Hordern, J. (2018) 'Educational knowledge: traditions of inquiry, specialisation and practice', *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*. doi: 10.1080/14681366.2018.1428221.

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis Group in *Pedagogy, Culture & Society* on 17/1/2018 available online: http://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2018.1428221

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Educational knowledge: traditions of inquiry, specialisation and practice

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Authors copy of following paper:

Hordern, J. 2018. Educational knowledge: traditions of inquiry, specialisation and practice. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, DOI: 10.1080/14681366.2018.1428221

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Abstract

This paper draws on sociological and philosophical work on educational knowledge and expertise to consider what is distinctive about different traditions of educational inquiry. It is argued that an examination of the character of educational knowledge benefits from scrutiny of the relations between specialised and non-specialised forms of knowledge, and an emphasis on distinguishing forms of educational practice in terms of their underpinning socio-epistemic character. With reference to the work of Durkheim, Bernstein and social realism, it is suggested that traditions of educational inquiry can be differentiated by the extent to which they recognise the distinct value of specialised educational knowledge and by which they offer a conceptualisation of educational practice as a specialised activity for which systematic knowledge is necessary. Various traditions of inquiry are briefly explored in these terms (i.e. foundation disciplines, German educational thought and practice-centred traditions).

Keywords: specialised knowledge; educational research; educational practice; theory-practice relation.

Introduction

Questions of educational knowledge are often at the heart of debate about educational policy and educational futures (Whitty 2006; James 2012; Furlong 2013), underpinning much of what is contestable about education. The work of Young (2008), Barrett and Rata (2015) and Young and Muller (2016) has highlighted the centrality of knowledge in analyses of curricula, pedagogy, and educational reform. Arguments about how educational problems are framed and solutions determined often return to questions of how knowledge validity is determined, and by whom. A relativist view might construe these questions as being primarily about struggles amongst differing voices for dominance, while the critical and social realists open up opportunities to differentiate knowledge claims on the basis of commitments both to 'truth' and to 'truthfulness' (Young and Muller 2007). For some, questions of educational value are increasingly marginalised by the push towards empiricism and 'what works' in research design (Biesta 2007; Hammersley 2005), while others have queried the potential for academic researchers to make valid claims about educational practice (Carr 2006) and highlighted the problems facing institutional educational research (Furlong 2013; Whitty 2014). Meanwhile, some governments have sought to influence the processes by which educational knowledge achieves recognition, often explicitly criticising much academic educational research for its irrelevance, politicisation or plain incompetence (i.e Gibb 2016). In England, for example, the government has sponsored a preferred research institute (the Education Endowment Foundation and the 'what works centre for education') which is charged with 'improving and spreading the evidence on what works in education' (DfE 2016, 13). This entails producing educational knowledge according to specific methods and to meet specific policy objectives, and then distributing that as 'preferred' knowledge to schools, thereby discouraging the engagement of educational practitioners with other forms of disciplinary educational knowledge.

In this politically-inflected context of debate around educational knowledge Whitty and Furlong's (2017) recent comparative study of educational knowledge traditions provides a novel approach to differentiating between knowledge form and purpose in education across national contexts. In the introductory chapter Furlong and Whitty (2017) identify twelve knowledge traditions, categorising them in terms of the 'academic', the 'practical' and the 'integrated', drawing on Bernstein's (2000) work for their analysis. They also distinguish between 'objective' and 'normative' concerns in the production of knowledge, that is between aspirations to produce knowledge that is 'contestable through accepted protocols

within particular epistemic communities' (2017, 19) and those that start with an 'explicit (or at least clearly identifiable) value position' (ibid.). Furlong and Whitty's analysis is sociological and comparative in form – they seek to identify the social character of educational knowledge and the context of the historical traditions within which it has developed in differing nations. This is achieved partially through comparing, contrasting and identifying features within the traditions that have resonance in relation to other traditions.

Although their work draws on forms of realist educational sociology that asserts the special character of certain forms of knowledge for education (i.e. Young 2008), Furlong and Whitty (2017) do not seek to make strong judgements about the 'value' or appropriateness of the knowledge traditions they identify. This liberates them to explore the character of the various traditions without fear or favour while not explicitly arbitrating between them. However, there is little doubt that the later work of Bernstein (2000), and that of Young (2008) and Young and Muller (2016) takes a distinctive position regarding forms of knowledge. Bernstein (2000) suggested that the institutional fabric that had successfully produced specialised forms of knowledge is under attack from a 'new concept of knowledge' that is 'divorced from persons' and 'their commitments' (86), and instead values knowledge in terms of its instrumentality and its commerciality. Young and Muller (2016) have drawn on Durkheim and Bernstein to identify how certain forms of knowledge accrue the power to provide greater insight by virtue of the social conditions of their production and validation. The implication of this Bernsteinian and social realist tradition therefore is that is possible to make well-founded judgements about forms of knowledge circulating in academic and professional communities, and to locate debates about knowledge in a broader social and political context.

