Agency as the Acquisition of Capital: the role of one-on-one tutoring and mentoring in changing a refugee student's educational trajectory

Agency as the Acquisition of Capital: The Role of One-on-one Tutoring and Mentoring in Changing a Refugee Student's Educational Trajectory

Iris E Dumenden

School of Education, Faculty of Arts, Education and Human Development

Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia

Abstract

Current research into the experiences of refugee students in mainstream secondary schools in Australia indicate that for these students, schools are places of social and academic isolation and failure. This paper introduces one such student, Lian, who came to Australia as a refugee from Burma, and whom I tutored and mentored intensively during his final year of schooling. This paper provides an empirically-derived understanding of how one-on-one tutoring and mentoring became a platform through which this student was able to succeed in a structure which systematically tried to exclude him. Here, agency is conceptualised in terms of Bourdieu's concept of capital. The analysis highlights the ways in which one-on-one tutoring and mentoring provided the necessary platform by which this refugee student was able to acquire the necessary capital that effected a positive change in his educational trajectory.

Introduction

Australian research into the experiences of refugee students in mainstream secondary schools (Cassity & Gow, 2005, 2006; Brown, Mitchell and Miller, 2006; Hewson, 2006; Matthews, 2008; Miller, Mitchell, and Brown, 2005; Naidoo, 2008, 2009) report that education is seen by refugee students as a crucial part of their transition to their new lives in Australia. Cassity and Gow (2005, p. 52) note that

> Probably the biggest challenge for recently arrived young people is to identify a community to which they can safely belong. This is why schools are such important sites for what we loosely call 'cultural citizenship'. By this we mean experiences of attachment and belonging to a society, which occur at the level of everyday lived experiences.

While students regard the social aspects of the schooling experience positively, they also complain that the time available for establishing new friendships or playing sports was severely limited by the time it takes them to complete homework: simple homework tasks require many hours of work by these students (Brown et al, 2006). But Naidoo (2008, p. 145) finds that refugee students "really want to work, want to achieve well in school and go to university." In general, though, these research studies reveal that "overall… school is not working well for these young people" (Cassity & Gow, 2005, p. 53) and that for some students, schools "will continue to be a place of social and academic isolation and failure" (Brown et al, 2006, p. 160).

It is in this general atmosphere of pessimistic predictions for the prospects of refugee students in mainstream secondary schools that I situate my own research project. Specifically, in this paper, I wish to demonstrate that schools need not be a place of academic failure for refugee students: that through one-on-one mentoring and tutoring, it is possible to not only disrupt the reproduction of disadvantage for students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, but to also produce the privilege that their more privileged peers enjoy and take for granted.

The Research Project

The research project from which this paper is derived is an in-depth, single case study of a refugee student, Van Dawt Lian (a pseudonym chosen by the participant, which I shorten to Lian from here on) during his final year of secondary school in a capital city in Australia. In the study, this student's agency is foreground by his request to the researcher/author – whom he met at a homework program for refugee students – to be his private tutor.

Lian arrived in Australia with his parents and siblings in January 2005, as refugees from Burma. Although Lian had already completed secondary school in Burma (when he was just 14 years old) and had worked as a teacher in a village middle school after his high school graduation, he returned to secondary school in Australia and was placed in Year 10 [1]. At the end of 2005, he was advised to repeat Year 10 so as to gain more English language fluency and adjust to the school – which he did. We met in 2007, when he was in Year 11, at a homework club for refugee students where I volunteered as a tutor. We worked together on a few of his school projects and he

received an A for one of these. At the beginning of 2008, when was 19 years old and in Year 12, Lian sought me out and told me he had asked his parents for money to pay for a private tutor during his final year of schooling. He explained that he wanted to get As and Bs in his schoolwork, instead of the Cs that he could manage on his own; he was not happy with just getting a passing grade. He asked me if I could tutor him and I agreed, sans payment. I tutored and mentored him intensively from February 2008 to January 2009 [2].

When Lian and I started our tutoring relationship, my main question then was, "What are the learning needs of a young adult refugee in a mainstream secondary school?" and I focused my research primarily on homework and schoolwork. But as our tutoring sessions became more frequent, longer, and more intense, our tutoring relationship evolved to include mentoring. A second research question emerged: "What is the role of one-on-one tutoring and mentoring in providing for this student's needs?" – needs which included, for example, looking for work experience placements during the school holidays, helping him fill out university application forms, and finding a paying job at the end of the school year.

Theoretical Framework

In answering the research questions above, I utilise a theoretical framework that includes: Bourdieu's theory of capital, Lareau and Horvat's (1999) re-conceptualisation of cultural capital as "moments of inclusion" and "moments of exclusion" and Hutchison's (2007) conceptualisation of homework as a socio-culturally located practice that is produced by, and emerges from, the confluence of home and school cultures. In this paper, I will focus on the concept of capital within a one-on-one tutoring and mentoring relationship.

