



A COMPREHENSIVE YET CONCISE INQUIRY INTO CULTURAL CAPITAL AND ITS EFFECT ON EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES: THEORETICAL INSIGHTS AND EMPIRICAL APPLICATIONS

A Review of the Scientific Monograph Cultural Capital and Educational Practices: From Findings to Open Questions

Radulović, M. (2023). *Cultural Capital and Educational Practices: From Findings to Open Questions*.
Belgrade: Institute for Educational Research, 24 cm, 123 pages.

Educational inequalities constitute one of the key topics in the sociology of education. Within this discipline, the issue of educational inequalities has been studied by the representatives of different theoretical perspectives, who have illuminated its diverse aspects. Certainly, one of the prominent approaches to this topic is that of Pierre Bourdieu, who emphasizes the significance of the concept of different forms of capital. The author particularly highlights the importance of cultural capital for academic achievement, with some dispositions being valued and others punished. In the scientific monograph entitled *Cultural Capital and Educational Practices: From Findings to Open Questions*, Mladen Radulović turns his research lens to the concept of cultural capital and its significance for educational practices. The monograph centers on the use and transformation of this commonly used concept.

The author scrutinizes the significance of cultural capital for educational practices while simultaneously striving to achieve two aims. First, he seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the significance of cultural capital. Through a comprehensive analysis of numerous studies devoted to this subject and a thorough examination of their results, the author provides a systematic overview of the existing knowledge on the subject. Likewise, he sheds light on the theoretical dilemmas or points of discord among the authors who have used the aforementioned concept. Additionally, he employs novel analyses of the existing data gathered in large-scale international studies (TIMSS, PISA) as a means of expanding the existing knowledge on the subject and resolving some of the abovementioned dilemmas. The second,

equally important aim of this monograph is assessing equity in Serbia's education system. By analyzing the significance cultural capital holds in Serbia and comparing this significance with the influence of cultural capital in Western Europe, the author determines the degree to which Serbia's education system and Serbian society as a whole are (in)equitable.

The many years of hard work, analysis, and contemplation that have gone into the creation of this monograph have allowed Mladen Radulović to examine different aspects of the effect of cultural capital on education in a mature, studious, and systematic manner. Moreover, the author views the issue of cultural capital from different theoretical perspectives, reexamining its foundations and potential applications, while also focusing on its empirical validation. The monograph comprises 123 pages, with the central segment divided into seven chapters. The first two chapters are devoted to the theoretical and methodological framework of the research, while the subsequent four chapters are dedicated to research findings (with each chapter focusing on one of the four educational practices scrutinized). In the final chapter, the author sums up the findings and points to the areas in which empirical findings have not been sufficiently ample.

After the introductory chapter, the author provides a more detailed definition of the concept of cultural capital, explains Bourdieu's theoretical framework from which it stems, and analyzes its reception in the scientific community. The author highlights the different ways of understanding and conceptualizing cultural capital, which allows him to use the subsequent chapters not only to examine its significance, as a unique concept for educational practices, but also to investigate the differences in significance it manifests depending on the way it is operationalized.

The main segment of the monograph comprises four chapters in which the author provides answers to four questions that are paramount to understanding the role of cultural capital in the field of education. After the chapter presenting the methodology of the research at the foundation of the study, each subsequent chapter is dedicated to one the crucial questions guiding the interpretation of the way structural social indicators affect educational processes via cultural capital. These questions pertain to: 1) how the amount of cultural capital affects academic achievement; 2) whether and how cultural capital shapes educational aspirations; 3) how cultural capital determines a student's attitude towards education; and 4) whether and how certain aspects of the educational context can diminish the influence of cultural capital on the aforementioned educational practices. All four chapters dedicated to the analysis of these questions are identically structured, that is, they comprise an analysis of theoretical assumptions, an analysis of the results of published research, and the author's analysis of the data obtained in international studies of student achievement. By virtue of this approach, the author reveals findings that highlight the great significance of cultural capital for the understanding of educational inequalities. Furthermore, the results indicate that the potential of cultural capital in

terms of explaining educational practices is closely related to the way it is understood and operationalized. Likewise, the theoretical and empirical insights regarding Serbia's education system are especially valuable. It is important to emphasize the alarming findings confirming the existence of major educational inequalities among children in the lower grades of primary school, which are comparable to inequalities in European education systems in which they are most conspicuous (e.g., in France). Furthermore, the author discusses the comparative advantages of Serbia's education system, primarily in terms of inequalities among secondary school students. Finally, the author highlights the findings suggesting that certain teaching characteristics can weaken or strengthen the link between cultural capital and academic achievement. This can be particularly significant for the planning of both education policies at the macro level and teaching practices at the micro level.

The author systematically and thoroughly answers the posed questions, providing a clear and comprehensive overview of the existing knowledge about the significance of cultural capital. Furthermore, he pinpoints the areas in which the level of knowledge is still unsatisfactory. In accordance with the subtitle of the monograph, *From Findings to Open Questions*, the final chapter offers a systematic overview of the existing knowledge and points to the areas that constitute challenges for future research. The chapter contains highly detailed suggestions for future research topics and methods that could enrich our current understanding of the significance of cultural capital.

Mladen Radulović's monograph gives a valuable contribution to Serbian sociology of education and leads to a better understanding of cultural capital and its significance in the field of education as well as a better understanding of Serbia's education system. While the monograph is undoubtedly valuable for future scientific research in this field, it is likewise useful in the context of the wider public discussion concerning the planning of education policies, which particularly focus on the equity and availability of education in Serbia. This monograph provides answers to questions about the existence of educational inequalities in the education system and gives us an opportunity to contemplate what kind of education system and society we aspire to build.

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