

MIL05061

REPRODUCTION AND TRANSFORMATION IN DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES: A BOURDIEUIAN PERSPECTIVE ON IMPROVING THE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES OF STUDENTS

Carmen Mills
The University of Queensland

Abstract

This paper draws on research concerned with the reproduction of social inequalities in schooling. While Bourdieu is used to understand these matters, the paper suggests that there is transformative potential in his theoretical constructs and that it is possible for schools – such as the secondary school in this research – to pave the way for improvement in the educational outcomes of marginalised students. The paper draws together the major areas of contribution to this theme of reproduction and transformation, beginning by characterising Bourdieu's notion of habitus (often criticised as too deterministic) as constituted by reproductive *and* transformative traits. This is followed by a discussion of capital and more specifically, the way that teachers can draw upon a variety of capitals to act as agents of transformation rather than reproduction. The paper concludes by considering the necessity of a transformation of the field to include parent participation in disadvantaged schools.

Introduction

The research that this paper draws upon attempted to make visible the reproduction of social inequalities in one regional Australian secondary school with a view to transforming the understandings and practices of those involved and pave the way for improvement in the educational outcomes of disadvantaged students. Informed by the work of Bourdieu, the research not only provided a different perspective on what it means to 'do school' in a disadvantaged community, particularly in the way that disadvantage is reproduced for marginalised students, but it also explored the opportunities or the spaces for agency in the school and its communities to generate alternatives for students.

Located in a rural area of Australia and yet within commuting distance from a larger regional city, the small secondary school (of 200 students) is situated within an historic mining community. After a century of activity, the mine closed just over a decade ago. Reputed to have been the richest mine of its type in the world, its success extended far beyond the community, with its wealth stimulating the growth of nearby regional towns. Having provided work for tens of thousands over its lifetime, the economy of the town had become dependent upon the continuance of mining. Since the mine's closure, the community has experienced considerable economic depression and a high proportion of its residents are now welfare dependent. The town is also characterised by its large Indigenous population, and as a place of relocation for many uprooted and transient people, attracted – among other things – by the inexpensive housing available in the area.

As a small district that had relied primarily on a single financial source, the long term downturn of mining in this community has led to economic jeopardy. With reduced employment opportunities, fewer people have money to spend in the community and many small businesses have had to close as a result. The students are conscious of their town's economic vulnerability and know that it will be difficult to obtain employment there. Although educational qualifications are viewed by many as a proven way of accessing more secure, well-paid jobs offered by national labour markets (see, for example, Ainley & McKenzie, 1999; McClelland, Macdonald & MacDonald, 1998), in this town there tends to be disillusionment, especially among older students, about the real value of schooling, given the lack of employment opportunities in the community.

Like many disadvantaged schools, the school has problems attracting and retaining high ability teachers, instead relying on a high turnover of often reluctant staff who are sent to (or feel compelled to) fill positions unable to be resourced through teacher choice procedures. As Thomson (2000) points out:

Schools with high turnover of teachers, casualised support staff, and /or high turnover of leadership may appear on the surface to be 'like' others. Yet is it hardly possible for a school to consider making a difference, when two thirds of the teachers leave each year – and that indeed is the situation in some of the schools. (p. 165)

Rurality also plays a part in the disadvantage that students experience at this school. As is the case in many rural areas, teachers in the case school community are among the few remaining professionals in the region. As economic conditions have worsened since the closure of the mine, many of the professionals – the doctors, dentists and lawyers – have moved to 'greener pastures' (Schmuck & Schmuck, 1992). Coupled with this, 30% of children who fall below the poverty level live in rural communities (Bane &

Ellwood, 1989) and the white and middle-class population, whom schools have served most well in the past, are giving way to a minority and lower economic class of students, whom schools have served least well (Hodgkinson, 1986). Indigenous people, for example, who predominantly live in rural areas, continue to be the most educationally disadvantaged adult and student groups in Australia (Sanderson & Allard, 2003).

The reproduction of social inequalities in the case school was the focus of the research. While Bourdieu is used to understand these matters, this paper suggests that there is transformative potential in his theoretical constructs and that it is possible for schools – such as the secondary school in this research – to pave the way for improvement in the educational outcomes of marginalised students. The paper draws together the major areas of contribution to this theme of reproduction and transformation, beginning by characterising Bourdieu's notion of habitus (often criticised as too deterministic) as constituted by reproductive *and* transformative traits. This is followed by a discussion of capital and more specifically, the way that teachers can draw upon a variety of capitals to act as agents of transformation rather than reproduction. The paper concludes by considering the necessity of a transformation of the field to increase parent participation in disadvantaged schools. It is to an explanation of these matters that the paper now turns.

Transforming the habitus

One aspect of my research explored the tensions between how marginalised students see themselves, what some teachers want them to become, what other teachers expect them to become, and the regard held for the ways in which these students name themselves with reference to Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*.

