Bourdieu's Social Theory and Sustainability:
What is ‘Environmental Capital’?

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Abstract
Drawing on the social theory of Bourdieu, this paper introduces the concept of ‘environmental capital’, which is theorised as particular ways of understanding and relating with the world’s environment, and with the potential to inform a habitus of sustainability. The extent to which such capital relates to and is convertible with other capitals is also theorised. In particular, it is argued that environmental capital is undervalued in the current schooling ‘stakes’, and that its revaluing requires pedagogical work on the habitus of teachers and, by extension, students, in order to transform their dispositions in more environmentally sustainable ways. The cultural field upon which this paper concentrates is the education of pre-service teachers, with the intent to influence their pedagogic work by demonstrating the value of sustainable pedagogic actions. It is argued that educators and education practices need to be informed by a habitus of sustainability and, similarly, that if students are denied access to environmental capital from the very first years of schooling, the collective habitus required to create a sustainable world may never eventuate.

Introduction
Drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, this paper seeks to define and claim importance for ‘environmental capital’. We argue this to be a hybrid capital: both cultural and economic and perhaps social as well, although here we tend to focus on its cultural attributes. We begin with Bourdieu’s concepts of field, doxa, capital and habitus, which assist understanding of how and why the environment is facing degradation and how this is connected to our particular cultural practices. In particular, his work exposes the mechanisms behind and within the reproductive tendencies of education, society and culture, which, by extension, reproduce essentially unsustainable practices.

This rendition of Bourdieu’s social theory enables us then to name what in advanced capitalist societies makes sustainability difficult to realise, and how the reproductive tendencies of education can be used to achieve a “habitus of sustainability” through increased valuing of the environment. We contend that Western societies in general and their citizens in particular are short on environmental capital. It is argued that the field of education, in particular the education of pre-service teachers, is an important site for the accumulation of such capital, with the intention of producing a habitus of sustainability in pre-service teachers, and by proxy, their future students.

We begin, though, with a Bourdieusian analysis of our current environmental condition and how the cultural practices of western societies are implicated in this.

Bourdieu and the Environment
In explaining his social theory, Bourdieu often likens society to a game, with different players possessing resources (social, economic and cultural capitals) that receive differing values depending
on within which cultural field they are acting (academic, political, economic, etc). For Bourdieu, field is ‘seen as a structured space of positions in which the positions and their interrelations are determined by the distribution of different kinds of resources or “capital”’ (Bourdieu, 1991: 14). From our perspective, it is within the environment that individuals live, work and relax while they negotiate their progress through other cultural fields. An agent’s given trajectory through any particular field will be governed by their individual habitus; constituted by the sensibilities and dispositions embodied through early familial, educational and social interaction. While action in the past may have been oriented towards wealth, prestige, recognition or truth, environmental scientists posit that in the future the stakes could be either sustainability or destruction, put simply, life or death. For instance, ‘Global warming involves issues of wealth creation and distribution, of immediate gratification versus long-term gain, of traditional assumptions and modes of living versus newer realities, of international cooperation in place of independent isolationist policies’ (Kennedy, 1994: 118).

When considering environmental issues, Bourdieu's methodology behind his theory of habitus provides a valuable parallel for theorising the ‘discrete’ and unsustainable conceptualisation of humanity/nature. While focusing primarily on human actions, Bourdieu rejects both existentialism and structuralism, thereby denying the existential notion of the fully autonomous agent and the structuralist notion that it is our environment, the structures that surround us, that make us what we are. While influenced by structuralism, Bourdieu does not regard individuals as being without agency, hence his notion of the ‘habitus’ being:

… not only a structuring structure, which organises practices and the perceptions of practices, but also a structured structure: the principle of division into logical classes which organises the perception of the social world is itself the product of internalisation of the division into social classes (Bourdieu, 1984: 170).

