2024-07-05

On the intellectual horizons of social realism: a response to Barton

Jim Hordern *School of Society and Culture*

On the intellectual horizons of social realism: a response to Barton

Jim Hordern

University of Bath and University of Plymouth

j.hordern@bath.ac.uk

Abstract

This paper comments on the arguments made in "knowledge without disciplines: a critique of social realism's disciplinary fixation", authored by Keith Barton. It is suggested that Barton has not fully grasped how social realism views disciplines and curricula, and that this reflects a wider tendency amongst commentators to overlook some of the thinking underpinning social realism. A different more generous interpretation of social realism is outlined in respect of disciplinarity, the constitution of knowledge, the relationship between disciplines and subjects, and the socio-epistemic formation that make knowledgeability possible. Social realism is seen as having already made substantive impact, with potential to further extend its intellectual horizons.

THIS IS AN AUTHOR'S COPY OF A PAPER TO BE PUBLISHED IN THE JOURNAL OF CURRICULUM STUDIES SPECIAL ISSUE ON "SOCIAL REALISM AND THE CURRICULUM"

1. Introduction

This short paper comments on some of the arguments made in "knowledge without disciplines: a critique of social realism's disciplinary fixation", authored by Keith Barton. It is suggested that Barton has not fully grasped the position of social realism (SR) on disciplines and their relation to the curriculum. This reflects a wider tendency amongst commentators to oversimplify the arguments of SR and neglect its socio-epistemic foundation. A more generous interpretation of SR enables a reconsideration of what might constitute a discipline (or disciplinarity), emphasising permeability of boundaries and socio-historical context. A more generous interpretation also allows the discussion to move away from a focus *solely* on the cognitive (which Barton rightly highlights as potentially problematic) and into a more nuanced interpretation of knowledge and knowledgeability. Finally, Barton is helpful in highlighting the knowledge contributions of those who sit outside established institutions, and for this a conceptualisation of specialised (or knowledgeable) practice draws attention to what underpins SRs 'socio-epistemic formations'.

2. Barton's critique

Barton argues that SR is characterised by 'unreflective reverence of so-called disciplines' (2024, p. 235) and that Young and Muller, as key SR thinkers, have mistakenly 'emphasized the centrality of the 'powerful knowledge' found in academic disciplines' (p.238) in relation to the curriculum. Disciplinarity, Barton argues, is an idea with inherent 'weaknesses', but it 'keeps turning up, including as a key tenet of powerful knowledge' (p.239). Whereas 'proponents of the disciplinary approach often point to the coherence and distinctiveness of academic disciplines' (Barton 2024, p. 239), the reality is that there is 'both considerable overlap and extensive internal variation' (ibid.) within each field of knowledge. Disciplines are 'less intellectual projects than institutional ones' which merely 'reflect university organizational structures' (p.239) and have 'neither the coherence not the firm boundaries' that 'proponents of this doctrine like to assert' (p.240). Barton (2024, p.240) cites Deng and Luke's point that those who advocate disciplines as a basis for the curriculum tend to 'reify a formal and frozen abstraction of knowledge…that ignores or at best brackets the dynamics of paradigm change' (2008, p. 76). Barton also points out that 'disciplines have no privileged claim on knowledge', and any assumption that they do ignores the development of

‘sophisticated knowledge outside academic disciplines…by not just elites but everyday people’ (p.241). He provides examples of indigenous knowledge such as ‘systematic understanding of the natural environment that provides a basis for dealing with climate change’ that has ‘developed without the benefits of disciplinarity’ (p.241).

