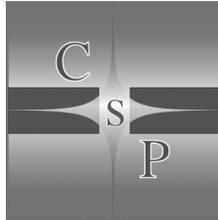


The School at the Frontiers of Modernity

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Edited by

José Resende and Maria Manuel Vieira



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INTRODUCTION

JOSÉ RESENDE AND MARIA MANUEL VIEIRA

Questions about the links between schooling and modernity

The reason for this collection of articles is to introduce a select set of considerations of a sociological nature which ask pertinent questions about the boundary relationship between the school and modernity, taking into account the different starting points and subjects of our study. The history of such questions dates goes right the way back to the beginning of the boundary relationship between schools and the process of modernisation of society.

Our purpose is not to make considerations regarding the long history of this relationship. However, in this brief introduction we must say something about the links between the history of the school institution and the history of modernity. In other words to understand the challenges that schools face in the context of a late or reflexive modernity (Beck, Giddens, Lash, 2000) or in terms of an expanding liberal modernity (Wagner, 1996) it is important to highlight the pioneering role of schools in recognising the internal differences, of a geographical nature, which are present in the civilizing process of European societies.

In reality, the long civilizing process has not been the same throughout the European continent.

The north and centre of Europe went through this process earlier than in the south, and it was based on a relationship between modern social awareness and the new ideas that were emerging in schools about the ways of governing human conduct (Elias, 1989). In writing about the origins of civilization in Europe, Norbert Elias points out that the dissemination of the treatise of Erasmus of Rotterdam – *About civility of customs of children* – can be considered, at the start of 16th century, as one of the first investments of its kind (Thévenot, 1986) carried out by the educational work of humanists in terms of offering a more conceptual look about the education of children in general – and of boys in particular – of aristocratic and middle class families that were part of European court society.

Erasmus of Rotterdam had by that time collated in book form his symposiums on families. The two books - *About civility of customs of children*

and his *Symposiums on families* – appeared in the form of manuals, and were therefore works meant to be used in schools. The author's educational objective was clear from the start since it was his intention to question old customs related to corporal customs. His criticism gives rise to an alternative look, to alternative values and rules about the new ways of looking at the physical attitudes in different social environments – from knowing how to be at table and using a knife and fork to a more sensitive look at love and sexuality.

The educational undertones of this humanist literature introduced by Erasmus will shift the focus from the moral vision practised by religious rituals to a vision of secular morality practised in the school context. It also teaches other, more reserved ways of expressing the most profound human sentiments, and contributed to developing new standards of behaviour where self-discipline, over desires and emotions, is highlighted as the most adequate and civilized form of conduct.

This modern school (Vincent, 1994), introduced by the social and cultural changes that are taking place during the Renaissance of Europe's classical culture (16th century), will have an enormous impact on new models of social awareness which are very different from the customary social practices.

From this point on children will gradually, from the top to the bottom of social scale, be weaned away from their home environment and will be confronted with other forms of social awareness, for which the school is held responsible. Even learning to write will be influenced by these manuals of good manners. This way learning is done in reference to the rules on which polite manners are based on (Queiroz, 1995), and not in terms of custom or the archetypes and symbols behind the communal world of medieval society.

The institutionalisation and expansion of the modern schooling take place in a period of profound political changes in Europe. Besides the separation of the spheres of the Church and papal power from the exercise of legitimised violence by the State, the consolidation of this new way of transmitting knowledge through the school will be the foundation of new forms of social regulation based on a shift from religious morality to lay and republican morality. With the victory of imagined project of modernity (Wagner, 1996) which took place in Europe between the end of the 18th century and through the 19th century, the political ideals inscribed into modern schooling give substance to the ideals of freedom and discipline that become an integral part of the social ties between modern individuals.

On the other hand, the friction between the arguments on which the principles of freedom and discipline were conventionally based, in the texts that justified the new order of modern politics – both in its more restricted form (until the end of the 19th century) and in its more organised form (until 1970) (Wagner, 1996) – was reflected in the way the State in most European countries

began to construct its educational system, how it constructed that system, and what aims and functions it attributed to it. In reality, building the political principles on which the compulsory school system is based relies upon joining together the modern school of discipline, which is close to the model for school socialization, and the modern school of freedom, which is close to the model for teaching a set of information.

