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Practice, pedagogy and education as a discipline: Getting beyond close-to-practice research

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Abstract

The British Educational Research Association (BERA) has promulgated a concept of close-to-practice research that is seen as vital to defending and promoting education as an academic discipline. However, what is overlooked are the questions of what education is for and what educational practice is—questions that need to be addressed for any research aiming to understand and improve educational practice. Informed by Robin Alexander's conception of pedagogy, continental *Pädagogik* and *Didaktik* and Anglo-American sources, this paper advances an alternative, different way of thinking about close-to-practice research and education as a discipline. It makes a case for education as a distinctive discipline directed towards the understanding and development of practice for the advancement of education. This discipline necessitates an educational and *Didaktik* way of thinking and theorising, centred on the questions of what education is for, what educational practice is and how practice is supported and developed. This way of thinking and theorising calls for three interrelated lines of research that are significant and matter to practice, particularly within the current context of the National Curriculum in England.

KEYWORDS
close-to-practice research, *Didaktik*, education as a discipline, *Pädagogik*, pedagogy

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Key insights

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INTRODUCTION

UK higher education institutions (HEIs) have entered a new phase of competitive performativity since the introduction of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in 2014—a replacement for the previous Research Assessment Exercise (REA). As a new system for assessing the quality of research, REF evaluates not only the quality of research outputs but also (more importantly) the economic, social and cultural impacts of research. Since the results are employed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to allocate public funding for universities' research, HEIs have been under immense pressure to align research with the expectations and criteria promulgated in REF.

As a response to the outcomes of the 2014 REF, the British Educational Research Association (BERA) commissioned a research project (2017–2018) aimed at enhancing the quality of *close-to-practice research*—a term referring to 'any research that focusses on educational practices in order to better understand or improve them' (BERA, 2018). The concern was that this kind of research was generally low in scholarly quality. According to the REF education panel report, 'Some studies, close to practice, lacked originality, significance and rigour' (HEFCE, 2015, p. 195). Also, 'Less strong research in the submission was often the small-scale professional research or action research which was frequently insufficiently theorised to make a contribution to knowledge and/or was low in rigour with poor use of statistical data or inappropriately selective reporting of qualitative data' (HEFCE, 2015, p. 107). Awarded to Dominic Wyse and his team, the BERA close-to-practice research project was proposed to investigate the nature and dimensions of quality of research that is close-to-practice.

Based on a systematic review of a significant corps of pertinent research publications, Wyse et al. (2018, p. 34) formulated a definition:

> Close-to-practice research focusses on issues defined by practitioners as relevant to their practice, and involves collaboration between people whose main expertise is research, practice, or both.

They further identified a wide range of methodological traditions of close-to-practice research, among which are action research and practitioner inquiry—two most frequent

traditions—together with evidence-informed practice, design-based research, lesson study, research-informed teaching practice, and so forth (Wyse et al., 2018, 2021). Furthermore, based on interviews with educational researchers who had experience with close-to-practice research, they formulated a supplemental definition of high-quality close-to-practice research in terms of criteria:

> High quality close-to-practice research requires the robust use of research design, theory and methods to address clearly defined research questions, through an iterative process of research and application. The research process will be well documented and the conclusions that are drawn will be appropriate to the strengths and weaknesses of the design, theory and methods used. Such research will draw upon practitioners' and researchers' reflections on both practice and context. (Wyse et al., 2018, p. 34, also 2021)

These two definitions have been adopted by BERA as two official statements on the definition and criteria of close-to-practice research.

It is important to note that this concept of close-to-practice research is seen as vital to defending and promoting education as an academic discipline in universities—the thrust of another ongoing BERA project (BERA, 2021). Close-to-practice research, according to Wyse et al. (2021, p. 1512), 'has been the source of a range of debates relevant to understanding the development of education as an academic discipline'. Having established the criteria of high-quality close-to-practice research, in his 2019 BERA presidential address, Wyse (2020) confronted a perceived weakness of education as an academic discipline—attention to practice—by asserting that the higher or lower quality of research is judged by the criteria of research in the discipline. He tackled another alleged weakness—multidisciplinary nature—by pointing out that 'multidisciplinary thinking has been and continues to be a central feature of academic disciplines' (p. 18), in particular those that are centrally concerned with practice, like medicine and engineering. Wyse proceeded to advance a conception of education as an academic discipline where close-to-practice research is embedded in all three layers of context: *national and international* (international competitive assessments like PISA and TIMMS, REF, BERA); *local* (early years setting, schools, further education); and *personal* (curriculum, lesson planning, pupil learning, classroom management). So conceived, the discipline of education is underpinned by 'its close connection with and understanding of education practice' (p. 22) and characterised by interplays between academic knowledge and practical knowledge and the promotion of multidisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity in educational research.

It is commendable that BERA promotes practice-focused research aimed at understanding and improvement of educational practice, given that educational research has long been criticised for being both removed from and irrelevant to the needs of classroom teachers (e.g., Hargreaves, 1996; Lawlor, 1990; O'Hear, 1988; Tooley & Darby, 1998). It is also praiseworthy that BERA positions education as an academic discipline—with close-to-practice research as its defining feature—given in the dominant 'academic knowledge tradition' (Furlong & Whitty, 2017), education is regarded *not* as a discipline but as a multidisciplinary field that replies on input from *foundation disciplines*—the psychology, sociology, history and philosophy of education (McCulloch, 2017; Tibble, 1971).[i] The field as such is currently in crisis because of its dubious value or contribution to the practice of education, and because of its lack of connection with the professional knowledge of teachers (Furlong & Whitty, 2017; Hordern et al., 2021).

However, important issues have been raised concerning how practice is conceived in the 2021 special section 'Close to Practice Research' in the *British Educational Research Journal* (*BERJ*), **47**(6). Hordern (2021, p. 1451) points to a neglect of concern for 'the purposes' or

'core educational concerns' with respect to the portrayal of educational practice. Echoing Hordern, Takayama and Nishioka (2021, p. 1501) argue that the close-to-practice research project 'vacates the question of purposes and direction in education'. The question of purpose is fundamental because any research claiming to understand and improve practice presupposes a discussion of 'what it is one seeks to achieve' (Biesta, 2020, p. 25).

The purpose question is inextricably connected with another fundamental question which is also neglected by Wyse and his team: 'how educational practice itself is actually understood … particularly with respect to what makes such practices *educational*'—raised by the editors in the special section (Biesta & Aldridge, 2021, p. 1448). Furthermore, they have neglected to address how practice needs to be understood with respect to broad socio-cultural, institutional issues—culture and tradition, schooling, institutional curriculum, etc.—which shape and determine what practice is. As a matter of fact, in both their project report and the *BERJ* article (Wyse et al., 2018, 2021), Wyse and his team provide no definition or conception of what educational practice is—as also observed by Hordern (2021).