Barton argues that the SR position ignores ‘how the societal purposes of schools differ from the goals of scholars—even with regard to knowledge’ and this leaves the position ‘sterile and unproductive as a perspective on curriculum’ (2024, p.242). Barton emphasises that disciplines and subjects are categorically different, stating that ‘in most cases, the very construction of school subjects bears little resemblance to what disciplinary specialists do, precisely because schools exist to promote general education, and thus its goals are different than those of specialized scholars’ (2024, p.241). Thus ‘disciplines have limited relevance for general education’ (p.241). Instead, he suggests we must look to subjects to ‘extend students’ natural sense of compassion and benevolence so that it extends to unfamiliar people, places, and events’, requiring ‘knowledge: not ‘disciplinary’ knowledge, but knowledge of the lives, feelings, and circumstances of people who are affected by the topics under discussion, and of the challenges and success of those engaged in civic action’ (p.242)

Importantly, Barton (2024) also contends that the ‘intended geographic scope of the social realist position is highly circumscribed’ (p.239) and doubts that the SR arguments have ‘much currency’ beyond specific national contexts (in Barton’s view the ‘former colonies’) (ibid.). The SR position is, according to Barton, ‘notably limited in its intellectual horizons’ (ibid.).

3. Does SR have a disciplinary fixation?

Barton’s charge of ‘disciplinary fixation’ has, however, overlooked some important foundational SR work. In reflecting on his points, I refer in particular to Young and Muller’s earlier work (including Muller 2009 and Young and Muller 2010, 2013), and the work of Moore (2007), which arguably opens up a more nuanced approach to disciplinarity and clarifies the basis for ‘powerful knowledge’ (PK). While there may be merit in some aspects of Barton’s critique, it is also important to realise that there are some differences between the earlier arguments of SR and how debates about curricula informed by PK have developed, as I tried to indicate in Hordern (2019). The earlier SR arguments were perhaps more about exposing some of the problems with prevailing trends in educational knowledge than proposing a curriculum principle (as PK has arguably become). In any case, once a ‘sexy-

sounding phrase' (Brown and White 2012 in Beck 2013) such as PK is picked up by influential policy-makers or politically-motivated groups (as noted by Morgan, Hordern and Hoadley 2019), it risks losing its moorings and becoming aligned with positions with which its authors may have limited sympathy. It is also probably true to say that those who might see themselves as connected with SR are now a diverse group who share a general scepticism towards competency-based approaches and varying levels of opposition to the rather stale view of disciplines that Barton (ironically) attributes to them, but may disagree substantively on a range of other educational matters. An issue with the contemporary take-up of SR ideas amongst academics and teachers from a range of subject backgrounds (and some policy-makers) is the risk of only partial engagement with the arguments of the earlier literature.

It is possible to claim that SR offers *a more nuanced view of disciplines* than Barton (2024) assumes. In Young and Muller's (2010) paper on 'three educational scenarios for the future' the authors contrast an 'a-social or 'under-socialised' epistemology that defines knowledge as sets of verifiable propositions and the methods for testing them' (Future 1) with an 'over-socialised' 'second approach which arose in direct response to the first' and which 'plays down the propositional character of knowledge and reduces questions of epistemology to 'who knows?' (Future 2) (Young and Muller 2010, p. 14). While the first approach sees the 'boundaries of particular disciplines as implicit or taken-for-granted' (p.14), 'given and fixed' (p.16), and 'trapped' in an 'elitist past' (Young 2011, p. 267), the second approach seeks to expose 'knowers and their practices' as social constructions, and informs advocacy for 'the end of boundaries' (Young and Muller, 2010, p. 16).

Young and Muller argue that both Future 1 and Future 2 are problematic and instead set out a third option (Future 3), founded on the idea of 'boundary maintenance as prior to boundary crossing' (2010, p. 16) and the permeability and changeability of boundaries, 'based on the assumption that there are specific kinds of social conditions' within which knowledge production takes place, but these 'conditions are not given; they are historical but also objective' (p.19). Disciplines need therefore to be seen as socio-epistemic constructions which 'morph and adapt' as new problems emerge, while 'new formations invariably arise from existing disciplines' (p.20). Young and Muller also acknowledge that 'existing disciplines' coalesce 'around new problems', potentially forming into 'discrete identifiable formations' (p.20) over time (see also Bernstein (2000) on 'regions'). Central to this nuanced notion of disciplinarity is the notion of 'the historicity and objectivity that are embodied in the critical role of specialist communities' (p.19) which act as the dynamic means by which

new claims to knowledge are evaluated. Objectivity is defined in terms of developing 'legitimate, shared and stably reliable means for generating truth' (Young and Muller 2010, p.21), but it remains socio-historically constructed and therefore adapts with time and societal change. As Young (2011, p.269) emphasises 'this 'social' objectivity is not 'given' but fallible and always open to change'. Discussing the value of different types of 'specialised knowledge' (which might apply to disciplines and subjects), Young and Muller note that 'Irreducible sets of robustness criteria—epistemic, ethical and aesthetic—have always contested for dominance in the academy' and that 'each has had its day of dominance' (2013, p.237). Therefore Young and Muller's SR opens up the opportunity for a range of knowledge to be valued in universities, schools and other educational institutions, even if one set of robustness criteria (as a means for identifying 'objectivity') 'dominates at any given historical moment' (2013, p.237).

