

Education, Opportunity and the Prospects for Social Mobility

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Outline

- Increased Policy Interest in Higher Education and Social Mobility;
- ‘Class Analysis’ Approach Goes a Long Way in Explain Why Current Government Policies Are Inadequate;
- But Need to Extend Focus of ‘Class Analysis’ Approach;
- Examine Social Congestion; Social Closure; Social Justice
- Dominant Experience ‘Social Congestion’ not ‘Social Mobility’ → Policy and Political Consequences.

Policy Focus: Fairness as Social Mobility

‘Fairness demands that what counts is not the school you went to or the jobs your parents did, but your ability and your ambition. In other words, fairness means social mobility.’

Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg (2010)

Fairness as Social Mobility (Cont'd)

- Maintaining the 'Supply Side' Argument!
- New Labour *Unleashing Aspiration* (2009)
 - Holistic View of Inequalities in Opportunity, But
 - 'Second Great Wave of Social Mobility.'
- Conservative Coalition *Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers* (2011)
 - Low Levels of Intergenerational Mobility and Inequalities in Opportunity, But;
 - 'The Demand for Skilled Workers is Currently Outstripping Supply...There is "Room at the Top".'

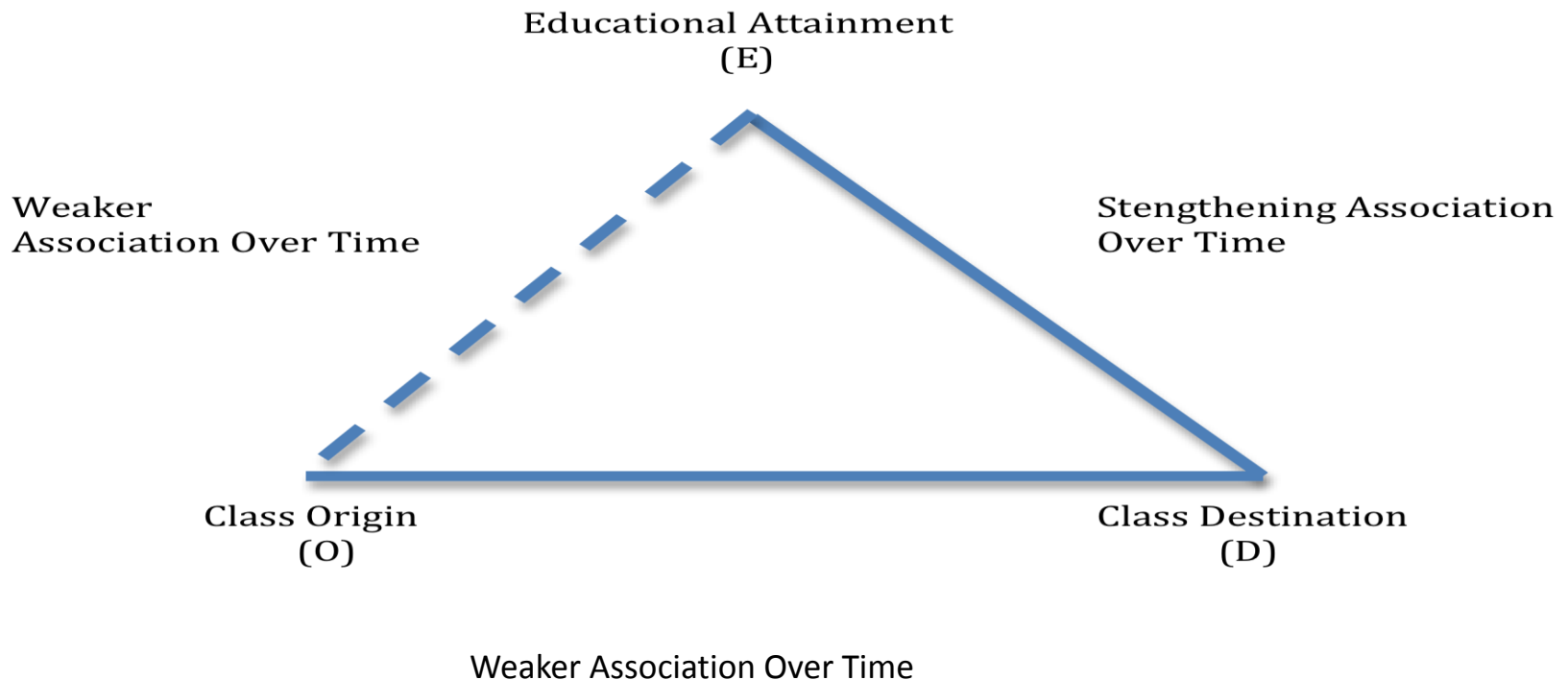
Fairness as Social Mobility (Con'd)