In the case of an individual from a family generously endowed with the dominant cultural capital, the dispositions and embodied sensibilities accumulated via the family represent the ‘structured structure’, and the trajectory and subsequent success or failure through education and career represent the ‘structuring structure’. Bourdieu notes that those in possession of valuable cultural capital serve, through greater likelihood of academic success, to create and fulfil the dominant roles in academia, law, business and so on – thereby re-creating or re-producing the society ‘naturally’, by being recognised as an individual who is intelligent, successful and cultured. This status in turn can be exchanged for social capital, a network of agents in various fields. While there are no guarantees, with these valuable resources there is a likelihood the individual will gain economic capital. This structuring structure provides their progeny with dominant cultural capital, and similarly, those individuals not in possession of the dominant cultural capital or with less of it, have less chance to acquire it, as education is reflective of middle-class ways of speaking and acting (Bourdieu, 1979, 1977b).

So the habitus, as informed by various forms of capital, embodies the dialectical relationship between the individual and society, between agency and socialisation, and represents an inter-relation of modernist binaries such as subjectivism/objectivism, autonomy/determinism and humanity/nature.
Bourdieu’s methodology can, therefore, be utilised when theorising about the dialectical and unsustainable relationship between humanity and the environment.

In order to examine these apparently discrete entities, we must chart a course through our cultural history, which recognises some reasons for the arbitrary and anthropocentric conceptualisation of our separation with nature. Bourdieu notes that “Nature” as science understands it – [is] a cultural fact which is the historical product of a long labour of “disenchantment” (Bourdieu, 1977a: 167). Baconian science, for example, dictates that it is through the knowledge and exploitation of nature that power can be realised – hence the famous aphorism: ‘knowledge is power’. Over time, our scientific endeavours led to a further stage of separation, the industrial revolution, where nature was viewed simply as an exploitable resource, from which trees, rivers and earth were viewed in terms of potential profits, and little thought was given to nature as a life-sustaining resource (Orr, 2002; Suzuki, 1990). Finally, and only recently in late capitalism, phenomena such as climate change and salination have been shown to be the result of human activity, though many still consider the exploitation of nature essential to maintain our quality of life. Environmentalist, David Suzuki, takes this further, writing that

Our political and economic systems do not consider the cost of human activity on an ecosystem. Whatever we take from that ecosystem denies it to other life forms, and whatever we dispose into it flows through the various cycles of air, water and soil. For millennia, our numbers were small and our technology simple, so the environment seemed limitless and endlessly self-cleansing. Today we are too numerous and our technology is too powerful for nature to be as forgiving. The economic “costs” of new products simply do not include long-term environmental degradation. Governments don’t offer enough rewards to those who conserve resources for future generations or adequately punish those who use up or damage the environment. It doesn’t make sense to decide on recycling only if it is economically profitable: we live on a finite planet where all life is ultimately interconnected (Suzuki, 1990: 60).

To this day, this unsustainable conceptualisation is part of humanity’s ‘doxa’; its preconscious acceptance that nature and humanity are separate (Gare, 1993). This is evidenced within Australia’s education system, even within the title of one of our 8 key learning areas: Studies of Society and Environment. The title itself provides legitimacy to the cultural arbitrary which holds that environment and society are discrete entities. However, we argue that this anthropocentric dichotomy requires reformulation in order to provide an understanding of the holistic interdependence between society and environment. Humanity’s ability to meet its survival needs is dependent upon nature’s balance (Huckle, 1993; Suzuki, 1990), and while Studies of Society and Environment contains valuable knowledge, any pedagogic action which enforces a dichotomy between environment and humanity, implicitly delegitimizes any authority given to holistic interpretations of this interrelation (Gough, 1997). A functional step in addressing humanity’s interplay between itself and the environment is providing this notion with appropriate nomen clature, rather than providing legitimacy to modernist binaries such as humanity/nature which are to a large extent responsible for our current environmental predicament (Bowers, 2001). We need to reconceptualise our identity as ecological animals, depending as we do
upon food, warmth and shelter, rather than just socio-cultural animals, which associates us directly with phenomena which may be responsible for our extinction. Bourdieu provides support for such cultural reconsiderations, when he writes that

The selection of meanings which objectively defines a group’s or a class’s culture as a symbolic system is arbitrary insofar as the structure and functions of that culture cannot be deduced from any universal principle, whether physical, biological or spiritual, not being linked by any sort of internal relation to ‘the nature of things’ or any ‘human nature’ (Bourdieu, 1994: 8).