These three contrasting futures are useful templates for thinking about the relationship between knowledge and the curriculum, but the relations between them have been interpreted a little differently by those interested in the claims of SR. Oates (2017), an influential actor in the curriculum reforms of the Conservative-led government from 2010 onwards , suggests that Future 1 and Future 3 are in quite close proximity and thus arrives at what some might perceive as quite a conservative view of disciplines, subjects and curricula. He argues that reconciling differences between 'Future 1 and Future 3 may require a short and intensive debate to resolve the practicalities of translation into legitimate curriculum policy' but that 'Future 2 was embedded in an entirely different and outdated conception of knowledge' (Oates 2017, p.159). On the other hand, other commentators, such as Morgan, Hordern and Hoadley argue that Future 3 can be interpreted as distinctly different, with a 'radical, democratic and participatory aspect' (2019, p.110) that recognises the salience of the arguments of Future 2 around power and access, and responds to them. If we take the Morgan et al (2019) line, it is possible to see a view of disciplinarity and curriculum possibilities emerging from SR that is *not* characterised by 'unreflective reverence' (Barton 2024) but rather emphasises debate, iteration and contestation. While Barton (2024) is drawing some similar conclusions as Oates (2017) about SR's implications for the curriculum (even if these commentators may differ considerably about what forms of curriculum are desirable), close readings of Young and Muller's work on Future 3 suggest a different interpretation.

The core argument underpinning SR that should be foregrounded here is about 'epistemic access' (to certain kinds of knowledge) for social justice. It is this that underpins Young and

Muller's Future 3 (and their arguments for PK, rather than the policy-makers). Wheelahan (2023) asserts that for SR this 'access…provides the grounds for democracy' and 'the means through which society conducts its conversation about itself' (2023, p. 91). The essence of SR is thus the claim that civic participation requires a recognition of the boundaries of the debates in which the conversations are held and the rules that govern these debates, while noting the permeability of boundaries and the possibility of change (Bernstein 2000, Young and Muller 2010, 2013). The boundaries, for Muller (2000), 'are the precondition for meaningfulness' and without them we are left 'in a marsh of senselessness and uncertainty' (p.75). Recognising the boundaries and how to negotiate them is therefore significant, as 'to cross the line without knowing it is to be at the mercy of the power inscribed in the line' (p.71). On this basis, SR argues that a curriculum has a responsibility to introduce all young people to these boundaries, so that they can be safely crossed and potentially re-negotiated.

4. Does SR have a 'formal', 'frozen' and purely cognitive view of knowledge?

It is easy also to see how a SR approach to knowledge might be charged with accentuating the 'cognitive' and 'epistemic' and relying on a 'formal' and 'frozen' view of knowledge. Indeed that is how the arguments of Young in particular have often been interpreted by policy-makers in England (see e.g. Gibb 2021) and sometimes the media (Wilby 2018). However, it is worth turning here to the work of Moore (2007), which Young and Muller were influenced by in their development of the idea of PK. This work highlights that such (powerful) knowledge is 'systematically revisable' (which relates to the use of 'criteria…which allow their disciplinary communities to arrive at a judgment of 'bestness', or the nearest we have to truth at any time'), 'emergent' (which principally means that knowledge is 'produced by social conditions and contexts but cannot be reduced to them'), 'real' (' about something other than itself about which it says something in a robustly reliable way'), and 'material and social' (which means 'produced in particular socio-epistemic formations' with 'their own internal rules of solidarity, hierarchy, and truth norms') (Young and Muller 2013, pp. 236-8). Importantly, in using the term 'socio-epistemic formations' Young and Muller open up the possibility that the discipline is not to be venerated as the *only* possible vehicle for the production of PK (even if they suggest that these formations have 'traditionally taken the form of disciplines' (2013, p.238)). In emphasising the notion of *revisability* knowledge can also be seen as continually freezing and unfreezing in a freeze-thaw dynamic as challenges are made to existing assumptions.