In other words, the idea of close-to-practice research, and the conception of education as a discipline which this idea underpins, are articulated without being informed by a sophisticated and coherent theory of educational practice as called for by Alexander (2000, 2001, 2004) in terms of *pedagogy*. Referring to both the act of teaching and its attendant discourse, pedagogy links classroom teaching to the wider sphere of human culturally and morally purposeful undertaking—that is, education—and locates it in the context of society, state, school, classroom and their interplays (Alexander, 2001). The absence of such a theory is not a surprise, since pedagogy has long been absent in English educational discourse—a paradox which was first deplored by Simon (1981) in his classic essay 'Why no pedagogy in England?', and has continued to be lamented by Davies (1994), Hamilton (1999), and Alexander (2004), among others. Yet in Continental Europe, pedagogy, Alexander (2000, 2001) observed, has long been established as a discipline under the names of *Pädagogik* and *Didaktik*. Without a more sophisticated, better informed and educational understanding of practice as called for in Alexnder's conception of pedagogy and German *Pädagogik* and *Didaktik*, I am concerned that the concept of close-to-practice research would be limited and constricting, missing out on issues that are vital to the understanding and improvement of practice. And the attempt to advance education as a discipline based on this concept would not be able to contribute significantly to the advancement of education.

Building on Alexander's conception of pedagogy and informed by *Pädagogik* and *Didaktik* and Anglo-American sources, this paper seeks to advance an alternative, different way of thinking about close-to-practice research and education as a discipline. It makes a case for education as a distinctive discipline directed towards the understanding and development of practice for the advancement of education. This discipline necessities an educational and *Didaktik* way of thinking and theorising about practice—centring on the questions of what education is for, what educational practice is and how practice is supported and developed. This way of thinking and theorising calls for three interrelated lines of research that are significant and matter to practice, particularly in the current context of the National Curriculum in England.

I start by addressing what practice is and how practice needs to be thought about by locating it within the socio-cultural, institutional and instructional context of schooling. I next discuss what it means to position education as a discipline in its own right and sketch out three bodies of theory and research which are important for the understanding and development of practice. This is followed by an examination of *Didaktik* to elucidate a distinctive way of thinking and theorising about educational practice. Afterwards, I articulate three lines of research which together provide a different, alternative way of thinking about practice-focused research. I conclude by discussing the implications for promoting close-to-practice research and the significance of establishing education as a distinctive discipline in view of recent radical changes to the education and teacher education landscapes in England.

UNDERSTANDING PRACTICE IN CONTEXT

In the education community it has been widely recognised that teaching is not a technical activity but an intellectual and moral endeavour involving judgement and decision making in a particular context (Biesta, 2012a; Hargreaves, 1996; Jackson, 1986). Teaching, too, is a purposeful practice; it 'is always framed by a *telos* – that is, by a sense of purpose – which means that teachers always need to make judgements about what is desirable in relation to the different purposes that frame their practice' (Biesta, 2012a, p. 36).

This view of teaching needs to be broadened from the perspective of pedagogy that comprehends teaching by locating it 'within the concentric circles of local and national, and of classroom, school, system and state' (Alexander, 2001, p. 511; see also Alexander, 2000, 2004, 2009). Three broad layers of context, *socio-cultural*, *institutional* and *instructional* or *classroom/school*, are identified—in which teaching is embedded and takes place, determining and shaping the activities of teaching.

- *Socio-cultural context*. National culture, history and tradition that are essential for making sense of both the current stage and future possibilities of education; values and norms that inform and shape a society's views of what education is for, what schools are about and how teaching is conducted; political and social structures and larger social forces that shape both school curriculum and practice.
- *Institutional context*. National, state or district educational policies and curriculum frameworks that promulgate what education is for and prescribe what is taught and how it is taught in schools; examination and inspection systems that ensure the quality and standard of teaching; institutional categories—school types, grade levels, school subjects, programmes, assessment procedures, and so forth—that organise, structure and regulate classroom teaching; curriculum resources, initial teacher education and professional development opportunities that enable and support teaching.
- *Instructional or classroom/school context*. School culture and structures that shape and influence teaching; the classroom in which the teacher, students and content intersect; teachers' practices and judgements; instructional media and technologies; the experience, background and competences of teachers; the attitudes, characteristics and background of individual students; laboratories, school libraries and other places where teaching and learning also take place (Alexander, 2000, 2001; Goodlad, 1979; Meyer, 1980; Talbert & McLaughlin, 1993).

These three layers of context, together with their sublayers, are interrelated; they together constitute the 'reality of schooling as a whole'—a necessary foundation on which to comprehend and make sense of teaching (Deng, 2017).

Three conceptions of teaching can be articulated with respect to the socio-cultural, institutional and classroom/school contexts of schooling. First, teaching is a *social practice* that occurs within a society and culture. Like all social practice, teaching is influenced by social and cultural expectations, norms and values which influence and shape what teaching is for and what significance teaching has. As an institution, schools in England are expected to contribute to *individual* (individual fulfilment and flourishing), *economic* (economic development or prosperity) and *social* (citizen formation) goals (Reiss & White, 2013; Winch, 2002). Such expectations and beliefs signify what is to be valued and sought after by members of a society, hence carrying social meaning and significance for the work of teachers. They are shaped by the history and tradition as well as the social and organisational structure of schooling in a country. In this regard, to understand teaching as a social practice, Alexander (2004, p. 12) contends, is to locate it 'in time, place and the social world, and anchor it firmly to the questions of human identity and social purpose without which teaching makes little sense'.

The second conception, *teaching as an institutionalised practice*, locates teaching within a context of educational policies, institutional curriculum planning, school organisation and examination/inspection regimes. In a centralised education system, the social meaning and significance of teaching is often signified by a central agency—such as the Ministry or Department of Education—by articulating the goals or purposes of education as contained in policy and curriculum documents. Furthermore, what is taught and learnt is prescribed in the institutional (national or state) curriculum—in the form of curriculum frameworks and guidelines—developed by the central agency. Teachers are expected to respond to the institutional expectations and requirements promulgated in policy and curriculum documents as such. Teaching is institutionalised also in the sense that it is practically embedded in the institution of schooling that regulates and supports the activities of teaching via institutional categories such as school types, grades/levels, school subjects, schedules, assessment requirements, and so on (Reid, 1999, 2006).

