1 | INTRODUCTION

This paper presents a discussion on culinary capital and school mealtime. Food studies should be more engaged in social theory and this paper presents an extension following the work of Neuman (2018). The focus is on bridging the disciplinary gap between education and food studies. Research which focuses on the social...
aspect of food in school continues to grow but only limited to the globalised North (Lalli, 2023); or at least is only much more reported on in the global North. Children’s early experiences with mealtimes and food are critical determinants for eating behaviour over the life course (Harte et al., 2019). Healthy eating has been identified as essential during the early years, particularly for optimal growth, development, cognitive functioning and prevention of nutrition related chronic diseases including obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and certain cancers (Chiuve et al., 2012; Uauy et al., 2008). It is internationally known that despite the importance of nutrition in the early years, the majority of children fail to meet guidelines for vegetable intake or consumption of appropriate foods (Harte et al., 2019) which particularly important to acknowledge in identified how culinary capital affects such consumption. Theories of socialisation are deliberated to frame this paper, particularly in the first section which aims to conceptualise family mealtime as a building block and model for the setting up of school mealtime, which whilst has not taken priority in terms of time and space, has continued to remain a focal point for advocates. The paper opens up with the context of the research site and methods, which is a UK based school. The rest of the paper is organised into two sections, (1) traditional ‘family’ mealtime, (2) eating choices and Free School Meals (FSM).

2 | CONTEXT AND METHODS

The study was conducted in an all-through academy school, referred to as Maple Field Academy, which was the pseudonym given to the school, based in the Midlands, UK. Maple Field Academy has approximately 330 pupils who have claimed FSM and of these 230 access the vouchers according to the catering manager at the school. The school was chosen based on being located in a multicultural and socio-economically deprived region of a local part of the West Midlands where I have prior knowledge and networks. This does not consider those pupils who may be eligible and have not applied. Approximately 28% of pupils claim FSM at the school. The national average for all school types for pupils claiming FSM is 13.6%. SES consistently collocates with FSM. The rest of the section highlights when the study took place, research questions, a discussion on case study design (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2017), methods used and the context of the school. This piece of research took place between 2018 and 2019 and ethnographic techniques were employed to learn more about mealtimes at the school using case study design. The following research questions were designed to help develop the focus of this research: (1) To what extent can school meals promote forms of capital? (2) To what extent has school food policy supported school food provision in bridging gaps of inequality? (3) What do pupils and staff in the school perceive to be the barriers to up-take of Free School Meals? An ethnographic (Hammersley, 2013) case study research design (Stake, 1995) was adopted in collecting data. I seek to understand the complexity of a cultural site and I am interested in the uniqueness and interested in studying people and institutions. Research methods used included semi-structured interviews, fieldnotes and photographs with the aim of capturing a rich picture of the school. The focus of these questions helped to refine the project direction and provide a platform for investigating how school mealtime is said to become implicated not just by policy reform, but also by the material culture through which children become exposed to consumption of food through popular culture. Research ethics are taken seriously in this project and a central part of the project involved adopting a stance which ensured participants were safeguarded at all times. A number of processes were developed to implement a strong ethical framework for this study. Ethical approval was granted from the host institution following a submission of ethics to the review panel. The BERA (2018) guidelines were adopted as a central framework for conducting this research. A letter was sent out through the school to all parents and guardians in order to gain informed consent for their child to participate in this research project. Parents and guardians were given the right not to participate and withdraw from the research at any stage and whilst photographs were taken, these did not include any participants. Participants were provided with a research project information sheet, and were able to access the transcripts of this research. Below I include images of Maple Field Academy (see Figures 1–5).
We know for children, school serves as both a physical and social environment; the school being the physical within which behaviours are learned and the social being the environment through which children and adults are said to interact and influence each other (Lalli, 2019). In order to engage with the physical and social environment, involves engaging with our senses. Effective learning takes place when all five senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste) are stimulated (Laird, 1985). 75% of an adult’s knowledge was obtained by seeing, 13% through hearing and 12% through touch, smell and taste combined (Laird, 1985). Visual prompts for students enhance learning potential and dining halls in particular include positive messages around eating habits and these have been observed at Ingalls Academy. In the classroom, examples of ways in which sensory learning theory is applicable in this case study work is through Taste Education. This is a pedagogical activity taught in the classroom and where students at Maple Field Academy are taught about food through the senses. Essentially, a teacher brings fresh vegetables or fruits into the classroom and the students talk and write about what they see, smell, touch, hear and taste and whether they enjoy it or not.
The family meal, being an intimate affair yet we assume such intimacy does not necessarily and explicitly exist in the public-school meal. In order to draw parallels between the school meal and family mealtime, we often assume this forms the basis of school mealtime organisation and the school principal at Maple Field Academy alludes to this notion here:

