

Questioning recontextualisation: considering recontextualisation's geographies

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Abstract:

This chapter explores the spatial imaginaries at work in Bernstein's model of the pedagogic device and considers the implications for accounts of recontextualisation. I argue that the fields of production, recontextualisation and reproduction are more blurred than implied by Bernstein's model, and increasingly so with actors taking on hybrid, boundary-crossing roles. I consider what might be gained by conceiving of the relationships between these fields, and their actors, in less hierarchical or horizontal (planar) ways – and what networked, relational spatialities might offer. By exploring alternative ways of thinking about the relationships between the fields, I draw out implications for how we understand the relationships between the academic discipline of geography and school geography. The effect is to consider how we might better value the teaching and communication of geography in and across all spaces of learning. This opens up new questions, and avenues for research, about the connections, collaborations and exchanges between academic geographer, teacher educator and school communities.

1 Questioning Recontextualisation

It is a legitimate and useful question to ask: how is this or that geographical concept recontextualised from one site to another? We can do this and 'see with' recontextualisation, using the theoretical apparatus as a descriptive model, to make sense of the processes by which "knowledge is selected from the field in which it was produced and transformed for the purpose of acquisition in schools" (Firth 2018: 279). Indeed, other chapters in this volume do this very productively.

However, in this chapter I want to do something different and raise some questions about recontextualisation itself, as conceptualised in Bernstein's model of the pedagogic device. I argue that the boundaries between the different fields (and the actors that constitute them) are more blurred in practice than might have been understood from the model, and increasingly so. By offering alternative ways of thinking about the relationships between the fields, I draw out implications for how we understand the relationships between the academic discipline of geography and school geography. The effect is to consider how we might better value the teaching and communication of geography in and across all spaces of learning. This opens up new questions, and avenues for research, about the connections, collaborations and exchanges between academic geographer, teacher educator and school communities.

In order to raise these questions, I first outline literature which provides a basic account of recontextualisation as part of the pedagogic device drawing on the writing of Basil Bernstein and those who take up these ideas. I then move to raise a number of questions about where geographical knowledge is produced and recontextualised and who is doing so – noting first, that

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academics are educators and there are teachers which are research-engaged and research-active, and second, that there is no ‘pre-pedagogical knowledge’. These complicate Bernstein’s account of knowledge production, recontextualisation and reproduction. This allows me to explore the spatial imaginaries at work in the pedagogic device and consider the implications for accounts of recontextualisation. In part, this is expressed in the idea that knowledge comes ‘down’ from universities to schools. This opens up avenues for new trajectories and questions which are resonant with geographical work about the spatialities of knowledge production.

This task carries some risk. I am bringing the ideas of recontextualisation and the pedagogic device into dialogue with literatures that have quite different purposes, are animated by different problematics, and which I’m using to pose questions of the theory that it was not intended to address. This would be an uncharitable reading if, as critique, the purpose was dismissive or to devalue the ways in which the theory has already proved useful. Instead, I see this as part of the lively, iterative and generative process of knowledge production. Through staging this kind of encounter limitations may be clarified but also new avenues for investigation highlighted.

Bernstein wrote that some of his material was a ‘sketch’ (Bernstein 2000: 65). A sketch is not intended to be the whole picture – neither in its level of detail nor as accounting for some total perspective. However, such sketches can, and I think do, become reified as more fulsome and universal accounts than theorists like Bernstein intend. This is especially the case when the models are ‘used’ in, or ‘applied’ to, diverse contexts without those contexts speaking back to the theory and pointing up its limitations and possibility for development or indeed, the need for new theorisations. It is to that account that I now turn.

2 The Pedagogic Device and Recontextualisation

I sketch out here an abbreviated account of Bernstein’s ‘pedagogic device’ which sought to account for the rules by which knowledge becomes pedagogic communication (Bernstein 1990, 2000; Singh 2002: 573). He tied this to the action of particular social groups, rules, fields of operation and processes and created a model of these (Figure 1).

Formal Model		Realisation Model		
Social groups		Rules	Fields	Processes
Distributive Rules	Power	Distributive	Production of discourse	Creation
Recontextualising Rules	Knowledge	Recontextualising	Recontextualising	Transmission
Evaluative Rules	Consciousness	Evaluative	Reproduction	Acquisition

Figure 1 The device and its structuring, adapted from Bernstein 2000: 37

The distributive rules regulate and hierarchically stratify groups based on the distribution of knowledge among them. These rules also set limits of the thinkable and (as yet) unthinkable, and who may perform the function of producing discourse, or in slightly different language to Bernstein, in producing (new) legitimated knowledge. The distributive rules create fields, or contested social spaces (Singh 2002) – of production, recontextualisation and reproduction. Recontextualisation rules

regulate the process of selecting and transmitting knowledge from one site to another and through the process of recontextualisation transforming it. The evaluative rules concern the regulation of pedagogic practice and assessing the valid acquisition of knowledge and orientations or 'dispositions' to that knowledge (Firth 2018).

