

SCHOOLING AS GAMING

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Introduction

Public interest in schooling is growing. More and more people are speaking out on issues and linking them to schools. Dropouts, graduates that can't read, write, or do simple arithmetic, apparent emphasis on self-esteem over "basic" competencies, all linked to concerns over our global economic competitiveness are favourite topics of editorialists, open-line radio shows, and letter writers. The Alberta Teachers' Association (1993) published concerns of teachers in the monograph, **Trying to Teach**. People are demanding that schools change. Some want change back to the way it was. Others want schools to adopt more business-like approaches. Some want teachers to have more freedom to make decisions about learning, others want stricter control on learning, imposed by people from the "real world" outside the school. People lobby, they write, they pass policy, they strike, they compete over schooling. One way to see the field of schooling is as an arena for competing forces, forces that each wants the right to say, "This is how schooling shall be."

The purpose of this project is to suggest that an analogy between competitive games and schooling should be part of the people of Alberta's debate and decision making about schooling. The focus will be on what I am most familiar with, the grade school system in Alberta, but I'll also make limited comment on post-secondary and graduate education. I don't mean to suggest this analogy as the ultimate way to understand schools. Rather, I see it functioning as

another way of organizing much of what we know about schools. In this manner the project should also function to bring forward new sets of questions about schooling. The ultimate success of this project lies with these new questions and the dialogue, research, and investigations they guide. Following Pierre Bourdieu's definition of the mission of sociology I want participants in the field of schooling to "...necessitate conducts, to tear them away from arbitrariness by reconstituting the universe of constraints which determine them, without justifying them"(Bourdieu, 1989, p. 143 cited in Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 50).

I write this project as part of the requirements of an academic institution but it is not an academic paper. That does not mean that I am anti-intellectual or anti-academic. Writing for the academic community often assumes the reader is familiar with the writing of this or that individual or at least familiar with the language of that particular academic circle¹. I will provide the customary links to the literature for those who will pursue these ideas in that direction. My intent in this project is to write in a manner that might bring these ideas to an audience that extends beyond the typical academic community. I would like parents and community members who may not be part of the professional education community to read parts of

¹Robbins (1991) quotes Bourdieu writing in *L'ontologie politique de Martin Heidegger* "Learned jargon - official languages which produce and reproduce groups of specialists by a systematic alteration of ordinary language - is, like all discourse, the product of a compromise between an expressive interest and a censure constituted by the very structure of the field within which the discourse produces itself and within which it circulates."

the project. I want others to become more aware of the determiners of their actions.

How do we understand schools?

Each person's way of understanding school is likely unique, because each of those understandings is built of a lifetime of different experiences. Despite these unique experiences the fact that we can discuss schooling at all, or that the news media often focuses on schools, are indicators that people share common experiences and understandings about schools. These shared experiences and understandings probably include the first-hand, going to a school building on a regular basis for approximately 12 years, and the second-hand, reading articles about schooling in magazines and newspapers. The experiences may also be as a parent, as a teacher or as a researcher. When we enter into discussions related to schooling or when we write a letter to the editor of a newspaper about school issues we assume some common understandings. From these common understandings we can begin to deepen our understanding and hope to take wiser actions. The approach to understanding schools I will suggest in this project takes advantage of schooling's resemblance to another common experience, that of playing games.

Playing games on the school playground is probably the most common experience that comes to mind for people thinking about a link between schooling and gaming. A great deal of the writing in education texts and journals linking play and games to schools is

directed toward early childhood, drama, or physical educators. A minority of writers discuss play and games in the contexts of mathematics, social studies, or computer education. I must accept that the reader of this project expects the same. Play and games in school seem to have a particular place in educational thinking. Some might argue that discussions involving play are being marginalized. It is certainly acceptable for people to talk about play when discussing learning centres for young children, but if they were to talk of play during policy development for equity funding, others would likely see them as being out of place. This particular way that educators, and others, have of isolating the talking, writing and reading about play and games in schools to a few defined areas is an exemplar of the phenomenon I will discuss in this project. I will not, however, review the typical appearances of play and games within the educational literature. Instead I will show how the discussion of play in schools, specifically the field of play we commonly call gaming, can be extended to the broader perspective of schooling in Alberta.

This project is original only in the sense that it uses local Alberta examples to illustrate and make more accessible an approach to understanding schools that is developing in the research being done by Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist. Some of Bourdieu's writings have been translated into English, but those that have are not widespread in the educational literature. Richardson (1986) included one chapter by Bourdieu in **Handbook of Theory and Research for the**

Sociology of Education. Most educators familiar with Bourdieu's thinking likely have read Bourdieu's and Jean Claude Passeron's **Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture** (1977). **Invitation to Reflexive Sociology** (1992) and **Outline of a Theory of Practice** (1977) are two other books in English where Bourdieu elaborates on an evolving approach to understanding based on an analogy between social phenomena, play, and games. I will follow Bourdieu's suggestions and explore the analogy between play, games and schooling in Alberta.

Bourdieu makes use of three concepts in approaching the study of a social phenomenon, the ideas of field, habitus, and capital. I will describe these concepts and their interrelationships. This description will not be definitive. This project is not about illustrating the scope of the thinking of Pierre Bourdieu, the books I've listed begin that task much better than I could. The ideas Bourdieu brings to the project serve as jumping-off points. I will show where these ideas can lead us with examples taken from my experiences of Alberta schooling. With the concepts now set in an Alberta context, I'll suggest several avenues of research that might logically extend from the model I have described. This is not a study following Bourdieu's approach in a strict and literal way. Instead it takes Bourdieu's ideas as provocative for people interested in education and speculates on what such a rigorous study might reveal. Such a study would greatly exceed the expectations

of a one-credit project and exceed the time I have available to devote to this project.

Games and play

We can find part of the apparent bias to link games with “less serious” activity in the origin of the word, game. Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (1989) shows that game is derived from an old German word meaning amusement. Game is related to fun and sport, to tactics and to rackets (both the athletic and the criminal forms).

Game also refers to “a physical or mental competition conducted according to rules with the participants in direct opposition to each other ...a situation that involves contest, rivalry, or struggle...; *esp.* one in which opposing interests given specific information are allowed a choice of moves with the object of maximizing their wins and minimizing their losses.” This facet of the definition comes closer to the line of thinking this project is pursuing. Following Bourdieu I will also extend the definition of game to include “the manner of playing in a contest.”

I want to clarify something near the beginning of this project. Teachers or parents sometimes use the word, “games” to mean some sort of undesirable behaviour. In my experience they usually mean a student is challenging the teacher, a power game, or that the students are not taking their lessons seriously, they’re “just playing games.” Games in this sense become something to be avoided, or when met, eliminated. The sense of gaming I will pursue with this project can be

applied to this aspect of “games as pathology” but can extend to all aspects of schooling.

Though thinking about gaming and schooling tends to be limited to less serious matters, the links between gaming and other aspects of life take on very serious dimensions. Gaming, in the form of gambling, results in the flow of enormous amounts of money. Gambling forms the basis of the economy in places like Las Vegas and Atlantic City. Some Indian band councils have decided to use gambling as a major source of funds. Provincial governments in Canada use lotteries to fund projects. Service organizations hold casinos and bingos to raise their funds. In 1993 the premier of Alberta has suggested that hospitals look more seriously at gambling to make up shortfalls between government grants and the costs of providing health care. Gaming is not trivial.

Many people in North America and elsewhere will spend time and money on professional game playing in the form of athletics. Throughout the year, as leagues trade or draft players, we can read about this or that athlete receiving multiple millions of dollars for their ability to play a game. Cities gain stature when they can afford a major league team. These teams require expensive facilities, usually paid for by the people of the city. In return, the professional teams can draw money, interest, and people to a city. A city can also enhance its prestige amongst some members of the international community by

hosting the games of all games, the Olympics. Games are a reason for a flow of wealth and of people.

Many more people are involved in games through amateur competition. Communities have set up junior leagues for sports like soccer, baseball, hockey, judo, badminton, basketball, and skiing. Contests like chess tournaments, science fairs, and debates are popular.

Games in one form or another play important roles in Alberta and elsewhere. Most people have played or are playing games. Games are part of conversation, of the television news, and of newspapers. That games are a common experience, played in many different forms by most people, allows them in my opinion, to play an important role in thinking about schooling.

Bourdieu's Approach

As I mentioned above this will not be a detailed or all encompassing summary of Bourdieu's research. I will instead provide a broad sketch, sufficient I hope, to provide the reader with a beginning framework for adapting Bourdieu's methods to understanding Alberta schools. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) would provide the reader with a better sense of the dynamics of Bourdieu's thinking.

