**Title**

Tensions in Teaching Character: How the ‘entrepreneurial character’ is reproduced, ‘refused’ and negotiated in an English Academy School

**Abstract**

This paper examines ‘character education’ in a school setting. It does so by drawing on ethnographic data collected at Milltown Community Academy, a secondary school in northern England. In this piece I focus on how character education at Milltown materialises and is enacted within the sites and everyday practices of schooling. By analysing the practices of teachers at the school, I show how on one hand the character initiative is embedded and complied with, but on the other hand teachers’ practice is also littered with instances of ‘refusal’ and non-compliance. Through recent reforms Milltown Academy now houses an ‘entrepreneurship specialism’. At the school ‘entrepreneurship’ is embedded in the school’s core ethos and curriculum, and as part of this, the ‘entrepreneurial character’ is sold as necessary and progressive and is regularly deployed in narratives of attachment to and detachment from success and failure respectively. Therefore I make claims that not only is a character agenda at place in the school, but an ‘entrepreneurial character’ initiative. The analysis in this paper is foregrounded in the idea that the Academy’s attempts to instil an ‘entrepreneurial character’ are part of a problematic policy complex that reproduces class based inequalities I argue however that those tasked with ‘teaching entrepreneurial character’ are indeed part of the process of the socio-cultural reproduction of inequality and dominance, but importantly, they also engage in plural and contradictory practices when it comes to putting the agenda into action.

**Key Words:** Character education, Academies, Entrepreneurship, Inequality,

Social Class, Domination, Resistance, Struggle, Refusal, Mundane non-compliance

**Introduction**

In 2014 the then Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government released a press statement claiming that England was to “become a global leader of teaching character” (Department for Education 2014). The proposed Character Programme was to be given a £3.5 million investment for schools in England to promote and operationalise an explicit ‘character education’ agenda. A further £1 million was also to be spent on researching the “most effective” ways to teach character. Although the statement did not include a clear definition of what constitutes good or effective character teaching, examples were given of schools who had already been identified as having “existing character efforts”, and within this the virtues of “self-control, humour and charity” and “resilience and grit” were noted (*ibid).* During this announcement the former Secretary of State for Education, Nicky Morgan, claimed that such an education in ‘character’ is as “equally” as important as gaining good grades in schooling (*ibid).*

This speech came as I was in the process of writing up my PhD thesis, for which I had just completed ten months’ worth of ethnographic fieldwork within and outside Milltown Community Academy1. The Academy opened its doors in 2008. Prior to this, it had been known as Milltown High, a ‘failing’ secondary school. Converted to Academy status under New Labour reforms, Milltown Academy gained sponsorship from a leading educational foundation that saw the ‘entrepreneurship specialism’ embedded. In the Academy, entrepreneurship underpins all aspects of school life. It is seen not as just good business sense but a set of socio-cultural traits and behaviours that should be learned, harnessed and instilled in pupils. This includes a reward system that sees traits such as ‘determination’, ‘passion’, ‘risk taking’ and ‘creativity’ as central components to building the ideal entrepreneurial student. In the words of the Academy sponsor, ‘entrepreneurship’ is a ‘way of life’, it is something to *do*, and is something to *be* (Academy Sponsorship founder, national newspaper article, 2011, emphasis added).

Following the trajectory of the Character Programme from the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition into the Conservative led government preceding the June 2017 election; Nicky Morgan went on to say of the scheme:

Character is about being self-aware, playing an active role within communities. It’s about selflessness and self-discipline as well as playing a full role in society (Morgan 2016).

There are strong similarities between the entrepreneurial initiative at Milltown and the Character Programme. Not only were ‘entrepreneurial traits’ such as determination and passion reflected in the Character programme’s calls for self-control, resilience and grit, official Academy documentation explicitly states that:

An entrepreneurial education instils good character and does so through building entrepreneurial, self-reliant and socially responsible citizens (Milltown Community Academy website and promotional brochure).

Although by October 2017 the Character initiative was decommissioned (see Bull and Allen, 2018 for further details of on-going character schemes), the entrepreneurial agenda at Milltown remains. While the entrepreneurial agenda in the Academy was not specifically framed or funded through the Character Programme, this article is predicated on the idea that there are embedded qualities of the character agenda through entrepreneurship that compliment and reinforce each other in an on-going context of neo-liberal educational policy reform and governance. Just as the character initiative sought out how to do character education better, the same instrumentalism can be seen in the still existent entrepreneurship agenda at Milltown.

