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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Profitable portfolios: capital that counts in higher education

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Profitable portfolios: capital that counts in higher education

Under-representation in UK higher education of students from less privileged social backgrounds is an enduring problem. While there are examples of productive participation, the pattern of collective trajectories of this group differs sharply from that of traditional entrants (Reay 2006). The onus falls largely to students to adapt to established practices which remain strongly oriented towards traditional white middle-class populations (Read et al. 2003, Burke 2005).

Bourdieu's theory of practice informed the analysis of data emerging from a longitudinal case study and empirical insights are offered into how students with non-traditional academic backgrounds experienced and negotiated the demands of studying in one of the UK's research-intensive universities. A new conceptual framework identifies academic, linguistic, social and professionally-oriented capital as underpinning the logic of practice of this sub-field of higher education, and their influence on the positional tendencies and trajectories of the students operating within it are highlighted.

Keywords:

widening participation; capital; field; logic of practice

Background and introduction

Long before the release of the Browne Report in 2010, the United Kingdom (UK) field of higher education (HE) had been subject to significant and far-reaching changes. Already expanding admissions (Maringe and Fuller 2006) were given new impetus by the 1997 Dearing Report and the pursuant widening participation agenda which was explicitly underpinned by social justice and economic rationale (DfES 2003a, 2003b). The emergence of the 'knowledge' or 'information' society was accompanied by an expectation that HE would contribute to developing the nation's competitiveness in the global economy and simultaneously facilitate and enhance social cohesion and equality (Naidoo 2000, Osborne 2003).

Despite a significant increase in the proportion of students securing the necessary qualifications to enter and the number actually participating in HE, under-representation of those from less privileged social backgrounds remains an enduring problem (Reay et al. 2005). It has been suggested that students from non-traditional backgrounds have to contend with a variety of significant challenges that can have a marked impact on their performance, retention and experiences (see, for example: Ozga and Sukhnandan 1998, Yorke 2001, Thomas 2002, Leathwood and O'Connell 2003, May and Bousted 2004, Sambell and Hubbard 2004), but growing appreciation of the depth and complexity of the issues has witnessed a movement away the apparent assumption of deficit towards greater recognition of the role played by institutions themselves (Thomas 2002, Leathwood and O'Connell 2003, Sambell and Hubbard 2004, Greenbank 2006).

On an individual basis there are indeed examples of productive participation in HE, but the pattern of the collective trajectories of less privileged social groups differs sharply from that of traditional entrants (Reay 2006), and the onus falls to students to adapt to and fit in with established practices (Layer 2002, Burke 2005). Despite changing student demographics, significant challenges to the dominant culture of HE have been slow to emerge and its long-established traditions and practices continue to be very much oriented towards its traditional white middle-class student population (Read et al. 2003). The literature offers insight into the constrained choices, the challenges encountered and even the successes achieved by students from non-traditional backgrounds (see, for example: Ball et al. 2002, Archer et al. 2003, Forsyth and Furlong 2003, Crozier et al. 2008, Reay et al. 2009, David et al. 2010), but there is less consideration given to how the practices and culture of a particular learning environment directly influence students' experiences.

Research Outline

The findings presented here emerged from a three-year longitudinal case study in which an undergraduate occupational therapy (OT) programme in one of the UK's research intensive universities became a vehicle for exploring the educational experiences of students with non-traditional academic backgrounds. The study aimed particularly to explore how students' learning experiences were influenced by the culture, practices and nuances of the HE environment they

entered. The intention of this paper is to provide insight into the nature and role of the capital that was identified as profitable to students within that particular field, or social space.

Thirteen volunteer participants were drawn from a single cohort as they prepared to commence their studies. Data were collected via initial focus groups exploring pre-entry educational experiences and expectations of studying in HE, reflective diaries recording educational experiences that participants considered significant or meaningful, and one-to-one semi-structured interviews conducted towards the end of participants' first and third years of study which focused on exploring their learning experiences. Additional background data were collected via participant-completed demographic information forms and family education and employment maps. Analysis of documentation produced by the dominant voices within the institution, school and department (e.g. mission statements, strategies, policies, regulations, validation documents, programme specifications, timetables, module profiles and assessment criteria) provided representations and images (Mason 2002) of the case study site and offered insight into the pervading culture, values and assumptions (Bogdan and Biklen 2007).

Bourdieu's theory of practice (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, Bourdieu 1990b, Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), particularly his core concepts of 'habitus', 'field' and 'capital' provided the framework within which data were examined. These sensitising concepts were used neither to construct a pre-determined coding framework nor to dominate analysis, but to examine how Bourdieu's theory of practice might lend meaning to participants' experiences and therefore provides an example of what Braun and Clarke (2006) describe as 'theoretical' thematic analysis.

