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Teaching, teacher formation, and specialised professional practice

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Abstract

This paper starts by exploring the relevance of Bernstein's work on vertical and horizontal discourses and the constitution of professional knowledge for conceptualisation of the knowledge needed for teaching practice. Building on arguments for the differentiated nature of knowledge, and drawing on the work of Winch, Young and Muller on expertise, and the sociology of the professions, this paper advances a conception of teaching as a 'specialised professional practice' that requires the support of particular socio-epistemic arrangements and conditions embedded in professional communities. Prevalent notions of teaching and teacher education that find favour in some European countries are examined in the light of these arguments, with particular reference to recent reforms in England.

Keywords: teacher formation, teacher expertise, recontextualisation, Bernstein

Introduction

In a recent paper Beach and Bagley (2013) draw on Bernstein's (1999) notion of a horizontal discourse to explain how teacher education is changing in Sweden and England, in particular the incursion of notions of the 'everyday' into the discourse of what it means to become a teacher. This horizontal 'everyday' knowledge is contrasted, in Bernstein's (1999) paper, with more systematically structured disciplinary based 'vertical' discourse. An examination of Bernstein's work on knowledge structures can underpin an exploration of the types of knowledge that inform professional practice (Young and Muller 2014), but foregrounding the differentiated nature of knowledge that Bernstein outlined poses challenges for how professional practice is conceptualised. This has particular resonance for teaching and teacher education. Reforms in England and Sweden (Beach and Bagley 2013), and pressures on teacher education internationally to meet educational policy objectives (Tatto 2006) have given impetus to new models of teacher professional formation that challenge the role of educational institutions in providing abstract conceptual knowledge for teaching, suggesting instead that teachers can acquire requisite expertise through forms of 'practice immersion' and extensive practical experience in school (Maandag et al. 2007). For example in England we have seen the initiation of the School Direct model, which places responsibilities for teacher education on schools, and has been promoted as a more 'relevant' mode of formation based on the assertion that 'the classroom', in contrast to the university, is always 'the best place for teachers to learn as well as to teach' (Gove 2013). Such reforms and initiatives are often based on the supposition that novice teachers can acquire the most useful forms of teaching expertise through direct experience of teaching practice and engagement with communities of teacher practitioners, or on views of teachers as primarily 'technicians' whose role it is to implement prescribed curriculum and pedagogy (Winch 2014; Tatto 2006).

This paper sets out to examine in greater depth the relevance of Bernstein's 'vertical' discourse for teacher formation, its relation to horizontal discourse, and how these concepts provide insight into the nature of teachers' knowledge and practice. Teacher formation is understood here as the processes by which teachers develop expertise and assume a professional identity (Hordern 2014a). Drawing on the work of Winch (2010) and Young and Muller (2014) on expertise, in addition to aspects of Bernstein's (1999, 2000) work on the sociology of knowledge, this paper advances a conception of teaching as a 'specialised professional practice' that is supported by particular social arrangements and conditions embedded in communities of professionals. Improvements in teaching quality, and ultimately

educational outcomes, can thus only be made if certain conditions are developed and sustained within a professional community of teachers and teacher educators, broadly understood.

Bernstein's discourses and their relevance to teacher formation

Beach and Bagley (2013) identify the resurgence of a 'training paradigm' in teacher education, outlining how Bernstein's (1999) vertical and horizontal discourse distinction provides a useful means for delineating between the types of knowledge prioritised in teacher education. Beach and Bagley argue that the 'context-bound, specific, concrete' nature and 'common sense knowledge' (2013, 387) of horizontal discourse has increasingly dominated teacher education in England, and to a lesser extent in Sweden, at the expense of the 'theoretical and abstract' (387) vertical discourse that provides a better foundation for professional knowledge. They suggest that the horizontal discourse provides a 'very poor basis for developing thoughtful practice, as it runs against the idea of a teaching profession grounded on scientific research-based 'know-why' knowledge' (387-8), while vertical discourse 'in the form of a robust system of concepts and practices' (388) is necessary 'to describe, model and theorise from empirical situations to help students in and after teacher training to understand the ideological and political restructuring that is going on around them' (388) and 'as a tool for analysing trends and thinking critically and strategically about teaching and learning processes' (388).

