

## **C10.2 Denbigh 1 Wednesday 5 December 14.15 - 16.16**

### ***Higher expertise and pedagogic rights in the post-truth society (0419)***

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This paper conceptualises the role of higher education as the locus of specialised expertise in a just, knowledgeable society, and discusses ways in which this role is compromised in the current increasingly ‘post-truth’ context. Drawing on Durkheim (1912/2001) and Bernstein (2000), and the wider sociology of knowledge and philosophy of expertise, it is argued that higher education is dependent upon forms of sociality and commitment to sustain its expert role, but that these are contrary to the logics of the post-truth society. Bernstein’s notion of pedagogic rights is discussed as a potential underpinning template for expert practice in higher education, while offering a means for exposing unwarranted truth claims and forms of injustice.

Higher expertise is only made possible by the existence of certain social conditions and practices. Firstly, there must be some scope for the evaluation of claims to expertise against existing norms, a capacity for norm-referencing (Winch 2010). This recognises that expert activity does not exist in a vacuum – there are others engaged in the pursuit of expertise in any occupation or academic discipline, and there is a history to that expert practice that has constituted means by which claims to expertise can be evaluated. Other parties may make claims to expertise – if these claims do not in fact represent expertise they must be exposed through recourse to the norms of the practice. Norms may nevertheless need to change over time, so that the practice can continue to meet its purpose and answer to a mutually agreed problematic. Secondly, any notion of expertise implies a desire to maintain and if possible improve a high standard of performance, and therefore some criteria of excellence (Macintyre 2001) are likely to be central to the norms by which expert practice is defined. Such criteria may need to be redefined as the world around the practice changes. Thirdly, expert practice relies on a notion of community through which the practice is pursued and normativity harboured. Forms of critique and evaluation can only be constituted by a community that is mutually conscious of the standards by which performance can be judged (Rouse 2007). The expert community must therefore co-operatively take responsibility for the practice and the development of experts, establishing agreed procedures for the evaluation of knowledge claims as expertise iterates, and maintaining the inferential capacity which makes propositional knowledge meaningful.

Higher education is seen here as a key site in which forms of expertise central to a just, knowledgeable society are generated and sustained across generations, and rights and responsibilities explored and calibrated through disciplinary interaction. It is only through the preservation and iteration of such socio-epistemic arrangements that knowledge and expertise can be extended beyond higher education institutions to provide service to society, its occupations, and the general public. Higher education can therefore provide a model for forms of societal institutional life that rely on expertise, generating the forms of knowledgeable ability that can discern the validity of truth claims (Winch 2010), and reducing the potential for confusion in wider social intercourse.

However, there are influential actors both inside and outside higher education sectors that focus *overwhelmingly* on interests and origins to assess claims to expertise, denying the potential of truth (however fallible) (Young and Muller 2007), or the possibility of a mutually accountable community. Claims cannot be judged if consensually-agreed norms cannot be established. The consequence can be a relativism that reduces each claim to expertise to ‘just another view’, allowing those who have the most power to shout down other views, including those views that challenge received wisdom. To counter this, educational (and professional) institutions need to enact their role as arbiters between the ‘sacred’ (or specialised knowledge) and the ‘profane’, iterating the symbolic representations that bind societies (Durkheim 2001), while recognising the importance of continuing to expose forms of bias, exclusion and discrimination. This specialised knowledge requires continual reshaping through ceaseless inquiry and critical investigation, to mitigate against the development of a conservative and static view of knowledge, and therefore also a moribund view of society.

Achieving the sociality which underpins these processes in higher education requires the exercise of the ‘pedagogic rights’ to (individual) enhancement, inclusion and participation, which are in themselves conditions for the ‘civic practice’ through which knowledge and expertise can be more completely democratised (Bernstein 2000). A focus on pedagogic rights offers a means for considering how those in higher education and all expert institutions can do more to ensure that ‘all have a stake’ (Bernstein 2000, xx) in the constitution of expertise. Pedagogic rights are predicated upon and are constitutive of a notion of higher expertise, and that they provide the beginnings of an answer to questions of how to engage with expertise in contemporary society with all its post-truth manifestations.

## References

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