

This article was downloaded by: [Universiteit van Amsterdam]

On: 9 March 2010

Access details: Access Details: [subscription number 907217973]

Publisher Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



British Journal of Sociology of Education

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713409002>

Cultural capital: strengths, weaknesses and two advancements

Herman G. van de Werfhorst ^a

^a University of Amsterdam, 1012 DK Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Online publication date: 23 February 2010

To cite this Article van de Werfhorst, Herman G.(2010) 'Cultural capital: strengths, weaknesses and two advancements', British Journal of Sociology of Education, 31: 2, 157 – 169

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/01425690903539065

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01425690903539065>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.informaworld.com/terms-and-conditions-of-access.pdf>

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Cultural capital: strengths, weaknesses and two advancements

Herman G. van de Werfhorst*

University of Amsterdam, Oudezijds Achterburgwal 185, 1012 DK Amsterdam, the Netherlands

(Received 17 July 2009; final version received 15 October 2009)

In this paper I discuss two weaknesses in Bourdieu's work on cultural capital, both of which are related to his integration of the multidimensional nature of social space in different domains of life: social mobility, lifestyle differentiation, and political orientation. First, there is an anomaly between the work on social mobility and on lifestyles. Multiple dimensions of social origin (cultural and economic capital) are related to uni-dimensional outcomes (e.g. schooling levels), whereas it would be more appropriate to study multidimensional schooling outcomes too. Secondly, although Bourdieu sees a close resemblance in the type of resources affecting lifestyle preferences and political orientations, I argue that these outcomes are affected by two different types of resources: cultural and communicative resources. Proposals for progress, including a review of the empirical results supporting these, are given.

Keywords: cultural capital; field of study; politics; education; social mobility

Introduction

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has had a tremendous impact on research on educational inequality in Europe and the United States. His most influential work on this topic with Jean-Claude Passeron forwarded the claim that social reproduction is realized through cultural reproduction in the schooling system (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). Children of advantaged backgrounds do well in the schooling system because the culture in schools resembles the culture in their homes. Children who lack this cultural capital from the home will find it much more difficult to adapt to the schooling culture, will perform worse, will be rewarded less by teachers, and will select themselves out of the schooling system.

Quantitative empirical research on the influence of cultural capital on children's schooling attainment has aimed to operationalize parents' familiarity with the dominant culture in society by their involvement in cultural products such as theatres, art museums, and books (De Graaf 1986; Dumais 2002; Sullivan 2001; Crook 1997; for an overview, see Sullivan 2002). Based on Bourdieu's (1984) study of lifestyles, cultural participation of parents and children (Aschaffenburg and Maas 1997; DiMaggio 1982) is thought to be indicative of their attachment to the dominant culture, which in its turn resembles the culture that is assumed in the schooling system. Others have argued that parental involvement in culture is not primarily indicating cultural status, but rather indicates parents' involvement in cognitive

*Email: h.g.vandewerfhorst@uva.nl

performance. Because parental reading behaviour is a better predictor of children's schooling outcomes than their outdoor participation, parents' cultural consumption is said to reflect the degree to which children are introduced to written texts, which affects cognitive rather than cultural qualities (De Graaf et al. 2000; Sullivan 2001; Barone 2006). In any case, operationalizations of cultural capital have almost exclusively focused on the 'objectified state' of cultural capital. This is the case at least in what has been called the 'domesticated' version of cultural reproduction theory, which uses clear-cut research designs to test hypotheses derived from Bourdieu's work (Goldthorpe 2007). This domesticated version of Bourdieu's theory has not been very successful in operationalizing the 'institutionalized state' and the 'embodied state' of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986). The institutionalized state is manifested in things such as formal diplomas, but if cultural capital is equated with parents' schooling levels, then tests of cultural reproduction theory against other theories that explain social origin effects are impossible. The embodied state is perhaps most crucial in Bourdieu's work, but it is difficult, if not impossible, to operationalize a person's habitus (Sullivan 2002). Some 'domesticated' Bourdieuians have operationalized habitus by looking at schooling ambitions (Dumais 2002). However, schooling ambitions have elsewhere been used to implement empirical designs to test relative risk aversion theory (Need and De Jong 2000), an important alternative theory that explains educational inequality from the basic assumption that people wish to avoid downward mobility, and that the attractiveness of educational options depends on their costs and benefits (Breen and Goldthorpe 1997).

Cultural reproduction theory has recently come under attack (Goldthorpe 1996, 2007). According to Goldthorpe, cultural and norm-based theories – among which is cultural reproduction theory – are not compatible with known facts on trends in educational inequality. See Figure 1 for a graphical representation of Goldthorpe's critique. One central element of cultural theories of educational inequality is that children of lower social origins develop a culture that is incompatible with the schooling culture. This is central in Bourdieu's work as well as in related studies such as by Paul Willis

