Bourdieu and doing policy sociology in education

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Introduction

In this chapter we draw on the social theories of practice and fields of Pierre Bourdieu (1990a; 1993), which were major contributions of his writing. However, and given Bourdieu's approach to research, we discuss these theories in relation to the methodology and research approach adopted in his work. While Bourdieu drew on a variety of traditions of intellectual thought to inform his theories, they were also open to engagement and change in relation to different social phenomena. This is the reflexive theory/empirical data relationship we will touch on later in the chapter, which was generative in his work and also for those in education research.

Our overarching claim is that Bourdieu's work provides a specific form and application of the sociological imagination, which carries within it a generative way of worldmaking (Goodman, 1978). This is a world populated and made meaningful through concepts like agents and habitus, practices and fields, but also capitals, logics and strategies. For our work, one of the key strengths has been Bourdieu’s conceptual and theoretical flexibility — he rejects ‘theoreticism’, where formal theories are developed in absence of empirical encounters. In doing so, Bourdieu developed a wide range of resources for research, as well as a language base for representing problems in education policy. He also rejects an atheoretical empiricism, in which the categories and language of everyday life are taken for granted and accepted without interrogation and then used as the basis for statistical, descriptive, explanatory or representational analyses.

This engagement with Bourdieuian theory and methodology aims to explore its utility for education policy analysis and policy sociology in education. The initial premise of this account is that the adaptation of Bourdieuian theory and concepts to education policy, though not impossible, does raise some initial problems that require resolution. As will be discussed later, much of this can be
attributed to the historical unfolding of Bourdieu’s research and theoretical developments, and the incompleteness of his overarching theory of social fields (Bourdieu, 1993). Though challenging, these problems are not insurmountable and have proven quite productive for some researchers. Indeed, Bourdieu has been the source of inspiration for a variety of researchers in education, of which many have drawn directly on aspects of his work to understand and research problems either explicitly or implicitly related to education policy (Albright and Luke, 2008; Kenway and Koh, 2013; Ladwig, 2014; Reay and Ball, 1997; Thomson, 2005).

In outlining this account of Bourdieu’s theory, we start with two premises. The first premise is that Bourdieu’s concepts and theories are adaptable as a methodological base for research on education policy and useful to describe and understand the connections between the field of education policy and other education fields and sub-fields, such as schooling, university, VET, early childhood and so on. This implies that Bourdieu’s concepts and theories can be extended and applied to new objects of research, with the caution that further refinement and additional theorisation may be required to develop coherent accounts of practices in each field or sub-field, which may equally loop back and cast light on Bourdieu’s own theories and concepts. The second premise is that Bourdieu concepts are useful to understand broad processes of social change, which apply also to fields and sub-fields, particularly those related to mediatisation, globalisation and continuous education policy change.

This second premise is in opposition with some prominent critiques of Bourdieu’s theory (e.g. Connell, 1983: 151), but we would point to our own and other researchers’ work drawing on Bourdieu to explain broad processes of change like globalisation and mediatisation (Lingard and Rawolle, 2004, 2011). Here we agree with Wacquant’s (2014: 5) critique of this criticism that Bourdieu is only about social reproduction rather than change and emergence, when he makes the important point that habitus never necessarily results in a specific practice, rather, it takes the conjunction of disposition and position, subjective capacity and objective possibility, habitus and social space (or field) to produce a given conduct or expression. And this meeting between skilled agent and pregnant world spawns the gamut from felicitous to strained, smooth to rough, fertile to futile.

This dis- or con- junction between disposition and position, between habitus and field, is a source of either change or reproduction. In order to elaborate on this account, we will draw primarily on and emphasise developments in Bourdieu’s own writing, in particular his theoretical, conceptual and methodological approaches. As an illustration of the felicity of Bourdieu’s work, we also provide brief accounts of the use of Bourdieu’s concepts by researchers in education that relate to education policy.

Although Bourdieu never directly offered an approach to education policy analysis in relation to schools or universities (van Zanten, 2005), he did offer one
example and approach to policy analysis drawn from his work. In an account of the development and effects of a housing policy in France, described in *The social structures of the economy* (Bourdieu, 2005), Bourdieu provided something of an approach to policy analysis in respect of housing. This work, linked to research on the preconditions, introduction and effect of the French housing policy of 1977 during a time of restructuring of housing policies and markets in France, was revisited in a latter account of the role of the state and the abdication of the neo-liberal, managerialist state from its obligations, in *The weight of the world* (Bourdieu et al., 1999). Bourdieu’s account of housing policies in France involved a close analysis of state decision-making in the creation of market conditions and demand for housing (Bourdieu, 2005: 89–122).