There are several key ideas that the reader should have in place to understand the moves Bourdieu is making. First, to explain the uneven distribution of certain scarce resources, Bourdieu constructs relations of dominant and dominated (Bourdieu, 1977, p.178). The dominant have better access to the resource and/or control over the

resource; the regularities of the game tend to favour them. Bourdieu calls the structures and actions that ensure dominance appears legitimate, symbolic violence. Wacquant writes that, “the whole of Bourdieu’s work may be interpreted as a materialist anthropology of the specific contribution that various forms of symbolic violence make to the reproduction and transformation of structures of domination” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 14-15). Instances of domination important to Bourdieu’s method include the competition in dichotomies such as theory versus practice or structuralism versus constructivism. Bourdieu’s approach should be of interest to those people caught up in the debate between quantitative and qualitative approaches to research.

Second, Bourdieu believes that there, “exists a correspondence between social structures and mental structures, between the objective divisions of the social world—particularly into dominant and dominated in the various fields—and the principles of vision and division that agents apply to it” (Bourdieu, 1989, p.7 cited in Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 12).

The way people see, think and act on the world is influenced by their position in the world. Wacquant emphasizes this link, “Social structures and cognitive structures are recursively and structurally linked, and the correspondence that obtains between them provides one of the most solid props of social domination” (Bourdieu and

Wacquant, 1992, p.14). Whether you are in a dominated position or a dominant position you will tend to (though you are not condemned to) think and act in ways that maintain the status quo. Bourdieu bases these assumptions on findings that include, among other things, why the children of the powerful are more likely than the children of the common people to advance through graduate education to positions of power (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

Third, based on the correspondence between social and cognitive structures, Bourdieu identifies a critical bias in any attempt to describe a phenomenon, the social position of the person doing the describing. Bourdieu wants at least as much attention paid to the describer's social position and the describer's tools as to the object being described.

Bourdieu insists the key concepts of field, habitus, and capital arose, not in theoretical speculation, but from attempts to explain the patterns in the data given by empirical research. Bourdieu points out that the findings and interpretations of current research continue to shape these concepts. The concepts used to explain the data are open to change, they have a history. This dynamism, this evolution, is the reason both Bourdieu and his commentators caution that other investigators should not reify the concepts and take care in giving the language he uses their native meanings.

Method

Bourdieu believes that the study of a topic must proceed through two modes, one “structuralist, ” and the other,

“constructivist” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 11). The structuralist mode, a “social physics” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 7), rejects the preconceptions held by the subjects under study and through the scientific method determines the structural relations that organize them. The correspondence between cognitive structures and social structures means that we should have common-sense, taken-for-granted concepts. Being raised in that world we are very likely to encounter matches between what we think and what we see. Those who have traveled to “exotic” countries have come face-to-face with the mismatch between the way they behave in the “homeland” and the expectations of the “strange” country. They can be like a fish out of water. Bourdieu strongly believes that rigorously applied science can lead us to see the arbitrary construction of our common sense. For Bourdieu this part of the study helps to determine the objective regularities, the spaces of positions in the game. Knowing the positions in the game is one important part of understanding the playing of a game. However, Bourdieu acknowledges the danger of stopping an investigation at this stage. Just because you’ve mapped out the positions does not mean you can understand how each game came to be, how it is being played, and how it might be played in the future. Bourdieu believes that by itself a model built through the objective approach cannot explain its own genesis and tends to slip from being thought of as a model to being thought of as reality (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.8). Games would not likely be such a large part of

our culture if they were completely predictable over time. There is always a component of uncertainty, both in who will win a particular game and in the stability of the game over many playings. Games are played by players and it is from these players, agents who experience meanings, that these uncertainties spring. By itself the “structuralist” model cannot account for initial conditions or subsequent uncertainty.

The second mode, the “constructivist,” attempts to build from the lived experiences of the players themselves. Rather than determining the position of the player in the game, this mode helps to determine the player’s *disposition*. Here Bourdieu attempts to understand the way *that* player plays the game, the player’s disposition, as opposed to what that position is to the game. We know what a pitcher does in a baseball game but we should also talk to pitchers as individuals to get their sense of the game. In most cases though, the players did not invent the game they play. And these players usually find others who will play the game with them. By limiting an investigation to lived experience, we miss out on learning about why and how the game exists, and on the regularity of the game across wide groups of people. But lived experience gives a sense of the social space as emerging and evolving through the “decisions, actions, and cognitions of conscious, alert individuals to whom the world is given as immediately familiar and meaningful” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.9).

Bourdieu combines the structuralist approach and the constructivist approach, neither approach is sufficient on its own, but Bourdieu does not give the two approaches equal weight. The constructivist approach relies on the player's common sense understanding of the game. This common sense understanding is built from that player's experiences playing that position. This understanding then will vary from position to position and player to player. Bourdieu believes that the researcher's common sense influences the researcher, thus the researcher should reject their preconceptions before analyzing the common sense understanding of a social space.

The first and most pressing scientific priority, ..., would be to take as one's object the social work of construction of the pre-constructed object. That is where the point of genuine rupture is situated. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 229)

Field

Game is the word we commonly use that comes closest to giving a sense of Bourdieu's use of the term, field. Fields differ from games in that they are not invented, they do not have explicit or written rules, and their players are not fully aware of their own playing. Fields are like games in that they involve players in competition or struggle over stakes, they establish strategies for players to follow, and the players vary in their abilities to control the field. The field's allowable strategies also form part of the field's stakes. Each field is a social space

that has its own unique logic of operation. Fields can overlap and people can be members of more than one field. One can find the limits of the field by measuring where the stakes of the field no longer matter to the people. Bourdieu's concept of field most closely resembles what game theory calls the zero-sum game. A zero sum game has winners and losers with no net gain as an outcome of the game, to win means to win at the cost of another, a key element of dominance relationships.

When we think of a game we may be tempted to think of a playing board or an arena. These are, however, only the physical objects that the game is played on or in. We may think of the players themselves as the game, but they only occupy the positions of the game. The game itself is what goes on between the players, the network of relations. Bourdieu favours the concept of game to describe field, because “To think in terms of field is to *think relationally* [italics in original]” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 96). Relations are not visible things, they have their existence between the players. Relations are not in the object nor in the subject. Bourdieu believes that by thinking relationally one can sidestep the argument between the measurers and the story-tellers. Measuring and story-telling become particular examples of parts of relations.

The field is a network of relations between players occupying positions. These relations are ones of influences or power. Each position is held by a player with a particular type and volume of power,

or capital (to be discussed in greater detail below). The players are engaged in struggles to influence their position on the field. A player can do this by following the rules or regulations of the game to increase the value of the type of power held by that player and decreasing the value of power held by others. Players may also, if they are dominant in the field, play to alter the rules so control of the field remains in their favour. The strategies that guide the players in these moves are part of the characteristics of the field. Playing a particular position means only a particular set of strategies are present. These players do not necessarily rationally choose a strategy with an overall goal in mind. Strategies in Bourdieu's field concept appear as "objectively oriented lines of action which social agents continually construct in and through practice." (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 128). Strategies would appear as obvious choices of action given the player's experience in the particular field. To a baseball player, playing their position means that only certain moves are possible. We say of a very good player that their moves are "natural" as their playing has become "a second nature." For the player immersed and competent in the game the field becomes part of them. The expert soccer players can make moves without thinking, they react instantaneously to the change in relations on the field. They have embodied the field. Bourdieu calls this embodiment, habitus, and I will describe it in greater detail below.

Bourdieu has identified a particularly important field that he calls the field of power. The positions on the field of power are occupied by players who hold dominant positions in other fields. At stake in the struggles on the field of power is the “...dominant principle of domination.” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 76). The struggle is for who shall be granted credibility for speaking the truth. We see this field in operation during debates between senior government bureaucrats, government ministers, university deans, economists, and business leaders over the best ways to handle Canada’s economy. What power will win: those wielding policy, those who have made a career of studying economics, or those who operate businesses? Do we believe the answer from the bureaucracy, academics, politics, or the commercial world? Who has credibility? Bourdieu believes that it is always a balance of power in this field (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 76). The forms of power, called capital by Bourdieu, are discussed below.

Capital

Fields do not resemble those games of chance like roulette where a person can, with one spin of the wheel becomes wealthier, more advanced, or more of whatever it is that is effective in the field. Bourdieu calls those things that are effective in the field, in directing the play of the game, capital. Each player in the game possesses some capital, more or less than other players. Bourdieu defines both capital and field in terms of the relationship each has to the other. The ability

to read, write, and speak Latin is an effective form of capital for a person involved in the field of translating classic Latin literature but lacks value in the field of an ice hockey game. Latin classics and ice hockey are fields that have distinct qualities that cause them to be different from each other. However, in both fields, players take time and effort to build their unique capital. Bourdieu has found three common forms of capital at operation in the fields he has investigated, economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital. Each form of capital has unique qualities and can be transformed from one to the other. Bourdieu identifies a fourth form of capital that is derived from the three basic forms, symbolic capital. When people fail to see the link to the fundamental form of capital, they misrecognize symbolic capital for what it is and don't expose it to the same questioning.

