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Educational Studies and Educational Practice: A Necessary Engagement

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Educational studies and educational practice: a necessary engagement

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Abstract

This paper assesses prospects for the relationship between educational studies and educational practice, with reference to the current institutional and policy context in England. Drawing on the sociology of educational knowledge and practice, it is argued that educational studies can be conceptualised in contrasting ways, by considering internal structures, external relations and how disciplinary problematics are defined, but also by how educational practice is portrayed. To develop the analysis, Bernstein's work on knowledge structures and academic and professional discourses is articulated with philosophical work that distinguishes between different conceptualisations of practice prevalent in the humanities and social sciences. This enables critical reflection on three arrangements of educational studies (the foundation disciplines, the new science, and the deliberative traditions) each with their own internal dynamic, socio-epistemic assumptions, relationship to policy, and implications for the future production of knowledge. This process of reflection is illustrated with reference to some recent developments in England that illuminate the current position of educational studies in relation to educational policy and practice.

Keywords: educational knowledge; disciplinarity; theory-practice relation

1. Introduction

The study of education is an activity that could involve a range of research traditions, scholarly societies and organisations with differing processes of knowledge production (Furlong and Whitty 2017). While one position is well encapsulated in the aims and scope of the British Journal of Educational Studies with its emphasis on 'scholarly, research-based articles on education which draw particularly upon historical, philosophical and sociological analysis and sources' (BJES, n.d.), another is illustrated in the research focus of the Institute of Educational Sciences in the United States, whose 'mission' is to 'provide scientific evidence on which to ground education practice and policy' (IES, n.d.). Nevertheless, the claims of educational researchers are not just 'scholarly' in an abstract sense, but of interest to the public and policy-makers due to the role of education in the socialisation of young people and the assumed relationship between educational attainment and life chances, not least in terms of labour market opportunities.

However, the relations between educational policy, practice and research are constantly in flux (Moss 2016). Whereas research in some disciplinary areas (e.g. natural sciences and humanities) may be seen to proceed at some distance from government policy, the study of education is closely influenced by the trajectories of national education systems together with the global flow of educational ideas (Bruno-Jofré and Schriewer 2011). Greater recent policy focus in many nations on the outcomes of education has given impetus to pledges to 'harness' and re-organise educational inquiry so that it concentrates on improving the educational practices that are said to lead to better outcomes (Royal Society/British Academy 2018). A more systematically-organised educational knowledge base that provides demonstrable insights into educational practice may have advantages in illustrating the professional competence of educators to other professionals and the public (Abbott 1988; Barrett and Hordern 2021), potentially rebalancing the policy-practice-research dynamic so that there is greater local term consensus regarding the future development of education systems.

This paper assesses prospects for the relationship between educational studies and educational practice, with reference to the current institutional and policy context in England. Drawing on the sociology of educational knowledge and philosophical work on practice, it is argued that educational studies can be conceptualised in contrasting ways, by considering internal structures, external relations and how disciplinary problematics are defined, but also by how educational practice is portrayed. To develop the analysis, Bernstein's work on

knowledge structures and academic and professional discourses is articulated with the work of philosophers such as Rouse, Hager, Addis and Winch, who have distinguished between different conceptualisations of practice prevalent in the humanities and social sciences. This enables critical reflection on three arrangements of educational studies (the foundation disciplines, the new science, and the deliberative traditions) each with their own internal dynamic, socio-epistemic assumptions, relationship to policy, and implications for the future production of knowledge. This process of reflection is illustrated with reference to some recent developments in England that illuminate the current position of educational studies in relation to educational policy and practice, including the Core Content Framework for Teacher Education in England and the Panel Report relating to Education submissions to REF 2021.