There is no doubting the clarity of the distinction that Bernstein (1999) makes between vertical and horizontal discourse; a distinction with its origins in Durkheim's between the 'sacred' and the 'profane' (Young 2009; Young and Muller 2014). Vertical discourse has a number of characteristics that delineate it from horizontal discourse. Specifically, it has a 'coherent, explicit, and systematically principled structure', which is 'hierarchically organised, as in the sciences' or comprises 'a series of specialised languages with specialised modes of interrogation and specialised criteria for the production and circulation of texts, as in the social sciences and humanities' (Bernstein 1999, 159). It is these aspects of structure and specialisation which enable vertical discourses to act as the repositories of valuable disciplinary knowledge, husbanding the knowledge iterated and refined by past generations and providing the criteria by which new knowledge claims can be judged. Horizontal discourse, in contrast, is 'oral, local, context dependent' (159) and therefore ephemeral or particular to individuals, unable to provide any basis for value estimation outside of its

immediate context. Horizontal discourse is ‘circulated’ through a process of ‘tacit recontextualising’ which relies on the maximisation of ‘encounters with persons and habitats’ (159), suggesting the importance of personal contact in the relevant context, whereas vertical discourse is distributed through ‘explicit recontextualisation and evaluation’, enabling knowledge to be reviewed and iterated through transparent mechanisms. Vertical discourse is the structure of the academic disciplines, and for Bernstein, forms a starting point for the constitution of professional knowledge (2000, 52).

However, when approaching issues of professional knowledge, education and learning a number of factors come into play that somewhat complicate issues discussed above. Bernstein differentiated between the academic disciplines or ‘singulars’ (2000) and the more professional or vocationally orientated ‘regions’, which lie at the ‘interface between disciplines (singulars) and the technologies they make possible’ (Bernstein 2000, 52). ‘Singulars’ and ‘regions’ can be construed as socio-epistemic entities which are useful in analysing how knowledge develops in academic and professional fields through the interrelation between knowledge structure and social forces (Muller 2009; Young and Muller 2014). In ‘singulars’ (i.e. disciplines such as Maths or history) academics use disciplinary procedures to establish and iterate the knowledge base with regard only to the requirements of the discipline itself. Singulars are reasonably tightly ‘bounded’ or ‘classified’, enabling them to conserve and iterate the unique properties of their discipline and its unique vertical discourse. However, in a ‘region’ (i.e. Medicine or engineering) those involved in establishing and iterating the knowledge base must have regard to the requirements of professional practice as much as the existing professional disciplinary body of knowledge. The broader range of stakeholders with interests in the work of the profession can complicate the process of establishing and iterating the body of professional knowledge.

The process of the development of a ‘region’ requires a ‘recontextualisation’ of singulars for the ‘supervening purpose’ of practice (Muller 2009, 213), suggesting that one or more singular vertical discourses may be ‘selected’, ‘appropriated’ and ‘transformed’ (i.e. recontextualised) by a ‘recontextualisation principle’ that serves to ‘constitute its own order’ (Bernstein 2000, 33) in the region. While Bernstein did not use teaching as an example, the mention of other professional fields such as ‘Medicine’ and ‘engineering’ suggests that ‘education’ and its professionals can reasonably be construed as a region, with implications for how vertical discourse and its relation to horizontal discourse are understood. Indeed, recent work that has developed Bernstein’s work for understanding professional knowledge

and expertise has included work on the teaching profession (Shalem 2014; Taylor 2014), and highlights the ‘region’ as central to analysis of the constitution of expertise (Young and Muller 2014, 13-15).