It is thus our contention that Bourdieu’s theoretical ensemble, his ‘thinking tools’, including the concepts of habitus, capitals, field and practice, which sit in synergistic relationship to each other, can assist research on education policy, especially important is their relationality. Bourdieu’s work on language and symbolic power, including the classificatory capacities of the state, policy and schools, is also useful for policy analysis. As Swartz (2013: 39) notes, ‘Symbolic power creates a form of violence that finds an expression in everyday classifications, labels, meanings, and categorisations that subtly implement a social as well as symbolic logic of inclusion and exclusion’. Policy can be seen to function in this way and is linked to Bourdieu’s extension of Weber, who saw the state having the capacity and monopoly for expressions of legitimate violence (e.g. through the work of armies, the police, etc.), which Bourdieu extended to include the legitimate right to symbolic violence. Bourdieu’s work on language also draws our attention to the significance of the language of policy texts and their role in symbolic violence, especially when connected to the state’s claim for the universal application of policy.

Our use of Bourdieu in policy sociology of education moves beyond a straightforward application of his thinking tools to understanding the policy cycle and the inevitable refractions in policy implementation or enactment across competing logics of practice. In Bourdieu’s (1998: 57) terms, the state holds a monopoly on the constitution and application of the ‘universal’, while we know classroom practices are contingent and specific. Herein resides the basis of a Bourdieuian approach to understanding implementation infidelities: policy production and enactment sit within different fields with different logics of practice. Here we might see policy in these terms as simplifying and seeking to be applied universally across a schooling system to all schools. In contrast, the logics of practice of schools and classrooms, including pedagogies are more complex and much more contingent and specific – each school has its ‘thisness’ (Thomson, 2002), as does each classroom. Herein we see in Bourdieu’s terms an argument about gaps between policy texts and policy enactment. We note the usefulness of Bourdieu’s thinking tools – his concepts and theories – in policy sociology in education and also some necessary additions derived from his approach. The fruitfulness of Bourdieu’s thinking tools, however, is intricately linked with his methodology.
Bourdieu's methodology

Bourdieu's concepts of rejecting epistemological innocence, being reflexive, and 'objectivating' one's self as researcher demand that the policy sociology researcher deal with their 'positionality' within the field of policy sociology and within putative national education policy fields (Hardy, 2009). Positionality here refers to the researcher's position in relation to the object of study and in relation to the relevant or cognate academic field. In Bourdieu's terms, we might define researcher positionality as position within various fields, encompassing the field of the object of research and the academic field/s in which the research is positioned. Rizvi and Lingard (2010: 47–48) suggest that such positionality demands reflexivity and consideration of the researcher's position in relation to the field and object of research, actual location in respect of analysis, theoretical/methodological stance, spatial location, temporal location and so on. In a sense, this is the reflexive application of Bourdieu's concept of 'socioanalysis' to the positionality of the policy sociology researcher. Socioanalysis for Bourdieu is a way of understanding how individuals are social products and that people's dispositions and engagements with practices relates to their social history, which is embodied in their habitus. Socioanalysis involves providing a context for examining the relationships between a researcher's own arguments about social objects and their social history; this context involves a recount of the significant social events and social trajectory through different fields that are relevant to the research. In this way, socioanalysis represents a rethinking of a researcher's declaration of interest, and of the impossibility of disinterested research. Bourdieu's argument here is that acknowledgement of this produces better social science research.

In field terms, we also see policy developed within an international organisation such as the OECD and its implementation within nations meaning there are often slippages between text and enactment, given the competing logics of practice of the field of policy text production and policy practice and particularly when spread spatially across the globe. In his later work, Bourdieu (2003) also noted that the amount of national capital possessed by a given nation mediated to varying extents global impacts. Think here of the contrast between World Bank policy impact on developing nations and OECD impact say on the USA.

An education policy field

The first and most direct account treating education policy as a field was outlined by James Ladwig (Ladwig, 1994). The key innovation that Ladwig (1994) provided was an account of education policy as a field through an examination of its emergence in the USA during the 1990s. We would note that Ladwig equated the policy field in the USA with federal policy making in education, a shortcoming in our view, given the weakness of the federal presence in education policy at the time. There were two ways in which Ladwig's argument was important for education
policy sociology. The first is that it took a coherent and broad scale account of Bourdieu’s work and applied it systematically. From this, a number of methodological applications of the field concept can be discerned. Secondly, Ladwig’s use of the term policy field and in particular of the idea of policy effects highlighted the limitations of a Bourdieuan account of policy, if not supplemented with additional concepts. In particular, Ladwig argued that policy effects should be used to designate effects of policy and policy practice on policy makers within the field of education policy. That is, that the development and maturation of an education policy field meant that its effects did not travel beyond the field and that debates were largely academic and located within a field of political discourse, rather than classroom practice. Ladwig’s intent here in using Bourdieu was to highlight this disconnect and to suggest that educators should look elsewhere beyond policy to make changes in classrooms.

