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Becoming a researcher: forms of capital associated with “research capacity” trajectories of young British social anthropologists

Chris Holligan*

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The paper privileges the voices of British social anthropologists examining their perceptions of how their research expertise was acquired. Reference is made to the case of education research in Britain, which, by comparison with social anthropology, reveals limited capacity as measured through performance audits of scientific research quality. The paper endeavours to facilitate knowledge transfer by uncovering and theoretically classifying the origins of research capacity. Life history interviews provide the data which illuminate the grounded nature of symbolic capital. The intellectual formation of the sample is characterised through Pierre Bourdieu’s theorisation of symbolic capital. The results indicate that research capacity can be characterised in terms of a transmission of symbolic capital, including that gained in the field through institutional affiliations whose reputational assets enhance the power of academics to play the game.

Keywords: anthropology; Bourdieu; education; qualitative; research

Research justification

Individual lives are shaped by significant events (Denzin, 1989) and this humanistic generalisation underpins the portrayal of research capacity in this paper. The UK’s Economic and Social Research Council’s (ESRC, 2006, p. 9) account of social anthropology noted that, “our discipline is definitely associated with qualitative research and methods, especially with ethnography”. This paper celebrates qualitative research at a juncture when contributors to QSE characterise it as facing “global uncertainty” (Denzin et al., 2006, p. 769) and threatened by a “resurgent positivism” (Lather, 2006, p. 35). The purpose of the research was to answer the question: What facilitates the emergence of qualitative research capacity among social anthropologists employed in UK universities? Funded by the Carnegie Trust, this timely study contributes to our knowledge of research capacity, offering fresh resources for fostering research culture and supporting researchers in the field of education.

Empirical deconstruction of scientific practices through removal of mystique affords insight into the sociomaterial basis of knowledge construction (Latour, 1979, 1987). Symbolic capital (see Table 1), whilst undoubtedly produced by doing research, as Latour documents and as Bourdieu has theorised, claiming to have unearthed the anthropological presuppositions implied in all “human sciences” (Lenoir, 2006), is also acquired more serendipitously, resulting in a particular habitus. Lenoir (2006, p. 33) describes the scientific habitus as, “the object of a
constant, continuous, deliberate labour of inculcation, the bulk of which comes through the practice of research”. It affords the scholastic relationship to the world, what Bourdieu calls “a sense of the game”. That sense of the game is the object of Latour’s sociomaterial deconstruction. Life histories afford access to the ways in which forms of symbolic capital underpinning academic research capacity are nurtured and reinforced. For Bourdieu, the field of academia, which he desires to de-mythologise, is a marketplace where the stocks take time to grow their exchange value. The conception of research capacity in this paper contrasts with managerial orientations in academia which, while important, fit an instrumentalist logic (Munn, 2008; Murray & Pollard, 2011). Edmund Leach, a titan of British social anthropology, recollected: “No doubt my undergraduate experience at Cambridge had a formative influence on what I subsequently became, but this was trivial compared with influences stemming from my family and social class background which are much harder to spell out” (1984, p. 2). Ringer’s (2000, p. 70) claim that, “intellectual fields are part of a way of life…typically transmitted by institutions, practices, and social relations” endorses Leach’s humanistic thesis.

An impetus to the paper’s creation was the finding that in the UK’s Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) in 2008, the Education sub-panel were awarded comparatively few of the highest RAE grades for research outputs compared with most social science disciplines (British Educational Research Association, 2011), despite recent British Government-funded interventions aimed at building research capacity within university education departments (www.tlrp.org/capacity, Pollard, 2007; Education’s Subject Overview Report, 2008, www.rae.ac.uk/results). By comparison, the ESRC (2006, p. 12) stated that UK social anthropology continues to shape the field globally by “sustaining leading scholarly journals, among them the Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, Critique of Anthropology and Anthropological Theory”. British academic anthropology has been classified as “exceptionally research intensive, 93% of Anthropology staff were submitted to the 2001 RAE as

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Forms of symbolic capital.</th>
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<td><strong>Forms of capital</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scientific</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social</td>
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Source: Bourdieu (1986).
research active scholars… it is the most research intensive of all the social sciences” (ESRC, 2006, p. 11). Mills et al. (2006) found that British anthropology was world-class, whilst academic educational research performance was patchy across Britain (www.rae.ac.uk). The next section explores the micro processes which may help explain these macro phenomena performance differences and further justify the choice of comparator academic discipline.

There are compelling grounds for selecting social anthropology, as opposed to other academic disciplines, from which to garner material of interest to an education research community. It has a depth of interconnections with the intellectual foundations of education research and has inspired many publications by renowned education research academics. Anthropology and education share intellectual canons and traditions; paradigm shifts in the policy landscape of UK university education departments, and a reconfiguration of the professional site for teacher training support the decision to give attention to anthropology, especially in terms of its resonance for capacity building in education research, as a qualitative project. Bourdieu has been seminal to developments in anthropology and many social sciences (Caine, 2013; Lamont, 2012) and his ideas have spawned a body of sociological scholarship about educational phenomena (Deem & Lucas, 2007; Lucas, 2006; Moore, 2008). In the USA, the journal editor of Anthropology and Education is a professor of education, indicating disciplinary cross-fertilisation at a publication whose explicit editorial mission is to deploy “anthropological theories and methods to examine educational processes”. A British social anthropological study of schooling reflects that approach to research into educational phenomena (Gellner, 2004). Its author is a son of Cambridge anthropologist Ernest Gellner; his scientific trajectory suggests life histories are replete with social energy and habitus reproduction.

Mills et al. (2006) found around 96% of staff in British university anthropology departments were research active, judged typically in terms of papers published and research grants, but the number fell to below 50% in the case of university education academics. Educational research in British universities has been classified as comparatively weak in terms of the academic outputs from education departments, as judged through successive government policy performance audits of UK social science (www.rae.ac.uk). In Britain, the RAE is a quasi-market mechanism, designed to audit academic research performance within disciplinary fields and allocate funding to universities, which has received critical attention from scholars (Lucas, 2006). In 2014, the RAE is being replaced by the Research Excellence Framework (www.ref.ac.uk). Its documentation recognises that results will affect the reputation of universities which, for Bourdieu, is a component of symbolic capital and a theme resonating with the primary data.