The model of school socialization reflected the new kinds of modern social regulation since it was adjusted to the values and general rules of the legal codes set down by the State. Educating students meant, from that moment on to the teachers, the complete education of the modern citizen with an ability to face up to the challenges of democratic societies.

The model for school teaching was for the first time established according to a set of guidelines defined by the Government. Fragmenting knowledge into specific subjects became a new way of transmitting information. In addition, each subject had a program. The content of these programs were broken down into a sequence of years and school cycles that made up the educational system. Intellectual maturity began to be gauged, not only according to age but also according to the abilities that students demonstrated through the actual evaluation of acquired knowledge.

Considerations about the place of schools in modern societies had begun to concern sociologists (like Durkheim) and by social thinkers (Vincent, 1994) who made it possible to link the effects of educational policies with the more universal aspirations defended by enthusiasts of the project of imagined modernity.

One of those effects was precisely the idea that the modern school was responsible for making a modern, cultured, civilized human being with a sense of criticism.

Built on the rubble of the Old Regime, with the civilizing process in full swing in societies all over Europe, the modern school process benefited from political conditions which allowed it to support a new principle of justice, built on the principle of equal social opportunities (Durkheim, 1976). The political recognition of this principle was decisive in outlawing the former principles which stratified individuals socially not according to merit but according to inherited social value, principles which came from a now defunct social order.

The advent of the principle of equality of educational opportunities (derived from the principle of equality of social opportunities) in the political agenda of democratic and economically more developed countries, in the first decades of the 20th century constitutes a new vision of the school process.

Educational policy becomes from this moment on to be an integral part of the social policies guaranteed by the Government in its regulation of the economy and society. In actual fact schools become a 'social ladder' since it is

the school which can distinguish the competence shown by different students in their study of subjects, and it is they that hold a monopoly on certifying the knowledge that has been acquired throughout the course of scientific and technical programs that are increasingly drawn out.

In this manner, the certificates that are handed out by academic institutions grade individuals, and direct them in terms of the jobs they will carry out after their studies. In other words these diplomas become the most legitimate means of access into the job market and will establish which job they will occupy in the corporate ladder, and overall which position they will occupy in the social structure.

However, the friction created by the different ‘vocations’ of the job market that are established in the modern school process have never ceased to be felt in contemporary societies. With a growing public awareness of social problems (a sign of how lacking in boundaries the modern way of life is) it is demanded of the school that it carry out other missions such as the idea of being a school of socially acceptable behaviour as well as a school of guidance of students’ cognitive abilities.

In truth, from its outset the modern school process has been made up of a diverse set of references that are usually cloaked in the principle of education and instruction.

However, as the experience of modernity begins to spread to all walks of life, the complexity of these references becomes all the more evident. This is particularly true when we discuss questions such as educating citizens, social and academic inclusion, social and school success, school absenteeism and dropping out of school, the relationship between certificates and the job market, among others.

Knowledge-based society and school know-how

As a fundamental building block of the imagined modernity project, the western school system was established over two centuries by different Nation States, in their attempt to ensure equal access to the basic instruments of citizenship and in doing so spawning the ‘new man’.

There are three pillars on which the instruments of citizenship are built on: the handing down of a culture of common values and universal know-how that surpass the cultural particularities of different social groups; access to reading and writing which through Reason will lead to the liberation of the individual from any kind of manipulation; finally, the inculcation of values related to citizenship and the respect for institutions of the Nation State, the agent of the Common Good.

It was this intention that inspired the enormous growth of the school system across the West, during this period. Although the rate of expansion varied greatly from country to country, the truth is that, through this institutionalised and compulsory way the West was witness to a complete transformation of oral-culture based societies to written-culture based societies.

The spread of science and culture in schools gave rise to the concept of a ‘knowledge based society’ that is presently the way we classify modernity and this is the reason why we are constantly asked to keep up the training of skills and knowledge.

