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A large, stylized yellow graphic element on a purple background. It consists of a thick, wavy line that starts on the left, curves down, then up, and then down again. A black railing with white vertical bars follows the curve of the line, appearing to be on top of it.

## Waikato Journal of Education Te Hautaka Mātauranga o Waikato

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# Waikato Journal Of Education

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Volume 19, Issue 1, 2014

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## Editorial. The field of education: Using Bourdieu's utensils for praxis

**lisahunter**

Sport and Leisure Studies  
The University of Waikato

Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) was a French social theorist who provided us with a reflexive social theory that drew from sociology, philosophy, and anthropology. He was one of many scholars who have had an impact on research with a practice base in education. He offered the more well used theoretical utensils of *habitus*, *field*, *capital*, *doxa* and *symbolic violence* and the lesser known *hysteresis*, *bodily hexis*, *illusio* and *misrecognition*. These were developed over his career as an activist scholar wherein he argued for praxis and research *reflexivity*. His concepts were developed to break from assumed ways of thinking, offering a theory of embodiment that is useful for understanding deeply entrenched forms of embodied existence and differentiated social power relations. Using these concepts, we can come to some understanding of how we embody culture while at the same time, through our practices, change and/or replicate the status quo. Bourdieu (1990a) proposed that it is our taken-for-granted, recursive daily practices that reveal the visible, objective social phenomena that determine the nature of our society. His own field-based anthropological research led him to conclude that practice should be the primary focus of all social analysis, because it is practice, derived from the subconscious, that reveals both the logic of the actions of individuals and the structuring of the social space in which they are embedded.

Bourdieu's methodological and theoretical contributions have been applied to many fields including the media, art and education. His theoretical framework offers a way to analyse the enduring behaviours, characteristics and cultural practices of social groups or classes, as papers in this special section attest. Education was the target of his well-known work with Jean Claude Passeron (1977) captured in *Reproduction: In education, society and culture*. Scholars have continued this work (for example see Grenfell & James, 1998, 2010; Lingard & Christie, 2003; Naidoo, 2004; Nash, 1990; and a special issue led by Reay, Arnot, David, Evans, & James, 2004) but have also gone beyond Bourdieu's work to explore practices in fields out of Bourdieu's view (see for example lisahunter, Smith, & emerald, in press, edited collection on physical culture), to explore practices while reshaping his utensils (see for example Adkins & Skeggs, 2004) or to explore in more depth some of the fields close to his own projects but in different timespace (see for example Conal McCarthy's recent work on the rules of Māori art, 2013). This extension of Bourdieu's work has been in keeping with his generative project to continue to expose symbolic violence and look for ways to embody more socially just practices, even within our own scholarship. He encouraged calling the intellectual world into question through critical reflexivity (1990a, 1990b) including his own (e.g. see 1990c, and with Wacquant, 1989, 1992), suggesting that as researchers we characteristically enter our work loaded with preconceptions. A way to address these is to illuminate and expose them as part of the



scholarship process; critiquing the “scholastic point of view” (1990b) that affects how we see the world and perhaps imposes structures or logics, mistaking “the things of logic for the logic of things” (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 61).

In an effort to take time and space to attend to our scholastic point of view and build collaboration and support for early career scholars in these individualistic neoliberal times, and with a focus on the education field, this issue of the *Waikato Journal of Education* is the culmination of work from two Bourdieu hui and a symposium held at The University of Waikato for Aotearoa/New Zealand and international scholars. The hui were created to enhance our language and understandings of the conceptual work of Bourdieu, share the methodological and theoretical dilemmas and breakthroughs in our work, and create a community of scholars who can take Bourdieu’s work to new places. The symposium’s invited speaker, Franz Schultheis, gave insight into his personal and professional relationship with Bourdieu and prompted an invitation to also submit to this issue. Submissions were also invited from those who have applied and extended Bourdieu in their research of practice within education. As a legacy of Bourdieu’s work, the papers in this issue deal with praxis, putting his concepts to work, resulting in new ways of working for some, new ideas for others and insights into new contexts for others. As will be clear in some of the papers, this is ongoing rather than finished work!

