

## 'Pedants' vs 'Mondains' - On the Ways in Which Young People Interact in the Schooling Process Through the Lens of Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Habitus and Socio-Cultural Capital

Marta Jurczak-Morris<sup>1</sup> 

### Abstract

School, like a social melting pot, is a space for diverse interactions and behaviours, often of quite a different nature. The aim of this text is to look at the ways in which pupils from varying social backgrounds interact with the school world as well as to explain the logic behind their behaviour. Pierre Bourdieu, whose theoretical approach forms the basis of my research, has dichotomised these types of interactions as 'pedantism', a characteristic of the so-called 'humble pupils', and 'self-confidence', that of the so-called 'worldly pupils' ('mondains'), highlighting the fundamental differences in their modality to culture and language, manifested in their different ways of being and reacting within the school world. This text discusses these various ways of interaction with and at school based on pupils' social class affiliation, highlighting specific situations from school life to illustrate the Bourdieusian theory of capital and habitus.

### Keywords

social class, reproduction theory, educational inequalities, teacher-pupil interactions

### Introduction

Pierre Bourdieu's widely known theory of socio-cultural capital still valid today although criticised, among other things, for its objectivised concept of habitus

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<sup>1</sup> University of Lower Silesia, Poland, [martajurczak16@gmail.com](mailto:martajurczak16@gmail.com),  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9152-0671>

(King, 2000), unequivocally refutes the postulate of meritocracy, proving that the institution of school is not the central and key element of the educational process and success (Kwieciński, 2009). The Bourdieusian thesis on cultural reproduction goes back almost as far as the sociology of education itself, therefore proving the reproduction of educational inequalities is neither new nor necessary today; however, there is a lack of empirical knowledge about how this comes about. Apart from the reproduction of inequalities itself, little is known about how class differentiation in Poland determines the dimension of pupil interaction in the school world and what its consequences are for young people's participation in school life. The French researcher demonstrates in *Distinction* (Bourdieu, 2005) and *Reproduction* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2006), among others, that students with higher capital resources, correlated with a higher social status, consider school as a space of freedom, feeling that they belong there, while others, in contrast, consider it to be an environment that is completely alien to them, which they constantly feel they must adapt to. The question is, how does this happen in practice? What types of student interactions make it possible to demonstrate the class differences in ways of functioning within the school environment that Bourdieu depicted? This article aims to identify those very situations from the school reality that are difficult to capture, hence also rarely studied, and that constitute an empirical exemplification for the legendary French sociologist's concepts of capital, habitus, and theory of cultural reproduction.

However, before going into the substance, I will first lay out the theoretical context for the qualitative research presented later in this article.

### **Theoretical Basis of Bourdieu's Sociology**

Bourdieu formulated his concept by drawing on the traditions of Durkheim, Marx and Weber, while at the same time transcending them (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2006, p. 12). His "spiral way of thinking" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2001, p. 11) enabled the French researcher to overcome the antinomy of structural necessity (implied by functionalism and conflict theories) and Weberian individual action, using seemingly contradictory paradigms to show the dual nature of the social world (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2001). Its duality lies in the existence of external coercion, which determines human interactions and perceptions. On the other hand, human experience is also significant because it influences categories of perception and evaluation, which in turn influence human perceptions, in which the taking of mental positions is manifested. The social world, according to Bourdieu, is "not a compact whole integrated by systemic functions, (...)

intersecting conflicts” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2001, p. 20). It is rather a structured but dynamic “set of relatively autonomous areas of play [fields], which cannot be subordinated to a single social logic, whatever it may be” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2001, p. 20). Bourdieu defines social structure as a social universe, which consists of a multiplicity and diversity of social worlds with deeply hidden structures. These, in turn, function in two ways: as so-called objectivities of the first and second order (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2001). The first type includes forms of capital – especially economic and cultural in the form of material resources and means of appropriating goods and values. The second type includes both mental and bodily schemas that play the role of symbolic patterns of behaviour, feelings, judgements, thinking, and practices, referred to by Bourdieu as habitus, which will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