Playing the game

Distinct arenas of life or social spaces such as HE, or even particular sub-sections of it, are described by Bourdieu as fields. Each has its own unique, established and taken-for-granted practices which effectively define the range of possible and acceptable (or orthodox) actions and behaviour available to individuals operating within it (Wacquant 1998, Grenfell 2004). In this way, individual fields have their own particular 'logic of practice' or 'game', the governing principles of which reflect the interests of a field's most powerful or dominant groups, and entry into that field is dependent upon at least implicit acceptance of the 'rules of the game' (Grenfell 2007).

Bourdieu (1990b, p66) explains that a 'feel for the game' implicit in individual social fields emerges from experience of the game and the structures within which it is played. The 'rules' or patterns which define the ordinary functioning of the field are not explicit or codified (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) and orthodox ways of doing and being are not consciously held in the heads of 'players'. Instead, they are largely implicit and partially internalised, shaping individuals' thoughts and actions to profit from or succeed within the field according to the capitals valued by it (Grenfell and James 1998, Grenfell 2007).

The (sub-)field in focus

Pre-registration education of OTs in the UK straddles the fields of professional practice and HE and is therefore subject to the dynamics and struggles operating within each. The research was undertaken in a well-established research-intensive university that typically demands high UCAS entry points. Although it can be understood to represent a (sub-)field in itself, within the wider field of HE in the UK at the (pre-Browne) time of the research, the institution was recognised as being of good-standing, but also to be dominated by other, more powerful and prestigious institutions. Keen to improve its national and international reputation to further enhance its position, research excellence on an international scale was a key strategic aim reflecting the high value status of this form of capital within the HE field. Responding to imperatives emanating from the political field regarding widening participation and the quality of student experiences, the institution also identified a commitment to providing high-quality research-led education to all students who could benefit from it.

Entry into the OT profession is contingent upon a minimum BSc (Hons) qualification, institutionalised cultural capital which is only accessible through engagement with and legitimation by the HE field. Professional practice is strongly influenced by health and social care agendas emanating from the political field, the standards set by the independent regulatory and professional bodies, and by struggles for professional recognition and status within the healthcare field. The case study site demanded some of the highest entry requirements within the UK field of OT education at the time. Although a small school within its institution, recent programme revalidation documentation emphasised its field position by describing its strong reputation amongst competitors and local employers, and its strong performance for a school of its type in terms of research output.

Building on the notion of fields within fields (Grenfell and James 1998), the case study site can be understood as a microcosm of the field of OT education within the field of HE. Most of the study's participants successfully secured their professional/academic qualification and therefore accrued the sought-after cultural capital. While the routes to achieving these ends varied widely, it is evident that even where participants' established habitus, their unconscious ways of being and perceiving acquired during lengthy exposure to particular social conditions (Bourdieu 1990b, Wacquant 1998), were largely incongruent with the social conditions of the new field they had entered, most were able to adapt to its logic of practice to take advantage of the opportunities presented.

Capital that counts

Capital refers to any resource holding symbolic value within and therefore acting as a form of 'currency' of a particular field, denoting the position of an individual within it or, more broadly, within the hierarchy of society. In any social field there is variability in the habitus of even long-term inhabitants. It is those with well-formed habitus that most closely aligns with the dominant culture and logic of practice of the field who possess the most symbolic capital relevant to it (Moore 2008). Common to and underpinning the experiences of participants in this research were the concepts of

academic, linguistic, social and professionally-oriented capital, portfolios of which were held in variable configurations and volumes by each participant. Individuals' experiences, positioning and trajectories within the field reflected their portfolios of these identified capitals. Figure 1 provides a model or conceptual framework illustrating these key forms of capital which were highlighted by the data as underpinning a 'feel for the game', or the successful engagement with the logic of practice of the field under consideration.

FIGURE 1 LOCATED APPROXIMATELY HERE

Academic capital

Bourdieu (1988) uses the term 'academic capital' in relation to academic staff to reflect graduation from an elite institution, the age at which a highly selective national exam was passed (Grenfell 2007) and the development of intellectual products such as 'lectures, textbooks, dictionaries, encyclopaedias, etc.' (Bourdieu 1988, p98). He uses 'educational capital' to refer to the options studied or grade awarded in the baccalauréat (Bourdieu 1988, p168). Naturally, cultural capital of this type held particular relevance and value in the context of this research. Reflecting the spectrum of capital that might be expected of students and academics operating within the field, my use of the term 'academic capital' might be seen as a bridge between Bourdieu's educational and academic capitals.

