

Access to 'pedagogic rights': the teaching and learning of social science in English universities (0068)

Context The paper is based on a larger study which investigates equity and quality in social science departments in four universities in England in different positions in published league tables. It employs concepts Basil Bernstein's concepts (2000) to reveal the the relations between students' lives and backgrounds; the degrees that they study; the conditions in their universities, and educational outcomes.

There is wide-spread concern about the limitations which a stratified higher education system places on achieving social justice, despite widening participation. Students from poorer backgrounds study at less prestigious and well-resourced universities; and, the social and economic value attached to the degree is also less. Despite formal efforts to ensure comparative standards, public discourse represents educational standards as lower at less prestigious universities and is reinforced by league tables (e.g. Crozier and Reay, 2011; David 2009; Furlong and Cartmel, 2009; Reay, Crozier, and Clayton, 2010).

Methodological Approach

Data sets include: interviews with students and tutors; life histories; case studies; teaching observation; student work; departmental, institutional and national documents; a student survey, and statistical data. Qualitative data sets are analysed using NVivo software. Codes are generated independently and e inter-coder reliability checks used. We avoid being over-influenced by theory by using Bernstein's distinction between the meta-language of theory; and the languages of the empirical world we study.

Theoretical Framework: Who has access to what knowledge?

Bernstein's theory is that knowledge creates specific relationships between the inner worlds of individuals and the outer world of social structures; and that the distribution of knowledge reflects society's hierarchies. The main issue for justice is the extent to which people have access through knowledge to being agents capable of changing inner/outer relationship in their lives. Universities are sites for the distribution of knowledge.

The project employs a wide range of Bernsteinian concepts to explore questions related to whether the distribution of social science knowledge plays out differently in different universities for different students; whether differences are hierarchically structured; and whether hierarchies are justified (whether higher-status does mean a better education). Here we select the concepts of 'classification', 'framing', 'pedagogic identity' and 'pedagogic rights'.

Classification reflects power relations in society by establishing boundaries. Within education, classification regulates *what* knowledges, skills and discourses are taught and learned. *Framing* is evident *within* classified categories and relays principles of control; it regulates *how* knowledge, skills, dispositions are to be taught and learned.

The classifications and framings of formal education influence being and becoming. We select from Bernstein's typology of *pedagogic identities* those that have been particularly generative. A '*retrospective*' pedagogic identity is based in grand narratives of the past. The dedication to discipline of university tutors is, according to Bernstein, a retrospective identity. An '*instrumental*' identity adapts to messages about 'appropriate attitudes, dispositions and performances' (Bernstein 2000, 68). A '*prospective*' identity rests upon a 'narrative of becoming' (76). We investigate whether specialised graduate identities produced by studying social science differs hierarchical.

Bernstein proposes that formal education should institutionalise three '*pedagogic rights*'.

Right	The right to:
<i>Enhancement</i>	'the means of critical understanding and to new possibilities.' (2000, xx)
<i>Inclusion</i>	'be included socially, intellectually, culturally and personally.' (ibid.)
<i>Participation</i>	'participate in the construction, maintenance and transformation of social order' (ibid. xxi)

Provisional Findings: What counts as 'good quality' and what counts as 'equal'?

Caveat: Analysis of the classification and framing of curriculum and pedagogy in terms student identity and 'pedagogic rights' is laborious and complex. At the time of writing (June 2011) analysis of data bases has just begun and some findings relate to first-year students only, so both the findings and the argument are highly provisional.

- Compared to the two lower-status universities, the two higher-status universities have more academics have PhDs and who teach what they research; they are more selective of students; and, have less diverse student bodies.
- Higher-status universities are classified as 'good' in the minds of the public, policy makers and media, but not in the minds of students for whom the only classification that matters is 'high and low status'.
- For Bernstein, the prediction is that higher-status universities would classify social science as a single discipline -in this case sociology- and lower-status universities would offer packages of knowledge attractive to prospective students and employers.

We find some difference in emphases on classical, political and critical social science, yet not straightforwardly according to status.

- In all universities legitimate performance of social science is similarly classified, and, the same level and style of social science produced by first-year students across the universities.
- Pedagogy is framed along hierarchical lines. For example, in the lower-status universities there is more contact time, and more varied forms of assessment,
- In terms of pedagogic identity, policy discourse projects students as customers who make informed choices oriented to employment. However, regardless of socio-economic background and university, students and tutors project a prospective identity as critical thinking, ethical citizens. The discourse of transferable skills and 'employability' does not appear to have infiltrated student consciousness.

Argument: exchange-value v. use-value

The findings do not translate into easy judgements about the quality of educational provision or about unequal distribution of knowledge. Whether pedagogic practices play out as limiting or empowering depends on whether the knowledge acquired expands or limits the student's horizons. Tentatively the league tables appear to unfairly denigrate the quality of what is learned and taught in lower-status universities. Indeed, possibly we are witnessing tutors and students overcoming evident inequalities of resources and reputation.

The concept of pedagogic rights' has moved towards the heart of our research. Whatever the exchange-value of the degree in the labour market, the use-value of learning social science is the same and expressed in terms that connect to pedagogic rights, students value: becoming confident about expressing their opinions; belonging to a group of people with specialised understanding about how society works; and, the prospect of using disciplinary knowledge in employment that will improve the social world.