2. Knowledge structures and disciplinary practice

Bernstein's (1999) paper on vertical and horizontal discourse, and his associated work on the 'grammar' of knowledge structures, are useful heuristic tools for considering the character of disciplines and subjects. Bernstein made the distinction first between vertical discourse, described as 'systemically principled', 'specialised' and 'symbolic' knowledge structures (Bernstein 1999: 161), and horizontal discourse, which is 'local, context-dependent 'and 'everyday' knowledge (159). Some types of vertical discourse (for example the physical sciences) are seen as more hierarchical and consolidated, with 'integrating propositions' (162), while there are also examples of vertical discourse which are more segmented, with more distinctive 'specialised languages' or traditions such as 'sociology' (162-3) or 'cultural studies' (164). While there may be a tendency to view vertical discourse as *only* abstract propositional or declarative knowledge, this interpretation seems insufficient, particularly if we consider the inextricability of 'know that', 'know how' but also 'acquaintance knowledge' in the development of specialised expertise in any discipline (Winch 2010; Muller 2014). Gamble's (2004) discussion of craft, for example, illustrates that vertical discourse can encompass a wide range of specialised activity, including what might be seen as skilled practical expertise. Indeed, this also fits with a more complete understanding of disciplinarity in the physical sciences or humanities: practical acquaintance with laboratory work or the processes of historical or archaeological investigation are arguably inextricable

from the development of expertise in these respective disciplines. Furthermore, a focus on vertical discourse does not entail a dismissal of the horizontal 'everyday' as somehow irrelevant. Rather, horizontal discourse can be seen as the unstructured site of 'circulation' and 'exchange' of 'repertoires' (Bernstein 1999, 159-160) which may at some point become recontextualised into an existing or future specialised vertical discourse, if we acknowledge that what is considered specialised by any society is always subject to iteration and change (Hordern 2021a). In any case, the navigation of the challenges of everyday life (using horizontal discourse) is necessary for the functioning of any specialised activity.

Bernstein also introduced the notion of 'grammar' which relates to the relationship between the internal language of description (ILOD) and external language of description (ELOD) of a discipline and the extent to which that discipline imposes 'rigorous restrictions' on the phenomena under investigation (Bernstein 1999, 163-4). The ILOD can be seen as the internal conceptual language of the discipline, the central ideas which frame research and scholarly activity, whereas the ELOD relates to methods of data collection and analysis. As Moore and Muller (2002) put it, the ILOD 'constructs conceptual objects and the relations between them, whereas the ELOD identifies 'what is to count as an empirical referent' and 'how these referents relate'. The ELOD must then 'translate these referential relations back into the internal conceptual language' (2002, 633) for the theoretical core of the discipline to progress. Bernstein identifies that some disciplines have stronger grammars with an 'explicit conceptual syntax' (such as Maths, Economics and Linguistics (1999, 163-164)), where there is a structured translation from the ELOD into the ILOD, revising and updating the internal conceptual structure in the light of new evidence, argumentation and insight. On the other hand, some disciplines have weaker grammars (such as sociology or cultural studies), where there is less structure in the translation of new findings into the substantive internal core of the discipline. As Moore and Muller stipulate, the ILOD and the ELOD have a 'reciprocal nature' and are 'justified only in relation to one another'. While 'theory on its own is abstract scholasticism', the empirical work and its procedures only 'exist to develop or amend the internal theory' (2002, 635), and thus the safeguard against both scholasticism and atheoretical empiricism is to ensure that 'conclusions are continually related to tension points in the theory, thus advancing the theory' (2002, 635).

However, Bernstein's discourses in themselves are insufficient accounts for the dynamics of disciplinary knowledge. As Muller (2014) identifies, there is a need to account for the socio-epistemic arrangements within disciplines, or in other words the relationship between social

