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On Pierre Bourdieu's Key Theoretical Concepts and Pedagogical Approach

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Abstract

This paper explores Pierre Bourdieu's major concepts that help us to understand his theory on education. Bourdieu discusses the forms of inequalities in education and the field of education within the context of *field*, *habitus*, *forms of capital*, *symbolic violence*, and *reproduction*. The reproduction of power and the relations of domination in education are both formed through diverse structures and practices in the field. Education, which is the source of the institutional production of cultural capital, plays also a leading role in the reproduction of class culture. In this context, this paper aims to examine Bourdieu's studies on education with a collaboration of Bourdieu's major concepts.

Keywords: *Pierre Bourdieu, education, habitus, forms of capital, symbolic power, reproduction.*

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Introduction

This paper aims at setting the framework of Pierre Bourdieu's basic theoretical concepts and focuses on how the French sociologist formulates the pedagogic field. The main axis of the paper is the concept of *habitus*, and related mechanisms of *field*, *forms of capital*, *symbolic violence*, and *reproduction*. These theoretical concepts will be explained below through a review of the field studies conducted by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, and of the books on these fieldworks they published and they are: "Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture (1970)," "*Inheritors: French Students and Their Relations to Culture (1964)*." In addition, some of the major concepts that are part of "*The Forms of Capital*" are also included.

Pierre Bourdieu's oeuvre includes works which focus on the complex structures and systems that form *the school*, as an institutional unit in which education and its institutional practices are produced. His works also examine the social structures that surround *the school*, and reveal the relations between them with a comprehensive perspective. In his research, Pierre Bourdieu attempts to analyze the relationship between the individual and the society beyond the dualist polarization of subjectivity and objectivity, and problematizes and avoids such forms of dualities. He proposes a new formula, a new model, the basic characteristics of which includes the configuration of "the conception of social practice, structure, and knowledge" that stands against polarizing and dualist approaches, and hold a position that "straddles disciplinary, theoretical, and methodological divides" (Wacquant, 1998, 4). Wacquant (1998, 4) refers to another characteristic of this formula in relation with Bourdieu's vision of society: "the social universe is the site of endless and pitiless competition, in and through which arise the differences that are the stuff and stake of social existence." Also, Craig Calhoun (2000, 288) claims that Bourdieu's sociology "was not for an action-centered sociology as opposed to one focused on structure" but tends towards a "genetic structuralism", as he calls it, with addressing the problems of such an opposition between structure and practices. Thus, by genetic structuralism

Bourdieu refers a form of sociology that “a sociology that uses the intellectual resources of structural analysis, but approaches structures in terms of the ways in which they are produced and reproduced through action” (Calhoun, 2000, 288). This conceptual model manifests itself in various methodological suggestions and a set of concepts that provide strategies to overcome the conflicts and distances between dualities. These concepts are the concept of *habitus*, *field*, *forms of capital*, *symbolic violence*, and *reproduction*; and they play major roles in explaining the field of education and the sources of inequalities within this field.

The Concept of Habitus

Pierre Bourdieu explains everyday life as a game mechanism, in which the struggle and competition are immanent and the actors also use improvisations as part of it. The practices that can go beyond the immanent rules of the game require the understanding of the game and the understanding of how to play it become a part of actors' lives. Bourdieu emphasizes that this form of knowledge and sense are collective elements, including performances of pursuing the game, observing the rivals, and determining the next maneuver, each of which is a strategy. According to Bourdieu, a good strategy, besides the rules of the games, is made of “ability to evaluate strengths and weaknesses of the rival ... and to foresee the next move, game and strike of each player” (Calhoun, 2014, 79). Bourdieu claims that this sense improves with the continuity of practices, and with *habitus* as a structured form.

Bourdieu emphasizes the role of social practices in the concept of habitus, but he also states that social practices are not determined solely by individual behaviors. In *The Logic of Practice*, Bourdieu (1990, 53) defines habitus as follows:

Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor.