In this research, academic capital reflected the legitimated forms of academic skills and knowledge profitable to students within the field, which ultimately translated into academic attainment and award and therefore a higher value cultural capital. Building throughout students' engagement with the field academic capital included, for example, legitimated disciplinary and related knowledge, including adherence to referencing and citation conventions; orthodox approaches to searching for, accessing and critically appraising knowledge sources and to justifying and substantiating ideas and arguments; and the legitimated style and delivery of oral presentations and written work, including the structure and tone of academic writing. Marking criteria provided some insight into the characteristics of academic capital but, holding true to the largely symbolic nature of cultural capital, much remained implicit.

To illustrate, Gabby had a full and varied life before entering HE, aged 51, with her partner's financial, emotional and practical support. She had held various unskilled and semi-skilled jobs, and more latterly had considerable experience in caring and support roles, often with children with physical and learning disabilities. Working closely with OTs inspired her to join the profession, which in turn compelled her entry to HE. Gabby soon recognised that her prior experience (and nascent professionally-oriented capital) offered no guarantee of success. She said:

I probably thought that I would know more or do better than perhaps I did. [...]

Just because I worked in that field before doesn't necessarily mean I know stuff. I mean, I do know *some* stuff [laughs] but I might not know how to apply it properly [first interview].

Explaining how her pre-entry Access course helped her to 'cope' with learning in the HE field, Gabby highlighted her appreciation of the need to comply with the demands imposed by the field, saying:

Understanding how to do the assignments...There is a lot you have to learn before you start on all that. You have to learn about referencing. I didn't know about that. You have to learn to study things. You have to learn how to read books and how to apply yourself and how to write things [first interview].

Notwithstanding this preparation, Gabby had to work hard to try to develop a feel for the game as illustrated by the following quotes from her second interview:

To start with, when you get all these journal articles, you think, 'Why the heck are we reading all these boring things? Why aren't we learning more about the actual subject?

I think a good understanding of *why* you are doing what you are doing, for me, would be helpful; certainly with some of the Uni-type things. I think if I'd understood more *why* I was looking at *that* particular theory, or those particular theories underpinning those [...] situations or issues, I probably would have written a better essay.

A perceived lack of timely feedback further obscured the rules of the game and resulted in a lack of clarity about how she was performing. Unperturbed, Gabby said: 'I just had to think, well, I'll keep going and hope for the best' [first interview], and it was here, for example, that she put her social capital to particularly good use:

one of the most useful things I've found is speaking to my friends and saying, "What do you think about what I've written? Can you have a look? I'm not sure about this. I'm a bit worried that I haven't addressed this properly. What do you think?" [second interview].

Gabby's data demonstrated the manner in which she was able to deploy social, linguistic and professionally-oriented capital to help accrue academic capital relevant to the field and ultimately, a feel for the game. For example, recognising the subjective nature of marking and strategizing accordingly she said:

one of the comments on the [failed] essay was “I wouldn’t have applied this theory to this situation. It’s not really relevant and it’s not the easiest theory to use.” When I went to see the [module leader] afterwards, to go through my essay, she said, “Actually, this theory is one that I would use, and if I was marking this essay, I wouldn’t have marked it down on that, because / think that this is better.” [...] I thought, “OK...who’s marking my essay this time around? Is it you? I’ll go with that then.” [laughs] [second interview].

Standing in some contrast are the experiences of Frances who, aged 41 and with a pivotal role in sustaining her family of two teenagers and a husband working in the emergency services, entered HE seeking a career change. Early on she noted that compared to her recent educational experiences (an Access qualification and one year of a Foundation Degree): ‘the expectations are so very much higher at Uni and the way things are done are so different’ [reflective diary]. With her expectations and understanding of education incongruent with the established practices of field, Frances struggled with the prevalence of self-directed learning and the absence of close working relationships with staff, and felt short-changed at not having been ‘taught’ enough [first interview].

Frances identified herself as highly ambitious academically:

I always set myself up to fail...Always expect to be there [indicating with her hand a high level on an imaginary vertical scale], but I’m *not* going to be there; never have been [...] You know, I’m expecting to get an A; I’ve never got an A [first interview].

Her ambitions may contribute to the deep sense of frustration pervading her data, but it was also evident that Frances struggled to develop a feel for the game and had limited relevant academic capital. Reflecting on a result the previous year she observed: ‘I was pleased with what I’d got, but [sighs] I just get *baffled* on how other people seem to get 70s and I think, “Well what have *they* done that I haven’t?”’ [second interview]. This was clearly an ongoing issue even on the brink of completing her studies:

We were saying on the way down, actually...we still don’t quite know how the marking criteria fit in and the learning outcomes all fit together. It’s always a bit hit and miss whether you’ve written about what you’re supposed to write about [second interview].

