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Teacher professionalism in a double field structure

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ABSTRACT

While various forms of teachers' habitus have been described in education studies, little consideration has so far been given to their interaction with fields in schools. This article draws on Bourdieu's theory and related concepts of field, habitus, capital and doxa to explore types of teacher professionalism, especially in Austrian secondary schools where innovative measures and reforms have been introduced. By combining a model of teaching profession with a Bourdieu-based analysis in the interpretation of 70 interviews with secondary school teachers, we show that a double field structure has emerged in some schools, where a field of traditional teaching competes with one of new professional field teaching. We argue that further initiatives will be needed from the field of education policy and other forces in society to stabilise the field of new professional teaching. This article illustrates the dynamic interrelationship between professional habitus and conflicting fields in one particular school.

Introduction

In recent decades, economic and technological competition has influenced many political decisions in western societies and this has had a particularly strong impact on their education systems. This has led to increasing pressure from policy-makers and the public to reform both schools and the professional development of teachers (Collinson et al. 2009; Gewirtz et al. 2009). The resulting education reform processes have been implemented over several decades and have led to profound changes in the teaching profession. Measures like greater autonomy for schools, self-evaluation, quality management and performance standards are all examples of the planned – and in part realised – reforms. These have been introduced in reaction both to the social and cultural changes in the pupil population and also as a result of international comparison studies (Program for International Student Assessment, Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study). A current example of an initiative to reform schools which has received a great deal of media attention in Austria is the Neue Mittelschule (new middle school), a new type of lower secondary school introduced by the governing Social Democrats in 2012 to replace the former Hauptschule (secondary modern school). Unlike most western countries, Austria has never developed a comprehensive school system but has instead maintained the early tracking
approach. This means that pupils are still separated at the age of 10 years into two school tracks, namely general secondary schools (new middle schools) and academic secondary schools (Gymnasium) (Geppert, Bauer-Hofmann, and Hopmann 2012). In the new middle schools, several innovations have been introduced such as team teaching, the abolition of ability grouping and more individualised learning. In addition to centrally initiated school reforms (e.g. by the Ministry of Education), there have also been (and still are) reforms initiated by the schools themselves, like the replacement of traditional structures with more flexible modular structures and/or individualised learning projects.

All of these initiatives which have emerged from the field of education policy can be interpreted as attempts to reform the field of traditional teaching and turn it into a field of new professional teaching. Yet, despite the numerous reforms and pilot projects that have been carried out in Austrian schools and the resulting changes in the school fields, the studies and evaluations that are currently available offer little insight into how these developments have affected the professional habitus of teachers.

Thus, in our study, we are attempting to fill this research gap, by exploring the field-related understanding of professionalism held by teachers. In doing so, we draw on the theory put forward by Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1990) which views professionalism not solely as a competence cluster but as a logic of practice. This means that habitus and the field of the school are linked; that is, there is an interplay between dispositions, interactions and capital struggles. To this end, we interviewed a series of teachers in secondary schools where innovations and reforms had been introduced, and thus gained insights into the corresponding changes in teacher professionalism and the dynamic interplay of habitus and field.

Our work draws on the professionalism models put forward by Day (2007), Sachs (2001), Whitty (2008) and Evetts (2011) and uses Bourdieu’s conceptual tools to capture and understand the dynamic interweaving of field, capital and habitus. Specifically, we use four Bourdieusian concepts (habitus, field, capital and doxa) in the analysis and interpretation of our interviews with teachers to demonstrate how professionalism can be identified by researchers. Accordingly, we begin this article with a brief introduction to these conceptual tools and also reflect on Bourdieu’s ambivalent stance on the use of the term ‘profession’ in the social sciences (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 96). We follow this introduction with a brief and selective overview of the literature on profession and professionalism in the field of teaching. We differentiate between the different types of professionalism identified by Day (2007) and Sachs (2001) as well as by Whitty and Wisby (2006), and describe the model of the teaching profession developed for our own study. We then go on to present the data and methods used in our empirical study and illustrate our findings with a selection of those interview passages that proved to be of particular relevance for the analysis and interpretation of the results. Our analysis shows how a double field structure corresponds with the formation of two habitus types. We then summarise our findings and conclude with suggestions for education policy and teacher education.

