

**Then and now: Challenging the Reproduction of Values in the Secondary Curriculum: A Critical, Reflective Commentary on Practitioner Dispositions**

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**Abstract**

This article provides a reflective commentary on the modification of the lead author's professional practice in a secondary academy in England. The modification of practice has been as a result of work conducted on a postgraduate Masters module, which has focused on practitioner development of an exemplar grammar lesson devised for Year Nine collaborative learning. The motivation to publish this work is in light of a heavily structured, prescriptive and time pressured approach to teacher development which disconnects professionals from more meaningful enquiry into the practice they are engaging with.

The work initially sets the scene for the situated context detailed above, before moving into a reflective commentary that focuses on the lead author's structurally influenced dispositions to practitioner development. The paper then moves into key conceptual considerations that have underpinned the development of practice, which subsequently leads to details on the implementation and evaluation of the new learning intervention.

With the intervention founded on *praxis*, it is the critically reflective and reflexive conceptual work completed which is of central interest, and the conclusion that spaces for undertaking a genuine reflective and reflexive approach are diminishing in educational practice. As a result, the authors finish the article with a number of recommendations for practitioners to be given space for authentic reflection focusing on classroom practice, dialectical critical enquiry, theory and reflexivity.

**Keywords**

Reflection; Reflexivity; Enquiry; Pedagogy; Bourdieu.

**Setting the Scene**

This article provides an account of work completed on a *Teaching, Learning and Assessment (TL&A)* Masters module. With the module aligning to a form of practitioner enquiry (Dadds, 2006), the work completed has encouraged the reflective (Bolton, 2010; Moon, 2004) and theoretical development of the lead author's secondary classroom practice for English grammar lessons. The work constructed on this module followed a patchwork text process (Winter, 2003), where learners construct a series of responses subsequently 'stitched together' (ibid:1) via a reflective commentary.

Although founded on critically reflective and reflexive conceptual work revealed during the module, there is no intention here to provide a prescriptive development pathway to what could be deemed as corrective 'best practice' (Adams, 2014:128). Moreover, this article is not advocating for models of professional training and support. Although models can be considered as important for professional development (Philpott & Oates, 2015:35), experience concurs with the view that these cannot be disconnected from existing educational theory and research (ibid:36). What is of central interest is the reflective journey within the TL&A module and the resulting reflexive questioning of personal

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dispositions, influenced by political educational positioning and policy initiatives. These have re-defined the nature of teacher professionalism around the acquisition of skills at the expense of reflection and professional understandings (Adams, 2014:160). It is the development of these deeper understandings, and the role of educational research and theory within a reflexive context, that are the focus here. In particular, Bourdieu's work on cultural reproduction (1973; 1979; 1984; 1986) has given space to explore transformative conditions in practice (Mills, 2008): a form of sociological imagining (Wright Mills, 1959) on how things could be otherwise.

This reflexive context can be defined as the act of scrutinising tacit experience to the point where understandings of the interplay between structures and agents operating within education (Costa and Murphy, 2015:6) are foregrounded, rather than remain underlying and essentially invisible to the practitioner. This approach led to the questioning of personal ontological position and motivation (Bolton, 2010), via three critical questions, then investigated as part of the TL&A module:

1. How successful has past teaching practice been when influenced by political and ideological structuring within education?
2. In light of the above, what is important for reconfiguring practice to increase opportunities for learners with diverse needs?
3. How successful has this reconfigured practice been within an ideologically structured educational environment for both the practitioner and learners?