Bourdieu uses the term "capital" to describe a player's ability to maintain or conserve their position in the field. Capital gives the player the energy needed to make a play. Capital can exist in a number of forms and quantities but the quality that defines it is whether or not it is effective in allowing players to make a move. Bourdieu's research shows that different people hold different amounts and different types of capital. When we think of capital only in terms that we are familiar, that is, dealing with money, property, and labour, Bourdieu believes we limit ourselves. People are inclined to make moves that will ensure that the particular type of capital they hold will

keep or increase its value. Ice hockey provides a good example some of the dynamics of capital.

I've observed the game of ice hockey in the National Hockey League (NHL) evolve over the years the game. During one period of time most of the effective players were big and hard hitting. It was a game where coaches saw little point in recruiting smaller players. Pressure coming from both inside and outside the league, caused the league to introduce rules to limit fighting. Coincidentally teams began to draft smaller players who had great speed and puck handling skills. Players no longer needed the ability to hit hard. Games are won by scoring more goals. Coaches selected fewer players for their ability to fight. The fighting player became the enforcer, a player specializing in the protection of lighter, faster, goal scoring, team members. The types and amounts of capital in the marketplace of the NHL players shifted. The shift, though obvious, still did not mean that anyone could now play in the NHL. Only the form of capital that had value shifted.

Bourdieu (1986) identified a variety of forms of capital that extend beyond the typical monetary form. Capital can take economic, cultural, social, and symbolic forms.

Capital has a relationship with time/labour and economic capital is the form we are most familiar with. Bourdieu reminds us that capital takes time to accumulate. The time and labour put into earning a high school diploma is also capital; in a form Bourdieu calls

cultural capital. The diploma itself takes the form of institutionalized cultural capital, it can't be transferred to anybody and it is not embodied in its owner. The learning that led up to the diploma is embodied in the owner and is also a form of cultural capital. If you had Albert Einstein's original diploma it too would be a form of cultural capital, objectified cultural capital.

Bourdieu observed that people often invest (but not necessarily in a consciously planned manner) time and effort building relationships with other players. This can take a wide variety of forms including: joining clubs or political parties, attending parties, giving gifts, or participating on teams. The "old boys network" and "it's not what you know but who you know that's important" are examples of what Bourdieu calls social capital.

These forms of capital, economic, cultural, and social, are not always easily recognizable. Bourdieu uses the label, symbolic capital, to name the misrecognition of economic, cultural, or social capital. The enthusiastic materialism of the "I've got more and better things than you" yuppie is one example of symbolic capital in a world where your value is judged by what you possess.

Habitus

With the concept of field Bourdieu accounts for the dynamics behind the changes and the shifts we see in our social world over time. Capital is what allows players to become effective in a field, to make change or hold position. They struggle and compete for the stakes and

rules of the field. However Bourdieu also noticed that some things changed more slowly or not at all. He noticed that people playing in a familiar field were able to make the right moves at the right time without putting much thought into the move; people seem to be well adapted for their native social space. When social space is changed over distance you have the foreigner and when it is changed over time you have the generation gap. To account for all these effects Bourdieu developed the concept of habitus.

Time plays a key role in understanding habitus. Each of us is born into a world that has a history. We are not the creators of the world that receives us, we are its inheritors. Though we may invent our own language as toddlers, we quickly switch to the language that gets us what we want. In most cases this language is one that, for the most part, is many generations old. Language is only one example of the history of a people being deposited in its young. We can think of customs, holidays, ways of dress, manners, tastes, that are also passed on, accepted, perhaps modified, and used in the accepted way of functioning social spaces. For Bourdieu the individual is “social, collective” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 126).

The social in habitus means that groups of people share experiences. Language is a good example. This access to a common code allows members sharing the social space to coordinate their relations, to have some understanding of each other. This is also a key example of social structures shaping cognitive structures. Our

expectations can match our surroundings because our surroundings played a major role in establishing our expectations. Bourdieu reasons “...there is a probability, inscribed in social destiny associated with definite social conditions, that experiences will confirm habitus, because most people are statistically bound to encounter circumstances that tend to agree with those that originally fashioned their habitus “ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.133).

Since it is habitus that frequently guides our actions and the actions of our fellows it is habitus that shapes our present. History lives on in habitus and is reproduced in the actions of people to be incorporated again into the habitus. This is the recurring and structural link between social and cognitive structures. History shapes habitus and habitus in turn shapes history.

This does not mean that we are doomed to follow the crowd or that the social space is stagnant. Habitus, as the social embodied, has the ability to adjust, to improvise, with what it has accumulated. This makes it different from habit. Habit implies a mechanical correspondence to social structures; habitus is more organic.

Habitus is more than passive recording of the world. Habitus encounters a world and constructs new objects of knowledge based on past experiences. There are limits to new construction in that “...all external stimuli and conditioning experiences are, at every moment, perceived through categories already constructed by prior experiences.”

(Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 33). Habitus means that people will tend to carry similar dispositions to a variety of experiences. Bourdieu explains style and taste in this way.

Improvisation is always a probability. Habitus means that prior experiences can be juggled to seek solutions to novel situations. When the traveler enters a community where the language is different, the traveler may improvise with sign language or seek common words or expressions. There is a play in habitus as it seeks practical solutions to the problems at hand.

We may escape from habitus when we reflect on our actions, when we take the time to calculate a solution. Habitus shows itself best in the non-reflexive, unconscious adapting to the world. When we question what we take-for-granted we are taking over from habitus. This is the hope that Bourdieu offers to the dominant and dominated. The habitus of these people is built from their position in the social space. The habitus of the dominated matches the dominated position they place. Likewise with the dominant. By reflective thinking Bourdieu believes we can minimize the effect of the social determinus on thinking.

Bourdieu's Approach in the context of Alberta schools

The examples below are ones that come to my mind when I think about Bourdieu's writing and Alberta schools. They come to my mind for a reason. It follows from the discussion above that they are a result of my habitus, the sum of my experiences in schooling, and my

position in the field of schooling in Alberta. I believe they should be enough to get the reader started thinking about schooling and gaming. I acknowledge that they may not be enough for readers who do not share similar positions or habitus.

The examples are also limited by the practical scope of this project. I want to keep the focus close to what we typically think of as schooling, the grade school, involving people between the ages of 6 years and 19 years. It will, however, be necessary to extend the discussion beyond what many people commonly associate with schooling, that is, a school building. The **Alberta School Act** (1988) definition of school extends the scope of schooling for this project.

1(1)(q) “school” means a structured learning environment through which an education program is offered to the student by

- (i) a board,
- (ii) an operator of a private school,
- (iii) an early childhood services program private operator,
- (iv) a parent giving a home education program,
- (v) the Minister;

The project will also be delimited to the people involved in schooling. In the examples that follow I will attempt to show how teachers, administrators, parents, and students might be involved in the play of field, capital, and habitus.

Field

The education field has action, history, conservation or transformation only because there are agents, socialized organisms in whom the education field is sedimented, who are willing and able to play the game

I am making a number of assumptions by focusing this project on schooling as gaming. When I assume that schooling is a field, I assume that there are willing and able players who see the schooling game as a worthwhile one to play.

The school classroom will be the starting place for this discussion of the field of schooling in Alberta. However we must take care not to trap ourselves into thinking of the walls of the classroom as the limits for the field. There are lines of force extending into the physical classroom from outside its walls and from outside its present time. The classroom has a location in space and in time and Bourdieu insists we go beyond the single point in space and time. The classroom serves only as a convenient jumping off point for the discussion of the field.

We can think of the classroom as a handy location for observing a key part of the network of relations that makes up the schooling field. The limited number of typical inhabitants of classrooms, teachers and students, will make the discussion easier. The classroom rules can give us an insight into the relation between the students and the teacher. The rules help to set the behaviours allowed in the

classroom. Often developed under the direction of the teacher, the rules control some aspects of the classroom field.

The limited nature of the rules and the relationships can be seen where the rules and expectations differ between classrooms in a school. Suppose one teacher prohibits the chewing of gum in their classroom. This is not a school-wide rule but one this teacher strictly enforces within the bounds of the classroom. During a visit to another classroom the teacher sees their students being taught by another teacher, one who has no rule about gum chewing. Some students flaunt the teacher and the rule by blowing bubbles with their gum, making it very obvious that they are now outside one field and in another. The field is the space where the effects of the field are exercised. Students move from one field to another within the same school. Gum chewing serves as a simple example of a marker of the edge of a field.

School dress codes give us another example of the limits of a field. We can find an obvious case with the private school uniform. While in school students are expected to wear the school uniform. In one school the uniform jackets and ties come off as soon as the student leaves the school to board the bus home. Once outside the school, both in terms of location and time, the school rules have no authority. Another field boundary is made evident.

Both of the above examples are overt examples of a field's spatial boundaries. Less obvious are the examples' boundaries in time,

when did they arise, when will they subside. The no gum chewing teacher and the director of the uniformed school may have grown up with those rules. These two rules are not limited to the two schools in which I saw them.

