

**Reproduction and transformation of inequalities in schooling:  
The transformative potential of the theoretical constructs of Bourdieu**

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## **Abstract**

This article is concerned with the theoretical constructs of Bourdieu and their contribution to understanding the reproduction of social and cultural inequalities in schooling. While Bourdieu has been criticised for his reproductive emphasis, this article proposes that there is transformative potential in his theoretical constructs and that these suggest possibilities for schools and teachers to improve the educational outcomes of marginalised students. The article draws together three areas of contribution to this theme of transformation; beginning by characterising *habitus* as constituted by reproductive *and* transformative traits and considering the possibilities for the restructuring of students' habitus. This is followed by a discussion of *cultural capital* and the way that teachers can draw upon a variety of cultural capitals to act as agents of transformation rather than reproduction. The article concludes by considering the necessity of a transformation of the *field* to improve the educational outcomes of marginalised students.

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**Introduction**

The work of Pierre Bourdieu first came to be known to many educationalists in the English speaking world in 1977 via the publication of the translation of *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. Although Bourdieu has made significant contributions to understanding the role that schools and school systems play in reproducing social and cultural inequalities through the hidden linkages between scholastic aptitude and cultural heritage (Bourdieu, 1998), the work is still widely misunderstood and attracts fierce criticism for apparently mechanistic notions of power and domination, an overly determined view of human agency, and the oversimplification of class cultures and their relationships to each other (Giroux, 1983). According to his critics, Bourdieu's theory leaves no room for notions like resistance. 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).

While Bourdieu has often been (mis)represented as a determinist, this article suggests that there is transformative potential in his theoretical constructs and that these suggest possibilities for schools and teachers to improve the educational outcomes of marginalised students. The article draws together three major areas of contribution to this theme of transformation; beginning by characterising Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* (often criticised as too deterministic) as constituted by reproductive *and* transformative traits and considering the possibilities for the restructuring of students' habitus. This is followed by a discussion of *cultural capital* and more specifically, the way that teachers can draw upon a variety of cultural capitals to act as agents of transformation rather than reproduction. The article concludes by considering the necessity of a transformation of the *field* to improve the educational outcomes of marginalised students. It is to an explanation of these matters that the article now turns.

**The habitus as reproductive *and* transformative**

A term that has been linked to such writers as Aristotle, Hegel, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Weber and Durkheim, *habitus* is not necessarily a unique or original concept. Bourdieu's version of habitus reflects his effort to escape the mechanistic tendencies of Saussure's structuralism without relapsing into subjectivism. It is ironic, then, that habitus has been subject to widespread criticism on the basis of its 'latent

determinism'. While some of Bourdieu's concepts are better understood than others, habitus is less well known and is probably Bourdieu's most contested concept (Reay, 2004). As Reay (2004) points out, 'there is an increasing tendency for habitus to be sprayed throughout academic texts like "intellectual hair spray" (Hey, 2003), bestowing gravitas without doing any theoretical work' (p. 432).

As a way of accounting for the fact that there are other principles that generate practices beside rational calculation, habitus refers to 'a system of durable, transposable dispositions which functions as the generative basis of structured, objectively unified practices' (Bourdieu, 1979, p. vii). The term characterises the recurring patterns of social class outlook – the beliefs, values, conduct, speech, dress and manners – that 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.

The dispositions (capacities, tendencies, propensities or inclinations) that constitute the habitus are acquired through a gradual process of inculcation; making the habitus a complex amalgam of past and present. For Bourdieu, the body is a 'mnemonic device upon and in which the very basics of culture, the practical taxonomies of the habitus, are imprinted and encoded in a socialising or learning process which commences during early childhood' (Jenkins, 2002, pp. 75-76), enabling it on the appropriate occasion to produce skilful social activity. The system of dispositions that individuals acquire depends on the position they occupy in society, which is related to their particular endowment in capital (Wacquant, 1998). Therefore, the dispositions produced are also structured in the sense that:

they unavoidably reflect the social conditions within which they were acquired. An individual from a working-class background, for instance, will have acquired dispositions which are different in certain respects from those acquired by individuals who were brought up in a middle-class milieu. (Thompson, 1991, p. 13)

The habitus of some students will resemble more closely the values that the school seeks to transmit consciously (and also unconsciously) and to legitimate. As Grenfell and James (1998) point out, 'proximity

to this orthodoxy at birth has a determinate effect on habitus not only in ways of thinking which more closely approximate that of schools but in terms of a whole cultural disposition' (p. 21). Indeed, 'the most privileged students ... owe the habits, behaviour and attitudes which help them directly in pedagogic tasks to their social origins' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964; translated by and cited in Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 21).