This article is an interrogation of the entrepreneurship-character initiative at Milltown Academy and offers an analysis concerned with the (re)production of systems of class based inequality within and through education. Generally it draws on a rich history of work in the sociology of education which has criticised educational interventions that are built on the assumption of a ‘deficit’ in the culture and psyche of individuals, rather than locating problems in structural or material factors (Reay, 2012, 2017; Kulz, 2014; Abrahams, 2017; Gill and Orgad, 2018). It also speaks through literature that extends these arguments to issues of both character education (Bull and Allen, 2018; Burman 2018) and entrepreneurship education (Morrin, 2015). To push debates forward however, the first half of the paper is a theoretical discussion which maps out some of the current theoretical paradigms in education research, including Bourdieusian, Foucauldian and de Certeauian framings. In particular I unpack the different way these three theorists have conceptualised power, in order to inform their theories of practice. This includes discussion of theories of dominance and reproduction (Bourdieu 1977; 1986), governance, (see Foucault 1977; 1991), ‘resistance’ (Willis, 1976; Giroux, 1988; Reay, 2017), ‘refusal’ (Ball and Omeldo 2013; Ball 2016) and ‘making do’ (de Certeau, 1984). I highlight some of the tensions between these theories and claim that working with these tensions provides a generative conceptual framework for my analysis of entrepreneurial character at Milltown Academy.

To put this conceptual frame to work, the empirical focus of this paper has two dimensions. Firstly I analyse how the Academy’s ‘official’ documentation states the ‘entrepreneurial character’ should be taught. Secondly I explore the everyday pedagogical practices and narrative interpretations of this entrepreneurial character agenda, by teachers at the Academy. I argue that those tasked with ‘teaching entrepreneurial character’ are indeed part of the process of the socio-cultural reproduction of inequality and dominance, but importantly, they also engage in plural and contradictory practices when it comes to putting the agenda into action. Linking this back to my conceptual concerns, I argue that by working with and through the tensions between these different sets of theories enables a nuanced, rigorous and comprehensive way to consider how teachers can be simultaneously complicit and ‘make do’ *and ‘*refuse’ powerful structures of dominance.

**(In)Surmountable Tensions: Theories of power and (possible) resistance**

Since Willis’ (1976) seminal work, *Learning to Labor: how working class kids get working class jobs*, UK based educational ethnography has been in the main, “orientated towards the exploration and documentation of ‘resistance’ and interplay of domination and struggle” (Ball 1994: 3). This article follows this tradition. I first document some of the dominant Bourdieusian, Foucauldian and de Certeauian framings found in education research today. I do so to highlight the differences or tensions between each. I examine how these different theorists conceptualise power, and leave room for the consideration of ‘resistance’. I then move on to work with these tensions as a conceptual framework for my analysis of the entrepreneurial character scheme at Milltown Academy.

When considering classed based ‘domination’ in UK education scholarship, the works of Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault have gained much purchase over the past three decades. From their earlier writings on concepts such as misrecognition, symbolic domination and violence (see Bourdieu 1977; 1986), and notions of discipline and governmentality (see Foucault 1977; 1991), a significant tranche of British sociology has since used, and developed these concepts to understand class based inequality in education, including readings of ‘race’ and gender (see Reay 2009; Kulz 2014; Abrahams 2017; Wilkins 2016; Ball 2017).

Further scholarship has focused attention on concepts of ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu 1977; 1984) and ‘subjectivities’ (Foucault 1997; 2000) in order to understand how individuals contend with domination in education. Where habitus is a centralised and relational “system of internalized structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action” (Bourdieu, 1977: 86), there is no such centrality in subjectivity which is “neither simply the domination of a subject nor its production”, it is always both “but designates a certain kind of restriction in production” (*ibid*: 84). While the concepts differ here they both are conceived as sites of ‘struggle’. In Bourdieu’s work (1984) he accounts for the internal struggles that working-class individuals face in finding value and defending themselves against (middle-class) classification and judgment. On the other hand, Foucault noted that subjectivities are sites of “‘struggle’ against the processes implemented for conducting others” (Foucault 2007: 201). Alongside this, there has also been a rise in works that consider the dialectic thinking, agentic qualities and generative aspects of Bourdieu and Foucault’s work (for Bourdieu see: McNay 1999; Reay 2009; Ingram 2011; Morrin 2015 and for Foucault see: Ball and Omeldo 2013; Ball 2016). For example, Ball (2016) has suggested that by looking to sites of subjectivity there is potential to locate reflexive struggle:

in neoliberal economies, sites of government and points of contact are also sites for the possibility of refusal…the starting point for a politics of refusal is the site of subjectivity. It is a struggle over and against what it is we have become, what it is that we do not want to be (Ball 2016: 15).

Ball here argues that Foucault provides an account of possible refusal, or revolt, where there is a “point of contact” between self and power.

Nonetheless, these accounts have regularly been accused of underplaying or under-theorising how individuals are reflexive and move against domination in their everyday lives (Willis 1976; de Certeau 1984; Sayer 2005; Skeggs 2011). Although said of Bourdieu’s earlier writings, Willis went as far as to suggest Bourdieusian scholarship especially as having “no theoretical basis for a politics of change” (Willis 1983: 121). In a critique of both Foucault and Bourdieu, de Certeau (1988) argues that both have been so focused on analysing how the dominant order is produced that they have simply failed to recognise the ‘tactical’ non-conformist everyday practices which they think have been repressed (and which he thinks are irrepressible):

It is in any case impossible to reduce the functioning of society to a dominant type of procedures…beneath what one might call the “monotheistic” privilege that panoptic apparatuses have won for themselves, a “*polytheism*” *of scattered practices survives* (de Certeau 1988: 48, emphasis in original)

Whereas Foucault and Bourdieu are concerned with the ‘right’, ‘correct’ (or proper) order of ‘things and dispositions’, here de Certeau’s pragmatic theories of the everyday are interested simply in 'ways of speaking', 'ways of operating' and how individuals ‘make do’ in their everyday circumstances (de Certeau 1984: 39).

