

Reimagining curriculum through a  
Bernsteinian lens: rethinking the canon in  
Political Science



# What is Political Science education for?

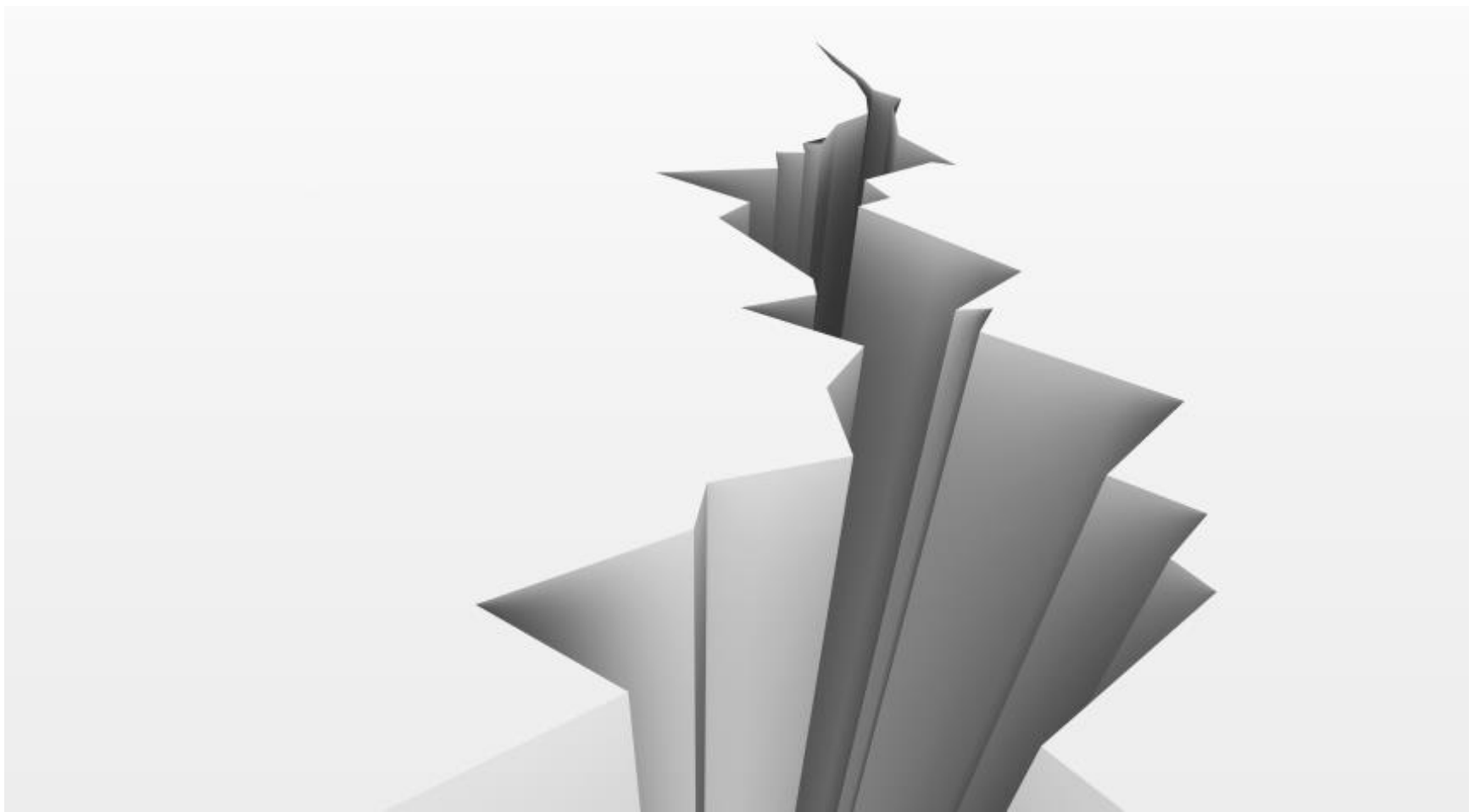
‘A fully realized political science education would wed content and methods to a social purpose so as to “give students tools and dispositions to be more effective participants in their government and community”’ (Bernstein 2010, 14, in Isacoff 2014, 420).

Students need to ‘develop the disposition to approach discourses...with some scepticism and the ability to identify some of the problematic assumptions that may inform such discourses’ (Matthews 2015, 7)

# Then, what 'canon' would be needed?

- 4 sub-disciplines: 'area studies'; 'international relations'; 'political theory'; 'comparative studies'
- In SA most academics in sub-disciplines other than Theory don't see a 'canon' as being set or pre-imposed into content
- 'Theory' is slightly different – seem to be common texts read and used around key concepts, i.e., power, the state, government

Is there a gap between aims and curriculum?