British education research shares with British social anthropology a strong empirical tradition and intellectual affinity reflected in journals: Ethnography and Education, for example, privileges qualitative research methods (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1991) and exhibits enthusiasm for French Theory. But education research lacks ownership of a unitary academic identity: Mills et al.’s (2006, p. 8) review of UK social science found that “exporter” disciplines, such as anthropology, which provide researchers for other disciplines, are “research-focussed” and intellectually distinctive. By contrast, education depends for its expertise on incomers from other disciplines and hence, they dub it an “importer” discipline, reflecting the multiple types of education research drawing upon psychological, sociological, anthropological and other epistemic traditions and methods. The 2008 RAE Subject Panel Report
confirmed education’s intellectual promiscuity; the Unit of Assessment (45) report concluded: “Overall, Education is essentially a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary field: engaging critically with the social sciences and humanities” (www.rae.ac.uk/pubs/2009/ov/).

Despite reasons favourable to utilising social anthropology as a source for knowledge transfer, particular professional and demographic factors may nevertheless appear to militate against this choice of comparator: socialisation into social anthropology has traditionally entailed extensive fieldwork, whereas historically at least, as Mills et al. (2006) note, education research appears more akin, in its putative professional life world, to practice-based caring professions such as medicine and social work, where application and relevance to practice are key drivers informing research practices. In this vein, Labaree (2004) highlights tensions uniquely facing university education departments, which he argues account for their alleged academic mediocrity, where achieving academic research excellence competes with securing professional relevance to the school system. Recent dramatic changes in the landscape of UK higher education, however, bring into question the continuing validity of Mills et al.’s (2006) analysis and the legitimacy of Labaree’s understandable anxiety.

During the past decade, the UK general teaching councils have significantly relaxed demands that education academics achieve qualified school teacher status before they hold positions in universities involving teacher training. By implication, they may now enter academia via a traditional academic route. One pertinent impact of the incorporation of teacher education into the university system has meant that education is now subjected to the same RAE audits as other disciplines. This change in recruitment and intellectual orientation is now being reflected in the contemporary “mixed economy” of academic staffing in UK university education departments. Individuals with conventional academic, but not professional, qualifications constitute a key part of this cadre of departmental education expertise. The University of Bristol’s School of Education and the London Institute of Education performed extremely well in the RAE. These research-intensive organisations were uninvolved with undergraduate teacher education, suggesting that the theoretical “blue sky” research tradition is achieved through exclusive devotion to academic research. That historic orientation of the academy to knowledge generation means the tensions Labaree (2004) documents disappear. Staff expertise recruited into research-intensive education departments inevitably contrasts, historically, with that sought by institutions committed to delivering the professional requirements of teacher training. School Direct is a major school-led model of teacher training (www.teachfirst.org.uk), funded by the Department of Education in England and includes provision in Wales. UK Government policy has increasingly emphasised school-based models of teacher training, such as School Direct. This policy is a departure from models of teacher training where university departments of education were ideologically dominant. As a consequence of this policy change, we are likely to witness reorientations in the recruitment of expertise into university departments of education.

Furlong (2009) found that 25% of university education departments in English universities providing teacher education at undergraduate level did not submit to the RAE 2008, and of those English university education departments who did participate, only 60% of staff were “research active”; but these proportions may be changing and the proportion of education staff compared with other social science disciplines entered by universities for the 2014 UK’s Research Evaluation
Framework (www.ref.ac.uk) may well be higher. The changes in recruitment patterns into academic posts in education and the increasingly academic nature of education departments in universities as a result of a systemic change in policy towards teacher training mainly into the school system, seem likely to create the grounds for growth in academic education research capacity in the university.

Analytical framework

According to Bourdieu, the appropriation of objectified forms of cultural capital, such as books, paintings and cognate intellectual forms, requires that agents have already acquired cultural capital in its embodied form. Agents can also accumulate objectified forms of cultural capital via mentoring through the “services of the holders of this capital” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 50). Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, field and capital underpin processes of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Grenfell, 2008, p. 22). For Bourdieu, the academic research field is a subfield of the intellectual field and is, “made up of agents taking up various intellectual positions. Yet the field is not an aggregate of isolated elements, it is a configuration or a network of relationships” (Ringer, 2000, p. 67). Habitus and field constitute fundamental elements of his view that agents and social structure are constitutive of the “social space” (society) which consists of interconnected fields. The habitus is the internalisation of particular social structures and their norms acquired through lived experiences within fields. As Jenkins (1996, p. 80) points out, people create their own history, but that history arises from “a dialectical relationship between collective history inscribed in objective conditions and the habitus inscribed in individuals”. The social world is organised by fields and, as Bourdieu argues, fields are:

Structured spaces of positions (or posts) whose properties depend on their position within these spaces and which can be analysed independently of their occupants (which are partly determined by them). (1993, p. 72)

He regards the field as a site for endemic power struggles between actors over its boundaries, about who may legitimately enter the field and about how “distinction” is achieved:

Investment is the disposition to act that is generated in the relationship between the space defined by a game offering certain prizes or stakes (what I call a field) and a system of dispositions attuned to that game (what I call a habitus) – the “feel” for the game and the stakes, which implies both the inclination and the capacity to play that game, to take an interest in the game, to be taken in by the game. (1993, p. 18)

Table 1 presents an overview of the diverse and complementary forms of symbolic capital characterising Bourdieu’s theoretical perspective. Within each field, actors are inclined by their historically acquired habitus to struggle persistently and without end to accumulate symbolic capital: “social” (networks of relations), “cultural” (cultural distinctions and differentiations, educational credentials) and “economic” (Bourdieu, 1986). An individual’s accumulation of symbolic capital resources positions him or her within a social field in a particular way. The habitus of individuals exposed to the same fields and the same “logic of action” over time gives rise to a “class habitus” which, “enables practices to be objectively harmonized without any … direct intervention or … explicit co-ordination” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 58). An academic’s power and advancement in career terms hinges upon the possession, not only of both scientific and symbolic capital, but arguably also of social capital,
illustrated in Table 1, by membership of appropriate networks such as prestigious research groupings which afford opportunities to “cash in” capital as a move in the game. In the research-intensive university sector, the possession of scientific capital is reputed to be critical to career advancement (Fulton, 1996). According to Bourdieu:

Capital is accumulated labour (in its materialised form or its “incorporated”, embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e. exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labour...It is a force inscribed in objective or subjective structures … (1986, p. 46)

Given this paper’s thesis that acquiring the forms of symbolic capital is an emergent phenomenon, life-history interviews are an ideal conduit for capturing insights into this diachronic process and how sense of the game is tacitly learned. The latter metaphor alludes to an awareness of academia as a social field and how it is played through strategic choices which could affect access to prestigious symbolic capital. Through life histories, we can identify the sources of the social energy referred to in this extract above and how entering the “zone” of the game is internalised. Table 1 illustrates Bourdieu’s (1986, p. 46) differentiated kinds of capital, which, as mentioned, are utilised in the analysis of the paper’s qualitative data below.

