

# Bourdieu in Educational Research



*Language and Literacy Learning*  
*October 2020*

 @AERABourdieuSIG

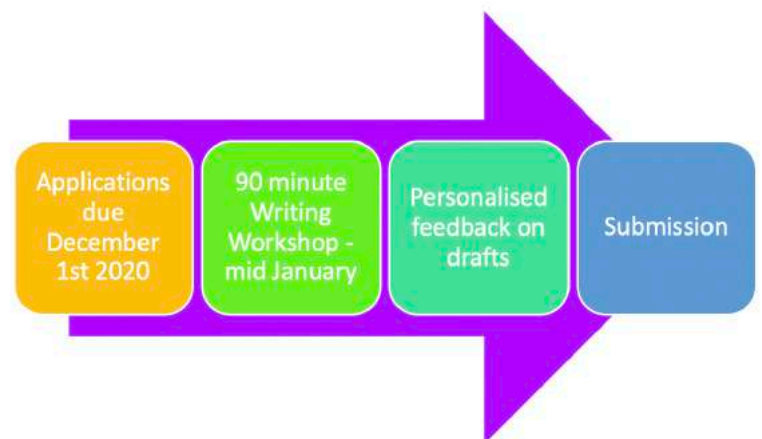
# ANNOUNCEMENTS

## Mentorship Program: Supporting SIG Members in Their Publications

We are hosting a mentoring scheme for *Bourdieu in Educational Research* SIG Members who are starting out in academia and looking to contribute to sociology of education. The aim of this scheme is to promote dialogue around Bourdieusian issues with writing and publication. It would also create additional opportunities for collaboration and strengthen networks among researchers early in the careers.

This mentorship program is designed to help PhD students and early career researchers improve their writing skills and publication output through personalized mentorship. First, will be a 90-minute Writing Workshop (over Zoom) held in December which would be led by the SIG conveners and have tips in terms of academic writing, editing, journal recommendations. After the workshop, we would then provide one-to-one feedback on a draft of a journal article.

This opportunity is open to members of the *Bourdieu in Educational Research* SIG for AERA. To apply please submit one paragraph (250 words) detailing your topic of interest, publishing experience and how you think the workshop and one-to-one help will assist you ([aerabourdieu@gmail.com](mailto:aerabourdieu@gmail.com)). It is expected the author should be working on a sole-authored publication during the workshop.



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If you would like to join our mailing list, please send us an email. Also, if you would like your Bourdieu-inspired scholarship to be featured in our next newsletter, please email us.

**[aerabourdieu@gmail.com](mailto:aerabourdieu@gmail.com)**



# Introduction

Language and literacy are foundation to Bourdieu's oeuvre. He writes of the relations of dominant language practices, linguistic production, how language is authorized/validated, linguistic capital, etc. Language, for Bourdieu, is an integral part of stratification - the so-called 'language game' - where it empowers and disempowers depending on its relation to other forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 99). In *Language and Symbolic Power* (1992, p. 43) Bourdieu's writes:

*"Language forms a kind of wealth, which all can make use of at once without causing any diminution of the store, and which thus admits a complete community of enjoyment; for all, freely participating in the general treasure, unconsciously aid in its preservation'. In describing symbolic appropriation as a sort of mystical participation, universally and uniformly accessible and therefore excluding any form of dispossession, Auguste Comte offers an exemplary expression of the illusion of linguistic communism which haunts all linguistic theory."*



Within studies of language, Bourdieu's scholarship was wide ranging. He focused on the production and reproduction of legitimate language, the social conditions of discourse, the symbolic power of words, etc. For Bourdieu, language contributes to the social imaginary where language is "an object of contemplation, formal invention or analysis" (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 13).

With this in mind, a plethora of scholars have sought to capitalize on Bourdieu's conceptual toolkit to study the inequalities innate to the development and acquisition of language and literacy.

We have asked a few scholars in the field to reflect on how Bourdieu has influenced their research and thinking. In the text that follows, academics consider how Bourdieu has provided insight into language and symbolic violence, the literacy practices of marginalized groups, literacy and power relations, as well as the recognition and misrecognition of academic literacy.



# Bourdieu for Beginners: Overview of Bourdieu's Three Main Tools



## HABITUS

**B**ourdieu defines habitus as “a system of lasting and transposable dispositions which, integrating past-experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 18). He emphasises a combination of “a system of dispositions, that is of permanent manners of being, seeing, acting and thinking” and a system of “long-

-lasting (rather than permanent) schemes or schemata or structures of perception, conception and action” (Bourdieu 2016, p. 43). Habitus is understood as dispositions (systems of propensity, tendency, inclination) working as the mechanism of an individual's behaviour (e.g. perceptions, appreciations, actions) that are gradually ingrained from the societies s/he is involved in through the process of inculcation (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992).

## CAPITAL

**A**ccording to Bourdieu, capital is a “species of power whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 97). Typically, there are three types of capital, namely *economic*, *cultural* and *social capital*, and, in relation to one another, they can be mutually transformed.





According to Bourdieu (2004, p. 16), economic capital is “immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights”. Cultural capital is the accumulated “experience and knowledge” (Bourdieu 1984, p. 23), which “may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications”. Social capital is “the possession of a durable network ... or institutionalized relationships ... or membership in a group ..., a ‘credential’ which entitles [people] to credit” (Bourdieu 2004, p. 21). So, social capital is a symbolic entitlement of being a member of a group which, to a great extent, allows the persons of socially recognized credentials (social status, respect or legitimacy) for appropriation accordingly, and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility or proper name.

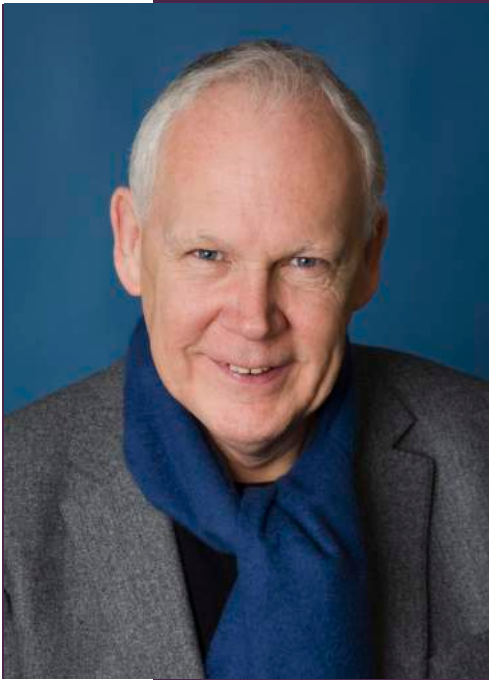


## FIELD

**F**ield is a social space where individuals interact with one another and, for Bourdieu, is organized by a system of operations or “the rule of the game” or “regularities” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, pp. 18, 99). For Bourdieu field is “a network, or configuration, of objective relations between positions ... in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 97).

