From constructivism to realism in the sociology of the curriculum[i]

"Education is… a living struggle, a replica on a small scale of the conflicting purposes and tendencies which rage in society at large" Karl Mannheim

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to offer a critical assessment of what curriculum theorists and policy makers can learn from the sociology of education [1]. It is both historical and conceptual in approach- charting changes over time and emphasizing a shift between different sociological approaches to knowledge. It begins in the early 1970s when sociologists of education in England began to challenge the whole idea of a curriculum and that claims for some knowledge to be "worthwhile", "true" or "better" were other than ideological smokescreens legitimating the authority of those in power. The first section indicate some of the problems, both educational and political, that such an approach to knowledge and the curriculum gave rise to. Section 2 stands back from the historical account and sets out the assumptions about knowledge on which the rest of the paper is based. Section 3 focuses explicitly on the 'new sociology of education' and 'critical curriculum studies' and their strengths and weaknesses and argues that if as sociologists we are to take the issue of 'knowledge' seriously, we must think again about what it means to assert that knowledge (and hence the curriculum) is ***social****. Section 4 considers the 'neo-institutionalist' approach to the curriculum and their argument that it is best seen as a product of an emerging global culture. This research tradition, initiated by John Meyer and his colleagues at Stanford University, has been largely neglected within the sociology of the curriculum both in the UK and the USA. I summarise their main findings, and explore the implications of their concept of the curriculum as an 'institution'. Section 5 returns to the question of knowledge as central to any sociology of the curriculum and suggests that its starting point must be the* ***structured differentiation*** *of knowledge. It develops this idea through a discussion of the ideas of Emile Durkheim and Basil Bernstein and refers to some of those who have developed Bernstein's ideas since his death. Section 6 concludes the paper with some reflections on the previous analysis and its implications for a future agenda for the sociology of the curriculum in the uncertain era that we face of an increasingly global economy and the ever expanding role of information and communication technologies.*

1 This paper is written from the perspective of a sociologist of education working in the UK. However I am aware that the sociology of the curriculum embraces a much wider field within educational studies and includes a number of strands of curriculum theory which I have not been concerned with. I have treated the 'new(but now far from new) sociology of education' that was first developed in the UK and the 'critical curriculum studies' that emerged in the USA and other Anglophone countries as sub fields with largely common purposes, despite their different origins and somewhat different trajectories of development. I have not, within the time and space available, been able to go much beyond English and American developments. This does not imply that I do think there has not been important work elsewhere(especially in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa). It does imply my reluctance to write about a body of work with which I have only limited familiarity. The issues about knowledge and the curriculum that this paper is concerned with, however, are far from nationally bounded as I found in lecturing recently in China, Japan, Brazil and other European countries.

1. Introduction

"What is educationally worthwhile knowledge?" and "what are(and what should be) the significant differences between curriculum or school knowledge and the everyday common sense knowledge that people acquire at home in the community and in the workplace?". Until the 1970s, answers to these questions were either taken for granted as part of existing educational systems or left to philosophers to clarify in terms of their epistemological and ethical implications. Education was seen as a good thing; the only big issues for sociology were why progress to upper secondary and higher education was limited to the few and how(and for some, whether) opportunities could be expanded and how far. The 'what' of education, the knowledge that students did or did not acquire was not questioned. Likewise it was accepted that school and non-school knowledge were different as they had always been. Only rarely in the past, and invariably around religious issues, did the content of the knowledge that was included in the curriculum, become part of educational let alone wider public or political debates.

With the publication of **Knowledge and Control** (Young 1971) in England and Michael Apple's **Ideology and the Curriculum** (Apple 1979) in the USA, this situation began to change, at least within the somewhat limited fields of educational research and teacher education. What became known as the 'new sociology of education' and 'critical curriculum studies' that these books led to showed that the curriculum and its selection and structuring of knowledge need not and indeed should not be taken as given. The curriculum, these books argued, was neither a neutral nor a technical issue but had to be understood in terms of questions about power, politics and ideology both within and beyond schools. More significantly, making explicit the largely hidden links between knowledge and power meant that the curriculum did not remain just a matter of administrative or academic debate. In showing how questions about knowledge and the curriculum could be seen as 'political', the 'new sociology of education' offered(or at least claimed to offer) tools for teachers and educational researchers with which to

challenge and even overthrow existing curricula and develop more democratic forms that would reflect wider and not just elite needs and interests. It is not surprising that such developments generated such opposition, both within universities and beyond; some of the most basic assumptions of modern societies were being called into question. Studying sociology of education in the 1970s was, many teachers said, a literally 'mind changing experience'.

Looking back, over 30 years later, when the basic assumptions of this sociological approach to the curriculum have undergone such sustained criticism, it is worth remembering the initial vision of democratic control that was symbolized by the idea that the curriculum was not something given but a social and political construct reflecting particular sets of interests, beliefs and values. As is indicated by a recent collection (Weiss et al 2006) that reflects on the influence of Michael Apple's work in the USA and globally, the political vision and the sense of possibilities that inspired the early sociology of the curriculum still captures the imagination of many educators. That said, it is not clear that the congratulatory tone of Lois Weiss and her colleagues' book can really be justified. Firstly, although the critical vision that they endorse may live on, at least in the UK, it no longer has any direct involvement with teacher education or with educational policy; both appear to have been able to disregard it. Is this because it has been domesticated? In other words, was it allowed a space in the academy but with few if any opportunities to relate to practice or policy. Undoubtedly there is some vaalidity in this view (Young 2004). Or, as I shall argue in relation to both the English tradition of the 'new sociology' that I was associated with and the American tradition of 'critical curriculum studies', does its lack of influence reflect its flawed assumptions about knowledge and the curriculum?

Important though visions are (for without them we would have no basis for envisaging real alternatives, as is all too evident in much contemporary political debate), on their

own they are not enough, at least if they claim to be based on social science. They can easily become dogmas, and as a result, largely immune to debate and criticism. The sociology of education is in an ambiguous position as an intellectual field, being neither a science nor one of the humanities. As a social science it makes claims to have theories that ***explain*** educational(and in the case here) curricular problems with sufficient grounds, both conceptual and empirical, to be taken seriously by policy makers and teachers. On the other hand as Jeffrey Alexander (1991) once argued about sociology in general, theories in the social sciences are never just explanations; they always involve visions about the possibilities of something better. It is too easy for anyone involved in education, and even more so for sociologists of education on the Left who are more than most, aware of injustices, to allow the search for inequalities to dominate their thinking and allow the difficult search for and testing of theories to be neglected. This is what many of us involved in the 'new sociology of education' were inclined to do the 1970s and this is what many of the authors writing in Lois Weiss's collection still tend to do more than 30 years later. As social (or educational) scientists, we can, I am sure, and without losing our visions or our politics, do better.