Key questions for understanding professional knowledge, therefore, include how a body of specialised knowledge is recontextualised from vertical discourses, whether and how this knowledge acquires and maintains ‘verticality’, and how professional practice ‘in the field’ is underpinned by this knowledge. Relatedly, it is important to establish which ‘singular’ disciplinary vertical discourses provide for a given knowledge base, and how elements of these discourses are selected. Drawing on Winch’s (2010, 2014) and on Muller (2014), this specialised knowledge could be said to consist both of propositional ‘know that’ and inferential and procedural ‘know how’, in addition to forms of acquaintance knowledge that enable the development of expertise. Arguably, considering the engagement with diverse contexts which characterises professional work, it is also important to develop an understanding of the relation between specialised professional knowledge and the horizontal discourses of the everyday. While certain elements of practical and particular knowledge may be inextricable from a given specialised body of knowledge (Winch 2014), many professionals have to work within contexts over which they have only limited control; in other words, professionals do not work in a vacuum. In Bernstein’s (1971, 2000) terms the classification, ‘insulation’, or strength of boundaries, between professionals’ specialised knowledge and practice and wider ‘practices’ within the world in which they work is weaker than in the case of the ‘pure’ production of academic knowledge, and the nature of this ‘boundedness’ varies from profession to profession. Professionals require the knowledge schema that enable ‘diagnosis’ of cases (Abbott 1988; Shalem 2014), meaning that the professional knowledge base must take account of the complexity and contextuality encountered in practice, and yet links must be sustained and iterated with a more distant abstract theoretical base of ‘distinctive concepts’ so that solutions can be developed to unforeseen problems arising in professional work. While horizontal discourse(s) may play only a marginal role in processes of professional judgement, they may enable understanding of the complexity in which professionals work and the efficacy of professional action.

In the case of teaching, it could be argued that a number of notions of vertical discourse are at work underpinning specialised teaching knowledge and practice. A teacher, particularly working in a secondary, and sometimes a primary, phase is very often a ‘subject specialist’ and therefore could be considered, at least partially, working within and drawing on the

vertical discourse of the subject that they teach. Of importance here is consideration of Noddings's (2003) distinction between the 'maths teacher' and the 'mathematician', and whether they both, despite their distinct specialist roles, could be seen as part of a practice called 'Maths', which, we could argue here, is constituted from a pure 'singular' vertical discourse. However the 'maths teacher' is perhaps also drawing on another specialised body of knowledge underpinned by vertical discourse, that of 'pedagogy' or 'didactics'. Of course, the extent to which this body of pedagogical knowledge is seen as a 'professional discipline' or non-academic 'nonsense', as was asserted by the Social Affairs Unit in England in the 1980s (Anderson 1982), depends on the socio-political context and the nature of the professional 'region', and may be rather different across different nation states. Whereas the constitution and ongoing iteration of a discipline of 'pedagogy' or 'educational sciences', despite change to structure and assumptions, maintains some salience for teacher education in Sweden (Beach and Bagley 2013), and indeed in various forms across Europe (Alexander 2004), in England this is called into question.

The policies towards teacher education advocated by the coalition government in England, at least during the period of time that Michael Gove was secretary of state for Education (2010-4) suggest that the academic subject provides sufficient 'vertical' discourse for teaching practice, and indeed that any 'educational' specialist discourse has the potential to be counterproductive for teaching (i.e. Gove 2013). Such assertions call into question the notion of teaching as a specialised practice, suggesting a 'subject specialist' and 'craft' model, with teaching practice specific to subjects best learnt through experience and contact with more experienced practitioners from that subject. While learning from experienced teachers may be an important part of professional development for the novice teacher, the denigration of academic pedagogy risks allowing all manner of pedagogical techniques to gain prominence. In other words, we are left with a form of subject-based specialism that may be coupled with forms of horizontal discourse, as context specific techniques and 'local' practices are foregrounded. This may be particularly the case if pedagogies championed by powerful independent educational organisations aspiring to growth are not subjected to scrutiny.

While the subject specialist debate has particular relevance at secondary level, in primary education the notion of the generalist class teacher predominates in England, and has a strong influence in many other countries, in Europe and internationally (Le Metais 2003). This suggests a lesser role for the vertical discourse that underpins school subjects, and, potentially a much greater role for a pedagogical or didactical vertical discourse. Indeed, a high

proportion of primary teachers in England have historically studied three year Education-related degrees (Furlong 2013), and primary teacher education in many European countries often consists of strongly didactically-orientated undergraduate or masters level programmes (Zuljan and Vogrinc 2011) that would seem to require engagement with specialised discourse specific to Education.

