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Understanding the 'production' of the schooling identities of young working class boys: time to move beyond the sociological/psychological divide?

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Symposium: The 'Production' of Children: Understanding the Role
of Families and Education in 'Making Up' Social Identities

**UNDERSTANDING THE 'PRODUCTION' OF THE SCHOOLING IDENTITIES
OF YOUNG WORKING CLASS BOYS: TIME TO MOVE BEYOND THE
SOCIOLOGICAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL DIVIDE?**

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ABSTRACT

In recent times the sociology of childhood has played an important role in challenging the dominance of Piagetian models of child development in shaping the way we think about children and childhood. What such work has successfully achieved is to increase our understanding of the socially constructed nature of childhood; the social competence and agency of children; and the diverse nature of children's lives, reflecting the very different social contexts within which they are located. One of the problems that has tended to be associated with this work, however, is that in its critique of developmentalism it has tended simply to replace one orthodoxy (psychology) with another (sociology) rather than providing the opportunity to transcend this divide. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate some of the potential ways in which the sociological/psychological divide might be transcended and the benefits of this for understanding, more fully, the 'production' of children's schooling identities. In particular it shows how some of the key sociological insights to be found in the work of Bourdieu may be usefully extended by the work inspired by the developmental psychologist, Vygotsky. The key arguments are illustrated by reference to ethnographic data relating to the schooling experiences and identities of a group of 5-6 year old working class boys.

Key words: Bourdieu, Vygotsky, habitus, situated learning, distributed cognition.

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INTRODUCTION

Developments within what has become known as the ‘new sociology of childhood’ have certainly played an important role in re-orientating research on children with an increasing emphasis on their experiences and perspectives, their agency and social competence and the social and historical contexts within which they are located (Jenks, 1996; James and Prout, 1997; James *et al.*, 1998; Mayall, 2002; Kehily, 2004a; Prout, 2005). Early developments within this field tended to be framed in terms of a rejection of dominant models of child development that tended to naturalise childhood as a social category and construct children as passing through universal and invariant stages of development. Such models, emanating largely from the work of Piaget (1962, 1965, 1977), not only had the effect of ignoring the social contexts within which children ‘develop’ and significantly underestimating children’s competence but they also played a powerful regulating role in children’s lives. As James *et al.* (1997: 19) have argued:

Piaget’s genetic epistemology has, through its measuring, grading, ranking and assessing of children, instilled a deep-seated positivism and rigid empiricism into our contemporary understandings of the child. Under the hegemony of developmental stage monitoring it is not just iniquitous comparison with their peers which children suffer through testing and league tables, but also a constant evaluation against a “gold standard” of the normal child. For those who fail to meet that standard, whether in education, bodily development or welfare, the repercussions and sanctions are strong.

As Walkerdine (2004) has recently argued, however, the problem with this emergent discipline, especially given that it has been forged out of a critique of (Piagetian) developmental psychology, is that it can often be read as an attempt simply to displace one orthodoxy (psychology) with another (sociology) in terms of research on children. For Walkerdine this, in turn, tends to cultivate and reproduce the dualism between psychology and sociology and the unhelpful distinctions between cognition and social context, the individual and society, and interiority and exteriority. Thus, from this vantage point, developmental psychology tends to be characterized as a discipline that takes the category of childhood for granted and has an inherently individualistic focus. It has little interest in children *per se* and is, rather, concerned simply with understanding the processes by which they learn to become adults. In contrast, sociology is positioned as a discipline that fundamentally questions the category of childhood, that therefore tends to focus on children as a socially constructed group and that is also interested in children’s experiences and perspectives in and of themselves (see, for example, Mayall, 2002; Kehily, 2004b).

One of the problems arising from this dualism for the sociology of childhood is that we are only able to go so far in understanding what Foucault (1980: 39) described as the mechanisms of power and, in particular, their ‘capillary form of existence, the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives’. In other words, sociology may give us the means for understanding how particular groups of children are constructed and positioned within society and it also may well help

us to understand some of the micro-processes by which these subject positions come to inform and shape attitudes and identities. However, without some psychological tools and concepts it is difficult to go that stage further, as indicated by Foucault, to appreciate more fully how all of this comes to shape the cognitive processes associated with how children learn to reason and think. Such an understanding becomes important when we wish to move beyond documenting and explaining the experiences of particular groups of children to wishing to make a difference in relation to such matters as school organization, curriculum and classroom pedagogy.

The purpose of this present paper is to outline some ways in which it may be possible to move beyond this dualism. In particular, it will be suggested that one particularly fruitful way forward is to consider how the sociology derived from the work of Bourdieu (1977, 1990) can be effectively enhanced by drawing upon some of the insights to be found in the large and diverse body of work inspired by the developmental psychology of Vygotsky (1978, 1987). As will be seen, these two bodies of work have been chosen precisely because of their compatibility and the remarkable similarity in terms of their respective concerns with and approaches to understanding human practice.

The choice of sociological and psychological perspectives here are to a certain extent arbitrary and are used simply as an illustration of the ways in which we might begin to move beyond the divisions created between these two disciplines. While a range of sociological perspectives could have been chosen, the work of Bourdieu is used here simply because it has inspired a number of important and insightful studies of pupil identities over recent years (see, for example, Grenfell *et al.*, 1998; Reay, 1998; Ball, 2003; Reay *et al.*, 2005). If anything, the choice of Vygotsky is less arbitrary given that his work lies at the root of most attempts within contemporary psychology to understand the socio-cultural basis of children's development and learning. However, and as will be seen, since the initial writings of Vygotsky in the 1920s and 1930s, a wide range of research has developed taking forward differing aspects of his work.

