

# Recovering Pedagogic Discourse: A Bernsteinian Approach to the Sociology of Educational Knowledge

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This article aims to illustrate why and how the “voice” of pedagogic discourse should be recovered within the sociology of education, through an analysis of how cultural studies has been legitimated by its proponents. Building upon Basil Bernstein’s work, a generative, empirically-applicable, and original means of conceptualizing languages of legitimation is developed and two modes of legitimation—knowledge and knower modes—are defined. From this a narrative of the development of knower modes (exemplified by cultural studies) is elaborated. Dynamic processes of imaginary alliances, idealization, and proliferation and fragmentation are identified, illustrating how the intrinsic features of pedagogic discourse shape the subject area’s development. In so doing, the article raises questions about the future directions of cultural studies and the sociology of education.

## INTRODUCTION

Reviewing the range of dominant approaches within the sociology of education, Basil Bernstein (1990) argues that despite surface differences they overwhelmingly share both a common focus and a common blindspot. The shared focus is on analyzing the ways in which discourses of education work to reproduce external social relations of power, such as class, race and gender; the shared blindspot is the analysis of pedagogic discourse itself, they “assume, take for granted, the very discourse which is subject to their analysis” (op. cit., p. 165). Bernstein argues that existing sociological approaches construct pedagogic discourse as a neutral relay for external power relations and regard its intrinsic

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**Linguistics and Education 11(1): 79–98**  
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ISSN: 0898–5898

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features as irrelevant for an understanding of education, the central concern being instead the voices said to be silenced by pedagogic discourse:

It is often considered that the voice of the working class is the absent voice of pedagogic discourse, but ... what is absent from pedagogic discourse is its own voice ... It is as if the specialized discourse of education is only a voice through which others speak.

(op cit., pp. 165, 166)

This article takes up Bernstein's insistence on the need for the sociology of education to recover the analysis of pedagogic discourse itself. My principal aims are to illustrate how the *intrinsic features* of pedagogic discourse may be analyzed and their significance for understanding educational knowledge; i.e., how to recover this voice and what it can tell us. Given the well-known criticism that Bernstein's work is overly abstract and theoretical, I shall illustrate this approach through an analysis of cultural studies.

In addition, the *structure* of the article aims to illustrate the generative mode of concept formation and relation between the empirical and the theoretical which Bernstein argues are required for a scientific and cumulative sociology of education (1996, pp. 134–144). These can be understood as addressing two further limitations endemic to the sub-discipline: a division between theoretical and empirical research (Whitty, 1985), and the tacit empiricism and innate conservatism of analyzing only perceivable phenomena. Briefly, Bernstein proposes that empirical descriptions of phenomena should be redescribed so as to conceptualize their underlying principles in a non-tautological manner, and that theories should be *generative*, i.e., capable of generating descriptions of other possible empirical realizations of these underlying principles. In other words, an adequate analysis requires: an empirical language of description; a theoretical language of description; and a conceptual means of translating between these two (from theory to empirical descriptions and vice versa) in a non-tautological and non-arbitrary way. The latter is crucial, for without an explicit means of translation, theoretical and empirical descriptions remain divorced from one another. Accordingly, this article has three main stages:

1. I begin by briefly outlining the development of cultural studies in terms of its "language of legitimation" (the ways in which practitioners have legitimated the subject area).
2. From this empirical description I develop a generative means of conceptualizing languages of legitimation, one which facilitates their redescription in empirical terms.
3. Lastly, this conceptual framework is used to generate a theoretical narrative of the intrinsic dynamic generated by the mode of legitimation

exemplified by cultural studies, showing how this feature of pedagogic discourse has *itself* shaped the subject area's development.

### THE LANGUAGE OF LEGITIMATION OF CULTURAL STUDIES

The feature of cultural studies I shall focus on is its *language of legitimation*, the ways in which cultural studies has been legitimated by its proponents through their espoused or proclaimed practices. Such languages of legitimation are crucial in the emergence, institutionalization and development of academic subjects—they represent claims made by actors to maximize their positions and carve out intellectual and institutional spaces within the field of higher education (cf. Bourdieu, 1988). When actors make claims on behalf of their academic subject or approach they are also proposing a ruler for participation within the field and proclaiming criteria by which achievement within this field should be measured. Thus, far from being mere marketing rhetoric to be ignored or bombast to be punctured, legitimating discourse represents the basis for competing claims to limited material resources and status within higher education. They are strategic stances aimed at maximizing their authors' positions within a relationally structured field of struggles (cf. Bourdieu, 1993). I shall begin by briefly outlining some of the dominant themes characterizing the language of legitimation of cultural studies.<sup>1</sup>

#### Breaking Down Boundaries

Cultural studies has often been characterized as actively opposed to notions of disciplinarity (Nelson & Gaonkar, 1996). Practitioners typically make a virtue of its proclaimed non-disciplinary nature, describing it as “cross-,” “inter-,” and even “anti-disciplinary” (Green, 1982; Johnson, 1983; Storey, 1993), and as committed to breaking down boundaries and hierarchies within education: between disciplines; between formal educational knowledge and everyday experience; and between the teacher and the taught. Indeed, cultural studies has been obsessed with images of crossing borders and boundaries (Giroux, 1992b; Giroux & McLaren, 1994; Salper, 1991). One main aspect of this is a commitment to the academic study of non-official knowledge (“popular culture,” “mass culture,” “everyday life”)—bringing the profane into the realm of the sacred.

