Metaphors of Work-based Vocational Education for Residential Care Workers

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Abstract

Within an ethnographic study of effects of organisational cultures on work-based learning, two students' practice portfolios and interviews were analysed applying Bourdieu's theoretical tools. Analysis pointed to two types of habitus, one being characterised by the student's propensity to immerse herself in the "lifespace" of her local community and to cultivate a sense of belonging and trust, and the other by a disposition on the other student's part to establish "boundaries" in her interaction with colleagues and to attain a "balcony view" of the turbulent events in the wider organisation. Metaphors used by the students in their writing indicated transformation of students' habitus on their trajectories through the organisational fields.

Keywords: work-based learning, residential care, Camphill Community

Introduction

This article seeks to apply Bourdieu's theoretical tools for analysis to a small sample of a much larger corpus of data, which were gathered in the course of an ethnographic study of a practice-based vocational education programme, the BA in Social Pedagogy (BASP). The five-year research project, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, looks at the impact of organisational cultures on work-based learning.

The BASP is a partnership programme of the University of Aberdeen and the Camphill School, an independent residential special school for vulnerable children and young people with a variety of additional support needs. The Camphill School is also a life sharing Camphill Community, founded more than 60 years ago and based on Rudolph Steiner's concept of anthroposophy. While some of the core modules of the BASP are based on the anthroposophic view of a human being, in preparation for and after the validation of the programme in 1997, the original content of the BASP predecessor, the Camphill Seminar of Curative Education and Social Therapy, was expanded to include what students and tutors call 'mainstream approaches'.

The BASP is a part-time programme; its defining feature is the continuous work experience of its students. Most BASP students remain voluntary workers in the Camphill School for the duration of their four-year study, living and working in the 11 house communities and

attending lectures and seminars one day a week. Each house community is made up of 10 to 25 people, as in the example here below:

- Long-term co-workers, members of the Camphill community (6): house coordinator, her husband (craft master) and their two children; two retired co-workers

- BASP students (2)

- Short-term voluntary workers (6)

- Employees (3): care worker, cook, laundry worker

- Pupils (7)

Students have up to 10 hours per week of study time and one or two days per week free from any duties in their house communities. The other four or five days of the week, students, together with other co-workers, work long hours, up to 12 hours each day, providing care and support to the pupils. Some of the students, at a later stage of their studies, take positions as house coordinators (managers of the house communities), craft masters and teachers.

There is ample literature on Camphill communities and an anthroposophic approach to special education and social care, which has largely been written by those who live and work in the Camphill communities (see, for example, Jackson 2006). This includes a quarterly *Journal of Curative Education and Social Therapy* but very few publications in peer-reviewed academic journals, for example, Hart & Monteux (2004) and Jackson (2011).

One of the objectives of the research was to develop an understanding of how the various positions of students within the Camphill School affect their learning practices. Two students, whose written assignments (practice portfolios) and interviews are analysed below, were selected, because they occupied different positions: one student was a care worker and the other a house coordinator. Both students were at the end of their four-year course of study; the portfolios were the last assignments they submitted before graduation.

The analysis that follows is also based on my own experience, as a Camphill School co-worker. For many years I have been living and working alongside BASP students and tutors; however, I had never been involved with the BASP until I started researching it.

The coordinators group agreed that the Camphill School may be identified in any published outcomes of the research. In the text below, the names of students have been changed in accordance with their wishes to remain anonymous. Both participants understood that their colleagues in the Camphill School, reading this article, might identify them.

Definitions of Bourdieu's theoretical tools, field, habitus and capital, can be found elsewhere, for example, in Grenfell (2012). Bourdieusian analysis has been extensively applied in educational research (Grenfell & James 1998, Murphy 2013) and, in particular, in a large research project in college-based Further Education in the UK (James & Biesta 2007). There was an uptake of Bourdieusian theory in research in Higher Education (see chapters in Ashwin 2012 and Grenfell & James 1998). I am not aware of any application of Bourdieu's theoretical tools in a study of work-based learning.

In what follows, all words and sentences in inverted commas are quotations from the data.

Care worker

Anna was a voluntary care worker in a house community. In her assignment, she wrote about developing "mastery" in her work. Anna wrote that since joining the Camphill School five years ago, she had shed the habits and values she had been raised with in her family, which were centred on her own interests and needs, and acquired new dispositions,

focused on the interests and needs of the pupils. She noticed that when interacting with pupils her behaviour had changed: she was delaying her responses and had more self-control. She became less prone to "taking charge". She attributed these changes to her study and the knowledge she could now draw upon. As a consequence, Anna started to feel more confident and relaxed doing her work. She said that this allowed her to pay more attention ("listen") to the pupils and to "better understand their needs".