Bourdieu's theory of capital

In his studies of educational systems (cf. Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1988, 1996), Bourdieu noted that families pass on to their children not only money, land and stocks, but also cultural values, class-based practices, and their position in the social hierarchy. In doing so, he redefined the meaning of 'inheritance' and 'capital' beyond simply financial and material things. In his theory of capital, Bourdieu extends the economic metaphor of 'capital' to "all the goods, material or symbolic, without

distinction, that present themselves as rare and worthy of being sought after in a particular social formation" (Bourdieu, 1977a: 178). By conceptualising capital as existing in forms other than purely economic, Bourdieu is able to analyse cultural background, linguistic competence, taste, dispositions, and so on, as if they were economic goods which can be produced, distributed and consumed by individuals or groups.

In *The Forms of Capital*, Bourdieu's (1986, 2006) seminal essay on the topic, he identifies three forms of capital: economic capital, cultural capital and social capital. Economic capital includes all material resources that are immediately and directly convertible to money (for example, land, stocks, shares) and may be institutionalised in the form of property rights (2006, p.106). Cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the *embodied state*, in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the *objectified state*, in the form of cultural goods such as paintings, books, machines; and in the *institutionalised state*, such as educational qualifications (2006, pp. 106-110). Social capital is "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to… membership in a group – which provides its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital" (2006, p. 110). And, although Bourdieu did not specifically formulate *emotional capital* as a form of capital, nor theorised the other forms of capital as gendered, feminist theorists (cf. Nowotny, 1981; Allatt, 1993; Reay, 2000, 2004) have seized his formulation of the "time, attention, care, concern" expended in the transformation of economic capital into social capital (Bourdieu, 2006, p. 113) as representing emotional capital and sees it as mostly the work of women, especially mothers. For example, Allatt (1993, cited in Reay, 2000, p. 572) defines emotional capital as the "stock of emotional resources built up over time within families and which children could draw upon" and which includes "love and affection… support, patience and commitment."

Bourdieu (2006) goes on to argue that the different resources (capital) of different groups are unevenly valued in society. For example, he points out that the value placed upon cultural capital is arbitrary and is determined by the dominant social classes. In this way, the dominant classes are able to reproduce themselves through the transmission of arbitrarily-valued cultural capital to the next generation. In applying the concept of cultural capital to the education system, Bourdieu (1977b)

notes that education fulfils a role in society by "contributing to social stability in the only way conceivable in societies based upon democratic ideals" – that is, through what is seen to be a meritocracy, which is a refusal of the hereditary transmission of power and privileges (p. 487). But he goes on to argue that the education system actually "perpetuates the structure of class relations" through the "controlled mobility of a limited category of individuals, carefully selected and modified by and for individual ascent" (p. 487). That is, educational institutions perpetuate the current structure of class relations through pedagogical actions that reward those students who come to school already possessing considerable cultural capital, and sanction those students who lack this capital.

Moments of inclusion, moments of exclusion

In *Unequal Childhoods*, Lareau (2011) re-conceptualises cultural capital at the micro-level context of parents' involvement in their children's schooling. She finds that social class (by which she means socio-economic class) is a determining factor in how parents use their social and economic capital in customizing their children's educational careers. Here, Lareau draws attention to the "need to understand the individually insignificant by cumulatively important ways" in which "individuals draw on [their] class-based cultural resources in their moments of interaction with institutions" such as schools (2011, p. 364). Like Bourdieu, she notes that the critical aspect of cultural capital is that it allows culture to be used as a resource that provides access to scarce rewards, is subject to monopolization, and, under certain conditions, may be transmitted from one generation to the next. However, for Lareau, this does not imply that Bourdieu's model of social reproduction is overly deterministic. Rather, she stresses the socially determined character of cultural capital. In an earlier study (Lareau, 1987, pp. 83-84), she notes that:

> Families and schools, and family-school relationships, are critical links in the process of social reproduction… We know relatively little about the stages of this social process. The concept of cultural capital may help by turning our attention to the structure of opportunity and to the way in which individuals proceed through the structure. Moreover, the concept does not overlook the importance of the role of the individual in constructing a biography within the social structure. Class provides social and cultural resources, but these resources must be invested or activated to become a form of cultural capital.

Thus, a re-conceptualisation of cultural capital into "moments of inclusion" and "moments of exclusion" becomes a practical way for researchers to apply Bourdieu's concept of capital at the micro-situational level (Lareau and Hovart, 1999). Lareau and Hovart (1999) suggest three modifications to Bourdieu's notions of cultural and social reproduction: (1) any form of capital derives value only in a specific field of interaction, (2) individuals must activate capital in social environments, but each individual varies in his/her skill level in activating this capital, and (3) social reproduction in not a smooth trajectory, nor seamlessly transmitted across generations. In short,

> a closer focus on the moments of the activation of capital situated in a field analysis that emphasizes how individual behaviours are recognized and legitimated or marginalized and rebuffed provides a more conceptually accurate picture of how social reproduction occurs (p. 50).

It should be noted that in this re-conceptualisation of Bourdieu's theory, Lareau and Hovart draw attention to the gate-keeping role of institutions in determining the value of an individual's capital. "Moments of inclusion" are those wherein an individual's display of capital are recognised and legitimised, and "moments of exclusion" are those wherein they are marginalised and rebuffed. Additionally, they point to the importance of individual agency and skill in the activation of an individual's capital.