The structure of professional knowledge is significant for the nature of professional identity and the capacity to generate trust and confidence in professional judgement, and therefore for the future sustainability of the profession. For Bernstein, as it was for Durkheim (Grace 2014), and for Abbott (1988) and Friedson (2001), the specialised nature of professional work necessitates the *disciplined* production of conceptual knowledge that has relevance across a range of practice contexts, and this implies the importance of research activity in higher education institutions that can continually produce and iterate vertical discourse. Without a specialised vertical discourse underpinning professional practice, professional identity is unbounded and flexible, ready to be bent towards the whims of government or the market (Beck and Young 2005; Friedson 2001). In Bernstein's (2000) terms, specialised discourse provides strong boundaries which enable practitioners to recognise the nature of their practice and their role within it, leading to a specialised professional identity that can be acknowledged, and trusted, by clients of the profession and the general public. Equally, if practice itself is not shaped and constrained by the underlying conditions provided by a disciplined discourse, then professional judgement is open to influence by various fads and untested techniques.

Recontextualisation for specialised professional practice

The processes by which knowledge is selected, appropriated and transformed for practice (i.e. recontextualised) are particularly important for the constitution of professional knowledge. Building on Bernstein's work, Barnett (2006, 147) describes a process of 'reclassificatory recontextualisation' as vertical discourses are transformed to become a 'toolbox of applicable knowledge' that is designed to address the problems of practice. However, this reclassification is only possible if the 'technological and organisational problems' (Barnett 2006, 148) of practice are defined and framed in a way that disciplinary knowledge can be selected and appropriated to aid in their solution. However, the definition of problems for practice is often a complex political and social negotiation between parties interested in the work of the profession. In teaching, for example, we have seen considerable interest from

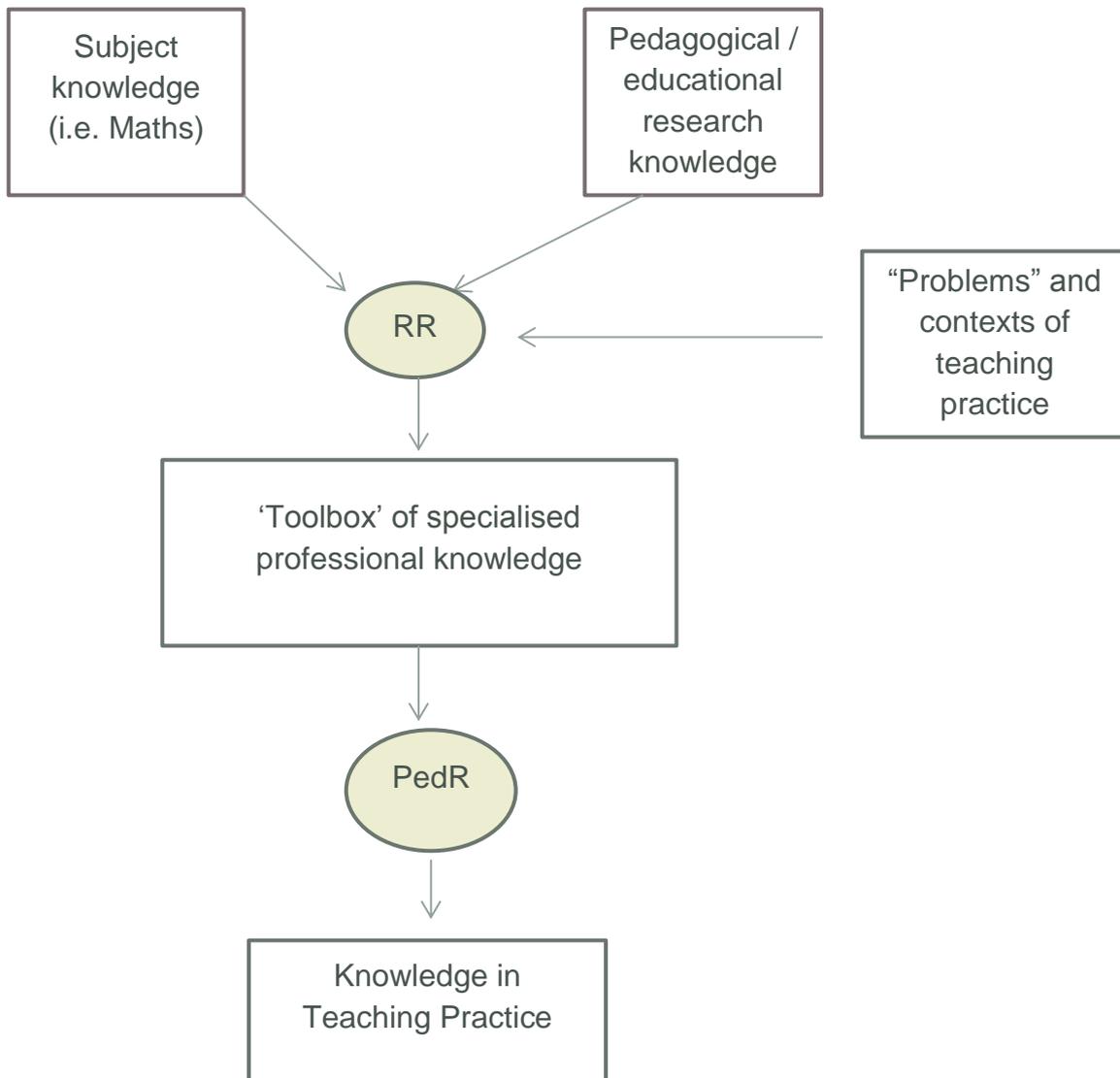
governments concerned that the ‘definition of problems’ is not monopolised by teachers themselves or their representatives. In England, we have seen struggles between government, the unions, academics and the teaching profession around the role of teachers and the core purposes of education (Beck 2008; Furlong et al. 2000). The problems of teaching practice can be variously defined as relating to improving exam results, improving behaviour and discipline, extending opportunities to all, and ensuring pupils are well-prepared for all aspects of their future lives. How these problems are accented and framed has considerable impact on what types of knowledge are considered appropriate for teacher formation. The situation in England contrasts with that in Scotland where there appears to be a greater consensus around the purpose and character of schooling and the role of teachers (Menter and Hulme 2011), notwithstanding certain disagreements, leading perhaps to a more settled definition of the ‘problems of practice’.

