
This is the **accepted version** of the journal article:

Tarabini-Castellani, Aina; Curran, Marta; Fontdevila, Clara. «Institutional habitus in context : implementation, development and impacts in two compulsory secondary schools in Barcelona». British journal of sociology of education, Vol. 38 Núm. 8 (2017), p. 1177-1189. DOI 10.1080/01425692.2016.1251306

This version is available at <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/288680>

under the terms of the  license

Postprint version of:

Tarabini, A. Curran, M., Fontdevila, Cl. (2016). Institutional habitus in context: implementation, development and impacts in two compulsory secondary schools in Barcelona. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 38(8), 1177-1189.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2016.1251306>

Institutional habitus in context: implementation, development and impacts in two compulsory secondary schools in Barcelona

This paper aims at revisiting the relationship between school-level variables and students' educational opportunities through the lens of *institutional habitus*. This approach is particularly well suited to explore the notion of *school culture* as it brings to the forefront the impact of social context, avoiding some of the limitations typically associated with the long-dominant perspective of School Effectiveness Research. Drawing on an ethnographic approach, the paper explores how *institutional habitus* unfolds in two urban public secondary schools in the city of Barcelona. Breaking the notion down into three main components (educational status, organizational practices and expressive order), the analysis identifies two main types of *institutional habitus* – one based on action and inclusion and another based on reaction and expulsion. Ultimately, these results give insight on the complex interplay of these three components, as well as on their combined impact on students' educational opportunities.

Key words: school culture; educational inequalities; habitus; teachers' expectations; social class.

1. Introduction

Secondary schools play a key role in influencing young people's educational opportunities. Obviously, not all responsibility for educational success can be attributed to the actions of schools themselves, but they do represent key institutional settings to understand students' educational experiences, decisions and choices (Van Zanten 2012).

Acknowledging the role of schools in the production, reproduction or compensation of social inequalities is not a novelty in itself. Since the 70s, several studies have analyzed the relationship between school characteristics and students' educational opportunities in terms of academic results, school engagement and disengagement, etc. The academic discussion carried out within School Effectiveness Research (SER) is especially important in this field. However, one of the main problems of SER, at least in its early developments, is the tendency to omit the effect of the social context in the analysis of school effectiveness. As claimed by Thrupp, SER “has become increasingly criticised for being a socially and politically decontextualised body of literature which provides support for inequitable educational reforms” (2001, 8). Thus, the focus on school organizational, management and leadership aspects as key mechanisms to improve educational results has tended to omit the effect of the social context, not only on the students' opportunities to succeed, but also on the pedagogical practices developed by schools. However, school academic and organizational practices are not independent of their social

composition (Dupriez, Dumay, and Vause 2008).

The purpose of the article is to contribute to the academic debate on the effects of schools and, more specifically, on the effects of school culture, from a theoretical perspective that explicitly differs from SER. Specifically, the institutional habitus perspective coined by McDonough (1996) and developed by Reay (1998) and Reay, David, and Ball (2001) is adopted. As stated by Burke, Emmerich, and Ingram (2013), the institutional habitus has clear conceptual utility and theoretical coherence, although more empirical research is needed in order to further develop it. Indeed, the very meaning of the concept institutional habitus allows some of the main problems of SER to be overcome, as it focuses precisely on how social class is reproduced through particular institutional-school practices. Consequently, it is a very useful concept to capture the intrinsic, but not linear, relationship between the school's social composition and the school's organizational practices, structures, values and norms. In coherence with the original Bourdiesian notion of habitus, then, the institutional habitus allows us to explore how objective structural conditions produce particular schemes of perception, appreciation, and action (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 16), now embedded within an institutional realm.

The article is structured as follows. First, we present the main theoretical assumptions related to the concept of institutional habitus. Second, the context of the research and the methodology are explained. Sections three and four present a detailed analysis of the institutional habitus of two secondary schools in the city of Barcelona. The last section presents a general reflection, regarding the advantages of using this concept and its various impacts in terms of equity and educational opportunities.

2. Advantages of the theoretical approach: strengths of the institutional habitus

The concept of institutional habitus was first introduced by McDonough (1996) under the name organizational habitus, and further developed by Reay (1998) and Reay, David, and Ball (2001) under the specific name institutional habitus. As defined by the authors, it refers to the set of predispositions, taken-for-granted expectations and schemes of perception on the basis of which schools are organized (Reay, David, and Ball 2001). Paraphrasing McDonough, it refers to the "impact of a cultural group or social class on individual behaviour as it is mediated through an organization" (McDonough 1996, cited in Reay 1998, 521).

Therefore, the concept has three main characteristics that, from this article's perspective and according to Burke, Emmerich, and Ingram (2013), explain its relevance as a heuristic and socio-analytical tool for the analysis of school culture. First, it involves the incorporation of the

social composition of schools as an intrinsic element to understand their practices, regulations and forms of organization. Second, it goes beyond the perceptions and actions of teachers on an individual level by introducing an analysis of school culture from a collective perspective. Third, it entails going beyond organizational practices of schools *per se*, incorporating cultural and expressive elements into the analysis of the daily life of schools.