However, the rise of the school system has not been a passive one and a host of new questions has arisen about the principles on which it was originally based.

One of those questions has precisely to do with the knowledge that schools pass on. One of the basic principles of modern schooling is the separation of individuals as well as the separation of subjects. Contrary to the socialization that took place up to the time when the school system began – a ‘practical socialization’ that was carried out without a second thought, from person to person, in the place of work, by people imitating one another (Queiroz, 1995) – the school system is concerned with passing on universal knowledge, is based on the separation of subject matter according to use and takes place by a specific means – the teaching practice.

It is nevertheless far from a rational process which condenses information in a neutral manner at a specific point in history. School knowledge carries with social priorities (Goodson, 1997).

One of the key elements in the building of a public school system is the standardization of the national language, which takes place in the 19th century with the publication of a uniform grammar. The standardization of language at school will be at the heart of a push towards a uniform culture which is core principle of the Nation State, particularly important at a time when many Western nations are in the process of re-constituting themselves. The concept of Nation as a single common symbol, shared by all, is backed by the school system and its programs, throughout the 19th century, particularly in subjects such as Mother Language, but also in History and Geography.

This diversity which was instilled in the different national school systems – despite an overall concern with universal knowledge which all school systems share – is nowadays confronted with the international pressures of globalization and the need for harmonizing different school systems. The ability to compare different systems, at an international scale, through modern auditing, especially through statistical references which are in place in all governments, and the use of such data by international institutions overseeing

different social spheres, has given rise to a ranking of each country's school system on a world scale.

In this context school knowledge, its methods for teaching and learning become the subject of many heated debates, both political and scientific. The studies of Rune Saksind and of Luís Baptista and João Costa are precisely dedicated to these questions.

Saksind is concerned with the theory behind the concept of 'knowledge'. He argues that behind the constant invoking of the expression 'knowledge-based society' which often comes up in discussions about globalization of educational system, there is an enormous lack of understanding, both of the theory and practice, of the concept of 'knowledge'. According to Saksind, it is the Social sciences – particularly Education Sociology – which are to blame for this lack of understanding about school knowledge.

Rune Saksind highlights this paradox and stresses the national and contextual peculiarities which are at work in the process of grading students, and evaluating and teaching universal knowledge at school. Using this in his thesis, Saksind analyses the process of translation and learning that the concept of 'cultural capital' of Pierre Bourdieu emphasised in his study of sociology of education in the United States.

On the other hand, the study carried out by Luís Baptista and João Costa looks at the reverse; in other words the internationalisation of national school knowledge, in particular of the Portuguese Language.

It is a detailed study of Portuguese language teaching to non-nationals in different places around the world, with distinct historical and cultural backgrounds and how they serve the educational policy that has been devised which is at the heart of this chapter. How do we structure school knowledge that can be exported beyond the national setting for which it was devised? Who is the target learner? What preparation must the teacher have? The answers to these questions are interesting and apparently not in step with the idea of with the idea of a standardization which is associated with cultural exchanges between countries.

Old and new forms of inequality

Questioning the principle of **equal opportunities** of access to school and to knowledge learning is another question which has sparked heated debates. It is probably the most debatable subject since the advent of public school systems.

Development of access to public schools has varied from country to country, but it is an ongoing process which for a long time was more a theory than practice. Even in the most advanced countries in terms of education,

access to school was unequal, a ‘two speed process’ (Dubet, 2000) – the sons of the middle class benefited from longer schooling than the sons of the working class; boys were going to school for longer than girls, among other examples...

Now that the old aspiration of securing a long education for all has been achieved new questions are being raised about the principle of equal opportunities. Now that there is school for, and there are certificates to go around, a new social hierarchy is emerging in present day society: a hierarchy which is based on the diploma that the student has achieved.

In the school system which is accessible to all there are new kinds of inequality that are being pointed out, that for many update the tendency that schools have always had to reproduce social and cultural inequalities and which the apparent progress to democratise the system – which was never anything else but a numbers game – never managed to truly do anything about.