arrangements and the production and recontextualization of knowledge, and this takes us beyond Bernstein's work. What Bridges (2006) describes as the 'discipline of the disciplines' needs unpacking and relating to the questions of knowledge structure and grammar. The production of knowledge is a constant process, leading both to the accumulation of new insights but also potentially the discarding of previous claims and assumptions. However, as Foray and Hargreaves (2003) demonstrated, the extent to which any disciplinary or professional field embeds processes of validating claims and removing redundant knowledge varies considerably and is influenced by what is required of this knowledge and expertise by those external to the discipline. Some disciplines must take account of a 'supervening purpose' (Muller 2009, 213) that develops in negotiation with external stakeholders (for example professional knowledge in engineering or medicine), whereas other disciplines that primarily 'face inwards' are able to control their own problematics and mode of research with less overt external interference (e.g. the physical sciences or humanities). Ideas and methods may also be 'recontextualised' from one disciplinary structure to another, involving processes of selection, appropriation and transformation (Bernstein 2000; Hordern 2021a), with ideas often adapted and reimagined to align with the disciplinary problematic. The study of education in the Anglosphere, for example, has arguably become increasingly influenced by ideas from economics (Allais 2012), which may serve to reconceptualise how education is researched and educational practice conceived. An argument could also be made that the disciplines of psychology or sociology have achieved considerable influence in defining the disciplinary character of educational study.

And yet these socio-epistemic dynamics do not in themselves provide us with a complete understanding of the reasoning behind disciplinary activity, or the agreements and mutual understandings that underpin them. For this, it is valuable to turn to the literature on specialised practices, to unpack both the 'goods' and 'standards of excellence' that might characterise disciplinary discourse, and the criteria and accountabilities which inform practitioners' decisions and judgements (MacIntyre 2007; Addis and Winch 2019). It is therefore helpful to reflect on the character of the practice that enables disciplinary activity, and the social arrangements that enable disciplinary expertise (Eyal 2019). Distinctions are made by some authors between notions of practice that encompass any habitual or routine activity and those more specialised practices that can be said to be constitutive of disciplinary process. Hager (2013), for example, identifies that some notions of practice are 'more attenuated' in that they describe 'a whole host of disparate activities', including 'any micro-

level human behaviours, activities or even actions' (Hager 2013, 95), whereas other conceptualisations are 'less attenuated' in that they suggest more stringent criteria for defining a practice. Hager's distinction has some parallel with Rouse's (2007) delineation between (i) regularist/regulist practices, which 'repeat the same or similar performances' or share common 'presuppositions' (Rouse 2007, 47), and (ii) 'normative' practices which are characterised by 'mutual accountability', prospectivity, processes of 'holding to account' against criteria, and a sense that there is something 'at stake' (p.48) within the practice that those involved in the practice find significant. MacIntyre's notion of practice, which could be considered 'less attenuated' and 'normative' in Rouse's (2007) terms, revolves around collective activities which seek to achieve the 'community's common good' (MacIntyre 2007, 151). While both notions of practice may be potentially valuable, the normative notion of practice adds something to our understanding of the social arrangements that are equipped to evaluate claims to knowledge according to reasonable criteria (Addis and Winch 2019), with an eye to the history of the discipline and a recognition of its ever iterating and prospective purpose. In essence, the normative or less attenuated notions of practice are often concerned with explaining the persistence of practices considered socially valuable or constitutive of society.

To approach from a different angle, a normative understanding of practice has the capacity to better explain the interactivity and rituality which Collins (1999) suggests sustain and iterate knowledge traditions, while enabling the dynamics of trust that expertise requires for its ongoing development and efficacy (see also Eyal 2019). This is not, however, to deny the potential for such arrangements to become static and conservative, if the requirement for knowledge to constantly iterate to represent the collectivity is not observed. It is quite possible for disciplinary or expert practices to be captured by elites who seek to protect their own interests by 'closing' the practice to those who do not meet their expectations (Larson 2018). A normative, specialised, criterial or 'less attenuated' notion of practice can nevertheless be retrofitted to Bernstein's idea of vertical discourse to highlight the social arrangements required to sustain the specialised knowledge structure and the processes of recontextualization required. In order to make informed judgements about new claims to knowledge that may change what counts as authoritative knowledge, normative processes of holding claims to account in the context of what is 'at stake' or considered valuable in the practice are necessary. What is 'at stake' provides a constraint on the disciplinary problematic and shapes the process of developing the ILOD and thus the grammar of the

discourse, its coherence and 'verticality'. On the other hand, more habitual, 'regularist' practices may relate to horizontal discourse, with its contextually apposite 'repertoires' (Bernstein 1999).

