdieu empirically is quite a different matter, and a more complex one.

For Bourdieu, theoretical concepts are 'polymorphic, supple and adaptive, rather than defined calibrated and used rigidly' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 23). Thus the concept of capitals can be regarded as a set of 'thinking tools'. He describes, in *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (1992), a 'logic of research' that highlights the 'construction of the object'. This is a methodological point of rupture in which researchers must recognise that unless they themselves construct the objects of their research, they are left dealing with objects that have been pre-constructed within narrow approaches. Both theory and method are part of the construction of the object, rather than separate. While some find this an exciting prospect (for example, SurrIDGE 2002), others feel that it leads to questions about lack of methodological rigour (Schuller, Baron and Field 2000).

The two teams of researchers who came together to discuss operationalizing Bourdieu's concepts in their empirical research were more attuned to the prospect of critically deploying Bourdieu's framework, and we were keen to identify some of the issues involved in attempting to apply his key concepts of capitals. Both research teams are concerned with critical interrogation of concepts, which includes probing Bourdieu's categories and whether or not 'capital' is a meaningful and productive construction. We now briefly describe the two projects and their concerns, before moving on to draw out some key points from our joint discussion.

The Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion Project⁴

From the Bourdieusian approach and main critiques key questions emerge regarding the investigation of capitals, which are central to the concerns of the CCSE project. Does the relative importance of the three forms of capital vary in particular contexts? Is it possible to convert one form of capital into another,

⁴ To complement this summary of the project further information may be sought from the research team, or by visiting the project's web site on www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/sociology/research/ccse.

and how is this conversion done? Are barriers to conversion imaginary and intangible or real? How do movements between possession of different sorts of capitals affect social position? How does the distribution of capitals relate to socio-economic classifications? Is the possession of capital an individual or a household resource? What sorts of transference of capitals between individuals and households are possible and how are these done? These sorts of questions have been addressed in some of the literature on capitals inspired by the Bourdieusian framework, without however being fully explored, or explored in conjunction.

In the CCSE project, cultural capital is defined with reference to the roles that distinctive kinds of cultural tastes, knowledge and abilities play in relation to the processes of class formation in contemporary societies. But, as in Bourdieu's work, cultural capital is only one possible source of social advantage, which is also compounded by social and economic capitals. In this project social capital refers to the resources accrued to individuals or groups through their networks of social connections, which enable them to cash in, or exchange, in one way or another, in a market, through their own occupational advancement or position in the social structure. Economic capital refers to individuals' wealth, income, material possessions and financial assets. The project aims to review the advantages and disadvantages of reconceptualizing Bourdieu's notions of 'capitals' by developing new ways to operationalize and explore the interdependency of economic, cultural and social assets (Fine, 2001). Links between the concepts of capital, resource and asset – an important aspect of the investigation - were subject to considered attention at the workshop and are discussed further below.

Bourdieu's key empirical work in *Distinction* provides a focal point for the CCSE project but other aspects of his views and methodology are also relevant, even though the project explicitly takes issue with certain perspectives and explores some points of critique. The project prominently takes account of the controversies over which one of the three forms of capital – economic, social and cultural – are most important in the social hierarchies and in what sorts of combination, and questions how these relations translate to contemporary British conditions. For instance, are there clear divisions in contemporary Britain between the forms of cultural capital associated with the practices of 'high' and popular culture, or do people combine elements of both, showing cultural fluidity and varied cultural participation (i.e. 'omnivorousness'), as Richard Petersen and colleagues (1992 and 1996) have demonstrated for the United States? Does Britain exhibit greater potential for the transmission of social advantage through the

possession of social capital rather than cultural capital, as Tony Bennett, Michael Emmison and John Frow (1999) found to be the case in Australia – the opposite of what Bourdieu showed for France?

The inspiration of the CCSE project from Bourdieu's *Distinction* is, however, limited to the borrowing of the concept of cultural capital, to the analyses of the relative importance of social and economic capitals in relation to cultural capital, the use of a multi-method approach (but in a different manner, as we further discuss below), and to the replication of some of the survey questions in the research design. The research team's studies and concerns with particular features of contemporary Britain provide a distinctive background for our critical engagement with salient aspects of Bourdieu's work (For example, see Bennett 2004 on historical relativism; Savage, Devine and Warde 2004 on assets and resources; and Silva 2004 on home and family).