The ’cognitive’ and ‘formal’ charge is also tempting to observers (see e.g. Alderson 2020). But again, this tends to overlook the articulation of SR with wider epistemology. For example, the work of philosophers such as Chris Winch (2010) and Jan Derry (2018) have offered perspectives that bring together propositional knowledge with the ‘know how’ processes of making inferences and applying criteria and procedures to claims to knowledge. In Winch’s (2010) work there is also an acknowledgement of the value of acquaintance knowledge and the experiential for the development of expertise, opening up a more holistic and rounded perspective on knowledge and processes of coming to know. Barton (2024) risks equating the SR position with a purely propositional (know-that) view, which is not the position outlined in Muller (2014) or Young and Muller (2014), which take on board the work of Winch, Derry and others. The work of Rata and McPhail (2020) on the Curriculum Design Coherence framework also leans to this more rounded view. Granted, it is possible to still interpret SR thinking on the curriculum as backgrounding the experiential – Hordern (2022) is an attempt to draw attention to this, noting that how we interpret experiences is closely related to our engagement with other aspects of knowledge, and that certain types of experiences open up new ways of thinking about the world.

5. *Does SR ignore the differences between disciplines, subjects and the school curriculum?*

Barton’s accusation here is particularly significant, as the importance of conceptualising subjects differently from disciplines is a longstanding and well-grounded position of many scholars of curriculum theory (see e.g. Deng 2020). Subjects have different histories, structures and purposes, as Barton asserts and other scholars have demonstrated, although it is also important to unpack the distinctive educational purposes that underpin subject processes. While a rather straightforward relation between disciplines and subjects can be interpreted in some work influenced by SR (Barton cites Counsell 2011), much of the earlier SR work tends to focus on exposing moves amongst policy-makers and curriculum authorities in many countries (not just England) to completely sever the relationship between what happens in schools and disciplinary knowledge through the introduction of outcomes-based or competency based curricula, which as Wheelahan (2007) has argued has the potential to remove access for all students to knowledge beyond their immediate experience. Moreover, Bernstein’s (2000) work (foundational for SR) on recontextualization shows that the relationship between disciplines and subjects is not at all straightforward, as there are always processes of ‘selection’, ‘appropriation’ and ‘transformation’ (and opportunities for

'ideology to play'), and subjects may potentially involve a selection of knowledge from a range of sources in the pursuit of educational purposes (Hordern 2021a). Thus, a line of SR thinking taking account of the above would suggest that the SR argument is engaged with *the future of subjects* as much as the possibility of disciplinary knowledge reaching schools, and the two are closely intertwined. Some might seek to clarify Counsell's (2011, 221) suggestion that the 'role of the subject is to mediate the discipline' by highlighting the recontextualization processes that relate disciplines to subjects taking account of educational purposes, including the interests and motivations of students. A view of the subject as simply the 'discipline in a school setting' would echo the problematic tendencies of Future 1 outlined above.

In any case, both Muller (see e.g. 2009, pp. 215-217) and Young (2011) have approached the relation between disciplines and the school curriculum with more nuance than Barton suggests. Muller (2009) acknowledges that 'the inevitable selections and arrangements that go to make up the curriculum create a quite different animal to the discipline' and that there are 'widely differing contexts of producing new knowledge in the university and reproducing it in the classroom, particularly in schools' (p. 215). While Muller is critical of moves that sever the relation between the school curriculum and academic disciplines, he acknowledges that 'laudable democratic intents' (p.216) come into play with the development of the school curriculum that may (or may not) serve to recontextualise knowledge in ways that are beneficial for students. Young (2011, p. 269), in a critical piece on curriculum reforms in England, also points to the significance of recontextualization in the development of subjects. Yates and Millar (2014), well aware of the claims of SR and also sceptical of excessively simplistic assumptions about the links between discipline and subject, provide helpful examples of how subjects such as physics are shaped quite differently from the academic discipline of physics. Yates and Millar (2014) show that subjects have educational purposes which are not all about producing 'disciplinary adepts' (Muller 2009, p. 217), but the SR authors might argue that it is the potential for *detachment* from disciplinary knowledge in the school curriculum that SR is guarding against (at least in Young and Muller 2010).