What follows is the lead author's response to these questions, via the drawing out of her reflexive journey on the aforementioned module. The start of the reflexive journey can be characterised as past complicity in creating structures that are destructive of diversity, where there has been an inadvertent lack of contestation to a managed power imbalance in educational practice (Bolton, 2010:7). The reflexive journey then shifts into informing conceptual considerations on how things could be otherwise, before moving into a learning intervention that directly responds to question two. This intervention attempts to empower a diverse range of learners via an engaging curriculum, which can be more allied to notions of educational 'public good' (Wilkins, 2011:390). After considering the effectiveness of the intervention in relation to question three, the article finishes on the two authors' conclusions and recommendations for the wider educational community. We would suggest that this journey highlights the importance of countering inadvertent educational stasis, and this can only be undertaken through a transformative reflective process involving reflexivity (Finlay, 2008:5-7). Dadds highlights that practitioner enquiry needs to examine beliefs and assumptions to claim philosophical validity (2006:2), but opportunities to find space for critically dynamic reflexive work (Grenfell and James, 1998:12) seem to be diminishing (Adams, 2014:vii). This represents a key area of concern leading to the development of this paper as it is argued practitioners must be alert to the limitations of a more structurally managed professionalism that takes away judgement and autonomy (Ball, 2013:106).

### **Lead Author's Reflexive Journey**

#### **Q1) Structural Influences on Dispositional Teaching Practice**

Having taught, initiated and assessed learning for 24 years in grammar schools and for two years in a non-selective secondary academy, the initial reflection (Moon, 2004) in my Masters TL&A module focused on where my experience meets the government's educational intentions. My review of literature soon revealed one keenly felt conclusion; that I am the successful product of a highly politicised education system (Ball, 2013) where policy aims first not to educate, but rather to control, form and maintain the status quo within traditional neoconservative structures (Ball, 2013:15). Some success may be attributed to this objective with the straightjacketing of practice, curricula and pedagogy (Macrine, McLaren & Hill, 2010:131); but it is also pertinent to consider the drive to further our national position within globalised neoliberal educational reform (Ball, 2013:44). This agenda

provides prioritisation to 'strong grammar' (Bernstein, 1999:163-166) subjects, characterised by an emphasis on precisely defined empirical sciences. This international agenda is encouraged by policy borrowing within a climate of performativity (Ball, 2013:57) and subsequent national reform is fettered with neoconservative ideology by the denigration of weaker grammar subjects (Bernstein, 1999:163-166), such as Sociology which defies precise empirical definition. The intertwining of these ideologies can be characterised by systemic educational failures and, whether I liked it or not, result in the realisation that I am a product of a reproductive system, which I have been produced within and legitimated by (Graham, 2014:826). This reproduction has occurred within my family over consecutive generations of teachers; moreover, the vast majority of my pupils stay where they are too.

The above alludes to stratified, reproductive opportunity for learners (Porter and Simons, 2014) within ideological structuring. Failures to address reproduction within education can be associated to the evolution of policy rooted in 'contradictions and incoherences [sic]' (Ball, 2013:17), whereby one political party after another re-works its 'ramshackle' (ibid:35) rehearsal of the 'education being organised along the lines of social class' (ibid:68). With the political system in England moving to the right post the result of the European Union referendum in 2016, it is perhaps no surprise that selective grammar schools are back on the agenda (May, 2016), providing tensions with globalised OECD educational reform (Coughlan, 2016). Yet, these political considerations have not been my day-to-day motivation as a teacher. My dispositional objective has been to teach specialist knowledge and skills so learners fulfil their potential and break through whichever contemporary glass ceiling pertains to them: ultimately helping them to achieve in a perceived meritocratic society. On reflection, I have found this is not what I have been doing; rather, I am the object of 'two decades of controversy' (Reynolds, Sullivan & Murgatroyd, 1987:14). Born as I was in 1965 and completing my first degree in 1987, and armed with the comprehensive education I received and now teach, I feel that I continue to reproduce division, rather than break it.