Reproducing privilege, interrupting disadvantage

Hutchison's (2007) study of homework practices in contemporary Australia re-conceptualises capital in the form of the parent's (usually the mother's) intellectual and emotional capital expended in the completion of the child's homework. She contends that the pedagogization of parental labour due to homework is implicated in the reproduction of privilege in schools. Importantly, Hutchison discovered that homework clubs (or after-school homework programs) were sites where refugee and disadvantaged students could "interrupt disadvantage" through the provision of social, cultural, and intellectual capital in the form of homework tutors.

Conceptualising agency for this paper

Working from the theoretical framework outlined above, agency is conceptualised as the active acquisition of capital that has value in the specific field of interaction, defined here as mainstream secondary schooling and the transition to tertiary education. In this paper, agency is explored within the context of a one-on-one tutoring and mentoring relationship, which provides the platform whereby one student is able to acquire the different forms of capital that allow him to disrupt the trajectory towards academic failure already documented by previous research studies (see Introduction). Moreover, as I will demonstrate below, through one-on-one tutoring and mentoring, Lian and I were able to replicate the very processes through which privilege is reproduced in families rich in cultural capital – for which Lareau (2011) coined the term "concerted cultivation" – that is, through the tutor/mentor taking over of the pedagogical and emotional labour expected of his parents in the completion of homework and in the micro-management of his educational career.

Methods

This study takes an ethnographic approach. Data were collected during tutoring and mentoring interactions between the student and his tutor/mentor (who is also the researcher/author), from February 2008 to January 2009. Research data consist of over 200 hours of audio-recordings of our tutoring sessions, artefacts from the student's homework and school projects, examination-related materials, university application forms, and the researcher's reflective journals and field notes. This ethnographic approach makes visible the micro-level processes by which different forms of capital are converted from one form to another, and the micro-situational moments of inclusion and exclusion in Lian's dealings with educational institutions.

Findings

In this paper, I have chosen to present data in narrative form. According to Bruner (1986), there is a link between ethnography and narrative if we think of "ethnography as [a] discourse, as a genre of storytelling" (p. 139). He notes that ethnographic studies, just like stories, have a beginning, middle, and end – or a past, a present, and a future. Ethnographers have before them the present, and they must reconstruct the past and the future in order to situate this present in a time sequence. But Bruner argues that the present is also a reconstruction: "The past, present, and future are not only constructed, but connected in a lineal sequence… How we depict any one

sequence is related to our conception of the whole, which I choose to think of as a story" (p. 141).

I include three stories below that show the micro-, meso-, and macro-level processes by which one-on-one tutoring and mentoring accomplished the interruption of disadvantage and the production of privilege for this one student. The first story, which I call *Writing the obituary of John Proctor*, illustrates how success in school is tied up to a student's linguistic capital, and how Lian was able to tap into my linguistic capital within a homework-tutoring setting. The second story, *If you do ESL, it doesn't mean you're dumb***,** presents Lian's active resistance to the deficit view of him as an ESL student as revealed in the discourses he produces to counter this marginalised view of him. These discourses also serve to sustain him in his quest to become successful in school. The third story, which I call *More than a number*, brings to the fore the personal repercussions on Lian of a university admission process that relies heavily on school achievement and a ranking system. These stories vividly demonstrate Lian's agency in the face of these constraints, and the amount of cultural and emotional capital expended by the tutor in supporting her student during these difficult times.

1. Writing the obituary of John Proctor

Lian's first assignment for his Year 12 ESL class was an essay on *Citizen Kane*, the movie by Orson Welles. The essay question was "What did Kane gain and lose in his life?" and Lian wrote a three-page answer, which his teacher said was "Quite well argued" and "A good effort." However, she also wrote that the essay had "some clumsy expression/tense issues" and gave him only 23 out of a possible 35 marks. Lian had worked hard on this essay and was expecting very high marks. But when he saw the "23", he recounted to me that he was so disappointed that he "couldn't see," that there were "clouds in front of his eyes." (I interpreted this as: he was so disappointed, he was almost in tears.) I explained to him that his teacher could not give him full marks because of the grammatical errors in the essay, even though she thought the content was very good. In giving Lian this explanation, I was trying to be constructive. However, I had no inkling how much he had taken this to heart, until we worked on his next assignment, the obituary of John Proctor (the main character in Arthur Miller's play, *The Crucible*). Here, I have chosen to present extended

transcript excerpts from one of our tutoring sessions to show the incredible attention to detail that needs to be paid in order for an ESL learner to construct a perfectly grammatical essay for his English class, and his need for a tutor with linguistic capital to help him.

Composing the heading and by-line

Lian: John Proctor. Comma, yeah?

Iris: Yeah.

Lian: Comma, and, uh, maybe I'll use my date of birth.

Iris: In those times people didn't have a date of birth – exact ones.

Lian: But she [his teacher] said you can just make it up.

Iris: Okay.

Lian: So, 1657, isn't it? And, maybe, uh, this the place is in autumn, so the autumn in America is September, October, yeah? So, maybe, uh, 7 of 10, 1692. And who's by?