First, the concept of institutional habitus allows us to incorporate the social composition of schools as an invaluable starting point to understand their forms of organization and action, thus overcoming one of the main limits of SER. Indeed, the original definition of the concept is directly linked to the socio-economic and cultural status of students, assuming that schools' organizational practices and teachers' expectations cannot be understood without taking into account the students' characteristics. By way of example, the large body of research regarding ability-grouping practices in different school settings (Gamoran 2009; Halvorsen, Lee, and Andrade 2009; Van Houtte 2011) demonstrates that grouping practices are deeply mediated by the social origin of students and the effect of this social origin on the educability expectations of teachers.

Second, regarding the collective dimension of institutional habitus, this involves studying individual dispositions through its mediation by an institution's organizational practices (Burke, Emmerich, and Ingram 2013). Obviously, teachers at the individual level have their own views on many social and educational aspects that affect their daily practice. These views, however, are influenced, mediated and even constrained by the particular institution in which they work. Teachers do not act independently from their contexts of reference; on the contrary, they are embedded in particular institutional contexts that inevitably affect and condition them. In this respect, as with individual habitus (Bourdieu, 1990, 2002), institutional habitus involves a combination of agency and structure, of teachers and institutions. It is constituted from individual dispositions but goes beyond them; it is negotiated and reinvented in the daily practices of schools (Ingram 2009). Therefore, it does not entail homogenizing the entire teaching staff, as claimed by Atkinson (2011), but rather recognizing that the institutional context mediates the practices and perceptions of teachers individually, highlighting the shared elements that define school culture. As DiMaggio and Powell point out, "the concept of habitus offers a powerful means of linking micro- and macro-level processes in organization theory" (DiMaggio and Powell 1996, cited in Emirbayer & Johnson 2008, 4). Hence, institutional habitus should not be understood as a coherent or unitary entity, as conveyed in Lahire's critical observations. By all means, institutional habitus (just like individual habitus) are frequently affected by contradictions and internal ambiguity, allow for multiple and sometimes contradictory dispositions, and change and evolve when experiencing pressure or

conflict. In this respect, recognizing the role of the institution in mediating teachers' particular practices does not entail denying the potential conflicts and contradictions within them.

Third, with respect to the expressive and cultural aspects, the work undertaken by Reay, David, and Ball (2001) clearly shows that beyond *what* schools do, it is imperative to determine *how* and *why* they do it. This is not just a matter of observing whether schools are organized in one way or another, if they apply one or another educational perspective, but rather, above all, of exploring the logic and rationale behind the application thereof, the micro-dynamics by which these are configured and specified in different schools. By way of example, case studies in the field of higher education (Reay, David, and Ball 2001) show the effect of institutional elements such as prejudice, cultural bias, types of advice and guidance or different aspects of the hidden curriculum of each institution on the chances of success of students from different socio-economic and cultural statuses. As a matter of fact, this approach cannot be considered entirely new – in that it bears a resemblance to other research programmes, such as school culture theories or the institutional ethnography approach advanced by Smith (1990). The latter, for instance, is close to institutional habitus theorizations not only in the methodological tools that both approaches favour, but also in its recognition of the need to pay attention to the connection of people's everyday activities, experiences and social relations to the ruling forms of the social organization (DeVault and McCoy, 2006; Grahame and Grahame, 2001; Smith, 1990). Undertaking institutional ethnography enables researchers to analyze precisely the way in which institutional relations may structure teachers' practices in a particular local context. However, what is new and distinct in the work of Reay, David, and Ball (2001) is its capacity to shed light upon the *collective coherence* of the perceptions and dispositions of those agents involved in a given institution – which are not only affected by, but in fact constitute these institutional complexes.

In short, institutional habitus research involves inquiring into how schools, collectively, think, perceive and have an impact on their students. It implies asking about the shared beliefs of teachers from one institution as to the nature of students, education and the schools themselves. In sum, it means examining how schools are positioned in relation to their social context and how they respond to this background through a variety of organizational and pedagogical devices.

3. Methodology and systematization of the institutional habitus concept

In order to analyze the institutional habitus, a systematization of its key dimensions has been conducted, so as to allow greater specificity and visibility of the concept and, consequently, a

better application to the analysis of specific schools. Specifically, this article brings into play the three dimensions for the study of institutional habitus considered by Reay, David, and Ball (2001): the educational status, the organizational practices and the expressive order. The resulting analytical framework (see Table 1) draws upon a combination of the aforementioned theoretical elements and specific empiric inputs from the fieldwork. The analytical framework is therefore intended to be useful both for the specific national context of this article and for other national or school contexts.

The analysis developed in this article is based on the results of an ethnographic study¹ conducted in two lower secondary schools in the city of Barcelona². The two case studies selected are representative of two poles in the three key dimensions defining the institutional habitus. Indeed, as we will see in the following section, there is a sort of linearity between the three dimensions in each of the cases. However, it does not entail a normative gaze intended to identify 'good' or 'bad' habitus. It has an analytical rather than a normative justification. The two extreme cases should be understood as ideal types in the Weberian sense, useful to identify certain educational patterns present in different educational contexts, although with different levels, types and degrees.

