

Review Essay: Basil Bernstein (1996). *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity*. London: Taylor and Francis.

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Abstract:

This paper reviews Basil Bernstein's (1996) book *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity*, focussing specifically on the usefulness of Bernstein's concepts for an analysis of curricular justice in schooling. The review details five concepts from Bernstein's model and demonstrates the relevance of these to analyses of equity policies and curricular justice in Queensland schools. These five concepts include: (1) classification and framing; (2) instructional and regulative discourse; (3) recontextualisation; (4) micro-politics of curricular justice and (5) pedagogic models. The paper also links theory to empirical data demonstrating how the Bernsteinian theoretical corpus is illustrative of adaptive theory – simultaneously cumulative and evolving, macro and micro, deductive and inductive.

Review Essay: Basil Bernstein (1996). *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity*. London: Taylor and Francis.

Bernstein's analysis of the organisation and distribution of educational knowledge was originally proposed over thirty years ago. In his important new book, Bernstein formulates a comprehensive model of the structuring of pedagogic communication from the principles yielded by his on-going research in the ensuing decades. The model focuses on how different ways of selecting and putting curricular knowledge together produce different identities and relations in pedagogic contexts. Formulated with reference to the substantial restructuring of educational systems which has occurred since the 1960s, the model attempts to understand emerging forms of curricular organisation and the attendant production of educational identities.

Bernstein's work is notably controversial. For over three decades it has been discussed, debated, tested and challenged. One persistent criticism is that Bernstein presents a deficit model of working class language. This interpretation arose from the erroneous assumption that Bernstein's use of terminology such as 'restrictive' and 'elaborated' codes was a claim about essential differences between working and middle class people, rather than a description of learned forms of language use complexly caught up in relations of class power in educational institutions. This is an example of the criticism that Bernstein's work attends inadequately to the relational dimensions of class. It is connected to the more general criticism that Bernstein's work is overly functionalist; technical, at the expense of theorising social relationships; and insufficiently illustrated with reference to real schools (McFadden, 1995).

Bernstein (1996: 125) suggests that these criticisms of his theoretical work may arise in part from the difficulty involved in publishing books "composed of empirical research organised in relation to an informing theory", particularly when the theory is inter-disciplinary and crosses publication outlets. By contrast, Halliday (1995) provides a more critical interpretation and explanation. He suggests that Bernstein's explicit discussion of the relationship between social class and access to different forms of educational knowledge was unacceptable to US audiences. The alignment of class and race in the US meant that Bernstein's

discussion broached the taboo topic of the racialised distribution of social goods - education included.

In *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control and Identity*, Bernstein answers the criticism of the empirical grounding of his model by documenting the development of the theory through investigations conducted over thirty years in a range of pedagogical sites in Britain, Chile, Portugal, Spain and Australia. In response to the criticism that his work is functionalist, Bernstein emphasises that the potential for change in relations between social classes is intrinsic to human subjects, and that change arises out of systematic diagnosis, strategies, commitments, and forms of collective action (see also McFadden, 1995). In responding to the criticism that his work attends inadequately to class relations, Bernstein argues that his theory is able to attend to such relations in a way that critical and cultural reproduction theories cannot. To elaborate, Bernstein states that these theories are limited because they examine only the surface manifestations of educational knowledge. They identify the ideological bias of pedagogic practice, but do not conceptualise the construction of ideology in pedagogy. According to Bernstein, ideology is not a content, but a way of making and realising relationships. In showing how pedagogic identities and relationships are made and realised through the selection and putting together of curricular knowledge, Bernstein's theory is thus able to attend, as critical and cultural reproduction theories do not, to the production of social class identities and relations.

In this review, I describe Bernstein's model of pedagogic communication and argue its usefulness for analyses of emerging issues in education. This argument is illustrated by reference to the changing politics of inclusive curriculum in Australian contexts. Where inclusion was initially defined as access to the curriculum which had historically served the interests of the socially dominant, it is now defined by some theorists as involving changes to the form and content of curricula so that it serves the interests of all students. Connell (1995) has described the first of these initiatives as procedural justice and the latter as curricular justice.

Under the Hawke-Keating Labor government (1983-1996), social justice was on Australia's national policy education agenda, although regulated and defined by discourses of economic rationalism (Fitzclarence & Kenway, 1993; Taylor, 1993). In Queensland, the same was true at the state level under the Goss Labor government (1989-96). The alignment of discourses of justice and economic rationalism was questioned by Fitzclarence and Kenway (1993) who argued that the logic of profit must inevitably subvert social justice imperatives. By contrast, Taylor (1993) argued that the alignment with economic rationalism did at least mean that social justice principles, and the value of egalitarianism, were not attacked as in Britain under Thatcherite policy. I suggest that the issues raised by these researchers can be effectively analysed through Bernstein's theory of pedagogic communication. So too can the issues which are emerging from the educational restructuring undertaken by conservative governments at both the federal and Queensland state levels in 1996.