Iris: By you – you're the one writing it.

Writing the main body of text

Iris: (Reading from the class handout) He had a steady manner

Lian: He has

Iris: Had – he's dead.

Lian: Okay. Had a steady manner. I don't get it. What does it mean, "steady manner"?

Iris: Even tempered. Steady manner. He's not prone, not very excitable. He doesn't become very excited or very sad.

…

Lian: He helped to build the church?

Iris: To build the church. Okay.

Lian: Helped to built.

Iris: Build. Helped is the past tense.

Lian: Past tense, okay. To build

Iris: To build the church.

…

Lian: We have to use all past tense, huh?

Iris: Yeah, because he's dead.

John Proctor is survived by…

Lian: Three child, unborn child and wife.

Iris: Three children.

Lian: Yeah, three children and unborn child. (Writing) John Proctor is survived. How do you spell 'survived'? (Copies from the sample obituary I had cut out from a newspaper) By his wife?

Iris: Um, and three sons.

Lian: His wife, Elizabeth, three sons – S – yeah – sons.

Iris: S.O.N.S. and an unborn child – if you want.

Lian: Unborn child, unborn baby.

Iris: Unborn child – it's very formal – "baby" is not formal.

Lian: Formal? What you mean "formal"?

Iris: Which means it's not ordinary language, like, do you ever use "survived by" in speaking? "I am survived by."

Lian: No. Never "I survive."

Iris: This one is what we call passive tense – "is survived by". You never hear this

Lian: I did. Active and passive. Active voice and passive voice.

Iris: You know active and passive?

Lian: Yeah, I do. I passed Grammar, okay? Direct and indirect. They're pretty similar, you know?

…

Iris: (Reading from what Lian has already written) Proctor is survived – D – past tense – by his wife, Elizabeth, and three sons, and an unborn child. Elizabeth. Comma. Take out the "and." Three sons AND an unborn. AN unborn.

Lian: Unborn. (Lian writes but misses the "an".)

Iris: AN unborn.

Lian: How?

Iris: (Writes it down for him.) AN unborn child.

Lian: And?

Iris: (Dictating) His wife. How do you say it nicely? Because this is the last sentence, it has to have much impact.

Lian: Elizabeth really, really love him. (Laughing.)

Iris: What? (Joins Lian in laughter.)

Lian: Or, maybe, Elizabeth (*in a very deep voice*) DEEPLY love him.

Iris: (Looking for the exact quote in the book.) Okay. (Dictating.) His wife, Elizabeth. His wife, comma, Elizabeth, comma, spoke of his goodness, comma, quotation mark.

Lian: Quotation mark?

Iris: Because we're going to quote. (Reading from the book) "There be no higher judge." That's a semicolon. Just a comma. "There." This is English, that's why I'm very careful. Okay. Capital T. (Dictating from

the book) “There be no higher judge under heaven than Proctor is”. No

Lian: Don’t need that?

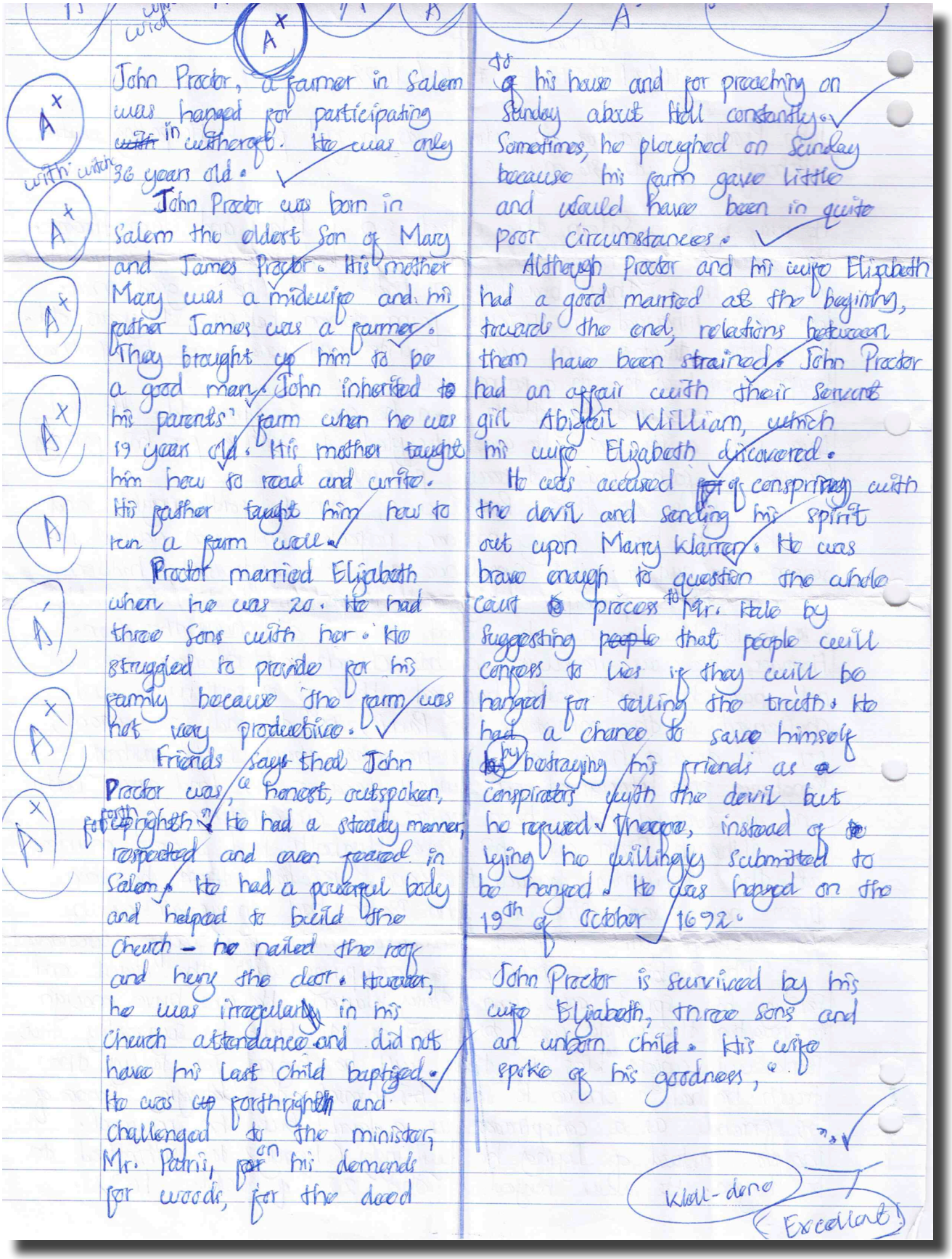
Iris: You know when something’s missing? You put these: dot dot dot.

