

Bourdieu and social class within the educational system

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The subject of social class within the educational system seems to be the elephant in the room. Issues of race, gender, discrimination and making safe places are addressed constantly within the pedagogy yet we ignore the realities of social stratification, especially when it comes to the classroom and the curriculum we are expected to teach. According to Bourdieu, the education systems of western societies function in such a way as to legitimize class inequalities (Bourdieu, 1977).

Success in the education system is enhanced by the possession of cultural capital (which is determined the dominant culture) and Lower-class pupils do not, in general, possess these traits. Bourdieu then supposes that the failure of the majority of these pupils is inevitable. This, he postulates, explains class inequalities in educational attainment. For Bourdieu, educational credentials help to reproduce and legitimize social inequalities, as higher-class individuals are seen to deserve their place in the social structure.

Place in the social structure is not pre determined and education often is a factor in the upward mobility in SES. Muller and his team describe cross-national similarities and differences in the two steps in which education intervenes in the process of intergenerational class mobility: the link between class of origin and educational credentials attained, and between these credentials and class position allocated to (Muller et al. , 1989).

They conclude that the patterns of association between class origin and education, and between education and class destinations are similar across the nine nations. However, the strength of these associations demonstrates

cross-national variations. This paper is one of the first comparative studies of social mobility, which used the data sets collected in the early 1970s from nine European countries investigated in Comparative Analysis of Social Mobility in Industrial Nations (CASMIN) project.

Nevertheless, this article supports FJG hypothesis which argues that class origin inequalities in relative mobility chances will be roughly constant across nations. Social mobility, class and education is further explored through a longitudinal study conducted by Johnson, Brett & Deary (2009). They proposed that social class of origin acts as ballast, restraining otherwise meritocratic social class movement, and that education is the primary means through which social class movement is both restrained and facilitated, thereby giving weight to Bourdieu's theory of Cultural Reproduction.

They conclude that parental social class attainment contributes to educational attainment, which in turn contributes to participant social class attainment, suggesting that educational attainment contributed to social class stability. Education is important to social mobility and, thus, appears to play a pivotal role in the association between ability and social class attainment. When looking at the relationship between ability and social class attainment, it is useful to also look at the different types of culture capital.

Andersen and Hansen (2011), for example, distinguish between two interpretations of cultural capital: "narrow" and "broad." The narrow interpretation refers to a child's exposure to 'high cultural' products or activities (Bourdieu's concept of objectified capital): for example, having objects of art at home, or a tastefully furnished home, visits to the theatre or art

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museums, or playing the piano (p. 608). These signs of high culture may not improve a student's work in any objective way, but they are rewarded through subjectivity involved in assessing academic performance.

The same is true of the broad interpretation of cultural capital, which is "general linguistic skills, habits, and knowledge, including cognitive skills," which are "used in a strategic manner by individuals, who thereby may receive advantages or profits" (p. 608). This kind of cultural capital is passed from parents to children through school work (p. 608). Bourdieu's description of educational capital encompasses this outlook. One of

Andersen and Hansen (2011) implications in schools which supports Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital is that: "Students from classes with highest cultural capital will perform the best academically, on each horizontal level" (of social class) (p 611) This is often seen played out when looking at the Socio Economic Status schools. Bankston and Caldas (2009) examine how legal desegregation of American schools starting in the 1950s and 1960s was countered by de facto segregation due to "social class, residential patterns" and other forms of social marginalization.

Since the average socioeconomic status of a student population affects a school's educational achievement levels, upper and middle class families eluded and hindered desegregation by moving to different school districts, suburban communities, by choosing private schools etc. Bourdieu's concept of education through institutional capital sees education as a place where one acquires the skills to enter different positions within the labour force - and those positions in turn determines one's socioeconomic status..

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Bankstone and Caldas state that policy assumes that differences in educational achievements are caused by the concrete schools and in particular by its teaching staff. Schools are believed to determine socioeconomic conditions instead of the other way around. As educators, not only must we be aware that class differences are present in the classroom, but, perhaps, look for ways to minimize the gulf between classes and increase capital culture in those who do not possess as much as others. Technology may be one way to do this. There seems to be a push towards using new technologies in the classroom.

Considering class inequality and cultural capital, an educational model that aims to bridge the divide by bringing students together to the same level of technological proficiency would be desirable. Kapitzke (2000), following a case-study in an Australian school, concludes that integrating student-based projects using information technology is a way to bring students with tech skills back from the brink of alienation. Kapitzke states that "teachers who ignore the texts, identities, skills and interests of the young do so at their own peril." (p. 0) Faced with a growing techno-cultural capital gap, educators need to "view students as fellow explorers and co-workers" (p. 60) and possibly working on innovative projects like revamping a school's computer network. The student who led the project ended up teaching not only students but teachers too. Not only would cultural capital be affected, it is most likely that a student's social capital. Conversely, a study done in Californian schools shows a different side of the story. Cuban (2001) and fellow researchers explored the paradox of high access to technology with low real use.

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This was explained by traditional constraints on teachers such as time and structure, as well as annoying deficiencies in the technologies, such as computer crashes, that limited teachers' initiatives. The teachers stressed "that using computers in their classes made demands upon them that made their job harder." (p. 828) In the end, "inadequate time in the daily schedule to plan work together goes to the heart of teacher use of new technologies and their preferred teaching practices" (p. 28) and resulted in the teachers preferring traditional teacher-based discussions, lectures and activities supplemented with some time for technologies. Cuban and his colleagues believe that technology will never revolutionize the classroom; instead, "historical legacies of high schools in their school structures and technological flaws will trump the slow revolution in teaching. In conclusion, the Kapitzke article highlights an innovative practices" (p. 830). way of maximizing technology saw students' cultural capital and thereby pushing for equality and integration.

However, as the Cuban article points out, technology will likely be relegated to special projects when deemed appropriate by a teacher relying on various methodologies. While dynamic technologically innovative teaching methods have their place they are not the magic answer to solving cultural capital and class inequalities.