

Bourdieu's Reproduction – 50 Years After

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Introduction

Reproduction (1977a) is one of the most well known books by Pierre Bourdieu in Great Britain; certainly amongst educationalists. It was published in English in 1977 and quickly became a 'best seller'. Bourdieu became a leading sociologist of education' of an entire generation, and his concept of 'cultural capital' established itself in their academic vernacular. Yet, its reception and interpretation also gave rise to a series of confusions and misunderstandings, which continue in the present.

Context for its Reception

The publication of *Reproduction* needs to be set within its sociocultural context of its day: the fields of education and sociology and both their development with respect to each other and the field of power of the times.

Firstly, *Reproduction* appears to have arrived at exactly the 'right time' and place in Britain in terms of the positive reception it received. The post second world war period in British Education had been marked by a policy of 'comprehensivisation' of secondary schools; that is, the adoption of a non-selective system. The post-war generation of children was therefore offered a more 'democratic' route through their schooling. This policy was itself part of a broader project of social welfare and reform which found the state more actively involved in social transformation: including social housing, national health and the nationalisation of industry, for example. The focus on social progressivism also led to an expansion of higher education and thus research within universities.

Secondly, this expansion in educational research and teacher education that took place in the 1960s was driven by institutional change; especially the growth in importance of the *Institute of Education* (IoE) in London. The origins of the IoE can be traced back to 1902, but it was by bringing together key researchers in education in the 60s and then opening a new building in Bedford Square in 1975 that its status as the centre for educational policy and practice was confirmed.

The IoE became an enormous influence on educational research and policy: curricula, pedagogy and teacher education. Importantly, the latter was 'reconceived' in terms of the so-called 'foundational disciplines': sociology, philosophy, history and psychology. Seminal researchers – most of them at the IoE – then provided key ideas for students across the country training to become teachers. Central to all this work was the philosophy of Paul Hirst (1966) and his approach to *Educational Theory* and its relationship to classroom practice.

Thirdly, is the state of British sociology itself. This discipline had never been particularly theoretical, but a new generation of sociologists emerged from the 'non-stalinist' left with a strong interest in cultural issues. Another key institution in this

respect was the *Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies* in Birmingham, founded in 1964. Its first Director was the literary theorist Richard Hoggart, and its second was Marxist sociologist and political activist Stuart Hall. Cultural issues therefore became central to their mission; including media, education, gender and race. The philosophy of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci was a key illuminating figure for many of those working at the Centre.

As for the Sociology of Education, writers at the time - such as Banks (1968) and Musgrave (1966) – mostly undertook statistical analyses, which demonstrated the relative under performance of working class pupils in schools, even in the new comprehensive schools. Increasingly, however, and in the light of communicative revolution of the 60s and the changes mentioned above, more interest was given to classroom discourse and what occurred there in the construction of knowledge through pedagogic language.

The 'New' Sociology of Education and its Impact

Bourdieu had already begun to publish and to be discussed in English from the late 60s – both on education, culture and philosophy (1967a, 1967b, 1968a, 1968b, 1969). But, for educationalists, it was the appearance of *Knowledge and Control: New Directions for the Sociology of Education* (1971 edited by Michael Young) – which reproduced articles previously published in French and English (1967b and 1969) - that put him on the map. The idea for the book first arose in discussion at a conference of the British Sociological Association in Durham in 1970 with Bourdieu, Young and the English sociologist Basil Bernstein. Bernstein (1971) was at the time developing his own concepts of 'elaborated' and 'restricted' codes to characterize the language that pupils used in classroom in setting up congruence and incongruence with conventional pedagogic language; an approach which seemed to harmonise with Bourdieu's 'cultural capital'.