Nevertheless, perhaps SR could do more to explore the complex process of recontextualization that is needed to appropriate, select and transform knowledge in ways that are beneficial (and engaging) for students (Hordern 2021a). Colleagues working as part of the KOSS network (Knowledge and Quality across School Subjects and Teacher Education) have also taken this further through detailed examples from curriculum-making in various subjects,

researching in Sweden, Finland and the UK (see for example Hudson et al. 2022). Arguably recontextualization is also heavily influenced by teachers' *educational* knowledge, in terms of the capacity to think through processes of curriculum design and development, the sociological context of schooling and the purpose of pedagogical practice (Hordern 2021a).

6. ***Does SR have limited intellectual horizons?***

As noted above, Barton (2024) suggests that SR is relevant only to particular national contexts, which he calls the 'former colonies', and has an 'extraordinarily Eurocentric focus' (p.239). Even if this was accurate, it would hardly mean that the ideas of SR were 'limited' in their 'intellectual horizons' (p.239) as Barton claims. After all many of the political movements that he lauds (e.g. the Levellers or the Molly Maguires, p.241) arose within particular historical contexts and had struggles against specific authorities in particular nations, but this did not mean they had limited intellectual horizons. In any case, the central arguments of SR are in part directed against flawed assumptions about educational knowledge and reforms in education (e.g. competency-based approaches to the curriculum) that are international in scope and have had demonstrable impact in many national jurisdictions. The work of Allais (2010, 2014) on learning outcomes in national qualification frameworks (NQFs) is a good example of how ideas associated closely with SR have purchase internationally, in addition to demonstrating their relevance beyond the school curriculum. Her research for the International Labour Office in Geneva covered the impact of NQFs in 16 countries, with contributions from researchers developing case studies in Australia, Bangladesh, Chile, Botswana, England, Lithuania, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mexico, New Zealand, Russia, Scotland, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, and Turkey. In that report Allais notes 'how a rigid separation of outcomes and competences from syllabuses or learning programmes leads to the marginalization of educational knowledge' and that 'forcing curricula to be 'designed down' from outcome statements trivializes knowledge, and reduces it to pieces of unrelated information' (2010, p. 105). In her later book Allais (2014) develops this critique further, drawing on a range of international examples.

It is also worth noting that ideas associated with SR have been influential internationally in curriculum studies in higher education as much as professional and vocational education (e.g. Shay and Peseta (2018) on curriculum contestations, and Wheelahan and Moodie's (2021) groundbreaking critique of micro-credentials). And while SR might appear at first glance to have limited engagement with thinkers in the United States, it is worth looking more

carefully at some of the sociological and philosophical work that Young, Muller, Moore and Wheelahan (amongst others) engage with in some of their earlier SR papers – there is no exclusion of American thinkers. And back in European contexts, there is plenty of engagement with SR from educational traditions beyond England - as noted above there is the work of Hudson et al. (2022) around the school curriculum, which is influential in Scandinavia, and engages *Didaktik* traditions with SR (see also Muller and Hoadley 2021), and the work of Krogh et al. (2022) which explores shared concerns between curriculum traditions internationally, including SR. There is also work unpacking the realist underpinnings of SR (see Wheelahan 2023). In sum, this is hardly a parochial intellectual tradition with limited horizons, but it is also (as noted above) less univocal or resistant to new thinking than might appear to an external commentator.