This paper provides a basis for distinguishing between traditions of educational inquiry by foregrounding issues of differentiation and specialisation in educational knowledge and practice, drawing on elements of the work of Durkheim, Bernstein, Young and Muller. It is argued that a renewed focus on the socio-epistemic character of the sacred and the profane, on the nuanced relation between 'theory' and practice, and on the character of practice in educational contexts, can help illuminate debate and point to clear lines of demarcation between different educational knowledge traditions. While recognising the insights of Furlong and Whitty's (2017) approach, in this paper the relationship between specialised and non-specialised knowledge and practice is placed at the centre of the analysis to better understand the content and logic of particular traditions of inquiry and their dynamics within

educational systems. It is suggested that traditions of educational inquiry can be usefully differentiated according to whether they value and recognise specialised educational knowledge (i.e. knowledge concerned with educational problematics pertinent to educational practice), and by whether educational practice itself is conceptualised as a specialised and yet normative activity for which systematic knowledge is necessary. Aspects of various traditions of inquiry are briefly examined in these terms to exemplify the analysis.

Bernstein, Durkheim, and a socio-epistemic approach to the analysis of educational knowledge

Bernstein's (1999, 2000) work, and work informed by Bernstein (i.e. Muller 2009; Young and Muller 2016; Beck and Young 2005) is helpful for differentiating between forms of knowledge, their underpinning logics, structures and forms of sociality. While it can be helpful to clearly separate the sociological dimensions of knowledge production from the epistemic character of knowledge, the Bernstein work and its development by those involved with social realism (i.e. Young and Muller 2016) enables an analysis of the sociology of knowledge that sees the social and epistemic as inextricable, in that there is an interdependency between knowledge structure and the social processes through which that knowledge is shaped (Muller 2009). The origin of this is primarily in Durkheim's (1912/2001) elementary forms of religious life, in which it is argued that the division between the 'sacred' and the 'profane' characterises all societies, and that contemporary society is replacing religion with science as the host of the sacred, with significant implications. In Durkheim's work 'sacred' forms of knowledge are 'collective representations' that have a special character – they are constructed through the 'work of society' and are 'rich with its experience', providing an 'intellectual realm' that is nevertheless 'subjected to an indefinitely repeated test' as concepts are verified through the engagement of those that 'adhere' to them (2001, pp. 331-3). Sacred or 'specialised' knowledge is enabled through specific forms of 'sociality' that enable its ongoing refinement and modification (Durkheim 2001; Young and Muller 2016).

Bernstein echoed Durkheim with his depiction of vertical discourse as 'specialised symbolic structures of explicit knowledge' (1999, 161), and then distinguished between the 'hierarchical' and 'horizontal/segmented' knowledge structures within this discourse. This vertical discourse of specialised knowledge is a product of certain social relations and practices which seek to sustain the knowledge itself 'in an ongoing process in extended time'

(Bernstein 1999, 161). In horizontal discourse, however, profane ‘repertoires’ and ‘strategies’ borne of individual experience are circulated and exchanged to meet specific individual or group objectives (ibid., 159-160), and are ‘exhausted in the context of..enactment’ (161). Inevitably the boundaries between the sacred/ vertical/specialised and the profane/horizontal/non-specialised have a degree of permeability, in that notions that have an origin in horizontal discourse can, conceivably, engage with the existing body of specialised vertical knowledge and, providing they can demonstrate their value, become absorbed into that body (Muller 2014; Young and Muller 2016). Furthermore, it must be accepted that specialised notions may become discredited over time and therefore no longer meet the conditions for membership within the conceptual web of specialised knowledge, and be recategorised as ‘non-specialised’ within horizontal discourse (although this recategorisation is unlikely to be unopposed!).