Reflecting in her assignment on changes in her attitudes and behaviour, Anna wrote about a particular organisation of social space, the Lifespace. She gave a reference for this concept (Smith 2009) but characterised it simply as "a place where residential care workers and children share everyday living". Anna said in her interview: "I always thought that this is something I really need to learn to let go a bit of control and trust situation, give more space to the child and just let them react even if something doesn't go how I planned it, that it is ok." Referring to one of the pupils, she said: "Lifespace is just about [working] with him." A concise manner, in which Anna referred to the Lifespace in her assignment and the way she spoke about it in her interview, indicates that, in the assignment, she didn't analyse it conceptually, but, rather, referred to the Lifespace metaphorically.

Finding a metaphor that fitted her experiences and expectations, Anna began enacting such "lifespace" within her house community. Taking initiatives, she was "trusted" and supported by the house co-ordinator. In her assignment, in a section with the title 'Generosity', she wrote about one of her initiatives. Anna decided to invite her colleague, a first-year co-worker from her house community, to a pupil's review meeting. Though this co-worker was a "key-worker" for that pupil, he had to be invited to attend the review. Anna clarified in her interview that the first-year co-workers were not invited to the reviews, because "experienced professionals" used anthroposophic theories and terminology, with which first-year co-workers were not familiar. Anna said that after the review meeting she realised how important it was to share knowledge with her colleagues. This occasion prompted her to make a presentation to other co-workers in her house community on techniques, which she used in her work. Anna commented: "It was good to see others getting inspired and asking questions …This gave my work with [pupil] more value by involving others and sharing knowledge."

In the same section of her assignment Anna described how she was asked by the house coordinator to contribute to the written assessment of a pupil. Anna wrote: "It was difficult for me at first as the previous report [made by a social worker] seemed very negative and concentrated on what A couldn't do instead of what he could. My personal involvement with A and my need to show his positive sides and protect him from the "bad old report" meant that I tried to explain his "unsocial" behaviour and went to the other extreme." Only after talking to her house coordinator did Anna start to understand the social worker's perspective: "It helped me to hear the question from my house coordinator: "How do you think A would manage in a completely unfamiliar setting?" … I realised that a child in a different environment (at home, shopping, respite) is someone I don't know and it is very likely that he is very different." In her interview, Anna said that such realisation involved overcoming her Camphill-centred perspective. In the conclusion of her assignment she referred to this realisation: "Previously, I think I liked to view situations as black and white or right and wrong, whereas now I can see that our work often includes several shades of grey."

Anna's account is a story of social reproduction of a house community, as a social unit within the Camphill School. According to Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990), a social entity reproduces itself through transfer of cultural capital, i.e. specific knowledge, attitudes, dispositions and skills, from its established members to newcomers. The driving force for this transfer is the desire of newcomers to improve their position within the organisational field and to accumulate capital in its three forms, economic, cultural and social. According

to Anna's account, she was initially focused on the acquisition of cultural capital, and only at a later stage of her study did she start to engage with her colleagues, thus, accumulating her social capital.

From the moment of her arrival at Camphill School, Anna was developing a habitus of the organisational field she inhabited. Bourdieu (2006) described this process as the inculcation of lasting transposable dispositions, which become part of the embodied cultural capital. In her assignment, Anna reflected on the changes in her attitudes and behaviour in her interaction with pupils. But she also became familiar with the norms and rules of her community and developed skills of living and working in a group of co-workers. She became a competent and "trusted" member of her house community. All this indicates that by the end of her four-year study, Anna's 'lifespace' habitus became 'well-formed'.

Anna's transformative experience was common among those co-workers in the Camphill School who were studying at the BASP. Every house community included students, who were more experienced than other voluntary workers. This provided the Camphill School with a mechanism of transfer of cultural capital within the house communities, thus ensuring their social reproduction (Chepelin 2014).