### **Habitus as the Logic of Practical Sense**

What is crucial and distinctive about habitus is its socially constituted nature (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2006, p. 10), which must be considered as a kind of “embodied necessity” (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 216). Paraphrasing and reducing it to a somewhat more colloquial denominator, we can say that habitus generates things that [students] “can do and cannot do, can utter or must keep silent about their likely future” (Mikiewicz, 2011, p. 89). This is because social reality, in this case school reality, is not perceived equally by all the students involved, but rather each student, depending on their habitus, has a different (subjective) idea about it. This is where the interpretative danger of habitus arises, since it can lead to putting forward the thesis that there are as many habitus as there are social actors. Bourdieu denies this logic by pointing out that although the habitus defines what is “personal and subjective” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2001, p. 113) it is nevertheless collective in character, constituting a subjective but “non-individual” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 60) system of internalised structures. This means, according to Berger’s reconstruction of the mechanism of social creation of reality (Mikiewicz, 2007, p. 71), that a given subjective vision of school reality is also intersubjective, since it is shared by groups of pupils belonging to the same social class (Gdula, 2017). As a result, it acquires an objective dimension for this group of individuals and becomes “social knowledge, determining the perception of reality, the ways of acting in it and even the reasoning of the actors” (Mikiewicz, 2007, p. 71). Hence Bourdieu’s overwhelming emphasis on the class character of the habitus. He states clearly that a social class, being in itself

a class of identical or similar conditions of existence and conditions, is at the same time a class of belonging of biological individuals having the same habitus understood as a system of dispositions common to all, being a product of the same social conditions (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 59).

In the context of pupils standing at the threshold of the institution of school, this statement has a double meaning, since it refers explicitly to the primary habitus, since pupils entering education are, as it were, the pure embodiment of the attitudes, practices, values, and evaluation system of their family. Thus, their original habitus, uncontaminated yet by the influence of the school, which, using symbolic violence, tries to impose the dominant culture on pupils, is the most visible. This creates convenient conditions for carrying out research on students' interactional and communicative functioning, from which it will be possible to infer certain properties of their habitus and the forms of capital they possess.

### **The Concept of Capital and the Logic of the Field**

The concept of capital portrays social reality as a universe that from the beginning contests equality of opportunity because it emphasises the historical and thus also hereditary aspect of the social world, as a result of which the size and types of capital inherited are not the same for all students. Thus, capital is closely linked to and dependent on the family environment and the social conditions in which the family functions. Bourdieu distinguishes three basic types of capital (each of which has sub-families): cultural, economic, social, and a fourth, symbolic capital, which is the form that each capital takes "when it is perceived by means of a perception that grants it a specific logic" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2001, p. 104). This logic is closely related to the dynamic and simultaneously relational concept of field, which is "the configuration of objective relations between positions defining their current and potential situation in the structure of distribution of different types of power (capital)" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2001, p. 104). This means that the field is an object of permanent change, resulting from the action of forces, functioning as forms of different types of capital, which – depending on the conjuncture of the field – ensure control over it and the benefits flowing from it (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2001, p. 83). Bourdieu uses a specific metaphor in relation to the field, defining it as a space in which a social game or struggle takes place (Bourdieu, 2005). Thus, if we assume that education is a field in which a game is played where the educational success of students is at stake, then the bargaining chip in this game are the forms of their cultural, economic, and social capital on the one hand, and their habitus, on the other, that is the structure of the perception

and evaluation of school reality. This very habitus decides or, in other words, is subject to the assessment of whether it is worth playing this game, and if so, how to participate in it. Therefore, the players of the same game (pupils) pursue in the field (education) various interests that are determined simultaneously by different habitus and forms of capital, which bear traces of social class affiliation.

### **Research Methodology**

My research, embedded in the qualitative paradigm, was conducted using the ethnographic method requiring active participation, observation, listening, asking questions (Brewer, 2000), and above all, “learning from [and about] people [pupils]” (Spradley, 1979, p. 3) in their daily environment. The subject of my research is the class-conditioned dimensions of pupil-teacher interaction, which I understand as being diverse and differently possessed forms of cultural, economic, and social capital on the one hand, and as differing habitus, i.e. structures of perception and evaluation of school reality, on the other. Indeed, Bourdieusian concepts of inherited capital and primary habitus make it possible to identify pupil interactions conditioned by different class habitus, which exists, to use Bourdieu’s language, inside the brains of subjects, acting as a “structuring and evaluating structure” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2001, p. 87) and at the same time generating specific practices – interactions, both with and within the school world. My main aim is to describe these interactions and to understand their course from the perspective of socio-cultural reproduction theory in two selected, status-divergent, school environments.

