



Working with First in Family Students

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NERUPI WORKSHOP 3RD APRIL 2025

Session outline

1. OfS Equality of Opportunity Risk Register inclusion of First in Family Students
2. Who are First in Family Students?
3. Inequality of Access for FiF students (*Schooling Inequality Project*)
4. Working with Bourdieu
5. Inequality of Experience for FiF students (*Paired Peers Project*)
7. Audience Discussion

OfS Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR)

First in Family Students

Risk 1 →

Risk 2 →

Risk 4 →

Risk 6 →

Risk 7 →

Risk 10 →

Risk 12 →

RF1: Knowledge and skills to be accepted onto suitable HE courses

RF2: Access to appropriate information and guidance to support informed HE decisions

RF4: Acceptance to some HE providers despite appropriate qualifications

RF6 & RF7: Insufficient academic and personal support

RF10: Cost pressures

RF12: Access to appropriate employment or further study

Risk 3: Perception of higher education

Students may not feel able to apply to higher education, or certain types of providers within higher education, despite being qualified.

Risk 8: Mental health

Students may not experience an environment that is conducive to good mental health and wellbeing.

Risk 11: Capacity issues

Students may not have equal opportunity to access limited resources related to higher education, such as suitable accommodation.

Risk 5: Limited choice of course type and delivery mode

Students may not have equal opportunity to access a sufficiently wide variety of higher education course types.

Risk 9: Ongoing impacts of coronavirus

Students may be affected by the ongoing consequences of the coronavirus pandemic.

First in the Family Students Are...

1. Less likely to attend prestigious universities
2. More likely to drop out by second year of studies
3. Come from families with lower household income than peers with graduated parents

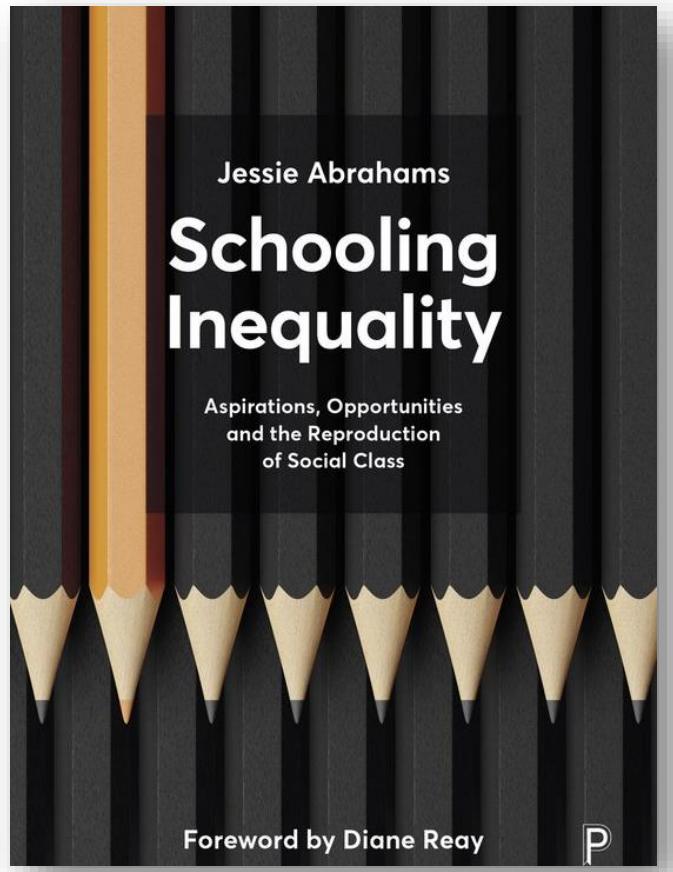
(Henderson, Shure, & Adamecz-Völgyi, 2020; Coombs, 2022)

HESA Data 2020/21

Adapted from: Table T2a - Participation of under-represented groups in higher education (HESA, 2025: online). All figures relate to UK domiciled undergraduates for the year 2020/21.

