The argument developed in this paper is that a focus on practice provides some resolutions to methodological problems facing Bourdieuan scholarship in education. In order to develop Bourdieu's work on practice to account for the interactions between practices, this paper presents a conceptualization of practice as chains of production and consumption. The first part of the paper reviews the account of practice offered by Bourdieu both embedded in practice games and as field effects. The second part of the paper introduces practice chains of production and consumption as a way to conceptualize practice by drawing on a case involving print journalists involvement with policy makers over the course of an Australian policy review. The final section presents a discussion of this conceptualization and highlights the potential of the concept for further research in understanding the processes of educational policy development.

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Practice chains of production and consumption: mediatized practices across social fields

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The argument developed in this paper is that a focus on practice provides some resolutions to methodological problems facing Bourdieuan scholarship in education. In order to develop Bourdieu’s work on practice to account for the interactions between practices, this paper presents a conceptualization of practice as chains of production and consumption. The first part of the paper reviews the account of practice offered by Bourdieu both embedded in practice games and as field effects. The second part of the paper introduces practice chains of production and consumption as a way to conceptualize practice by drawing on a case involving print journalists’ involvement with policy makers over the course of an Australian policy review. The final section presents a discussion of this conceptualization and highlights the potential of the concept for further research in understanding the processes of educational policy development.

Keywords: practice chains of production and consumption; Bourdieu; hijacking the event; policy-media interactions; mediatization

Introduction

Since the passing of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in January 2002, there has been a resurgence of papers in educational research documenting and evaluating the conceptual and methodological tools that his work offers (Kenway & McLeod, 2004; Maton, 2005; Taylor & Singh, 2005; Thomson, 2005; van Zanten, 2005). An outline of these tools, including fields, habitus, practice and forms of capital, will be familiar to many in educational research. Central to Bourdieu’s work, yet largely overlooked in the return to Bourdieu, has been the place and account of the concept of practice in his work. Arguably, Bourdieu’s key concepts may be represented as responding to specific sets of problems around practice. The strength of these concepts is therefore dependent on the adequacy and coherence of the account of practices for which they are offered as explanations. The central underlying premise of this paper is that a practice focus offers much for educational policy scholarship, but also forms the basis of some methodological and theoretical problems for Bourdieuian scholarship, and that the contours of these problems deserve some attention. There are two kinds of issues that illustrate the importance of a focus on practice, one related to developing language consistent with Bourdieuan concepts that allows an understanding of ways that practices interact with one another. The second issue relates to developing a language basis that permits exploration of social processes such as globalization and mediatization, both of which have led to a fluidity of social relations, and have taken on an increasingly important role in education policy processes.

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Educational research that draws on Bourdieu’s work faces a dilemma about how to label and discuss interactions between different social fields, such as research concerned with the impact of the policy field on school fields, the impact of fields of journalism on policy fields, or the impact of global education policy fields on national education policy fields. The argument developed in this paper is that a focus on practice rather than fields, capital or habitus may offer a resolution to methodological problems facing Bourdieuan scholarship in education, particularly those dealing with research that involves the interaction of multiple social fields. However, the promise of a return to practice is dependent on the development of a more methodologically useful and analytically distinct account of practice drawn from Bourdieu’s work. In order to develop this argument, this paper explores Bourdieu’s elements of practice, and their place in two major theorizations in his work. First, the paper takes up Bourdieu’s conception of diverse practice games; and second, it takes up Bourdieu’s conception of practice as the effect of social fields. Moving beyond Bourdieu’s own work, this paper argues that the conceptualization of practice as chains of production and consumption provides educational policy scholarship with one way to explore the interaction of two or more practices.

