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A sociologist teaches history: some epistemological and pedagogical reflections

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Abstract: *This article discusses the concept of 'historical sociology' in relation to the teaching of a module on an undergraduate degree in Education Studies at a university in the United Kingdom. The module examines the history of education policy in England from 1870 until the present day. Drawing upon comparisons with Social Foundations of Education programs in the United States, I examine some key epistemological and pedagogical issues raised by the inter-disciplinary approach to teaching and learning followed within the module in which we combine historical and sociological perspectives as a means to understand the evolution of the English education system. In particular, using Bernstein's concept of the pedagogic device as an analytical framework, I consider the epistemological congruence of sociology and history as the contributory disciplines of the undergraduate module. From a discussion of the concept of historical sociology, I conclude that although sociology and history are distinct subjects, they share a large amount of analytical ground which thus facilitates the inter-disciplinary approach pursued within the module. Following that, I examine some pedagogical issues that have arisen in my experience of teaching upon the module and I discuss how I have addressed these. I conclude the article by making comparisons to relevant examples from pedagogical practices in Social Foundations of Education programs in the United States.*

Keywords: Education Studies; History; Sociology; Epistemology; Inter-disciplinary.

Introduction

Undergraduate degrees in Education Studies have grown in number over the last two decades or so in British universities. Having first developed in reaction to the de-theorisation of teacher training programmes in the 1980s, Education Studies has emerged as a popular non-

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qualified teaching status undergraduate pathway in the UK (Bartlett & Burton, 2012). Although such degrees will vary in content and approach, all will, broadly speaking, draw from the disciplines of sociology, philosophy, psychology and history with the aim of presenting a critical approach to education as a field of study (Ward, 2008, p.1).

As a subject, Education Studies raises a number of epistemological and pedagogical issues. One key issue centres upon the differences between how education is researched as a subject area and how it is taught within many Education Studies degrees. As Furlong (2013, p.9) notes, as a field of research activity, education still tends to be firmly rooted in the convention of discrete disciplinary areas, and this is reflected in the existence of specialised journals and learned societies. However, the teaching of Education Studies degrees will often challenge this. Evidence from practitioners working in Education Studies programmes indicates that in actual pedagogical practice, these discrete disciplinary boundary classifications are crossed with some practitioners viewing Education Studies as multi-disciplinary (McCulloch, 2002), some as inter-disciplinary (Griffin & McDougall, 2009) and some as transdisciplinary (Palaiologou, 2010).

These debates have been very fruitful in opening up general questions of epistemology and pedagogy. However, they do not reach down to the more granular, module-level experiences of teaching that draws upon the parent disciplines of Education Studies. The particular contribution of this present article shall be to address this gap within the literature. Employing Bernstein's (2000) concept of the pedagogic device as an analytical framework, I shall contend that Education Studies should be an inter-disciplinary endeavour. However, I want to take a somewhat unusual approach to arguing the case for this position. Rather than making a general argument in relation to Education Studies as a field of study, I shall unpick some of the epistemological and pedagogical underpinnings of inter-disciplinarity by examining in some detail the meeting of two of the key subject disciplines upon which

Education Studies degrees in the UK draw: history and sociology (QAA, 2015). More concretely, I shall argue that, following Bernstein (2000), there is a porous border between the knowledge structures of sociology and history, and this, in turn, is of significance because it forms the epistemological basis for the inter-disciplinary approach to the module on which I teach and which I discuss within this article.

The rationale for this discussion lies in my position as an academic who trained in and researches within the sociology of education but who also teaches on a module in a BA (Hons) Education Studies programme which purposely draws upon both historical and sociological perspectives to examine the history of education in England from the beginnings of state-funded schools education in 1870 until the present day. This paper's central focus is therefore on my reflections upon teaching within a UK context, however, in the discussion section of the article I shall seek to make connections between these experiences and some pedagogical practices in Social Foundations of Education (SFE) programs in the United States. Butin (2005a, p.290) acknowledges that there is no single definition of SFE but offers three possible perspectives: discipline-based study of education; academic involvement with themes relating to pluralistic multiculturalism; dealing with the socio-political context of education. While there are important differences between UK Education Studies courses and SFE, there are also key similarities in curricular aims. Like Education Studies degrees, SFE programs also have the curricular aim of undertaking a critical evaluation of education as an area of study (Butin, 2005a; Dotts, 2013). Consequently, I believe that a comparative evaluation is useful to illustrate the wider significance, beyond the module that I discuss, of the arguments that I shall make.

