

## ***The Growth Of Knowledge and the Discursive Gap***

*We are told and socialised into what to reject, but rarely told how to create.*

(Basil Bernstein 1977 p167)

Rob Moore, *University of Cambridge, UK*  
Johan Muller, *University of Cape Town, RSA*

ABSTRACT *This paper...*

### **Introduction**

Reviewing thirty-five years of his research, Bernstein said, ‘the theory, however primitive, has always come before the research. Thus by the time a piece of research *has been initiated* the theory has already been subject to conceptual clarification as it engages with the empirical problem. And by the time it has finished there have been further conceptual developments.’ (Bernstein 2000 p93). The question we pose, here, is precisely what *is* ‘the theory’? We do not pose it in the more usual sense of, ‘what is Bernstein’s theory of the family?’ or ‘is Bernstein’s theory structuralist?’. Rather, our question is closer to: ‘how does the theory *work* and what *kind* of theory is it that works in this kind of way?’ What does the theory *do* when it ‘engages with the empirical problem’? Bernstein’s use of the term ‘engages’ is significant and in the words quoted above he appears to be treating theory as a process, as a practice. It does not simply picture or represent reality; it *engages* directly with it, enters into a relationship with it. In some of his later papers (e.g. *ibid* chs 6, 7 & 9), Bernstein began to develop a new language for thinking about theory – a theory of theories – and the concepts for a new sociology of intellectual fields more broadly, for a comprehensive sociology of knowledge. We will draw upon this language in what follows. We will attempt to answer our question by posing it again in terms of how Bernstein’s theory of theories would describe his own theory and how this, in turn, addresses the question of how sociological knowledge grows.

There are two senses to the question of knowledge. The first inquires into Bernstein’s *diagnosis* of sociology as a knowledge field (the form of what is); the

second inquires into Bernstein's account of the *growth* of sociological knowledge, and by extension, the growth of his own theory (the form of its transformation). Together these senses pose the question: what are the prospects and conditions for knowledge advance in our discipline? This question is broadly framed on the one side by the Popperians and their account of methodical advance through the succession of conjectures and refutations, and on the other, by post-modern generalised scepticism about the possibility of any knowledge advance at all. It will soon become clear that Bernstein's position is far more supple and nuanced than either of these viewpoints.

Hence, the current exercise is not limited to that of exposition or exegesis of Bernstein's ideas. There is a deeper and broader issue to do with the possibilities of the sociology of education and sociology generally. Bernstein was concerned with the conceptually weak character of knowledge in sociology and the sociology of education. The concepts that he developed describe in a theoretical language the condition of an intellectual field characterised by fragmentation; the history of which is the successive proliferation of sub-disciplines and perspectives or approaches and one which fails to secure an integrative general theory or produce cumulative knowledge. In his terms (see below) this is a *segmented, horizontal knowledge structure with a weak grammar*. His theory opens the prospect of viewing the sociology of education and thinking about its internal divisions and debates in an entirely new way. This way is one that dispenses with traditional and current characterisations and dichotomies (social change/social order, positivist/constructionist, structuralist/post-structuralist, masculinist/feminist, modern/post-modern etc) and replaces them with a new theoretical language that describes the field conceptually in terms of its *condition*.

### **Fields of Knowledge Production**

Fields of knowledge production can operate in different modes. It is the modality that shapes the production of theories, and, hence, knowledge in the field and, in doing so, constructs identities for practitioners in the field, defines what is a problem to be disputed, and how. It is possible to distinguish two quite different

ways of describing intellectual fields. In the first, approaches are ‘named’ in terms of the organising features of their perspective (‘functionalist’, ‘structuralist’, etc) or by naming the perspective directly in terms of the standpoint or interest they are held to represent (as when knowledge is designated ‘male’, ‘feminist’, or ‘indigenous’) In the second, their structures and knowledge forms are conceptualised in terms of their modalities. In this second case, as Bernstein frequently stressed, the focus is also upon relations *internal* to knowledge rather than on those solely external to it - for example, solely on the relational properties of the field and its positions, trajectories and strategies, as with Bourdieu.