To achieve the proposed understanding of the processes of creation of social inequalities in relation to the cultural processes identified within the notion of cultural capital, CCSE addresses some theoretical and methodological questions which are relevant to this paper. How can cultural capital be identified and measured? How does the concept of cultural capital compare with other alternative accounts of class-based forms of social stratification? A major concern about Bourdieu's use of cultural capital is his lack of clarity about its relationship with ethnic and gender divisions and whether it is a household or an individual resource. How does the notion of cultural capital operate when the bases of stratification are broadened from social class to include gender and ethnicity? How do people who live interdependently manifest and generate cultural capital and how does this affect social positioning of the individual and that of the family/household?

The theoretical issues and research questions addressed in CCSE have required a research design compatible with sensitive exploration of little known aspects of the contemporary British social world and individuals' dispositions, as well as concrete measurement of capital holdings. The methodology employed in this project makes use of a multi-method approach combining both qualitative and quantitative techniques to generate data. A selection of 25 focus groups involving 143 participants, is combined with a national statistical survey of a random sample of more than 1700 individuals interviewed in households with a standard questionnaire, and an in-depth study of about 30 households (involving around 55 individual interviews). This multi-strategy approach seeks to explore the dynamics

of the complex phenomena of social stratification, and to grasp contradictions, enabling the problem of cultural capital and social exclusion to be investigated from various angles. Connections between macro and micro features of the cultural and social worlds should be facilitated with this approach. The study is to cover the whole of the UK (England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales) and be restricted to the adult population (over 18 years of age). The transmission of cultural capital within the family and educational practices, parental attitudes towards children and children's cultural training are explored in the adults' biographies, opinions and practices, including a concern with family trajectories both from the previous generation (parents) to the current situation as parents (for those with children). Both the ways in which households connections to culture are conceptualised (as capitals, resources or assets) and the use of multiple methods are points of contact between CCSE and the Families Group, as well as the engagement with the notion of capitals, and are discussed further below.

The Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group Programme of Work⁵

The concerns of the Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group are both narrower and broader than the CCSE project. It is narrower in being more centrally focused around social capital, and it is broader in being concerned with more than one theorist's conception of social capital, and in being researched through a series of projects addressing a number of social capital issues in substantive areas. The five-year programme of research is fundamentally concerned with the inter-relationship between the dynamics of family life and processes of social capital. It seeks to address key debates that have developed around the extent to which social capital is constituted in families or communities, or is attached to individuals or groups; how far it is rooted in family structures and ties, or in economic structures; and whether it is a positive or negative feature of family and social life, breaking down or flowing in new forms?

The Families Group's integrated programme of work is organised conceptually around three linked and key processes of social capital as these interact with family issues. Firstly, identities and values – on what basis and how do people identify with each other and develop or maintain value systems? Secondly, trust and reciprocity – who and how much do people trust, and who would they help and who would reciprocate? And thirdly, caring for and about – how do people see their responsibilities to others,

⁵ Details of the programme of work are available at: www.lsbu.ac.uk/families.

are these status-bound or chosen? These three processual issues highlight the ways in which family life creates, sustains or is disengaged from people's identities and values, their trust and reciprocity, and how they care for and about each other, within and across generations within families, within and across locations, and in wider society, and what this means for processes of social capital.

Substantively, the Families Group's research is organised under three strands: Ethnicity, Education & Employment, and Intimacy, each consisting of three or four individual projects. Increasing ethnic diversity, changing structures of education and employment, and the nature of intimate relationships, are both at the forefront of discussions of family and social change, and have been addressed in various ways within social capital theorising. The Ethnicity strand thus focuses on how growing ethnic diversity and transnational networks affect family life and social capital; the Education & Employment strand looks at what changes in education and employment mean for family and community values and for social capital; and the Intimacy strand addresses the implications of growing diversity in intimate and family relationships for social capital.

Overall, the body of knowledge about social capital can be viewed as confused and ambiguous, rather than cohesive. Reflecting this, a substantial part of debate within the field is devoted to what social capital is, how it can be measured and how to increase its stock (Devine and Roberts 2003; Fine 2001; Fukuyama 1999; Harper 2001; Morrow 1999; Portes 1998; Putnam 2000; Robison et al. 2002; Stone 2001; van Deth 2003; Winter 2000; Woolcock 2001). In such challenging circumstances, the Families Group as a whole is working with a broad definition of social capital as the values that people hold and the resources that they can access, which both result in, and are the result of, collective and socially negotiated ties and relationships. The definition is broad because there are competing definitions arising from different theoretical perspectives on social capital, and because the suppositions underlying the various definitions involve pre-constructions of what to measure, explore and investigate that invoke assessments about the nature of society and of families. For example, family diversity has been posed as both an indication of the loss of social capital (such as for Coleman 1988 and Putnam 2000), and an indication of its flowering in new forms (for example, Giddens 1992, Weeks 1995). Further, for some groups, especially children, the supposition is that they are the passive recipients of social capital, rather than involved in its production (Morrow 1999).

