
The Three Stages of Critical Policy Methodology: an example from curriculum analysis

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ABSTRACT The article identifies and discusses three stages in the critical policy methodology used in the sociology of education. These are: firstly, employing a political economy theoretical framework that identifies causal links between global forces and local developments; secondly, analysing educational policy within that theoretically conceptualised context; and thirdly, undertaking empirical studies to examine educational phenomena located within the larger context of political and economic forces and policies. The integrated nature of the three stages of the methodology is illustrated using the example of curriculum change in New Zealand and the effects on the subject of history. The example's first and second stages are discussed in some length in order to demonstrate the importance of theorising to critical analysis. Therefore the purpose of the example is to show the theoretically embedded nature of critical sociological methodology. In the example, the theoretical framework establishes the conceptual basis for the curriculum analysis. In turn this analysis can be applied to empirical studies of the practice of policy in order to explain those practices.

The Three Stages of a Critical Policy Methodology

Critical policy analysis emerged as a major research methodology in the sociology of education in the late 1980s (e.g. Codd, 1988; Dale, 1989; Ball, 1990; Marginson, 1993; Whitty, 2002). Influential journals include *Journal of Education Policy*, which was launched in 1986, *Educational Policy*, which was launched in 1987, and *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, which was launched in 2003. Its attraction for critical theorists was partly in reaction to the over-politicised New Sociology of Education (NSOE) and to postmodern relativism (Young, 1998; Rata, 2012), but it was also in recognition that policy is 'purposeful and alterable' (Fischer et al, 1996, p. 10). This provided a counter to the pessimism that resulted from the NSOE's focus on the macro politics of the capitalist system as the cause of inter-generational inequalities in education – a situation that left many sociologists of education unable to use their theoretical analysis to fulfil 'the accepted purpose of educational theory'; namely, to 'determine what should be done in educational practice' (Hirst, 1966, p. 48).

One of the main problems with the NSOE approach was the absence of a methodological link between what was happening at the global level with events at the national level and at the level of school practices. This is overcome by the way in which critical policy methodology conceptualises the link between the global and the local in order to integrate theory and empirical studies. I argue that the link is made possible by the concept of the nation-state as the 'meeting point' of global political and economic forces on the one hand and the implementation of policy in education practice on the other. By conceptualising the nation as the imaginary of the democratic social polity, the state as the regulatory site for both capitalism and democracy, and the citizen as the polity's subject, critical policy analysis provides the point of entry into linking the global and the local. It does this by asking how the state uses policy to regulate the disjuncture between the ideals

that inform the national democratic polity and the inequalities produced by global capitalism. Education is at the meeting point of this contradiction. Its political function is to create citizens for the democratic polity and its equality ideals. However education also functions on behalf of capitalism. It creates workers and consumers for the global capitalist economy. Given that education is regarded as a way to promote the national ideal of equality, the study of its policy is particularly useful in examining how education engages with these contradictions.

The shift to critical policy methodology involved the increasing use of empirical research into how education policy shapes practice, while at the same time retaining theoretical explanations of complex patterns of causation from a political economy approach. This combination of theoretical analysis and empirical research enables researchers to avoid the descent into propaganda that Roy Nash (1988) had argued limited the effectiveness of NSOE with its tendency to use theory alone. At the same time it maintains both the importance of theory that is central to the critical approach including critical theorists' commitment to equality ideals, along with enabling researchers to directly address educational practice.

The aim of this article is to identify and illustrate the three stages of the critical policy methodology with a focus on the first theoretical stage. The following section describes the example of the methodology used in the article. That example is of curriculum change and I look particularly at how different and rivalling approaches to curriculum knowledge and the consequences for practice can be understood by locating the difference in opposing theories of knowledge. The specific example is from New Zealand, where the new National Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) demonstrates the influence of the competency and experience approach at the expense of a focus on knowledge. In addressing this topic I join an increasing number of sociologists of education who are going 'back to the "knowledge question" in exploring the basis of middle-class success and working-class failure' (Whitty, 2012, p. 225). The article goes on to discuss curriculum change by drawing on that literature.