Bernstein’s main contribution to the analysis of knowledge forms, and to an answer to the question of knowledge growth, comes in his analysis of *horizontal and vertical discourse*. In an earlier version of the analysis (Bernstein, 1996), Bernstein is at pains to distinguish his position from that of Bourdieu (1977), and implicitly from the standard sociological account of knowledge dynamism, which is in terms of competition, that is, in terms of ‘horizontal tensions among contemporaries’ as well as ‘vertical sequence among the generations’ (Collins, 1998, p791). Indeed, in an earlier paper, we partly accounted for the periodic recurrence of ‘voice’ discourse in sociology in terms of generational challenge (Moore & Muller, 1998). Such an ‘externalist’ account is not wrong; but, Bernstein avers, it must be supplemented by an ‘internalist’ account, which explores the structuring significance of the internal structure of knowledge itself as well as its social base. This is what Bernstein in his later work sets out to offer.

### *Vertical and Horizontal Knowledge Structures*

In his classic analysis, Bernstein first distinguishes between horizontal and vertical *discourse*. The former is ‘everyday’ discourse, consisting of a reservoir of local communalised segments defined in contexts of use. Vertical discourse consists of a ‘coherent, explicit and systematically principled structure’ which is either hierarchically organised as in the sciences (hierarchical knowledge structure), or takes the form of a series of specialised languages as in the social

sciences and humanities (horizontal knowledge structure) (Bernstein, 2000, p157). Sociology of education is thus a horizontal knowledge structure with a weak grammar, with a conceptual syntax not capable of generating unambiguously precise empirical descriptions. And because this grammar cannot relate empirical descriptions to theoretical descriptions non-contentiously, empirical description cannot arbitrate conceptual disputes. As a result, when disputes arise, a new specialised language is invariably invented because there is no generally accepted principle for integrating the existing disputing theories. Equally, there is no generally accepted means for clearing out old superannated theories which begin to clutter the literature.

These concerns have a heightened significance in education where the problem of knowledge is posed in terms of what to teach and of the purposes of induction into knowledge. For some time now debates within both sociology of education and education itself have been locked into default settings oriented by the traditional/progressive polarity (Muller 2001). More recently the anti-theoreticism of progressivism has been reinforced by a range of post-modern and multicultural perspectives that raise relativism to a point of principle and lodge knowledge exclusively at the level of experience specialised to particular identities and standpoints (elsewhere we refer to these as 'voice discourses' (Moore & Muller 1999)). Knowledge is reduced to the politics of identity and recognition, where knowledge relations are represented simply as power relations between groups. The dislodging of post-modernism entails not just the addition of one more approach (a set of social critical realist perspectives (Moore & Young 2001) alongside all the others already in the sociological collection, but a reorientation of the field in which that collection, and the relationships between its elements, comes to be understood quite differently. It is here that Bernstein's theory makes a crucial contribution.

Although we have stated above that it was in some of his final papers that Bernstein began to formulate concepts for knowledge structures, it was in a review of the sociology of education in the early 1970s that he first presented an extended account of the field in which the later concepts have their likely origin

(Bernstein 1977 ch7). It is useful to refer to this earlier account, both in order to illustrate the continuity of this line of thought in his work and also to illustrate the manner in which the field of sociology of education has continued in one particular dominant modality over this lengthy period of time. We will take as our starting point a description of what, in the later conceptualisation, can be recognised as a ‘horizontal knowledge structure with a weak grammar.’

In a subject where theories and methods are weak, intellectual shifts are likely to arise out of conflict between *approaches* rather than a conflict between explanations, for, by definition, most explanations will be weak and often non-comparable, because they are approach specific. The weakness of the explanation is likely to be attributed to the approach, which is analysed in terms of its ideological stance. Once the ideological stance is exposed, then all the work may be written off. Every new approach becomes a social movement or sect which immediately defines the nature of the subject by re-defining what is to be admitted, and what is beyond the pale, so that with every new approach the subject almost starts from scratch...A new option is created, and the collection of sociology has expanded to include a few more specialised identities: ethnomethodologist, symbolic-interactionist, phenomenologist, structuralist.

(Bernstein 1977 pp167-168).

The field of sociology being described, here, is characterised by the following features:

- An array of ‘approaches’ each with a strongly defined character.
- Each approach is defined by what are held to be its unique foundational commitments rather than by its products.
- Each approach provides a specialised identity for its adherents.

- Approaches are evaluated in terms of what are held to be their extra-explanatory functions (primarily, representing and promoting particular standpoints and interests) rather than in terms of explanations offered.
- Work produced within different approaches can be discounted wholesale once its ideological stance has been displayed rather than engaged with on a case by case basis in terms of explanatory power.