The third conception, *teaching as a practical and deliberative practice*, situates teaching in a classroom within a particular school context. It is *practical* in the sense that a teacher works with specific content, specific students and specific curriculum texts within a specific classroom context (Reid, 2006; Schwab, 1973). The work of teaching requires *deliberative* decision making to tackle specific issues and problems—concerning students, curriculum content and teaching methods—towards educational goals (Reid, 2006). It involves interpretation, judgement and decision making (Biesta, 2015a; Doyle, 1992; Hargreaves, 1996).

What I want to bring to the fore, as alluded to earlier, is that classroom teaching needs to be thought of as embedded within the broad socio-cultural and institutional contexts that give it social and cultural meaning and regulate and shape its activities. To locate teaching within the socio-cultural context is to argue that what a teacher does in a classroom has social and cultural significance that goes beyond the exigencies of a classroom. By helping students acquire a body of worthwhile knowledge, skills and values, a teacher is, in effect, contributing to broad educational goals—citizen formation, human flourishing, economic development, among others—in an indirect manner.

Furthermore, teaching is conducted within an institutional and organisational framework of schooling within which teachers pursue their activities (Reid, 2006). They are supposed to work with and transform an institutional curriculum into a *classroom curriculum* (instructional events and tasks) in their specific situations (Deng, 2018a; Doyle, 1992). Likewise, the institutional curriculum—in the form of curriculum frameworks and guidelines—is supposed to be developed in a way that enables and supports their professional activities in classrooms. How to reconcile teaching as a practical and deliberative practice (driven by classroom exigencies) with teaching as an institutionalised practice (shaped by institutional expectations, demands and regulations) has long been a puzzle in a centralised system with a national or state curriculum (see Westbury, 1994, 2008)—an issue that is highly relevant in respect of the National Curriculum in England—to which I will return.

I have examined what teaching is within the socio-cultural, institutional and classroom/school contexts, with particular attention to educational purposes and the institutional curriculum. It is important to point out that the formulation of educational purposes and the making of the institutional curriculum are 'always … embedded within governments and, therefore, within politics, party and "interests"' (Westbury et al., 2016, p. 735). They are therefore inescapably matters of policy and politics involving not only institutional resolutions but reflecting 'struggle[s] over meaning, resources and power' (Ozga & Lingard, 2007, p. 66). The National Curriculum—introduced in 2014 in England—moves away from the emphasis on generic competences and refocuses on content knowledge, reflecting a shift in control over the curriculum from the Labour government to the Conservative-led government. The primary purpose of education is then construed as the transmission of 'essential knowledge', signifying the interest of 'a return to a traditional vision of what education should be' (Chapman, 2021,

p. 5; also see Gibb, 2012). A fuller and more responsible understanding of practice needs to take account of policy and politics and their potential impacts on practice.

PEDAGOGY AND EDUCATION AS A DISCIPLINE

The preceding discussion of practice—informed by Alexander's (2000, 2001, 2004, 2009) conception of pedagogy—provides a useful starting point for advancing education as a discipline in its own right. If there is a discipline that suits practice, it needs to be a 'practical' one like politics or ethics, centrally concerned with understanding and developing human deliberative practice for public good—rather than a 'theoretic' one like physics, directed towards explaining natural phenomena and mechanisms (Aristotle, 1980; Schwab, 1970/2013). Education is a 'practical' discipline in the sense that it is centrally concerned with the understanding and development of practice—as embedded within the socio-cultural, institutional and classroom/school contexts—towards the advancement of education. Three distinctive, interrelated bodies of theory and research are necessary for this purpose.

One body of theory and research contributes to our understanding of teaching as a social practice. Among the issues and topics examined are: national history, culture and tradition; human nature and human flourishing; purposes and ideals of education; the relationship between education and social development; and teaching as a social and cultural endeavour. The examples of theory and research dealing with these issues and topics can be Cohen (1988), Dewey (1990), Nussbaum (1998), Biesta (2010) and Lawson and Silver (2013). Inquiries into such issues and topics require bringing to bear theories and perspectives from the foundation disciplines, comparative education, economics of education, and so on. The modes of inquiry can be philosophical, sociological, historical and hermeneutic.

Another body of theory and research serves to inform the understanding of teaching as an institutionalised practice. It examines issues and topics such as: educational policy and regulation (e.g., Aldrich et al., 2013); schooling as an institution (e.g., Meyer, 1980); institutional curriculum frameworks and guidelines (e.g., Luke et al., 2013); assessment and inspection (e.g., Isaacs, 2010); initial teacher education and professional development (e.g., Brooks, 2021). Investigation of such issues and topics requires bringing to bear perspectives and insights from foundation disciplines, curriculum studies, policy analysis and institutional analysis, among other sources, with modes of inquiry such as philosophical, historical, sociological, scientific, phenomenological, narrative and hermeneutic.

A third body of theory and research contributes to the understanding and development of teaching as a practical and deliberative practice. This body of theory and research deals with issues and topics such as: school-based curriculum development (e.g., Stenhouse, 1971); teachers' judgements and decision making (e.g., Clark & Peterson, 1986); pedagogical tasks and activities (e.g., Emmer, 1986); and educational technologies and media (e.g., Spector et al., 2014), among others. Theoretical perspectives can be drawn from foundation disciplines, curriculum studies, the learning sciences and applied linguistics. Modes of inquiry can be hermeneutic inquiry, narrative inquiry, scientific inquiry, practitioner inquiry and design-based research, among others.

There are, of course, other issues and topics that are relevant and useful to our understanding and development of practice. As already indicated, policy and politics (pertaining to the formation of educational purposes and the making of the institutional curriculum) is a case in point. From a broader perspective, this topic calls for theory and research on globalisation, policy borrowing and educational governance that explores 'the dynamics of the relationship between globalising, economising forces and technologies of education governance, and mediating, vernacular forces and resources' that affect the ways in which practice is understood and carried out (Ozga & Lingard, 2007, p. 65; Paine et al., 2016).

Further topics are: political and social structures surrounding education and schools; the socio-political nature of schooling within a broad social, cultural and institutional context; and differential performance of affluent and disadvantaged students, among others. Topics as such have long been researched and theorised in education as a multidisciplinary field in the English-speaking world, which, I argue, needs to coexist with and inform education as a discipline as advanced in this paper.

After all, education as a discipline is directed towards understanding of what educational practice is with respect to society and culture, how practice is regulated, organised and supported by the institution of schooling, and how practice is carried out in a classroom within a school context. It seeks to provide bodies of knowledge and theory that are significant and relevant to the understanding and development of practice—and hence to the professional development of teachers. In this sense, the discipline 'marries' the study of practice with the foundational disciplines and other external sources (Alexander, 2009).