4. An institutional habitus based on action and inclusion

Educational status: a preferred and popular school

School A is publicly owned and operated, medium-sized (almost 500 students including compulsory and post-compulsory secondary education), with a clear academic orientation: there are three groups per class year of compulsory secondary education and two groups per class year of upper (non-compulsory) secondary education (baccalaureate). The school enrolls mainly middle-class students, typically with one or both parents in liberal or upper white-collar professions and high cultural capital. This is specifically the kind of white middle-class families with political commitment regarding public schooling that were perfectly described in the research undertaken by Reay, Crozier, and James (2001). Conversely, students from poor households or suffering from social exclusion are the exception rather than the rule, while students from a migrant background coming from low-income households make up a relatively low share of the school population. See table 2 for the main characteristics of the school in terms of its social composition and the educational profile of its students.

With regard to the educational profile of the students, it is worth noting the good results obtained annually in the Catalan educational assessments, as well as the low levels of grade

repetition rates and, especially, of dropout. Indeed, more than 95% of the students obtain the certificate of compulsory education and most of them continue their educational pathway towards baccalaureate. The school staff does not hesitate to point out that there are two reasons for this educational profile. First, the social origin and the family habitus of most of their students have a high degree of synergy with the institutional habitus of the school. Second, the model for the management of pupil heterogeneity, as will be seen, which is known for preferring an inclusive model based on heterogeneous grouping, individualized attention and moderate use of grade repetition.

These elements are also of paramount importance to explain the high prestige the school enjoys in the catchment area, having high demand which year after year exceeds the number of places available.

Organizational practices: distributed leadership and the value of diversity

The first analytical element regarding school organizational practices relates to the very organization and relations among teachers who, in this school, are strongly committed to a model of distributed leadership. The school has several mechanisms contributing to this, and provides for several coordination spaces, such as meetings bringing together all the professionals teaching a given grade, and a strategy to ensure a mutual support structure. This situation is the result of deliberate and conscious work to redistribute power, aimed at ensuring the collaboration of all faculty members in the common objectives and adequate attention to students' individual needs. Indeed, the very philosophy of the school is based on the fact that the entire school staff is responsible for attending to the learning, social and emotional needs of the students, irrespective of their specific role in the school's management or teaching structure. By way of example, the school proclaims that 'all the staff is a student's mentor or tutor', this being a key feature that guides the current organization of the entire school.

Regarding the practices for the management of pupils' social and academic heterogeneity, the school is characterized by the application of mixed-ability grouping, combined with several mechanisms of academic support through individualized learning and tutoring. In addition, different curricular and methodological adaptations are made for students with learning difficulties, including the reorganization of subjects into more general thematic areas and the use of experimental learning methodologies. Especially interesting is the organization of an 'Open Classroom'³ in grades 9 and 10, targeted at those students who are struggling academically, have experienced a progressive disengagement from the school and who, because of their age, are at risk of dropping out. This schooling modality – targeting

around 12 students per year - allows the combination of regular courses in ordinary groups and participation in professionalizing activities and practical workshops outside the school, privileging a manipulative and practical type of learning through project work, organized as an integrated curriculum.

These mechanisms for the management of pupils' heterogeneity are articulated with a robust guidance and counselling strategy aiming to expand the educational horizons and possibilities of the entire student body. A major effort is made to ensure that all students achieve at least the certificate of compulsory education and then to ensure their educational continuity towards post-compulsory education. In this respect, there are different both formal and informal devices and protocols designed to assist the student in their educational transitions, such as regular individual and group counselling meetings, visits to post-compulsory schools, regular consultations with the educational administration and so on.

There are other schools that have a more straightforward policy and expel students that don't perform well. This is not our case: we try to retain all students, look for different alternatives by offering adequate counselling. This consists of suggesting and guiding students' different options according to their interests instead of getting rid of them (Pedagogical Coordinator, Grade 7, School A).

Therefore, at this point one should ask: what is the relation between the social composition of the school and this kind of organizational practices? Of course, having a student body that mostly shares the school's middle-class codes facilitates this kind of work. Specifically, as other research has already shown (Diamond, Randolph, and Spillane, 2004), the greater the social complexity of the school the more ability grouping practices are implemented. Indeed, the very meaning of the habitus, in our case the institutional habitus, refers to the impact of objective structural conditions on dispositions, practices and values. Thus, the social composition of a given school is a basic element to understand its organizational practices and expressive values. Nevertheless, this does not entail thinking about linearity or inevitability. Habitus can lead to contradictory positions, ambiguities and internal divisions (Bourdieu, 2000). Our hypothesis here is that the expressive order of schools, and specifically teacher expectations, is the crucial mediating element explaining the relation between social composition and organizational practices, specifically regarding the management of pupils' heterogeneity.