Habitus, as Bourdieu uses the term, characterises the recurring patterns of class outlook – the beliefs, values, conduct, speech, dress and manners – which are inculcated by everyday experiences within the family, the peer group and the school. Implying habit, or unthinking-ness in actions, the habitus operates below the level of calculation and consciousness, underlying and conditioning and orienting practices by providing individuals with a sense of how to act and respond in the course of their daily lives 'without consciously obeying rules explicitly posed as such' (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 76). That is, the habitus disposes actors to do certain things, orienting their actions and inclinations, without strictly determining them.

I proposed that the way students see themselves and the way their teachers see them, including their expectations for their futures, fall largely into two categories: those with a *reproductive habitus*, who recognise the constraint of social conditions and conditionings and tend to read the future that fits them; and those with a *transformative habitus*, who recognise the capacity for improvisation and tend to look for opportunities for action in the social field.

Those with a reproductive habitus feel constrained by their circumstances; a feeling or disposition that seems to reproduce these constraints. Indeed, they appear largely incapable of perceiving social reality, in all of its arbitrariness, as anything other than 'the way things are' (Jenkins, 2002). Lapsing into apathy or despair, they take themselves and their social world for granted, rather than recognising that there are ways that the situation could be transformed.

Moreover, those with reproductive dispositions read the future that fits them, confining possibilities to those they see to be suitable for the social group to which they belong. In Bourdieu's (1977) terms, the reproductive habitus realises the 'subjective expectation of objective probabilities' (p. 72). This adjustment between 'the individual's hopes, aspirations, goals and expectations, on the one hand, and the objective situation in which they find themselves by virtue of their place in the social order, on the other' (Jenkins, 2002, p. 28), means that those with a reproductive habitus know how to 'read' the future that fits them, which is made for them and for which they are said to be made (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Their aspirations are defined by objective conditions that exclude the possibility of hoping for the unobtainable; expressing it both as an impossibility and a taboo (Bourdieu, 1974). Indeed, our dispositions tend to exclude certain aspirations as unthinkable, and incline us instead to love the inevitable (Bourdieu, 1977).

A transformative habitus is one that sees possibilities in what might otherwise appear constraining, which invites agency and is generative of alternatives not immediately apparent. What one may experience as incapacitating, another may see as generative of opportunities for self-enhancement or self-renewal (Jordan, James, Kay & Redley, 1992). The latter is true of the transformative habitus. Rather than confining possibilities to those deemed appropriate for the social group to which they belong, the beliefs, values and conduct of those with a transformative habitus are creative and inventive. Students with a transformative habitus recognise possibilities and act in ways to transform situations. As Connell (1993) argues, 'even dominant groups do not seek simple "reproduction" through education. They know the world is changing, and they want the schools to help their children get ahead of the game' (p. 29).

I understand the reproductive and transformative habitus as dialectically related; as potentials within each agent. Within the Bourdieuan literature, habitus is both 'generative (of perceptions and practice) and structuring (that is, defining limits upon what is conceivable as perception and practice)' (Codd, 1990, p. 139). Bourdieu's attempt to 'undermine the dualisms of objectivism and subjectivism, structure and agent, determinism and phenomenology' is a central element of his work (Kenway & McLeod, 2004, p. 528). This creative yet limited capacity for improvisation reveals both the dynamic structure of social reality and the constraint of social conditions where many of us believe there to be choice and free will (Bourdieu, 1990a). The notion enables Bourdieu to analyse the behaviour of agents as 'objectively coordinated and regular without being the product of rules, on the one hand, or conscious rationality, on the other' (Postone, LiPuma & Calhoun, 1993, p. 4). In this sense, habitus transcends 'determinism and freedom, conditioning and creativity, consciousness and the unconscious, or the individual and society' (Bourdieu, 1990b, pp. 54-55).

However, as Kenway and McLeod (2004) point out, 'there remains much contestation over the extent to which this is ultimately an account of social determination and reproduction, where the habitus is reducible to the effects of the field, or whether there is space for the improvisation of agents' (p. 528). Jenkins (2002), among others, argues that despite Bourdieu's best efforts to 'transcend the dualistic divide between "objectivism" and "subjectivism" ... [he] remains caught in an unresolved contradiction between determinism and voluntarism, with the balance of his argument favouring the former' (p. 21). Although concerned to give to practice an active, inventive intention by insisting on the generative capacities of dispositions (Bourdieu, 1990a), some suggest that Bourdieu does not give nearly enough credit to agency and the revolutionary potential of agents. In their view, his world is far more reproductive than transformative; his social universe 'ultimately remains one in which things happen to people, rather than a world in which they can intervene in their individual and collective destinies' (Jenkins, 2002, p. 91). Indeed, Jenkins (2002) argues that despite Bourdieu's 'acknowledgement of, and enthusiasm for, resistance, it is difficult to find examples in his work of its efficacy or importance' (p. 90).