#### The Study of Everything

Proponents argue that cultural studies is not limited by disciplinary notions of the identification of a delimited and specified object of study and procedures of inquiry (Turner, 1990). Its object and procedures of study are thus relatively uncircumscribed and *hypothetically* boundless. This is illustrated by the primacy

accorded within accounts of cultural studies to definitions of “culture” embracing an extremely wide compass—such as “signifying practices,” “everyday life” and in particular Raymond Williams’s (1961) “a whole way of life”—and the celebration of diversity in methodology and criteria as a virtuous and defining characteristic of the field (Hall, 1971; McGuigan, 1997). Its emergence is also typically related to arguments emphasizing Leavisite notions of the irreducible wholeness of experience and the need to analyze culture and society in their interwoven totality and complexity (Hall, 1960; Hoggart, 1964).

### **Ever Thicker Descriptions**

Cultural studies has, thus, often been portrayed as offering an antidote to intellectualist tendencies towards the “elitist” and “simplistic” generalizations of the detached observer. Studies of its disparate foci have correspondingly tended to generate thicker descriptions, show greater complexity and encompass wider and less delimited objects of study. For example, the development of audience studies since the late 1970s can be understood as a movement through the analysis of: meanings “encoded” into media texts (Brunsdon & Morley, 1978); how audiences differentially “decode” texts (Morley, 1980); what shapes the contexts of reception (Hobson, 1982); and how these contexts are related to other aspects of audiences everyday lives (Morley, 1986). This represents a movement outwards from a delimited object of study towards an interwoven totality, and from notions of generalizability towards the irreducible particularity and complexity of experience.

### **Radical Pedagogies**

Central to the legitimation of cultural studies has been its identification with a radical educational project concerned with empowering and forging alliances with dominated social groups (Giroux, Shumway, Smith, & Sosnoski, 1984). It has become associated with developing democratic and participatory forms of teaching, evaluation, social organization and curricula, and reaching out to wider constituencies beyond the academy (McLaren, 1993). As such, cultural studies is frequently portrayed as offering educators an oppositional pedagogy capable of giving voice to groups said to be silenced within and by established pedagogic discourses (Giroux, 1992a; Giroux & Shannon, 1997).

### **“Giving Voice To”**

This notion of “giving voice” to the knowledge and experience of marginalized and previously excluded social groups has been a recurring theme in the legitimation of the subject area’s practices, epistemologies, and methodologies (Canaan & Epstein, 1997). It also underpins the conventional schema of the curricular development of cultural studies as a movement through the study of class, race, gender, and sexuality: early work focused on giving voice to

*working-class men*; there followed a feminist emphasis in the 1970s on the silenced voice of *women*; and these were both in turn critiqued in terms of *race* and then later, *sexuality* (Brantlinger, 1990; Jordan & Weedon, 1995).

### **Subjective Epistemologies**

Cultural studies has thus been a key site within higher education for the various “interventions” of feminism, race studies, queer theory, and so forth. Common to these is a critique of the ability of existing “voices” to represent a new “voice,” underpinned by (often implicit) notions of standpoint epistemology (Carby, 1982; Walkerdine, 1997); i.e., claims to specialized and unique insight are based upon one’s subjective experiences as a member of a specific, usually dominated, social category. Cultural studies has also been associated with the development of anti-positivist and anti-foundationalist ideas. Legitimation of cultural studies has thus often celebrated *difference*, explored subjectivity and identity, and emphasized the multiplicity of truths and narratives against notions of objective truth and grand narratives (Giroux, Lankshear, McLaren, & Peters, 1997).

### **Valorization of Primary Experience**

Since its beginnings in Leavisite notions of critical sensibility, “life” and “experience,” and especially since the eclipse of Althusserian structuralism in the 1970s, cultural studies has tended to emphasize the “subjective” over the “objective” and to valorize primary experience at the expense of the viewpoint of the detached observer. For example, studies of youth subcultures (Thornton & Gelder, 1996) and of television audiences (Morley, 1992) typically critique the “elitist” privileging of the detached academic observer and argue for beginning with the experiences of participants in order to show the active construction of meanings “from below.”