This discipline can further strengthen its own right of existence by adopting 'the practical' to research and theorising, developed by Josep Schwab—based on Aristotelianism—at the University of Chicago (Schwab, 1970/2013, 1973, 1983). From the perspective of the practical, research and theorising starts with issues pertaining to practice as a deliberative decision making undertaking embedded within the socio-cultural, institutional and school/classroom contexts of schooling—rather than with 'external' theories from the foundation disciplines and other sources. External theories, where relevant, are brought to bear to shed light on issues under investigation and to assist in theory development (Connelly & Xu, 2010, 2012). It requires theories to be used in an eclectic, critical and creative manner (Schwab, 1970/2013, 1973).[ii] In other words, this approach to research and theorising embraces the insights from the foundational disciplines and other sources and 'turns' them for the study of practice in a way that 'promised sustained effects on schooling' (Westbury, 2005. p. 89). The term *practice* or *practices* can be extended to encompass all kinds of activities pertaining to education and schooling, including policy making, curriculum planning and development, and school leadership. Education as a discipline, so conceived, can become the 'crowning discipline'[iii] that organises the foundation disciplines and other external sources towards understanding practices for the development and improvement of practices—and therefore towards the professional education of teachers, school leaders and educational specialists.

I have shown that education can be established as a discipline in its own right, with its own commitment or orientation, its own bodies of issues and topics, and its own approach to research and theorising. So far, the discipline is advanced based on Alexander's conception of pedagogy and pertinent Anglo-American literature. Still lacking is what Biesta (2011, p. 189) terms 'its own forms of theory and theorising that are distinctively educational'—called *educational and Didaktik way of thinking and theorising* in this paper—which, as will be shown below, is particularly pertinent to addressing the issues concerning educational practice raised at the beginning of this paper.

PÄDAGOGIK AND *DIDAKTIK*: A DISTINCTIVE WAY OF THINKING AND THEORISING ABOUT PRACTICE

The discipline of education advanced in this paper finds its counterpart in Germany and German-speaking countries, where *Pädagogik* has long been established as a discipline that deals directly with education and is directly related to 'the practical process of education and to professions in the field' (Terhart, 2017, p. 922).[iv] Contemporary *Pädagogik* normally refers to *Geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik*, developed notably by Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), Hermann Nohl (1879–1960) and Erich Weniger (1894–1961), which is depicted as an autonomous discipline in its own right, with its own 'educative, pedagogical ambitions' and

'ambitions of doing research' (Terhart, 2017, p. 923). It is a discipline of educational practice and for educational practice (Biesta, 2011; Klafki, 1998). Of particular interest to this paper is *Geisteswissenschaftliche Didaktik*, an integral part of *Pädagogik*, where theorising particularly takes into account the practice of teaching as embedded in the institutional context of schooling, where purposes of education and the institutional curriculum are always two essential components (Kansanen, 2002).

Before going further, it is necessary to note that starting from 1960s *Pädagogik* has been challenged by modern Anglo-American theories and methods for its lack of an empirical basis and its inability to respond to the changing needs and demands of the school system (Terhart, 2012). With the importation of a multiplicity of educational theories and methodologies from the United States and the United Kingdom, around the 1960s and the 1970s *Pädagogik* (as the then dominant tradition) was replaced by *Erziehungswissenschaft* (the modern science of education), alongside the establishment of *Bildungsforschung* (research on education as an interdisciplinary field). Applying multiple and pluralistic concepts, theories and methods to the examination of practice, *Erziehungswissenschaft* functions as 'the integrating centre' for *Bildungsforschung*, which examines empirically problems and themes concerning education, with the employment of multiple disciplines (psychology, sociology, economics, history) (Terhart, 2017). In recent years, however, there has been a growing concern that the educational and *Didaktik* way of thinking and theorising inherent in *Pädagogik* and *Didaktik* becomes marginalised and diminished as obsolete and irrelevant (Hopmann, 2008, 2015). As a result, educational research is no longer 'educational' or 'educative'. Therefore, 'The term *educational research* is misleading' (Terhart, 2017, p. 923). It is observed that *Erziehungswissenschaft*, as the integrating centre for *Bildungsforschung*, is a complete failure (Terhart, 2012, 2017).

Education as a discipline advanced in this paper employs the practical to research and theorising which, as indicated above, provides a promising and productive way of bringing together the various bodies of research that rely on input from the foundation disciplines and other sources for the study of practice. This paper can also be seen as an attempt to reassert or recover the significance of the educational and *Didaktik* way of thinking and theorising which is, from the perspective of Terhart (2017), indispensable for determining what constitutes *educational* research. This way of thinking and theorising, as will be made plain below, centres on the questions of what education is for, what educational practice is and how practice can be developed and supported—questions that are relevant particularly within the current context of the National Curriculum. Yet these questions, as noted earlier, have been overlooked in the close-to-practice research project.

Didaktik deals with issues of teaching and learning within the institutionalised context of schooling by subsuming the state curriculum 'as one issue … interwoven with other issues like teaching and learning, schooling, school administration, etc.' (Hopmann & Riquarts, 1995, p. 335). As such, it provides a vehicle for 'bridging the gap' between centralised curriculum planning and local classroom teaching (Hopmann, 2007)—or between teaching as an institutionalised practice and as a practical, deliberative practice. Underpinning this tradition is an educational and *Didaktik* way of thinking and theorising about educational practice in terms of (1) *Bildung*, (2) a theory of content and (3) teachers as curriculum makers.

Bildung

Viewed as the central goal of education by German *Didaktik* theorists, *Bildung* refers to the full formation of the individual through the cultivation of human moral, cognitive, aesthetic and practical capabilities and dispositions such as sensibility, self-awareness, liberty and freedom, and dignity (Humboldt, 2000; Lüth, 2000; see also Hopmann, 2007). Furthermore,

it is concerned with the cultivation of capabilities for self-determination, co-determination and solidarity, together with the dispositions of freedom and responsibility (Klafki, 2000; see also Willbergh, 2015). The cultivation is achieved through interactions of the individual with the world (physical, cultural, social) (Humboldt, 2000; see also Hopmann, 2007). The world, independent of human existence and practice, is processed by different forms of human thought represented by various academic disciplines which have the potential to develop *human powers*—a term used to encompass understanding, capabilities and dispositions (Lüth, 2000). In this regard, academic disciplines provide an indispensable resource or vehicle for the development of human powers.

