



School beyond stratification: Internal goods, alienation, and an expanded sociology of education

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Abstract

Sociologists of education often emphasize goods that result from a practice (external goods) rather than goods intrinsic to a practice (internal goods). The authors draw from John Dewey and Alasdair MacIntyre to describe how the same practice can be understood as producing “skills” that center external goods or as producing habits (Dewey) or virtues (MacIntyre), both of which center internal goods. The authors situate these concepts within sociology of education’s stratification paradigm and a renewed interest in the concept of alienation, contrasting the concepts of skills, habits, and virtues to capital, credentials, and habitus. They close by connecting the argument to broader critiques of procedural liberalism and the ideology of meritocracy, then giving suggestions for an expanded sociology of education beyond the stratification paradigm.

Keywords Alienation · External and internal goods · Habits · Sociology of education · Skills · Virtues

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The stratification paradigm in the sociology of education¹

When sociologists of education study the experience of schooling, they often do so as a means of understanding later outcomes rather than as a means of studying schooling in itself. In their recent content analysis of *Sociology of Education* and education-related articles in *American Journal of Sociology*, *American Sociological Review*, and *Annual Review of Sociology*, Mehta and Davies found that “reproduction and its mechanisms became the orienting question for the field; both quantitative and qualitative work has elaborated and further specified these patterns and the mechanisms which sustain them” (Mehta & Davies, 2018: 8). While they acknowledge certain smaller discussions within the sociology of education (see also Hout, 2012), these side-conversations tend to exist outside of the widely understood paradigm.

Yet by centering stratified outcomes of schooling, sociologists of education can inadvertently miss much that happens in schools, or else notice what happens in schools not as an important problem in itself but as a mechanism to explain stratified outcomes. To be clear, this has not always been the case, neither in the broader study of education nor in the sociology of education itself (Guhin, 2021a). Interest in the social, cultural, and moral lives of schools goes back to the very beginning of the sociology of education, especially in the work of Durkheim (1973) and DuBois (Westbrook, 2014). These commitments were continued in different ways by, among others, Parsons (1959), Coleman (1961), and Thorne (1993). Yet, as Mehta and Davies note, the primary area of interest has narrowed to what Labaree (1999) has called the “social mobility approach,” emphasizing questions about how schools operate to either amplify or reduce the stratification of socio-economic outcomes.

Mehta and Davies also note that there has been “scant new theorizing” in the sociology of education since the heyday of the 1970’s, which saw the still influential theories of Bowles and Gintis (1976), Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), Meyer (1977), and Collins (1979). We largely agree with this description of theory in the sociology of education, though we would emphasize that theory has not so much vanished as it has shifted from sweeping questions about the nature of schooling to the testing, development, and refutation of more local theories about various mechanisms of inequality and stratification, including, among many others, oppositional culture (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Carter, 2005; Downey, 2008; Tyson et al., 2005), tracking (Bourdieu, 1996; Ferrare, 2013; Gamoran & Mare, 1989; Holm et al., 2013), summer learning (Alexander, 2007; Dewey, 2005), parental involvement (Domina, 2005, Lareau, 2011, McNeal, 1999),

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cumulative advantage (DiPrete & Eirich, 2006), neighborhood effects (Owens, 2010; Sampson et al., 2002; Wodtke et al., 2011), peer networks (Horvat & Lewis, 2003; Ream & Rumberger, 2008), and opportunity hoarding (Hanselman & Fiel, 2017, Hamilton et al., 2018, Lewis-McCoy 2014). Implicit within these different theories is an overarching commitment to the study of schools as a means of understanding, explaining, and potentially remedying stratification (Downey and Condron 2016, Raudenbush and Eschmann 2015).

Such commitments remain as important as ever, both as projects to understand the social world and as efforts, potentially, to improve it. Yet surely there are sociological questions about schools that are not about unequal socio-economic outcomes. To be clear, these questions might still be about power and inequality without being (at least directly) about schools' roles in socio-economic stratification. For example, a high school student might receive exclusively abstinence-only education at public schools (Doan & Williams, 2008). This might or might not have effects on socio-economic outcomes, but there are other sociological elements of the student's life such education would affect, and power and inequality are certainly related to these processes.

While they are in the minority, certain sociologists of education have pushed against the SES outcomes paradigm, asking questions about civic and political participation (Binder, 2009; Brand, 2010; Reyes, 2018), artistic expression (Fine, 2018), emotion (Tichavakunda, 2021), organizational forms (Hallett, 2010), culture (Stevens, 2009), religion (Guhin, 2021b), the state (Mayrl, 2016; Mehta, 2015), friendship (Frank et al., 2013), and suicide (Abrutyn & Mueller, 2014). Even in these cases, however, authors have often been pushed to account for their works' relevance to questions of socio-economic inequality.²

However, there is another reason to be concerned about sociologists' stratification paradigm and the concomitant focus on external rather than internal goods. There is a risk, however unintended, that centering questions of unequal outcomes in the sociology of education can inadvertently center schools as the primary means of *solving* unequal outcomes (Guhin, 2021a). In other words, to the extent that sociologists center what schooling produces rather than the experience of schooling itself, they run the risk of reifying schooling as an engine of meritocratic achievement rather than as a space for growth, joy, and other positive experiences unrelated to later outcomes. To be clear, we are not suggesting that sociologists of education and others who study schools should abandon more radical critiques and descriptions of inequality. Indeed, our argument is precisely the opposite: that centering schooling as the *primary means of solving inequality* (rather than one means of studying inequality) can strengthen "the tyranny of merit" (Sandel, 2020) and what Drake and

² See Mehta and Davies (2018) for an impressive mapping of both dominant and minor themes in the contemporary sociology of education, as well as an overview of new directions in the subfield. There is also a notable difference between sociological articles about schools, which tend to be much more focused on stratification, and sociological books about schools, which even if still generally about unequal socio-economic outcomes, do manifest a broader range of interests.

Guhin (2021) call “the achievement ideology,” potentially obfuscating more radical means of redistribution and reparation.

Additionally, focusing on the external goods of schooling can lead to deep feelings of alienation within schools. In what follows, we discuss how a focus on alienation necessitates a close examination of the difference between internal goods and external goods, a difference we interrogate through articulating three helpful ways to distinguish the capacities that schools can develop: skills, virtues, and habits. We show how the same practice can be experienced and developed towards either a skill, a virtue, or a habit, and that these differences have important stakes in how students themselves experience and understand the practices they develop in their education: do these practices elicit virtues or habits that brings goods in and of themselves, or do these practices simply elicit skills that will be useful to gain a certain status or income but are not themselves meaningful?