Sample and methodology

The adoption of Critical Incident theory is informed by Ringer’s argument, which is that naturalistic methodology facilitates the identification of significant events. In this way, research capacity can be pursued without assuming an instrumentalist ontology. Instead, the methodology is sensitised towards identifying the accumulation of symbolic capital resources grounded in cultural, scientific and social encounters (see Table 1). This qualitative methodological paradigm (Flick, 1998) was adopted to elicit interviewees’ accounts of how they acquired their research capacity. The semi-structured interviews were conducted over the period 2011–2012. This type of interview enabled informal conversational exchange and provided flexibility to informants to pursue their recollections. Each interview was conducted in the university office of the interviewee. The interviews, lasting for at least 80 minutes, were taped and transcribed for analysis. Throughout the interview exchanges, the interviewer found opportunities to pursue in greater depth critical incidents which the research informants identified. Polkinghorne (1995, p. 15) refers to an “analysis of narratives”, where data collected are in the form of stories which are analysed to identify themes. In his other complementary mode of analysis, known as “narrative analysis”, the researcher collects “descriptions of events and happenings” and “synthesizes” them into a narrative to provide a thematic analysis.

Each informant holds a permanent academic post in a prestigious British university social anthropology department. That type of institutional eminence confers on these individuals immense social capital, whose use-value affords them access to other forms of capital stock, thus augmenting the power of their strategising and sense of how to win the game. Most informants encountered their academic research socialisation (graduate and undergraduate education) in the “golden triangle” of universities deemed world-class (London School of Economics, University College London, Oxford and Cambridge) with outstanding research performance in the RAE (www.rae.ac.uk). The informants were all drawn from university departments with
websites that revealed highly productive academic lives, prestigious journal publications, research grants and other indicators of academic distinction. Many had achieved the distinction of a first-class honours undergraduate degree followed by a postdoctoral position in a prestigious university. In the findings section, their trajectories of capital accumulation are conveyed through narrative discourse. This affords a grounded understanding of the nature of their particular “research capacity”. The average age of the informants was 35 years, representative for this discipline (Mills et al., 2006). Several had completed their doctorates overseas in continental Europe or the USA. Table 2 provides a descriptive content analysis of the interviews which is classified descriptively.

**Mapping the research field**

Lather (2006, writing in *QSE*), dismisses neo-positivist hegemonies of research as “imperial science”. In her own teaching of educational research, research capacity building involves helping “students work against technical thought and method” (Lather, 2006, p. 48), an approach supportive of intellectual criticality. Ridley’s (2011) analysis of research capacity building privileges what researchers bring to research enquiry, not merely scholarly knowledge, but also dispositions and qualities such as humility, patience, perseverance and intense curiosity. These universal academic virtues (Ridley, 2011) are then inescapably present in the academic habitus. Judith Okley’s (2012, p. 39) autobiographical study of factors shaping her professional pathway (or habitus) into the discipline of anthropology alludes to inspiration from a specific text and later, what the methodology afforded her:

> Many of us were inspired by Jackson and Marsden’s The Education of the Working Class (1961). Its power came from the fact that the authors of the study of working class pupils who gained grammar school places were, albeit latently, drawing on their lived experience. Years later, Social Anthropology’s special appeal to me was the embodied knowledge acquired through participatory fieldwork.