Capital

I find that thinking about the field helps lead me to the capital that is effective in that field. Capital has the property of effectiveness on the inside of the field but little or no influence outside the field. The following example shows the relation of capital and field.

There are schools in Alberta where the students address the staff as Mr., Mrs., or Ms., depending on the preference of the teacher. The students always address the teachers politely for there are sanctions for disrespect. Though they don't say it to their faces, some students have little respect for some teachers. Now imagine a group of students meeting one of their teachers on the weekend in the local shopping mall. They exchange polite greetings and small talk before going their separate ways. Shortly after meeting the first teacher the group of students have a second, chance meeting, with another of their teachers. The students call out to the teacher with a disrespectful rearrangement of the teacher's name. The teacher keeps on walking, not looking at the students. The students follow this teacher for a short way, continuing to taunt and laugh. Before they break away one of the students yells out, "Aren't you going to send me down to the

office!” The teacher says nothing and continues alone, red faced, down the mall.

The example brings forward questions about the qualities of the capital held by the teachers and the students. If we only observed the students and the teachers in their classroom relationship we would likely see little difference between the two teachers. In the classroom both teachers appear to possess the same capital and in the same amounts. Outside the classroom, outside the school, the example shows that the teachers hold different capital. The first teacher holds capital that extends the teacher-student relationship beyond the school. The influence of the second teacher’s capital over the teacher-student ceases to be effective once the players are beyond the formal school setting.

In the following paragraphs I will make suggestions about the types of capital that are effective for different positions within the schooling field. As discussed above, species of capital are those things that are effective in making moves in the field, either to conserve or destabilize the field. We cannot identify capital without understanding what is at stake in the field. In the example that I provide below I will assume that what is at stake is the players ability to get their way within the schooling field. In other words, “What gives the player the ability to say, do, and make things happen their way in the schooling field?”

Alberta legislation and regulations limit who can teach in an Alberta school. To teach in a public, separate, or an accredited private school in Alberta, a teacher must hold a teaching certificate granted under the **Department of Education Act**. The certificate acts as a powerful piece of capital. Letters to newspapers and commentaries in magazines show that many people feel they could do a better job of teaching than teachers. These people are barred from the position of school teacher unless they hold a certificate.

The teaching certificate is currently issued in two stages. To qualify for the first stage, the interim professional certificate, a person must meet the criteria spelled out in Section 3 of the **Certification of Teachers Regulation**. These criteria center on the holding of a university degree and successful completion of “an approved basic professional teacher education program in a faculty of education of a university in Alberta or any other approved institution...” Bourdieu would identify the teaching certificate as an indicator of cultural capital. Through the certificate the state acknowledges the accumulation, the embodiment, of culture. Those receiving the certificate have converted economic capital to this embodied cultural capital, by paying for their university education. Bourdieu discovered that in France, those most likely to get admitted to university faculties that lead to better employment are those who have received more cultural capital from their families. Are the graduates from faculties of education in Alberta also more likely to have received more cultural

capital from their parents? Such cultural capital might include better access to books, other learning materials or other experiences that made a university degree a natural and attainable choice.

The second stage of issue of the teaching certificate is the permanent professional certificate. A teacher holding the interim professional certificate must have two years of continuous, or 400 days of interrupted, teaching in an Alberta school to be eligible for a permanent professional certificate. At this point an officer acceptable to the Minister of Education (school superintendent, a Department of Education school inspector, or any other person authorized by the Minister) recommends the teacher either spend more time teaching under an interim certificate or receive a permanent professional certificate. Over 95% of teachers get recommended for their permanent professional certificate. School superintendents have suggested that the interim certificate is not necessary and that the bureaucracy required to support it be eliminated. They suggest that the probationary contract, discussed below under Experience Teaching, serves the same purpose as the interim certificate.

The teaching certificate can serve to dispossess parents and other members of the community interested in schooling. The teaching certificate gives a form of monopoly on teaching.

A graduate degree is not required to teach in Alberta schools. It typically does not, as Bourdieu would likely say of the teaching certificate, “consecrate” the individual as teacher. Nonetheless all

three faculties of education in the province's universities sponsor graduate programs in education, programs that require the teacher to invest time and economic capital. Both these are indicators that the graduate degrees must have some value in the schooling game.

Most teachers in Alberta are on some form of contract that links their pay to their years of university education (usually to a maximum of 6 years university). The graduate degree then serves a means of converting cultural capital (the years of university education) into economic capital (raises in pay). The graduate degree may also have negative value as capital in the schooling game. In 1993 the superintendent of largest school jurisdiction in the province announced the jurisdiction would give hiring preference to teacher candidates holding a maximum of four years of university training. The reason the jurisdiction gives is found in the conversion of cultural capital to economic capital, four year university program teachers are paid less than those with graduate degrees. Despite this move, it has been my experience that years of education alone have little direct bearing on the stakes of the schooling game, that is, determining who is able to say what shall be in schooling.

Newspaper advertisements for school administrator positions give another possible clue to the value of the graduate degree. School jurisdictions often specify the qualifications and credentials of job candidates. Candidates must typically be involved in study at the graduate level or have a graduate degree. Since school systems usually

pay their administrators more money than teachers we cannot dismiss the conversion of graduate studies cultural capital into the economic capital of higher pay. But school administrators are also people who, by virtue of their position in the schooling game, have a form of capital that does allow them to have greater sway in the stakes of the schooling game. I'll discuss that form of capital in greater detail in the examples of school administrators.

A teacher's years of teaching experience form a capital whose value, like all other capital, is subject to complex market pressures. Years of teaching experience does serve, as does graduate study, as a good example of capital and markets in the schooling game. Like graduate study, years of education directly effect pay rates of most Alberta teachers. With each year of teaching experience the teaching contract specifies an increment in pay (usually to a maximum of 11 years). Years of teaching experience are directly convertible into economic capital. A teacher with 11 years of teaching experience will cost a school jurisdiction more than a teacher with no teaching experience beyond their university courses. In a job market where economic costs of teaching staff are of increasing concern, years of experience beyond zero can have negative value. The same school jurisdiction that gives hiring preference to teacher candidates with only 4 years of university also gives hiring preference to candidates with zero years teaching experience.

School jurisdictions usually enter into probationary contracts with newly hired teachers. The **School Act** dictates some of the major terms of the contract. These contracts are typically valid for one school year. At the end of the year the school board may release the teacher, sign the teacher to a continuing contract, or, if evaluations of the teacher indicate, extend the probationary contract for one year. A school board cannot keep a teacher on probationary contract for more than two years. These years of experience, a form of cultural capital, have value in determining whether or not a teacher will stay in the game with that school jurisdiction.

Informal discussions with school principals and superintendents in Alberta lead me to suggest a form of capital that has value for beginning teachers, where did they earn their BEd degree. All other factors equal, most of the principals and superintendents I've spoken with would hire a graduate from the University of Lethbridge. The reasons these administrators give center on the newly hired teacher's ability to handle the logistics and administrative aspects of classroom teaching. They believe these teachers are able to get on with the task of teaching sooner because they are more adept at handling the non-teaching tasks. After a few years of teaching experience the University of Lethbridge BEd gives little advantage, but for the first year teacher seeking a job in a tight market is has great value. The value of capital is not constant.

A teacher seeking a teaching position with an Alberta school jurisdiction usually includes with their application names of referees or letters of reference. It is likely that the value of these referees to the candidate varies with the referee's position in the schooling field and their familiarity to the person making the hiring decision. A letter of reference from my aunt, a retired bookkeeper, will not likely have as much value as a letter of reference from my previous jurisdiction's superintendent. This is an example of what Bourdieu might see as social capital.

The majority of school administrators in Alberta are former teachers. This does not mean they faced the same market that values the capital I described above. The market changes and a complete study of the capital of administrators should include a review of past market conditions. I've chosen examples of capital below that are current.

Though school jurisdictions advertise openly for candidates for administrative positions I believe a thorough study would reveal most people hired are from within the jurisdiction or well known to the people doing the hiring. Social capital, whom do you know, likely plays an important role in getting hired as a school administrator. The résumé, the interview, and the reference check all serve, in part, to measure the strength of the linkage between the candidate and the group doing the hiring. The potential candidate must invest both economic capital, in terms of membership fees and time, and cultural

capital, in terms of academic qualification, in building this social capital.

Since most school administrators have more than 5 years teaching experience, time spent teaching must serve as capital. Time spent teaching likely increases the cultural capital of the person. They learn about schools by experiencing them, have the school impressed on them. Could the person not also learn about schools by studying them in a graduate program? The time spent in schools is different from time spent studying schools from the outside. Spending time in schools, teaching, allows the candidate for administration to also build social capital with the network of people who hire administrators.

The variety of experience a candidate for administration carries is likely a form of cultural capital. The hiring authority may wish to ensure the candidate has the disposition to understand the particular school. As with other forms of capital required by hiring authorities of administrative candidates, types of experience can serve to limit who gets access to the role of administrator.