A shift from vision to theory imposes constraints on our thinking as sociologists that were dismissed by the 'new sociology of education' in the 1970s with what now seems an excess of naivety and wishful thinking. What was dismissed, and this is a key point in this paper that I will return to, are two truths[2] which any sociological analysis of education cannot, I now think, avoid. The first is that schooling, or formal education more broadly, involves the transmission of knowledge from one generation to another. This has to be a premise of the sociology of education, not as it was in the 1970s,

2 The way that I am using truth here is inevitably controversial, and follows philosophers such as Gellner, Williams and Blackburn. For Gellner, for example, and unlike post modernists like Derrida and pragmatists like Rorty, truth is a premise of rational debates not a topic for them. Truth is, to put it another way, a regulatory ideal without which sociology and society as we understand it, would be inconceivable. In the case of education, at least since the mid 19th century, and notwithstanding the romanticism of the 'deschooling' theorists such as Illich(1971) and Reimer(1971), it has been impossible to think rationally about education (or schooling) independently of the idea that we need to transmit knowledge to each successive generation and that this necessitates an expansion of the 'institution' of schooling.

something to be debated[3]. The second truth is that although the knowledge transmitted in curricula changes over time and is not given or beyond question, it imposes constraints on curricula options that it is the task of the sociology of education to explore. In contrast, the 'new sociology of education' treated knowledge as a socially constructed reality like any other. It followed that if knowledge structures like subjects or disciplines appeared to be in the way of reforming the curriculum, they could always be changed. The problem, which I shall return to, was that this over-sociological view of knowledge led to an over-politicised and instrumental view of the curriculum as something that could always be changed if political purposes changed. In pursuing the link between the ***social*** reality of the knowledge structures of the curriculum and the politics of changing them, sociologists of education were led away from identifying the social basis of the knowledge structures themselves. As Basil Bernstein would have put it in his aphoristic way, and I am not here quoting him directly, 'there was too much focus on the purposes to be relayed by schooling and not enough focus on the relay itself".

In reflecting on the sociology of the curriculum as it has developed since the early 1970s, I am not in this paper going to trace the many internecine debates between different varieties of phenomenology, Marxism, feminism and the more recent post modern critiques; these debates have been well rehearsed elsewhere(Ladwig ; Moore and Muller). I want instead to develop two ideas that have until recently been neglected but which, I will argue are central to the future of the sociology of the curriculum. The two ideas are *structural differentiation* and *institutionality* as applied to both knowledge in general and the structuring of knowledge in the curriculum in particular. Both ideas have long been at the centre of sociological theory, particularly that strand which traces its origins back to the French sociologist Emile Durkheim (Lukes 19??YandM M). However, both ideas were neglected and often explicitly dismissed in the early days of

3I do of course imply that there is no need for debates about the form of cultural transmission and the dangers of applying mechanical metaphors of transmission to the transmission of culture.

the sociology of the curriculum in the 1970s, and even more so in the 1980s when it became diversified and increasingly involved in the identity politics of gender and race[4]. The idea of ***structural differentiation***, between fields of knowledge within the curriculum, between theoretical and practical knowledge and between curricular and everyday knowledge was resisted or opposed because it appeared to imply that some forms of differentiation and some knowledge structures could not be overcome or transformed, at least in the short term. Indeed the possibility that such knowledge structures might actually be conditions for learning and the creation of new knowledge seemed to stand in the way of any commitment to a more inclusive and participatory curriculum. Likewise, the idea that the curriculum might have an ***institutional*** form that was not just a product of the day to day realities of classroom life or the sectoral interests of teachers was avoided for somewhat similar reasons[5]. The idea of the curriculum as a social 'institution' that was independent of the activities of teachers and pupils was assumed to have only conservative overtones and was associated with narrow notions of tradition and rule-governedness thus avoiding the possibility that an institution such as the school a curriculum or a subject such as history or physics might represent a condition for some types of learning.

There have been two strands of sociological research on the curriculum that have taken the themes of institutionality and the structural differentiation of knowledge seriously. However, for the reasons I have suggested they were never directly a part of the critical curriculum studies or new sociology of education 'movements'. The first strand was the 'neo-institutionalism' associated with the work initiated by John Meyer and his colleagues at Stanford; I shall discuss their work in Section 4. The second strand has been the work of Basil Bernstein and those who have developed his ideas. As early as

4 This is not to imply that issues concerning race and gender are unimportant for the sociology of the curriculum or vice versa. It is to make the point that the focus on the different axes of diversity and inequality when they were un-related to the question of knowledge led to forms of 'contextualism' that became a diversion from questions about knowledge and its unequal dstribution. The focus on diversity involved, as Moore (2004) has expressed it, a shift in analytical focus from knowledge to knowers ; hence the specificity of the curriculum as a condition for knowledge acquisition was lost.
5 A specific example of what became known as the 'practice turn' in the social sciences.

1970, he identified the idea of knowledge differentiation as a key issue for the sociology of the curriculum. Bernstein has been associated by some with the 'new sociology of education'[6]. However, this confuses two issues. He certainly inspired many of us associated with the 'new sociology of education' to focus on the curriculum(Young 2007a). However from very early in the 1970s he developed his own quite distinctive approach to the curriculum with its roots in a sophisticated interpretation of Durkheim's ideas and had little in common with the radical social constructivism of the 'new sociology of education' (Moore 2004). Bernstein's link with critical curriculum studies is more ambiguous. His work is often referred to by critical curriculum theorists (Apple et al). However if one contrasts the recent collection edited by Lois Weiss and her colleagues (Weiss 2006) and the books based on the series of Bernstein research symposia (Muller et al), it is clear that critical curriculum studies and Bernstein's work have developed in very different directions. Before discussing these two strands of research in more detail, the next section considers the broader issue of how the sociology of the curriculum might address it most fundamental issue, the question of knowledge and why I give such importance in this paper to the ***structural differentiation of knowledge*** and the idea of ***institutionality***.

2. An approach to Knowledge and the Curriculum

Thinking about the role of knowledge in education has to begin, I suggest, not with knowledge itself nor with questioning how we produce and acquire it; both imply a separation of knowledge from its social origins which has so often been part of the problem for the sociology of education. It must begin, I suggest, with reflecting on our *relationship* to the world of which we are a part ***and*** the symbols that we develop in perceiving and making sense of it (Cassirer 2000). It is the ***symbolic*** nature of our relationship to the world that enables us to have knowledge that we can rely on; and it is that relationship that distinguishes us as human beings who create and acquire knowledge

6 Not unreasonably as one of his most influential papers was included in my book **Knowledge and Control** which was subtitled New Directions for the Sociology of Education(Young 1971)

and transform the world, from animals who can only adapt to the world as they find it. It is for that reason that Durkheim and Vygotsky among others, put education, seen as the acquisition of knowledge, at the centre of their ideas about society and human development. How else, they asked, other than through learning(and teaching) could we become social and in the process construct aand change societies? (Young 2003:2007(a) and (b) .