To illustrate this argument, the paper draws on research which explored practice interactions between the field of print journalism and the field of policy over the course of an Australian Federal Review of Australia’s Science Capability, carried out by Australia’s then Chief Scientist, Dr Robin Batterham (Batterham’s Review). The result of this review was a wide range of recommendations for universities, schools and science institutions, focusing particularly on maximising their productivity in a newly emerging knowledge economy (Batterham, 2000a, 2000b). This built specifically on the work of the OECD (1996) in their policy text, The Knowledge Based Economy, which presents the development of the concept knowledge based economy. The official duration of this Review was between 25 September 1999 and late November 2000. Throughout this period, there was considerable debate within the field of print journalism, and responses from the field of policy, about the relevance and importance of the Review. Subsequent to the end of the Review, the Government released Backing Australia’s Ability (Commonwealth of Australia, 2001), which adopted most of the recommendations from Batterham’s final report. To contextualise the Review and its subsequent effects on official Government policy, data concerning media-policy interactions was collected on either side of these dates, from Batterham’s announcement as Australia’s Chief Scientist on 20 May 1999, to the announcement of the Australian Federal Government’s response to the Review on 29 January 2001. Consequently this paper utilises data around interactions between those in the field of print journalism and the field of policy as a vehicle for exploring the benefits that a Bourdieuan return to practice might hold for researchers in education. As discussed elsewhere, this data presents an account of moves in the process of mediatisation, where the field of print journalism slowly influences and shapes power relations in other social fields (Lingard & Rawolle, 2004; Rawolle, 2005, 2007).

The remainder of the paper is structured in three sections. The first section discusses Bourdieu’s account of practice, and the methodological and theoretical implications of this account. The insights of Bourdieu’s account are treated as resources for research in policy sociology, and are subsequently drawn upon throughout the
remainder of the paper. The second section presents the conceptualization of practice chains of production and consumption and utilises data collected over the course of Batterham’s Review to illustrate an application of this conceptualization. The final section provides a discussion and conclusion about the place of practice in educational policy studies.

The place of practice in Bourdieu’s theories: practice resources for education policy sociology

Within Bourdieu’s writing, practice occupied a central yet ambiguous place, acting as a link between his early anthropological work and later sociological work. In Bourdieu’s early anthropological writing, practice was understood as socially meaningful activity, which acted as the foundation for societies (Bourdieu, 1965, 1973, 1977). For Bourdieu, practical activities were those that provided social meaning to those involved, such as marriage rituals, farming activities throughout the year, or gift exchanges. It was through practical activity and active engagement that individuals and groups made meaning of the world. The potential and importance of practice was its role in enabling individuals and groups to shape and construct the world around them.

When Bourdieu developed his work in relation to the sociology of capitalist societies, practice was again the foundation point, and in investigations that straddled his anthropological and sociological work, such as Distinction (Bourdieu, 1984), practices were again the key element on which his analysis and study of capitalist society rested. In this later contribution of Bourdieu, as Warde (2004) has argued, practice denoted at least three interconnected associations that were somewhat conflated. First, practice denoted practical activities that are located at specific points in time and in cycles, such as negotiating terms of reference for a policy review, or interviewing relevant people in preparation for an article about an upcoming policy development. Second, practice denoted the nominalization (or naming) and bounding of these activities, such as a Review of Australia’s Science Capabilities, which provides points of harmonization and limits for practical activity. Third, practice denoted an opposition to theoretical accounts of practice. In addition to these associations, it is also important to include the products of practical activities, such as policy texts, media releases or newspaper articles, which, although located within specific nominated practices, may also be taken up and influence other practices.2 These four associations with practice – practical activity, naming and bounding, opposition to practice, and products – will be referred to in the remainder of this paper as Bourdieu’s elements of practice.

Despite its central location within Bourdieu’s writing, practice has not been explored substantially by scholars extending and utilising his methodological tools and concepts (though see Warde, 2004; and Schatzki, 1987, 1997 for critique). This is somewhat problematic, in that the strength of Bourdieu’s theory rests on the tools that it offered to describe and explain the progress of and links between the elements of practice in different social settings. There is, then, scope for exploring Bourdieu’s conception of practice, and locating it amongst other concepts that have been more explicitly confronted, such as habitus, capitals and social fields. Without a clear understanding of what practice is for Bourdieu, how can the strength of his other conceptual and theoretical
developments be assessed? In the argument that follows, Bourdieu’s elements of practice are explored in relation to two major theorizations of practice in Bourdieu’s work, first as the subject of strategy and tactics embedded in different kind of practice games, and second as the primary site of social production in capitalist societies, located within different social fields.