If anything, the field of sociology today even more strongly represents this segmental structure than it did thirty years ago. As a result of post-modern and post-structuralist influences, segmentation has become a condition to be consciously sought and celebrated in terms of the recognition and affirmation of ‘identities’ and ‘standpoints’. Whereas at the time of writing, Bernstein named approaches with a theoretical nomenclature, today this same exercise would be to a significant extent accomplished by one of hyphenated identities where the approach is specialised by the *knower* rather than providing an identity *for* a knower (Bernstein 1977 pp106-110). Once at this point, a segmented field becomes increasingly unstable because there is in principle no end to the proliferation of ever more specialised (hyphenated) identities to be ‘voiced’ (Maton 2000), and knowledge cumulation is ruled out by definition.

At one level, the field is described in terms of its ‘appearance’: a segmented structure of specialised and strongly classified approaches maintaining a high level of boundary maintenance and insulation. At another, the description is in terms of the perspectives and activities of its members: the kinds of things that are defined as ‘problems’, the ways in which problems will be typically dealt with and the sort of product that will result. Although, especially where the condition is expressed through the rhetoric of post-modernism, segmentation involves the emphasis upon distinctiveness and difference, in terms of structure, each segment in a horizontal knowledge structure is of the same form. The differences between the ‘clans’ are emblematic – each worships its own totem (a construct of its own identity, e.g. the varieties of post-colonialism specialised by hyphenated

identities), but each exhibits the same form. It is not that more gets to be said, but more come to say the same thing. This mechanical replication proceeds either by proclaiming a radical break with the past ('post' theories) or schismatically by breaking with an established (mainstream/malestream) church ('standpoint' theories) (Moore 1996, Moore & Maton 2002).

To recap, sociology in a horizontal knowledge mode advances not cumulatively but by lateral expansion of specialised languages, each of which has limited powers of vertical extension for the stacking of what Collins calls 'abstraction-reflexivity sequences'. Indeed, if it is the 'long-term tendency of an active intellectual community to raise the level of abstraction and reflexivity' (Collins, 1998, p787), then sociology's prospects in this regard seem dismal.

What is most striking about this pessimistic account is that it seems, on the face of it, quite unable to account both for the originality of Bernstein's *own* corpus, nor for the way in which it has developed and become modified over time. Bernstein (2000, pp 89-100) himself points out how earlier conceptual couplets of his theory - personal/positional, instrumental/expressive and elaborated/restricted - are subsumed at a higher level of abstraction into the concept of 'pedagogic modality':

Pedagogic codes can now be written as:

$$\frac{E}{\pm C^{ie} / \pm F^{ie}}$$

where *E* refers to the orientation of the discourse (elaborated): \_\_\_\_\_ refers to the embedding of this orientation in classification and framing values. Thus variation in the strength of classification and framing values generates different modalities of pedagogic practice.

(*Bernstein, 2000, p100*)

Here Bernstein seems to be doing what his own theory disallows. A minimal interpretation for this seeming paradox is that he is simply displaying the conditions for modest growth of abstraction within a single specialised language:

his own. Nevertheless, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Bernstein harboured hopes for a robust sociology of education which transcends the limits of a horizontal knowledge structure with a weak grammar. We will argue that embedded in Bernstein is a normative model for transition to a strong grammar. Indeed, we will argue that sociology will only survive if it makes this transition.

### **The Growth of Knowledge**

It is interesting that Bernstein was not alone in developing a project of this type in the period that he did. Perhaps the most ambitious undertaking in terms of scope is Randall Collins' monumental work, *The Sociology of Philosophies* (Collins 1998). There are points of contact between their approaches and both take Durkheim as their starting point. Others, like Ward (Ward 1997), Shapin (1994), Latour (1999), and Abbott (2001), are investigating the associational codes of knowledge producing communities and the sociality of knowledge (Muller 2000) or presenting powerful defences of general theory (e.g. Alexander 1995) and substantial critiques of post-modern relativism (e.g. Delanty 1999). Taken together, these efforts could be indicative of two related developments: first a developing multidimensional critique of the current wave of 'voice' sociology and (Young 2000), secondly, the formation of a revived sociology of knowledge that draws upon post-positivist developments in epistemology and the philosophy of science that have been largely ignored in sociology.