Bernstein observes three broad hierarchically organised fields. The field of production is associated with the actors and activities which produce knowledge and is typically associated in contemporary societies with universities. The field of recontextualising is associated with the activities through which the knowledge produced is pedagogised or transmitted from the site of production to the site of reproduction. This may be through the official recontextualising field (ORF) typically created and dominated by the state and the pedagogic recontextualising field (PRF) such as teacher educators and subject associations. The site of reproduction is associated with the activities of acquisition by teachers and subsequently students in schools.

Having sketched out Bernstein's pedagogic device I will point out two curious features of this model which seem evident here and in the ways in which the model is explicated (such as Singh 2002). I then draw out the implications of these features for the question of recontextualisation.

First, the model provides a truncated view of the field of production by omitting the multiple roles that academics play. Now while this may be seen as sufficiently tangential given the purpose of the model, the effect is significant. The role of knowledge production is separated from the academic's role as educator or learner-scholar. The model encodes a symbolic division of academic research from teaching and holds the field of reproduction as external and separate to the field of production. In Bernstein's account, the fields are populated by various agents who take up different and distinct roles through a division of labour. Here universities – and their academics – are the producers of disciplinary knowledge. Pupils are evaluated on the acquisition of reproduced disciplinary knowledge, pedagogised by those performing roles of recontextualisation. Yet, we could take a moment to consider that a significant proportion of the activities seen across the pedagogic device (as seen in Figure 1) also take place 'within' universities. Here, though shaped by wider imperatives and state policies, academics recontextualise the knowledge they have produced for their students – and importantly for other academics – to acquire. And, it is more dialogic than readings of the model might imply (as is suggested by the double-headed arrows in Bernstein's model, Figure 1) in that the questions and engagements of the students, and other academics, reshape the academic's own understanding of their knowledge and how they frame and explicate it. This leads to the second curious feature.

Second, disciplinary knowledge risks being presented as if it is 'pre-pedagogical' if those in the field of recontextualisation are held to be the ones who take disciplinary knowledge and then pedagogise it. When we talk about disciplinary knowledge what do we mean in material terms? I don't think it can mean the data from research, as this isn't self-interpreting knowledge, nor can it mean the knowledge as the private knowing of a phenomena by an academic. Knowledge circulates in academic contexts through communicative acts – be they journal articles, books, conference presentations, lectures - and in some cases through exhibitions, documentaries and other cultural products which may have a range of audiences. These communicative acts necessitate the same kind of pedagogical translation and transformation as takes place across the fields of recontextualisation and reproduction as they are selective, sequenced and take culturally diverse and particular forms. For example a journal article written for a specific journal may necessitate a particular selection and ordering of material and a different writing strategy to another – whilst all seek to inform, persuade and indeed, to educate the reader, whomever that may be. The product, as long as it is not ignored (a depressing reality for any academic), may be seen to add to or challenge existing disciplinary

knowledge, but it is not 'pre-pedagogical'. Knowledge is always already pedagogised for its consumers. This is not to say that it is accessible to all consumers. I do agree with Singh's (2002: 575) argument that the "growth in the volume and complexity of esoteric knowledge (vertical discourse)" means that knowledge producers may not have the time or resources to translate it to an accessible form for "non-specialist consumers". However, the field of production of a discourse or (to allow for the slippage used by many commentators) knowledge is fully engaged in and not separate to communicative and necessarily pedagogical acts addressed to a range of more or less specialists consumers. When we say that knowledge is recontextualised we must ask from what and for whom. We should not answer disciplinary knowledge and for teachers or pupils if we imagine such disciplinary knowledge is not already variously – and not uniformly – contextualised (and pedagogised) for different audiences.