### **Recurrent Radical “Breaks”**

Central to its proclaimed non-disciplinarity is the anti-canonical stance adopted by many within cultural studies. Proponents legitimate the subject area not only as free from the restrictions of a canonic tradition but also actively undermining established canons (Denning, 1992; Smithson & Ruff, 1994). There is, thus, a propensity for practitioners within cultural studies to regularly decenter its own tradition and announce its originality and freshness (Wright, 1998). It is, for example, customary within audience reception research to begin by critiquing the “outdated” work of the Frankfurt School, rather than emphasizing the tradition upon which the research builds. Over the past decade or so there has also been a preoccupation within cultural studies with various forms of “post-” theories: post-structuralism, post-modernism, the post-man always rings twice. Such theories, alongside the conventional account of its development in terms of

critical “breaks” due to various interventions on behalf of silenced voices, highlights the propensity of practitioners of cultural studies to declare new beginnings and radical disjunctures. Rather than the notion of an incrementally developing canon, progress is thus measured by the addition of new voices or “theories of the break.”

## CONCEPTUALIZING CULTURAL STUDIES

### Cultural Studies: A Contradictory Picture?

If one turns to Basil Bernstein’s framework to conceptualize this language of legitimation, cultural studies appears at first to present a contradictory picture. However, by highlighting what I shall define as two analytically distinct dimensions to pedagogic discourse, the approach enables this superficial contradiction to be resolved and its underlying structuring principles clarified. To illustrate this, I shall draw upon Bernstein’s concepts of educational knowledge codes (1975) and more recent work on knowledge structures (1995, 1996), both of which build upon the concepts of classification and framing (1971). Briefly, the strength of *classification* refers to the strength of boundaries *between* contexts or categories, such as between academic subjects in a curriculum; and the strength of *framing* refers to the strength of control *within* contexts or categories, such as within a classroom (where strong framing would be associated with didactic teaching and weak framing with “progressive” pedagogy).

### Knowledge Codes and Cultural Studies

Using these concepts, Bernstein defines two principal educational knowledge codes: the collection code (relatively strong classification and framing) and the integrated code (relatively weak classification and framing). Applying these to cultural studies, its language of legitimation represents weak classification and framing: it has been legitimated as comprising attempts to weaken disciplinary boundaries, break down academic distinctions and hierarchies, celebrate a multiplicity of methods, and develop radical forms of pedagogy—i.e., weakening boundaries between and within categories and contexts. Thus, cultural studies would appear to represent an *integrated code*.

### Knowledge Structures and Cultural Studies

However, if one applies Bernstein’s concepts of hierarchical and horizontal knowledge structures to cultural studies, it appears to present a different picture. A hierarchical knowledge structure, such as exhibited by the natural sciences, is defined as “an explicit, coherent, systematically principled and hierarchical organization of knowledge,” which develops through the integration of knowledge at lower levels and across an expanding range of phenomena and is thus

motivated by an integrated code (1996, pp. 172–173). In contrast, a horizontal knowledge structure represents

a series of specialized languages, each with its own specialized modes of interrogation and specialized criteria ... with non-comparable principles of description based on different, often opposed, assumptions.

(Bernstein, 1996, pp. 172–173)

Such knowledge structures develop by the addition of another specialized language, resemble a series of segments (with disparate and incommensurable approaches or languages), and are motivated by a collection code. Legitimation of cultural studies emphasizes “giving voice to,” where truth is defined by the “voice,” and highlights the importance of radical intellectual breaks and “post-” theories, giving the subject area a segmented structure and development at the level of approaches, voices and specific areas of study—a horizontal knowledge structure and *collection code*.

So, the legitimating discourse of cultural studies can be said to exhibit *both* weak classification and framing, *and* strong classification and framing; or, in other words, *both* integrated *and* collection codes.

However, this does not imply that either the theoretical framework or cultural studies is contradictory. This can be clarified by considering the underlying relations to which these features of cultural studies refer. Those characteristics exhibiting weak classification and framing relate to the intrinsic structuring of the pedagogic discourse of cultural studies—its object of study, procedures, forms of pedagogy and so forth. In contrast, those aspects exhibiting strong classification and framing tend to refer to issues of who may adopt these procedures, study these phenomena, and so on. In other words, the language of legitimation of cultural studies places differing strengths of boundaries around and within the definitions of, on the one hand, *what* can be legitimately described as “cultural studies”; and, on the other hand, *who* can legitimately claim to be doing “cultural studies.” One can thus conceive of pedagogic discourse as having two co-existing but analytically distinguishable sets of relations, which I shall term the:

- *epistemic relation*: between pedagogic discourse and its object of study (that part of the world of which knowledge is claimed); and the
- *social relation*: between pedagogic discourse and its author or subject (who is making the claim to knowledge).