He claims that practices are determined neither by individual dispositions, nor by supra-individual structures. Habitus is a product of the individual and the collective together (Calhoun, 2000). Bourdieu's concept functions as an explanatory bridge between these two extremes. *Habitus*, in Latin, means habitual, typical, physical characteristics of a body, especially appearance and constitution. Calhoun (2000, 292) defines habitus basically as "the embodied sensibility that makes possible structured improvisations." In habitus, habits are so crucial, and they are practiced in a spontaneous, careless, and unconcerned fashion rather than according to consciously learned rules and principles, and this is what Bourdieu called *dispositions* (Jenkins, 1992, 45-52). Also habitus "designates the system of durable and transposable dispositions through which we perceive, judge, and act in the world" (Wacquant, 1998, 6).

Bourdieu defines dispositions as follows: 1. 'the result of an organizing action', a set of outcomes which he describes as approximating to 'structure'; 2. a 'way of being' or a 'habitual state'; and 3. a 'tendency', 'propensity' or 'inclination' (Jenkins, 1992, 45-47). Bourdieu refers to the unconscious character of practical logic and the existence of dispositions as beyond consciousness. The link between habitus, practice, and disposition can be formulated as follows:

The habitus disposes actors to do certain things, it provides a basis for the generation of practices. Practices are produced in and by the encounter between the habitus and its dispositions, on the one hand, and the constraints, demands and opportunities of the social field or market to which the habitus is appropriate or within which the actor is moving, on the other. (Jenkins, 1992, 48)

Therefore, the habitus consists of structures objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted while disposition is conceived more as natural tendency, a way of behaving in a certain way with willingness, practical sense, and reason. In Bourdieu's terms, "the habitus is the site of the internalization of reality and the externalization of internality" (Jenkins, 1992, 49). The habitus relates to objective and subjective conditions while adjusting the conditions that constitute the habitus itself. This relation is historical, and involves in individual and collective practices.

Education and Forms of Capital as Fields

Another concept that Bourdieu employs is *field*, and it is in close relationship with *praxis*, *disposition*, and *habitus*. For Bourdieu, “fields are arenas of struggle,” they are “relatively autonomous, meaning each tends to have its own logic (or ‘rules of the game’) and history,” and in fields there are “players occupy positions relative to one another but have a shared sense of the socially constructed, centralized framework of meaning, or what is at stake in the field” (Kluttz and Fligstein, 2016, 189). The dispositions and practices of actors are shaped by these determinations, so that they can make their presence felt in the field. For instance, someone who wants to be a musician has to acquire the necessary artistic capital in that field, in Bourdieusian sense, and behaves in accord with the determinations, rules, and strategies of that specific field.

Pierre Bourdieu defines field as a realm of struggles, and describes it with the metaphor of game. Each game has its different rules and strategies, and the differences imply the presence of various fields. Bourdieu claims that each field includes a variety of games, and these games may well provide the opportunity to move from one field to another. According to this metaphor, actors occupy positions in the field relative to each other's. Fields include autonomous structures, which make them different from the other. The difference between fields also stems from the distinction between the actors of distinct fields. In other words, field can be conceived as a setting for its actors and their social positions and practices, while habitus plays a role in revealing its complementary structures. Therefore, actors who have different resources and statuses in distinct fields relate to and struggle with each other in accordance with “the rules of the game” (Kluttz and Fligstein, 2016, 189). The move from one field to another depends on the forms of capitals the actors have. Actors establish relations of dominance, subordination or homology in the fields, depending on their positions and opportunities to access capitals (Jenkins, 1992, 52-56).