As Aby Warburg, a colleague of the German philosopher, Ernst Cassirer put it:

> The conscious creation of distance between oneself and the external world may be called the fundamental act of civilization" (Cited in Habermas 2001:7)

Viewing knowledge as an expression of the symbolic relationship between us and the world necessarily constrains the range of social (and educational) possibilities open to us at any particular time. Firstly it implies limits on how we can construct the world. Our concepts and theories have a history and a structure which we have to take account of- they vary over time and across cultures but they are not infinitely variable. Secondly the world (both natural and social) of which we have knowledge is itself structured and not arbitrary, even if we can never be absolutely certain what those structures are. This approach to knowledge shares with the 'new sociology of education' of the 1970s, and the writings of those such as Berger and Luckman (1967) that it drew on, the idea that the structures of our knowledge are ***social*** in origin- that they are not either divinely inspired, inherent in our minds or in a world external to us. Our knowledge and the structures such as the different disciplines, subjects and fields though which we acquire and produce it have been created historically by men and women acting collectively.

However, the sociology of knowledge that follows and frames this paper has a very different view of the nature of those structures and their relationship to the world. Although social and therefore not beyond history, knowledge structures (and therefore curricula) face both learners as real constraints and cannot, as some of us once thought, be 'constructed away' by political or pedagogic action(Young and Muller 2007). In this sense philosophers such as Pring(1972) and science educators such as Jevons(1973) were right and I and the 'new sociologists' were wrong when we set no limits on the possibilities of constructing the world differently. What I argue in this paper is that these limits too are social, albeit in a very specific way(Collins 1998).

To what extent the knowledge structures of the curriculum represent barriers to be overcome in the process of creating a fairer and more inclusive system rather than the 'epistemological' price we pay for a better understanding of the world is a major question for the sociology of education. It has been through coming to recognize the dual character of curriculum constraints that I have been led to rethink my ideas about how the question of knowledge in education should be approached and to adopt what I refer to in this paper as a form of 'social realism'[7].

Addressing these issues and especially taking account of the fact that despite or perhaps because it avoided the difficult questions about knowledge, the 'new sociology of education' inspired and continues to inspire researchers and teachers, has turned out to be more difficult than I expected. This came home to me most vividly in reviewing the recent collection by Lois Weiss and her colleagues(Weiss et al_2006; Young 2007). I found myself disagreeing fundamentally with the project of critical curriculum studies that initially I had identified closely with as well as with scholars with whom I have much in common politically[8]. Why might this be so? Firstly, the question of knowledge

7 I am using the term 'social realist' in a particular way that relates to the idea that knowledge is structurally differentiated. that I develop this idea later in the paper, drawing on Durkheim and the more recent work of Collins Moore and Muller.
8 Indeed I have begun to think that it is important for social scientists to hold some distance between their political and intellectual stances. Although our politics will shape our intellectual work, it is misleading to imagine that they will mirror each other in any simple way.

is a uniquely tricky issue and one that I now realize the 'new sociology of education' dealt with superficially at best. It may be that this partly explains the reluctance of educational researchers to engage in 'knowledge' issues. It may also be partly because questions about knowledge are part of a long and intimidating philosophical tradition from Aristotle and Plato to Kant, Hegel, and Popper, and because as this lineage indicates, knowledge issues *are* really difficult. It is also, I suggest, because knowledge questions always take us back to some of our most basic assumptions about what it is to be educated or to educate someone. It is not possible to think more than superficially about education without considering what it is we want students to learn and why. For those of us who teach, at any level, there is always a tension between the real difficulties that students face in learning something and one's confidence as a teacher in saying that despite such difficulties, certain things are ***worth*** learning, a subject or field is ***worth*** studying, for, as the rather misleading phrase expresses it, 'their own sake'. Secondly, questions about knowledge in education involve issues that overlap a number quite distinct specialist literatures(for example, epistemology and the sociology of knowledge and educational policy and practice as well as the wide range of subject knowledges associated with the curriculum). Prior to the advent of sociology of the curriculum these literatures had few if any connections and it was possible to specialize in one and be ignorant of the others. It is therefore not surprising that many curriculum researchers put questions about knowledge aside as problems best left to other specialists, and try to get on with their research. Reaching the conclusion that this sort of pragmatic option was not good enough arose less for me from any theoretical principle and more from my experience throughout the 1990s when I had little directly to do with sociology of education and worked on curriculum policies for post school and vocational education(Young 2007). I kept coming up against issues such as the differences between the types of knowledge that could be acquired in workplaces and the knowledge acquired in colleges and schools and what might be involved in claiming that the vocational curriculum should somehow enable students to 'integrate' them. It was not possible to

even begin to provide answers to such questions without a theory of knowledge that identified types of knowledge and the conditions for their acquisition. Another issue that arose from my curriculum work was the difficulties that vocational teachers face when governments try to base the vocational curriculum on statements of outcomes or standards(Young 2005). How do you develop a curriculum from a set of standards? Or is one dealing, as I came to believe, with a fundamental incompatibility between acquiring skills and demonstrating competence on the one hand and acquiring knowledge on the other?(Allais 2005:2006;2007;Weelahan: Young 2004). It was these practical issues faced by those developing a vocational curriculum that could not be adequately resolved 'practically' and called for a new approach to knowledge; they led me back to Durkheim's sociology and how he dealt with the issue of differentiation (Young 2003) .

In the 1970s, the 'new sociology of education' re-stated the argument already implicit in Durkheim that the sociology of education needed a social theory of knowledge. However this involved a problem that I, like most of those involved in the sociology of education at the time, avoided. A social theory of knowledge can easily slip into a form of sociological reductionism. For some, of course, this was part of the attraction of social theory. If knowledge can be reduced to the interests or standpoints of knowers, all kinds of new possibilities appear open[9]. However, this type of reductionism[10] can also mean that questions about the curriculum lose their specificity and become almost synonomous all other examples of the uneven distribution of power. A tendency to lose what is specific to the curriculum - how and what knowledge is acquired and how it should be paced, sequenced and assessed - was the trap that the 'new sociology of education' and 'critical curriculum studies' often fell into and perhaps why their substantive research record (Whitty 2006) in relation to curriculum subjects is, with some exceptions[11], not impressive.

9 a view that my colleague Geoff Whitty referred to aptly at the time as 'naïve possibilitarianism'(1974)
10 I use the term to refer to questions about knowledge, such as scientific truths, being 'reduced' to questions about knowers- the backgrounds and personal interests of scientists.
11 Ball, Goodson …

The alternative to reductionism that retains the insights from the sociology of knowledge follows from two of Durkheim's much neglected ideas. One is the distinction that he makes between knowledge and experience which he traces to the early separation between the sacred and the profane in aboriginal societies (D and D). It is this separation that underpins the idea that knowledge is ***structurally differentiated*** that informed Bernstein's approach to the differentiation of curricular knowledge that I will return to in a later section of this paper. The idea that knowledge is structurally differentiated from experience is not straightforward or without its problems(Muller 2000: Young 2003). It can easily become the basis for the total separation of the two and lead back to Kant's a-social idealism that Durkheim set out to replace. On the other hand, without separating knowledge and experience, at least analytically, it is difficult to see how we can find principled grounds for making the school/non-school knowledge distinction that is crucial to an theory of the curriculum.