As the above work suggests, in current educational research there is not much ‘pure’ resistance to be found. As this article is concerned with the role of teachers in education the focus here will be on the capacity of those educating to ‘resist’. Incorporating the emancipatory framework of Paulo Freire (1970), Giroux (1988) claims teachers must understand the language, experience, and cultural forms of their students in order to reconstruct pedagogical practices to emancipatory ends. In this way Giroux considers ‘resistance’ as an ‘alternative’ form of education, with different utopian goals. He claimed that it is possible for radical educators (teachers who believe in emancipatory education) to engage in a ‘pedagogy for the opposition’ (Giroux 1988) which can challenge process of reproduction.

I acknowledge here however the concerns of scholars such as Walker (1986), James (2015) and Reay (2017) who argued that much educational research which has claimed to discover or bring about ‘resistance’ has in fact overstated what such ‘resistance’ can achieve, and romanticised what it means to be resistant for certain marginalised groups. Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) claim that the new material realities of capitalism are capable of incorporating previous critique, and this includes some of the moral and ethical questions put to previous educational agendas that have been shown to produce and reproduce socially unjust systems. This of course brings about questions as to what resistance is? What is being resisted? And where might we find resistance, if at all? Are individuals resisting the structural constraints of neoliberal agendas? Or can we only find dominance in these neoliberal times? Moreover, is it the case that as de Certeau suggests ‘resistance’ is just ‘making do’, or as I propose later in the article to be found in the mundane non-compliances of everyday school life? Given these concerns, I therefore approach the issue of ‘resistance’ tentatively but do not erase it entirely, for although there might not be much ‘resistance’ about I do not want to foreclose the idea that it could come about.

Moving forward, the conceptual framework of this article is as follows. I do not intend to say whether for example ‘Bourdieu was right’, or ask ‘what would Foucault make of it all?’ or even ‘Would de Certeau agree?’ Rather my framework is in the different paradigmatic assertions between these theories and conceptual work. What I call ‘tensions’ here refer mainly to the different ways in which these three theorists conceptualise of how power operates, in order to inform their theories of practice. Without misunderstanding the generative aspects of both Bourdieu and Foucault’s conceptualisations of power (and practice) the ‘tensions’ I work with in this article are as follows:

1. Power as settled, ‘top down’ and as a resource.
2. Power as unsettled, circulatory and productive.
3. Power as ‘bottom up’ and pragmatically realised.

This leaves me with a complex web of in some ways insurmountable theoretical and conceptual tensions, but I suggest that this very tension is useful in explaining just how and why educational inequality persists, *and* resistance might potentially come about. I want to move away from the ‘sociological thinking’ Bauman and May outline (2001) which seeks to:

… put the propositions they [sociologists] make about the facts in a form in which they can be clearly, and unambiguously understood and tested against evidence. In doing so they seek to pre-empt or eliminate contradictions between propositions in order that no two propositions can be true at the same time (Bauman and May, 2001: 4).

I suggest that it is within the very tensions between these theories that I find an important site for analysis, as it opens up a space to constantly read an environment for complexity, contradiction, dominance, ‘struggle’ and ‘resistance’, even within the same subject. Overall I argue that it is necessary to bring together this seemingly eclectic mix of theories in order to more fully understand the impacts of the entrepreneurial initiatives at Milltown Community Academy. For while such initiatives are part of a system that reproduces socio-cultural inequality in education, it is also necessary to account for the multiple and complex ways in which individuals navigate their way through the Academy in their everyday lives: ways which sometimes step outside, fail to recognise, or even refuse (in part) the dominant order in which they are situated.

It is acknowledged that the question of intentionality underlies all questions of domination, ‘struggle’ and ‘resistance’. That said the emphasis of analysis in this article is placed on explaining *how* the initiative is framed officially and is in practice, and not necessarily *why* things are as they are at Milltown Community Academy. For the rest of this article I operationalise the tensions outlined above to examine how the initiative was constructed interpreted and enacted by staff within the Academy. Before doing so I briefly outline the study and its methods.