The paper will therefore begin by comparing the overall approaches found within the work of Bourdieu and Vygotsky before looking in a little more detail at how some of the specific insights to be found in the work of Vygotsky have been usefully developed since his death. The way in which these insights might usefully extend a Bourdieurian account will then be discussed before concluding with a discussion of the implications for future research. In an attempt to illustrate some of the arguments to be made the paper will also draw upon empirical data from an ethnographic study of 5-6 year old middle class boys' experiences of and dispositions towards schooling (Connolly, 2004).

BOURDIEU AND THE POSSIBILITIES OF VYGOTSKY

One of the key concerns that has preoccupied Bourdieu (1977, 1990) has been the desire to produce an understanding of human practice that moves beyond the traditional sociological dualisms of individual/society and agency/structure. In this sense much of his work has been concerned with describing in detail and with great insight how the attitudes and behaviours of individuals and social groups tend to incorporate and reflect the social structures within which they are located while also attempting to understand what role they can also play in adapting and changing those very structures. It is here where Bourdieu's notion of habitus plays such an important role in providing a bridge

between the individual and society. For Bourdieu, the habitus represents the way in which an individual's experience of the world comes, progressively, to be internalized as a set of taken-for-granted ways of thinking and behaving. Thus the longer that an individual is located within a particular social context and set of relationships the more likely they are to develop a practical (and largely unconscious) sense of how to operate within that context and thus to have acquired a range of dispositions to behaving and acting in certain ways. As Bourdieu (1993: 86) has explained:

The habitus, as the word implies, is that which one has acquired, but which has become durably incorporated in the body in the form of permanent dispositions. So the term constantly reminds us that it refers to something historical, linked to individual history, and that it belongs to a genetic mode of thought, as opposed to essentialist modes of thought.

A key element of this notion of the habitus for Bourdieu, however, is that it is not something that is simply produced by the social conditions that surround it but that it is also generative. In other words, through the actual practices of individuals and groups, the habitus is able to reproduce and transform these social conditions. This point is evident in relation to Bourdieu's explanation for why he does not simply use the term 'habit' rather than habitus:

But then why not say "habit"? Habit is spontaneously regarded as repetitive, mechanical, automatic, reproductive rather than productive. I wanted to insist on the idea that the habitus is something powerfully generative. To put it briefly, the habitus is a product of conditionings which tend to reproduce the objective logic of those conditionings while transforming it. It's a kind of transforming machine that leads us to "reproduce" the social conditions of our own production, but in a relatively unpredictable way, in such a way that one cannot move simply and mechanically from knowledge of the conditions of production to knowledge of the products.

(Bourdieu, 1993: 87)

Perhaps one of the principle strengths of Bourdieu's notion of habitus is the way that it is used specifically to help understand the nature of broader social processes and divisions and how these are constituted and reproduced through the related concepts of capital and field. The habitus is thus constituted only within the context of a specific field of social relations and these social relations, in turn, are organized around particular forms of (economic, social and/or cultural) capital. What these notions of habitus, capital and field offer, therefore, are a flexible set of conceptual tools for understanding the complex ways in which society is structured (in terms of a range of overlapping fields of relations), the dynamics by which social change takes place (through struggles over particular forms of capital) and how all of this impacts upon and comes to shape individual subjectivities (through the habitus).

Clearly, therefore, there are many different forms of habitus that not only reflect the differing field of relations that exist but also the range of subject positions that are taken

up within these fields around specific forms of capital. In this sense the habitus can be seen, among other things, as the internalization of objective social class positions:

The habitus is not only a structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices, but also a structured structure: the principle of division into logical classes which organizes the perception of the social world is itself the product of internalization of the division into social classes. Each class condition is defined, simultaneously, by its intrinsic properties and by the relational properties which it derives from its position in the system of class conditions, which is also a system of differences, differential positions, i.e. by everything which distinguishes it from what it is not and especially from everything it is opposed to; social identity is defined and asserted through difference.

(Bourdieu, 1984: 170-1)

It is interesting to note that these key concerns with human practice are also shared by the Russian developmental psychologist, Vygotsky (1978, 1987). While there may well be a number of significant differences in the detail of both Bourdieu and Vygotsky's work, what I want to demonstrate here is how their overall approaches are remarkably similar (see also Panofsky, 2003; Connolly, 2004). Where they differ is simply in terms of their orientation; Bourdieu, as touched upon above, was concerned with the social foundations of human practice whereas Vygotsky was more concerned with the specifically cognitive dimensions of that practice. However, while primarily concerned with cognition, Vygotsky's work is characterized by a concern to understand the structural basis of this. In this sense it should be noted that most of Vygotsky's work was undertaken in 1920s and 1930s Soviet Russia with the aim of developing what was, within that context, a radical and liberationist Marxist understanding of child development and human cognition (Bruner, 1997). Perhaps the most explicit statement of these goals is to be found in his article 'The Socialist Alteration of Man' [*sic*] where he argued:

the influence of the [economic] basis on the psychological superstructure of man turns out to be not direct, but mediated by a large number of very complex material and spiritual factors. But even here, the basic law of historical human development, which proclaims that human beings are created by the society in which they live and that it represents the determining factor in the formation of their personalities, remains in force.

(Vygotsky, 1994: 176)

This historically materialist approach to developmental psychology is also evident in the following which bears more than just a passing similarity with Bourdieu's comments on the habitus and class divisions quoted earlier:

In the same way as the life of a society does not represent a single and uniform whole, and society is subdivided into different classes, so, during any given

historical period, the composition of human personalities cannot be said to represent something homogeneous and uniform, and psychology must take into account the basic fact that the general thesis which has been formulated just now, can have only one direct conclusion, to confirm the class character, class nature and class distinctions which are responsible for the formation of human types. The various internal contradictions which are to be found in different social systems find their expression both in the type of personality and in the structure of human psychology in that historical period.