Key texts, formative of the academic habitus, are the intellectual canons representative of the field’s symbolic capital whose foundation, Bourdieu points out, lies in language. Traditions of enquiry generate social and cultural capital and situate agents in the field in certain ways (see below). Paul Willis’s (1977) education research monograph “Learning to Labor”, a Marxist deconstruction of formal schooling, has impacted upon the intellectual architecture of social anthropology and education university departments’ undergraduate curricula. Articles published in *QSE* reinforce cultural capital linkages between academic education research and social anthropology (Eichhorn, 2001). Halsey’s (2004, pp. 173–176) citation analysis of British sociology journals, demonstrating that many education researchers publish in sociology journals, gives additional weight to the connections between British university education research and British academic social anthropology. Whilst research traditions in educational ethnography vary depending upon whether their disciplinary base rests in sociology or anthropology (Delamont & Atkinson, 1980), intellectual provenances overlap: frequent citations by academics included the social theories of Bourdieu, Foucault, Latour, Bauman and Beck (Halsey, 2004, p. 176). Halsey (2004) also found Weber, Goffman and Marx prominent authorities informing theorising, coupled with a consistent historical trend towards qualitative research methods in Britain. Since 1970, he commented: “one of the most surprising results
Table 2. Sample taxonomy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methodological sensibility</th>
<th>Research specialism</th>
<th>Critical “incidents”</th>
<th>Research capacity-building contexts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informant 1 Sam</strong></td>
<td>Education and schooling in remote communities</td>
<td>Being personally exposed through fieldwork in Madagascar, it “opened my eyes”</td>
<td>Lecturing to students about the discipline; doctoral supervisors; weekly seminar culture; doing fieldwork</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attitude of “openness”; “really softly managing interactions with informants”; patience; respect; interpersonal strategies; using theories to question</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Informant 2 Simon</strong></td>
<td>Historical commemoration, communist mythology and education in Chinese villages; cultures of eating and political reform in China</td>
<td>Individual teachers; doctoral cohort; undertaking fieldwork</td>
<td>Inspirational teachers; doctoral supervisor; parents are academics; PhD cohort; seminars; doctoral research study group; informal mentoring and recognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban ethnography; interviewing, reading documents; historical textual studies; “deep hanging out”; historical archive research on the past; diaries; household interviews</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Informant 3 Thomas</strong></td>
<td>Urban change in SE Asia</td>
<td>Growing up in a small US town and my father’s “being in the world … a cowboy intellectual”; intense intellectual relationship with female research supervisor</td>
<td>Family upbringing; travelling; writing; doctoral supervisor; inter-disciplinary graduate academic studies; PhD cohort; reading; university environments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Cultivated disposition”, how you sense and know the world; participant observation; “hanging out”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Informant 4 Chris</strong></td>
<td>Political change in Indonesia and effects on social life and identities</td>
<td>Taking social anthropology at Cambridge; doctoral fieldwork in Indonesia</td>
<td>Reading leading thinkers – Geertz, Foucault, Butler, Sartre, and other literatures; encouraged to be creative through degree studies; peers and supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to use your life to establish rapport; extensive “hanging out”; not taking things at face value; post-modern dramaturgical interviewing</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Informant 5 David</strong></td>
<td>Indigenous mountain peoples of South America</td>
<td>Doctoral thesis examiner’s patronage; doing fieldwork</td>
<td>Post-doctoral fellowship; fieldwork; conferences; reading journal papers and monographs; PhD cohort; supervisors; inspirational books, films, novels; workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnography, establishing human relationships; participant observation and “sharing people’s lives and experiences”</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informant</th>
<th>Methodological sensibility</th>
<th>Research specialism</th>
<th>Critical “incidents”</th>
<th>Research capacity-building contexts</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informant 6 Anna</strong></td>
<td>Ethnography: “deep hanging out”; participant observation; semi-structured interviews; critical reflexivity; archives</td>
<td>The film industry in SE Asia, production and consumption by class and gender</td>
<td>Fieldwork in India; academic mentoring through joint conference attendance with supervisor</td>
<td>Doctoral supervisor; writing monograph; workshops; talks; seminars; wide reading; supportive academic environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informant 7 Keith</strong></td>
<td>Photography; “a way of thinking as an anthropologist”; a mindset; participant observation; building relationships</td>
<td>Pygmies’ socio-political conditions and twenty-first-century tourism in the Congo</td>
<td>Travelling and meeting a group of indigenous peoples in Africa; a professorial “supporter”; fieldwork</td>
<td>Reading; academic recognition; teaching students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informant 8 Henry</strong></td>
<td>Ethnography, interviews, “hanging out”; participant observation; critical distance; rapport building; making creative conceptual connections</td>
<td>Medical anthropology of SE Asia</td>
<td>Undergraduate degree fieldwork in India</td>
<td>Travelling overseas for research; research supervisor; reading, writing, and publishing papers; intellectual role models; conference presentations; research fellowship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informant 9 Luke</strong></td>
<td>Participant observation; interviewing; building relationships; flexibility of method and attitude</td>
<td>Urban theory knowledge and the city; literary societies</td>
<td>Intellectual relation with doctoral supervisor; engaging with seminars</td>
<td>Post-doctoral fellowship; engaging with leading ideas in the discipline and French Theory; the research literature; fieldwork; seminar culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informant 10 Helen</strong></td>
<td>Experiential and observational methods; long-term relationship engagements; patience and respect; observant participation; key informant interviews</td>
<td>Alaskan tribal community’s knowledge and kinship</td>
<td>Working in the field</td>
<td>The ‘long slow burn’ of fieldwork and human relations; research supervisors and peers; some books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informant 11 Stan</strong></td>
<td>Ethnography; historical archives; virtual participant observation; interviewing; “hanging out”</td>
<td>Anthropology of science and technology in society</td>
<td>Presentation to high-level government actors at MIT lab</td>
<td>Undergraduate degree in science; working as an engineer; teaching undergraduates; partner who is anthropologist; conversations with students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informant 12 Emily</td>
<td>Communities in the Antarctic</td>
<td>Work experience in research field sites; female role models</td>
<td>Support by a friend with a PhD; learning through intuition; reading in your field; being a good writer like Bateson, Malinowski</td>
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<td>Long term ethnographic fieldwork involving participant observation</td>
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<td>Research supervisor; my academic parents and “key teachers”; monograph writing; good academic colleagues; doctoral cohort; reading; seminars</td>
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<tr>
<td>Informant 13 Roger</td>
<td>Religion and politics in Cuba</td>
<td>Fieldwork relations</td>
<td>Doctoral supervisor; being a post-doctoral student; collaboration and ideas sharing; reading the anthropological canon, and continental philosophy; intellectual mentors; doing the research; space to develop networks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnography, “deep hanging out”; lateral thinking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Paul Willis’ book ‘Learning to Labor’ inspired; intellectual mentors; personal confidence to challenge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Informant 14 Joseph</td>
<td>Remote Scottish communities and farming</td>
<td>Won doctoral research grant; offered academic post; seminars and writing excellent papers</td>
<td>Wide reading on region and across disciplines; questioning disposition; highly collegial research environment; doctoral cohort; excellent supervisors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant observation; interviews; archives; building field relations</td>
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<td>Reading the subject; supportive and inclusive department; reading certain books</td>
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<tr>
<td>Informant 15 Tim</td>
<td>Global migration from Asia; economic anthropology</td>
<td>Living and working in a Chinese migrant community in China</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnography; in-depth interviewing; an active and flexible mind</td>
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<tr>
<td>Informant 16 Frank</td>
<td>Anthropology of rural China, morals and ethics; the Chinese in Africa</td>
<td>Worked in a soup kitchen for the poor in Argentina and became politically aware and critical of western intellectual traditions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant observation; dialogical method and grounded theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Informant 17 Richard</td>
<td>Religion, politics, identity and heritage in Africa</td>
<td>Support and mentoring from eminent professor; a book which helped re-frame the argument in the doctoral thesis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant observation, but retaining distance; a mindset; knowing how to engage and get by in a foreign setting; building relationships; writing field diary</td>
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<td>Methodological sensibility</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Informant 18 Elsa</strong></td>
<td>Displaced islanders and scientific versus indigenous knowledge regarding environmental issues</td>
<td>Parents both social scientists who worked in India; undergraduate research fieldwork overseas</td>
<td>Undergraduate teaching at Cambridge; ESRC fellowships; engaging with the literature</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnography; participant observation; semi-structured interviews; household surveys</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Informant 19 Mark</strong></td>
<td>Contemporary capitalism and audit culture in the west</td>
<td>Being an active member of a radical left-wing political organisation; nervous breakdown in a commercial job led to studying anthropology</td>
<td>Doctoral supervisor; reading; writing opinion articles; sitting around talking to people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnography; interviews; “hanging out”</td>
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<td><strong>Informant 20 Ian</strong></td>
<td>Colonial history, land tenure, cosmology and Cargo Cults – Solomon Islands</td>
<td>Experiencing wide intellectual engagement and passion from lecturers and research supervisors; living in student residence overseas with other anthropology students</td>
<td>Academic lecturers and supervision team; fieldwork relations; engaging with various literatures and theories; doctoral student cohort; degree courses</td>
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of our analysis is the rise in the use of qualitative methods, especially ones using ethnographic and anthropological techniques…” (Halsey, 2004, p. 192).