**Practice analogies: practice games**

In *The Logic of Practice*, Bourdieu (1990) introduced practice in terms and metaphors similar to Wittgenstein’s (1953) account of language games, and drew some insights from Wittgenstein’s philosophical questioning about what it means to follow a rule. The opening quote in the introduction to *Logic of Practice* (Bourdieu, 1990) presents Wittgenstein’s problem about the usefulness of rule following as an internal explanation of human activity:

> ‘How am I able to follow a rule?’ – If this is not a question about causes, then it is about the justification for my following a rule in the way I do. If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: ‘This is simply what I do’. (Wittgenstein, 1953/2001, p. 72e §217)

Bourdieu’s interpretation of this problematic seems to be that the ‘bedrock’ of Wittgenstein’s quote, beyond which discourse and language alone cannot provide justification, is practice. However, language games, while developed and enacted within practice forms, are not reducible to practice. In this Wittgensteinian reading, practice forms a problematic that needs to be confronted in multiple ways, locating the elements of practice relative to different practice forms. The broad problematic for Bourdieu rests on reconstructing and explaining how different practice forms are internally meaningful to people actively participating in the practice form, while also contributing to the make-up and structure of the social world.

In developing an argument in relation to practice from this overarching problematic, Bourdieu suggested that, to be a part of particular practices, people need to hold a ‘feel for the game’, indicating an awareness not only of the rules of specific practices, but also the strategies and timing required to be competitive within the game (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 66). Practice is therefore a socially constituted layer of human activity, which loses its subjective meaning when reduced and removed from its embedding in the societies in which different forms occur. Like Wittgenstein, Bourdieu’s arguments suggest that practice occurs in multiple forms, which are not reducible to one another and serve different purposes. In Bourdieu’s version, practice games are not exclusive to human activities that present an ethically justified premise or conform to specific theoretical architectures, but are inclusive of all kinds of human activities. Hence, this version of practice can be described as a ‘practice games’ account of the sequences of any actions and activities that hold social meaning to those involved. The implication of this formulation is that practices, in the form of individual actions, products and their naming and bounding, hold social meaning by virtue of their place within sequences, in which specific moves are made with different degrees of success.
Within a ‘practice games’ view of the social world, practice denotes the specific moves that people make, the products associated with and integral to the activity, and the naming and bounding of these moves either by the agents engaged in the practice or by agents relatively distant from the game, such as researchers, policy makers or politicians. Practice is also integrally related to the habitus that allows people to make socially recognised moves. Research drawn from Bourdieu’s practice games theorizing is then directed towards reconstructing, describing and explaining the flow and logic of these nominated practice moves within specific contexts and timelines, the place and role of specific products produced and utilised within these practice moves, and the goals and stakes of the game. From this starting point, the attributes and dispositions of agents involved in the practice game are then used as the basis for developing a profile of the habitus required of those taking part in the game. What the concept of habitus provides is an explanation of links between Bourdieu’s practice elements within a practice game. For Bourdieu (1990), it is only in relation to the flows and movement of practice that research can apprehend practice ‘at the point of generation of practice in order to grasp it, as Marx says, “as concrete human activity, as practice, in a subjective way”’ (p. 145).

The units of measurement for practice within this formulation are dependent on the specific goals towards which the game is directed. For example, drawing on the empirical data that underpins this paper, practice may take the form of writing media releases and strategizing the timing of their release, developing representational frameworks for policy texts or writing articles about a review. In light of Bourdieu’s work on fields, it may be considered that practices are best understood relative to specific fields. Yet the focus of research in a practice games account is on understanding the sequence of practice moves that people undertake, which does not *a priori* limit research direction by their location within specific fields. Hence, studying interactions between policy makers and journalists over the course of Batterham’s Review does not imply an initial research focus on either the field of print journalism or the policy field. Rather, a practice games view directs attention to the agents that made the first practice moves within the practice game, and then of developing an account of the flow of practice that occurs in the interactions that followed the initial move. To research, practice games thus suggest different methodological implications in comparison to a social fields view of practice.

