Two models of professional knowledge

1. CONCEPTUALISING PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE AS REFLECTIVE PRACTICE(SCHON)

Learning by practice
in the workplace

Market demands   **Government Regulation**

- Practice is not differentiated or codified
- Knowledge is implicit in practice
- No sources of innovation except external demands

2. CONCEPTUALISING PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE AS REGIONS OF KNOWLEDGEABLE PRACTICE(REGIONS)

Research
Leading to
Innovation and
new knowledge

Knowledge from disciplines

**RECONTEXTUALISED
BY**

selection
pacing
sequencing

FIELDS OF PRACTICE   **Professional knowledge**
procedural and everyday   (Regions) as the basis of
knowledge   Knowledgeable practice

MARKET DEMANDS   GOVERNMENT REGULATION

Problems; research based

Researching the Professional curriculum; from Schon to Bernstein

1. Background in teaching and research
2. The research traditions on professions and professional development

3. **Donald Schon and the Reflective Practitioner**
4. His critique of 'traditional professional education "from the academy to the messy swamp of practice"
5. Schon's alternative – an 'epistemology of practice'
6. Schon's appeal
7.

8. **Basil Bernstein knowledge-led approach to professions**
"The construction of the inner was the guarantee of the construction of the outer. In this we can find the origin of the professions"

9. Bernstein's theory
   - The differentiatedness of knowledge
   - Forms of knowledge differentiation
10. Types of knowledge structures
11. Types of relation between knowledge and practice

SINGULARS, FIELDS OF PRACTICE and REGIONS
12. Regions- their structure and purposes
13. Bernstein's innovation
14. Weak and strong professions and their knowledge
15. A concluding note

Michael Young February 2014

Researching the Professional curriculum; from Schon to Bernstein

1. Background – teaching and research
- **Teaching**
- a Masters degree course with the title **Education for the Professions.**
- **Research**
- Theoretical and curriculum issues arising from the sociology of knowledge and the tradition that stems from Durkheim and Bernstein

2. Research on professions and professional education
It has been is dominated by two traditions:
- sociological approaches which set out to expose professionalism as an ideology- this developed initially from a Marxist perspective and interpreted professions as a section of the ruling class and but more recently drawing largely on Foucault. This means that professions are treated largely in terms of the complex power relations of modern societies. Parallel with these strands of theoretical thinking is a focus on challenges to professions either from the increasing dominance of the market or by neo liberal policies represented by new forms of accountability, and threats to their relative autonomy over their work.

What was avoided was asking what knowledge was it that clients and patients trust when they trust doctors, lawyers, and accountants, and which appear to have less grounds for trusting in nurses, teachers and social workers.

It is this question that the book Joe Muller and I edited, **Knowledge ,Expertise and the Professions** sets out to consider and which I will draw on today.

Donald Schon(originally a philosopher in the American Deweyian pragmatist tradition) and the idea of professions as Reflective Practitioners
As a tutor on a course called **Education for the Professions** , I faced the enormous influence in professional development, , especially for teachers, of Donald Schon's idea of the 'Reflective Practitioner'.

What struck me was that in his approach Schon separated his key idea that a member of a profession needs to be a 'reflective practitioner' from **the knowledge** that distinguishes members of a profession from their clients, patients or students or other lay persons.

As a consequence, in the literature on professional development the knowledge that future professions may have to acquire is largely neglected or taken for granted.

As the philosopher Chris Winch has pointed out, and here I over-simplify - professional knowledge involves:
'knowing that' - the concepts of a subject or discipline relevant to her/his practice, and the relations between them , **and**
'knowing how' to use these concepts in their professional practice . Furthermore, only a part of this knowledge can be acquired, through experience. Hence the limitations of Schon's approach.

I shall argue that Bernstein's ideas offer us a more productive way forward in three ways;
- in conceptualizing the 'knowledgeable practice' that is distinctive of professions, and suggesting
- how this 'knowledgeable practice' varies widely across different professions.

A few words about Schon before turning to Bernstein.

1. There is no doubt that Schon identifies the predicament of any new member of a profession facing their first client, patient or students At the same time he identifies crucial flaws in many programmes for 'professional education. New professionals do not know what to do and little that they have learned at university seems to help. This explains the popularity of his work in the

field of Professional Development. It may also explain why there are many attempts to re-design programmes in medical and engineering education which start with 'problems' that the profession faces rather than the body of knowledge they need access to.