What these anti-reductive approaches share is the concern to bring into focus and conceptualise the intrinsic properties and structures of fields of knowledge production and their distinctive principles of relative autonomy. In the case of the reductive analyses that have dominated sociology of education, 'It is as if', Bernstein says, 'pedagogic discourse is itself no more than a relay for power relations external to itself; a relay whose form has no consequences for what is relayed.' (1990 p166). It is the problem of theorising and researching the 'relay' *in itself* that is the key issue, but before we consider how Bernstein depicts the optimal relation between theory and research, and hence the growth of knowledge, it may be useful then to consider briefly how contemporary *non-*



reductive sociology of knowledge regards the prospects for knowledge growth in sociology (e.g. Abbott, 2001; Collins, 1998). The starting point, which is also Bernstein's, is that symbolic structure (internal relations) as well as social structure (external relations) must be accounted for *non-reductively*: that is, the internal relations must be accounted for in their own right and not merely conflated with (as in standpoint theory) external relations or treated as a homologic transformation them (as in Bourdieu). Regarding the former: if the structure must be 'coherent' and 'systematically principled', though the grammar is weak, how is the ideational form to be conceived? Otherwise put, if logic and empirical disconfirmation are not enough to drive conceptual elaboration, what internal structuring principle then does? Abbott's answer, for instance, is that conceptual evolution takes a *fractal*, rather than a linearly logical, form: 'the cultural life of the social sciences evolves through an unfolding of fractal distinctions' (Abbott, 2001, p157; see also Dowling, 2001). A fractal structure occurs when the distinction it makes is repeated at different levels of abstraction, when the 'small structure' recapitulates the 'larger structure', or more specifically, when 'the relation of the general terms is recapitulated in the specific ones' (op. cit., p 9).

This applies to a discipline as a whole, as well as to a specific theory (or language) in a discipline. For example: each discipline has a certain small number of key distinctions, centred on key ideas, what Collins calls 'deep troubles:

A deep trouble is a doctrine containing a self-propagating difficulty. Alternative paths open out, each of which contains further puzzles. Exploration of such conundrums becomes a chief dynamic on the medium to higher reaches of the philosophical abstraction-reflexivity sequence.

(Collins, 1998, p837).

For Abbott, these deep troubles, if unelaborated, will recur endlessly, probably at least once a generation. The founding example in sociology is what Abbott calls the 'fraction of construction', which periodically lines up to take on realism (as

schools of interpretative sociology in the 1960s and '70s, as varieties of post-modernism today), though always, for a very particular reason, unsuccessfully. Constructionism tends to 'extremalism', that is, to a position of endless self-purification which drives it into a corner, a position which is always self-undermining. Realism on the other hand, usually chastened by the recurrence of the constructionist challenge, responds by unpacking the homogenised poles: 'The generic response of realism; one has to simplify in order to explain' (Abbott, 2001, p83).

*Dealing with 'deep troubles'*

There are two ways to deal with a fractal 'deep trouble', then. The first is to collapse all sub-distinctions (upwards) into the parent distinction and to purify the difference – frequently, today, simplified into forms of: dominant hegemonic vs subjugated Other. This is self-defeating: 'Extremal positions are heady and noble, but also sterile and vain' (Abbott, 2001, p89) because this is the direction of a successive weakening of the grammar. The second is logically to elaborate the parent distinction (downwards) into various constituent sub-levels. This is the systematic path of realist theoretical elaboration in sociology. Bernstein exemplifies it perfectly. Let us take his theory of the structure of discourse considered above, a textbook case of recapitulating the relation of the distinction at each successive node of the theory:

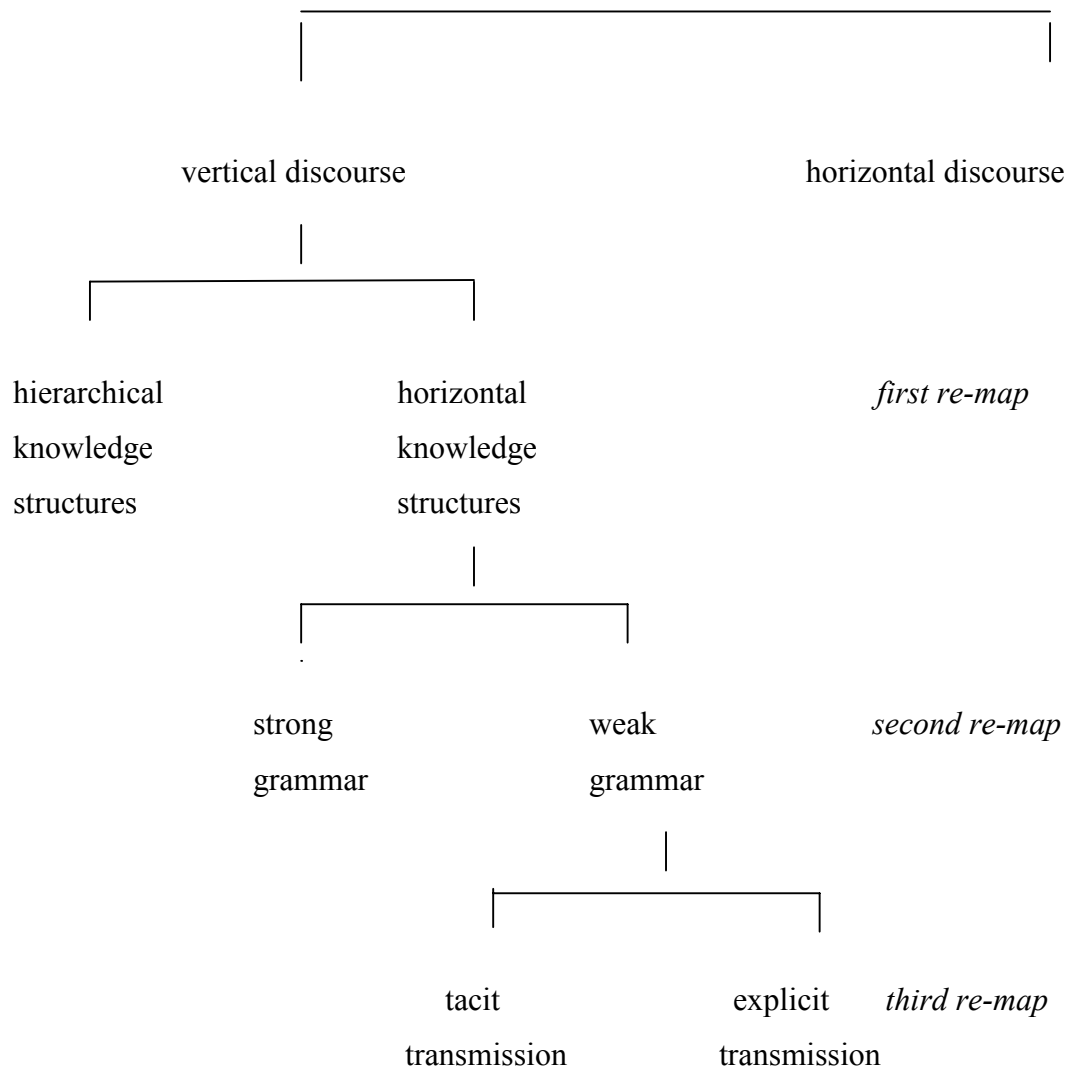


Fig. 1. A model of the nested structure of discourse form

Bernstein begins by identifying the core fractal ‘deep trouble’ of sociology of knowledge, namely, the *distinction between forms of discourse*, and notes that upwards conflation into a rigid dichotomy, variously labelled but always with evaluative overtones (as in the familiar binaries of concrete/abstract, primitive /logical, or commonsense/scientific), has acted as a block to theoretical elaboration. He sets out to explicate the fractal chain by showing how the relation is recapitulated by a particular kind of fractal tree. The main conceptual gain accomplished by this form of elaboration and construction of an internal language of description is the following: by exploding the original dichotomy in this

controlled way, similarities and differences in the constituent terms can be methodically explored – for example, the degree to which horizontal knowledge structures partake of verticality, but still embed features of horizontal discourse. What we see here is an elaboration of conceptual positions that avoids the distorting simplicities of a two column fractionating dichotomy. Equally, it fills out the middle ground of the spectrum in a way that respects the specificity of levels.

Young scholars coming to Bernstein for the first time frequently attempt to make sense of him by collapsing the fractal branches back upwards into a symmetrical dichotomy, with the result that terms quickly end up in the wrong categories, creating confusion, not clarity. The result is de-differentiation and conceptual regression. Over the years, this tendency was a major source of misrecognition of Bernstein's work, as when, notoriously, the early concepts of elaborated and restricted codes were collapsed upwards into 'middle-class'/'working-class'. Bernstein rarely talked about inter-class differences. His downward conceptual elaboration was concerned with *intra* class variation and its contextual regulation (e.g. the division between the new and the old middle class) (Bernstein 1977 ch 6, 2001).

### **Languages Of Description and the Discursive Gap**

In a detailed exposition of the criteria for his theory, Bernstein calls attention to a crucial feature of the relationship between the theory and empirical data.