While the habitus disposes actors to do certain things, it is a 'strategy-generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72). Although Bourdieu recognises the existence of objective structures – 'which are independent of the consciousness and desires of agents and are capable of guiding or constraining their practices' (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 123) – action is not 'the mere carrying out of a rule, or obedience to a rule. Social agents ... are not automata regulated like clocks, in accordance with laws which they do not understand. In most complex games ... they put into action the incorporated principles of a generative habitus' (Bourdieu, 1990a, pp. 9-10).

Within the Bourdieuan literature, then, 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). For example, Nash (1990) maintains that Bourdieu's theory of practice 'negates the theory of action, blurs the concept of choice, and introduces confusion, circularity and pseudo-determinism' (p. 445). Similarly, 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).

While it is not difficult to understand the critique directed at Bourdieu's work given the structuralist language and forms of reasoning in some early formulations of habitus (e.g. Bourdieu, 1977) (McLeod, 2005), some of Bourdieu's texts provide more space for agency than others. In more recent studies, such as *The Weight of the World* (1999), 'there is a great deal of striving, resistance and action aimed at changing current circumstances as many of the poor and dispossessed, interviewed by Bourdieu and his colleagues, search around for ways of changing and transforming their lives' (Reay, 2004, p. 437). This powerful 'account of how "ordinary people" are negotiating lives in a time of major social, cultural and economic upheaval' (McLeod, 2005, p. 15) is oriented to understanding the effects of 'objective relations' in the apparently idiosyncratic and individual; to understand, in other words, 'the complexity of interactions between social space/field and habitus' (McLeod, 2005, p. 15). Indeed, Bourdieu would argue that 'micro-negotiations in local contexts and macro processes of society and culture need to be seen as dialectically related' (Dillabough, 2004, p. 490).

Moreover, while I agree with Jenkins that Bourdieu's conception of agency is somewhat restrained, I tend to regard this as a strength, reflecting its relationship with an equally restrained conception of structure. In short, 'there is no such thing as pure agency; but a kind of (limited) agency can be identified ... [S]ubjects are able to negotiate the rules, regulations, influences and imperatives that inform all cultural practice, and delimit thought and action, precisely because fields dispose them to do so' (Schirato & Webb, 2003, p. 540).

Like Harker and May (1993), I believe that habitus 'sets the boundaries within which agents are "free" to adopt strategic practices. These practices, based on the intuitions of the practical sense, orient rather than strictly determine action' (p. 174). That is, habitus shapes, but does not determine our life choices. It is true, nonetheless, that 'Bourdieu's agency is not unconstrained. He can be seen as pessimistic only to the extent that there would appear to be no possibility of truly novel human agency' (Harker, 1984, p. 122). While

choice is at the heart of habitus, at the same time the choices inscribed in the habitus are very clearly limited (Reay, 1995). In this sense, habitus *lends* itself to reproduction rather than transformation, although the latter possibility is not excluded. Dillabough (2004) argues that it is here that Bourdieu 'sheds light on a theoretical notion of identity that does not foreclose action or agency, yet accepts that such notions can never be seen as unconstrained action ... or as individual acts of liberal freedom' (p. 498).

Such agentic notions of habitus are evident in the research of Adkins, who addresses change and continuity through the re-inscriptions of gender in new social and political times, and McNay, who seeks to account for instability and change in gender. Similarly, Reay, David and Ball's (2005) work on student choice in higher education employs notions of habitus as both reproductive and transformative. McLeod (2005) argues that understanding habitus in this way is less an issue:

of choosing either side of the binary, than of rethinking the usual terms (freedom or resistance) of ... analytical debate. In other words, the critical dilemma becomes not simply one of freedom from the social field, or determination by it, or cultural reproduction versus cultural resistance ... The more pressing political and analytical challenge is attempting to theorize both change *and* continuity ... (p. 24, emphasis original)

The reproductive and transformative potentials of the habitus suggest that in the context of schooling, we could expect that on some occasions, students will recognise the constraint of social conditions and conditionings and tend to read the future that fits them, while on others they may recognise the capacity for improvisation and tend to generate opportunities for action in the social field.