- Consistent With Functionalist Theory →
- Anticipate Increasing Intergenerational Mobility:
 - New Technologies → Raises Demand for Certified Expertise → More Professional & Managerial Jobs (Growth Model);
 - (Post)Industrial Societies Become More Meritocratic Over Time → Universities gain ‘Quasi-Monopoly in Determining the Future Stratification of the Society’ (Bell).
 - Widening Access to Higher Education, etc.

A 'Deficit' Model of Working Class (Im)mobility

- ▶ Fairness Does Not Depend on Reducing Social Inequalities (Education Opportunities; Incomes, etc.), but on Market Competition to be Unequal;
- ▶ Remains 'Win, Win' → No Need for Middle Class 'Downward' Mobility;
- ▶ Working Classes → More Like Middle Classes; Widening Access to HE; More Internships; More Employability Skills; More Incentives to Study, Work, etc.;

The Hypothesis of Increasing Merit-Selection (IMS)



Sociology's Inconvenient Truth

- Dominant Finding of 'Class Analysis' Approach:

- 'Absolute' Mobility Key to Intergenerational Mobility (Class Structural Effects);
- Social Fluidity 'Remarkable' Temporal Stability (Odds Ratios);
- Declining 'Absolute' Mobility Makes 'Relative' Mobility Key to Policy Agenda:

'The golden age of social mobility may be over unless there are radical policy reforms aimed at achieving equality of opportunity resulting in increasing middle class downward mobility.'

Goldthorpe & Jackson

(2007);

- ▶ Policy-Makers Lack a Relational Theory of Positional Competition (Methodological Individualism);
- ▶ Upward Mobility and Downward Mobility Reflect Different Class Interests.

Extending The Research Agenda

- Social Closure (Opportunity Gap);
- Social Congestion (Opportunity Trap);
- Social Justice.