For Bourdieu, capital, as an important resource for actors in the field, has three basic forms: Economic capital, social capital, and cultural capital. The fourth form of capital is symbolic capital. In his article *The Forms of Capital*, Bourdieu

defines economic capital as the possession of economic sources and wealth (money, property, etc.). Social capital is in a relation with economic capital, and refers to institutionalization of social connections and reciprocal relations to become permanent in the production and sustainability of property relations, e.g. being a member of a well-know NGO, student club, alumni association which all of these provide social connections, network, sense of solidarity, reciprocity etc. Cultural capital, according to Bourdieu, can take various forms determined by social structure, such as religious capital, bureaucratic capital, political capital, etc. (Göker, 2015). Bourdieu (1986, 47) formulates cultural capital with reference to three structures: Embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. In embodied cultural capital, knowledge is the result of “long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body,” and it is passively inherited. This form of capital has the most crucial role in deepening the inequalities in the field of education, since it is acquired from childhood and forms the primary habitus. For instance, linguistic dispositions an individual has because of her family, and the means of communication she uses are the forms of embodied cultural capital. Linguistic cultural capital can be considered as an indicator of good communication skills, self-expression and using advanced vocabulary which are all rewarded by the education system, so as to contribute to the reproduction of inequalities. As it is not possession of a property, embodied capital form cannot be transferred. It is an embodied form that determines an individual’s habitus and the structures around it, and acquired in time. Objectified capital refers to the acquisition of the forms of property, e.g. possession of works of art, books, and scientific works. The cultural capital acquired by such ways can be transferred to economic capital. Bourdieu (1986) emphasizes the historical characteristic of the relationship between an actor and the cultural capital she possesses. For example, possession of a work of art cannot be considered as the sole determinant of objectified cultural capital; the historicity of how the possessor acquires the artwork also determines the characteristic of the cultural capital. The third form of cultural capital, i.e. institutional cultural capital, depends on institutional belongings of actors, and is formed by institution’s recognition of the actor’s cultural capital, and related knowledge and characteristics. The institutional structure an actor belongs to provides the actor with certain advantages and privileges. Recognition of institutional belonging also establishes the transformation of cultural capital to

economic capital. Bourdieu discusses still another form of capital, i.e. symbolic capital, which consists of honor, reputation and respect an actor has, and which determines the actor's social position, and opportunities to access certain sources. Finally, Bourdieu remarks that a form of capital can be transformed to another, and this refers to the following: 1. Transformation process is one of reproduction, and thus the capital can be transferred to the next generation, 2. A certain form of capital, e.g. symbolic and/or cultural capital of being a famous musician, can be transformed into the economic capital (Calhoun, 2000).

Symbolic Violence and Reproduction

Pierre Bourdieu uses the concept of *symbolic violence* to refer to imposition of symbol and meaning systems on a group or a class as a legitimate practice, e.g. gender and class relations. The legitimacy functions through concealing the power relations that make the imposition successful. Once the process is accepted as legitimate, the cultural structure collaborates with these power relations and contributes systematically to the reproduction mechanism. Then, the question becomes which structures contribute to this process. Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, in their work *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, analyze these structures in detail. Bourdieu claims that *pedagogic action* is the basic foundation of the exercise of symbolic violence, and it exists in three forms: 1. Informal education emerging from the interaction among the members of a society, 2. Education in the family, and 3. Formal education (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). The symbolic power of the pedagogic institution in this formula should be considered as their function of their position in the network of power relations. To clarify, race, class and gender relations in society as part of informal education; gerontocratic, hierarchical relations in a family; and the practices of hidden curriculum in formal education can be considered as examples of pedagogic action in diverse spheres of life. *Pedagogic action* reproduces not only the culture in all its arbitrariness, but also the power relations that establish its own operation. Another element, according to Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), is *pedagogic authority*, a necessary element for the production, reproduction and maintenance of the conditions of pedagogic action. It is a legitimate position of exercising pedagogic power to make the operation of pedagogic action possible.