We suggest a focus on students’ practices that divides how these practices are experienced between skills, habits, and virtues, each a different way of thinking about practices that captures how students experience their own connection to practices. In what follows, we first outline what we mean by skills, habits, and virtues, illustrating how each of these practices interacts with power and processes of alienation. We then differentiate our comparison of skills, habits, and virtues from a long-standing distinction between capital and credentials, continually returning to the work of Pierre Bourdieu. We argue that while capital and even credentials might be experienced as internal goods, they also might not, as there is always a possibility that students feel alienated from their practices. After that, we provide a case study for our project by using examples from studies of peer cultures. In our conclusion, we suggest procedural liberalism as one potential cause and the reification of the achievement ideology as one potential result of the focus on external goods in education, closing with recommendations for how other sociologists could build upon the theory we develop here.

Skills, virtues, and habits

In this section, we describe how MacIntyre and Dewey distinguish between goods internal to a practice and goods external to a practice, as well as how they distinguish “skills” (results of practices that emphasize external goods) from what MacIntyre calls virtues and what Dewey calls habits. Virtues and habits both emphasize internal goods, but not in the same way: virtues emphasize how practices relate to a broader conception of the good life, while habits emphasize how the goods of practices can be experienced as growth while empowering further growth.

As we here define them, skills, virtues, and habits are all the results of practices (Bourdieu, 1990; Schatzki, 1996; Turner, 1994). As we will describe more below, the same practice can produce either a skill, habit, or virtue, an internal good or an external good. Yet while virtues and habits help practitioners to identify, appreciate, and cultivate internal goods, that is, the goods internal to a practice, skills only aid in the development of external goods, that, is the goods one gains from accomplishing a practice. As such, while examining the development of skills can

help to explain changes in socio-economic status between generations, such a focus can obfuscate the experience of alienation felt by students, especially if those skills are felt as necessary impositions for success rather than meaningful means through which people can interact with the world. In other words, it might well be the case that students need to improve their capacity at certain practices in order to gain a certain role or status in society after they finish their education. But how is that practice experienced? Is it only good for the status or something else it might provide, or is it good in and of itself?

As MacIntyre, pulling from Aristotle, defines the term, an external good is some benefit you gain from a practice that is not intrinsic to the practice.³ For example, you might make money from playing basketball, but that money is not intrinsic to the playing of basketball as you might have made the money some other way. In contrast, the joy of mastering a certain game and executing it well (even if not perfectly) is such an internal good (MacIntyre, 1984: 188, 274). While there are longstanding philosophical debates about the nature of internal goods and intrinsic value, these can largely be bracketed here as we suggest a sociological adaptation of the concept of internal good. In other words, philosophers have debated whether there is a “real” (Abend, 2008) and ontological rooting of the “goodness” of a certain practice, but, as sociologists, we can simply emphasize the socially constituted *experience* of a certain practice as either alienating or what sociologist Hartmut Rosa would call “resonant” (Rosa, 2019). Is a practice experienced and narrated as meaningful in and of itself, or is merely useful to get something else?

Following Rosa’s recent work on alienation and resonance, one of the most important differences between internal and external goods is their relationship not only to the practices themselves but to the person doing the practices. If a given practice is developed merely as a means of gaining a skill (i.e., for the achievement of an external good), then it may be experienced by the person engaging in that practice as an alienating imposition (Seeman, 1959: 790). If a given practice is developed as a habit or virtue, then it may be experienced not as alienating but as a coherent and life-giving element of human life. Alienation (Dean, 1961; Jaeggi, 2014) is therefore a central element of any distinction between kinds of goods.

³ The distinction between internal good and external good comes ultimately via Aristotle, especially his *Nicomachean Ethics* (see Smith, 1999). The distinction is similar to, though ultimately distinct from, Weber’s distinction between value and instrumental rationality (Weber, 1978). Sociologists of organizations and states have developed arguments contrasting “substantive values” and “substantive rationality” with an “instrumental logic” in which something is not an end in itself but “a means for obtaining some other goal” (Espeland, 1998: 40). In many ways, this tension between substantive rationality and instrumental rationality (Brubaker, 2013) parallels the distinction between internal and external goods we have been drawing on here, though with important differences. Most obviously, internal goods are not *reasons*, and neither are, they, exactly, *rationality*: Weber is notoriously mercurial in his definitions and usages of terms like rationality (Kalberg, 1980), but while substantive rationality is ultimately linked to a way of making sense of the world, internal goods are ultimately linked to particular practices and their relationship to a community and an individual’s phenomenological experience. That linkage to practice is especially important, because it gives internal good a relative purchase outside of particular value spheres (Weber, 1958: 323–359), at least in the more expansive sense of Deweyan habits.

Internal goods in this sense are best understood as a tripartite structure with links between a person's phenomenological experience, the accomplishment of the practice in question, and a personal good gained from that practice.⁴

For both Dewey and MacIntyre, recognizing these goods requires a community with a tradition into which young practitioners can be initiated. As MacIntyre argues, the rules of practices can obviously change within a community, “but nonetheless we cannot be initiated into a practice without accepting the authority of the best standards realized so far” (MacIntyre, 1984: 190). Internal goods, at least as we are applying these authors' work, are therefore sociological processes phenomenologically related to practices, making them distinct from a psychological focus on “intrinsic motivation” in studies of schooling (Deci et al., 2001) or a philosophical study of the ontological rooting of intrinsic value (Taylor, 2003). The tradition is learned early and to some extent forced upon practitioners who can only later recognize the internal goods of the practice of what they are doing. For example, novices do not necessarily immediately find meaning when playing the piano; they only know they will be rewarded if they practice and potentially punished if they do not.

Skills

Now that we have established how internal goods are necessarily related to practices and the social interpretation of those practices, we can move into how those internal goods are distinguished from external goods. For both MacIntyre and Dewey, practices which produce external goods can develop into “skills.” In contrast, practices that produce internal goods can develop, respectively, into virtues and habits. We will describe the difference between virtues and habits later, but for now we will examine what MacIntyre and Dewey mean by skills.

Both authors describe skills as static and unreflective and, more importantly, unconnected to a greater sense of meaningful life or community. Skills might help you accomplish a task, but in an alienated way similar to Marx's description of workers' alienation from their own labor (Marx, 1978: 72, Ollman, 1976). Recent studies of alienation likewise describe how people in various elements of their lives feel a sense of disconnect from their required tasks or roles, even if they are sometimes quite talented at accomplishing them (Rosa, 2019; Jaeggi, 2014).

Similarly, Hascher and Hadjar's helpful synthesis of recent research on school alienation shows the degree to which students can experience schooling as an alien imposition, though in ways not quite the same as what we are describing as skills (Hascher & Hadjar, 2018). As we define skills, students might well be able to achieve certain tasks through getting better at them; the students simply will not feel a meaningful sense of connection while doing so. In their summary of existing literature, Hascher and Hadjar argue that school alienation “is characterized by limited bonding to school, a low level of identification with school and learning, and an affective detachment from academics goals and values” (Hascher & Hadjar, 2018:

⁴ The question of education's relationships to public goods (Labaree, 1999) is an important one, though separate from the questions examined here.