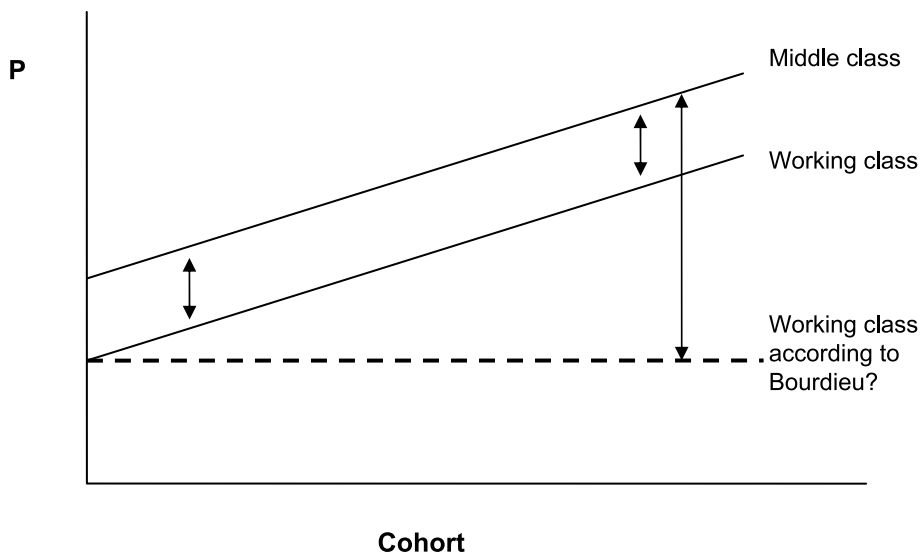


Figure 1. Two scenarios for trends in educational participation (P).

(1977). However, what we observe in many western societies is a massive educational expansion, both among the middle classes and the working classes (see both solid lines). It is not the case that the working classes have refrained from educational participation as one would expect on the basis of an anti-school culture (see dashed line in Figure 1). Although it is as yet unsettled whether expansion either has come together with a decrease in educational inequality or with stable inequalities (for example, Shavit and Blossfeld 1993; Breen et al. 2009), there is no research that shows an *increasing* inequality which one would expect on the basis of a strict interpretation of cultural or norm-based theories.

Although Goldthorpe may be applying a correct reading of Bourdieu's original texts, there is an unsatisfying determinism in his interpretation of fitness for school cultures for two reasons. First of all, it is likely that, when education expands, more working-class children will adapt to the schooling culture. Cultural capital is something that can be *achieved*, although it may be more *probable* that it is achieved if people are endowed with parental cultural capital. Second, the schooling system may have changed with educational expansion, where the school culture itself becomes less exclusionary and more inclusive of the school orientations of working-class families.

So, for me, there is little reason to completely abandon the concept of cultural capital. The resources that people are endowed with come in multiple dimensions, and although Goldthorpe (2007) remarks that this insight cannot be attributed to Bourdieu but to earlier scholars, it is certainly to the credit of Bourdieu that he has offered an *integral* view on the multidimensionality of resources in three domains of life: social stratification, lifestyles and politics. However, what I shall argue in this article is that there are two weaknesses in this integration of domains where multidimensional stratification occurs. These relate to the unfortunate focus on uni-dimensional schooling outcomes where social origin is multidimensional, and on the unfortunate mixture of cultural and political outcomes that Bourdieu sees amalgamated in the cultural elite. With regard to both weaknesses I propose advancements that relate to theory, analysis and empirical research. In this endeavour, I build upon the strength of Bourdieu's approach by applying a multidimensional social space to different domains of life.

Multiple dimensions of aspirations

In Bourdieu's work on cultural reproduction, cultural capital ultimately functions to reproduce social advantage. Through cultural reproduction, elites have become able to transmit their advantage to their children by means of monopolizing the educational system. Bourdieu's work has led to numerous studies that have investigated the impact of parental cultural resources on educational and occupational attainment.

However, these studies have predominantly looked at life outcomes in a uni-dimensional way: the attainment of higher levels of schooling, or the attainment of higher-level occupations. Basically what is done is to relate multiple dimensions of resources of the family of origin to unidimensional outcomes of the children. This is not only true for empirical researchers who derived hypotheses from Bourdieu's work, but for Bourdieu himself too. In his own words:

the transmission of cultural capital is no doubt the best hidden form of hereditary transmission of capital, and it therefore receives disproportionately greater weight in the

system of reproduction strategies, as the direct, visible forms of transmission tend to be more strongly censored and controlled. (Bourdieu 1986, 246)

In other words, once direct forms of transmission of (economic) capital became less easy, elites had to find other ways to transmit their advantage, which is achieved by means of cultural resources reproduced through the educational system. It could be added that the increasing relevance of education was not only driven by normative pressures against direct transmissions of advantage, but also by increasing demand for the kinds of skills closely related to cultural resources, such as social and language skills. It is unclear whether Bourdieu would accept such a functionalist stance. On the one hand he would object against the truly functional character of schooling, given the arbitrariness of what cultural capital actually comprises (Lamont and Lareau 1988). On the other hand, it has been argued that Bourdieu's cultural capital is a productive capacity, which is not the case for other theories of social closure that refute any functional importance of schooling (Collins 1979).