**Conceptual tools**

According to Bourdieu, the social space (i.e. society) is divided into fields in which people act and compete – depending on their habitus – for capital and position (Bourdieu 1993, 1996). In this context, we need to point out that a cluster of several fields exists. These can
be divided in line with the categorisation of institutions into the fields of politics, economics, religion, science, school and so forth. There exists also a meta-field of power through which the prevailing political and economic groups seek to influence these fields. However, fields can only – at least according to Bourdieu – be defined and recognised in relation to empirical observation and description.

Habitus consists of dispositions that are developed primarily in the home or family and secondarily in other fields, with education institutions assuming the most important role. The development of a specific habitus in a field constitutes the largely unconscious embodiment of perceptions, cognitions and visions of the world and its practical translation into everyday life. Bourdieu himself calls these ‘systems of durable, transposable dispositions’ (1990, 53). Dispositions are schemes, scripts, competences, expectations and interests, which are directed at fields. The term habitus covers gender, class, ethnicity and other social, mental and physical attributes in their interaction with each other. Their activation and performance depend on the respective field. In the family or primary group, children acquire a primary habitus specific to their social class or milieu. Secondary habitus, which emerges through years of experience in significant fields (school, university, work), is developed in relation to the primary habitus over the course of a person’s life. This does not mean that secondary habitus is tied exclusively to the field in which it has been developed. For example, a habitus which has been manifested within the field of school can be activated later in life (e.g. at university).

To win the battles within and between fields, and also maintain a certain autonomy, both habitus and field need capital. Bourdieu distinguishes between different forms of capital, and refers above all to economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1997). Symbolic capital brings recognition and legitimacy to the deployment of all capital for habitus and field. Fields, in turn, differ in terms of quantity and composition of the different sorts of capital. There are big differences, for instance, between high-risk schools and elite schools when it comes to cultural and symbolic capital. These manifest themselves, for example, in ‘legitimate’ language, distinctive behaviour, learning and teaching competences and other psychosocial characteristics of the respective school actors. The cultural and social capital of teachers may be modified and expanded through education reforms and access to research and new technologies. Some researchers (Hargreaves 2003; Ball 2008; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012) view changes to the cultural capital and dispositions of teachers brought about by new public management as controversial, since they could lead both to habitus–field conflicts as well as to divisions within the field.

Habitus and field are linked through a silent, invisible bond, which Bourdieu calls doxa and defines as the ‘pre-verbal taking-for-granted of the world that flows from practical sense’ (Bourdieu 1990, 68f.); that is, through a bond woven from the norms, perceptions, opinions and prejudices which form the field-based view of the world, which are not called into question, and which determine everyday practice(s).

A teacher’s illusio can be interpreted as the belief, that ‘the game is worth the effort’ (Bourdieu 1998, 76). Thus, illusio is strongly linked with the teachers’ motivation for, interest in and acceptance of the doxa of the educational field. At the same time, the teachers’ illusio can also strive to change the rules of the field and the doxa – and can also bring about a change of the field. This requires favourable conditions (e.g. provided by the field of education policy) and access to suitable capital (e.g. innovative teacher education).
Traditional and new professionalism

Some social scientists doubt the viability of the term ‘profession’ and propose that it should be replaced, for example, by the term ‘knowledge-based occupations’ (Gorman and Sandefur 2011). But despite its change in meaning and the manifold criticism voiced in humanities disciplines, profession remains a well-anchored term (Evetts 2011; Muzio, Brock, and Suddaby 2013). This can also be seen in the fact that changes in the rules and practices in schools triggered by political and bureaucratic interventions are often seen as threats to teacher professionalism (Hargreaves 2010; Leaton Gray and Whitty 2010).

No consensus has yet been reached in the decade-long debates on profession and professionalism. Instead, there are now ‘plural conceptions of professionalism’ (Gewirtz et al. 2009, 3). It should be noted here that these different conceptions originate in the hefty battles between groups competing for status, resources and symbolic capital (McCulloch, Helsby, and Knight 2000; Sachs 2001). These struggles are exacerbated by social and market changes, which have led – and continue to lead – to uncertainty and the limitation of professional self-control in various occupational groups (Muzio, Brock, and Suddaby 2013).