**Interviewee:** "We’re fortunate in that ours isn’t like that, but what we haven’t got is enough space for them all to sit down together. If we did, we’d do—we would look at family dining, which I’ve talked to about before, where children all sit down together and eat with their staff. I think that’s a nice concept because then, also, that—it’s that social skill of sitting down as a family, as a group and talking about how your day is going and having that emotional intelligence for each other".
The family meal remains an important opportunity for families to bond and be together, by cooking and doing food, and as a result can potentially enhance not only the physical health but the mental well-being of children and adolescents (Hamilton & Wilson, 2009). History tells us that the tradition of family mealtime has changed and dates back to Victorian times and in its simplest form involved gathering the family around the table in a commensal act to enjoy ‘familial food and intimate conversation’ (Hamilton & Wilson, 2009, p. 346). Although, the Victorian meal was a more formal occasion compared with the mealtimes we experience today. Regardless of the changes which such mealtimes has undergone in terms of both function and form in relation to cultural and economic factors, we know that mealtime is identified as a symbol of unity and stability for the family (Cinotto, 2006; Fiese & Schwartz, 2008). Mealtime is an important ritual that can offer positivity in terms of socialisation (Larson et al., 2006). In post-industrial society and with globalisation, as lifestyles have become more congested, it has become increasingly difficult for some families to enjoy mealtime as a collective. The idea of developing a discussion here is to extend the traditional notion of family mealtime to the school and question how this translates and whether such interactions are replicated.

Like school mealtime, the family meal is more than merely a time when families come together to consume a meal, but it is a densely packed occasion in the space of typically twenty minutes (Fiese et al., 2006), similar to the duration of school mealtime in the UK. Whilst mealtimes vary culturally, food is grown, prepared, cooked tables set, served and consumed alongside individual family role assignments. Therefore, mealtimes offer so much in terms of opportunities to support child development and socialisation, particularly shaping opportunities to model behaviours and guide children. So, coupled with a busier lifestyle which includes extracurricular activities for children outside of the school gates and increasing employment demands for parents with changing patterns in the division of labour has brought about challenges to engage with routine mealtime (Cason, 2006).

The connotations attached to mealtime include the term ‘traditional’ and this has been indicative of a number of interactions with the social actors who play a role in school mealtime. Following on from an interview with the school catering manager, it was interesting to learn about the way in which a traditional style of dining was discussed. For example:

Interviewee: “Yeah, it was yeah. That was a massive thing, but I think going back to traditional—so much better. I’ve got a good load of kids here ... ”
Facilitator: What do you mean by traditional?

Interviewee: "Traditional is like home-cooked produce, home-cooked food from scratch, massively. Fresh vegetables, everything cooked from fresh ..."