This conception implies that the positions in the field are interrelated by objective reasons in the form of the rules of the games in the field. The positions are determined and distributed by power or authority legitimate in the field. As a social space, field refers more to the actual ‘locus’ or contextual boundaries where society is working (Bourdieu 1989; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). Bourdieu adds that “a field consists of a set of objective historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital)” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 16). As fields “are organized around specific types or combinations of capital” (Broberg 2015, p. 51), so field would essentially include the arena of interactions and the systems it operates by agents’ exercising capital/power for positions in the field. There are forces and struggles in this social field in terms of securing status positions or influence. In the field of higher education, the type of power or authority most legitimate here is not money – economic capital – but predominantly symbolic and cultural capital.

***What does this mean for the study of language and literacy?***



# Bourdieu, Language and Literacy

Michael Grenfell

When the work of the French social theorist first came to prominence in an Anglo-saxon speaking world in the 1970s, it did so within two principal academic constituencies, both of which were concerned with issues of literacy: Education and

Cultural/ Media Studies. Despite being very distinct in their range of interests, they shared a common affinity with the notion of *cultural capital* as a key concept in explaining the dynamics of their respective fields. Indeed, for a while in Education, Bourdieu was known as the ‘cultural capital man’. Yet both disciplines mostly overlooked the empirical work that Bourdieu had undertaken in the previous decade in Algeria (1963) and the Béarn (2008) without which it was possible to misconstrue his intentions (see Grenfell, 2009).

Within Education, the participants of the ‘New’ Sociology of Education (see Young, 1971a) were happy to read his two contributions (1971a and b) to ‘*Knowledge and Control*’ as supporting their interest in classroom discourse, even though neither particularly dealt with such: they took from it what they could and ignored the rest. The same might be said of the English translation of *Reproduction*, which appeared in 1977. The publication of his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977b) in the same year might have been a clue as to what he was up to but, many educationalists were mystified by its references to ‘epistemological breaks’ and the case studies from Kabylia. In this book, he even seems to eschew the possibility of teachers doing much about the *pedagogic authority* – and thus *symbolic violence* – carried out in classrooms in the name of education (p. 126). Yet, his field-work in Algeria and the Béarn was integral to his view of language, and therefore how he brought this understanding to Education and beyond (1977b and 1979), as well as the resulting implications for pedagogy and educational policy.

There are five key aspects to Bourdieu’s view and use of language: 1) his empirical studies; 2) his critique of contemporary linguistics; 3) his theory of language; 4) the conceptual language he developed; 5) its significance in reflexivity.

I shall say a little on each.

1) As noted, Bourdieu did undertake language research in Algeria, the Béarn, as well as with respect to ‘Academic Discourse’ (1994). However, although there is commentary on what he found, there is little actual systematic linguistic analysis. He did, however, report detail on intellectuals’ use of language (see Bourdieu, 1982: 207 – 233 and Grenfell, 2014: 236 - 243) and its significance for the *Homo academicus*.



And, of course, he analyses the German philosopher Heidegger's use of language as a 'censorship and imposition of form' in expressing and supporting a particular political (right-wing) ontology (1991a and 1991b: 137 – 159).

2) Bourdieu was very critical of the traditional 'formalist' approach to language - exemplified by structural linguist Bloomfield- with its focus on formal grammar rather than practical speech (see Grenfell, 2011: 45ff). Saussure, the 'father' of contemporary linguistics, with his distinction between *langue* and *parole*, does not fare much better. Both are seen as echoing Comte's view of language as a kind of 'universal treasure', an incarnate deposit in each of us, which we carry in equal proportion for the means of communication. Language, here, is treated as a thing *in itself* for object of study rather than *a practice*, an epiphenomenon of social context (Bourdieu, 1975: 27), reducing real linguistic practice – style, manner, speakers – to a kind of 'historical essence'; in other words 'nothing' (Bourdieu, 1990/ 1980: 33).

Contemporary linguistics – especially that of *universal grammar* is no better; with its notions of 'Competence/ Performance', the 'homogeneous speech community', 'perfect grammatical competence', and the 'ideal speaker-listener' (Chomsky, 1965: 3). Again, this is to treat something as an 'object of study', which simply does not exist (Bourdieu, 1991b: 43ff).

Bourdieu draws a distinction between the formal and functional aspects of linguistic study and what he would see in their place: 'grammaticalness' – 'acceptability'; 'langue' – 'legitimate language'; 'relations of communication' – 'symbolic power'; 'meaning' – 'power of speech'; 'linguistic competence' - 'linguistic capital' (1977c: 646). There is a *linguistic market* – just as there is a 'market of symbolic goods' – and a *linguistic capital* that has value there.

3) For Bourdieu, words are *polysemic*; that is, they take on meaning by an *imposition of form* by the *field* through which they pass (as in the case of Heidegger but the same process occurs in the education field). He writes that it is, 'at once transformation and a transubstantiation, whereby the substance signified *is* the significant form in which it is realised' (1991a: 78). Words then represent an epistemology that is at the same time an ontology for those who embrace them within a certain *field* context – defining identity, sense and meaning. For education, the ideal *Homo academicus* (1979: 43)

4) Bourdieu has a complex series of concepts expressed in language: *habitus*, *field*, *capital*, etc (see Grenfell, 2012). It is important to treat these as 'praxeological instruments'; that is, as 'epistemological matrices' always implying their underlying 'theory of practice': they are not simply heuristics or descriptive metaphors.

Michael Grenfell  
with contributions from Adrian Blackledge,  
Cheryl Hardy, Stephen May and Robert Vann

## Bourdieu, Language and Linguistics



5) Bourdieu's advice to a would-be researcher is to 'beware of words' (1989: 54) for the way they take on a 'Trojan horse' type character, carrying with them all sorts of unacknowledged interests, attitudes, disciplinary orthodoxies. They are therefore an essential point of rupture within his reflexive methodology – what he calls 'participant objectivation' (see Grenfell and Pahl, 2019: chapter 3 and 9). Without this, the researcher risks simply reproducing their own relationship to the object of research.