However, it was not simply because of the more recent developments in society that the structure of the teaching profession came under criticism for the first time. Fundamental shortcomings in this profession have been the subject of discussion since the 1960s, and the profession itself has been described as a ‘semi-profession’, ‘quasi-profession’ (Etzioni 1969; Lortie 1969) or ‘fragmented profession’ (Beck 2008).

Indeed, Lieberman (2009, 84) maintains that the occupational orientations ‘described in Lortie’s work still prevail in the profession’: presentism (following short-term goals), conservatism and individualism. Hargreaves (2010), confirming the theoretical and empirical findings of Lortie, also refers to teachers’ resistance towards educational reforms and a reinvented conservatism that has gone hand in hand with social and political conservatism in many states. Traditional professionalism is characterised by low or ritualised collaboration and a preference for the role of the lone fighter and ability grouping. Whitty (2000) notes in this regard that the frameworks of such a traditional field in the school are not only accepted but also often defended against intrusions.

Day, Sachs and Whitty differentiate between managerial professionalism and new professionalism (Evetts 2011), both of which aim to replace traditional professionalism. New professionalism is defined as an ‘instrument of change’ (Evans 2008, 21) or transformation that focuses on ‘practitioner control and proactivity’ (2008, 23). Our empirical study follows the line taken by Sachs, Day, Whitty and Evetts, and we use the term new professionalism in the following sense (Sachs 2001; Day and Sachs 2004; Whitty 2006): a high amount of collaboration, acceptance of heterogeneous groups, research orientation and professional communities. This develops when professional groups are given greater autonomy and school leadership supports a professional approach to teaching (Sachs 2003; Evetts 2011).

To date, new managerialism, accountability and performativity (Sachs 2001; Evetts 2011) have been less prevalent in the Austrian system than in its Anglo-Saxon counterparts, since the former is still organised according to traditional bureaucratic structures. While output-oriented controls, standardisation and increased documentation requirements have been stepped up in Austria in recent years, the school authorities have only exercised limited pressure on teachers to change their traditional practices (Altrichter 2010; Altrichter, Heinrich, and Soukap-Altrichter 2014).
Traditional professionalism can likewise still be found in countries with pronounced new public management systems (Bourke, Lidstone, and Ryan 2013). Given the education policy situation and the findings of our own prior empirical studies, we have based our present study on the premise that there are two types of teachers, namely those with a traditional habitus and those with a new professional habitus (Nairz-Wirth and Feldmann 2015), and that these correspond to two types of teacher professionalism, namely traditional professionalism and new professionalism. A traditional habitus means that teachers and students are locked into old, ingrained routines and practices.

In the power-centred view of Bourdieu, professionalism is realised in fields and constitutes special fields. In school fields, one can diagnose conflicts between different habitus each of which try to assert their capital constellations. These conflicts are intensified by the field of power and by educational policy. ‘New professional habitus’ acquires its dispositions and capital constellations in the field of professional teaching that is created through the conflict-ridden interplay of teacher training institutions, the field of education policy and the only partially professionalised fields in secondary schools (Schinkel and Noordegraaf 2011). The teaching profession has repeatedly been described as a semi or fragmented profession because the professional habitus has to operate in a labile professional field.

The studies by Leonard and Roberts (2014) and Hardy (2008, 2014) – like our own studies (Nairz-Wirth, Feldmann, and Wendebourg 2012; Nairz-Wirth 2016) – indicate that the examination of education micro-worlds using Bourdieu’s tools also can produce valuable findings for the development or confirmation of models and theories (e.g. concerning teacher professionalism). Nonetheless, the interdependencies between changes in field rules, capital constellations and habitus in action have so far not been adequately analysed (for example, Hardy 2010; Shim 2014).

Little consideration has likewise been given to the possibility that – in addition to heterogeneous teacher habitus – diverse and conflicting fields or subfields can also exist in one and the same school. While various forms of teachers’ habitus have been described in education studies, their interaction with diverse fields still needs further examination (for example, Helsper et al. 2008; Kramer 2014). Accordingly, we aim in particular to explore the dynamic interrelationship between professional habitus and these fields.