The first paper pays attention to reflexivity in higher education. Wayne Smith wanted to better understand workplace shared experiences and craft action during a difficult time of change involving a merger within a university setting. He used the dialectical relationship of Bourdieu’s field/habitus to expose the doxa and *illusio* that he and his colleagues embodied but then attempted to use to resist unwanted changes. He describes how he developed his theoretical lens using Bourdieu’s theory of practice when a previous lens fell short for his purposes and then put the theory to work in order to influence practices in which he was intimately involved. He describes the interaction between his cohort and university management; each group’s blind spots being exposed through the intellectual tools he used to examine and better understand the nature of their practice.

The second paper by Marion Sanders also pays attention to reflexivity in higher education: an honest account of her learning encounter in cultural appreciation as a tertiary educator. While many academics are striving to expose only a competent and informed scholarship, constantly raising the bar of what it means to engage with scholarship, Marion is humble in her recognition that there is always more to learn, as praxis, when working in education. Her intentionally conversational style reminds us to employ styles that are accessible, unlike her early encounter with Bourdieu’s writing. Nonetheless, she also notes the importance of persevering with language in order to understand that which is outside our current safe spaces of English as a first language and conceptual spaces that may be familiar to us. Through her engagement with Bourdieu she is able to recognise the cultural arbitrary, reflect upon and change her own practice to ensure a more authentic alignment with her education values, and engage more fully with the Tongan students she encounters.

In Margaret Walshaw’s paper titled “Confirmations and contradictions: Investigating the part that digital technologies play in students’ everyday and school lives”, we move to schooling practices as the object of investigation. Like other papers in this issue, change in practice is again a theme. Drawing on a large-scale study, technological innovation was seen to be a part of students’ lives but lacking in schools. The paper interrogates how habitus/field operate to resist or embrace digital change and how gaps between different fields’ take-up of the same practice may inform reworking education. The relationship between field/habitus in terms of change and technology is also taken up by Aminath Adam and Noeline Wright. In their paper “Maldivian teacher educators’ cultural embodiment and the shaping of ICT habitus in their pedagogical practices”, they identify how teacher educators negotiate ICT for the purposes of efficiency but not pedagogy. There are strong links to Bourdieu’s field of power as they point to an available discourse of teacher-centrism rooted in (Maldivian) cultural capital. Both papers point to the dialectical and co-constitutive relationship between habitus and field,

one that still requires much attention if schooling specifically, and education more broadly, is to understand and lead change as opposed to reproduction.

Lars Bang goes beyond Bourdieu's notion of field by also incorporating Foucault's discursive field to investigate a Danish regional project and suggest ways to trace "practices, rationalities and entanglements" across different fields. He introduces the idea of the quasi-self-similar-fractal to understand field multiplicity with a mind to illuminate how scientific habitus in the educational field is related to the business of empire building, where certain aspects of schooling are marketed and sold. A similar theme of marketization sits behind Franz Schultheis' invited 'think piece' informed by his sociological roots and embodiment of Bourdieu's work. In "The precariousness of the young generation and the making of flexible and employable workforce: A Bourdieusian point of view revisited", Franz focuses on Bourdieu's notion of youth, intimately related to schooling and the education system that he dubs a social laboratory, in particular defined at the borders of another field, employment or the labour market. He recognises that inequality takes on a "paradoxical quality" for young people in today's context, one that education perhaps reproduces rather than challenges.

Clearly, there is still plenty of scope for the field of 'education' to engage with, beyond and against Bourdieu's utensils given the relatively narrow range of concepts and contexts addressed in this special issue and in education more broadly to date. However, continuing the practices of scholarly praxis to challenge oppression, social research and doxic onto-epistemologies, as have these authors and many others who have participated in the hui, and as Bourdieu invited, leaves much space to move from here.

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