It is important to add here that the descriptions, or, rather, the rules which generate the descriptions, must be capable of realising all empirical displays to which the context gives rise. This is crucial if circularity is to be avoided; in which case the theory constructs at the *level of description* only that which lives within its own confines. Thus the principles of description, although derived from the theory, must interact with the empirical contextual displays so as to retain and translate the integrity of the display. Thus the principles of description are the key principles in bringing about a

dynamic relationship between theoretical and empirical levels...Thus a theory is only as good as the principles of description to which it gives rise.

(Bernstein 2000 p91)

This statement goes to the heart of the matter. It defines not only the central criterion of Bernstein's own theory but a *general* condition for *any* theory aspiring to a strong grammar. But in the first instance, it is crucial to actually *see* that this is important and why.

The strength of a grammar, and hence the power of a knowledge structure, derives from the strength of its 'languages of description'. Bernstein distinguishes between two qualitatively different languages in theory and research: the language of a theory itself, an *internal* language of description (describing relations *within*), and the *external* language that describes those things outside the theory that it investigates. If the internal language constructs conceptual objects and the relations between them, the external language must construct what is to count as an empirical referent; how these referents relate; and translate these referential relations back into the internal conceptual language.

This distinction between languages raises the question of the respective roles of theory and empirical data in theoretical elaboration. We have said that Bernstein regards sociology as having a weak grammar. This means, for the internal language, weak extension of abstraction within the theory, and for the external language, weak capacity to identify empirical objects invariantly. Sociology is highly proficient at constructing internal theoretical languages, but woefully inept with external ones. We may even say that this is the kernel of sociology's malaise. The external language of description opens up 'the possibility of showing both the strengths and limits of a theory' (Bernstein, 2000, p139). Without a robust external language, we are deprived of 'a crucial resource for either (theoretical) development or rejection' (op. cit., p168). With that, theory is perpetually at risk of stabilising as a 'frozen form' (ibid.).

We have established then that sociology needs 'principles of description', an external language, that will connect the field of data to the theory. But how is this connection actually achieved? Every graduate student sooner or later has to wrestle with this problem. Usually, the internal language is fairly well articulated, and the field of data clearly identified. But how is the theory, the internal language, supposed to speak to the data? Bernstein's answer is that it cannot do it directly, because the conceptual condensation of the internal language - say,  $\pm C^{ie}/\pm F$  - is too general, too data-distant, to be able to do so. A data-near device - the external language - must be constructed to categorise in a logical grid, what, for this particular field of data, is to count as stable identifiable instances of C and F. In order to make progress, therefore, every investigation requires the construction of an external language of description that consists of empirical categories that can unambiguously be translated into the conceptual categories of the internal language. Morais *et al* (Eds) (2001) provide very clear examples of how this should be done; see also Ensor, 1999).

### *Theory and Data*

The above account clarifies how data is brought to bear on theory. But how can data *extend* theory? In an interview with Joseph Solomon, Bernstein discusses this in terms of a 'discursive gap' (Bernstein & Solomon, 2000, p.209) between the internal language of the theory and the language that describes things outside it. The external language must not only be able to describe what is outside the theory in terms relevant *to* the theory, but also somehow be capable of recognising what is *beyond* the theory. It must submit to an external *ontological* imperative that allows that which is outside to 'announce itself' (*loc cit*), and hence open the categories of the external language, but also the conceptual relations of the internal, to possible modification. Graduate students reaching this threshold of their work experience both the intoxication of possibility and the unique terror of having to confront the conceptual shortfall of their internal theory. This defines intellectual life in the 'discursive gap'.

Data, via the external language, can, thus, create a surplus that requires an extension of the theory to make sense of, or do justice to it. Equally however, theory is able to generate empirical possibilities which are not necessarily empirically evident. In discussing this generative aspect of theory, Bernstein has said:

It is often said that the theory works by producing opposing dichotomies in which each side functions as an ideal type: elaborated/restricted, positional/personal, stratified/differentiated, open/closed, visible/invisible, collection or serial/integrated. That these are opposing forms (models) I certainly agree. That they are ideal types I certainly disagree. Classically the ideal type is constructed by assembling in a model *a number of features* abstracted from a phenomenon in such a way as to provide a means of analysing the presence or absence of the phenomenon, and a means of analysing the ‘workings’ of the phenomenon from an analysis of the assembly of its features. Ideal types constructed in this way cannot *generate* other than themselves. They are not constructed by a principle that generates sets of relations of which any one form may be only *one of the forms* the principle may regulate.