Both SFE and UK-based Education Studies are located in an unstable position in relation to teacher education, albeit for quite different reasons. Since its emergence from the late 1980s onwards, there has been a consistent attempt among practitioners to position Education

Studies away from its roots in teacher training and to forge an identity for itself as a distinct subject of study (Ainley, 2009; Griffin & McDougall 2009; Hodkinson, 2009). By contrast, SFE courses form part of teacher preparation programs in the USA. In this respect, their purpose, as Lewis (2013, p.173) notes, is to prepare culturally competent teachers with a comprehension of educational philosophies, ideologies and practices, and of the impact of these upon schools and teaching. This is a task that Butin (2005b, p.218) terms an “upstream endeavor”, one which calls into question the very premises of educational organisation and practices, as compared to the “downstream endeavor” of the more instrumental business of teacher education. It is also a problematic undertaking, with many SFE practitioners viewing their subject area to be a misunderstood or simply side-lined component of teacher education, which is devalued for its perceived irrelevance to the development of quality teachers (Butin, 2005a, 2005b; Carter, 2008; Kuntz & Petrovic, 2011; Lewis, 2013).

The remainder of this article is divided into two main sections. In the first section, I shall begin by outlining the Bernsteinian conceptual framework that I shall apply to understand the characteristics of inter-disciplinarity in relation to Education Studies degrees in the UK; following that, I shall examine debates surrounding the intersections of history and sociology, or what is sometimes termed ‘historical sociology’, and I shall apply a Bernsteinian analysis to consider the epistemological and pedagogical implications of these debates for the historical-sociological undergraduate module under discussion within this article. In the second section, I shall relate some key pedagogical issues that have arisen in my experience of teaching upon the module, and I shall discuss how I have addressed them.

A Conceptual Framework: Bernstein’s Pedagogic Device

Bernstein’s (2000) concept of the pedagogic device is a theory which attempts to model how expert, discipline-related knowledge becomes translated (or ‘pedagogised’) into classroom-

level knowledge. To model this process, Bernstein (2000) distinguishes between three different fields of knowledge: the field of production (where knowledge is produced), the field of recontextualisation (where knowledge becomes recontextualised into curricula) and the field of reproduction (where knowledge is transmitted through teaching activities). These fields of knowledge are semi-autonomous social spaces constituted by the relations between agents within them—thus, classroom teaching will be governed by its own sets of institutional rules and relationships between teaching practitioners. Importantly, though, there is a naturally hierarchical relationship between the fields in that the production of knowledge must precede its recontextualisation and recontextualisation must occur prior to reproduction.

As Shay (2013) notes, the value of this model is that it directs our attention to the ways in which knowledge may become transformed as it passes across the different fields, each exerting its own semi-autonomous effect upon what is regarded as knowledge. Thus, to use Shay's (2013, p.567) own illustrative example, there will inevitably be a big difference between the kind of knowledge produced by research physicists and that which appears in an introductory-level textbook. Knowledge (of physics) becomes decontextualised from its site of production (the laboratory etc), recontextualised within curricular material (textbooks etc) and then, ultimately, pedagogised as educational knowledge at the classroom-level (Shay, 2013, p.567). For Singh (2002), Bernstein's delineation of the three fields in this way represents a significant attempt to map processes of knowledge (re)structuring at macro, meso and micro levels of analysis, and thus has clear empirical applications to educational research.

How, though, does this model help us to understand Education Studies programmes? Following a Bernsteinian analysis, we can see that, in the UK, at the macro-level of the field of production (i.e., research), educational knowledge continues to be characterised by quite a high degree of disciplinary speciality, although there is evidence that this is suffering from a

period of long-term decline (Furlong & Lawn, 2011). If we look at the meso-level of the field of recontextualisation and the micro-level of everyday reproduction, where we site the curriculum preparation and teaching of Education Studies programmes, we see a very different picture. While there will be differences of emphasis between institutions across the UK, teaching practice and its associated curricula in the form of textbooks and other learning materials tend to adopt an integrated, inter-disciplinary approach to the study of education (Bignold et al., 2013). The result of this type of pedagogical recontextualisation is that UK Education Studies programmes are a good example of what Bernstein (2000, p.52) terms a *region*, that is, a field or area of study constituted by the interaction between the different ‘singulars’, i.e, specialised disciplines, of which it is composed (principally, history, sociology, psychology, philosophy and economics in the case of UK degree programmes).