The historical and cultural development of our relationship with nature outlined above not only locates a potential site for action, but contains an affective correlation upon the formation of the habitus. As already outlined, the habitus is our embodied sensibilities, our dispositions as influenced by our various capitals and by our collective history. An unsustainable habitus is effectively the product of total human history, a history from which the environment has been viewed as a place to visit, or a resource, or something to buy, or something beautiful to be admired, and not a living organism whose balance must be maintained for our survival. It has only been 40 years since Silent Spring (Carson, 1963), an expose of the harmful effects of pesticides, which heralds for many the beginnings of the environmental movement. Now environmental scientists believe ‘that the root causes of environmental problems are located in the very nature of our current social, economic and political systems and in the world views, institutions and lifestyle choices that support them’ (Fien, 1993b: vii). This is consistent with a Bourdieueian perspective, which posits the reasons for our unsustainable actions, even considering that environmental knowledge is easily accessible, within the culturally reproductive tendencies of the habitus and the high cultural values placed upon unsustainable forms of capital accumulation. Bourdieu may also say that there has simply not been enough time for conscious environmental action, as ‘…every historical action brings together two states of history: objectified history, i.e. the history which has accumulated over the passage of time in things, machines, buildings, monuments, books, theories, customs, laws, etc.; and embodied history, in the form of habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1981: 305, original emphasis). The knowledge of environmentalism has not yet had the time to be inculcated into the habitus of most cultural agents as it is not, as a rule, part of family life.

For sustainability to become an accepted part of family life, many changes are required in education, in cultures and the capitalist doxa of our society. As Suzuki suggests, ‘In the long run, the only way we can get off our destructive path is to develop a radically different perspective on our place in nature’ (Suzuki, 1990: 183) and the essential process to realising such change is education (Bowers, 2003; Kennedy, 1994). However, this is easier said than done.

Bourdieu provides an understanding of the unconscious opposition to educational change which may subvert the emphasis upon economic and social conservation, such as an invigoration of an environmental ideology. As Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture (Bourdieu, 1994) shows, education, society and culture tend towards conservative reproduction, or stasis, though Bourdieu believes that to ‘speak of strategies of reproduction is not to say that the strategies through which
dominants manifest their tendency to maintain the status quo are the result of rational calculation or even strategic intent’ (Bourdieu, 1996: 272). According to Bourdieu, it is the inculcated, durable, structured, generative, and transposable dispositions which constitute the habitus that are to large extent responsible for the reproduction of culture, hence, the reproduction of our unsustainable society. Due to the nature of the habitus, which may have been shaped by a life history of unsustainable doxa such as the necessity of economic growth, or that wealth is essential for happiness, or that the environment is simply a resource and so on – the necessary decisions to contribute to environmental sustainability may not even be considered. While Bowers (2001: 5) thinks that the ‘downward trend in the viability of ecological systems is being disregarded by a public that wants to believe in the media and in shopping mall images of plenitude rather than consider the ecological consequences of their consumer lifestyle’, Bourdieu would add that

    to view action as the outcome of conscious calculation – a perspective implicit in some forms of game theory and rational action theory – is to neglect the fact that, by virtue of the habitus, individuals are already predisposed to act in certain ways, pursue certain goals, avow certain tastes, and so on (Bourdieu, 1991: 16, original emphasis).

Our unsustainable actions are then as much a form of ignorance as they are the result of rational calculation. An essential process to achieve sustainability will be the alteration of the habitus, and Bourdieu enables us to theorise ways in which education can intervene in the production of a ‘habitus of sustainability’, through the introduction and accumulation of ‘environmental capital’. In short:

    The transition to an ecologically sustainable society will involve a historically unprecedented revolution in institutions, systems, lifestyles and values. Much of Western culture has to be totally reversed in a few decades. We have to replace a long list of cultural traits by their opposites, particularly obsessions with material affluence, getting richer, competing, winning, exercising power and controlling nature (Fien, 1993c: 39).