Total number entrants	Number no entrants with no previous HE	Total number of entrants at University of Bristol	Number with no previous HE at the University of Bristol	Total number of entrants at UWE Bristol	Number with no previous HE at UWE Bristol
426, 360	85,035 (roughly 20% of total students)	5,455	240 (4.3% of total UoB entrants)	6,580	1,175 (18% of total UWE Bristol entrants)

Inequality of Access (to elite HEIs)



	Grand Hill	Einstein High	Eagles Academy
% Mothers have HE	74	70	9
Total count (n=100%)	247	317	204
% Fathers have HE	75	75	12
Total count (n=100%)	240	295	152

(Adapted from tables 2.2 and 2.3, Abrahams, 2024, p30)

A Levels

When we were choosing our choices, they were like “try and get a science in there”, so I chose Biology’

(Phoebe, Year 11, Grand Hill)

Grand Hill Grammar		Einstein High		Eagles Academy			
Pupils select any combination from list		Pupils select any combination from list		Pupils select one subject per block			
		Block 1	Block 2	Block 3	Block 4		
Art: Fine Art	Art: Fine Art						
Art: Theatre Design	Art & Design: Photography	Art & Design	Photography	Biology	Textiles		
Biology	Art & Design: Textiles						
Business Studies	Biology						
Classical Civilisation	Business Studies						
Chemistry	Classical Civilisation						
Computing	Chemistry	Computing	Chemistry				
Critical Thinking	Computing						
Dance	Dance						
DT: Product design	DT: Product design						
DT: Systems and Control							
Theatre Studies	Drama & Theatre Studies	Drama	English				
Economics	Economics						
English Language	English Language						
English Literature	English Literature						
French	English Lit & Lang						
Geography	Film Studies						
German	Food Technology	French	Geography				
Greek	French						
History: Medieval & Early Modern	Geography						
History: American & Modern World	German						
IT	Government & Politics	History					
Latin	History: Ancient						
Mathematics	History: 20th Century						
Further Mathematics		IT		Technology			
Music			Mathematics				
Sports Studies	Mathematics			Media			
Physics	Further Mathematics			Music			
Psychology	Media Studies				PE		
Religious Studies	Music				Physics		
Russian	Music Technology					RE & Philosophy	
Spanish	Physical Education						
	Physics						
	Psychology						
	Religious Studies						
	Spanish		Spanish				
		Sociology		Sociology			
			(6)	(5)	(5)	(6)	
				Total (22)			
Total (32)		Total (35)					

(Abrahams, 2024, p87-88)

Holly ...you get four columns and you could only do one in each column and it's either Computing, no IT Applied BTEC but then I wouldn't be able to do Photography and I really wanted to do Photography so I had to do Computing

Jessie Ok and what about Business why did you choose that?

Holly Because there was nothing else in that column that I wanted to do

(Year 11, Eagles Academy)

Key Findings

See also Abrahams, J. (2018) 'Option Blocks that Block Options: Exploring inequalities in GCSE and A Level options in England'. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 39(8): 1143-1159.

First in the Family students may face inequalities in access to university (esp. elite universities) depending upon which school they attended, due to factors such as:

1. Subject offerings (inc. facilitating subjects) and timetable option blocking systems
2. Understanding and emphasis on 'the package' and 'keeping the options open'
3. Careers advisor practices (inc. use of informed choices document)
4. Alumni events and work experiences opportunities
5. Proximity to university (physical and social)

This is related to structural factors (position in the field, resources and institutional knowledge and connections, see Bourdieu)