176). Yet, as we describe the experience of “skills,” alienation can also be characterized by the student who does well in school only because she knows she must do so rather than because it is a meaningful experience she seeks out and enjoys, something which might (but does not necessarily) link to the first and second of these three characteristics, but not really the third (Dhingra, 2020; Demerath, 2009; Lampert, 2013).

Hascher and Hadjar go on to define school alienation as a “specific set of negative attitudes towards social and academic domains of schooling comprising cognitive and affective elements” (Hascher & Hadjar, 2018: 179) building their own conceptual model that separates school alienation into three domains: learning, teachers, and classmates, arguing for the utility of distinguishing between alienation from any one or combination of these three domains. In contrast, our goal in this paper is not a general theory of how alienation works in schools (or even more broadly) but rather an argument about how an ongoing focus on schools as mechanisms of inequality and achievement can miss the difference between internal and external goods and potentially lead to a form of alienation from any of the three domains Hascher and Hadjar describe: learning and teachers and possibly classmates as well.⁵

The scholarly study of students’ skills can therefore be ambivalent. To have a skill is to have a capacity often regarded as the goals of education: for example, one might be able to touch type, do math problems, or write a critical essay. Yet, as we are defining the term, a skill is experienced *by the practitioners themselves* purely for its instrumental value, as a means of gaining resources or pleasing certain important others. Skills are marked by a lack of sustaining feelings of meaning and connection; they are what Hartmut Rosa (2019) would call alienating rather than resonant. As such, the same practice (for example, solving a geometric proof) could be experienced as either a skill, a necessary hoop through which a student must jump, or as a habit or virtue with a good contained within itself.

This is also the key distinction between an external good and an extrinsic motivation: while the question of motivation examines the reasoning for learning or undertaking a practice, the question of good examines the broader and sociologically constituted experience of the practice. As such it is entirely possible that someone might have an extrinsic motivation for first engaging in a practice but then experience the practice’s internal goods upon becoming more capable. This is exactly how John Dewey describes certain forms of learning, especially artistic practice, which begins as a mechanical repetition, but eventually merges with feeling and creativity to become an “instrument of the mind” (Dewey, 2002: 71). Dewey describes a similar process in education, in which “some stimulus” is necessary to get children started at a task though eventually “the child should gradually grow out of this relatively external motive into an appreciation, for its own sake, of the social value of

⁵ In this sense, we see our work as building on Hascher and Hadjar’s call “to discover more about the processes that underlie the harmful effects of alienation in ways that take into account more precisely the specific contribution of the educational context to the development of [school alienation] (Hascher & Hadjar, 2018:184). We also see our work as a more sociological grounding and counterpoint to Hascher and Hadjar’s more psychological focus.

what he [sic] has to do, because of its larger relation to life ...” (1909: 23). Note how Dewey uses the word motivation but also the word value to demonstrate the ongoing experience of the practice itself rather than simply its reason or justification.

In both *Democracy and Education* and *Experience and Education*, Dewey seems to view skills, or at least skills education, as relatively ossified and alienating, similar to the critiques of reification in recent critical theoretical studies of alienation (Honneth, 2008). Dewey opposes skills to habits, which, for him, are the basis of all human actions and the means through which people reflect upon themselves and their lives (Dewey, 1963: 91, Dewey, 1997: 19–20). Similarly, for MacIntyre, a skill is marked by successful completion of a particular practice while a virtue is marked by linking the successful completion of that practice to a much broader sense of the good life (MacIntyre, 1984: 273).

In this sense, what we mean by skills is very different from what labor scholars like Richard Sennett refer to as skills (Sennett, 2008), which has more in common with Dewey’s sense of habits, a distinction which Dewey would no doubt agree with: “whether it concerns the cook, musician, carpenter, citizen or statesman, the intelligent or artistic habit is the desirable thing, and the routine the undesirable thing” (Dewey, 2002: 72). However, in academic discussions of labor and education, the terms skills and skills education do not often have this expansive sense, a distinction Sennett himself admits (Sennett, 2008: 10). Instead, skills usually refer to those practices that achieve desired ends, ends which will then meet with certain external goods in a market. Whether those skills are reflexive or related to a broader sense of self is of only secondary importance and can usually be bracketed as part of a study of whether X skill is correlated with Y socio-economic outcome.

Yet it is important to note that practitioners make such brackets themselves as well, bracketing whether they enjoy or find meaning in the successful completion of a practice. Many students and teachers instead focus on what said practice will provide, whether that be a financial reward or an educational credential. This disconnect between the experience of the practice and the good of the practice is why skills are best understood as unrelated to internal goods and (at least potentially) alienating.⁶

Virtues and habits

Now that we have described skills as related to external goods and alienation, we can better elaborate on virtues and habits, their relation to internal goods, and the difference between them. MacIntyre links his concept of virtue to this distinction between kinds of goods, and he sees virtues as developing in three stages:

a first which concerns virtues as qualities necessary to achieve the goods internal to practices; a second which consider them as qualities contributing to the

⁶ It is a separate question whether such *academic and policy-making* bracketing of practices and internal goods has any causal relationship to practitioners’ own experience of alienation, and while there is insufficient space to explore this provocative question here, we will return to it in the conclusion.

goods of a whole life; and a third which relates them to the pursuit of a goods for a human being the conception of which can only be elaborated and possessed within an ongoing social tradition (MacIntyre, 1984: 273).

There are a few important points here. First, for MacIntyre, virtues are always related to what has elsewhere been called “virtue ethics,” driven by a commitment to Aristotelean ethics and the Aristotelean question of “what is the best kind of life for a human like me to lead?” (MacIntyre, 1984: 275). As a result, virtues are necessarily habituated and practiced even as they are, at the same time, qualities of people and even communities that can help to evaluate the success or failure of those practices.

Such an understanding of virtue is at least potentially relativistic, as MacIntyre himself acknowledges (MacIntyre, 1999; MacIntyre, 1988), and is therefore quite different from certain efforts to “educate for virtues” or “return to virtues” that assume a Platonic or Natural Law mooring for moral behavior (Lickona, 2004). Different cultures will have radically different, often incommensurable virtues: In MacIntyre’s example, the virtues of Homeric Greece are radically different than the virtues of early Christianity (MacIntyre, 1981). Such perspectivalism fits well into a broadly Durkheimian (Durkheim, 1995; Durkheim, 1973) understanding of how moral life has real effects in particular social contexts but cannot be said to exist outside of human awareness, or, at best, that we can only be agnostic about such morally realist claims (Abend, 2008).

Virtues in this sense are not quite the same as norms (Horne & Mollborn, 2020) or values (Martin & Lembo, 2020), both terms which have produced ongoing debates about their definition and conceptual utility. As we refer to virtues here, we do not mean a normative commitment that motivates action across situations, similar to how some might interpret Parsons on values, and neither do we mean a broad normative evaluation shared across a social group that helps actors form and adjudicate evaluations, as some might understand norms.