This is to highlight that knowledge claims are simultaneously claims to knowledge *of the world*, and *by authors*. As I shall show below, the language of legitimation of cultural studies can thus be understood as exhibiting: weak

classification and framing of its epistemic relation; and strong classification and framing of its social relation. The superficial contradiction, therefore refers to two distinct dimensions of its pedagogic discourse.

### Modes of Legitimation

Using this distinction, I have developed a means of conceptualizing *modes of legitimation* which takes this structuring of cultural studies as the basis for generating further possible (though not necessarily empirically realized) modes. By varying independently the relative strengths of classification and framing for the social relation (SR) and for the epistemic relation (ER), one can generate four potential modes of legitimation (where plus/minus signs refer to strong/weak classification *and* framing respectively): (a) SR−, ER−; (b) SR−, ER+; (c) SR+ , ER−; (d) SR+ , ER+ . This is less complex than it may appear. Here, I shall focus on defining two principal modes of legitimation: the *knowledge mode* and the *knower mode* (b) (c). I return to consider (a) and (d) below.) These distinguish between legitimating pedagogic discourse by reference to:

- procedures specialized to a discrete object of study (knowledge mode); or
- personal characteristics of the subject or author (knower mode).

I should emphasize that these modes do not represent two ideal–typical models of pedagogic discourse, but highlight an *analytical distinction* between two *modes* of legitimation which are always and everywhere co-existing and articulating within languages of legitimation—they are ever-present and competing principles of legitimation. Fig. 1 presents the relative strengths of classification and framing for the two relations (epistemic and social) of these modes of legitimation. I now turn to a brief discussion of each of these two modes.

### The Knowledge Mode

#### Epistemic Relation

Discourses exhibiting a knowledge mode are legitimated by reference to what is claimed to be specialized and unique knowledge of a discrete object of study. This object of study is said to require specialized procedures of enquiry, which form the basis of truth claims within the specific discourse. Actors adopting this mode thus emphasize the difference between, on one hand, their particular discourse’s proclaimed object of study, specialized procedures and resultant knowledge; and, on the other hand, other possible objects, procedures and knowledge. They, therefore, maintain strong boundaries around these defining attributes—*strong classification*. Alongside these relatively (and explicitly)



	Epistemic relation	Social relation
Knowledge mode	C+, F+	C-, F-
Knower mode	C-, F-	C+, F+

C = classification; F = framing. Plus / minus signs refer to strong / weak, respectively.

**Figure 1.** Knowledge and Knower modes of Legitimation.

strong boundaries, strong controls safeguard the discourse's object of study and specialized procedures from claims based on different criteria, by maintaining that legitimate knowledge of the object of study requires the specialized procedures defined as characterizing the discourse—*strong framing*.

### Social Relation

Knowledge claims are adjudicated or legitimated according to disembodied sets of more or less consensually agreed upon procedures, methods and criteria which, it is claimed, transcend the particular personal and social characteristics of any actor or group of actors. Subjective characteristics, such as the social status or categorization of the author or actor, are thus held to be insignificant; anyone can make truth claims, provided they comply with the extra-personal knowledge structures and practices. Subjects or authors, in other words, are not strongly differentiated nor strongly controlled in their relation to knowledge claims—*weak classification* and *weak framing*.

The knowledge mode thus refers to languages of legitimation with relatively *strong classification* and *strong framing* of the epistemic relation, and relatively *weak classification* and *weak framing* of the social relation. One example of this mode of legitimation is the positivistic conception of science.

### The Knower Mode

#### Epistemic Relation

The knower mode is legitimated not on the basis of extra-personal procedures providing access to knowledge of a distinct, constructed *object* of study, but on the basis of a distinct *subject* of study, the “knower.” This knower may claim privileged insight into much more than a specific object of study, which may thus be hypothetically limitless, difficult to define, or embrace a whole host of disparate phenomena, thus exhibiting *weak classifica-*

tion. As criteria are not deemed appropriate or inappropriate according to the object of study, there is relatively little explicit theoretical articulation of procedures of proof. There is thus, at least hypothetically, considerable individual discretion in the choice of objects of study and procedures of inquiry, and adjudication of competing knowledge claims in these terms is explicitly eschewed—relatively *weak framing*.

### Social Relation

Whilst the knower mode declares no discrete foundational ontological object of study, it does proclaim the existence of a specific social group with a privileged and unique insight: the knower. Knowledge claims are thus legitimated by reference to “what one is or was”—the subjective attributes and experiences of the actor or group of actors—and “truth” is defined as that which is articulated by the “voice” of this *strongly classified* knower. This specialized viewpoint is often based upon the knower’s social position, such that actors with different defining social characteristics are said to be unable to access the knowledge or experience of the privileged knower and censure may follow attempts to do so—relatively *strong framing*.

The knower mode of legitimation is thus characterized by relatively *weak classification* and *weak framing* of the epistemic relation, and relatively *strong classification* and *strong framing* of the social relation. Examples of this mode include subjectivist, insider, perspectivist and standpoint theories of knowledge.