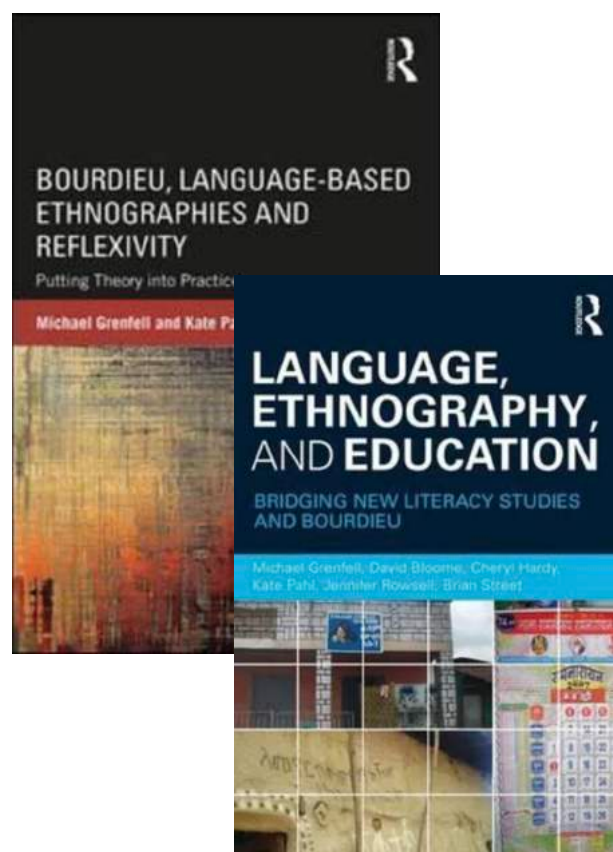
Each of these points raise a number of issues for the sociology of education, and the topics of language and literacy within it. In a way, Bourdieu upset contemporary linguists with his publications of 1982 and 1991b, and they reacted by ignoring him – or confining him to *en passant* footnotes. Interestingly as well, 'language' as the main medium of education, is still not a principal research topic area within the field. There is then a certain lack of paradigmatic maturity within the research community (see comments on *linguistic ethnography* and method in Grenfell, 2011 chapter 9). Even when Bourdieu is used explicitly with respect to literacy (see Albright and Luke, 2008), there is often a cornucopia of fragmented applications, which detract from the potential of deploying his philosophy and method in research on educational language.

Issues with respect to 4 and 5 above – the use of his language (concepts) in language in education, and researcher reflexivity - would be critical in a more developed application of his theory and method. Moreover, Literacy in its traditional sense would be liable to 1, 2 and 3: where language constitutes a source of symbolic violence in its imposition of forms; the definer, on any linguistic level, of the *linguistic market* instantiated in pedagogy and against which any individual's *linguistic capital/habitus* is be judged. Street (1984 and subsequently) did a lot of research to position such functional literacy and develop a more constructivist model. Pahl and Rowsell (see Grenfell et al, 2012) have also worked to discover all sorts of other literacies within educational contexts. Street went on to analyse incidents of literacy across cultures, the polyvalent use of words within them, and what happens when different cultural fields mix (ibid: 73ff). But, fifty years after the publication of *Reproduction*, much remains to be done to found and develop a truly sociology of language/ literacy in Education.

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<https://www.southampton.ac.uk/education/about/>





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# Critical Literacy as Empowerment Vicky Duckworth

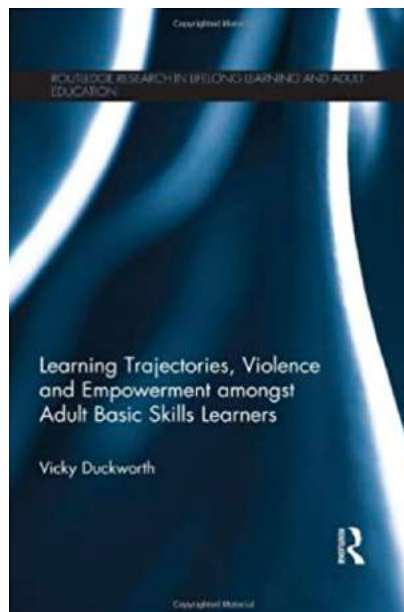
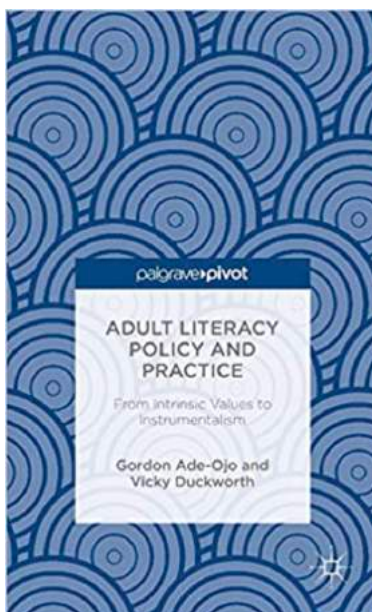
A poignant insight from Bourdieu's engagement with symbolic violence is the prominence given to symbolic relations which was premised on the argument that, in class analysis, both economic and symbolic dimensions are represented (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Weininger, 2005). The concept of symbolic violence as coined by Pierre Bourdieu underpins the way in which social and cultural control is tacitly maintained by the dominating and the dominated within a given milieu. Symbolic violence being "the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 167) and it is "the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power" (Bourdieu 1977: 19) that continues the cycle. The implication being that, driven by neo-liberal logic of a meritocratic society, if a person tries hard enough, they can surely succeed. However, this places the onus on the individual (their failure positioned as a personal deficit) and in doing so masks the impact of structural inequality in perpetuating 'symbolic violence' and its cycle of inequity.

Differences in status are essentially indicators of lifestyle and manifestations of social class. Perceptions, attitudes and practices within society, which are formed and shaped by the power relations structure, eventually become "inscribed onto bodies in the form of dispositions" (Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016, p. 2) and remain influential even when conditions change. Furthermore, they can dictate the dominant perception of how events and resources (which include literacies) are to be shaped and structured within a society (Bourdieu, 2001). Societal actors may come to view the relations between classes "from the perspective of the dominant thus making them appear as natural" (Ade-Ojo and Duckworth, 2019; Bourdieu., 2001; Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016, p. 2). Amongst the more important indicators of these boundaries are preferences and practices which are clustered and associated with different classes within the social space shared by all classes (Bourdieu, 1998).