Several Alberta school jurisdictions are insisting that candidates for administrative positions be engaged in or have completed graduate studies, forms of embodied and institutionalized cultural capital.

The candidate that has experience in a variety of schools, especially schools configured in the manner that match the potential job, likely has a better chance of getting the job. Candidates that have

experience in jobs that require them to perform some of the tasks of a school administrator have another piece of capital.

Though we don't have merit pay in Alberta schools, previous successes in schools may increase an administrator's other forms of capital. Organizers often invite successful teachers and administrators to make presentations at professional development sessions and conferences. This gives them the opportunity to strengthen their ties to the network of other educators and administrators. Successes in school may also increase the social capital they hold with the students, parents, community, and school board. Successes that become known and linked to a particular teacher or administrator likely increase that person's ability to make further moves.

With respect to parents, the Alberta **School Act** gives some choice over their child's schooling. Their ability to choose or to influence educational decisions are forms of capital in the schooling game. This "legislative" capital is likely a derived form of social capital.

The Alberta **School Act** makes each student in Alberta the responsibility of either a public or a separate school jurisdiction or the Minister. Each student is a resident student for some board or for the Minister. The provincial government wants to ensure that each resident student gets an education program without tuition charge. The resident board has the responsibility to direct the student to one of its schools or to some other jurisdiction's school if the resident jurisdiction cannot provide a suitable education program. However,

the **School Act** determines residency based on the location of the parent's residence and on the parent's faith. By changing the location of their home or by changing their faith to match that of the school jurisdiction of choice, parents can make moves in the schooling game.

The parent must have sufficient economic capital to change the location of their primary home. This does not necessarily mean that a parent is limited by economic capital. The following examples illustrate the influence economic capital has on parent choice.

Economic capital can change value depending on the habitus of the player. First example, an unemployed, single parent is a member of a profession that is not in demand in the large city. The parent also has a young child who requires very specialized educational and health programs. These programs are only available in the large city. The parent could move to a rural area where the profession is in high demand, but the rural area cannot offer the special programs needed by the child. The parent chooses to remain unemployed or under employed in order to get their child into the special programs. Economic capital has less value in this parent's game.

For a second example we might imagine a family that can no longer afford to live in the big city and moves to a nearby small town. The children were in a French immersion program in the city schools and the small town school does not offer French immersion. The parents ask the city school jurisdiction to continue to serve their children. The city school jurisdiction recovers some of its costs from

residential taxes. Since this family no longer pays residential taxes to the city, the city school jurisdiction charges the parents a tuition fee. The parents cannot afford the tuition fee and ask their rural school jurisdiction to pay the tuition. The rural school jurisdiction decides that the program they offer in their town school will meet the basic education needs of the students and so refuses to pay the tuition fee. The rural jurisdiction believes they offer fair exchange of cultural capital (less the second language) for the economic capital (tax dollars). The parents choose economic capital over the cultural capital of a second language for their children.

The Alberta **School Act** (1988) also gives the parents the right to appeal to the school board any decision of an employee of a school board that significantly affects the education of the student. In a more limited scope of circumstances that parent can ask the Minister to review the decision of the board. This legislated capital, given to the parents by the dominant powers, ensures a degree of uncertainty and play in the extent of the powers of the board.

Parents in Alberta have additional legislative capital in their ability to choose the education for their child. Parents may remove their child from a public or separate school and enroll the child in a private school or home school. The economic capital the parent holds can influence this decision as most private schools charge tuition fees. Economic capital also has a bearing on the decision to home school. Home schooling, especially for young children, usually means that

one parent must stay home. The family must have sufficient economic capital to relinquish one potential income.

Parents' social capital shows up in a variety of different forms. This capital, built up through associations with particular people or groups of people can provide parents with considerable influence over the schooling game.

Parent associations and their affiliated special interest lobby groups are responsible for significant changes in the direction of schooling in Alberta. At the provincial level they have influenced the writing of the **School Act**. At the school level they have influenced school procedures and course offerings. Parents do not need to join one of these groups to be influenced by the groups' actions. However some groups will only provide specialized services, such as legal counsel or professional advice, to their members (an example of pooled economic capital converted into the cultural, legal, capital of a lawyer).

Politicians, including school board chairs, often seek counsel from their constituents or, at least, their friends. Being able to "get the leader's ear" is another form of social capital.

Parents can accumulate a form of cultural capital through their experiences in dealing with teachers and the school system. Parents can learn who will listen and who won't. They can learn what approaches are most effective in dealing with particular teachers or school administrators.

Some parents seek social capital in the form of a spokesperson from outside the school system. In Alberta, Dr. Joe Freedman and various staff members of the **Alberta Report** magazine often speak out on education issues. By sharing their concerns with these spokespeople, parents may be hoping to influence their own position in the schooling game.

By coming to school with more cultural capital than other students, by accumulating more cultural capital than other students, a student is meeting one of the goals society sets for schooling. The school's task is to reproduce the society and it does that by ensuring the students have the right kind and amount of cultural capital. The students that excel at this task may receive economic capital (scholarships) and social capital (meeting other successful students, teachers, politicians, employers, or post-secondary administrators).

Membership or association with a particular group of students in a school can give a student more or less ability to influence the stakes of the schooling game. Membership or association may be tied to a student's economic capital

Dress is one way a student demonstrates membership in a group. Some groups of students ("preppies") maintain their exclusivity by requiring members to wear economically expensive (in terms of economic capital) clothing. Other groups ("headbangers, skinheads, punks") maintain their exclusivity by requiring their members to wear socially expensive (in terms of social capital) clothing. The torn clothes,

black leather, and pierced body parts are a deficit social capital in the broader marketplace dominated by the “establishment,” but a benefit in social capital in the narrower marketplace dominated by the “alternative culture.” By rebelling against the dominant players in the field, students who dress in “outlandish” costume, reinforce their identity as dominated players.

The examples above should illustrate how we can apply Bourdieu’s concept of capital to the schooling game. There are, of course, many other players in this game that I’ve not mentioned here: central office administrators, provincial bureaucrats, the media, school board members, faculties of education, and the community at large. We can also count, due to recent international comparisons of student test scores, the members of the global schooling field. Exploration and research into the forms of capital held by these players I leave to the reader.

Habitus

We don’t need to look far to find the conservative effects of habitus in the Alberta schooling game. The calls for, “back to the basics,” is likely the result of the habitus of those who experienced schools prior to the 1960’s or those who are under the influence of those who were in school prior to the 1960’s. We can see it in the form of school buildings. Though we had a “fling” with the “fad” of Open Area we are now back to building “sensible” boxes that are divided into smaller boxes that accommodate about thirty children and one adult. I

put the words in quotation marks to draw attention to expressions of those currently dominant in the field of schooling. These words could be seen as strategies used by people intending to devalue concepts other than their own. (My use of the boxes to describe classrooms may be read as an illustration of an attempted counter-move.)

Students show their habitus in many different ways. Those in their first year of schooling may not have experienced being part of a large group operating under the systems of management of a school. Part of their teachers' task is to teach them, Bourdieu would say make part of their habitus, things like two-shoe policies, fire drills, asking to go to the bathroom, or lining up to leave the classroom. By making these tasks parts of a game or by offering a positive reinforcer, teachers give these systematized activities a practical logic that makes sense to the young student. After all why should a young student ask to go to the bathroom? As an infant they went uncontrollably and parents spent much time and effort with the toddler to get them to go to the toilet without assistance and without asking permission. We can see asking permission to carry out what was once a natural act as an example of the establishing of a dominant/dominated relationship between teacher and student. We could also see it as the teacher's need to ensure the safety and whereabouts of the 20 plus young children. Such a concern seems natural for a person made responsible for 20 children but Bourdieu might ask us why is it natural for one adult to

be responsible for 20 children. It is our habitus that says such a grouping within the larger grouping of the school is natural.

Cuban (1986) writes of the persistence of certain teaching methods. It seems natural for many teachers to ask students to take notes, sit and listen, do homework, and write tests. It's natural to call the school learning done at home, "homework." That's likely because that's what the teacher calls it and what the parents call it and the teachers' teachers called it and the parents' parents and so on back over the generations. A label like home learning sounds awkward, but isn't that what is really intended?

Students show their habitus when they say to the parent helping them with their "homework," "That's not the way to do it. Our teacher doesn't do it like that." Substitute teachers sometimes hear the same refrain.

Parent-teacher interviews are opportune times to see how the habitus of the parent differs from the habitus of the teacher. The parent bases their perceptions and comments about the child on six or more years experience of familial relations with the child. The parent speaks from a point of view coloured by sleepless nights caring for the sick child, moments of excitement and discovery, and long talks about hopes and aspirations with the child. The teacher cannot share all the experiences the parent has but has some experiences the parent hasn't. The teacher sees the child with many other children, in the context of an institutionalized learning environment and a mandated

curriculum. The teacher sees the child as student, the parent sees the student as child. The parent, who understands the teacher's relation to the child might ask, "If he were your son what would you do?" Similarly the teacher might ask, "If you had to spend every day with 30 people like your son what would you do?". We can see habitus best in the first response and reflection can bring the possibility of seeing how habitus determines our actions.