Also of relevance to this article, is Bernstein’s (2000) further distinction between the forms or structures of knowledge at the level of the field of production. Here, Bernstein (2000) distinguishes between ‘everyday’ knowledge (termed a ‘horizontal discourse’) which is generated through familial and community socialisation, and ‘esoteric’ knowledge (termed a ‘vertical discourse’) which is the product of disciplinary-based research communities. Of importance here is the strength of the insulation between the two forms of knowledge: in contemporary advanced capitalist economies a growing bifurcation has emerged between ‘folk’ knowledge and ‘expert’ knowledge in which legitimacy is generally conferred upon the latter. I shall return to this distinction later within the discussion section of the article when I shall throw a conceptual light upon my own pedagogical activities in the historical-sociological Education Studies module under discussion.

Finally, another key distinction of value to this study is that which Bernstein (2000) makes between knowledge structures *within* the esoteric or horizontal forms of knowledge discourses. Here, Bernstein (2000) distinguishes between subjects that are characterised by

their ‘strong grammar’ or ‘weak grammar’. Subjects characterised by ‘strong grammar’ will be constituted by a very specialised, discrete conceptual language which does not translate easily into other knowledge fields. Subjects that exhibit ‘weak grammar’ are those that draw upon a less explicit conceptual syntax or more diffuse empirical point of reference and where, in consequence, the borders between subjects may be more permeable. And this distinction between strong and weak grammar subjects directly informs my analysis in the next section of this article in which I shall outline some key debates which sit at the level of Bernstein's (2000) field of knowledge production. These surround the interaction between history and sociology and revolve around the concept of 'historical sociology'.

Inter-disciplinarity within Bernstein's field of production: Historical Sociology

Historical sociology can mean different things but in relation to Bernstein's (2000) field of knowledge production, the term basically refers to the meeting of history and sociology as an academic research activity. There is not sufficient space in this paper to do full justice to all aspects of the debates it has aroused. Instead, I shall summarise some of the principal contributions. A key issue relates to the question of whether history and sociology broadly share a common analytical focus or are fundamentally different subjects with quite distinct investigative orientations. This argument is typically framed in terms of an ‘ideographic’ and ‘nomothetic’ binary divide. Traditionally, history has been seen as an ideographic discipline: historians aim to provide time-bound, localised accounts of singular phenomena that make no pretensions towards generalised trans-periodic theorisations. By contrast, sociology is more typically characterised as a nomothetic discipline whereby sociologists will seek to generate theories that enable them to offer broader explanatory generalisations which may overarch particularities of time and space.

An important contributor to this debate has been John Goldthorpe, a sociologist although a historian by undergraduate study. Goldthorpe (1991, p.212) accepts that there can be no neat ideographic-nomothetic binary divide. However, Goldthorpe (1991, p.212) also contends that we need to retain an understanding of history and sociology as distinct disciplines, and that the ideographic-nomothetic division is still useful if seen as a point of emphasis rather than as one of set principle. Goldthorpe's (1991) contribution to this question proved controversial and it drew a number of responses. Mann (1994, p.37) argues that we should see the two disciplines as neither completely alike nor fundamentally distinct. To illustrate his point, Mann (1994, p.38) observes that much general theory in sociology was produced by social theorists—many of them canonical figures such as Marx or Durkheim—who examined social problems from both past and present perspectives. The necessity of seeing the past and the present as inextricably caught up in one another is a theme taken up by Bryant (1994). Bryant (1994, p.11) observes that all present-day social arrangements, structures and cultural institutions have their roots in past human activities with the result that, “The 'past' is thus never really 'past', but continuously constitutive of the 'present'”.