(Vygotsky, 1994: 176-7)

With this emphasis on social context, one of the key points to draw from the above quote is the decisive break that Vygotsky's work has made with Piaget's 'ages and stages' model of child development. According to Vygotsky (1978: 55), his approach 'refutes the notion that development represents the mere unfolding of the child's organically predetermined system of activity'. Rather, there are no universal stages to children's learning and nothing is predetermined in relation to their development. As he went on to argue:

Our concept of development implies a rejection of the frequently held view that cognitive development results from the gradual accumulation of separate changes. We believe that child development is a complex dialectical process characterised by periodicity, unevenness in the development of different functions, metamorphosis or qualitative transformation of one form into another, intertwining of external and internal factors, and adaptive processes which overcome impediments that the child encounters.

Just as with Bourdieu, at the heart of Vygotsky's approach is an emphasis on the way in which the social contexts and networks within which an individual is located becomes progressively internalised as a set of dispositions to thinking and behaving. For Vygotsky, this process of internalisation takes place as the individual participates in the activities of those around them. As he argues:

Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, *between* people (*interpsychological*), and then *inside* the child (*intrapsychological*). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals.

(Vygotsky, 1978: 57, original emphases)

There is little substantive difference in the process described above and that by which the habitus is acquired in Bourdieu's work, with an individual's engagement in communities of practice eventually leading to the acquisition of particular ways of

thinking and behaving that are reflective of those communities. Compare, for example, the quote from Vygotsky above with the following from Bourdieu on the relationship between the habitus and the field:

The relation between habitus and field operates in two ways. On one side, it is a relation of *conditioning*; the field structures the habitus ... On the other side, it is a relation of knowledge or *cognitive construction*. Habitus contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world, a world endowed with sense and value ... Social reality exists, so to speak, twice, in things and in minds, in fields and in habitus, outside and inside of agents.

(Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 127, original emphasis)

So far it has been established that there is at least some compatibility between the overall approaches adopted by Bourdieu and Vygotsky in relation to their study of human practice. With this in mind, the paper will now focus on two particular aspects of Vygotsky's work – that of mediated action and also the zone of proximal development – and will consider how each might usefully help extend the insights to be gained through Bourdieu's notion of habitus.

MEDIATED ACTION AND THE HABITUS

The concept of mediated action is a central one to Vygotsky's approach to developmental psychology and has the potential to provide a way of helping us understand a little more fully the cognitive dimensions of the habitus. The concept itself derives from Vygotsky's attempts to extend Marx and Engel's discussion of tool use and its role in contributing to the alienation of workers to the field of psychology. As Vygotsky (1994: 178-9) wrote:

As a result of the advance of capitalism, the development of material production simultaneously brought with it the progressive division of labour and the constantly growing distorted development of the human potential. If "in manufacture and manual labour the worker makes use of his tools, then in a factory he becomes the servant of the machine". Marx says that in the former case he initiates the movement of his tool, but here he is forced to follow its movement. The workers turn into 'living extensions of machines', and what results is a 'dismal monotony of the endless torment of labour', which Marx says is the characteristic feature of that period in the development of capitalism which he is describing. He is tethered to a specific function, and according to Marx, this turns him "from a worker into an abnormality and artificially ... fosters him in just one special skill whilst suppressing all the remaining wealth of his productive inclinations and talents".

The interesting point to note from the above is that while tools, by definition, have generative and transformative qualities they also act to limit and restrict an individual's activities. Tools therefore play a mediating role between an individual and their environment. Individuals thus does not relate directly to their environment but only do so

via tools. Tools therefore make it possible to alter the environment but also tend to define and shape the way in which this is done.

One of the key contributions that Vygotsky made through his work was to extend this analysis to the notion of psychological tools. In this sense, and following the logic of above, Vygotsky argued that individuals do not have the means to experience, know and act upon the world directly but can only do so indirectly through the mediation of the range of psychological tools they have acquired. Such psychological tools can be physical in nature (such as written notes, diagrams and also crucially the interventions of others) or semiotic (the most significant for Vygotsky being language). In essence, psychological tools represent any means that an individual uses to reason and think.

As before, while psychological tools therefore, by definition, are empowering in that they can facilitate thought and action, they are also constraining (Wertsch *et al.*, 1995). As Vygotsky (1981: 137) argued:

By being included in the process of behaviour, the psychological tool alters the entire flow and structure of mental functions. It does this by determining the structure of a new instrumental act, just as a technical tool alters the process of a natural adaptation by determining the form of labour operations.

Overall, and for Wertsch *et al.* (1995: 21), this mediational role played by psychological tools ensures that they ‘provide the link or bridge between the concrete actions carried out by individuals and groups, on the one hand, and cultural, institutional, and historical settings, on the other’. This description of the role of psychological tools takes us back directly to Bourdieu’s notion of habitus. In fact it is being suggested here that the habitus is an appropriate term to use to describe the set of psychological tools available to the individual.

Unfortunately, Vygotsky’s notion of psychological tools and the way in which they are acquired through the process of internalisation remained under-developed in his work due to his premature death. One issue that was never adequately resolved was whether Vygotsky wished to imply that all psychological tools, and thus the processes of cognition, were actually internalised in the heads of individuals (Daniels, 2001). Take the following quote from Vygotsky:

Considering the history of the development of higher mental functions that comprise the basic nucleus in the structure of personality, we find that the relation between higher mental functions was at one time a concrete relation between people; collective social forms of behaviour in the process of development become a method of individual adaptations and forms of behaviour and thinking of the personality ... Put more simply, higher mental functions arise from collective forms of behaviour.