***"The concept of symbolic violence as coined by Pierre Bourdieu underpins the way in which social and cultural control is tacitly maintained by the dominating and the dominated within a given milieu."***

Symbolic violence occurs when the preferences and practices of one class are applied and imposed on members of other classes (Weininger, 2005), such that the preferences of one social class are ignored while the preferences and practices of another social class are valued and legitimized. As such, Bourdieu's sensitising tools offer a framework for understanding how the unequal distribution of capital (including linguistic capital) has shaped peoples educational and personal journey. For example, Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and symbolic violence is vital in exposing the transmission of wealth and power and incorporating ideas about how those in a position of power, who are 'insiders' (Puwar, 2004), reproduce and maintain their domination. The flow, or lack of flow, of capital in the fields learners inhabit shape their experiences in various aspects including social, linguistic, confidence, and so on. Most importantly, the flow of capital, which might mean gaining new capital and shedding old ones, may expose a rupture in the habitus and, therefore, create the space for transformation in contradistinction to a norm-imposed deterministic habitus. The habitus exposing how the practices and representations of agents are dependent on their structural position (and flow or not of capital). The field and habitus are bound together. The field may be viewed as a 'space of possibles' bound to chances of notions of choice, access, aspirations and expectations, which are shaped by the habitus (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 64). This is based on Bourdieu's belief that the cognitive structures of agents tend to reflect the structural position of agents in the field they inhabit.

Marginalised groups, including women and ethnic groups, are often silenced if they are unable to access the powerful tools that literacy offers that can enable them to transform their lives (Duckworth, 2013; Duckworth & Smith, 2018; 2019). Through the sorting and delimitation of individuals, access and enactment of dominant literacy can also impact on the productivity and wealth of the communities and societies in which they live (Ade-Ojo & Duckworth, 2015). There are a myriad of ways this 'economisation' of literacy serves to depoliticise it at the local and individual level. Critical literacy, and the dialogue it provides, and other frameworks such as Bourdieu's *Principes pour une réflexion sur les contenus d'enseignement* (Bourdieu, 1989) offer outlets which enables us to consider a 'a lens for exploring literacy as a tool for hope (Duckworth & Smith, 2019) which involves its reimagining and radical emancipatory link to transformation and empowerment.



# Research in Focus: *Transforming Lives*

The research project *Transformational Further Education: Empowering People & Communities* was a research collaboration with Professor Rob Smith that drew on the work of Bourdieu and exposed literacy is a tool for empowerment and resistance against the barriers the learners have faced, which includes being poor, struggling with literacy, labelling and being stigmatised.

Offering a democratic and ‘differential’ space both in and out the classroom, through research activities for the learners to share their narratives also allowed sharing stories, which included those of symbolic violence, and solutions to overcome them.

In this context, the narratives of adult learners and their success stories in themselves assumed the status of a capital which others drew from to inspire and offer strategies to move themselves and others forward. They exposed the structural inequalities in the learners’ lives—which include class, gender, and ethnicity.

The classroom is a linguistic space in which those deemed as lacking capital may be marginalised, silenced, by dominant expectations of discourse (Bourdieu, 1991: 82). With this in mind there needs to be a shift to re-curricularizing and re-pedagogizing literacy curricula in such a way that it provides literacy learners the dialogic space to move from a deficit positioning (symbolic violence). The move includes offering critical spaces whereby learners can consciously reassess their own capitals (informal and dominant) and map out the capitals required in the habitus that their goals relate to; this being the first step in transformative learning.

**Overview of the Project:** <https://transforminglives.web.ucu.org.uk/about-this-project/>

See Jade’s story

<https://transforminglives.web.ucu.org.uk/2017/09/22/jade/>

See David’s story

<https://transforminglives.web.ucu.org.uk/2017/09/22/david/>

See Guy’s story

<https://transforminglives.web.ucu.org.uk/2016/12/13/guy-access-and-esol-student/>

**Vicky Duckworth** is a Professor of Education at Edge Hill University, United Kingdom. Vicky has developed considerable expertise as an educationalist and researcher in the field of Adult Literacy and Education. She is deeply committed to challenging inequality through critical and emancipatory approaches to education, widening participation, inclusion, community action and engaging in research with a strong social justice drive and agenda.

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# Bourdieu and Intercultural Understanding

## Jenna Min Shim



**E**ducation occupies a central place in Bourdieu's work, and while Bourdieu was mostly interested in social analysis of class and inequality, his conceptual toolkit can beneficially be applied to race, ethnicity, and culture. This is particularly salient because Bourdieu's concepts allow for a more nuanced analysis of domination.

My scholarship focuses on anti-oppressive/racist intercultural and multicultural education. Bourdieu's scholarship has enhanced my understanding of the spaces of intercultural education as more than mere sites of transmission of knowledge, but rather as sites that represent contestations over knowledge and pedagogy mediated by individuals with different socialization histories. Bourdieu's sociological theories help me to problematize the psychologically-based conceptions of intercultural education which focus solely on benign differences. Bourdieu argues that we are not the sole authors of our perceptions, thoughts, and (re)actions because we are all inescapably constituted within a variety of historically constituted social and political discourses.

To illustrate these points, when a teacher perceives a student's home cultural practice as outlandish and primitive, such perceptions are not invented entirely by that individual teacher because an individual's perceptions of other cultural practices are largely based on what one has been socialized to perceive as normative. Drawing on Bourdieu's assertion that 'interpersonal relations are never, except in appearance, individual-to-individual relationships and that the truth of the interaction is never entirely contained in the interaction' (1977, 81), allows me to acknowledge that intercultural relations is never contained within the immediate parties involved.

Considering his point about the social construction of interaction – where the field of education is a site where existing social structure is perpetuated and reproduced – allows for a deeper understanding of how the barriers to intercultural education is not simply lack of knowledge about others.