What is more, I now realise that imposed curricula have led to dispositional practice that I have little control over; what and how I teach has become a 'performative' professionalism (Wilkins, 2011:392), one defined by managerial structures and associated measurable outcomes of performance, providing little perceived space for professionals to act with autonomous judgement on curriculum requirements. Lawton (1980) provides a comprehensive discussion of how successive governments of the 1960-70s took hold of the curriculum, a curriculum deemed somewhat ironically as '...too important to be left to teachers' (ibid:24). During the late 1970s and early 80s, rather than being devised by experts and educationalists, curriculum control belonged to politicians, firmly 'in the hands of others who are in no position to exercise it effectively' (Kelly, 2009:2). By 1982 (my 'O' level year), 'shades of the prison house were beginning to close around pupils and teachers' (ibid:1), in terms of curriculum control, disempowering professional judgement for both the content and assessment. Eight years later, as an NQT, my conscious, diurnal priority was (and still is) to educate, not focus on 'traditional discipline' (Lawton, 1980:72) or 'comply with central manipulation' (ibid:132). But complicit I am; so where was my rebellion? Where could it have been? It is only now, through this reflection, that I recognise that the restorative ideology of today - 'a good education is all' - is not all. Concurrently, it has to be acknowledged that a social and economic agenda appears to dominate central government concerns for schools.

Indeed, I now recognise I have been inadvertently supporting both New Labour's 'necessarian logic' (Watson and Hay, 2003:26), which portrays reform in relation to economic globalisation as a common sense inevitability, and more conservative neoliberal concerns surrounding globalisation. Working in the state system has not only ensured what I teach but also how I teach is tightly managed via an inordinate range of policy technologies (Ball, 2013:48-62) - referred to as 'hyperactivism' (Dunleavy & O'Leary, 1987) or the creation of a wide range of policy initiatives to react to perceived dominant

ideological need for educational regulation. My experience infers this has been a deliberate political device, imposing change so authentic professional development and reflection are squeezed out. I suggest this is for one reason: as Bolton writes, 'Effective reflective practice and reflexivity are transgressive of stable and controlling orders; they lead cogs to decide to change shape, change place, even reconfigure whole systems' (2010:7). And this seems to be exactly what the government does not want teachers to do.

I reflect that a tight grasp over what teachers do in the classroom has encouraged a new era of structurally managed professionalism (Furlong, 2005:123), rather than being an 'exercise in professional judgement' (Adams, 2014:136). This not only controls the what and how of classroom practice, but also constrains reflexive professionalism, ultimately contributing to a failure in the promotion of effective teaching practice. Instead we see a content-driven emphasis on skills 'banking' (Freire, 2000:72), where learners 'bank' ideologically valued packages of knowledge with little critical reflection, learned by rote-practice and encouraged by curriculum requirements. As a result, not only is control paramount, but, additionally, authentic opportunities for learning are limited to those with the appropriate *capital* needed for success; I return to the notion of *capital* below in my discussion of aspects of Bourdieu's. I have come to recognise there is a diminishing space for critically transformative educational possibilities within practice (Mills, 2008), which could be created in more culturally relevant terms for learners. Work conducted here underlines Bolton's suggestion that reflection helps to challenge assumption and ideological bias (Bolton, 2010:3), which demands a measured approach to how my practice stands theoretically in relation to perceived requirements. I have found this a worthwhile exercise even with the painful admission that my assumptions were naive and my past ideological illusions were more akin to delusion. However, the process of questioning my dispositional objective in light of the past – 'then' – does allow me to access the power of reflexivity – 'now' – by developing richer understandings of my role in relation to others (ibid:13) and reconsidering the impact of *habitual* action.

So, before trialling a pilot intervention which would both comply with structured requirements and meet my personal educational values, I found myself asking, what then can I do in the classroom to break from a cycle of socio-educational stagnation? I was keen to develop strategies compatible with structured contexts yet offer pupils greater opportunities to succeed. With the work signalling theoretical and conceptual underpinnings for developing practice, the section that follows foregrounds these considerations. The work of Bourdieu (1973; 1979; 1984; 1986) provides a theoretical starting point on making the 'familiar, unfamiliar' (MacDougall & Trotman, 2009:13), followed by a critical consideration of how reflection and learning have been re-conceptualised in the context of work carried out here.