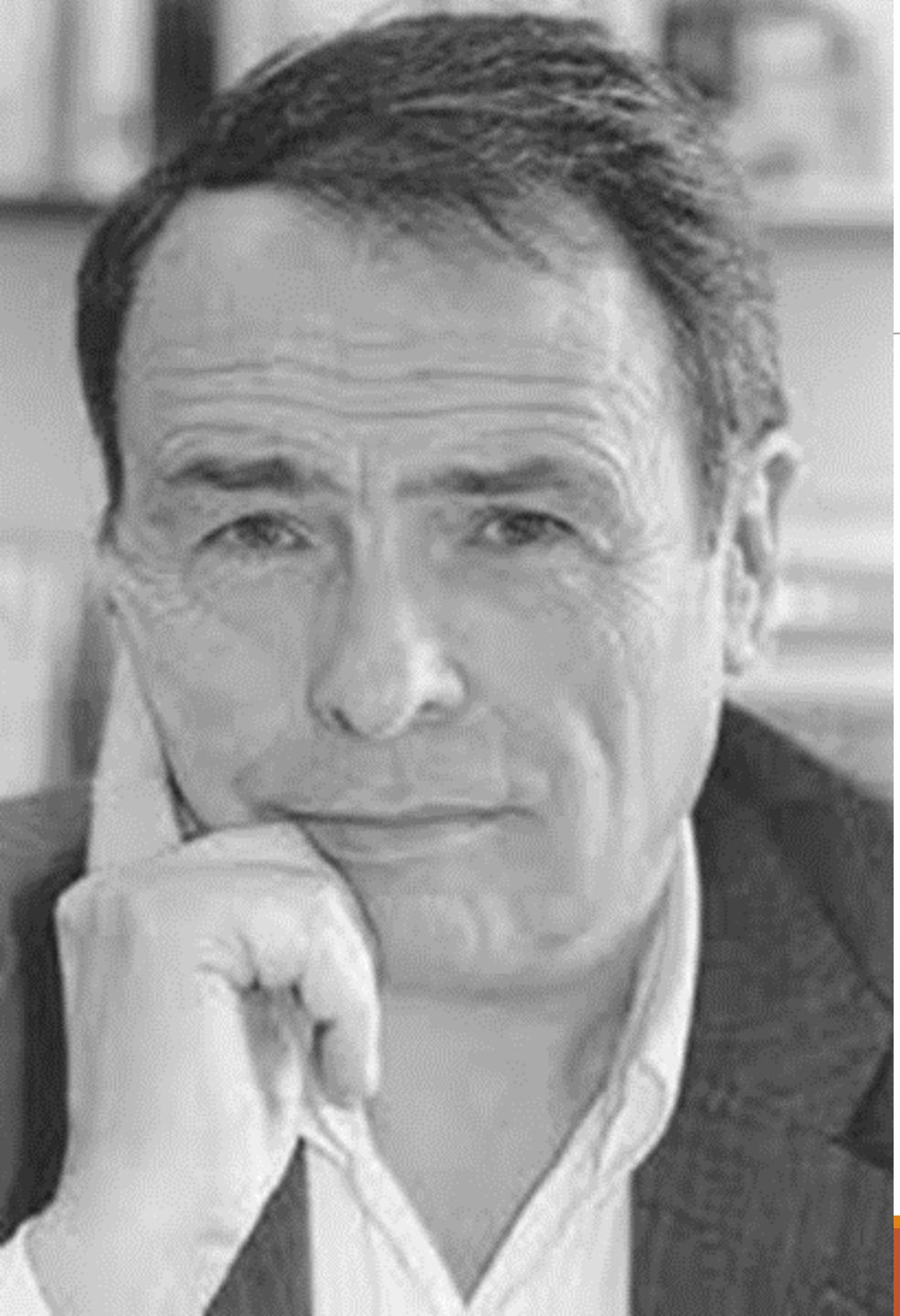
OfS Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR) . Risk Factor 1: Knowledge and skills and Risk Factor 2: Information and guidance

AND- OfS Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR). Risk Factor 3: Perceptions of HE and Risk Factor 5: Limited choice

Key Recommendations

We need a new way of responding to inequality of access to (elite) HE. Widening Participation (WP) initiatives contribute but do not address the underlying issues.

1. End timetable blocking systems or ALL schools must operate with blocking systems
2. Contextualised admissions to include **subjects** as well as grades.
3. WP outreach initiatives to look beyond pupils who 'tick the right boxes' (behaviour and grades)
4. Move WP outreach work out of schools and into communities