The distinction between the sacred and the profane (and thus between Bernstein’s vertical and horizontal discourse) involves examining the underlying socio-epistemic processes and practices that constitute certain forms of sacredness and profanity. Muller (2014) suggests, drawing on Winch (2010), that Bernstein’s discourses are more than simply propositional knowledge structures; they are socio-epistemic entities that consist of propositional knowledge but also the inferential and procedural know-how that enables those propositions to form a meaningful body of knowledge, and to enable that body of knowledge to continue to iterate. Therefore, the disciplinary communities responsible for husbanding this knowledge must refine and enact the disciplinary procedures for evaluating new claims to knowledge, including referencing claims against the existing knowledge base and registering the significance of the new knowledge for the community. There is a degree of necessary self-referentiality in this form of disciplinarity (Bridges 2006), implying autonomy and discretion for the knowledge community and freedom from direction from external parties. Whitty and Furlong’s (2017) work highlights elements of such disciplined socio-epistemic dynamics in education in an international perspective. The social dynamics of disciplined normative educational thought (i.e in the German context) appear purposeful and bounded, clearly delineating themselves from other disciplinary communities, and this contrasts with the more multi or inter-disciplinary traditions that are characteristic of the U.K (Furlong and Whitty 2017; McCulloch 2017). The German tradition of hermeneutic educational thought centres around key concepts and notions that form the core of the disciplinary tradition (Schriewer

2017; Westbury, Hopmann and Riquarts 2000), although this is nonetheless challenged in recent time by empiricism (Schriewer 2017).

On the other hand, there are educational knowledge traditions that deliberately eschew academic knowledge, or much of it, deeming it to be worthless or subversive. Such knowledge traditions operate on the basis of a 'what works' logic - knowledge and its producers must be tested against market imperatives. If you can show your 'knowledge' has a direct practical use and secures results or outcomes that meet the approval of those in power, then it achieves validity. Knowledge producers are in competition not to achieve truth but to establish their work as dominant on the market, as their reputation and livelihood may depend on it. This is antithetical to academic approaches to establishing truth claims and achieving consensus on knowledge value (Young and Muller 2016). It supplants disciplinary procedures for evaluating knowledge with procedures determined external to disciplinary communities – the norms are no longer internally generated and owned. The boundaries between the sacred/specialised and the profane/non-specialised are therefore irrelevant to the knowledge tradition – the 'ongoing process in extended time' (Bernstein 1999, 161) that underpins disciplined knowledge production is impossible if knowledge is instrumentalised and there is no necessary reference to previous knowledge claims.

In the elementary forms of religious life Durkheim (2001) provided a useful distinction between the practices of the church and that of magic, which can serve to further illuminate the socio-epistemic underpinnings of different knowledge traditions. Durkheim observes that much of the outward character of the practices of the church and magic are similar - magic has 'rites which are the mirror image of religious ceremonies', imitating aspects of religion and demanding the belief and faith of its followers. However, the relationship between the magician and his/her followers is hierarchical and ephemeral – 'there are no lasting bonds', and magic societies 'never include the believers in magic only the magicians' (43-44). Magic itself seeks to inspire belief through rites and rituals – but once these are stripped away, little substance remains. On the other hand, the idea of the church (at least in Durkheim's conception as a template for a secular religion) is characterised by bonded inclusivity, with individuals 'bound to one another by their common beliefs' (42), with a 'common conception of the sacred world and its relation to the profane world' (42-43), incorporating 'worshippers as well as priests' (44) as 'members of a moral body' (43). While such a participatory and inclusive community may appear utopian, the overall distinction between the character of church and magic illustrates characteristics of potential knowledge traditions and the

communities that construct them. It turns our attention to issues of hierarchy and participation, distinctions between the sacred and the profane, and the importance of shared conceptions across knowledge communities.

While some traditions of educational inquiry may deliberately collapse the sacred/profane distinction and rely on what is seen to 'work', offering top-down magical solutions to meet the concerns of funders or politicians, other traditions seek to work towards shared understanding and are supportive of the development of consensus, while seeking to maintain a clear distinction between knowledge that meets recognised standards and that which does not. In the 'church' model, it is the community itself, and its historically-developed precedents, which act as the ultimate arbitrators of knowledge value, while in the 'magic' model, magicians are free to concoct knowledge claims without recourse to a community, and free to contract their activity to the highest bidder – relying only on convincing 'followers' eager to become spellbound. In a context where policy-makers and educational practitioners are searching for solutions to real and imagined problems, which have often arisen as a consequence of previous policy initiatives, it is easy to see the seductiveness of a 'magical' knowledge tradition.

Extending the sacred/profane differentiation to educational practice

While academic institutions and the knowledge they produce has sometimes been thought to characterise the 'sacred', and 'everyday' contextual work the 'profane', this often seems an improbably tight distinction in reality. Those educational practitioners who have been educated in the 'sacred' world by studying at university or in teacher education institutions are exposed to ideas and concepts that they may carry with them as they practice in schools and other educational settings. These ideas may be seen as irrelevant or become subsumed within those practice contexts, or they may become opportunities to perceive the practice experience differently. In general, what we think of as 'educational practice' contains numerous notions, concepts, rules of thumb, judgements and various levels of commitment to truth and validity. In this respect Schon's (2001) characterisation of practice as a 'swampy lowland' is perceptive, but there are surely different types of swamp, multiple ways in which swamps can be negotiated, and knowledge that can assist in the negotiation of swamps that can be gathered and distributed amongst practitioners. What then is the relation between theory and what Furlong and Whitty (2017, 19) call the 'world of practice'? As others have

argued from rather different perspectives (Guile 2010; Winch 2010) a simple dichotomy between the two can be misleading, as it masks all sorts of potential relationships.