Durkheim's second insight that many traditions in the sociology of knowledge fail to grasp(D 1984)[12], was that the sociality of knowledge does not undermine its objectivity by introducing bias, as much sociology of knowledge assumes; for Durkheim, knowledge's social basis is the condition for its objectivity and why we rely on it. For Durkheim it is our *social* being as humans that grounds the very possibility of us having objective knowledge about the world (Durkheim 1983). However, such a position also has its dangers. It can easily slip from providing grounds for the authority of knowledge and of course of the teacher, to being a licence for authoritarianism and the imposition knowledge. One of the tasks of the sociology of the curriculum today is to develop Durkheim's idea and specify the new societal forms- modern versions of CS Peirce's 'communities of enquiry'(Pierce)- which could be the condition for the acquisition and production of knowledge and underlie its objectivity in a fast changing and increasingly globalised world. Michael Gibbons and his colleagues with their Mode1/Mode 2

12 An outstanding exception is of course Randall Collins in his remarkable book, **A Sociology of Philosophies** (Collins 2000)

distinction(Gibbons et al 1994) offer an interesting way of conceptualizing this issue. However, they avoid the epistemological issues and the possibility that giving priority to knowledge acquisition and production, as ,for example ,in the university, might require resistance to the blurring of boundaries and the pressures for transdisciplinarity.

With these general principles about how the sociology of education might re-think the question of knowledge, the next section turns more explicitly to the "new sociology of education' and the closely linked field of 'critical curriculum studies'.

3. Knowledge and the Curriculum in the 'new sociology of education'

Like many researchers working in the field of educational studies, I was excited by Michael Apple's book *Ideology and Curriculum* (Apple 1979) when it was first published over 25 years ago. It resonated with, and in certain ways extended, the attempts of a number of us in the UK (e.g Young and Whitty1977: Whitty and Young 1976) to use the sociology of knowledge to develop a critical approach to the curriculum. Finding some of our ideas being picked up with such enthusiasm in the USA made us feel part of a global movement and not just a national sub-discipline. Writing after the publication of Bowles & Gintis's influential Marxist critique of American schooling(Bowles and Gintis 1976), Apple was able to demonstrate the 'politics' or non-neutrality of the curriculum and how the everyday practices of teachers in classrooms expressed and even mirrored the unequal power relations of capitalist societies. Furthermore, he was not trapped in Bowles and Gintis's over-economistic and deterministic version of Marxism. Influenced by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, and especially the work of Paul Willis(Willis 1977), Apple's later books (Apple 1984…) built on the idea that the dominant relations in a capitalist society that were expressed in the curriculum as elsewhere were not only social class relations but invariably relations of gender and race. Furthermore he argued that these dominant power

relations were always, even if not consciously, resisted and therefore always had to be 'achieved' by those in power. By incorporating the concept of hegemony into his curriculum analysis, Apple's more recent books ( ), with their analysis of the project of 'conservative modernisation', have reminded the educational research community that innovation is by no means always progressive. At the same time and against the trend of the times, he has retained the political optimism of his earlier work by drawing on (sometimes rather selectively) local exemplars of resistance. However, despite the merits of these analyses, the flexible form of neo-marxism that underlies his and other research in the 'critical curriculum studies' tradition leads to a number of problems which have parallels with those of the increasingly fragmented forms of 'identity politics' that have recently been influential in the sociology of education in the UK Mendick. The lack of any explicit theory of knowledge has made it difficult for these more 'politicised' approaches to do more than critique the the new instrumentalism of the Blair and Bush governments and the former's emphasis on competition, targets and ranking of schools. Secondly, the absence of an explicit theory of knowledge is linked to a parallel absence of substantive curriculum analyses. If the curriculum is assumed to be politics by other means, then one example is as good as any other. I shall return to this point in the concluding section of the paper.

I think those of us in the UK and US and elsewhere who, since the 1970s, have drawn on the sociology of education to develop a critical approach to educational studies must address the unintended consequences of our over-politicization of the curriculum. In other words, we have to re-examine what we mean by *being critical* in curriculum studies and whether it is possible to have a coherent concept of criticality without an explicit theory of knowledge(Moore 2007). Critical curriculum studies documents how subordinate groups are discriminated against. However without a counter theory of knowledge it has no basis for suggesting what a system that discriminated less against the oppressed groups and subordinate classes might look like. Nor can it offer a reliable claim that doing away with or even modifying the characteristic features of the current system- its subjects, its pedagogic

hierarchies, its external examinations and its text books, would make discrimination and inequality less rather than more likely.

The mistake that I and others made in the 1970s and 1980s was to imagine that if we exposed the power relations underlying curricula and convinced others that they were the reality of public education, somehow a more democratic and equal distribution of education would follow. It has not happened and in some ways it can be argued that public education has gone backwards or at least not forwards in the last 25 years. For example, in England so-called 'vocational' options and 'functional skills' are being introduced for 14-year-olds under the superficially progressive mantras of widening participation and choice ( ). There is hardly a debate about the possibility that the introduction of these new 'choices' could well exacerbate the exclusion of the most disadvantaged young people from access to what in Section 5 I shall refer to as 'powerful knowledge'(Weelahan: Young 2008)

We have to ask what went wrong—not just with the policies of successive governments in different countries, but with our theory. What 'critical curriculum studies' in the US and much sociology of education in the UK tended to forget(and major strands of each still forget) is that to assert that the curriculum is an expression of power relations is at best only a beginning; it is a stance not a hypothesis. Unequal power relations are necessarily involved in curricula for the same reason that pedagogic relations are necessarily hierarchical; they express relationships between those with specialist knowledge and those without it. Many of us were attracted by Bourdieu and Passeron's(1990) evocative conceptualisation of pedagogy as 'symbolic violence' and therefore something to be opposed or at least located in the wider structures of capitalist power(Althusser 1971). What we neglected were the problems posed by Bourdieu's less heralded claim that culture is arbitrary and therefore any form of cultural transmission, in imposing itself as if it was not arbitrary, is 'violent'. It is significant that Bourdieu himself in his last book addressed this problem head on in trying to resolve the contradictions of recent developments in the sociology of science(Bourdieu 2004). If all

culture is arbitrary and all pedagogies are forms of symbolic violence and therefore to be struggled against, the logical conclusion is that each generation would have to re-invent knowledge anew and we would, like animals, be limited to survival (but with a much more limited range of instinctive capacities to draw on). The counter argument made here is not to deny that education involving the acquisition of knowledge is a legacy from past generations and will be experienced as external and even threatening by young learners who are born into the world with capacities but no culture. It is to recognise the fundamental pedagogic problem facing teachers and link it with the epistemological problem facing philosophers and sociologists[13]. Furthermore the necessity of acquiring knowledge created by previous generations will threaten and be resisted most by those most disadvantaged by family circumstances. Hence a question for the sociology of education becomes not the imposed nature of the curriculum but what kind of knowledge is provided by the curriculum made available to the most disadvantaged students(Dowling Spradberry). Only with a theory of the differentiation of knowledge can the sociology of education begin to address such questions.