The concept of *Bildung* has been instrumental in articulating and defending the central responsibility of schools—nurturing students to become independent and responsible human beings (Klafki, 1998). It has also played an important role in safeguarding *Didaktik* against undue political, social and economic forces which seek to intervene in education (Wulf, 2003). Education is not so much about the acquisition or transmission of knowledge as it is about the formation of individuals through encounters with knowledge. What makes practice *educational* thus has to do with the transformative impact that the imparting of knowledge brings about on the understanding, capabilities and dispositions of students.

This notion of *Bildung* serves to inform or direct how knowledge is selected and organised into the content of the institutional curriculum—in the form of institutional curriculum guidelines—in a way that facilitates or enables educational practice in classrooms.

A theory of content

All German states had a state curriculum guideline, the *Lehrplan*, which was designed to provide guidance and support for the practice of teaching towards *Bildung*. Behind the *Lehrplan* is a theory of content comprised of four interrelated concepts—*contents of education* (*Bildungsinhalte*), *educational substance* (*Bildungsgehalt*), the *elemental* (*das Elementare*) and the *fundamental* (*das Fundamentale*)—which serves to translate *Bildung* into state curriculum planning and classroom teaching. This theory of content also links the selection and organisation of content to *Bildung* and to the classroom work of teachers (Doyle, 1992).

Contents result from a deliberative process of selection and organisation of the wealth of academic knowledge, experience and wisdom for *Bildung*. Such contents, set aside for teaching, were assumed by *Lehrplan* designers as embodying *educational potential* for *Bildung*:

> … these contents, once the children or adolescents have internalized and thus acquired them, would enable them to 'produce a certain order' (Litt) in themselves and at the same time in their relation to the world, to 'assume responsibility' (Weniger), and to cope with the requirements of life, and take the free chances of life. The contents of teaching and learning will represent such order, or possibilities for such order, such responsibilities…. (Klafki, 2000, p. 150)

Educational potential thus refers to the *possibilities* that contents can bring about for *Bildung*.

Educational potential lies in *educational substance* that is found in the *elemental* categories or aspects (concepts, principles, relations, values, methods). Content, by virtue of its educational substance, can contribute to *Bildung*—a *fundamental* change in the perspectives, modes of thinking, dispositions and ways of being-in-the-world of individual students (Krüger, 2008).

In accord with this theory of content, the *Lehrplan* only specified the contents to be taught in schools but *not* the educational substance and meanings—which are to be interpreted

and unpacked by teachers in their classroom situations (Hopmann, 2007). Teachers are entrusted with a high degree of professional autonomy to interpret the state curriculum guideline (Westbury, 2000).

Teachers as curriculum makers

Teachers are viewed as reflective professionals 'working within, but not directed by' state curriculum guidelines, informed by the idea of *Bildung* and the *Didaktik* way of thinking (Westbury, 2000, p. 26). Endowed with the responsibility of interpreting and enacting the state curriculum, they are supposed to rethink the intention of the *Lehrplan* developers when selecting specific content for teaching. They function as curriculum makers who 'come alive' the *Lehrplan* in classrooms by creating 'fruitful' encounters (Copei) between content and students (Klafki, 2000).

The teacher is a curriculum maker in the sense that he or she interprets and translates the content to create a world of possibilities for *Bildung*. The interpretation and translation entail a form of *Didaktik* thinking centred on the 'what' and 'why' of teaching. The teacher is to identify the elemental elements that constitute the educational substance of a particular content, with particular students in mind and within a particular historical context, present and future (Klafki, 2000). Furthermore, the teacher ascertains the educational potential of content through analysing and unpacking the educational meaning and significance of the elementary elements from the perspective of *Bildung*. Addressing the 'what' and the 'why' questions is prior to, and a precondition for, addressing the 'how' question. The search for methods (the how) is the final step, the 'crowning' moment in curriculum making in a classroom (Klafki, 2000).

Practice is assisted and enhanced through the mastery of *Didaktik* thinking. To this end, *Didaktik* theorists have developed tools used by teachers in their deliberative thinking about the what, why and how of teaching when interpreting state curriculum guidelines. Klafki's (2000) model of *Didaktik* analysis and lesson planning is a case in point, comprised of five questions—in terms of (1) exemplary value, (2) contemporary meaning, (3) future meaning, (4) content structure and (5) pedagogical representations—which a teacher should ask during lesson planning to explore the educational potential of content and its actualisation (see Deng, 2021, 2022a).

Let it be clear that *Didaktik* is not without tensions and challenges. With its religious roots in Protestantism,[v] *Bildung* is inherently fraught with a tension between 'demands from the outer world' and 'the right to follow one's own path', between 'master[ing] the world' and self-preservation or freedom, and between 'solidarity' and 'self-realisation' (Gundem, 2000). And, associated with *Didaktik* is a persistent tension between maintaining the autonomy of *Didaktik* and responding to political, social and cultural demands and influences on schooling. How these tensions are managed or handled—a question which is beyond the scope of this paper—has been discussed by Weniger (2000), Hopmann (2007) and Uljens (2023), among others.

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, *Didaktik* has been under challenge by global educational reform movements. The global move towards the delineation of educational goals in terms of twenty-first-century competences leads to the questioning of *Bildung* as an educational goal. Accompanying this move is a movement towards competency or outcome-based curriculum development, which renders irrelevant or obsolete content-based curriculum making as exemplified in *Didaktik* (see Hopmann, 2007, 2009; Karseth & Sivesind, 2010). Teaching is increasingly construed as the facilitation of learning that is constructivist and experiential—directed towards the development of generic competences or skills—rather than the imparting of knowledge content (Biesta, 2011; Voogt & Roblin, 2012).

These challenges need to be dealt with if we are to reassert the significance of the educational and *Didaktik* way of thinking and theorising inherent in *Didaktik*. In what follows I discuss three interrelated lines of practice-focused research that are called for by this way of thinking and theorising and are informed and supported by pertinent Anglo-American literature in a way that responds to the challenges.

THREE LINES OF RESEARCH THAT ARE SIGNIFICANT AND MATTER TO PRACTICE

If we take this educational and *Didaktik* way of thinking and theorising about practice seriously, we can identify three interrelated lines of research that are significant and matter to practice, with reference to the current context of the National Curriculum in England. They include: (1) clarifying the purposes of education; (2) the development of institutional curriculum frameworks and guidelines; and (3) the understanding and development of classroom teaching as curriculum making.