The process of defining ‘problems’ is also framed by how practice itself is conceptualised. If teaching practice is conceived as routine, requiring levels of judgement and decision-making that are relatively easy to acquire, then an argument can be made that problems are straightforward and can be simply met through the provision of suitable knowledge resources, packaged appropriately for the practitioner. However, if teaching practice is considered as requiring forms of conceptuality that can help teachers make ‘good sense’ of the variety of contexts which they encounter (Winch et al. 2013), with new challenges and problems constantly arising and complex processes of professional judgement and decision-making required, then a more specialised knowledge base is needed which supports the development of the capability of individual teachers, so that they can infer, assess and act confidently cognisant of the implications of their actions (Winch 2010; Guile 2010). How a practice is conceived has a considerable impact on what processes are used to define problems, and who is considered sufficiently capable of engaging in the process of definition. From conservative or ‘traditionalist’ perspectives, education is too important to be left to ‘progressive educationists’ (Campaign for real education, 1999), suggesting that problems must be defined and solved outside of a professional community of teaching, leaving it to teachers merely to implement solutions in a linear and unproblematic manner. Alternatively, teachers understanding and awareness of their own practice can be considered a fundamental resource within the definition of educational problems, and thus a key contributor to the ‘reclassificatory recontextualisation’ (Barnett 2006) of knowledge for teaching.

Recontextualisation is, at root, a process by which knowledge is ‘selected’, ‘appropriated’ and ‘transformed’ for a new context (Bernstein 2000; Barnett 2006), but in terms of professional learning this process can be seen as occurring at a variety of levels, including those of knowledge production, validation, curriculum, pedagogy, workplaces and by the learners (professionals) themselves (Evans et al. 2010; Guile 2010; Hordern 2014b). It is also important to note that processes of recontextualisation are influenced by the socio-historical context of the profession and its societal role, which may differ by nation and by historical period, and may be shaped by trans-national conceptions of the profession, agreements between professional associations, or more formal legislative or institutional factors (Hordern 2014b, 2014c). The esteem and value that is attributed to the profession in a given context may also support the profession in mitigating external pressures, including from other professions and government (Abbott 1988).

Using an adaptation of Barnett’s (2006) model of reclassificatory recontextualisation it is possible to model how a specialised body of knowledge that underpins teaching practice can be brought together through engagement between vertical discourse and the problems of practice, as shown in the diagram below.