The actual analysis of curriculum policy in the article exemplifies the second stage of the methodology. The article then returns to the theoretical discussion and then deepens the theoretical contextualisation by using the concept of localisation to explain how sociopolitical organisation at the local institutional level, including education, changes in response to global forces (Rata, 2012). The approach draws on the writings of world systems theorists, in particular anthropologist Jonathan Friedman's (1994) concept of four identity poles which he uses to explain the relationship between global processes and localised identity movements. The following section then illustrates the third stage of the methodology. Having shown the importance of theoretical contextualisation in the previous sections, I use the example of a proposed empirical study of history in the new curriculum to illustrate how empirical studies can be embedded in the theoretical and analytical stage.

The specific purpose of the article is to illustrate the development of a theoretical framework which might be used for proposed empirical studies into how policy affects teachers' professional practice. It is not to provide an actual account of such a study. I argue that it is the methodological integration of theory, policy analysis, and empirical studies which enables comprehensive critical engagement with the operation and consequences of curriculum policy. This comprehensive approach provides the critical sociological interpretation that is currently revitalising the sociology of education.

Contextualising the Knowledge Problem

Significant changes to the New Zealand National Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) illustrates the shift from the disciplinary base of a school subject to the current focus on generic understanding, competency, skills, values, and the experience of the students and their sociocultural group. New Zealand is not alone in that shift. Young (2012a) refers to the 'failed attempts of successive generations of progressive and radical educators to collapse the categories and construct an experience-based curriculum' noting these attempts include the 'problems of the South Africa and Australian outcomes-based curricula, the English child-centred curriculum ... and the more radical Queensland-based "new basics curriculum"' (pp. 147-148). (For analyses of curriculum change in Australia, South Africa, Norway, Belgium and England see, Muller, 2000;

Karseth & Sivesind, 2010; Mangez, 2010; Wheelahan, 2010; Yates & Collins, 2010; Lambert, 2011; Oates, 2011.)

Since Rob Moore and Johan Muller's influential article in the *British Journal of Sociology of Education* on 'voice discourses' (Moore & Muller, 1999), and publications by Michael Young (for example, 1998, 2008, 2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2012a; Young & Muller, 2010), the enquiry into the sociology of knowledge in education has seen the rapid growth of an impressive literature in books (Muller, 2000; Moore, 2007; Young, 2008; Maton & Moore, 2010; Wheelahan, 2010; Lauder et al, 2012; Rata, 2012), as well as numerous articles in educational journals. This recent literature critiques the influence of the competency and experience approach to curriculum knowledge in a number of countries, including New Zealand, Northern Ireland, England, Scotland, Australia, Norway, and South Africa. Its social realist approach re-affirms two principles central to critical NSOE. These are the concepts of the sociality of knowledge and the commitment to education as a means to greater social equality (Moore, 2007; Young, 2012b).

However there is also a crucial difference between today's social realists and the sociologists of knowledge of the 1970s despite the major role played by Michael F.D. Young in both. While the 1971 publication of his edited volume, *Knowledge and Control* (Young, 1971), placed the concept of 'knowledge of the powerful' squarely at the centre of NSOE with epistemic knowledge understood as 'constructed realities realized in particular institutional contexts' (p. 3), his writings in the past decade are concerned with 'powerful knowledge'. This 'voice of knowledge' (2012a, p. 142) is the epistemic knowledge developed in the disciplines of the arts, humanities, social sciences, and sciences, and recontextualised as subjects for teaching in school. Referred to variously as disciplinary, scientific, objective, academic and esoteric, powerful knowledge is distinguished from what I refer to as 'social knowledge' (Rata, 2012), and others call everyday, folk, doxic, common sense, popular, or culture.

Extending Moore's work in 'establishing the epistemological basis for the idea of the "voice of knowledge" in education', Young emphasised that the 'key idea implicit in a realist theory of knowledge is *knowledge differentiation*' (Young, 2012a, p. 140, original emphasis). Similarly, Muller (2001) places the differentiation between popular and erudite knowledge as the place where 'any sociological study of knowledge and the curriculum properly starts' (p. 13). In these accounts, the knowledge derived from experience in a student's sociocultural community, i.e. social knowledge, is different from the epistemic knowledge that these writers argue it is the purpose of schooling to teach. For example, Young (2010a) argues that 'schools are places where the world is treated as "an object of thought" and not as "a place of experience"' (p. 25). It is the idea that the two types of knowledge are differentiated that separates realists from social constructivists. Although both approaches agree that disciplinary knowledge is produced within a sociohistorical context, realists argue that knowledge becomes, as a result of its generative principles and concepts, and through procedures of scrutiny and critique, independent of that context (e.g. Moore, 2007).