I still don’t think I’ve totally got to grips with the stuff, even at this stage of the game, which is a bit worrying, really [second interview].

Touching on the notion of a hidden curriculum and the implicit nature of the logic of practice, Frances said:

whether they are looking for something that isn't written down or [sighs] I don't know. I just get baffled. I never know what marks I'm gonna get. I think sometimes I've done a really good job; I've worked really hard. I've done masses of research or whatever, and then I'll get...a pretty mediocre mark. And then other essays, I mean, my best mark was [in Module X] funnily enough, and [sighs] I was like, "Where's that come from?" [second interview].

Her limited academic capital was compounded by demands that her knowledge be conveyed using forms and language legitimated by the field:

the criteria [...] says: spelling and grammar inaccurate and lots of mistakes and things. I can't, I can't find *anything* and I've asked other people to read it, you know: "Can you see why I've got this?" ... "No" ... [...] The aim I had was for the lad to go to a local football match [...], so I said, "the travelling won't be great as it's a local team", meaning it's not going to be a great distance. She'd obviously interpreted it as the travelling won't be great as in marvellous: "Too colloquial!"... But if you read the whole sentence... [...] OK. I should have said, "The travelling will not be too onerous", or "too far" or I could have used another word. I can see that now. But straight away: "Too colloquial!" When I saw that, I was just so cross [first interview].

Linguistic capital

For Bourdieu, language represents much more than an unproblematic instrument of communication; he said:

it provides, together with a richer or poorer vocabulary, a more or less complex system of categories, so that the capacity to decipher and manipulate complex structures, whether logical or aesthetic, depends partly on the complexity of the language transmitted by the family (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, p73).

An individual's repertoire of language reflects the logic of practice of the social field in which they are immersed, with the initial familial social field having a strong primary influence. As a medium of cultural transmission (Grenfell 2007), the understanding and use of language is unevenly distributed across society and can be understood as a specific form of cultural capital, termed linguistic capital (Bourdieu 1991), the form or style of which potentially differs greatly between fields (Grenfell 1998).

In the context of this research, linguistic capital encompassed aspects of the form and content of language valued within the field, including, for example grammar, linguistic repertoire, forms of phraseology, and tone and mode of written and verbal expression or expressive style (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, Bourdieu 1991). The data highlighted an important relationship, and potential for conversion, between linguistic and academic capital that manifested in a number of ways. Illustrating the impact of linguistic capital on the efficiency of verbal or written pedagogic communication (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977), linguistic capital influenced the accessibility of various learning activities, particularly when that deployed by staff (representing more dominant voices within the field) was markedly different from that held by individual participants. It was central to the interpretation of learning outcomes, marking criteria and feedback, was critical to the capacity to present knowledge and understanding in a form legitimated by the field and to the ability to think using language and therefore to manipulate, interrogate and develop concepts and ideas.

Language was a strong theme in the data of Betty, who described a personal history that included living as a single parent on a council estate for a number of years [focus group] and being 'extremely working-class' [first interview]. She reported holding a range of unskilled and semi-skilled jobs prior to undertaking a pre-entry Access course. She commenced her undergraduate studies aged 34, weeks after marrying her self-employed mechanic husband. Speaking about her early experiences in the field Betty said:

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]. Not just medical words...just normal... language. Sometimes some of the words that we used, I was thinking, "I don't know. I haven't got a *clue* what that means, so I'll write that down and I'll look it up when I get home" [first interview].

The development of language skills (and through them, linguistic capital) was an ongoing and active undertaking for Betty. Differentiating this from the need to develop discipline-specific language, she also highlighted the value of social capital in the development of the linguistic form:

on placement, I tend to do it with medical terms, which I think everybody does, you know [...] but in university, it just can be a word. One of the girls, she's great for telling me words. We'll sit and have a chat and I'll go, "Whatever are you talking about?" [laughs] She's great at explaining and just giving me a definition of words. "OK; and how would you use that in a sentence?" [laughs] [second interview].

Betty indicated that in her third year of study she continued to build her linguistic repertoire and through it linguistic capital by looking up definitions and actively searching the dictionary and thesaurus for new words to use in her written submissions.