**The empirical study – data, methods and findings**

From a methodological perspective, our work is founded on constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2006) and follows Bourdieusian research traditions, whereby theory-building and empirical research are continuously linked.

A total of 70 interviews with teachers at 34 general and academic secondary schools in Vienna and other parts of Austria provide the empirical basis for our study. The sampling was carried out according to the principles of theoretical sampling and underpinned by concepts of professionalism and a Bourdieusian approach. Particular emphasis was placed on ensuring that our sample included schools both in major cities and in smaller towns and rural communities.

Our interviews with teachers were conducted during a period in which education policy changes had instigated habitus and field activities in many secondary schools. These included, for example, team teaching, the implementation of new teaching and learning methods, the abolition of ability grouping and so forth. The interviews were conducted over a five-year period from 2011 to 2016 and ranged in length from 60 to 90 minutes. They
were narrative in style and always began with the interviewee's own account of his/her career history (with a particular emphasis on information relating to experience in school or university settings). The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed, and the data were analysed using the qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti. Each coded segment of data contained either a full sentence, a part of a sentence or several sentences. Interview passages were categorised using open coding; that is, with a focus on the significance indicated by the interviewee (personal interpretation). In a further step, these categories were ordered and modified in line with the two types of professionalism mentioned earlier. The interviews were then interpreted using Bourdieu's conceptual tools.

In the initial analysis and interpretation phase, we used the empirical data to construct a comparative image of the participating teachers and their experiences as teachers. In subsequent phases of the analysis, we applied Bourdieu's tools and reconstructed the habitus underlying occupational dispositions and the conflicts of positioning in a manifest or latent field.

**Teachers' habitus and field struggles**

The majority of the interviews revealed that teachers have widely diverging professional dispositions, expectations and experiences. A habitus–field world in which 'all is well' was found only in a minority of the interviews. The following quote represents a habitus of traditional teaching that indicates the existence of a traditional field:

> School is a simple system: attend, pay attention and do the homework. (Teacher, female, age 56, 32 years of teaching experience, secondary school)

However, many statements in the interviews indicate strong tensions between the different forms of teacher habitus (i.e. the habitus of traditional teaching and the habitus of new professional teaching) as well as serious tensions between habitus and field:

> You are labelled as a lone fighter in the first year. You're on your own and you're left on your own. And on this basis, you then have to try to slowly work it out by yourself. Finding a colleague you can collaborate with is a sensitive matter because you don't want to inadvertently break any taboos. Finding two colleagues who collaborate well is already a satisfying situation. (Teacher, male, age 31, three years of teaching experience, secondary school).

These tensions can strengthen teachers' motivation to win new allies for their new professional logic of practice, thereby changing the school culture. The following passage illustrates one such situation. The teacher being interviewed refers to two fields in his school, namely the field of traditional teaching and the field of new professional teaching, and reveals his motivation to induce his colleagues to embrace the latter:

> It's not that I just turn up at the staff meeting and say, 'You know what guys, we're going to do that like this from now on,' because I know that wouldn't work. But I have been thinking that things can be changed from inside ... so I'm trying to show the others what's good about it so that it takes root a bit. And some of it is also intended in such a way that it might become part of our culture. And when young teachers are around, then I nab them [laughs] and make sure that I get them at least a bit on my side. (Teacher, male, age 30, eight years of teaching experience, secondary school)

This passage shows that this teacher has developed a sense of how to strengthen the field of professional teaching by activating his own professional habitus and that of his fellow
teachers. He is aware that he cannot challenge the doxa directly but that he has to use his own professional practice instead, which is based on a heterodox illusio (‘But I have been thinking that things can be changed from inside …’). To be successful, he needs to act from within the partially hidden ‘inner’ professional field. A ‘new culture’ has to be created by using innovative cultural capital. One way to do this is to empower the still labile professional habitus of colleagues, thus working towards the establishment of the new professional field.