School Catering Manager

So, to continue discussing the complexities of trying to understand family mealtime, it is useful to refer to the popular expression, ‘family who eats together stays together’ (Stone, 2002, p. 270). This suggests that the social relationships that emerge during mealtime build a sense of belonging and community within the family as the family mealtime is a crucial yet intimate event through which attempts to understand the processes of this time have involved interdisciplinary efforts, which owe debt to psychology (Eisenberg et al., 2004; Fiese et al., 2002). Moreover, family mealtime has been identified as positive for bringing families together to support social and cultural learning (Boutelle et al., 2001). The similarities shared between school mealtime and the family meal is that no other daily activity brings together such regularity in terms of activities which involve ‘checking in’ with family members (i.e. students) and also in terms of training children by modelling behaviours (Fiese et al., 2006; Larson et al., 2006). Family style dining has been more popular and possible in primary schools but using that model in academic schools is more problematic, due to the substantial number of children enrolled.

4.1 | Mealtime interaction and sociology of food

Having discussed the psychology surrounding mealtime and the narratives linking to school mealtime, it is important to draw on the cultural structuring of mealtime socialisation as discussed by anthropologists, Ochs and Shohet (2006). As research suggests, little focus is placed on the ‘socialisation processes that promote continuity and change across generations in the sociocultural life of food’ (Ochs & Shohet, 2006, p. 35). Mealtimes are considered as cultural sites for the socialisation of individuals who are inducted into competent citizens of society. The school meal as a cultural site assumes that participants will act in conventional ways, but not necessarily share the same level of competence (Dreyfus, 2004; Eagleton, 2000). In this regard, mealtimes can be regarded as arenas for the production of sociality, morality and localised understandings of the given community. Socialisation and feeds into commensality, which is defined the practice of sharing food and eating together in a social group such as a family or a class in a school dining hall. Therefore, whilst commensality is considered as a critical element to sociality, the idea that individuals will share food cannot be taken for granted. So in this sense, sociality highlights the rules that govern mealtime in the during family time and in Western Europe and the United States, family members arrive at the same space to dine together in the form of an evening meal and when such meets are violated by consuming food beforehand, then the typical response refers to a lack of manners and sensibility (Dreyer & Dreyer, 1973; Murcott, 1982). Whilst in some communities, the ideal is not for family members to dine together; certainly not at all times as children are often socialised into commensality which involves social order through which certain members eat before others based on a generational, gender or social position and China is one example (Cooper, 1986). Therefore, to return to the ideas of mealtime as being classed, gendered and racialized, socialisation into commensality also become ‘socialisation into sociocultural embodiments of generation, gender and other social positions’ (Ochs & Shohet, 2006, p. 39). To move on, socialisation is also associated with communication which involve unpacking the associated norms and values of mealtime occasions.

4.2 | Mealtime and civilisation

Mealtime is not only a cultural site but also a platform for communication and establishing norms around manners. An important note here is that the kinds of communicative practices during mealtime are said to be linked to
historically rooted ideologies (Ochs & Shohet, 2006). So, in order to address children’s socialisation in relation to mealtime and civilisation, close attention needs to be given to both norms of appropriate mealtime communication and the social positioning of children during this time. At this point it is particularly useful to draw on the work of Norbert Elias and The Civilising Process (Elias, 2000). Children’s table manners are particularly relevant in line with the work of Elias who documented how ‘sixteenth-century texts were devoted to instructions concerning how French, German and Italian elite children were to use their napkins and utensils, receive offers of food, and cut and chew meat’ (Ochs & Shohet, 2006, p. 43). In the modern day, families are said to enforce moral meanings of mealtime and in the context of the UK is through practicing appropriate dining etiquette, whether this includes using cutlery correctly or positive manners around food. The field note illustrates and interaction with a student at the school:

One pupil begins talking to me. “What do you do?” So we talk and his friend appears to be frustrated following an incident. The pupil that I was talking to makes an interesting comment. “Look at that ... the way he acts is not like Year 11”. The pupils I spoke to were Year 10. It is interesting too learn about how (2pm bell rings) this suggest how pupils are seeking a model for positive behaviour in a space in which the school meal is consumed.