Using some of the theoretical instruments borrowed from Critical Sociology of the 1960’s and 1970’s – particularly from the theses of Bourdieu – the analysis of the new kinds of inequalities of opportunity are now focused within the school system.

Amongst them we see the lack of social integration which the school system promised. Seen as a fundamental condition of access to citizenship, just the fact the children went to school – and thereby learned the common culture that it promotes – seems to be insufficient nowadays to ensure that the conditions are met for a full integration in a modern and advanced society, dependent on access to diplomas and jobs.

This is the question which Nikos Gousgounis focuses on in his study of the Greek school system. The current thirst for schooling in a country whose tradition for universal access to school is only recent and marked by a relatively stagnant economy, places high expectations on the schools as a passport for a prestigious job which in reality is only accessible to some.

Another of the inequalities which has been pointed out in the current way that school systems work and their target of meeting quantifiable democracy is the hierarchy of access within a certain level of teaching. In other words the old school hierarchy based on how long someone spent in school is now being replaced with a new type of hierarchy associated with the different academic and social value which is recognised in each of the choices that are put forward to students within each of the cycles of their studies. Higher education, where all long term schooling inevitably converges on, is an area of particular pertinence to this debate. Cláudia Urbano and Nuno Jorge have attempted to find similar patterns in terms of university courses.

In the fourth chapter, Cláudia Urbano analyses the polytechnic career choices of higher education in the interior regions of Portugal. Similarly to the Greek educational system, the Portuguese system has only recently become one

of universal access to all, which is one reason why so much more prestige is placed on obtaining a university degree – which until recently was only accessible to few – over a polytechnic degree. Looking from the negative connotation which this form of higher education has in Portugal the author wonders about the motives that are behind the students who have chosen to follow the polytechnic route of higher education.

Nuno Jorge, on the other hand, bases his study on what he considers the top of the food chain of Portuguese higher education – students of Medicine – and discovers that beneath an apparently merit-based selection system which limits the number of students by their academic excellence lies a family context of an academic and professional nature which facilitates the appearance of such a ‘vocation’, as well as helping the student to achieve academically the standard that is demanded in this so-called merit-based system.

Nevertheless, it is not only the new types of old inequalities that we find within the school itself that are revealed by social scientists today.

In the last decades the very concept of equal opportunities has been the subject of discussion. In this arena there have been many arguments raised by different parties to justify the purpose of the school system in modern societies (Derouet, 1992). Various models are put forward. Besides the model of the school system as a common good – which is the why an educational system is viewed as a public service – there is the model of success and the commercial model, held in opposition to each other, there is also another, the community model, which is based on valuing the student who is seen as an important member of the school community.

Now, if the focus is placed on developing the potential of the individual, and this is seen as one of the aims – if not *the* aim – of the current school system, then it must follow that the recognising and placing value on individual differences is an enriching factor in the educational context. As such the focus shifts from *equality* to *difference*. And it up to this new light that, many believe, current teaching practices should be held up to and it is on this principle that current criteria of justice in the school system should be based.

Chapter six is a good illustration of this concept of justice in the school system at work, in view of the way that the school deals with the language diversity resulting from the many ethnic backgrounds of its students, many of them from former Portuguese colonies in Africa where standard Portuguese is not the mother tongue and it advocates the need for ‘recognition’ criteria – and not simply ‘redistribution’ – to be put into practice in the school as a means of promoting social justice which is pluralistic, not standardised – in other words, based on the model of general interest.

New challenges for the school system

In the aftermath of the Second World War and what followed, the experience of modernity touched all spheres of society. From the rural exodus witnessed in democratic and more developed societies, between the 1950s and the 1970s, as a first flux, to the great migratory movements from developing countries toward their former colonial rulers, from the 60s onwards, and especially during the 80s, as a second flux, the school system is faced with new challenges. These take place within the school, between teachers, students and their parents, as well as outside the school, as evidence of the effect of an ever longer schooling on the public and political arena.