However this usage of policy effects seems counter intuitive, particularly in education policy sociology and policy studies more broadly. We would also suggest that in the 20 years since Ladwig wrote his paper that the (federal) education policy field in the US now has more effects in states and schools: think here of Bush’s *No child left behind* and associated accountability regime and Obama’s *Race to the top*, both of which have had real impact on schools, teacher practices and classrooms, particularly through testing and more recently the Common Core State Standards Initiative for Mathematics and English Language Arts. In current times we also see the emergence of a global education policy field above the nation with effects within the nation. Think here, for example, of Obama’s concern at Shanghai ‘coming top’ in the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Sellar and Lingard, 2013).

In Bourdieu’s work then, ‘fields’ replace ‘institutions’ and the social world is seen as consisting of multiple social fields, overlain by a field of power and field of gender relations. It is also within the concept of field that Bourdieu’s emphasis on relationality comes to the fore. With this argument, Bourdieu appears to be working across and together Weber, Durkheim and Marx by suggesting the relative autonomy of each field (stretched on a continuum from highly autonomous to heteronomous) with its own logics of practice, so as to reject a deterministic account, whereby in the last instance all is determined by the economic field, as with classical Marxism. Rather, Bourdieu postulates an overarching field of power on which struggles for the principles for determining the capitals most highly valued within societies are defined, that is, these are not necessarily determined as economic capital or cultural capital or social capital, but are a contingent mixture at particular points in time. A field of gender also cuts across other fields. We also need to recognise that in Bourdieu’s work all capitals have the potential for ‘tran-substantiation’ into economic capital. Significant in Bourdieu’s work as well is the acceptance that all relations are affected by and involve power, while this reality is most often misrecognised in everyday life. Herein for Bourdieu lie naturalisation and misrecognition.
In Bourdieu's work:

- instead of policy, he would talk of the policy field;
- instead of politics, 'the field of politics';
- instead of the media, 'the journalistic field'; overarched by fields of power and gender.

His following observation on the circulation of policy texts also provides insights into both the policy field and the policy cycle (Ball, 1994), and also the gaps in policy enactment:

The fact that texts circulate without their context, that - to use my terms - they don't bring with them the field of production of which they are a product, and the fact that recipients, who are themselves in a different field of production, re-interpret the texts in accordance with the structure of the field of reception, are facts that generate some formidable misunderstandings and that can have good or bad consequences.

(Bourdieu, 1999: 221)

This observation about the re-interpretations and re-contextualisations involved in policy enactment has particular pertinence to the translation involved in national enactment of global education policy texts (e.g. the OECD's PISA). Some other points to note about conceptualising a policy field include:

- competing logics of practice across the policy cycle (Cf. Ladwig, 1994) to understand the policy/implementation or enactment 'gap';
- logics of practice of the 'bureaucratic field: claims to the universal, gives the state the legitimate right to exercise symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1998);
- left hand (high spending, social state) and right hand (treasury and finance, fiscal austerity) of the state sitting in tension; 'distinctions' within the field of schooling; the 'magisterial discourse' of some policy texts - unidirectional and often authoritative in character and 'performative usage' of globalisation in policy talk, where globalisation is taken as neo-liberal globalisation, bracketing out more pertinent social science definitions (Bourdieu, 2003).

In concluding this section on the notion of a policy field, we would note that researching a field involves creating a rupture with everyday language by representing key problems in consistent and considered ways, identifying practices attached to the field, the logics of practice, locating key positions in the field (drawing on descriptive and statistical forms of analysis), identifying dominant and dominated agents within the field and measuring different forms of capital possessed by agents (cultural, social, symbolic), which are the focus of struggles within the field.

We should also say something, albeit briefly here, about the place of the state in Bourdieu's theorising. We have noted that Bourdieu would speak of the field of
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The state is the culmination of a process of concentration of different species of capital: capital of physical force or instruments of coercion (army, police), economic capital, cultural or (better) informational capital, and symbolic capital.