These cultural traits and practices that Fien observes as responsible for Western culture’s unsustainable practices correspond to Bourdieu’s concept of practice, ‘in accordance with the formula: [(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 101). While this formula was designed with particular cultural fields in mind, we can adjust this to account for the impact in the environmental field thus: [(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice with a +/- environmental result. Clearly, the only spaces to intervene for positive environmental practices are the habitus and mainly cultural capital. As the forms of capital one possesses will invariably influence the habitus, it is fitting to conceptualise the nature of ‘environmental capital’ first.

**Environmental Capital**

Environmental capital is primarily knowledge about the environment. This involves an understanding of the interdependence of all life on Earth, and an awareness of the complicity that individuals possess
in contributing to both positive and negative environmental consequences. Environmental capital also entails an understanding of the interconnectedness of the social, cultural, political, technological and economic systems and the effects these have on the environment. This is for two reasons; first, it is within these systems that sustainable initiatives will have their foundation; second, knowledge of the root causes of environmental problems is essential for real progress towards sustainable solutions (Bowers, 2001; Fien, 1997; Hug, 1998).

Wals (1990: 6) notes that knowledge and understanding is ‘not sufficient in resolving environmental problems. In order for people to be able to act upon their knowledge and awareness they need to become acquainted with a variety of action skills’ (cf. Fien, 1993a: 71). Environmental capital must therefore include the following skills (Byrne, 2000: 49):

1. Analysis Skills
   • To be able to utilise and create models that define and describe the interactions within and between environmental, social, and economic systems and predict probable interactions and outcomes.

2. Communication Skills
   • To be fluent in the language of systems, from which one can describe environmental, economic and social constructs and processes to others who have different perspectives.

3. Collaboration and Cooperation Skills
   • To be able to develop shared visions with peers, families, and community members about the future.

4. Deep Thinking Skills
   • Apply broad and diverse definitions of fundamental concepts, such as environment, community, development, and technology, to local, national and global experiences.

5. Decision making Skills
   • To exhibit leadership in individual or groups problem solving to ensure that solutions developed are acted upon in a strategic manner.

6. Use of Appropriate Technology Skills
   • Be able to use a wide range of technologies, including email, www., etc. to effectively communicate and coordinate with peer collaborative groups, mentors, teachers, and members of the larger community.

7. Planning Skills
   a. Be able to create a “what if analysis” and a systems thinking approach to issues that influence the sustainable systems of the environment, the economy, and social equity.

8. Action Taking Skills

9. Conflict Management Skills
   • Be able to work towards negotiated consensus and cooperative resolution of conflict.

10. Multiple Perspective Skills
    • Be able to assess the nature of bias and evaluate different points of view.
In addition to these skills, valuable environmental capital exists in material forms such as solar panelling or recycled materials, and in educational qualifications or employment positions in fields which have as a focus a sustainable environment. Available time to either engage in sustainable initiatives, or to enjoy the outdoors is another factor, as is the motivation to explore beneficial relationships with nature. The confidence to make sustainable choices, enter into environmental discussions, along with the values and concerns one has for the environment are other factors of environmental capital (Mortenson, 2000). Everybody possesses environmental capital in one form or another, though we believe it is the quality and quantity of this capital which must be increased across the general population before sustainability will be achieved.

Conversions
Environmental capital is convertible with the other forms of capital. In nature, it is most closely linked to cultural capital, as the amount or quality of cultural capital one possesses will to an extent determine one’s social capital and the expenditure of economic capital. So too, environmental capital will to an extent determine one’s social capital and the expenditure of economic capital. As Bourdieu writes ‘To possess the machines, he only needs economic capital; to appropriate them and use them in accordance with their specific purpose (defined by cultural capital, of scientific or technical type …), he must have access to embodied cultural capital’ (Bourdieu, 1986: 247). Environmental capital will determine how economic capital is used. Those possessing large amounts of both may purchase expensive hybrid electric/fuel cars, solar panelling or rain water tanks, while those with high environmental capital and low economic capital may ride to work, choose recycled goods or grow their own food. Those with valuable environmental capital are aware of the links between materialist consumerism and environmental degradation, and accordingly have a different view of wealth, ‘one that equates wealth with the quality of relationships, participation in community-centred activities, and ability to add to the culture’s symbolic world of dance, music, narratives, and visual arts’ (Bowers, 2003: 161). Environmental capital entails an awareness of non-commodified conceptions of wealth, and equates success with the ability to live sustainably, leave a small ecological footprint, and so consider the livelihood of unborn generations.