Firstly, it seems misleading to equate Bernstein's (2000) 'horizontal discourse' with 'practice' per se, as vertical discourse also consists of a form of practice, albeit of a more specialised type than that present in horizontal discourse (Muller 2014). Much like in Durkheim's (2001) ideal type of the participatory church community that recognises and distinguishes sacredness from profanity, the social practice of vertical discourse is characterised by stipulations around the differentiated nature of knowledge, and how this knowledge is to be iterated and sustained over time. Secondly, if we consider how specialised ideas and concepts generated in a vertical disciplinary discourse are introduced to educational practices in schools and other educational settings then we may suggest that these concepts have the potential to alter or transform that practice if they have resonance amongst practitioners, but alternatively they may be disregarded or ignored. Furthermore, the ideas and concepts may themselves, within an educational (or any occupational) practice, be 'recontextualised' (Bernstein 2000; Hordern 2014) into something very different from their origins. Nevertheless, it seems plausible to suggest that theories originating in specialised knowledge/vertical discourse may be as much a part of any given educational practice as they are part of knowledge production, and they may be in competition within that practice with notions that are distortions of specialised knowledge, or those that are effectively 'rules of thumb' developed in situ by individual practitioners. Educational practice can therefore be a melting pot in which educational ideas are applied, adapted, tested, rejected and originated – in which various ideas persist in various forms (Hordern 2017). Any given educational practice may align more or less with 'specialised' practice characteristics in terms of its use of procedures and recognition of the distinctiveness of specialised knowledge, or with the more fluid and arbitrary dynamic of horizontal discourse.

In attempting to understand practice, however, we can foreground 'practice' as a defining characteristic of all shared human (and possibly non-human) activity, or we can see practice as stemming from, and fundamentally shaped by, the knowledge and issues by and for which it is constituted. Much practice theory suggests the former approach, suggesting that engagement in a practice 'forms and transforms….those who are also involved in and affected by the practice' and 'transforms the world in which the practice is carried out' (Kemmis et al. 2014, 25) through, in Schatzki's (2010) terms, 'an open organised array of doings and sayings' that are held together by 'rules' and 'understandings'. The world is thus,

in this view, a ‘seamless assemblage, nexus or confederation of practices’ (Nicolini 2013, 3), and the task of the researcher is to identify the defining elements of, or phenomena associated with, any given practice, and how it relates to other practices. Rouse describes these approaches as ‘regulist’ or ‘regularist’ as they suggest that habits and behaviours co-exist within a practice because they are ‘governed by a rule’ or are collectively ‘exhibiting a regularity’ (Rouse 2007, 47) that defines that practice.

On the other hand, what Rouse describes as ‘normative’ approaches to practice stress the significance of ‘mutual accountability’, and the necessity for something to be ‘at stake’ (2007, 50) for the practice to hold together meaningfully. In such a conception boundaries and criteria are formed which indicate what counts as constitutive of that practice. Where processes of generating, modifying, circulating and exchanging specialised knowledge are central to the practice, this normative version seems apposite, for example in the case of professionalised occupational practices, and in academic communities (Hager 2011; Beck and Young 2005; Hordern 2016). For those involved in generating specialised forms of knowledge in disciplinary communities something is clearly ‘at stake’, as that knowledge has a particular value to those who produce it and perhaps (in Young and Muller’s 2016 conception) to society in general**.** While the differentiation between the sacred and the profane is fundamental to understanding society, the development of ‘collective representations’ and the development of common bonds in the Durkheimian tradition, the differentiation between the concomitant elements of the sacred and profane *in practice* is equally important for understanding the diverse nature of educational knowledge. We might suggest therefore that educational practices that involve the production (i.e research), relay (i.e. curricularisation) and reproduction (i.e. pedagogy and learning) of knowledge are in some sense ‘sacred’ in tone as they are core educational processes that require specialised conceptualisation, while cutting a hedge or copying a letter on a computer are in some sense profane in that they do not rely on the active use of sacred or specialised concepts.