Lian: Okay.

Iris: (Dictating, reading from the book) “I never knew… such goodness in the world!” This is a good way to end.

Lian: That’s right. It’s very, very, very official.

The above excerpts, which are only a small part of our first two-hour tutoring session dedicated to this essay, present in detail the effort we poured into writing this obituary. As shown in these excerpts, Lian and I tackle everything: how to write the heading and by-line, making up a story to pad out Proctor’s biography, tenses, punctuation, spelling, singular/plural, active voice/passive voice, the meaning of certain phrases, the use of a “formal” tone and constructing an ending with impact. It took us more than four hours over two days to compose this obituary. It took Lian many more hours to make it his own. After we had done a hand-written draft, Lian then typed it up, adding flourishes, including a picture of actor Daniel Day Lewis as John Proctor, which he had downloaded from the Internet. Typing and printing the obituary is not a class requirement. This is what is called a “School Assessed Coursework” (SAC) and Lian is required to write out the essay in class, under examination conditions. Lian typed up the essay to help him memorize what we had written: he read the essay into his MP3 player and listened to it several times. He then wrote two hand-written drafts, checking and marking his own work against the printed copy. He showed me his final practice draft: he had given himself an “A+”, as well as written, “Well done” and “Excellent” (see Figure 1). Because his essay on Citizen Kane was marked down due to grammatical errors despite its well thought-out argument, he was going to make sure that this obituary would be perfect, in both content and grammar. Thus, he did all this preparation so that on the day of the SAC itself, he would be able to write a perfectly grammatical essay.



John Proctor, a farmer in Salem was hanged for participating in witchcraft. He was only 36 years old.

John Proctor was born in Salem the oldest son of Mary and James Proctor. His mother Mary was a midwife and his father James was a farmer. They brought up him to be a good man. John inherited to his parents' farm when he was 19 years old. His mother taught him how to read and write. His father taught him how to run a farm well.

Proctor married Elizabeth when he was 20. He had three sons with her. He struggled to provide for his family because the farm was not very productive.

Friends says that John Proctor was, a honest, outspoken, forthrighth. He had a steady manner, respected and even feared in Salem. He had a powerful body and helped to build the church - he nailed the roof and hung the door. However, he was irregularly in his church attendance and did not have his last child baptised. He was forthrighth and challenged to the minister, Mr. Parris, on his demands for woods, for the deed of his house and for preaching on Sunday about Hell constantly. Sometimes, he ploughed on Sunday because his farm gave little and would have been in quite poor circumstances.

Although Proctor and his wife Elizabeth had a good married at the beginning, towards the end, relations between them have been strained. John Proctor had an affair with their servant girl Abigail Williams, which his wife Elizabeth discovered.

He was accused of conspiring with the devil and sending his spirit out upon Mary Warren. He was brave enough to question the whole court process to Mr. Hale by suggesting that people will confess to lies if they will be hanged for telling the truth. He had a chance to save himself by betraying his friends as a conspirators with the devil but he refused. Therefore, instead of lying he willingly submitted to be hanged. He was hanged on the 19th of October 1692.

John Proctor is survived by his wife Elizabeth, three sons and an unborn child. His wife spoke of his goodness,

Well-done

Excellent!