We can see the ability habitus has to change when we see innovation, improvisation, and renewal. Though every recently graduated Early Childhood Services (ECS) teacher sat in rows in classrooms and wrote many paper and pencil examinations they don't likely teach their students that way. We cannot say the same for all recently graduated high school teachers. Seated students and paper and pencil examinations are very much part of their teaching practice. Would the secondary teacher if placed in an ECS classroom, adapt their technique? Would an ECS teacher, likewise transplanted, retain an activities, centres-based, approach to Mathematics 20 classes? The pressure to change, exerted by students, parents, fellow teachers and administrators, would likely be strong. The degree of success in changing would be directly dependent on the habitus ability to adapt from its store of experiences.

The store of schooling experiences held in the habitus of teachers differs from most any other player in the schooling field. They are more likely than a student to see the group of young

teenagers at the mall as students than as rivals or friends. This is an example of thinking relationally prompted by thinking about habitus. Relations are embedded in habitus. In this country we know, most of us at any rate, that we can run to a uniformed police officer for help. The relationship is, as long as you are obeying the law, one of aid and support. Police officers are being stationed in large urban high schools. This arbitrary nature of the relationship shows itself when we look at the initial reactions of students from police-state countries to uniformed officers in schools. Habitus is at the root of every action in the schooling game.

I hope the examples I've given above are enough to assist the reader in seeing the nature of Bourdieu's concept of habitus, capital and field.

Bringing Field, Capital, and Habitus Together

In the following section I will show how we might apply Bourdieu's approach to an aspect of the schooling game. There is a significant limitation, a shortcut, to providing this example: I've gathered very limited empirical evidence and conducted no interviews. Bourdieu encourages the researcher to begin with an extensive, empirical construction of the structures of the field, its positions. This is to be followed by an investigation into the attitudes, intentions, the dispositions, of the occupiers of the positions on the field. Such a study would involve an amount of time and research effort that is not reasonable in the context of a one credit creative project. My intent

with this project is to interest others concerned with education in a little known approach to understanding schools. I rely on my experience as a player in several of the positions I identify in the field to provide the strength of the example.

Marks and grades attract attention in the schooling field. A common refrain from secondary students to the introduction of a topic in class discussions is, “Will this be on the test?” or in other words, “Will we be getting a mark for this?” When the teacher returns the tests to the students after marking, some students eagerly question their fellows to find out their mark, while others turn their paper over or hide it in their notebooks, reluctant to share their mark with others. Some teachers ask students to take their tests home so that parents may share in the knowledge of the mark. Teachers often summarize and write marks on report cards. Parents may praise their child, “You got a 55 last report card and a 60 on this one, you’re improving!” Or they may admonish, “You got a 60 last report card and a 55 on this one, you’re grounded for a month!” High school students and parents are interested in finding out if the mark is high enough to get credits for the course, enough credits to graduate from high school. Universities look to the mean average of a student’s Grade 12 marks to decide whether or not the student is eligible for admission. The media make stories of the thrice annual Grade 12 diploma examination marks and the annual achievement test marks for Grades 3, 6, and 9. The varieties of interests people in different

positions have in school grades and marks, the variety of uses these people have for these school grades and marks, and the fact that most of us have been described by grades and marks make this a good site of entry for showing how Bourdieu's concepts apply in the schooling game.

Bourdieu suggests we begin by re-examining the schooling field's relation to the field of power. The field of power is that field of play where the positions are occupied by players or institutions that are dominant in their own fields. These players come together to contest over "the legitimate principle of legitimation and for the legitimate mode of reproduction of the foundations of domination" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.76). Some school jurisdictions play in this field alongside businesses, and post-secondary institutions. Each of these players holds different amount of cultural, economic, and social capital, but in each case we could say of them that they are "influential".

The provincial government identifies the **Goals of Schooling** (Alberta Education, 1993a) and prepares a curriculum document, the **Program of Studies** (Alberta Education, 1993b) to set the direction for schools. The large school jurisdiction places its administrators and teachers on the committees that develop the curriculum documents and supporting materials. Post-secondary institutions set entrance requirements for students graduating from schools. Employers set minimum qualifications for new employees and these days' employers

are more frequently asking students to have a high school diploma. Though schools have some choice in whom they hire to teach it is the faculties of education and the government who determine what people must learn to qualify to teach in schools. The schools tend to play a dominated position in terms of their ability to use their strength and cultural capital, to make changes in the field in the field of power.

The provincial government regulates what schooling activities it will fund and to what level. Local school boards or private school societies raise further funds to allow the schools to meet the requirements of the **Goals of Schooling** and the **Program of Studies**. These locally raised funds are also used to support additional programs or activities the board or society deems worthy. Schools themselves are free, to a greater or lesser degree depending on board policy and the economic wealth of its parents and partners, to raise funds for what the school deems worthy. In terms of control of economic capital these school raised funds are usually a tiny portion of the total funds needed to operate the school. From an economic point of view the school plays a dominated position, dominated by the provincial government and the school's governing board or society.

Schooling plays a dominated position on the field of power. Others tell schools what students should learn and others give schools the funds and people needed to carry out this mandate. Following Bourdieu, we can expect to see the effects of this domination reach

into the field of schooling and influence that field's positions and the habitus of its players. I'll show below how marks and grades are one sign of this external control.

Once we have uncovered the field's relation to the field of power, Bourdieu advises that we sketch the field and its positions. As in the examples in the previous section, field boundaries are helpful places to find out about the field and the capital in it. Bourdieu advises us to look for the field boundaries where the effects of the field, and therefore the species of capital effective in that field, cease to have any effect (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 100). Marks and grades, as a form of capital effective in the schooling field can show the limits of the schooling field.

Unlike learning, which Bourdieu would call embodied cultural capital, grades and marks are expressions of institutional cultural capital. As a form of capital, grades and marks allow the holder to produce effects in the schooling field. These effects may be produced in the exchange of other capital both into and from grades and marks.

Grades and marks first appear when they are issued by teachers or the provincial government (diploma examination marks for some Grade 12 courses). A key element of grades and marks is that only those who are intimately connected to and sanctioned by legitimate institutions can issue them. Imagine a teacher who may have left schooling to take up other pursuits and is now tutoring Grade 12 students. This teacher could ensure the students learned all the

knowledge, skills, and attitudes specified in the **Program of Studies** but because the teacher is not operating under the formal authority of an accredited school any grades or marks issued by the teacher carry no weight. Institutions will recognize only the grades or marks issued by the school teachers of these students. A student could elect to stay at home, away from the educational institution, for their education but to get their high school diploma they would have to write the provincial diploma examinations, a return to the institution. Grades and marks are institutionalized cultural capital.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) attempted to show that academic success is not solely a function of natural talents. I will use a part of his argument in the following. Though some students may joke about offering their teacher \$20 for an “85% in Math” there are more likely routes for players to convert economic capital into the institutionalized cultural capital of grades and marks. I’ll illustrate only one of these with this example.

We can find the strongest indications of this conversion in the early grades. Children who come from homes where they have had many opportunities to be excited about reading, through books and stories, are likely to be ready to read books when they enter formal schooling. Children who come from homes where there are no books and no story reading, are less likely to be ready to read books when they enter formal schooling. These latter students are the ones who will be playing a catch-up game in learning to read books. Reading books is a

central goal of elementary schooling. Though students may come to school with pre-literacy skills gained from helping in the family store, recognizing restaurant signs, or traffic symbols, schools tend to focus on the child's involvement with "books". Since teachers give grades and marks to students for their ability to read books, higher grades and marks will likely go to those students who are better book readers. Those parents who can afford to supply their children with reading materials before school, either by purchasing children's books and magazines, or by having the money to be able to get to a lending library, give their children an advantage in learning to read. This advantage, paid for with economic capital, expresses itself in the form of institutionalized cultural capital, good grades and marks.

There are other ways in which players may convert other forms of capital into good grades and marks. Related to example of reading books being available in the home for the pre-school child, are the parents' interests and abilities in schooling, their cultural capital. Children, whose parents show them the importance of learning and of schooling, are more likely to ready for learning in school. These children are more willing to conform to the expectations teachers have for an ideal pupil, and in this conformation more likely to get good grades and marks. Bourdieu believes that the teaching and learning that is done in the early years has a lasting effect on later success at school (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977, p.43). Teachers, operating under the psychologist's label of "halo effect," might

convert social capital, those students who get along well with their peers and the teachers, into better grades and marks. Social capital, in the form of political capital, that ability to influence politicians and then bureaucrats, was exchanged for better grades and marks in the January 1993 Mathematics 30 provincial diploma examination. People, though holders of insufficient individual political capital, lobbied the government in great enough numbers to cause an adjustment upwards in the grading of that examination.