**Ethnographic Tales: Methods and mapping ‘middling’ power**

I conducted ethnographic research within and outside Milltown Community Academy from 2013-2014. As well as everyday observations and conversations I also conducted 40 individual interviews and 5 mixed focus groups with students, teachers, other staff members and parents at the academy. I engaged in extensive participant observations in lessons, assemblies and at school events, and I conducted content and discourse analysis of the Academy building, official documentation and publications. Although drawing on interpretations based on this much wider set of data, this article focuses on ‘official’ Academy documentation, publications and brochures, and my interactions with teaching staff at Milltown. This includes formal interviews with 8 teachers, multiple and extended informal conversations with a further 13 members of teaching staff, and observations and participants observations of formal taught lessons.

I acknowledge here that although teachers in Milltown Academy are the central force in rehearsing and practicing the school’s entrepreneurial initiatives, it must be noted that the question of the role and power of teachers in school is a complex one. As Ball (2017: 14) puts well, “The definition of ‘official knowledge’ is also again a site of struggle to both prescribe and ‘free’ teachers judgement at the same time”. For the purpose of clarity, the teachers I interviewed had varying positions in the school, some of which involved managerial roles including Heads of Department (2) and Subject Leads (3). As well as this, there has been a notable ‘intensification’ and complexity of teaching workloads (Apple and Teitelbum 1986; Easthope and Easthope 2000) and teachers bring with them their own personal marginalisations and privileges of gender, ‘race’ and class which help to shape their abilities to be autonomous in their teaching practices. That said, for the purposes of this paper I am focusing on documenting what teachers are doing in their everyday interpretations and practice of the entrepreneurial character agenda at Milltown. I am not questioning why these practices might come about. In this way this piece is a class-based analysis centered on the idea that ‘teaching character’ in any way in the school will at least in part reproduce class-based inequality. Overall I suggest that teachers have some sort of ‘middling’ power in the school setting. In principle, they hold less power than decisions making managerial teams or sponsors, but more power than students at the school.

**Official Accounts: The rise and rise of the entrepreneurial character**

In every classroom at Milltown Community Academy there are a set of six standardised posters. On each of these posters is one of the following words: determination, passion, creativity, risk taking, problem solving or team work. These posters are put in place as part of the Academy’s ‘Badges of Entrepreneurship’ scheme, the foundational entrepreneurial initiative at the Academy. This scheme is built on the assumption that ‘successful entrepreneurs’ embody common characteristics that can be nurtured over time to ‘unlock the full potential’ of students (Milltown Community Academy Entrepreneurship faculty brochure). The scheme shows the school’s commitment to the idea that a set of pre-defined behavioural and character-based qualities are a necessary and progressive endeavor of education.

The omnipresence of Badges of Entrepreneurship scheme through posters around the Academy calls on students to continually reflect on their ‘entrepreneurial capabilities’. To show determination students are expected to ‘move towards a goal and be resilient to difficulties along the way’. To win a badge for passion one must show ‘high energy levels, self-belief and a desire to succeed’, for example2. Once a student is identified as displaying one of these entrepreneurial characteristics, they are given a slip of paper, or a piece of ‘entrepreneurial currency’ in the Academy terminology. These slips are stored in an ‘entrepreneurial account’ throughout the year and the students with the highest deposits are awarded a physical Badge of Entrepreneurship, with the relevant entrepreneurial attribute marked on it. The highest achieving students can also receive additional ‘rewards’, including trips to London to meet the Academy sponsors.

In developing these entrepreneurial characteristics, the Academy claims students can develop their own ‘entrepreneurial mindset’, which they see as a ‘mindset that strives to take action, solve problems, and reject the status quo’ (Milltown Community Academy sixth form brochure). The ‘status quo’ is positioned here by the Academy as a past of educational failure of both the school before its conversion to Academy status, and is linked to the idea that this past failure can be attributed to a ‘culture of low or no aspirations’ in its pupils (Milltown Community Academy website). Finally, it is through the development of such a mindset that students can ‘realise their potential’ and be ‘successful’ in their education and working life (Academy sponsor website).

The Badge scheme is problematic for a number of reasons, many of which have been raised throughout this special issue (see Burman, 2018 and Gill and Orgad, 2018 in particular). Firstly the notion of the ‘enterprising’ or ‘entrepreneurial self’ have become embedded in our “basic presuppositions that … are embodied in the very language that we use to make persons thinkable and in our ideals as to what people should be” (Rose 1998: 151). The badge scheme reframes and recasts everyday words (such as determination, creativity, passion, teamwork, problem-solving and risk-taking) as inherently ‘entrepreneurial’, thus contributing to and continuing the process of naturalizing ‘the entrepreneur’ as an ideal neoliberal form of selfhood, and *the* legitimate form of personhood (Bourdieu 1992; Rose 1998; Harvey 2005; Hall and O’Shea 2014).

Secondly, the Badge initiative presumes participants have a prior deficit of the valued qualities (determination, passion, creativity, etc.) being promoted. The scheme then locates the ‘problem’ of educational under-attainment or ‘failure’ in the pathology of students, as notions of ‘success’ and failure are attached to an individual’s capacity or willingness to take on and develop ‘entrepreneurial mindsets’. Under these conditions, students who are not ‘successful’ are pathologised as ‘lacking’ the ‘right’ kind of (entrepreneurial) ‘mindset’ for success, and are locked into a moralising cycle in which blame is shifted to the individual for any future under-attainment or ‘failure’ (Bourdieu 1998; Skeggs and Wood 2012). The Badges of Entrepreneurship scheme in this way is a rebranded version of previous ‘cultural deficit models’ in education (Reay 2001; Archer et al 2003; Devine 2004).