*Practice analogies: social fields*

While practices are not extensively presented as a general theory by Bourdieu in his later work on social fields, it is clear that they form an ongoing commitment. In Bourdieu’s later work practice may be viewed as the underlying theme and problematic, but now relocated and embedded within different social fields. Practice provides an important location for research in what has come to be known as Bourdieu’s theory of fields, including the further development of the concept of habitus, and the addition of the concepts of social fields and forms of capital. Within this theory of fields, practice provides the object of research and helps to understand the utility and explanatory merit of habitus, fields and forms of capital. In other words, the usefulness of concepts such as habitus, social fields and forms of capital rests on the ways that they allow researchers to
explain and understand different kinds of practice. Habitus, for example, was developed as a way of describing sets of dispositions that allow people and groups of people to produce practices and practice products that are socially recognised, and fit within the flow or logic of practice evident in social fields. Habitus thus provides Bourdieu with a dispositional account of the production of practice: habitus is not reducible to practice, but a precondition for the expression of practice by individuals and groups. Understood in this way, the concept of habitus provides a way of explaining how individuals and groups are able to produce practical activities and products that are recognised and perceived as such by others within a social field and worthy of recognition. Habitus also provides a way of understanding what enables innovative or new practices to emerge and take form.

Social fields were developed as a way to describe social spaces in capitalist societies in which there exists a structuring and structured pattern of effects related to practice. Social fields are so named because the structure is conceptualised as resulting from the forces that individuals and groups are subjected to through their engagement with the field. A social field is primarily a field of social forces that act on the trajectories and practices of people. The net result of these forces is used as an explanation of the hierarchical positions of different people and groups within these spaces. The way that individuals and groups are able to produce practice/s in each field is explained by Bourdieu through shared habitus common to a field. Bourdieu’s theory of social fields therefore requires subdivisions of habitus, leading to the naming of a ‘scientific habitus’, a ‘linguistic habitus’, a ‘journalistic habitus’, or a ‘policy habitus’.

Bourdieu’s account of different forms of capital was developed as a way to talk about the stakes that practices in different social fields were oriented towards, and which can be accumulated and contested by different people within each field. Similar to habitus, this leads to a subdivision of capital into field-specific forms, such as scientific capital, linguistic capital, policy capital, and journalistic capital, and is used to explain the dominance of practices of people with a high volume of field-specific capital. Hence, each of Bourdieu’s key concepts may be represented as responding to specific sets of problems around practice. The strength of these concepts is therefore dependent on the adequacy and coherence of the account of practices for which they are offered as explanations.

Methodological and theoretical problems of practice

Though practice can be viewed as an organising concept for Bourdieu’s work, the shift to social fields did entail a change in the priorities of his research and theorization. In contrast with the central position of practice in the ‘practice games’ analogies, when Bourdieu developed his arguments about the central role of social fields in capitalist societies, practice was repositioned as one kind of ‘field effect’. As the primary organising structure for Bourdieu’s view of capitalist societies, social fields became the major site of explanation, and field effects became the major aspects of the social world to be studied, including practice, forms of accumulated capital, positioning and habitus. While practices are one of the most important elements under consideration in both practice games and social fields, by instating practice as one kind of field effect, the
research importance of practice appeared to shift. One of the most significant of these shifts can be traced to methodological issues related to a research trajectory, rather than explicit conceptual development. As Bourdieu’s project focused more explicitly on social fields as the defining structure of capitalist societies, the majority of his work dealt with single fields rather than multiple fields simultaneously. Hence, field effects, when they involved practice, referred to practices internal to single fields, and denoted the changes in and structure of practice that resulted from the action of magnetic-like organisation and features associated with a single field. Yet, logically, the strength of this account is dependent on the explanation that field-like characteristics provide for the flow and logic of practices within a field. This usage of ‘field effects’ suggests some limits to research involving both policy and the media, in that it is somewhat counterintuitive to talk about policy effects and media effects only in relation to the relative practice effects and moves of people in the media or in policy making. There are therefore some methodological and conceptual problems that arise in applying Bourdieu’s use of practice as a field effect to educational policy research. Some recent work in educational policy has attempted to counter-balance this use of field effects related to practice by talking about cross-field effects, indicating that changes in practice in one field may be caused by practices and practice effects in other fields (Lingard & Rawolle, 2004, 2009; Rawolle, 2005, 2007; Rawolle & Lingard, 2008).