Bourdieu's contributions to the book were '*Intellectual Field and Creative Project*' and '*Systems of Education and Systems of Thought*'. In '*Intellectual Field*' the focus is on the relationship between social structures and the nature of thought itself. He draws on the work of Erwin Panowsky who had previously analysed the relationship between Gothic art and the Scholasticism apparent in architectural training schools. Such scholasticism, he argued, emphasised 'the principle of clarification', 'the schema of literary presentation', 'the order and logic of words', and can be seen as the defining principles for the designs of Gothic cathedrals - with their symmetries and correspondences. In short, it is a 'mental habit', a way of doing things, which should be understood, not in terms of instrumental replication, but of dispositional 'cause and effect'. Schools, Bourdieu insinuates, act in a similar manner and provide a 'habit-forming force', which endows those who have undergone its direct or indirect influence, not so much with particular and particularized schemes of thought as with general mental dispositions as part of their *habitus*.

In '*Systems*' Bourdieu further asks whether it is a certain way of thinking that creates the world – in this case the scholastic forms of classification and thus thinking - or whether, it is the structure of this world itself which creates a certain way of

thinking? His answer is to see 'culture' as the medium of the relationships between these two. In other words, culture does not provide a 'common set of codes' or answers to recurrent problems in the social world. Rather, it offers a set of previously assimilated 'master patterns', which are brought to bear on immediate problems as a sort of 'art of invention' in directing how to act and think.

Bourdieu's thinking here suggests the direction his intellectual trajectory had been taking since his earliest work in Algeria and the Béarn, and in many ways also reflects the sociology of knowledge and method he had been developing. *Le métier du sociologue* had already been published (1968) (although an English translation would have to wait another 23 years to appear). Both articles in *Knowledge and Control* therefore represented his current epistemological and methodological thinking, and went beyond conventional British sociology of education of the times.

Bourdieu was evidently also connecting with other epistemological trends outside of education. For example, in '*The Unthinkable and the Thinkable*' (1971b) he addressed, literally, what could and could not be thought in terms of *field* orthodoxy. His 'structural constructivist' view therefore added further reinforcement to the sociological synthesis achieved by widely-read books such as *The Social Construction of Reality* (Berger and Luckmann, 1967) with its thesis of social dialectics and the 'internalisation of externality' and the 'externalisation of internality' - a phrase that Bourdieu himself employed at the time. The influence of the Soviet sociocultural psychologist Lev Vygotsky was also growing after the publication of his *Thought and Language* in 1962.

The irony was, therefore, that whilst the contributors to the *Knowledge and Control* book were mostly interested in the 'construction of classroom knowledge', and moreover what teachers could do about it, Bourdieu was coming from and going to an altogether different direction. What he had to offer differed noticeably from many of the other contributions. In fact, Bernstein's use of concepts such as 'Classification, Framing and Codes' in the book to describe educational discourse was later criticized by Bourdieu for the way it reinforced a sense of 'objective natural aptitude' and 'reduced scholastic inequalities to linguistic competence' (1975). Furthermore, when another contributor Keddie examined 'classroom knowledge', she focused more on the ways that subject and pupil orientation were dependent on the perceived abilities of pupils and how information was transacted between teachers and pupils. However, she had less to say about the actual form and status of that knowledge *per se*. Other IoE 'non-sociologists' – for example, Douglas Barnes – were similarly looking at the structure of pedagogic discourse in terms of question typology, etc. (1969), and became influential in setting the parameters of educational research. These trends resonated with Bourdieu's own work rather than in any way integrating with them. Set within the thesis of *Reproduction*, such pedagogy was a source of 'symbolic violence' in the judgment or verdict it implied when pupils did not learn. Moreover, this feature was ultimately connected with the universalist project of the field of power as he had observed in operation in Algeria and the Béarn. The methodology and epistemology, which Bourdieu had been developing as a result of his experiences in these contexts was also highly

philosophical, combining phenomenology and structural anthropology - neither of which were necessarily native to a British educational research constituency. Central to his was subsequently an approach elucidated in terms of 'structuring and structured structures', 'subjectivity and objectivity' - in short, *habitus*, *field* and *symbolic power/ capital*. Yet, if certain concepts were indeed adopted by a British educational readership, their underlying 'theory of practice' remained mostly unacknowledged and misunderstood.