The main research question concerns understanding the difference between pupil-teacher interactions of two school cohorts underpinned by their social origin, as well as the culture (Czerepaniak-Walczak, 2015) of both schools. In other words, do children from ‘better-off’ families behave differently from children from families of lower social status, and if so, what differences are noticeable at the level of pupil-teacher interactions in the school environment? Moreover, to what extent does parental social origin determine their choice of school (with its unique culture), which in turn, reflects pupils’ behaviour in classroom? Interestingly, according to Bourdieu’s theory, the answer to these questions is equivalent to answering the question of capital differences between these groups. If there are differences in the attitudes and ways in which students participate in the educational process as well as the culture of the school they attend, they should be explained by the difference in the capital resources possessed by the two groups of young people (and their parents). On the other hand, if my research

shows a different result, demonstrating that despite different capital resources and different school cultures, students' involvement in the educational process is of a similar nature, then "a pattern of surprise" (Merton, 1982, p. 170) will emerge as further evidence that "theory does not determine reality, but reality determines theory" (Mikiewicz, 2005, p. 129). This approach of reflexive participation guides my research, in which I try to avoid any kind of interpretation that bears the mark of methodological purism (Mikiewicz, 2005, p. 128).

### **Choice of Research Area, Units of Analysis, and Time Dimension**

The research area was selected in an arbitrary and non-probabilistic way due to the nature of the research (Babbie, 2008, p. 212). As a result, I selected two schools based in the same city in Poland that differ considerably in terms of their status. On the one side of the status gap I chose a music school of relatively high prestige (named school X for the purposes of this research), knowing that it is attended by children with higher levels of economic and cultural capital; on the other side, I chose an ordinary primary school (named school Y), about which I had information suggesting that the majority of school children attending this institution come from environments of lower social status (indicating lower capital resources and a different class habitus). In addition, the primary music school children I observed were Year 2 students, while the regular primary school pupils were Year 3 students. The research was both dynamic and simultaneous, as I conducted it over a time span of several months in both schools simultaneously. Due to the lack of complete status/class homogeneity in both school classes, the basic units of analysis are not groups but individuals in the form of pupils. However, the important fact remains that on the basis of the analysis of individual units, it is possible to draw conclusions about the characteristics of both communities X and Y (pupils) (Babbie, 2006, p. 116), which is shown later in the text.

## **The Research Findings**

### **Specifics of Class X and Y**

Before getting to the heart of the matter, it is vital to give an overview of the way in which both classes function and are organised, in order to identify the promotion of specific forms of capital by each school. First of all, the pupils of class X are introduced to high culture from the very first days of their school education, not only in the form of music, which is the very idea of the music school, but also theatre and art. Once a week they go on organised trips to the theatre,

cinema, or an art centre, which inevitably become an integral part of their school curriculum. As far as the pupils in class Y are concerned, they attend such events less frequently, i.e., no more than once every few months. Class Y, on the other hand, is focused on achieving sporting results (the school is recognised as the best basketball school in the region). The pupils therefore participate intensively in sports activities and competitions, while the pupils of school X have limited exposure to physical education and only have swimming lessons once a week at the initiative of their parents (who pay for them). Thus, we can see a programmatic difference in investment in various forms of capital, oriented, on the one hand, to the development of high cultural capital, and on the other, to the development of popular culture capital, as basketball is considered to be, due to its mass appeal. Let us see how these priorities translate into capital resources in the functioning of students of classes X and Y.