Expressive order: collective identity and teaching responsibility

At the expressive level, School A is characterized by its strong identity as a school. There is a

clear collective consciousness articulated in a widely shared discourse on the "ease" of working at the school and on the welfare of the faculty, evinced by practices such as groups of retired teachers involved in various activities within the school. Indeed, this strong sense of belonging to a "worthwhile" community explains the voluntarism (materialized in overtime work) on which the success of the school is partially based. Moreover, historically, the school has been involved in various experiences of the research-action type and has accumulated some "intellectual capital" - pedagogical skills, resources and shared knowledge resulting from a sustained effort of reflection on the education process.

When it comes to current goals, at least from the management and leadership positions, there is an active, zealous rhetoric in favour of combining good academic results with the desire not to leave anyone behind. Furthermore, while inside the school there are various ways to address students' social and academic heterogeneity, it seems that the binomial "excellence and social cohesion", which functions as the main school byword, has the ability to accommodate or reconcile these possible perspectives in tension. In addition to these shared goals, a high degree of solidarity is also observed: mutual support is the order of the day and seems to be an integral part of the faculty welfare at the school. As claimed by the school principal:

Here, problems are everyone's problems and successes are also hits for everyone. If a teacher has an issue, the head teacher, the principal and the rest of the team will deal with it. Here, you will never hear: "If you have a problem with your classroom, work it out yourself" (...) and I think this is one of our milestones. People feel much more supported here. They know that they are part of a team and that they will never feel alone (Principal, School A)

In line with the integrative will of the school, collectively there is a mainly positive view on students' social and academic heterogeneity, conceived in terms of 'educational value for all'. Moreover, the importance of giving everyone what his or her needs require is stressed in the teacher and management staff discourses. As a consequence of these conceptions, the logic for the management of pupils' heterogeneity is mainly articulated with a view to "making the best" of each student and achieving their full potential. The difficulties of some students with the regular or 'one-size-fits-all' schooling model are not interpreted in terms of deficit, but as a result of an overly rigid system that is unable to respond adequately to the wide variety of student profiles.

Our current educational system is like a shoemaker that only produces size-38 shoes because that's the standard. So, it is fantastic for whoever has size 38 as it fits in with the standard, but those who have a 40 or a 36 will have the wrong footwear for the rest

of their educational trajectory. Therefore, first we have to figure out the right size for each student - which would mean targeted policies - and, once the student has the right size, we see how far she/he gets and which path is more suitable for her/him. But, if you don't make sure they have the right size from the beginning, you will lose them half way through (...) our system is too academic and students need other types of schooling (Principal, School A)

In this regard, it should be noted that this vision is based on a conception of school success that goes beyond an academic perspective, and introduces elements such as equity, attachment and engagement as crucial elements to understand success. In this respect, there is clear awareness of the impact of social inequalities as key factors explaining educational failure or success. Consistent with this view, the school staff recognizes that much of its success stems from the particular social composition of the students with which they work, privileged as a result of an advantaged cultural background.

All students are different because there is nobody starting from scratch. We are all born in a particular historical period, in a certain country, in a specific family and I mean... there is no justice. When you are born your path is pretty much defined. It's very difficult to get out of it. They (the students) are the least able to change this situation (Coordinator, Grade 7, School A).

Despite recognition of the influence of the students' social background on the possibilities to succeed, the dominant discourse is clearly part of a logic that also places responsibility on the school itself towards the processes of educational failure and success. The leeway enjoyed by the school is recognized and a sense of teachers' responsibility for students' learning is shared by the staff. There is an explicit commitment to make the most of every student's potential, based on the assumption that there are no "hopeless cases" for which teachers do not have any responsibility.

Behind the desire to convey high expectations to students about their chances in the future and to serve everybody, there is a very positive image of students (regardless of school success) that emphasizes the potential of *all* students. Teachers speak about students in a respectful way, paralleled in their observations on their families, and attempt to understand rather than judge them. Furthermore, there is also concern about issues of an emotional order, and a clear desire for empathy: the importance of peer pressure in adolescence is recognized and there is an abundance of reflections aimed at "putting themselves in the adolescents' shoes".

We always think that intelligence only has an academic dimension, but this is false. If I

put myself in my students' shoes, honestly, I'm not sure I could stand spending so many hours at school. We need to put ourselves in the skin of our students and their families. A single meeting with parents is not enough. It is necessary to speak with them on various occasions. It is important to work with emotions, with empathy (Principal, School A).

In short, School A is characterized by an explicit confidence in the chances of success for all students, regardless of their family background. Importantly, such an approach does not lead to the shifting of responsibilities to families or pupils, but rather to a collective commitment to adapt the school dynamics to students' needs. The imperative to avoid the premature dropout of struggling students is regarded as professional responsibility assumed by most of the staff, which results in the widespread use of flexible learning schemes and an effort to promote students' engagement.