Bourdieu does not refer to a uniform pedagogic action, but its variety in various groups and social classes, which he calls *pedagogic ethos* (pedagogical values), and defines the concept as follows: A form of dispositions towards pedagogical process which is a consequence of family education and a recognition of the material value of education (Jenkins, 1992, 66-67). Another element of pedagogic action is *pedagogic work*, which includes a process of inculcation which must last long enough to produce a durable training, i.e. a habitus—ingrained dispositions. The more pedagogic work is done, the more it tends to obscure the objective truth of the habitus as the internalization of the principles of a cultural arbitrary, which is defined as “the increase of economic and symbolic value of cultural arbitraries in education market, and their becoming cultural capital, while they used to be used as historical entities” (Göker, 2015, 17). Pedagogic work, thus, has the function of maintaining order. In summary, in the creation of an apparently autonomous educational system there is a;

reciprocal relationship of mutual reinforcement between structural processes of institutionalization and the professional interests of those who monopolize pedagogic work (teachers). The latter becomes formalized into a homogeneous and orthodox ‘work of schooling’. This routinized work produces a standardized and ritualized school culture within which these agents of the educational system reinforce their own value by ensuring the reproduction of the (educational) market which bestows that value upon them. (Jenkins, 1992, 68-69)

The first research Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron focused on French students and their relationship with the field of culture was *Inheritors: French Students and Their Relations to Culture* in 1964. In their fieldwork, they conducted questionnaires with students of art schools in Lille and Paris, and asked the basic question of how cultural distinction is produced and reproduced. In *Inheritors*, Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) analyze the forms of reproduction and structural symbolic violence, and consider family as a pedagogic institution with an educational attitude, in which forms and exercises of discipline occur. Production and reproduction of inequalities in such a structure begins in the family. Therefore, production and reproduction of a privilege is a constituent element of maintaining this structural form. The structural criticism this book develops starts from the following point: Privilege assignation forms are inherent in the very structural operation which seems to ignore it. This operation claims that each individual is in the same equal level (the principle of equality of

opportunity), however distinctions occur due to cultural capital. Privilege becomes merit, and gets circulated in this form. While some actors have to struggle to get their acquisitions in the social level they are involved in due to their privileges, some others do not have to struggle at all since their acquisitions are their legitimate inheritances, and they live on their meritocratic acquisitions (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979). The forms of capital that produce such privileged positions, and their relations with structural mechanisms constitute the channels through which the system generates its legitimacy. In order to clarify the main discussion in *Inheritors*, it is possible to give an example of how an education system gives the impression that the current competitive structure is organized justly—such as social placement is activated through standardized testing system—with concealing how some families secure their children from failure through providing the forms of cultural capital, thereby privileges in social life.

Another work of Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, in which they further discuss reproduction in education is the book *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, published in 1970 (Jenkins, 1992). This study includes an intense analysis of symbolic violence, maintenance of the established order, and the role of education within it (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). In the first chapter, Bourdieu and Passeron render the conceptual construction of reproduction processes. The study focuses on transformation of cultural arbitrary—legitimization of meanings of things by certain dominant groups in society to impose on others through concealing their arbitrary nature-- into various forms of capital, and how the system of education employs *pedagogic action*, *pedagogic authority*, *pedagogic work*, *pedagogic authority* and *work of schooling* in relation to one another (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990).

Pedagogic action, according to Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), is a part of the process of internalization and transformation of cultural arbitraries into the forms of capital. The authors claim that pedagogic action in diffuse education, family education, and institutional education can be considered objectively “as symbolic violence since cultural arbitrary is imposed by an arbitrary power” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, 5). Since cultural arbitrary is defined by Bourdieu as the legitimization process of the meanings of the things by hegemonic groups

in society and their imposition on others through pedagogic action, having defined pedagogic action as symbolic violence, Bourdieu and Passeron go further and claim that this violence is established through a pedagogic communication, which consists of the power relations in the social formation, and serves the objective interests of certain groups and classes (Bourdieu ve Passeron, 1990). Pedagogic action also determines what is to be reproduced, with an act of exclusion. The level of arbitrariness of the imposed culture is thus in correlation with the level of arbitrariness of the imposing power. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) remark that any other pedagogic action models besides the present ones are also inclined to produce dominant cultural codes, and to contribute the set of mechanisms which generate cultural arbitrary.