The debate between realists and constructivists in the sociology of knowledge is about the separation of 'text' from 'context'. For social constructivists, the social basis of knowledge means that knowledge remains tied to the knower. It is, therefore, always subjective and in the interests of the 'knowers'; always from the standpoint of the knowledge 'producer' (Moore, 2007). However, for social realists, knowledge can become separated from its producer and the context within which it is produced, and is therefore objective and universal, a separation traced to Emile Durkheim's differentiation between the 'sacred' as the collective representations of an internally consistent world of concepts and the 'profane' or everyday world of practical activities (Muller, 2000).

Despite this major chasm in the sociology of education between social constructivists and realists, both share the NSOE's commitment to social justice. As a key theorist in the sociality of knowledge of that earlier period, and now a leading writer from a social realist approach today, Michael Young has recently explained (2012b) how his lifelong commitment to social equality has not changed, but he has 'come to realise that we had not understood the true meaning of a democratic curriculum or a curriculum based on equality. It was not about treating all knowledge equally but about making sure all pupils had access to the same curriculum' (p. 12). Similarly, Moore (2007) describes how 'sociologies for education overestimate education's capacity to affect social inequalities by exaggerating its role in reproducing them'. He argues that critical sociologies of education that reject the politicisation of NSOE do 'not abandon the project of a radical

sociology of education or a radical role for education in society, but acknowledge that both may require fundamental reformulation' (p. 178).

This commitment by social realists to the social justice ideals associated with the liberal-left is an important point of difference from two other groups that also argue for the central place of knowledge in education. Hirsch (2006) advocates from the American liberal tradition of 'the ideal of a "career open to talents"' (p. xiii), regarding the common curriculum as the means for equal opportunity. While social realists would support the equality ideal, they are more cognisant of the classed context within which schools operate and which allocates resources, including intellectual resources, unequally (Nash, 2010). Similarly, in the United Kingdom (UK), the Conservative Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, called for the return of knowledge into schools which sounded initially like the social realist position. But Gove's advocacy for a traditional subject-based curriculum 'treats knowledge as given and as something that students have to comply with'. Young distinguishes between Gove's 'curriculum for compliance' and the social realist 'curriculum for engagement' (2010b, p. 22). The latter is developed as the Future 3 scenario by Young and Muller (2010).

Graham McPhail (2012) takes the Future 3 model, 'a progressive form of cultural transmission where disciplinary knowledge boundaries are utilised to establish important knowledge content' and extends it by arguing for the central role of the teacher in the 'interplay between curriculum and pedagogy'. In this interplay the teacher must be 'conversant with the knowledge considered pivotal within the discipline' and accept that its 'social and historical development does provide a mechanism for a degree of objectivity in relation to matters of knowledge value and hierarchy within the discipline' (p. 40). McPhail's contribution to the literature is to show how teachers can use social (i.e. horizontal) knowledge 'as a starting point for both curriculum content and the pedagogical approach but that learning aims are then linked to the more vertical or systematised processes of conceptual learning'. In this way, 'students' understanding and application of knowledge can be extended' (pp. 40-41). Accordingly the process is reversed as 'learners draw on their newly acquired theoretical concepts to re-engage with and transform their everyday concepts' (Young, 2010a, p. 16).

This approach rejects the privileging of pedagogy at the expense of the curriculum with knowledge reduced to a pedagogic process – to be produced by the learner with the assistance of the teacher-facilitator. In this constructivist pedagogy the pupil's experience is viewed as a major source of knowledge. Pedagogical techniques that see teachers focusing on their social and emotional interactions with their pupils are understood to facilitate learning. It is believed that knowledge is 'co-constructed' as the pupil moves from the known as it is experienced to the unknown as it is conceptualised within the teacher–student and student–peer social relations. But for social realists, the constructivist approach to building knowledge through a responsive pedagogy is to confuse social knowledge and disciplinary knowledge. The latter moves not from a student's experience, but from the less advanced to the more advanced idea. This is not to downplay the importance of students' social experiences, which, as McPhail (2012) argues, are necessary in the pedagogy–curriculum interplay.