7. Knowledge and practice beyond institutions

Barton suggests that SR is making the assumption that disciplines have a 'privileged claim on knowledge', and that in so doing SR is allying itself with 'attempts to create and maintain racial and cultural hierarchies' and with the 'self-delusion' (pp.240-1) that it is only through disciplines that students can become critically orientated towards the world. For Barton, this implicitly denigrates various social movements which, he claims, 'have been masters of doubt, challenge, and criticism', and overlooks that it is 'not just elites but everyday people' that 'have developed sophisticated knowledge outside academic disciplines' (pp.240-1). It also potentially excludes other knowledge producers, such as 'journalists, photographers, artists, activists, and people who are themselves part of social issues' (p.242). Disciplines can therefore be seen as primarily 'institutional' rather than 'intellectual' projects.

As noted above in respect to the point about 'socio-epistemic formations', SR is not quite as wedded to a model of academic disciplines *as institutions* as might appear at first hand, in the sense that the 'community of inquiry' that SR claims is key for systematic revisability is not confined to the modern academic discipline. Indeed, Muller (2009, pp. 206-210) sketches some of the communities of inquiry that preceded disciplines and Young and Muller's (2013) work on the sociology of educational knowledge has also been influenced by Randall Collins's global theory of intellectual change which encompasses studies of the guilds and factions that produced and iterated the 'four vedas' of 'medieval India' (Collins 1998, pp. 193-5) and the knowledge of monastic communities in China (pp. 274-9), amongst other

historical formations. While some disciplines *may* be manifestations of what we might call an exemplary contemporary socio-epistemic formation capable of generating and evaluating specialised forms of knowledge of benefit to society, it is not *necessarily* the case that all meet these criteria at a particular time. Barton's point reminds us that the institutional interests of those involved in the discipline may undermine the production of knowledge, echoing the point made by Bernstein regarding the tendencies of some disciplines to be 'narcissistic, orientated to their own development' and 'protected by strong boundaries and hierarchies' (2000, p. 52). As Collins's (1998) work demonstrates, the productivity and esteem of a socio-epistemic formation is always in transition, but this does not mean that these communities are not striving for the nuanced form of 'objectivity' that Young and Muller (2013) draw attention to.

So what might be helpful for unpacking the constituent elements and underpinning dynamic of socio-epistemic formations that are producing knowledge considered beneficial for society? From the perspective of Collins (1998), 'thinking consists of coalitions in the mind, internalised from social networks, motivated by the emotional energies of social interactions' (p.7). From studies of the development of knowledge in the early modern period, we can also see how communities focused on skilled practical work were engaged in the 'codification of practical activities', allowing for 'the creation of more abstract structures of knowledge that linked heterogeneous intellectual and practical fields to each other' (Valleriani 2017, p.2), and see Moodie (2022) and Hordern (2021b) for further related discussion. Merrill's (2017) example of the circulation and iteration of architectural drawings in 'practitioners' manuals' (p.22) within groups of collaborating architects in Italy in the 15th century is a pertinent example of how an epistemic community develops around shared practical knowledge. To conceptualise these dynamics further, we might also draw on philosophical work conceptualising the basis for practices considered of particular value to society (see MacIntyre 2007; Hager 2011) to note how durable practices generate criteria for evaluating claims to knowledge (Addis and Winch 2019), and combine norms, mutual accountability, prospectivity and a sense that something is 'at stake' (see Rouse 2007 and Hordern 2022 for a discussion). The notion of commitment to exploring 'at stake' issues also introduces questions of 'convictions' and 'moral and ethical action' which Barton (2024, p.242) alludes to. These characteristics might well be found in various states of development in contemporary disciplines, but they might well also emerge in socio-epistemic formations beyond the conventional university (including in indigenous communities and in political

movements). Durkheimian perspectives on the relationship between knowledge and society provide a template for exploring these dynamics (as Young, this issue) suggests.

There is no reason therefore why a new 'socio-epistemic formation' cannot develop around a new societal issue, as Bernstein (2000) explored in relation to 'regions'. And there is no reason why the notion of a 'socio-epistemic formation' with a normative practice underpinning cannot be a basis for theorising a 'subject' or 'area of learning' in a school context, although in such cases that which is 'at stake' is distinctively *educational* (Krogh et al. 2022; Hordern 2023) and thus a little different from the 'at stake' issues held by disciplines. The point is that socio-epistemic formations arise and persist where there is a sense amongst a community that there is something worth developing and continuing to develop for mutual benefit – this could be something practical, aesthetic or intellectual (or often a mix of these). Ultimately, as Durkheim (2001) outlined, some of these become 'collective representations' which are definitive of society itself as expressions of solidarity and identity.