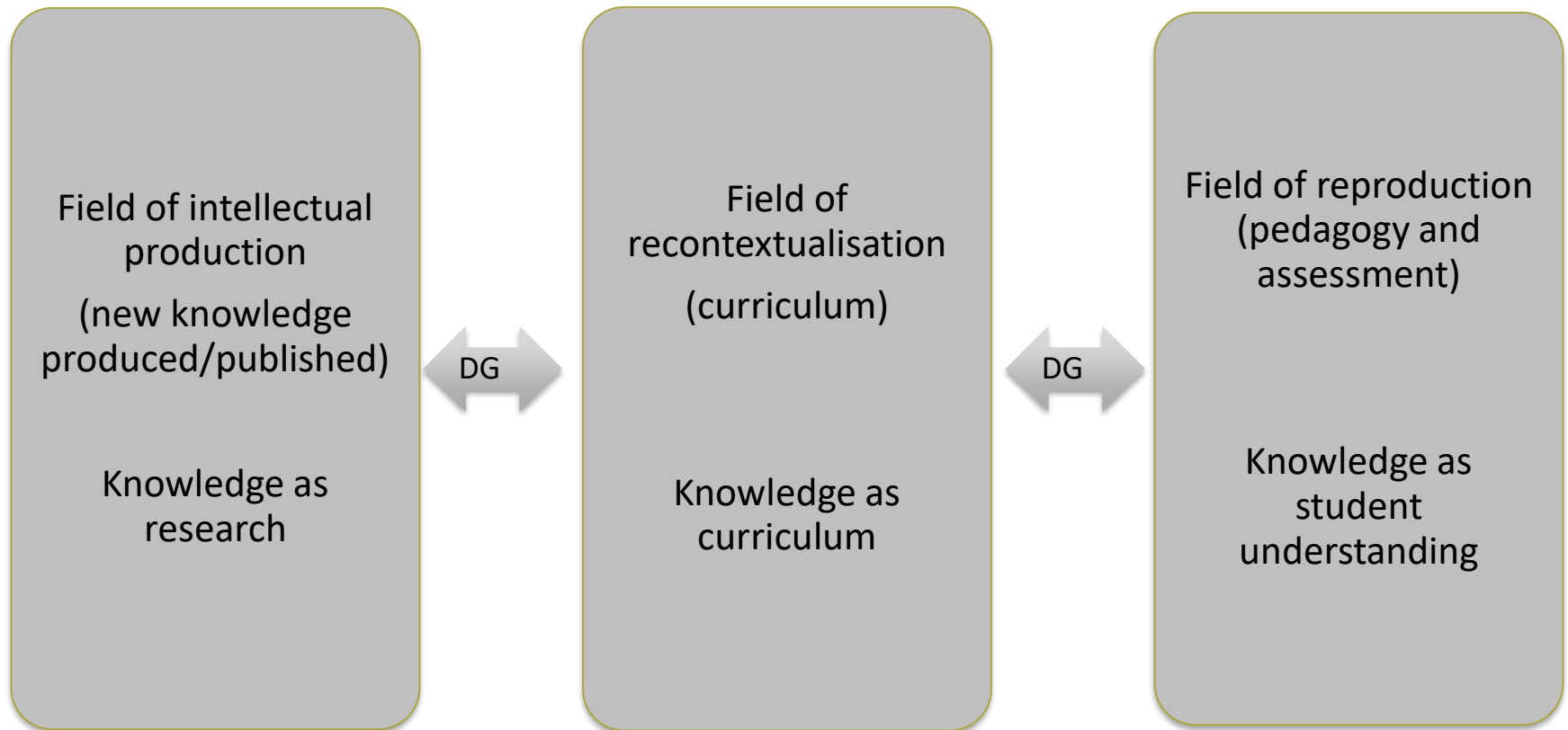
# Common discourses around curriculum

- Notions of 'coverage' of 'content – what is brought in or left out, and why?
- 'Stuffed' curriculum (Cousin 2006, 4) – what is it stuffed with?
- Inclusivity and recognition – whose voices are allowed to speak and whose are excluded or pushed aside?
- Canonisation of knowledge – squashing of reimagination or reinvention

# One way of thinking about decolonising curricula

- Calls for wider inclusion and recognition – growing the discipline in different ways
- Represents a challenge to status quo, interests and current ‘space of possibles’ (Maton 2014)
- Represents alternatives – not only knowledges, voices, ideas, also ways of thinking, writing, creating knowledge
- Alternative points of reference (Gatsheni-Ndlovu) – thinking *from* rather than *about* Africa

# Model for working with knowledge in higher education



# The discursive gap

- Critique of status quo, and slow pace of change
- Contested, potentially fraught space – but a space for reimagination and for change
- ‘No discourse ever moves without ideology at play’ (Bernstein 2000, 32)



# Reimagining the discursive space

- Challenge is to be open to reimagining any discipline in terms of the space within the discursive gaps – whose voices, whose power, whose interests?
- What are we ‘canonising’ and what are the implications of that for the discipline, ourselves, our students?
- How do we invite participation and challenges to our own and others’ ideas? And sustain this?