Figure 1: An interpretation of the constitution of specialised teaching knowledge for practice



RR= Reclassificatory recontextualisation (various recontextualisation agents involved – i.e. governments, professional bodies, higher institutions, schools)

PedR = Pedagogic recontextualisation (teacher educators and teachers primarily involved in recontextualising knowledge for and in practice contexts)

The *specialised* nature of this discourse relies, however, on the existence of certain social conditions that engender specialisation of teaching as a practice. It is to these that we now turn.

In what ways can teaching practice be considered ‘specialised’?

The sociology of the professions posits that specialisation emerges where types of work require particular forms of knowledge and preparation (Abbott 1988; Friedson 2001), where work demands conceptualisation that is not readily available to the uninitiated. Complex work that is considered particularly valuable for society becomes specialised, driven forward by public backing for the generation of knowledge that fuels greater professional awareness of different conditions or circumstances. The process of specialisation requires categorisation, and the development of norms and conditions that can assure the public of the value of the work; a ‘normative structure’ (Winch 2010, 80) that symbolises rigour and quality. Questions of whether teaching should be specialised labour are inextricable from questions about the extent to which education is considered important for society and involving complex thought and action. While education itself ‘cannot compensate for society’ (Bernstein 1970) it has enormous influence on the formation of individual identities, with teachers having the capacity to make a considerable impression on student enthusiasm for different academic subjects and to influence processes of socialisation.

It is clear, however, that at least in England there is considerable variability in the ways in which education is considered important, and in the role of the teacher in providing that education. The growth in supra-national measurement and increasing political interference in schooling has resulted in assessed performance of pupils in standardised tests dominating evaluation of the worth of education, with impacts on how teacher education is shaped and structured (Tatto 2006). Education is often seen purely in service to the economy as a result of the dominance of ideologies that see investment in ‘human capital’ as the key to economic growth (Lauder et al. 2012), with the consequence that the ‘internal goods’ (MacIntyre 1981 in Winch 2010) of education are marginalised as the most powerful focus only on what is measurable, in particular qualification achievements and test performances. The teacher’s role is often seen as that of implementer of policies and initiatives, with little meaningful to contribute apart from efficiency, competence and industry. In such circumstances ‘specialisation’ in teaching is considered minimal, with professional judgement implicated as a routine process.

It is important to consider what certain prevalent conceptions of the nature of teaching mean for concepts of specialisation. As Winch et al. (2013) identify, both the notion of the teacher as a craftsman/woman and the teacher as a ‘technician’ have particular resonance in England, and have variable levels of influence on policy developments in teacher education in other countries, for example in Sweden (Beach and Bagley 2013) and indeed across Europe (Zuljan and Vogrinc 2011). In the craft conception of teaching, the teacher primarily learns through experience in the workplace, with expertise acquired through practice. In some versions this mode of learning is described as an ‘apprenticeship’, although how this is conceptualised and occasionally denigrated by critics working in the field of teacher education perhaps overlooks theoretical development in studies of vocational learning (i.e. by Guile and Young 1997 or Fuller and Unwin 2004). Craft conceptions of teaching often venerate models of communities of practice, drawing on Lave and Wenger (1991) or others. Experience in the workplace is central to such models when applied to professional formation, and yet there is a risk that the limitations for learning of certain types of workplace experience are not sufficiently acknowledged (Fuller et al. 2005). The craft conception is often coupled with the view of the teacher as a ‘subject specialist’, as discussed above. Here, there is specialisation through the subject community, but if this is allied with ‘learning on the job’ without encouraging a ‘good conceptual grasp of education, including its contestable elements’ (Winch 2012, 313) then teachers cannot adequately interpret and make judgements about knowledge developed through educational research, or about suggestions for new curricular or pedagogical strategies.

The craft conception also risks a prioritisation of knowledge on the basis that it is preferred by an organisation or by dominant voices within a particular hierarchy, with limited scope for entertaining the possibility of alternative perspectives. In a teaching context, one can see the potential for particular institutions immersing new ‘craft’ teachers in particular teaching practices favoured in those institutions without developing the teacher’s capacity to acquire, and to critique, other teaching practices. In England, the ‘immersive’ School Direct teacher education model can lead to teaching experiences outside the host school being afforded little value, and this may be exacerbated by recent reforms that place greater power in the hands of chains of schools and independently-minded sponsors (Hordern 2014a). Knowledge in such scenarios can be highly ‘specific’ to context, and not necessarily specialised, if there is no link with the processes and procedures validated by society as appropriate for specialisation. As Winch et al. (2013) have identified, the craft conception of teaching is sceptical of the

value of educational research, and indeed implies that there is no requirement for research into practice at a *systemic* level. While research into professional learning is clear on the value of learning from others in workplaces (i.e. Eraut 2007, Fuller and Unwin 2004), what may be missing in the ‘craft’ conception of teacher formation is an adequate recognition of the importance of institutions and social relations for arbitrating the value of knowledge and expertise, as will be discussed further below.