### **Pupil Interactions**

#### **The Freedom of Mondains vs. the Self-Control of Pedants due to Unequal Resources of Cultural Capital**

In Class X, one can observe numerous situations that reveal students' independence and freedom to express their own opinions (even if they were incompatible with the teacher's opinion or met with their disapproval). To illustrate this, here is a short, spontaneous dialogue between the teacher and a pupil, who automatically asked the question that came into their mind at that moment. The teacher said: "We just talked about the adventures Walus had." To which the pupil asks: "Why Walus, and not Walduś?" "Because his name was Walus," said the teacher. After a while, the teacher continued: "Today we will talk about pilots," to which the same boy replied: "Miss, my grandfather was a pilot in the world war." The teacher replied briefly, "Good," as if realising and somehow approving that she had such talkative pupils. Although at school Y similar interjections from pupils about their personal experiences did happen, they did not ask similar kinds of questions. In general, the tendency to ask questions like "why", "how", and "why not" was almost imperceptible at school Y. It is difficult to say whether this is due to a sense of insecurity caused by the incompatibility of the school world with the home world, which was a barrier in the case of pupils Y, or whether it is due to the school culture, which effectively inculcates patterns of appropriate behaviour, thus precluding the asking of questions posed by pupils from class X, who were one or even two years younger and had not yet been effectively tamed by it. The fact is, however, that if there were any doubts on the part of pupils from class Y, they mainly concerned

two aspects: technical matters, related to the way the task was written, and the evaluation of their work, i.e. checking the correctness of the exercise (one of the most frequent questions: “Miss, did you check mine?”) The children from school Y also had a strong tendency to go up to the teacher’s desk during the lesson and show the task they had done, which was by no means the case at school X. The meticulousness with which some pupils from school Y did their school exercises and the pride with which they came to me to show me their homework, and even more, the desire to demonstrate their completed tasks in front of the whole class, are undoubtedly distinctive features of this group of pupils. None of the children in class X showed a similar attitude during my observations. This situation brings to mind a comparison once made by Bourdieu when comparing higher and lower classes in terms of their functioning in the educational field. In *Distinction* he defined the first group of people as “worldlings” (*mondains*) and the second as “pedants” (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 94) who “have to confirm the value of their achievements and the very value of the work of acquisition, of the long internal effort of education, which constitutes the whole of their value and, in the eyes of the worldling, is a defect” (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 94). The pedantism of which Bourdieu speaks can mainly be observed among Y students in two forms. Firstly, as the abovementioned pride that comes from doing exercises correctly, which requires a great deal of effort from these pupils and which, as the French sociologist says, constituted their entire value. Secondly, as meticulousness in the tasks performed, which, interestingly, was reinforced by the teacher’s attitude. This can be seen, for example, in the way the pupils coloured the drawings in the exercises: “And why are you colouring so carelessly?”, or during exercises in mathematics: “Vases are not works of art, but it has to be nicely [drawn]”. These remarks, seemingly insignificant, become clearer when juxtaposed with the way the teacher from school X approached this type of task. She did not attach much importance to careful painting, as the time she saved was more valuable for her, since she could devote it to other activities. Most often she encouraged her pupils to complete the task by saying: “Don’t waste time painting too elegantly.” Thus, we can see the parallel dichotomy of the ‘teacher-pedant’ from school Y and the ‘teacher-educator’ from school X, which marks a clear contrast between the behaviour of the students and the teachers in both schools, working as a coupled mechanism.

Another example of the independence of class X pupils (*mondains*) and their lack of self-control over what is ‘allowed’ and ‘not allowed’ at school is illustrated by three situations. The first of them shows the freedom of expression of emotions



of a pupil from class X, who, upon seeing the borders of Poland placed on a geographical map, said loudly with astonishment: “Oh my gosh... how big!” At school Y, it is difficult to encounter comments of this kind. The pupils (pedants) were indeed interested in the map of Poland, coming forward again and again to demonstrate their knowledge of the location of the various places on it, but they were far removed from expressing their emotions in such a spontaneous way. This characteristic freedom of the students of school X could also be seen in other situations. One of them took place on the first day of my arrival in class X, when the pupils, having learnt my name, immediately commented on this fact with the words: “Now we already have three Martas [in the class].” This characteristic lack of distance towards a new person is one of the basic characteristics of the pupils of X (mondains), who, having a feeling of being at home, in a way accepted me into their world, which was their class (or more broadly, the world of school). Another situation happened at the very beginning of a lesson I was observing. One of the pupils, due to the fact that he had been absent for a long time and therefore had apparently forgotten that I had already attended class X before, asked the teacher just after her official greeting to the class: “Miss, who is this lady?” He did so in an extremely ostentatious manner, which was met with her hostile reaction, which she verbalised: “The reason I won’t answer your question is because you behaved inappropriately. One does not ask in the presence of a person about them in such a manner. If one does it, it should be done discretely. Do you understand me?” The student replied briefly, “Yes!” However, the ending of this dialogue does not change the fact that the boy asked the above question in a completely natural way, without any shadow of fear, in front of the class, without having to make any effort to build up courage to do so. Once again, a strong sense of freedom can be observed, suggesting that the school is a space where the boy feels ‘at home’ and therefore, demands an explanation of the new situation he has found due to my presence in the classroom.