All research that attempts to be relevant to practice seeks to improve practice. This begs the question of what direction practice is improved in (Biesta, 2011). What counts as improvement 'crucially depends on what it is one seeks to achieve – the question of educational purpose' (Biesta, 2020, p. 25). This question can be addressed in terms of various goals of education, such as human flourishing, citizen formation and economic development. Practice and its improvement take on different meanings and significance with respect to these different goals.

The question of educational purpose has been addressed by Michael Young and Zongyi Deng with respect to the 'knowledge turn' in the National Curriculum in England.[vi] From a Bernsteinian sociological perspective, Young (2009) argues that the distinctive, central purpose of schooling is to help students gain access to 'powerful' disciplinary knowledge that they cannot acquire at home. Access to this knowledge is a social justice issue—an entitlement for *all* students (Young, 2013). Accordingly, the central task of a teacher is to promote epistemic access to disciplinary knowledge and to take students beyond their existing experience or what they already know (Young et al., 2014). From the perspective of *Bildung*, Deng (2022a) contends that the purpose of providing access to disciplinary knowledge is inextricably intertwined with another more fundamental purpose—the formation of independent and responsible individuals through the cultivation of human powers (understanding, capabilities and dispositions). The cultivation can be extended to include many of the so-called twenty-first-century competences—communication, problem solving, critical and innovative thinking, creativity—which can be developed in and through powerful disciplinary knowledge (Deng, 2020). In this way, the concept of *Buildung* can address a challenge created by global educational reform movements—the development of the twenty-first-century competences (Deng, 2022b). The central task of a teacher is then to bring about possibilities for students to develop human powers broadly construed, using knowledge as an indispensable resource or tool.

Of course, what exactly these two purposes entail is relative to socio-cultural milieus and is in need of (re)interpretation in the light of new challenges and expectations facing school education. The formulation of educational purposes, according to Schwab (1973), needs to be attained through a deliberative process that takes account of four curriculum commonplaces—the subject matter, the learner, the teacher and the milieus—by a deliberation group representing four bodies of experience pertaining to the four commonplaces. '[T]he question as to what education is for', Biesta (2015b, p. 3) argues, 'should actually be a central and ongoing concern within educational practice, policy and research'. It is vital to

both institutional curriculum development and classroom teaching where practitioners pursue aims, plan and carry out action in order to achieve those aims.

A second line of research concerns the development of institutional curriculum frameworks and guidelines that can direct, guide and support the practice of teaching towards educational goals (Westbury, 2008). Rather than being 'obstacles' to the professional work of teachers, as viewed by some curriculum theorists (e.g., Apple, 1990; Pinar, 1978), curriculum frameworks and guidelines are important resources and tools for teachers to engage in meaningful curriculum work (Ball & Cohen, 1996; Reid, 2006). As indicated above, in *Didaktik*, state curriculum guidelines (*Lehrplan*) are developed in a way that positions the teacher as an autonomous, responsible professional and a curriculum maker who interprets and enacts the state curriculum to bring about fruitful encounters between students and content. In a similar vein, Luke et al. (2013) argue that curriculum frameworks and guidelines can enable and support teachers' professional interpretation of the institutional curriculum and face-to-face interaction in classrooms. Behind the development of institutional curriculum frameworks and guidelines is a theory (or theories) of content that links the selection and organisation of content in a school subject to educational aims and the work of teachers (Deng, 2009, 2021, 2022a).

If the imparting of disciplinary knowledge and the cultivation of human powers are taken as two central purposes of education, then several questions could be asked concerning the development of institutional curriculum frameworks and guidelines. What human powers would students need to develop to become independent, socially responsible individuals and to face the challenges of the world today? What would be the knowledges that students need to acquire, and that have potential for cultivating human powers? How would knowledges be selected and organised into school subjects in the institutional curriculum in a way that both promotes epistemic access to knowledge and supports the cultivation of human powers? How would curriculum frameworks and guidelines be designed in a way that supports curriculum making in classrooms and enables the development of practice?

To ask such questions is an attempt to reinvent content-based curriculum development in a way that responds to the challenge of developing the so-called twenty-first-century competences (Deng, 2021, 2022a, 2022b). These questions call for research concerning the development of institutional curriculum frameworks and guidelines that contribute to practice towards the two central educational goals—a task that is highly significant in view of the current promotion of a knowledge-rich curriculum by the government (see Deng, 2022a). Yet, such a task has not received sufficient attention from educationists and curriculum researchers in England. 'The current debate about "powerful knowledge"', Rawling (2020) observed, 'opens up a new area of concern of which national curriculum designers in England and Wales may have been aware but seemed not to know how to address' (p. 74). Institutional curriculum frameworks and guidelines can be developed by the Department for Education (DfE), which then constitute the National Curriculum to be taught by state-funded and local authority schools. They can also be developed by academies and free schools with or without reference to the National Curriculum.

A third line of research aims at the understanding of classroom teaching as curriculum practice and the development of tools and resources that can support such practice. As noted above, teachers are curriculum makers because they interpret and transform what is in institutional curriculum guidelines to create fruitful encounters between students and content. From the perspective of Doyle (1992), teachers 'author' instructional events—that is, the enacted curriculum—through interpreting and transforming the purpose and content of a school subject within the institutional curriculum framework, in the light of students' existing knowledge and experience. The interpretation and transformation call for educational and *Didaktik* thinking on the part of teachers, as they need to engage with the questions of what, why, whom and how with respect to the broader purpose of education (see Deng, 2018a).

When the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge and the cultivation of human powers are regarded as two essential purposes of education, many questions could be asked about curriculum making in classrooms. How would teachers interpret and enact institutional curriculum frameworks and guidelines in a way that promotes students' epistemic access to disciplinary knowledge and renders a wealth of possibilities for students to develop human powers? What would teachers need to know and be able to do with respect to interpreting and enacting national curriculum frameworks and guidelines as such? How would the kind of *Didaktik* thinking entailed be characterised? What would be the *Didaktik* models that can provide teachers with guidance and support in their curriculum work in classrooms? And how would such models be developed?

Questions like these call for research focusing on classroom teaching as curriculum practice within the context of an institutional curriculum. As with Lambert (2018), this line of research holds curriculum making as the 'core professional responsibility' of classroom teachers. However, curriculum making is not in the sense that teachers bypass the institutional curriculum to 'remake and recontextualise the curriculum' by means of powerful disciplinary knowledge (Rawling, 2020, p. 69), as advocated by the Geography community (see Lambert & Hopkin, 2014; Lambert et al., 2015). Rather, it is in the sense that teachers work with and transform the institutional curriculum to create space for students to gain epistemic access to knowledge and to cultivate human powers through interacting with knowledge. The fundamental task of teachers involves not only imparting disciplinary knowledge but also using knowledge as a tool for unlocking the educational potential of curriculum content to open up a wealth of possibilities for students to develop human powers (Deng, 2022a). This image of teachers as curriculum makers, in turn, presupposes that institutional curriculum frameworks and guidelines are developed in a way that supports and facilitates the curriculum work of teachers as reflective professionals, as noted above.