Turning now to consider the applicability of these ideas to educational studies, it seems important to note first the segmented and varied traditions of educational knowledge internationally (Whitty and Furlong 2017), each with differing conceptions of, and restrictions on, the educational 'problematic'. While some traditions of educational knowledge may have a more coherent ILOD, and more explicit stipulation regarding research methodology and the ELOD (as perhaps we can see in the case of the "new science" below), other traditions may be much more open and fluid in their interpretation of educational research processes (Hordern 2017). Educational research traditions may employ ideas and methodologies drawn from other disciplines, and such developments may be shaped by the relationship between policy, practice and academic research, and by the specific socio-historical context of the development of education in any given nation or jurisdiction (Furlong and Whitty 2017). It is certainly questionable whether the ILOD and the ELOD of educational knowledge *as a whole* develop reciprocally, and therefore there may be risks of the 'scholasticism' and atheoretical empiricism that Moore and Muller (2002) warn against.

Educational practice could be conceived as whatever habitual activities educational practitioners are engaged in, or alternatively as a normatively-inclined constituent element of any society, and this has a substantive bearing on the character and problematic of educational studies. If we assume a 'more attenuated' and unrestricted view of educational practice then the purpose of educational activities is open to definition and redefinition through empirical investigation. The door is open to a wide range of qualitative and quantitative approaches to data collection found across the social sciences, which may offer rich prospects for external languages of description. Without some restrictions or consensus on the educational problematic, there are nevertheless difficulties with developing a coherent internal language of description and accumulating a body of distinctively *educational* knowledge, as opposed to seeing educational research as just another branch of (applied) social science. There is a licence to neglect previous scholarly reflections on what is distinctive about educational activities. On the other hand, if there is acknowledgement that educational practice has a special purpose that is fundamental to and generative of contemporary societies then what is 'at stake' in that practice is more closely defined. For Noddings (2003), for example, educational is a 'relational practice' which generates special

goods such as 'the development of students as whole persons' (249), 'intellectual enthusiasm' and the 'establishing and maintaining relations of care and trust' (250). These contribute to the development of 'distinctive criteria of internal excellence' (251), which could be ascribed to all forms of teaching and educational activity. Dunne suggests that education is concerned with the 'human good to be realised by a community as its common good' and 'by individuals as the good of their individual lives' (2005, 370), and therefore we could argue that education both 'fosters individual capability' and 'regenerates 'the social'' (Hordern 2021b, 1455). Further, aspects of these goods can be observed widely across socio-historical and national contexts, notwithstanding cultural inflections (Alexander 2001). If we assume this more normative view of educational practice, then *educational* research (as opposed to other forms of research in the social sciences or humanities) would need to address the normative concerns of educational practice. Just as medical research would need to address the nature of human health and well-being, *educational* research would be defined as such if attuned to debates on the engendering of citizenship, intellectual enthusiasm, and personal formation in contemporary societies (following Dunne (2005) and Noddings (2003)).

The discussion now proceeds to examine three configurations of educational studies, exploring further the relationship between the production of educational knowledge and how the character of educational practice is defined.

3. Foundation disciplines

The foundation disciplines (in England) or educational foundations (in the USA) consist primarily of the history, philosophy, sociology and psychology of education, although cases have also been made for including economics, geography and comparative studies of education as distinct disciplinary perspectives (Lawn and Furlong 2009). Each foundation discipline has its own problematics and methodologies, shaped to a considerable extent by the 'parent' discipline of which it is a part. Thus philosophy of education may have more in common with the rest of philosophy than the sociology of education and vice versa (Oancea and Bridges 2009). Having said that, the size of the sociology of education as a field of research could be said to lead to a degree of self-referentiality, with exclusive and distinct problematics such as the relationship between social class, social mobility and education (Allais and Shalem 2021; Barrett and Hordern 2021). As the structure and grammar of each