Concluding remarks

There is little doubt that social realism has some imperfections (as any school of thought), and is also characterised by different emphases amongst those associated with or influenced by it. Some would contend that it does not provide straightforward recipes for the curriculum, despite the best efforts of some policy-makers and school leaders (and even academics) to reimagine its claims to fit pre-existing prejudices. I have argued here that SR is less fixated on disciplines that might be assumed, and has intellectual horizons which are more far-reaching than Barton (2024) has suggested. Nevertheless, there is value in further examining claims of SR, including its positions on knowledge and the curriculum, and bringing these into engagement with other traditions and perspectives (e.g., Deng, 2020; Krogh et al., 2022)- and Barton's (2024) commentary is helpful to that end.

Acknowledgements

The author is grateful to Zongyi Deng for the invitation to contribute to this Special Issue and to Leesa Wheelahan for her insightful comments on a draft of this paper.

References

Addis, M., & Winch, C. (2019). Introduction. In M. Addis & C. Winch (Eds.), *Education and expertise* (pp. 1–20). Wiley.

Alderson, P. (2020). Powerful knowledge and the curriculum: Contradictions and dichotomies. *British Educational Research Journal*, 46(1), 26–43. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3570

Allais, S. (2010). *The implementation and impact of National Qualifications Frameworks: Report of a study in 16 countries*. International Labour Organisation.

Allais, S. (2014). *Selling Out Education*. Rotterdam: Sense

Barton, K. (2024). Knowledge without disciplines: a critique of social realism's disciplinary fixation, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 56 (3), 235-245.

Beck, J. (2013) Powerful knowledge, esoteric knowledge, curriculum knowledge, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 43(2), 177-193,

Bernstein, B. (2000). *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity* (Rev ed.). Rowman and Littlefield.

Collins, R. (1998). *The sociology of philosophies: A global theory of intellectual change*. Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press.

Counsell, C. (2011). Disciplinary knowledge for all, the secondary history curriculum and history teachers' achievement, *Curriculum Journal*, 22 (2), 201-225

Deng, Z. (2020). *Knowledge, content, curriculum and didaktik: Beyond social realism*. Routledge

Deng, Z., & Luke, A. (2008). Subject matter: Defining and theorizing school subjects. In F. M. Connelly, M. F. He, & J. Phillion (Eds.), The Sage handbook of curriculum and instruction (pp. 66–87). Sage.

Derry, J. (2018). What is educationally worthwhile knowledge? Revisiting the case for powerful knowledge. In D. Guile, D. Lambert, & M. J. Reiss (Eds.), *Sociology, curriculum studies and professional knowledge: New perspectives on the work of Michael Young* (pp. 84–96).Routledge

Durkheim, E. (2001). *The elementary forms of religious life*. OUP.

Gibb, N. (2021) The importance of a knowledge-rich curriculum, speech to Social Market Foundation. The importance of a knowledge-rich curriculum - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Hager, P. (2011). Refurbishing MacIntyre's account of practice. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 45(3), 545–561

Hordern, J. (2019) Exercise and intervention: On the sociology of powerful knowledge. *London Review of Education.*. Vol. 17(1), 26-37. DOI: 10.18546/LRE.17.1.03

Hordern, J. (2021a). Recontextualisation and the teaching of subjects. *Curriculum Journal*, *32*(4), 592-606. https://doi.org/10.1002/curj.110

Hordern, J. (2021b). Specialised, systematic and powerful knowledge. *London Review of Education*, *19*(1), Article 6. https://doi.org/10.14324/LRE.19.1.06

Hordern, J. (2022). Powerful knowledge and knowledgeable practice. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, *54*(2), 196-209. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2021.1933193

Hordern, J. (2023). Educational Studies and Educational Practice: A Necessary Engagement. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, *71*(5), 567-583. https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2023.2213310

Hudson, B., N. Gericke, C. Olin-Scheller, M. Stolare (eds.) (2022). *International Perspectives on Knowledge and Curriculum: Epistemic Quality across School Subjects*. London: Bloomsbury.