### Summary

Both these modes of legitimation involve a relation to a proclaimed object of study (knowledge of something) and a relation to a proclaimed subject of study (someone who knows it). The distinction between them refers to which relation is emphasized within a pedagogic discourse’s language of legitimation; in other words, whether the discourse is said to be specialized by procedures related to its object of study (the epistemic relation) or by the unique insight of the author (the social relation). For each mode it is, therefore, the relation which is *strongly* classified and framed (see Fig. 1) which comprises the basis of knowledge claims (its epistemology), and the relation which is *weakly* classified and framed which represents the resources drawn upon in the process (its sociology). One can thus say that those categories which are epistemological in the knowledge mode are sociological in the knower mode; in other words, knower modes replace epistemology with sociology.<sup>2</sup>

Of the two other possible modes of legitimation mentioned earlier: mode (a) (SR–, ER–) exhibits relatively weak classification and framing for *both* the epistemic and social relations. It thus equates to a position which renounces both epistemology and sociology and proclaims that anyone can make knowledge

claims about anything using any procedures—in short, anything goes. In contrast, mode (d) (SR+ , ER+ ) represents legitimating discourses with relatively strong boundaries and controls on both procedures and authors: only actors from specific social categories and using specific procedures specialized to explicitly delimited objects of study may make legitimate knowledge claims within the discourse. I would suggest that these two modes will exhibit pressures towards either the knower or knower modes: mode (a) represents an ineffective basis for legitimating the positions of *specialized* actors and pedagogic discourses over any length of time; whilst mode (b) is likely to become associated with sclerotic knowledge development and stagnation.

### **Empirical Realizations**

These modes represent ever-present and competing *principles* of legitimation; their empirical realizations are thus a function of the context. The degree to which any of the features of these modes becomes salient within a specific *language* of legitimation is dependent upon the structuring conditions of power and control inhering within empirical contexts; these enabling and evoking conditions set the parameters within which these features may become voiced. For example, the language of legitimation of cultural studies outlined above is that commonly found in intellectual texts aimed at other knowledge producers within the subject area. Although this language may be characterized as exhibiting a knower mode, one would not automatically expect to find the same features in other evoking contexts, such as university promotional literature or the lecture hall.

In addition, the above concepts are concerned with languages of *legitimation*—the proclaimed or espoused practices of academics—rather than with conceptualizing their enacted social practices. There is, of course, no necessary correlation between self-characterizations of practices and their actuality. For example, the legitimation of cultural studies as an emancipatory educational project can coexist with traditional forms of pedagogy and assessment in the lecture room. The adequacy of actors' accounts as descriptions of their social practices is not at issue here—it is the underlying structuring principles of these accounts with which I am concerned.

## **THE INTRINSIC DYNAMIC OF KNOWER MODES**

Rewriting cultural studies in terms of these concepts, its language of legitimation exemplifies a knower mode. This is the underlying structure of this language—its “voice,” as it were. In this final section of the article I shall address the question of what this voice can tell us by drawing out the ramifications of this mode of legitimation for the development of academic subjects over time. I should emphasize that this analysis is not intended as an

implicit argument for the knower mode of legitimation, nor meant as a critique of the aims of the “project” of cultural studies (although it may highlight that its means may not best serve its ends). Neither is it a definitive account of cultural studies, for which analyses of the role of social relations of power and the active construction of meanings would be required (Maton, 1999). Rather, the following is intended to be read (with the earlier outline of cultural studies in mind) as an *illustrated* analysis of the knower mode. To reiterate, my aim is to illustrate the significance of analyzing the intrinsic features of pedagogic discourse by showing how these structures have a bearing on the discourse’s intellectual and institutional trajectories within higher education. I shall focus on elucidating three main interrelated processes generated by the intrinsic dynamic of the knower mode, namely: imaginary alliances and the procession of the excluded; discursivity and idealization; and proliferation and fragmentation.<sup>3</sup>

### **Imaginary Alliances and the Procession of the Excluded**

Actors adopting knower modes of legitimation base their knowledge claims upon the unique insight of specific social categories—the privileged knower. This may be expressed as claims to membership of, alliances with, and/or representing the interests of the knower category. According to accounts of cultural studies, the subject area first emerged out of attempts in early 1960s Britain to forge alliances with the working class (in adult education and the first New Left) and began with social class—specifically membership of the working class—as the specific social category upon which claims to privileged insight were made (Kenny, 1995; Steele, 1997). However, social and cultural mobility through prolonged education make claims to membership of and shared interests with the working class increasingly hard to sustain. Thus, to maintain this mode of legitimation, one would expect attempts to construct a theoretical basis for connecting social class origins to current social class position in order to overcome the distance between them. Within British cultural studies, the focus increasingly shifted after its pioneers re-entered higher education to Gramscian notions of the “organic intellectual” and working with radicalized professions, such as teachers. (Cultural studies could be described as having been the avant garde of the British Welfare State and later an international intelligentsia, rather than of the working class.)