The data presented in Table 2 highlight nuanced difference in the accumulation of capital in terms of context in the field: Ian’s (Informant 20) cultural capital resonates with inextricably linked social and scientific forms: fieldwork, academic mentors, student cohort, reading and degree studies. Mark’s (Informant 19) critical life incident fell outside the institution of academia; he was an active member of a left-wing political group. In his interview, he reiterated its impact on this life phase and its importance in the formation of a research habitus: his subsequent concept of what university life ought to be about, believing that its incorporation into a corporate ideology was anathema to academia, conveys the particularity of this politically driven habitus. Mark also argued that by writing journalistic polemical articles for the serious press and participating in less formal public engagements, chatting over coffee with colleagues, for instance, a serendipitous impact on research capacity and productivity will occur as ideas are shared and publicly debated. These brief anecdotes illuminate the importance attached to a social space for capital accumulation as described by research participants whose accounts touch on how symbolic capital reflects a certain kind of embodied immersion. As narratives, they are congruent with the more elaborated engagements with capital found in the descriptive thread of forms of symbolic capital running through Table 2 and especially, the theorised thematic narrative findings. Fieldwork, as Table 2 indicates, has been critical in the informants’ training and identity formation. Frank (Informant 16) referred to predoctoral engagement as a volunteer in Argentina supporting indigenous communities afflicted by poverty, an experience that resonated throughout his subsequent life history as an academic sceptical of the legitimacy of hegemonies. He felt radicalised politically and that experience meant he then questioned triumphalist ethical assumptions about European civilisation which he had been taught at school. Scholars argue serendipity is important in scientific discoveries and enables original anthropological fieldwork (De Neve & Unnithan-Kumar, 2006). Elsa (Informant 18) was amongst those informants who benefitted from family influence. Her academic parents contributed to capital’s embodied form. Thomas’ (Informant 3) account of the “critical incident” concerning the impact of his own biological father, whom he fondly called a “cowboy intellectual”, conjures an upbringing that privileged a critical mindset. His father did not “quite fit into society”, leaving his family to trade goods on distant Indian reservations. Richard (Informant 17) recalled sitting in bed at night as a child with an old-fashioned typewriter on his lap making up stories. The habitus each of these two individuals was acquiring suited the solitary research labour typifying much anthropological fieldwork. Writing as a builder of research capacity, and the sense of the game it helps adumbrate, is evident in the accounts of others too (Informants, 8, 13, 19), and it is important in Bourdieu’s framing of academia.

Another noteworthy feature of the taxonomy presented in Table 2 is the social space of the traditional university seminar. It is, of course, a forum for research capacity building – ideas are acquired and ethnographic materials explored. As one informant remarked, it was a place for the “import and export” of ideas, to keep abreast of developments in academia. But the seminar as a social space also offers opportunities to grow forms of capital (“learning the sense of the game”). Social and cultural capitals were nurtured through opportunities afforded by encounters in this space. Spencer (2000) argued that the seminar as an oral tradition of research training has its roots in Malinowski’s London seminars held in the 1920s during his
tenure at the LSE. Spencer (2000, p. 19), a professor of anthropology at the University of Edinburgh, writes:

The critical culture was built around the weekly seminar. It was renowned for dissection of arguments and bringing out important things...seeing this rigor was prevalent.

It encouraged and made a difference.

The themes sketched in this section are developed in the next and the formal structure of research capacity’s development in personal histories is documented by paying attention to these thematic data-rich narratives and their interpretation through the lens of symbolic capital.

**Findings**

**Theme I: Capital accumulation**

Bourdieu’s (1990) theory of practice embraces imitation as a mechanism for cultural reproduction and generating a habitus reflecting the nature of a field’s capital and strategic game playing. Resources and recognition are key stakes in the game. Field-attuned cognitive schemata both help constitute the field and are constructed by a field’s logic. As agents in the field of social anthropology, each informant shares many critical events entailing particular capital stocks. This commonality is a basis for unearthing the formal structure of “research capacity” in terms of symbolic capital. Their personal and academic trajectories demonstrate processes whereby appropriate social energy is developed for the game. Their recollections as narratives contribute to our understanding of the sources of prestige and repute in the field. Helen (Informant 10) acquired capital assets, especially social capital, which by implication, she subsequently “cashed in”, enabling a swift accumulation of scientific capital. Helen’s habitus for her academic field was developed, not just through academia, but also by travel and certain social encounters. In the first extract, she engages with “indigenous peoples”, a practice which is doxic to the logic of this discipline’s field:

Before I went to university I took a year off and we bought a van and drove to the New Territories in Canada with friends. It was a kind of proto-anthropology. Most of the population were indigenous peoples. That was an important exposure to me working with anthropologists and aboriginal peoples later during my masters. I met people who’ve been very supportive … (Helen, Informant 10)

Her social and scientific capital was strengthened by encounters with “the elders” and immersion involving “travel stories” and the study of “maps”, which besides enhancing her capital stock literally helped her navigation and offered a serendipitous social space to grow the social capital which is a prerequisite for the application of the discipline’s core methodology:

One of the elders told me to go and live with one of the families on the land, and for the first few weeks don’t ask any questions. Be helpful. You’re not confronting them as a researcher. The best way was to travel and hunt with the people. The stories you hear are attached to places. You can look at maps if you sit down at a table and people can show you their routes. You can guide the questions in a very conversational way, it’s give and take. The diaries of explorers are useful and adventure and travel stories … (Helen, Informant 10)

Mentoring was critical to her capital accumulation: she describes “good mentors” and “an old anthropologist” whose sensibility encouraged Helen to “listen” and
attend to “stories” as a source of cultural insight. Her methodology emerged through social capital. Critical field encounters and academia were its building blocks:

A lot of it comes from being in contact with good mentors. The best advice was from an old social anthropologist who said when I go into the field I listen and then I think about it. That’s my methodology! A lot of it comes from being in contact with good mentors. I don’t think I’d be here without good conversations with them. I heard their stories. So much of what I do is from listening to them. At conferences it’s important to hear and listen to those stories … (Helen, Informant 10)