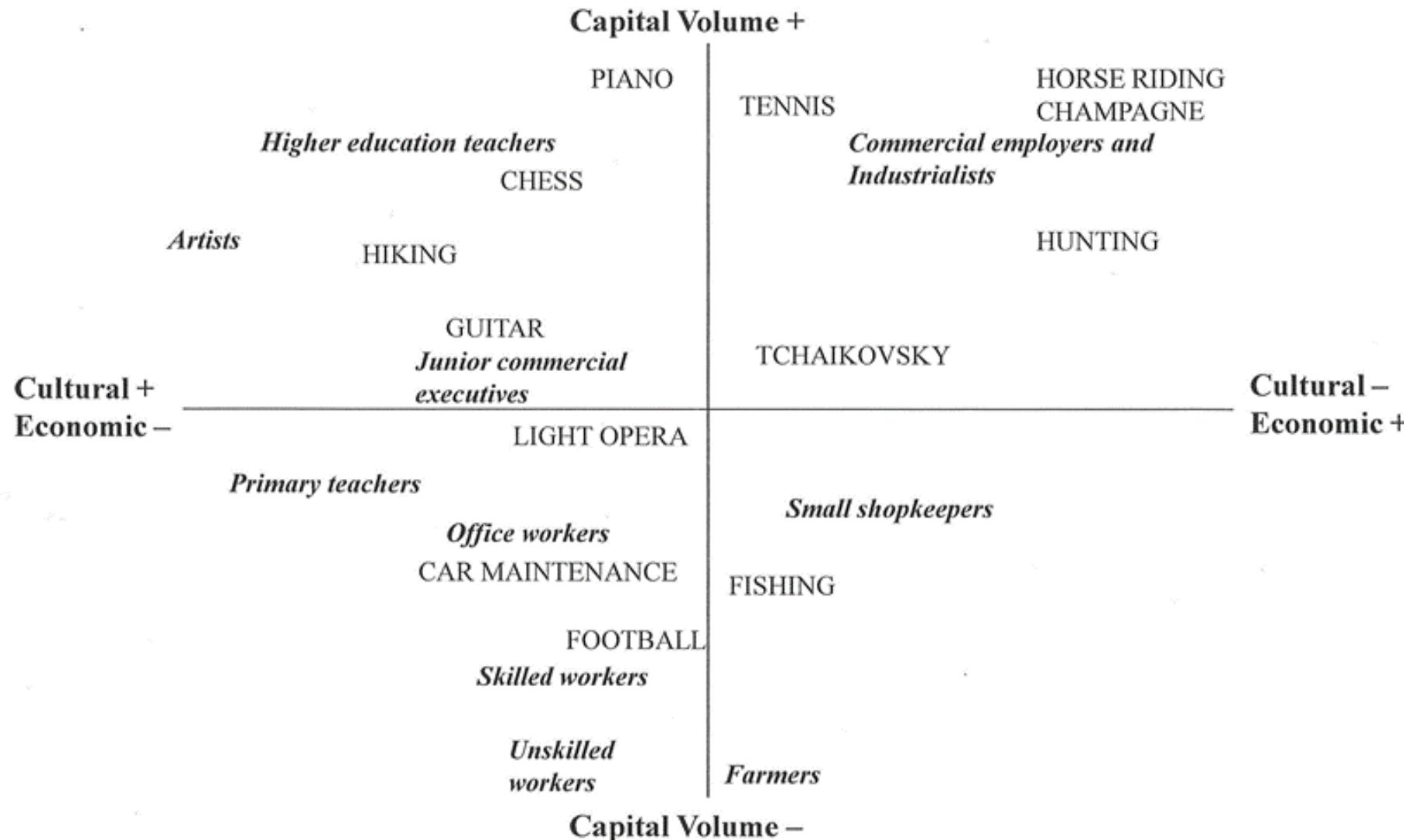


Responding to OfS 'Risk Factors' effectively and sensitively

Principles applied from Bourdieu's theory of Power (Economic, Cultural and Social Capital + Habitus and Field)

1. First Generation students are not 'lacking' intellectually or culturally, rather they are misrecognized as 'lacking'
2. First Generation students may feel 'out of place' in elite institutions due to a mismatch between habitus and field (structure determines which tastes, practices and dispositions are recognized and valued)

The Social and Symbolic Spaces



The NERUPI Framework

SOCIAL & ACADEMIC CAPITAL		HABITUS	SKILLS CAPITAL	INTELLECTUAL & SUBJECT CAPITAL	ECONOMIC CAPITAL
PROGRESSION CURRICULUM		STUDENT IDENTITIES	SKILLS CURRICULUM	KNOWLEDGE CURRICULUM	ECONOMIC RESOURCES CURRICULUM
KNOW	CHOOSE	BECOME	PRACTISE	UNDERSTAND	SUSTAIN
Develop students' knowledge & awareness of the benefits of higher education & graduate employment	Develop students' capacity to navigate Higher Education sector & make informed choices	Develop students' confidence & resilience to negotiate the challenges of university life	Develop students' study skills & capacity for academic attainment	Develop students' understanding by contextualising subject knowledge	Develop students' capacity for critically informed financial decision making & managing financial resources