Thus, debates surrounding the ideographic-nomothetic distinction have engendered some sharply opposed views. However, they may give the impression of a greater disciplinary polarity than exists in actual practice. In fact, educational research has benefited from the meeting of historical and sociological analyses and methods when scholars work at the intersections of those two disciplines. For example, in the United States David F. Labaree, as a sociologically oriented historian of education, has employed historical-sociological perspectives to examine the difficult balance throughout the history of American schooling between the expansion of access to school and the educational and social stratification this produces (Labaree, 2011). Similarly, the UK-based educational historian Andy Green has applied a range of sociologically informed concepts, including the Gramscian concept of

hegemony, to trace and compare the development of the education systems of England, France and the United States in the nineteenth century and their relationship with wider processes of state formation (Green, 1990). Why though does this matter in relation to the undergraduate module that I teach upon? Here we need to return to Bernstein's (2000) concept of the pedagogic device to unpick the epistemological underpinnings of the interdisciplinary approach followed in the module.

Following Bernstein (2000), both subjects may be characterised, in relative terms, by their weak grammar and porous disciplinary borders and, as I have discussed, this is reflected in the fact that Goldthorpe (1991) and fellow discussants occupy different points of emphasis within the debate rather than fixed positions; it is also evidenced in the creative interdisciplinary work of scholars such as David F. Labaree and Andy Green. In practical terms, such weak disciplinary boundaries mean that, at Bernstein's (2000) micro-level of knowledge reproduction, I enjoy quite a wide discretion in the control of what is transmitted in the pedagogical relationship. This, then, has been the epistemological underpinning of the interdisciplinary approach that I have taken to the teaching of this module. In the remainder of this article I shall discuss some key pedagogical issues that have arisen from this approach and more generally from my experiences of teaching on this module. Prior to that, however, I will outline the institutional teaching context of the module.

The teaching context

The institution at which I teach is a large university in the north of England of about 30,000 students and recruits from all over the United Kingdom and beyond. Education Studies is a popular undergraduate degree at the university where it may be taken as a three-year single-honours subject or as a three-year triple-honours qualification with psychology and counselling. In the 2015-16 academic year, there were just over 500 students enrolled on both

programmes. The majority of the in-take could be categorised as working-class in terms of parental occupation and about 75% were female.

The undergraduate module *Education Policy and Social Class* is a core module on the BA (Hons) programme in Education Studies at the institution. The module is a twelve-week, 36-hour course which examines the evolution of English education policy, with particular reference to schools-related developments. We begin from the passing of the 1870 Elementary Education Act, which represents the inception of a state school system, and continue until the present day. Within the module, key pieces of legislation such as the 1944 'Butler' Education Act and the 1988 Education Reform Act are focused upon as landmark changes in policy development. An integral aim of the module is to consider explanations for the persistence of class inequalities in educational participation and attainment.

The following second main section of this article is an account of interdisciplinarity at the level of Bernstein's (2000) field of pedagogical reproduction. In particular, I shall discuss how interdisciplinarity 'works' within the module through a focus upon key teaching and learning issues that have arisen. These relate to students' understanding of the central concerns of the module: to address social class as a contemporary phenomenon within education; and to locate it within its appropriate historical context. I shall also outline some of the ways in which I have addressed these issues through my teaching strategies.

Interdisciplinarity within Bernstein's field of pedagogical reproduction: teaching sociology

The module examines the history of English education policy from 1870 until the present day in a largely linear fashion. It is also, however, concerned with social class and, more particularly, with the question of persistent social class disadvantage and inequalities within the education system. In order for the students to address issues of class inequalities, it is

necessary to 'prepare the ground' by exploring what is meant by social class. This is important because, in my teaching experience, most students on the module initially find difficulties in addressing social class as a topic of study, and lack the 'language' to talk about and conceptualise it. As a university teacher trained within the sociology of education, this is of no real surprise to me. Across advanced capitalist countries young people are likely to ascribe individual 'success' or 'failure' to personal endeavour and talent while the influence of powerful socio-economic factors remains largely obscured from view (Beck, 1992; Kelly, 2006). A further irony is that a belief in meritocracy is persisting during a period of growing socio-economic inequalities within most developed economies (Dorling, 2011; Sayer, 2016).