My own reading of Bourdieu holds some similarities with Jenkins insofar as Bourdieu did not provide me with the tools to recognise the transformative habitus; nor were there as many examples of the transformative habitus as the reproductive habitus in the data set. By seeking out these examples in my work I have attempted to push the boundaries of Bourdieu's theory or at least his elaboration of it; using the data to bring the transformative habitus to light. However, what it is that makes the habitus predominantly reproductive or transformative, or how it is that such dispositions become inscribed on the body, are matters which would seem to warrant further consideration.

Although my explication of the transformative habitus seeks to challenge the practical acceptance of possibilities and impossibilities, I agree with Bourdieu that we cannot make history just as we please. Hence, it would be ignorant of the 'material conditions as the dominant influence on the quality of life open to individuals' (Giddens, 1994, p. 181) to try to convince the marginalised that they:

don't have to stay victims. The present is the point of power. We can always choose, in the present, to change our negative beliefs ... My body, my health, my relationships, my work, my financial situation – everything in my life – mirror my own inner dialogue ... Our experiences all arise from our inner dialogue. Therefore, if we change our thoughts, we will have different feelings and different experiences. (Corbett, 1993, p. 150; cited in Giddens, 1994)

This is a weak substitute for real material and procedural emancipation. It is not to say, however, that people cannot 'change their psychological outlook in the face of material deprivations they are powerless to control' (Giddens, 1994, p. 187). Indeed, if we were to 'develop means whereby damaged identities can be healed and a strong sense of self-respect developed' (Giddens, 1994, p. 187), individuals may be able to negotiate changes in their life circumstances. Specifically, Giddens (1994) suggests directing schemes of positive welfare to fostering what Csikszentmihalyi (1992) describes as the *autotelic self*; one with an inner confidence which comes from self-respect. It refers to:

a person able to translate potential threats into rewarding challenges, someone who is able to turn entropy into a consistent flow of experience. The autotelic self does not seek to neutralize risk or to suppose that 'someone else will take care of the problem'; risk is confronted as the active challenge which generates self-actualization. (Giddens, 1994, p. 192)

Habitus, therefore, provides a way to overcome the tension between representing historically oppressed groups as victimised and damaged *or* as resilient and strong: what Fine and Weis (1996) have described as an artificial and dangerous dichotomy. Concerned that these two intellectual stances are carved out as the (presumably) only appropriate alternatives, they argue that:

Simple stories of discrimination and victimization, with no evidence of resistance, resilience, or agency, are seriously flawed and deceptively partial, and they deny the rich subjectivities of persons surviving amid horrific social circumstances. Equally dreary, however, are the increasingly popular stories of individual heroes who thrive despite the obstacles, denying the burdens of surviving amid such circumstances. (Fine & Weis, 1996, p. 270)

Instead, Fine and Weis (1996):

lean toward a way of writing that spirals around social injustice and resilience, that recognizes the endurance of structures of injustice and the powerful acts of agency, that appreciates the courage and the limits of individual acts of resistance but refuses to perpetuate the fantasy that victims are simply powerless and collusive. (p. 270)

Transforming the capital that counts

Bourdieu writes extensively about the central role that schools play in reproducing social and cultural inequalities. Once thought by some as capable of introducing a form of meritocracy by privileging individual aptitudes over hereditary privileges, the school system is viewed by Bourdieu (1998) as an institution for the reproduction of legitimate culture through the hidden linkages between scholastic aptitude and cultural heritage. Despite ideologies of equal opportunity and meritocracy, few educational systems are called upon by the dominant classes 'to do anything other than reproduce the legitimate culture as it stands and produce agents capable of manipulating it legitimately' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, pp. 59-60).

Bourdieu argues against this meritocratic illusion and has been involved in research to expose the fallacy of individuals possessing innate intelligence or 'giftedness' (see, for example, Bourdieu & de Saint Martin, 1974). In such work Bourdieu (1973; 1974) has argued that it is the culture of the dominant group, that is, the group that controls the economic, social and political resources, which is embodied in schools. That is, educational institutions ensure the profitability of the cultural capital of the dominant, attesting to their gifts and merits. Educational differences are thus frequently 'misrecognised' as resulting from 'individual giftedness' rather than from class based differences, ignoring the fact that the abilities measured by scholastic criteria often stem not from natural 'gifts' but from 'the greater or lesser affinity between class cultural habits and the demands of the educational system or the criteria which define success within it' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979, p. 22).