(quoted in Daniels, 2001: 48)

An initial reading would seem to suggest a clear, temporal distinction between higher mental functions that are initially found externally only to then become internalised. However a more dialectical reading of the relationship between the external and the

internal can be taken from this same quote. The fact that these ‘higher mental functions’ begin as ‘concrete relations between people’ suggest that such relationships are themselves processes of cognition. Moreover, the fact that Vygotsky recognised that psychological tools could be physical as well as semiotic implies that they cannot by definition all be located ‘in the minds’ of individuals.

Fortunately, this tension was certainly recognised by Leont’ev (1978), one of Vygotsky’s contemporaries and research collaborators whose own work went onto focus on the dialectical relationship between the internal and external and which, in turn, has played a role in establishing a diverse range of work including ‘activity theory’ (Engeström *et al.*, 1998) and ‘sociocultural theory’ (Wertsch *et al.*, 1995). One key element within such work that has significant potential for helping us to reflect upon the precise nature and forms that the habitus takes is the notion of ‘distributed cognition’ (Salomon, 1993). Such a notion has arisen precisely because of the difficulties of attempting to maintain a simple distinction between the internal and external. As Lave (1988: 1) has argued:

The point is not so much that arrangements of knowledge in the head correspond to a complicated way to the world outside the head, but that they are socially organised in such a fashion as to be indivisible. “Cognition” observed in everyday practice is distributed – stretched over, not divided among – mind, body, activity and culturally organised settings (which include other actors)

Thus the psychological tools with which an individual thinks and acts are not just internalised and contained in the mind but are also crucially a part of the social environments and settings within which they are located. Such an approach therefore points towards the diverse array of mechanisms that enable and inform an individual’s cognition, including importantly the activities and relationships of those them and the cultural artefacts and structures that emerge and are reproduced by these. This is illustrated by Cole and Engeström (1993: 17-18) who take the ‘simple’ example of cognition in the context of a restaurant:

Within each local setting, such “cognitive actions£ as remembering and decision making are distributed not only among the artefacts (the menu, the arrangement of chairs and tables, the sign pointing to the restrooms) but among the rules (one pays before leaving the premises; sitting down at a table with strangers requires one to ask permission) and among people according to the division of labour (waiters fulfil different parts of the activity at the café than the customers or the dishwasher; the janitor must remember to put away the mop and bucket; the owner is responsible for paying the janitor and waiter).

As Cole and Engeström (1993) go onto point out, it is such a view of the distributed nature of cognition that enable us to begin asking questions such as ‘how do institutions think?’ and ‘how do societies remember?’ This approach, in turn, encourages us to reflect a little further on Bourdieu’s notion of the habitus and to ask the question where does it

actually reside?² Seeing the habitus as a complex set of distributed cognitions certainly provides the potential to develop a deeper understanding of its embedded nature and form and the futility of conceiving it as anything but located in particular fields of relations. Some of the implications of this will be discussed shortly when reflecting further on some of my own research on the effects of social class and gender on young boys' dispositions towards schooling (Connolly, 2004). However, before turning to this it is useful to first provide a brief outline of the other key aspect of Vygotsky's work that holds much potential for enhancing Bourdieu's notion of the habitus – that of the zone of proximal development.

THE ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT AND SITUATED LEARNING

Alongside the notion of mediated action, perhaps the other key concept proposed by Vygotsky that has been most commonly used is that of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD provides the means of understanding precisely how people learn and develop within the context provided by mediated activity. Thus while the notion of mediated action and the related concept of distributed cognition may well help us understand more deeply the nature and form of the habitus, the ZPD provides us with a means of considering in more detail the pedagogical implications of the habitus for effective educational interventions.

As already explained, for Vygotsky, individuals learn and develop through their participation in communities of practice. Stated in its simplest form, they acquire new or enhanced ways of thinking and behaving through their active participation in relations with others and by making use of relevant cultural artefacts. What Vygotsky wished to stress with the notion of the ZPD was the incremental nature of that learning and also its potential as well as its limits. What an individual learns is not just dependent on the mediating effects of others but also on what the individual has already acquired and learnt. As Vygotsky (1978: 86) explains, the ZPD is 'the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers'. In essence, the ZPD therefore represents the space within which individuals learn and develop.

At one level the concept of ZPD is rather obvious. For example, an individual will only tend to encounter one of three experiences through their interaction with others. The first will be experiences that they are familiar with and which they have therefore already acquired the necessary psychological tools with which to make sense of and appropriately respond to them. In such cases the individual simply draws upon these pre-existing tools and thus learns nothing new from these particular experiences. The second will be experiences that are too far removed from their existing schemes and thus impossible for them to make sense of. For example, for a young child who is only just being introduced to the concept of electricity and electric circuits, it would make little sense to attempt to show them how to rewire an entire house. Even with help, the specialist skills and knowledge required would be too much for the child to acquire in one go.

² I would like to thank my colleague, Hugh Morrison, for asking me this question in a departmental seminar. I am only now beginning to appreciate the relevance of this question!

It is the third type of experience however, in between these first two, that represents the ZPD. This type of experience involves the child engaging in activities with others that are new and which they could not achieve on their own. However while they are activities which the child requires the help of an experienced other to successfully complete initially, they are able through practice eventually to be able to learn such activities and undertake them without help over time. The ZPD therefore typically involves activities that are capable of making use of and building upon those psychological tools that an individual already has. Thus, returning to the example of the child who has just acquired a rudimentary understanding of electric current and circuits, while it will be beyond them to teach them how to rewire their entire house, it may well be possible to build upon their existing understanding to help them construct a simple circuit that includes a switch, small battery and a light bulb. While they would need support and guidance to be able to do this initially it would be possible over time for them to have acquired sufficient knowledge to eventually be able to do this themselves. Once they have acquired these skills it would be possible to introduce them to more complex circuits and, eventually, it may well be meaningful to turn to the task of rewiring the house.