This phenomenon appears to be equally true of both the UK (Ball, Maguire & Macrae, 2000) and the USA (Willis, Brewster & Fulkerson, 2005), and this, in turn, has created pedagogical challenges in the two countries. In the UK, practitioners working broadly within the field of Education Studies report student difficulties with addressing issues of class (Gazeley & Dunne, 2007; Reay, 2006) while their SFE counterparts in the USA have indicated similar issues with students in relation to class, and also to a range of other social categories such as 'race' and gender (Butin, 2005a; Doyle, 2001; Renner, Price, Keene, & Little, 2010). The pedagogical implication of this situation is that class needs to be treated carefully if its significance within young people's lives (and thus its place as a salient concept within the module) is to be apprehended by the students.

There are many different theoretical perspectives on social class. Within the module, we draw upon the work of the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, whose 'culturalist' approach to understanding class has proven very influential within the sociology of education in the UK (Bottero, 2005; Savage et al., 2015). Bourdieu (1997) conceives of social class as being composed of three different but closely inter-related forms of 'capital'. Thus, economic capital refers to an individual's material wealth in the form of income or other economic

assets; cultural capital is a broad concept for Bourdieu and encompasses a range of aspects, including educational qualifications and embodied cultural attributes such as a sense of social self-confidence or a particular style of comportment; social capital refers to an individual's network of social relationships and, crucially, the extent to which these relationships may advance (or not) an individual's social position. Bourdieu (1997, p.54) argues that the different forms of capital may be converted into one another, for example, economic into cultural and social and vice versa, although the relationship between the types of capital is complex.

Bourdieu's concept of class potentially translates well into classroom teaching strategies because, although old-style collective class consciousness may no longer exist among young people in the UK, there is evidence that people do retain a keen relational sense of class—of 'us' and 'them'—when presented with it within certain contexts—accent, dress, cultural tastes, social networks etc (Savage, 2000), and this clearly relates to the Bourdieusian theoretical schema discussed above. However, care has to be taken in dealing with the topic of social class. In both the UK and the USA, it can be seen as an embarrassing, uncomfortable and even taboo subject (Sayer, 2005; Tablante & Fiske, 2015). How then to approach teaching it within the module?

The concept of class is largely explored through the small-group seminars of approximately twenty students. Within the seminar group, students are sub-divided into smaller groups of four-five. This allows for more creative intra-group discussion and expansion of concepts covered elsewhere within the course, a benefit also noted by Muijis and Reynolds (2005) and Brown (2016). Students are provided with a large piece of flipchart paper and a marker and are told to draw three columns down the paper, one for each of Bourdieu's three types of capital as outlined previously. They are then asked to think of as many examples of things

under each column heading as possible and to write them down under each column. After this stage of the activity, each group will present their findings to the whole class.

Having built upon their understanding of the Bourdieusian model of social class through the first-stage activity, students are usually able to make the links. Thus, typically students will relate low levels of income (economic capital) to material disadvantage, e.g., a pupil may not have access to a computer necessary for homework; parental education, knowledge of the school system and confidence in dealing with educational authority figures (cultural capital) are often cited as examples of the reproduction of cultural disadvantage; parental social networks and contacts (social capital) and the leverage these may offer to well-connected middle-class parents within an increasingly competitive and individualistic school system are another example of a link that students often make.

Interdisciplinarity within Bernstein's field of pedagogical reproduction: teaching history

While the sociological elements of the module produce particular pedagogical challenges, the historical narrative that we follow also presents its own teaching issues. I shall discuss these by reference to two of the key pieces of legislation that we study on the module: the 1870 Elementary Education Act and the 1944 'Butler' Education Act.

The 1870 Elementary Education Act marked a turning point in English educational history in that, for the first time, the state accepted responsibility for ensuring the provision of a universal elementary education to children from five until (at least nominally) thirteen. Prior to this act, although there had been some schooling provision available, it had been very patchy and usually of very short duration (Hendrick, 1997). Following the act, going to school eventually became an accepted part of growing up and was thus a key factor in the

evolution in Victorian thinking towards poor children from that of ‘earners’ to that of ‘learners’ (Hendrick, 1997; Middleton, 1970). The act thus occupies a pivotal position in both the development of a modern education system in England and in helping to construct our modern notions about what is proper to childhood. For that reason, the *Education Policy and Social Class* module begins its examination of educational legislation with a study of this act. In my experience of teaching around the act, however, I have encountered two key issues which I shall discuss.