Although modern schooling has always been a subject of debate and public discussion amongst intellectuals, specialists in the field, politicians and teachers, with the advent of the late or reflexive modernity (Beck, Giddens, Lash, 2000) or of the expanded liberal modernity (Wagner, 1996), more emphasis is put on educational policy, around these political discussions that are taking place, and how those policies affect all of the spheres of influence of the school institution.

Portugal is no exception, despite the relative delay in bringing matters of education to the public forum, which, it can be argued, are a clear demonstration of the country's difficult political history.

In actual fact, after a short-lived democratic experience at the time of the First Republic (1910-1926), Portugal was under a political dictatorship – the New State – that promotes ideals and values of a corporate doctrine, between the coup d'état in 1926 and the restoration of democracy in 1974. Despite the constitutional ban on political parties, free associations and unions, the country witnesses a widespread, unofficial discussion of many of its problems that had to wait until after the 1974 Revolution for public venting.

The studies we highlight at this point are a reflection on the public debate around the challenges of contemporary Portuguese schools, the problems of building aims and various other unique questions.

Bruno Dionísio's study covers some of the areas of modern ideological discussion which call for educational psychologists to become an integral part of the Portuguese public school. The ideological discussion that is centred on the need to build a sense of personal identity and of a life project all point to, according to Dionísio, the emergence of a 'market of career orientation' with psychologists and students on either side of the supply and demand side of this market.

The considerations put forward by Maria Manuel Vieira focus on the transformations taking place in the 1990s in the Portuguese educational system, with the advent of the political principal of decentralization and autonomy of

schools. The school project is the centre-piece of this principle of educational decentralization in the school. Maria Manuel Vieira realises that it is as difficult to combine the principles of organization and administration at a local level as it is at a national level, as well as discovering that many schools prefer the old system of being part of a grid of centralized decisions as regards the purpose and aims of education, instead of investing in these common identifying principles to become more autonomous, despite the uncertainties that brings and the added responsibility.

The approach chosen by José Resende in his first article is centred on the criticism and public outcry of certain teachers in secondary school during the years of the Portuguese dictatorship. Many of the criticisms have to do with the way that schools were organised, both administratively as well as in terms of educational orientation. The changes introduced in the relationship between students and teachers made it possible for emergence of other ways of representing the latter, both in establishing the ideals of the autonomy of the student, as well as developing ideals of the creation and expansion of individualization of the student in Portuguese society.

The discussion about the role of the school in contemporary societies will continue for many years to come. There are many reasons for this discussion of which we have highlighted two that are particularly pertinent, one being that of the school being the place of modern freedom – which is translated in the model of passing down a set of knowledge – and the other one being that of the school being a place of modern discipline – which is translated in the model of school socialization, or social awareness – on which all public school systems are based.

The first has to do with the importance that has been placed relatively recently on lifelong studying which is a new concern on the political agenda, both of national governments and internationally. Whatever the reasons for this new ‘trend’ in education – whether it be demographics, given that there is a longer life expectancy in western societies, or an economic reason, in trying to arm the work force with greater competitiveness in international terms, or others – we believe that the discussion of this matter will bring to it new ways of equating the modern school.

The second is concerned with the emergence of new social contexts where there is a demand for a greater identity statement. It is the result of more intense fluxes of migrant populations on a global scale and of the value placed on freedom of expression in western societies, as well as, we believe, standing up for the right to be different due to ethnic origin, gender, religion and culture, which question the centralized identity of the school and its socializing role which is vital to the formation of everyday citizenship.

It is up to the Social Sciences to come up with the necessary theoretical and practical instruments that will allow for a balanced and clear analysis of the school in modern times.