That is, the habitus may make some students feel constrained by their circumstances and largely incapable of perceiving social reality, in all of its arbitrariness, as anything other than 'the way things are' (Jenkins, 2002). Many marginalised students, for example, take things for granted, rather than recognising that there are ways that their situation could be transformed. Students, 'even the most disadvantaged, tend to perceive the world as natural and to find it much more acceptable than one might imagine, especially when one looks at the situation of the dominated through the social eyes of the dominant' (Bourdieu, 1990a, pp. 130-131). Reading the future that fits them, the dispositions of such students confine possibilities to those they see to be suitable for the social group to which they belong; excluding certain aspirations as unthinkable, and inclining us instead to love the inevitable (Bourdieu, 1977). This is a good example of symbolic violence, a

term Bourdieu uses to describe 'the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 167). Such violence, rather than being explicit or overt, is achieved indirectly. Indeed, 'people play a role in reproducing their own subordination through the gradual internalisation and acceptance of those ideas and structures that tend to subordinate them' (Connolly & Healy, 2004, p. 15). Further, as Webb, Schirato and Danaher (2002) suggest, such complicity with 'dominant vision[s] of the world [occurs] not because we necessarily agree with [them], or because [they are] in our interests, but because there does not seem to be any alternative' (p. 92).

However, what one may experience as incapacitating, another may see as generative of opportunities for self-enhancement or self-renewal (Jordan, James, Kay & Redley, 1992). Rather than defining limits upon themselves and working within the perceived constraints of social conditions and conditionings, the ways of behaving and responding that seem natural to those with a habitus that is more transformative recognise the capacity for improvisation. While our dispositions 'enable us to recognise the possibilities for action and at the same time prevent us from recognising other possibilities' (Codd, 1990, p. 139), those with a more transformative habitus recognise opportunities for improvisation or 'tactics' (de Certeau, 1984) and act in ways to transform situations. We could analyse these actions as an attempt by some students to *make things happen*, rather than have things happen to them. This is what Giddens (1994) refers to as a generative politics.

While teachers may experience frustration with the reproductive tendencies they observe in the habitus and battle to engender more transformative dispositions, it is important to ask whether it is appropriate to attempt a transformation of students, projecting onto them identities without regard for the communities they embody. Some would argue that it is through these 'symbolic and cultural mechanisms that working-class existence, in large part, becomes pathologized' (Lawler, 1999, p. 4).

While teachers should endeavour to develop in students a sense of transformatory possibility, they 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, Hayes, Mills & Christie, 2003).



### **Transforming the cultural capital that counts**

Bourdieu writes extensively about the central role that schools play in reproducing social and cultural inequalities. 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. He believes that 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). His sociological account implies a major break with human capital theories, western psychology and the neo-liberal politics that drive educational policy, all of which 'explain' differences in scholastic outcomes as an effect of natural aptitudes.

The notion of cultural capital was proposed by Bourdieu in the early sixties to describe 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). This notion 'includes such things as acquired knowledge (educational or otherwise), cultural codes, manner of speaking and consumption practices and so forth, which are embodied as a kind of "habitus" in the individual and are also objectified in cultural goods' (Bullen & Kenway, 2005, p. 52).

Cultural capital 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). Indeed, as Nash (2002) points out, 'students socialised into codes of communication derived from class-cultural communities recognized as illegitimate by the middle-class school, and incompatible with those that regulate the transmission of educational knowledge, are confronted with insurmountable barriers of incomprehension' (p. 42).

In addition, the educational provision for marginalised students is impacted by the cultural capital of their parents. Reay (1998) found that white middle-class mothers were engaged in 'an extensive, systematic programme of generating educational capital through tuition, cultural capital through art, dance, drama and music classes, or social capital through orchestrating regular slots for their children to develop their own social networks and practice their social skills' (p. 70). Whereas, parents who were recent immigrants felt inadequate for the task of compensating what they perceived to be gaps in their children's educational provision. That is, while the situation of middle-class mothers provided 'material and social conditions under which cultural capital could be generated' (Reay, 1998, p. 62), there were educational repercussions for those having a cultural capital in the wrong currency (Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995).