Taken together, these three interrelated lines of research, informed by the *Didaktik* tradition, manifest an 'internal' perspective taken by those who are centrally concerned with the development and improvement of practice towards educational goals. Nevertheless, the formulation of educational goals, the development of curriculum frameworks and guidelines, and classroom practice itself are influenced and shaped by issues of policy and politics, external expectations and demands, norms and beliefs, circumstances and conditions (Kemmis, 2012; Ozga & Lingard, 2007; Westbury et al., 2016; Yates, 2018; Yates et al., 2011). These three lines of research, then, need to be supplemented by research and scholarship that examine the processes of educational policy making, curriculum development and classroom teaching from perspectives which are 'external' to these practices. Indeed, this is in accord with what I have argued about education as a distinctive discipline based on Alexander's conception of pedagogy—a discipline that 'marries' the study of practices with the foundational disciplines, policy studies, organisational studies and other external sources (Alexander, 2009). How to further articulate and defend these three lines of research against external expectations and demands, norms and beliefs, circumstances and conditions is beyond the scope of this paper—an important issue that needs to be tackled on other occasions.

DISCUSSION

Informed by Alexander's conception of pedagogy, continental *Pädagogik* and *Didaktik* and pertinent Anglo-American sources, this paper provides an alternative, different way of thinking about close-to-practice research and education as a discipline. It makes a case for education as a distinctive discipline directed towards the understanding and development of practice—embedded in the socio-cultural, institutional and instructional contexts of

schooling—for the advancement of education. The discipline necessitates an educational and *Didaktik* way of thinking and theorising about practice, centred on the questions of what education is for, what educational practice is and how practice is supported and developed. This way of thinking and theorising calls for three interrelated lines of research that are significant and matter to practice, particularly within the current context of the National Curriculum.

This paper should not be seen as a repudiation of close-to-practice research. This type of research, not least in the forms of practitioner inquiry and action research, always has an important role to play in the world of educational research and inquiry. Close-to-practice research, as Wyse et al. (2021) have convincingly demonstrated, can be 'excellent' and of high quality if it is designed and carried out in a way that fulfils the set of criteria indicated earlier. On the other hand, the paper challenges the concept of close-to-practice research by arguing for the necessity of engaging with the questions of what education is for and what educational practice is, and of locating practice within the socio-cultural and institutional world surrounding schools and classrooms.

All research that seeks to improve practice needs to be informed by a discussion about the purposes of education and a conception of practice which locates practice within the socio-cultural, institutional and instructional contexts of schooling. To make this argument is to invite close-to-practice researchers to extend their gaze beyond schools and classrooms to wider issues vital to the understanding and development of practice and, more specifically, to issues concerning the purposes of education, the development of institutional curriculum frameworks and the development of classroom teaching as curriculum practice. Such a broadening allows research to be better aligned with the 'impact' expectation of REF—in terms of contributing to debates of public significance and aiming at impacts on public (educational) policy and services (REF, 2019). The three lines of research articulated in this paper have the potential of contributing to public debates on the purposes of education, to the development of the National Curriculum and to the improvement of classroom practice.

However, the way of measuring research impact—via impact case studies[vii]—in REF must be questioned. If education is held as a 'practical' discipline as I think it is, then the main purpose of educational research needs to be seen in terms of understanding and developing practices for the advancement of education. Classroom practice, by way of influencing or developing individual students, can indirectly contribute to the individual, social and economic goals of education. Then, educational research, by way of contributing to the development and improvement of practice, can make an impact with respect to self-formation, human flourishing, *citizenship cultivation* and economic development. Yet such an impact is extremely sophisticated and uncertain and can be long-lasting. It poses a profoundly challenging question that is beyond what impact case studies can attack: How can one measure the extent to which research does or does not make a positive contribution to the personal, social and economic purposes of education?

The conception of educational research adopted in REF also needs to be questioned. Framed within or consistent with the academic knowledge tradition in the United Kingdom (Furlong & Whitty, 2017), in REF, education is positioned as a multidisciplinary field where research examines 'educational systems, issues, process, provision and outcomes', with the employment of 'a range of theoretical frameworks and methodologies drawn from disciplinary traditions' (REF, 2019, pp. 21–22). In this tradition, educational research is 'just another branch of [applied] social science' (Hordern, 2023) where educational practice is regarded as something 'simply "there" to be studied' (Biesta, 2012b), with the employment of theoretical and methodological models from social sciences and related sources. '[D]ebates about the substance and purpose of education', Hordern (2021, p. 1451) observes, 'are often glided over in the pursuit of ever more rigorous research methods'. Also rejected is the idea that there can be 'distinctively educational forms of theory and theorising' (Biesta, 2014).

This conception of educational research is a far cry from the position of education as a 'practical' discipline in its own right, as advanced in this paper—where research on practice presupposes a serious engagement with the questions of what education is for, what educational practice is and how practice can be supported and developed, and where research entails an educational and *Didaktik* way of thinking and theorising about practice.

To engage in these questions and to make a case for education as a 'practical' discipline in its own right takes on greater urgency and significance in the light of the radical policy changes to the education and teacher education landscapes in England over the last two decades. As mentioned already, there has been a knowledge turn in the National Curriculum, with the primary purpose of education in effect construed as the transmission of 'essential knowledge' (Alexander, 2012; Deng, 2022a). There has been a repositioning of initial teacher preparation by the government as 'a craft best learnt through observation and imitation of teachers in school settings' (McIntyre et al., 2019, p. 153), with teaching conceived as the mastery of proven procedures and skills (DfE, 2010; Hordern & Brooks, 2023). Accompanying this position are 'the diversification of teacher education providers and the increase in education stakeholders' (Brooks, 2021, p. 2). This has led to the closure of some university-based teacher training programmes and the emergence of multiple alternative routes into teaching where schools take primary responsibility (Whiting et al., 2018). Most recently, there has been a market review of initial teacher education (ITE)/initial teacher training (ITT), which led to the mandate that all ITE/ITT providers 'must ensure their curricula encompass the full entitlement described in the ITT Core Content Framework' to achieve accreditation (DfE, 2021; 2022b, p. 5), and be inspected by Ofsted[viii] (DfE, 2022a). The framework outlines a *series of 'learn that' and 'learn how to' statements* which reflect a commitment to a 'scientism' that marginalises the education foundations and other traditions of educational thinking and centres on 'what works' in classrooms, to the neglect of broader educational purposes (Hordern & Brooks, 2023). All these changes progressively lead to dissolving the role of university-based teacher preparation, where educational theory and research have also been under attack by the government for being irrelevant and unpractical to the work of school practitioners (Biesta, 2007; Hordern et al., 2021; McCulloch, 2017).

