

1

Introducing Pierre Bourdieu to the Practitioner



WHAT THIS CHAPTER IS ABOUT

The name Pierre Bourdieu may not be familiar to many educational practitioners in public school settings in the United States, the United Kingdom, or anywhere else. This introductory chapter is aimed at acquainting the school-practitioner reader (teacher, administrator, counselor, social worker) with a general appraisal of Bourdieu and why his stature continues to grow internationally. It also is an attempt to indicate why Bourdieu's ideas, research, and thought are powerful, insightful, and useful despite being somewhat difficult to understand initially.

Specifically, this chapter addresses the following points:

- Bourdieu's concept of a social space as contested presents a fluid and dynamic model of contestation in education, along with the notion of misrecognition.
- Bourdieu's unique vocabulary for concepts presents an initial dilemma in coming to a quick and easy understanding of his work.
- Bourdieu's concepts and ideas have to be seen not in the usual linear fashion (A, B, C, etc.) but as an integrated whole that does not depend on unequivocal categorical definitional boundaries.

Ideas are defined not by themselves but in relation to other ideas. Readers accustomed to conceptual singularity and stand-alone definitions may find this feature of Bourdieu's body of work off-putting at first. We will work hard to ease this transition and any potential tension it creates.

INTRODUCTION

Educational practitioners may not know Bourdieu because the world of classroom and administrative practice was not one in which he traveled, wrote, or researched. He penned no popular works on how to improve schools or teaching. For most of his career, Bourdieu was a sequestered academic in a prestigious French university, where he pursued his research interests in sociology.

Even among fellow academics, Bourdieu was somewhat of an eccentric. He was a trenchant critic of the French educational system for its failure to live up to its Republican aims (Lane, 2006). In this respect, his criticisms have great appeal and relevance to other educational systems in other countries that are anchored in a universal approach to education irrespective of class and/or wealth and yet consistently produce results that privilege and reinforce class and wealth.

The disparity between educational goals and educational results so readily observable in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and other nations is not produced by a failure of political aims or even funding. Huge monetary sums, public and private, have been allocated in the United States and elsewhere to eliminate disparities in promoting educational achievement that are rooted in race, class, and social position. But Bourdieu's work cuts through the political rhetoric and exposes the interests of those who control public education, showing how their selection of reforms is designed to maintain their dominant position in determining what schools do to reinforce and perpetuate social inequality.

In short, Bourdieu's work exposes the contradiction behind the mask of democratic and meritocratic goals and reforms, and shows why none of them will likely erase the achievement gaps and other discrepancies that currently exist in educational systems. It isn't that the public educational system can't be reformed; rather, it is unlikely to be reformed under any of the proposed political approaches currently being debated in the popular public and policy circles, and especially not with approaches centered on school choice and privatization (the neoliberal agenda Bourdieu vehemently fought against as a public

intellectual in the latter part of his life). These popular approaches are not designed to confront social inequalities that emerging research strongly suggests are at the root of the gaps in school achievement (Condrón, 2011; Sahlberg, 2011). In the end, they only serve to perpetuate these inequalities.

Bourdieu's work, conducted over an extended time period, helps in reexamining the nature of public schooling everywhere. His dogged pursuit of how public schools continue to fail the public is what ultimately makes him worth reading, to help school leaders and teachers understand more accurately how the work they do in the schools will or will not transform them into more democratic and truly meritocratic institutions. The true nature of Bourdieu's work rests on his understanding of the forms of cultural power and domination (see Lebaron, 2010). This is the work that has propelled Bourdieu into the international fame on which his reputation rests today.

Bourdieu (1990b) believed that by using the instruments of sociology he could discern the mental categories and structures teachers used in schools and, by so doing, could reveal the social dichotomies and disparities that educational systems teach (see also Savage & English, 2013). He professed that "sociology unmasks self-deception, that collectively entertained and encouraged form of lying to oneself which, in every society, is at the basis of the most sacred values and, thereby, of all social existence" (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 188). Bourdieu's life in the academy, his humble beginnings as a student of the lower classes, and his belief in the power of self-criticism, even as it contained blind spots he himself was not always able to discern, all provide lessons for those who desire a more broadly based avenue for humanistic education in public schools everywhere.

BOURDIEU'S BIOGRAPHY

Bourdieu (2004b) was a firm advocate of reflexive approaches, acutely aware of how his own experiences influenced his thinking; yet he was contemptuous of biography as a method of discerning truth. He wrote about himself as a critique of his life and work, and underscored that this remembrance was not a biography. As a result of his avoidance of traditional biography, there is not a lot of intimate, personal data about him beyond a kind of general outline of his 72 years of life (1930–2002).

Bourdieu was born in 1930 in a small village in the French Pyrenees. His family was of modest means, and the particular French dialect he

spoke is no longer considered a living variation of the language today. He was sent to a boarding school and exhibited superior academic ability, though aspects of his boarding school experience were filled with the usual form of torment and bullying from other boys. He completed his secondary education in Paris and graduated from the *École Normale Supérieure* in 1955 with a degree in philosophy.

Although Bourdieu would rise to the heights of the French university system, he always had some ambivalence toward it. He railed against the conformity of the university and found himself confronting an intellectual world that believed itself to be liberated and open-minded but that he found to be profoundly conservative and conformist. This insight moved him to comment, "I have almost always found myself on the opposite side from the models and modes dominant in the field" (Bourdieu, 2004b, p. 106).

Bourdieu's failure to submit his doctoral thesis was part and parcel of his refusal to play the university game and submit to its rules. Later, he consoled himself with a line from Kafka, which counseled, "Do not present yourself before a court whose verdict you do not recognize" (Bourdieu, 2004b, p. 101).