The Second Stage: analysing curriculum policy

This section shifts the focus from theorising changes to curriculum knowledge to exemplify the second stage of critical policy analysis by asking what is happening to a specific policy. My example is New Zealand's curriculum policy and the focus is the subject of history. What strikes the reader immediately in the first section of the New Zealand curriculum document is the almost total absence of the word 'history' as it is subsumed into the generic 'Social Sciences' learning areas. History and other social science disciplines receive one mention in the sentence: 'Inquiry in the social sciences is also informed by approaches originating from such contributing disciplines as history, geography, and economics' (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 30). The second section of the document entitled 'Years and Curriculum Levels' which details achievement objectives is similarly characterised by the absence of reference to 'history' and to any specific content. According to the guidelines being developed to accompany the curriculum document (Ministry of Education, 2010), 'the Curriculum does not prescribe topics (specific contexts for study). Teachers and students have

the freedom to explore historical events, forces, movements, and trends that engage and challenge them. Students develop an understanding of the complexities of human interaction by drawing on a variety of perspectives, interpretations, and evidence' (p. 28).

Earlier changes in secondary school music to a 'relativist conception centred on popular music and students' rights of ownership' (McPhail, 2011) are instructive for possible changes ahead for history as a result of a student-led generic curriculum. McPhail found that the 'lack of consistency in what might define a music programme in one school from that in another' contributed to an emptying out of epistemic knowledge. He refers to the resulting 'knowledge displacement, brought about by the move to generic curriculum documents, [which] increasingly places the responsibility on teachers to manage and balance the epistemic and social demands of curriculum realisation' (p. 202). These findings support those of Tim Oates (2011) who notes that the 'specific information embedded in contexts can decay into mere "noise" unless individuals have concepts and principles to organise and interpret the content of those contexts' (pp. 132-133). These are the concepts and principles embedded in disciplinary codes.

While music may already have 'lost' its subject according to McPhail's research, the consequences of the emptying out of specified content from the history curriculum at all senior secondary school levels from 2012 may not be realised for several years. Currently, teachers of history have a strong disciplinary base. Beginning teachers have studied history at university. Experienced teachers have years of teaching prescribed topics along with their own university background in history. It is likely that their ability to draw on this knowledge will enable them to retain the subject's disciplinary focus for some time. This is important given that the choice of topics will become increasingly arbitrary and dependent upon a teacher's own knowledge. However, in a word of caution, McPhail notes that, for music at least, not all the music teachers he studied had a disciplinary base in the classical canon and its generating theoretical knowledge. Those who had studied the 'rock music' option at university recognised their limitations in teaching the generative principles and concepts of music.

The Guidelines to the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2010) do provide examples of historical concepts that should be taught. While this indicates that history's disciplinary base continues to play a role in recontextualising the discipline for teaching at school, that influence sits uncomfortably with the competency, outcomes, skills and experience approach emphasised in the main curriculum document which 'sets the direction for teaching and learning ... it is a framework rather than a detailed plan' and 'schools have considerable flexibility when determining the detail' (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 37). Given this degree of flexibility it is possible that the assessment system will play a greater role as a teacher's choice of topics become responsive to assessment demands. Barbara Ormond's (2011) study of the shift to standards-based assessment in New Zealand senior art history suggests that the national assessment system serves as a de facto curriculum in that subject; a situation that may well become the case in history after 2012. It is also likely that pedagogical concerns, rather than knowledge, may drive what is taught as teachers strive to make the context 'relevant' to the students' experiences and interests.

The Effects of Curriculum Policy Change

The previous section looked specifically at the New Zealand example of curriculum change. I now turn to discuss the effects of curriculum change in terms of the sociology of education's commitment to the democratic ideals of equality. The emphasis on learning and a constructivist pedagogy that is concerned mainly with building close ties between pupils and schools is within the liberal-left tradition of promoting national education as an important means to improve social equality. The various forms of progressivism, including its version in today's social constructivism, are intended to overcome the alienation of working-class children to the school's cognitive culture. That alienation has long been a source of concern for sociologists of education as inter-generational working-class disadvantage appears entrenched. For example, Morais and Neves (2011) refer to their devotion for 'more than twenty years ... to finding out answers to the major problem of improving the learning of students, especially the disadvantaged, without decreasing the level of conceptual demand' (p. 191). This was also the main focus of the research undertaken by the late New Zealand educational sociologist, Roy Nash (Nash, 2010) who recognised the 'important

contribution of Bernstein' (along with Durkheim the major influence on social realists today), to the 'sociology of cognitive development' (p. 47).

