



How Children in Urban Poverty Experience Alienation at School: A Theoretical Exploration of Exclusion Practices Using Bourdieu's Habitus

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Abstract

Bourdieu's concept of "cultural capital" revealed how educational practices selectively rewarded those possessing language, values and beliefs central to the bourgeoisie. This leads to alienation of children living in urban poverty who lack cultural capital. Existing scholarship that focuses heavily on cultural capital alone demonstrates which belief systems and values are preferred in the education system. There is silence on the nature and depth of alienation itself. As a result, its debilitating impact on the lives of children in urban poverty remains unseen. This paper argues for deeper theoretical understanding of alienation experienced by children in urban poverty within the Indian schools. To accomplish this, the paper foregrounds the concept of habitus with cultural capital. Habitus provides the conceptual machinery to explain the historically-embodied nature of alienation. Understanding habitus within the material and relational context of urban poverty reveals how historical and cultural processes (such as migration, communal violence, deprivation) lead to deeply embodied dispositions and schemes of perception that further reinforce alienation. Historically, institutional practices of schooling have misrecognized the embodied nature of exclusion. Foregrounding of habitus with cultural capital provides a lens to critically examine schooling practices. This creates dialogue towards dismantling alienating tendencies within the schools.

Keywords: educational inequality; embodiment; misrecognition; relationality; social reproduction