This lack of understanding of the texts shaped how *Reproduction* was subsequently read: as a confirmation of the general thesis that *Knowledge and Control* had presented six years earlier. It would thus be true to say that few educational writers of the day understood the foundations of Bourdieu's work: they were unaware of his own philosophical background, his extensive works in Algeria and the Béarn – his work on culture, museums and photography remained had not yet been translated. This then had a significant effect on how *Reproduction* was received and used subsequently. The *Outline of a Theory of Practice* was published in English (1977b - the same year as *Reproduction*), although few educationalists would have got beyond the page 3 discussion of 'epistemological breaks', or understood their significance; nor quite grasped the implications behind the studies included based on Bourdieu's Algerian field work.

The one concept that most certainly was grasped and taken forward by educationalists was that of *cultural capital*, as a cultural arbitrary in the transmission – or not – of educational knowledge; in fact, for a while, Bourdieu was known as the 'cultural capital man'. However, such a term was often understood and applied more as a descriptor of educational process, not as an epistemological matrix logically necessitated by extensive field-work in a range of contexts, including a large amount of statistical analyses. Few British educationalists obtained and read *Les étudiants et leurs études* (1964) – *Les héritiers* when it was published in English in 1979 was often passed over as an earlier version of *Reproduction* – so, neither as integral to a reading of the later text.

In these ways, Cultural Capital as a concept was taken as confirmation of the need for more qualitative educational research based on classroom discourse – the culture of classrooms. One consequence was that the Sociology of Education took an 'ethnographic turn'. For example, a collection edited by Barton and Meighen (1978) both supplied and called for more classroom ethnographies in order to theorise the relationship between what was called the 'micro' and 'macro' in education. The CCCS in Birmingham was now also actively critiquing education from a multicultural position. One seminal study – *Learning to Labour* - from the Centre dealt with the way working class boys end up with working class jobs. The thesis of the author, – Paul Willis – was summed up in two questions: 'the difficult thing to explain about how middle class kids get middle class jobs is why others let them. The difficult thing to explain about how working class kids get working class jobs is why they let themselves'. The answer to both questions is analysed by Willis in terms of neo-Marxist theories of cultural penetration. The book came out in the same year – 1977 – as *Reproduction*; although the fact Bourdieu is only cited once in it demonstrates

how others were working in congruent territory to Bourdieu's, although his view of education had by no means been fully assimilated into a broader educational research agenda.

Bourdieu does in fact refer to Paul Willis' *Learning to Labour*. But, it is necessary to appreciate the respective sociocultural conditions in France and England and the relations between French and English sociologists at the time. Bourdieu was mostly responding to what he saw as the Republican view of education in France; while Willis was very much of the British 'counter-culture' generation of the 1960s.

The reception of *Reproduction* was therefore marked by miss-readings, misunderstandings, confusion and thus consequent over-generalisation. Of course, academic traditions in France and the UK are very different. In 'Systems' Bourdieu had already distinguished between French 'rationalism' and English 'positivism' as the resulting intellectual style of their two respective education systems. These traditions once again had an effect on how *Reproduction* was read, understood and applied. For example, the structure of the book - with the conceptual conclusions given first - was seen by some English critics as lacking in empirical evidence; while others exaggerated the literal 'reality' of the concepts themselves. Neither group appreciated the process that Bourdieu had gone through to formulate explanatory concepts arising from the empirical data in which he had submerged himself; or how such a process had also implicated his own *habitus*, and thus the centrality of reflexivity to his project. The relationship for Bourdieu between theory *and* practice was therefore misunderstood and the theory *of* practice unappreciated.

We can see further misunderstanding and confusion in the critiques the book received: its apparent 'determinist' vision of the education (and social world) and its 'universalist' pretensions. For example, in an otherwise positive account of Bourdieu's theory, anthropologist Bidet (1979) refers to the 'determinism' of Bourdieu in describing the relationship between structure and habitus. From this, he concludes that for 'reproduction' we need to read 'perpetuation'. Ironically, of course, 'Circular and mechanical models of this kind are precisely what the notion of habitus is designed to destroy'. In fact, Bourdieu was seeking to build a dynamic theory, which attributed social position to the interaction between the social and the biographical, and the way dispositions and the logic of practice of particular contexts co-respond.