The disjunction between the social knowledge of the working class and the academic curricular remains alienating despite the attempts of progressive educators to close the gap. Indeed those very attempts, particularly the influence of constructivism's more recent emphasis on the social knowledge that comes from students' sociocultural experiences, may have worsened the problem (Rata, 2012). Avoiding academic knowledge for those groups does not remove the need for such knowledge if working-class children are to succeed at school. Those who have returned to the knowledge question today ask: what are the consequences of 'emptying out' the curriculum for the working class in particular (for example, see Wheelahan, 2010). As the emphasis shifted to the school's role in making connections with the pupils' lives, experience becomes a central theme in what content knowledge is taught. While a pedagogy that shows the links between what young people learn at school and what they and their communities experience may well make pupils less alienated at school, it masks the real educational issue. This is that schools are not like home. Their purpose is to teach what cannot be taught at home, knowledge that is less available for working-class children (Bernstein, 2000; Nash, 2010). According to Nash (2010), 'the structures of social class ... should be recognised as effective causes of the differential cognitive and non-cognitive habits of mind and body that enable middle-class children, as a group, to make much better progress through the educational system than working-class children' (p. 47). Nash argues that it is 'family-based early childhood socialisation practices' which generate and sustain 'the intelligence of a particular kind' (p. 49) that enables success at school.

New Zealand was not alone in the turn from the idea that transmitting knowledge is the role of the school to the idea that schools should be concerned with socialising children into their respective communities by 'making meaningful links between school knowledge and pupils' everyday lives' (Whitty, 2012, p. 226). Unfortunately, making the school more like the home through a fundamental shift to the curriculum – a shift from abstract, hence unfamiliar, knowledge, to the familiar knowledge of experience – does not solve the problem of working-class alienation. Indeed it is more likely to ensure that working-class children do not have the opportunity to overcome the cultural divide between home and school. Pedagogies that achieve this crossing are necessary, indeed crucial, but they should not require the emptying out of the curriculum in order to do so. In fact, a limited curriculum, based on the child's experience, one that does not take the young person into the intellectual world of the unthinkable and unimaginable, is likely to be as disengaging as a disciplinary-based curriculum that does not use pedagogy practices to motivate and engage people.

A Sociological Explanation

The sociological question for critical policy analysis raised by the shift in curricular policy to the competency and experiential approach is to ask what larger sociopolitical and historical forces have influenced that shift given that it characterises not only the New Zealand history curriculum, but the curricula of a number of other countries. Contextualising the analysis of curriculum policy within these deepening multi-layered influences is justified by the role of education as a national system. Global forces that affect the nation affect every part of a nation-state's infrastructure and education is not exempt. This is the case because national education systems have a major integrating role in establishing and maintaining the social contract of the modern nation. They promote the national imaginary, an imaginary characterised by ideals of equality of opportunity, individual freedom, and the social cohesion of a population that does not share the common history of the homogeneous ethnic group. Education's role is to create and build that national imaginary by providing areas of commonality in the language, curriculum, and pedagogy of the school. In doing so, education represents the paradox inherent to the modern nation-state. While the nation-state is the capitalist state it is simultaneously and contradictorily the democratic state. As the site of political regulation, it faces the demands of global capitalism's inequalities and the opposing demands of national democratic equality. The subject also contains these contradictions; on the one hand the individual is the worker in an unequal economic system, but that person is also the citizen who carries the equal rights of citizenry status. Education operates at the crossroads

of this paradox. It is required to mediate equalising democratic ideals developed in its liberal character with the unequalising economic forces that underpin its instrumental character. Examining education policy and practice can reveal how those deep contradictions are played out in the education system.