In brief, equity remains on the educational agenda in Queensland, and a Ministerial Committee on Equity Matters has been appointed, and given the responsibility of identifying priority issues in educational equity, and strategies for addressing these issues at the centralised policy and decentralised school level. The committee was asked to consider current policies, research and case studies of two Queensland schools in their consideration of equity matters. In addition, the Social Justice section of the Queensland Department of Education has been renamed as Student Support Services, and the gender and cultural equity units have been merged, although other target areas (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, gifted and talented, disabilities, low socio-economic background, and geographically isolated) have maintained their policy and curricular identities. Moreover, educational equity is being realigned with behaviour management policies, a back-to-basics drive focussing particularly on literacy and numeracy (Bantick, 1996; Editorial, 1996; Jackman, 1996; Jones, 1996; Slattery, 1996) and public accountability procedures such as the publishing of student results (Morley & Maynard, 1996). At the same time, educators are being encouraged to promote a policy of inclusive tolerance, specifically racial tolerance. Moreover, discourses of racial tolerance have been aligned to economic rationalism. For example, federal and state political leaders alarmed by the prospect of losing Asia-Pacific markets have entered the so-called race and immigration

debate, calling for racial tolerance. This debate has been inflamed by Pauline Hanson who claimed in her maiden Parliamentary speech that ‘mainstream Australians’ are disadvantaged by “the privileges Aboriginals enjoy over other Australians” and are in “danger of being swamped by Asians”(Hanson cited in Charlton, 1996: 27).

It is crucial for researchers to analyse the nature and form of these complex and significant changes in Australian state education policy on equity and inclusive curriculum. Bernstein’s model of pedagogic communication is useful for this purpose because it enables researchers to focus on the following key questions:

How have these changes affected the potential for social justice and educational equality in schooling? What remains the same? What is different? How have these organisational changes set the limits and possibilities for what is thinkable about educational equality and inclusive curriculum at the level of official pedagogic discourse, school and classroom practice? How is the meaning of educational equality and inclusive curriculum regulated by local institutional contexts?

In the following section, I describe five concepts from Bernstein’s model. I demonstrate the relevance of these to analyses of current changes to equity policies and curricular justice in Queensland by listing research questions made possible by the concepts.

(1) Classification and Framing

The theory of the classification and framing of educational knowledge, originally published in 1971, continues to form the foundation of Bernstein’s more recent theoretical research on pedagogic discourse. Bernstein stresses that power is constituted in the strength of the insulations or symbolic boundaries between categories, rather than by the content of the categories. According to Bernstein, classification (power) and framing (control) structure the symbolic insulations between and within categories of discourse, agents and sites in the classroom. Power relations create, legitimise and reproduce symbolic boundaries between different groups of students (*eg.*, gender, race, class, disability, learning difficulties, gifted and talented), and different categories of instruction. Power

relations always operate *between* categories of instruction and students, and establish legitimate relations of social order. In this way, power relations determine who gets access to particular forms of educational knowledge. Control relations establish legitimate forms of communication appropriate to different contexts such as teacher-student relations in specific curricular areas such as Human Relationships and Physics.

The principles of classification and framing may be either strongly or weakly regulated depending on the negotiating power of teachers and students. Weak regulation constitutes the possibilities for transformation rather than reproduction or resistance of power relations. Relevant questions about curricular justice are:

- Which group is responsible for initiating the change to social justice and equity issues in education? Is the change initiated by a dominant or a dominating group?
- If values are weakening, what values still remain strong? (p.30)
- Between which categories has the weakening of symbolic boundaries occurred (*eg.*, between subject areas such as History and English, or Mathematics and Life Skills, or between school equity and behaviour management policies)?

(2) Instructional and Regulative Discourse

Bernstein (1990, 1996) defines pedagogic discourse as an ensemble of rules or procedures for the production and circulation of knowledge within pedagogic interactions. According to Bernstein, pedagogic discourse is not a discourse but a principle of recontextualisation, that is, a principle or rule “which embeds two discourses: a discourse of skills of various kinds (instructional discourse) and their relations to each other, and a discourse of social order (regulative discourse)” (p.46). He argues that researchers often distinguish between the overt or official curriculum, and the hidden or covert curriculum. Bernstein suggests that there is only one discourse which regulates the form and content of curricular knowledge. Pedagogic discourse is the rule which leads to the embedding of instruction (content, skills) in a social order, so that specific curricular identity is always constituted by the regulative discourse. The regulative discourse constitutes the social division of labour for knowledge production, transmission and acquisition. Consequently, the regulative discourse sets the limits and possibilities for what is thinkable and unthinkable in

relation to school knowledge, student and teacher identities, and classroom order.