Sociologist Margaret Archer (1983) took up the issue of Bourdieu's apparent universalism, although she had to go as far as point 2.3.1.1 in the book to do so. Her target is the 'theoretical statements' set out in Book 1, the so-called 'Foundations of a Theory of Symbolic Violence'. Here, she examines Bourdieu and Passeron's claim that the unification of symbolic markets for educational goods is one means by which bourgeois society has multiplied the ways in which it is able to submit the educational outcomes of those dominated by its dominant bourgeois 'pedagogic action' to the 'evaluation criteria of the legitimate culture' - thus, confirming its domination. For Archer, this statement is tantamount to 'ethnocentric bias' (p.132). Rather, she argues, that 'strong unification' only works in highly centralised systems;

for example, France with its national competitive exams, state training of elites, and the Napoleonic university tradition of education as servicing the state. Bourdieu and Passeron are therefore guilty of ethnocentrism: and, 'Bourdieu categorically asserts that every educational system necessarily monopolises teacher training and imposes standardised methods, texts and syllabuses to safeguard orthodoxy' (ibid.). If this is a mark of 'institutionalization', she argues, other 'decentralised' systems should logically be considered 'less institutional', which clearly they are not. She concludes, that an unfortunate consequence of what she calls 'their neglect' of the educational system itself is that, 'general theories of cultural transmission and cultural reproduction are severed from historical and comparative sociology of education' (p.137)', whilst what is needed is 'the development of a more comprehensive theory capable of unifying processes of structuration and enculturation in education' (ibid.). She ends stating that the authors: 'cut their theories off from comparative sociology because their homogenization of educational systems precludes the cross-cultural examination of systematic structuration' (ibid.).

It is in fact the case that since Archer wrote these words many national systems have become more centralised, and thus more institutionalized in terms of state values. Indeed, one of the paradoxes of the neoliberal state is that it can become decentralized (in terms of responsibility) and centralised (in terms of surveillance and control) at the same time. In this way, educational agencies and institutions are both brought under the control of the state but have to survive as semi-autonomous structures. However, more than this, it is now evident that Bourdieu and Passeron were not attempting to produce a general theory of educational practice as such, even though the way that *Reproduction* was presented might have suggested they were. What they were offering were 'foundations' for a 'theory of symbolic violence' with much broader ramifications, and *Reproduction* was just one example and an extension of the 'theory of practice' that Bourdieu was developing in a range of other social contexts. This undertaking had a different type of 'theory' as its goal: one which would give rise to a praxeological understanding of 'symbolic power' within nation states. Moreover, what the approach is offering in *Reproduction* is not a type of deterministic knowledge to describe all education systems (as Archer suggests) – universals exemplified with empirical evidence – but a set of axioms and 'thinking tools' which could be used to illuminate other national systems. Passeron (1986) himself warned that: 'one must beware of taking a model of social reproduction as a comprehensive model of society, as a law or trend which appears to regulate the order of historical evolution'. Reproduction models are approximate models, 'constructed on a pattern of extremes', of hypotheses which would be the case if they existed in 'systematic perfection'. 'Society is not a *system*, and that is why it is the task of history to create a form of description of the dependencies and continuities which the use of models and typologies can never replace' (ibid.).

Whatever the issues concerning philosophy and method and, even with these criticisms, *Reproduction* still acted as a contributing inspiration that animated educational research and teacher education for the rest of the 1970s and 80s; and, even outside of sociology, there was a new found interest in the language of pedagogy in knowledge construction to which the notion of 'cultural capital'

contributed. Yet, the 'new' sociology of education was inherently radical, and implicitly (and explicitly!) critical. Its advocates argued that if schools were complicit in reproducing the inequalities of society, then they needed reform. Many educationalists hence supported a policy of 'deschooling'; the aim of which was to by-pass the pernicious effects of schools - or at least to compensate for them. The thinking went: in effect, schools are promulgating a certain kind of culture, which excludes the masses and privileges the sons and daughters of the middle and upper classes. Three responses to this situation were formulated: Either resistance could be mounted - if the dominant culture was alienating and pacifying, it should be opposed. Or, 'alternative' cultures could be celebrated - indeed, partly as a form of resistance - Bourdieu later called it their 'canonisation'. In this case, 'non-hegemonic' cultures were held up for their rich diversity and alternative ways of seeing the world. Or, 'compensatory' measures could be undertaken so that those who were 'culturally deficient' could be 'topped up' with the requisite cultural attributes. Here, 'positive discrimination' was seen as one possible tactic to ensure that those who had hitherto been deprived of contact with the necessary culture - in form and content - were now given the opportunity to acquire it in the form of academic knowledge which would enable them to enter the social world on an equal cultural footing with their contemporaries.