It should be clear, then, that:

we do not enter fields with equal amounts, or identical configurations, of capital. Some have inherited wealth, cultural distinctions from up-bringing and family connections. Some individuals, therefore, already possess quantities of relevant capital ... which makes them better players than others in certain field games. Conversely, some are disadvantaged. (Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 21)

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). 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). That is, those involved in reproducing the social order often do so without either knowing they are doing so or wanting to do so. In particular, teachers frequently do not see and often do not intend the social sorting that schooling imparts on students.

However, by broadening the types of cultural capital that are valued in the classroom, I believe that teachers can act as agents of transformation rather than reproduction. Through their curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, 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. While schools need to create an environment that values and appreciates cultural differences, 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). It is also important that students have access to 'the best of what contemporary society has to offer' (Comber & Hill, 2000, p. 80); complex collections of practices that make up the cultural capital valued by dominant groups. Teachers play a key role in this accumulation process, particularly for students who have 'cultural capital in the wrong currency'.

As Delpit (1997) argues, the unequal distribution of knowledge and skills to working class and minority students reflects their exclusion from the codes or rules of the culture of power operating in schools. Unlike middle-class students who have other sites in which to acquire the dominant cultural capital – the family, its communities and so on – children from marginalised groups find themselves doubly disadvantaged with their cultural capital diminished by the school (Bernstein, 1990). In fact, 'to penalize the underprivileged and favour the most privileged, the school has only to neglect, in its teaching methods and techniques and its criteria when making academic judgements, to take into account the cultural inequalities between children of different social classes' (Bourdieu, 1974, p. 37).

Delpit (1997) would argue that teachers can make a difference for these students by using visible pedagogic models: taking nothing for granted and making explicit the rules of that culture through examples, illustrations and narratives that facilitate the acquisition of school knowledge. Bernstein (1990) suggests that

the use of such pedagogies weakens the relationship between social class and academic achievement, while ensuring that the school provides 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). The point is not to eliminate the cultural capital that students bring with them to school or use it to limit their potential, but rather to add other cultural capital to their repertoires (Delpit, 1992).

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 they acknowledge and respond to the cultural and linguistic diversity of the communities they serve. Political philosophers such as Nancy Fraser and Iris Marion Young conceptualise this ‘as a tension between an impulse toward *redistribution* of power-elite capital on one hand; and, on the other hand, toward *recognition* and valuation of diverse social-cultural identity formations’ (Zipin, 2005, p. 2, emphasis original). Fraser (1997) challenges us to move beyond redistribution and recognition and pursue a theory and politics of transformation by engaging with the deep structures that generate injustice. In pursuing ‘redistributive and cultural justice simultaneously, in ways that move beyond their contradictory logics ... the aim is to remedy social disadvantage through problematising and restructuring the underlying frameworks that generate such disadvantage’ (Keddie, 2005, p. 87). Keddie (2006) suggests that such ‘radical re-envisionings of curriculum and pedagogy ... might work to dismantle and transform the inequitable power relations and underlying frameworks that generate ... injustice within and beyond the contexts of education’ (p. 21).

### **Transforming the field**

Although the notion of habitus enables Bourdieu to grasp the generative principles underlying practices, individuals act in specific social contexts and settings. Particular practices should not be seen, then, as simply the product of habitus, but as ‘the product of the *relation between* the habitus, on the one hand, and the specific social contexts or “fields” within which individuals act, on the other’ (Thompson, 1991, pp. 13-14, emphasis original). Bourdieu refers to these social contexts or fields of action alternatively as ‘fields’, ‘markets’ and ‘games’: that is, ‘structured space[s] of positions in which the positions and their interrelations are determined by the distribution of different kinds of resources or “capital”’ (Thompson, 1991, pp. 13-14).

In this definition of field, Bourdieu explodes the vacuous notion of society, replacing it with ‘an ensemble of relatively autonomous spheres of “play”’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 16-17). Advanced societies are a plurality of worlds, ‘differentiated, partially totalized entities made up of a set of intersecting but increasingly

self-regulating fields' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 52). The conception of field that Bourdieu uses is therefore not to be considered as a field with a fence around it, but rather as a 'field of forces' that is dynamic and in which various potentialities exist (Mahar, Harker & Wilkes, 1990). While the field structures and predisposes, at least on Bourdieu's own account, there is space for improvisation (McLeod, 2005).

