

Chapter 8

Parental Involvement (Mis)recognised by Bourdieu's Conceptual Toolkit: *Illusio*, *Doxa*, *Habitus*, and *Capitals*



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Abstract This chapter presents Bourdieu's theoretical toolkit, which allows to look at the early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings' collaboration with families through concepts embracing both objective/societal conditions and individual characteristics. These concepts are *illusio*, *doxa*, *habitus*, and *capital*. The empirical example presented in the chapter shows how the power of the parents' economic, cultural, and social capital can negotiate and tailor the modes of involvement into parental needs and *illusios*. The analytical potential of Bourdieu's theory is also discussed in relation to the established pre-school and social pedagogy traditions, which imply different practices of parental involvement.

Keywords Capital · *Doxa* · *Habitus* · *Illusio* · Families · ECEC

Concepts Capturing Objectivity and Subjectivity

An objective that is deeply imprinted in Bourdieu's work is his efforts to overcome the dichotomic line between *objectivism* and *subjectivism*, which he found to be "the most fundamental, and the most ruinous" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 25). Observing over the years that the historical process of societies happens not only because of individuals obeying the rules, he developed a unique conceptual toolkit that captures the continuous permeation of the objective (structures) and the subjective (understandings, feelings, and actions) that arise in every social practice. He understood social practice as happening in the dialectics of the social structure and individuals' actions. This dialectic is constituted by the structure that structures individuals' actions, which also influences the structure that shapes their future actions. When proposing a theory able to capture the dynamic between the structure and

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individuals, he argues for “a science of dialectical relations between objective structures ... and the subjective dispositions within which these structures are actualized, and which tend to reproduce them” (1977, p. 3).

Bourdieu’s thought extends beyond the main philosophical and sociological traditions of his time. Influenced by structuralism (and the determinant character of structures) and existentialism (with its focus on individual choices), as well as Durkheim’s emphasis on the structuring powers of social institutions and Marx’s notion of ideology as a power structuring individual understanding of the world, Bourdieu developed his own “theoretical toolkit,” with the principal “thinking tools” of *field*, *capital*, and *habitus* as the core concepts explaining the ongoing social game (Thomson, 2014).

The Field and Its *Illusio*

Bourdieu underlines that a social practice needs a social space, which refers to a *field* in which the social practice is going on. Bourdieu’s understanding combines the social structure constituted by the crossing axes of social and cultural capital with *illusio*, a human sense of valuing particular phenomena or values as “at stake,” or worthy of living, struggling through, or play for. When writing about the “field,” Bourdieu is using the French word *le champ*, which is actually related to a football field, battlefield, or forcefield, and not to a meadow or a field of growing wheat, which are captured by the French word *les pré* (Thomson, 2014, p. 68). These metaphors show that humans belonging to a particular field must have a “sense of the game” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 14) about the same *illusio*. What humans value depends on their habitus as it is established at the intersection of economic, cultural, and social capitals (Bourdieu, 2004). However, a focus on *illusio*, the object of human interest, allows for the borders between different fields and subfields to emerge.

Bourdieu’s own investigations were centred on the fields of education (1977, 1998a), culture (1984, 1990), art (1996), science (1988), and television and journalism (1998b), among others. However, the borders between the fields remain problematic (Thomson, 2014) and blurred, as the social sectors and institutions seem to be intertwined with different social fields rather than standing on their own. Looking at *illusio* as structuring the fields and distinguishing them from each other helps to draw a map of the diverse fields crossing the sectors and practices of education, cultures, and science. While the fields may transform and change over time, remains keep being the structuring power of each emerging field.

Illusio is also what enables dynamics and games in the field. The field is always about *something* – something that is at stake for the members of the field. Bourdieu’s usage of the metaphor of the football field allows us to realise that in a game about *illusio*, the players represent pre-determined positions, which influence their chances of achieving the stakes. The positions in the field depend on the players’ levels of economic, cultural, and social capital. However, the levels of capital need to be sufficient to (mis)recognise (*doxa*) something as “at stake” and play for it.