Field notes

Cultural fragilities certainly come into play and perhaps where the problem lies, particularly in schools with more diverse populations. How about if eating with cutlery is not the norm usually practiced in a given culture or community? For instance, mealtime prayers are reflective of some communities in the United States, whilst in China in some areas, it would be deemed impolite to consume the entire plate of food being served (Cooper, 1986). Therefore, mealtime varies across communities and cultures, so whilst an attempt to understand more about family mealtime is established, it must be done so by acknowledging how socialisation processes can co-exist to recreate inequality. Mealtime whether in the domestic sphere or school space involves eating together and food, friendship alongside narratives of inequality are formed. Julier (2013) explored the ways commensality and how eating in company provides a platform for social relationships, whilst connecting to power structures and to each other. More importantly, eating together encourages collective understanding.

The work by Julier (2013) is insightful as sociability is central to the overall argument which emerge through commensalism. More specifically, reference is made to ‘food events’ as coined by Julier who discusses the intricacies involved in analysing discourses of etiquette and how sociability can become inflected by class, gender and race. What is particularly interesting about the work on sociability is how sharing meals can reveal social inequalities including economics, race, gender but also identity formation. Further, it is interesting to explore how individuals may find themselves included or excluded whilst sharing meals and this is part of the observations during school mealtime which are said to emerge.

4.3 | Eating spaces

Space for eating is the modern day has changed considerably and school dining halls have typically become reduced in size. What impact does this have on participants and how powerful are such spaces? Eating spaces in schools are highlighted as a common cause for concern (Lalli, 2019) and for this reason, it was commonly perceived among staff who thought that whilst the dining spaces around the school were designed to facilitate quite a flexible and open approach to eating, the dining hall was not very well suited as it was relatively small. For example:
Interviewee: “We also use the outside area to communicate and converse as well as the inside area and that the school lunch ... the school canteen is designed in quite a nice way to facilitate that”

Interviewee: “Yeah, that’s breakfast, because we have the whole of the school in at breakfast time. So, that’s used down there that’s—that is a lovely area to sit in as well, plus they do put films on, and different educational things on the screens for the kids to see, so it’s a bit like a cinema in different sections”

Interviewee: “Compared with other schools, compared with our old school, which was the old building, we have gone down to half the size of what our old kitchen was to now. It’s storage, you know what I mean? At the moment the intake of kids that we’ve got coming for a meal is massive at the moment. They all come for a dinner”

Catering Manager
Eating spaces in schools are much contested and one of my earliest memories of school is filled with dread of the school dinner hall, from a dislike of sensory attributes include smell of the food, congested space and the taste of the food (Lalli, 2020). Burke (in Dudek, 2012) who conducted extensive research on school architecture argued how school kitchens and dining spaces were regarded as symbols of modernization and progress. However, in the modern day, we experience ‘technologies servicing large-scale food preparation and consumption and instead of using spaces like school gardens and dining halls as learning spaces for food growing and preparation; children now practice ‘food technology’ and children are considered to be out of touch with the origins of the food they consume’ (Burke, 2012, p. 246). The narrative on space for dining in schools is consistently referenced to a lack of it. This was evident from the discussions at Maple Field Academy.

Interviewee: “I mean in my experience, right, a bigger kitchen by far. If you see the kitchen space, you know what I mean ...”

Interviewee: "Because of the mass intake, I haven't got a big enough kitchen to actually take the entire cutlery, the plates, the dishes"

Catering Manager
Therefore, whilst eating spaces are limited, we still need to think harder about how to best utilise such spaces and this is why schools opt for staggering lunch breaks which has a negative effect on the time available during lunchtime. Having discussed the connotations attached to the family style of dining, it is paramount that we draw on eating choices and behaviours in order to learn more about the variables involved in children’s eating and how such behaviours could be shaped by resource available from a schools’ perspective and the socioeconomic position of the families in the context of Maple Field Academy.