This distinction does require some nuance, however. Firstly, some professional or occupational groups (medicine) possess forms of social or moral authority that make it easier for them to ‘control’ the sacredness of their practice – and therefore to ensure that sacred specialised knowledge is engaged with systematically *in practice*. Secondly, we should not ignore the fact that specialised concepts underpin a great deal of activity in modern life. Even when we are not consciously making use of specialised knowledge, forms of that knowledge may have been used to construct the materials involved in a given activity, and are

indispensable to its execution (Hordern 2018; Young and Muller 2014). Copying letters on a computer is only possible with the existence of language and the algorithmic structures that underpin computing.

An important question therefore is whether a practice provides the socio-epistemic conditions by which specialised knowledge may be validated, adapted and disregarded where necessary. When practice contexts enable the examination of previous, existing and new theoretical ideas and research postulates in a fair and balanced manner with regard to their truthfulness and commitment to truth (Young and Muller 2007) then we can be more confident that good theories are being made 'good sense' of in practice (Winch, Oancea and Orchard 2015, 209). In essence this is an echo of Durkheim's assertion that concepts maintain validity through the 'indefinitely repeated test' that the 'men who adhere to it verify by their own experience' (1912/2001, 333). Practice may be rich in the examination of theory, generating new ideas with practitioners perhaps participating in the ongoing development of knowledgeable forms of practice. Nevertheless, practice can also be a site where research knowledge is distorted or where discarded theories survive unchallenged, where magicians thrive, and where market or bureaucratic logics dominate to the exclusion of the 'voice of knowledge' (Young 2009).

We can therefore differentiate educational practices by (i) the extent to which they are underpinned by specialised or non-specialised knowledge; and (ii) the extent to which the differentiation between those forms of specialised and non-specialised knowledge is recognised and acknowledged in the practice (Hordern 2016). This recognition and acknowledgement is demonstrated if specialised forms of disciplinary logic prevail over instrumental logics that suggest knowledge should be valued for its 'effectiveness' in supporting contrasting governmental or commercially sponsored notions of valuable knowledge. If practitioners are full participants in the practice and enabled to engage in building shared conceptions of the practice purpose, much as in Durkheim's idealised version of church practice, then this is greater potential for knowledge value to be refined and mutually agreed across the practice, and procedures for establishing and recognising quality upheld. In contrast if practitioners are disempowered and not encouraged to engage in building shared conceptions of knowledgeable practice, and only receive instructions or dictates around the use of knowledge in practice (i.e. in Winch, Oancea and Orchard's (2015) portrayal of executive technicians), then they are ill-equipped to make judgements about new techniques or innovations, and unable to contribute fully to the practice community.

However, there is a further dimension to this relationship between knowledge and practice. In many traditions of educational inquiry, knowledge is always produced in a manner that is conscious of the nature and potential of educational practice, and the pedagogical relations therein. This does not necessarily mean that practice concerns directly and explicitly drive knowledge production, but it does suggest that concerns relating to practical action in practice are not absent. In other words, for educationalists, questions of what and how to teach, or how learning occurs, of potential constraints on learning, issues of socialisation and of the moral and ethical dimensions of education, become central problematics for the knowledge tradition. Examined another way, the study of education in these traditions can be seen as inextricably 'interested' (Biesta 2011) in educational practice, and knowledge that speaks to that interest can be seen as implicitly more 'educational' than that which does not. We might suggest, following aspects of continental European traditions, that the most distinctly educational problematic is that of concern for the 'formation' of each and every individual, a concern for their well-being, growth and enlightenment in the world. These concerns are arguably echoed in Furlong and Whitty's (2017) characterisation of some educational knowledge traditions as 'normative', and other traditions (that are less directly interested in educational practice) as 'objective'. The extent of the level of 'interest' in, or concern with, educational practice, its purposes and problems, is demonstrated through a profile of the prominent research foci in any given tradition. While some knowledge produced by educational researchers may be clearly *educational* in character, and concerned directly or indirectly with core *educational problematics* (i.e. formation), other knowledge may nevertheless sit more comfortably in another, more disinterested, disciplinary category (i.e. sociology, psychology, or economics), while still potentially having bearing on the context of educational practice.