Perhaps the key point to draw from this notion of the ZPD is that learning is essentially mediated and situated within a community of practice (or ‘activity system’ or ‘field of relations’ to return to Bourdieu). The development of increasingly complex cognitive skills is therefore not something that derives naturally and is somehow ‘pre-programmed’ within all of us as Piagetian models of development would suggest. Rather, what an individual learns is located firmly in the social contexts within which they are positioned. In addition, learning does not necessarily take place through explicit guidance and tuition. Much learning, if not the majority of it, takes place simply by indirect means; through the effects of participation in a wider network of relations and/or location in a particular social context.

Moreover, it needs to be noted that just as with the concept of mediated action, the notion of the ZPD was never a final and completed project of Vygotsky’s given his premature death. While it is useful therefore to hold onto the essence of what Vygotsky was suggesting about the processes of learning through the ZPD it is important not to be drawn back into the creation of dualisms whereby what at first takes place in activity with experienced others is then seen to be ‘internalised’ as a set of cognitive schemes or psychological tools. Even in the simple example above, once the child has learnt how to construct a simple electrical circuit it cannot be assumed that this knowledge has been completely internalized and thus is something that can be taken by that child from one context to the next unchanged. How that child will *think* about constructing an electrical circuit consequently will depend upon the actual materials they have available (the type of light bulb and switch, size of the battery, length of wire at hand) as well as the specific context and purpose for constructing the circuit and also the possible involvement of others. The way in which the child thinks about all of this is still therefore necessarily distributed and not reducible to the previous knowledge they may have retained ‘in their heads’.

Fortunately, and as before, the project begun by Vygotsky has been continued and taken forward by many others in relation to ‘activity theory’ and sociocultural theory (for a useful overview see Daniels, 2001). One particular development that helps extend

Vygotsky's original conception of learning through the ZPD is Lave and Wenger's (1991: 51-52) notion of 'legitimate peripheral participation'. As they explain:

given a relational understanding of person, world, and activity, participation, at the core of our theory of learning, can be neither fully internalized as knowledge structures nor fully externalized as instrumental artifacts or overarching activity structures. Participation is always based on situated negotiation and renegotiation of meaning in the world. This implies that understanding and experience are in constant interaction – indeed, are mutually constitutive. The notion of participation thus dissolves dichotomies between cerebral and embodied activity, between contemplation and involvement, between abstraction and experience: persons, actions, and the world are implicated in all thought, speech, knowing, and learning.

What I want to suggest here is that this approach to situated learning and the ZPD can also usefully extend our understanding of the habitus and its implications for learning. In terms of classroom practice, for example, it encourages us to understand particular episodes of children's learning more holistically; examining the role that their classroom peers, the teacher, the nature and layout of the classroom and the school ethos itself all play a role in informing the way that children think and learn. The formal curriculum is therefore not something that the child learns simply from the teacher but it is essentially mediated by all of these other factors. An understanding of how that child then actually comes to interpret and process the information presented to them can therefore only be gained by examining the direct mediating role of their classroom peers as well as the indirect mediating role of their family and local community.

To examine the implications of all of this a little further the paper will conclude with a brief consideration of the findings of a research study I have undertaken examining the effects of social class and gender on 5-6 year old boys' attitudes to education and dispositions towards schooling (Connolly, 2004). While the original research consisted of a comparative study of boys from two schools: one located in a deprived working class estate and the other an affluent middle class suburb, because of the limitations of space the following discussion will focus simply on the working class boys. It will begin by providing a brief outline of the local area in which they live before then focusing specifically on their experiences of schooling and the processes of learning that they are actively engaged in.

YOUNG WORKING CLASS BOYS' DISPOSITIONS TOWARDS SCHOOLING

North Parade³ and the Working Class Habitus

North Parade, the housing estate where the boys live and the school is situated, is ranked within the bottom 20 per cent of the most deprived wards in the region and in some ways is rather representative of many isolated working class areas that were decimated by economic recession in previous decades and have made little progress since. There are

³ All names, including those of the local estate and the teachers and children are pseudonyms to maintain anonymity.

high levels of long-term unemployment in the area and of the rest the majority are in low-paid, unskilled and relatively insecure manual work. Overall levels of health in the area are low and over two-thirds of pupils at North Parade Primary School are in receipt of free-school meals (an indicator of families in receipt of state welfare). North Parade itself is also physically isolated, cut off from its surrounding area with just one road into and out of the estate. The estate has a distinctly desolate feel to it with few shops and amenities and large areas of wasteland. Some of the housing stock is run-down and unoccupied and there is graffiti and litter strewn across the area.

In addition, North Parade bears all the hallmarks of a community that has experienced high levels of sectarian conflict and violence over the last few decades. Since the late 1960s over 3,600 people have died and a further 40,000 people have been injured as a direct result of the deep divisions that exist between Protestants and Catholics within Northern Ireland (Morrissey and Smyth, 2002). North Parade itself is a distinctly Protestant and loyalist community that has felt the impact of this violence with 25 deaths being recorded on the estate itself over the years related directly to the conflict. While the levels of violence have reduced significantly since the paramilitary ceasefires of 1994, the residents of North Parade still live with relatively high levels of sectarian tensions and threat from the neighbouring Catholic communities. Loyalist paramilitary groups, especially the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), operate freely in the area and, in many cases, acts as the unofficial 'police force'. All of this, in turn, is reflected in the physical environment of the estate with kerbstones on the roadside painted in the colours of the British Union flag – red, white and blue. There are also a number of British flags and also paramilitary flags (mainly in support of the loyalist paramilitary group the Ulster Volunteer Force [UVF]) flying from lampposts and painted wall murals and graffiti in support of the UVF. On entering the estate along the only road into it there is no doubt that one is entering a staunchly loyalist area.