Similarly, on entry to the HE field, Amanda recognised that her existing language skills (and stock of linguistic capital) were deficient in the new context and presented a significant barrier. While unfamiliar disciplinary language no doubt had some influence, Amanda spoke of the difficulties she encountered in reading core texts:

I had such a problem with the actual reading [...] because there are just all these words and I was trying to make notes on them because I didn't know the words [...] I'd only read, like, four pages and I'd got all these notes I'd tried to look [them] up and I just, you know, I couldn't decipher which was the most important, because I didn't know it...I didn't know any of it [first interview].

Amanda clearly encountered similar issues during timetabled sessions:

You *think* you've got some of it in your head, and then they stand there and they show you all these things on the slides and they talk about all this stuff and you go home and you read things, and suddenly you think: OK, what the *hell's* that about! You've got all these extra words and you think, "Oh, God!" So it's actually quite different. It's like a foreign language [first interview].

Amanda's limited stocks of relevant linguistic capital confounded the development of academic capital, for example in deciphering marking criteria and learning outcomes, which contributed to the obfuscation of what was required of her: 'I mean they do flow in a sentence, stuff like that, but they use certain words and things that I'm not quite sure about' [first interview]. Linguistic capital also impacted significantly on her capacity to present her knowledge and understanding in the form legitimated by the field, she observed: 'I need to be concise. I know I tend to...I need to be a bit more professional about writing [...] It's just the standard is totally different.' She explained that she meant 'professional' in relation to her style of referencing, use of literature and style and tone of writing: 'It's stuff like that. Little things, and maybe tone of expression. Try and make the sentences stand alone and not babble' [first interview].

Social capital was an important resource in helping Amanda to accrue linguistic and academic capital and a stronger feel for the game. She said:

I've had to try and rely on, well, not *rely* on the network, but talk to them more and use the facilities and use people resources that are there because, umm, key words and thing, I'm trying to be a bit more attentive [to] those things

myself. So I'll try and do stuff and then go to people and meet up and say, "OK, we've got this essay, this is how [sic] my interpretation of it, do you concur?" [second interview].

Noteworthy here is the use of the word 'concur', which, compared with the language she used in earlier rounds of data collection, is evidence of Amanda's growing linguistic capital.

Social capital

Bourdieu describes social capital as 'the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p119). In this research, social capital was drawn primarily from social networks developed within the field and had the potential to confer benefits in the guise of, for example, access to collaborative study groups, peer-review of draft submissions, the sharing of resources and skills, and practical and emotional support. Reflecting what Bourdieu (2006, p110) called its 'multiplier effect', and as illustrated in several of the participant accounts above, social capital had the potential to serve as a powerful mechanism to aid the development of a feel for the game and to facilitate the acquisition of linguistic and academic capital.

Social capital played a particularly significant role for George, for example, who entered the field as a 33 year-old mother of two young children. Her pre-entry A-level was completed through correspondence following an 11-year study gap since the award of a Higher National Diploma at college. In her first interview, George commented: 'learning in groups, that's definitely the key as well. We use a lot of study groups and we find so long as you've got like-minded people and they're on the same wave length...'. The concept of 'like-minded people' was repeated throughout George's data and she was clearly discriminating about who she would work with: 'I think I need to be a little 'cold' and strategic and find people with good understanding of subjects and people on similar wavelengths' [reflective diary]. George's approach had the effect of ensuring that she developed high-value social capital that afforded the greatest benefit. Its centrality to her engagement within the field was further captured in her second interview when she said: 'So we've *needed* each other to gee ourselves on [...] we would get together quite often and just debate ideas and definitely bounce ideas off each other a lot.' It was also evident that social capital was extremely valuable during challenging times, such as the failing health of her father and a house-move in her second year:

I couldn't have done it without their help [...] last year when I was moving and I had [two assessments] to hand in and it was just *hellish*, they really helped me. They were like sending me journal [articles] and things like that, proof reading [second interview].

Standing in stark contrast are the experiences of Amy, the mother of two teenage children who entered HE aged 39 having secured an Access qualification 22 years after leaving school. Reflecting the lack of congruence between home (as her established social field) and the HE field she observed:

I do have my circle outside; one particular person that's very supportive as well. So I've got support from friends at home and Uni, but [...] 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, so sometimes it's best to talk to somebody that does [first interview].

As she progressed through her course, it became evident that Amy did not establish a supportive social network within the field, and therefore the possibility of social capital that she could draw upon. Without people to discuss her academic work with, Amy struggled, saying:

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 nobody to discuss, "Oh, I've come up with this idea; what do you think?" When you've got *absolutely* nobody, that's *damn* hard; really hard [second interview].

Amy often spoke of 'misinterpreting' instructions, marking criteria, advice, etc. [second interview] reflecting limited linguistic capital and suggesting that even the (apparently) explicitly stated rules of the game remained very difficult for her to identify and understand on her own.