This uni-dimensional nature of the outcomes that children reach is hard to reconcile with the claim in Bourdieu's other work (in particular, in *Distinction*; Bourdieu 1984) that two different hierarchies exist in the social space; a dimension of economic capital and one of cultural capital. If not only the amount of resources but also the type of resources is important in mobility strategies of families, it is unlikely that the type of resources only affects the amount of resources of children. Rather, it is more likely that children's ambitions will be located on different dimensions of capital, depending on the composition of resources of parents. So, in order to better understand the importance of parents' resources for children's outcomes, it is relevant to examine the outcomes of children in multiple ways. In schooling, this should be done by looking at the subjects children choose, or the field of study they enrol in (Davies and Guppy 1997; Hansen 1996, 1997; Van de Werfhorst 2001, 2002a; Van de Werfhorst, De Graaf, and Kraaykamp 2001; Van de Werfhorst, Kraaykamp, and De Graaf 2000; Van de Werfhorst, Sullivan, and Cheung 2003). With regard to occupational attainment, this should be done by examining the type of occupation that people choose (De Graaf and Kalmijn 2001; Weeden and Grusky 2005; Van de Werfhorst and Kraaykamp 2001). As closure patterns often occur at the occupational rather than social class level, investigating the influence of cultural capital on access to occupations could help us to pull forth new class theories (Weeden and Grusky 2005).

Figure 2 depicts a simplified version of Bourdieu's social space; on the vertical axis the amount of resources, and on the horizontal axis the composition of resources. As can be seen, at the bottom of the graph, little differentiation exists between types of resources. Few resources are available, irrespective of type. At the top of the graph, more differentiation occurs; with in the top-left corner those people whose capital is dominated by the cultural type (e.g. journalists, teachers, artists), and on the top-right corner those people whose capital is dominated by the economic type (e.g. business managers). If we compare this figure with the dominant structure of educational systems, it is evident that there is a close resemblance. At the lower levels of the educational system, people obtain lower-level skills, mostly undifferentiated among types of skills. At the higher levels of education, people choose a particular field of study, where a particular set of skills is acquired. Some of such skills are more cultural in nature, and others more economic. In the decision of which field of study to choose, it is likely that children are influenced by their parents' amount and composition of resources. Thus, children of journalists may choose differently than children from

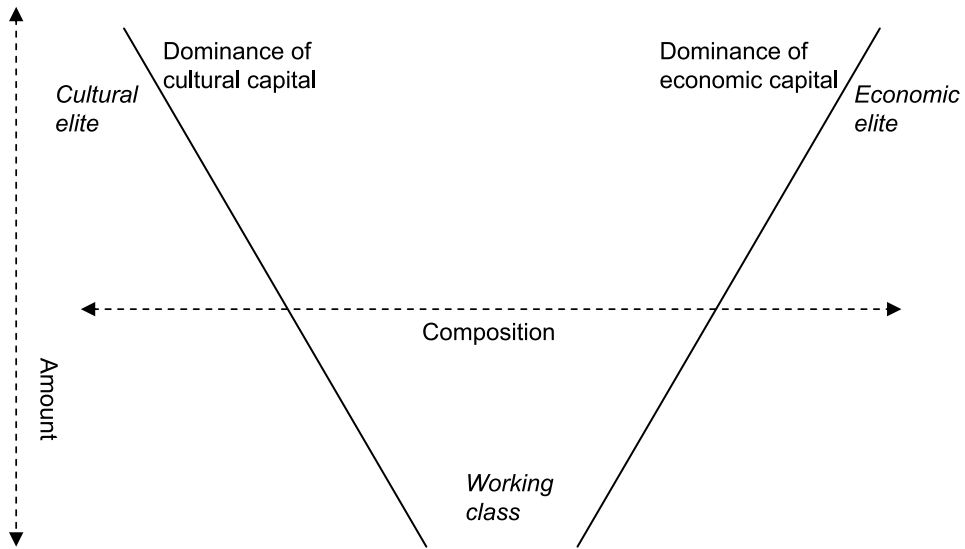


Figure 2. A simplified version of Bourdieu's multi-dimensional space of stratification.

business managers. Or, to be more specific, a family rich in cultural capital will direct their children into fields of study where cultural skills are taught, and where the possession of cultural skills is more helpful to perform well. For instance, it has been argued that the requirements for good academic performance are more vague in the fields strongly related to cultural capital than in more technically oriented fields (Hansen and Mastekaasa 2006).

By now quite some evidence has been presented for effects of social background on educational field of study, and some have pointed to cultural capital effects (Van de Werfhorst, Kraaykamp, and De Graaf 2000; Van de Werfhorst, De Graaf, and Kraaykamp 2001; Van de Werfhorst, Sullivan, and Cheung 2003; Hansen and Mastekaasa 2006; Hansen 1996, 1997; Davies and Guppy 1997; Duru-Bellat, Kieffer, and Reimer 2008). For instance, Van de Werfhorst, De Graaf, and Kraaykamp (2001) showed that children's enrolment into the cultural, teaching and care fields is positively affected by parents' cultural capital. Children's enrolment in cultural fields is reduced by parents' economic capital, whereas children's preference for economic and legal fields is positively affected by parents' economic resources. Notably these effects are found on top of direct intergenerational transmission of field of study, which is high in agriculture and the teaching field, but are found elsewhere too.