One of the defining moments in his life was being sent to Algeria during the war for Algerian independence from France. The terror and brutality of that colonial conflict changed his outlook on his life's work. France invaded Algeria, a state of some 919,500 square miles in north-west Africa, in 1830 and made it a French colony in 1848. Subsequently, thousands of Europeans migrated to Algeria and settled there, subjecting the local Sunni Muslim population to European culture and power. The European population confiscated land and set themselves up to be the arbiters of all matters, over the local inhabitants. However, a war for independence broke out in 1954. After 7 years of protracted and bitter fighting, during which "at least 100,000 Muslims and 10,000 French soldiers were killed, Algeria became independent in 1962" (Lagasse, 1994, p. 21).

Bourdieu went to Algeria to finish out his military service in 1955 (Grenfell, 2007, p. 13). There, he was witness to extreme violence and bloodshed in which "the scale of reprisals and torture carried out by the French paratroopers shocked the nation" (p. 38). Bourdieu (2004b) recalls that he refused to enter the reserve officers' college because he "could not bear the idea of dissociating [himself] from the rank-and-file soldiers" and because he found that he shared little in common with the candidates for officer (p. 37).

On the ship that took him to Algeria, he wrote that he tried in vain to ask the soldiers, "illiterates from the whole of western

France" (Bourdieu, 2004b, p. 95), tough questions about going to war. He confessed that he tried to stir in them "the need to revolt against the absurd 'pacification' which [they] were being sent to assist" (p. 95), but he made little headway as they replied, "You'll get us all killed" (p. 95).

Despite the country being in upheaval because of the war, Bourdieu carried out extensive sociological studies of Algerian society with the idea of showing "the extent to which French colonialism had destroyed it" (Grenfell, 2004, p. 39). He studied the four major groups that formed non-European Algerian society: the Kabyles, the Shawia, the Mozabites, and the Arab-speaking peoples. He contrasted traditional social norms with modern norms, especially highlighting the differences in gender roles in the traditional societies. He wrote several books about his experiences in Algeria, particularly important among them being *The Logic of Practice* (1980/1990a).

This period of time was important to Bourdieu. He was totally engaged in his sociological studies, and he believed that his intensity of effort was "rooted . . . in the extreme sadness and anxiety in which [he] lived" (Bourdieu, 2004b, p. 47). Thinking back on his time in Algeria, Bourdieu confessed that it involved a "transformation of [his] vision of the world" (p. 58) and that his personal motivation there was prompted by his need "to overcome [his] guilty conscience about merely being a participant observer in this appalling war" (Honneth, Kocyba, & Schwibs, 1986, p. 44).

From an educational standpoint, Algeria was a pivotal time for Bourdieu because his ethnographic studies of Algerian society showed him the power of education to change traditional modes of thinking and acting. He understood why the traditional community of Algerian elders resisted education: They correctly perceived the threat it posed to their native ways of thinking and their own positions of authority in their communities.

Bourdieu also began to map out a social class taxonomy of Algerian society and to examine how larger societal changes impacted various class levels and the people within them. His explanation of change was at odds with the views of others, including "intellectuals with Marxist sympathies" (Grenfell, 2007, p. 72).

A key insight was that the group of people in Algerian society, or any society for that matter, who had economic security and stability also had the capability to forward-project time into a state that did not exist (i.e., what we would call *the future*). People that had no such material conditions had no such capacity. In short, they could not consider a *future* at all.

According to Grenfell (2007), Bourdieu also tried to reconcile the competing demands and contradictions of modern society and its need for education. As he worked in this area, he rejected a “highly centralized, top-down driven education agenda” (p. 74). In its place, he considered the possibility of a different approach in which the individual and the larger social structure might be harmonized.

It was in Algeria that Bourdieu began to construct a vision that would connect individuals “with the social structures that surrounded them and the personal cognitive structures which guided their thoughts and actions” (Grenfell, 2007, p. 75). When he left Algeria to return to France, “education became his prime focus of work” (p. 75).

Bourdieu returned to France in 1960 and became a graduate assistant to Raymond Aron, a leading French philosopher of the period who was connected to an inner circle of top-ranked academics such as Jean-Paul Sartre (Collins, 1998, p. 775). He did some university teaching and was named the director of the Center for European Sociology, where he wrote two important books in education: *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture* with Jean-Claude Passeron (1970/2000) and *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1972/1977).

His work with Passeron was a landmark book and has gone through numerous reprintings since it was first released. Grenfell (2007) claims “it is this book, more than any other, which establishes Bourdieu’s reputation and it is still among the most-cited of his works” (p. 94).

Bourdieu (1990b) characterized his academic work by reflecting, “For me, intellectual life is closer to the artist’s life than to the routines of academic life” (p. 26). While Bourdieu remained in the broad sociological traditions of inquiry for most of his academic career, he was not afraid to cross over into other fields if he believed it was necessary. He was thus a border crosser, and his writing has to be seen as representing his determination not to be confined or defined within a neat academic box. He spoke out on what moved him, and he used a wide variety of public forums to do so, from popular magazines to the usual, more esoteric academic journals read by very few politicians and pundits. Bourdieu was that rare academic who was comfortable tackling controversies in the more mainline avenues of public discourse. He also incurred academic criticism from his colleagues for these public forays. The translation from academic discourse to more mainline venues is replete with the dangers of overstatement and easy generalization. Bourdieu accepted this danger and appeared not to be unduly concerned about it.