5 | EATING CHOICES AND FREE SCHOOL MEALS (FSM)

As more free school meal children will be eligible for FSM now and in the future, how do we ensure that schools provide healthy, tasty and nutritious food which are also compliant with the School Food Standards? The factors that influence take-up of FSM can also be contested. Such factors include the procedural aspects of claiming and accessing FSM alongside the food choices (Sahota et al., 2014). In the study conducted across four primary and four secondary schools in Leeds, UK, factors influencing up take also included queuing and the social aspect of lunchtime such as eating with friends had an impact (Sahota et al., 2014). So it was interesting to explore how Maple Field Academy considered FSM and the barriers surrounding take up.
Eating choices are not thought of without attachment to epistemological belief systems so the links between school dining and family dining appear to be consistent among both staff and children. Quite often participants identify how children and young people do not necessarily have the space to eat so watching television or the tablet has become commonplace in the modern day (Chang and Peng, 2022). The example from the school highlights such narratives:

A lot of students don’t have—they’ll sit with they food on their lap watching TV, so actually it being part of the norm of, they go and sit down and they sit and chat and eat is something that they haven’t done, probably forever, some of them.

Behaviour and Learning Manager

So this led to reviewing research on the impact of watching television in relation to children’s food consumption and whether it is indeed an enabler or mechanism for disruption. When thinking about school food, there is a need to consider consumption and more specifically the material culture which surrounds us as we cannot think about school meal reform without looking beyond the school dining hall, beyond the school gates. It is important to find ways of educating children and young people to question what they ‘see’ on screen, on the way home in terms of advertising boards with fast food captions; so the battle is also with consumption and perhaps policing that through public policy; through fostering critical thinkers and advocates is the central concern of what I mean by developing ‘culinary capital’. A sedentary lifestyle is quite often identified as a determinant to poor health outcomes as child weight is influenced by multiple factors (Temple et al., 2007). Moreover, socioeconomic status is also a contributing factor as lack of access to nutritious food is said to impact on children’s health and wellbeing (Moore et al., 2020). Schools are said to play a critical role in reducing or increasing inequalities in wellbeing for young people, and more often than not schools are associated as platforms for delivering interventions (Moore et al., 2020).

5.1 | Childhood obesity and ‘schooling’ food

Whilst I have made a conscious effort to avoid discussing eating choices and more specifically, establishing a discussion on what constitutes a healthy school meal experience from the social aspect for children, the participants at Maple Field Academy begin to highlight how such agendas feed into the school food space. Do healthy meals equate to better learners? Whilst policy makers in the UK seek to improve school meals, the focus tends to be on academic performance yet we see a disregard for the social good that meal is said to offer (Lalli, 2021). How is culinary capital developed? A key point in this discussion which also needs recognising is the growing interests of government agencies and health promoters and what matters most for children and how their bodies develop have been central to such debates (Leahy et al., 2016).

Another point which needs close attention when considering food choices is the ideological influences which lead to the policing of food choices and what is ‘good’ and ‘bad’ food. Culinary capital is formed through identifying with such discourses which surround food. Cutting through such policing of food supports the capital that can be instilled in children. Of course, thinking of food in this binary way is also problematic. A number of connotations are thought of when we pose the question of school meals and these typically include associations to ‘healthy eating’, ‘childhood obesity’, ‘supersize me’, ‘Compulsory Competitive Tendering’ and to celebrities such as ‘Jamie Oliver’ and ‘Marcus Rashford’ and to popular culture and everyday expressions such as ‘you are what you eat’ and ‘being lean and mean’ yet the associations to the material culture which surrounds children is often neglected by policy makers in the fight against all things school food. At Maple Field Academy, the focus of healthy food is a process which is layered as the catering manager discusses the importance of certain foods including fresh fruit and the food technology teacher discusses how food is life and choices made are lasting beyond the school gates:
Yeah, health. It's like we do fresh fruit, we do salad, you know what I mean? We do have to push the salad on the kids, right, they're a bit like—but we try and put as much as we can in sandwiches. We do chicken [jal] wraps with salad in. We do—what else do we do? Anything we can put a veg in.