Figure 1: Lian's practice essay

2. "If you do ESL, it doesn't mean you're dumb"

"In Burma," Lian tells me, "I was always at the top of my class." He is telling me this by way of complaint. We had just spent most of the Queen's Birthday public holiday at the library, studying for his mid-year Psychology exam, and now we are having a late, late lunch.

He had said something in a similar vein just a few days earlier. "If I was born here, I'd be good."

"I know," I said.

Lian is obsessed with getting high marks in his exams but when he does, and then gets complimented by his teachers, his reaction is a mixture of pride and resentment. For example, he told me that he had received 34 out of a possible 40 marks in his most recent Legal Studies exam. It was the second highest mark in class, after his genius classmate, who got a 36. His teacher complimented him on how well he had answered the examination questions. When his teacher learnt that he was an ESL student, she became even more complimentary of his efforts. Yet, as he recounted all this to me, his final comment was, "If you do ESL, it doesn't mean you're dumb."

"I know," I said.

3. More than a number

> Eligibility and selection criteria for tertiary education in Victoria are largely determined on the basis of measures of school achievement: the successful completion of the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and the ranked performance as signified by ENTER [Equivalent National Tertiary Education Rank]. … Despite the use of alternative criteria for some institutions and courses, ENTER remains the centrepiece of tertiary selection. The predominance of ENTER is greatest in the courses for which there is the most demand and for which objective and fair sorting on the basis of academic merit and academic preparedness, or at least the appearance of objectivity and fairness, is a high priority. ENTER is profoundly influential… ENTER is the community's *lingua franca* for communicating the achievement

> of individuals in senior schooling, and, to some extent, the performance of teachers and schools as well (James et al, 2009, pp. 6-10) [3].

In March 2008, Lian was invited to be part of a panel of young refugees that participated in a forum with migrant settlement service providers. In his talk, Lian mentioned that when he told his school careers advisor that he wanted to do a Bachelor of Laws at university, his advisor told him that he needed to get an ENTER of 99.95% (the highest possible rank) to get into a law course. "This is a real challenge in my life," he told his audience.

The months passed and we concentrated on trying to get As for his school work, but the ENTER was always foremost in Lian's mind, as it was with every Year 12 student in the state: did one really need to get an ENTER of 99.95% to get into Law? And was he smart enough to get it?

By August 2008, our attention had turned from homework to university applications. Lian asked me to accompany him during university Open Days and we visited a couple of universities together, concentrating our energies on the ones which offered an undergraduate Bachelor of Laws degree as Lian was still keen on getting into a Law course despite his school career advisor's advice. During one of these visits, we found out that indeed, one needs to get an ENTER of 99 to get into Law School, but that there were other pathways if one did not achieve the necessary ENTER. For example, Lian could start with the Bachelor of Arts and then transfer to Law in his second or third year if his grades were good enough.

In September, our time was taken up in the university application process: choosing universities, choosing courses, filling in forms. I advised Lian to submit applications for a scholarship and for special equity and access (SEAS) considerations for which he qualified, such as low-income background, refugee status, and ESL speaker. I also advised him on where to get the necessary supporting documents, edited his replies to the forms' questions, and even drove him to the drop-off centre on the last day of submission (while there, I noted the high number of parents and children doing these same things).

In November, Lian sat for his final examinations and was confident that he had done well. But December brought heartaches and disappointment: when the final results were in, his ENTER was 53.55%. Gone was his dream of doing a Bachelor of Laws. His rank barely qualified him for a Bachelor of Arts course in any university within commuting distance from his home. Richard James, the main author of the government report on tertiary selection processes in the state of Victoria cited above, wrote a newspaper article which echoed our frustrations with the ENTER:

> Students with ENTERs around the 50s are often not proud of their achievements and struggle to get university places, yet they completed their VCE ranked roughly in the middle of the state. A solid achievement… ENTER is an imperfect measure of the aptitude of individuals for particular fields of study and does not measure important factors such as personal motivation and commitment. (James, 2009)

University offers were not due until the start of the new year, so we spent the Christmas holidays in dire spirits. Lian sought spiritual advice from his pastor. He asked, "Where did it go wrong? Maybe, I did not pray enough?" On the other hand, I felt guilty for having encouraged him to dream of becoming a lawyer. I should have known better and prepared him for the worst, I berated myself.

January 2009 finally brought some welcome news: he was offered a place in a Bachelor of Arts course in the suburban campus of a local university even though this course and campus required a slightly higher ENTER than the one he got – the SEAS application we filled out earlier probably helped in getting him this offer. The university also offered him a three-year scholarship.

Lian quickly parlayed this opportunity into more symbolic capital: he approached the registrar at the university's inner-city campus (which required a higher ENTER than the outer suburban campus which had offered him a place) and asked if he could transfer there. He was allowed to do so. He then approached the Faculty of Law at this campus and asked if he could transfer there from the Faculty of Arts. He was promised that if he did well in his first semester, then they would have a place for him in the second semester. Lian took up this challenge, and by the second semester of his first year at university, Lian was enrolled in the Bachelor of Criminal Justice course.

He plans on completing a Bachelor of Laws after his completes his current undergraduate course.