The broad definition of social capital that the Group as a whole is working with is then refined in various ways in each of the different strands and the projects running under them. For example, the 'Provision and deployment of care through family, mutual aid and local state' project focuses on time use and levels of social capital, and has developed a conceptual framework of milieu and the networks and shared values/expectations derived from them to guide investigation (Gray 2003). Different forms of social capital can also be refined out of the programme's broad definition. For example, in contrast to Coleman's (1988) emphasis on shared characteristics and values as key social capital builders in local communities, Putnam (2000) stresses a distinction between bonding and bridging social capital. The 'bonding' form of social capital is based on exclusive ties of solidarity between 'people like us', exemplified by families, and is restricted to enabling people to 'get by', while the 'bridging' form of social capital refers to co-operative connections with people from different walks of life, and is regarded as more valuable than 'bonding' social capital.⁶ This begs the crucial question of what constitutes 'us' and 'different from us', and this is followed through in particular ways under different strands (for example, in relation to the constitution of ethnic identity under the Ethnicity strand).

Methodologically, the Families Group is taking a multi-disciplinary and holistic approach, trying to keep in play both endogenous aspects within families, and exogenous aspects outside of families in broader society. The work also attempts to address processes and practices over time – past, present and projected future. For example, the 'Youth transitions and social change project' will have followed a sample of young people for over seven years, building on two earlier ESRC-funded studies (Thomson and Holland 2004). Across the programme of research, both extensive and intensive data are being used to provide, respectively, patterns of social capital within and for families, and an understanding of processes and social capital of and for families and their various members. Methods used include: secondary analysis of quantitative data, primary surveys, in-depth interviews, group discussions, participant observation, visual techniques (memory books, photos, circle maps, timelines and so on), and reviews of policy, theoretical and research literature. Individual projects may use any one, or a combination, of these. For example, the 'Locality, school and social capital' project brings together surveys, focus groups and semi-structured interviews, in looking at children's social networks and the

⁶ This social capital categorisation draws on Mark Granovetter's (1973) arguments about the positive effects of 'weak' ties between people who move in different circles, in contrast to the constraining 'strong' ties between family and friends. Michael Woolcock (2001) has also added the notion of 'linking' social capital to the typology to allow for the capacity to access resources from formal institutions.

transition from primary to secondary school in the development of local social capital in different types of communities.

Social capital theories argue that where people share a sense of identity, hold similar values, trust each other and reciprocally do things for each other, then this has an impact on the social, political and economic nature of the society. Thus the concept of social capital has gained a considerable influence in policy-making circles. Indeed, arguably the 'career' of the concept of social capital has been more policy-driven than theory driven, in part related to changes in the imperatives of a neo-liberalism that push towards governing through communities and responsabilizing different sections of communities. Promoting 'social capital' has become the policy answer to a whole range of different social issues because, in the form promoted by Putnam in particular, it makes connections across a huge range of social exclusion issues, with social capital as the underlying causal mechanism. This means that there is a need to go beyond social capital, and to take a quizzical approach to its dominant construction.

Issues in 'The Construction of the Object' for the Research Teams

A crucial aspect of working with the notion of capital is its very definition. This is compounded by the question of how capital can be identified, measured and seen to operate. The concept is an integral part of the method since decisions need to be made about whether or not the concept of capital is used in a generic sense, or in a specific sense that differentiates it from a concept like resources, or from assets. We outline below the concerns about these aspects in the context of the discussion of both projects. The reflection about defining capital – or capitals – is bound up with issues concerning the construction of the object. Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) argues that part of the 'construction of the object' is the process that suggests which methods to pursue in empirical investigation, rather than the choice of a particular method consistently providing superior evidence. He carried out ethnographic work, quantitative surveys, augmented with secondary analysis of available statistical data and of texts. Nonetheless, while Bourdieu 'broke' the rule (particularly strong at the time of his fieldwork for *Distinction* in the 1960s) that only data collected in socially defined scientific conditions is evidence, even in mixing methods at the beginning of the twenty-first century, there are still challenges for researchers in demonstrating adherence to methodological rigour and reliability. There are issues about whether or not

different methods of collecting data are consistent, and how they may fit together. The discussion of these concerns is relevant for both projects and are considered more fully below.

(1) Capitals, resources and assets

Both projects are concerned with policies (cultural and social) and with practical steps and formulation to counter social exclusions. How can the barriers to social and cultural participation be dismantled?