PART I

KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY AND KNOWLEDGE AT SCHOOL

CHAPTER ONE

KNOWLEDGE AS CULTURE AND CULTURES OF KNOWLEDGE

RUNE SAKSLIND

Introduction

Against the backdrop of the rapid extension of discourses on the "knowledge society" or on the "ICT-society" one would expect that social scientists would increasingly focus on the concept of knowledge itself, its structure, content, contextuality and morphological heterogeneity. However, this does not appear to be the case. The challenge of understanding the content and role of "knowledge" concerns classical sociological topics like inequality in education, explaining structural differences in national systems of education, as well as questions of the impact of cultural differences on global communication in general. The "globalizing" forces and the pressure to create institutional isomorphism in higher education and increasing international student mobility are bound to intensify these questions. What will be the effects of existing, diversified cultures of knowledge on the formation of students? The often posed question whether educational systems will "converge" or not as a result of supra-national political pressures is important, but still only one of the many problems that arise under a regime of globalization. What we already know about the durability of national cultures and institutions, signals that the outcome of pressures for formal, organisational rectification most likely will be the invention of new institutional structures that recreate traditional forms of education. And how will actors work to conserve the most sacred parts of national traditions from "multicultural" influences?

Social scientists and educationalists naturally turn to the sociology of education to seek knowledge and guidance for action. Unhappily, the traditional sociology of education is – in my view – not very well equipped to investigate and answer many of the questions brought forth by the challenges of globalization. Some reason for this is to be found in established, hegemonic structures internal to the profession of sociology itself and the transcultural circulation of theories and concepts within the international community of

researchers. Due to a certain latent “ethnocentrism” in the writings of leading scholars, one of the results of this logic is a lurking, conceptual alienation (often not recognized or discussed) in the work of researchers having a more peripheral position, noticeable in their attempts to understand the educational logic of their own country or when they try to describe this logic to a foreign audience.

This article pleads for the necessity of more systematic inquiry into “*cultures of knowledge*” as one of the ways sociology should respond to the new, globalized and multicultural realities that confront schools and educational systems. The political agenda produced by the globalization-discourse, is also translated into questions for sociologists. To be sure, the classic topic of equality of opportunity is still a compelling issue. But the new situation intensifies another problem, namely the question of the link between ongoing educational transformations and a new politics of knowledge.

In the article I try to encircle the topic of “knowledge” and how it is treated in Anglo-American sociology of education. I do this by means of a retrospective analysis of certain aspects of the discussion on social reproduction in education. In particular I address the concept of “culture” and “cultural capital” attributed to Pierre Bourdieu, as applied to processes in the field of education and in the educational system. The reception of his concept of *cultural capital* is a reasonable point of departure, because of the structure of Bourdieu’s thinking as well as his influential position. To use Bourdieu as an entrance places us directly on the most densely populated terrain of the discipline (the question of social class and *equality in school*) and allows us at the same time to observe how *cultural differences* are treated in the literature.

To do this means to confront a paradox, occasionally commented upon by writers on educational matters⁽¹⁾: The content of education in schools is not a major preoccupation for sociologists. Even those who specialize in the sociology of education are more concerned about the hidden curriculum than about the curriculum itself². This asymmetry is bound to create inconsistencies and lacunas in the practice of educational researchers, since schools and universities are institutions commonly recognized as having as a primary task the transmission of “knowledge”.

The problem at hand is indicated by some ambiguities still present in educational sociology. A look at the Bourdieu-reception and the critique directed at the concept of cultural capital as well as the theoretical solutions proposed, reveals – in particular – some recurring conceptual and paradigmatic particularities, that all concern the treatment of “knowledge”:

1. *Evasive knowledge*. This refers to the use of an often undefined concept of knowledge, having a curious dual position, on the one hand as something central to any comprehension of educational processes, and on the other as a

concept with a shadowy, disembodied existence and having a peripheral role in explicit, theoretical discussions.

2 *Objectified knowledge*. As a counterpoint to its evasiveness, knowledge is purified, and partitioned into two separate categories (sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit):

a) the technical (formal, neutral) types of knowledge (skills or abilities) – i.e. basically its “cognitive” aspect.

b) the “noncognitive” knowledge - open to influence or to being “infected” by (arbitrary), social, cultural and ideological factors.

3. *Culture-free knowledge* (or the problem of conceptual validation). A (mostly unreflected) methodological tension emerges from the literature: there is a predominant tendency towards theoretical “universalism”, that is a lack of attention to the problems of translating theories across different cultural universes, and little awareness of the contextuality of concepts.