Capital accumulation in Elsa’s case commenced early in her life, its contexts family and schooling. Her academic parents afforded her intimate privileged access to a sense of the game in academia and strategically relevant forms of capital. The symbolic cultural capital prestige of Cambridge was “cashed in” for economic capital “pots of Commonwealth funds”. Such types of exchange are inevitably cyclical as stocks will develop through decisions regarding how, where and when to “cash in” a type of valued capital to support strategic gain. Elsa’s eventual selection of research topic sprang from a seemingly chance encounter with a “childhood friend”. Social capital through tacit family networking supported her particular capital accumulation, which she appears to endorse:

For me it’s much to do with my family background. Both my parents were social scientists who worked in India. I spend time growing up there. I wanted to do something socially relevant at university and started off with social sciences. My childhood friend talked about Mauritius and I knew most were of Indian descent. At Cambridge there are pots of Commonwealth funds to go there to study. I read a legal case in a newspaper out there when I was doing an undergraduate study, and that led to my research into exile and displacement. (Elsa, Informant 18)

Tim’s accumulation of capital and habitus emerged more from a mix of critical incidents sensitising him to entrenched poverty. His negative experience of school authority no doubt provoked a sceptical disposition:

No certain actual event affected me. As a teenager I grew up in China in the 1980s and worked in a migrant community over six years. It sensitised me to social problems. Now I specialise in migration throughout Asia, but unfortunately the cognitive involution of academia towards thinkers like Foucault who must be cited moves one away from the outside world and that interferes with using that early experience. (Tim, Informant 15)

Thomas, following personal travels, studied anthropology as an undergraduate. He also highlighted the importance of his father as a role model, formative to his journey into the academic field:

Taking [anthropology] as an undergraduate blew me away; I discovered what it meant to give a gift, and what makes people related was called into question suddenly. I’d glimpsed these things before, but the discipline gave me a way of looking at what it means to be a man or a woman… I grew up in the US. I was influenced by my father, a cowboy intellectual. You pursued your own path. It was a cultivated disposition. I picked it up. I began to travel and imagined a more sustained engagement to make a living might be possible. I used to take my mother’s old typewriter and bang out stories on the bed when I was 5–6 years old. I was always a non-conformist. Anthropology gave me a way to express myself with legitimation. (Thomas, Informant 3)

Travel is common to each of them in shaping their habitus, and the process of becoming a researcher arose from opportunities to foster social capital and associated cultural capital. The solitary intellectual labour Thomas pursued in his bedroom
might have helped him to learn the “elevated style”. Bourdieu in *Homo Academicus* claims that the use of language enables capital accumulation; academic discourse is “a central dimension of the strategies with which academics compete in the struggle for distinction” (Jenkins, 1996, p. 171). Academia privileges that type of linguistic capital argot associated with status in the wider social space of stratification by hierarchy of class into which being an academic fits. Thomas’s enthusiasm for the “old typewriter” helped his formation of an acknowledged “cultivated disposition”. That disposition was an orientation to the social world. Within the data-set, we also observe processes of social clustering and closure. The resulting unequal positions in the academic field imply a Weberian perspective as the capacity of these informants, as stockholders, means that to win the game depends on the exercise of social closure (see Pakulski, 2005, p. 166). The reputational academic hierarchy associated with RAE rankings may assist closure, thus limiting competition. Competition for capital can also be controlled through membership of prestigious societies whose role involves some degree of gate-keeping, as discussed below.

**Theme II: Symbolic capital and the academy**

Lather (2006, p. 45), writing in *QSE*, argues that under-critical research training, “is a topic of considerable interest these days”, especially in terms of doctoral preparation for educational research. As the extracts here illustrate, dedicated doctoral commitment and belonging to a research culture are critical to the development of the “research active” disposition. Seminar culture, conference attendance and peer interaction nurture “elevated style”. Reputation is a social capital which is accumulated during these intellectual encounters and can be “cashed” to purchase other useful capitals. Academics routinely tend to pursue joint authorship only with those deemed to be at least as prestigious as themselves in the field, a practice typical of strategic alliances also made by universities. Joseph’s extract below reflects the mechanism of how dialogue builds capital, his supervisor the renowned Professor Tim Ingold. Here, we observe social capital “opening doors” for him to other networks through the recognition and status it confers. David’s analysis of the genesis of his capital overlaps with the details of the empirical make-up of the field explained by Joseph:

Apart from fieldwork is the vast number of hours reading, journals, monographs and going to conferences, workshops and saturating yourself in that way. My PhD supervisor and cohort were critical; we kept in touch and shared experiences that inspired me. There’s a book by Peter Gow and books on carrying out fieldwork and the writings of Levy Strauss on myth; we’d hear about them and then all read them. At LSE you’d attend a writing-up seminar each week. One person presented a chapter, you’d get feedback; it’s very peer based writing support. Research can be an isolated experience and this all helped. (David, Informant 5)

The academic habitus is built through such encounters and “vast number of hours reading” and “going to conferences” combined with this intellectually welcoming supervisor. Esteemed authors in the field consecrate what matters, Joseph comments:

My PhD supervisor was really important. I developed a lot of ideas with him and was offered a post-doctoral position. Tim Ingold was one of my supervisors whom I worked with closely. A lot of Social Anthropology draws on the canon of great fieldwork, Boas, Malinowski and continental philosophy, Merleau Ponty and Heidegger. It was my combination of degrees and doing research where you really develop your research skills by just doing the research and by reading and thinking. Reading and thinking are fundamental to all of it. (Joseph, Informant 14)
Induction into the contemporary intellectual framework coupled with outstanding academic role models and university teachers exemplify the material basis of social and cultural capitals. Scientific capital as a form of cultural capital develops an academic imagination:

Working with my supervisor Marshall Sahlins was formative. At Chicago the first year of the PhD programme is taught. He taught that year and another academic taught the second year course on Melanesia. Those experiences were very formative for me. At another university certain sociology lecturers were important to me on the sociology of knowledge and the cosmological approach to modernity. They were incredibly knowledgeable and made connections across disciplines and modelled an intellectual style which I admired. (Ian, Informant 20)

Salins’s “intellectual style” and processes of modelling it undoubtedly helped form Ian’s habitus. Such pedagogic encounters Ian argued “were very formative for me”. The field of research beyond the academy per se is critical to habitus formation in anthropology – the methodology of participant observation is foundational to the logic of this research field.