The naturalness and freedom of expression of mondains are the result, firstly, of the compatibility and continuity of the family world with the school world, which is characteristic – according to reproduction theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2006) – of the upper classes; secondly, they are the result of a specific educational approach based on a cultural logic defined by Annette Lareau as “concerted cultivation” (Lareau, 2003, p.2). As a result of these educational interactions, the child acquires the competence to ask questions and demand answers to justify the existing order of things and the status quo (Mikiewicz, 2011).

Pierre Bourdieu, in a remarkably lucid exposition in *Distinction* of the process

of transformation of cultural capital into school capital, made it clear that those who have inherited cultural capital become, in essence, “holders of considerable school capital” (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 107). It is this unwritten law that guarantees them the feeling of certainty in school that comes from “legitimate belonging” (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 107) and the ease that comes from cultural intimacy (Bourdieu, 2005). Thus, the possession of a legitimate culture takes place, *de facto*, without the active participation of its possessor, because – one could say – they have always possessed it, as it were, through the cultural capital they inherited. This is undoubtedly the reason for the feeling of certainty possessed by these individuals, which is often equated with a lack of humility, as they do not treat the legitimate culture as a precious possession that costs them a lot to be part of. It is certainly difficult to acquire such an attitude, since they have possessed it as long as they can remember (or even before) and, in addition, they are often unaware of it. The situation is completely different with the purchasers of legitimate culture, as they are deprived of the certainty provided by the continuity of the family world (understood as a source of cultural capital) with the school world. These individuals, upon entering the period of schooling, are faced with the task of acquiring legitimate culture through hard intellectual work. Bourdieu leaves no illusions, however, stating that the difference between the possessors and the acquirers of legitimate culture remains and lies “in the distance of practical mastery (...) from its symbolic mastery required by the school” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2006, p.176). Therefore, the symbolic mastery of legitimate culture results in characteristic modesty and humility, resulting firstly from the awareness of the transformation into someone different from what one was, and secondly from the necessity of constantly making an effort of acquisition, which is correlated with uncertainty.

Translating these considerations into empirical research, some characteristic tendencies between both groups of pupils can be observed. First of all, self-confidence is a characteristic that clearly distinguishes pupils at school X from pupils at school Y (although there are some individuals among the latter who are the exception and deviation from this rule). This manifests itself in several ways, ranging from comments on curriculum content, to jokey remarks and questions during lessons and breaks, to the creation of a specific class atmosphere during lessons.

A clear symbol of the confidence with which children relate to the material they are learning and the ease with which they assimilate it is the comment made by one of the pupils at school X about a letter that appeared in a word that was not yet studied as part of the curriculum. With a kind of disregard and “relative ignorance” (Bourdieu, 2005, p.87) – to use Bourdieu’s term – the girl stated: “g is

easy...” and continued writing down the word. During the same lesson, walking through class X, I noticed that many students were doing the exercises in advance of the teacher’s instruction, without discussing their content, which was obvious to them; in other words, those tasks were for pupils X only the completion of the formalities required by the ritual of the lesson. In class Y, on the other hand, there were a few pupils who also did the exercises before their teacher asked them to, but nevertheless they did not comment on the obviousness of the tasks performed, in which their modesty and humility were evident. On the contrary, they tended to stay focused and maintain perfect silence, which was often lacking in class X.