Instead, echoing Winchester and Guhin’s work on “normative frames,” (Winchester & Guhin, 2019) by virtues we refer to the specific and often intentional after-effect of certain practices, such as a person becoming kinder or more thoughtful, more mathematically talented or musically adept. As we adapt the concept of virtues from MacIntyre, we suggest that “virtues’ need not be exclusively contained within the moral domain and in many ways parallels the concept of a skill, that is, a cognitive, embodied capacity to accomplish a practice successfully, whether that be the practice of kindness or the practice of reading and interpreting a text. The difference is that virtues not only reveal the goods of the practices as such; they also reveal how a certain kind of moral vision becomes easier to experience and accomplish, a process somewhat similar to what Foucault and Foucault-inspired scholars have described as “technologies of the self” (Foucault, 1988; Mahmood, 2011; Besley, 2005). As Guhin (2021b) recounts in his study of Muslim schools, students at these schools come to experience the practice of prayer, or *salah*, as not only a good in itself but also as connected to the entirety of Islam, a “way of life” that both engenders and requires particular virtues. To the extent such practices have produced skills, then these students would have the capacity (or skill) to do what is required

of salah and to know whatever had to be said about the practices. Yet these students would not feel either the meaningfulness of the action nor its broader connection to the rest of their tradition, something that is made possible when practices produce *virtues* rather than skills.⁷

While MacIntyre emphasizes virtues as a way to recognize internal goods, Dewey emphasizes habits. Dewey uses the word habits often and sometimes in seemingly contradictory ways, but he often returns to the concept of habit as a “dynamic force” (Dewey, 2002: 43), continually linked to reflexivity and self-improvement. Unlike “those who wish a monopoly of social power [who] find desirable the separation of habit and thought,” Dewey calls for a “flexible, sensitive habit [that] grows more varied, more adaptable by practice and use” (Dewey, 2002: 72). These habits matter for much the same reason they matter for MacIntyre’s virtues, in that they allow for a full and meaningful life that is more than the sum of its accrued external goods. Habits in Dewey’s sense enliven the practitioner, making possible a continued capacity for reflexivity, growth, and engagement with fellow humans.

Dewey’s focus on habits here is less focused on a particular moral community than is MacIntyre’s description of virtues, though Dewey is still committed to a certain communal normative understanding towards which habits should direct us. Unlike MacIntyre’s more communitarian vision of the good, Dewey’s good life is marked, more than anything else, by growth. Indeed, even growth itself should be evaluated by its capacity to encourage further growth (Dewey, 1997: 36). As such, while Dewey would surely recognize certain habituated practices as more amenable to having internal goods (such as the habit of viewing art or working with your hands), for him, any practice can become mindless ritual. As a result, the greatest internal good is an openness to growth and a person’s capacity to reflect on that growth within a community (Dewey, 1958; Dewey, 2005; Dewey, 2007).

In this sense, habits, like skills and virtues, indicate a cognitive, embodied capacity to accomplish a particular practice. In contrast to skills, habits allow those doing these practices to experience and understand them as meaningful and important in themselves. In contrast to virtues, habits need not lead practitioners towards a coherent moral community but can instead push them towards a more inchoate sense of appreciation for the practices in themselves and the growth towards other experiences that these practices can provide.

Whether habits or virtues, both are capacities that empower actors to experience and develop the internal goods of their practices. In contrast, skills alienate actors from their practices, only experiencing these practices as means towards goods that are external to the practice itself. One important criticism of this distinction is that such experience of goods might well be situationally contingent, and indeed, such contingency is probably more often the case than not. As Rosa describes in his sociological account of resonance and alienation, someone might

⁷ While MacIntyre’s work has been extremely helpful in studies of religion and religious education (Carr, 2012, Asad 1993), the study of virtues in his sense of the term is not by any means necessarily confined to religious context.

experience a certain practice as deeply alienating and then something might happen to make it suddenly resonant and meaningful. Yet this ability to move in and out of resonant experiences is less a sociological problem than it is a sociological question: why might a student find math deeply meaningful and then, the next day, deeply alienating? Why might a classroom be divided, as they often are, between students who feel engaged with the internal goods of an assignment while others view the assignment as simply one more thing they must do to graduate? Goods, skills, habits, and virtues provide a theoretical vocabulary to examine these questions, and to examine them as sociological processes that go much deeper than the motivation students bring to the task.

Capitals, credentials, and goods

Our distinctions between skills, habits, and virtues bears some similarities to the difference between capital and credentials. In this section we review the difference between capital and credentials and then describe how they are similar to and different from our description of goods. We then describe how our descriptions of goods differs from Pierre Bourdieu's theory of competing forms of capital.

Capital and credentials

The debate over capital versus credentials in schooling is complicated and ornate, but the quick difference is that capital is some kind of capacity a student gains from school while a credential is an assertion about schooling that might or might not relate to an actual capacity (Collins, 1979; Labaree, 1999). This “might” piece is key: credentials' relationship to human capital is always suspect as students might get a degree or finish a grade while learning very little (Arum & Roksa, 2011).

Yet this fear of students learning nothing can be a bit of a red herring, as few would argue that students learn nothing in schools. The problem is that the “capital” students acquire can be the result of a “hidden curriculum” (Jackson, 1990) rooted less in explicit instruction and skills-building than in social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu, 1998a) gained through social interactions. As distinct from Coleman's (1988) description of social capital as an aid in the formation of human capital (Becker, 1994), this focus on cultural and social capital, developed most elaborately in the work of Pierre Bourdieu, emphasizes the relationality of students and educators in an unceasing series of distinctions. Developing “superior” cultural capital helps students prove to themselves and others they are more deserving of their privileged social position, just as developing “inferior” forms of cultural capital helps to justify students' ongoing exclusion, even to themselves.

Like Becker's human capital, Bourdieu's social and cultural capital are generally contained within the self (Bourdieu, 1984: 101). The difference is that these forms of capital are not broadly applicable skills that can be exchanged on the market for wages but are, instead, intimately linked to a habitus, providing forms of embodied knowledge that give actors a sense of the “rules of the game.” Credentials are

similar to capital for Bourdieu. Critiques of credentialism emphasize how gaining a certain credential (a college degree for example) can be relatively divorced from the “capital” such credentials might be said to represent, leading to ever-increasing rates of “credential inflation” (Collins, 1979, Labaree, 1999). For Bourdieu (1998a), there is no ultimate difference between credentials and capital, as credentials themselves are simply another form of capital (“symbolic capital”) that can be leveraged towards self-advancement. Bourdieu argues that these various forms of capital gain their salience and power through their meaning within a circumscribed social field in which actors fight with each other to gain advantages and superior position.⁸

For our purposes, what is important about all of these conceptions of capital is that they are primarily focused on what MacIntyre (1984: 188) refers to as external goods (as opposed to internal goods). It might make sense to argue that credentials are external to the practices that produce them: think of the college student who suffers through coursework to finally get that degree. Yet capital seems at least somewhat related to internal goods, especially Becker’s form of human capital. If you learn to type, it seems obvious that the capital you gain (the skill of typing) is a good internal to the practices you have mastered. Credentials raise a similar question: for a medical degree to be worthwhile, it must indicate the mastery of certain practices internal to the study of medicine. Even if some credentials are more cynically pursued and inflated, it remains the case that credentials often are indications of real competence specifically related to the mastery of certain skills.