(Bernstein 200 pp123)

The generative principles of the theory create a ‘surplus element’. The principles that make possible the description of *one* kind of empirical case (e.g., a progressive classroom as –C –F), simultaneously generate the *other* ‘modalities of pedagogic practice’. It is historically contingent as to whether or not any of these other possibilities *actually* exist in the world known to the theorist. There is no good reason, in principle, why any particular society should not have only ever operated with just one type of pedagogy. The theory can generate possibilities as yet *unrealised* in practice or present in experience – it can raise the possibility of other ways of doing things. The paper, *Codes and Research* (Bernstein 2000, ch 6) both outlines the criteria of the theory and provides a detailed account of the

process of conceptual refinement within the research process over the years whereby occurred.

The conditions for any knowledge growth, including that of the sociology of education should now be clear. The roles of both the internal and external languages of description have been discussed, especially their reciprocal nature: theory and principles of description, internal and external languages, are justified only in relation to one another. Theory on its own is abstract scholasticism; so is empirical research on its own. This latter point bears emphasising. The external language and its procedures exist to develop or amend the internal theory. When they become an end in themselves, as they tend to do where research is routinised and an increasing number of practitioners jostle for attention, then the work slips into what Collins calls ‘classificatory scholasticism’ (Collins, 1998, p845), the quantitative extension of classifications and commentaries for their own sake rather than for the sake of extending the theory, or for driving up the abstraction-reflexivity sequence. This, says Collins, marks the ‘bureaucratisation of intellectual life’ (op. cit., p799). The reflexive safeguard against scholasticism is to ensure that conclusions are continually related to tension points in the theory, thus advancing the theory. Repeated illustrations that do not advance the theory numb what Collins calls the ‘attention space’, which can lead to paralysis of the vital life of the theory.

## CONCLUSION

To return to our original question: what kind of theory is Bernstein’s? To give the most straightforward answer, to name it as an approach, it is a form of sociological *realism* in the Durkheimian mode. In this respect it stands apart from both positivism and constructionism. But much more important is to identify the kind of work such a theory can do and how it does it through the process of fractal theoretical elaboration and conceptual refinement. Abbott’s view is that ‘social science is progressive, not cumulative’ (Abbott, 2001, p231). That is, it goes forward, but not necessarily in a straight line nor necessarily towards greater abstraction. Fractal cycles ensure that ‘deep troubles’ never go away, but get re-



discovered every generation or so. This is not cause for pessimism, however: the form of re-discovery changes, and new possibilities are constantly generated. Collins establishes increased abstraction and reflexivity as a normative ideal. Like Bernstein, he is of the view that ‘progress in theory in sociology has not really come from the people who work in theory, but comes from particular research areas which have done a lot of cumulation’ (Collins, 2000). Bernstein would most likely agree with both of them.

In this paper we have attempted to describe the theory in terms of how it works rather than simply engage in that ‘epistemological botany’ of classification that Bernstein dismissed so firmly across the years (Bernstein 2000 p92). The theory *is* a species of realism, but we can also describe it in terms of its *grammar* – its modality. It is through this application of Bernstein’s theory about theory that we can begin to see a way ahead for the sociology of education. We may conclude that the royal road to sociological knowledge growth lies in the continual elaboration of internal languages/theory. An indispensable condition for elaborating them is the development and implementation of external languages, and it is here that sociology has historically been weakest. A condition for its future good health lies in concerted empirical work rigorously related to the theory. There are two key degenerative practices to avoid. Internal conceptual development breaks down when the fractal elaboration is collapsed into the parent dichotomy; and empirical illustration becomes sterile when it becomes disconnected from conceptual elaboration.

There are, however, still good reasons under current conditions for engaging in the taxonomic exercise of locating theories as approaches. This has to do with the problem raised above concerning the difficulties of *seeing* a knowledge form with a strong grammar within a field characterised by a weak grammar – of seeing Bernstein’s theory for the theory that it is, for example. In the first instance, the task is to announce that there *is* an alternative to the simplifying dichotomy of positivism or constructionism (or in education, ‘traditionalism’ vs ‘progressivism’). The realist approach enables a radical revalorisation of the field and the way in which its positions and relations are perceived and the relationship

between theory and research understood. Against positivism, realism insists upon the primacy of theory over experience, but against constructionism, it acknowledges the ontological discipline of the discursive gap – reality ‘announces’ itself to us as well as being constructed by us (Hacking 1999). It is precisely the discipline of the ‘discursive gap’ that has been denied or abandoned across a wide range of post-modern, multiculturalist and post-colonialist standpoint approaches, often sustained by various interpretations of key thinkers such Foucault and Derrida, that now cluster close to the centre of the sociological endeavour. For Bernstein and other realists, however, the quest for validity within the creative space of the discursive gap must extend, as Habermas puts it in a strikingly parallel analysis, ‘beyond the boundaries of the text’ (Habermas 1995 p223). Basil Bernstein's work stands as an exemplary marker illuminating the path.