5. An institutional habitus based on expulsion and reaction

Educational status: the effects of school segregation

School B is also publicly owned, medium-sized (around 400 students) and, although historically it only offered vocational training, it currently has a wide range of courses, including two groups per class year of Compulsory Secondary Education, two groups of upper (non-compulsory) secondary education and different vocational education programmes. As regards the social composition, it is a school characterized by a high degree of social disadvantage. Indeed, although the neighbourhood comprises an important share of middle-class families, the school's high concentration of students in a situation of vulnerability and social risk reflects the important school segregation present in the territory. Specifically, School B enrolls a remarkably high percentage of students with special educational needs, students from a migrant background and newcomers to the educational system, or from low-income households. In the same vein, the school serves an important share of students in extreme situations – affected or threatened by eviction orders, living below the poverty line or in shelter homes. It is also a school with low levels of demand among families in the neighbourhood. There are always vacancies and, accordingly, it has a high mobility rate (24.5% in 2012/13, while the Catalan average was 5.7%). As a result of this low demand, the school assumes a notable percentage of immigrant students who arrive throughout the course in comparison with the rest of the schools in the territory. Although the school provides considerable resources to attend to these new students, this constant influx of students adds more complexity to the

school.

Regarding the educational profile of the school, it should be noted that the levels of absenteeism among students are especially dramatic, being notably higher at the end of the school year and especially among students enrolled on the last years of secondary education. On the other hand, the proportion of students passing Catalan educational assessments lies significantly below the Catalan average and that of schools with a similar social intake. In the same vein, promotion rates are also well below the Catalan average and referral centres, indicating that grade repetition is a highly recurrent practice (31% at Grade 9, while the Catalan average is 11%). The same trend applies to graduation and dropout rates. Indeed, dropout rates are surprisingly high in all the years and especially in the last two years of compulsory secondary education. Altogether, the data collected by the Catalan Educational Administration show that school B has low percentages of students enrolled in post-compulsory education and is characterized by having a high concentration of students with learning difficulties.

Organizational practices: fatigue, division and ability grouping

In relation to organizational practices, it should be noted that School B is compartmentalized between the teaching staff of the academic path (compulsory secondary and academic high school) and that of the vocational training. The management team consists of four members who have extensive experience in senior positions at the school and who say that they hope to be replaced as soon as possible in the leadership roles. In particular, the principal agrees that the majority of his time is focused on management tasks and that he hardly knows the students at the school.

As regards the type of relationship between the teachers, which structures organizational practices and ultimately forms the identity of the school, a type of balkanized school culture characterizes it, in the terms defined by Hargreaves (1994). This type of academic culture is characterized by the existence of different groups (linked to the various teaching departments) operating in isolation and maintaining their own criteria and concepts concerning educational practices. Another feature of the teaching staff of the school is the fact that there are a large number of teachers who, in the next two years, are going to retire. This fact seems to indicate a profound future change in the dynamics of the school, experienced with apprehension by the management team.

The main mechanism for the management of students' heterogeneity basically revolves around tracking on all secondary courses and for a total of five subjects that include core and optional subjects and account for half of the curriculum. While the management team claims

that it is a flexible grouping that theoretically enables the mobility of students from one group to another depending on the subject and the group, it also recognizes that actual mobility is very limited. Ability grouping is based on the grades of students but heavily influenced by teachers' expectations regarding students' education prospects. Thus, the so called "expansion group" is defined by the Director of Studies as the group of "those who make it to high school"; the "follow-up group" as "the group with more learning difficulties" that will surely attend vocational training; and the "reinforcement group" as "the group of unmotivated students" that will probably drop out. The main advantage of this system is the reduction of the student/teacher ratio. Indeed, although at the rhetorical level flexible groups are presented as advantageous for everyone since they allow more individual attention, some comments made by the management team and by teachers suggest that its utility lies in the "reduction of the pressure" on teachers (in some groups) and, especially, in the "isolation" or "confinement" of students with difficulties, which would force the pace to slow down, "harming" those students that are considered "normal".

With the topic of (ability) grouping there is much discussion; there are a lot of theories such as "poor kids, they are being labelled...". Well, I think it is better this way because a student that cannot multiply shouldn't be in the same classroom as one that can move on. I think that if you put them together the level will have to be lower and you never know whether the low-performing student will take advantage of this anyway (Tutor, Grade 7, School B)

Beyond tracking, the school does not address the students' social and academic heterogeneity in a global and thoughtful manner, but it is rather characterized by implementing palliative measures in a targeted and residual way, mainly aimed at students with severe learning difficulties or with special education needs. Furthermore, student heterogeneity within the school also seems to be managed by means of expulsion, filtration or referral. This is the dynamics that apparently lies behind the "reorientations" held in the last years of compulsory education. According to the management team, the only mechanism they have to manage the risk of dropping out is to "redirect" the students towards resources outside the school, mainly vocational training courses targeted at students over 16 without secondary qualifications. The school is thus overwhelmed and unable to provide an internal solution.

We have all kinds of measures and mechanisms that allow us to survive. As soon as these kids are 16 years old or almost that age, well... we've done what we could and we look for other external services, pre-labour programmes, etc. (Educational Psychologist, School B).