### **Moving Towards Q2) – Conceptualising Reproduction, Reconceptualising Reflection and Learning**

Conceptually, I am entering into what Bourdieu would describe as a *double objectification*; that is, the explicit ideological consideration of my own background in order to avoid being controlled by my own beliefs (Holm, 2013:136). Such reflexive positioning has led to considering both my dispositional nature and the resultant connections with Bourdieu's 'grand theory' of culture, education and learning (Bryman, 2012:21). Bourdieu represents reality from a holistic 'structural constructivist' perspective (Kauppi, 2006:319), where the role of individual agency in the construction of reality is constrained by material and symbolic societal structures. The outcome of exploring this perspective is the development of an enlightened view of the why, which then allows more transparent consideration of how to proceed. This conceptual starting point sits differently to meritocratic conceptions, such as those offered by the current prime minister when justifying the re-introduction of selective grammar schooling (May, 2016). I now consider that this conception of education does not provide a fair opportunity for all, particularly since en masse, grammar school cohorts are now dominated by privately tutored Year Seven entrants (aged 11-12), as opposed to the inherently gifted disadvantaged

for whom the system was originally designed. Moreover, the *double objectification* entered into highlights ideological influence on practitioner *habitus*, or 'unthinkingness' when 'taking things for granted' in practice (Mills, 2008:82). Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* is useful here, interpreted as personal dispositions generated unknowingly through a range of external influences (that, here, may contribute to practitioner reproduction of dominant values in education). Thus, via this *double objectification*, my *habitus* can be seen to be shaping, rather than determining life choices (ibid). In recognising these factors, I believe I have reflexively transformed from stasis to a greater consciousness and ultimately, much valued transformative practitioner agency (Dadds, 2006:2).

These conceptual foundations have led to a conscious decision-making process focused on whether or not I can challenge structures that are potentially limiting and can be addressed by the broadening of *cultural capital* used within the classroom (Mills, 2008: 83-84). In this context, *cultural capital* can be seen as dispositional knowledge and attitudes contributing to an individual's *habitus* that is acquired outside of school, which will be either more or less valued as capital in academic contexts. I refer here to the broadening of what is accepted as valid cultural experience within educational systems and, for learners lacking cultural connection to traditional *academic capital*, this may position them as discursive insiders within practice (Northridge, 2003). However, this is a particularly difficult proposition within the 'strong grammar' vertical discourses (Bernstein, 1999:163-166) of my English subject area. Here, structures prioritise established canons of *objectified capital* (Bourdieu, 1986) within the curriculum encouraging pedagogy to play 'second fiddle' to subject knowledge (Adams, 2014:132). This has engendered an intrinsically behaviourist micromanagement of learning: a pedagogic strategy dependent on stimulus response with no independence (Gray and MacBlain, 2012:4). Again, it is all about control, with the inevitable, stifling result: the vast majority of learners emerge from education in the same social class, with the same socio-economic expectations and sustain the same culture of so many generations before. This saddening reflection served as further motivation to ensure any intervention I developed was founded on potential transformation from the *habitual* reproduction of division in learner opportunity.

With the reflexive conceptualisation detailed within the reflective journey so far, work inevitably took a metacognitive turn (Moon, 2004:86) to reflection and its role within my own study, juxtaposed with prior encounters as a teaching model rather than framed around insightful learning (Moon, 2004:13). Despite professional development and literature emphasising reflection as an important professional skill (Kyriacou, 2007), these contexts can encourage a deliberate squeezing out of more insightful use. Here, reflection aligns with 'engineering' learning to allow students to acquire 'commodified' knowledge (Moon, 2004:106) via linear diagrammatic training models such as Gibbs' reflective cycle. These tidy models can be considered as deceptive (Eraut, 2000:28), where the process is commonly represented in formulaic and simplified terms (Moon, 2004:114) – a form of *objectified capital*. Many call for teachers to be given a genuine chance to reflect but this is problematic for practitioners within institutionally time-pressured contexts (Finlay, 2008:19) and work is needed to re-conceptualise reflection past the annual and (it has to be said) somewhat superficial 'Reflection' on performance management pro-formas.

