Southampton
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The Off-side Trap

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The Field of Higher Education:

Widening or increasing participation?
– expansion driven by 18–21y.o. school-leavers, (Elliott, 2003) and by those from more affluent families (Franklin, 2006)
– targeted groups unequally represented across the sector, (BIS, 2010)

Changing profile of OT student population
– 67% of 2005 intake mature (COT, 2007)
– non-traditional academic backgrounds

The Field of Higher Education:

Barriers:
– adequate economic capital (Lynch and O'Neill, 1994; Reay et al, 2002)
– competing priorities (Quinn et al, 2005; Reay, 2003)
– the nature of the field itself (Ball et al, 2002; Reay et al, 2001)
– long-established culture, generally oriented towards the traditional white middle-class student population (Archer, 2003; Lynch and O'Neill, 1994)

Bourdieu's Theory of Practice:

Focuses on the dynamic interrelationship between social forces and individual dispositions that conceal and perpetuate conventional hierarchies of power and privilege (Grenfell, 2004)

Individual behaviour or practice is organised and produced neither entirely consciously nor entirely unconsciously.

Continuous learning about the usual patterns of social action and interaction within a given context enable individuals to develop an innate 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu, 1990)

Field:

- Bounded social spaces, spheres or arenas of life which form distinct social worlds (Bourdieu and Waquant 1992)

- Encompass the 'rules of the game' and taken-for-granted practices

- Define the range of possible and acceptable actions and behaviours (Grenfell, 2004)

Habitus:

- Durable, transposable dispositions through which individuals perceive, judge and behave within, and think about the world (Bourdieu 1990)

- Structured by the social forces of the field that produce it while simultaneously structuring behaviours, perceptions and expectations (Wacquant 1998)

Capital:

- Any resource that holds symbolic value within a given field and therefore acts as a currency of that field
  – Economic
  – Cultural
  – Social

- Positions and trajectories within a given field vary with the volume and composition of individual portfolios of capital (Wacquant, 1998)

Research Outline:

How do occupational therapy students from non-traditional academic backgrounds negotiate the learning requirements of the higher education environment?

- Exploratory, instrumental case study approach (Stake 1995)
- Focus: students with non-traditional academic backgrounds without prior experience of HE
- Incorporating Progression Routes Study and Documentary Analysis

- **Longitudinal Student Experiences Study**
  - 13 participants from a single cohort
  - Focus groups at entry
  - Individual reflective diaries
  - Individual semi-structured interviews towards the end of first and third years of study

Students' Experiences:
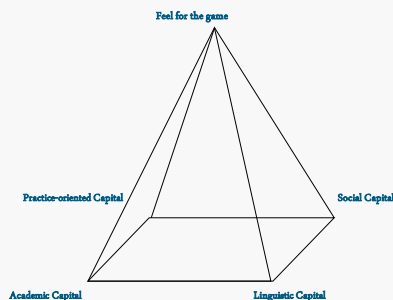
Betty: didn't want to 'change'

'*I'm not going to become somebody that I'm not. You know…I want to remain quite grounded and I don't want to lose myself along the way. This is going to help me grow*' [first interview]

'*I remember a lot of note-taking. I remember a lot of…the thing that sticks in my mind is this, writing down words. I didn't have a clue what they were, I just wrote them down [laughing]*' [first interview]

'*when you are sort of struggling a little bit with your academic work, you think, "I could have done with that", you know, just to sort of bounce ideas off.*' [second interview].

www.everyjoe.com/thefootie

Betty:

'*I think you grow because you want to adapt to the society that you're in as well. Because I want to do well in this. I don't want to just pass my degree or pass my exams, I want to do well in them. So I've had to sort of change my language, change my terminology and just fit in here at university.*' [first interview]

'*It's a huge pool, isn't it, that you step into and you're up to your neck rather than up to you knees […] I had to step on the side of the pool, delve into what I needed to get me though, rather than get in, immerse myself with it*' [second interview].

'*…it's something that I do need to sit and talk to my husband about. Because I don't want to have changed too much [laughing] Sometimes I say things and he'll say, you know, "What are you talking about?"*' [second interview]

Amy: hoped to find 'a new me'

'*[in a hushed, urgent voice] …you've got an assessment! You've got to hand this in! It's got to be right! [Returning to a normal voice] It's got to be at the right level.*' [second interview]

'*If you want to get this degree, you've got to pass this. 40%. You've got to do it!*' [second interview]

'*I'm putting the effort in, but I'm not meeting my potential. I have got more in me, but I don't want the University…I do have concerns that the University probably doesn't think I've got it*' [first interview].

Amy:

'*Sometimes it's difficult to actually…'cause you know when you get talking you go into Uni mode and I start saying things that probably, she wouldn't understand*' [first interview]

'*You don't think you're worthy, but when you go on to Placement you can…It's like you set that aside.*' [second interview]

'*I think I fit in University life completely. It's me; I'm the natural learner.*' [second interview]

'*I think it's been hard; but I think it's been harder because I've been isolated. When you don't have a buddy that you can talk to…when you have nobody to talk to […] When you've got absolutely nobody, that's damn hard*' [second interview]

Playing by the rules or off-side?

Habitus incongruent with dominant field culture often renders the taken-for-granted rules of the game inaccessible and unfathomable.

Sports News Ireland, 21ª March 2010

Difficult to avoid being off-side without a feel for the game, or how be 'on-side'.

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