The configuration of specialised (and non-specialised) knowledge and practice

We could be led to an assumption that notions of occupational educational practice are fundamentally different from how we evaluate academic educational practice, but hard distinctions between the two may be exaggerated. As Beck and Young (2005) identify, drawing on Bernstein (2000), the 'assault' from markets and governments pertains as much to academia and other professional groups. This assault entails a hollowing out of professional control of knowledge, resulting in a 'divorce' between 'knowledge' and the 'knower' (Bernstein 2000, 81), a squeezing out of 'commitments' and 'personal dedications' (ibid., 86) and an implicit or explicit belief in the 'obsolescence of accumulated knowledge' (Beck and

Young 2005, 191). Indeed, it could be argued that exacerbating the divorce between 'academic' practice and 'occupational' or professional practice can suit governments eager to execute particular educational reforms. Specialised disciplinary knowledge can be portrayed as outdated or irrelevant, an obstacle to the advancement of '21st century skills' (as in, for example Robinson (2008)), or to the achievement of 'necessary' educational reforms to curricula and teacher education. As disciplinary knowledge is supplanted, the loss is greater than just the form of knowledge that enables practitioners to think beyond their experience, to hypothesise and to conceptualise. This is because disciplinary knowledge, professional identity, professional judgement and occupational commitment are conjoined and interdependent (Bernstein 2000; Beck and Young 2005; Young and Muller 2014). By undermining disciplined educational knowledge, governments or commercial enterprises are undermining the potential for committed knowledgeable educational practitioners capable of exercising reasoned judgements. While there is no reason why educational professionals cannot continually draw on, engage with and contribute to the development of aspects of academic knowledge as participants in the production of educational knowledge, in order to do this they require some form of occupational 'jurisdiction' (Abbott 1988), or control over elements of their work, in order to preserve identities and protect professional judgements. The route to achieving jurisdiction is by claiming occupational authority over an area of work through demonstrating the value of occupational practice to society, as Abbott (1988) and Foray and Hargreaves (2003) show was achieved by medical professionals.

The relations between higher education, practitioners and the state are highly influential in shaping the conditions for specialised knowledge and practice to emerge, and therefore in constituting educational knowledge traditions. Considering historical accounts of the development of these relations over time in national educational contexts offers opportunities for conceptualising variants of these relations, and the potential implications. In Germany, for example, the role of educational professionals is underpinned by legislation enacted at state level, and 'higher education and the state worked together' to form 'licensure' that enabled teacher autonomy and Didaktik to flourish (Westbury, Hopmann and Riquarts 2000, 21). Educational professionals have historically enjoyed considerable autonomy in their practice and extended formation within higher education institutions, underpinned by powerful educational concepts which constitute an educational knowledge tradition (Westbury, Hopmann and Riquarts 2000, Schriewer 2017). While Furlong and Whitty's (2017) suggestion that German educational thought is a 'singular' or 'pure discipline' may be

accurate, there is no doubt that many of the concepts it has produced (i.e. Bildung, Didaktik) have had a profound impression on the constitution of educational practice in many continental European countries (Hopmann 2007). These concepts and the thinkers behind them have served to constitute German educational practice as it is understood by educators there, providing it with a specialised character that sits apart from the ‘everyday’. The key relation in the German context is between professional practice and higher education, but this is underpinned by state licensure in a well understood explicit system that affords professional autonomy and discretion (Schriewer 2017). The conditions for specialised educational knowledge (produced and relayed by higher education), and specialised education practice (maintained by professional jurisdiction and underpinned by legislation, a strong connection to specialised educational knowledge and a lengthy in depth period of formation) are sustained. These characteristics are not without challenge, however. They have been criticised for their perceived inflexibility and inherent conservatism, and are thought by some to be sub-optimal for success in international comparisons of student achievement (Ertl 2006).

In England, in contrast, reforms to teacher education over the last twenty years have seen an enhanced role for government in determining the nature of educational practice, including through the use of curriculum reform, inspection, and systemic change (Whitty 2014). Higher education and disciplinary educational knowledge production have increasingly been cut adrift from the formation of educational professionals (Furlong 2013). Thus concepts produced in higher education have travelled less and less frequently and profoundly into discussions and debates in educational practice contexts. Instead practice concerns increasingly look to the state, to teaching standards and to the latest reforms, rather than to any specialised educational knowledge traditions. While many practitioners have been exposed to disciplined educational knowledge through previous courses, current forms of teacher preparation in England have very limited space for the introduction of disciplinary concepts and conceptualisations of education. Instead a form of instrumental technicism holds sway (Winch, Oancea and Orchard 2015), and there is no state infrastructure or licensure that could unilaterally underpin a form of professional autonomy for teachers.

Thus the state in England plays a more active role in shaping educational practice in England than can be observed in Germany, and the relationship between higher education and practice is more distant and contested than in Germany. Instead of higher education supporting and sustaining a specialised form of practice, the English experience is of a state which seeks to

cast education in service to a knowledge economy (Young 2009), and therefore aims to recast educational practice in a form that can meet these reform objectives. Non-specialised forms of practice mingle with more specialised forms, in an environment which cannot stem the flow of non-specialisation. Instead of conservatism and a risk of inflexibility, educational practice in England is characterised by constant change and contestation over issues relating to curriculum and pedagogy. The circumstances for educational knowledge production are thus very different, with non-disciplinary providers able to produce non-specialised knowledge that would be considered valuable within the educational system, precisely because the macro-level objectives of educational practice in England are themselves increasingly antithetical to disciplinary educational concepts.