However, as we described above in our description of the difference between internal and external goods, these distinctions put too much weight on the adjectives “external” and “internal” and thereby diminish the importance of *goods* (Smith, 2015). For our purposes, the key question about either capital itself or the credential said to represent capital is the degree to which the *practice* of that capital is experienced as either a meaningful good or as a means to an end. As such, our focus on internal goods is not at all the same as a focus on capital or credentials. To the extent sociologists of education want to continue examining capital and credentials, doing so via the study of internal goods would change their work significantly: Alienation, rather than later outcomes, becomes the key normative and theoretical concern.

Of course, related to this concern are the ways in which poverty, marginalization, and social exclusion both cause and result from alienation. A sociology of internal goods could take these realities seriously as theoretical, empirical, and normative problems in and of themselves, rather than their eventual relationship to stratification, in a manner similar to Menjivar and Abrego’s study of migrants’ experiences as problems in themselves (2012). To what extent are students successfully gaining certain forms of human capital, but experiencing that capital as what we have been calling skills rather than as virtues or as habits? To what extent do students experience a credential as utterly divorced from any kind of virtue or habit that might make the practices of schooling meaningful and resonant?

⁸ Though such social connection or cultural know-how might be exchangeable with economic or other forms of capital, to focus exclusively on their fungibility misses much of the point of Bourdieu’s intellectual project, which shows how status distinctions reproduce themselves or change in various domains (Bourdieu, 1996: 234).

Bourdieu's capitals and internal goods

The difference between internal goods and external goods is more complicated for analyses following Bourdieu. In Bourdieu's vision, people may think they enjoy art, science, and sports on their own terms and not simply because such enjoyment provides a competitive advantage over others. However, such "disinterested" acts are quite rare, as a "disinterest" in, for example, wealth, is often simply a subterfuge for deeper interests: Bourdieu argues that "behind the appearance of piety, virtue, disinterestedness, there are subtle, camouflaged interests" (Bourdieu, 1998a: 87; see also Bourdieu, 1984: 55).⁹ Though Bourdieu did emphasize different elements of social life over his career, it is rare to find him arguing that *any* actions is not ultimately subject to an ontology of competition tied to the logic of the field (e.g. Bourdieu, 1993: 29–40). That is, even though Bourdieu is engaged with questions of internal experience in a way that other sociologists of education often are not (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu, 1991; Bourdieu, 1993; Bourdieu, 1996), it is never entirely clear if people can experience *anything* as an internal good (Alexander, 1995; Gorski, 2016). Indeed, throughout Bourdieu's work, he conceptualizes "the field" less as a space of communal meaning-making than as a site of contestation. Whether or not practices manifest internal or external goods is just not a relevant question; the relevant question is how various practices can be leveraged in competition on the field.

It is easy enough to interpret everything we are describing here via a Bourdieusian lens. Internal goods in this account are simply the experiences of those whose habitus matches the field, making their goals for field domination appear to be simply the virtues and habits of successful people. Similarly, external goods are the experiences of those in marginal field positions (Bourdieu, 1991: 52) or in hysteresis (Bourdieu, 1990: 59–63), people for whom the means of getting ahead feels like an uneasy burden rather than a natural way to thrive.

Nonetheless, though we find much that is helpful in Bourdieu, we suggest that this ontology of field competition is both too cynical and ultimately unfalsifiable. We certainly agree with Bourdieu that the social "realities" learned in school are reifications produced by an earlier generation and imposed upon the next, an essential phenomenological insight from Heidegger (1996) to Berger and Luckmann (1967).

¹⁰ Yet we differ from Bourdieu (and some elements of this phenomenological

⁹ See also *The Logic of Practice*, in which Bourdieu describes how "all the virtue honored by the ethic of honor" are actually mechanisms of symbolic violence: "the most economical mode of domination because it corresponds to the economy of the system" (Bourdieu, 1990: 127).

¹⁰ While neither is a phenomenologist, both MacIntyre and Dewey share with Bourdieu a recognition that the goods of a practice are not immediately obvious for practitioners. In a similar way, Bourdieu argues that the logic of the field must be imposed upon its members through "symbolic violence" (Bourdieu, 1984: 511) as a means of inculcating the *illusio* (Bourdieu, 2000: 101), that is, the shared "illusion" that certain ways of living, valuing, and interacting are simply the right way to live, "naturalizing" their own "arbitrariness" (Bourdieu, 1977: 164). The central difference between Bourdieu on one hand and Dewey and MacIntyre on the other is that, for the latter two, alienation is not a necessary part of the educational process (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977: 5), thereby creating the possibility of internal goods in the study of education. Both Dewey and MacIntyre are much more optimistic than Bourdieu that students will eventually identify a good that is relatively autonomous from the goal of field competition, yet they share an awareness that the recognition of those goods requires a power outside of the students' own.

tradition) in two ways: first, while we agree about the naturalization of an intergenerational imposition, we do not share the necessarily negative normative spin associated with it: imposition does not have to mean alienation. After all, learning a parents' language is a kind of imposition, but it is not necessarily an alienating one.

This brings us to our second point: Bourdieu's concept of habitus, while influenced by Aristotle in a way that parallels Dewey's habits and MacIntyre's virtues, is nonetheless quite distinct from any of these three thinkers. Bourdieu's habitus is generally denuded of ethical content, and while the "rules of the game" ensure some shared meaning, the point of a field is not collective efforts at a meaningful life but rather contestations towards dominance. Bourdieu's study of the habitus tends to highlight the (often subconscious) habituation of various forms of capital that can then be leveraged within a field of competition. The concept of skills, as we are describing it, is amenable to this understanding, albeit in a subtler and less deliberative form. However, for both Dewey and MacIntyre, it is essential that either habits (for Dewey) or virtues (for MacIntyre) be the result of both local socialization and conscious development towards a particular vision of the good.

This vision of the good is the most critical distinction: for both MacIntyre and Dewey, internal goods are central to their accounts rather than marginal possibilities that might theoretically exist in certain contexts (Bourdieu, 1998b: 75-91). Students are capable not only of finding joy in their experiences at school (which Bourdieu would no doubt also acknowledge they can do), but of seeing that sense of connection, what Rosa would call resonance (Rosa, 2019), as a primary end (and means) in itself. Bourdieu is ambivalent about this resonance as a primary goal rather than as an indication of field position, given his oeuvre's ontological rooting in field competition.¹¹ In other words, as Bourdieu himself acknowledges, such internal goods in his view are always the subject of "suspicion" (Bourdieu, 1998b: 90), which is surely a helpful hermeneutic (Josselson, 2004, Ricoeur, 1970: 30) in certain contexts, though it debilitates any form of scholarship that takes unalienated experiences of meaning in schools seriously both as important academic questions and as important normative goals.