Where actors do not have a working-class background, one finds attempts to construct this social class position through various theories of structural homology, such as the notion of the academic as “intellectual proletarian.” This becomes the basis of an *imaginary alliance* between the “intellectual” and the “proletarian”—theoretically constructed, homologous social positions are proclaimed to result in shared insights and interests. Similarly, social class tends

to be suppressed as a marker of difference between the academic knower and other, non-academic knowers when membership claims are based upon non-class characteristics, such as race, gender or sexuality. Differences of social class are (often tacitly) held as insignificant to the essentialist subjective basis of being a knower; in effect, such claims argue the equivalent of “once a Catholic, always a Catholic.”

Within cultural studies these imaginary alliances have been with dominated or marginalized social groups.<sup>4</sup> Examining the development of cultural studies over time, its pedagogic discourse forms a *procession of the excluded*: working class, women, ethnic minorities, etc. In other words, it takes on the characteristics of a queue: once one group enters (usually into pedagogic discourse rather than higher education institutions as staff or students), another group takes its place outside the door demanding (or having demands made on its behalf for) entry. Until everyone and/or their experiences are included within higher education and/or pedagogic discourse, there is always scope for a new excluded group to emerge and for the process(ion) to continue.

### **Discursive Inclusion and Idealization**

The less likely it is that members of the knower group will physically enter the context, the more likely it is that imaginary alliances will form the basis of knower mode legitimation. For example, legitimating pedagogic discourse as producing “organic intellectuals” requires a sufficient and regular supply of working-class knowers, limiting its viability (post-war higher education expansions have tended to leave the proportional social class profile of the student body little changed). One thus finds a tendency to focus on the *discursive inclusion* of the knower group, rather than its *social inclusion*; i.e., actors attempt to maximize their position by arguing for the inclusion of the knower’s knowledge and experience within pedagogic discourse (in canons, texts, curricula, etc.) rather than their physical presence within higher education (as staff or students)—bodies of knowledge rather than bodies of knowers. Where knower mode claims are based in low status institutions (where dominated knowers are most likely), actors may ask “Who is (silenced) in the classroom?”; actors in higher status institutions may ask “Who is (silenced) in the text?” Interestingly, within British higher education, taught courses in cultural studies have largely emerged in relatively low status institutions, whilst its “key texts” are typically by actors located in higher status sites (Maton, 1996).

### **The Representation of the People Acts**

Legitimation claims, which emphasize the discursive inclusion of the knower, foreground two further interrelated issues: representation and language. First, in the absence of the physical presence of the knower, the aim becomes

that of “giving voice to” their knowledge and experiences. The question is how this knowledge may be discursively represented; the quest is for the means of being faithful to this voice. Such a focus lends itself to inductive rather than deductive approaches, qualitative rather than quantitative methods, description rather than explanation, the valorization of primary experience and use of extensive quotation, and an emphasis on the practical process of research rather than its product. Although celebrating multiplicity and diversity in procedures, cultural studies has tended in practice to privilege approaches and methods proclaimed to facilitate the unmediated relaying of the voices of “Others” and the “view from below,” namely qualitative, inductive, descriptive approaches.

Second, by claiming to “give voice to,” knower modes foreground the significance of discourse, language and textuality. Claims to legitimation focus on exclusions from the discursive or ideational rather than the social or institutional dimensions of higher education. The symbolic thus comes to assume a primary structuring significance in accounts of the world at the expense of the material (social, political, economic, etc.). The procession of the excluded is thereby accompanied by a recurring emphasis on this dimension, expressed in cultural studies as a series of idealist “turns”—superstructural, textual, linguistic, cultural, post-modernist, etc. Correspondingly, since its early “break” with orthodox economistic Marxism, the pedagogic discourse of cultural studies has tended towards idealization and superstructuralism, with approaches such as political economy and policy studies accorded a marginal role (Ferguson & Golding, 1997; McGuigan, 1992).

### **Proliferation and Fragmentation**

Knower modes base their legitimation upon the privileged insight of a knower, and work at maintaining strong boundaries around their definition of this knower—they celebrate difference where “truth” is defined by the knower or “voice” (strong classification and framing of the social relation). Such discourses are legitimated on the basis of the inability of existing pedagogic discourses to articulate the voice of the knower; i.e., knowledge is reduced to the knower (see below). Putting this concept into motion over time: as each voice is brought into the academic choir, the category of the privileged knower becomes smaller, each strongly bounded from one another, for each voice proclaims its own privileged and specialized knowledge. The knower group will thus fragment, each fragment with its own representative. For example, this may begin with “the working class”; then, as the category of the working class fragments as previous knowers’ ability to speak for the new voice is critiqued, it may become:

- working-class men,
- white, working-class men,
- white, heterosexual, working-class men,

- Oxbridge-educated, white heterosexual men of working-class origin in their late 20s,
- and so on, until you reach: me (at which point, one could introduce notions of the fragmentation of the self and talk of “we”).