Finally, and directly echoing concerns raised in Gill and Orgad’s (2018) piece in this special issue, this ‘entrepreneurial character’ agenda is disembodied in nature, and presume the cognitive capacities of a person are disconnected from other affective and material conditions (Kristjánsson 2010; Gilles 2011; Suissa 2013), for example, different access to resources (James, 2015). The Badge scheme has (self)disciplinary effects. In the initiative students are required to be resilient, self-reliant and to develop an ‘entrepreneurial mindset’. In doing so the Academy is also part a system that misrecognises or ignores the structural and historical formation of marginalised identities and the subsequent unequal material conditions, structures and resources afforded to different students. In this way the Badge scheme is guilty of “a denial of working class experience” (Reay and Ball 1997:90), inclusive of those marginalised by race, gender or disability.

Both the empirical and theoretical traditions that have called out such a reproductive and unjust agenda have problematised these longstanding assumptions on both entrepreneurship and character (see also Macdonald and Coffield, 1991). Nonetheless these initiatives find themselves reformulated, reapplied, and reinvigorated in the Academy, where the:

the form and function of these moral character ideals in the continuation of unequal social relations across educational and workspaces, become obfuscated by a generalized celebration of learning, education and self-worth. (Gerrard 2014: 862)

**Plural Singularities: Teaching the entrepreneurial character**

So far I have considered how the Badges of Entrepreneurship scheme and Milltown Academy more generally are harnessing and incubating a ‘neoliberal imaginary’ (Ball 2012) in which the ‘entrepreneur’ or the ‘entrepreneurial character’ is sold as the ‘ideal Everyman’ [sic](Sennett 1998: 31). Here I turn to look beyond the official Academy documents, publications, poster sets and brochures to analyse how those tasked with ‘teaching entrepreneurial character’ do so. Bringing forward the conceptual tensions I discussed earlier in the article, I next show how in some way all teachers interviewed were implicated in reproducing problematic assumptions underlying the entrepreneurial character agenda, but this this is not straightforward nor settled in practice.

The six Badges of Entrepreneurship were on display in all classrooms in the Academy, without exception. No teacher had actively taken down the display. There were also no formal or en masse actions against the implementation of the scheme. All teachers I spoke to saw *some* value and purpose in the Badge scheme, although how much value and which elements they valued was varied. Entrepreneurship and Business teacher Rebecca, Business teacher Ann, and Graphics teacher Oscar placed a high value on the Badge scheme in both their interpretations of the agenda, and also their pedagogical practices, as is evident in the following quotations from their interviews:

We teach them it’s kind of, it’s kind of like a way they should go through life… If you take on the different behaviors within entrepreneurship, ‘cos it’s not just one thing, most people think it’s just about setting up your own business but it’s also about learning to say, be passionate, *and* understanding the market you’re trying to break in to, and you’ll be set on that path. It’s partly to do with the kind of kids we get through these doors, a lot of the time they struggle to think about what’s next? They say to me ‘Miss how do I get this job?’ but there’s no real conception of what a job is, any job, like the basic skills of any job. So really it’s about taking responsibility so they’re ready for the big wide world (Rebecca).

The ethos of the school is anything is doable, so we’ve got entrepreneurship, now that's available to everyone you've just got to do it, you've got to be determined, that’s why I think the opportunities are far better now (Ann).

This way we have the Entrepreneurship model that can be applied to school life, professional life, I’d even say home life myself…I apply it to all my teaching, I make sure I make it relevant to the students learning and this way everyone has a choice, they can take it on and be successful and we can show them how to do that, or they can choose not to, it’s up to them (Oscar).

I also saw these interpretations realised in practice during an observations of both Rebecca’s and Oscar’s lessons. Both teachers worked to incorporate as much of the Badge scheme into their lessons as possible. At each turn they would reinforce that a task being undertake was linked to the badge of ‘determination’, or ‘creativity’, for example. They also constantly reminded their students that these characteristics were positive, useful and necessary for the success of each task. Oscar took this a step further in his lesson, as he also related the Badge scheme to working life, embedding the ‘professionalising’ qualities of the scheme as he taught.

In these responses, the overarching messages of entrepreneurship, and the underlying messages of pathology and individualism found in the Badges of Entrepreneurship scheme, are echoed. They are heard through narratives of responsibility, choice and opportunity. Not ignoring the fact that the legitimacy of two of these teachers’ taught subjects are bound up in the entrepreneurial agenda (Entrepreneurship and Business studies), the assumptions underlying these responses are embedded with ‘settled’ notions that the Badge scheme is a necessary and progressive intervention for pupils at Milltown. Here there are clear forms of ‘misrecognition’ and old cultural deficit models being played out and echoed in their accounts (Reay 2009; James 2015).