Extending the analysis of stratification by incorporating multiple dimensions of destinations may lead to different conclusions as to the role of education in the intergenerational mobility process. Educational strategies where the type of parental capital is reproduced across generations may not be the ones in which the educational system could lead to an optimal immobility in unidimensional stratification. If we look at the fields in which children from families with cultural capital end up, these are not the fields that generally lead to more labour market value in a unidimensional sense. For example, earnings are not particularly high for people educated in fields of study where cultural capital is most evidently reproduced, nor is the chance of finding employment, or of finding employment that matches one's educational level (Reimer, Noelke, and Kucel 2008; Ortiz and Kucel 2008). Thus, at first sight it may seem that

the cultural choices of children from high cultural capital families hold their attainment back relative to children who choose fields with greater labour market value, and thus their educational choices malfunction for transmitting advantage across generations. Yet, such a conclusion may be untenable when we think of the counterfactual situation. If the counterfactual is what would have happened to these children had they chosen a different field of study, it may appear that they may particularly benefit from occupational domains where cultural capital helps for job performance. This could be the case because of the particular resources people bring with them, but also because of differential social networks through which information about opportunities is disseminated. So, children from cultural capital families may be particularly inclined to seek occupational domains where the cultural, rather than financial, ‘returns’ are of greater weight. And such returns do not fit in a paradigm that focuses on uni-dimensional outcomes.

Similarly, if the counterfactual is what would have happened to children of the economic elite had they chosen fields richer in cultural capital, again it may result that their chances would have been severely hampered by such a choice relative to children of the cultural elite.

Further support for this reasoning may be obtained from the asset-based approach to cultural capital theory developed by Savage and associates (for example, Savage et al. 1992; Butler 1995; Savage, Warde, and Devine 2005). This approach sees clear differences between two fractions of the middle class: managers and professionals. Managers, according to Savage et al. (1992), depend heavily on their position in organizations, whereas professionals have always been strongly associated with credentialism and cultural capital. Because organizational skills are not transmissible, managers have fewer opportunities to transmit relevant resources to their children than professionals. Based on the asset-based approach, we may expect that managers influence their children’s educational choices so that they obtain skills relevant in business, including financial and legal skills. This way, managers can reproduce their own type of resources, by which an indirect reproduction of commercial and legal skills is created. For children of professionals, legal and business fields are less attractive for ensuring advantage as their attachment to credentialism and cultural capital allows for a wider set of occupations in which they can maintain their class position.

Summarizing, precisely with regard to the main achievement of Bourdieu – which is to integrate the multidimensional structure of social space in issues of social mobility, lifestyles, and politics – there is a discrepancy between the work on social mobility (*Reproduction*; Bourdieu and Passeron 1990) and on lifestyles (*Distinction*; Bourdieu 1984). The multidimensional nature explicated in Bourdieu’s work on lifestyles should also be implemented in work on the relevance of cultural and economic capital for social mobility. It allows us to include processes of occupational and educational choice beyond the vertical differentiations so central in much of contemporary stratification research.

The next point is, again, a weakness in Bourdieu’s work precisely with regard to the integration of the multidimensional space in several life domains, in this case between lifestyles and politics.

From two to four types of resources

Thus far I have followed Bourdieu in thinking of the social space as being formed on the basis of two types of capital: cultural and economic. Of course Bourdieu

acknowledges that a third form, social capital, should be distinguished, but social capital comprises of the amounts of cultural and economic capital that can be mobilized through social networks. Thus, cultural capital and economic capital are the only types of capital that people can possess.

In Bourdieu's work, the two types are important to understand social mobility, lifestyle preferences, and politics. The cultural elite not only prefers complex forms of modern art, but is also in favour of economic redistribution, and more tolerant towards other groups. The economic elite not only prefers more traditional forms of art or luxurious lifestyles, but is also conservative in politics. This overlap between the cultural and political spheres is exemplified in the political space that Bourdieu draws (Bourdieu 1984, 452).

It is, however, likely that the resources that affect people's lifestyle preferences are different from the resources that affect people's political orientations. To illustrate the relevance of differential resources affecting social attitudes and cultural behaviour, I start with discussing three different theories why education affects political orientations. Only one of these theories is clearly linked to cultural capital theory, and this is not a theory that finds clear empirical support.

The first, the cognitive theory, argues that education broadens the students' horizon by giving them the ability to look at social issues from diverse points of view (Hyman and Wright 1979). Education stimulates cognitive ability, through which one's frame of reference is expanded, and rational thinking is stimulated (Nunn, Crockett, and Williams 1978). However, earlier research has rejected the cognitive theory because there are country differences in the association between education and liberalism (Weil 1985) or differences across types of issues (cf. Phelan et al. 1995). In addition, it has been argued that attitude differences across people educated in different fields of study are incompatible with the cognitive, rationalized model (Van de Werfhorst and De Graaf 2004). Not the most rationalized fields like the sciences, but rather the social sciences, most strongly develop tolerant attitudes (Crotty 1967; Guimond, Begin, and Palmer 1989; Pascarella and Terenzini 1991; Hillygus 2005).