As mentioned previously, the strength of these concepts is ultimately dependent on the adequacy of the description of practice provided. Two major theorizations offered by Bourdieu, and discussed in this paper, as research orientations – practice games; and practice as the effects of social fields – help to locate practices within major practice-theoretic traditions. Yet, despite this rich set of resources, they leave unresolved how to describe and study processes that involve the interlinking of multiple practices. This is an important matter for research in studies involving the influence of policy, media and globalization on education; And it is both a methodological problem and a theoretical problem for educational research, in that there are few ways within Bourdieu’s language to identify and describe instances in which multiple fields influence a given practice form, or ways to explain interactions between practices located in different social fields, be they national social fields or global fields.

**Problems of practice between fields: a resolution**

Studies utilising Bourdieu in which different practices interact or straddle different social fields face something of a blind spot: there is no simple way to group together and talk about such cases using Bourdieu’s practice-based language. One resolution to some of the methodological and theoretical problems of Bourdieu’s account of practice is to add a conceptualization of practice as chains of production and consumption, in which the production of specific practices is oriented towards and informed by the likely consumption patterns of those practical activities or the effects of those practices. Such practice chains are located within the logic of practice games, and may be localised within social fields or straddle two or more social fields. Included in this development are products of practice, such as policy texts, media releases and articles. The central role of the effects of practice in orienting practice forms should not be understated. That is,
studying policy practices and media practices without attending to their effects in the form of practice products such as policy texts and articles would lead to a very partial understanding. Following Bourdieu’s work on fields, in capitalist societies these practice chains of production and consumption are structured around hierarchies and networks both within fields and hierarchies and networks that develop, at times temporarily, between fields.

One development of this conceptualization is that the positioning and dominance of people within a practice game in a field may be illustrated by the success or failure of their practice moves. For example, if a newspaper article related to a policy is produced by a journalist and is subsequently consumed, picked up and amplified by other journalists or policy makers, resulting in subsequent practice effects, this illustrates a successful move. Hence, their practice effects in the form of articles are widely consumed and link to the production of subsequent practice effects by other agents. Alternately, articles whose emerging themes are not picked up or amplified (are not ‘reproduced’ within the game) illustrate a failed practice move. Dominant agents might therefore be identified by the continued success of their practice moves within the game.

Developing an understanding of the practice effects of products such as policy texts requires retracing the steps to locate the emergence of policy practices and the points of harmonization produced by the naming and instituting of policy reviews. In this conceptualisation practice products are considered an integral aspect of policy practices, in that they both provide a strategic representation of the production of the policy and act as a mechanism for intervening in other practice games. In order to illustrate and develop this conceptualization of practice as practice chains of production and consumption, this section presents a practice based analysis of a policy review, Batterham’s Review, focusing in particular on the practice of mediatization.

The practice chains of producing and consuming media releases and articles

The research on Batterham’s Review was based around a study of the mediatization of policy. Where other research has described mediatization as a process (Kepplinger, 2002; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Schulz, 2004), conceptualizing mediatization as a practice form provides a research focus based around the Bourdieuian elements and analogies outlined earlier. In particular, a practice account of mediatization suggests that attention should be devoted to identifying relevant agents and groups engaged in mediatization activities (such as policy makers, politicians, journalists and public commentators), providing an account of the named activities and cycles of mediatization (such as the name, terms of reference and time-line for policy reviews, and specific media coverage of policies), and the production and consumption of effects associated with mediatization practices. Given the practice games approach, the specific practice moves that are made and their success or otherwise by agents involved in mediatization practices provides the basis for retracing the practice chains of production and consumption. As has been argued elsewhere, mediatization involves the interlinking between different fields, in particular the interlinking of the fields of journalism with other fields and the interlinking of the field of information and communication technology production (Rawolle, 2007). As a result of this view, the cross-field effects of the products of
mediatization also require some attention, as the basis for reconstructing practice chains of production and consumption between different fields. In effect this requires examining the effects of products of mediatization practices on practices and products located in other fields.