The second strand of the counter argument is that knowledge that takes people beyond their experience has historically been expressed largely in disciplinary or subject forms. Critical curriculum theory has focused on the oppressive relations between knowledge and power and the inequalities that have been embodied historically in the disciplinary and subject basis of school curricula. It has neglected the extent to which the knowledge from which the disadvantaged are dis-proportionally excluded—the social sciences, the natural sciences, history and literature, foreign languages and mathematics and technological subjects such as engineering—is not just the 'knowledge of the powerful' which it has for too long been, but it is also, in an important sense, 'knowledge itself'. As a result, critical curriculum theory can expose neo-liberalism's endorsement of choice and markets and how they inevitably disadvantage children from poor families, but it has no basis for offering an alternative.

13 This 'epistemological dilemma" that was first expressed by Alexander(1991). In a recently revised paper with Rob Moore(Moore and Young 2001:Young 2007) we linked this to the pedagogic dilemma facing teachers and sociologists of education.

Before discussing the theoretical basis for a knowledge-based approach to the curriculum, the next section of the paper tackles the second aspect of the curriculum largely neglected by the 'new sociology of education'- its institutional form. Section 4 considers research findings that suggest that the curriculum is not just a product of social practices or even of government policies. It has emerged, this research suggests as a *social institution*, independently of individual actions. Their findings on global curriculum developments provide important links to the theory of knowledge differentiation developed in Section 5.

4. The Curriculum as a social institution

In a series of studies, 'neo-institutional' sociologists (Meyer and colleagues and ore recently, Baker and Le Tendre) have charted the progressive democratisation and modernisation of the curriculum as a global phenomenon. There are two elements in their analysis that I want to refer to, one is the idea of the 'institutionality' of the curriculum itself and the second is their evidence for a growing and global emphasis in the curriculum on relevance, student choice and the needs of the individual learner or child. These trends are revealed across a wide range of curriculum subjects on which they have data. They argue that the striking similarities across what are in other ways very different national systems are indicative that schooling and specifically the school curriculum is a global modernising institution that expresses an increasingly 'global culture' largely independent of national policies. The statistical data from international surveys that they rely on has limitations which they are aware of, but this does not detract from the power of the data as evidence of global similarities. They are able to challenge the many theories that seek to explain curriculum changes in terms of the priorities of national governments. There are interesting parallels in their argument with Durkheim's ( )famous study of suicide. Durkheim used official statistics to argue that although voluntarily killing oneself is self evidently the ***most individual*** act that is possible, *rates* of suicide are social facts which vary systematically in relation to structural features of

societies such as their degree and form of integration. The parallel with Durkheim in the studies by Meyer and his colleagues is that the curriculum, perhaps the most ***nationally distinctive*** of educational policies, appears, using their cross-national statistical data, as the product of ***internationalising*** or global forces. Dale et al (2000) criticise their thesis as being too descriptive and not explanatory and argue that their data need to be located in the contradictions of global capitalism rather than in their somewhat ill-defined concept of global culture. However they do not challenge the structure of their argument about the curriculum as a global modernising institution.

There are two issues that this research raises for curriculum policy makers and the sociology of the curriculum. One arises from their hypothesis that national policies have had at best a weak causal role in the development of the curriculum. If they are right, this suggests a way of approaching the frequent failures of national curriculum reforms that are increasingly well documented, especially in the field of vocational education(Keep 2006). The second issue which I want to give attention to is their finding that there is growing tendency across the countries that they studied for the 'technical' content of curriculum subjects to be reduced[14]. There a number of interpretations of these findings that the priorities of schooling appear to be changing from a focus on the acquisition knowledge that students are unlikely to have access to at home, to a focus on their 'socialisation' of future citizens. Some would of course argue that this is a change in form rather than purpose and that mass schooling has always been primarily about the 'socialisation' of future citizens; critical curriculum studies and the 'new sociology of education' have frequently adopted a critical version of this argument (Young 2008). Another possible interpretation of their findings is as a challenge to the widely accepted 'knowledge economy' thesis developed by Daniel Bell and Manuel Castells(Bell :Castells :Guile 2006) that argues that more and more jobs are forms of 'knowledge' work and need high levels of learning. It is difficult to see how the neo-

14 in the UK at least, this is acknowledged to be part of a wider attempt to make the curriculum more 'inclusive' and to increase participation. The recent proposal in England for reducing the subject content of school science and encouraging students to debate science-rel;ated issues such as the environment and HIV Aids is an example that lends powerful support to their case.

institutionalists and the knowledge economy theorists can both be right. 'Knowledge acquisition' can have very different meaningS. It can refer, as Bell and Castells imply, to the development of better grounded theoretical understandings; however the research of Meyer and his colleagues provide little support for this kind of global trend at least in mass schooling . It may that whereas Bell , and less explicitly Castells are referring to research-based knowledge which is largely acquired in the university. The neo-institutionalists, on the other hand have statistics on those going through mass schooling, many of whom will never reach university. This suggests the emergence of new divisions hardly yet studied by sociologists of education. 'Knowledge acquisition' can and is often seen negatively and associated with 'the accumulation of facts'. It is this interpretation that has led countries such as Singapore to attempt to re-design their curriculum in line with the slogan *Thinking Schools:Learning Nation ( )* . One consequence of this shift away from content to 'thinking' skills is a curriculum model in which the process of thinking takes precedence over what the thinking is about. Whether the evacuation of subject content that the neo-institutional research points to implies a process of 'up-skilling' through the development of new 'intellectual skills' as the Singapore government hopes will happen or a process of 'down-skilling' because thinking without content is impossible, remains another important but neglected research question for the sociology of education. Over twenty years ago Braverman (1976) commented, in a postscript to his book **Labour and Monopoly Capital**, on how the evacuation of content within the school curriculum for the lowest section of each cohort was following the more general 'deskilling' of work. One of the possible implications of the neo-institutionalist findings is that the process identified 30 years ago by Braverman may be extending upwards, albeit masked by the growing number of students gaining some form of school leaving certificate and going on to higher education.