*Correspondence:* Dr. Rob Moore, University of Cambridge Faculty of Education, Homerton College site, Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 2PH, England. E-mail [rm233@cam.ac.uk](mailto:rm233@cam.ac.uk)

Prof. Johan Muller, Department of Education, University of Cape Town, Private Bag, Rondebosch 7700, South Africa. E-mail [jpm@education.uct.ac.za](mailto:jpm@education.uct.ac.za)

## REFERENCES

- ABBOTT, A. (2001). *Chaos of Disciplines* (Chicago, Chicago University Press).
- ALEXANDER, J. C. (1995) *Fin de Siècle Social Theory: Relativism, Reduction and the Problem of Reason*, (London, Verso).
- BERNSTEIN, B. (1977) *Class, codes and Control vol 3*, (London, Routledge).
- BERNSTEIN, B. (1990) *Class, codes and control, volume IV: The structuring of pedagogic discourse*, (London: Routledge).
- BERNSTEIN, B. (1996). *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control and Identity: Theory, Research, Critique* (London, Taylor & Francis).

- BERNSTEIN, B. (2000). *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control and Identity: Theory, Research, Critique*, Revised edition, (Oxford, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc).
- BERNSTEIN, B. (2001) TITLE, Journal, pp
- BOURDIEU, P.(1977) Symbolic Power, in Gleeson, D. (ed) *Identity and Structure*, (Driffield, Nufferlin Books).
- BOURDIEU, P. (2000). *Pascalian Meditations*, (Stanford, Stanford University Press).
- COLLINS, R. (1998). *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change*, (Cambridge, Mass., The Belknap Press).
- COLLINS, R. (2000). Interview with Randall Collins by Alair Maclean & James Yocom, September 20, 2000.  
<http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/theory@madison/papers/ivwCollins.pdf>
- DELANTY, G. (1999) *Social Theory in a Changing World*, (Cambridge, Polity).
- DOWLING, P. (2001). Social activity theory. (working paper), London University Institute of Education, <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/ccs/dowling/>
- ENSOR, P. (1999). Unpublished PhD thesis, University of London.
- HACKING, I. (1999) *The Social Construction of What?*, (Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press).
- LATOURE, B. 1999. *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*. (Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press).
- MATON, K. (2000) Languages of Legitimation: the structuring significance for intellectual fields of strategic knowledge claims, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, vol 21 no2, pp.147-167.
- MOORE, R. (1996) Extended Review: Richard Hoggart, 'The Way We Live Now', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 17(4), pp.521-530.
- MOORE, R. & MATON, K. (2002), Founding the Sociology of Knowledge: Basil Bernstein, Intellectual Fields and the Epistemic Device, in Morais, A., Neves, I., Davies, B. & Daniels, H. (Eds), *Towards a Sociology of Pedagogy: the contribution of Basil Bernstein to Research*, (New York, Peter Lang).
- MOORE, R. & MULLER, J. (1999). 'The discourse of "voice" and the problem of knowledge and identity in the sociology of education', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 20, 2: 189-206.

MOORE, R. & YOUNG, M.F.D. (2001)

MORAIS, A. NEVES, I. DAVIES, B. & DANIELS, H. (Eds), (2001) *Towards a Sociology of Pedagogy: the contribution of Basil Bernstein to Research*, (New York, Peter Lang).

MULLER, J. (2000). *Reclaiming Knowledge*. (London, Routledge/Falmer).

MULLER, J. (2001). Progressivism redux: ethos, policy, pathos, in A Kraak & Young, M. (Eds), *Education in Retrospect: Policy and Implementation Since 1990*. (Pretoria, Human Sciences Research Council/ London, Institute of Education, University of London).

SHAPIN, S. (1994) *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in 17th Century England*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press).

WARD, S. (1997) Being Objective About Objectivity: the ironies of standpoint epistemological critiques of science, *Sociology*, 31 (4) pp 773-791.

YOUNG, M.F.D. (2000) Rescuing the Sociology of Knowledge From the Extremes of Voice Discourse: towards a new theoretical basis for the sociology of the curriculum, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, vol 21 no 4 pp 523-536.

Words: 6006