Catering Manager

I'm focusing really with key stage 3 on healthy eating and giving them the skills that they need when they leave school. So even if they don't choose it as an option, they're still having life skills that they can use when they leave school life. Key stage 4 it's hospitality and catering that we offer now. So that's also relating to real world and working in the environment.

Food Technology Teacher

I think it food lesson wise because we speak about the breakdown of how you should eat a healthy diet. That's something that they do take home and pass on and the recipes that we make.

Food Technology Teacher

So as a number of factors influence children's eating behaviours, it is interesting to explore the people and place and the effects on such behaviours. Two key features which influence children's food choice include the presence of other people and the place in which food is consumed (Patrick & Nicklas, 2005). A study conducted by Suggs et al. (2018) assessed the effect of social setting on the diet of 6–12 year old children who resided in Ticino, Switzerland. Whilst we may consider the school food space to be a conducive setting for educating children about what I call 'food for life', Suggs et al. (2018) highlighted how a variety of social, psychological, environmental and interpersonal factors determine eating behaviours in children and adolescents.

The social and physical features of mealtimes considered together are identified as the social setting where children consume food and this can play a crucial role in children's food choice (Suggs et al., 2018). So, reducing the space for eating in schools and limiting the time available to socialise has an impact on eating behaviours. In order to highlight the contributing factors which affect eating behaviours in children and young people Suggs et al. (2018) use the term 'social setting' in which they refer to the presence of individuals including parents, school friends, extended family and others; and the place where they eat which include, home, school, restaurants and other (Suggs et al., 2018, p. 111); then to bring these two features together make reference to 'Dyads' i.e. home-family and school-friends etc. Children's food consumption was examined in three settings by Suggs et al. (2018) which included (1) restaurants/fast food outlets, (2) schools, (3) and the home environment. In terms of healthy food choices then, unsurprisingly it was found eating out in restaurants or fast food outlets were associated with less healthy choices compared with eating at home namely on the basis of an increase in consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages, sweets and savoury snacks. Interestingly, some evidence presented by Woodruff et al. (2010) found eating at school was associated with a better diet and lower energy intake compared to eating out. Although, we still have to note the disparity of school food menus as the quality of food varies globally (Clark & Fox, 2009; Patrick & Nicklas, 2005).

FSM could have a great benefit for health promotion and on improving future public health measures among children (Vik et al., 2019). The study found that serving free school meals for a one year period increased children's intake of healthy foods, particularly among children with lower SES (Vik et al., 2019, p. 5). The study was conducted in Southern Norway in which a non-randomised design with one intervention group and one control group was conducted. Free school meal eligibility is a measure of low parental income, widely used in social policy research as an individual indicator of potential disadvantage (Gorard, 2012, p. 1003). In England, a child may be eligible for FSM if they reside from families who are in receipt of income support and have no more than a gross income of £16,190 per annum. The price of school food is another area in which schools, caterers and children are said to suffer from not being able to provide or consume a suitable school lunch. Staff in the school were quite
open to discussing this issue and it was interesting to learn more about how options for children to try different food were available, but on a budget:

We try and base things around—they've actually got £2.20 to spend, right, of free school meals, right, so what happens then is we'll do meal deals. They can get a full traditional dinner meal and a pudding for £2.20. They can get a jacket potato with three fillings or whatever and a little carton of pop if it's in with a—you know what I mean? We'll try and do lots of different meal deals. They can have as much salad as they want for 35p ...

Catering Manager

School mealtime consists of more than merely consumption of food, it is politically-bound and the SES of families are said to transcend through school mealtime participation and one of the ways in which this has been evident is through FSM. For example:

**Facilitator:** “In terms of free school meals then in general, this is based on your experience now, what barriers do pupils face in terms of access to free school meals? What can you tell me about that?”