**Theme III: Habitus formation in fieldwork**

Undertaking extensive fieldwork constitutes a key rite de passage for British social anthropologists (Stocking, 1983). This legitimated space ideally suited to building capital is now challenged by intensified work pressures affecting UK universities (Gornwall, Cook, Dauton, Salisbury, & Brychan, 2014). Burke (2009, p. 11) writes:

> It was Malinowski who insisted most vigorously that fieldwork was the anthropological method par excellence. “The anthropologist”, he declared, “must relinquish his comfortable position in the long chair on the veranda of the missionary compound”… only by going into the villages, the “field”, would he be able “to grasp the native’s point of view.”

Immersion in community defines Malinowski’s “scientific treatment” for the “proper conditions for ethnographic work” (1932, p. 6). Malinowski (1932, p. 6), talking about ethnographic research practice, referred to living “right among the natives… by camping right in their villages”, and through encounters, “this natural intercourse, you learn to know him, and you become familiar with his customs and beliefs…”. Fieldwork demands imaginative resources and personal flexibility, as the following extracts demonstrate. A distinctive aspect of their habitus has its foundations in immersion in other cultures. Helen (Informant 10), whose fieldwork extended over 30 years in Alaska, emphasised: “You become a social anthropologist because you are interested in what people think about stuff”; accessing that “stuff” requires the capacity to build social capital, which underpins the scientific capital. Embodiment matters, as Richard argued:

> … We use the body as the research tool by putting ourselves in the place and having to learn to function to get by. That is the primary method. You become a member of who you are studying, but you must not get lost in relationships. Writing my fieldwork diaries every evening gave me a critical distance. It was a key method for me. (Richard, Informant 17)

Richard’s mention of “the body as the research tool” and as the “primary method” endorses Bourdieu’s argument that power of habituation rests with the capacity of the body as a mnemonic tool. That embodiment funnels cultural coding, and its
careful calibration is represented in research tactics: “critical distance”, “fieldwork diaries” and not getting “lost in relationships”. Richard demonstrates strategic use of social capital as he builds his power in the academic field.

Diaries have been at the historical core of the discipline and its iconography (Stocking, 1983). In connection with education research, this insight about “distancing” conjures an approach to objectivity and criticality. Ian described his experience as a student studying a Melanesian community while a doctoral student at Chicago:

Most of my research has been led by the people I studied and what they found interesting in their lives. I had read about them, but once I got there I found that bore no relation to what mattered to them. I’d listen to their stories working with hundreds of them over the years. It meant doing things. I built my own house, grew vegetables and went pig hunting. By being actively involved with their lives is my vision of Anthropology. (Ian, Informant 20)

For Ian, the research habitus disposed him to “listen to their stories”, “doing things”. Embodiment is palpable in his case, as his physical activity undoubtedly generates social capital with these peoples: building trust and reciprocal social bonds. A villager helped him build the house. Extensive social skills, empathy, rapport and undoubted patience are sine qua non for anthropological tasks. Henry records this skill set and dispositions in the work of Clifford Geertz, the renowned anthropologist who coined the term “thick description”:

Clifford Geertz went on about rapport so repeat encounters and getting to know them gives you the data that anthropologists seek. Interviews have a place there too. The social anthropologist goes often for the everyday life which can mean just hanging out with the group and just observing. You create a case for participation. The data is informed by the everydayness of social life. That kind of data allows you to write thick description. You’ve got to become a different sort of person if you’re to be a good fieldworker, a very enthusiastic participant observer. (Henry, Informant 8)

Simon’s “hanging out” described below reiterates the discipline’s orientation to significant immersion. This dwelling in the field is necessary for a successful study, as conceptual access to the culture is premised on social capital. Simon remarks, “a lot of hanging about in the villages listening and talking to migrants”:

I studied historical commemoration in Chinese villages. The Opium War led to uprising in villages and later the Communists saw it in a certain way and built it into their mythology. I looked at how this was being reproduced and used. I read the papers, interviewed official and collected the texts with stories about the Uprising. I spoke to teachers and spent a lot of time hanging out in the villages listening and talking to migrants. I was there 2 months. It was ethnography, a deep hanging out. I wanted to find out how the village worked and place the specifics into that. As a historically minded anthropologist a characteristic of my work is going into how the present developed. (Simon, Informant 2)

Emily recognises reading “a lot of other people’s work in your field to understand where you might fit” is an unconscious recognition of the reproduction of the field’s habitus. Emily reminds us of the importance of linguistic capital, remarking on the need for the social anthropologist having the literary capacity for “weaving a tale and being good at writing a picture of the place you’ve been”. Malinowski called this power the ethnographer’s magic. The role of early experience reminds us of the early capital accumulation prefiguring entry to the formal academic field prefigured in theme 1:
With ethnography you’ve to pick up a lot of things by intuition so on one level it’s learning how to be a good observer which is probably learned younger than through methods handbooks. But I did learn a fair amount through research methods training on how to take field notes and to record information that might be useful later on. You need to read a lot of other people’s work in your field to understand where you might fit. Social Anthropology is also about weaving a good tale and being good at writing a picture of the place you’ve been. You’ve to describe different sorts of realities. (Emily, Informant 12)

This research habitus organises production of expertise through taking advantage of opportunities which built its capital stock. A foundation of scientific assets identified in these findings is the cross-cutting manner with which the forms of capital inter-penetrate to afford advantage in the field. David’s clustering of stock includes social capital, and cultural capital which congeals around the individual as researcher bolstered and authorised by texts, which help cause a particular discursive understanding legitimated by the esteemed nature, in this field, held by the cultural capital these texts embody:

Immersion in a community gives time to know and learn about it so that it can be researched and understood and trust built. This is the basis from which you investigate using participant observation. Issues come up and then I think about them and then I return to the field with questions to follow up. Participant observation is not an explicit method. They key idea is sharing people’s lives. You approach a topic by spending time. Roy Wagner’s book about the invention of culture shows me the main goal of Anthropology is to find out about them, but also in that process your own society so you do a reverse Anthropology especially learning from them builds your understanding. (David, Informant 5)

In Distinction, Bourdieu is concerned with the asset structures associated with positions in the composition of capital within the class structure (Weininger, 2005). If we think of research capacity as representing consumption practices and giving rise to “lifestyles”, this analogy with class foregrounds how this group of anthropologists become “distinguished” and work within a legitimate style. That badge of difference as “experts” or “professionals” is institutionally sanctioned and circumscribed by the exclusive Association of Social Anthropologists (www.theasa.org) and royal status as a scholarly discipline in western academia (www.therai.org.uk). Henkel’s (2000) research found that the academic discipline was central in cementing an academic identity. In the competitive struggle for distinction in the hierarchical social space of research performance rankings, cultural capital which is consecrated by royal status confers a unique advantage in the field.