The view of the teacher as ‘technician’ is equally problematic for the notion of specialisation. In this conception, ‘what works’ in education is established at a systemic level by policy makers or curriculum authorities, and teachers are then tasked with implementing pre-packaged parcels of effective practice, expressed in terms of curriculum or pedagogical techniques, to meet prescribed outcomes. There is some tension here between a technician with a degree of autonomy and discretion, and what Winch terms the ‘Executive technician’ (2010, 165). While the reasonably autonomous technician is less constrained and has scope to develop their expertise, the executive technician is charged to ‘execute a precept derived from someone else’ (165). Certainly an emphasis on the teacher as technician allows for teaching to become in some sense ‘specialised’, but the specialisation of the knowledge is held at some distance from the teachers themselves.

In the technician model teachers are not encouraged to understand *why* knowledge has been specialised in a particular way and to contribute to the ongoing review and development of its specialised nature. Instead, teachers are only encouraged to become experts in *how* to teach on the basis of that specialised knowledge, so to authoritatively implement practices specified for them by governments and their agencies. In the terms outlined above, knowledge is recontextualised (selected, appropriated and transformed) for the teachers at a ‘safe distance’ by governments who do not enable (or trust) those teachers to develop the capability to recontextualise knowledge for themselves. The distance between teachers and the organisers of teacher knowledge has multiple implications, as the pre-specified knowledge and the requirements for its implementation may be in considerable tension with the realities of the contexts in which teachers work. The insights that teachers inevitably gain within workplace practice are accorded limited value, and teachers are not included within discussions about the relevance and appropriacy of the curricula and pedagogies they are asked to implement.

In summary, prevalent conceptions of teaching practice as related to craft or (executive) technical models are problematic at a variety of levels. They tend to absolve, or disempower

teachers from the development of their own professional capability and a deeper understanding of contexts in which they work (and use of research is often considered irrelevant to practice). The belittling of bodies of research knowledge, often developed outside of the practice of teaching, means that teachers may have difficulty in conceptualising the complexity of human interaction and processes of learning within the contexts that they encounter (Winch 2012, 315), and difficulty in conceiving of hypothetical new contexts that may extend their conceptualisation of alternative forms of practice. The craft and technician notions negate the importance of the capacity for inference in professional judgement (Winch 2010), and suggest that teachers need ‘no conceptual grasp of education’ (Winch 2012, 313), leaving teachers at a loss in the face of new challenges for which they have not been prepared.

The technician notion in particular suggests that teachers cannot be trusted to make sound well-reasoned professional judgements (and yet following the arguments above must be trusted because of the importance of the role). Whereas the craft notion restricts the horizon of professional formation, and naively assumes that individual practitioner experience alone is a sufficient model for expertise. This neglects the role of quality mechanisms in all disciplines and professions for establishing the ‘truth’, truthfulness’ and ‘fitness for purpose’ of professional knowledge (Young and Muller, 2007, 2014; Muller 2009). Neither model recognises the sociality of knowledge production and the need for certain conditions to be met for knowledge to acquire validity, as will now be discussed, or the significance of enabling teachers to organise (recontextualise) their own knowledge in order to develop professionally.

Maintaining the socio-epistemic conditions for specialised professional teaching practice

For teaching to enhance its specialisation and professionalism the arguments above suggest that there are both ‘social’ and ‘epistemic’ conditions that need to be met. The inadequacy of prevalent conceptions of teaching practice, at least in England, is coupled with weak conceptions of teaching knowledge. This is unsurprising if one considers how our understandings of professional knowledge have become dominated by an over-emphasis on ‘practice’ itself as a source of knowledge (Young and Muller 2014). As Bernstein’s work demonstrates, there are structural differences between specialised vertical discourses and the contextually-limited horizontal discourses that relate to their inherent epistemic character and quality, and to the social relations that support their development. Practice can indeed be

specialised, and potentially also a source of knowledge, but surely only if underpinned by recontextualised forms of vertical discourse that provided the epistemic structures that enable practitioners to make judgements about the value of current and new knowledge for the purpose of that practice.