The study of mediatization was undertaken by retracing chains of three kinds of products or effects of practice, situated in two sites. These included the production of policy texts by policy agents, the production of media releases about the Review by policy agents, and the production of articles by journalists directly commenting on the Review. What was of interest in these practice chains of production and consumption were the links and cycles between them: the way that the effects of practices produced at specific points in time were consumed and informed the production of new practice effects. The first site identified for collecting data on the practices of policy agents and media agents was in Australia’s newspapers, the medium in which media coverage of Batterham’s Review was largely confined. In this site the effects of journalists’ practices, in the form of articles published over the course of the Review, were collected and coded into different policy themes (when produced by policy agents) and emerging themes (when produced by journalists and contributors to media coverage) that journalists either introduced or circulated. Second, the effects of policy agents’ practices, in the form of all policy documents and media releases produced over the course of Batterham’s Review, were also coded into different policy themes and emerging themes they produced. Two brief examples will be used to illustrate patterns of production and consumption of practice and practice effects, illustrating two kinds of practice moves that occurred over Batterham’s Review. The first example comprises initial moves in the practice game, illustrating both unruly practices and containment practices, while the second example comprises a practice move of hijacking an event, illustrating one kind of cross-field effect related to specific events (Lingard & Rawolle, 2004). This pattern of chains between the production of practice effects and their subsequent consumption, based around the products of practice, such as media releases, policy texts and media articles, occurred throughout Batterham’s Review.

**Practice moves: initial moves in a mediatised game**

Contrary to what might be considered a logical order to begin discussion of the mediatization of educational policy, the opening gambit in the practice game that formed around Batterham’s Review was not the production of a media release about the Review by the government, but the announcement of a new Chief Scientist, Dr Robin Batterham by Nick Minchin, who was then Minister for the Department of Industry, Science and Resources (1998-2001). The significance of this announcement was not the media release as such, but the relevance of this announcement that one specialist higher education reporter – Dorothy Illing, in *The Australian* – saw in the announcement, whose consumption of this practice effect led to an interview with Batterham. The effect of this interview was that Illing was able to produce an article in the higher education section of the newspaper that outlined a scoop: Batterham was going to head a Review of Australia’s Science Capabilities, and that part of this Review would, by necessity, entail some scrutiny of funding to research in universities, and the links between school
education and higher education in the education and development of science, engineering and technology students (Illing, 1999a). Without further comment by Minchin about the boundaries and limits of Batterham’s Review, Illing’s network of contacts within universities and federal departments resulted in the production of a number of articles that developed emerging themes about the significance of Batterham’s Review (Illing, 1999b, 1999c, 1999d). In particular, the effect of Illing’s initial article was the emergence of themes concerned with internal tensions between Batterham’s Review and a much more secretly conducted review of higher education funding being undertaken by Dr David Kemp, who was then Minister for the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (1998-2001) (Kemp, 1999). Illing’s scoop was also to produce emerging themes around power plays and strategies within the Howard Government. This kind of practice move in the mediatization of educational policy could be called an unrruly practice, in that the practice effects in the field of print journalism that resulted from the production of the initial media release were not contained or tamed as ‘on message’ by the policy themes. Discussion about Batterham in the field of print journalism moved well beyond the policy themes introduced in the initial media release, and Batterham contributed to speculation about instabilities within the Howard Government through interviews reported in Illing’s articles.

The formal announcement of Batterham’s Review in a subsequent media release by Minchin took place earlier than Illing’s initial article suggested. The media release was produced by Minchin’s office. It introduced policy themes which highlighted the limits of Batterham’s Review and offered a resolution to the production of emerging themes in Illing’s earlier articles. The policy themes produced by Minchin’s office presented a focus for Batterham’s Review on investigating ways in which the science, engineering and technology sectors could contribute to Australia’s development of a knowledge-based economy, a new policy (and academic) field which had emerged following the OECD’s production of a policy text of the same name in 1996, and its subsequent adoption in a number of OECD nations. The media release therefore highlighted the consumption of this policy practice effect from a global education policy field, and the themes introduced highlighted cross-field effects of this text in a national policy field (Lingard & Rawolle, 2009). In short, the media release implied that the policy game that Australia’s science, engineering and technology fields should be oriented towards was a global game, and the stakes of this game were the international competitiveness of Australia within an emerging global knowledge economy.