Bernstein's(2000);see also Young 2007 chapter 10)) analysis of the structuring of educational knowledge which is discussed in more detail in the next section, suggests a possible explanation for the content reduction of the curriculum that the research of Meyer and his

colleagues have identified. If the extension of a global culture is a de-specifying or de-differentiating process- in other words knowledge fields, occupational fields and specialist sectors such as education are becoming more similar- then the curriculum is responding to forces that are not concerned with knowledge acquisition and is becoming, in Bernstein's terms, a relay of these forces. We may therefore be seeing a de-differentiation of the curriculum as the primary institution for the acquisition of specialised knowledge transmission. There is evidence that this is both an internal process(the pattern appears similar across different subjects) and an external process(the pattern is common across different national systems). Despite the global evidence for this, it has generated little public anxiety, at least in this country, when governments can also point to evidence of widening participation, longer periods of full time study and higher proportions of each cohort achieving higher grades. I do not mean to imply the well known politically 'conservative' argument that 'more inevitably means worse' and that we may be loosing a strong knowledge-based curriculum even for the few. The possibility however, is that the expansion of mass schooling has been paralleled by the de-differentiation of the curriculum as schools strive to involve an ever widening proportion of each cohort without having the necessary pedagogic resources to be successful with students resist the demands of the curriculum or who find knowledge acquisition particularly difficult. This process may be exacerbated by the 'internationalisation of education policy, the role of international organisations and the increasing emphasis on 'League Tables' and international comparisons. Governments may feel forced to find short cuts to scoring higher on iternational comparisons, regardless of the longer term consequences.

4. Knowledge differentiation and the sociology of the curriculum

In 1971, *Knowledge and Control* (Young 1971) proposed a re-orientation of the sociology of education towards questions of knowledge and the curriculum, and away from its previous focus on the distribution of educational opportunities. This was a

belated recognition, that could be traced back to Durkheim, that it is the process of ***cultural transmission*** that lies at the heart of the role of formal education in modern societies. It followed that a key issue for sociologists was *the discontinuity* between the culture of the curriculum or school knowledge and the culture that different groups of students acquire in their homes, peer groups and communities and bring to school. The social class basis of this cultural discontinuity was first analysed by Bernstein (Bernstein 1971) in his research on language codes and by Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) with his concept of cultural capital. Despite Bourdieu and Bernstein's understanding of complex character of the process of cultural transmission, research in the sociology of education at the time split between a focus on the social factors influencing the differential attainment of children from different social classes which paid little attention to the curriculum, and the 'new sociology of education' which pointed towards the socially distributing effects of the school curriculum without a similar attention to the process of cultural transmission. The sociology of the curriculum that developed in the 1970s and 1980s in England (e.g. Whitty and Young 1976) and later in the USA(Apple, Anyon et al)and Australia (Connell and Tease..) was largely, if not always explicitly, based on a *social constructivist* approach to knowledge. Bringing back the idea that the school is primarily an agency of cultural or knowledge transmission, as it proposed here, raises questions about what is the knowledge that it is the schools' responsibility to transmit. If it is accepted that schools have this transmission role, then a differentiation between school and non-school knowledge is implied. In other words, a curriculum assumes that some types of knowledge are more worthwhile than others, and their differences must form the basis for the differences between school or curriculum knowledge and non-school knowledge.

I developing an approach to knowledge differentiation in the curriculum, I find it useful to distinguish between two ideas- ***"knowledge of the powerful'*** and ***"powerful knowledge"***. "Knowledge of the powerful' is defined by who gets the knowledge in a society and has its

roots in Marx's well known dictum that the ruling ideas at any time are the ideas of the ruling class. Even today when we look at the distribution of access to university, it is those with more power in society who have access to special kinds of knowledge; it is this that I refer to as "knowledge of the powerful". It is understandable that many sociological critiques of school knowledge have equated school knowledge and the curriculum with the idea of ***"knowledge of the powerful'*** . It was, for example, the upper classes in England in the early 19th century who gave up their private tutors and sent their children to the Public(fee charging) schools to acquire powerful knowledge(as well, of course, to acquire powerful friends) . However the fact that some knowledge is 'knowledge of the powerful', or 'high status' knowledge as I once expressed it (Young 1971:Young 1998), tells us nothing about the knowledge itself. We therefore need another concept in conceptualising the curriculum that I want to refer to as ***'powerful knowledge'***. This refers not to who has most access to the knowledge or who gives it legitimacy, although both are important issues; it refers to what the knowledge can do or what intellectual power it gives to those who have access to it; for example, whether it provides more reliable explanations, new ways of thinking about the world and understanding it or a language for engaging in political or moral debates. Powerful knowledge was what the Chartists were calling for with their famous slogan "really useful knowledge"; for them as trade unionists it was a code for a political economy which would help them to understand the conditions of their employment(Johnson 197. Accessing powerful knowledge is, if not always consciously, what parents hope their children will achieve in making sacrifices to keep them at school; they hope that their children will acquire knowledge that is not available to them at home. Powerful knowledge in modern societies in the sense that I have used the term is, increasingly, specialist knowledge and schooling, from this perspective, is about providing access to the specialised knowledge that is embodied in different knowledge domains. The key curriculum questions will be concerned with:

(a) the differences between different forms of specialist knowledge and the relations between them

(b) how this specialist knowledge differs from the knowledge people acquire in

everyday life

(c) how specialist and everyday knowledge relate to each other

(d) how specialist knowledge is 'pedagogised' (in other words, how it is paced , selected and sequenced for different groups of learners.

It is these differences and how they are expressed in different knowledge domains that the idea of the structured differentiation of knowledge refers to.

Underlying these differences is a more basic difference between two types of knowledge. One is the ***context-dependent*** (or everyday, common sense) knowledge that people develop in the course of their everyday lives. It can be *practical*- like knowing how to repair a mechanical or electrical fault or how to find a route on a map. It can also be *procedural*, like a set of regulations for health and safety or a manual for operating a machine(Gamble 2000). ***Context-dependent knowledge*** enables the individual to do specific things and to cope in the world that he or she is a part of; its basis is a mixture of experience, practical good sense and how things are traditionally done. It does not explain or generalise, except in a limited way; it deals with particulars. On the other hand it can be 'ideologised'; in other words when it becomes prejudices and dogmas and draws on unfounded claims to generalisation. The second type of knowledge is ***context-independent knowledge.*** This is knowledge that provides a basis for generalisations and makes claims to universality; it seeks to provide a reliable basis for moving beyond specific contexts and beyond one's experience and for making judgments. It is knowledge that is codified, tested and elaborated by specialist communities and is typically, but not solely, associated with the sciences and technology. It is ***context-independent knowledge*** that is not, except incidentally, available in homes and communities; it is acquired with the support of specialist teachers and is therefore at least potentially acquired in school. Context-independent knowledge is also open to ideologising; The extent to which the specialist knowledge communities such as universities or more

general forms of accountability limit this tendency varies. Context-independent knowledge is what I referred to earlier as ***powerful knowledge***. [15]

Inevitably schools are not always successful in enabling pupils to acquire powerful knowledge. It is also true that schools are more successful with some pupils than others. The success of pupils is partly dependent on the culture that they bring to school. Elite cultures that are less constrained by the material exigencies of life, are, not surprisingly, far more congruent with acquiring context-independent knowledge than disadvantaged and subordinate cultures. The distributional consequences of a curriculum based on context-independent knowledge means that schools have to take the knowledge base of the curriculum very seriously-even when this appears to go against the immediate demands of pupils (and sometimes of their parents). Teachers have to ask the question "Is this curriculum a means by which pupils can acquire powerful knowledge?" For children from disadvantaged homes, active participation in school may be the only opportunity that they have to acquire powerful knowledge and be able to move, intellectually at least, beyond their local and the particular circumstances. It does them no service to construct a curriculum around their experience on the spurious democratic grounds that everyone's experience needs to be validated; if schools do no more than validate experience, they can only leave them there. The idea of school and non-school knowledge being structurally differentiated provides the basis for making curriculum decisions; it is not adequate on its own as a basis for pedagogy. The pedagogic role of the school means that teachers have to develop ways of moving beyond the non-school knowledge that pupils and students bring to school. This process which Bernstein refers to as re-contextualisation is a no less crucial issue for the sociology of education. However it is beyond the scope of this paper.