Bourdieu uses the term *cultural capital* to describe this familiarity with bourgeois culture, the unequal distribution of which helps to conserve social hierarchy under the cloak of individual talent and academic meritocracy (Wacquant, 1998). It refers to a way of thinking and disposition to life where the 'expected behaviours, expected language competencies, the explicit and implicit values, knowledge, attitudes to and relationship with academic culture required for success in school are all competencies which one class brings with them to school' (Henry, Knight, Lingard & Taylor, 1988, p. 233). Yet, 'the school assumes middle-class culture, attitudes and values in *all* its pupils. Any other background, however rich in experiences, often turns out to be a liability' (Henry et al., 1988, pp. 142-143, emphasis added).

The injustices of 'allowing certain people to succeed, based not upon merit but upon the cultural experiences, the social ties and the economic resources they have access to, often remains unacknowledged in the broader society' (Wacquant, 1998, p. 216). The limited disposable income of some lower and working-class parents, for example, makes it difficult to supplement and intervene in their children's schooling. Middle-class parents, on the other hand, often have the necessary economic resources to more fully contribute to their children's schooling (Lareau, 1987).

Hence, the implicit demands of the educational system 'maintain the preexisting order, that is, the gap between pupils endowed with unequal amounts of cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 20) 'behind the backs' of actors engaged in the school system – teachers, students and their parents – and often against their will (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Like many of the teachers from the case school, those involved in reproducing the social order often do so without either knowing they are doing so or wanting to do so (Bourdieu, 1998). Such teachers frequently do not see and often do not intend the social sorting that schooling imparts on students.

However, I believe that teachers *can* act as agents of transformation rather than reproduction. That is, depending on the pedagogy, curriculum and assessment on offer, schools and teachers can either:

silence students by denying their voice, that is, by refusing to allow them to speak from their own histories, experiences, and social positions, or [they] can enable them to speak by being attentive to

how different voices can be constituted within specific pedagogical relations so as to engage their histories and experiences in both an affirmative and critical way. (Giroux, 1990, p. 91)

Instead of being a site of 'disjunction and dislocation' (Comber & Hill, 2000), schools can relate curricula to students' worlds, making the classroom more inclusive by legitimating locally produced knowledge and ensuring that students can see their everyday lives and experiences as relevant to their learning and success at school. By ensuring that there are transparent links between the classroom and the world beyond, teachers and schools can encourage and assist students to draw on their cultural experiences in order to succeed academically (Gale & Densmore, 2000).

While I believe that the case school needs to create an environment that values and appreciates cultural differences, and success 'needs to be redefined to incorporate the lives and experiences of currently marginalised and materially excluded groups' (Hattam, Shacklock & Smyth, 1998, p. 102), it is also important that students have access to the cultural capital of the dominant. Teachers play a key role in this accumulation process, particularly for students who have 'cultural capital in the wrong currency', like many of the marginalised students from the case school whose cultural capital, the way in which they see and experience the world, is not highly valued.

The challenge for teachers, then, is to teach the academic skills and competencies required to enable their students to succeed in mainstream societies, while also ensuring that this content acknowledges and responds to the needs and interests of the cultural and linguistic diversity of the communities they serve. Negotiating the curriculum, then, is 'not an abrogation of responsibility by teachers' (Lingard, Hayes, Mills & Christie, 2003, p. 28). Rather, the teacher needs to be 'a skilled negotiator who [is] able to ensure that the classroom maintain[s] its intellectual rigour at the same time as allowing student input' (Lingard et al., 2003, p. 28). Such a socially just curriculum, I believe, can open up ways of transforming the situation of the marginalised, equipping them with understandings that can empower them to act individually and together to improve their circumstances (Australian Schools Commission, 1995) and to lead fulfilled lives.

Transforming the field

The involvement of parents or other important caregivers in their children's schooling is an ideal that informs much contemporary practice in schools. For some parents, such expectations are taken for granted and energetically pursued. Other parents, however – often those from working class and ethnic minorities – do not necessarily share these understandings, at least not in ways legitimated by schools. Given these different understandings of the role of parents in schools, involving disadvantaged communities in schools can be extremely difficult (Connell, 1993). Moreover, these inequalities of opportunity for parent participation in schooling work to maintain disadvantage for marginalised students.

Often the non-participation of parents is attributed to their own lack of interest and is viewed as a reflection of the lower value that these working-class families supposedly attribute to education compared with middle-class families. In contrast, Soliman (1995) suggests that:

Social class differences may explain how separate from or how connected with the school families feel and what action they take on behalf of their children, but not how much they value education. Teachers often mistakenly assume that parents who have not progressed far in their own formal education do not value it for their own children (Lareau, 1989) or that those parents who do not attend the school on specific occasions when they are invited are uninterested in their children's education (Bridges, 1987). (p. 162)

There seems little recognition that there could be parents who would like to become more involved in schooling and little understanding of the more complex reasons why they are not, including the role of schools in fostering non-participation. Moreover, the assumption that having a voice is really just a matter of choice ignores the complex matrix of power relations that define living in Australian society and that enable some and inhibit others from having their say in what counts as 'good' schooling. To do so is to laminate over the extent to which some individuals or groups are effectively disempowered or marginalised as a consequence of their classed, gendered and racialised identities (McInerney, 2002).