Social networks, and the social capital derived from them, are unequal. Perhaps reflecting what Grenfell (2007) describes as a degree of social solidarity, networks developed amongst marginalised students did not afford the same capital value as networks including students who fitted more comfortably within the field. As Bourdieu (2006) explains, social capital depends not only on the size of the network of connections an individual can mobilize, but also upon the portfolio of capital possessed by each of those with whom the individual is connected. This situation is best exemplified by Tracey, whose established habitus was one of those least congruent with the demands and expectations of the HE field. She observed: 'If I go back [home], there is no university there...you don't normally speak to anyone like that. You're a chamber maid or a shop assistant and there's a lot of, well, "Why? Why would you wanna go to uni?"' [interview].

With a recently acquired Access qualification and at 44 years of age, Tracey relocated to enter HE as a single parent to two 'quite needy' [focus group] sons who remained living in her small home town (the youngest with his previously estranged father). A lack of harmony between her perspectives and experiences and those of other students on her programme of study contributed to social exclusion and at times to what she described as 'bullying' [interview]. Tracey's position within the field was

diametrically opposed to George's and while she did eventually develop a network, it was with students who were themselves marginalised by the broader cohort. Although they worked together in a study group, it did not assist Tracey in clarifying or meeting the demands of the field or developing capital relevant to it. She worked hard to try to identify and fulfil what was required of her but struggled consistently. Also lacking relevant linguistic and academic capital, the rules of the game were very much obscured for Tracey and remained so until, as a result of outstanding debts (reflecting limited economic capital), the University denied her registration for second year studies and formally excluded her from the field.

Professionally-oriented capital

Cultural capital reflects the logic of practice of a field translated into 'physical and cognitive propensities expressed in dispositions to act in particular kinds of ways' (Moore 2008, p111). It incorporates (amongst other things) knowledge and skills (Bourdieu 1991) and in the context of this research, professionally-oriented capital emerged as a valued form of cultural capital encompassing those aspects of students' skills and knowledge particularly focused on the practical, enacted aspects of professional OT practice. Professionally-oriented capital is related to academic capital, and while each has the potential to enhance the other, the data highlight that they are independently identifiable, although best conceived of as overlapping to some extent.

Professionally-oriented capital reflected, for example, depth and breadth of knowledge appropriate to and legitimated by the professional practice context; a suitably professional disposition and appearance; enactment of collaborative, client-centred practice; proficient execution of the professional role and associated personal management, including approaches to communication and team-working, and active engagement with reflective practice and continuing professional development. Like academic capital, professionally-oriented capital was expected to develop throughout students' engagement with the field and its most profitable form was partially characterised within marking criteria. In the vocationally oriented programme under consideration, professionally-oriented capital proved equally as profitable as academic capital; it too translated into attainment, this time primarily in relation to practice placement results, and it too had the potential to convert into higher value cultural capital via academic award. It is further proposed that professionally-oriented capital would continue to be of significant value and to confer benefit to graduates moving from the HE to the professional field.

Jocelyn, for example, clearly felt much more comfortable learning in the professional environment than an academic one. She grew up in a small rural village where a university education was largely unheard of and left school at 16 with five O-levels. After years working in an office environment while undertaking voluntary work in health and social care, Jocelyn moved to employment as a support worker of adults with learning disabilities, and having observed the work of OTs: 'thought, yeah, I'll

have a go at that' [first interview]. She secured a relevant A-level, and aged 38, was the first in her family to enter HE.

Believing her A-level did little to prepare her for the 'totally different' expectations of the new field [first interview] and having spoken a lot about struggling to understand what was required of her and to demonstrate the academic skills and perspectives expected, Jocelyn did eventually accumulate some academic capital. Reflecting its impact, she said: 'I can see an improvement in my writing and my research skills and search strategies. I've got the hang of looking for articles and *knowing* how to do it, what I need to know and *getting* that information' [second interview], and this was evident in her academic achievements. In the professional context, however, Jocelyn was immediately much more at ease, explaining that she knew what she needed to learn because she felt the 'embarrassment' of ignorance or lack of knowledge, so took control of it and addressed it, without feeling encumbered by trying to fathom out what 'they want' [second interview]. Jocelyn had a very strong work ethic which revealed itself on placement in a fashion not apparent in the academic context, perhaps because the field of work was more familiar to her and in it she was more readily able to respond to the struggles and tensions encountered:

I really feel as if that's my job. And I'm there to actually work, rather than learn [laughs] I don't know...It's not as if the supervisors, or anything, have lead you into that. Maybe I'm just very much, when I get a new job, I go straight in and try really hard and want to learn [second interview].