2. Schön describes traditional professional education programmes as technical-rational and linear- crudely put- you acquire the basic knowledge and this tells you what problems in your field are and how to solve them.

3. He points out that even in engineering , real-world problems are rarely well formed; they complex and ill-defined, and involve technical and non technical issues. This means that engineers even in their first job have to act more like researchers – trying things and seeing whether they work.

4. Schon's approach is based on what he calls an 'epistemology of practice' – that a profession's knowledge is tacit and located in their everyday practice and the process of reflecting on it – hence his idea of the 'Reflective practitioner'.

5. Members of prrofessions, for Schön, builds up their experience of certain types of situations and examples, and it is this 'store of experience' rather than their 'specialised knowledge', that forms the basis of their expertise and judgement.

6. Schon's is a kind of 'learning from one's mistakes' model- not so different from what people do in their everyday lives. It is intuitively attractive, an obviously forms a part of becoming a doctor or engineer, but it is a highly individualistic and in the end 'conservative' approach(I don't mean necessarily in the political sense, but in the limitations of its sources of innovation change). It is *specific experiences*, for Schon, that take precedence over the power of *generalisable knowledge*. One only has to think of the work of the structural engineer or the surgeon to know that experience alone cannot be the basis of professional judgment. Why has it been so popular? Three possible reasons:

- It appeals to those designing professional development programmes because it claims to be generic to all professions, and gives them claims to a unique body of knowledge.
- It means those involved in CPD do not need to worry about the specialist knowledge future professionals must acquire, whether they are engineers, accountants, or teachers.
- It perpetuates the idea teaching has no specialist knowledge base- more like a craft- to echo the Secretary of State- and encourages a view, especially in a fields like teaching, nursing and social work but even in engineering and medicine, that specialist knowledge is unimportant.

7. This almost 'anti-intellectualist' stance towards specialist knowledge is even more problematic in the wider context of a global economy- in which according to the OECD- 50% of jobs by 2020 will be for knowledge workers who are graduates or better.

The next section discusses Basil Bernstein's ideas. He is hardly known in the fields of professional education and professional development.

My question is "Does he offer a way of getting beyond the knowledge practice split which Schon seems to criticise but in effect perpetuates?

It his last book, Bernstein made the following cryptic and rather obscure comment:

'The construction of the 'inner' was a guarantee for the construction of the outer. In this we can find the origin of the professions'

I interpret Bernstein's comment as follows- it is 'the *knowledge* that *shapes their* practice' that should be the starting point for conceptualising professional knowledge. Shaping is the key word. This is quite different from the technical-rational model which Schon criticises as assuming that practice follows theory and quite different from the knowledge-free 'epistemology of practice' that he proposes.

Bernstein's theory of professional knowdge

A. Bernstein starts with the idea that knowledge is differentiated. This is particularly important in English when knowledge can have very different meanings....

B. Professional knowledge is different from theory and different from practice or common sense. It depends on two forms of knowledge differentiation:

- between knowledge types(disciplines) with different structures and
- between types of relation between knowledge and practice.

1. The differentiation of knowledge structures
1.1 Bernstein distinguished between:
- **hierarchical** knowledge structures(**mathematics and the natural science disciplines**) and
- **segmented** knowledge structures(**the social sciences and the humanities**)

in terms of how new knowledge is developed- through generalisation or through new ways of posing problems

1.2 This difference is better understood as a continuum across the science/social science divide; the social sciences tend to take their *methods* from the sciences and their *content* from the humanities .

Different forms of professional knowledge draws on different combinations of disciplines, depending on what he refers to as their field of enquiry..

2. Types of relation between knowledge and practice

Bernstein distinguished between *three* ways knowledge(theory) can relate to Bernstein distinguished three ways that knowledge can relate to practice. He defined them as 'singulars', 'fields of practice', and 'regions'.

SINGULARS are Bernstein's term for knowledge 'pursued for its own sake' – knowledge which *has no relationship to practice except its own.* The goal of singulars is to 'find the 'best(or truest) knowledge'. The first singular, *theology-* was also the professional knowledge of the first profession, priests. Gradually, singulars extended the domain of theology from 'after life' to logic, the material world and the universe(the domains of philosophy and the sciences) and later to the social world (the domain of the social sciences).