Concluding remarks: implications for how we think about traditions of educational inquiry

The discussion above implies that debates about educational knowledge may benefit from a triple differentiation, firstly between specialised and non-specialised forms of educational knowledge (following Durkheim (2001), Bernstein (1999, 2000) and Young and Muller (2016)), secondly between specialised and non-specialised forms of educational practice, and thirdly between specialised educational knowledge and specialised non-educational knowledge. This third differentiation relates to the strength of the boundaries of the educational discipline – the extent to which the nature of 'the educational' is clearly defined and forms a guideline for what is considered educational inquiry. In some traditions of inquiry the boundaries are blurred and the educational net is cast wide to include a wide range of studies that may have bearing on education – education itself is defined in broad terms. On the other hand, some traditions may seek greater 'restrictions over the phenomena they address' (Bernstein 1999, 164), resulting in a more focused claim to disciplinary identity. In the light of the discussion above it seems useful to ask the following questions of traditions of educational inquiry:

- Is *specialised educational* knowledge produced and valued by the knowledge tradition? Is this clearly differentiated from *non-specialised* knowledge, and from *specialised non-educational* knowledge that nevertheless may have a bearing on the context of educational practice?

- How is educational practice conceptualised in the tradition? Who or what configures the nature of the educational practice related to that tradition? Is it seen as important that specialised knowledge be clearly identified and differentiated from non-specialised knowledge in practice contexts?

It is questionable whether all knowledge produced in the foundation disciplines in the UK or in the U.S., or indeed in France (i.e. as discussed in Whitty and Furlong 2017), is necessarily focused primarily on the problematics of educational practice, and therefore some of this foundational knowledge could potentially be better categorised as part of other disciplines. For example, some studies of education policy or of the history of educational institutions, or of the relationship between social mobility and education, produce significant knowledge that has a bearing on education, but is not centrally concerned with core *educational* problematics (i.e. issues of personal formation or socialisation, or of the pedagogical processes and educational knowledge that enable these). This research may look to bodies of knowledge produced by sociology, politics and history as primary reference points, but may also remain important sources of knowledge for educationalists, although their knowledge might not be characterised by all as 'educational'. However, other knowledge located within the foundation disciplines may be much more focused on educational problematics – there is, for example, a significant body of philosophically and sociologically informed work conceptualising curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, (i.e. see Barrett and Rata 2015 and Barrett, Hoadley and Morgan 2017 for the use of one sociological tradition). The foundation disciplines benefit from the capacity to self-regulate and configure their own practices with a level of independence from external interests (although in the UK this is challenged by increasing performance management in higher education). Arguably where educational practice is subject to government policies that contrast with much educational academic thought (i.e. in England), some distance from immediate practice concerns could also be seen as beneficial for maintaining disciplinary community.

On the other hand, there are knowledge traditions outlined by Furlong and Whitty (2017) that are clearly focused on producing knowledge relevant to educational practice, rather than answering to other disciplinary traditions. Some of these also explicitly rely on educational practice as a source and relay of that educational knowledge. These include (i) clinical practice, (ii) practitioner inquiry/action research and (iii) networked professional knowledge (Furlong and Whitty 2017). While none are necessarily similar, they are all characterised by a

focus on the workings and potential of practice to generate knowledge, or to transform disciplinary knowledge into a type that can be 'applied' in educational contexts. What may differentiate them is the extent to which they seek to produce specialised educational knowledge, or indeed recognise the distinction between specialised and non-specialised forms of knowledge (the sacred-profane distinction) and enact this distinction in practice. While this process may be possible in forms of clinical practice and practitioner inquiry, it seems absent from forms of networked professional knowledge.

In the clinical practice tradition forms of specialised knowledge produced in the foundation disciplines are often valued within a 'structured dialogue' that brings together 'diverse sources of knowledge' (including student data and teachers' conjectures about the learning context) with the aim of developing teachers' professional reasoning (Burn and Mutton 2015, 226). The potential here is for specialised forms of knowledge to be considered alongside non-specialised local knowledge – and to stimulate forms of integration and new insight into the practice context. However, there is also a risk that the character and potential of the specialised knowledge may become elided if practitioners do not recognise the value that inheres within this knowledge as a consequence of its conditions of production. If the various knowledge forms considered in a clinical practice dialogue are valued for what it is perceived they can offer to help practitioners make sense of their specific practice contexts and to come to judgements about *their approach to their practice,* then the resonance of more specialised forms may be lost. Some versions of clinical practice may, therefore, slip towards an undifferentiated view of knowledge specialisation, if the reasoning process is shaped by a priority to produce teachers to meet current demands as they are shaped by current education policies. This may lead to some knowledge being selected and transformed independently of those other propositional, inferential and procedural forms of knowledge that together provide that knowledge with its full meaning (Winch 2010; Hordern 2017). This means that it is difficult to see this knowledge tradition as inherently specialised, although its focus on rigorous interrogation of knowledge and deepening professionalism (Burn and Mutton 2015, Furlong and Whitty 2017) leaves open scope for a more consistently specialised focus.