Indeed, what appear as opportunities to participate are those most often constructed from within the school, not by parents themselves, and, therefore, are constrained. For those parents who share the school's agenda this may be acceptable, but others are left without a voice (Crozier, 1998). Even in situations where parents may want to contribute to school activities, the lack of appreciation for their particular abilities provide further constraints on their participation.

Rather than attributing blame to these parents, there needs to be recognition that family and other commitments (including the limited time and disposable income of lower and working-class parents) make it difficult to supplement and intervene in their children's schooling. This can prevent the participation of some who otherwise may be quite willing to play some kind of formal role in their children's education. Middle-class parents, on the other hand, often have the necessary social and economic capital – for managing child care and transportation, hiring tutors and meeting with teachers – to become actively involved in their children's schooling (Lareau, 1987).

Moreover, the decision to participate in schooling is easier for those who have had positive experiences in school, either as students themselves or more recently as parents. And it is no surprise that more often those with positive school experiences are from dominant groups; schools are largely staffed by teachers from similar backgrounds who reflect and authorise similar views (Boykin, 1986). Lareau (1989) explains this phenomenon as 'interconnectedness': 'middle-class parents speak about education in the same language as the teachers; they have similar expectations of the education system; they have the same views on what one needs to do in order to achieve within the educational system' (Crozier, 1998, p. 130). In contrast, for some parents, the school may be 'an instrumentality of a dominant government and a symbol of an alien culture' (Gilbert & Dewar, 1995, p. 13).

One approach to increasing parent participation is to educate parents in the skills of participation. It is presumptuous to assume that parents have these skills as a matter of course, particularly when the cultural context of this specific community and of schooling in general are so disparate and foreign in many ways and when the experiences that parents have of school serve to extenuate these differences. However, skilling parents in how to participate in school is itself presumptuous. It presumes that schools know best. Thinking differently about these cultural and political aspects of knowing may produce different ways of doing school. Indeed, this is to be expected if the particularities of a school's community are taken into account.

While traditional notions of parental involvement in schooling suggest that the conversations between schools and their communities should begin from the school, as Cairney and Munsie (1995) found in their research and as is suggested by interviewees in my own, such attempts to bring the school and its communities closer together have been ineffective and frustrating to both parents and teachers and little has been achieved. In this school-centred model of school-community relations, parents and educators do not necessarily work well together and they do not equally share decision-making.

Clearly, schools need to think about what they expect from families and communities and respond in ways that serve socially just purposes. Recognitive justice (Gale & Densmore, 2000), informed by the work of Iris Marion Young (1990) and Nancy Fraser (1995) with its positive regard for social difference and the centrality of social democratic processes, offers one way of advancing this discussion beyond simplistic attributions of blame. In particular, a politics of recognition is concerned with improving access to and participation in education by opening up the processes of schooling to groups, including marginalised or disenfranchised parents, who often have been excluded and for their views to be seriously engaged within decision-making processes (Gale, 2000). Such politics aims at 'overcoming subordination by establishing the unrecognized party as a full member of society, capable of participating on a par with other members' (Fraser, 2001, p. 24). For this to happen, parents should be viewed as partners, and the vital role that they play in education recognised.

Teachers need to implement initiatives that recognise the complementary roles of parents and teachers, and bring schools and communities closer together (Cairney & Munsie, 1995). One way to do this is to involve the community in the development of the curriculum, which ideally should be responsive to local as well as global cultural and economic contexts, and encourage and assist students to draw on their cultural experiences to succeed academically (Gale & Densmore, 2000). Teachers need to begin with whatever is familiar and comfortable to their students, whatever its source. Anne Haas Dyson (1997) argues that this is a teacher's 'pedagogy of responsibility': not only being sensitive to but exploiting diversity by explicitly acknowledging the diverse cultures present in their classrooms and helping students become aware of – and appreciative of – those cultures. Given the current reform agenda with its emphasis on school-based management, it is the local school rather than the public education system that is the locus for action, enacting curriculum that is responsive to communities (McInerney, 2001b). As community experts, then, parents and other lay community members need to become more important to the work of schooling and ensure that the cultural capital of their homes and communities is validated and valued in schools (Vincent, 2000). The development of curriculum should encourage critical and collaborative reflection among all those involved in education, and be 'an ongoing and continuous activity that belongs to the whole community and has its roots in the attitudes, aspirations, dreams and biases of its people' (Middleton, 1995, p. 195).