Anna's account indicates that towards the end of her study she started expanding her interests and activities beyond her house community. Contributing to a written assessment of a Camphill School pupil, she was eager to understand the perspective of an external social worker. She also became active in the wider community of the Camphill School. The latter experience brought her some disillusionment. During the interview, Anna said "What is Camphill? It gets more and more difficult the more you stay [in the Camphill School] probably. There are many things I just feel I can't really identify with here." She added: "I think somehow within the house community and working with the children that's where I feel I belong." Anna's 'lifespace' habitus, which she developed within a house community, did not seem to match the wider organisational field of the Camphill School. The account of the second student provides an insight into that wider organisational field and the habitus that matches it.

House coordinator

Jane was a house coordinator. She lived with her family with two young children in a house community. Jane started this house community, which was viewed as a "new project" in the Camphill School, and became its coordinator after she finished her second year of BASP study.

Jane's account was a testimony of her struggle to establish her position as a house coordinator within the wider organisation. Incidentally, she found a fitting name for the amount of capital which corresponded to this position – "my cheese". Jane picked up this word from the book *Who moved my Cheese*? (Johnson 1998). In her assignment, she explained why she used this word: "In my opinion, the cheese is a metaphor for the things that give us happiness, satisfaction and meaning on [a] material, emotional and spiritual level . . . The care for the individuals with complex needs I am responsible for in combination with communication with parents I consider 'my cheese' and I enjoy and value this highly". Jane described how being confronted by a parent, who alleged some failings in the care of her daughter, she felt that her "cheese" was "moving away" from her. At that moment the fear of "losing her cheese" made her act like "running through the maze". Jane's reaction is understandable: had this parent lodged a formal complaint, it might have put into question her competence as a house coordinator.

While her assignment was mainly focused on her practice within the house community, from the interview with her it became clear that she faced no lesser challenges in the group

of house coordinators. It was within this group, Jane said, that she felt an "incredible pressure". In her assignment, she described herself as a "facilitator of change" and assigned the troubles she had within the group to the "existing myths and traditions". In the interview, she said: "Not all, but [some of] these people don't agree [with] what I am doing, [they think] that I actually maybe shouldn't do it." It seems that her colleagues rejected her claim of being a champion of change, thus undermining her position as a house coordinator.

As it appears from her writing, Jane's struggle to gain recognition within the group of house coordinators coincided with the transformation of her habitus. Writing about her life and work in the house community, Jane described herself as a "dancer on the dance floor" with her "natural" disposition to be "open" and to "sympathise" with others and "to say 'yes' rather than 'no'". But, through the assignment, she repeatedly used another metaphor, the "balcony view": "Throughout my practice I was consciously and continuously creating the necessary distance and more objective 'balcony view'." Like Anna, Jane gave a reference for her concept (Heifetz 1994), but didn't elaborate it, using it as a metaphor in her reflection on particular events in her practice.

Here is her description of one event in her house community: "I stood on the balcony and 'checked' the situation on the dance floor … I was fully 'conscious' and aware what the consequences or reactions my intervention could potentially have … I was able to shake L's ground to a certain extent." In the interview, Jane recollected this situation somewhat differently: "And I think, ok, this all goes so fast. Intuitively I see, hey, this is an opportunity, and maybe it doesn't even go here but it's really like ok this is what can happen somehow, or in this case I actually did think about it that probably ok we can use it as an opportunity but it's more or less to open a new door to give to facilitate somehow what is beyond person to open a new door." She added: "But, looking back at this example, when I read it, I was not fully happy with it." Jane seemed to feel the discrepancy between the way she acted as a "dancer", being fully involved in a fast developing situation, and the position of a distant observer, which she attributed to herself in her writing. Comparison of these parts of the interview and of the assignment exposed a struggle within Jane's habitus, between her old and new dispositions.

A metaphor of "authentic boundaries" crops up repeatedly in Jane's writing, with a reference to the "contact boundary statement" for a child and youth care professional in Fewster (2007). Thus, Jane wrote that "developing true sense of Self with the necessary boundaries in place" had been central to her in her "self-development into a practitioner". She added: "I often failed and often managed to authentically adapt, which helped developing my authentic boundaries of Self." Jane wrote that a failure to act within her "boundaries of Self" led her to "run through the maze", when she faced allegations made by a parent. Describing an inspection of her house community, Jane wrote: "It was my ability at that moment to 'be' within my boundaries of Self that I think contributed most to a very successful inspection." And it is her acceptance by other members of the house coordinators groups that made her feel she had her "boundaries" in place.