Different social fields emerge along the axes of social and cultural capital, the different levels of which saturate people's lives with a variety of meanings, values, and tastes. Apart from the variety of fields, Bourdieu also points out their homologies, one of which is the field of power. Power in a field comes from the accumulation of economic and cultural capital that allows for greater influence on one's own field, but also on other fields (Thomson, 2014).

In this chapter, I reflect on the practice of ECEC's collaboration with parents as one where very different "parental fields" and "parental *illusios*" cross and interact. In the example of a private ECEC constituted at an intersection of economic and educational fields, the power of high economic and social capital will be shown, and its relationship to cultural capital will also be discussed.

Capital

As one of Bourdieu's thinking tools, the various forms of capital structure the social structure. More specifically, the intersections of different accumulations of different kinds of capital constitute different social fields with different *illusios*. Individuals entering particular fields have the "right" dispositions (*habitus*) to resonate with particular *illusios* and join the game of achieving the sensed/chosen *illusio*. The dispositions (*habitus*) of an individual are an effect of the capital accumulated in the individual's life.

Bourdieu (2004) systematises capital in different ways. Based on the kinds of resources they contain, he distinguishes between "*economic capital*, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in form of property rights (...), *cultural capital*, which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; (...), *social capital*, made up of social obligations ('connections'), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility" (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 16). Each of these types of capital exists in an embodied, objectified, and institutionalised form.

The embodied form relates to a set of individual dispositions (*habitus*). Economic, cultural, and social capital will manifest themselves in a particular way of being in and understanding the world – in behaving, talking, and sensing the importance of diverse activities. People with a high level of cultural capital, who have been exposed to a good education in art and literature, for example, will articulate themselves differently and make other choices than people with rather practical or technical educational backgrounds and cultural experiences connected to pop-culture spectacles. As indicated in the quote above, the type and quality of education and experiences one receives in his/her life depend on economic capital. However, the economic capital cannot replace the cultural; it is the cultural capital that will influence the *illusio* that an individual will recognise and play for, while economic capital will safeguard an individual's freedom to choose the most optimal strategy to achieve the *illusio* (Bourdieu, 2004).

Another form is objectified capital. While cultural capital can be objectified in the form of particular cultural goods (e.g., pieces of art, books, artefacts, objects, etc.), economic capital will be objectified in money and properties. Social capital becomes objectified in the networks one is a member of and the resources that are possible to access through the network. Institutionalisation of a particular form of capital involves participation in a relevant social institution and the institutionalisation of money into property right; cultural capital into diplomas, academic degrees, and prizes; and social capital into very noble titles and awards confirming the individual's position and value, among others.

Capital accumulates over time, and its levels limit possible social mobility within an individual's life, apart from some exceptional social carriers. Capital is "what makes the games of society – not least, the economic game – something other than simple games of chance offering at every moment the possibility of miracle" (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 15). The levels of capital make us choose a particular *illusio* and position us in a more or less advantaged position to achieve it.

When discussing the forms of capital in relation to the social practice of parental involvement in ECEC, the most interesting type might appear to be social capital, which is "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively owned capital" (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 21). Such a "back-up" of collectively owned capital may be a way of overcoming inequalities between the individual/family capitals, and by that mitigate the effect of socio-economic differences.

Later in this chapter, I will present a more complex picture of a private kindergarten and their management of the diversity of parental capital and *habitus*. However, to more thoroughly understand the complexity of the empirical example, a few more thinking tools should be introduced.

Habitus and Doxa

Habitus is the central concept of Bourdieu's toolbox that clearly shows how objective social conditioning intertwines with the individual's (subjective) sense of oneself and the surrounding world, and how the "structured structure" through internalisation starts structuring our meanings, choices, and actions. Habitus shows how the forms of capital at the intersection of which a human life emerges are internalised and embodied into the very unique entity of an acting individual.

Bourdieu (1990) defines habitus as "a system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organise practices and representations" (p. 53). As a "structuring structure," the habitus is "an open system of dispositions that is constantly subjected to the experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992,

p. 133). As a “structuring structure,” the habitus also gives one a sense of one’s own (and others’) place and role in the world of one’s lived environment (Bourdieu, 2005).