A more insightful use of critical reflection and reflexivity (Finlay, 2008:5-7) encouraged a recognition of how far my dispositional teaching has been influenced by behaviourist approaches. These were more viable in previous grammar school experience, where learners were equipped with the necessary *social* and *cultural capital* (Mills, 2008:84; Bourdieu, 1984) for achievement. However, this traditional behaviourist foundation does not link to my subjective reality currently faced in practice. Here, a lack of acceptable *cultural* and *social capital* amongst disadvantaged pupils leaves them marginalised, unable to access an education which supposedly provides meritocratic opportunity. Furthermore, learners' *habitus* can also hinder movement beyond established broader stratified *fields*. Bourdieu's 'visceral intolerance' (1984:56) of another social class was recently voiced by one of

my learners in the heartfelt and spontaneous exclamation, 'I hate the upper classes!' This exclamation suggests division lies so deeply, some learners are not only unable but are also *habitually* unwilling to access different cultures.

I came to understand that although the current political call may be for commodified knowledge interventions (Ball, 2013:26), it is left to practitioners like me to re-conceptualise a classroom strategy which over-takes meritocratic and traditional approaches to learning. This encouraged the consideration of constructivist approaches for a new intervention, providing opportunity for independence and initiative (Millis, 2014). Ultimately, I found opportunity to promote the professional values I believe should underpin and dominate education today to encourage genuine transformation. This is not to say that traditional, formulaic approaches do not have their place in practice and any approach within a single lesson necessitates a variety of pedagogical conceptualisations. What is advocated is the vital promotion of independent practitioner thought, learner creativity and initiative, generated by internally active, mental process which may otherwise be marginalised by the drive towards traditional, top-down, prescribed educational approaches. We cannot create entrepreneurial, enterprising young people to challenge global economic insecurities, by dictating knowledge and fabricating skills 'banking' (Freire, 2000:72) approaches within society.

Wells and Claxton position this societal situation as one of 'confusion and fragmentation' (2002:1), which I suggest is heightened by dictating knowledge and eliciting a culture of performing skills-on-demand. If yesteryear's education cannot guide tomorrow's, and society is in a 'complex heterogeneous flux', theory must be given room to aid re-appraisal of 'the means and ends of education' (ibid). Wells and Claxton's ontological recognition of fluidity lends a welcome, buoyant optimism to our concerns; considering the already established ability of educational theory to move beyond the behaviourist stimulus-response of Pavlov (Bartlett & Burton, 2012:197), pedagogical approaches can go beyond contemporary ideological framing. Similarly, my own practice can be engaged with behaviourist approaches when it suits the structural context while also going beyond ideological framing with additional co-constructed and reflective layers of intervention when possible to do so. For example, the current emphasis on generating and assessing measured outcomes can sit alongside an equally useful focus on the 'introspective processes' (Gray & MacBlain, 2012:4) that contribute to learning, coupled, in this instance, with a purposeful sociological reading of Bourdieu. As a practitioner, I feel I have achieved a renewed insight into my profession, subsequently galvanised into new approaches that can be associated to *praxis*. The concept of *praxis* has its roots in Greek philosophy and although it is broadly analogous to contemporary conceptions of practice (ibid, p.167), it emphasises the connection of theory and practice through dialectical thinking (MacDougall & Trotman, 2009:15). Greek philosophers would see little sense in the contemporary separation of these concepts (1993:168) and the tendency to put theory on a pedestal over practice. The unified process of *praxis* emphasises that action is guided by attempts to realise a morally worthwhile 'good' (ibid); and as highlighted in this paper, it has been guided by the reflexive consideration of my own educational values in relation to theory, to dialectically reconfigure practice over time for the benefit of learners from a diverse range of backgrounds.