Thus, significant differences are identified between Schools A and B, both as regards the type of school identity and coordination mechanisms among teachers and as regards organizational practices and the approach to students' heterogeneity. As stated above, the high social complexity characterizing school B has an impact on this, but this impact is mediated by the expressive order of the school and specifically by a lack of confidence of the teaching staff regarding the 'educability' of their students (Agirdag, et al. 2013; Bonal and Tarabini 2014). Institutional habitus is thus a very useful analytical tool to understand this form of 'misrecognition' of working class and migrant students. It allows a school to be featured that fights against its own identity, that is unable to accept its own student body, at least as a form of 'false conscience'.

Expressive order: the logic of survival

As the title of this section indicates, the main logic explaining the expressive order of school B is survival. First of all, and regarding the logic behind the management of student heterogeneity, both the management team and the teachers say that their main goal is to manage the complexity of the school, always experienced as negative and in deficit terms in order to mitigate its impacts on the possibilities to conduct the 'teaching task'.

The level of psychological and academic problems that I've found here, I haven't seen it anywhere else (...) kids being diagnosed, with a high level of difficulties and others that, albeit not having been diagnosed, you cannot consider them as normal students. Normal in an academic sense I mean. Here, there is an accumulation of these problems; I think it is highly complex and this makes the job much more difficult because we are talking about very specific issues (Tutor, Grade 7, School B).

Indeed, a fatalist, deterministic, or at least resigned vision with respect to school success prevails in the school. It is considered that the school has little room for action given the composition of the student body and, generally, the educational expectations for their students are very low. The "unfortunate" social composition of the school is experienced as a kind of fatality that it is difficult to influence. As stated by the school psychologist, there is a "functional illiteracy which is exasperating and frightening", highlighting the low level with which many students arrive from elementary school. Also, the constant reference to "chronic school failure" made by various interviewees reveals a fatalistic logic.

In my opinion, one of our errors is to think that we can change the entire world from our school, that we can save the country, that we can fix everyone's house. I cannot work with my pupils in the school if their families work 25 hours a day in the opposite

direction. We cannot fight against such a thing (Tutor, Grade 8, School B).

As regards the factors attributed to school success and failure, they are mainly family-type issues, the migrant background of students and individual-type factors. Regarding the former, there are many references to "broken homes", referring to family composition (particularly single mothers), and the (lack of) involvement of families in the education of their children, as the main factors that explain the paths of educational failure among young people. In this respect, they tend to ignore the social and structural factors as explanatory variables in the educational failure and success processes. Regarding immigrant students, and especially newcomers to the educational system, it is claimed that there is an increased risk of failure linked to both language comprehension difficulties and, especially, to cultural distance (referring to issues of values and norms that affect behaviour). Together, they tend to omit and naturalize social inequality factors and to individualize school failure.

The students' learning difficulties are mainly explained by lack of commitment and motivation, family deficit and mental health issues. Indeed, strikingly, educational problems are constantly attributed to alleged psychiatric problems, a fact that generates a "pathologization" of the risk of dropout (Tarabini, 2015).

Some students with behavioural problems also conceal mental problems, school phobias, depressions, Asperger, psychosis (...) these are students that suddenly refuse to come to school because they feel incapable; it's beyond their strength, they can't even cross the front door (Head of Teachers, School B).

Finally, and as a result of the above, there is widespread scepticism about the capacity that teachers have to influence student failure. Overall, this is a school that considers itself overwhelmed by the high social and educational complexity of its students and, therefore, tends to "resign itself" and consider that it is difficult to revert the current dynamics of failure and dropout: "Too much is asked from us and we do what we can" (Director of Studies, School B). Accordingly, it focuses on managing conflict and concentrating on those students with certain possibilities of success. Ultimately, the role of the school appears to be that of managing a manifest lack of connection between a good part of the students (and their families) and the school itself.

6. Conclusions

The analysis conducted on the two case studies selected enables us to reach two main conclusions. First, the analysis shows the usefulness of the institutional habitus concept to

study the role of schools, particularly of school culture, in providing educational opportunities. As noted earlier in this article, institutional habitus allows for a deeper analysis of schools from a collective perspective, exploring the articulation of agency (teachers) and structure (educational institutions) in the generation of a distinct *ethos* specific to different schools. Likewise, the concept allows the focus of analysis to be placed in those areas often relegated to second place: those of a cultural or expressive nature. Thus, through institutional habitus, teachers' expectations take on a central role to understand school culture. From this perspective, as has been argued, it is not only about knowing what schools do, but also about exploring why and how they do it; what foundations are concealed under their *modus operandi* and what their intervention logic is. Thus, the concept of institutional habitus is a crucial advance in the study of teachers' expectations, which have often been studied from a purely individual perspective. Institutional habitus, as noted by Diamond, Randolph, and Spillane (2004), allows an analysis of teacher expectations in an intrinsically group manner, which is therefore inseparable from the specific characteristics (organizational and social composition) of the schools in which they are produced and reproduced.