Internal goods in the sociology of peer cultures

Distinguishing between internal and external goods also allows sociologists of education to recenter the importance of alienation alongside a longstanding commitment to examining the intricacies of power imbalances within schools. For example, in her book-length ethnographic comparison of a low-SES urban elementary school and another in an affluent United States suburb, Hayward (2000) shows how power is suffused in each setting, and the operative distinction is the possibility of meaningful connection or alienation created in each situation of

¹¹ In his critique, Alexander notes that, for Bourdieu, "altruistic behavior...becomes impossible in any substantive sense of the word" (Alexander, 1995: 151; see also Boltanski, 2011: 18, though see also Gartman, 2007).

learning. In recognizing the overt and covert forms of power in educational practice (Pace & Hemmings, 2007), Hayward describes what we are calling internal goods at work, showing how suburban students come to understand the practices they have been compelled to complete as enabling what MacIntyre might call *virtues*, helping them to understand their lives as part of a broader community. Meanwhile, the students Hayward worked with at an urban school felt alienated by the process, learning skills they had to master to get through their day, even if those practices were not necessarily connected to either the broader virtues of a meaningful community or the habituated capacity to seek growth for the sake of growth.

In either case, teachers have sought to subjugate students, in that they have attempted to socialize them into a particular normative community (Guhin et al., 2021). The difference is that the urban children recognize that normative order as a necessary process to which they must relate, even if it remains external to their own normative sensibilities. A sense of alienation almost necessarily ensues. In contrast, the suburban children have fully naturalized the virtues and skills of their teachers. This might or might not have important implications for either group of students' future academic or career success but asking about the relationship to future inequality can miss the degree to which these differing classroom experiences affect how students experience their own practices, whether in school or years later. Are the practices learned in school experienced as a series of internal goods that can enact virtue or growth? Or are these practices experiences primarily for the external goods they might eventually provide, mobilizing a skilled capacity to work through an unfair system?

To use another example, Bettie's (2014) book, *Women Without Class*, is an ethnographic study of Mexican-American and white girls in central California. The book's focus is primarily framed as a study of the relationship between peer cultures and socio-economic inequality rather than as an examination of how practices are experienced as goods or external impositions. Yet her work—and that of other scholars of peer cultures (Hayward, 2000; Best, 2006, 2013; Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013)—provides an excellent starting point for how such analysis might move forward. Bettie's study of the intersections of race and class nods at the work of Eckert (1989) to show how “smokers” develop “alternative badges of dignity” (Bettie, 2014: 108). Such an argument could be read as similar to an analysis of status in schools whether via Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1998a) or Milner's study of status consciousness in high school peer groups (Milner, 2013), and, indeed, Bettie regularly cites Bourdieu, especially in the chapter from which the above quote is drawn.

Yet field position is not the only relevant concern, and Bettie, like many talented qualitative scholars, is able to show how a sense of meaningful connection to one's own practices is important on its own, rather than as the result or indication of status within a social field. Bettie shows how a group she calls the “preps” have a habitus that is readily amenable to the dominant school culture, which they can then experience as *habits* that encourage their own personal growth or even—for some—as virtues that put them in a meaningful community of practice. Yet the smokers are alienated from this process, and because of the intersections of class, gender, and racial inequalities, they are compelled to develop alternative understandings of what a good life might

entail. They are also forced to develop what we have been calling “skills”—that is the capacity for practices they experience as only instrumentally useful—in ways that the “preps” do not have to. This is especially clear when Bettie describes how and when low-income students lie as a means of “passing” a “cross-class interaction” (Bettie, 2014: 120–122). Similarly, in her description of “acting white” (Bettie, 2014: 83–86), she shows how certain skills of deception and self-abnegation are *inevitably* alienating precisely because they do the ideological work of hiding the reality of class and racial animosity, forcing students to feel a profound lack of connection to their own instrumental actions.

Similarly, there is a straightforwardly Bourdieusian way to read Armstrong and Hamilton’s *Paying for the Party*, which the authors note in one of their appendices (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013: 270). Indeed, for their stated goals of explaining differing socio-economic outcomes, Bourdieu’s analysis of how certain kinds of habitus more easily accommodate themselves in certain kinds of fields is an excellent “fit” (2013: 23). Yet there are other stories in the book, stories which a study of the difference between skills, habits, and virtues might help other sociologists to tell. For example, the authors show how the women they studied bring differing levels of economic and social capital to college, making for distinct academic, social, and sexual experiences. While the authors are more focused on how these varying levels of capital wind up reproducing socio-economic inequalities, they also provide devastating accounts of how the lived experience of college is significantly more alienating for those who are not “socialites.” These partygoers experience party-going as a kind of virtue, a positive end-in-itself that helps them to become a kind of person their community values. Armstrong and Hamilton not only show how inequality can explain differing outcomes; they also show how inequality can prevent the experience of college as an opportunity to develop virtues or habits that allow for internal goods. College instead becomes either a set of extremely difficult (and alienating) skills to master or else, for those who leave, something to reject entirely.

We discuss these studies of peer cultures in schools to emphasize their importance as counterexamples to the stratification paradigm while maintaining a normative and theoretical commitment to the study of inequality. A focus on stratified outcomes might miss the internal goods subcultural groups actually *do* experience in certain communities, whether via habits or virtues, even if these goods are judged harshly by the dominant culture, something well-developed in Willis’s classic study of working-class lads (Willis, 1977). Yet unlike contemporary applications of Willis’s work, the point is not using the lads’ practices as a means of explaining later outcomes but rather describing how their practices form communal virtues that help them to identify a particular vision of the good life. Further work could show how and why such internal goods make sense in their contexts and how they are the result of both youths’ agentic decision-making and their pre-existing structural and discursive constraints (Bettie, 2014: 92). A focus on the relationship between power and internal goods could therefore help to provide a fuller account of resistance to certain institutional and organizational missions (Best, 2013; Blume Oeur, 2018), doing so in a manner sensitive to how the resisters’ own internal goods are themselves the result of other locations of socialization (Willis, 1977; Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Abu-Lughod, 1990; Mahmood, 2011).

Discussion and conclusion

External goods and procedural liberalism

While we do not have space to explore the causes of this focus on external goods, we suggest that one possible explanation—as well as a line for future research—might be a commitment to procedural liberalism within the sociology of education. By procedural liberalism (Sandel, 1984; Farrar et al., 1998; Walzer, 1990), we mean a form of social and governmental organization that emphasizes negative obligations rather than positive commitments (Carens, 1986), perhaps best encapsulated in the work of Locke (2003) and John Stuart Mill (2015). As such, there can be no robustly shared sense of a common tradition through which people are socialized into certain practices with internal goods specific to those practices; society is instead organized by a set of common procedures through which individuals interact (Hauskeller, 2011).¹²

It might sound odd to say that a field of study still influenced by Marxian analysis is liberal, but we mean by liberal more a focus on individual autonomy than a commitment to the free exchange of ideas, goods, and services. This focus on autonomy is often accompanied by a utilitarian focus on an agentic capacity for self-actualization, sometimes with the important insistence that such actualization is only even possible if a certain outcome (e.g., high school or college completion, a certain kind of career, etc.) has been achieved, therefore justifying, via procedural liberalism, a robust welfare state. Still the primary goal of such a politics is not what people do, how they relate to each other, or even whether their lives are meaningful: the point is simply to ensure “everyone” has the agentic capacity to pursue their own interests.¹³ As such, a focus on the aggregated individual life outcomes of students makes sense not only as a field of study but as a moral commitment. In this sense, Labaree (1999: 51) is not quite right that individual student success is purely a private good: the aggregation of these successes has become, for many Americans concerned about education, an index of our country’s moral worth.