Beyond these globalization effects, the media release also introduced a number of policy themes concerning the terms of reference for the review, the time-line for the review, the relationship between the review and Kemp’s Review and outcomes expected at different times over the course of the Review. The practice move associated with this media release can be called one of containment. Such a move illustrates a setting of parameters for journalists producing articles, which limits expectations and speculation about the internal politics of the policy practice and its effects. There is, predictably, a risk involved in such a strategy: that the limits of the Review and the production of new policy themes may not be consumed by journalists; or, alternately, that the policy themes may be challenged by journalists through their production of emerging themes. The practice move of containment by policy makers may not successfully contain unruly practices and effects by journalists who consume policy themes within media releases, or
quell speculation. What a containment practice move offers as alternatives are new policy themes and substantive topics for journalists to consider regarding the cycle of the policy review, and its relationship with other policy reviews and political cycles. In Bourdieu’s language, the production of this media release (a practice effect) provided journalists with a bounding of practice to be undertaken over the course of Batterham’s review. The production of such a practice effect provided a social identity to Australia’s Science Capability Review, which also imposed boundaries and limits (Bourdieu, 1991). These boundaries applied equally to policy agents and journalists, and included a timeline for the review, specific activities to be undertaken at different intervals within this timeline, and expected practice effects (three policy texts to be produced over the course of the review). A key effect was to delimit the purpose of the review to the contribution of different institutions to a knowledge-based economy. This containment practice also directed journalists’ practical activities and practice effects away from current government spending and investment in institutions of higher education, school education and research; and it problematized these institutions’ commitments to an emerging global knowledge economy.

‘Hijacking the event’

The second example to illustrate practice chains of production and consumption involves the struggle between policy agents, science activists and journalists to represent the problems faced by Australia’s science, engineering and technology fields, exemplified by a public mobilization of scientists through a ‘science meets parliament day’. This event, which was initially unrelated to Batterham’s Review, coincided with the then recent announcement of Batterham’s Review. It was organized as a media event by science lobby groups in the hope of convincing politicians of the importance of political and financial support for science. Whilst there had been media coverage prior to the event, on the eve of the event the Federal Government produced a media release that connected the event with Batterham’s Review and announced advisors for this Review. In short, the purpose of the policy media release within the mediatized practice game was as a political tool to divert media attention from the event so as to promote government initiatives in the form of new policy themes. The production of such a policy practice effect is reliant on the subsequent consumption of the policy themes in the media release by relevant journalists and their pre-disposition to combine coverage of the event and the policy themes simultaneously when they subsequently produced articles. This implies that policy agents attached to Batterham’s Review had an understanding of the rules of the game of print journalism, and in particular knowledge of the hierarchy of newsworthy events for relevant journalists: they held a mediatized habitus. That is to say, the production of such a media release implies that policy agents hold an expectation of a predictable set of practice effects by relevant journalists who consume the media release. As a result, this pattern of practice chains involving the production of media releases and their consumption by journalists can be represented as a move by Batterham’s office to hijack the event.

The media release produced by Batterham’s office (Commonwealth of Australia, 1999) made an explicit link between the Science Meets Parliament Day and his Review,
and devoted the majority of the media release to the Review rather than the event. New policy themes were introduced in the media release, detailing the advisors to Batterham’s Review. Within the practice game, the production of the media release resulted in the overshadowing of the event in newspaper articles, and attention was diverted from the scientists’ motive for the demonstration: that is, Batterham’s attempt to hijack this event was successful. The success of this hijacking strategy was evidenced in that subsequent articles based on media releases involved the consumption of the policy themes, with journalists weighting the event equally with the policy themes in articles produced.

Discussion and conclusion

The initial claim developed in this paper was that ‘a research focus on practice rather than fields, capital or habitus may provide alternate resolutions to methodological problems facing Bourdieuan scholarship in education, particularly those dealing with research that involves multiple social fields simultaneously’. The conclusion to this paper discusses the potential that a Bourdieuan practice focus offers to educational policy research, and the place of practice chains of production and consumption within this return to practice. This entails re-examining the potential role of habitus, forms of capital and social fields as explanatory resources for educational policy research, and the usefulness of Bourdieu’s theory of practice more broadly.