But there are also cases where the situation is completely the reverse. Tensions resulting from a series of frustrating experiences can activate and/or strengthen the traditional habitus, as the following two passages indicate. In these passages, two teachers talk about a school field that is dominated by actors with a habitus of traditional teaching (low collaboration, lone fighters). Both teachers describe how they resolve the dissonances between the habitus of traditional teaching and the habitus of new professional teaching (high level of collaboration, process orientation, openness to science and research findings, innovative teaching practices) by adopting a resigned attitude, leaving the former to ultimately prevail over the latter:

If you admit that you have a problem, then it’s your own fault – you’ve clearly done something wrong … But you wouldn’t believe how hard it is to reach a joint decision on how to proceed. Everyone just does their own thing. (Teacher, female, age 34, three years of teaching experience, secondary school)

I’ve tried twice in the course of my teaching career to establish exam and homework pools of some form or another – but sadly to no avail. Many teachers are simply used to organising these things on their own … they do what they have always done, because you can’t do it differently anyway. That’s just the way things are … (Teacher, male, age 39, nine years of teaching experience, secondary school)

The professional field as work in progress

The following interview passages highlight the typical characteristics of the habitus of new professional teaching, namely process orientation, openness to science and research findings, high levels of interest in collaboration and innovation:

I now always keep the camcorder in my bag … and use it to film lessons or take photographs … I now have a corresponding archive and will use it to make a film-based profile of the school or presentation films for various modules. I’m just at the start, but I will build it up in conjunction with other people. But it’s something that all schools really should do in future.

And so I set up, for example, a homepage that is being managed from this year onwards by the school newspaper, which has also been newly established. Projects or pieces of work by the pupils are photographed, digitalised and uploaded onto the homepage. This transports a more positive image of the school to the homes of the pupils, while these things in turn gain a new level of value in the school. (Teacher, male, age 30, eight years of teaching experience, secondary school)

It is evident here that this teacher has a habitus of new professional teaching and that his logic of practice represents what might be termed new professionalism: he clearly focuses on processes and not simply on traditional teaching by the book. His actions are designed to bring long-term results but are not intended to become rituals. He considers the integration
of various media to be vital. His focus is not on strengthening the traditional subject-oriented approach, although it does include planned (interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary) modules. Cooperation is not based on an established pattern of behaviour that centres on personal relations in what are usually exclusionary groups, but is instead driven by the desire for an essentially open network structure in which pupils and parents also constitute active partners. This dynamic habitus evolves in response to the professional field as work in progress.

Official and unofficial field structure

The earlier passages show that a double field structure can emerge in schools where both teaching habitus types are encountered. Such a double field structure contradicts the ‘official representation’ of schools as being permanently framed within a unified and bureaucratic structure.

Research which treats the organisational unit ‘school’ as a unified field ignores these tensions and the power of habitus to change the field. In fact, an empirical-reflexive and relational analysis is required to detect the habitus and capital situation in a given field and to ascertain whether both the field and the habitus have manifestly developed towards new professionalism.

Our findings also correspond with those of a new Australian study (Lewis and Hardy 2014, 17):

The field of schooling practices is neither homogeneous nor impervious to alternative practices and processes, and this contestation within the field suggests alternative (albeit, arguably, somewhat latent) teacher subjectivities exist alongside more dominant discursive regimes. In this way, the field of schooling practices is also a site of potential change or transformation, and the research provides instances both of ‘that which is’ and ‘that which could be’. (Foucault 1990, 36)

This manifest field (‘that which is’) and a potential or latent field (‘that which could be’) within which Lewis and Hardy discover ‘alternative practices and discourses’ is confirmed by our findings – as is the fact that an appropriate habitus can make a latent field manifest if this is supported by the capital constellations and not hindered by policy and bureaucracy.

Transformation through education policy or creation of a double field structure?