To foreground the question of what education is for, then, is to question the construal of the primary purpose of education as the transmission of essential knowledge. This view is extremely short-sighted and narrow; it attends to the immediate, present question of 'what should they [students] know?' but neglects the future-oriented question of 'what should they [students] become?' (Hamilton, 1999, p. 13). It fails to recognise a fundamental purpose of education—the formation of autonomous and responsible individuals who can flourish and thrive in the present and future world (Deng, 2022a)—which is inextricably connected with the purpose of imparting knowledge. This fundamental purpose is vital to human flourishing, citizen formation and economic development or prosperity (Deng, 2020, 2022a).

To engage in the question of what educational practice is, is to call for a broader understanding of practice and the responsibilities of teachers. Teaching cannot be reduced to merely what teachers do in classrooms or the mastery of a body of skills and procedures. As a human purposeful enterprise, teaching has broad social, cultural and educational significance that is beyond the mere passing on of knowledge to students. By helping students acquire 'powerful knowledge' and taking them beyond their immediate surrounding experience, a teacher, in effect, contributes to 'reproducing human societies' and 'providing the conditions which enable them to innovate and change' (Young, 2009, p. 10). By orchestrating fruitful encounters between students and knowledge content in classrooms, teachers help open up a wealth of opportunities for students to cultivate intellectual, moral and social powers and to learn to become independent and responsible individuals (Deng, 2022a). In short, the social cultural and educational significance of practice goes beyond the exigencies of a classroom; it needs to be grasped in terms of social reproduction and innovation,

individual formation and citizenship cultivation—another way of conceptualising educational goals.

To address the question of how practice can be supported and developed, it is necessary to see teaching as an institutionalised, practical and deliberative endeavour. It is institutionalised because teachers work within a conception of public goods, within an institutional and organisational framework of schooling and within the specific context of a classroom in a school (Deng, 2017). They necessarily engage with three domains of ideas, values, expectations and requirements—pertaining to: (1) educational ideal, culture and tradition; (2) educational policy, an institutional curriculum and schooling; and (3) school/classroom curriculum making, teaching, learning and assessment (see Alexander, 2004). Teaching is practical and deliberative because in classrooms, teaching entails intellectual and moral judgement and complex decision making, rather than being a mere employment of best practice and what works. At the heart of teaching is the process of curriculum making directed towards not only enhancing 'epistemic access' (Winch, 2013) to discipline content, but also creating fruitful encounters with the content to bring about opportunities for the cultivation of human powers. It entails *Didaktik* thinking centred on the what and why of teaching, with a concern for the purposes of education and the educational potential of what is to be taught (Deng, 2018a).

Universities can make an indispensable and vital contribution to ITE and continuing professional development if educational theory and research are reconfigured and developed in ways that are significant and matter to practice—and thus to the professional education of teachers. It is for this reason, I argue, that education is a 'practical' discipline in its own right, centrally concerned with the understanding and development of practice—embedded in the socio-cultural, institutional context and instructional contexts of schooling—for the advancement of education. Such a discipline can serve as a bridge for bringing together the foundation disciplines and other theoretical sources in the study of practice for the development of practice. As such, it acts as the crowning discipline that organises the foundation disciplines and related theoretical sources towards the professional education of teachers. Teachers are provided with opportunities to engage with fundamental questions concerning the purposes of education and to develop a well-informed understanding about teaching as social, institutionalised, practical and deliberative practice. They are also provided with opportunities to connect practice with broad educational purposes and with an institutional curriculum and to develop educational and *Didaktik* thinking. All this is predicated on the development of a body of professional knowledge called for in the discipline of education as advanced in this paper—'a "powerful" educational knowledge base steeped in reflective consideration of educational purposes and processes, but yet meaningful and relevant to the practical work of educators' (Hordern et al., 2021, p. 143).

ETHICS STATEMENT

This is a theoretical paper which involves no research subject or empirical data. Ethics approval is not required.

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ENDNOTES

[i] Education as a multidisciplinary field of study stands for the dominant model in England. There are other models of educational knowledge. For example, education 'may be seen as a "subject" defined by its curriculum content and drawing selectively upon the methods of the contributory areas of psychology, sociology, philosophy, history and economics' (QAA, 2019, p. 4).

[ii] From the perspective of the practical, all theory is incomplete and partial and has a perspective bias. With the use of eclectic arts, researchers 'discover and take practical account of the distortions and limited perspective which a theory imposes on its subject' (p. 323) and modify that theory for practical considerations. They combine various theories to form a more appropriate 'whole' for application to issues and problems concerning practice. In other words, researchers use various theories in combination 'without paying the full prices of their incompleteness and partiality' (Schwab, 1970/2013, p. 600; also see Schwab, 1973).

[iii] This term is borrowed from Browning's (1983) *Practical theology*. He wrote: 'Practical theology should be the crowning discipline organising the other theological specialities toward the end of formulating the specific rules and procedures governing clerical practice in the church' (p. 4).

[iv] The origin of *Pädagogik* can be traced back to Johann Amos Comenius, Johann Friedrich Herbart and Friedrich Schleiermacher, among other continental thinkers (see Hopmann, 2007; Wulf, 2003).

[v] Tröhler (2021) examines German Protestantism and how it eventually gave rise to the theory of inner *Bildung*, at the heart of which is the idea 'the perfectibility of the soul as an educational project' (p. 265).

[vi] As a response to the concern for the weakening of knowledge, the revised National Curriculum introduced in 2014 moves away from the emphasis on generic competences and refocuses on content knowledge. It focuses on 'the core subject knowledge that every child and young person should gain at each stage of their education' (DfE, 2010, p. 11).

[vii] Prepared and written by higher education institutes, impact case studies 'outline the changes and benefits that research has had on society, economy, public policy and practice, environment and quality of life'. They are 'presented within a template, are up to 5 pages in length and undergo peer review by a panel of experts' (https://research-impact-toolkit.co.uk/impact-case-studies/).

[viii] Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, responsible for inspecting and regulating schools in England.

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