Why do these two curious features matter? Against the larger task of describing relationships between fields of activity and their agents these might seem to be relatively minor concerns. One might ask, 'so are academics writing the textbooks for schools or sequencing material in curricula for pupils'? The answers in the main might be, 'no', though this does vary historically and across national contexts (Fyfe and Yarwood 2018). In the broadest sense, the divisions of labour and account of social relationships hold. However, Bernstein has a particular spatial imagination of these relations that narrate them as hierarchical and which imply sharp distinctions between these fields and divisions of labour between the actors. I have suggested that as we consider – even in quite broad terms – the field of production and its agents, we don't see such neat ring-fencing of production from other activities, and we see that knowledge production is itself a pedagogising act. We could look at the other fields and raise similar questions. For example, how should we make sense of Lambert and Biddulph's conception of teachers as curriculum makers (Biddulph 2017; Lambert 2016, 2017 and Lambert and Biddulph 2014), or Butt and Collin's (2018) writing on the knowledge turn which positions teachers as those capable and expected to engaged with disciplinary knowledge directly, along with English A level reform which increasingly normalises engagement with such knowledge directly through readings such as journal articles. This suggests a vision (actualised or not) of teachers as professional knowledge workers who themselves operate across the recontextualisation and reproductive fields. Further, they may also be part of the field of production through research (for example Masters Research) conducted in schools and with the supervision and accreditation of universities. Despite issues with how well the model functions descriptively, and the contention over the distributive rules that mark boundaries between the activities of the fields and their agents, there are other ways of conceiving this bigger picture.

3 Recontextualisation and Spatial Imaginaries

Bernstein's model is a hierarchical model where the field of reproduction is dependent on the field of recontextualisation and these fields together are dependent on the field of production. Whilst it makes room for interchange and contestation between agents, there is a predominately downward movement of knowledge between fields (Figure 2). A further slippage in language we may wish to be attentive to is between fields and sites. If fields are contested social spaces by which certain activities are organised and regulated (Singh 2002) they are not the same things as the sites of those activities which may have many different locations and forms. Following actor-network theory and broader work in Science and Technology Studies (STS) (for example Latour 2007 or Law 2003) we can see the traces of knowledge movement through tracking the 'actors' such as journal articles, textbooks as well as people, which may move quite freely in the world across the boundaries implied by theorists who make models.

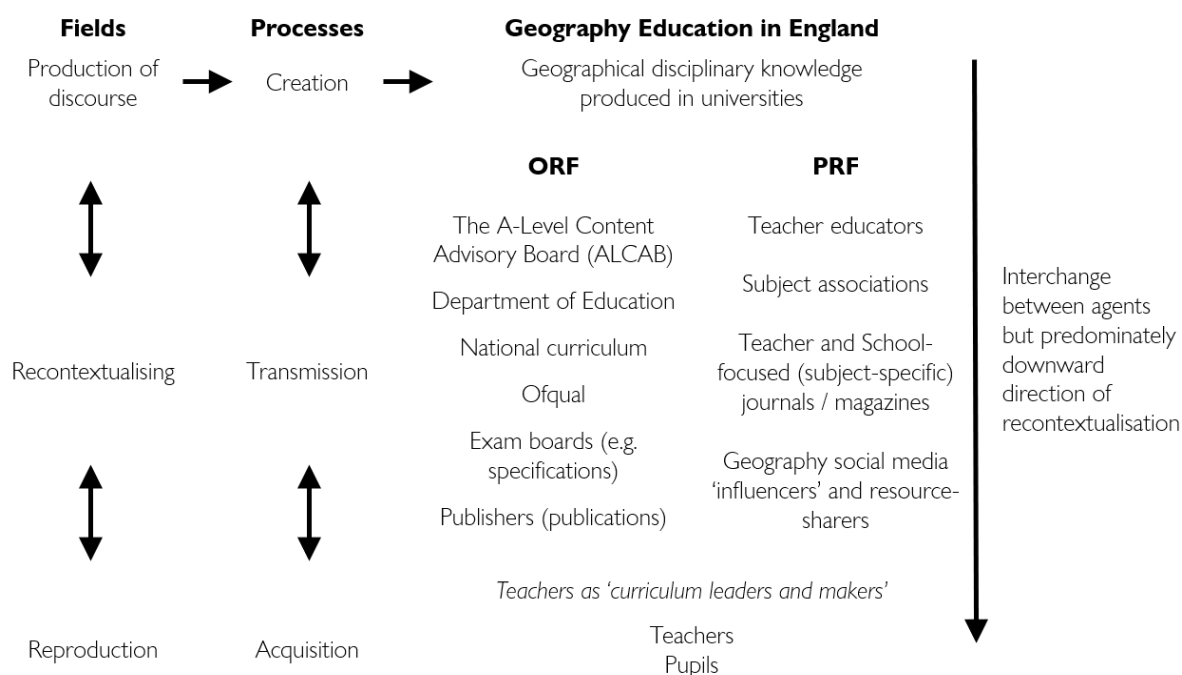


Figure 2 Geography in English Education; ORF is the official recontextualising field and PRF is the pedagogic recontextualising field, author's own after Bernstein 2000: 37

Michael Young (2014: 97, emphasis added), puts it discursively in this way:

"The knowledge stipulated by the curriculum must be based on specialist knowledge developed by communities of researchers. This process can be described as curriculum recontextualization. However, these research communities are not involved in schools. It follows that the curriculum cannot lay down how access to this knowledge is achieved; a further process of 'recontextualization' will be specific to each school and the community in which it is located and relies on the professional knowledge of teachers."