Given that this is the community within which the boys are situated and are actively participating in it is not surprising to find a habitus emerging within that context which values the ability to fight and to 'look after yourself'. As documented in the study and also to be touched upon below, the boys spent a significant amount of time engaged in 'play fights' whereby they could practice and rehearse various fight sequences. For some of the boys, this emphasis on physicality and violence was also manifest in the symbolic capital that they attempted to acquire by associating themselves with the local Loyalist paramilitaries as the following discussion with Martin and Lee illustrates:

Interviewer: What do you want to do when you grow up?

Martin: Join the UVF!

Lee: [laughs].

Martin: UVF! [chants] U-V-U-V-F! U-V-U-V-F!

Interviewer: What's the UVF?

Martin: They fight! They shoot guns!

Interviewer: Do they?

Lee: They have big guns!

This sense of physicality and the desire to be 'streetwise' was also enhanced for some of the boys by the tendency of their parents to dress their children in designer clothes, to

have their ears pierced and/or to buy them items of jewellery to wear. As explained in the study, one possible reason for this tendency can be seen in the general struggles that these working class mothers had in terms of living day-to-day. With such limited (economic) resources, a significant amount of symbolic capital could be acquired within the community by presenting their children in fashionable clothes and buying them the latest toys and games (see also Connolly, 1998). This achievement, however, tended to be viewed negatively by the school and as evidence of the inability of the parents to care for their children appropriately. As the school principal explained:

The vast majority, I would say, 99.999 per cent of the parents here love their children. But that love can manifest itself in different ways. For example here the love would be demonstrated in expensive toys. Quite often, quite inappropriate toys. For example a quad bike will be bought or a television and a video as well as, you know, and they put themselves in debt. Whereas in [a more middle class area] that love would be thinking about a secure home background [about] the here and now and how that will effect the children in the future and their education prospects and all those sorts of things.

Within the community, this disposition towards the physical and material was not only found among the boys in terms of their current activity and behaviour but also in relation to their future career aspirations. These were boys participating in and growing into a community characterised by limited social mobility and career opportunities. Such limited career trajectories were therefore clearly evident in the boys' own thinking about their futures as the following discussion with Adrian, Tommy and Kurt illustrates:

Interviewer: When you grow up and you leave school what jobs would you get?

Adrian: I would get the best job - building houses.

Tommy: I'd get, I'd fix some cars!

Kurt: No, I wouldn't get a job. I would clean carpets with my daddy's carpet machine - my daddy cleans carpets.

Interviewer: And would you work with him.

Kurt: [nods].

LEARNING IN SCHOOL

As suggested above, and described in more detail in the original study, this emphasis on physicality and the material among the boys is situated within and emerges out of our participation in their families and local community. In the sense that it is become a taken-for-granted aspect of the boys' collective identity and is structured and reproduced through their peer relations as well as the mediating effects of their families and the structure and nature of the local community then it can be understood most appropriately as their community habitus. One of the benefits of adopting a distributed cognition model for understanding the nature and form that the habitus takes is precisely the fact that it reinforces the necessity to locate the habitus within a particular field (or activity network). In this sense there is no singular habitus for these working class boys but many

different forms of habitus associated with the differing contexts within which they participate.

It is in this sense that we cannot assume that the boys arrive at school with this community habitus intact and thus their attitudes and behaviour in school is simply a reflection of what they have learnt from home. While they certainly bring with them the imprint of their lives at home and within the community, the school is another field of relations (or activity system). Their habitus within the school – comprising, as described earlier of a complex range of physical and semiotic psychological tools – is therefore also distributed. How they think and behave is therefore partly mediated by the experience they bring from home but is also, crucially, mediated by a range of other factors including teachers, classroom resources and the organisation and ethos of the school. These all comprise elements of the psychological tools that generate and make possible the boys' thought processes and thus what we can term their schooling habitus.

With this in mind, this notion of distributed cognition helps to stress the fundamental role the school plays in shaping the boys' schooling habitus and thus their attitudes to education and dispositions towards schooling. Moreover, it alerts us to the fact that an understanding of this role requires a careful analysis of the mediating effects of the many different physical and semiotic tools that comprise the school. By way of illustration it is worth taking the example of the organisation of classroom activities and its mediating effects on the boys' schooling habitus and thus their learning.

The deficit model that tends to underpin the perceptions of teachers at the school towards the local community has already been touched upon above in relation to the comments reported from the school principal. The sense in which the parents have (or exert) little control over their own lives is also found in the following comments from the principal:

The parents [at the other school] would have their lives better organised. [...] There'd be a group of parents here who would live a very hand-to-mouth existence. They stagger from one crisis to the next to the next. I can think of one or two who really, they cope with enormous difficulties, some of their own making. And you think that "I would have avoided that situation". But I don't know, they're sort of sucked into it. They don't have the mental energy to take stock of their lives and say, you know, "I'm in a mess, how can I get out of this? What strategies can I use?"

Similar views were also expressed by the boys' class teacher Mrs Lee who, in the comments below, focused more on the effects of this lack of control on the boys' behaviour:

It's a very difficult school. The area's very tough. A lot of children kind of run wild after school and at night time as well, especially coming into the summer term. Erm, and also by September as well a lot of them just run wild for two months over the holidays so we find it takes a long time for them to settle down, you know, and get them into the routines ... Last year it took them until about Halloween before they really calmed down. It's just getting them into the routine

of work and, erm, school. ... This year I think they were wilder [*laughs*], it seems, wilder at the beginning of September! By Halloween they did settle down. It is quite a large class and you just have to be on them the whole time. You can't relax really for a minute with them really, there is quite a lot of pressure that way I think.