Moreover:

contemporary commentators have attempted to reformulate the relationship between habitus and field so that it is imagined as less tightly deterministic and rigidly presumed, emphasizing more the scope for improvisation and degrees of inventiveness alongside the structural and shaping qualities of habitus (e.g. Ball et al., 2000). (McLeod, 2005, p. 17)

A field is also an arena of struggle; the site of a more or less openly declared struggle for power and influence between the dominant and dominated who are unequally endowed in the objects and the weapons of struggle: capital. While positions stand in relationships of domination, subordination or equivalence to each other by virtue of the access they have to the capital at stake in the field (Jenkins, 2002), agents struggle to transform or preserve these force fields by defending or improving their positions. Hierarchy is continually contested and the very principles that undergird the structure of the field can be challenged and revoked (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Agents, therefore, are not 'particles' that are 'mechanically pushed and pulled about by external forces' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 108-109). Rather, they are bearers of capitals and:

depending on their trajectory and on the position they occupy in the field by virtue of their endowment (volume and structure) in capital, they have a propensity to orient themselves actively either toward the preservation of the distribution of capital or toward the subversion of this distribution. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 108-109)

Participants in these struggles therefore have differing aims – 'some will seek to preserve the status quo, others to change it – and differing chances of winning or losing, depending on where they are located in the structured space of positions' (Thompson, 1991, p. 14). Yet, this does not simply imply that 'all small capital holders are necessarily revolutionaries and all big capital holders are automatically conservatives' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 108-109). Nevertheless, position in the field inclines agents toward particular

patterns of conduct: 'those who occupy the dominant positions in a field tend to pursue strategies of conservation (of the existing distribution of capital) while those relegated to subordinate locations are more liable to deploy strategies of subversion' (Wacquant, 1998, p. 222). If we picture each player as:

having in front of her a pile of tokens of different colors, each color corresponding to a given species of capital she holds ... the moves that she makes, more or less risky or cautious, subversive or conservative, depend both on the total number of tokens and on the composition of the piles of tokens she retains, that is, on the volume and structure of her capital. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 99)

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)

In the context of schooling, while the rules of the game are accepted and it appears as if everyone is free to play and everything is negotiable, more often, it is a game in which the rules are determined by the dominant. Everyone plays, but not everyone is equal. Moreover, the rules or regularities of the field are 'only ever partially articulated, and much of the orthodox way of thinking and acting passes in an implicit, tacit manner' (Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 20). The legitimate is never made fully explicit. If the marginalised do not know the rules of the game of schooling, how can they understand the moves that permit them to win?

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. By letting marginalised students in on the rules of the game, for example, teachers can be involved in transforming the field rather than seeking to preserve the status quo. As Bourdieu (1988) posits, this is what happens when teachers 'take up a struggle which we may call revolutionary in so far as it aims to establish alternative goals and more or less completely ... redefine the

game and the moves which permit one to win it' (p. 172). Bourdieu would argue that to pave the way for improvement in the educational outcomes of marginalised students, such a revolutionary struggle is needed.

## **Conclusion**

While some will seek to preserve the status quo, others will strive to challenge and transform existing hierarchies. 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, then, becomes the construction of adequate theory that can accommodate and conceive of such apparent disparate interests. As has been articulated in this article, it is in this messiness that I turned to Bourdieu, seeing transformative potential in his theoretical constructs.

I agree with Harker (1984, p. 117), who argues that 'Bourdieu's critics who claim that his theory is structurally "frozen", with no room for human agency misperceive the basis of the theory'. To label Bourdieu as a 'structuralist', '(a description Bourdieu specifically rejects) ... is not only quite inaccurate, but also misses the point of what [he] is trying to accomplish – i.e. to account for agency in a constrained world' (Harker & May, 1993, p. 177). Bourdieu's emphasis on reproduction does not foreclose contrary action such as revolutionary struggle (Calhoun, 1993). It is struggle, not 'reproduction', that is the master metaphor at the core of Bourdieu's thought (Wacquant, 1998).

The transformative potential of Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, cultural capital and field suggest possibilities for schools and teachers to improve the educational outcomes of marginalised students. In the context of schooling, 'linking pedagogy to social change, connecting critical learning to the experiences and histories that students bring to the classroom, and engaging the space of schooling as a site of contestation, resistance and possibility' (Giroux, 2003, p. 6) can lead to such transformation.

**Biographical note**

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