***“Bourdieu’s scholarship has enhanced my understanding of the spaces of intercultural education as more than mere sites of transmission of knowledge, but rather as sites that represent contestations over knowledge and pedagogy.”***

I believe my research on anti-oppressive intercultural education resonates with a Bourdieusian perspective in that the focus in any attempt to understand the process of intercultural exchanges among teachers and students must always involve a broader consideration than simply social activities of the classrooms and schools. One of the key tenets of Bourdieu's work that would be crucial for educators to remember is that practices are largely the mediated result of social structure, although social structures are also the mediated result of practice; thus, individual practice can modify social structure over time. After all, according to Bourdieu, it is through the individual practice that the system of domination produces itself but it is also through the individual practice (including the practice of resistance) that the system of domination may change and transform. What people say, what they do not say, how they label and judge others, and what educators assume in intercultural education is not so much just a matter of personal choice applied in situated ways but rather effects of the socially and historically derived dispositions that individuals bring to local activity. Therefore, what I see as future directions for those committed in anti-oppressive/racist intercultural education is to always begin with the recognition of a system of oppressive relations in society and institutions and one's own place in that system.

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# Recognizing and misrecognizing academic literacy in higher education

## Mary Jane Curry

The driving interest of my career has been to understand—and to demystify for others—the role that academic literacy plays in gatekeeping access to higher education. Rather than focusing on the mechanics of language/literacy, in contrast to mainstream scholarship in applied linguistics and literacy/writing studies, the other fields that my work straddles, my work has centred on the experiences of writers who use English as an additional language (EAL): immigrants, refugees, international students, and multilingual scholars. Exploring literacy's role in academic gatekeeping means focusing on power. Bourdieu's theories have enabled me to interrogate how power circulates through language, institutional practices, and apparatuses of global academic knowledge production and to unpack the phenomena of exclusion that sustain oppressive educational and communication systems.



***“Bourdieu’s theories have enabled me to interrogate how power circulates through language, institutional practices, and apparatuses of global academic knowledge production and to unpack the phenomena of exclusion that sustain oppressive educational and communication systems.”***

I first encountered Bourdieu through Michael Apple's books on social reproduction in education while writing my master's thesis on the social class of teachers of English to speakers of other languages. Then, under Apple's supervision, my PhD dissertation was a classroom ethnographic study of a free community college writing course for immigrant and refugee students. Grounded in Bourdieu's (1990) social practice view of human activity and using the lenses of capital and field, I examined why 80% of the students dropped out during the course. I identified the cultural capital that supported students from privileged backgrounds as comprising knowledge of the practices of higher education, including how to access resources. Further, I analysed how the course's hidden curriculum of docility and neo-liberalism (Curry, 2003) aligned with the capital of the students who persisted. They drew on the spatial, classroom participation, curricular, and institutional competences that I argued comprise academic capital (Curry, 2007).

Bourdieu's theories remained powerful when I became a research fellow in the Centre for Language and Communication at the Open University, UK, in 2001. Collaborating with Theresa Lillis, I launched a study of the experiences and writing practices of 50 multilingual European scholars with publishing in English. Our focus paralleled the sharp rise in pressures on scholars worldwide to publish in English in the past 25 years. Bourdieu's notion of recognition helped us map out how the publications by the participants in our longitudinal, "text-ethnographic" study functioned as cultural capital that was variably rewarded by their institutions (Curry & Lillis, 2004); how people we call "literacy brokers" act as a social capital in gatekeeping scholars' publishing (Lillis & Curry, 2006); and how scholars' participation in research networks, or "institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 248) can be more consequential than their English proficiency. We identified these academic research networks as instantiations of social capital that provide significant access to publishing opportunities for multilingual scholars. Our approach contrasts with the ideology that publishing in English depends on native-like proficiency in English (linguistic capital).

These projects illuminate how literacy practices can serve power relations in higher education. Indeed, dominant forms of (English) language and literacy have traditionally been a static target, toward which students and multilingual scholars are meant to move. Those who are empowered to evaluate texts by multilingual students and scholars decide—recognize or misrecognize—whether to accept the forms of language, writing, and publications used or to expand the literacies deemed acceptable.

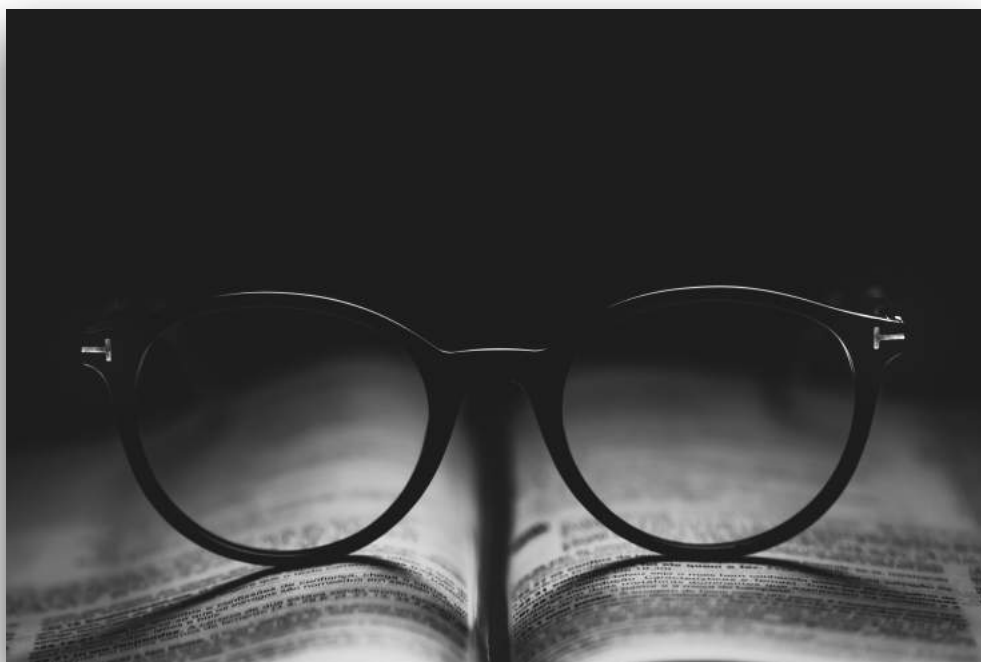
The notions of field, capital, and habitus from Bourdieu's work will all remain powerful tools for the analysis I am undertaking in my next project, an autoethnographic book tracing my journey through the array of schools I attended in the 1960s and 1970s in the city of Pittsburgh. I shuttled between Jewish, Catholic, public, private, and university laboratory schools, witnessing the interplay of language, academic capital, social class and race. These experiences that seeded my abiding interest in how language and education are used as tools to impose distinctions related to social class, race, and ethnicity. Indeed, the landscape of memory provided Bourdieu with fertile ground for his own reflexive analysis.