**Conclusion**

Bourdieu used the metaphor “the feel for the game” to articulate how the body links his theoretical constructs of habitus, capital and field (Bourdieu, 1984, 1990). This metaphor is important for the purpose of helping identify what might be the distinctive nature of the habitus in relation to becoming a social anthropologist as opposed to the formation of researchers inhabiting different disciplinary fields. Characterising the sedimentation of the anthropological habitus returns us to a goal of this paper which lies in the aspiration of knowledge transfer. Bourdieu’s metaphor of a “feel for the game” requires that we exercise sociological sensitivity towards forms of capital as representing assets and investments, with the researcher being a stockholder, whose wealth relies on the extent to which capital aids advancement. Earlier
mention was made of Cambridge’s cultural capital playing a role in accessing economic capital in the form of research monies. Frequent biographical insights in the data coalesce around social capital affording access for the application of scientific capital. The internalised structures of this particular habitus contain long-lasting schemes or structures of perception, conception and action which give them a distinctive sense of place in their research field (Bourdieu, 2005).

Understood in this theoretical light, the data illuminate the sociomaterial origins of these dispositional schemes as generative and, of course, somewhat determining, as membership of this academic field will require upholding respect for particular boundaries. A sense of the game, it follows, will differ according to the characteristics of the field as the dispositions of the habitus emerge in their encounters with the social world of fields where they are assembled and which they in turn help generate. This dialectical feature of the interaction of the habitus and field is important not only for understanding why education research performed as described earlier, but also for identifying how the origins of the habitus in that characteristically professional applied field are distinctive. Esteemed authors and renowned anthropologists both symbolise and circumscribe limits around the research field of anthropology, as was tacitly acknowledged by the informants. Becher and Trowler (2001) note that academics situate themselves within disciplinary communities:

… being a member of a disciplinary community involves a sense of identity and personal commitment, ‘a way of being in the world’, a matter of taking a cultural frame that defines a great part of one’s life. (47)

The particularities of education research in being multidisciplinary and also reflecting a complex mixture of partially interpenetrating academic and professional fields lead to the conclusion that a way of being in the world does not have a clear purchase on education research. For this reason, the habitus of those employed in the high-performing research-intensive education departments may be more akin in certain respects to the habitus of the informants than it is to colleagues whose departments tend to belong to the more teaching-led university environments. Whilst the formation of their habitus may depend less on the accumulation of social capital stocks than appeared to be the case for the informants, their successful position in the field – as denoted by high research performance rankings – is likely to reflect a sufficient quantity of the other forms of symbolic capital which are a sine qua non of productivity in the research field. It is apparent that the habitus of the researcher working from the disciplinary base of social anthropology in the UK does designate a distinctive sociocultural frame.

That theorisation encourages attention to Deem and Lucas’s (2007) discovery that a proportion of their sample of university education lecturers continued to identify with their professional selves as school teachers. The leading education research associations such as the British Association of Education Research are also open to all. Deem and Lucas (2007) found, in line with the demographic survey by Mills et al. discussed previously, that a high proportion of their sample of university department of education lecturers did not possess doctorates. The results these authors describe suggest that the habitus of the education researcher is inevitably formed differently in line with its situated nature in a professional field of practice, and in contrast to the informants, later in the age span, by which time other culturally conventional turning points, e.g. marriage and children, will compete for the time available for research formation. Mills et al. comment that “We are not the first
to identify research capacity in Education as a concern” (p. 94), adding their particular concern is with “enhancing research capacity in the ‘importer’ and practice-linked disciplines” (p. 11). They also note that recruitment into academia is frequently based on “senior teaching professionals from secondary education” (see Deem & Lucas, 2007), giving an “ageing” demographic profile to education research staff members, 50% of whom are over 50 years old (p. 86). Nearly 25% of those entering academia as education academics in 2003 were over 40 when they took their doctorate (p. 77). Whereas in research-focused disciplines, we “tend to have a younger age profile” (Mills et al., 2006, p. 8). Mills et al. conclude that such challenges confronting education research capacity indicate “the need to promote dialogue and knowledge transfer …” (2006, p. 44).

Of academia, Bourdieu (1988, p. 14) notes it is a field of struggle like any other field, and that “the locus of struggle is to determine the conditions and the criteria of legitimate membership and legitimate hierarchy, that is, to determine which properties are pertinent, effective, and liable to function as capital”. One informant recognised his habitus was enabled by affiliation with Johns Hopkins, a prestigious research-driven institution: he claimed “it opened doors for me”. In this vein, as argued by Smith (2012), the repositioning of education research through the RAE interrupted a previous logic of professional practice. The new social space of the university aiming for national and international research esteem meant that two differently acquired forms of capital confronted one another, as Deem and Lucus (2007) tacitly revealed. If we see the state’s RAE as an external hierarchically dominant force representing a traditional disciplinary field of academia and enabling of social closure, then this helps to account for the comparatively weak outcomes for education research described.

The rules of the academic research game remained the same for social anthropology, but the logic of the field of education research was redrawn by national research rating exercises (Smith, 2012). Whether or not the fresh trend away from the professional field of education will produce higher-quality research outcomes is something that the coming Research Excellence Framework may adjudicate upon. A virtue of Bourdieu’s theoretical conception of capital is that it challenges a notion of research capacity as a hallowed esoteric expertise, without reducing it to a set of technically acquired generic competences or skills. The deconstruction of research capacity into forms of symbolic capital, in making transparent the acquisition of social scientific expertise, eases knowledge transfer from social anthropology to education and other disciplinary fields. Education research as a field can benefit from listening to the voices of the eminently credible informants, whose participation in this study has afforded insights into what they understand to have been constitutive of their expertise.

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Notes on contributor
Chris Holligan holds a personal chair in Education Research, and the professor’s research interests span research cultures in higher education, French theory, cultural consumption and social class mobility.

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