VIELSEITIGKEIT: WHAT IS DISTINCTIVE ABOUT BOURDIEU

Several distinctive aspects of Bourdieu's work have to be understood to come to grips with the power of his ideas. First, Bourdieu pursued his work as a practicing sociologist. He was interested in working to understand and resolve certain issues within sociology. He was not first and foremost a theorist; theory was a practical means to help him resolve problems he encountered in his field studies. He believed in working from the ground up—that is, dealing with real issues in context and backing into theory to bring coherence to his work.

Bourdieu's work is also evolutionary. He was constantly reappraising and recentering key concepts. Bourdieu also brought to his work a special vocabulary to define his major concepts and lines of intellectual development. The purpose of that vocabulary was to avoid having to dispel all the numerous layers of meaning that come with familiar terms. By using newly invented words he could attach his own meanings, and he could also connect them in a way that suited his ideas regarding their application. As Swartz (1997) notes, Bourdieu believed that "the experience of familiarity . . . stands as one of the principal obstacles to a scientific understanding of the social world"; so in his work he "self-consciously selects terminology and cultivates a writing style that establishes distance from everyday language use" (p. 13).

Bourdieu's concepts are relational and interactive. This feature of Bourdieu's work presents some formidable obstacles in coming to understand him. Definitions are not categorically clean and often appear vague, and where they are provided they may seem inconsistent. Readers of conventional research and self-help books on leadership who expect precision in categorical clarity are likely to be frustrated. In Bourdieu's work, he refused simple answers because, in the end, they are not very helpful in actually changing things.

Bourdieu's focus was on, for lack of a better term, "the big picture" of social interaction and how various aspects influenced other aspects. Bourdieu (1990b) described his perspective by recalling the concept of *vielseitigkeit*, a German term from Max Weber that referred to "the many-sidedness of social reality" (p. 21). It was this "mansidedness" that was most important, and how the various features work with one another is what makes Bourdieu both difficult and enlightening at the same time. Bourdieu (1990b) himself described his view as comprising the "tensions, oppositions, the relations of power which constitute the structure of a field or of the social field as a totality at any given point in time" (p. 118).

This feature of Bourdieu's approach represents a major intellectual and conceptual difference from the work of many others. As such, the use of a special vocabulary coupled with a dynamic and fluid conceptual base means that Bourdieu's corpus is of another kind altogether. Because Bourdieu was more interested in problem solving than creating a major theoretical apparatus, his work appears disjointed and conceptually jagged at times, and piecing together his principal lines of thought has to be done over many books, articles, and compendia that stretch across his entire academic and public career.

Perhaps the most appropriate characterization of Bourdieu's refusal to employ "ordinary language" was that he wanted to remind his reader that what he was constructing was an account of reality and not reality itself. Or as Jenkins (2002) observed, "He [Bourdieu] is trying to prevent the 'reality of the model' becoming confused with the 'model of reality'" (p. 169). For this reason, the reader must be patient as Bourdieu's thinking is unfolded and explained in this book.

UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF PEDAGOGIC WORK AS POLITICAL STRUGGLE

The educational practitioner normally works within a set of bureaucratic agencies, each with a set of rules and expectations. Usually via policy directive or a law, new actions are defined within a context of expectations and requirements. The requirements may also be accompanied by a definition of rewards and sanctions. The embodied actions are then given to a set of agencies and institutions for implementation in the schools, and school-based practitioners engage in the work itself. Many practitioners never even think about the larger socio political arena in which they toil day in and day out, believing that if they just do their work, the politics of the moment will leave them alone. Unfortunately, the increasing intrusiveness of political change should have convinced even the most naïve that this view of education is a thing of the past, if it ever existed at all. In some U.S. states, teacher tenure laws have been abolished. The linkage between obtaining a master's degree and increased salary advancement has been erased. Teacher collective bargaining agreements have been abrogated and teacher due process procedures severely limited. Teacher evaluations now must include student test score gains, and in some jurisdictions teachers who fail to demonstrate improvement may have their license to practice revoked. These changes are not random acts but a

well-coordinated and well-funded effort to change the nature of the control of public education in the United States (see English, 2014).

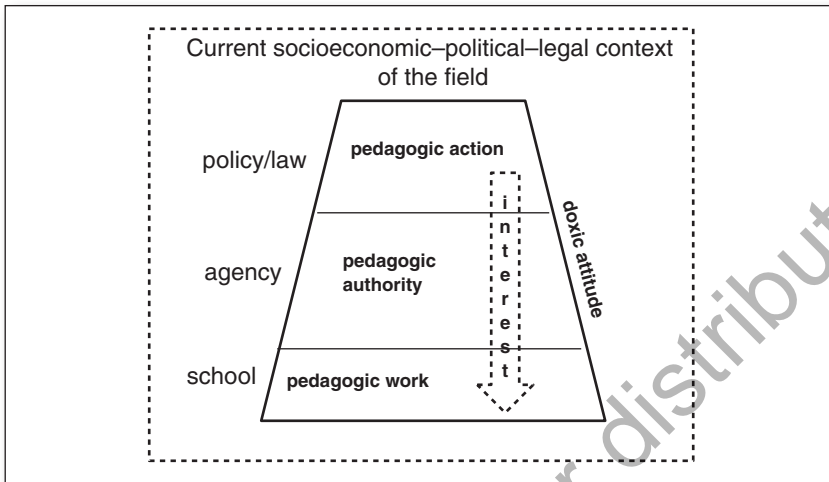
Bourdieu's sociological analyses of how power and domination are attained in various fields, including education, would have predicted how various groups within a field can come to impose their vision of the world through the use of multiple forms of capital. That would include the powerful billionaires such as Bill Gates and Eli Broad who are pushing a variety of "reforms" for public schools, and how neoconservative think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute combine with the U.S. Department of Education to compel adherence to their agenda in the Race to the Top federal initiative (see Ravitch, 2010b).