discipline varies, the foundation disciplines seem to resemble a highly segmented form of vertical discourse, with limited coherence across the range. There is also minimal incentive for researchers from one discipline to draw upon other disciplines to progress inquiry, as to do so would mean engaging with alternative criteria for judging claims to knowledge, new procedural know-how and (arguably) a disciplinary practice with which they have limited familiarity. As is noted in the panel report following the 2021 Research Excellence Framework, in educational research 'disciplines such as psychology, sociology and philosophy frame the conception, design and analysis of research on educational matters' (UKRI REF Panel C 2022, p.164). Without a stronger pull towards an inter or supra disciplinary structure that would take the process of inquiry beyond the existing foundations researchers are encouraged to look to the criteria of excellence afforded by their own discipline for guidance as to how to judge knowledge claims.

In this 'multidisciplinary field' (McCulloch 2017) of educational study, there are therefore different conceptualisations of education as an object of inquiry. Whereas a historian of education may examine the development of educational institutions chronologically, while locating any institution within a broader historical narrative, a psychologist of education may think of education more in terms of learning processes, memory, cognition or behaviour. Even within some foundation disciplines there are considerable differences of emphasis in terms of educational research. For example, within the sociology of education there is room for both a political arithmetic tradition with a focus on empirically examining the 'relationship between social class inequalities, education opportunities and educational attainment' (Allais and Shalem 2021, 199), and post-modernist and post-structuralist strands focused more on discourse and text to interpret how policy and practice is constructed and enacted (Moore and Muller 2002; Furlong and Whitty 2017). It is unsurprising therefore, given the diversity of perspective and lack of consensus, that politicians have been provided with an easy license to dismiss the foundation disciplines as an incoherent and largely irrelevant basis for educational practice or policy-making (Barrett and Hordern 2021). The resolution of many working in the foundations to source their standards of excellence from their parent disciplines, rather than make concerted efforts to engage in the messy process of reshaping a more independent disciplinary space and unified ILOD for educational studies, could lead to a disengagement from contemporary educational issues and educational policy.

What could be overlooked in this characterisation is the extent to which each foundation discipline has (or has not) a notion of educational practice that guides processes of inquiry. Is

there a sense within disciplinary debates that there is something sufficiently distinctive about *educational* practice that would enable it to be seen as something beyond a set of discrete routine or habitual activities? Reviews of the state of the foundation disciplines provide an insight, suggesting that much of the psychology, sociology, or economics of education study educational activities without pre-emptively pre-ordaining educational practice with any special purpose and character (Lawn and Furlong 2009; Furlong and Whitty 2017). Muller and Hoadley draw attention to the tendency within the foundation disciplines to negate a special status for educational practice by separating 'what' questions relating to 'curriculum or content' from questions of 'pedagogy and method' (2021, 170), as part of a longstanding tendency to distinguish educational theory from what is considered educational practice (ibid.). Nevertheless, it could be argued that some working in the philosophy of education have entertained arguments for a distinctive normative educational practice, as a constituent element in the ongoing development of the goods of society. This is true of those who have engaged with elements of MacIntyre's work on practice, such as Dunne (2005) and Noddings (2003) as noted above, and also others such as Addis and Winch who identify the need for 'a practice amongst experts of…explanation, debate and justification' as a basis for 'reliable criterial judgement' in the exercise of educational expertise (2019, 9). However, such arguments do not in themselves have *particular prominence* in the Anglophone structure of educational studies as currently conceptualised in England, U.S.A or South Africa, which has tended towards an increasingly thematic and fragmented structure in which a wide range of theoretical perspectives and empirical objects can potentially be taught and researched (Barrett and Hordern 2021; Muller and Hoadley 2021; Allais and Shalem 2021). In this more thematic approach, which nevertheless remains influenced by the longstanding concerns and assumptions of the foundations, more normative approaches to educational practice can easily find themselves marginalised.