The first issue relates to the fact that the 1870 act was the subject of much contestation and division (Green, 1990). Long after the passing of the act, many influential political critics continued to question the very idea of providing any kind of education to the working-classes, as it was believed that mass education would create aspirations that society could not (and should not) meet (Chitty, 2009, p.6). These class antagonisms, and the ways in which they saw expression in a rigidly divided education system (Green, 1990), can be difficult to comprehend for young learners brought up on a discursive diet of equality, meritocracy and individualistic aspiration. The students’ difficulties in reaching back and connecting with such different historical times also reflect the nature of studying history as an ideographic discipline with its analytical focus upon time-bound, localised accounts. This conceptual distance between then and now is an issue that the English novelist L.P. Hartley put more lyrically in the famous opening line of *The Go-Between*: “The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there”. Consequently, my teaching has to address this problematic and to help the students find a meaningful way into such historical complexities.

The best place to start, in my experience, is with the students’ own knowledge and views and to build up from there. Thus, as critics of the period questioned the very purpose of educating working-class children, before looking at the act in any detail we consider what the purpose of a school education can be. Students are asked to form into groups of four-five to ponder

the question, “Why educate children?”. The question is put so boldly precisely because the answers in the UK seem so obvious today that they have become part of an assumptive, common-sense worldview. (This is not to say that there are not different, contested versions of that worldview, only that they would all reach the same ultimate conclusion that children need to be educated).

The students are given paper on which to write possible answers and a spokesperson feeds back to the whole seminar group and this usually forms a platform for a wider, whole-group debate. Students are not expected to arrive at any definitive answers (as, of course, there are none) or even a consensus. Rather, the purpose is to stimulate thought and possibly problematise taken-for-granted assumptions. The aim of this, in turn, is to equip the students with some thinking tools which they can apply to understanding and critiquing the antagonistic class-based worldviews that made the 1870 act so controversial at its inception. Following this, we look at some of the key provisions of the act through use of excerpts from the act itself, and we consider different commentaries upon the act within some of the key secondary texts that form the basic reading material for the module. These readings then form the basis for further classroom discussion.

The second issue with regard to the 1870 Elementary Education Act also relates to the ideographic nature of historical study within an inter-disciplinary module. It is important that the teaching and discussion of social class is properly contextualised. Put simply, social class in Britain in 2016 is not the same as social class in 1870 (where we start our module) or at other key points such as 1944 or 1988. For example, it is not possible to talk of *the* working-class in late Victorian Britain because labour was characterised by complex gradations of skills, status and incomes, and the largest single group of working people in Britain was domestic servants—a situation that was not to change until 1923 (Todd, 2014, p.14). Consequently, as the distinguished Victorian specialist David Cannadine (2000) argues, most

late-period Victorians would not have recognised the triadic class model which guides our thinking today.

These points do not diminish the argument that I made above with regard to the class antagonisms surrounding the 1870 act. However, it is clearly important that, in seeking to examine both historical and continuing issues of class-based educational inequalities, we should ask what class meant around 1870. Consequently, my pedagogy needs to locate social class in its appropriate historical context as well as dealing with it as a contemporary sociological concept. This issue is approached, in part, through a critical reading of some of the key texts of the module. For example, students will read selected chapters of David Cannadine's book *Class in Britain*. This book makes the case, which I have outlined above, for a more complex view of class for this period than the traditional three-tier model with which we are familiar. In sum, Cannadine (2000) contends that most mid-period Victorians tended to see their social world in terms of multiple, fine gradations of cultural, behavioural and linguistic hierarchies that was more akin to the status orders of the eighteenth century than the industrial model of collective class formations characteristic of the early twentieth century onwards.

In addition, to reading the Cannadine book, and following Formwalt's (2002) recommendation, we also make selective use of films on the module. These are used to try to bring alive in a more dramatic context how status/class functioned in this period. For example, the BBC's 1995 production of *Pride and Prejudice* (although it is set in a slightly earlier period) is useful to give a flavour to the students of a world very different from their own in which status was reflected and governed by a rigid set of social and cultural hierarchical norms. Taken together, the Cannadine readings and videos like the BBC production are used to form the basis of small-group and whole-group discussions regarding what social class/status meant in this period. I have found that, to some extent, students are helped in

their understanding of this very different historical context by their previous engagement with Bourdieu whose concept of capitals has clear applications to the more culturally stratified world of this period.