Players can convert marks and grades into other forms of capital. Students can use grades and marks as part of the capital exchange with teachers. Teachers may allow a student getting good grades and marks special privileges such as the opportunity to control blocks of time or the direction of their study, or to choose whom they will sit with. Teachers may place students lacking good grades and marks on a more teacher-directed, or a remedial program. Teachers or parents may not allow them to participate in field trips or special activities. The student directly converts grades and marks into economic capital when they apply for scholarships or grants (though sometimes the players offering the scholarship or grant put restrictions on how the student may further convert the economic capital, i.e., used only for tuition). Students may use good grades and marks in exchanges with other students, i.e., to gain entry into a particular social group, a group that regulates their membership based on academic standing.

Students may also use grades and marks as part of an exchange with parents. Parents may promise a new bicycle or extension of privileges if the child improves their grades and marks. Parents may decide that poor marks should be exchanged for punishment.

Good grades and marks get students high school credits. With 100 credits (from the courses specified by the government) the student is eligible for a high school diploma. The high school diploma is another piece of institutionalized cultural capital that is rising in value as employers begin to demand it as a minimum qualification for the jobs they offer.

Grades and marks also serve as capital in exchanges with post-secondary education institutions in Alberta. Universities use the average of Grade 12 marks in specified subjects (further evidence of the dominated role schools play) to limit the number of students eligible to enroll. Students may exchange good grades and marks for a seat in university programs.

Relations of dominance and domination are expressed in several modes through marks and grades. First, marks and grades have value in the marketplace because they are not equally distributed. Those students that have good marks and grades are able to use them to get access to a wider variety of programs, scholarships and grants, and jobs. Most parents and many students recognize the importance of good marks and so there is usually support for efforts to improve marks. Employment and Immigration Canada, a department of the federal

government, in **Straight Talk About Staying in School** (1991), describes the path to economic success as more education. It seems that good marks in school would get a student good marks on graduation and access to a good job or to a good university (that continues marking and grading) in the right faculty then to a good job. The federal government points out that the people who don't get the extra years of education fall off this track and end up in a job that brings little economic success. Those that are able to accumulate additional cultural capital, in the form of good marks and grades, will likely go on to dominate, economically at least, those who were not able to get those good marks and grades.

In **Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture** (1977) Bourdieu and Passeron argue that those who are in dominant positions today have unconsciously set up structures that will ensure their inheritors assume those dominant positions. The example above, with parents passing their larger share of cultural capital to their children to ensure success in school, is one Bourdieu describes. Bourdieu believes that those people in the dominated positions unconsciously contribute to their domination by others. Marks and grades give us some insight into how this might operate.

As I've shown above marks and grades act to select those who will be able to go on to higher education and, says the federal government, to more economically successful careers. Good marks and grades are the keys to opening doors to future success, that's just common sense

these days. It is just this taking for common sense, taking for granted, that Bourdieu sees as the key to understanding how the dominated contribute to their own domination. Bourdieu asks us to suspend our belief in the given and question what we take for common sense. A structure like marks and grades did not appear overnight, as most “natural” things they have a history. Grades and marks are the concrete report form of educational evaluation. Desjarlais (1986, p. 25) provides a brief history of education evaluation and notes that in the second half of the 19th century “...the use of percentage to describe achievement flowered and became imbedded in evaluation’s tradition.” Of interest to our questioning of marks and grades Desjarlais also points out that “... the idea of percentages [as a means of mark or grade] was so anchored in the habits of society that, in spite of all the proofs of its weaknesses and imperfections, it has lived on until our day as the preferred method [of describing student achievement] of most” (1986, p. 26). Teachers derive marks and grades from educational assessments. These assessments can take many forms but some of the most influential, the provincial diploma examinations, take the form of a test. In a university text used to prepare teachers to evaluate students, Ebel and Frisbie (1986, p. 71) comment on evaluation, marks and grades and their importance to students.

“Reliability is important to students whose grades are often heavily dependent on the scores they make on educational

achievement tests. If they were clearly aware of the importance of test reliability to them, it is likely that they would ask for evidence that the tests used to measure their achievement are not only fair in terms of the purposes of the course, but also are of sufficient technical quality to yield reliable scores.”

Ebel’s and Frisbie’s concerns include the production of the grade or mark. They and other authors indicate that teachers should take great care when they evaluate a student to produce a grade or mark describing that student. As I am attempting to undermine a common sense faith in marks and grades I will provide extensive quotations from these authorities on educational assessment.

“Two major deficiencies of grades, as they are assigned in many educational institutions, are: (1) the lack of clearly defined and generally accepted definitions of what the various grades should mean and (2) the lack of sufficient, relevant, and objective evidence to use as a base for assigning grades.” (Ebel and Frisbie, 1986, p. 274)

“The reliability of scores from paper-and-pencil tests is sometimes not as great as we wish it to be. Reliability of data from a teacher’s observation of students’ procedures and affective behaviour is usually even lower. Yet both are used to determine final marks. Consequently, the reliability of final

marks is often less than desired.” (Ahmann & Glock, 1981, p. 428)

“Tests that impinge on the rights and the chances of individuals are inherently disputable.” (Cronbach, 1988, p.6)

“Anyone defining a measuring procedure implies that the variable is relevant to some purpose and perhaps is by itself sufficient for that purpose. Scrutinizing the fit of an achievement tester’s domain definition to the goals of instruction is necessary in the validity argument.” (Cronbach, 1988, p. 8)

These authors raise questions about the difficult nature of the task given to teachers and schooling, developing fair education assessments and then translating those assessments into a grade or mark. The grade or mark is a type of shorthand, it stands for the person who earned the mark. Using grades or marks in the form of a letter or a percentage the educator is trying to communicate some information they have about the student to interested readers. I once visited a school in a suburban neighbourhood where most of the students’ parents held degrees in engineering or other physical sciences. When the teachers asked parents what form of reporting they preferred for primary students the parents’ overwhelming response was in favour of percentages and accurate to within a single percentage

point. We know people who study assessment are concerned about teachers' ability to provide fair educational assessment. We also know from statistics that there are limits to the accuracy of measurements. These parents show what Paulos (1988) and Dewdney (1993) call "innumeracy." These percentage grades, calculated as a statistical average, by themselves, portray a misleading though numerically accurate in appearance, picture of the student. The provincial department of education acknowledges the limitations of reporting a student's raw score or an average score without additional statistical information. On the student achievement tests, the government reports the confidence interval surrounding the students score (95% chance of including the "true" score). Educational evaluation literature supports this move.

"Because of test unreliability, scores must be interpreted as regions rather than as points. Such regions, often known as 'bands,' are determined by the standard error of measure of the test. (Ahmann & Glock, 1981, p. 248)

From the diploma examinations the province reports only the student's raw score converted to a percentage. This practice continues for two main reasons: (1) the student mark is made available to the parents and parents who would not likely understand confidence intervals and (2) the mark is used by post-secondary institutions, and scholarship and granting agencies whose procedures are built around simple percentage scores. The media is a source of corroboration for

the first reason. The government provided the media with a summary report of student achievement on the diploma examinations. The report included the average mark for each examination accompanied by the standard deviation for each set of scores. None of the newspapers in Calgary, Edmonton, or Lethbridge reported the standard deviation. We can find support for the public's lack of understanding of the inherent inaccuracy in measurement in the literature.

[When discussing psychological tests] "...the idea that measurements have an associated error is not well understood by the general public. People tend to place great faith in exact numbers. This lays the foundation for all sorts of potentially harmful interpretations..." (Kimble, 1978, p. 188)

The media reveals its own lack of understanding on the meaning of educational assessment measures when they focus their reporting on scores that went up or down slightly (Bell, 1993a; Bell, 1993b; Gallant, 1993; Johnson, 1993; Marck, 1993). There is an assumption that the tests remain equivalent and students change in their ability to understand mathematics. Tests may change over time as can the population of students writing the test. The reporting does not explore these other possibilities.

[When] two 'bands' overlap, we can say that there is probably no difference between the two students in terms of this test.”

(Ahmann & Glock, 1981, p. 248)

The government combines their diploma examination percentages with teacher assigned percentages to produce a final course mark. These final Grade 12 marks are combined to produce a further mean average. This is the average used by some universities to determine eligibility for enrollment. The universities do not make use of the statistical tools of confidence intervals. This is the average that becomes the focal point for students returning to school to bring their average closest to the universities' set point average. Even though these averages lack validity as indicators of learning ability, they determine futures, separating other groups whose average meets or exceeds the university's set point from those whose average falls below. Other players determine a student's future on a single percentage. The decision to bar or to admit a student is not made face-to-face. There is distance between those who dominate the university through economic and cultural capital and the student who is denied entry based on a single percentage mark.

The single mark is a distillation of that student, a reduction to a number. Yet students, parents, teachers and post-secondary staff are caught in a structure that says marks are good and great marks are better. The focus of attention is drawn to a mythical point, the grade point average, and away from other means of knowing a student.