Moreover, introducing the perspective of the institutional habitus entails an assumption that it is not possible to understand either the organizational practices of the schools or their expressive other without taking into account their social composition. As demonstrated during the analysis of the two case studies, the school organization practices, values and norms are built upon the social and academic features of their students. This does not mean that the same social composition always generates the same school practices, perceptions and predispositions. Like the individual habitus, the institutional habitus can lead to different positions. Its capacity relies on introducing a theoretical and methodological perspective through which it is not possible to think of educational practices, policies and reforms in a decontextualized way.

Second, the analysis shows the differences generated by the institutional habitus of schools in terms of educational opportunities for students. While this article does not include the perspective of students, there is no doubt that the schools studied generate a framework of widely different and unequal opportunities to ensure the educational success of students. Therefore, centres like School A, with a much more comprehensive, thoughtful and shared model to manage pupils' heterogeneity than School B, generate, *a priori*, more opportunities to prevent and avert the risks of failure and dropout. Similarly, centres like School A, characterized by the constant training of its professionals, educational reform and innovation practices in their intervention models, promote a type of expectation among their faculty members that is less biased by the social origin of students and more aware of the role played by the school itself in the pursuit of educational success. Without a doubt, when teachers'

expectations are less influenced by *clichés* and stereotypes, when the weight of structural factors in the educational path of the young is taken into account, when deficits or lack of effort are not considered to be the main explanation of school failure, there are more opportunities for school engagement.

At this point, it is also crucial to mention the effect of the social composition on the educational results of both schools. Indeed, the differences between the two cases studied in terms of academic achievement, grade promotion or dropout rates are not only the consequence of their very different models to conceive and manage students' heterogeneity but also of the impact of their social intake. Indeed, the high inequality of the schools analyzed, in terms of social composition, shows the effects generated by the dynamics of school segregation in the day-to-day life of schools and highlights the importance of strengthening those educational policies that are aimed at generating a more balanced social composition in the various schools of a territory. If one wants to increase the chances of success for all young people and to make significant advances in terms of equity and social justice, preventive structural measures designed with this in mind are imperative.

References

- Atkinson, Will. 2011, "From Sociological Fictions to Social Fictions: Some Bourdieusian Reflections on the Concepts of 'Institutional Habitus' and 'Family Habitus'." *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 32 (3): 331-347, doi: 10.1080/01425692.2011.559337
- Bonal, Xavier, Tarabini, Aina. 2014. "Being poor at school: exploring conditions of educability in the favela". *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 37 (2): 212-229
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 2002. "Habitus." In *Habitus: A Sense of Place*, edited by Jean Hillier and Emma Rooksby, 27-34. Aldershot: Ashgate
- Bourdieu, Pierre, and Loïc J.D. Wacquant. 1992. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Burke, Ciaran Thomas, Nathan Emmerich, and Nicola Ingram. 2013. "Well-founded Social Fictions: a Defence of the Concepts of Institutional and Familial Habitus." *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 34 (2): 165-182. doi: 10.1080/01425692.2012.746263
- DeVault, Marjorie L., and Liza McCoy. 2006. "Institutional Ethnography: Using Interviews to Investigate Ruling Relations." In *Institutional Ethnography as Practice*, edited by Dorothy E. Smith, 15-44. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Diamond, John B, Antonia Randolph, and James P. Spillane. 2004. "Teachers' Expectations and Sense of Responsibility for Student Learning: The Importance of Race, Class, and Organizational Habitus." *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 35 (1): 75-98. doi: 10.1525/aeq.2004.35.1.75
- Dupriez, Vincent, Xavier Dumay, and Anne Vause. 2008. "How Do School Systems Manage Pupils' Heterogeneity?" *Comparative Education Review* 52 (2): 245-273.