These perceptions, which are themselves a product of the Mrs Lee's own distributed cognition,⁴ were manifest practically in a number of ways. One example of this was the way she organised her school day. Given the perceived difficulties faced in attempting to control the children, the day tended to be highly segmented with typically only 15 to 20 minutes given to any formal educational activity. This is evident in the following that represents a typical class schedule for the day:

8.50-9.45	Structured play.
9.50-10.05	Listen to story on carpet.
10.05-10.20	Numeracy activities sat at desks.
10.20-10.30	Milk and snacks and then toilet.
10.35-11.00	Breaktime in playground.
11.00-11.30	Visit to library within school.
11.30-11.50	Creative writing sat at desks.
11.50-12.00	Tidy up and toilets.
12.00-1.00	Lunchtime (lunch and then play in playground).
1.00-1.30	PE in assembly hall.
1.30-1.50	Singing.
1.50-2.00	Sat on carpet, preparation for home time.

Moreover, it was sometimes a difficult task for Mrs Lee to maintain the compliance of the children even for these relatively short periods where they were expected to remain seated. Some of the children were observed to find it difficult to follow instructions given and, without one-to-one direction from Mrs Lee or the classroom assistant, would often become distracted. One way Mrs Lee dealt with this was to provide three or four differing (but themed and inter-related) activities on the respective tables (whether numeracy- or literacy-based) and organise it so that the children moved from one activity to another after five or ten minutes.

There are three issues arising out of this for the boys' learning that I want to draw attention to here. The first is that for the most part the material covered and activities that were provided for the children to engage in bore little relevance to their wider lives at home or in the community. The focus on key skills meant that little opportunity was provided for the children to draw upon their own skills and knowledge. While they would sometimes make reference to their family or activities in the community when engaged in 'creative writing' sessions this was rarely followed up by the teacher. Moreover, even

⁴ It is not possible to explore this point in more detail here. However it is worth noting the potential that this has to produce a more holistic view of the teachers' attitudes and behaviours in school. Just as with the boys, the teachers do not simply 'bring into the school' their own particular understandings and prejudices and unilaterally act upon these in the way they relate to their children. Rather, their thinking is also mediated through the various elements – including the children and parents – associated with the school.

'carpet time' tended to be structured and used either to take the morning register, read a story or prepare the children for home. Little opportunity thus appeared here for the children to introduce their own themes and issues.

Second, the highly segmented and task-oriented nature of the day also meant that the children had little opportunity to make sense of the nature and purpose of the tasks they were learning. Many of the literacy and numeracy tasks bore little relevance to the children's own lives at home and in the community and this, together with the limited opportunities to introduce knowledge and skills gained from the home, added to their sense of alienation from the activities they were engaged in at school. A sense of this alienation and the relative meaningless of some of the formal educational tasks the boys were encouraged to engage in is evident in the following comments taken from separate interviews:

Interviewer: Do you think it's important to go to school?

Cameron: Nooo!

Davey: Nah!

Interviewer: Why? Does it not matter if you go to school or not?

Davey: No

Cameron: I hate it

Interviewer: In school what about sums, do you like doing sums?

Adrian: No

Tommy: No

Interviewer: Why?

Adrian: Because too boring

Interviewer: What makes it boring?

Adrian: Because you have to, like/

Tommy: /You have to, you have to think about it and write the number – a hundred plus a thousand and all

Adrian: I know

Interviewer: And do you find it hard or easy?

Adrian: Hard

Tommy: Hard

Interviewer: What about reading, do you like reading?

Jamie: No

Cameron: No

Interviewer: No? Why not?

Cameron: I don't

Jamie: It's wick! It takes my memory away

Not surprisingly, therefore, the boys' general dispositions towards schooling as mediated by these activities tended to reflect the lack of meaning and relevance that school had to their wider lives in the community:

Interviewer: Do you think it's important to go to school?

Cameron: Nooo!

Davey: Nah!

Interviewer: Why? Does it not matter if you go to school or not?

Davey: No

Cameron: I hate it

The third issue to draw out from the way the school day tended to be organised was the significant opportunities the children had to ‘play’. Alongside break time and lunch time the children would often have up to an hour each morning of what was termed ‘structured play’. This was structured by the fact that a range of games and learning resources were set out on the tables for the children to use and some sense of a ‘rota’ was employed to ensure the children gained access to a range of activities. However, much of the detailed activity that the children engaged in during this time, and certainly their activities during break and lunchtime, were relatively unstructured. These were the main opportunities, therefore, that the children had to introduce and make use of knowledge and skills they had acquired within the wider context of the family and community. Unfortunately, because it was largely unstructured and supervised then these activities remained marginal to the more formal activities of schooling.

The key point to note about such play activities, however, is that they still provided an important element of the children’s learning. In this sense, and given the model of distributed cognition being proposed here, the children all tended to contribute their own knowledge and skills to the collective activities that they engaged in with their peers. For the boys, this often presented the opportunity to acquire, rehearse and attempt to perfect their physical skills of fighting and associated wrestling moves. As the following discussion alludes to, there is much learning going on among these boys within the context of the playground:

Interviewer: And what do you play in the playground? What games do you play?

Cameron: Wrestling.

Interviewer: Wrestling?

Cameron: Aye, but sometimes you get shouted at for it/

Matty: /I know all the moves

Interviewer: Do you? Tell me what moves you know

Matty: “Choke-slam!” “The last ride!”

Interviewer: What’s that one?

Matty: It’s where you go [*demonstrates*] – flick ‘em up and then choke slam them

Cameron: Er, “people’s elbow”!

Matty: “The rock bottom”!