If there is a silver lining to Bourdieu's analyses of power and domination, it is this:

In the struggle for the production and imposition of a legitimate vision of the social world, the holders of bureaucratic authority never obtain an absolute monopoly, even when they add the authority of science, as do state economists, to their bureaucratic authority. (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 137)

This means that realignment is possible as contrary individuals, agents, and agencies engage in a struggle to converge around a different agenda. This picture of competition is Bourdieu's insight into political struggle as one of attaining legitimacy and hence hegemony in the education field. Bourdieu said it like this: "Legitimacy is indivisible: there is no agency to legitimate the legitimacy" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/2000, p. 18). This is especially the case in U.S. education, where there is no equivalent of a national ministry of education and no culture akin to many European and/or Asian nations. The decentralization of U.S. education to the 50 states ensures consistent competition for influence within and across the states.

Bourdieu uses the word *pedagogy* not in the usual sense of "the science, principles, or work of teaching" (Higgleton, Sargeant, & Seaton, 1999, p. 657) but, rather, in the sense of a critical reading and even deconstruction of the pedagogical relationship that is rooted in a parent/child (hierarchical) dyad. In Bourdieu's terminology (see Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/2000) the actions are called *pedagogic actions*. The agencies and/or institutions involved receive *pedagogic authority* to implement the *pedagogic actions*. These result in practitioners' engaging in *pedagogic work*. This relationship is shown in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1 Bourdieu's Relational Field of Educational Interests

Source: Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (2000) *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (2nd ed.) London: SAGE.

The arena of *pedagogic action* is the larger social space where individuals, agents, agencies, and groups engage in a contest to impose their version of how the world should work. Such interests are either in favor of preserving the status quo or in favor of transforming it. And in the continuing battle of linguistic symbols, agents claiming to “reform” education may actually be working to dominate all forms of education with a simple economic calculus where the mentality of profit, customers, and consumerism eclipses the ethic of public service.

THE “CULTURE WARS” IN THE UNITED STATES AND UNITED KINGDOM: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

The current struggle for what has been called “the soul of public education” is at least 40 years old in the United States and a bit younger in the United Kingdom. In the United States, this struggle was formerly known as “the culture wars” (Shor, 1986). One of the very first manifestations of cultural conflict that spilled over into education occurred over the teaching of Darwin’s theory of evolution. While very few in the scientific community take issue with this narrative, its premises are hotly disputed by the nonscientific community as represented in local

school boards, state boards of education, state legislatures, and even Congress in the United States (Smith, Heinscke, & Jarvis, 2004).

Even as evolution was thought by some to have been resolved in the infamous Scopes trial in Tennessee in 1925 (Bates, 1993), more than 80 years later the chairman of the Texas State Board of Education declared, “Evolution is hooley” (Collins, 2012, p. 18). Eugenie Scott, executive director of the National Center for Science Education, lamented that evolution is “settled science” and “we shouldn’t fight the culture wars in the high school classroom” (Tracy, 2012, p. A6).

The issue of climate change has now become the flashpoint in the continuing battles over which culture will be taught in schools, once again pitting “settled science” against popular nonscientific advocates who happen to be on school boards or in state legislatures. A local school board member in Colorado worked to prevent teachers in her school district from teaching climate change as a fact, remarking, “Unless we’ve got conclusive evidence one way or another—and I don’t think we’ll have that for hundreds of years—I think both sides should be taught. Allow the kids to figure it out for themselves” (Tracy, 2012, p. A6). The director of the National Research Council retorted, “What would be conveyed to them [the kids] is not how science works—it’s how politics works” (p. A6).

In the United Kingdom, Parliament adopted a national curriculum in 1988 following 8 years of debate. The new history curriculum attempted to strike a balance between memorizing past English monarchs and teaching children how to engage in critical thinking within the discipline of history. This stance drew fire from neoconservatives who demanded that the school’s “main mission [was] to transmit to children the country’s proud heritage and to reaffirm those collective memories that would make young people loyally and confidently *British*” (Nash, Crabtree, & Dunn, 1997, p. 138). The curriculum that finally came to be adopted excluded the “study of ethnic and religious minority communities and their historical experience” (p. 144).

Such episodes point to the issue Bourdieu addressed on many fronts. First, he outlined the lopsided influence of various groups within the larger society in putting their version of culture into the official school curriculum and imposing it on everyone else (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/2000). Second, he underscored how forms of cultural capital were expressions of power and were interconnected with economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

Schools graduate students and give them diplomas for the acquisition of the “right” knowledge and proper attitude toward themselves and others. Schools are battlegrounds where social classes will

be able to impose their view of the world and their group's place in it, because schools legitimize that view as they inculcate students with the approved and sanctified knowledge of the world. So the question isn't, "Will history be taught?" but, rather, "Whose history will be taught?"

Bourdieu's sociological assertion was that educational instruction and qualifications, together with the institutions attended, help reinforce prevailing social structures and positions, a situation illustrated in both the United States and United Kingdom throughout their recent histories, as we shall see. This view is not unique to Bourdieu and has long been the subject of debate. For instance, Reimer (1971) argued that "schools define merit in accordance with the structure of the society served by schools," adding that "merit is a smoke screen for the perpetuation of privilege" (p. 43). Those social groupings occupying more elevated positions predicated by forms of capital have the ability to ensure that the established "value" structure of academic routes and qualifications is reproduced, thereby retaining their own position of dominance.

THE BATTLE OVER THE CORRECT ACADEMIC SUBJECTS AND PROPER PEDAGOGIC WORK

Not only is the nature of specific topics in the school contested, because they are connected to the value-based positions of the world vision of a specific social class, but also what constitutes the "correct" or "proper" cluster of subjects. These groupings are often connected to the perceived nature of pedagogic work, as we shall see in the following examples.