It was abundantly clear from Jocelyn's data that her developing academic and professionally-oriented capital each supported and enhanced the development of the other to a certain extent, and that she developed an approach to being an OT that was valued by both the fields of HE and professional practice. Her experiences in part-time employment within a counselling service and the extension of her history of voluntary work into a Homelessness Prevention Team added to her portfolio of professionally-oriented capital, as did her willingness to stand out from the crowd and articulate her perspective. Jocelyn had a vision of the potential of OT and was willing to pursue it and to challenge what she perceived to be the limited perspectives and expectations of others she encountered both inside and outside the profession [second interview].

If Jocelyn's preference was for learning in a professional environment and professionally-oriented capital made a strong contribution to her overall portfolio, the opposite was true for Jemma who also left school aged 16. Following some part-time retail work, Jemma almost unconsciously followed her sister into accounts management [focus group]. She entered HE aged 25, newly-single and with an A-level, seeking a new career and a new life. Jemma quickly recognised differences between her previous educational experiences and what was expected in the new field. Although initially challenged by working with learning outcomes and unfamiliar assessment formats, she felt that requirements were clearly established and was proud of some very good academic results that began

even in her first semester saying: 'I thought it would be a lot harder, and I don't know whether I've just adapted as I've been going along, or what, but I seem to be coping as opposed to feeling drowned by it all' [first interview]. 'Fitting in' with the academic field was a strong theme in Jemma's data, even to the point of describing lecture theatres as her 'little comfort zone' [first interview].

The move from working in office environments to healthcare, however, was a big change for Jemma. The new logic of practice required a substantial shift from her and at the end of her first year she remained concerned about her ability to fit in with, and to demonstrate the perspectives, skills and experience relevant to, her new professional field. Later, describing her initial second year placement experience Jemma said:

I struggled quite a lot and [...] my supervisor was brilliant, but she did expect...I was expected to *do* things. And that real *test* of your knowledge really made me think, you know, "Well, bloody hell, I really just don't know what I'm doing." And I did feel like a fish out of water on that one [second interview].

Jemma described doing whatever she perceived to be required to fit in to the placement environments (as microcosms of the professional field) that she had been allocated to. She didn't question or challenge, just tried to establish what was expected, to deliver it and fit in. She said:

I just get engrossed into *that* world and how they do things and their systems and their reasoning behind doing things. I mean, the knowledge is there from lectures, but I think I tend to just conform to how *that* service or that setting does whatever they do. [...] [T]hey tell me, 'Well, this is how we do it here' and I just sort of say, "OK. That's fine" [...] I've been very much, "Right, I'll just do what I'm told" [laughs] [second interview].

Notwithstanding issues associated with unequal power in placement contexts, this approach seemed more compliant than strategic. The logic of practice of the professional field was difficult for Jemma to appreciate and her perspectives and disposition were not naturally at ease within in. Although she deliberately sought work that might enhance her experience (e.g. as an OT assistant and a healthcare assistant) and therefore her capacity to accrue professionally-oriented capital, unlike academic capital, this was a form she struggled to secure. With limited stocks of professionally-oriented capital, Jemma could not envisage practising as an OT and even before her new career began, she was contemplating alternative options.

Conclusion

This research provides empirical insights into how students experience and negotiate the demands of studying in HE and the influences brought to bear by the practices and culture of the particular sub-

field they enter. It offers a conceptual framework that identifies capital valued in and underpinning the logic of practice in a specific sub-field of (OT) education. The interplay between academic, linguistic, social and professionally-oriented capitals demonstrates the capacity for capital to beget capital. Participants whose pre-entry habitus was most closely aligned to the pervading culture of the field held the strongest initial portfolios of capital and therefore stronger field positions. The subsequent trajectories of participants, the extent to which their field positions were enhanced, static or undermined, reflected their ability to develop a feel for the game and where necessary adapt their habitus, and their ability to accrue or extend portfolios of the identified forms of capital. Profitable in terms of practical consequences rather than as inert products of the field (Grenfell and James 1998), participants who secured a legitimate (even if marginal) position within the field were able to covert these portfolios into higher-value cultural capital in the guise of the academic/professional qualification which would grant them entry to the professional field.

Although derived from an OT context, the research findings offer insights applicable to the educational programmes of other healthcare professions and more broadly across HE. The concepts of linguistic, academic and social capital are readily translatable, although individual disciplines and fields will naturally have their own logics of practice which define the specific nuances of academic and linguistic capital particularly. There are a substantial number of professional or vocationally oriented HE programmes, both within and outside the health-related disciplines, and with an increasing emphasis on graduate employability the relevance of professionally-oriented capital across the sector seems only likely to increase (again, in forms determined by the logic of particular fields and the practices of specific disciplines).