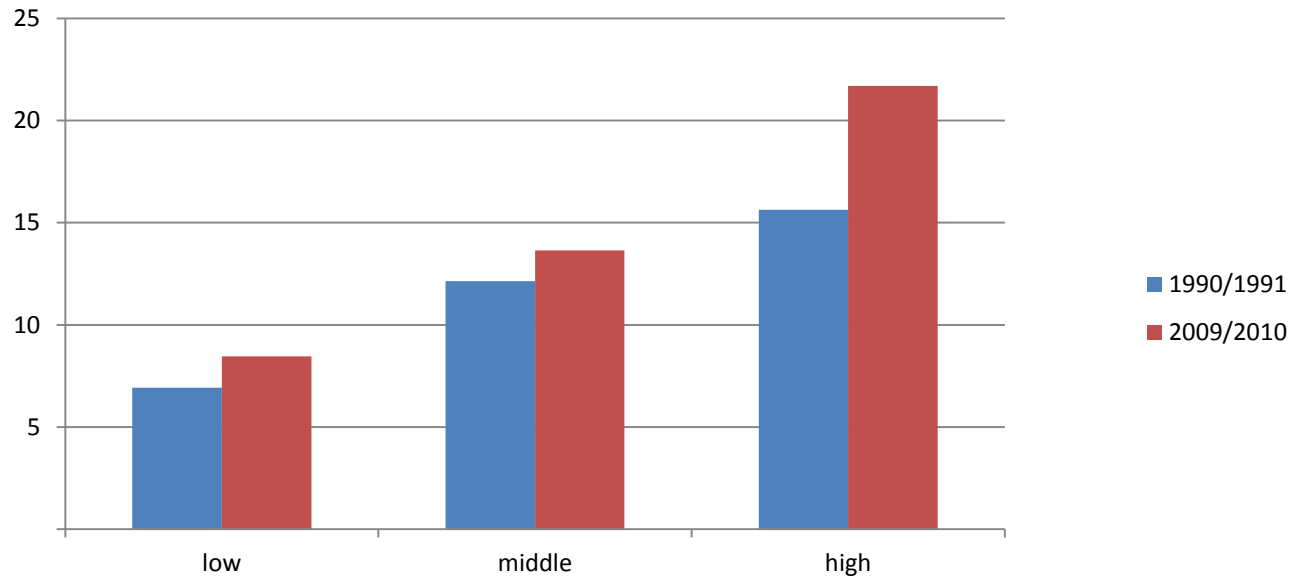
Issues of Social Closure

- ‘Remarkable Stability’ Fluidity - Does 30 Years of Education Reform and Labour Market Transformation Count for Nothing?
- Ideology of ‘Meritocracy’ → Ideology of ‘Performocracy’;
 - Extension of Market Rules of Inclusion/Exclusion (including Higher Education) → Emphasis on Raising Standards Over Equality of Opportunity;
 - Credentials: A Declining Currency of Opportunity:
 - Employability and Occupational Recruitment → Explicit Use of ‘Social’ Selection;
 - Opportunity, Merit and the ‘War for Talent’ (e.g. McKinsey):
 - From Expertise (Skills) to Elite Performance;
 - Globalisation of the ‘War for Talent’?;
 - Global University Rankings – ‘Being Good is No Longer Good Enough’!

Social Closure (Continued)

- Working Classes → Access to University ≠ Social Mobility
- Stratification 'Within' and Between Occupational Groups;
- Mobility Research → Occupational Titles = Entitlements
- Proxy for Social Class (Bureaucratic Bundling);
- Unbundling Education, Jobs and Rewards (incl. Increasing Income Inequalities);
- 'Destinations' → Permanent Employability;

Average hourly earnings HE teaching professionals (in 1990 pound), U.K.