Our argument here is in subtle contrast to that of Mehta and Davies, who suggest a more institutionalist explanation for why the sociology of education in the United States has seen an empirical and methodological consolidation as well as a lack of theoretical innovation:

By embracing quantitative methods, using large-scale data sets, asking questions compatible with broad notions of reformist liberalism, and developing increasingly refined knowledge about the roles that schools play in in social

¹² Whether or not liberalism is exclusively defined by this kind of proceduralist abandonment of morality is a separate question, much debated in political theory (Deneen, 2019; Macedo, 1990; Nussbaum, 2011; Walzer, 1990). For our purposes, we can acknowledge the “virtues of liberalism” (Kloppenber, 1998) and admit that liberal democracy is an expansive term while still positing a certain commitment to proceduralism as one possible explanation of the stratification paradigm (Johnston, 2007).

¹³ “Everyone” does a lot of work here, and some of the most important critiques of liberalism show how it has centered certain white men as the only relevant actors (Patemon, 2018; Mill, 2015)

reproduction and mobility, the field has developed an identity, a cumulative knowledge base, and a solid place within sociology. But it has done these things at the expense of other topics and approaches, reifying a small number of theories, questions, and research methods as central to the sociology of education enterprise (Mehta & Davies, 2018: 16–17).

We do not disagree with these descriptions or, broadly, with the historical argument. We instead simply focus on one element of that argument—the sociology of education’s compatibility with “reformist liberalism”—to show how liberal presuppositions color not only what sociologists of education study but also what they do not study.¹⁴

Historians of education have argued that procedural liberalism has led to an increasing focus on career and college readiness as the primary purpose of schooling, contrasting this narrow focus on external goods to an earlier, more expansive understanding of education for citizenship and cultural self-formation (Hunter, 2008; Neem, 2017). Even if early United States schools—like their later descendants—were structured in such a way that certain groups, namely wealthy white male Protestants, benefitted significantly more than others (Katz, 1968), it still seems fair to argue that internal goods were then (Neem, 2017) and are now (Rose, 2014) important components of what happens at a school, and that such goods relate to broader questions about how students relate to society as citizens and members of communities (Dewey, 1963), rather than as autonomous individuals, moving with grit (Duckworth et al., 2007) towards their own autonomous achievements (Guhin, 2018).

It is important to emphasize here that the history of American education has been a history of racism, sexism, classism, religious prejudice, and a host of other discriminatory practices, with the aggressive obliteration of indigenous and marginalized cultural forms (Adams, 1995, Brown, 2018, Dog & Erdoes 2014, hooks, 2014, Spring, 2016). Yet to argue that schools can be alienating and cruel does not distract from the question of whether internal goods can exist in education. Indeed, calls for

¹⁴ MacIntyre despaired that such liberal transactions of interests (Hirschman, 2013) characterized modernity itself, and his 1984 book is titled *After Virtue* because he believes that contemporary forms of moral philosophy—namely utilitarianism and deontology—do not make possible any real commitment to internal goods. Interestingly, Dewey makes much the same argument about utilitarianism and deontology, and while Dewey was much less cynical about the liberalism of his day (Dewey, 1935; Dewey & Rogers, 2012), he did share the concern that modern society is becoming increasingly atomistic, preventing robust forms of common life from developing (Westbrook, 2015). While there is debate in the secondary literature on Dewey’s relationship to liberalism (Ryan, 1997; Savage, 2002; Shusterman, 1994), much of it argues that Dewey’s commitment to participatory democracy was at odds with a focus on a purely procedural liberalism that emphasized individual experience in place of communal commitments (Shusterman, 1994: 393–394). If MacIntyre emphasizes the community over the liberal individual, Dewey rejects the dichotomy entirely, pointing out how the robust democratic ethic he espouses requires a simultaneous focus on the individual and the community in which they play a part. This relationship between society and the individual should occur at every level, starting at consciousness itself and extending to a commitment to the school’s organization bringing students towards a “larger and more vital union with life” (Dewey, 1963: 91–92), thereby keeping education from becoming an arbitrary “gymnastic exercise” (Dewey, 1909: 12).

“culturally relevant pedagogy” (Ladson-Billings, 1995) presume such goods exist and are worthwhile as ends in themselves and not simply as a means towards inculcating generic members of an economy. While we do not have time to provide any solid answers here, we believe that the relationship between liberal ideologies and the academic study of education merits further examination.

Alienation and the reification of meritocracy

If a certain kind of liberalism might have partially caused the stratification paradigm, it might also be the case that the stratification paradigm, however inadvertently, partially maintains a certain kind of liberalism, at least as expressed within the achievement ideology. In their article on alienation in schools, Drake and Guhin outline two key elements of the achievement ideology (Guhin et al., 2021): first, belief in a fully-functioning meritocracy, that is, that people achieve their statuses and roles in society based exclusively on their own merit, and, second, that this belief, like many myths, give meaning and order to a chaotic world despite compelling evidence to the contrary (Liu 2011, McNamee and Miller 2009, McCoy and Major 2007, Sandel, 2020). To the extent that those in the United States or other countries hold to an achievement ideology, then it makes sense that socio-economic stratification is best solved through schooling, as it is within schools that students gain the capital or credentials through which they can achieve a particular status or role. This ideology is often linked to a similar capitalist, individualist ideology of “equal opportunity” such that the state might be responsible for providing resources to ensure everyone has an equal chance at success, yet the state is not necessarily responsible for ensuring people have the material resources necessary for meaningful lives once they have finished school (Sandel, 2020; Brown, 2015).

Of course, much of the sociology of education’s “stratification paradigm” has both provided and been motivated by critiques of these meritocratic assumptions. Sociologists have shown how schools fail in their goal of creating equal opportunity, and, following Bourdieu (1998a) and Bowles and Gintis (1976), they have shown how schools often are not about equal opportunity anyway, but are instead about the reification and justification of an increasingly unequal socio-economic order (Mehta, 2015).