Next I turn to two more accounts of the Badges scheme from Physical Education teacher, Kelly, and Fiona who teaches across the Humanities subjects. Similarly messages of responsiblisation are embedded in their accounts, however their responses are a little more ‘unsettled’ than the previous ones. To begin they told me:

There are so many different aspects to it [the Badges scheme], yeah, there’s the posters, but there’s so much more, there’s even a erm, leadership programmes we run through Entrepreneurship in our department, and it just gives them [students] something, you know, something extra, extra-curricular activities that make them stand out on a CV, but also just a project to focus on, it gives them something to focus on and a responsibility… (Kelly).

It’s a new way to think for them [students] rather than having nothing to focus on they can pinpoint what they’re doing on something specific… I think it’s good to let them have a bit of responsibility for themselves (Fiona).

When prompted for their more specific engagements with the Badge scheme however, Kelly and Fiona responded with somewhat alternative views on its most valuable or useful aspects. They said:

I think the best aspects of having entrepreneurship are the extra-curricular stuff that’s now available to the students, even to me! I’ve been able to do a course on leadership, students can do a ‘student version’, but I’ve been given so many more opportunities because we became an Academy and have the entrepreneurship programme. With the Badges yeah it’s good to be determined and work hard but I think you can do that anywhere (Kelly).

The Badges are useful for getting the students to think about what they are doing… but I’m not really one of these ‘entrepreneurship or nothing’ types, I don’t take it too literally (Fiona).

Although different, Kelly’s and Fiona’s responses do not entirely reflect the ‘official’ Academy message. Kelly’s interpretation that it is not in entrepreneurship *per se* that she finds most useful and rewards is still of course part of a wider message about the virtues of academisation and the entrepreneurship agenda, however her secondary engagement with the Badges scheme’s character based qualities specifically shows in part a non-compliance with reproducing the Academy’s official line. Fiona’s account is much more explicit in this non-conformity. Fiona went on to say “I didn’t think entrepreneurship was useful for every child, every child is different” confirming her position as not only non-conforming but in opposition to the Academy’s championing of ‘entrepreneurship for all’. I do not want to overstate what these teachers are doing here and place them in a category of overt ‘resistance’ or alternative practice. Nevertheless, as shown the official Academy line was not fully adhered to, agreed with or followed, and this everyday and ‘mundane non-compliance’ shows how some of the ‘official’ messages of the Badge scheme become ‘unsettled’ in practice.

Finally here I bring in the account of textiles teacher Lena. In her classroom, not only were the Badges of Entrepreneurship posters on display, but Lena had also sewn and hung up a line of bunting that spelled out the word ‘entrepreneurship’ across her classroom wall. When I asked her about the Badge scheme she told me.

I made that [points to bunting hung across the classroom] but I don’t really use it too much, I know I need to use it more. I think it’s just about pointing out to them [students] what they’re doing, when they’re doing it, make them a bit more aware that way. Then they can do if for themselves. If I think about it I don’t really fully understand what it’s all about (laughs), that [points to the bunting again] will have to do for now (Lena).

There are a number of complex negotiations taking place in Lena’s response. To begin, she is contributing to the omnipresence of the entrepreneurship agenda through her additional bunting display. Moreover her suggestion that she is aware she ‘should’ be using the Badge scheme ‘more’ could imply that she has not got an inherent problem with the initiative, and would in fact take on more tasks were it necessary. On the other hand she might actually have a problem with the initiative and is signaling her awareness of the expectation that all teachers should be actively engaged with pushing the entrepreneurial agenda, while at the same time she is not so vehemently against going along with it. She also considers the Badges in some way useful in keeping students focused and ‘aware’. Her lack of certainty however, around what the Badges scheme “is all about” and her lack of motivation to engage beyond material visualisations with the initiative shows how she is consistently inconsistent in her interactions with the scheme.

In some respects, the ‘official’ modes of the Badges of Entrepreneurship scheme is accepted and enacted. In other ways, these accounts from teachers are consistent in their ‘scatteredness’ (de Certeau 1988). Brought together they offer a plurality of single perspectives3 that in some instances settle with one another and the Academy’s ethos to reinforce it, in other ways ‘make do’ in the context of the scheme, but in some way push against the official narrative. As a result, how these teachers *think* and *do* the Badges of Entrepreneurship scheme is inherently unresolved; it is complex and contradictory. There might also be something to be said about the consequences of doing this ‘non-compliance’. Particularly in the case of Lena I was struck by both the resignation to and negotiation with the Badges of Entrepreneurship scheme. Although there might appear to be some ‘non-compliance’ in her lack of comprehensive engagement with the scheme, what did my questioning of her practices that bring to the surface? Her claims that she ‘should use it more’ present a subversion to the initiative but also highlight the affective intersections of negotiation brought about by my questioning of her entrepreneurial credentials and the possibility of the emotional costs of ‘resistance’ (Reay, 2004).