Relevant questions about curricular justice are:

- How is curricular knowledge structured when the dominant regulative discourse is:
 - (a) educational equity?
 - (b) behaviour management?
 - (c) market orientations?
- What changes to the classification and framing of school curricula knowledge need to be made to ensure curricular justice?

(3) Recontextualisation and the Space for Ideological Change

According to Bernstein, recontextualisation refers to the rules or procedures by which educational knowledge is moved from one educational site to another. This process of movement of curricular knowledge opens a space for changes in power and control relations and thereby a change in ideological meaning. Ideologies are not merely carried as surface features of the knowledge, but are structured into the selection, organisation, transmission and acquisition of curricula. The concept of recontextualisation allows researchers to analyse how practices of pedagogic communication directly or indirectly relay dominant power and control relations and thus regulate cultural reproduction and change (p.126). Relevant questions about curricular justice are:

- How is curricular knowledge selected, organised, distributed and evaluated in specific contexts?
- How are social relations and identities of students from different social groups regulated by this organisation of pedagogic communication?
- How do these principles of pedagogic communication produce different student identities, or pedagogic consciousness?

(4) Micro-politics of curricular justice in specific case study schools

Bernstein suggests that pedagogic communication in schools can only be democratic and socially just if parents and students feel they have a vested interest in the school, and confidence that these arrangements will actualise and enhance this investment. If these conditions are to be met, then three interrelated rights must be institutionalised in schooling practices: enhancement, inclusion and participation. Enhancement occurs when social, intellectual or personal boundaries are experienced not as confining, but as tension points which condense the past, and open possible futures. It involves the right to the means of critical understanding and to new possibilities, that is, access to the best knowledge that educational systems can provide. The second right is the right to be included, socially, intellectually, culturally and personally. This right also entails the right to be autonomous, that is, the right to have a separate identity. The third right is the right to participate in the construction, maintenance and change of schooling procedures in terms of pedagogic communication (pp.6-7). Relevant questions about curricular justice are:

- Do policies on educational equity meet the rights of enhancement, inclusion and participation?
- How is the right to inclusion balanced with the right to maintain a separate, autonomous identity?

(5) Pedagogic Models of Inclusive Curriculum

Bernstein provides a typology of types of pedagogy. He identifies two models and three modes within each model. These models are illustrated in the table below.

Competence Model	Liberal Progressive Child-centred primary curricula	Populist Separatist curricula (eg., feminine or culturally specific content and methods)	Radical Critical pedagogies
Performance Model	Singular History Physics Mathematics	Regional Studies in Society and Environment Cultural Studies	Generic Competency-based education

Bernstein suggests these pedagogic codes of curricula organisation are rarely actualised in the pure forms described in the model. For example, radical instructional practice may be embedded within liberal-progressive practice, while student learning is evaluated in generic pedagogic terms.

A detailed description of this typology is beyond the scope of this review. What should be noted however, is that Bernstein distinguishes amongst these modes of pedagogy on the basis of what counts as knowledge (curriculum); how learning takes place (transmission); and what counts as a legitimate display of learning (evaluation). Relevant questions about curricular justice are:

- What are the modes of pedagogy within this site and how is social justice conceptualised within the terms of these modes? What is considered to be inclusive knowledge, teaching methods, and evaluative procedures?

In conclusion, Bernstein's comprehensive model of pedagogic communication provides concepts which make possible a systematic, nuanced and detailed analysis of changes to equity and inclusive curriculum policies in the Queensland context. While I have briefly outlined a few concepts offered by Bernstein to assist researchers in their analysis of the politics of curricular justice, it has not been possible to detail all the concepts and their relation to each other. To determine the usefulness of Bernstein's conceptualisation of power and control relations through the structuring of pedagogy, the reader needs to engage with *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control and Identity* with reference to specific research problems. One of the most important sections of this book, which I have not addressed in this review, is Bernstein's (pp. 75-81) analysis of educational identities (see Singh & Dooley, in press, for an empirical study of these concepts).

I believe that in this book, Bernstein has answered the criticisms directed at his work, providing a powerful conceptual model which has systematically been applied and developed in educational contexts across the world. Bernstein's theory of pedagogy offers promise for the analyses of current changes in education systems. One of the most valuable aspects of *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control and Identity* is its conceptualisation of these changes in the context of contemporary transitions in the relations of transnational capital.

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