In forming an individual at the intersection of particular levels of capital, habitus allows one to recognise specific meanings, values, or objects as an *illusio* worthy of the efforts of being played for and the use of one’s own resources as tools to achieve it. Regardless of the social conditioning common to many sharing the same socio-economic background, habitus also becomes something very personal. According to Bourdieu (2005), “In that respect habitus is very similar to what was traditionally called character, but with very important difference: that habitus, as the Latin indicates, is something non-natural, a set of acquired characteristics which are the product of social conditions” (p. 45). The dispositions or the “character” are characteristics of permanent manners of “being, seeing, acting and thinking (...) as a system of long-lasting schemes or schemata of structures of perception, conception and action” (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 44). As such, the habitus can be understood as “a peculiar philosophy of action, or better, of practice” (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 44).

As various schemes of perception and understanding the world abound, the habitus is strongly related to *doxa*, with an analogical function of Marx’s ideology and false consciousness. *Doxa* is a way of understanding oneself in the world and the world around oneself that strengthens and legitimates the habitus and its actions. Being a product of particular social positioning at a particular intersection of capital always makes *doxa* a misrecognition. The misrecognition lies in the fact that, while a particular recognition is possible and true, it is only so from a particular social position, and this perspective works in favour of reproducing this social positioning. In other words, society can last, and the social order can be reproduced only because of people’s general misrecognition of their own place, which makes them choose values and *illusio* that allow for continuance. *Doxa* is then a “pre-verbal taking for granted of the world that flows from practical sense” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 68); as such, it is better understood as a misrecognition rather than just “undisputed, pre-reflexive, naive, native compliance with the fundamental presuppositions of the field” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 68).

In terms of parental involvement, *doxa* may be related to the “democracy deficit” described by Van Laere et al. (2018), which refers to the fact that “the goals and modalities of parental involvement are defined without involvement of the parents themselves” (p. 189). However, the fact that these imposed forms of involvement are accepted and practised by the parents, and seen by them and the ECEC settings as real ways of getting involved, shows the power of *doxa*. This misrecognition of imposed forms of action as own forms of engagement safeguards the continuation of parental involvement as we know it, and as it always has been.

Parental Involvement in Bourdieu’s Terms

In the two traditions of early childhood education distinguished by Bennet (2010), the Anglo-Saxon pre-school tradition and the Nordic social pedagogy tradition, different goals and forms of parental involvement are implied. Using Bourdieu’s

toolkit, it is possible to say that the pre-school tradition, aiming at supporting the home in preparing the child for school and achieving school readiness, may be interpreted as “equipping” the home and the child with the legitimate, school-relevant (white middle-class) cultural capital that is recognised and rewarded by the school system. The study by Kampichler (2021, 2022), presented in Chap. 9, shows this kind of “equipping” with the right capital through examples of the involvement of Roma families in ECEC. Such parental involvement is founded on the ECEC’s perception of the parents as lacking cultural capital and desperately needing to be equipped with a basic version. At the same time, middle-class families in private and public ECEC settings are seen as resourceful and able to contribute to their children’s early education on their own terms.

All this is to say that educational institutions, here the ECEC, have their own expectations of the parental *habitus* and meet parents of different *habitués* in different ways. As an example, Bourdieu’s studies with Passeron (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) show how the middle-class habitus is favoured by educational institutions in France. This middle-class habitus and its underpinning of the expectations of educational institutions towards families has been detected in many studies around the world (Eliyahu-Levi, 2022; Leareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999; Sengonul, 2022; Uysal Bayrak et al., 2021; Solberg, 2018). By invalidating capitals of im/migrant groups, national minorities, or lower socio-economic status made many intervention programs about equipping the disadvantaged groups with the “right” capitals (Gedal Douglass et al., 2021; Wright et al., 2021), or challenged the institutions to acknowledge a greater ray of cultural capitals as resourceful and relevant (Ejuu & Opiyo, 2022; Fenech & Skattebol, 2021; McKee et al., 2022; Warren & Locklear, 2021). The theory of Bourdieu, with his use of the term *habitus*, is thus to explain how the structures (differently) structure interactions between professionals and different groups of parents, and what modes of involvement can be negotiated once the parent/caregiver becomes the one that the educational institution listens to with respect.