The second theory can be labelled 'socialization theory'. This theory is less concerned with the cognitive formation in schools, but rather sees values and attitudes as being socialized upon individuals, in a very broad sense. In school, people internalize the norm to be tolerant and democratic (for example, Crotty 1967; Guimond, Begin, and Palmer 1989; Hillygus 2005). Yet, although the theories of cognitive development and socialization employ different mechanisms through which education affects values (Van de Werfhorst and De Graaf 2004), both share the view that education alters individuals in a very general way, where many kinds of democratic and tolerant attitudes are developed. Whether it concerns democratic attitudes, altruism, or tolerance, in all such domains an effect of education is to be expected.

A third view, however, stresses that education affects attitudes in a much more limited way. Through processes of 'ideological refinement' education affects attitudes as a legitimation of the advantaged position that the highly educated will take in society (Phelan et al. 1995). Although similar to the socialization perspective with respect to the socializing function of schooling, the ideological refinement model stresses that education only affects attitudes and values to the extent that they legitimize the position of the well-educated in society. This could, for example, explain the support for strong governments among the well-educated (controlled for income), as they will probably benefit from it as a public-sector employee. This means that some subjective

outcomes, like tolerance, may be affected by education, but others that lie outside the realm, like giving donations, may not.¹

Central to the ideological refinement perspective is that there is a basis of self-interest in the attitudes that are developed, unlike in the other two perspectives. This self-interest has clear connections to cultural capital theory, in which the legitimation of inequalities resulting from cultural reproduction stands central.

If we look at the empirical evidence there is clearly something to say for the claim that education socializes particular values. Even though part of attitude formation may result from cognitive development, the hypothesis cannot be rejected that less rationalized fields of study lead to higher tolerance, a higher propensity to voting for a left-wing political party, or preferring strong governments. Yet, given that at least part of the education effect is manifested through socialization, it is the question whether this socialization occurs to justify inequalities that persist in society – inequalities among which the highly educated stand on the advantaged side of the line – or whether there is really something ‘altruistic’ in the views developed in education. It seems that the latter is more likely, given that education affects a much wider set of types of attitudes, behaviours and commitments than would be expected on the basis of legitimation of inequalities.

Thinking in greater detail why education affects social outcomes, it becomes evident that Bourdieu’s distinction in two primary types of capital needs to be revised. We need to acknowledge that other types of resources are relevant for the formation of tolerance than are relevant for certain artistic and cultural preferences. In my view there are not two but four types of resources that are horizontally differentially acquired in education. In addition to cultural and economic resources, also communicative and technical resources should be distinguished.

Technical resources can be seen as orthogonal to the cultural and economic types in Bourdieu’s social space. The engineers typically stand out as being indistinguishable with regard to the domination of economic or cultural resources in their capital composition. In the two-dimensional space of Bourdieu, this may be so – they are right in the middle of the horizontal dimension – but if a separate dimension is created on the basis of technical skills that students acquire in the schooling system, it appears that engineers are typically dominant in terms of technical resources. It is not only relevant to distinguish technical resources for the sake of multidimensional classifications, but in particular for the strong attachment of technical resources to two stratification processes. First, social class has a negative impact on the amount of technical resources students acquire in their education. Technical field choices are typically made by working-class children (Van de Werfhorst 2002a). Second, people graduating from technically oriented fields typically find jobs sooner after leaving school than people who acquired fewer technical resources in their education.²

More important for the present purposes is the importance for communicative resources. Unlike social capital, which refers to resources that can only secondarily be achieved through social networks, communicative resources can be described as the set of knowledge, skills and competencies through which people are able to look at issues from diverse points of view; for instance, by understanding other people’s standpoints. It is relevant to stress that these skills do not necessarily coincide with social skills, as social skills come in two different forms. On the one hand, social skills include skills that make people able to interact with other people for their own interest. Social skills relevant in the labour market and in business are typical examples. Through these social skills, others can be convinced to establish a market relationship,

and the application of these skills primarily serves the interest of the holder of the skills. Quite differently, communicative resources pertain to social skills not so much applicable for self-interest, but rather refer to the skills to look at issues from a divergent point of view.

Guimond, Begin, and Palmer (1989) studied the impact of education on people's attitude towards homeless people, in particular with regard to the question of whether the homeless individuals or the social system is responsible for personal problems. They find that people educated in social fields of study develop a 'system-blame ideology' where the social system is held responsible for personal problems. In non-social fields, however, people develop more strongly a 'person-blame ideology', holding individuals responsible for their lives. This finding can be explained by the communicative resources differently acquired in different fields of study.

Research has attempted to measure the amount of cultural, economic, communicative and technical resources that people acquire in different fields of study (Van de Werfhorst 2001; Van de Werfhorst and Kraaykamp 2001). The measurement instrument was developed to identify the skills attached to educational programmes rather than to individuals. This was done in two ways: first by asking graduates of different educational programmes to rate the extent to which a long list of skills and knowledge was paid attention to in their programme, and second by validating this information by a survey among experts on education. Figure 3 displays the amount of resources attached to different fields of study. As can be seen, there is some overlap between the amount of cultural and communicative resources that students of different fields of study acquire. Yet there are clear differences between the two resource types, with the humanities and art fields scoring exceptionally high on the cultural scale and the social sciences and teaching fields scoring high on the communicative scale.