Whilst I welcome the view this offers for the role of teachers, and the need to be attentive to school context without diminishing the 'curriculum offer', one can see again the positing of a sharp and complete division between research communities and schools, at least with respect to curriculum matters. These are, to use Latour's (1993 [1991]) language 'purified' notions of social and epistemic communities. Yet Butt and Collin's (2018) demonstrate this isn't and need not be so. For all the talk and experience of gaps between universities and schools the sense of this is reified by models like Bernstein's. They do not map, nor suggest, the many points of contact between schools and universities (neither of which are – to put it too strongly – 'hermetically-sealed containers' separate from their wider communities, Waters, 2016). They also ignore the hybrid roles that agents play across the fields of activity. Young's social realism is here, in my view, insufficiently social where empirical attentiveness suggests a much 'messier' (Law, 2003) state of affairs. Not that this relativises truth-claims but acts as an invitation to continue the work of description and to attend to the effects on our spatial imaginaries.

What alternatives imaginaries may be employed then? Bosch and Gascón (2014) through the Anthropological Theory of the Didactic (ATD) model, after Chellavard (1985), figure the relationship as linear and horizontal (Figure 3). Scholarly knowledge produced by scholars and other producers feeds into (and receives feedback from) the "noosphere" or knowledge to be taught, which feeds into (and again receives feedback from) teaching institutions and taught knowledge and which feeds

into (and again receives feedback from) groups of students in terms of their learner knowledge. In passing, I will note that Maton's (2014) account which takes up Bernstein's work also includes relations that are also figured horizontally.

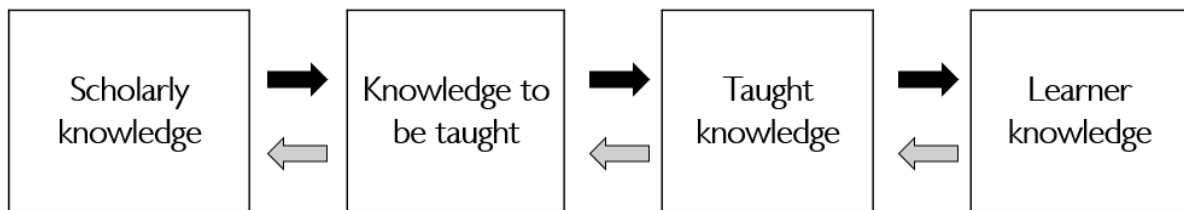


Figure 3 Anthropological Theory of the Didactic (ATD) model, adapted from Bosch and Gascón 2014

While we still have 'containers' of knowledge and agents, and the potential for shuttling and interchange between the forms of knowledge, the idea of the 'noosphere' is appears more diffuse than some of the features of Bernstein's account. That Bosch and Gascón conceived their model horizontally rather than vertically may be a matter of happenstance but it does raise questions about whether there could be cultural specificity to the models. Are there implicit ideological conditions which make it more likely for the theorist(s) to conceive both knowledge and actors as related horizontally on a more 'democratic' plane rather than vertically in dependent and hierarchical relations? I would suggest there are also likely to be effects in thinking this way in the ways in which value judgements are implicitly made in relation to divisions of labour (or through the rules of distribution). These models are not neutral in their effects when a description (an 'is') becomes a prescription (a 'should') or proscription (a 'may not'). I think it is much more likely in Figure 3 that those in a teaching institution (be they teacher educators or teachers) might see themselves as having a legitimate and necessary role in shaping the noosphere, and to make calls on what new knowledge will be produced, than equivalent agents in Figure 2. On the other hand Bernstein's model may make more experiential sense to those teachers who feel broadly disempowered and de-professionalised in a context where they see the Official Recontextualising Field (especially government ministers with responsibility for education, and examiners, and authorised textbook providers) as particularly dominant.