**Mary Jane Curry** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Teaching, Curriculum, and Change at the Warner Graduate School of Education, University of Rochester. She has co-authored or co-edited seven books, including *Academic writing in a global context: The politics and practices of publishing in English* (2010); *Global academic publishing: Policies, perspectives and pedagogies*, *Educating Refugee-background students: Critical issues and dynamic contexts* (2018), *Language, literacy, and learning in STEM education: Research methods and perspectives from applied linguistics* (2014) and *An A-W of academic literacy: Key concepts and practices for graduate students* (in press). Curry is co-editor of the *Multilingual Matters* series, *Studies in Knowledge Production and Participation* and has been a Fulbright scholar in Chile, co-associate editor of the Brief Research Reports section of *TESOL Quarterly*, and Principal Investigator of a U.S. Department of Education Grant on English language teaching.



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# Social Practice and the Reflexive Gaze

## Lara J. Handsfield

*Greek amphoras for wine or oil,  
Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums  
but you know they were made to be used.  
The pitcher cries for water to carry  
and a person for work that is real.*

*-from To Be of Use, by Marge Piercy, 1973*

As a former bilingual fourth grade teacher and now as a teacher educator and literacy researcher, Piercy's words highlight for me the importance of centering inquiry in the messiness of classroom spaces. My views in this regard have been heavily influenced by Bourdieu's (1990) critique of the "scholastic point of view"—scholars' attraction to the eloquence and tidiness of theories, while ignoring the messiness of everyday



***“...theory and practice are  
inseparable in literacy teaching and research...”***

This is not to say that theory is unimportant, but rather to argue that theory and practice are inseparable in literacy teaching and research (Handsfield, 2016). To treat theory as separate from practice is to place it on a shelf, like Piercy's Greek amphoras and Hopi vases, to be admired but not touched.

This attention to everyday practice, combined with Bourdieu's tripartite theory of social practice (habitus, field, capital) has led me into examinations of teacher and student subjectivities—how teachers' and students' discursive and embodied positioning may reproduce and/or disrupt dominant discourses of the fields of literacy and teaching (Handsfield, Crumpler & Dean, 2010; Handsfield & Jiménez, 2009). In my teaching, Bourdieu pushes me to support teachers in noticing and analyzing their own positionality in the classroom and how their positionality is tied up with broader social, historical, and political contexts. And yet, who benefits from such inquiry? Bourdieu wrote,

Adoption of this scholastic point of view is the admission fee, the custom right tacitly demanded by all scholarly fields; the neutralizing disposition (in Husserl's [1983] sense) is, in particular, the condition of the academic exercise as a gratuitous game, as a mental experience that is an end in and of itself. (p. 381)

This gratuitous game—the political economy of academia—rewards scholars based on their accumulating publications, impact factors and all. As such, the scholastic point of view is part and parcel how power flows reproduce the dominant discourse of the field of literacy research (Lysaker & Handsfield, 2019).

This highlights the importance of Bourdieu's reflexive sociology (1992), which has helped turn my gaze toward my own positionality as constructed through my research practices, including my interactions with participants (Hunt, Crumpler, & Handsfield, 2015). This reflexive gaze will be increasingly essential for literacy researchers attempting to disrupt the dominant flows of the game, which continuously work to neutralize our methodologies and misrecognize (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) everyday practice.

**“This reflexive gaze will be increasingly essential for literacy researchers attempting to disrupt the dominant flow of the game...”**

**Lara J. Handsfield** is a Professor of Bilingual and Elementary Literacy Education at Illinois State University and author of *Literacy Theory as Practice: Connecting Theory and Instruction in K-12 Classrooms* (Teachers College Press). A former fourth grade teacher, her research is grounded in classroom practices, and explores comprehension instruction in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms, discursive positioning, and how teachers negotiate multiple political and pedagogical demands in their work. Her scholarship has been funded by the Spencer Foundation and has appeared in a variety of academic and professional journals, including *Linguistics and Education*, *Reading Research Quarterly*, the *Journal of Literacy Research*, *Language Arts*, and *Harvard Educational Review*.

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# Karen Dooley

## Literacy and Symbolic Violence

Symbolic violence is a Bourdieusian (2000) concept that is useful for thinking critically about what counts as literacy education. The concept refers to coercion which entails the consent of the dominated. That coercion is *symbolic* in that it occurs through classificatory schema, for example, male/female. Schema like these work to *violent* effect when they not only encode the culturally arbitrary perspective of the dominant, but have also been incorporated as matrices of perception, evaluation and action by those whom they subordinate. Classificatory schemes and attendant relations of domination-subordination seem ‘natural’ when the social being of agents has itself been formed by them. This concept of symbolic violence is a recurrent one in Bourdieu’s work on education (Schubert, 2012).

In *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* pedagogy is described as symbolic violence: “[a]ll pedagogic action is, objectively symbolic violence insofar as it is the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 5). Bourdieu’s empirical studies of education homed in on symbolic violence with particular societal ramifications: the reproduction of the classed social order of mid-to-late twentieth century France (see the overview in Schubert, 2012). The concept of symbolic violence has proven similarly useful in other times and places, and not only with respect to class.

Here I supply one example to illustrate how the concept of symbolic violence opens up space to consider power and inequality in literacy education. Australia, from where I write, is a nation which is physically located on the countries of many First Nations; it is a nation in which the Anglo part of the settler population has dominated the State; a nation in which large migrant intakes from the end of World War II to the COVID-19 pandemic have created a population that has become ever more diverse ethnolinguistically. Sociological questions that need to be asked over and over again in this context are: What is counting as literacy education? And in whose interest? The doctoral study of Pei-shan (Peggy) Chiang (2010), for which I was a supervisor, illustrates the utility of Bourdieu’s conceptual toolkit for addressing these questions.

**“Classificatory schemas and attendant relations of domination-subordination seem ‘natural’ when the social being of agents itself been formed by them.”**





Symbolic violence was complexly woven into the conceptual object Chiang (2010) constructed for verification in her study. Chiang's study looked at literacy practices in the homes of Taiwanese families in Australia. The topic was a response, in part, to the criticism that progressive early childhood teachers in Australia were directing at families whose apparently traditional literacy-related understandings, values, beliefs and practices they overtly rejected. In Chiang's view, this criticism was indicative of dynamics of national cultural (re-)production that were playing out through the struggles over what should count as literacy education which had prompted the study.