Recognising the cultural symbols that are important to their students does not mean that teachers 'abandon their responsibility to make [academic] judgments ... for the young, nor does it mean that they adopt a vacuous cultural relativism' (Dyson, 1997, p. 180). Teachers must not be oblivious to the structural conditions under which pedagogic relations are established (Rizvi, 1995). We know that not all cultural capital is assigned equal status: some groups and their particular dispositions are 'socially dominant – carry[ing] with them social power and access to economic success' (Delpit, 1992, p. 297). It is important, therefore, that schools also ensure that they provide all students with 'the discourse patterns, interactional styles, and spoken and written language codes that will allow them success in the larger society' (Delpit, 1997, p. 585).

In short, schools need to engage with local as well as global community concerns (Taylor & Henry, 2000) and reach out to parents in new ways, as parents without money or status are often wary or uncertain about approaching teachers and administrators (Schmuck & Schmuck, 1992). They should help parents connect to resources, create environments where parents feel welcome, and organise various avenues for participation (Edwards & Young, 1992). In this way, positive relationships with school communities can be established and maintained and community representatives can be drawn into the processes of educational decision-making. More specifically, building on the ideas of Epstein (1990), Soliman (1995) suggests that:

outreach programs initiated by schools, including home visits, may be especially important to parents of low socio-economic status and from ethnic and linguistic minority groups who may lack confidence and skills to communicate with teachers. Outreach activities could include familiarising parents with the subject matter of the curriculum, training parent leaders to work with other parents, hiring translators to provide newsletters in all the languages spoken by parents, offering before and after school childminding services, establishing telephone 'hot lines' to answer children's and parents' questions on homework, and establishing drop-in centres for parents in school grounds. (pp. 164-165)

Bourdieu would argue that these suggestions are examples of transforming the field. While some will seek to preserve the status quo, others will strive to challenge and transform existing hierarchies. Indeed, players can play to:

increase or to conserve their capital, their number of tokens, in conformity with the tacit rules of the game and the prerequisites of the reproduction of the game and its stakes; but they can also get in it to transform, partially or completely, the immanent rules of the game. They can, for instance, work to change the relative value of tokens of different colors, the exchange rate between various species of capital, through strategies aimed at discrediting the form of capital upon which the force of their opponents rests ... and to valorize the species of capital they preferentially possess. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 99)

To increase parent participation in disadvantaged schools, then, what is needed is a revolutionary struggle 'to establish alternative goals and more or less completely ... redefine the game and the moves which permit one to win it' (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 172).

Conclusion

With their reduced access to the cultural capital of the dominant, marginalised students are at a disadvantage in the classroom, suffering educational repercussions for having a cultural capital that is in the wrong currency (Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995). Teachers, often unknowingly, are engaged in struggles to preserve the field and strategies to defend their position within it. Schools can become battlefields with teachers struggling against parents to maintain monopoly over the legitimacy of what counts as school knowledge, with teachers seeking 'to impose the hierarchy of capital most favorable to [their] own endowment' (Wacquant, 1998, p. 224) in their struggle to conserve the field in order to maintain their dominant positions within it.

Schools can also become places of transformation, but this is not to suggest that all transformation is inherently valuable. For example, that rather than attempting a transformation of students, I believe that teachers should be more concerned to transform schooling; to provide educational opportunities that transform the life experiences of and open up opportunities for *all* young people, especially those disadvantaged by poverty and marginalised by difference (Lingard et al., 2003).

Teachers and schools need to re-evaluate and transform their school curricula and learning environments; modifying these to teach the academic skills and competencies required to enable their students to succeed in mainstream societies, while also ensuring that this content is appropriate to local communities. A socially just curriculum can open up ways of transforming the situation of the marginalised, equipping them with

understandings that can empower them to act individually and together to improve their circumstances and to lead fulfilled lives.

I have also begun to make visible the structural constraints that affect parent participation in one disadvantaged school with a view to transforming the understandings and practices of those involved to move beyond attributions of blame and think through ways we can engage with the current arrangements (see Mills & Gale, 2004). It is the lack of participation on the part of subordinate groups that leaves the door open for the dominant – who are equipped with the cultural capital legitimated by educational institutions – to mobilise class advantage and lobby for their own agenda (Grimes, 1995; Henry, 1996). As Rizvi (1995) notes, in an educational marketplace, the well-off parents will always have the means of controlling the political process in a way that the poor will not. Enabled to reproduce a situation which benefits them is hardly optimal for anyone else whose interests do not coincide with dominant groups (Hatton, 1995).

Situations of rupture and transformation occur when there is no longer acceptance of the rules of the game and the goals proposed by the dominant class. So while some will seek to preserve the status quo, others will strive to challenge and transform existing hierarchies. At the same time, however, due recognition must be given to the constraints of the structure in which we are placed and the positions we occupy within that structure as largely determining what we can or cannot do (Bourdieu, 1998). The challenge for the researcher, then, becomes the construction of adequate theory that can accommodate and reconceive of such apparent disparate interests. As has been articulated in this paper, it is in this messiness that I turned to Bourdieu, seeing transformative potential in his theoretical constructs.