Discussion

Agency, conceptualised here as the active acquisition of capital relevant to the field of interaction, is demonstrated in each of the stories told above. Lian had asked me to be his tutor because he could only manage a passing grade on his own and was unhappy about it. Our one-on-one tutoring and mentoring relationship provided Lian with the social capital – conceptualised by Bourdieu (2006) as access to resources through membership in a group – through which he was able to acquire the other forms of capital he needed to be successful in school and in the transition to tertiary education. The first story shows how Lian was able to tap into my linguistic capital to enable him to write his 'perfect' English essay. My role here was as homework tutor and 'supplier' of linguistic capital. The second story helps us understand his need to pursue As and Bs: he was always a top student in Burma and understood that he did not have the 'right' capital to be considered a 'good' student in Australia. He also found his Legal Studies' teacher's compliment as quite condescending; when he said, "If you do ESL, it doesn't mean you're dumb," Lian showed that he understood the devaluating discourse regarding ESL students that was embedded in his teacher's compliment, and he actively resented and resisted it. My role here was to listen and to provide emotional capital – that is, the time, affection, patience and commitment that mothers normally expend in supporting their children's acquisition of academic capital (Allatt, 1993). The third story reveals how Lian tapped into my cultural capital to help him navigate the complex tertiary admission process. The skill with which he has been able to parlay the hand he had been dealt with allowed him to go from suburban campus to inner-city campus, and from a Bachelor of Arts course to a Bachelor of Criminal Justice – both of which increased his symbolic capital. This shows how well he has learnt to 'play the game' – which can also be thought of as a form of cultural capital.

Bourdieu contends that to enter a field is to believe in the rules of the game as it is played in the field, and to believe in the value of the profits to be made in the field:

> Whoever responds to collective expectations, whoever, without having to calculate, is immediately adjusted to the exigencies inscribed in a situation, has all the profits of the market of symbolic goods (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 103).

Lian is a very quick learner and is adept at learning the rules of the game. The first story tells us that, in trying to write an essay that would be acceptably free from "clumsy expressions/tenses issues" and therefore get him an A, Lian was playing by the rules of the game as revealed by his teacher's comments and marks on his first essay. Moreover, it showed that he had accepted that the path to success within the mainstream schooling system in Australia lay in one's ability to write grammatically-correct English. Whereas one might be tempted to use Bourdieu's notion of 'misrecognition' to explain Lian's recognition of the legitimacy of this 'cultural arbitrary' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 8) [4], I side with Schubert (2008, p. 197) who argues that

> Caution should be taken in speaking of 'misrecognition' because a superficial understanding of the term would seem to blame individuals for their failure to see the social origins of categories… Indeed, such misrecognitions are actually accurate recognitions, to the extent that agents' cognitive categories align with the social categories of a particular field. We might say that such agents are culturally literate.

Thus, Lian is rightfully playing the game as best as he can within a structure that limits the pathways he can take towards his goal of going to university and becoming a lawyer. By complying with the requirements set by an arbitrary cultural power as to the legitimate cultural capital that would mark a student as 'talented' or an 'A' student, Lian demonstrates his skills as the ultimate game player: a sense of the rules by which the game is played and the profits to be made in excelling within these rules, and the capacity to devise a strategy by which he can excel at this game – here, it is by working with a tutor that would help him write a 'perfect' essay or navigate the educational pathways towards university. Therefore, one can say that Lian does not misrecognise; rather, he recognizes all too well the arbitrariness of the values by which, for example, English language fluency is seen to be a mark of intelligence or talent. As he so often reminds me when I ask him how he feels after a setback: "I know who I am." Having grown up in Burma and been recognised there as an

intelligent and talented young man, he knows that for Australians to recognise him as such requires that he excel at playing within the 'rules of the game' as it is played in Australia. It is this that accounts for his agency in the pursuit of capital he recognises as worth pursuing. Capital worth pursuing, as we saw in the first story, is linguistic capital in the form of near-native English fluency; in the third story, it is cultural capital in the form of knowledge required to navigate the university application process, such as knowing which forms to fill out, which special considerations to apply for, or knowing how to maximize one's chances of getting an offer through the strategic selection of courses and campuses.

Conclusion

At the start of his last year of schooling, Lian was told by his school careers advisor that he needed to get an ENTER of 99.95% to get into a Bachelor of Laws course: while he recognised this remark as a put-down, he chose to take it up as a challenge instead. Part of his strategy in meeting this challenge was to ask me to be his tutor and mentor. Our one-on-one tutoring and mentoring relationship provided Lian with the social capital that facilitated the flow of other forms of capital between the two of us and that allowed him to partially succeed in his quest of going to Law school: as tutor, I was able to fill in the gaps in his linguistic and academic capital; as mentor, I expended cultural and emotional capital in customizing his educational career.

Endnotes

[1] His first six months in Australia were spent in an English language school for newly-arrived migrant and refugee children. He therefore started Year 10 in the middle of the Australian school year.

[2] During the lead-up to his final examinations, we met everyday, sometimes studying for up to eight hours a day. I continue to tutor and mentor him while at university, though not as intensively as when he was in secondary school.

[3] From June 2009, the ENTER was replaced by the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR).