The problem is not what any sociologists themselves study about the relationship between stratification and schools, but rather how the relationship between stratification and schools becomes narrated and justified in society at large. Are school sites to *study* inequality? Or are schools sites in which to *solve* inequality? For many powerful interest groups, education foundations, and government leaders, schools are not just one part of a broader solution to socio-economic stratification but rather, following the achievement ideology, schools are the primary and sometimes exclusive means of ensuring “equal opportunity” (Tompkins-Stange, 2020). By centering schools as the *solution* to stratification, these interests can obfuscate and delay much broader efforts at reparations for harms against Black and Indigenous peoples and other mechanisms of redistribution.

It is obviously a separate set of empirical and normative questions to what degree research on stratification via schooling reifies an achievement ideology or marginalizes more radical socio-economic solutions to inequality. And we certainly are not arguing that sociologists intend their studies of stratification to be translated into broader commitments to solve stratification exclusively through schooling. Yet this is the risk that we believe deserves further study, both for the obvious reasons already listed, and because of its potential relationship to alienation and goods.

To the extent that students and teachers themselves understand schools as primarily about *solving inequality*, then schools are no longer important *as schools*, but rather *for the outcomes they might produce*. It seems plausible that schooling would be alienating and difficult for teachers, students, and parents if their primary good was external to anything that happened in the school itself. It also seems plausible that this alienation is racialized, gendered, and classed. Future research could analyze how an ideological commitment to schools as *the* solution to stratification might affect the capacity for students to experience education as a series of virtues or habits or rather, at best, as a set of potentially alienating skills they must master to get ahead.

Expanding the paradigm

We do not describe the stratification paradigm, liberalism, and achievement ideology here as a means of working out their precise definition and causal relationships but rather to suggest that each can prevent social scientists from studying the difference between internal and external goods, especially as played out in the difference between skills, virtues, and habits. In arguing for an addition to the stratification paradigm, we are not suggesting that sociologists should give up either their normative or their theoretical commitment to the study of inequality.

While the mainstream study of education tends to focus more on the external goods of student outcomes rather than the internal goods of its practices, that is less the case in education's specialty journals, especially journals related to specific subjects: those who teach math, history, literature, art, science, and anything else—as well as those who study them—clearly do care about the goods internal to what they teach their students, and not simply what their students can gain external to what they learn. Sociologists of education (and, we might add, economists of education) might respond that this is simply a question of division of labor: sociologists and economists study inequality and the stratification of external goods, and they leave the internal goods to everyone else.

While we recognize that such a specific focus can be helpful in developing a normal science framework and thereby better refining key questions and methods, we also suggest—along with others (Bills et al., 2013; Brint, 2013; Mehta & Davies, 2018; Stevens, 2008)—that this divisions prevents sociologists from using our theoretical and methodological resources to study much that matters in schools. We build upon these calls for a more pluralistic sociology of education by bringing to the fore two distinctions, the first between internal and external goods, and the second between skills, virtues, and habits. In so doing, we are not calling to end the

ever-more-important study of stratification, but instead calling to include the also vital study of *alienation* through an analysis of the experience of practices as goods.

Implications of expansion

This distinction between kinds of goods has important implications for other sociological subdisciplines. These distinctions could influence how sociologists of occupations discuss the nature of work (Krause, 2014; Ritzer & Walczak, 1988), including work in schools, which can move into other subfields as well, such as how sociologists of gender and sexuality analyze sex work (Hoang, 2015) how scholars of culture describe the working life of artists and the reasons for teaching art (Childress, 2017; Gerber, 2017), or how social movement scholars understand activists' reactions to unsuccessful efforts (Effler, 2010). Many of these arguments draw on Weber's distinctions between forms of rationality (Weber, 1978: 24–26), but even those that do not tend also to distinguish between something like what we are articulating here, that is, the difference between doing something for its own good or doing something to get something else.¹⁵ We would suggest that new avenues of research could be opened in these studies of work—especially work performed by both students and teachers—by articulating how something like internal goods can not only be distinguished from external goods but also how internal goods can take different shape in different contexts and via different kinds of practices (virtues or habits).

Additionally, scholars of education and related subfields ought to take note of how and why people feel alienated, not only because such alienation might affect their later socio-economic outcomes but primarily because such alienation is theoretically, empirically, and normatively significant in and of itself. What is the relationship between this alienation and meritocracy? How does such alienation play out differently in different contexts, and how is the experience of alienation unequally distributed? Finally, sociologists have built off of recent work in philosophy and critical theory to bring the study of alienation back to mainstream American sociology (Skotnicki & Nielsen, 2021), yet a lot of work remains to make the concept of alienation more analytically useful, distinct, and exportable.

These suggestions are only the start of what an expanded sociology of education could be. Once sociologists of education no longer have to justify their research questions by their connections to ongoing concerns within the stratification paradigm, nearly every other sociological subfield opens up as a point of convergence. The major institutions of sociological analysis all happen in schools, and they are all interesting in and of themselves, regardless of their later relationship to stratified outcomes. Whether migration, race, gender, sexuality, friendship, morality, religion, science, technology, or anything else, there is already brilliant work on how these elements of social life work out in schools, yet too often these scholars feel like

¹⁵ See footnote 3

marginal members of the sociology of education. An expanded sociology of education would make room for a broader sense of what's sociologically interesting in schools.

This expansion of the sociology of education need not require sociologists to give up either a normative or analytic commitment to the problems of inequality. For example, authors might ask how the experience of an internal good is unequally distributed, or how for different students—even students in the same classroom—the same practice can develop skills, virtues, or habits depending on the context. Why is math a joy for one student, a reason to daydream for a second, and a necessary though alienating means towards socio-economic success for a third?

Such analysis would be similar to Bourdieu's analysis of how certain forms of habitus can be more or less aligned with a particular location within a field, but the goals of the research would be radically different: instead of asking how different ways of experiencing practices help or hinder students to compete for resources, this kind of research would instead take seriously the goals and experiences of students and teachers as ends in themselves. Schools, then, become problems *as schools*, as sites of experience that matter as they occur, places that are alienating or meaningful, joyful or excruciating. Shifting the sociology of education to focus on questions of internal goods and the problem of alienation can help to affirm that the problem of stratification is not necessarily—and certainly not exclusively—schools' problems to solve (Downey et al., 2004). As a result, schools and scholars of schools are in a better position to solve those problems that are contained within schools themselves: how schools can best be schools, and how schools can prevent inequality and alienation *within* schooling rather than because of it. Such a shift also acknowledges the limitations of achievement ideology and can shift political attention towards more radical policies of redistribution and reparations (Drake & Guhin, 2021). The shift in focus might also bring sociologists of education to pay more attention to pedagogy, something vital to any school yet curiously absent in their sociological study (though see Mehta & Fine, 2019).

Again, this is not a call to end the study of stratification within the sociology of education so much as it is a call to widen the paradigm containing it. If schooling is truly a common good, it would be useful for sociologists to examine how those goods are experienced as common, social things. As Dewey put it, the “inherent irony and tragedy of much that passes for a high kind of socialized activity is precisely that it seeks a common good by methods which forbid its being either common or a good” (Dewey & Tufts, 1913: 304).

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