It is possible that McInerney (2001a) is correct when he suggests that the notion of a socially just school will always remain a utopian vision; an ideal to be struggled for, rather than an achievable goal. But, as Freire has argued so passionately, history is never foreclosed; the future is not written large in the sky; human agency does exist and alternative pathways are possible.

References

- Ainley, J., & McKenzie, P. (1999). *The influence of school factors*. Paper presented at the Australia's young adults: The deepening divide, Dusseldorp Skills Forum, Sydney.
- Australian Schools Commission. (1995). *Quality and equality*. Canberra: Commonwealth Schools Commission.
- Bane, M. J., & Ellwood, D. T. (1989). One fifth of the nation's children: Why are they poor? *Science*, 245(4922), 1047-1053.
- Bourdieu, P. (1973). Cultural reproduction and social reproduction. In R. Brown (Ed.), *Knowledge, education and cultural change* (pp. 71-112). London: Tavistock.
- Bourdieu, P., & de Saint Martin, M. (1974). Scholastic excellence and the values of the educational system. In J. Eggleston (Ed.), *Contemporary research in the sociology of education* (pp. 338-371). London: Methuen.
- Bourdieu, P. (1974). The school as a conservative force: Scholastic and cultural inequalities. In J. Eggleston (Ed.), *Contemporary research in the sociology of education* (pp. 32-46). London: Methuen.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J.-C. (1979). *The inheritors: French students and their relation to culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1988). *Homo academicus*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990a). *In other words: Essays towards a reflexive sociology*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990b). *The logic of practice*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1998). *Practical reason: On the theory of action*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J.-C. (1990). *Reproduction in education, society and culture* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
- Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Boykin, A. W. (1986). The triple quandary and the schooling of Afro-American children. In U. Neisser (Ed.), *The school achievement of minority children: New perspectives* (pp. 57-92). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Bridges, D. (1987). "It's the ones who never turn up that you really want to see": The "problem" of the non-attending parent. In J. Bastiani (Ed.), *Parents and teachers: Perspectives on home-school relations* (pp. 234-247). Windsor, Berkshire: National Foundation for Educational Research / Nelson.
- Cairney, T. H., & Munsie, L. (1995). Parent participation in literacy learning. *The Reading Teacher*, 48(5), 392-403.
- Codd, J. (1990). Making distinctions: The eye of the beholder. In R. Harker, C. Mahar & C. Wilkes (Eds.), *An introduction to the work of Pierre Bourdieu: The practice of theory* (pp. 132-159). London: Macmillan.