Wilmott (2005) offers a rich empirical account from her doctoral studies of teachers as recontextualisers in two South African schools. While this retains the three fields of Bernstein (Figure 4) arranged vertically, Wilmott's account and diagram suggest a more complex and temporally shifting set of social relations and non-linear processes. That she positions teachers, and argues that they re-positioned themselves, as recontextualisers rather than reproducers is particularly interesting and chimes with the vision of teachers as curriculum makers (who as I attempted to show in Figure 2 are operating across or in the borderlands of the fields of recontextualisation and reproduction). However, Wilmott's powerful observations don't seem to have disrupted the heuristic model as they might have done and broadly keep the vertical elements intact while being suggestive of the potential 'play' (Bernstein, 2000: 32) where "every time a discourse moves from one position to another, there is a space in which ideology can play". Puttick (2015) extends this work through his model focusing on teachers as recontextualisers who operate at different degrees of recontextualisation (Figure 5). Though both are fascinating and productive accounts they seem not to trace these differences back to fundamentally trouble the Bernsteinian model. The vertical spatial imagination is retained and also evidenced in teacher's language (Puttick 2015: 373) about their positioning relative to academics and the ORF.

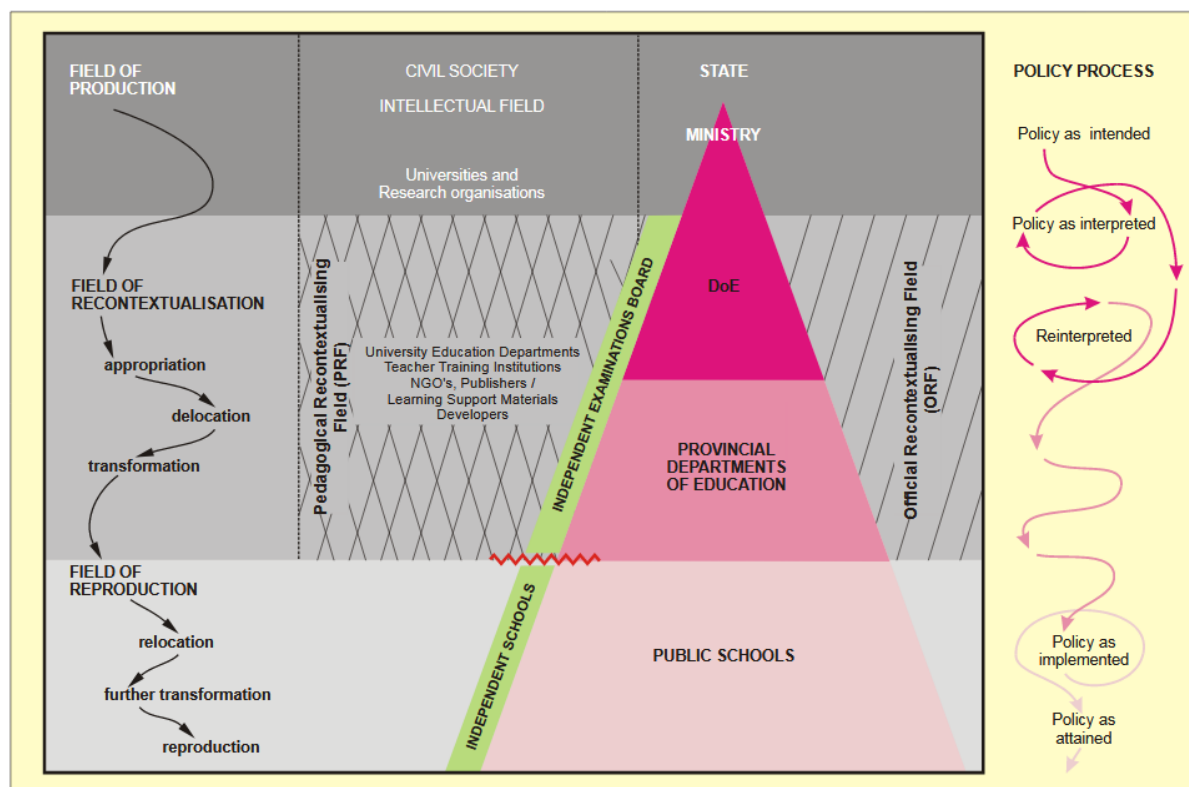


Figure 4 Heuristic for the analysis of knowledge recontextualisation, Wilmott, 2005