In their *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, Bourdieu and Passeron originate some other concepts that define and relate to pedagogic action. Pedagogic authority is an important one of them, and it is defined as follows:

[Insofar as it is a power of symbolic violence] exerted within a relation of pedagogic communication which can produce its own, specifically symbolic effect only because the arbitrary power which makes imposition possible is never seen in its full truth; and insofar as it is the inculcation of a cultural arbitrary, carried on within a relation of pedagogic communication which can produce its own, specifically pedagogic only because the arbitrariness of the content inculcated is never in its full truth, pedagogic action necessarily implies, as a social condition of its exercise, pedagogic authority and the relative autonomy of the agency commissioned to exercise it. (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, 11)

Pedagogic authority intensifies the power that establishes and conceals it, and in return, power relations determine the forms of imposition specific to pedagogic action. Therefore, the relation between pedagogic action and pedagogic authority becomes complex. On the determination of pedagogic authority, Bourdieu and Passeron (1990, 20) describe the practices of pedagogic authority as follows: “[t]he pedagogic transmitters are from the outset designated as fit to transmit that which they transmit, hence entitled to impose its reception and test its inculcation by means of socially approved or guaranteed sanctions.” Pedagogic authority is only possible with imposition of cultural arbitrary, and use of the means of symbolic violence. “The more directly a pedagogic agency reproduces, in the arbitrary content that it inculcates, the cultural arbitrary of the group or class which delegates to it its pedagogic authority, the less need it has to affirm and justify its own legitimacy” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, 29). Another element of

the process of pedagogic action is the group of pedagogic receivers who “are disposed from the outset to recognize the legitimacy of the information transmitted and the pedagogic authority of the pedagogic transmitters, hence to receive and internalize the message.” The concept of pedagogic work describes this process of internalization and defined by Bourdieu and Passeron (1990, 31) as follows:

Insofar as it is the arbitrary imposition of a cultural arbitrary presupposing pedagogic action, i.e. a delegation of authority, which requires the pedagogic agency to reproduce the principles of the cultural arbitrary which a group or class imposes as worthy of reproduction both by its very existence and by the fact of delegating to an agency the authority needed in order to reproduce it, pedagogic action (PA) entails pedagogic work, a process of inculcation which must last long enough to produce a durable training, i.e. a habitus, the product of internalization of the principles of a cultural arbitrary capable of perpetuating itself after pedagogic action has ceased and thereby of perpetuating in practices the principles of the internalized arbitrary.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990, 33) claim that “the specific productivity of pedagogic work, i.e. the degree to which it manages to inculcate in the legitimate addresses the cultural arbitrary which it is mandated to reproduce, is measured by the degree to which the habitus it produces is durable, and by the degree to which the habitus it produces is transposable, i.e. capable of generating practices conforming with the principles of the inculcated arbitrary in a greater number of different fields.” The relation between pedagogic work and pedagogic action depends on primary and secondary pedagogic work. A pedagogic action resulting from a primary pedagogic work creates the primary habitus, which is the basis for the subsequent formation of any other habitus. Then, the following question arises: What is the role of secondary pedagogic work in the formation of habitus? Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) discuss this on the basis of the following principles:

[a] The specific degree of productivity of any pedagogic work other than primary pedagogic work (secondary pedagogic work) is a function of the distance between the habitus it tends to inculcate (i.e. the cultural arbitrary it imposes) and the habitus inculcated by the previous phases of pedagogic work and ultimately by primary pedagogic work (i.e. the initial cultural arbitrary) ... (43).

... ..