doi: 10.1086/528764

- Emirbayer, Mustafa, and Victoria Johnson. 2008. "Bourdieu and organizational analysis". *Theory and Society* 37: 1-44.
- Fernández Enguita, Mariano. 1987. *Reforma educativa, desigualdad social e inercia institucional. La enseñanza secundaria en España*. Barcelona: Laia.
- Fernández Enguita, Mariano, and Henry M. Levin. 1989. "Las reformas comprensivas en Europa y las nuevas formas de desigualdad educativa" *Revista de Educación*, 289: 49-64.
- Gamoran, Adam. 2009. *Tracking and Inequality: New Directions for Research and Practice* (Wisconsin Center for Education Research Working Paper No. 2009-6). Available at: files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED506617.pdf
- Halvorsen, Anne-Lise, Valerie E. Lee, and Fernando H. Andrade, 2009. "A Mixed-method Study of Teachers' Attitudes about Teaching in Urban and Low-income Schools". *Urban Education* 44 (2): 181-224. doi: 10.1177/0042085908318696
- Hargreaves, Andy. 1994. *Changing teachers, changing times*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Ingram, Nicola. 2009. "Working class Boys, Educational Success and the Misrecognition of Working class Culture." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 30 (4): 421-434. doi: 10.1080/01425690902954604
- Lahire, Bernard. 2003. "From the habitus to an individual heritage of dispositions Towards a sociology at the level of the individual". *Poetics* 31: 329-355.
- McDonough, Patricia. 1996. *Choosing Colleges: How Social Class and School Structure Opportunity*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- NESSE (Network of experts in social sciences of education and training). 2009. *Early School Leaving. Lessons from Research for Policy Makers*. Brussels: European Commission Directorate General for Education and Culture. Available at: <https://www.spd.dcu.ie/site/edc/documents/nesse2010early-school-leaving-report.pdf>
- Reay, Diane. 1998. " 'Always Knowing' and 'Never Being Sure': Familial and Institutional Habituses and Higher Education Choice." *Journal of Education Policy* 13 (4): 519-529.
- Reay, Diane, Gill Crozier, and David James. 2001. *White Middle Class Identities and Urban Schooling*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Reay, Diane, Miriam David, and Stephen Ball. 2001. "Making a Difference?: Institutional Habituses and Higher Education Choice." *Sociological Research Online* 5 (4): 126-142. doi: 10.5153/sro.548
- Smith, Dorothy E. 1990. *Texts, facts and femininity: Exploring the relations of ruling*. London: Routledge.
- Tarabini, Aina. 2015. "La meritocracia en la mente del profesorado: un análisis de los discursos docentes en relación al éxito, fracaso y abandono escolar". *RASE, Revista de la Asociación de Sociología de la Educación* 8 (3): 349-360.
- Thrupp, Martin. 2001. "Sociological and Political Concerns about School Effectiveness Research: Time for a New Research Agenda." *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 12 (1): 7-40. doi: 10.1076/sesi.12.1.7.3459
- Van Houtte, Mieke. 2011. "So Where's the Teacher in School Effects Research?: The Impact of Teacher's Beliefs, Culture, and Behavior on Equity and Excellence in Education." In

Equity and Excellence in Education: Towards Maximal Learning Opportunities for All Students, edited by Kris Van den Branden, Piet Van Avermaet, and Mieke Van Houtte, 75-95. New York: Routledge.

Van Houtte, Mieke, and Dimitri Van Maele. 2011. "The Black Box Revelation: In Search of Conceptual Clarity Regarding Climate and Culture in School Effectiveness Research." *Oxford Review of Education* 37 (4): 505-524. doi: 10.1080/03054985.2011.595552

Van Zanten, Agnès 2012. "A good match: Appraising worth and estimating quality in school choice." In *Constructing Quality. The Classification of Goods in the Economy*, edited by Jens Beckert J. and Christine Musselin Oxford: Oxford University Press

Institutional habitus in context: implementation, development and impacts in two compulsory secondary schools in Barcelona

Table 1. Analytical framework

Educational Status	Educational provider (public / private)	
	Type of offer (Academic/Vet - Optional subjects)	
	Social and ethnic composition	
	Level of demand	
	Educational profile (retention, performance, graduation, etc.)	
Organisational practises	Among teaching staff	Internal distribution of roles and power
		Openness to the community
		In service for teachers
		Coordination mechanisms
	Management of pupil's heterogeneity	Devices to manage pupil's heterogeneity
		Curricular and methodological organisation
Expressive order	Among teacher staff	Guidance and counselling
		School identity
		Shared goals and beliefs
	Conception of pupil's heterogeneity	Conceptions of the teachers' roles and functions
		Meanings and implications of pupil's heterogeneity
	Conceptions of educational failure and success	Ontology behind the management of heterogeneity – theoretical foundations and normative beliefs.
		Definition of school success
		Factors attributed to educational failure and success
		Perception of the role of teachers in failure and success
		Confidence and respect towards students

Source: authors

	Centre A	Centre B	Catalan average
Percentage of students with special education needs (motor, sensorial, physical or psychical disorders) - 2011/12 academic year	3,73	5,10	3,47
Percentage of students with specific education needs in terms of economic disadvantage - 2011/12 academic year	5,17	7,40	7,30
Percentage of nearly arrived students (2 years at most enrolled in the Catalan education system).	3,26	10,45	2,40
Percentage of foreign students (nationality other than Spanish)	16,84	30,91	14,14
Grade promotion rates – students in Grade 9	92,63	77,79	89,75
Completion rates	96,39	88,64	87,63
Percentage of students in Grade 10 passing diagnostic tests (maths) - 2011/12 academic year	72,22	52,83	68,04
Dropout rate – Grade 10 CSE	2,4	6,38	2,07

Table 2: School indicators: social composition and education profile.

(2013/14 academic year, unless stated otherwise)

Notes

¹ The field work was conducted during the 2014/15 school year and took into consideration different sources of information, including semi-structured interviews with teaching staff, focus groups, non-participant observation in school board sessions and other staff meetings, and documentation produced by schools (pedagogical and management projects, school websites, etc).

² Lower secondary education in Spain includes grades 7 to 10 and is compulsory up to the age of 16.

³ Secondary schools in Catalonia can organize smaller groups of 10-15 students in grades 9 and 10 called “Open Classrooms”. In these groups, teachers offer a diversified curricular content, pedagogical methodologies and evaluation criteria for students with learning difficulties and/or low motivation with schooling.