In 2013, the new British coalition government headed by the Conservative Party introduced plans to alter the nature of what it termed "traditional academic" subjects. For example, the party argued that the teaching of English should include a more rigorous focus on spelling, punctuation, and grammar. The education secretary at the time, Michael Gove, expressed strong objections to what he termed the "infantilisation" of the school curriculum, illustrated by such concerns as too few schoolchildren studying pre-20th century novels.

Indeed, in his changes to the history curriculum, Gove is charged with ignoring all guidance and constructing the content himself to include a strong emphasis on memorizing names, dates, and facts. Gove suggested that curriculum reforms should be couched in terms of a return to an age of high educational standards

and rigor, creating a “gold standard” qualification that referred to a curriculum and qualification frame originally devised in the 1950s, a harking back to a mythical “golden age” of education familiar in political rhetoric today.

Similar concerns were echoed in the U.S. debate regarding the Common Core curriculum standards. In one high-ranking state, Massachusetts, the English standards would “reduce by 60% the amount of classic literature, poetry, and drama that students will read. For example, the Common Core ignores the novels of Charles Dickens, Edith Wharton, and Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*.” It is feared that this proposed curriculum will impair student test achievement in Massachusetts, where “students became the first to score best in the nation in all grades and categories on the National Assessment of Educational Progress” (Gass & Chieppo, 2013, p. A15).

Educational systems in all nations function as constellations of individuals, groups, and agencies vying for position and influence. It is a field of struggle, and the relative positions of influence are anchored in forms of power, the chief of which is economic materialism—that is, wealth based on money and the influence money can buy. But economic materialism is only one form of power.

Bourdieu’s work included the idea of cultural capital; for example, noneconomic or nonmaterial aspects of power and education are one form of cultural capital, which is both a means and ends of power. That old saying, “Knowledge is power,” typifies this notion. Becoming educated is therefore the acquisition of a form of nonmaterial power. But at some point education is also translated into economic capital, because educational certificates and degrees tend to confer greater influence and material wealth over time.

So education is itself an expression of power. It is not a culturally neutral social space open equally to all who seek to enter; rather, it is a structured set of experiences framed and sanctioned within an institutional and bureaucratic social space. Bourdieu was one of the first to notice the presence of forms of *linguistic capital*—that is, the acquisition of language in the home and its connection to acquisition of language in schools, and the importance of this connection. If the language used in the home mirrors that used in school, then “it follows logically that the educational mortality rate can only increase as one moves towards the classes most distant from scholarly language” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/2000, p. 73). In later chapters in this book, we will explore the various forms of capital at work in education and how they influence what schools do and how various agencies and individuals think schools can be changed or reformed.

THE CONCEPT OF MISRECOGNITION AND HOW IT WORKS

The mechanism of social reproduction is further facilitated by Bourdieu's concept of **misrecognition**, which explains how the fundamental structure of socioeconomic inequality, defined and working within distinctive social/professional fields, is reproduced in the schools. Misrecognition has been defined as

the form of forgetting that social agents are caught up in and produced by. When we feel comfortable within our roles within the social world they seem to us like second nature and we forget how we have actually been produced as particular kinds of people. (Webb et al., p. xiv)

Despite the usual egalitarian rhetoric about schools being the ladder to the good life for all children of all people, they have rarely, if ever, actually worked that way. Bourdieu was not the first to gather empirical data about how schooling benefited some social groups more than others.

For example, in 1968, Michael Katz published his research on an 1860 town meeting in Beverly, Massachusetts, where the eligible voters approved a motion to abolish the town's 2-year-old, tax-supported public high school. Through an examination of town records, Katz was able to show that the 143 citizens who voted against abolishing the high school were largely from the business class and were wealthy in the community. Those who voted in favor of the motion to abolish the high school were mostly working-class people, what we would call today the town's "blue-collar" segment.

Katz (1968) then took this historic vote and contrasted it with the prevailing reform rhetoric of those times, which was filled with claims regarding what a publicly supported high school would do to bring about greater equal opportunity for all groups of students in Massachusetts. He showed that working-class voters clearly saw it had benefited only a few students, most of them from the wealthy part of Beverly. Katz subsequently commented:

Surely, high school promoters could not really have expected that the children of factory operatives and laborers would attend. They knew only too well the apathy of these people toward education. In this situation their ideology served partly as a rationalization. By stressing that high schools were democratic, that they fostered equality of

opportunity, educational promoters could cover personal motives with the noblest of sentiments. What they were doing was spreading throughout the whole community the burden of educating a small minority of its children. (p. 53)

The advancement of one agenda without fully understanding who actually benefits from it, and without recognizing that the advocates are the ones who benefit most, is an example of the Bourdieusian concept of misrecognition.

SOME HISTORY WITH MISRECOGNITION

High school advocates in Beverly, Massachusetts, advanced the argument for tax-supported high school on the grounds that it would benefit all children, when in reality it would benefit only a few—their own. Opponents, at least in Beverly, saw quite clearly that their children were not likely to benefit. More than a hundred years later, Christopher Jencks and his colleagues (1972) published a widely read book on inequality in which they stated, “Schools serve primarily as selection and certification agencies whose job is to measure and label people, and only secondarily as socialization agencies whose job is to change people. This implies that schools serve primarily to legitimize inequality, not to create it” (p. 135).

To this day, not much has changed about how schools serve to reflect, reinforce, and advance existing socioeconomic inequalities (Greer, 1972; Harris, 1982; Lareau, 2011; Lucas, 1999). The long history of the schooling process illustrates that schools are the means—the tools, if you will—by which those with political power and control legitimize the continuation of their own privilege by controlling the content and process of schooling. While some may perceive the language game being played with “leave no child behind,” in reality the same children as before will be left behind (Smith, 2013).