## **Q2) Reconfiguration for Diverse Learner Need via *Praxis***

To find room to exert teachers' professional judgement on emancipatory and transformative opportunities for learners, Kelly (2009:8) advocates for a reinstatement of an enriching 'educational curriculum' which is liberating, promotes and respects freedom and generates social empowerment. A curriculum of this nature can be associated with the development of employability and enterprise, as well as an opportunity to socially construct situations that are more inclusive of learners' cultural starting points. To extend these informing perspectives for piloting a new intervention, research advocates for strategies which employ cognitive approaches (Laird et al., 2014; Millis, 2014) that also draw on students' potential for learning through social interaction (Millis, 2014). In my first post in 1990, my Head of Department was quick to tell me, 'Helen, don't teach them what to think. Teach

them how to think!’ which indicates that this cognitive aspect is not new. However, the contemporary informing change is the reflexive association to ‘theoretical underpinning[s]’ (Kelly, 2009:1) and the new social and cultural insights this brings.

My intervention became a series of constructivist grammar lessons on sentence structures, deliberately designed to support disadvantaged year nine pupils lacking connection to *academic capital*. Focusing on constructivism, each lesson was designed to harness co-operative learning through problem-solving (Millis, 2014) and engender independent learning skills in order to achieve deep learning (Lublin, 2003). Deep approaches to learning encourage ‘better thinkers’ (Laird et al:402) so, for example, the lesson stimulating this reflection demanded critical thinking, active cognition and overtly encouraged positive attitudes to learning. An example lesson plan, extended rationale and evaluation for the intervention can be found in a separate document (Ward, 2015) for those interested in the details of this practical intervention.

### **Q3) Measuring success**

In short, the evaluative outcomes of the intervention provided a mixed picture of effectiveness. Resultant development of grammatical competencies through peer-work indicated a closing of the gap (James, 2013) between lower and higher ability learners; but this curricular success was tempered with learners’ lack of confidence in self-reflection and self-assessment contexts. Despite such lack of confidence, learners displayed an appreciation of peer-work and one particular learner (within an evaluative context) recognised the development of teamwork and leadership skills, indicating the potential for learners to develop softer skills that tend to be ignored within a continuing climate of hard knowledge accountability (Adams, 2014:143-158). At the same time, it is important to recognise that some learners provided less enthusiastic comments, indicating difficulties with implementing a reflective approach such as this due to lack of familiarity. This was echoed by my lesson observer (peer-work was required in the context of the TL&A module), who recognised that ‘...some children were expecting traditional pedagogic strategies’. Clearly, despite the self-reflective and reflexive contexts that have allowed for the critical consideration of the impact of structures on my own practice, this needs to be extended further into the lived experience of learners and the difficulties that their own pedagogic expectations present. The lack of perfection in the outcomes of the lesson indicate that the development of new practice is a delicate and continual balancing act to bring about more meaningful interventions for learners.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

With the preceding sections voicing the lead author’s engagement with the core questions asked within the context of the TL&A module, the conclusions and recommendations represented here have been subsequently jointly agreed by the authors in response to these module experiences. Although success can be attributed to an intervention that has been developed in the micro-autonomy of the classroom (Wilkins, 2011:401-402), further space for dialogical development is undoubtedly needed. The underlying difficulty here however is the lack of time available for practitioners to make such development on a day-to-day basis. Such a conclusion is drawn out of the reflective work conducted above and aligns with the view that time for this work is lacking within a heavily structured environment (Bolton, 2010:5). To combat a cognitive and cultural dissonance between what teachers need to do and what teachers believe they can do, space is needed for supportive mechanisms where ‘effectively facilitated reflective and reflexive professional development is amply repaid’ (ibid). It is vital that practitioners have the opportunity to reflect and socially construct relevant, meaningful knowledge (Herrmann, 2013) rather than ‘offering [learners] a curriculum that is irrelevant, meaningless and alienating - and, at worst, using the educational system as a means of effecting an inhibiting form of social control’ (Kelly, 2009:248).