Of course, there is a fatalistic aspect to Bourdieu's work and it is quite paradoxical to realise that Bourdieu's own theoretical perspective would suggest that 'resistance' by the dominated only locked pupils into systems in which they would continue to be dominated; since whatever we do, the inherent 'logic of practice' of 'social systems' develops 'reconversion strategies' to reassert the mechanism behind the *raison d'être* of a field; and for education, that is the reproduction of elites. Bourdieu was active politically throughout his career and he did make proposals for a 'rational pedagogy' and a 'sociology of inequalities' to redress the balance in scholastic achievement derived from social origin. However, these proposals remained mainly unexplored in the British context.

Nevertheless, one of the reasons for the popularity of the 'foundational disciplines', and indeed the 'sociology of education', was their practical orientation; and many took solace from the practical dynamic at the heart of *Reproduction*. Throughout the 1970s and much of the 1980s, teacher training programmes, both pre-service and in-service, included courses in sociology. These were taught separated from psychology, philosophy and history of education, with the assumption that the necessary integration between these diverse disciplines would be made by the teachers or by individual students themselves. The belief was that somehow, by knowing what was going on, teachers could act to counter its effects. Ironically, such a belief is once again counter to the internal logic of *Reproduction*; where Bourdieu writes how 'It is impossible to imagine a teacher able to maintain with his own discourse, his pupils' discourse and his pupils' relation to his own discourse, a relation stripped of all indulgences and freed from all the traditional complicities, without at the same time crediting him with the capacity to subordinate his whole pedagogic practice to the imperatives of a perfectly explicit pedagogy which could actually implement the principles logically implied in affirmation of the autonomy of

the specifically scholastic mode of acquisition' (p.126). Bourdieu and Passeron thus argue it was clearly too much to expect that an individual teacher, or even a small group, could affect radical change in pedagogy simply by understanding the way that classroom knowledge was produced and the effect it had on individual pupil academic achievement. Yet, many educationalists ignored their argument and took the egalitarian implications of *Reproduction* as a *raison d'être* for their research and pedagogic practice. If such suggested a political dimension to this position, it was to have a major consequence for what came next.

Legacy

The great anthropologies of France that Bourdieu published in the 1980s left an British educational profession somewhat perplexed; or at least it would have done if they had been widely read. Both *Le Sens Pratique* and *La Noblesse d'État* did not appear in English until the 1990s. *La distinction* did appear in 1984 but would have been considered too 'Franco-centric', and English readers of *Homo academicus* from 1988 would mostly have missed the points about 1968 and the reflexivity at the heart of Bourdieu's method.

However, as noted, the focus on knowledge in the 'new' Sociology of Education' did become a theme which concerned educational research outside of sociology *per se*. Increasingly, therefore, research approaches took on board various qualitative and naturalistic methods, including the broadly ethnographic. Some of this approach was explicitly 'critical', but much of it was utilitarian with respect to improving classroom pedagogy of individual teachers – not Bourdieu and Passeron's mission at all. Classroom language in the construction of educational knowledge was seen as pernicious for the way it excluded pupils coming from outside of the 'home school' culture. The educational zeitgeist was therefore reformist. This broad understanding had led to a widespread acceptance on the 'relative' nature of scholastic knowledge as defined within a state educational orthodoxy. In reaction to it, teaching approaches became more exploratory and 'pupil centred'.