The next major legislative landmark that we examine in English educational history within the module is the 1944 'Butler' Education Act. The act is important to the module for a number of reasons. Firstly, as Chitty (2009, p.19) notes, the act certainly marked great changes to the *structure* of education: for the first time since the 1870 Act there was to be a definitive distinction between primary and secondary education, thus ending the pre-war system of all-age elementary schools. The act also contained, however, some arguably less progressive measures. The most contentious of these was the distinction, to be made through the '11-plus' examination taken by children at the age of eleven, between 'academic' and 'non-academic' pupils. Results would decide if a pupil went to a 'grammar school' (academic) or a 'secondary modern' (non-academic). Roughly 75 percent of state-educated children failed the 11-plus for entry to a grammar school, the vast majority of whom were working-class (Watts, 2002).

The 11-plus system was based upon eugenicist ideas about inherited intelligence, and the perceived hierarchy of intelligence mapped clearly onto existing social class divisions (Chitty, 2009). Learning about these ideas, as genuinely felt common sense assumptions of seven decades ago, may be difficult for young learners schooled in a discourse of meritocracy who are often puzzled by the type of social determinism they reflect. Additionally, most state schools are now non-selective, so most of our students will not have taken the 11-plus which has largely disappeared. Again, therefore, the ideographic nature of history presents challenges to the teacher in helping students to make conceptual links with a past that seems to be quite different from their present. However, selection certainly lives on *within* schools through the SATs testing regime to which English children are subjected, and in associated

pedagogical practices such as placing children into ability sets for key subjects such as Mathematics or English. These practices thus offer a way in for the students to learn about testing and the common sense attitudes that prevailed among those in power in 1944.

Following the same small-group and then whole-group discussion formats described previously, students are asked to consider the following questions: Are some children naturally cleverer than others? Do middle-class children tend to be cleverer than working-class ones? If so, what is the best form of education for different types of intelligence? The questions are deliberately put in provocative terms to stimulate thought and debate. Students are encouraged to draw upon their own recent experiences of the school testing regime in formulating their opinions. These debates then offer an entry point into the 1944 act with the aim of arming the students with some thinking tools which they can apply to take a critical position upon the act's provision for 11-plus selection.

Discussion

This article has discussed the teaching of a module on an undergraduate-level, non-teacher qualified Education Studies degree at a UK university as an inter-disciplinary endeavour. The significance of this article has been to examine in detail the meeting of two key disciplines—sociology and history—of Education Studies programmes in the UK, as opposed to discussing issues of inter-disciplinarity in general terms. In doing this, I have sought to shine a light on some of the specific challenges that an inter-disciplinary teaching approach can entail at the very localised level of the individual module, and to indicate how I have addressed these.

Following a Bernsteinian analysis, I have argued that, due to their 'weak grammars', there is a porous epistemological border between the two subjects that facilitates the type of inter-

disciplinary approach I have described. Nevertheless, this article has also been able to demonstrate that the two subjects remain irreducibly distinct. For example, the difficulties I have outlined that students experience in connecting with and understanding historical times quite different from the present reflect the nature of studying history as an ideographic discipline with its analytical focus upon time-bound, localised accounts. Sociology throws up different conceptual challenges for the learner. The students' difficulties with the 'language' of class reflect the nature of a nomothetic discipline which requires the learner to reach towards broad explanatory generalisations of a contemporary phenomenon (class, gender etc) that go beyond the student's immediate subjective experience of it.