'Localisation is the process by which social organisation changes at the local level in response to global forces' (Rata, 2012, p. 12). Broadly, it is a strategy in the reconfiguration of class relations in the increasingly inequality of contemporary globalisation and is characterised by an emphasis on the local, the immediate, the particular, and the personal. It takes the form of a focus on ethnic and religious groupings and a shift away from policies based on the Enlightenment idea of the universal to policies that categorise historical groups (such as ethnic and religious groups) as primary political units. Such cultural politics or culturalism also emphasises individual identity in primordial group terms. Localisation, as a strategy of anti-universalism, is justified by the relativism of postmodernism and the associated identity politics of culturalism. It is characterised by the depoliticisation of the working class, the decline of universalism, the rise of pre-modern groups that revive identities of race, religion and tradition, and the increasing power of global elites that use traditionalist ideologies to justify various anti-democratic polities.

Jonathan Friedman (1994, 2006) theorises the effects of global processes on the ways in which people turn to identities that offer the stability of tradition in a world that has not lived up to modernity's promise of continual progress. Of his four identity poles, three – traditionalism, primitivism, and postmodernism – support the 'cultural turn'; that is the turn to the past and to the local. The fourth pole – modernism – remains as the struggling remnant of the commitment to the Enlightenment ideals of universalism, progress and democracy. According to Friedman's theory, postmodernism provides the intellectual justification for localisation and contributes to eroding the trust that binds the modern imaginary of democratic nations. Without that trust, liberal democracies like New Zealand become economic units to be managed in the interests of the global market rather than social polities to be governed by the people in their own interests. Like the national imaginary of democratic ideals, rational epistemic knowledge is a source of trust for historically diverse populations that are now united in the modern state. As Shapin argues (1994), 'the very power of science to hold knowledge as collective property and to focus doubts on bits of currently accepted knowledge is founded upon a degree and a quality of trust which are arguably unparalleled elsewhere in our culture' (p. 417).

Traditionalism, primitivism, and postmodernism directly affect the type of knowledge that is valued and the type of authority for that knowledge. Under the influence of these beliefs we have seen the authority for knowledge taught at school shift from what is to be known to who knows (Moore, 2007; Maton & Moore, 2010). Rather than an authority implicit in a knowledge discipline, the authority for knowledge is now more increasingly the responsibility of the priest, the patriarch, the party, or the person who claims cultural expertise (Rata, 2012). The idea that knowledge is universal and objective, and hence available to all regardless of ethnic or religious backgrounds, is replaced by a belief that knowledge belongs to the group from where the knowledge is produced. The crucial point here is that knowledge is regarded as permanently located in the group and developed to serve the group's interests. According to this position, knowledge cannot be objectified and universalised.

The type of knowledge valued for teaching to young people in national education systems shifts from the Enlightenment idea of disciplinary knowledge based on ideas about universalism and objectivity that will move a child away from his or her experience to the social knowledge that will consolidate the child within the immediate sociocultural group. The concentration of knowledge in experience, particularly the localised experience of a given sociocultural group is in complete contrast to the idea of knowledge as the means by which we move beyond our experience. 'If knowledge is no longer seen as the understanding of reality but merely as the understanding of experience ... what can be the justification for an education defined in terms of knowledge alone?' (Hirst, 1972/2010, p. 394). For those educationalists who took the 'cultural turn' to relativism, a turn which has its apotheosis in the 'empty' history curriculum, there is no justification. Knowledge is to be relativised and forever dependent upon the knower.

New Zealand historian, Kerry Howe (2009), has described the effect of postmodern influences on his discipline of history saying how his generation of history students in the 1960s and 1970s 'were involved in a post-imperial/post-colonial sentiment that started sweeping through western

universities from the later 1960s' and the 'belated arrival of postmodernism in the late 1980s/early 1990s' (p. 18). In an essay looking back over his career as a university historian, Howe refers to these decades as a dark age for serious scholarship in the Pacific and more especially in Maori history. The events of the past and their protagonists were commonly reduced to binary categories – 'Western/indigenous, modern/traditional, male/female, colonial/postcolonial. Good/bad/, winners/losers' (p. 22).

With the rise to dominance of such relativism, experience becomes the source and justification of knowledge. What should be taught at school is decided by its interest and relevance to teachers and students. According to the guidelines currently being developed to align with the National Curriculum, 'Teachers and students have the freedom to explore historical events, forces, movements, and trends that engage and challenge them' (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 28). Lest this suggest a move to disciplinary knowledge, the difference between this approach where one starts from the student's experience and the approach where one starts from the disciplinary knowledge, is that in the former the topic is understood from the standpoint of the student's experience and the standpoint of the social group to which the student belongs. This social knowledge approach reinforces the student's understanding of knowledge as something that relates to, and supports, his or her experience. It keeps the student within his or her context, understanding the world from that perspective. In contrast, the disciplinary knowledge approach, while perhaps still dealing with the same topic, focuses on how the content expresses historical principles and concepts. The value of the content is in the way it enables the principles and concepts of the discipline to be most clearly expressed.