Private ECEC Setting Manoeuvring Between Parental *Habitués*

To show other dimensions of collaboration between ECEC and the parents that can be interpreted with the use of Bourdieu’s toolkit, I will describe a few narratives involving a headmaster and three parents from a private ECEC setting in Poland. As a private ECEC setting, it grows at the intersection of the fields and values of education and business. This particular school is an institution of early education and care regulated by the Polish Ministry of Education (2017) and, at the same time, a company functioning in a real market with the goal of making economic profits. As the headmaster told me,

The profits of ECEC depend on the parental fees, which are quite high, and this explains why they expect a high quality of service that tailors the general guidelines for ECEC to their needs. The needs are, however, distinctive, as the parents are very different. (Headmaster)

The three parents whom the headmaster mentioned to show the variety of their needs were a company owner (Mother 1), an art teacher at an upper secondary school (Father 1), and a journalist at the local TV station (Mother 2). All the parents had higher education degrees of different kinds. Distinctions among their cultural capitals, seemed to be additionally strengthened by their economic capitals – and made them sensitive for and responsive to quite different *illusios*.

Mother 1 graduated from a technical university and started a company that generated high economic profits, while her knowledge connected to *humaniora* and art was limited. She perceived the ECEC settings as consisting of “both experts on children and their development as well as absolutely necessary help” in making her professional life possible. Her involvement in ECEC was mostly economic: “I am always willing to help this ECEC setting economically, as their great job allows me to run my business, but I really can't attend all these events for children and parents that they are organising. What I would support is even more extracurricular activities for additional fees, as it would allow me to work with a good conscious, knowing that my child is receiving the best education from the experts” (Mother 1).

Father 1, as an art teacher in a public school, represented rather limited economic capital, but a high level of orientation in temporary art and literature, as well as children's art and literature. His cultural capital allowed him to recognise the value of early education, which is why, regardless of the quite limited income that he and his partner received, the (rainbow) family chose “this ECEC setting, known for its high quality, and high prices. But it's worth it” (Father 2). As an art teacher, he offered to run an extracurricular art circle, the income from which was applied toward this family's tuition: “I have a lot of time after work and would really like to be involved in my daughter's life as much as possible, so running the art circle is an extra bonus, both in terms of reduced tuition and time spent with my daughter. Apart from this, I am always attending and helping with every event arranged by the ECEC setting” (Father 1).

Mother 2, a journalist at a local TV station, represented a high economic status and “good knowledge about the culture, literature, and art that may be forgotten during work in a TV station” (Mother 2). As a mother of a child with disabilities, she was interested in promoting and normalising such experiences of childhood and parenthood, for which she used both her job and ECEC:

I'm running a documentary through my work, which is about parenting with disabilities. My aim is to normalise it and challenge people's biases and fears, so I invite myself with the camera to all the events run by the ECEC, or even ask them to arrange some extra events so I could film them. I want to show that a childhood with Down syndrome is normal, that parenting with Down syndrome is normal, and that a kindergarten with Down syndrome is normal and that our parents are there for all of our kids. (Mother 2)

The *illusio* of changing the disability discourse was not the only one that this mother had. She also wanted a good childhood for her son:

I want him to be invited to birthdays, to other children's homes, and to have friends. Apart from attending these events, I also invite other children to our home. I talk with the parents when they are picking up their kids. I don't want them to be afraid to invite my boy, and it seems to work. They have started inviting, and the majority attend the events I am arranging and allow me to film them. (Mother 2)

The diverse *illusios* driving the parents' lives seem to be mirrored in their different expectations towards the ECEC setting and their activities that take place there (or lack thereof). While Mother 1, with her life dedicated to her company, needs more time most of all and thus expects "the experts" to release her from her mothering, Father 1 is offering his spare time to run an art circle at the ECEC. The *doxa* of Mother 1, seeing her child getting the best education from the experts during curricular instruction and extracurricular activities, is completely different from Father's 1, who, according to his *doxa*, is paid (in the form of a tuition reduction) for doing what he values most (time with his daughter and art).