In the next and final section of this article I document the accounts of two more teachers, Janet and Alison, both of whom work in the Academy’s Creative Art Department. While I have not wanted to overstate the potential for resistance through the unresolved and non-compliant acts of teachers thus far, in what follows I consider what happens when some of those non-conformities are mobilised. As I go on to show, the Creative Art Department has carved a space in the Academy to operate very differently to all other departments, in ways that could be perceived as inherently against some of the entrepreneurial initiatives.

**Incorporative Capacitation: The Creative Art Department**

In interviews with Art and Photography teacher, Janet and Head of the Creative Art Department, Alison, our discussions on the Badges of Entrepreneurship were over in the matter of two short sentences, respectively. Janet told me “I don’t take much notice [of the Badge scheme], we’ve got our own good thing going in this department”. And Alison said, “we’re strategic in everything we do. We only use it as and when we need to show that we’ve done it”. In this final section I outline how the Creative Art Department operate in spite of, not through the Badges of Entrepreneurship scheme. Unlike other teachers’ responses discussed thus far, there is an active ‘refusal’ (Ball 2016) to engage fully with the Badge scheme from both Janet and Alison and as I go on to show, this is also reflected in their pedagogical practices.

The Creative Art Department is a series of classrooms like no others in the Academy. While these rooms have seating capacity, a good proportion of the rooms are open plan, leaving room for students to stand and move about. Desk tops and work surfaces are messy with unintentional paint and ink, and all the aprons hung up are stained. The walls and ceiling are littered with student art works, these pieces scattered across the room, and not placed in neat order around a given topic as you might usually find in a classroom. Taught lessons also work differently. From my observations and participant observations of Photography, Fine Art and general Art classes, movement and interaction around the room and between people is encouraged. The design of the classroom ‘space’ matched this pedagogical operation, similarly open and loosely confined. Although this kind of openness and visibility that could be considered as a post-panoptic design (Courtney, 2014), something I for the most part do not dispute, especially as an open, glass-walled style is present throughout the Academy’s building, and from my time at the Academy I saw has traditional (but I argue not totalising) disciplinary effects. There is something interesting that takes place when praxis and space are complimentary in this way. The very same openness that might have disciplinary forces might simultaneously have otherness (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999).

The content and form of taught lessons was also distinct. In one lesson I sat in, a compulsory lesson in Art for year 8 students, pupils engaged with the topic of protest. I use the word ‘engaged’ here purposefully. Students were given a basic social history of some protests and social movements, a whistle-stop tour of The Suffragette movement and Civil Rights in the US. They were then tasked for the rest of that lesson, and for their lessons over the next few weeks, to go and research a protest related topic that they felt was important to them. From this they were to make signs and banners, or anything they thought an appropriate facet of material culture to represent their chosen protest subject. During that lesson Alison told me:

Everyone has some injustice, give anyone a pen and paper or a brush and they’ll find something to talk about or make…It doesn’t matter what they actually make, the final product’s not what’s important, we could just screw it up and throw that away…It’s the process, the process, through that learning and thinking, and thinking critically, and thinking about what matters to you and in the world (Alison).

In these classroom and lessons students were not encouraged to think with and through the entrepreneurial initiative in the explicit way they are taught to think through protest, for example. This non-entrepreneurial learning is a practice that I found to be distinctive to the Creative Art Department in the Academy, but nonetheless of importance as I go on to talk about shortly.

I learned that the definitive moment in securing this ‘alternative’ pedagogical practice, was when a student in department gained the Academy’s first ever place at an Oxbridge institution, and then a second in consecutive years, both to study Fine Art. When telling me about this ‘success’, Alison explained: “I knew this approach worked, any good teacher knows this is how students learn but I had to jump through all sorts of hoops to get it started”. She then returned to my question about the Badges initiative and said, “this is what I mean when I said ‘it’s what the Academy needed from us’”. Although Alison named a number of ‘hoops’ or performances she undertook to secure her department’s practices, she firmly believes it was the Oxbridge successes that allowed this ‘alternative’ teaching practice to be incorporated into the department’s official curriculum.

Ball writes, “Struggle on this terrain is an engagement with, and can involve a refusal of, neoliberal governmentality in its own terms” (Ball 2016: 3). I suggest that Alison here is that point of contact with neoliberalism in the entrepreneurship character agenda, and posits it as a site of and for ‘refusal’. This is most clear in the fact that this is not how the Art department had operated prior to Alison’s headship, as Janet told me:

If Alison hadn’t taken over…I would have played the game of this department…because it’s too difficult as an individual to overcome a group of people who want to do things in certain ways… when I came here drawing a pencil was a recognised art activity (Janet)