The idea that schools were once successful and now are “failing” is a myth. This myth has been used to advance the neoliberal ideas of standardized testing and pay-for-performance plans as an antidote to school failure (Kumashiro, 2008; Prier, 2012; Rotberg, 2011). But as Herbert J. Gans (1972) clearly illustrated in his foreword to *The Great School Legend* (Greer, 1972), released more than 30 years ago, “the public schools of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not help poor children, but instead, failed them in large numbers and forced them out of the school” (p. vii).

Greer (1972) examined the data and noted that

the successful selection of losers in this society has been as much an indicator of the school's success as the selection of winners. Excessive real mobility is a great danger to the status quo—and the public schools in America cannot be characterized by their willingness to threaten the propriety of things as they are. (p. 106)

Grant's (1988) school biography of Hamilton High, established in 1953 in a middle-class suburban district near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, similarly revealed the presence of the social class structure. Grant's portrait mirrored Coleman's (1961) research on school and the teenage subculture, about which he wrote that in a middle-class school a "boy or girl in such a system finds it governed by an elite whose backgrounds exemplify, in the extreme, those of the dominant population group" (p. 217). Grant (1988) observed that in the 1950s Hamilton High was a place where

fewer than 15 percent of its students would have been classified as working class. . . . These students either dropped out of school when at age sixteen they were permitted to do so, or they attempted to emulate the leaders in a bid for social mobility. (p. 15)

The impact of social classes using schools to legitimate their position is not confined to Anglo-American or European schools. Rohlen's (1983) study of Japanese high schools similarly illustrated how "the children of the wealthy are doing well, by and large, in education" (p. 139). Rohlen noted:

The social gap between Kobe's high- and low-status high schools is indeed great—a separation as large as between nineteenth-century classes, European or Japanese. The gap is certainly not just academic. Past and future status, income, and power are involved, and between the elite schools and the vocational schools there is a significant difference in self-esteem and personal conduct. . . . The magnitude of the subcultural differences between types of high schools makes them the modern equivalent of nineteenth-century industrial classes. (pp. 139–140)

Another example is found in India. In 2009, India passed the Right to Education Act, which established that 35% of school admissions must be set aside for low-income students. So far, the results of this intention to use schooling as a means of confronting the wealth gap are disappointing. Teachers in the schools serving large numbers of children from the wealthy sectors of Indian society complain that even at age 4,

the children from poor families are way behind in learning fundamentals and social skills (Anand, 2011).

Parents of the more privileged class complain that the presence of the low-income students holds their children back from learning more at school. The differences in cultural capital were evident when teachers at one school asked their class of young children to name things that were colored purple:

The rich kids shouted out “blackberries,” “blackcurrant ice cream” and “potassium permanganate,” a chemical used to clean fruits and vegetables. None of the seven low-income kids raised their hands. Unlike the wealthier children, they hadn’t learned their colors at home, spoke no English, and were further confused by examples of things they had never heard of. (p. A10)

That schools reinforce existing social classes or groups is largely an accepted notion among most serious scholars examining test score differences internationally (Condrón, 2011; Sahlberg, 2011). The conventionally held view of the relationship between schools and social class can be summarized in the influential work by Bowles and Gintis (1976), who commented that schools fostered inequality that was legitimated by an apparent meritocratic approach to rewarding and promoting students and then assigning them distinct positions in the extant social hierarchy. In performing this function, they created and reinforced the existing social class divisions and perpetuated “patterns of social class, racial and sexual identification among students which allow them to relate ‘properly’ to their eventual standing in the hierarchy of authority and status in the production process” (p. 11).

Bourdieu’s notions of class differed from the typical Marxian view advanced by Bowles and Gintis. He also suggested that Marxism posited a raw and crude form of economic determinism and domination, proffering that

the submission of workers, women, minorities, and graduate students is most often not a deliberate or conscious concession to the brute force of managers, men, whites and professors; it resides, rather, in the unconscious fit between their habitus and the field they operate in. It is deep inside the socialized body. (Wacquant, 1992, p. 24)

Thus, Bourdieu (1989b) wrote, “if it is fitting to recall that the dominated always contribute to their own domination, it is necessary at once to be reminded that the dispositions which incline them to this complicity are also the effect, embodied, of domination” (p. 12).

Bourdieu rejected theories that rested on assumptions that social agents within fields of power or between different fields always behave consciously, rationally, and intentionally to obtain specified goals or objectives. He was therefore at odds with rational-choice models of decision making that were centered on economic models solely motivated by material gain. Rather, Bourdieu's relational approach revolved around his ideas of *habitus*, *capital*, and *field*, concepts we will explore in greater detail in the following chapters.

A relatively recent example is evident in the acerbic exchange between Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and German Chancellor Angela Merkel over the utter lack of Turkish secondary schools in Germany, despite the fact that Germany's Turkish population of 2.5 million (3% of the total German population) is the European Union's largest Turkish community. Stevens (2010) reported that "many Germans . . . resent Turks' many segregated neighborhoods and high rates of unemployment, and feel many don't try hard enough to adapt to Germans' way of life, or even learn the German language" (p. A9).

Students of Turkish descent in German schools tend to perform at lower levels of achievement than their German equivalents, and only 13% of Turkish students make it to the top-level secondary schools, called gymnasiums. In addition, the unemployment rate for the Turkish population is estimated to be nearly double that for native Germans. There are no public schools that teach Turkish students in Turkish. In the larger political world, Germany has also opposed Turkey's entrance as a full-fledged partner in the European Union. The antagonism between the Turkish minority and the German majority involves capital, culture, and fields of power, a conflict that spills over into higher levels of politics in Europe.