Access wise it’s getting the kids to know that they are free school meals. That’s getting in touch with the parents, right. We try and—if we’ve got kids coming that have not got any money, you know what I mean, we—I get involved with them stating—if they come to me and say I haven’t got a lot of money or whatever, I’ll go, right then. I will then try and say, you need a little bit more help. They then need to get in touch with the secretary of the school, because that’s who passes out the forms for free school meals, right. You know what I mean, so that then goes down to the secretary part, right. Most kids know that they are allowed free school meals. There aren’t many that don’t, but there are a few

Catering Manager

It might have done. I know most kids now would want to say, oh I’m free, you know what I mean? They’d rather keep their little bit of money in their pocket, right. So, that stigma, I really think that’s not the choice. I just think it’s down to the individual kid that wants to come through in general

Historically, the terms ‘free school meals’ and ‘stigma’ have been linked closely, particularly in terms of not being able to encourage more children to make use of the voucher system. This is said to reflect the ‘stigma attached to applying for FSM, particularly for low income families who reside in high-income areas’ (Taylor, 2018, p. 40). Eligibility for FSM has been widely used as a proxy for SES within government policy and academic research (Taylor, 2018). The work of Taylor (2018) is particularly interesting in this regard as after controlled for other socio-economic characteristics, being eligible for FSM is not associated with word reading ability at the age of seven. There is also ‘no significant relationship between levels of household income, occupational group or neighbourhood deprivation and word-reading ability at age 7’ (Taylor, 2018, p. 43). Therefore, when using FSM as a measure of socio-economic disadvantage, the simple binary measure is an accurate indicator but when analysing the context of the relationship between educational outcomes, then such measures are limiting in terms of reliance. Acknowledging the discourse around FSM and performance at school is critical as ultimately, schools are funded in ways which rely on such data. So, to return to the idea of stigma, it is critical to view how over time the school meal service has changed. However, more recently, the introduction of an electronic card and fingerprint system in schools means this stigma no longer exists. The extracts presented below highlight how schools in deprived regions are less likely to experience such stigma. Moreover, food choices are also said to impinge upon take up. For instance:
I'm not too sure why that would be the case here, because certainly because of the fingerprint and all that—there would be no stigma attached to it anyway because nobody would know that a child is on free school meals or non-free school meals

Vice-Principal

Possibly it’s around eating habits in terms of the foods and some of the foods for some students might not be what we have on offer. But I’m surprised at that, I would probably just double check on that because that does surprise me

Vice-Principal

I think we've got such a high amount of free school meals it's pretty much the norm. So, I don't think—there's no stigma attached to it because I think most people are on free school meals, really

Academic & Pastoral Leader for Year 11

I don't know if it does. I think it's better because it's smaller. I think if all of the year groups were together, they might be a little bit more embarrassed about queuing or lining up whereas if they're with their own year group, it might not be—they might not feel as intimated

Food Technology Teacher

It's very obvious who was free school meals and who wasn't, but now, I don't see it as so much of a barrier because, like you say, we're a cashless system so a student goes up to the till and they just put their fingerprint or give their name and that, then there's not a conversation about whether they're free school meals or not

Director of Sport

I think kids don’t want to eat the food that we have to serve them, if I’m honest