One teacher with a professional habitus. working in a school where team teaching, learning in heterogeneous groups and other innovations had not previously been common practices, draws a distinction between his own attitude and behaviour and those of the traditional habitus of some of his fellow teachers:

My colleagues […] ask: ‘What’s the point of it all? I haven’t got the energy for that. I’ll be retiring soon anyway.’ (Teacher, female, age 40, 16 years of teaching experience, secondary school)

Again and again you encounter teachers who resist reforms. But I think I want to try something new. You have to try something new in order to be able to assess something. (Teacher, female, age 54, 30 years of teaching experience, secondary school)

These statements imply a polarisation between one group of teachers with a traditional habitus and another group with a professional habitus who want to use new methods. The
teacher with a habitus of new professional teaching is aware that his colleagues with a habitus of traditional teaching want to preserve their field of traditional teaching. At the same time, both teachers are aware that trying to transform the traditional field within their school would be too risky – working to activate and stabilise the (latent) field of professional teaching is the better option. The first teacher refers to the crucial role played by the headteacher in a reform process, since the continuation of the frail field of new professional teaching depends greatly on the support of the headteacher:

I hope the new headteacher will be on our side. Because I think many of us who have got used to it would have a big problem being told that we now have to do things in a certain way. I believe quite a few [members of the group] would leave. I would describe us as a small but very keen group. (Teacher, female, age 40, 16 years of experience, secondary school)

The professional field in this school co-exists and competes with a strong traditional field. At its core is a ‘small but very keen group’ (teacher, female, age 40, 16 years of experience, secondary school), a professional learning community with a dominant habitus of new professional teaching and the attributes of new professionalism.

This separation of fields is also described by teachers in other types of secondary schools. The following interview passage likewise refers to two groups of teachers – one that tries to ward off innovations and another that is actively interested in professional changes and developments:

In the beginning, we really were all lone fighters. In other words, you would never admit to a colleague that you didn't know something or that you needed help … At my school, and I hear the same from others, this lone fighter approach is now increasingly disappearing. We build subject groups or come together as a group of form teachers. […] We're starting new things, like bilingual lessons or new learning cultures. (Teacher, female, age 40, 17 years of teaching experience, secondary school)

This teacher describes the process as a transformation in the field of the school, in line with the official new education policy doxa. Yet the official evaluations that are currently available indicate that such a transformation has so far only occurred in a minority of the schools in which these reforms have been introduced (Leitgöb, Bacher, and Weber 2015; Eder et al. 2015). This passage could be interpreted as partial evidence of a process of transition from a field of traditional teaching to a field of new professional teaching and, consequently, as a transformation. This complies with the official education policy hypothesis that the field of traditional teaching should and will be transformed into a field of new professional teaching. The growing number of teachers with a habitus of new professional teaching is interpreted by some teachers and reform-oriented politicians as an indication that the transformation process has taken place. Yet an interpretation of these and other statements by teachers reveals that this is only part of the story. In fact, even in ‘successfully transformed’ schools, not all teachers are included in this transformation process. This corresponds to our own interpretation of the official evaluation results: the desired full transformation has so far not been achieved and has instead resulted in the double field structure which manifests itself in many schools.

As already mentioned, changes were introduced in the new middle schools in a cultural capital context (team teaching, individualised instruction, inclusive education, etc.). This was also accompanied by a redefinition of professionalism in schools of this type. At the same time, those teachers who were open to reforms were strengthened through the field
of education policy and were thus equipped with more symbolic capital. This new professionalism was not accepted by all teachers. Indeed, some of them stuck to their ‘old’ teaching practices, a situation that was facilitated by the absence of a (comprehensive, long-term, constructive) evaluation culture and the lack of professional training.

This division into two groups – one strengthened by the symbolic capital of the field of education policy (teachers with a habitus of new professional teaching), and the other dominant in the field of the school (teachers with a habitus of traditional teaching) – produced a double field structure. This could be interpreted as a battle between two groups of habitus for dominance of the field. This type of polarisation is also encountered in the central field of the political parties, thus creating a homology between the field of the school and the field of politics in Austria.

A report published by the Austrian Court of Auditors (2016) reveals that this battle remains unresolved. It criticises the lack of consistency in the implementation of the reforms, which can already be seen, for instance, in teacher training and continuing education. While the professional field is boosted on the one hand by the symbolic capital of the field of education policy, the new professionalism remains shaky on the other because of its dependence on political developments.