He saw the state as holding a monopoly over symbolic power and violence, effected through policy and the classificatory powers of the state with schools seen to be central here. Herein lies the 'invisibility' of educational policy for Bourdieu (van Zanten, 2005). Bourdieu saw the state as holding a form of 'statist capital' that allows it to exercise power over other kinds of fields that constitute the society. As Swartz (2013: 131) observes, 'Statist capital represents an emergent metacapital, a regulatory power over the field of power and the broader society. It is state authority'. In his later political writing, it is the abdication of some of this authority associated with neo-liberalism that Bourdieu critiqued. We can see this abdication in new forms of policy governance and networking in education such as contractualism (Rawolle, 2013) and in the marketisation and privatisation agendas (Ball and Junemann, 2012).

Policy implementation/enactment and competing logics of practice

In considering the focus of policy sociology as the field of education policy or the policy field, we have alluded to the way in which this Bourdieuan approach allows another take on policy/implementation 'gaps', 'deficits', 'differences'. In Ball's (1994) 'policy cycle' approach this is the gap between the context of policy text production (the text itself) and the context of policy practice or implementation. Ball, of course, uses the context of policy practice rather than implementation to align with his rejection of a straightforward linear policy/implementation relationship. Bourdieu's approach – thinking of a policy field – works with a similar rejection of straightforward linear relationship as well. Some more recent education policy work talks of policy enactment, which gets closer to a Bourdieuan account (Ball and Junemann, 2012). We see here the gap between the simplifying tendencies of the universal claims of state policy as opposed to the complexities and messiness of school and classroom practices.

To reiterate, Bourdieu would see the context of policy text production occurring within the policy field with its specific logics of practice; itself located within the bureaucratic state field. Idiosyncratic to the bureaucratic state field, according to Bourdieu (1998), is its claim to the universal. Thus policy produced within this field claims universal undifferentiated application across all sites of policy practice or implementation. Yet we know the school field, particularly classrooms, have different logics of practice and are also located within other fields. The logic of the classroom is one of contingency and specificity, so that we have another fruitful explanation.
of implementation issues in terms of disjuncture between competing logics of practice, including competing and disjunctive temporalities. Here we also see another explanation for policy/practice de-coupling. Contemporary top-down, test-based accountability is an attempt to more tightly couple policy and practice across different fields and competing logics of practice, and in the process often challenging the broader goals of schooling in a mode of goal displacement or means/ends decoupling.

Policy habitus

We will first deal with the concept of habitus generally, which has its roots in philosophy from Aristotle. For Bourdieu, habitus is used to theorise practice without identifying either rational mental states as the sole origin of action, and without appealing to the mind’s ability to generate and act on representations of actions (Burkitt, 2002). Habitus provides the connection between agents and practices through 'systems of dispositions', which are bodily incorporations of social history and dispositions associated with previous practices, which are transposable to different contexts. Like practice, habitus is an open concept that, in its most general applications, indicates the socially developed capacity to act appropriately.

Dispositional accounts of practice do not of themselves explain the expression of that predisposition in the actual production of a practice. For example, holding critical or sceptical dispositions towards education policy does not, on its own, explain why agents (e.g. policy makers or teachers) will selectively oppose some policies, while engaging others. Given that the relationship between habitus and practice is socio-genetic, it could be that resolutions offered in genetic theory fit this problem. To explain: genes provide a predisposition to the expression of different characteristics in living things, such as particular genes associated with different cancers. Yet the expression of these genes does not always follow in people who have these genes. Rather, it is in the interaction between genes and environment that the predisposition may be expressed. The environment provides the stimulus for the expression of predispositions, with the concept of field providing the stimulus in Bourdieu’s theory. Wacquant (2011, 2014) has written similarly about the contingent relationships between dispositions of agents (habitus) and position in ever volatile and pregnant fields. Here we see habitus as a dispositional theory of action or practice (Wacquant, 2011). There is, however, something of an ontological complicity between habitus and field, especially when agents have a ‘feel for the game’.

In his use of habitus Bourdieu refers to the overall ‘system of dispositions’ that are both attached to a person and some of which are collectively shared by others who have similar trajectories through fields. But Bourdieu also developed ways of talking about stages of development of a habitus, distinguishing between primary and secondary habitus, the former the product of child rearing in the home, the latter the product of more structured pedagogies of education. With the latter, we get a sense of the potential malleability of habitus (Wacquant, 2011: 86). But
Bourdieu also uses habitus to talk about divisions of habitus, such as scientific habitus and journalistic habitus. This second use refers to specific sets of dispositions that are developed and related to practice within a specific social field. Hence, as with other applications of Bourdieu, we could talk about a 'policy habitus', a concept which we have discussed elsewhere (Rawolle and Lingard, 2008), and initially proposed by Stensli (2006).