These scales of fields of study on the four types of resources are included in empirical research to examine the impact on a wide range of outcomes. This research shows a picture that disputes Bourdieu's strong alliance between cultural and moral preferences. Similar to Bourdieu, cultural resources strongly affect various kinds of

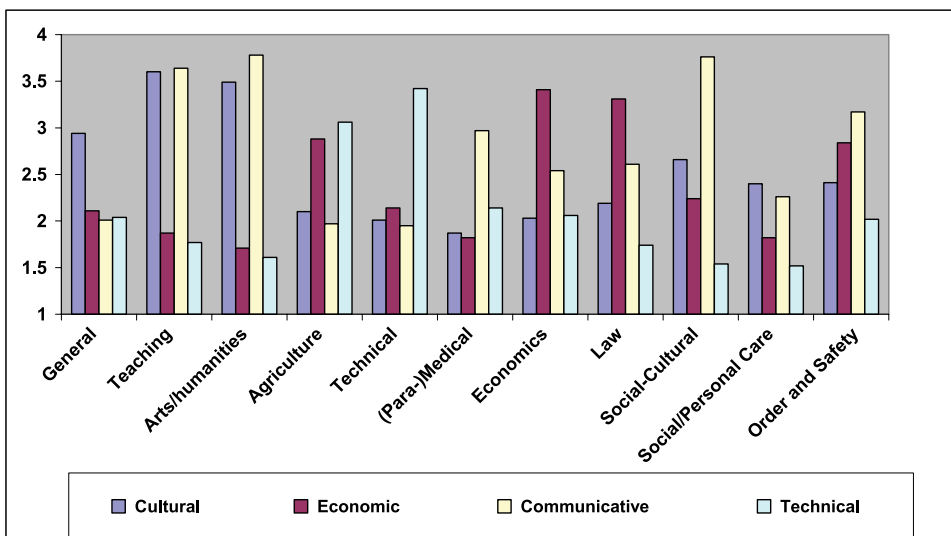


Figure 3. Four types of resources obtained in educational fields of study.

high-cultural preferences, such as reading books, going to theatres, and going to city trips on holidays. Also in line with Bourdieu, economic resources affected finding well-paying jobs, but also lifestyle preferences such as playing elite sports, going on luxurious holidays, and ownership of luxury goods. However, not in line with Bourdieu, communicative – rather than cultural – resources affected tolerant attitudes, voluntary memberships, and postmaterialism. The fact that communicative resources affected a great variety of attitudinal outcomes suggests that the self-interest argument underlying the ideological refinement model is not sufficient to explain variations across fields of study. Rather, the wide range of outcomes affected by communicative resources is in line with the argument that, through education, people develop skills to look at issues from diverse standpoints, which is in line with the socialization model of schooling. It is true that education socializes altruistic outcomes without this being the consequence of legitimizing existing inequalities.

Summarizing, although Bourdieu sees a strong overlap between the domains of politics and of lifestyle preferences, where a social space with two types of resources is thought to display stratification in a satisfactory way, the overlap is less evident than it may seem. Rather than the identification of one cultural elite that is highly educated, has a preference for modern culture, and has a left-wing political orientation, the resources that affect lifestyle preferences are different from the resources that affect political outcomes.

Concluding remarks

Despite these two criticisms and advancements, the concept of cultural capital can still be of interest to stratification researchers. I see the ‘domesticated’ type of Bourdieuan empirical research more fruitful than the ‘wild’ type (Goldthorpe 2007). If researchers wish to test the relevance of cultural capital for educational inequality, it is important that they specify operationalizations of cultural capital that uniquely relate educational outcomes to cultural capital and not to alternative theories. So an impact of parents’ education on children’s education should then not be interpreted as support for cultural reproduction theory; as there are many more mechanisms why parents’ education has an effect on children’s education. The good thing about cultural behaviour as an indicator of cultural capital is that it does uniquely operationalize cultural capital. But also with cultural products, in particular book reading, an alternative mechanism may be available, because book reading may relate to investments of parents in cognitive development of their offspring (De Graaf et al. 2000).

One problem for Bourdieu’s theory of such an empirical approach to testing cultural reproduction theory, however, is that only one type of cultural capital is measured: the objectified state. How can we, if we wish to uniquely associate measurements to cultural reproduction theory, ever operationalize the institutionalized type, if parents’ education cannot be used? Or how can we operationalize habitus in empirical research? I have no idea. Who knows, at some point we may rely on magnetic resonance imaging scans of the brain to test individuals’ unconscious judgements of elements of the dominant culture of societies; otherwise, I see no easy solution.