To capture the field structures, the habitus changes and illusio need to be analysed and compared with the heterodox statements on the doxa and the logic of practice. Our study shows that a growing number of teachers are now willing to invest in their professional development, although there are still many who show resistance:

He just does it the way he always has and he’ll continue to do it that way until his last day at school. He is absolutely not motivated at all […] And then of course there’s the other side, those who are already training and investing in themselves. (Teacher, female, age 30, seven years of teaching experience, secondary school)

In this interview passage, the teacher talks about specific colleagues and contrasts an attitude of bureaucratic routine with a willingness to be part of an innovative reform and to be dynamic. In her comment regarding ‘the other side’, she shifts her arguments from an individual level to a group level. This group of teachers aspires to a habitus change, is interested in further educating and ‘investing in themselves’, and wants to gain innovative cultural capital – which can then be transformed into symbolic capital (prestige, recognition) and stabilised in a permanent praxis. Her use of the term ‘the other side’ serves to delineate the field of new professional teaching from the field of traditional teaching. On the whole, the interviews show that teachers’ willingness to invest and raise their cultural capital is closely linked to an increase in social capital, and ultimately also symbolic capital, generated through the dynamics between habitus of new professional teaching and field of new professional teaching.

Conclusions

In this article, we have illustrated how new insights into habitus and field structures in schools can be gained when established models of the teaching profession are combined with a Bourdieu-based analysis.

By interpreting interviews with teachers in Austrian schools, in particular those where the field of education policy has provided professional impetus through the forced
introduction of team teaching and the banning of ability-based grouping, we have shown that a field of new professional teaching as well as a double field structure can be identified in some schools. We have also been able to show that field and boundary work and the formation of a professional habitus are being encouraged and that the configurations of capital are changing; that is, the acquisition of professional cultural capital through teamwork and innovative teaching strategies is on the rise.

Accordingly, our study led to several theoretical, methodological and empirical insights. Notably, when innovative impulses from the field of education policy, a latent professional field structure and a group of teachers who are willing to embrace reform all come together, a professional habitus can develop and change the capital endowment in a field. This creates opportunities for repositioning in the professional field, since the sustainability of the changes in the field is not yet guaranteed and a stable new professionalism has not yet emerged.

In schools in which a professional field of teaching was activated, this field still competes with the traditional field. A double field structure, whose dynamic development depends on the actions of the field of education policy and of the school players, takes root. The double field structure is hidden by the traditional doxa, which presents schools as existing within a framework of a unified and bureaucratic structure. We assume that changing the prevailing school doxa is a slow process that faces many obstacles. While some of the teachers we interviewed do adopt heterodox positions that are in line with recent education research, in most interview passages the traditional doxa nonetheless also still resonates.

Our analysis of the empirical data could be interpreted in two ways: on the one hand, the data indicate an emerging double field structure. An alternative interpretation would imply field struggles leading either to the maintenance of a traditional field or to a transformation of the field into a professional field. Determining which of the two interpretation approaches takes into account the reality in Austrian schools could best be achieved in a longitudinal study.

As far as praxis is concerned, our study shows that not enough has yet been done to broaden the activities of the field of new professional teaching and to involve the community, the media and regional, national and international workgroups and networks in school activities. Likewise, the field of professional teaching we identified does not currently have sufficient autonomy to be able to create sustainable professional communities and durable new forms of school culture. To foster this development, further initiatives will be needed from the field of education policy. These initiatives would, however, have to take into consideration that the core of a professional field is not a bureaucratic, hierarchical organisation but rather a professional community that networks with other professional communities. A dynamic field structure of this kind needs field strategies and innovative school authorities and headteachers who are more strongly committed to autonomy and self-evaluation – as other research findings likewise suggest (Richmond and Manokore 2011; Stoll et al. 2006). It also needs an adequate capital endowment, in particular cultural and social capital acquired through professional activities and an activation of student and community capital. These aspects should form an integral part of teacher training and further education curricula, where the focus should be shifted away from the development of personal competences towards field development and should also encourage the formation of professional networks in combination with new evaluation strategies. This would enable a large number of decentralised, relatively autonomous mini-fields to be grouped together in regional, national and international cooperatives.
Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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