BUILDING AWARENESS OF THE FORCES AT PLAY

The purpose of describing the forces at play within the Bourdieusian lens is not to find enemies or scapegoats. Bourdieu's sociology is about accurate description and portrayal to create improved understanding and the possibility of real change. Some critics have charged that Bourdieu is "deterministic," in that his descriptions appear to leave little room for change (see Jenkins, 2002, pp. 117–119). We demur in this regard, because real change begins with as realistic an understanding as possible of the social forces one wishes to alter.

Bourdieu (1990b) was fond of quoting French philosopher Martial Gueroult on this score:

I cannot at all approve of the fact that people try to deceive themselves by feeding on false imaginings. That is why, seeing that it is a greater perfection to know the truth, even when it is to our disadvantage, than not to know it, I confess that it is better to be less happy and to have more knowledge. (p. 188)

Bourdieu himself worked toward a metanoia—that is, a new vision or understanding—because without it, a real transformation is not likely to occur. The first real change happens within the leader’s mind. The practitioner has to find “new eyes” for continuing problems and issues. With new eyes comes the development of new solutions (see Bolton, 2011).

WITHOUT NEW EYES: THE BLINDERS OF DOXA AS ORTHODOXY

In Bourdieu’s corpus, **doxa** refers to the prevailing orthodoxies at work in any field. All fields have prevailing modes of thought and generally accepted remedies for an array of problems, whether they work or not. Such remedies are often perceived as generically true and necessary for success. “For Bourdieu, the ‘**doxic attitude**’ means bodily and unconscious submission to conditions that are in fact quite arbitrary and contingent” (Webb et al., 2002, p. xi).

In the history of science, some of these mental constructs have been called *paradigms* (Kuhn, 1996). Kuhn showed that while the use of some paradigms helped solve problems, in other cases it blocked problem solving. Paradigms are simply “lenses”—that is, peculiar “glasses” we look through to solve problems. Some glasses prevent us from seeing all the dimensions of a problem because humans don’t problem-solve with an open mind. Problem solving begins with all our previous experiences, conditioning, and narratives serving as filters to any kind of work we do. Humans come to problem solving with their minds filled with lived past experiences and “classificatory schemes, systems of classification, the fundamental oppositions of thought, masculine/feminine, right/left, east/west,” and so on (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 25). In short, our minds are crowded with a great deal of cultural and conceptual clutter, and too often we are completely unaware of it. We don’t think reflexively; that is, we don’t think about *how* we are thinking.

Instead, we think about things, actions, or outcomes. Bourdieu tried very hard to subject his own thinking to scrutiny before he thought about anything. This is the difference between reflexivity and reflectivity. True reform and change begin with reflexivity, which is the beginning of having “new eyes.”

Doxa are simply the “rules of the game, meaning that specific forms of struggle are legitimized whereas others are excluded” (Swartz, 1997, p. 125). It is instructive to note that in mid-2010, all the “reform” strategies considered by the Barack Obama administration in turning around so-called “failing schools” began with firing the school principal. When queried as to the research base substantiating this position, Obama officials couldn’t come up with any (Flanary, 2010). Bourdieu (1971) observed that “what attaches a thinker to his age, what situates and dates him, is above all the kind of problems and themes in terms of which he is obliged to think” (pp. 182–183). Firing the principal is an approach preferred in the world of business, and the Obama administration Department of Education was staffed with many ex-officials from foundations and businesses, or those who had training in business (English, 2014).

BOURDIEU AS THE PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL, ACTIVIST, AND PROVOCATEUR

Bourdieu’s academic brilliance and his reputation on issues of social justice in France led him to speak out in the popular media against the emerging forces of neoliberalism and globalization that enjoyed popularity in the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia (Mullen, Samier, Brindley, English, & Carr, 2013). Increasingly, Bourdieu spoke out publicly to renounce the harmful impact of privatization of government services and to advocate for protection of the least able to protect themselves in the public arena (Lane, 2006).

Bourdieu spoke of the “left hand” and the “right hand” of the state in this struggle. He characterized those on the “left hand” as public officials, teachers, and social workers who were pitted against the “right hand” as represented by the politicians, technocrats, bankers, and think-tank pundits. At stake in this struggle was the ethos of “public service,” which had been the watchword of the state and was now under direct attack. Bourdieu lumped both Marxists and neoliberals into one hostile camp because both “were forms of economism” and led to the triumph of economic models as the arbiter of social good.

The irony of Bourdieu's life is that, at the end of his career, he engaged in a defense of the French educational system and programs of government that he had built his reputation on critiquing for their failure to live up to their ideals (Lane, 2006, p. 26). He discerned that the influence of neoliberalism was a greater threat to the ideals of France than their reform or abandonment because neoliberalism threatened the total erasure of those ideals.

Bourdieu's life was a self-imposed trial of discovery and a dogmatic pursuit of reality. In this pursuit he was not afraid to confront established dogma, to challenge cherished beliefs, or to pursue lines of thought and inquiry that made sense to him. He was not a perfect man or a perfect academic; yet what makes Bourdieu worth the effort is that even within his pessimism based on observations of how school systems worked to reinforce the social and cultural dominance of certain powerful groups, he found reason to believe change was possible. Thus, his ideas and ideals are worth reading and understanding because, in doing so, the promises for improved public education can be realized. Bourdieu (1990b) summarized this perspective well when he remarked about challenging various classifications, "It is in discovering its historicity that reason gives itself the means of escaping from history" (p. 25).