Director of Sport

So whilst a number of factors are typically identified with access to FSM, at Maple Field Academy, as a sizable percentage of pupils are eligible, the stigma of this kind was not evident based on responses from staff. The technology used in the school was also identified as helpful in minimising stigma. The factors influencing take-up of FSM in primary and secondary schools in England has been studied extensively by a particular paper which consisted of conducting qualitative research (Sahota et al., 2014). The study aimed to explore factors that influence registration for FSM and the recommendations were that schools should develop proactive approaches to promoting the quality of the food and also the social, cultural and environment features of school dining. Furthermore, more effort to anonymise pupils’ identities should be considered. It was particularly interesting to come across how reference was made to the dining environment as pupils’ sensory arrangements were influential in shaping mealtime experiences. It was found that the structural aspects of mealtime affected experiences as pupils felt rushed and had to finish pudding before the main to make room for other year groups to enter. Whilst much is said about the stigma of up-take of meals, it is crucial to think about the sensory features of mealtimes, which include queuing, lack of time, limited availability of food, seating arrangement, noise and hygiene. These factors work against creating a vibrant and fruitful occasion for eating. So, pupils’ reasons for consuming food are not merely about the perceived anxiety of being labelled as ‘free school meal pupil’, but the reasons are complex and multi-layered, and the cultural factors also impinge upon consumption. One critical issue that may be indicative of a national take is the bureaucracy involved in claiming FSM, which the Principal at Maple Field Academy had said was a barrier as parents were not always aware of how to apply. The procedural intricacies prohibit access and these issues are systemic and not representative of just one school. These observations have become known as being a common theme in relation to the operationalising of school mealtime. Such issues
need to be handled carefully to ensure families are supported throughout their children's school lifecycle. Sahota et al. (2014) also discovered this as an issue suggesting how low confidence had an impact on parents and literacy skills. Culinary capital is then developed in its broader sense here through understanding more about school food policies and the workings of accessing FSM.

Much has been said about FSM eligibility as a proxy for pupil socio-economic deprivation (Ilie et al., 2017; Taylor, 2018). To return to this discussion introduced earlier, it is important to consider the structural elements in how such proxies are used to fund the English schooling system. To elaborate, if a pupil has had FSM eligibility over a six-year period is consistently identified as an indicator of socio-economic disadvantage. Ilie et al. (2017) assessed how well this measure predicts 'pupil attainment in secondary school in comparison to other measures of socio-economic background which is known to influence attainment such as parental education or income' (Ilie et al., 2017, p. 253). The key question is whether this FSM measure is a suitable and valid proxy for pupil's socio-economic disadvantage in an educational context. Whilst we cannot ignore the gap in educational achievement between pupils from different socio-economic backgrounds, it is difficult to rely on a single proxy. Moving forward, for researchers and policy-makers attempting to draw parallels between pupils on FSM and attainment, a measure that is consistent over time and one that is able to identify children living in socio-economically deprived spaces and positions that identifies with low achievement is needed (Ilie et al., 2017). FSM eligibility is said to current off such a measure although with the introduction of the Universal Credit system, the measure could identify a different group of pupils and this needs to be raised to policy-makers, schools and researchers interested in SES and deprivation. This leads onto a much-needed focus on school food and attainment, or at least explore attempts that have been made to investigate these phenomena.

6 | CONCLUSION

This paper has deliberated what it means to consider food as a familial occasion by drawing on the broader issues. The contribution to educational debates is strong based on the impact of Free School Meals on families and their children. The school as an institution plays a critical role in socialisation and food acts as a key catalyst. It has presented insights from Maple Field Academy in starting certain conversations on what it means to create a social space not just conducive for eating but for interacting with one another. It has also made attempts to highlight disadvantages and highlight implications of those in receipt of free school meals. The overarching message is that school food education needs much attention in order to grow as a central concern for policy makers as much of what is distilled to schools in terms of policy is how we are able to enact change. Much more investment is required both in terms of time and funds to ensure we are able to develop a generation fit for combating society's ills and this involves addressing social inequalities around malnutrition, disengagement and hunger. Food is a right and not a privilege but in today's society in some communities, who experience disadvantage, food has become a form of capital and such culinary capitals need to be accessible for all children in order to ensure potentials and life chances are maximised in order to create global citizens and for them to flourish. So, it is critical to recognise the social good that comes from participating in mealtime and as school is a microcosm of society, close attention needs to be given to ensure inequities can be tackled that are (re) produced so to diversify what we serve in schools and how we serve as citizens.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was report was the author(s). All permissions for figures obtained.
DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author, [GL]. The data are not publicly available due to restrictions, i.e. respecting the privacy of research participants.

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