The two last ones will, in particular, will be discussed here. These specific ambiguities are not peculiar to the sociology of education as a subfield, but could be shown to characterize much social science when it deals (explicitly or implicitly) with the topic of “knowledge”. But one must expect such a defect to have more negative and far-reaching consequences in the treatment of a subject like education.

The aim in this essay is threefold: First, to reveal how these ambiguities unfold in the Anglo-American discussions on the relevance of the Bourdieusian legacy for the sociology of education, and how this discourse confronts (or evades) the challenges of cross cultural analysis and the existence of national varieties in educational systems and their societal embeddedness. Next, I discuss briefly some of the methodological issues confronting a sociology of education focused on national patterns, in a context of international circulation of cultural artefacts and political ideas. Then, in the last part, I try to outline some perspectives, theories and hypotheses that seem essential to research addressing the comparative institutionalization of knowledge.

The concept of ‘cultural capital’ and its transmutations

The notion of cultural capital in Bourdieu’s theory is intimately connected to his sociology of education, and in his writings on cultural reproduction the educational process has invariably been considered central to the creation and distribution of culture as “capital”, something which reflects the importance of the educational system in French society. It emerges as a central concept in the book by Bourdieu/Passeron (*La reproduction* 1970/1977) and as a basic element in their sketch for a general “theory of symbolic violence” which is presented as the leading concern in the the study. The cardinal ambition - to

theorize power as it is manifested in a specific institutional context – is a significant feature of the study, which places at the centre of attention the work of the teacher as the representative of the dominant classes and their elite culture, and as a profession exerting a “pedagogic authority” in educational institutions that functions as a form of “symbolic violence” towards students. It is well known that this perspective on culture, class distinction and symbolic power is further developed in numerous studies of different social “fields” by Bourdieu in the following decades, although the continuing importance he attributed to knowledge and education in the process of cultural reproduction tends to be forgotten.

A full study of conceptual diffusion – its reception and translation - should reconstruct in detail the history of the idea of “cultural capital” as it emerges from the study of education, in the first books and articles written in the 60s by Bourdieu (and Passeron) (from *Les Héritiers* to *La reproduction*) and their translation into English in the late 70s, and its Anglo-American reception. In this essay I will not launch such a larger project, but restrict myself to the review of some recent contributions that attempt to take stock of Bourdieu’s sociology of education and the fulfilment (or not) of the “promise of cultural capital theory” (Kingston 2001).

In the process of reception of the concept, the tendency is to transform it in terms of theory, methodology or perspective. It is reshaped from a concept of culture as power into one of culture as a variable. It is refocused from the class room as the intersection between class domination at the macro-level and educational micro processes, and toward the analysis of the local interaction between schools and families or neighbourhoods. It is removed from the practice of symbolic violence in schools to one of education as a process of (neutral) accreditation and (efficient) learning of skills. In the north-American context a decisive influence is attributed to the study by Paul DiMaggio on “Cultural capital and school success” (DiMaggio 1982). Here the concept of cultural capital is conceived as a property of elites sharing a common sense of honour and esteeming conventional, but distinctive cultural traits, tastes and styles, which is considered prestigious in the society at large, and are used for exclusionary, class-related purposes. This notion of cultural capital is operationalized by use of survey data in a study of the impact of culture on the attainment of high school grades. Earlier studies had shown that neither family socioeconomic status nor measured ability were strong predictors of high-school grades, while ethnographical studies described schools as places where social status mattered and where cultural particularisms reigned. The study followed up a suggestion made in an earlier review article on Bourdieu, namely that “... the theory of cultural capital calls attention to the importance of studying the role of non-cognitive traits in school experience.” (DiMaggio,

1979:1471). This “non-cognitive”, definition of cultural capital as elite-culture is specified in the later study where DiMaggio sharply distinguishes “culture” from measured “abilities” or specific, technical “skills” (3).