Krogh, E., Qvortrup, A. and Ting, S. (2022). The question of normativity: examining educational theories to advance deliberation on challenges of introducing societal problems into education. In E. Krogh, A. Qvotrup and S. Ting (Eds) *Bildung, Knowledge and Global Challenges in Education* (Abingdon, Routledge), 171–202

MacIntyre, A. (2007). *After virtue: A study in moral theory*. University of Notre Dame Press.

Merrill, E. M. (2017). Pocket-size architectural notebooks and the codification of practical knowledge. In M. Valleriani (ed.), The structures of practical knowledge (pp. 21–54). Switzerland

Moodie, G. (2022). Sources of vocational knowledge. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, *74*(1), 50–67. https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2020.1804437

Moore, R. (2007) *Sociology of knowledge and education*. London and New York: Continuum.

Morgan, J., Hordern, J., & Hoadley, U. (2019). On the politics and ambition of the 'turn': Unpacking the relations between Future 1 and Future 3. *The Curriculum Journal*, 30(2), 105–124.

Muller, J. (2009)'Forms of knowledge and curriculum coherence', *Journal of Education and Work*, 22 (3), 205 — 226

Muller, J. (2014) Every picture tells a story: Epistemological access and knowledge, *Education as Change*, 18 (2), 255-269

Muller, J. (2000). *Reclaiming Knowledge. Social Theory, Curriculum and Education Policy*. RoutledgeFalmer, London.

Muller, J., & Hoadley, U. (2021). A pedagogic compact: retrieving 'powerful' educational knowledge from *Didaktik* and curriculum studies. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, *53*(2), 166–178. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2021.1887360

Oates, T. (2017). Powerful knowledge – Moving us all forwards or backwards? In D. Guile, D. Lambert, & M. J. Reiss (Eds.), *Sociology, curriculum studies and professional knowledge: New perspectives on the work of Michael Young*. Abingdon: Routledge

Rata, E., McPhail, G. (2020). Teacher Professional Development, the Knowledge-Rich School Project and the Curriculum Design Coherence Model. In: Fox, J., Alexander, C., Aspland, T. (eds) Teacher *Education in Globalised Time*s. Springer, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-4124-7_17

Rouse, J. (2007). Social Practices and Normativity. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 37 (1), 46–56.

Shay, S. and Peseta, T. (eds) (2018). *Curriculum as Contestation* . Abingdon: Routledge

Valleriani, M. (ed.) (2017). *The Structures of Practical Knowledge*, Dordrecht: Springer.

Wheelahan, L. (2007). How competency-based training locks the working class out of powerful knowledge: a modified Bernsteinian analysis, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 28 (5), 637-651

Wheelahan, L. (2023). Realism and theorizing curriculum—the role of knowledge. In: Tierney, R.J., Rizvi, F., Erkican, K. (Eds.), International Encyclopedia of Education, vol. 7. Elsevier, pp. 85–95.

Wheelahan, L., & Moodie, G. (2021). Analysing micro-credentials in higher education: a Bernsteinian analysis. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, *53*(2), 212–228.

Wilby, P. (2018). *The counterculture class warrior who turned to Gove*. The Guardian, 9th October 2018. The counterculture class warrior who turned to Gove | Curriculums | The Guardian

Winch, C. (2010). *Dimensions of expertise: A conceptual exploration of vocational knowledge*. Continuum.

Yates, L., & Millar, V. (2016). 'Powerful knowledge' curriculum theories and the case of physics. *The Curriculum Journal*, 27(3), 298–312.

Young, M. (2011) The return to subjects: a sociological perspective on the UK Coalition government's approach to the 14–19 curriculum, *Curriculum Journal*, 22 (2), 265-278.

Young, M., & Muller, J. (2010). Three educational scenarios for the future: Lessons from the sociology of knowledge. *European Journal of Education* 45 (1), 11–27.

Young, M., & Muller, J. (2013). On the powers of powerful knowledge. *Review of Education*, 1(3), 229–250.

Young, M. and Muller, J. (eds.) (2014). *Knowledge, Expertise and the Professions*. Abingdon: Routledge