Awareness of the dangers of localised knowledge is not new. Marxist-inspired educationalists warned about how experience-based education could be used to confine children to what they already know. Gramsci regarded the shift from academic knowledge to the knowledge of experience as leading to 'a hardening and widening of class distinctions' (Muller, 2000, p. 8). By promoting the type of social knowledge constructed from experience, education systems support the wider processes of class configuration. In contrast, education systems that use disciplinary knowledge liberate students, not only by what is taught, but because what is taught 'liberates the person from the limitations of the present and the particular' (Bailey, 1984, p. 20).

The Third Stage: proposing an ethnographic study

I began this article by discussing how critical policy analysis in the sociology of education has developed a methodology that integrates theories of macro political and economic movements with the analysis of how policy puts the generated power relations into operation. Empirical studies comprise the third stage of the methodology. They complete the integrative approach as case studies, narratives, ethnographies, and vignettes show how policy operates in people's lives. This section continues the curriculum knowledge example with its focus on history in the New Zealand curriculum to illustrate how the justification for an empirical study should lie in the approach established theoretically in the first two stages of the critical methodology.

The growing social realist literature which examines curricular knowledge includes a number of these studies (e.g. Wheelahan, 2010; McPhail, 2011, 2012; Ormond, 2011). They are studies that are heavily theoretically informed and therefore they meet the three-stage methodology that I describe in this article. The studies build on the significant research undertaken by Roy Nash and use the same critical integrated methodology (Nash, 2010; Openshaw & Clark, 2012). Hugh Lauder has noted the major contribution made by Nash's realist methodology, one that combined 'a sophisticated explanatory structure' with 'both narratives and numbers' (Lauder, 2012, p. 145). It is in this Nash tradition that critical policy analysis will continue to strengthen the sociology of education, particular in the innovative and challenging literature currently being developed by researchers in the sociology of knowledge who take a social realist approach. It is an approach which integrates the three stages of research: theoretical conceptualisation, policy analysis, and empirical studies.

An area that is ripe for ethnographic study is suggested by the curriculum example used in this article. It is the effects of the changes to the New Zealand history curriculum with the ending of specified topics in 2012. Such research could explore what history is taught to future generations

when the authority for deciding on the significance of knowledge has shifted from the discipline to interest groups, teachers, or students. Ethnographic studies of this type enable glimpses into the actual practices that operate at the local level and that are theorised and analysed in the first two stages of a critical sociological policy methodology. Although I have theorised the shift in education to localised experience as located in the neo-liberal and neo-conservative politics of class configuration that accompany contemporary global capitalism (Rata, 2012), the way localisation occurs in any given country is shaped by that country's history and politics (Openshaw, 2009). A methodological approach seeking to link the global and the national would need to consider the particular case of each nation and how a nation may respond in different ways to the same global forces. In my example of the New Zealand curriculum, I identify the historical antecedents of both constructivism and instrumentalised education; the former in the influential progressive child-centred education movement, the latter, which views the student as human capital, has a long tradition in a commitment to vocational schooling. Both movements share a focus on the particular, on experience, and on the local.

The strong commitment to localised knowledge has led to a loss of faith in the universality and objectivity of disciplinary knowledge especially in subjects that have a strong social content such as history, English, and sociology. (These are Bernstein's [2000] horizontal subjects.) Social knowledge is conflated with disciplinary knowledge and the idea of a demarcation between the two types of knowledge is abandoned. As a consequence, all knowledge is regarded as social knowledge, that is as knowledge that remains tied to its context and is therefore considered always subjective and always non-universal. Without the demarcation between social knowledge and disciplinary knowledge, school subjects, especially the horizontal ones derived from the humanities, arts and social sciences, are treated more as beliefs rather than as provisional truth claims. History, for example, takes on a social knowledge character and is true if the social group claiming authority over the historical experience says it is true. There is an emphasis on who is telling the story, from what perspective, with what interests. It encourages the approach described by Maton where 'it is not what is said that matters, it is who said it' (Maton & Moore, 2010, p. 54).