In summary, while the Foundation Disciplines may offer considerable insight into education, the restrictions on what counts as an object of study for educational research vary considerably, and this is coupled with an attenuated view of educational practice, if we look across the disciplines as a whole. The grammar of each discipline is distinct, and thus the development of an internal educational language of description is problematic. As a consequence, the foundation disciplines struggle to offer a systematic and coherent educational knowledge base, leaving the work of educators vulnerable to redefinition and restructure from policy-makers with their own objectives for educational activity.

4. New science of educational research

While the Foundation disciplines can be seen as eclectic in their research approach, other educational research traditions pride themselves on the assumed rigour of their methods and focus of their investigations. What Furlong and Whitty (2017) term the 'new science' of educational research bases its claims on the systematicity, reliability and validity of its data collection, analysis and evaluation processes, drawing most notably on randomised controlled trials and systematic reviews. It can nevertheless be seen as maintaining an exclusive focus on causal explanation at the expense of investigating and appreciating educational meaning and value (Smeyers and Smith 2014), and rests on 'an ontology that universalises the reality of the physical across the social world' which is only applicable for objects of study that do not 'have a mind of their own' (Gale 2018, 211). With 'initial appeal to each new generation of researchers' and 'for each new generation of politicians', the new science has in recent time gained prominence through the support of 'powerful regulatory frameworks' (Furlong and Whitty 2017, 28-29) and new government-sponsored research organisations such as the Educational Endowment Foundation (EEF) in England and the Institute of Educational Sciences and What Works Clearinghouse in the USA which have developed their own definitions of research quality independently of academic consensus (Hordern, Muller and Deng 2021).

Those advocating for a new science of education argue its principles and approach offer radical improvements to educational research and have the potential for direct impact on educational activities and international assessments of educational outcomes (Goldacre 2013), although some have expressed frustration at the slow pace of change in response to findings (Gorard et al.2020). Nevertheless, the recent Core Content Framework (CCF) for initial teacher education in England, which is said to have been 'independently assessed and endorsed by the Education Endowment Foundation' (DfE 2019, 2), is supported by a selection of literature that is principally aligned with this new science (Hordern and Brooks, 2023), offering the opportunity to embed a 'scientific approach to education' in the work of teachers. As Mayer and Mills (2022, 56) identify, in the CCF there is no 'mandate to engage with theory' or need for novice teachers to consider the social context of schooling and its

relationship to disadvantage. Instead the CCF is characterised by studies that make assumptions about terms such as learning and behaviour management that reflect a belief that educational practitioners should focus narrowly on improving attainment and 'managing behaviour' irrespective of the socio-economic profile and circumstances of the students they teach. Out of 139 references in the appendix at the end of the CCF, 74 are journal articles, and of these 41 are published in journals focused on applied psychology, the learning sciences and the economics of education, while many of the other articles are systematic reviews published in more general educational journals on topics such as 'motivation interventions' and 'social-psychological interventions in education' (Hordern and Brooks, 2023). Furthermore, many of the remaining 65 references comprise of reports and toolkits produced by organisations such as the EEF (17 references alone), Deans for Impact and the IES, all of whom advocate an approach to educational research heavily influenced by the "new science" (Hordern and Brooks, 2023).

The new science is remarkable for its lack of interest in the normativity and relationality of educational practice, and for perceiving 'practice' as independent of the processes of rigorous investigation, and therefore available for intervention and change. *Activities* or habitual phenomena taking place in educational contexts are objects of study, and stand as something to be investigated and evaluated according to the appropriate methodology. While the new science assumes that education has a purpose or objective, this objective must be somehow measurable – or it is not available for acknowledgement or investigation. Thus studies drawing upon the methodologies of the new science tend to require an explicit focus on measurables such as attainment in tests or improvements in memory. For example the EEF focuses on 'reviewing the best available evidence on teaching and learning' and 'finding new evidence' that relates to 'programmes and approaches that aim to raise the attainment of children and young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds' (EEF 2023, 3), and to do so it argues it must review, conduct or sponsor structured 'interventions' with specific outcomes that can be assessed and evaluated. For the EEF evidence is to be used to 'improve decision making and practice towards closing the disadvantage gaps' (EEF 2023, 20). On the surface this might seem uncontroversial, but the consequence is that the processes of current educational practice must always give way to the assumed 'best available evidence'. Educational practice is to be 'improved' according to the findings of research studies that assume that human activity can be measured in similar ways to experiments in

the physical world, with the consequence that questions of meaning and value are sidelined in educational practice.