Secondly, in terms of extra-curricular activities, pupils from class X showed interest in me as someone new in their class. They often approached me during the break to independently initiate a conversation. The girls shared updates from their lives with me, the six-year-olds showed me the toys they had brought, some hugged me. Some of the boys spent time in solitude, reading comic books (of not inconsiderable size), others played together pretending to be virtual characters from computer games. In conversation with me, they talked about the latest technological innovations, as well as about the types of sports they practised, often expressing their devotion to them (e.g. “I love football so much that I would give my heart for it”). Sometimes they gave a running account of bad behaviour by a classmate or even a parent. Indeed, during my first ever visit to class X, a boy came up to me at break time and announced: “My mother doesn’t love me. She keeps shouting at me if I play a note wrong. Playing is ruining my life.” The ruthlessness of this pupil’s statement and his directness surprised me enormously. It revealed, without doubt, an important aspect of parenting styles, namely parents’ ambitions for their children, but in this case, I would like to draw attention to the very fact that this statement took place in the school classroom, in the presence of the teacher, a trainee teacher and other pupils. The boy said what he thought openly without worrying about how his statement would be received. This characteristic independence, both towards school subjects and peers, and a kind of personal freedom, are distinctive features of the pupils in class X. ‘A cherry on the cake’ in terms of these students’ sense of confidence and freedom is implied by the jokes they tell in my presence during breaks. Here are examples of two of them:

First joke:

An artist goes to a bakery and says: “Two hundred rolls, please.”  
To which the seller replies, “Two hundred – so many? How about a hundred?”  
“And who would eat that much?!” concludes the artist.

## Second joke:

Beware: dangerous dog! And, even worse: mother-in-law...

The boldness with which the seven-year-olds told these stories and their joy in telling them, without a trace of embarrassment as to whether it was appropriate to tell them seemed to speak for themselves. These pupils, despite the traditional character of the school, felt comfortable and confident on the school premises and demonstrated this in many ways.

Pupils from class Y, on the other hand, also came up to talk to me during the break, but their frequency was much lower – especially among the boys. The girls behaved in a similar way to the girls from school X – they showed me the gadgets they had brought to school and their favourite toys, and some of them ran up to give me a hug and told me about current events in their lives. The boys, on the other hand, were less forthcoming and it was rather up to me to initiate a conversation with them. Compared to class X, they were a less talkative and shyer group, with minor exceptions (one of them insisted that I play draughts with him and did not give in until we had a game together). However, none of the students told jokes or reported on class life. During the break, the impression was that the boys had their time, in which they tended not to talk to anyone outside their circle. This was also supported by the infrastructure of the school – in particular the ping-pong tables in the corridors and the drinks and sweets machine at the entrance. Surprisingly and rather paradoxically, despite Y's much more favourable school environment, the behaviour of the pupils in the classroom indicated that they did not feel as comfortable at school as pupils from class X. The reason for this could be attributed to the lesser compatibility of the home world with the school world, which is reflected in their minds and, consequently, in the ways they perceive school reality and behave within it. Material goods in themselves, are not able to compensate for this gap, which has its roots in their primary socialisation, decoupled from the norms of the dominant culture certified by the school (Bourdieu, 2005).

This conclusion is illustrated by the photos I took of both classes, when I spontaneously asked the pupils for permission to take a commemorative photo. Pupils from class X immediately, as if automatically, gathered together and, while behaving in a completely natural way and taking a lot of joy in doing so, posed for the photo, making all sorts of facial expressions. The Y students, on the other hand, not only did not think of posing for a photo together, but it was difficult to notice any signs of spontaneity. They stood at the proverbial 'attention', as if

subconsciously treating my request as some kind of duty to be fulfilled. The slight smile that accompanied them was incommensurable with the joy demonstrated by the X students.

### **Class Emblems as Determinants of Economic Capital**

Observing the emblems characteristic of the different groups of pupils to indicate their economic capital resources, I noticed that the Herlitz brand school products were quite commonly used by the pupils from class X. In general, the children from the music school were equipped with neat, high-quality school equipment, which undoubtedly required considerable financial investment. A telling illustration of the potential economic capital resources of the parents from school X is the response of a pupil from class X to my question regarding a writing pen. Looking at her pencil case, I asked if she used a pen, to which the girl replied: "I have three pens." Seeing my surprise, she continued: "I have three pens because I wanted to, because I liked them all." In the case of pupils in class Y, there was also some high-end branded equipment, but this tendency was not as widespread as in school X. In addition, a characteristic feature was the high wear and tear of these items among the class Y pupils, but the reason for this is difficult to diagnose. This could have been due to the long (one year longer than in class X) use of the stationery, but it could also be a sign of disrespect towards the school equipment, resulting, however, in both cases in a lack of purchase of new stationery (which also somewhat illustrates the level of economic capital).