***“Bourdieu’s empirical studies of education homed in on symbolic violence with particular societal ramifications: the reproduction of the classed social order of mid-to-late twentieth century France.”***

Initially, Chiang used Basil Bernstein's concepts of classification and framing to describe the pedagogic discourses of the study families. Those concepts enabled description of relations of power and control operative in literacy practices in the families. For Bernstein (2003, p.3), such descriptions are a writing of “pedagogic grammars of specialized habitus and the forms of their transmission which attempt to regulate their acquisition”. To probe the specialised literate habituses of her participants, Chiang then drew on Allan Luke's (1992) sociological reconceptualization of literacy training. Luke's model was informed by the theory not only of Bourdieu, but also of Michel Foucault. It posited that literacy education entails the construction of a bodily habitus. This occurs through disciplinary inscriptions on the subjectivity of the young student in formal education, and multiple transformations of such in concurrent and subsequent linguistic/literate practice in family, community and other sites.

Working with Luke's model, Chiang documented the exercise of symbolic power by families as they inscribed literacies on the bodies of their young children through reading and writing instruction. Interestingly, some of the practices of the families could not be classified as either progressive or traditional in the way those terms were being used by Anglo educators. In any case, Chiang argued that it was, in part, through the bodily inscription of literacy that Taiwanese culture was being reproduced in the families in Australia. I would suggest that what Chiang described might be named ‘pedagogically formative dimension of symbolic violence’.



In Luke's (1992) terms, Chiang described family-based transformations of the literate habitus of 4-5 year olds while those children were concurrently enrolled in the educational institution of centre-based childcare. Chiang portrayed familial pedagogic work which differed from that valued by many Anglo agents of institutional education at the time. Her culturally specific and historically located portraits of families' practices of literacy education drew to attention the arbitrariness of that which was counting as literacy education in institutionalised education. In other words, Chiang de-naturalised the progressive/traditional classificatory schema which was being wielded (its inaccuracies notwithstanding) in normative struggles over early childhood literacy education. She thereby made explicit a mechanism that I would name as the 'societally-constitutive dimension of symbolic violence'.

Ten years on, aspects of Chiang's (2010) analysis resonate with research I am conducting on the use of private literacy tutoring by families in Australia. In interviews, migrant families are criticized by some Anglo educator-parents not only for using tutoring with high achieving children, but also for seeking out traditional pedagogies through tutoring. But there is more going on. A national curriculum which institutionalizes 'standard Australian English' has been rolled out; regimens of literacy testing for both school students and would-be teachers have been put into place; and policies of school choice have been implemented. Moreover, there are periodic outbreaks of so-called "literacy war" over the content and methods of reading education, and more latterly, writing education. Anglo teachers such as those evoked by Chiang are themselves grappling with what they perceive as coercive forces as they make decisions about enlisting tutoring for their own children. Notions of pedagogically-formative and socially-constitutive dimensions symbolic violence are proving helpful as I seek to explain what counts as literacy education in the cultural conditions of this new historical moment.

### **Acknowledgement**

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# Sarah Galloway

## Structural Inequalities and Adult Literacies Education

My research has developed through critical engagement with Bourdieu's scholarship. I was aware of Bourdieu's broad influence on research encompassing literacies learning, particularly for those accounting for contexts of power in education specifically James Paul Gee (1991) and Shirley Bryce Heath (1983). More recently, Bourdieu's work is revealed in practical approaches to adult literacies education, placing emphasis on the development of students' linguistic and discursive practices (Ade-Ojo & Duckworth, 2015, pp. 108-111; Grenfell et al., 2012, p. 68; Janks, 2010). My perception of the broad-reaching application of Bourdieu's theory motivated me to engage with his work.

My initial reading of Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) *Reproduction in Education, Culture and Society* was a critical one. I critiqued the broad concepts of symbolic violence, habitus and capital reproduction by placing these in dialogue with concepts of equality found within the seminal works of Paulo Freire (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*) and Jacque Rancière (*The Ignorant School Master*) (see Galloway, 2015; 2019).

In line with many others, my own reading suggests that Bourdieu's theory of power reproduction in education points towards the impossibility of escaping from structural inequalities and existing power hierarchies. However, researchers of adult literacies learning have offered educational alternatives informed by Bourdieu's analyses. I would summarise these alternatives as adult learning understood to build social capital or encourage positive identity formation. To put it another way, it is education that takes power into account. Indeed, it has been argued that: 'literacy [education] that obscures the power relationships inscribed in its construction ultimately disempowers' (Crowther, Hamilton, & Tett; 2003, p. 3). In practical terms, this is literacy learning where teachers might encourage students to valorise their vernacular ways of speaking, so that they might express their own self-narratives and reclaim these as stories of success (e.g. Grenfell et al., 2012). Social and cultural capital might be gained through the telling of learners' stories and the connections made with audiences and peers. The role of the educator might include intervening to make students more aware of and therefore more able to value their existing literate practices.

***“Social and cultural capital might be gained through the telling of learner’s stories and the connections made with audiences and peers. The role of the educator might include intervening to make students more aware of and therefore more able to value their existing literate practices.”***



Implied approaches to teaching (e.g. Ade-Ojo & Duckworth, 2015, pp. 108-111; Grenfell et al., 2012; Janks, 2010) are drawn out from empirical research incorporating ethnographic methods. Indeed, it is suggested that teachers might adopt ethnographic methods to gain insights into their students' valuable everyday literacy practices, or encourage students to undertake this type of research themselves. The idea is that the students' literate practices, as revealed, might be drawn upon as productive resources serving to empower them, where their existing literate practices are valued rather than judged (Street, 2012, pp. 75-77). It follows that categorisations of literate and illiterate might be refused by teachers and students as the whole spectrum of literate practices are afforded value (Street, 2012, p. 77).

Whilst the above approaches are helpful in countering instrumental teaching and learning geared towards narrow and instrumental aims (Ade-Ojo & Duckworth, 2015), there are also constraints. The implicit assumption, which can be traced to Bourdieu's influence, is that learners may not be capable of understanding the power of their own evolving discourses without the assistance of an educator. The empowering teacher is accorded the privileged role of an orchestrator (e.g. Bourdieu, 1988) who might make judgements about which discourses are desirable and therefore to be encouraged. It is in this sense, the replication of power remains inescapable.