This is not to say that teachers have nothing important to say about students. Teachers often know much more about a student than they put into a single percentage or letter grade. It's likely that teachers find it difficult to come up with a single grade because the process of reduction produces a report that leaves so much unsaid. The limited space on many report cards and the limited time for teachers to write extensive reports combine to make simple letter or percentage grade, or checklist, the only "practical" way of reporting what the teacher knows about the student.

What's "practical" is a product of the history of the field and of the players in it. I've suggested that schooling tends to be dominated by those with more economic and cultural capital. I've also shown how those in the field are complicit with their own status as dominated. Students, parents, and teachers put their energy into improving grades and marks, items of institutional capital that most players on the field over-value when their reliability and statistical validity are examined. I've used the word innumeracy when describing this misplaced faith in numbers. Bourdieu identifies the collective personal characteristics that may be applied from situation to situation (not just a 65% average is better than a 62% average but "beating any advertised price by 5% or it's yours free!") and durable (though one of the hoped for spin-offs from this paper is that readers will learn more about measurement and statistics), as habitus.

Teachers produce percentage grades because that's what their audience, parents, other teachers, and employers expect. Most of us have been graded and marked. It's part of our upbringing (part of our schooling) and that's why it seems, for many, such a natural thing. We learn how to calculate percentages in school, we even have calculators that will do them for us. And the numbers these calculations produce are accurate, some to eight decimal places. People who have faith in the number may transport that faith into assessments of people by the number. This is an example of Bourdieu's finding that social and cognitive structures match. But this does not mean we are eternally committed to this way of life. The field, its capital, and its players evolved over time. There are many examples of people, teachers and parents who want to find a fuller way of communicating a child's educational achievement. More extensive parent teacher interviews, portfolios of student production and written reports begin the move away from the single percentage report. These players are attempting to subvert (as I am) people's faith in simple numbers. The closer they come to the institutions that dominate schooling i.e., post secondary and employees, the more resistance they encounter. The relationship the student has to the potential employer or to the post-secondary institution's admissions committee is mediated through the high school diploma and the grade point average. This is likely the reason that you find more extensive reporting and dialogue about a student at the primary grades where more often, though not always,

relationships between student, teacher, and parent are less affected by the dominant players in the field of power.

Suggestions for further study

The intent of the preceding part of this paper was to introduce the reader to Bourdieu's approach to understanding our social world. With the following section I want to suggest possible areas of schooling in Alberta where Bourdieu's approach might be fruitful.

The Media

Education and schooling provide the storyline for many news items sold by the print and electronic media. Major provincial newspapers have reporters specializing in stories about schooling. The **Globe and Mail** has a weekly column written by a former teacher. The **Alberta Report** magazine runs regular articles on schooling. Television producers make news stories and documentaries about schooling. The media made many reports when Statistics Canada reported a figure of 32% in a study of school dropouts. The impression they gave to many readers, viewers, and listeners was that 32% of all students dropped out of school. This resulted in much political activity and the reduction of money (Fennel, 1993). Fennel goes on to say the 32% figure resulted from a rigid and unrealistic definition of 'dropout.'" The definition was available to reporters when the 32% figure was announced, yet it was not until a second Statistics Canada report on school leavers did the definition come into serious question by the media and politicians.

What influence does the media have over the schooling game today? To what degree are policy makers, parents, teachers, and communities swayed by media reporting? In what ways is the symbolic capital of being a syndicated columnist able to be converted into changes in classroom practice?

Teacher Evaluation

Teacher evaluation is mandated by Alberta Education policy. Universities teach courses on teacher evaluation. School administrators evaluate teachers or coordinate teams of peer evaluators. Some teachers are concerned when students are made part of their evaluation. What does the field of teacher evaluation look like in a particular school? What are the positions when we have teachers evaluating teachers? What forms of capital are effective in the teacher evaluation field? What is that field's relation to the field of power?

School Evaluation

Many parents want assurances that their child's school is a "good school". Boards of trustees are under an obligation from Alberta Education to evaluate the performance of their schools. The parliament in Great Britain has directed that all its schools be inspected by 1996. School evaluation or inspection is likely to continue in Alberta over the next few years. These evaluations might be better constructed if the participants were able to "necessitate their conduct." Evaluations will likely result in the awarding of some rating. Like any other commodity, the rating should be open to an analysis in terms of

capital. What converts into a high rating? Who and what influences the conversion rate? Many may say things about a school under evaluation but not all will speak with “authority”. Who is in the position to speak with authority? Why do players consider their speech more legitimate than that of others?

Teacher Hiring Practices

I mentioned in one of the examples above that many principals and superintendents have said they prefer hiring graduates of the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge. How has the value of the institutional capital, a BEd. from the University of Lethbridge, been increased over the same degrees from other universities? What are the relations between first year teachers, their fellow teachers and school administrators?

Reflexivity

One of the most important elements of Bourdieu’s use of field, capital, and habitus is the place of the researcher. Bourdieu believes that researchers often forget that they are also: caught up in a game, influenced by some field’s relations, holders of some capital, and the embodiment of habitus. Bourdieu advocates objectivizing, “not only the individual who does the research in her biographical idiosyncrasy but the position she occupies in academic space and the biases she takes by virtue of being ‘off-side’ or ‘out of the game’” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, pp. 71-72). In the case of this project I am not a side line player or out of the game. This project is the coming together of

several lines of force. Bourdieu asks us to trace the reasons for its writing not so much in my biography, but in the positions I've occupied, the forces influencing both those positions and particular aspects of habitus.

This first relation supporting the appearance of this project is one between the position of graduate student and the university as institution. This project is required in partial fulfillment of the qualifications for a Master of Education degree. The institution describes the requirements of the project in a guide book and authorizes holders of appropriate cultural capital to supervise the project. The university itself has been accredited by those in the field of power with the authority to institutionalize cultural capital to ensure the cultural capital is carried into future generations and to certify or consecrate those who have accumulated a defined quality and amount of cultural capital.

The Master's degree itself has value within the field of schooling and since I occupy a position in that field obtaining a Master's degree increases my capital holdings. On the basis of a decision four years ago by some of the dominant players in the field of schooling, only people with a Master's degree can be hired to employment positions similar to mine.

Another relation supporting this project exists between my position as a provincial education bureaucrat and those people occupying administrative and teaching positions in school systems.

Part of the task those in dominant positions in the bureaucracy assigned me is to advise and assist those people implementing government policy in schools. I often find school administrators and teachers who severely limit the range of their teaching practice sometimes to the detriment of their students. Many believe, because of misinformation or sometimes deliberate misdirection by others, that the government policy is the reason for their narrow practice. Bourdieu's intent for sociology "necessitate conducts, to tear them away from arbitrariness by reconstituting the universe of constraints which determines them, without justifying them" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 50) applies to the task I've been given. I chose to write about Bourdieu because of this liberating message in his writing.

The relation I have with my children and the relations I've had with my former students also directed by selection of Bourdieu. The position of responsibility brings forward a more practical reason for the project, to continue to understand my position of responsibility.

Limitations

Schooling as gaming, using the concepts Bourdieu provides is but one way of understanding schooling. This approach organizes our thinking about schools and perhaps opens opportunities for new and fruitful lines of questions. We learn the game, its positions, and something about its players but it does not tell us much about the right or wrong of the game. "...sociology can tell us under what conditions moral agency is possible and how it can be institutionally

enforced, not what its course ought to be.” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.50). As educators we must not allow this approach to confuse our moral responsibility. Followers of Bourdieu’s approach will not be on a quick and simple path. This research demands more than a passing familiarity with the tools and techniques of quantitative methods. The researcher must understand which statistical tool is appropriate to the problem at hand. The researcher must also be experienced in understanding how to tease the concepts under investigation from the tangled data given by lived experience. The researcher must be directly involved in all stages of the research to understand why and how decisions are made to select this data but reject that. This demand on time and talent means that this approach is financially expensive and may not return results in the time period desired. For reasons of limited economic capital and cultural capital such research is not as easily sponsored. The reflexive nature of the approach brings to light the forces promoting this or that as a potential research project. Those in a position to sponsor such research may not wish to have these forces uncovered, especially if the sponsors are in a dominant position within the field.

To avoid becoming the object of the problems that you take as your object, you must retrace the history of the emergence of these problems, of their progressive constitution, i.e., of the collective work, oftentimes accomplished through competition and struggle, that proved necessary to make such and such issues

to be known and recognized ... as legitimate problems, problems that are avowable, publishable, public, official. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 238)

Bourdieu believes that this approach, because it uses science at its core, is valid. He acknowledges that researchers who appeal to science as a guarantor of their findings may not have carefully examined the assumptions and givens that guide their practice. Though Bourdieu makes reflection on practice a significant part of his approach this is no guarantee he will be able to uncover all of his own assumptions. Given that we have inherited the world we live in it may only be wishful thinking that we can be certain about everything we do. There will always be an element of uncertainty, an element at play, in any attempt to understand who we are and where we are going.

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