The metaphors of "balcony view" and "authentic boundaries" are the choices Jane makes from the resources that became available to her during her study. As in Anna's case, metaphors help her to make sense of what happens to her and to cope with the challenges of everyday life and work in the community. Transformation of Jane's habitus took place after she became a house coordinator and entered the wider organisational field. This indicates that the new dispositions that she was developing matched this wider organisational field and guided her to those metaphors, which resonated with its logic of selection.

Two logics of selection

Analysis of these students' accounts would seem to suggest that the Camphill School is comprised of multiple organisational fields, which correspond to two different sets of dispositions of those who inhabit them: the local fields of the house communities correspond to the "dancer" and "lifespace" set, and the wider organisational field to the "balcony view" and "authentic boundaries" set. The two sets of dispositions seem to operate under two different logics of selection: the "dancer" and "lifespace" set under the logic of association; and the "balcony view" and "authentic boundaries" set under the logic of difference (Bourdieu 1986). The logic of association guides both Anna and Jane to see similarity and feel affinity with others, and to say 'yes', rather than 'no'. The logic of difference prompts Jane to see a distinction between herself and others, to distance herself from the events "on the dance floor" and to draw what she considers to be "authentic boundaries", which others cannot cross.

The difference between two sets of dispositions may be described in terms of 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital (Putnam 2000). Indeed, Anna invites a colleague to a review and shares her knowledge with others. She is keen to understand the perspectives of other professionals across organisational boundaries. These are the features of the 'bridging' social capital. Jane, by assigning herself and her house community an exclusive role within the organisation, displays the characteristics of the 'bonding' social capital.

While the 'bonding' and 'bridging' types of social capital, as stand-alone concepts, have been widely adopted in sociological research (Field 2008), in the Bourdieusian approach the terms 'capital', 'habitus' and 'field' are defined and used only in relation to each other (Grenfell 2012). In Bourdieu's framework, capital is the medium of communication between a particular field and a habitus corresponding to this field (Grenfell 2009). Therefore, it seems appropriate to assign the 'bonding' and the 'bridging' qualities not to the capital but to the dispositions (habitus) of an actor, shaped by a field. These characteristics originate in the normative principles ('rules of the game') of a particular field, which generate a distinction between positions in this field by attributing certain values of capital (of different types) to each position. In any specific situation, these normative principles lead an actor to perceive and to act in line with either the logic of association or the logic of difference. The personal history of an actor also impacts on their choice of logic, but, with the habitus 'well-formed', the actor acquires a propensity to operate as an agent of the field. The two logics of selection complement each other – in any field both are present, in tension. In extreme, one of them entails virtue, the other vulgarity (Bourdieu 1986). It seems possible to describe the 'bridging' habitus as the one which is dominated by the logic of association. The 'bonding' habitus applies the logic of association selectively, to a particular group, and the logic of difference to those who do not belong to this group.

Within the house communities of both students the logic of association prevails. Anna's "lifespace" habitus and Jane's "dancer" habitus are bonding people in their respective house communities. The difference between the two students materialised when they acted outside their house communities. Anna transposed into the external field of care professionals the 'bridging' disposition of her "lifespace" habitus. Jane, guided by the logic of difference, developed dispositions for a distant "balcony view" and "adaptive work", which she needed in order to operate within the group of house coordinators.

During this time, the situation in the group of house coordinators was evolving. Jane described in her assignment how one of her colleagues offered her some help. She wrote: "I felt relieved and accepted help without feeling that my 'cheese' [was] being taken away." Jane called this moment "the experience of a collaborative common cheese". In the group of house coordinators, the logic of association seemed to prevail over the logic of difference. Perhaps it was only to have been expected: the house coordinators were firmly

grounded in the life of their house communities, where the logic of association dominated. Like Anna, the house coordinators were transposing the dispositions of their local fields within their circle. It is this disposition for association that helped them to bridge their differences, accept a newcomer and accumulate social capital, "a collaborative common cheese".

Conclusion

Application of Bourdieu's theoretical tools for analysis of ethnographic material obtained at a practice-based vocational programme, BA in Social Pedagogy, allows characterisation of organisational fields and dispositions of students, who inhabit these fields. It also allows differentiating between positions that the students occupy within the organisation.

With a small sample of data, only a tentative conclusion can be reached, that students of the programme use those theoretical concepts, which, taken as metaphors, resonate with their developing habitus. These metaphors make visible characteristics of the organisational fields and reflect the transformation of students' habitus on their trajectories through the organisation.

Acknowledgement

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