

Research Seminar Series

Exploring teachers' professional learning for designing and making the curriculum

Eleanor Hotham, Robbie Campbell, and Richard Pountney

12.00 – 13.30 15th June 2022 [Online](#)

The 'renaissance' in curriculum thinking over the last decade has brought key issues around the curriculum to the forefront of educational debate and policy. These issues include questions about the purpose of curriculum, and the relationships between curriculum and teacher agency, teacher professionalism and teacher professional knowledge. However, research into professional learning is often hampered by an unhelpful dichotomy between subjective and objective understandings of practice and how it develops. The centrality of knowledge practices to teachers' curriculum practices, including how the former validates the shift from social to subject knowledge in the latter (Muller, 2000), argues for greater attention to teacher professional knowledge and how it is acquired, including how teachers are prepared for, and continue to develop, this professional knowledge.

The three presentations in this seminar explore the juncture between the practices of professional development and curriculum making and draw on two doctoral studies of teachers' work, and a cross-phase analysis of mentoring in educational contexts.

Curriculum making and professional learning: interactions in teacher practices

Eleanor Hotham, doctoral candidate, SIOE.

Making the Science curriculum active: teacher knowledge and expertise

Robbie Campbell, doctoral candidate, SIOE.

Practice knowledge and mentoring: a realist analysis of professional learning in mentoring others

Richard Pountney, Postgraduate Taught Portfolio Lead, SIOE.

(See abstracts below)

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Abstracts

Curriculum making and professional learning: interactions in teacher practices

Eleanor Hotham, doctoral candidate, Sheffield Hallam University

The centrality of knowledge practices to teachers' curriculum practices, including how the former validates the shift from social to subject knowledge in the latter (Muller, 2000), argues for attention to teacher professional knowledge and how it is acquired. Curriculum making relies on teachers' application of the specific knowledge practices of curriculum, and it is therefore imperative to consider how teachers are prepared for, and continue to develop, this professional knowledge. There is precedent for examination of these interwoven knowledge practices. Discourse on the classification and framing strength of curricula formation recognises the related effect on teacher knowledge practices, such that an 'integrated code' may result in cooperative curriculum design (Bernstein, 1973, p. 381). Indeed the two aspects of practice are arguably so intertwined that 'curriculum development must rest on teacher development' (Stenhouse, 1978, p. 24).

It is logical that those engaged in curriculum theorising make the conceptual leap to consider the professional knowledge required by teachers for selecting, sequencing, and pacing curricula. Whilst much theorisation and application of 'powerful knowledge' (Young, 2008) has hitherto been steered towards explorations of curriculum (Stolare et al., 2022, p. 25), recent work at the intersection with professional knowledge and learning has expanded social realist discussions (Barrett & Hordern, 2021; Furlong & Whitty, 2017; KOSS Network, 2021). Building upon this, it is vital to consider the related field of study pertaining to professional learning practices, in which much discourse adopts a constructivist lens, to consider how knowledge practices offer greater understanding of teacher curriculum making and professional learning.

Working at this juncture, between the practices of curriculum making and professional development, this paper will draw on the initial phase of my doctoral research: 'Curriculum making and professional learning: interactions in teacher practices'. Building on personal experience as a primary teacher and English subject lead, the study focuses on practices within this setting to facilitate theory building (Stake, 1978). Primary schools present a particularly rich context, as understandings of powerful knowledge are contested here (Catling & Martin, 2011), and disciplinary structures necessitate teachers' interaction with contrasting horizontal and hierarchical knowledge forms as curriculum makers (Bernstein, 2000), further obfuscating knowledge practices.

In this presentation, I set out an emerging conceptual framework for the interpretation of the relationship between curriculum making, professional learning and knowledge practices. In this way, existent structures for understanding teacher professional learning, such as Clarke and Hollingsworth's (2002) influential Interconnected Model, are recontextualised using a social realist lens. Through discussion of the research design, in conversation with adapted models of professional development and initial scoping study findings, I chart the course for my doctoral research. In explicating the process of shaping the object of study, I begin to speak back to the central question: What knowledge is needed for teachers to enact curriculum making practices, and what knowledge is gained through them?

Making the Science curriculum active: teacher knowledge and expertise

Robbie Campbell, doctoral candidate, SIOE.