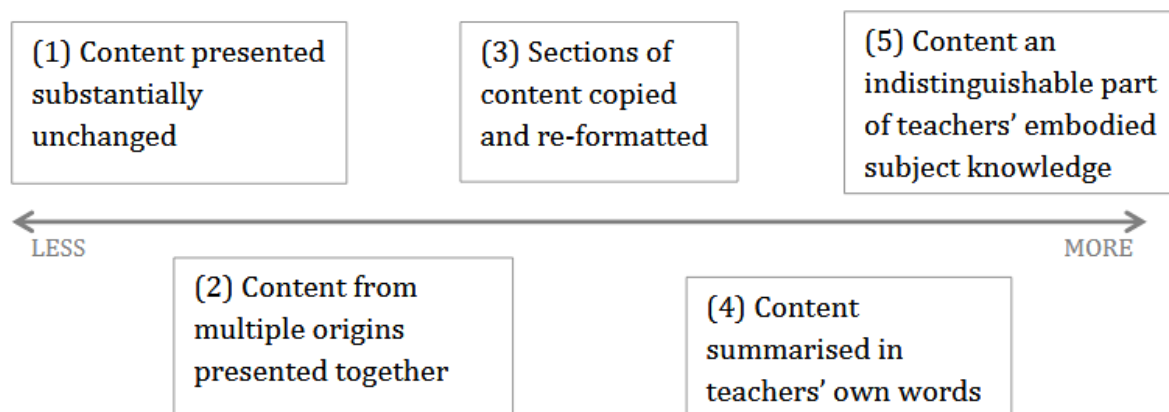


Figure 5, Degrees of recontextualisation, Puttick, 2015

Although this concern with vertical and horizontal relations are not the same thing as Bernstein's distinction between vertical and horizontal discourses they do suggest that Bernstein did tend to a planar imaginary of social relations: that is to say he thought in terms of two dimensions (up and down and side to side). And even where other educational theorists are taking on or developing these or related ideas (e.g. Maton and Bosch and Gascón) they tend to conceive these relations in similar linear and planar ways.

Whilst it may make for less neat figures, scholarship from Science and Technology Studies (STS) or actor-network theory traditions (for example Law 2003 and Latour 2007), and subsequent

geographers exploring assemblage thinking (for example Anderson and McFarlane 2011) offer alternative spatial imaginaries: such as the network or assemblage.