But a limited measurement of the objectified state of cultural capital could be used for examining primary and secondary effects of social origin. Primary effects of social origin are the effect on schooling outcomes through differential demonstrated ability of children of different social classes. Secondary effects refer to the effects of social origin on schooling choices conditional on demonstrated ability (Boudon

1974; Goldthorpe 1996). So, children of different social classes with equal abilities still often choose differently. If we wish to understand change in educational inequality, Goldthorpe (1996) argues that we should focus primarily on secondary, rather than primary, effects. Changes in secondary effects can not easily be understood from cultural factors, as I showed above in Figure 1. Class differences in demonstrated ability are much less susceptible to change than class differences in choices conditional upon ability. Yet the primary effects comprise around two-thirds of the total effect of social origin (Erikson et al. 2005; Jackson et al. 2007). And we cannot say that we are close to understanding processes through which inequalities in learning abilities come about. Primary effects may result from a combination of genetic, cultural and biological factors, and in understanding the influence of cultural factors cultural reproduction theory may help (Van de Werfhorst and Hofstede 2007).

In any case, I conclude that the multidimensionality of resources is relevant for understanding inequalities and distinctions in a wide array of life domains, including stratification, tastes, and politics. Yet, while this encompassing perspective may be seen as the largest achievement of Bourdieu, this perspective has weaknesses, and progress has to be made.

Acknowledgements

This paper was earlier presented as a keynote lecture to the workshop 'Cultural Capital and Educational Inequalities: Concepts, Methods, Strategies and New Configurations', at Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic, 19–21 September 2008. The author thanks Giseline Kuipers and Bowen Paule for comments.

Notes

1. A fourth view is that education does not affect attitudes and values, but selects on attitudes and values (reversed causality) (Hillygus 2005). Although there is certainly evidence for such a self-selection, empirical research usually demonstrates a causal effect of education (Dee 2004; Hillygus 2005).
2. It should be stressed that not all labour market outcomes are positively influenced by technical resources. Earnings and occupational status of technically trained personnel are, for example, usually not higher than for people educated in other fields (Reimer, Noelke, and Kucel 2008; Van de Werfhorst 2002b).

References

- Aschaffenburg, K., and I. Maas. 1997. Cultural and educational careers: The dynamics of social reproduction. *American Sociological Review* 62: 573–87.
- Barone, C. 2006. Cultural capital, ambition and the explanation of inequalities in learning outcomes: A comparative analysis. *Sociology* 40: 1039–58.
- Boudon, R. 1974. *Education, opportunity, and social inequality*. New York: Wiley.
- Bourdieu, P. 1984. *Distinction. A social critique of the judgement of taste*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Bourdieu, P. 1986. The forms of capital. In *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education*, ed. J.G. Richardson, 241–58. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Bourdieu, P., and J.C. Passeron. 1990. *Reproduction in education, society, and culture*. London and Newbury Park, CA: Sage in association with Theory Culture & Society, Department of Administrative and Social Studies, Teesside Polytechnic. (Orig. pub. 1977.)
- Breen, R., and J.H. Goldthorpe. 1997. Explaining educational differentials: Towards a formal rational action theory. *Rationality & Society* 9: 275–305.

- Breen, R., R. Luijkx, W. Müller, and R. Pollak. 2009. Non-persistent inequality in educational attainment: Evidence from eight European countries. *American Journal of Sociology* 14: 1475–1521.
- Butler, T. 1995. The debate over the middle classes. In *Social change and the middle classes*, ed. T. Butler and M. Savage, 26–36. London: UCL Press.
- Collins, R. 1979. *The credential society: An historical sociology of education and stratification*. New York: Academic Press.
- Crook, C.J. 1997. *Cultural practices and socioeconomic attainment: The Australian experience*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Crotty, W.J. 1967. Democratic consensual norms and the college student. *Sociology of Education* 40: 200–18.
- Davies, S., and N. Guppy. 1997. Fields of study, college selectivity, and student inequalities in higher education. *Social Forces* 75: 1417–38.
- De Graaf, N.D., P.M. De Graaf, and G. Kraaykamp. 2000. Parental cultural capital and educational attainment in the Netherlands: A refinement of the cultural capital perspective. *Sociology of Education* 73: 92–111.
- De Graaf, P.M. 1986. The impact of financial and cultural resources on educational attainment in the Netherlands. *Sociology of Education* 59: 237–46.
- De Graaf, P.M., and M. Kalmijn. 2001. Trends in the intergenerational transmission of cultural and economic status. *Acta Sociologica* 44: 51–66.
- Dee, T.S. 2004. Are there civic returns to education? *Journal of Public Economics* 88: 1697–720.
- DiMaggio, P. 1982. Cultural capital and school success: The impact of status culture participation on the grades of U.S. high school students. *American Sociological Review* 47: 189–201.
- Dumais, S.A. 2002. Cultural capital, gender, and school success: The role of habitus. *Sociology of Education* 75: 44–68.
- Duru-Bellat, M., A. Kieffer, and D. Reimer. 2008. Patterns of social inequalities in access to higher education in France and Germany. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 49: 347–68.
- Erikson, R., J.H. Goldthorpe, M. Jackson, M. Yaish, and D.R. Cox. 2005. On class differentials in educational attainment. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 102: 9730–3.
- Goldthorpe, J.H. 1996. Class analysis and the reorientation of class theory: The case of persisting differentials in educational attainment. *British Journal of Sociology* 47: 481–505.
- Goldthorpe, J.H. 2007. ‘Cultural capital’: Some critical observations. In *From origin to destination. Trends and mechanisms in social stratification research*, ed. S. Scherer, R. Pollak, G. Otte, and M. Gangl, 78–101. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag.
- Guimond, S., G. Begin, and D.L. Palmer. 1989. Education and causal attributions: The development of ‘person-blame’ and ‘system-blame’ ideology. *Social Psychology Quarterly* 52: 126–40.
- Hansen, M.N. 1996. Earnings in elite groups: The impact of social class origin. *Acta Sociologica* 39: 385–408.
- Hansen, M.N. 1997. Social and economic inequality in the educational career: Do the effects of social background characteristics decline? *European Sociological Review* 13: 305–21.
- Hansen, M.N., and A. Mastekaasa. 2006. Social origins and academic performance at university. *European Sociological Review* 22: 277–91.
- Hillygus, D.S. 2005. The missing link: Exploring the relationship between higher education and political engagement. *Political Behavior* 27: 25–47.
- Hyman, H.H., and C.R. Wright. 1979. *Education's lasting influence on values*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Jackson, M., R. Erikson, J.H. Goldthorpe, and M. Yaish. 2007. Primary and secondary effects in class differentials in educational attainment: The transition to A-level courses in England and Wales. *Acta Sociologica* 50: 211–29.
- Lamont, M., and A. Lareau. 1988. Cultural capital: Allusions, gaps and glissandos in recent theoretical developments. *Sociological Theory* 6: 153–68.
- Need, A., and U. De Jong. 2000. Educational differentials in the Netherlands: Testing rational action theory. *Rationality & Society* 13: 71–98.