Rather differently, the collaborative nature of practitioner inquiry suggests a participative mode that can potentially involve all practitioners in the constitution of practice and build a consensus around specialised forms of knowledge. However, the strong 'situational' emphasis (Furlong and Whitty 2017) of practitioner inquiry and action research may militate against the development of a clear view of the nature of the practice and the extent of its

specialisation. The work of Young and Muller (2014, 2016) suggests that certain practices may not have specialised characteristics, whereas action research explicitly centres study on the practice at hand irrespective of its underlying socio-epistemic character. Indeed, the emphasis is usually on producing new knowledge relevant to the practice at hand and this is often seen as validated through the research process itself (Brydon-Miller and Maguire 2009), rather than through recourse to disciplinary procedures for validating knowledge. The risk here is that practitioners may become too immersed in the practice itself to be able to critically examine the knowledge present in the practice –the capacity to hypothesise alternative, perhaps transformative, practices may be hindered. A potential remedy to such situations may be found in opening access to other (more specialised) practice contexts to enable comparison and differentiation to occur.

What Furlong and Whitty call Networked Professional Knowledge (2017, 36-38) has arisen partly through dissatisfaction with the perceived 'traditional hierarchies' (2017, 37) represented by disciplinary knowledge, the perceived lack of 'practical relevance' (37) of said disciplinary knowledge, and the belief that schools should 'take ownership' of educational problems and develop and share 'best practice' through networks of practitioners instead. It has made significant inroads into educational thinking and policy in England. Instead of criteria for judging truth claims developed through disciplinary processes, networked professional knowledge values whatever is said to 'work in practice'. There is no need, in such a conception, for a disciplinary community or for recourse to existing bodies of knowledge – those with power to define the current context of 'practice', in particular in England governments and leaders of educational organisations, set the terms for what counts as valid knowledge. This is undoubtedly profane, horizontal discourse, as Furlong and Whitty (2017, 36) note, and it could be argued fertile territory for Durkheim's magicians to hold powerless congregations in wonder at new educational innovations.

All three traditions above are configured to some extent by practitioners, rather than the academic field of the foundation disciplines. However, there are important differences. Whereas, clinical practice has been developed through partnerships between higher education and research-inclined practitioners (Burn and Mutton 2015), practitioner inquiry and action research have tended to be more comprehensively practitioner led, often by individuals or groups of practitioners, although much of the tradition stems from critical elements of educational thought (Brydon-Miller and Maguire 2009). Indeed it could be argued that much innovative thinking in practitioner inquiry still stems from sources in higher education,

irrespective of the commitments from advocates to place practice concerns at the centre of inquiry. However, networked professional knowledge has been more explicitly shaped and embraced by those sited outside higher education, and by those who have straddled the worlds of policy, educational practice and academia including influential figures in school improvement movements and politicians (Furlong and Whitty 2017). Undeniably this form of knowledge offers considerable control to non-academics, and its success can be seen in relation to the difficulties the foundation disciplines have faced in ensuring their knowledge is seen as relevant to educational problems as perceived.

In the English context it can be argued that forms of educational knowledge located in higher education have failed to develop a coherent vision of educational practice to which their knowledge speaks. The production of knowledge that is presented as educational, and yet relates more closely to other disciplinary traditions makes the translation of knowledge to practice concerns more problematic. What England lacks perhaps, in contrast to Germany, is a distinct disciplinary tradition of specifically educational thought powered by educational concepts that can have resonance in practice. The lack of an offer of compelling educational concepts around which higher education research and practitioner thinking can gather and iterate has left 'practice' ripe for redefinition by governments and educational entrepreneurs with motives that are, at best, only partially educational. Brian Simon's (1981) observation that there is no pedagogy in England still resonates, and without the development of a stronger tradition of educational thought with some restrictions on what is considered educational inquiry the capacity of educational practitioners to 'make good sense' (Winch, Oancea and Orchard 2015) of the practice they experience and enact is significantly curtailed.

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