(see Hayton and Bengry-Howell, 2016 and <https://www.nerupi.co.uk/>)

Habitus: Fish in Water

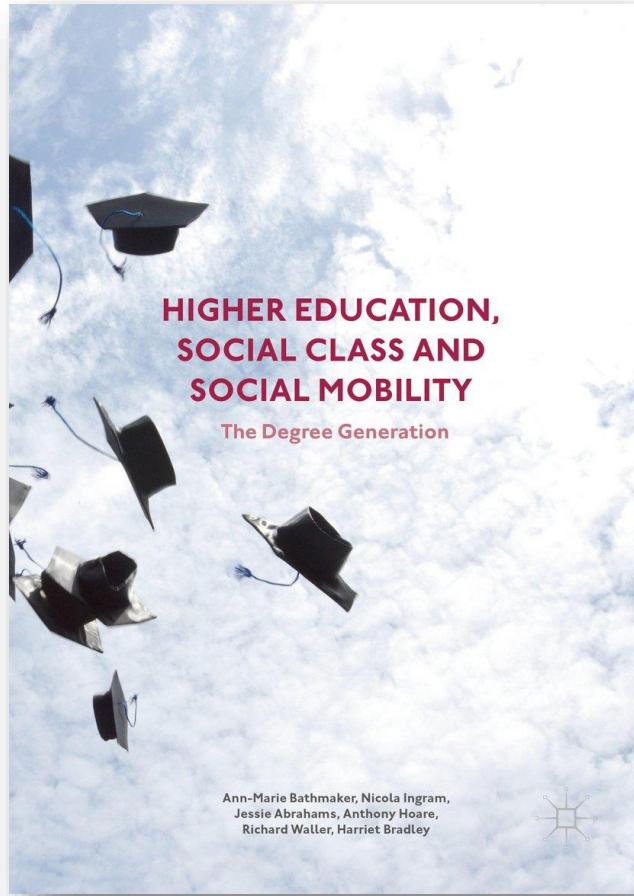


‘When habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like ‘a fish in water’: it does not feel the weight of the water and it takes the world about itself for granted’

(Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p127)

Inequality of Experience

Bathmaker, A. M., Ingram, N. & Waller, R. (2013)
'Higher education, social class and the mobilisation of capitals: recognising and playing the game', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 34:5-6, 723-743



Samantha, Working-Class (First in Family), Geography Student, University of Bristol

Samantha: I feel the division of people, and I shouldn't, but I do. But it just makes life a bit more difficult.

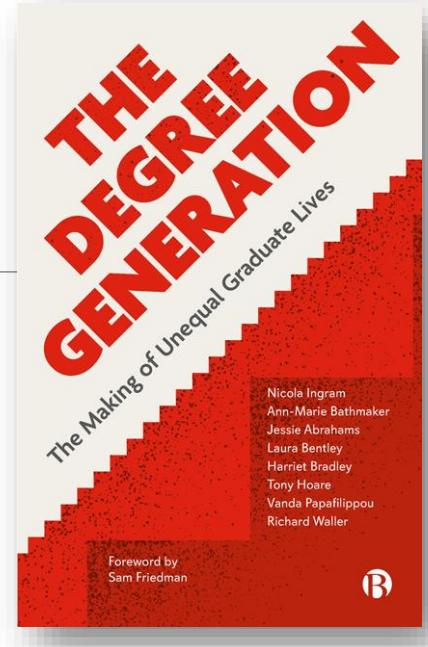
Interviewer: You say you feel the division.