- Nunn, C.Z., H.J. Crockett, and J.A. Williams. 1978. *Tolerance for non-conformity*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Ortiz, L., and A. Kucel. 2008. Do fields of study matter for over-education?: The cases of Spain and Germany. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 49: 305–27.
- Pascarella, E.T., and P.T. Terenzini. 1991. *How college affects students. Findings and insights from twenty years of research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Phelan, J., B.G. Link, A. Stueve, and R.E. Moore. 1995. Education, social liberalism, and economic conservatism: Attitudes toward homeless people. *American Sociological Review* 60: 126–40.
- Reimer, D., C. Noelke, and A. Kucel. 2008. Labor market effects of field of study in comparative perspective: An analysis of 22 European countries. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 49: 233–56.
- Savage, M., J. Barlow, P. Dickens, and T. Fielding. 1992. *Property, bureaucracy and culture: Middle class formation in contemporary Britain*. London: Routledge.
- Savage, M., A. Warde, and F. Devine. 2005. Capitals, assets and resources: Some critical issues. *British Journal of Sociology* 56: 31–47.
- Shavit, Y., and H.-P. Blossfeld. 1993. *Persistent inequality. Changing educational attainment in thirteen countries*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Sullivan, A. 2001. Cultural capital and educational attainment. *Sociology* 35: 893–912.
- Sullivan, A. 2002. Bourdieu and education: How useful is Bourdieu's theory for researchers? *Netherlands' Journal of Social Sciences* 38: 144–66.
- Van de Werfhorst, H.G. 2001. *Field of study and social inequality: Four types of educational resources in the process of stratification in the Netherlands*. Nijmegen, the Netherlands: ICS Dissertation.
- Van de Werfhorst, H.G. 2002a. A detailed examination of the role of education in intergenerational social class mobility. *Social Science Information* 41: 407–38.
- Van de Werfhorst, H.G. 2002b. Fields of study, acquired skills and the wage benefit from a matching job. *Acta Sociologica* 45: 287–303.
- Van de Werfhorst, H.G., and N.D. De Graaf. 2004. The sources of political orientations in post-industrial society: Social class and education revisited. *British Journal of Sociology* 55: 211–35.
- Van de Werfhorst, H.G., N.D. De Graaf, and G. Kraaykamp. 2001. Intergenerational resemblance in field of study in the Netherlands. *European Sociological Review* 17: 275–94.
- Van de Werfhorst, H.G., and S. Hofstede. 2007. Cultural capital or relative risk aversion? Two mechanisms for educational inequality compared. *British Journal of Sociology* 58: 391–415.
- Van de Werfhorst, H.G., and G. Kraaykamp. 2001. Four field-related educational resources and their impact on labor, consumption, and sociopolitical orientation. *Sociology of Education* 74: 296–317.
- Van de Werfhorst, H.G., G. Kraaykamp, and N.D. De Graaf. 2000. Intergenerational transmission of educational field resources: The impact of parental resources and socialisation practices on children's fields of study in the Netherlands. *The Netherlands' Journal of Social Sciences* 36: 188–210.
- Van de Werfhorst, H.G., A. Sullivan, and S.Y. Cheung. 2003. Social class, ability and choice of subject in secondary and tertiary education in Britain. *British Educational Research Journal* 29: 41–62.
- Weeden, K.A., and D.B. Grusky. 2005. The case for a new class map. *American Journal of Sociology* 111: 141–212.
- Weil, Frederick D. 1985. The variable effects of education on liberal attitudes: A comparative-historical analysis of anti-Semitism using public opinion survey data. *American Sociological Review* 50: 458–74.
- Willis, P. 1977. *Learning to labour: How working class kids get working class jobs*. Farnborough: Saxon House.