Cultural studies has often illustrated the multiplicity of subjectivity and identity—the potential categories of knowers are hypothetically endless. Once established, knower modes are particularly prone to their own legitimating strategies—it is hard to deny new voices what one has claimed was denied to one’s own. Such a strategy thus tends to evoke its own disrupter, a new voice—“interruptions interrupted” as Brunson (1996, p. 179) characterizes feminist work in cultural studies. The result, in terms of the privileged knower, is an accretion of adjectives, the hyphenation which knower modes often proclaim as a sign of progress. One can then find recourse in truth claims to the “As a . . . ” strategy—“As a man . . . ,” “As a heterosexual . . . ,” “As someone in their late 20s . . . ”—where the more “As a . . .”s mustered, the greater the strength of the claim. Thus, with the emergence of each new category of knower, the categories of knowers become smaller, leading to proliferation and fragmentation within the pedagogic discourse.

### **The Evacuation of the Social**

This process also carries with it a tendency to methodological individualism; from wide social categories, the focus of knowledge claims tends to become smaller and smaller. This generates pressures towards adopting approaches which are said to provide insight into these categories—for example, from sociology towards social psychology, then psychology, and finally psychoanalysis. It thus leads to an evacuation of the social and moves towards autobiographical reflection in approaches and vocabularies (e.g., Miller, 1992; Smith & Watson, 1992)—“narcissism–hermeneuticism” as Gellner (1992, p. 26) pithily put it. The social totality as an object of study thereby comes to be replaced by a series of minute and disparate objects of study. Paradoxically, whilst knower modes *proclaim* a relatively uncircumscribed object of study, they also exhibit tendencies towards thicker and thicker descriptions of smaller and smaller phenomena—more and more about less and less. For example, the espoused direction of studies of youth sub-cultures and of audiences within cultural studies have been towards showing greater complexity and providing thicker descriptions of increasingly localized cultural sites, fragmenting and desocializing “culture” and “the audience.”

### **Shooting the Messenger**

Knower modes develop through a process of displacement of existing knowledge rather than its integration within a new approach. Since “new”

knowledge is defined according to the criteria of articulating the specialized “voice” of the knower, and “truth” is defined as whatever is said by the voice, then it is not *what* has been said before that matters, it is *who* has said it. If knowledge is reducible to knowers, then new knowers brings new knowledge which existing voices are incapable of articulating. In other words, existing knowledge cannot be integrated within the new discourse, but must be displaced by the knowledge specialized to the new knower—it is the messenger and not the message which counts. It is thus likely that with each addition of a new adjective, hyphen or “As a . . . ,” existing work within the field will be overhauled—old songs will be sung by new voices in their own distinctive register. The pedagogic discourse thereby exhibits a sort of permanent cultural revolution, with regularly proclaimed radical breaks with the past and the subject area seemingly beginning anew. Although names and faces change, the underlying form of the recurrent radical “breaks” characterizing the discourse is the same; they are empirical realizations of the same underlying principle: knower mode legitimation.

### **Institutional Positions within Higher Education**

This fragmentation into a series of strongly bounded “knowers” reduces the social bases for collective political action. It emphasizes *difference from* rather than *similarity with* (leading to ever smaller categories) and is thus difficult to defend institutionally. Furthermore, it encourages struggles not only between those claiming to represent different knowers, but also between actors claiming to speak on behalf of or give voice to each specific category of knower. Questions arise, for example, as to whose is the *genuine* voice of the working class, which knower is the *real* working-class knower, leading to “prolier than thou” legitimation struggles. It is perhaps unsurprising that professional associations within British cultural studies have often had a precarious existence.

Fragmentation and proliferation also leave the discourse vulnerable to criticism from outside higher education; after all, if the only people who can tell us about ourselves is us, then why employ academics to do so? Paradoxically, if the legitimating principle is to give voice to the unmediated experiences of everyday life, then the social position of specialized intellectuals, which this argument is ostensibly legitimating, is undermined. Knower modes are thus particularly vulnerable to utilitarian climates in educational policy and funding and to functionalist criticism from the media. British cultural studies, for example, has been a regular target for political and media questioning of its role, purpose and academic credentials.

One response to such calls to justify an academic subject is to highlight the significance of its object of study; for example: “Higher education should offer courses and employ lecturers and researchers in sociology because *society*, into



which sociology provides unique insight, is significant.” Knower modes, however, are not based upon claims to provide specialized and unique insight into a discrete foundational object of study, and so cannot base their legitimation upon its significance. Whilst the marginalized position of a specific group of knowers may be highlighted, the procession of the excluded shows the limited life span of such arguments. Not only do they evoke their own disrupter, but their vitality varies inversely with their success—discursive inclusion of the knower diminishes claims to marginality. Knower modes thus problematize attempts to carve out sustained institutional space within higher education.