The concept of policy habitus raises interesting questions about how one researches habitus. Some current work (Lingard, Sellar and Baroutis, forthcoming) is considering this in respect of the emergent global education policy field and how a particular policy habitus appears to be significant in the emergence of such a field with similar dispositions expressed by policy makers within international organisations such as the OECD and national policy leaders. Such an approach to understanding the effects of globalisation in education policy, works with Bourdieu's (1990b: 122) depiction of his theoretical framing as being both 'constructivist structuralism' and 'structuralist constructivism', giving emphasis to both structures and agents, helping us see the actual processes of globalisation of education policy. International and national policy makers both have a similar 'feel for the game', operating within the same epistemic community, which sees and constitutes the globe as a commensurative space of measurement. Against Dianne Reay's (2004) argument that habitus has been a (too) heavily used concept in educational research, we would argue that this is not the case in policy sociology and indeed call for more research into 'policy habitus'. There is some useful recent work in terms of thinking about the policy habitus of senior policy makers in respect of the emergent global education policy field and its effects into national education policy fields (see above). We might think of globalisation actually being the capacity to imagine the globe as a commensurative space of measurement, implying that a crucial part of a global education policy habitus might be the disposition to imagine practice and possibilities in this space and to do the required commensurative work. This is a capacity today of both national policy makers and those in international organisations. We would argue that the constitution of the global education policy field results at one level from this alignment between the habitus of policy makers in international organisations and those of national policy makers.

Globalisation and an emergent global education policy field

We developed the concept of a global education policy field from Bourdieu (2003) and his concept of a global economic field (Lingard, Rawolle and Taylor, 2005; Rawolle and Lingard, 2008), as well as his inchoate work on 'national capital', and used research conducted by one of us with others on the OECD (Henry et al., 2001; Sellar and Lingard, 2013) as an empirical basis. This research included the OECD's Indicators Project and PISA (Henry et al., 2001) and related work on policy as numbers (Grek et al., 2009; Ozga and Lingard, 2007). We have drawn on
this research to empirically confirm the salience conceptually of a 'global education policy field' and in terms of policy effects.

While Bourdieu's concept of social fields had a primarily national focus, there is no logical reason why the concept could not be applied to social structures beyond the nation state. Indeed, the concept of field is more a social and spatial one than a geographical one. As noted above, Bourdieu was aware of the shortcomings of 'methodological nationalism', which unthinkingly equates space and social categories, processes and effects with national society. Processes associated with globalisation carry methodological implications for research, for which Bourdieu's theorising is useful. First and foremost, Bourdieu's concept of social field is a physical metaphor that can be applied to global relations. Indeed, in the empirical research that underpins our discussion, such methodological and conceptual developments are required in order to situate and understand how global comparisons between nations and the emergence of a commensurative global space of educational measurement have come to have such influence over national education policy fields.

Drawing on the work of historians of the development of national statistical systems (Desroiseres, 1998; Hacking, 1990; Porter, 1995; Rose, 1999) and on sociological work on policy as numbers (Lingard, 2011; Rose, 1999), we have argued that the creation of national comparative data on school performance, as with the OECD's PISA and the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement's (IEA) Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), has helped constitute an emergent global education policy field, just as the emergence of national statistical systems constituted the nation as a commensurative space of measurement, helping to constitute the nation. This is associated with the 'governance turn' and comparison as a central mode of governance (Novoa and Yariv-Mashal, 2003). We have argued that comparative education policy analysis now must move beyond just nation-to-nation comparisons to take account of this emergent global field. The concept of 'reference societies' important in comparative education also needs to be rethought in this context (Lingard and Rawolle, 2011; Sellar and Lingard, 2013). Furthermore, the concept of cross-field effects can now be developed to consider global/national relations in policy development, and also global/provincial relations (Lingard and Rawolle, 2004) as globalisation reconstitutes global/national and global/local relations (Sassen, 2007). Here, as already suggested, we could also think of the policy habitus of both policy makers in national policy making positions and those within international organisations and their roles in the emergent global policy field and travelling globalised education policy discourses. However, we would stress the need for empirical research in relation to these matters.

Conclusion

We have argued that Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' (habitus, capitals, fields, practice), his argument concerning the necessity of the imbrications of the theoretical and
the empirical and support for a researcher disposition of reflexivity, offer both a theory and a methodology for conducting policy sociology in education. Some such research and theorising have been done and referenced throughout, but we stress the necessity of the empirical – the pressing need for more empirical research – to develop the usefulness of Bourdieu's sociology for policy sociology in education and for understanding rapid developments in the face of neo-liberal globalisation of education policy today as the spaces and places of education policy continue to change.

References