In the eyes of the headmaster, he is engaging in an unbeneficial transaction:

It's not our case to have an opinion on what the family uses their money for, and how they make money, but if I were the fathers, I would instead go for a cheaper ECEC and have more money for travels during the summer break. I would also sell my competence at a higher price than what the art circle here pays. With their education and time, they would be able to provide their daughter with the best education even if she attended a cheaper ECEC. However, it's their choice. (Headmaster)

However, the father's *doxa* makes him believe that it is he who is outsmarting the world by selling something that does not cost him anything and getting paid for realising his highest values. What is at stake in his involvement in ECEC is the priceless time spent with his daughter and children, who are important in her life.

Mother 2 is also very focused on the social environment of her child and invests a lot in transforming the children and parents in the ECEC into the social capital of her son, which is the "back-up" he needs to have a good, "normal" childhood. The social capital of the ECEC, together with the social capital she gains access to through her work, is expected to promote the normality of childhood with disabilities in the public discourse and fulfil the mother's *illusio* of normalisation of parenthood/childhood with Down syndrome. The ECEC supports her efforts very much, but not only for ethical reasons, as the headmaster sees great economic value in the free advertisement of the ECEC through her documentary.

The headmaster's narrative below shows how she manoeuvres between the different expectations of the parents so that they continue to be the "customers" of the ECEC setting, even if she personally or pedagogically does not agree with their *illusios* or lifestyles. Even though neither the headmaster nor the staff believe that a wide range of extracurricular activities with "experts" can replace time and relationships with the parents, no one shares their opinions with the mother. The mother's economic capital that she also brings into the ECEC makes the staff support her *doxa* of the best experts providing her child with the best education and care. For extra payment, her child is taken care of by one of the pedagogues during the events for the children and parents. The headmaster could avoid organising so many events for children and parents (which are clearly making the absence of Mother 1 even

more visible), but the support for the values of Mother 2 and free advertisement for the ECEC are powers that even the pure economic capital of Mother 1 cannot stop. However, the economic capital of Mother 1 creates a field of power in which pedagogical argumentation for more time and arenas for strengthening the relationship between the child and the parent become impossible to articulate:

So, it is very sad when the parents don't have time for their children. No matter how many sports and art activities we provide—and thanks to Mother 1, we provide a lot—the child will always need time with the parents. I can see that it is extra painful for this child to be at all the events for children and parents without his mom, and it's me or someone from the staff taking extra care of him. Maybe we should confront the mother and tell her that she should be more present in the life of her child, but then she would find another ECEC... so we do what we can, so that such events are not too sad for this child, and there are many of these events because of Mother 2 insisting on one at least once in a month. I totally support her in her activism, but I can see that I'm also very happy for the advertisement of our ECEC. It really attracts more parents to us, not necessarily with disabled children, but parents who want their children to be respectful of diversity among humans. (Headmaster)

This narrative shows how the field of power created by exceptionally high levels of particular parental capital blocks the pedagogical interventions that would take place in the case of less privileged parents. In the case of a family with a lower socio-economic background “abandoning” the child with the ECEC experts, the ECEC would most likely confront or mentor the parents, or contact relevant services capable of helping the family manage their priorities and time. Here, in the case of an economically privileged family and the economic benefits from the child staying extra hours, the ECEC instead releases the mother from her parental responsibilities and confirms her *doxa* of the child's developmental benefits.