This standpoint position is most vividly demonstrated in the New Zealand case by academic Mason Durie's (cited in Munz, 2000) defence of the New Zealand National Museum's Moriori exhibition. Durie justified the omission of any reference to the most important event in Moriori history – their massacre and enslavement by invading Maori tribes in 1835:

First there are many different standards of knowledge and each standard reflects the cultural situation of the historian. There is no real truth. Second, the Museum is justified in suppressing the truth about the massacre because it accepts the inherent value of maturaanga Maori [Maori knowledge]. The Museum is committed to the recognition of different knowledge bases. (p. 14)

The discipline of history in particular is concerned with understanding the events of the past. Included in its purpose is a requirement to make judgements about the significance of some historical events, people, and movements that are more implicated than others in historical causes and consequences. If the discipline is unwilling or unable to do this, then who does? Who then, and using what criteria, determines the significance of an event? At this point the weakness in all horizontal subjects, that is subjects that have a strong social context, to slip from their disciplinary constraints to become social mythologies and ideologies, is difficult to resist. It is a process that weakens the role of the disciplines in developing the principles, concepts and content for subjects to be taught at school. It also weakens the task of knowledge discipline in making judgements about the significance of its knowledge. As Moore (2010) insists, these are not arbitrary personal judgements, but 'informed judgments grounded in respect for truth, a respect that is not a slogan. It has an internalised value, acquired through the methodology of education (the systematic formation of a habitus), embedded within and manifested through shared, collective procedures, principles and criteria' (p. 143). It appears that history has abdicated that role in the New Zealand curriculum. According to the Guidelines statement 'people's perspectives on past events that are of significance to New Zealand differ' (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 37, emphasis has been added). This suggests that those who decide on the significance of historical knowledge may be from any number of interest groups and not from the discipline where their judgments are subject to the discipline's 'truth testing' procedures. While I have noted that many New Zealand history teachers continue to teach from a disciplinary perspective, probably as a result of their university training in

the discipline, the removal of subjects from the curriculum across the senior school from 2012 for topics based upon their significance, may well be the beginning of a weakening of even that fairly arbitrary teacher choice of content.

At the national level, the discipline of history located in the universities will have failed in its task to provide the explicit knowledge that is significant to the nation if there is an unwillingness to judge what is significant. The shift in New Zealand's curriculum policy away from prescribed content knowledge, exemplified in secondary school history, suggests that the selection of the significant knowledge to be taught to succeeding generations may be that chosen by various interest groups. This is likely to be social knowledge that will not be put on trial, but taken as belief, as fixed truth, and unamendable to critique and change. Michael Young points out that if we lose the 'voice of knowledge', this is the knowledge 'in the strong sense that involves its claims to reliability', the knowledge that 'is central to the whole purpose of education', then we create a 'highly problematic heritage' for future generations. This is a heritage where 'there is no explicit knowledge that is important enough to be "transmitted" to the next generation' (2012a, p. 139).

Conclusion

Sociology of education has become greatly enriched as the development of critical policy methodology returns the discipline to its sociological roots and away from one-dimensional evaluative-type educational studies or studies that focus on politics only. My aim in this article has been to isolate the three stages that make up that methodology and to argue that each stage is important for its contribution to the critical nature of the inquiry. Theory above all is essential. All human activities take place within contexts and the task of critical sociology of education is to theorise those contexts, using the method of sociology described by Durkheim (1982) – 'As for the method appropriate to be used, two words may serve to characterise it: it must be historical and objective' (p. 245). Indeed Durkheim goes further in his insistence on the role history plays in sociology. 'There is no sociology worthy of the name which does not possess a historical character' (p. 211). While a historical account of the sociology of education was required for my purposes so that I could show the revitalisation of the three stage methodology out of the discipline's past, my choice of history to illustrate the methodology has a certain irony. Given that I argue for sociology's recognition of the importance of theoretical contextualising, which must include the historical component, it is ironic that the subject of my example – curriculum history – is in danger. Locating policy and practice in its historical context is essential to the sociological imagination. It is certainly essential to the theoretical stage of critical policy analysis. For that reason the future of the sociology of education requires researchers who are well versed in the discipline of history in order to provide the theoretical contextualisation required by critical sociology.

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