Environmental capital is therefore correlated with cultural capital. One’s embodied cultural capital can signify class status, educational achievement, and dispositions or tastes. One’s environmental capital, though not essentially embodied and marked by style or language, is recognised through occupation and hobbies, consuming habits, preferences for attire, conversation, recreation etc. The two forms of capital do have important distinctions, as while

the specifically symbolic logic of distinction additionally secures material and symbolic profits for the possessors of a large cultural capital: any given cultural competence (e.g., being able to read in a world of illiterates) derives a scarcity value from its position in the distribution of cultural capital and yields profits of distinction for its owner (Bourdieu, 1986: 245).
We contend, however, that environmental capital works differently in scarcity. While a large environmental capital will yield profits of distinction for its owner, all agents and the environment will benefit from the environmental knowledge, attitudes and actions exhibited by a single agent in possession of environmental capital. Similarly, cultural capital

exists as symbolically and materially active, effective capital only insofar as it is appropriated by agents and implemented and invested as a weapon and a stake in the struggles which go on in the fields of cultural production (the artistic field, the scientific field, etc.) (Bourdieu, 1986: 247).

Environmental capital is also only effective if it is appropriated by agents in fields of cultural and social production (the local community, the local school, etc.). Environmental capital is therefore also recognised and given worth when exhibited through actions, as a weapon used in the struggles for sustainability which go on in fields of cultural production.

Environmental capital works in interesting ways with social capital. One’s social capital is defined to an extent by the amount of cultural and economic capital an agent possesses. Any social network, if infiltrated by an agent with high environmental capital will necessarily change. Knowledge will be shared, assumptions will be challenged and practices will be affected. In this way, the group’s collective cultural and economic capital will also change.

Bourdieu, when discussing the nature of social capital, notes that

Every group has its more or less institutionalised forms of delegation which enable it to concentrate the totality of the social capital, which is the basis of the existence of the group … in the hands of a single agent or a small group of agents … charged … to represent the group, to speak and act in its name (Bourdieu, 1986: 251).

Environmental groups, members and causes bring together agents with diverse cultural, economic and social capitals. The strength of the group lies primarily in its ability to affect environmental changes, and only secondly ‘to concentrate the totality of the social capital’. It is the collective amount of environmental capital that the group possesses which provides both its value and its ability to contribute to a sustainable environment. While environmental capital is analogous to individual environmental knowledge, skills and resources, agents, both alone and within social groups, must possess a ‘habitus of sustainability’ if environmental capital is to be utilised effectively in the battle for sustainability.

Habitus of Sustainability

Kennedy (1994: 33) writes that the ‘human race as a whole could suffer more from a careless pursuit of economic growth than it may lose by modifying its present habits’. As habits are synonymous with the inculcated, durable and structured dispositions of the habitus (Leitch, 2003), it is only through the accumulation of valuable environmental capital that one can adapt to a ‘habitus of sustainability’.
Webb et al. note that like doxa, ‘habitus is, in a sense, entirely arbitrary; there is nothing natural or essential about the values we hold, the desires we pursue, or the practices in which we engage’ (Webb et al, 2002: 38). We contend that the pursuit of sustainability is less arbitrary, as environmental action on a universal scale will be required to ensure the survival of humanity as a whole and not the singular reproduction of a particular culture. Also, as the habitus is a construction, it is amenable to reconstruction. Awareness of the interconnectedness of life-systems provided by environmental capital may influence the habitus to incorporate ideas generally outside those of dominant cultural capital (i.e. the livelihood of others). In this way, a habitus of sustainability will reflect values and actions that consider the universal, and will therefore be less arbitrary.