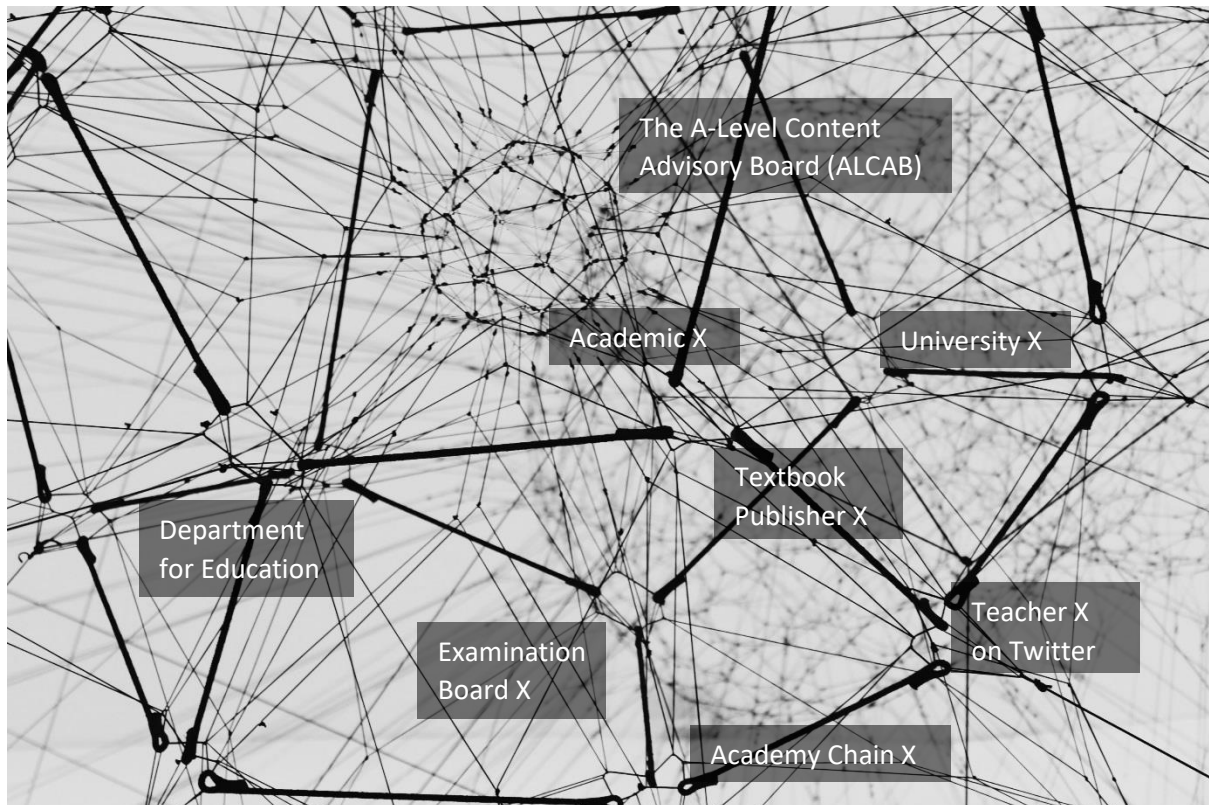


Figure 6, a networked imaginary. This images focused on particular individuals or organisations but could equally focus on other actors that move such as lesson resources, data, policy, affect, tweets and so on, photo by [Alina Grubnyak](#) on [Unsplash](#), text added.

To think three- or even four-dimensionally with the spatial imaginary of the network would make much more visible what is immanent in Bernstein's writing, if not apparent in his model, that the processes by which knowledge comes to 'appear' as something to be cognised in classrooms is a matter of interrelations between heterogeneous and hybrid agents (or actors) which are dynamic and contested.

An imaginary like that in Figure 6 makes it much harder to adduce such clearly and separately defined fields of activity (and this could be critiqued as an unacceptable loss) but the actor-network theory approach does not presume *a priori* what any actors does or is: this is treated as an empirical question. In the following examples I refer to individuals and organisations but of course there are many other actants that we could follow such as lesson resources, data, policy, affect, tweets and so on. Continuing with the English context, we could follow a particularly – and perhaps unusually – networked (or nodal) teacher and see that they have a trajectory which has seen them gain a significant influence on Twitter where they provoke debate and share resources, complete a masters degree, be invited to write a textbook and so on. We could think of the role of a lead practitioner within a Multi-Academy Trusts and their role in producing resources with and for schools in their trust, and their connections to the Department of Education, and emerging teacher-led education research communities. A particularly networked (or nodal) academic may have a trajectory that involves producing journal articles, and a textbook for undergraduate use, being invited to give a subject update at a local subject association branch and take a role on the A-Level Content Advisory Board. Now these may be untypical actors perhaps but I think it would be necessary to 'follow the

actors' to start to be able to answer questions about why some knowledge and not other knowledge is selected for inclusion in curricula, why some producers of geographical knowledge may be drawn on more than others, and why some teachers and not others may be more or less enabled, and more or less expected to recontextualise than others. Further, we might expect to see both variation and similarities between different geographical contexts. The narratives which might be derived from a networked imaginary would likely give us more complicated accounts than fit the current models and the question must be grasped of whether we allow these to trouble these models or dismiss them as 'mess' and hold instead to the neater versions.

4 Following Further Trajectories

By not assuming we know which agents (or actors) are playing which roles we can start to notice more things that might not fit our otherwise purified schemas (Latour 1993 [1991]). Agents may be taking up hybrid roles (and they may be financially rewarded for doing so) and the fields may not be so neatly separated. This seems to be increasingly so, as social media and information technology continue to provide visibility to, and possibilities for the networking of, different actors. To start to notice that which might not fit our existing models I suggest it is instructive to follow those asking related questions about the geography of knowledge production – along three lines that in different ways ask: where is knowledge produced? These are lines of thought that Margaret Roberts picks up and takes in slightly different directions, with characteristic thoughtfulness, in her 2014 paper.

First, geographers such as Jazeel (2016: 663) are engaged in a broad set of work to consider the implications and limitations of the "pervasive EuroAmerican orientation and composition" of the disciplinary community. This can risk a separation between a typically western, white and male academy in which theory and legitimate knowledge is produced, and a field of 'elsewheres' which are reductively envisioned as the sites which provide empirical data for theorising. Jazeel quotes the work of Brazilian philosopher Marilena Chauí (2011: 145 in Jazeel 2016: 657) warning of the risk of authoritarian thinking where:

"Facts are reduced to examples and tests, while theory is reduced to a formal schema or, as is often stated, a model. Providing reality with the task of mere empirical example and bestowing on theory the role of an empty framework for changeable contents, authoritarian thought frees itself from the disturbing need to confront that which has not yet been thought (the real thus being the here and now) and of undertaking the work of a theory wherein form and content are not separate."