The most sustained and original attempt to conceptualise the differentiation between school and non-school knowledge is that developed by the English sociologist Basil Bernstein

15 No knowledge of course is entirely context-independent; even the reliability and validity of mathematics is guaranteed ultimately by the community of mathematicians.

(Bernstein 1971;2000). His distinctive insight was to emphasise the key role of boundaries between types of knowledge(or knowledge domains), both as a condition for the acquisition of knowledge(only through engaging with boundaries can learners move beyond their experience and acquire knowledge) and as embodying the power relations that are necessarily involved in pedagogy(boundaries are social and not fixed; however they inevitably include and exclude) . Bernstein began by conceptualising knowledge boundaries in terms of two dimensions. First he distinguished between the ***classification*** of knowledge- or the degree of insulation between knowledge domains(physics and chemistry or history and geography, for example)- and the ***framing*** of knowledge- the degree of insulation between school knowledge or the curriculum and the everyday knowledge that pupils bring to school(for example the relationship between biology as a school subject and the pupil's possibly detailed knowledge of his local habitat). Secondly, he proposed that the ***classification*** of knowledge can be ***strong***- when domains are highly insulated from each other(as in the case of physics and history) – or ***weak***- when the there are low levels of insulation between domains (as in history and geography in the humanities or social studies or physics and chemistry in general science programmes). Likewise, ***framing*** can be ***strong*** – when school and non-school knowledge are insulated from each other, or ***weak***, when the boundaries between school and non-school knowledge are blurred (as in the case of many programmes in adult education and some curricula designed for less able pupils where the knowledge that pupils bring to school is emphasised). In his later work Bernstein(2000) moved from a focus on *relations between* domains to the *structure of the domains* themselves by introducing a distinction between vertical and horizontal knowledge structures. This distinction refers to the way that different domains of knowledge embody different ideas of how knowledge progresses. Whereas in vertical knowledge structures(typically the natural sciences) knowledge progresses towards higher levels of abstraction (for example, from Newton's laws of gravity to Einstein's theory of relativity), in horizontal knowledge structures like the social sciences and humanities, knowledge progresses by developing new languages which pose new problems(an example in sociology is how symbolic interactionism

raised questions that were quite beyond the scope of structural functionalism). Bernstein's second crucial argument was to make the link that between knowledge structures, boundaries and learner identities. His hypothesis was that strong boundaries between knowledge domains and between school and non-school knowledge play a critical role in establishing learner identities and are a key condition for learners to progress.

There are however a number of distinctive aspects in how Bernstein developed the idea of knowledge boundaries, all of which can be traced back to Durkheim (Moore 2004). Firstly, boundaries refer to *relations between contents* not the *knowledge contents themselves*. His sociology did not directly address the specific contents of different subject syllabuses; it asked subject specialists to think about relations between the contents of their subject and other subjects. Secondly, although strong boundaries have traditionally been expressed in disciplines and subjects, from Bernstein's perspective, this is a historical fact and the disciplines and subjects with whichy we have become familiar are not necessarily the only form that strong boundaries can take. Thirdly, he argued that strong boundaries between contents will have distributional consequences; in other words they will be associated with certain inequalities of outcomes. Fourthly, whether innovation is associated with creating new knowledge (in the university) or extending the acquisition of powerful knowledge to new groups of learners, it will involve crossing boundaries and calling into question the identities of both students and teachers.

This section has argued that a key concept for the sociology of the curriculum is ***knowledge differentiation***[16]. It sets a threefold agenda for the sociology of education. Firstly, we must explore the relationship between the purpose of schools[17] to create the conditions for learners to acquire powerful knowledge and both their ***internal structures*** - such as subject divisions- and their ***external structures***- such as the boundaries between schools and professional and

16 In beginning with ***a theory*** of why types of knowledge differ and not just the fact of differences, the concept *knowledge differentiation* is quite distinct from (and a critique of) the superficially similar idea that there are different types of knowledge.
17 Here, schools is a short hand for **all** formal educational institutions.

academic 'knowledge producing communities', between schools and local communities and employers.

Secondly, if schools are to help learners to acquire powerful knowledge, local, national and international groups of specialist teachers will need to be involved with university-based and other specialists in the ongoing selection, sequencing, pacing and inter-relating of knowledge in different domains. Schools therefore will need the autonomy to develop this professional knowledge; it is the basis of their authority as teachers and the trust that society places in them as professionals. This trust may at times be abused; however new ways of making teachers accountable must support that trust rather than try to be a substitute for it. Thirdly, sociologists of education will need to address the tension between the essentially ***conservative*** role of schools as institutions with responsibility for knowledge transmission in society and the pressures on them to respond to an increasingly unstable global market. However, conservative has two very different meanings in relation to schools. It can mean preserving the stable conditions for acquiring 'powerful knowledge' and resisting the political or economic pressures that might undermine such conditions. A good example is how curricular continuity and coherence can be undermined by modularisation and the breaking up of the curriculum into a bank of units which students choose from . The 'conservatism' of educational institutions can also mean giving priority to the preservation of particular privileges and interests, such as those of students of a particular social class or of teachers as a professional group. Radicals and some sociologists of education have in the past tended to equate the two forms of conservatism and assume that schools must become more radical or progressive. This however equation, however treats schools as no more than another arena of politics and takes us back to the tension between differentiation and de-differentiation that I referred to earlier in this chapter.

This section has introduce the concept - ***knowledge*** differentiation as a principled way of distinguishing between school and non-school knowledge. The evidence of the neo-institutional research reported on in Section 5 has suggested that de-differentiation may be leading to a weakening of the boundaries between school and non-school knowledge. I have

drawn on Basil Bernstein's work on the curriculum to suggest that to follow this path may be to deny the conditions for acquiring powerful knowledge to the very pupils who are already disadvantaged by their social circumstances. Resolving this tension between external political pressures on schools and educational realities is, I would argue, one of the major educational questions of our time.

