

# **Reclaiming Knowers: Advancing Bernstein's sociology of knowledge.**

Karl Maton  
University of Sydney  
Australia

A key feature through the development of Basil Bernstein's sociological framework has been to reclaim knowledge as an object of study: his earlier work brought the structuring of educational knowledge to the fore (1975); the 'pedagogic device' analysed the ways in which this educational knowledge was constructed (1990); and his later work analysed the 'knowledge structures' of intellectual fields subject to this pedagogising process (1999). In this paper I illustrate how Bernstein's theoretical framework is being advanced. This cumulative development, codified as 'Legitimation Code Theory' (LCT), maintains and builds on the gains made by Bernstein's approach by exploring further the underlying principles structuring knowledge and their effects on practices and experiences. However, it also brings to light a dimension of intellectual and educational fields that remains secondary in Bernstein's framework: knowers. This is not to say Bernstein analysed knowledge and LCT analyses knowers, but rather that LCT analyses knowledge *and* knowers (Maton 2010b).

How this approach is advancing Bernstein's sociology can be illustrated by his model of knowledge structures. Bernstein distinguished 'hierarchical knowledge structures', such as the natural sciences, from 'horizontal knowledge structures', such as the humanities and social sciences. Hierarchical knowledge structures aim to bring a broadening base of empirical phenomena within the purview of a decreasing number of axioms and develop through the integration and subsumption of previous knowledge. In contrast, horizontal knowledge structures are segmented, progress by adding another segment horizontally, and so struggle to achieve cumulative knowledge-building. Bernstein's conceptualisation raises a series of questions. First, his model maps out a series of dichotomous ideal types - they highlight what *kind* of 'knowledge structure' one might discover in research, but not the underlying principles that make them 'hierarchical' or 'horizontal'. Secondly, horizontal knowledge structures such as the social sciences and humanities are characterised as having weak 'verticality' (internal relations among ideas) and weak 'grammars' (external relations to data) which begs questions of where their 'strength' might lie, or the basis of selection, recontextualisation and evaluation of ideas and actors in these fields. It has thus been argued Bernstein's conceptualisation represents a deficit model, where these subject areas are found wanting in comparison to the hierarchical structures of the natural sciences (Muller & Young 2010).

A cumulative series of papers have been addressing these questions. First, the concepts of 'legitimation codes' (Maton 2000) and 'the epistemic device' (Moore & Maton 2001) were introduced to start excavating the underlying principles generating different forms of curriculum and knowledge structures. Bernstein's notion of 'knowledge structures' was then extended to explore different forms of 'gaze' underpinning the 'knower structures' of fields (Maton 2007, 2010a). This brought to light the basis of achievement, identity and relation within fields where knowledge is

less explicit, such as those with horizontal knowledge structures. The issue of knowledge-building was then addressed in terms of the degree to which meanings (in curriculum and in students' understandings) achieved weaker 'semantic gravity' or lesser context-dependency and stronger 'semantic density' or greater condensation of meaning (Maton 2008, 2009). These ideas, which integrate and subsume Bernstein's concepts, are currently being used in a growing range of empirical studies of education (e.g. Carvahlo *et al*, 2009; Doherty 2008; Hood 2007; Lamont & Maton 2008; Lockett 2009; McNamara 2009; Martin 2009).

In this paper I draw on and develop this conceptual framework to further explore the humanities and social sciences and, in particular, the nature of theorising within these fields. Bernstein's framework suggests that theories within these fields have limited capacity for cumulative knowledge-building ('verticality') and weak external relations to data ('grammars'). This raises the questions: what purpose do they serve, how do they work, and why do such epistemologically weak theories achieve such prominence? Such questions can, I argue, only be addressed if one explores issues concerning both knowledge and knowers.

Focusing on the fields of sociology and Education and, specifically, approaches like constructivism and theories by Bourdieu, Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, Lyotard and others, I argue that the key to understanding their prominence lies in the nature of the *cosmology* of these modes of theorising: the basis of legitimacy and value in intellectual fields. I argue that in such fields, these cosmologies tend to be less epistemological and more *axiological*, i.e. a moral ordering which works to allocate ideas and authors to different poles of the field, as more or less virtuous or iniquitous. Using the longstanding divide between 'teacher-centred' and 'student-centred' approaches I analyse how such axiological cosmologies are generated through the construction of constellations of related positions that become morally charged. Drawing on LCT concepts I show how such theories do indeed involve high levels of abstraction (weaker semantic gravity) and condensation of meaning (stronger semantic density) but that their principal external relations - their 'grammars' - are not to empirical data but rather to knowers. That is, concepts in these theories condense a *structure of feeling* which then reflects on the actor adopting them. The axiological cosmology thus sets up different relations to knowers than those in fields dominated more by epistemological considerations (such as those with hierarchical knowledge structures). I argue that these relations are central to the widespread adoption of these relatively weak theories and that understanding the formation of constellations and axiological cosmologies is crucial for understanding the current state of the humanities and social sciences. Lastly, I discuss what this analysis suggests for how stronger theories, such as the tradition inspired by Bernstein, can reach out to a wider audience across the field. I also reflect on how bringing knowers back in can itself be misinterpreted within a knowledge-oriented field, such as the Bernsteinian community.

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