### **Types of Class Ties, or Social Capital**

On the basis of the observed school reality in classes X and Y, it can be concluded that Bourdieu was justified in treating social capital as "the correlate and interdependent of economic-cultural capital" (Mikiewicz, 2011, p. 21). In class X, where the resources of cultural-economic capital appear to be higher than in class Y, the ties between pupils and, by analogy, between parents seem to be closer. Examples include a teacher telling pupils the news that one of their classmates just experienced the birth of a baby sister, or a request to the rest of the class to send a card to a pupil who has been hospitalised, wishing her a speedy recovery. Observing this kind of situation and hearing clear messages in class about the fate of individual pupils and their families, which in other environments might be considered too personal, one had the strong impression that nobody in class X remained incognito. In fact, it was felt that these students, together with the teacher, formed family-like relationships, not so much on an emotional level, but in terms of knowledge about each other. At school Y, the situation was somewhat

different, as I did not have the opportunity to hear this kind of information, for example about a change in the family situation of one of the pupils. Nevertheless, I had the opportunity to participate in the birthday celebration of one of the pupils, whose mother baked croissants for the whole class as a treat. The children were very warm towards her, and they sang 'Happy Birthday' and wished her well. It was evident that the girl was on more intimate terms with some members of the class than others. It was also very telling when a class Y pupil declared that the birthday party would be held in the town and that the invited guests (some of whom were class Y students) would go for ice cream or pizza. An analogous situation took place in class X, with the only significant difference that the girl invited some of her classmates to celebrate her birthday at the horse farm. Once again, the differences in the economic capital of the pupils of classes X and Y and their parents can be seen.

### **Conclusion**

Bourdieusian pedants and mondains are inseparable elements of the jigsaw puzzle analogous to school reality – or in macroscopic terms, the wider social structure. The former, cautious, treading timidly on the unfamiliar terrain of the school, are constantly catching up; fighting against the overwhelming sense of distance from the dominant culture, they slowly and painstakingly acquire an intimacy with the legitimate culture. Mondains, on the other hand, acting as if nothing had ever happened, having always possessed cultural legitimacy, continue their schooling with confidence and ease, often unaware of their privileged position. For the latter, school is an extension of their family practices, constituting, as it were, a continuation of the learning begun at home and thus ensuring their cultural continuity. 'Worldly' students, due to their habitus, which is compatible with the school habitus, experience a constant continuity and coherence between the family world and the school world, which determines their proficiency and self-confidence which appears in the form of objectified cultural capital. These high-status pupils, unlike pedants, have not experienced the cultural contradictions, the collision of worlds, and consequently the sense of incompatibility and lack of belonging that pupils from low-status families bear the yoke of. In this fundamental context, the equation whereby every gifted pupil attending school will succeed is inadequate. School, in a natural way, becomes a catalyst to educational success for those who know how to use this 'tool'. This knowledge, on the other hand, is provided by cultural legitimacy, which is possessed by students with high capital resources and a specific class habitus, which is reinforced by a specific, class-

affiliated school culture. For these individuals, the prospect of social advancement and success in the broadest sense of the term is open, unlike pedants, of whom, Bourdieu writes, few will achieve social advancement, which he ironically calls “child prodigies” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2006, p. 18) and to which, *nota bene*, he himself belonged.

I am aware that the situations from the school life of both groups of pupils presented above may be perceived as incidental, because they are only snippets of school reality, which in its entirety appears as an extremely complex microworld, and is impossible to capture in a short article. Nevertheless, I hope that they at least to some extent shed light on the empirical exemplification of the Bourdieusian concept, central to this text, of social class-based, pupil-teacher interactions embedded in a specific school culture. The question of how this class gap in the sense of how pupils interact and engage with (and within) the school environment can be successfully narrowed, still stands, and requires further investigation, despite the substantial research conducted in this field so far (MacLeod, 2018; Leathwood & Archer, 2006; Dunne & Gazeley, 2008). It is a particularly challenging task to address, due to the fact that the differences in pupils’ interactions within the school are deeply internalised and often unconscious because they are part of their socialisation process, which is incredibly difficult to reverse or change.

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