[4] Bourdieu uses the term 'cultural arbitrary' to refer to the cultural standards that are dominant in any given society because he contends that these standards 'cannot be deduced from any universal principle, whether physical, biological or spiritual' and are therefore fundamentally arbitrary (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 8).

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Carola Mick for her comments on an earlier draft of this paper, and Keith Simkin, my thesis supervisor, for his support with this research project.

References

Allatt, P. (1993). Becoming privileged: The role of family processes. In Bates, I. & G. Riseborough (Eds.), *Youth and Inequality*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1977a). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Trans by R. Nice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1977b). Cultural and social reproduction. In J. Karabel and A.H. Halsey (Eds.), *Power and ideology in education* (pp. 487-511). New York: Oxford University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J.G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241-258). New York: Greenwood.

Bourdieu, P. (1988). *Homo Academicus*. Trans by P. Collier. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1996). *The state nobility: Elite schools in the field of power*. Translated by L.C. Clough. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1998). *Practical reason: On the theory of action*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. (2006). The forms of capital. In H. Lauder, P. Brown, J.A. Dillabough and A.H. Halsey (Eds.), *Education, Globalisation and Social Change* (pp. 105-118). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bourdieu, P. & Passeron, J.C. (1977). *Reproduction in education, society and culture.* Translated by R. Nice. London: Sage.

Brown, J., Miller, J. & Mitchell, J. (2006). Interrupted schooling and the acquisition of literacy: Experiences of Sudanese refugees in Victorian secondary schools. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, Vol 29, No 2, pp. 150-162.

Bruner, E.M. (1986). Ethnography as narrative. In V.W. Turner & E.M. Bruner (Eds.), *The anthropology of experience* (pp. 139-155). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Cassity, E. & Gow, G. (2005). Making up for lost time: The experiences of Southern Sudanese young refugees in high schools. *Youth Studies Australia*, Vol 24, No 3, pp. 51-55.

Cassity, E. & Gow, G. (2006). *Shifting space and cultural space: The transition experiences of African young people in Western Sydney high schools.* Retrieved on August 15, 2007 from http://www.aare.edu.au/05pap/cas05485.pdf.

Hewson, S. (2006). Inside out: Boys' voices: Identity and refugee students in a secondary school. *TESOL in Context*, Series 'S': Special Edition, pp. 34-48.

Hutchison, K.M. (2007). *Rethinking homework in contemporary Australia: A feminist sociocultural analysis.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Deakin University, Victoria, Australia.

James, R., Bexley, E. & Shearer, M. (2009). *Improving selection for tertiary education places in Victoria.* Retrieved on July 9, 2010 from http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/research/equity/docs/Improv_Tertiary_Sel.pdf

James, R. (2009). Is it time universities showed ENTER the exit? *The Age*, October 18, 2009.

Lareau, A. (1987). Social class differences in family-school relationships: The importance of cultural capital. *Sociology of Education*, Vol 60, No 2, pp. 73-85.

Lareau, A. (2011). *Unequal childhoods: Class, race and family life, second edition with an update a decade later.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lareau, A. & Horvat, E. (1999). Moments of social inclusion and exclusion: Race, class, and cultural capital in family-school relationships. *Sociology of Education*, Vol 72, No 1, pp. 37-53.

Matthews, J. (2008). Schooling and settlement: Refugee education in Australia, *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 31-45.

Miller, J., Mitchell, J. & Brown, J. (2005). African refugees with interrupted schooling in the high school mainstream: Dilemmas for teachers. *Prospect*, Vol 20, No 2, pp. 19-33.

Naidoo, L. (2008). Supporting African refugees in Greater Western Sydney: A critical ethnography of after-school homework tutoring centres. *Educational Research in Policy and Practice*, Vol. 7, pp. 139-150.

Naidoo. L. (2009). Developing social inclusion through after-school homework tutoring: A study of African refugee students in Greater Western Sydney. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 3, No. 3, pp. 261-273.

Nowotny, H. (1981). Women in public life in Austria. In C. Fuchs Epstein & R. Laub Coser (Eds.), *Access to power: Cross-national studies of women and elites* (pp. 147-156). London: George Allen and Unwin.

Reay, D. (2000). A useful extension of Bourdieu's conceptual framework?: Emotional capital as a way of understanding mothers' involvement in their children's education. *The Sociological Review*, Vol. 48, No. 4, pp. 568-585.

Reay, D. (2004). Gendering Bourdieu's concept of capitals?: Emotional capital, women, and social class. In L. Adkins & B. Skeggs (Eds.), *Feminism after Bourdieu* (pp. 57-74). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Schubert, J.D. (2008). Suffering/symbolic violence. In M. Grenfell (Ed.), *Pierre Bourdieu: Key concepts* (pp. 183-198). Durham: Acumen.

IRIS E. DUMENDEN is a Research Officer in the School of Education, Faculty of Arts, Education and Human Development, Victoria University, Australia. Her research interests include refugee education, adult literacy and education, and contemporary qualitative research methods. Correspondence: PO Box 14428 Melbourne VIC 8001 Australia. Email: iris.dumenden@vu.edu.au.