The imminent rise in student fees and the increased marketisation of HE in the post-Browne era seems set to reinforce the status of students as consumers of HE products and the quality of student experience will only increase in importance. The coalition government continues to espouse a commitment to social inclusion and widening participation in HE even if current policies do not seem clearly aligned with this position. Inviting diverse student groups into the field is a start, but this needs to be supported by inclusive pedagogies that facilitate productive engagement with the logic of practice of particular fields. Rendering the 'game' completely transparent is not achievable, but Bourdieu (1990a, p116) highlights the possibility of reducing its opacity through the awakening of consciousness, and active reflection was identified as fruitful by Reay et al. (2009) and in other data emerging from this study, so it is here that attention might best be focused. To the extent that it is possible to do so, educators need to demystify and make more explicit the rules of the game, be more aware of and reflective about their own and institutional practices and let students in on the nature of the game rather than assume that failure to grasp what is required reflects individual, or even collective, deficits.

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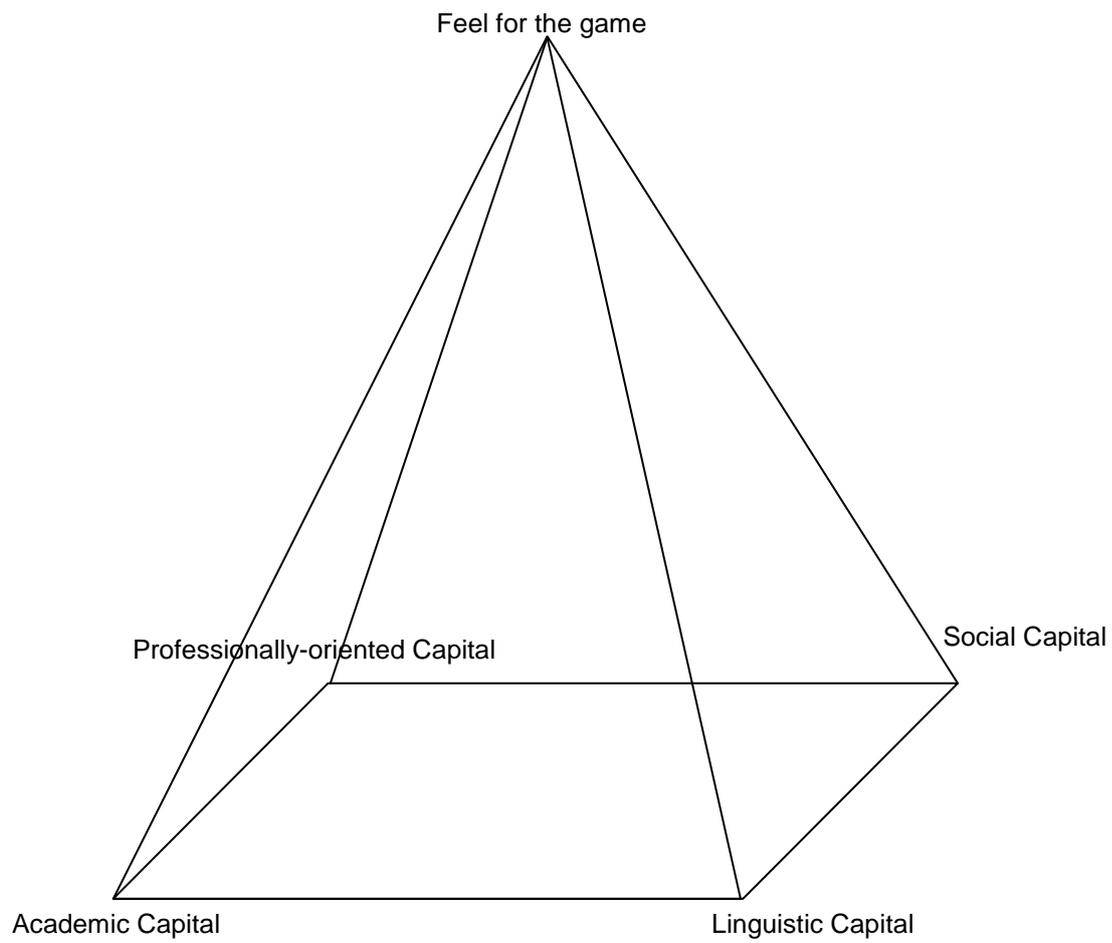


Figure 1. Key forms of capital valued by the field