In this paper I will present the research design to my ongoing doctoral study titled 'Active science curriculum making: Teacher knowledge and expertise'. My PhD will explore three intersecting fields of study: curriculum making, teacher knowledge and skills, and science teaching. The 'renaissance' in curriculum thinking over the last decade has brought key issues around the curriculum to the forefront of educational debate and policy. These issues include questions about the purpose of curriculum, and the relationships between curriculum and teacher agency, teacher professionalism and teacher professional knowledge.

The aims of this research are: to examine what is meant by an active science curriculum; to understand what constitutes teacher knowledge and skills in making active science curricula and how teachers acquire it; and to understand how school and policy conditions relate to teachers' active science curriculum making practices.

My object of study is teachers' practices in making the science curriculum active and how they come to acquire the knowledge and skills to do this. Social constructivism leaves unexplained the connection between described knowledge practices and the real structures which affect it. Therefore, to answer my research questions, the research needs to move beyond a focus on practice to examining its underlying basis. Using a social realist approach, I will move beyond description of teachers' active science curriculum making, to understand, analyse and explain it, in order that it may be changed (if required). To do this, I will apply a three-phase methodology. This consists of an exploratory phase, a theory-building phase, and a preparation for enactment phase. My work will apply Bernstein's theory (2000), namely the pedagogic device, knowledge structures and knowledge codes.

The exploratory phase will involve paired interviews, observations of curriculum planning, analysis of curriculum documents and a final semi-structured interview. The theory-building phase will develop a model or translation device (Pountney & McPhail, 2017) which 'speaks back to practice' igniting the possibility of new practice for teachers. To develop the model, I will enact Bernstein's knowledge codes and Maton's semantics dimension of Legitimation Code Theory (Maton, 2013). The final phase will seek to analyse curriculum making materials and make recommendations.

This study will throw new light on teachers' knowledge and skills in the practice of active science curriculum making and contribute to our understanding of curriculum making in active science. The findings will be useful to science teachers, science curriculum leaders and developers, teacher professional development leads, schools, teacher training providers and policy makers.

Practice knowledge and mentoring: a realist analysis of professional learning in mentoring others,

Richard Pountney, Postgraduate Taught Portfolio Lead, SIOE.

Research into professional learning (PL) is often hampered by an unhelpful dichotomy between subjective and objective understandings of practice and how it develops. Furthermore, while much of the literature focuses on the context and conditions for PL, the practice knowledge itself is often obscured. This exposes a 'subjectivist doxa' that dominates much education research in which knowledge is typically viewed as 'comprising states of mind or dispositions to act' (Maton, 2014), in

which the external realisation of PL is ontologically social. Realist approaches provide an alternative perspective by understanding the social world to be complex and layered; yet patterned and explicable by reference to underlying generative causal mechanisms. In this presentation I address the question 'what insights can realism provide to enhance research into professional learning in mentoring?'. I examine this problematic in order to consider a possible conceptual integration of ontological and epistemological approaches in order to identify a methodology appropriate for the evaluation of professional learning programmes.

Central to my analysis is the notion of knowledge practices that take place in professional contexts, such as those practised by teachers. I explore a multi-case study of professional practice in mentoring, as a form of social practice, and its emergence. While mentoring is an activity that takes place in a wide range of contexts in professional life, mentoring knowledge, of and for mentoring itself, is poorly understood and theorised. Furthermore, mentoring practice is often reduced to interactional forms of motivation and nurture of the mentee. However, in education, well-established contexts exist for mentoring others in the development of their PL, including the mentoring of trainee and newly qualified teachers (Pountney and Grasmeyer, 2019), the mentoring of in-service teachers (Coldwell and Pountney, 2019) and the mentoring of pupils (Pountney (in press); Pountney, Booth and Campbell, 2021).

My aim is to elaborate a conceptual/theoretical model that is transferable to other PL contexts. Critical realism provides the ontological basis for this by providing that there is a reality that may not be possible to know, and which is differentiated, structured, and stratified. Social realism explores the sociological implications of critical realism for education and the ways in which 'the sociology of knowledge in the sociology of education can have as an 'object' the socially organised ways in which such knowledge is systematically produced and transformed (rather than simply 'constructed' and reproduced)' (Moore, 2013: 339). I show this methodological insight to be important in examining the underlying basis of PL in mentoring.

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