The new science thus imposes a specific external language of description and narrows what counts as an object of study in education, with implications for the generation of an internal base of educational concepts. Through this attempt at a stronger grammar the new science is in a position to develop educational knowledge that is *seemingly* more systematically organised and coherent, and which can potentially gain the confidence of educational policy-makers and educators more generally. From the point of view of the sociology of the professions, this systematisation of accumulated educational knowledge through rigorous empirical study would seem to be advantageous in terms of improving the credibility of educational activity with the public and other professional groups (Abbott 1988). In Bernstein's terms, the work of the new science can be seen as an attempt to verticalize the structure of educational knowledge, and in so doing move to discard those aspects of educational thinking that would now seem irrelevant or insufficiently rigorous when held against the standards of the new science. From the perspective of Foray and Hargreaves such developments could provide an solution to the problem of the 'slow production of knowledge' and 'low levels of codification' (2003, pp.11-13) in educational research. With the advance of the new science, and its backing by state-sponsored research organisations with close links to government policy, the implications for much of the foundation disciplines would seem quite bleak.

However, what the new science overlooks is the purposes that Noddings (2003) and Dunne (2005) identify as 'at stake' in education, and the nuances of the educational goods that are developed in pedagogical relations. The new science does not offer an audit of which aspects of educational practice it focuses on, and which it chooses to ignore, or provide a clear explanation as to why it cannot capture such unmeasurables as the 'development of students as whole persons' or 'intellectual enthusiasm' (Noddings 2003, 249-250), or indeed the process of regenerating the social (Hordern 2021b). Furthermore, the anatomisation of educational activity that the new science encourages may lead to the obscuring of the extent to which educational activities need to make sense in relation to the individuals that they concern, given that what is best *educationally* for certain students is related to their needs and motivations as people, and thus appropriate judgements can arguably only be made by those who have developed sufficient knowledge of them as individuals. Perhaps just as importantly, the new science overlooks the *prospectivity* of educational practice, by reinforcing the view

that measurable outcomes take precedence in terms of evaluating educational activity. In so doing, a body of educational knowledge underpinned by the new science restricts opportunities for open-ended exploration of ideas in educational contexts that would better reflect the recursivity of educational practice (Biesta 2015), instead requiring "interventions" to have objectives, plans and indicators of success and failure.

5. Deliberative traditions

Muller and Hoadley (2021, 171-172), in their discussion of educational studies in South Africa, identify aspects of coherence and principles of progression in some programmes originating 'in the Didaktik tradition' which they did not find in other programmes with Anglosphere origins. This they ascribe to the extent to which the 'autonomous discipline of Didactics' (ibid., 172), with its origins in continental Europe, provided an independent and distinctive source of educational thinking, an analysis which articulates with that of Biesta (2015) and Deng (2020). Furthermore, the Didaktik tradition in its relation to notions of Bildung can offer a more thoroughly articulated unity between educational theorising and educational practice (Hopmann 2015), providing the parameters of an authentically educational discipline concerned with the 'inner work' (Deng 2020) of educational practice, recognising its complexity, normativity and value.

However, while the argument for the distinctive origins and claims of Didaktik provides a strong counterbalance to the structural fragmentation of the foundation disciplines and the methodological scorched earth of the new science, it does not highlight the normative and deliberative mode of thought that *underpins* this approach to education or indicate how widespread this might be internationally. In other words, is there a reasoning and commitment in the essence of Didaktik that is shared by other educational traditions? As Krogh, Qvortrup and Graf (2022, 171) demonstrate, concerns for 'why we educate' underpinned by a reflection on 'educational commitment to the next generation' and 'strategic and theoretical attention to societal challenges' sit at the centre of various longstanding perspectives on educational inquiry that are counterposed to much of the 'globalising, standardised' and (supposedly) 'evidence-based'(ibid., 171) objectives of contemporary educational policies.