That said, in the Art Department at Milltown there are a number of complexities at play, even when I suggest, ‘refusal’ is present. As mentioned previously, there is no outright resistance from Alison and Janet to the entrepreneurship agenda at large. Alison’s admission that she had to “jump through all sorts of hoops” to get her alternative practice in place, as well as the fact she told me that she uses the Badges scheme ‘as and when she needed to’, also shows prior negotiation and partial acceptance with pre-existing modes of schooling at the Academy. Moreover, finding and defining ‘success’ in securing one or two students a place at Oxbridge institutions has long been outlined as problematic. This kind of ‘success’ has long used as a token of the virtues and existence of working-class upward ‘social mobility’, and criticised as fuelling an education system that focuses attention on supporting the ‘brightest and the best’, and ‘forgetting the rest’ (Reay 2012). As a result I must also consider how ‘refusal’ here might also be partly incorporated into the wider neoliberal and individualising schema at Milltown and beyond. I suggest that what is happening as part of the Art Department’s ‘refusal’ is a form of critique that can be incorporated by the wider initiatives of the Academy, and ill-conceived social mobility agendas. So in some ways although I suggest Alison and the Art Department are sites of ‘refusal’, in other ways entrepreneurial legitimacies are ‘re-settled’, through their capacity to incorporate the ‘Art Department critique’.

I propose however, that it is important to consider the ‘potential’ emanating from this alternative practice. Through learning about social injustice and protest, as well as being asked to consider their own sense of injustice (or at the least a relevant topic they thought important) students have the potential here to learn and apply the analytical tools of critique in order question some of the current injustices brought about the very same neoliberal agenda that sees the Academy and its specialism in operation. As Hollander and Einwhoner (2004: 549 cited in Bottero, forthcoming) remind us that “Even while resisting power, individuals or groups may simultaneously support the structures of domination that necessitate resistance in the first place”. Therefore I suggest that while there are elements of incorporation by the entrepreneurial initiative at play, this does not diminish or foreclose the possibility of refusal ‘from below’, nor the potential of capacitating effects of ‘refusal’ and critique.

**Conclusion: On Pessimistic Optimisms**

Gerrard (2014: 864) argued, “education is a practice and concept that can usefully stretch and adapt to different political intents”. At the core of this paper is the claim that the Badges of Entrepreneurship initiative at Milltown Community Academy is the physical and symbolic realisation of current neoliberal policy agendas. Moreover, this character-based scheme contributes in uneven ways to the reproduction of class-based inequality. I have documented how the entrepreneurial schemes at the school are in *both* theory and practice, looking to the interpretations and pedagogies of teachers for analysis. I also noted how the ‘official’ version of Academy initiatives differs vastly in practice. I worked within the ‘tensions’ of popular theories in the sociology of education, including Bourdieu, Foucault and de Certeau. Focusing on the different paradigmatic assertions of ‘power’ between them, I created a conceptual framework that made it possible to undertake an analysis that foreground but not foreclose debates on reproduction domination, ‘struggle’ and ‘resistance’. Through empirical analysis I suggest that teachers at Milltown Academy work both with and against entrepreneurial initiatives in ways that are in some ways settled and reproductive, but are also unsettled, unresolved, and have non-compliance and ‘refusal’ embedded within them.

When thinking about the character education initiative(s) identified throughout this special issue, this paper reinforces arguments made around the problematic nature of resilience frameworks (Burman, 2018) and positive psychology agendas (Gill and Orgad, 2018). In line with Taylor’s analysis (2018) it also positions the entrepreneurial character as nothing new, but as a historically embedded phenomenon in the context of Milltown. Moving forward I have argued that it is important to also consider how character education initiatives might also be ‘resisted’ or at least ‘refused’, here in the case of teachers at Milltown Academy but more generally by teachers and student in schools. Additionally and importantly I state that ‘resistance’ might arise in subtle and understated ways.

Finally for the questions it answers, this paper also raises a many more for further exploration. Importantly, *what* allows these ‘refusals’ to flourish? How are teachers positioned or not to refuse? What are the affects of non-compliance or refusal? And how, or have ‘the arts’ been traditionally seen as sites of such creative practice?

**Footnotes**

**1** Academy schools are state funded institutions that are independent from local authority control. **‘**Failing’ schools are converted to academies and given a sponsor (local businesses, charitable foundations, philanthropic organisations and other educational bodies). Sponsors are tasked which improving standards at the schools. The Academy in this piece has been anonymised. To keep reasonable anonymity, all quotes taken from official documentation, Academy and sponsorship websites, or newspapers that could de-anonymise the Academy have been altered so that they cannot be identified in an online search. Although words have been substituted, or the order of the words changed around, the new structure of the quote holds the same meaning as its original counterpart. Consequently all quotes will appear in single quotation marks to distinguish them from direct quotes.

2 The remaining characteristics are described as, creativity: initiative, adapt ideas or identify opportunity; Teamwork: a co-ordinated effort as part of a team or in the interest of common cause; Risk taking: not being afraid to try something new or do something differently; Problem solving: the ability to interpret challenges, concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions.

3 See Highmore (2006) on a ‘science of singularity’.

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