- Comber, B., & Hill, S. (2000). Socio-economic disadvantage, literacy and social justice: Learning from longitudinal case study research. *Australian Educational Researcher*, 27(3), 79-97.
- Connell, R. W. (1993). *Schools and social justice*. Leichhardt: Pluto.
- Corbett, N. (1993). *Inner cleansing: Living clean in a polluted world*. Bridport: Prism.
- Crozier, G. (1998). Parents and schools: Partnership or surveillance? *Journal of Education Policy*, 13(1), 125-136.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1992). *Flow: The psychology of happiness*. London: Rider.
- Delpit, L. (1992). Acquisition of literate discourse: Bowing before the master? *Theory into practice*, 31(4), 296-302.
- Delpit, L. (1997). The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's children. In A. H. Halsey, H. Lauder, P. Brown & A. S. Wells (Eds.), *Education: Culture, economy and society* (pp. 582-594). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dyson, A. H. (1997). *Writing superheroes: Contemporary childhood, popular culture, and classroom literacy*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Edwards, P. A., & Young, L. S. J. (1992). Beyond parents: Family, community, and school involvement. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 74(1), 72-80.
- Epstein, J. (1990). School and family connections: Theory, research, and implications for integrating sociologies of education and family. In D. G. Unger & M. B. Sussman (Eds.), *Families in community settings: Interdisciplinary perspectives* (pp. 99-126). New York: Haworth Press.
- Fine, M., & Weis, L. (1996). Writing the "wrongs" of fieldwork: Confronting our own research/writing dilemmas in urban ethnographies. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 2(3), 251-274.
- Fraser, N. (1995). From redistribution to recognition: Dilemmas of justice in a 'post-socialist' age. *New Left Review*, 212(July), 68-93.
- Fraser, N. (2001). Recognition without ethics? *Theory, Culture & Society*, 18(2-3), 21-42.
- Gale, T. (2000). Rethinking social justice in schools: How will we recognize it when we see it? *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 4(3), 253-269.
- Gale, T., & Densmore, K. (2000). *Just schooling: Explorations in the cultural politics of teaching*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Gewirtz, S., Ball, S. J., & Bowe, R. (1995). *Markets, choice and equity in education*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Giddens, A. (1994). *Beyond left and right: The future of radical politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gilbert, R., & Dewar, J. (1995). Community and the politics of participation. In B. Limerick & H. Nielsen (Eds.), *School and community relations: Participation, policy and practice* (pp. 3-16). Sydney: Harcourt Brace.
- Giroux, H. (1990). Reading texts, literacy, and textual authority. *Journal of Education*, 172(1), 85-103.
- Grimes, J. (1995). *Cultural capital, ethnicity and early education*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Oxford, Oxford.
- Hattam, R., Shacklock, G., & Smyth, J. (1998). Doing critical cultural studies - An antidote to being done to. In J. Smyth, R. Hattam & M. Lawson (Eds.), *Schooling for a fair go* (pp. 97-114). Leichhardt, NSW: The Federation Press.
- Hatton, E. (1995). Devolution and division: Lessons from New Zealand. In B. Limerick & H. Nielsen (Eds.), *School and community relations: Participation, policy and practice* (pp. 245-259). Sydney: Harcourt Brace.
- Henry, M., Knight, J., Lingard, R., & Taylor, S. (1988). *Understanding schooling: An introductory sociology of Australian education*. Sydney: Routledge.
- Henry, M. (1996). *Parent-school collaboration: Feminist organisational structures and school leadership*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Hodgkinson, H. (1986). Here they come, ready or not: A special report. *Education Week*(May 14), 14-37.
- Jenkins, R. (2002). *Pierre Bourdieu*. London: Routledge.
- Jordan, B., James, S., Kay, H., & Redley, M. (1992). *Trapped in poverty?: Labour-market decisions in low-income households*. London: Routledge.
- Kenway, J., & McLeod, J. (2004). Bourdieu's reflexive sociology and 'spaces of points of view': Whose reflexivity, which perspective? *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 25(4), 525-544.
- Lareau, A. (1987). Social class differences in family-school relationships: The importance of cultural capital. *Sociology of Education*, 60(2), 73-85.
- Lareau, A. (1989). *Home advantage, social class and parental intervention in elementary education*. London: Falmer Press.
- Lingard, B., Hayes, D., Mills, M., & Christie, P. (2003). *Leading learning: Making hope practical*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- McClelland, A., Macdonald, F., & MacDonald, H. (1998). *Young people and the labour market disadvantage: The situation of young people not in education or full time work*. Paper presented at the Australia's youth: Reality and risk, Dusseldorp Skills Forum, Sydney.
- McInerney, P. (2001a). *Re-configuring a commitment to social justice in public schooling*. Paper presented

- at the annual conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education, Fremantle.
- McInerney, P. (2001b). School reform for social justice: Reflections from Wattle Plains. *Teaching and Teachers' Work*, 9(1), 1-10.
- McInerney, P. (2002). 'We've changed the rules now': *Counting and accounting for social justice in the devolved school*. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education, Brisbane.
- Middleton, M. (1995). Managing curriculum change collaboratively. In B. Limerick & H. Nielsen (Eds.), *School and community relations: Participation, policy and practice* (pp. 195-208). Sydney: Harcourt Brace.
- Mills, C. & Gale, T. (2004). Parent participation in disadvantaged schools: Moving beyond attributions of blame. *Australian Journal of Education*, 48(3), 268-281.
- Postone, M., LiPuma, E., & Calhoun, C. (1993). Introduction: Bourdieu and social theory. In C. Calhoun, E. LiPuma & M. Postone (Eds.), *Bourdieu: Critical perspectives* (pp. 1-13). Cambridge: Polity.
- Rizvi, F. (1995). Discourses of participation. In B. Limerick & H. Nielsen (Eds.), *School and community relations: Participation, policy and practice* (pp. 17-33). Sydney: Harcourt Brace.
- Sanderson, V., & Allard, A. (2003). 'Research as dialogue' and cross-cultural consultations: Confronting relations of power. *Australian Educational Researcher*, 30(1), 19-39.
- Schmuck, R. A., & Schmuck, P. A. (1992). *Small districts, big problems: Making school everybody's house*. Newbury Park: Corwin Press.
- Soliman, I. (1995). From involvement to participation: Six levels of school-community interaction. In B. Limerick & H. Nielsen (Eds.), *School and community relations: Participation, policy and practice* (pp. 159-173). Sydney: Harcourt Brace.
- Taylor, S., & Henry, M. (2000). Challenges for equity policy in changing contexts. *Australian Educational Researcher*, 27(3), 1-15.
- Thomson, P. (2000). 'Like schools', educational 'disadvantage' and 'thisness'. *Australian Educational Researcher*, 27(3), 157-172.
- Vincent, C. (2000). *Including parents? Education, citizenship and parental agency*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.
- Wacquant, L. J. D. (1998). Pierre Bourdieu. In R. Stones (Ed.), *Key sociological thinkers* (pp. 215-229). New York: New York University Press.
- Young, I. M. (1990). *Justice and the politics of difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.