An agent with a habitus of sustainability acts with an awareness of the interconnectedness of nature and humanity. Decisions that are likely to affect that relationship are filtered through the habitus, drawing on available environmental capital to assess any effects. Bourdieu says that the ‘habitus … provides individuals with a sense of how to act and respond in the course of their daily lives. It ‘orients’ their actions and inclinations without strictly determining them. [It] also provides a sense of what is acceptable’ (Bourdieu, 1991: 13). For example, an environmentalist, someone we assume to possess a habitus of sustainability, is highly unlikely to cut down old growth forests for work. In this way, an agent with a habitus of sustainability may reject a decision which may otherwise provide economically, culturally or socially, if the environmental consequences are too severe.

Bourdieu has been criticised for being pessimistically deterministic in regard to opportunities for social agents to be responsible for their actions due to the resilience of the habitus to change (Leitch, 2003), but this is only half the story. Bourdieu is cognisant of the dynamic nature of the habitus, noting that the ‘habitus, as the product of social conditionings, and thus of a history … is endlessly transformed’ (Bourdieu, 1990: 116). Other theorists employing Bourdieu’s concepts believe the habitus can change as a result of new circumstances, education and new information or schemata (Desmarchelier, 1999; Hodkinson, 1999; Moore, 1999), and Bourdieu himself states the habitus ‘can also be controlled through awakening of consciousness and socioanalysis’ (Bourdieu, 1990: 116, original emphasis). Considering the ability of environmental education to promote a habitus of sustainability, Desmarchelier (1999) notes that as

students learn to apply the terminology of academia … [or in this case, sustainability], they move from a position of ignorance to one of understanding. The new terminology, plus the value it encompasses, serve to move the student from one habitus to another (Desmarchelier, 1999: 283).

The habitus, then, is not static and can change or be influenced through education, new information and ‘an awakening of consciousness’. As the habitus ‘becomes active only in the relation to a field, and the same habitus can lead to very different practices and stances depending on the state of the field’ (Bourdieu, 1990: 116, original emphasis). Bourdieu here infers that the field can change. We propose that as knowledge of the environmental field grows, the perception of the field changes, hence the habitus may respond with different practices and stances depending on one’s
understanding of the state of the environment. For example, while an individual may swim freely in a river, new knowledge of pollution in the waterways will most certainly change the individual’s habits.

Pedagogic Work to Promote Environmental Capital for a Habitus of Sustainability

However, it is not just a matter of informing people about the environmental crisis and assuming this will lead to more sustainable practices (Gough, 1997). What is needed is education aimed at value change, skill provision and a sustainable environment (Fien, 1993a). While in western societies, formal education plays an essential role in providing knowledge and understanding of cultural practices, it is also often considered a critical process towards the resolution of social problems (Kennedy, 1994; Sterling, 1993). According to David Orr though,

No other issue of politics, economics, and public policy will remain unaffected by the crisis of resources, population, climate change, species extinction, acid rain, deforestation, ozone depletion, and soil loss. Sustainability is about the terms and conditions of human survival, and yet we still educate at all levels as if no such crisis existed (Orr, 2002: 83).

This raises an important issue, which points toward two things. First, there is not enough environmental education in schools, in teacher education or in general university courses (Gurova, 2002). Second, the type of education that is taking place is enforcing a fragmented world view, being single-disciplinary and uncritical of culture and society (Fien, 1997). This reinforces both the conceptions of humanity and nature as disparate, and the sort of thinking that is responsible for our environmental predicament (Bowers, 1999; DiMaggio, 2000).

Fien (1993a) attempts to address this issue, when he discusses three distinct forms of environmental education. First, education about the environment is information oriented, and intent on providing students with knowledge about environmental problems and solutions. Second, education in the environment is designed to evoke feelings of affinity and concern for the environment, accomplished through experiential activities, like field trips or camps. Third, education for the environment has an overt agenda of values education and social change. It aims to engage students in the exploration and resolution of environmental issues in order to foster the values … [and] promote lifestyles that are compatible with the sustainable and equitable use of resources (Fien, 1993a: 16).

A common argument as to why societies are unsustainable is bound up in current social, cultural and economic contexts (Fien, 1993a; Suzuki, 1990), hence the idea that ‘environmental education cannot encourage sustainable behaviour without being socially critical’ (Sterling, 1993: 88). A Bourdieuan analysis would add that our quest for capital accumulation and cultural distinction often involves unsustainable practices, and for sustainability to be realised, a change of behaviour (the habitus) is essential (Scott, 2003). In advocating this, pedagogues need to embrace education for the
environment, which 'seeks to contribute to the processes of social change through educational activities which promote both personal and structural transformation' (Fien, 1993a: 29).