It is important to conceptualise the conditions for specialisation as ‘socio-epistemic’ (Muller 2009; Young and Muller 2014). For Young and Muller (2013), drawing on the previous work of Young (2009) and Moore (2007) and with roots in that of Bernstein (1999, 2000), specialised knowledge should be ‘systematically revisable’ (Young and Muller 2013, 236) and ‘emergent’, and thus ever-changing, although ‘originating contexts may leave their mark on the knowledge’, with ‘criterial rules for acceptability’ acting as a process through which knowledge is revised, discarded and re-admitted to the knowledge base (237). Specialised knowledge is ‘produced in particular socio-epistemic formations’ (238), as ‘disciplines differ in terms of their internal material cultures’ (238). Underlying this argument is the assertion that ‘specialised knowledge is real’ and ‘material and social’, and therefore there is the implication that knowledge can acquire a degree of objectivity, but also that all knowledge is fallible and may be improved through further research and inquiry. While much of this thinking, at least in Bernstein’s work (1999), was originally applied to academic disciplines, there is no doubt that the same principles have resonance for professional knowledge (Young and Muller 2014), albeit through a process of ‘recontextualisation’ (Bernstein 2000, 52).

For a specialised professional practice to be sustained, therefore, the social relations need to exist within the professional community that generate and maintain the ‘criterial rules’, and a stance on knowledge that accepts its ‘fallibility’ but nevertheless the potential for a degree of objectivity, always keeping in mind that knowledge bears the imprint of those who were involved in its production. Those professional ‘regions’ that have close relations, or are highly ‘proximate’ (Hordern 2014c), to academic disciplines draw on the latest disciplinary developments but also often mirror these academic disciplines in the application of procedures and principles for the appropriation and transformation of knowledge for practice. Medicine is a paradigmatic example, requiring a particular admixture of professional ‘know that’ and concomitant specialised ‘know how’ from its practitioners, but also sustaining the procedures, principles and ‘criterial rules’ of a discipline, albeit one with a distinctly professional orientation.

In teaching, at least in England, the fragmentation of the professional community exacerbated by the coalition government reforms to school organisation and governance and teacher education from 2010 onwards make the development of these social relations highly problematic. This can be contrasted with Scotland, for example, where a greater systemic cohesiveness, the central involvement of higher education in teacher education, and a greater commitment to finding agreements (Menter and Hulme 2011) provides a better basis for these social relations to emerge. Major contrasts between the two countries exist around forms of professional association, as evidenced by the differing roles and fates of the respective General Teaching Councils, but also in the success of initiatives such as union learning representatives in Scotland (Alexandrou and Davies 2006) which demonstrate the potential of integrating practitioners in teaching improvement/professional development strategies.

Specialisation of teaching knowledge and practice, underpinned by the social relations outlined above, enables recontextualisation agents (i.e. professional associations, higher education institutions, teacher educators and teachers) to appropriate, select and transform vertical discourses to provide a knowledge base for teaching. As noted above, the involvement of practitioners in the definition of problems is important, but this also needs reframing in conversation with researchers in higher education, in order for extant bodies of knowledge to be brought to bear on those problems. The two specialised discourses of the disciplinary background and educational/pedagogical research are recontextualised to provide pedagogical knowledge for teaching, at least for secondary teachers. At primary level, recontextualisation relies to a greater extent of the educational/pedagogical research, and the elements of knowledge recontextualised are slightly different, given the more 'generalist' formulation of the role of the primary teacher.

Teaching needs to be a specialised professional practice because professional practice cannot function without specialised knowledge (Abbott 1988, Friedson 2001). Specialised knowledge must be conceptual and revisable (Young and Muller 2013; Winch 2010), and education as an activity is too important for society to not be specialised, given its central societal role (Bernstein 2000; Biesta 2010). While, internally at least, the conditions for this are achievable, there can be no doubting the difficulties involved considering the ways in which governments are keen on using education instrumentally, to achieve specified objectives which articulate uneasily with long-held societal and professional conceptions of education and its practice.

Notes on Contributor

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