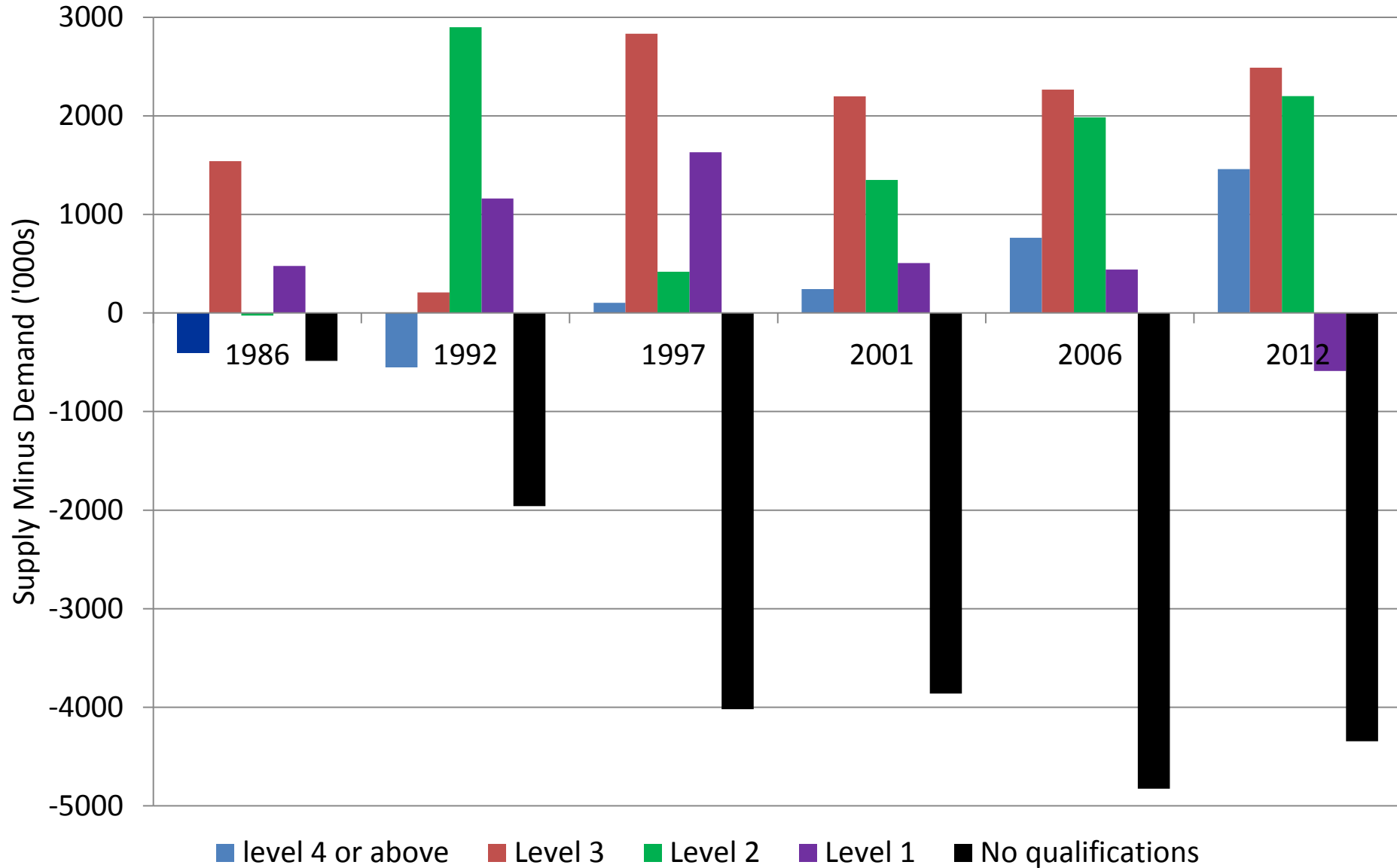


Low refers to 10th percentile, middle to 50th percentile, high to 90th percentile