To achieve such a transformation, education about and in the environment play an important role in the establishment of environmental capital, though education for the environment is where the accumulated environmental capital is given worth, and where actions not only affect the environment, but the individual involved, as encouraged at UNESCO conferences on environmental education (Tilbury, 1994). In this way, education for the environment contributes to personal habit, value and action change, hence this particular pedagogy can assist in the production of a habitus of sustainability. As argued above, a habitus of sustainability is essential for the realisation of sustainability, as ‘all the government, scientists, experts, organisations, laws, and treaties in the world will achieve nothing unless there are free-thinking and freely-operating individuals in a position to make their own decisions about the future of their natural environment (WWF, 1996: 27)’ (cf: Scott, 2003: 3).

Bourdieu gives us hope for influencing the habitus, when he writes that ‘only the concept of pedagogic work can break the circle in which one is trapped when one forgets that a ‘cultural need’ is a cultivated need’ (Bourdieu, 1977b: 38). As the habitus is constructed or ‘cultivated’, it is amenable to reconstruction or recultivation. We contend that a habitus of sustainability is cognisant of the difference between a ‘need’ and a ‘cultivated need’, and is also aware of the unsustainable practices used in the production of many ‘cultivated needs’, and so converts available economic capital with sustainability in mind. Such a reorientation of consumer habits is essential for sustainability to be realised (Kennedy, 1994; Suzuki, 1990). Education for the environment should also cultivate within students the ‘need’ to live sustainably, i.e. a habitus of sustainability.

Though, for a change of habitus to occur, pedagogues need to consider the distance between the current habitus and a habitus of sustainability,

Given that the primary habitus inculcated by primary pedagogic work is the basis for the subsequent formation of any other habitus, the degree of specific productivity of any phase of secondary pedagogic work is measured, in this respect, by the degree to which the system of the means required for carrying out the pedagogic work (the mode of inculcation) objectively takes account of the distance between the habitus it aims to inculcate and the habitus produced by previous pedagogic work (Bourdieu, 1994: 45).

This means that education for the environment needs to consider that, generally speaking, students in possession of dominant cultural capital will comprehend pedagogic messages more successfully than students with a less valuable cultural capital. Importantly, we consider that environmental capital is not inherent or reflective of either the dominant or “other” cultural capital embodied in the habitus, therefore the degree to which it can be inculcated should not be dependent upon prior pedagogic work on an individual habitus – except the linguistic capital available to decode messages. Any advantages
that students with valuable cultural capital possess should not mean the delimiting of those who are less endowed with such capital.

Therefore, attempts to inculcate environmental capital should take forms of pedagogic work which rely not only upon the ability to decode linguistic utterances and text, but also on context-specific work with tactile aspects such as tree-planting and soil analysis, picture/photo discussion and deconstruction, music/song analysis and discussion, dramatic representations of environmental problems in plays or revues, subjective accounts of feelings, interests and concerns about the environment, and perhaps even cross-social class local action group work (e.g. inter-school projects), rather than strictly objective text and action based environmental pedagogic work. Fien (2001: 31) takes this further, writing that

Education for sustainability also requires teaching and learning experiences that encourage students to explore questions, issues and problems of sustainability in contexts relevant to them and their communities. This requires student-centred and interactive enquiry-based approaches that, wherever possible, use the environment and community as a resource for learning, and involve such activities as debating controversial issues, role play, simulation games, values clarification and analysis, and discovery learning as well as a range of creative and experiential activities.

We argue that these methods will be less successful if teachers themselves do not have highly valued environmental capital or a habitus of sustainability. Research shows that successful environmental education is often the result of a committed teacher, rather than the result of the general population of teachers from all disciplines, and shortfalls have been identified in the quality and quantity of environmental education provided to pre-service teachers (Cutter-MacKenzie, 2002; Scott, 1996; Tilbury, 1992). Fien (2001: 32) argues that successful environmental education ‘requires teachers who understand concepts and principles of sustainability, who know how to integrate them into their teaching programmes and practices, and who are confident and proficient in the use of student-centred, interactive and outcomes-based teaching strategies’. We argue that the amount of valuable environmental capital a teacher possesses will reflect the quality of environmental education in the classroom, and those teachers with a habitus of sustainability would seize more opportunities to discuss environmental considerations whatever the discipline being studied.