What defines these deliberative perspectives and the traditions that develop around them is a sense of educational commitment and 'generational obligation' (Krogh et al. 2022, 171), which asserts that there is something distinctive at stake in educational practice which holds questions of truth and value central. There is thus a requirement for *deliberation* on the purpose of education and for *appropriacy of educational judgement* in the context of changing societal challenges. A more deliberative approach can be discerned in aspects of the work of Schwab, Klafki, Chevallard, Benner, Straume, Young and Muller, as explained in the synthesis provided by Krogh et al. (2022). It can also be discerned in the work of Noddings, Dunne, and those philosophers and social theorists that have identified educational practice as generative of social goods that *cannot otherwise be generated*, and thus from a range of sources much wider that just one tradition. Thus, while 'the compact' suggested by Muller and Hoadley may be a helpful first step, arguably what is needed is a broader survey globally of those traditions and perspectives that sit within a normative and deliberative umbrella.

A deliberative and normative educational studies can work towards a refined internal language of description developed around a constantly iterating discussion of what is 'at stake' in education that is respective of cultural inflections in educational thought but nevertheless revolves around questions of relationality and the formation of individuals in society. Rather than drawing on a mode of knowledge production taken from the natural sciences, the external language of description is likely to balance a more case and narrative-orientated approach with carefully constructed longitudinal studies of educational change that identify how changing societal configurations restructure the character of education and the 'collective representations' (Durkheim 2001) of societies. The idea of normative educational practice nevertheless requires the inclusion a wide range of practice participants – including students, teachers and researchers, who must somehow grasp the practice purpose and its 'prospectivity' or openness to ongoing iteration.

It is this deliberative meditation on *the educational* and commitment to seeing education as a distinctive practice that can provide an alternative direction for educational studies in the future, and point to a reconceptualised disciplinary problematic and internal language of description. The distinctiveness of education as an independent (normative) and practical discipline concerned with action and judgement as much as inquiry is an argument that has resonated historically in some national contexts (for example some countries in continental Europe) but has never attained a strong foothold in Anglo-American contexts. It provides the potential for a systematicity and coherence that can justify educational decisions and courses

of action, based not simply on causality but on a demonstrable contribution to a normative purpose – the formation of individuals within the collectivity. In turn, this has the potential to reinforce educational professionalism, providing an abstract knowledge base which can undergird educational reasoning and decision-making.

6. Concluding remarks

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The trajectory of educational studies is strongly influenced by the objectives of policy-makers in national systems and by global developments in educational measurement. As things stand, the new science of education is growing in strength, through its alignment with the prevailing policy emphasis on improving a narrowly defined version of educational attainment, and the 'insistence on certainty in the political domain' (Moss 2016, 935). But this new science silences the normative character of an educational practice that considers generational obligations, including our obligations to each other and the world around us. In so doing, it undermines the possibility for educational contexts to offer the potential for individual capability and social and environmental regeneration. By focusing educational research on a mission to "improve" practice according to objectives that revolve around acquisitive learning as measured by attainment in standardised tests, the new science downplays or ignores the deliberative questions that have historically sat central to educational practice and educational inquiry.

Therefore there is a need to provide a counterpoint to the new science that recognises that the arrangement of the foundation disciplines is insufficient to the task of centralising a normative educational practice as the focus for inquiry. The fragmentation of the foundations coupled by their multiple research foci and languages of description provides much rich insight but insufficient coherence to provide an ILOD for educational knowledge that can provide a basis for educational thinking and educational professionalism. The alternative is a revitalisation of the deliberative educational traditions, as detailed above, by identifying the common ground on which they stand – a commitment to an educational practice that prizes individual formation within the collectivity, engaged citizenship and not just measurable attainment; a focus on values and responsibility, and not just preparation for the labour

market. Without putting a notion of normative educational practice front and centre, however, this counter-tradition will lack strength, distinctiveness and clarity of purpose.

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