

SECTION 3. PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS OF EDUCATION

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CONCEPTUALISING EDUCATIONAL CAPITAL

Didenko L. V.

*Ph. D. in Philosophical Sciences, Associate Professor,
Associate Professor at the Philosophy of Humanities Department
Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv
Kyiv, Ukraine*

Education has long served as a key driver of both individual and societal transformations, accomplished through the intergenerational transmission of essential professional foundations – knowledge that is practically applied and transformed into skills and expertise.

This study draws on three sources: Karl Marx’s theory of capital [2], Pierre Bourdieu’s forms of capital conception [1], and my own experience teaching the course ‘Philosophy’ at Ukrainian universities. It is framed around a single research question: ‘If educational capital exists, what are its precise components?’.

According to Karl Marx, capital is a resource {or asset} that, through its utilisation, enables the accumulative and convertible (non-)material gain [2]. Pierre Bourdieu identifies the fundamental forms of capital as economic, cultural, and social [1, p. 243]. By analogy, educational capital can be conceived as a further form of capital, with its own components, properties, and functions. If so, how should educational capital be understood?

At first glance, its foundation appears to be something convertible, accumulative, and augmentable – namely, knowledge. However, knowledge cannot be transmitted ‘as is’ from one human being to another {i.e., from teacher to learner at university and beyond}. It is realised as a subjective experience of processed information flows, focused engagement with data, thematic reflection, and integration into an individual worldview. In other words, knowledge exists only through subjective comprehension.

A more nuanced perspective is required. Education is not limited to professional competence {or the knowledge-transmission and knowledge-applicability}, but also entails the development of cognitive abilities among all participants in the university educational process {including both teachers and students}, as well as the stimulation of innovative thinking and

creativity {with teachers designing learning tasks and students executing them}. Moreover, this competence {or professional qualification} – predominantly among teachers – must be formally recognised through credentials {such as diplomas, certificates, attestations}, enabling the realisation of professional potential {namely, the teaching of the academic discipline} for the formation of new generations of young specialists. Accordingly, all the aforementioned components of educational capital are activated through interactions between teachers and learners.

However, university teaching extends beyond the mere transmission and practical application of professional essentials; it also encompasses the cultivation of humaneness towards all living beings through case studies and individual reflective tasks {especially if studying philosophy}. Effective teaching {for instance, of philosophy} requires full access to up-to-date resources, ranging from texts by thinkers of previous eras to technical devices and/or tools that facilitate instruction and sustain students' attention. At the same time, numerous observations suggest the opposite: without a forward-looking vision of the intended outcomes from university leaders and subject lecturers, even the most advanced resources cannot be applied effectively. In other words, a procedural lecturer {one who focuses solely on completing tasks} may have access to all available resources, yet their teaching sessions fail to contribute to students' development. During such sessions, two key functions remain unfulfilled: 1) the integration of all knowledge acquired within the curriculum; 2) the preparation of students for life challenges that may arise beyond the educational institution.

On the one hand, educational capital denotes to a human being's inclination to learn and master the new through both formal and informal channels, drawing on access to cultural achievements, colleagues' expertise, adaptability to often unpredictable conditions, and the broadening of collaborative networks, among other factors. On the other hand, educational capital is not confined to higher education students but extends to each human being. Education involves both teaching and learning: that is, the transmission and the reception. Yet before transmitting anything, teachers must carefully tailor it to the specific discipline – considering how it will function, whether it will be predominantly useful, whether students will perceive it as merely supplementary to their professional trajectory, or whether it will shape their perception of the world and of a human being's place within it.

Educational capital should be understood in a dual sense: first, as the broadest form of individual and collective cognitive, theoretical, and practical activity, undertaken with the guidance of senior colleagues as well as independently by human beings; second, as the optimisation of conditions for world engagement, aimed at fostering a safe and comfortable

environment for human beings' existence in both the present and the future. Furthermore, educational capital cannot be detached from the cultural context and social challenges, which act as the primary catalytic conditions for its formation and renewal. Crucially, the key component of educational capital is the human being, who, through the (re)transmission of their own experience and effective models or approaches to solving professional tasks and/or challenges, contributes to the progress of humanity by shaping successive generations of sectoral specialists.

A natural question arises: can educational capital be reduced to an individual practice of learning and mastering something unknown? Not entirely, as educational capital is not only directed towards the accumulation and enhancement of this 'something', but also supports its transformation into skills and expertise requiring validation by others. Within higher education, this primarily occurs through assessments and distinctions: ongoing, semester-long evaluations of acquired competencies, examinations, certificates and diplomas confirming successful completion of studies. The element of public recognition strengthens a learner's {or student's} confidence in their professional expertise through acknowledgment by others, typically senior colleagues in the field. Although young specialists may not yet be familiar with all the nuances of the profession, they display a keen desire to engage with new knowledge, pursue self-directed learning while simultaneously acquiring the foundations of their profession. Furthermore, public assessment allows each learner {or student} to gradually construct their own professional (hi)story, thereby paving the way for their future and initiating a chain of life opportunities aimed at improving conditions for their future existence.

In general, educational capital can be understood as an individual drive to acquire and/or update professional and related competencies, realised through networks of formal and informal institutions, and practised through the opportunity for independent mastery and explanation to others – in higher education, to students and faculty; in the workplace, to colleagues and management – of one's own insights on specific professional challenges, aimed at the potential optimisation of actions in both private and professional contexts.

Thus, educational capital does not merely exist as an abstract notion; it emerges as a distinct, multi-layered concept requiring detailed research, including a careful examination of its structure, components, characteristics, and the impacts on both the private and professional spheres of the human being.

References:

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