The challenge for geographers, educationalists and others is remain open to being disturbed by the "alterity of place" (Jazeel 2016: 657), where we do not simply find new examples from multiple places to slot into, exemplify or modestly rework existing (EuroAmerican) theories or models. Instead we may find untranslatability, or that which may not be recontextualisable. Or, different theorisations than may require the unlearning, or at least provincialisation, of dominant ways of thinking. In this work the presumed 'we' is asked to consider our location and presumptions of the extent of our epistemic community and the limits of 'our' theorising. This is to trouble the division of academy from the field (i.e. as sites of fieldwork). The implications I draw from this for the current discussion is the need to reprovionalise, or reprovincialise, the pedagogic device and the form, processes and actors of recontextualisation. In other words, to question recontextualisation, as it is currently understood. If the geography education community is a global one we might expect to see both accounts which work with and crucially speak back to models such as the pedagogic device. We might also expect to see other models and theorisations of these social relationships which are less immediately legible because we are encountering alterity which hasn't been flattened out.

The second avenue by which geographers have sought to question the geography of knowledge production is through troubling the division of the academy from its communities. This has come through ideas such as the communiversity, and in interventions around the 'impact agenda' in the English Higher Education from Pain et al. (2011) and nom-de-plume trio mrs kinpainsby (2008). These envision academics as part of various communities (both geographically near and far) not as separate to them. This is to refuse a dichotomy of being a productive 'head' at work and a whole being with interpersonal connections and attachments to places 'outside' (mrs kinpainsby 2008: 294-295). They consider the accountability that may follow from this to leverage an academic's position and universities' resources for the benefit of the communities and societies of which they are part – and which may have been subject to disinvestment or disenfranchisement. Whether or not academic geographers are parents, they may find themselves connected to teachers, children and schools. This need not be, and is not always, separated off from an academic's role as a producer of knowledge. This is to encourage a reconceptualisation of the relationships between Bernstein's fields of activity to one that highlights (and perhaps also therefore encourages) connections over gaps, and knowledge exchange rather than knowledge dumping, that proceeds down a vertical chain of agents until it reaches a child.

Finally, these two lines of enquiry pick up a particular geographic tendency to blur the lines between the categories of knowledge that Bernstein employs of mundane and esoteric (Roberts, 2014). Geography educators who want to advocate for a knowledge-rich geography curriculum may need to deal with a certain squeamishness about academic geographer's attention to mundane (or horizontal) knowledge. These may presume disciplinary knowledge such as children's geographies is insufficiently esoteric (in the Bernsteinian sense) and be troubled by approaches like participatory action research, or citizen science, in which 'non-academics' or people of all ages and backgrounds are involved as "subjects and architects of enquiry" (Fine et al. 2000). This approach is being taken in both human and physical geography (such as Whitman et al. 2015). Participatory action research, children's geographies and the growing area of the geographies of education (Holloway and Jöns 2012 provides one of many starting points) complicate the narratives of the separation of fields and of esoteric knowledge from mundane. This could be symptomatic of Bernstein's notion of a weakening of the power exercised through the distributive rules but equally it could point to the limitations of this model and act as an invitation to explore other spatial imaginaries that figure the social relations differently and which may adduce more convivial encounters.

5 Asking Further Questions

In this chapter I have raised some questions about recontextualisation - and more broadly, the pedagogic device. I considered the various spatial imaginaries at work in conceptualising the agents of knowledge-related activities that result in cognisable knowledge in a classroom. This was to consider the ways in which the fields of production, recontextualisation and reproduction may be more blurred than implied by Bernstein's model, and increasingly so with actors taking on hybrid, boundary-crossing roles. I considered what might be gained by conceiving of these relationships in less hierarchal or horizontal (planar) ways – and what networked, relational spatialities might offer. Attention may then be drawn to connections over gaps, to knowledge exchange and its transformation and hybridisation. It raises a series of empirical questions about recontextualisation:

- Where and when does the Bernsteinian model work descriptively and what are its geographical and conceptual limitations?

- How might different geographical-educational contexts conceive of the social processes by which knowledge is selected and made amenable to acquisition in schools? How do these contexts speak back to, or offer counter-points to, the Bernsteinian model?
- How does a relational, networked spatial imaginary reconceive the relationship between the academy, schools and other intermediaries? Who might researchers and practitioners 'follow' to better understand the networked circulations of knowledge and its transformations and commodifications?
- How might researchers and practitioners make sense of the role of social media, such as Twitter, in connecting, or producing divergence between, diverse educational actors, in the circulation of knowledge, the establishment of expertise and social capital, and the blurring of Bernstein's fields?

Asking questions such as these would allow us to follow several geographical trajectories that reconceive the relationship between the academy and other places and communities. These may provincialize the Bernsteinian model and invite other models or theorisations. These could help us pay attention to different organisations of social relations which may, or yet may not, be conceived in top-down or bottom-up terms. It may also allow for the further recognition and valuing of exchange and collaboration between academic, teacher educator and school communities.

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