Recent research findings support this argument, noting pre-service teachers ‘may avoid or de-emphasise environmental education if they have relatively less content knowledge about environmental education’ (Cutter-MacKenzie, 2002: 22). The same researchers discovered a distinct lack of skills and knowledge in pre-service teachers, and Jenkins (1999: 45) found within the literature ‘that the majority of pre-service teachers do not have access to environmental education in a consistent and appropriate manner’. Fien advises that ‘a special commitment from teacher education institutions is necessary to reorient teacher education towards sustainability’ (Fien, 2000: 92), though how uniform changes could be made, the nature of such changes, and how teacher educators could be appropriately educated remains the focus of my research.
We argue that pre-service teacher education needs to provide more than just environmental information; it needs to assist teachers to acquire a habitus of sustainability, as

teachers should be ready to facilitate experiences conducive to the evolution of new world views, not just environmental knowledge. It makes sense then that teachers should learn to question and evolve new paradigms in their own thinking toward the environment prior to requiring the same of their learners (Hug, 1998: 9).

We concede that pedagogic work with intent to alter the habitus of teachers is difficult (Fien, 2000), and best achieved earlier in life (Bourdieu, 1977b), though Bourdieu’s concept of pedagogic authority means that education for the environment can be practiced with students when they begin school, even by those teachers without a habitus of sustainability. Pedagogic authority is ascribed to both the teacher and the curriculum, as

every pedagogic action that is exerted commands by definition a pedagogic authority, the pedagogic receivers are disposed from the outset to recognise the legitimacy of the information transmitted and the pedagogic authority of the pedagogic transmitters, hence to receive and internalise the message (Bourdieu, 1977b: 21).

Therefore, teaching by nature guarantees the legitimacy of the message, though what remains is a commitment from teacher education institutions that all teachers will become familiar with such pedagogy as mandated by the Belgrade Charter and Tbilisi, among others (Tilbury, 1994). The importance of such education, what has been called the ‘priority of priorities’ (Tilbury, 1992), is evidenced within the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005 – 2014). While pedagogic authority can be ascribed to the teaching of education for the environment, we contend that unless teachers are provided comprehensive education towards the construction of a habitus of sustainability, teachers will miss educational opportunities to explore the environment in a critical way with their students; they will reinforce the discrete notions of knowledge responsible for our environmental crisis; and they may confuse students by not considering an interdisciplinary or holistic understanding of sustainable environments.

**Conclusion**

This paper has argued that Bourdieu provides a valuable perspective on the environmental crisis, and that his theories can be utilised in the urgent quest for sustainability. Through increased valuing of environmental capital within all educational contexts, we believe both teachers and students have the potential to develop a habitus of sustainability.

We have outlined some of the cultural, social and historical reasons for current unsustainable practices, and argue that the accumulation of valuable environmental capital will assist people to understand these reasons, understand their personal complicity in environmental degradation, and also understand what in particular can be done to successfully achieve a sustainable society.

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Individuals who have valuable environmental capital will make different decisions than those with less of it, their values may change and their actions may be oriented towards creating a sustainable environment. In this way, they will embody a habitus of sustainability, the personal dispositions, values and actions needed for the ‘collective political choice’ necessary to attain the goal of sustainable development (Huckle, 1993: 58).

We suggest here that the amount of valuable environmental capital a teacher possesses will influence their pedagogical work, in turn shaping the process of habitus development that education provides students. The greater the emphasis teachers place on sustainability, the greater the likelihood students will develop a habitus of sustainability. We acknowledge that informing a habitus of sustainability within teachers will be challenging, and this remains the focus of our research. We have, however, realised that without the increased valuing of environmental capital to inform a habitus of sustainability, the values, attitudes and skills, and the political, social and cultural choices necessary for the sustainability of Earth will never be reached.

References