As so-called 'classroom ethnographies' proliferated, issues of reflexivity also arose but, in England at least, interpreted mostly in terms of 'self-awareness' – what Bourdieu called the wish to 'transcend thought by the power of thought itself'. The reflexive aspect of both teachers' and researchers was also often inspired by Schön's 1983 book *The Reflective Practitioner*; with its emphasis on an 'epistemology of practice' – in other words, again, on making practice more efficient. There followed a bifurcation between two strands in educational research: one became increasingly orientated towards exploring teacher-pupil centred pedagogies; the other took taking a more critical, philosophical route – with the inclusion of post-modernist philosophies from such writers as Foucault and Deleuze. Neither strand particularly adopted Bourdieu's field theory and method in conducting practical research projects, but were broadly ethnographic. Where Bourdieu was cited, 'habitus' was often reduced to issues of 'agency', 'field' was interpreted as 'context' and 'cultural capital' was used as a metaphor to describe cultural variation in the classroom rather than a fully integrated analytic instrument. Few could cope with the exemplars of

Multiple Correspondence Analysis as presented by Bourdieu in his 1980s studies. The legacy of *Reproduction* was therefore significant yet skewed.

If the situation in British education was ripe for a reactionary backlash, that is exactly what happened. From the 1990s, educational research was heavily criticized by writers such as David Hargreaves for still not providing enough information on how to improve teaching. For his constituency, teachers were too radical – indeed, there had been a series of teacher strikes in the 1980s which damaged their professional reputations. For Tooley (1998), the reason for this was the whole qualitative/ethnographic thrust of educational researchers, seen as lacking in methodology, rigor and accuracy. Many, he argued, had even ‘fallen in love’ with French philosophers – Bourdieu was quoted as an example. The period became marked by increasing governmental involvement and a return to more statistical, evidence-based research as state agencies were created to control the curriculum, teacher training, school inspection, and what was and was not deemed as ‘relevant’ in educational research. In this context, Bourdieu’s later work, including his political activism, was overlooked by all but the most avid educational Bourdieusians.

It could therefore be argued that *Reproduction* is a book that was misinterpreted at the time – and this misinterpretation shaped what was to be made of it. Readers were not necessarily aware of Bourdieu’s provenance, his philosophical roots, and the ethnology he was developing. What was gleaned from the book – cultural capital, habitus – was indeed integrated within a British educational research agenda, but one markedly different from Bourdieu’s own. Few British educationalists fully appreciated the background to Bourdieu’s work on education: the role it had played in the creation of the Fifth Republic – *Maisons de la Culture*, *Peuple et Culture*, *Education Permanente*, etc. – coming from a republican Jacobin tradition but also including the Catholic response to French déchristianisation. Furthermore, while British educationalists were mostly concerned with teacher training and pedagogy, Bourdieu was evidently more interested in education as one of other social institutions – which he also researched – that formed an intermediary in the French Republic and the nation state. The form of reflexivity embraced in Britain, moreover, did not match Bourdieu’s own, founded as it was on continental philosophies, including phenomenology. Neither did British researchers ‘do’ field analysis as such. Although there were attempts to understand biographical variation in terms of *habitus* and educational outcome, few ‘mapped’ the education field empirically in terms of structure and cross-field influences, or explored empirical relations to the ‘field of power’ except in the most general terms; nor the way the resultant ethos structured pedagogy and its consequences.

Of course, in the intervening years, it has become acknowledged that Bourdieu is so much more than a ‘sociologist of education’. And, it is not uncommon to still see his work quoted in educational research. Nevertheless, *Reproduction* – with its misinterpretations and misapplications – remains somewhat frozen in time. There is still a pressing need to understand this book in terms of Bourdieu’s theory of practice and develop a philosophical appreciation of both the epistemological breaks on which it is predicated and the resultant *metanoia* it offers (see Grenfell, 2007).

Bourdieuian reflexivity also remains 'the elephant in the room' for many educationalists, so that even Bourdieusians rarely mention or understand it. Such an appreciation would require an understanding of what Bourdieu intended by subject and the object, the 'structural' relationship between them, and indeed its underlying logic of practice.

In sum, despite its celebrity in Great Britain, the thesis announced with the appearance of *Reproduction* in English still awaits a more worthy and appropriate response in terms of its significance to schooling, research and consequence policy reform.

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