In relation to both subjects, however, my pedagogical approach is very similar. The task activities and related discussions that I employ in the examples given all aim to guide the learner from particular observations (personal knowledge, views etc) to be able to infer more general principles. In Bernsteinian terms, we may say that as a lecturer my classroom activities entail a process of recontextualising the students' 'everyday' knowledge (their 'horizontal discourse') into 'esoteric' institutionally legitimated knowledge (a 'vertical discourse'). Knowledge thus becomes (re)structured as it moves from one field (the field of production—the students' own folk knowledge) to another (the field of pedagogical reproduction). Of course, this is by no means a one-way, linear process. Rather, as I hope I have been able to illustrate, it is intended to be a dialogical process that always starts from and values the students' experiential knowledge. In this way, I aim to help bridge the gap between students' everyday and esoteric knowledges, two knowledge categories which, as Bernstein (2000) notes, are growing ever more insulated from each other in our increasingly pedagogised world.

And, I believe that the pedagogical issues that I have discussed may usefully be compared with some practices in SFE courses in the USA. For example, the approaches I have outlined

are broadly shared by O'Brien and Schillaci (2010) who, following a Deweyan pedagogical perspective, note the importance of activity-based, student-centred co-operative learning that starts with the students' own knowledge and develops from that. My teaching strategies also relate, for example, to what Murrow (2008, p.235) terms 'pedagogical scaffolding', a concept which she aims to apply in her own SFE teaching. By use of techniques such as discussions and personal journals, Murrow (2008) attempts to facilitate her students' entries into the academic demands of the course. In her account of this form of inductive pedagogy, the central emphasis in Murrow's (2008) approach is upon students' development and articulation of a personal philosophy of education; the 'expert' texts are then employed to critically reflect back upon the students' views rather than being foregrounded as the sources of authoritative knowledge.

Some of the challenges that I have faced in dealing with the apparent strangeness to modern day learners of historical periods also have echoes in some SFE practitioners' experiences. For example, Doyle's (2001) account offers a useful point of comparison with my own experiences, previously described, in dealing with the complexities of social class in 1870. Doyle (2001) reports that her students encountered difficulties in understanding the complex racial categorisations employed in the book *A Lesson Before Dying*, a novel published in 1993 but set in rural Louisiana in the 1940s. Her students initially found it difficult to distinguish between the fine racial distinctions described by the author and to understand their significance in the context of the society and the historical period in which the action of the novel takes place. Doyle (2001) surmises that, for historical reasons, this may be because the students were predisposed to view 'race' through a bifurcated 'Black-White' lens, and thus initially found it challenging to comprehend a more complex racialised social hierarchy as it existed in a particular time and place.

Doyle (2001) goes on to note that, through a close reading of the text and candid discussions of the issues it raises, the students were able to problematise their pre-existing conceptions about racial categorisations and to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the historical and continuing significance of ‘race’ in the United States. Class is not the same sort of social categorisation as ‘race’ and I do not wish to draw to close a parallel here. However, in principle as practitioners we were faced with a similar pedagogical task, which was to stimulate our students into critical thinking that would deconstruct an over-simplified set of social categories into a more nuanced understanding.

In addition to the pedagogical approaches and challenges that I have described, there are clear overlaps in curricular content. Both Education Studies and SFE draw upon historical and sociological content, among other disciplines, to pursue a critical study of education. Particular topics will also be very similar. For example, my coverage of the 11-plus selection system and its latter-day manifestations, and their relationship to social class, is addressed in a very analogous way within SFE courses which critically consider student tracking systems and the ways these may reflect and reproduce wider social inequalities (Gratch, 2002; Renner et al., 2004).

To conclude, however, there are also some important differences between the two programs which have some pedagogical consequences, although perhaps rather indirect ones. As I indicated in my introduction, while Education Studies is not part of teacher training and has sought to establish its own academic identity, SFE courses are part of teacher education programs in the USA—albeit a rather precariously situated part (Butin, 2005a, 2005b; Carter, 2008; Kuntz & Petrovic, 2011; Lewis, 2013). For many SFE practitioners, the implication of this is that the purpose of raising students’ critical awareness is that they should, ultimately, apply it to effect real social change on a micro-level within the classroom (Gratch, 2002; Murrow, 2008; O’Brien & Schillaci, 2002; Renner et al., 2004). By contrast, Education

Studies practitioners know that many of their students will not become teachers or even work in any form of education-related employment. Consequently, developing students' criticality is seen as general requisite of the degree rather than one with any links to professional practice. If comparative studies are undertaken in the future, they may indicate to us how (if at all) such differences in the position of the two programs in relation to teacher education influence actual pedagogical practices.

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