[b] ...Any given mode of inculcation is characterized by the position it occupies between (1) the mode of inculcation aiming to bring about the complete substitution of one habitus for another (conversion) and (2) the mode of inculcation aiming purely and simply to confirm the primary habitus (maintenance or reinforcement). (44)

The conditions of formation for a variety of habitus depend on the degree of specific productivity of pedagogic work, and the forms of pedagogic action related to it: Transformation depends on the distance between different forms of habituses and the positions of pedagogic work in this distance. In Bourdieu and Passeron's words (1990, 44): "the essential characteristics of secondary pedagogic work seeking to bring about a radical conversion (metanoia) may be deduced from the fact that such operations are required to organize the social conditions of their performance with a view to killing off the 'old man' and engendering the new habitus *ex nihilo*." This formation needs certain institutional conditions and means. This is the function of institutionalized education system; as Bourdieu and Passeron describes as follows:

[Every institution] has to produce and reproduce the institutional conditions whose existence and persistence (self reproduction of the system) are necessary both to the exercise of its essential function of inculcation and to the fulfilment of its function of reproducing a cultural arbitrary which it does not produce (cultural reproduction), the reproduction of which contributes to the reproduction of the relations between the groups or classes (social reproduction). (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, 54).

Reproduction of cultural arbitrary in the continuity of education system needs a group of trained actors. Bourdieu emphasizes the importance of a homogenized educational process for this group who does the work of schooling:

The education system tends to ensure that the corps of agents recruited and trained to carry out inculcation operate within institutional conditions capable of both dispensing and preventing them from performing heterogeneous or heterodox work of schooling, i.e. those conditions most likely to exclude, without explicitly forbidding, any practice incompatible with the function of reproducing the intellectual and moral integration of the legitimate addressees. (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, 57)

Pedagogic action exercised under all these conditions transmits and reproduces a systematized and homogenized message of schooling, which Bourdieu and Passeron name as *routinized culture*. Thus, due to the presence and work of a certain authority active in the school, it generates the culture of school or the institutional habitus.

Conclusion

Bourdieu's work on education has a very important role in conceptualization of the field and its practices, and in the analysis of the complex networks of practices within it. The present paper's aim is to review in detail the basic concepts of Bourdieu's work, i.e. habitus, field, forms of capital, symbolic violence, and reproduction, and the relations and links among these concepts.

The field of education is in a relationship with the various macro and micro structures and networks of practices. The relational nature of fields enable transitions between networks and fields, and transformations of structures and practices. The concept of *habitus* in Bourdieu's sociology formulates these relations and transitions. The concept emphasizes the association of individuals and trans-individual structures, and the potential of practices in generating such association. Practices may well be exercised consciously and unconsciously. These spontaneous forms become dispositions, and generate habitus as a system of dispositions. The field of education plays an important role in the determination, production, and the practice of the entire system of dispositions in a spontaneous fashion, independent from an evaluation mechanism.

Another determinant concept is that of *field*, a realm of struggle and structured positions, which offers an insight to autonomous structures, determination of actors and their practices. Bourdieu uses the metaphor of game to discuss the concept of field. In the field, the actors have relative positions which determine their relative actions. The structures which establish this relation of relativity can be defined as *forms of capital*. When the game metaphor is transferred to the field of education, the constitutive elements of the field turn out to be the positions and actions (teaching, education, administration, learning, etc.) of the actors (teacher, student, administrator, student's parent, actors who develop policies, etc.) determined in the context of the rules of the game and the relations in the field and in-between fields. Hence occur the relations of domination, subordination, and equality/inequality. Forms of capital also determine the relations in the field. Forms of capital, in Bourdieu's perspective, determine the positions of social links, property relations, and cultural acquisitions. Possession of forms of capital in the field of education has a particular role in determining

structural forms and network of relations, and understanding the dynamics of privileges.

Other crucial concepts detailed in the present paper are *symbolic violence* and *reproduction*. Bourdieu defines symbolic violence as imposition of the system of symbols and meanings, which consists of following procedures: *pedagogic action*, *pedagogic authority*, *system of pedagogic values*, and *pedagogic work*. The process of reproduction entails the reproduction of class culture and power mechanisms. These basic concepts of Bourdieuan literature are so crucial in analyzing the structural forms in the field of education in an organic relationality, and contribute to a critical understanding of the discussions in the field.

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