Conclusions

The explicit theme of this paper has been the question of knowledge and more particularly the importance of knowledge in the sociology of the curriculum. However, the paper has had two less explicit themes that might be identified as *change* and *difference*. The idea of change in this paper has referred to sociology of the curriculum since the 1970s. Difference relates to the sense that in the 1970s knowledge differences seemed to be in need of opposition, whereas writing over 30 years later, I have argued that knowledge differences have become in need of defence. I acknowledge that these themes may appear irrelevant to some, especially those who have not shared the history of the last 40 years. Furthermore, it can be reasonably argued both that and I am documenting little more than another example of the cyclical history of ideas moving from one extreme to another. My justification for the semi-auto-biographical approach that I have taken is that my experience is unlikely to be unique and that it represents a deep learning curve towards for me a more reliable sociology of the curriculum which is not primarily a stance to be for or against but a set of hypotheses to be explored. Furthermore, our ideas, our theories and our concepts are no different, in one sense, from those of earlier generations of sociologists. Like them they have to be seen in their historical context; they are always developed in opposition to other ideas, even when no explicit reference is made to what they are opposing. That is the only reliable way they can be understood, made use of and developed and what sets them apart from concepts and theories in the natural sciences.

I have traced the issue of knowledge in the sociology of education historically and biographically. I began with the hopes that I and others involved in the 'new sociology of education in the 1970s had for the emancipatory potential of bringing the sociology of knowledge into educational studies. These hopes were doubtless more a product of the radical climate of the time, when in a way that it is easy now to forget–all things seemed possible- than of a rigorous sociology. We took ideas, often

eclectically, from bodies of knowledge as diverse as phenomenology, cultural anthropology and Marxism when they appeared to support the fragility of what was given and possibility of change. As I have written about elsewhere(Young and Muller 2007) this unlimited radicalism itself contributed to the undoing of the project of the 'new sociology of education'. Through a focus on the more traditional sociological themes of institutionality and the structural differentiation of knowledge, Sections 4 and 5 of this paper seek to rescue the sociology of the curriculum from its own earlier weaknesses and learn from its mistakes, without, as it were, 'throwing the baby out with the bathwater'. The major weakness of the new paradigm that I have proposed is that despite its promise, it lacks empirical substantiation. Inevitably empirical work is more difficult if one is trying, at the same time, to tackle basic epistemological issues; however that is only a partial excuse. One encouraging example is the possibility of links between the kind of social realist approach to the curriculum proposed here and the large scale empirical research of the neo-institutionalists discussed in chapter 4.

I want to conclude this paper by stepping back[18] and then looking forward. In conceptualising the problem of knowledge in the sociology of the curriculum I have drawn on a series of dichotomies, some taken from Durkheim such as the 'sacred' and the 'profane', some from Bernstein such as 'vertical' and 'horizontal' knowledge structures, some not associated with one particular theorist such as school/non-school and context-dependent/context-independent types of knowledge and my own distinction between 'knowledge of the powerful' and 'powerful knowledge'. This dichotomising raises a number of questions. Does it over-simplify the issues? Do the dichotomies adequately capture social and educational realities of knowledge? Surely no knowledge is entirely context-independent or vertical? Does it leave me open to the charge that I am doing little more than returning to a traditional view of knowledge as something given and to be adapted to, at least for all except those at the leading edge of research?

Rob Moore and I tackled this issue in an earlier paper which I have recently revised for re-publication(Moore and Young 2001:Young 2007(chapter 2) . Elaborating slightly on our original ideas, we can pose the knowledge issue in education in terms of a fourfold typology. The four types are (i) the *conservative traditionalists* who

18 I making these final comments, I am grateful to one of the referees for this paper, Bill Green(Charles Sturt University, Australia)

take school knowledge as given. In relation to educational research I am referring to those researchers who do not problematise the social basis knowledge in their approach to curriculum and pedagogy; (ii) the *technocratic(or pragmatic)instrumentalists* who see knowledge as adaptable either to m political and economic purposes or to the learning problems of particular groups of pupils; (iii) the *post modernists* who critique the first two positions but reject the distinction between knowledge and experience;(iv) our position which is similar to the one adopted in this paper which I have referred to as *social realist*. A social realist approach as interpreted here is distinct from (i) to (iii) in a number of senses. First it has an explicit social theory of knowledge and its differentiation and does not treat even the most fundamental categories of knowledge as given as is the case with the *conservative traditionalists*. Secondly, it treats knowledge as social category separate from experience, from the political or economic uses of knowledge and from the pedagogic problems faced by teachers with diverse groups of learners[19]. It aims to set a benchmark that links the social organisation of knowledge(its acquisition and creation) and why some types of knowledge are more powerful than others. It is this differentiation that is elaborated by Bernstein. In recognising the powerful role of 'knowledge producing communities' such as members of specialist disciplines and professions, it can appear 'conservative ' in the second sense I mentioned earlier in the paper. However, by having a theory of knowledge, it provides criteria by which a curriculum can be evaluated in terms of whether or not it provides the conditions for the acquisition of powerful knowledge.

Let us turn to the further question-does dichotomising oversimplify? My answer is

19 the key pedagogic issues from a social realist position are not to alter or reduce the knowledge content of a programme but to alter its pacing and sequencing;

yes, but that we have no alternative. In the social sciences they are not only the only types of concept that we have, but they are our unique conceptual resources. The problems with dichotomies are not in the dichotomies themselves, although some will be more fruitful than others, but in their use. There are always dangers, as Max Weber was the first to point out, that dichotomies can be treated as descriptive and not seen in relation to each other. They do not tell us how the world is or what is a better form of social organisation; they identify trends and tendencies, and enable us to ask questions and propose hypotheses about the world. For example, Bernstein's concepts of classification and framing offer ways of exploring the possible implications of different forms of curricular organisation. Much of the empirical work in the sociology of the curriculum that might or might not lend support to the hypotheses suggested in this paper remains to be done. My argument is that without a set of dichotomies that theorise the differences between school and non-school knowledge we cannot even begin. It can be argued that the concepts that I have introduced in this paper are too static and offer only a synchronic as opposed to a diachronic approach to the curriculum. This I think is true but only if the concepts are presented independently of their empirical substantiation. One , albeit hardly developed example from Bernstein's work is his account higher education and professional curricula in terms of three knowledge relations– singular, regional and generic- with progressively weaker boundaries. In the social sciences we return to old categories which are interpreted and developed in new contexts. We are always dealing with a tension between stability(expressed in the concepts) and change as expressed in empirical reality. It is the concepts which provide us with the criteria for identifying whether change is mere difference. A more overarching theory is what Gellner refers to as the 'providentialism' that one finds in both Hegel and Marx. Gellner argues that it is untenable because it claims to know the future. He substitutes for it what he refers to as 'the great assymetry' of industrialization, not as a future but as a set of possibilities. It is an asymmetry for Gellner, because no society will willingly de-industrialise and return to a life of medieval poverty any more than science will go back to stating that the sun goes round the earth. If we direct Gellner's idea of 'the great assymetry' to the sociology of the curriculum, it means that we cannot go back to a time when the curriculum was a given; its assumptions will always be at least potentially open for debate. That at least is the progress that was achieved by the 'new sociology of education'.

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i This paper draws on some sections of the introduction to Young(2007) and on Young (2008)