The development of effective policy in the cultural and media sectors, one of the CCSE's aims, depends on the theoretical debates concerning the advantages of a 'capitals' approach, compared to both classical class schema (Goldthorpe 1980, Marshall *et al.* 1988, and Rose, Elias and McKnight 1999) and 'assets' approaches (Wright 1985, 1997), to the dynamics of class formation, mobility, and processes of social exclusion. CCSE seeks to measure asset accumulation in order to explain, both statistically and by means of qualitative analysis, how different accumulations of assets relate to different forms of cultural taste, knowledge and participation. It is expected that a better understanding of class formation processes will emerge from this, as well as a clearer picture of the structure of cultural inequality in the UK.

The Families Group retains a quizzical approach to the concept of capitals, especially in relation to social capital. On the one hand, there are arguments that use of the concept of social capital is beneficial because it brings issues of complex social lives, quality of relationships and a long term view to policy-making: it represents: 'a growing concern to revalorise social relationships in political discourse; to reintroduce a normative dimension into sociological analysis; to develop concepts which reflect the complexity and inter-relatedness of the real world' (Schuller et al. 2000: 2; see also Schuller 2001). On the other hand, it both imposes and hides economic issues. The use of the term 'capital' gives primacy to the economic or political effects or outcomes of family and social relationships, rather than social justice, and in a way that imposes a functionalist economic rationality on social life. At the same time, however, it moves towards causative explanations that take attention away from the economy to families and culture as the focus of policy intervention (Fine 2000; Garmarnikow and Green 1999). While Bourdieu's theories may be less subject to this double bind than Coleman's and Putnam's ideas, and is explicitly concerned with social justice, his work still retains elements of economic rationality.

Despite the engagement with the concept of capital, CCSE challenges the value of the term cultural capital. This refers to both the word 'cultural', and its construction as 'capital'. Are there distinctive forms of cultural assets that can meaningfully and productively be construed as capital? The investigation proceeds while the usefulness and appropriateness of the concept is questioned. For instance, the idea of capitalization is explored, with the understanding that processes that generate accumulating advantages over time would fall under the rubric of capital. In this sense, not all resources need be capital because some resources are given. It is expected that this sense of accumulation could move the debate further. But, how can researchers define, theoretically and empirically, sources and processes of social advantage? Capital, for Bourdieu, either as possession or accumulation, does not imply a specific social relation between agents, unlike in the Marxist theory of labour value. Moreover, the investment and accumulation potential of different capitals vary, as well as the volumes of particular sorts of capital. In Bourdieu, the whole logic of cultural capital assumes a degree of autonomy for the cultural product, which is part of the logic of its operation. This would mean that many forms of cultural practice – for example that of a particular ethnic minority - may not be connected to cultural capital processes at all. As remarked by Bev Skeggs (1997), if one's cultural capital is delegitimated it cannot be traded as an asset. Some cultural practices do not count as capital. However, practices that do not count as capital, and cannot be converted into capital, are nevertheless important for the ways in which culture operates. How to deal with these non-accumulating cultural practices? How can we define their non-accumulating status? One example of cultural practice that challenge classification concerns certain kinds of resources that do not count in the legitimating domain, such as 'emotional capital', defined as the personal resources mothers pass on to their children (Reay 2000), or as assets that can be cashed in specific markets and linked to specific strategies of advancement (Silva 2000).

It remains to be assessed whether 'multiculturalism' introduces something new about cultural capital. For example, how does the layering of high-brow and low-brow culture work in a multicultural community? Friendship networks increasingly include individuals who may cross cultural boundaries and incorporate a large range of cultural practices. The inclusion or exclusion of particular practices of culture raises issues regarding the legitimisation and reproduction of the dominant practices. Even if certain cultural practices do not count as aspects of cultural capital, the processes by which they link up with what does count as cultural capital needs to be reflected upon. This bears on the challenges of adapting the

Bourdieuian framework, devised 40 years ago, to the contemporary context. How to tackle changes of values and the different processes by which people make connections and choose how to live and what matters to them? These processes of change are related to shifts in legitimated power. Whether we want to, or can, call these processes, or the practices linked to them 'capital', the discussion needs to engage with the original framework. It is relevant in this context that the centrality of Bourdieu's work is in relation to the historical process of autonomization of culture, and we cannot link up *in the same way* all forms of cultural practice. Considerable work needs to be done in this area.

In the case of social capital, and more pertinent for the projects carried out within the Families Group, issues of social difference and diversity, and their negotiation, are important. Do the traditional means of identifying the dimensions of social capital and judging which groups have it, such as ethnic group or class group, still hold in a more diverse society? Do we need to look for new forms of social capital or something else – and how far do we follow up on multiple and flexible identities and group affiliations at the risk of missing embedded social inequalities? Further complexities are introduced by considering transnationalism, which poses a different sort of social capital link to those traditionally examined within neighbourhoods, regions or single nations.