Knowing that for the child of Mother 1, the events for parents and children organised by Mother 2 are the most painful, ECEC could think of limiting them. However, the media-related social capital of Mother 2 creates a field of power within which the needs of Child 1 are fulfilled in another way. The capital of Mother 1 comes to the ECEC as long as her child attends it, while the social capital of Mother 2 can help attract new, “really good parents” with “really good values” in the longer run. Here, it is also important to mention the habitual and value-related match of the headmaster and Mother 2 in relation to the importance of promoting the normality of childhood with a disability and strengthening the social relationships around her son. The question is, however, whether the ECEC would provide analogical support for a mother of a child with disabilities who would not be able to disseminate this information in the public media.

However, it is evident that economic and social capital and benefits were not the only things valued by the headmaster. Father 1 was important for ECEC not only as a relatively cheap art educator and a regular payer of tuition, but also because he was one of those “parents that we really want to have here. With good values, not only money, but family—in this case a rainbow family, so good values, openness, diversity. This is what we believe as teachers here” (Headmaster). Apart from the habitual match with the teachers, the diversity was also a marketing factor, as “spreading the news of us as a rainbow-friendly ECEC in homophobic Poland will possibly attract many well-situated, rainbow families to us.” However, the headmaster

underlined that the pleasure of some habitual mutuality and the same, open-minded understanding of the world is of great importance for the sake of satisfaction with one's work: "I really want the children to grow up in the spirit of diversity; with our tuition we talk only about a middle-class diversity, but still. I really prefer the open-minded, well-educated families to some of the posh, conservative ones. Even though our business depends on money, I can't say that money is everything" (Headmaster).

Attracting and keeping different types of middle-class families was important to legitimise different lifestyles and show the children that other lives are possible, but as humans, we still have the same values:

You know, the richer or posh ones may sometimes feel that they are somehow better, while the more educated feel better because they invest in the important stuff, like culture or education, not just money. For me, it is important that the children get a sense of diversity and different lifestyles being possible; although it's only a middle-class diversity, they can still learn that as humans, we have the same values and that we can live as we want. (Headmaster)

The examples of this ECEC setting and the narratives of the headmaster and parents showed the powers of different capital and *illusios* coming into the picture in the social practice of ECEC's collaboration with parents. It is fascinating to attend to the kind of powers (in the form of economic and social capital) that diminish the teachers' pedagogical voice in interaction with parents, and how an ECEC depending on parental economic resources needs to manoeuvre between their own beliefs and those of the parents, and thus between different *illusios* and forms of capital. It is also interesting to consider how pedagogical values emerge when safeguarding the economic resources for the ECEC. For example, the ECEC took extra care of the child whose parents could not attend the events for parents and children, so that the parental absence was not experienced as a lack, but rather as extra care. Moreover, regardless of the benefits of free advertisement through the documentary, the ECEC really identified with the values being promoted. Father 1 was also appreciated not because of being a cheap art educator, but because he was a well-educated, engaged, and open-minded parent with good values. Another interesting aspect of this empirical example is that it shows how upper middle-class parents have the possibility to negotiate forms and modes of parental involvement. It seems that those parents who enter (particularly a private) ECEC setting with sufficiently high levels of economic and social capital do not suffer from a *democracy deficit* (Van Laere et al., 2018). Quite the opposite, in fact, as it might actually be the professional, pedagogical knowledge that is marginalised.

Conclusion

In this chapter, Bourdieu's thinking tools were presented to inspire an alternative look at the social practice of ECEC collaboration with families. The concept of *habitus* allows us to look at both the more-than-parents and ECEC staff's understanding of the practice of parental involvement through their social positioning and

access to diverse types of capital. The empirical example presented in the chapter shows a private ECEC setting established at the intersection of educational and economic fields, interacting with different social fields and the *illusios* of parents, where economic, cultural, and social capital became significant forces in negotiating modes of parental involvement.

Bourdieu's theory also allows us to reflect on practices of parental involvement in different traditions of ECEC, including the pre-school tradition, where the families and children are "equipped" with the legitimate cultural capital (unless they are middle-class families), and the social pedagogy tradition, where the efforts are focused on strengthening social capital among parents (Bennet, 2010). The potential of this toolkit lies in its ability to perceive differences among parents and to establish a more nuanced picture of the practice of more-than-parental involvement, both in case of very heterogeneous and homogenous groups of families.

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