Samantha: Mmm, like codes of social conduct sort of thing. Like I just wouldn't speak to certain people, and certain people just wouldn't speak to me. It's kind of like at school when you have the 'populars' and the 'geeks' and they don't converse; they are two separate groups. It's kind of like the same thing. I think that's how it feels sometimes

(Bathmaker et al., 2016, p75)

Key Findings

1. WC (FiF) students less access to symbolically recognized forms of Capitals.
 - Economic Capital - additional financial pressures, paid work vs unpaid internships and work experience; Cultural Capital - extra curricular activites (see also Ingram, Abrahams and Bathmaker, 2018); Social Capital – networking (see also Abrahams, 2017)
2. WC students at UoB felt like ‘fish out of water’, habitus encountering unfamiliar field.
 - Cultural and Social Capital – challenges fitting in, socializing, understanding the assumed cultural knowledge and rules of the game, accommodation inequality.



OfS Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR). Risk Factor 10: Cost pressure and Risk Factor 12: Progression from HE

AND- OfS Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR). Risk Factor 8: Mental Health and Risk Factor 11: Capacity Issues

Key Recommendations



More social support for FiF students through for example FIF networks (and including staff and alumni within them)



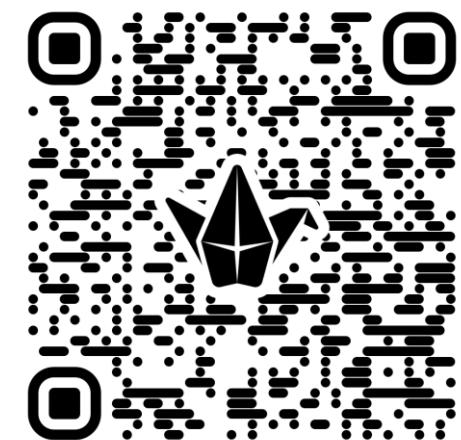
FiF access funds to support unpaid internship opportunities



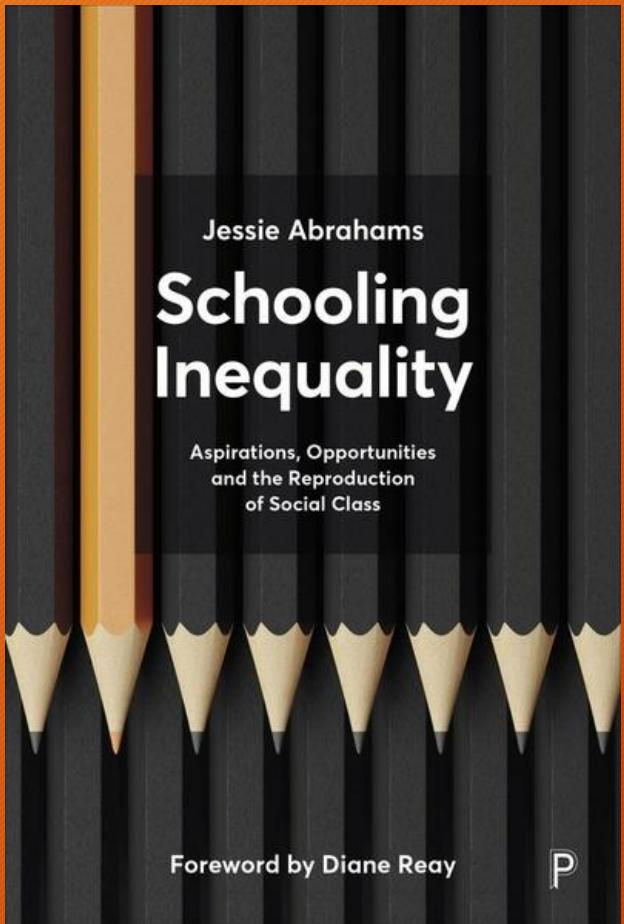
Shift in the field is needed, rather than seeing FiF students as in deficit and needing to becoming more 'middle class', we must reflect on our practices and strip back assumed knowledge and cultural norms that are arbitrary

Discussion with Padlet

1. What can you do in your practice to respond to the issues raised?
2. What has struck you as particularly important or moving so far?
3. Do you recognize the issues discussed in this presentation in your work?



Schooling Inequality

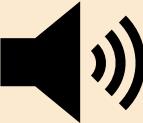


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Listen to Transforming Society [Podcast Interview](#) with Dr Abrahams about Schooling Inequality



For more information about the book or to purchase a copy, [follow this link](#)



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