The nearest we get to singulars are academic disciplines, like history and physics and new ones like genetics and neuro-science. They are found on both sides of the science/social science and humanities divide but because of their 'success' in their applications, the sciences are now the dominant disciplines.

FIELDS OF PRACTICE
Refer to all the activities of everyday life, sometimes clearly differentiated, sometimes specialised, sometimes codified. The defining feature of fields of practice is that their concepts are tied to the contexts

REGIONS are Bernstein's term for the professional or applied knowledge (see diagram) . Regions re-contextualise concepts from disciplines and combine them with the codified

knowledge of a field of practice to **transform**(or at least attempt to transform) that field of practice for particular purposes, (examples are curricula intensive care, nuclear reactors Examples are :

- physics into engineering and
- sociology into social work or social policy.

The distinctive features of regions are both structure AND their purposes:

Structure of regions

- they are sectoral; they relate to *specific* 'fields of practice'; hence regional
- they are multi-disciplinary as they are shaped by 'fields of practice' and so draw on more than one discipline-

The purposes of regions

- Regions depend on (but are different from) disciplines.
- Whereas disciplines are concerned with *explaining the world*9 they are in Bernstein's terms 'oriented to inwardness) regions are concerned with *changing or transforming the world* – they are oriented both to inwardness through the choice of disciplines and outwardness, their field of practice.

Bernstein's innovation

1. He converts the traditional binary distinction **between theory and practice** into a **three fold distinction- singulars(disciplines), regions and fields of practice**. He thus introduces a 'mediating concept – region- to describe the activity of a mediating occupation- members of professions. By conceptualising 'regions' we replace a account of professional practice as a 'mystery' – it just happens(Dreyfus and Dreyfus) or as intuitive(Schon) with a theory that can be empirically tested- and improved.

2. Distinguishing 'weak' from 'strong' professions.

1. A profession's 'control' its field of practice, as in cases such as engineering, medicine and law, through its specialised knowledge. This involves:

- agree on their specialist knowledge (much more likely in the science-based professions)
- the authority of their specialist knowledge being accepted by the wider society
- professional decisions defended by arguments and evidence rather than opinions and beliefs- early medicine and power- law
- the ability of a profession to limit the involvement of external interests such as politics and the market
- the 'field of practice' is codified and institutionalised

All these are empirical research questions that arise from Bernstein's concept of region as a knowledge relation.

A concluding note

I want to illustrate the practical possibilities of the approach I have outlined by describing a project I have been involved in Cape Town to mentor academic staff undertaking PhD's and funded by the Andrew Mellon Foundation - 3 researching engineering, one actuarial science and one physiotherapy and occupational therapy.

The staff involved were appointed in Academic Development(AD) to support Black students taking

professional courses such as engineering; each is based in a specialist department . Originally the focus of AD was on the 'academic literacy' skills that the weaker students appeared to lack. However partly influenced by the failure of ALS courses, and partly by developments in the sociology of education they began to shift their focus from academic skills the curriculum for progammes with highly specialised knowledge. To put it a bit crudely they shifted from Schon to Bernstein- or from practice to knowledge. The danger was that they might devise a curriculum that made learning easier by diluting the specialist content of the curriculum which would perpetuate the problem they began with. Their alternative approach was to recognised a research problem- how to conceptualise the professional curriculum in each case. This has involved specialists in these professional fields and thus the curriculum for future members of professions became the research focus.

It is early days; one direction which draws on the model I have outlined to you is to develop Bernstein's concept of *re-contextualisation* and the three processes he suggested which might be involved when disciplines are transformed into teaching subjects- selection, sequencing and pacing of knowledge. These concepts are then used to explore the assumptions that professional specialists, such as engineers, make about the knowledge future engineers will need –the findings of such research could provide the basis of a reformed curriculum and pedagogy. The problems of such an approach, which may explain why there are so few empirical examples is that it requires, in the case of engineering us as educational researchers or sociologists to be 'double specialists' and have a degree of familiarity with other forms of specialisation as well as our own.

Michael Young-February 2014