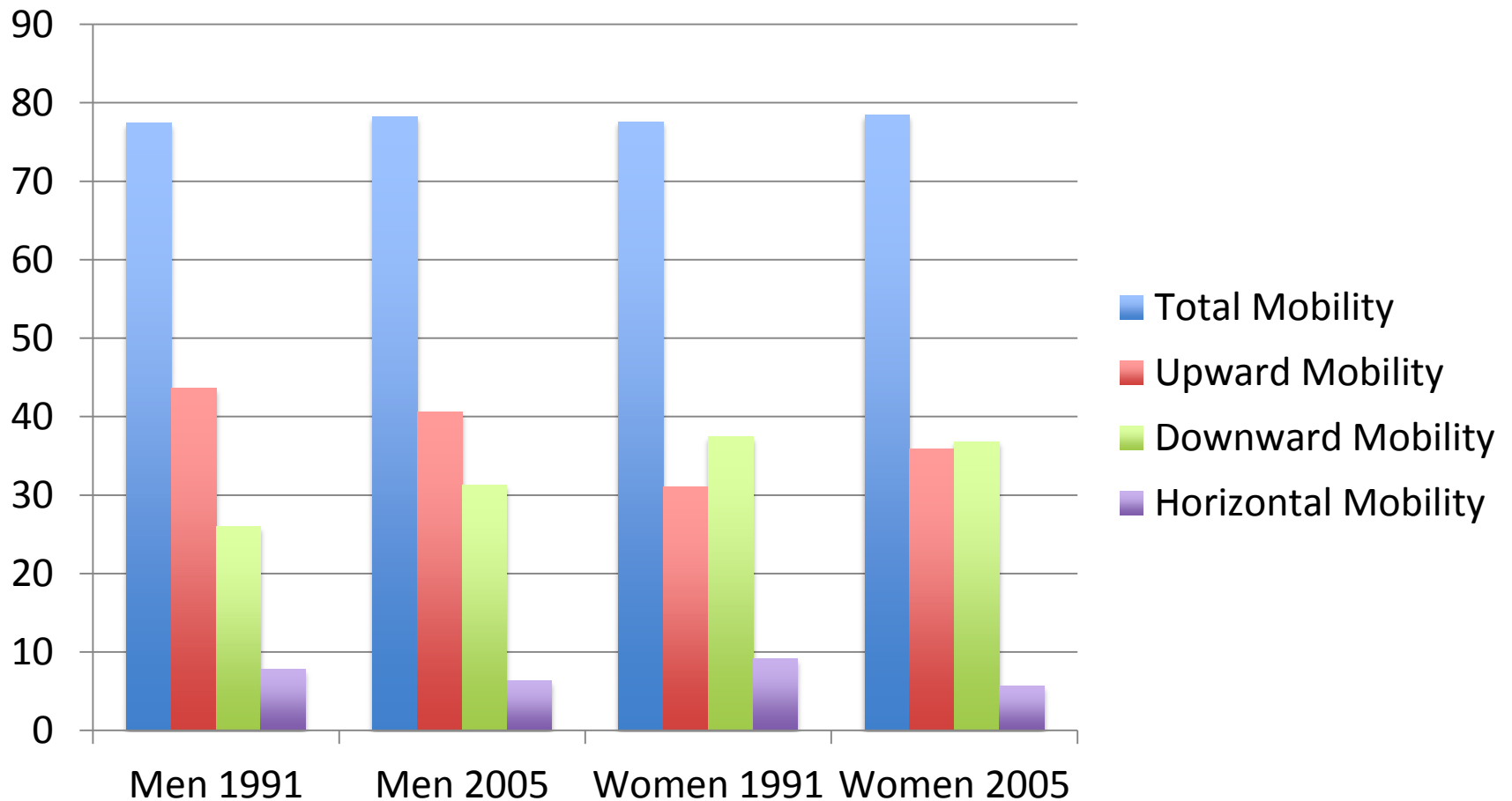
Issues of Social Congestion

- Changes in Class Structure → Major Source of Social Mobility (Absolute);
- Mismatch Between Jobs and Social/Class Expectations → Social Congestion in Education and Labour Market;
- Multifaceted Explanation:
 - Demand Side: Income Inequalities; Globalisation; New Technologies; Flexible Labour Markets; Recession; etc.
 - Supply Side: Mass Middle Class; Expansion of HE; Role of Women; etc.
- Middle Classes 'Running Faster to Stand Still' (Boudon) → Fear of Downward Mobility;
- High Stakes Competition → Not Only Less 'Over-Taking' but 'Human Traffic Jam' → Intense Positional Competition.

Qualifications Supply & Demand Mismatch (Felstead & Green, 2013)



(Absolute) Intergenerational Social Mobility % (Li & Devine, 2011)



Social Congestion → Opportunity Trap

- ‘Opportunities’ Harder to Cash In;
- Positional Struggle for ‘Distinction’ → More Time, Effort, Money.
- If All Stand on Tip-Toe No One Gets a Better View (Hirsch) → Opportunity Trap;
- Some are Trapped More Than Others, But Middle Classes Finding it Hard to Spring the Trap (Paired Peers Project).

Social Justice

- Conventional Policy Solutions Are Part of the Problem Rather Than Solution → Fuelling Congestion;
- Crisis in ‘Opportunity Bargain’ (Democracy and Capitalism) → Rethink Role of Education and Labour Market;
- Social Justice Requires Assault on Distributional Inequalities alongside Inequalities in Life-Chances (Helping to Reduce the Stakes, etc.):

‘While movement between positions may remain the same the opportunities constituting these positions may become more unequal (or the converse).’ (Adam Swift);

Social Justice

- Education Reduced to Individual 'Merit Selection' Ignores Wider Aims, Pedagogy and Experiences of Education;
- Education for Quality of Life (Beyond Origins and Destinations);
- Education as the Great Escape:

'...individual happiness does not only require that men (sic) should be free to rise to new positions of comfort and distinction; it also requires that they should be able to lead a life of dignity and culture, whether they rise or not.'

R.H.Tawney

- See Special Issue of British Journal of Sociology of Education (Autumn 2013)!

Social Mobility and Class Politics in an Age of Austerity

- Fairness is a Working Class Issue, But;
- Middle Class Insecurities, Underemployment, Rising Debts (esp. Education, Housing).
- ‘Class Analysis’ Approach → Class Opposition;
- Social Congestion → ‘Institutional Disappointment’, Esp. Within Middle Classes;
- Will ‘Incompatibility’ Between Expectations & Institutional Realities → ‘Confrontation’ [Boudon]?

Final Thoughts

- Need Qualitative and Quantitative Studies + Multi-Disciplinary Approach;
- The Contribution of the Sociology of Education → Understanding/Theories of Student, Teacher, Employee, and Recruiter Experiences;
- Higher Education – Key Arena for Studying Positional Competition → Paired Peers Project.