Social differentiation also bears on the methodology used in studies. Are there different methods appropriate for people who are differentially positioned socially? For example, on a practical level, researchers working on the Ethnicity strand projects have needed to become participant observers, involving themselves in specific ethnic community organisations and other aspects of daily life in order to build up the social capital required (especially involving trust) in order to move on to other methods of investigation (see contributions to Edwards 2004).

(2) Multi methods

Theorizing is not just a rational and logical process, and the practices of research reported for both projects reiterated it as a messy and untidy business. Nowadays, it is well acknowledged that the ability to perceive and apprehend something by means of intuition, perception and sensitivity is properly scientific (Layder, 1998, Brannen 1992), as much as statistical representative counting. This shift outdates Bourdieu's remarks in *Distinction* about the need to transgress in his methodological research,

to justify his inclusion of ethnographic observations, unstructured interviews and documents in conjunction with his analysis of the statistical survey. However, this does not mean that anything goes in producing good research. Methods and procedures need to be well established, within defined criteria, and the choices made need to be constructed with reference to the original theoretical assumptions.

In the cases of both the CCSE project and the Families Group programme of work, because they weave throughout quantitative and qualitative methods, the recognition that these methods are not unified bodies of knowledge requires careful consideration for the integration of material generated in different ways. For example, the integration of the two sorts of qualitative methods - focus groups and in-depth study of households - constituting part of the CCSE investigation is also challenging. What is intended from the integration of the data generated from the focus group discussions, the quantitative survey and the qualitative study of households? What are the implications of mixing different approaches? How can the different logics and different forms of analyses be interpreted? What are the issues arising from the particular ways by which each set of methods construct explanation?

In the Families Group, the case of the 'Resources in parenting: access to capitals' project provides a good example of addressing questions about the integration of methods within a single study. This project has adopted a particular perspective on the relationship between survey data and in-depth interviews. The nationally representative survey of parents does not attempt to address the complexities of what they do in their everyday lives; rather, it focuses on publicly expressed attitudes about who to turn to for support for a variety of different aspects of childrearing – the norms that parents hold about the right thing to do. The in-depth interviews with theoretically sampled parents from the survey sample are concerned with the differentially formulated question of who these parents actually have turned to for support, and who has turned to them, and in what circumstances – what they do in complex 'real life' situations (see Finch and Mason 1991 for discussion of this framework for integrating quantitative and qualitative methods). Nonetheless, while the integration of material generated in different ways can be resolved in this, and indeed other, ways within a single project, the programme of work as a whole will face the knotty issue of how to integrate material arising from 11 different projects, all using various combinations of methods.

The nature of the questions to be investigated is another aspect relevant to the Families Group in the choice of method and possibilities of combination. For example, in relation to social capital, an intensive period of networking may be consequential for social mobility, or it may not. A longitudinal dimension to data collection can thus be important. The Group is fortunate here in having the unique data set of biographical interviews with young people conducted over a seven year period under the 'Youth transitions and social change' project. Alternative approaches include asking people for historical accounts of, say, their involvement in family life and various kinds of voluntary activity and mutual aid activity over a period of time; or revisiting literature on the topic conducted in a previous period. Each of these approaches is being employed in projects under the Education & Employment strand, for example. Overall, as noted earlier, the strategy in the Families Group has been to carefully consider how we want to understand the 'components' of social capital (involving networks of identities and values, trust and reciprocity, and caring for and about) in the context of family and social diversity, rather than taking on pre-constructed definitions of what to measure and investigate, and to take an holistic approach to exploring these components.

The strategy in CCSE has been to move back and forth in the research process and to deal concomitantly with various elements of the investigation. Keeping track of the research questions and of what counts as evidence, the aim is to approach the broad topic and each key research question from a variety of angles. One same question will be explored in different ways, and one method can be used to corroborate the other, or not. The assumptions of the project are comparable throughout, yet depth and breadth of coverage of particular issues will vary. The broad survey, generated in a way by which everyone is asked standardized questions in a standardized manner, will be complemented with depth and complexity of people's accounts and experiences. CCSE was conceived with a plan and a strategy but it has been conceived as being constructed out of situated and contextual decisions and actions. In the same way that Bourdieu's experiences in the setting of the late 1960s France was used by ourselves to critically frame relevant research questions in our investigation, it is hoped that others should be able to do likewise in the future, by critically taking stock of what we are producing.

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