That change begins with an understanding of how the system works, which is the subject of the next chapter.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

A Social World of Policy and Practice That Is Dynamic, Fluid, and Contested

Bourdieu presents a sociological picture of the world of educational policy and practice as contested and dynamic. Teachers, administrators, parents, politicians, policy wonks, and self-defined neoliberal billionaires work in a volatile social space where forms of capital are expended to influence policy and practice. There will be no end to this contestation because, as Bourdieu points out, there is no supra agency that will bestow final legitimacy on any perspective or group's agenda. To prevail in this contested social space, individuals, groups, and agencies have to expend their resources to influence others to adopt their point of view, or compel them using various forms of power to adopt or accept their agenda.

Repressive and Discriminatory Educational Practices Persist Because Even Those Who Are Disadvantaged by Them Accept Them as “Legitimate”

Those persons or groups not well served by the school and its practices accept them anyway and in so doing legitimize and perpetuate them. That the dominated participate in their own domination is one of Bourdieu's key insights into how schools continue to function even as they underserve the larger society. One example is that Black males are continually suspended and disciplined in schools at rates way out of proportion to their actual numbers, but the routines and beliefs of the school that led to those suspensions and disciplinary procedures are rarely questioned as appropriate, even by Black males. The form of resistance adopted by Black males is considered aberrant and detrimental even by them (see Fergus & Noguera, 2010). Bourdieu (1980/1990a) described this feature when he said, “The dominated are dominated in their brains too” (p. 41).

School Practitioners Are Part of the Problem if They Don't See How Schools Really Work

Most school practitioners work in schools because they are part of the ethic of public service. Most believe in the promise of schooling to enhance the lives of young people. Few enter education to get rich. Work in schools represents a kind of special “calling,” one firmly anchored in the idea of progress and the advancement of humanity. And few educators would deny the power of education in helping their students advance both economically and socially in their respective societies.

However, it is amazing how many school practitioners who work very hard in schools don't see how their work reinforces the existing class divisions and economic disparities in the larger society. They are blinded by the rhetoric of their own calling. Bourdieu called all those claims into question when he presented the data on who advances and who benefits the most from schooling, by social class. His data, now several decades dated, are mirrored again and again in current data gathered in the United Kingdom and United States. The well-to-do receive the most benefit from state-sponsored school systems. Historical data strongly suggest that this has been the case since the establishment of public education.

For school practitioners to begin moving in different directions and more objectively examine their own behaviors and actions, the

connection between schooling and the larger social divisions must be seen in its entirety and with greater clarity than before. Practitioners must see that many of the so-called “reforms” are merely warmed-over calls to reinforce existing behavior and will continue to benefit the children of the privileged. The children of the poor don’t need more rigor in schooling; they need more relevance. The development of a different set of eyes regarding the function of schooling is to ask trenchantly, who is proposing changes and who will benefit most from them? Furthermore, whose voice is being heard and whose voice is silent or absent from any discussion of change? Those questions should help reveal the true beneficiaries of educational “reforms” being debated in policy discussions in both the United Kingdom and United States.

KEY CHAPTER CONCEPTS

doxa, the doxic attitude

Doxa are the core beliefs, attitudes, principles, or concepts considered true and proper regarding the nature and relationships of things. The *doxic attitude* encompasses the often unstated but shared beliefs about how practices in schools should be defined, advanced, and/or evaluated. This attitude is usually unquestioned and accepted as a given.

In *Masculine Domination*, Bourdieu (2001) spoke of the *paradox of doxa*, which is that the “order of the world as we find it . . . is broadly respected” (p. 1). He insightfully remarked that

the established order, with its relations of domination, its rights and prerogatives, privileges and injustices, ultimately perpetuates itself so easily, apart from a few historical accidents, and that the most intolerable conditions of existence can so often be perceived as acceptable and even natural. (p. 1)

In schools, a doxic attitude can be seen when the appalling rates of African American and Latino school failure, suspension, and dropout rates are considered acceptable and the “way it is” by both the dominant members of the culture and the unfortunate recipients of practices that have led to these conditions (the dominated). An excellent review of the doxic attitude as Bourdieu lived it in France appears in Grenfell (2007, pp. 152–171).

misrecognition

On the face of it, Bourdieu's concept of *misrecognition* seems fairly simple; actually, it is anything but simple. Misrecognition refers to the use of symbolic power and language as a symbol of its expression. The social world is one of structures and exists in hierarchies of domination and submission, of vying and competing political and socioeconomic interests that are interacting within a given social space.

Here is Bourdieu's (1991) explanation:

The institutionalized circle of collective misrecognition, which is the basis of belief in the value of an ideological discourse, is established only when the structure of the field of production and circulation of this discourse is such that the negation it effects (by saying what it says only in a form which suggests that it is not saying it) is brought together with interpreters who are able, as it were, to misrecognize again the negated message; in other words, the circle is established only when what is denied by the form is 're-misrecognized', that is, known and recognized in the form, and only in the form, in which it is realized by denying itself. (p. 153)

We can think of several examples of this. When regressive neoliberal policies speak of free markets and liberation but in practice what is meant is that public space is commodified and sold to those who want to make a profit, the true intention is concealed. When others repeat these words and fail to see how their implementation negates what is desired, *that is misrecognition*. The contradiction, the negation of the message contained within the message itself, is not revealed and remains hidden. Bourdieu (1991) summarizes this circumstance by saying, "Ideological production is all the more successful when it is able to *put in the wrong* anyone who attempts to *reduce* it to its objective truth" (p. 153).

In the case of the development of leadership standards in the United Kingdom and United States, the language of the standards seems to be about optimizing the strengths of individual schools, but it is really about making all the schools the same (English, 2003).