Two examples of practice chains of production and consumption were chosen to illustrate some of the characteristics of mediatized practices, and of practice games involving policy processes and journalists. Practice games can be thought of as chains of moves, with moves being made with greater or lesser success. The success of journalists’ and policy makers’ moves is illustrated in the circulation of policy themes and emerging themes contained in products such as articles and media releases. Successful moves result in the reproduction of themes in subsequent practice products; unsuccessful moves result in orphaned themes that are not carried in subsequent practice products. The pattern of success or failure can be used as the basis for testing the explanatory power of Bourdieu’s conceptual framework, including habitus, capital and social fields.

Consequently there are some research questions that flow from these concepts as a way to explain and explore the pattern of practice chains of production and consumption that result. For example, which journalists make successful or unsuccessful practice moves when they produce articles that contain emerging themes about particular policies? Likewise, which policy makers and politicians contribute policy themes to journalists in the form of media releases or interviews, and with what degree of success? Are successful practice moves produced by journalists located in specific positions of the field of journalism, such as the newspaper they work for, their specialization, and the publishing group of which their newspaper is a part? Are successful practice moves made by policy makers and politicians located in specific positions in the field of policy? Responses to these questions provide a way of exploring and understanding the structure of the field of journalism and the field of policy at the time of a policy review, and the differentiated practice effects of a policy review for segments of the field of print journalism. Beyond field position, a focus on the success of journalists’, policy makers’ and politicians’ practice moves leads to some thinking about the resources – in forms of
capital and habitus – that are required to be dominant within a mediatized practice game. For example, what kinds of cultural goods in the form of titles, past achievements and positions are drawn on when making a practice move? What strategies of timing are used within the flow of the practice game? How successful is late entry to the practice game, and what differences mark the approach of successful agents during different phases of the mediatized policy practices? While responses to these questions are beyond the scope of this paper, they point to a need for researchers to have available conceptual resources and mechanisms that would provide explanatory power for arguments involving the interlinking of practices.

The concept of practice chains of production and consumption was developed as a mechanism to explore the flow of mediatized practice, and the way that practice games evolve over the course of a policy review. Beyond this specific case, the concept also has a place in Bourdieuian inspired research as a bridge between practice games theorizing and a theory of social fields. The strength of Bourdieu’s practice focus has been its ability to account for the diversity of societies, with a focus not merely on the production and reproduction of inequalities, but on an understanding of the investment and meaning that practice holds for those involved in specific forms of activities, and the effects that are produced by these activities. Conceptualising practice as chains of production and consumption locates the meaningfulness of practices within an expectation of the usefulness of social activities for other agents: whether located within or beyond a given field. The broader significance of this conceptualisation is that it suggests that fundamental to social activity in capitalist societies is a pattern of exchange based around the production of practice and practice effects and their consumption by other agents. This pattern holds the potential to produce practice effects between social fields (cross-field effects), whether this is a short term pattern of cross-field effects located in a specific policy practice game (in the form of temporary social fields – see Rawolle, 2005, 2007), or the emergence and maturation of new and relatively stable social fields.

In order to develop Bourdieu’s relational thinking and approach to an increasingly globalised world, it is important to recognise the strength that his theoretical and conceptual frameworks offer, but also to move beyond the confines of his framework and adapt them to new circumstances. The increasingly important role of journalists and media commentators on educational policy warrants such attention, in order to understand the social forces that shape and guide the practices and practice effects expected of educational researchers, academics, teachers and students. This article suggests one approach to the sociology of mediatization as a way to develop this understanding.

Notes

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2 I want to thank one of the reviewers for their insightful comments on this issue. As will become clearer throughout this paper, the role of products that result from practical activities is important both in advancing Bourdieu’s account of practice and in developing understanding of the links between practices such as newspaper articles and policy development.
This argument is an extension of the conceptualization of cross-field effects presented in earlier work (Lingard & Rawolle, 2004; Rawolle, 2005).

References