Lacking an explicit strongly defined notion of what can and cannot be studied also opens up the discourse to being “poached.” One can, for example, simply add on a “cultural studies” module to existing courses or use the term “cultural” as an adjective (as in cultural geography), rather than develop a specialized course in cultural studies. Indeed, despite proclaimed opposition to the marketization of higher education and modularization of courses, the intrinsic dynamic of the knower mode makes cultural studies ideally suited to these processes. As Bernstein has said of horizontal knowledge structures, knower modes “reveal a suicidal tendency,” they may

*haemorrhage languages to such an extent that there is a loss of original identity. Here, paradoxically, the [academic] subject shines with an invisible light in other knowledge structures when it may itself be dying.*

(1996, pp. 177–178)

Whilst cultural studies is often heralded as a growth area, its institutional presence as a named area of study remains limited and marginal (at least within British higher education); if it has found a place in the sun, this has largely been through absorption by other academic subjects, rather than in its own right (Maton, 1996).

## CONCLUSION

According to Basil Bernstein, sociological studies of education neglect the analysis of pedagogic discourse itself in favor of revealing how it relays and reproduces external social relations of power, as if it were no more than “a medium for other voices.” (1990, p. 166) In this article, I have illustrated both how and why the sociology of education should set about recovering the missing voice of pedagogic discourse.

First, the concepts of modes of legitimation offers a means of theorizing the underlying principles structuring languages of legitimation, illustrating how such intrinsic features of pedagogic discourse may be analyzed. This generative and empirically-applicable conceptualization also demonstrates how empirical and

theoretical descriptions may related in a non-tautological manner; the article can effectively be read both forwards and backwards: from an empirical description to a theoretical narrative and vice versa.

Second, my analysis of the knower mode of legitimation highlights its ramifications for the development of academic subjects. The intrinsic dynamic of the knower mode generates tendencies towards imaginary alliances, idealization, and proliferation and fragmentation, which contribute to structuring the intellectual and institutional trajectories of its realizations. Contrary to reductionism and the sociological fallacy whereby knowledge is reduced to nothing but a reflection of its social source, this illustrates that the intrinsic features of pedagogic discourse have their own emergent structuring significance—the absent voice of pedagogic discourse has much to tell us. Although pedagogic discourse is not autonomous from social relations of power, it is irreducible to them. A fuller understanding of the changing structure of educational knowledge thus requires complementary analyses of *both* its intrinsic and extrinsic relations.

Lastly, my analysis of the intrinsic dynamic of the knower mode raises important questions for the future directions of both cultural studies and the sociology of education. Both these subject areas have been characterized by the knower mode of legitimation and both remain intellectually and institutionally marginal as named areas of study within (at least British) higher education. The analysis presented here suggests that these factors may be not entirely unrelated. It also highlights that the knower mode generates tendencies with potentially inimical ramifications for their proclaimed intentions to give voice to marginalized social groups—their means may thwart their ends. If the voice of pedagogic discourse can be recovered, not only would the sociological understanding of educational knowledge be less partial than hitherto, but also the question of how the silencing of other voices might be overcome could be thrown into fresh and sharper relief.

**Acknowledgment:** I am extremely grateful to Madeleine Arnot, Rob Moore, Gemma Moss, Parlo Singh and Julia Swindells for their encouragement and helpful comments on earlier versions of this article. The research was funded by an ESRC doctoral studentship.

## NOTES

1. I should emphasize that this necessarily brief and broad-brushed sketch is of dominant and recurrent themes within *Anglophone* cultural studies, primarily within Britain, North America and, to a lesser extent, Australasia. For brevity, references are to *illustrative* examples from these traditions.

2. The distinction between the epistemic relation and the social relation of knowledge is, I would argue, fundamental to the distinction between epistemology and sociology of knowledge. In terms of

the sociology of education, Bernstein's argument regarding the exclusive focus of existing studies upon extrinsic features of pedagogic discourse can be understood as an exclusive analysis of the social relation—their shared blindspot is the epistemic relation of knowledge. (See Maton, 1999 for a critique of Pierre Bourdieu's approach in these terms).

3. Empirically, these tendencies may be unexercized (because of a lack of enabling conditions), exercised unrealized (due to countervailing pressures), or realized unperceived (see Bhaskar, 1975); to reiterate, their status within any specific context is a matter for empirical research.

4. Association with dominated social groups is not intrinsic to the knower mode, examples of which include notions of the divine right of kings and papal infallibility. This highlights the necessity of combining analysis of intrinsic features of pedagogic discourse with analyses of social relations of power.

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