To be true DiMaggio, in this widely cited study, succeeded in establishing a connection between culture and grades, even though the relationship observed were of modest strength. But the measure of high status culture he used was only weakly related to family social status. Evidently, such a result is in disagreement with Bourdieu’s original theory, since it dilutes the class embeddedness of culture and turns it into a general “cultural resource” available to many strata in their striving for social uplift. Nevertheless, as is documented by Larreau and Weininger, a large number of educational studies has applied varieties of this purified concept of cultural capital, which in their judgement is part of the now “*dominant interpretation*” of the concept (Larreau and Weininger 2003), at least in the English language literature.

The “dominant interpretation”, as labelled by Larreau and Weininger has, however, a dual nature, involving a further cleansing of Bourdieu’s notion. In addition to the “high-brow” definition of the content of cultural capital, the “dominant interpretation” maintains that the content of the concept should be kept separate (both causally and conceptually) from the effects of “abilities”, “skills”, standardized test-scores and measurable academic capacities. One of the notable consequences of this idea is the expectation that cultural capital will make more difference for merit in subjects like history, language or social studies where the quality standards are diffuse and subjective than it will for example in mathematics or science topics, which are supposed to be based on more objective criteria. And in fact, here is where DiMaggio finds the highest impact of his culture-measure on grades.

What then has been the outcome of this wave of studies? A recent survey of the empirical research on the role of cultural capital in schools concluded rather negatively, and categorically, that cultural capital theory has not “fulfilled its promise” in the sense that

1. culture as exclusionary, class-related practices and dispositions “... does not substantially account for the relationship between social privilege and academic success...”, and that

2. “... too many conceptually distinct variables have come to be placed under the big umbrella of cultural capital, creating a distorted sense of what accounts for academic success” (Kingston, 2001:89).

Even if there is a net effect of the variables indicating cultural capital, the result is open to a wide range of interpretations and – in particular - leaves the question of the “causal” mechanisms involved unanswered. And the evidence there is for the cultural capital hypothesis points more to a model of culture as a

general resource for mobility than to culture as a mechanism for class reproduction.

However, in these discussions of various empirical contributions, including Kingston's survey, there emerges a picture of social processes and mechanisms at work in schools that apparently is quite different from the image of French educational life portrayed by Bourdieu. And even if we have in mind the different historical settings of the studies, it is hard to avoid the feeling that what is at stake here are not simply concepts and their operationalization, but the analysis of two quite different societies in their empirical manifestations. A study of American teachers and their perceptions of pupils (based on a national survey) e.g. showed that their focus was hardly affected by (what the researchers regarded as) "cultural capital". Instead they tended rather consistently to favour students with high test scores and who managed to "stay out of trouble". Moreover, the data also showed that teachers themselves had very modest endowments of cultural capital. Kingston also detects a pervasive tendency to widen the concept of culture including a heterogeneous mix of items like "working hard, academic equipment and whiteness" as "forms of capital" (Kingston 2001:95).

This stretching of definitions could probably be viewed as exemplifying a process of "epistemological transition" in the community of educational researchers, gradually adapting the French concept to an American context, not necessarily accompanied by explicit methodological discussion. One of the studies highlighted by Kingston indicates what really counts for school performance among seventh and eight-grade students in an urban south-western, North-American environment: If you have *good basic skills* and are *working hard* it will give you higher grades and better course-related test-scores (Farkas et.al 1990). In accordance with such findings, Kingston argues strongly for the (re)introduction of the skill-dimension and factors indicating abilities in the sociology of education - but *not* as an attribute to or enrichment of the class-embedded concept of *cultural capital*, rather it is conceived as an important, cultural non-arbitrary trait making for good students and which are "valued by all social groups" (Kingston, 201:97) ⁽⁴⁾.

Lareau and Weininger however, find this situation unsatisfactory. And as an alternative to the "dominant interpretation" they introduce a reconstructed version of Bourdieu's theory, based on a review of (some) of his writings on education. For one thing, they point to passages where Bourdieu uses a rather open definition of the content of cultural capital, inviting researchers belonging to different societies to re-interpret the notion according to empirical circumstances. This is the case for instance in the article on "Forms of capital", where the aesthetics of the "highbrow" culture is not brought into the theory (Bourdieu, 1998) ⁽⁵⁾. And they point to the article by Lamont and Larreau