Play activities, whether in the playground or in the classroom during ‘structured play’ also provided an opportunity for the boys to re-enact many other forms of fighting and violent behaviour they had either witnessed directly or seen on television. In the playground, for example, some of these re-enactments involved carefully choreographed displays of violence and aggression sometimes reflecting local paramilitary activities. On one occasion, for example, three boys were seen to be chasing a fourth. When they had caught him, two of the boys held each of his arms and pulled them, tightly, round his

back so that his chest protruded forward. The third boy then stood in front of him and proceeded to pretend to punch him, violently, in the stomach. On each 'punch', the boy who was being held jerked his body forward and let out a deep groaning sound. The two boys behind him would then sharply pull his arms back, thus thrusting his stomach out again, and the boy in front of him would proceed to pretend to punch him again. On another occasion, four boys were seen to be playing a shooting game where they would pretend to have handguns and be shooting at each other. Again, however, the actions of the boys were heavily choreographed and stylised with the boys standing with their legs astride, their arms outstretched and with their hands clasped together pointing the gun. Each shot they made was accompanied by a deep shooting sound and the gun sharply recoiling back and upwards. Similarly, in the classroom, the boys would be seen on occasion using Lego to make handguns and playing with the toy garage and cars on the carpet to re-enact car chases and bank robberies.

Overall, there are a number of immediate implications from the above in relation to pedagogy and school-based strategies. To understand these it is necessary to return to Vygotsky's notion of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and the emphasis it places on practice and working from where the children are at. This in turn requires us to engage with the knowledge and skills that children have and to draw upon these in a wider framework of participation. Rather than knowledge therefore being located firmly with the teacher to then be dispensed to the children, there is a need to begin with a recognition of the distributed nature of knowledge and cognition and thus to see learning as dialectic and premised on active participation. As Rogoff (2003: 285) has explained in relation to her notion of 'guided participation':

Communication and coordination during participation in shared endeavours are key aspects of how people develop. Participants adjust among themselves (with varying, complementary, or even conflicting roles) to stretch their common understanding to fit new perspectives ... From the perspective that development occurs in participation in shared sociocultural activities, it is clear that children play actively central roles, along with their elders and other companions, in learning and extending the ways of their communities ... In bridging different perspectives, partners seek a common perspective or language through which to communicate their ideas in order to coordinate their efforts. Mutual understanding occurs between people in interaction; it cannot be attributed to one person or another. Modifications in each participant's perspective are necessary to accomplish things together. The modifications are a process of development; as the participants adjust to communicate and coordinate, their new perspectives involve greater understanding.

The implications of this for classroom practice therefore involve a very different approach premised on the active participation of children and an emphasis on including and building upon the wide variety of knowledge and skills that they are able to bring to the classroom. This, in turn, requires alternative ways of organising classroom and the school day, encouraging more participatory and culturally-meaningful activities. While it is beyond the scope of this present paper to begin examining what this might mean in

practice, some useful examples from their own research with working class communities in America can be found in Moll *et al.* (1993).

In addition, and specifically in relation to gender, there is a need to examine the role that the school can play in encouraging boys to reflect upon and deconstruct their dominant forms of masculinity and in findings alternate and more constructive ways of 'being boys'. At a more general level some of the ways this can be done have been set out elsewhere (see Connolly, 2004, forthcoming). However, the approaches to situated learning and distributed cognition outlined above can help us consider the implications for pedagogy and classroom practice more specifically. In this regard Daniels (2001: 150-154) provides a summary of work that he has been involved in aimed at encouraging the development of differing forms of classroom participation among boys that can help to foster collaboration and to undermine the predominant individualistic and competitive focus evident among them (Hey *et al.*, 2000; Fielding *et al.*, 1999; Daniels *et al.*, 2000).

Of course this use of the habitus, as extended through the notion of distributed cognition, forces us to recognise the centrality of broader social contexts and structures. There are clearly ways in which schools and classroom practices can be revised in order to make learning for young working class children more meaningful and thus effective. However, and as seen from the brief case study of the boys outlined above, these children are still located in wider fields of relations characterised by limited opportunities and resources. This notion of distributed cognition therefore not only requires us to develop educational strategies that engage fully with parents and the wider community but also the fact that their effectiveness will in part depend upon changes in the many social structures and processes that mediate such activity.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this paper has been to draw attention to the potential advances that can be made in understanding the construction of children's schooling identities by moving beyond the current sociological/psychological divide. By way of illustration the paper has shown how the sociology of Bourdieu and in particular his notion of habitus and the related concepts of capital and field, can be usefully extended through the use of insights found in the work inspired by Vygotsky. It needs to be stressed that the paper has only sketched out some initial ideas concerning the ways in which the work associated with Bourdieu and Vygotsky might be usefully combined. There is undoubtedly much more work that can be done in this particular area.

Having said this it also needs to be emphasised that this focus on Bourdieu and Vygotsky is not meant to imply that this is the only (or even most effective) way of moving beyond the sociological/psychological divide. In my own recent work (Connolly, 2004), for example, I have suggested that the sociological insights provided by Bourdieu could be usefully enhanced by the figurational sociology of Elias (1978), particularly in terms of understanding the complex and interdependent nature of relations within particular fields. Moreover, others have suggested marrying poststructuralist frameworks with situated learning theories (Walkerline, 2004) while others have indicated possible ways of drawing together activity theory and some of the sociological insights to be found in the work of Bernstein (see Daniels, 2001).

The key point of this paper is simply to demonstrate the potential benefits to be gained from attempting to extend current sociological work with insights from psychology (or, equally, current psychological work with insights from sociology). The discussion surrounding the case study above is necessarily limited given that it is based upon revisiting data collected largely from a sociological vantage point. While some of the benefits of drawing upon concepts such as distributed cognition and the ZPD have hopefully been highlighted, there remains much more potential to be gained from following this avenue further. In particular, the incorporation of psychological concepts such as these provides the opportunity of more indepth analysis of precisely how young children's learning is mediated by factors such as social class, gender and ethnicity.

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