The above critique of Bourdieu's work has been expressed forcefully (e.g. Ross, 1991) and has drawn me towards revisiting principles of adult education, orientated traditionally towards exploring the meaning of equality in education. This represents a move away from explaining inequality in education in terms of power, discourse, identity and symbolic violence, as conceptualised by Bourdieu. Instead, equality is explored as the enactment of educational relationships, between educator and student, orientated towards human attributes of love, trust, hope and generosity (see Guillherme, 2019; Williams, 1993).

***“...equality is explored as the enactment of educational relationships between educator and student, oriented towards human attributes of love, trust, hope and generosity.”***

For me, this reorientation is important and urgent whilst we struggle towards educational responses to current political, environmental, and economic crises, as expressed, for example, in the work of Cowden & Ridley (2019) and Wildemeerch (2014). Here there has been some grappling with the question of who, in society, gets to speak and to be heard and on what basis. In my own work, I have attempted my own exploration of this question in the context of adult literacies education (Galloway, 2017) and, more recently, in relation to the education of prisoners. I have been informed greatly by the critique of Bourdieu's ideas, some of which I have explained above. I would characterise Bourdieu's influence on my research, not as a rich seam to draw from. Instead, my engagement with his work resembles the act of felling a great tree and gaining strength from the arrogance of doing so.





**Dr. Sarah Galloway** lectures in Further Education at the University of Stirling in Scotland, UK. She directs the University's Access Programme offering routes to undergraduate studies for adult returning learners. Her theoretical research explores empowerment and emancipation in the contexts of adult literacies and prison education and she is currently researching the impact of economic austerity on adult literacies provisions in Scotland. However, in the current crisis, her central focus is working to secure the continuation of academic programmes geared towards adult learners.

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# Talmor R. Farchi

## Habitus and School Leadership in Israel

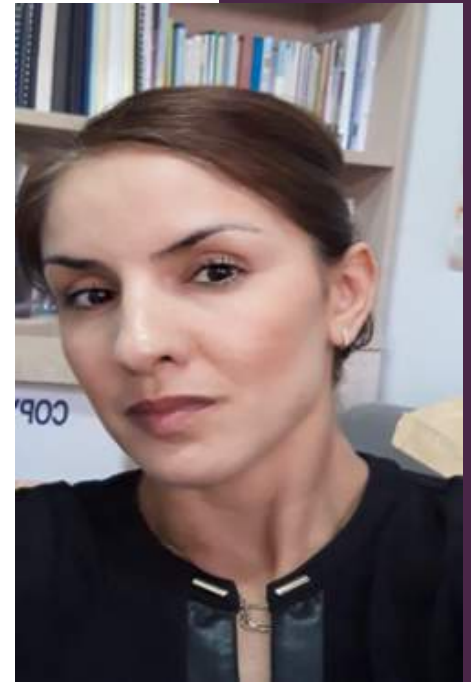
**What is one concept that resonates with you from Bourdieu's scholarship?**

Self-assurance and confidence are concepts we usually encounter in the psychological discourse. Bourdieu argued that legitimacy is granted to those who have confidence in a position and his concepts have enlightened my understanding of self-assurance and confidence. He drew a distinction between the 'being' of the 'distinguished' possessors, and the 'seeming' of the 'pretentious' challengers. Members of the upper class, the 'being' possessors, are usually self-assured in their power position, regard it as a taken-for-granted privilege, and are confident in their ability to handle it. On the contrary, members of the middle class, the 'seeming' possessors, are less confident of their right and ability to occupy power positions, but they may pretend confidence, "betraying

their uncertainty and anxiety about belonging, in their anxiety to show or give the impression that they belong" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 253). This is not to argue that all members of the upper class are confident in power positions, or that all members of the middle class are not; rather, that the dominant class often equips its offspring with such self-assurance that gives them (a) 'a feel for the game' with respect to their power positions, and (b) the ability to employ the right practices to enact and maintain power positions.

In my doctoral study of the habitus of school principals, I found that their habitual confidence as either 'naturally' or 'seemingly' assured affected their leadership practices differently (Farchi, 2019). The self-assured principals managed to generate appropriate leadership practices, which realized the principal's habitual dispositions and, at the same time, responded to the needs of the school. On the other hand, the less assured principals were constantly preoccupied with keeping up appearances, oftentimes at the school's expense. When principals act to support their self-assurance needs, they tend to choose leadership practices that seemingly reinforce them, but, since they are less attuned to the school, they can eventually cause harm both to themselves and the school (Farchi & Tubin, 2020). My findings are consistent with Bourdieu's idea that habitual self-assurance is reflected in the power position, design leadership practices and, in turn, reinforces the habitus dispositions that created that self-assurance in the first place.

The case of school principals is just one example of the deep habitual confidence we all have. Each of us holds a certain confidence that reflects our social background. The way we position ourselves and act in the social fields of our life (e.g. our professional lives), expresses that confidence, which, in my perception, moves on a continuum between



‘natural’ assurance, and the less natural ‘seeming’ assurance (Farchi, 2019). Bourdieu’s numerous publications indicate that the way to effectively deal with these gaps is through reflexivity (see for example: 1990, 1992, 2004), as he himself demonstrated in *Sketch for a Self-Analysis* (2007), which was published posthumously.

### **How has Bourdieu enhanced your understanding of school educators?**

Bourdieu’s work informs practical implications in the field of education. As educators in positions of power, we should study Bourdieu’s concepts because Bourdieu’s ideas have practical implications for us. For example, in the tracking processes of students for academic and non-academic studies, or in placement for special education, we need to see the real potential and needs, and reduce the impact of the embedded social order in the decision-making process.

### **What do you see as the main challenges for those interested in studying educational inequality?**

Methodological implementation is one of the challenges in adopting Bourdieu’s framework. The literature describes a variety of tools, both qualitative, such as life stories and interviews, and quantitative, such as questionnaires and statistics. Wacquant (2014) proposed principles for empirical inquiry, but we are still a long way from deeply understanding how to use these effectively in empirical work with different cultures, especially in qualitative research. Future research needs to account for the methodological diversity as it contributes significantly to how scholars apply Bourdieu’s theory to research.

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# Twenty Bourdieu and Bourdieu-inspired Publications on Language, Literacy and Learning

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