

Title: Understanding the contested processes of knowledge-practice mediation within Further to Higher Education transitions.

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to illustrate the differing forms knowledge-practice mediation that exist within the transition from Foundation Degree (FdSc) to Bachelor of Science (BSc) qualifications. Understanding of these processes has been framed by the principles outlined within Bernstein's concept of the Pedagogic Device. Data analysis highlighted the different forms of knowledge-practice mediations that existed within the FdSc and BSc curriculums. Alongside adapting to wider socio-cultural shifts, FdSc students undertaking the BSc qualification were required to recognise and acquire distinct sets of rules and processes many of which contested those that shaped their FdSc practice. The paper reflects upon the consequences of these contrasting mediative processes; raising questions regarding relations between Further Education and Higher Education in shaping forms of student practice and experience.

Paper Outline:

Set against the wider discourses of widening participation, social justice and employment UK universities have increasingly sought ways to provide further access for a diverse range of students in the hope of developing a skilled and knowledgeable workforce (Tomlinson, 1997; Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), 2011). One particular form of access can be seen in the development of Foundation Degrees (FD). Established in 2000, FD's integrate both academic and vocational forms of knowledge (BIS 2011) and have evolved to provide young people with the opportunity to 'Top Up' their Foundation Degree and gain Higher Education (HE) qualifications. However, while the 'Top Up' pathway was intended to provide students access to HE, there remains areas of contestation between the qualifications resulting increasingly diverse processes in which knowledge is constructed, transmitted and embodied. Drawing upon findings of a 18 month case study exploring student transition within one Top Up pathway situated in the UK, the paper illustrates the differing and contested ways in which knowledge is constructed and then mediated (as forms of practice) within Foundation Degree in Sports Coaching (FdSc) at FE Hope College (all names are pseudonyms) and Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Sports Science at HE Oceania University.

In articulating the processes by which knowledge is pedagogised into forms of practice, the paper draws upon the conceptual frameworks of Bernstein (1990; 2000). Within this study, Bernstein's principles regarding the pedagogic device have been drawn upon to illustrate how knowledge is distributed, recontextualised and evaluated within FdSc and BSc programmes. This supports the thoughts of Wheelahan (2011: 137), who suggests the use of Bernstein's concepts enable researchers to view 'how vocational pathways can be differentiated in the ways they mediate access to theoretical knowledge depending on the nature 'of the field of practice they are orientated to'. Thus, Bernstein's approach has informed understanding of the forms of knowledge that are evident within FdSc and BSc programmes and how they reflect the contrasting discourses of vocational

and scientific programmes. As noted by Bernstein, the three sets of rules (or processes) that constitute the device are concerned with the distribution, recontextualisation and evaluation of knowledge. This is further supported by Singh (2002: 573) who notes how the pedagogic device constituted 'the relay or ensemble of rules or procedures via which knowledge (intellectual, practical, expressive, official or local knowledge) is converted into pedagogic communication'. As such, the work of Bernstein adds a level of nuance to the understanding of the relationships between FE and HE; revealing what knowledge is legitimised and reproduced. In doing so it supports perspectives that continue to illustrate and acknowledge intersectionality and college specificity (see Avis, 2009) providing further multidimensional understandings of the power relations, practices and positions adopted by agents within FE and HE.

The framework outlined has been used to understand the experiences of agents within one particular FE-HE network within the United Kingdom as part of an 18 month case study exploring the transitional experiences of FE students into Higher Education. Based on the authors experience of FE and HE (see Aldous, 2012), the curriculum of the FDS*c* at Hope and the BSc at Oceania were analysed drawing upon a context analytical approach (Stones, 2005). This approach provided 'sets of regulative and selective guidelines' (Stones, 2005, p.120) that directed the study to some dimensions of the FDS*c* and BSc programme whilst also illuminating particular nuances within the knowledge-practice mediations. Within this, course and programme outlines at Hope and Oceania were analysed based on Bernstein's framework. Additionally, observations of student and lecturer classroom practice were undertaken following the qualitative principles outlined by Walcott (1990) and Creswell (1998). Alongside semi-structured interviews, such observations developed understanding of the practices that resulted from forms of knowledge mediation.

Data highlighted distinct forms of processes that existed within the FDS*c* and BSc program's. The differences within both sets of pedagogic device led to a plethora practices and positions that do not always harmoniously co-exist. Within the FdSc, transmission of knowledge emphasised vocational practice and strong links with employability context of professional sport and coaching. Furthermore, the mediation of knowledges were shaped through devices framed around forms of corporeal transmission (see Evans & Davies, 2004; 2011; Shilling, 2010;) in which the bodies of students and lecturers were used to distribute and acquire knowledge required by the FDS*c* qualification. As acknowledged by the partnership university Oceania, such assessment and practice contrasted to those within the BSc programme and failed to prepare FDS*c* students for the transition into the Top Up year. Here, knowledge on the BSc at Oceania was shaped by forms of a more traditional pedagogic device, resulting in students having to adopt positions and identities framed around differing academic practices and positions. Following the thoughts of Bernstein (1990, p. 154), this led to a 'whole new range of discourses that create(d) the discursive basis for both expansion and increasing differentiation: agents with different, ever opposing interests, depending on their field location, symbolic control or production'. Consequently, FE students adopted positions and practices that led to them becoming increasingly isolated from the learning outcomes on the BSc at Oceania.

In conclusion, the contrasting forms of pedagogic device within Hope and Oceania resulted in a contested transitional experience that contributed to restricted opportunities for FE students in HE. This supports the deepening of what Avis (2009) has previously illustrated as the tripartistic dichotomy of modern, technical and academic forms of post-16 education. Such differences are leading to student transitions that are increasingly complicated with a number of uncertain outcomes. Continuation of this may result in further dichotomies between partnership localities

founded on competitiveness rather than the possibility of sustainable integration of knowledge-practice mediation between institutions and qualifications. The continued understanding being developed illustrates the importance of not only understanding how forms of knowledge are constructed but also recognising how they are enacted, practiced and experienced by those agents within FE and HE institutions.

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