With the above in mind, we recommend that space for the following should be created to encourage transformative conditions within forms of practitioner enquiry and development (Dadds, 2006:2). The

intertwining nature of these recommendations means that they cannot be easily disconnected from each other.

### **Create space for authentic critical reflection on action**

The reflection presented here has highlighted the tendency for structural contexts to use reflection as a method for 'engineering' the acquisition of 'commodified' knowledge (Moon, 2004:106), where the chances for genuine reflection are stymied by a bland and mechanical application (Finlay, 2008:2). In apposition to this is the importance of reflecting-on-action, rather than reflecting-in-action (Schon, 1983), which has greater potential to further tacit knowledge that a practitioner has acquired over time. It is agreed that professionals need to find ways to more meaningful reflection that goes beyond a set of rules and procedures (Finlay, 2008:3-4), which is the common, more positivist formulaic representation (Moon, 2004:114) within educational contexts. These positivist conceptions of reflection are unlikely to allow practitioners to see past meritocratic configurations of education, into more valuable transformative approaches for all. However, in order to find these more genuine opportunities for reflection-on-action, and to counter some of the criticisms of Schon's work, the types of critical reflection should give attention to social and political structures (Finlay, 2008:4-5). Sustained practitioner enquiry should have its roots in this type of reflection (Dadds, 2006:4) and, if it does not, then our society will be responsible for preparing a 'generation of teachers as technicians or deliverers of set strategies' (Reid et al., 2004, cited in Adams, 2014:135).

### **Develop space for dialectical critical enquiry over time to construct pedagogical practice**

Reflective contexts can be allied to 'critical evaluation' (Finlay, 2008:1) and the vital role practitioners have in research (Kelly, 2009:16). This type of research provides an appropriate fit with the attributes of a good teacher and evaluating transformative learner contexts (Dadds, 2006:2). As discussed above, with the imposition of performativity measures (Adams, 2014:143-158), the straightjacketing of educational practice (Macrine, McLaren & Hill, 2010:131) and time-pressured contexts (Finlay, 2008:19), practitioner institutions need to find the time and space for genuine development of practitioner evaluation and CPD enquiry. This is a difficult recommendation to address, with the straightjacketing within educational systems prioritising objective knowledge and procedures, as well as prescriptive teacher development, rather than marginalised subjectivities of individual practitioner experience. In addition, particular problems can be seen with the 'strong grammar' (Bernstein, 1999:163-166) definition of particular subjects, which invite traditional didactic and passive approaches when knowledge is governed by rules. With blame being positioned on institutions and practitioners themselves, it is in the interests of those on the front line of education to enter into these critical spaces for the benefit of learners; and they can only do so with extended perseverance. As such, a 'mutual, reciprocal and shared process' (Finlay, 2008:7) has to be admissible within CPD contexts, yet the dialectical nature of this should not be limited to the individual practitioner and the institutional management structures they reside within. Learner voice has an important role within this dialectical configuration of critical enquiry, but with the prioritisation of objective forms of knowledge in conjunction with didactic, behaviourist pedagogical approaches, this causes problems. Indeed, nothing short of a transformation of institutional dispositions towards learning is also required. For the work conducted in the context of this article, a meaningful evaluation was only possible when disconnected from evidence-based practice (Finlay, 2008:3) and aligned with constructivist approaches to uncover learner dispositions in a critically evaluative dialogue. To work, this requires practitioners to engage with, and argue for, well-researched and theoretically underpinned approaches that go against the pervasive 'technical rationality' that exists within teacher education (Hall, 2004:37) and objectively positioned professional development models that encourage didactic transmission (Philpott, 2016b:3).

### **Integrate space to use theory and critical enquiry in the context of reflective practice**

Reflection on practice and critical enquiry involves examining the assumptions of everyday



practitioner experience (Finlay, 2008:1) and the tacit knowledge this entails. In order to challenge what may become a dispositional reproduction of what has been done before (and the pervasive technical rationality (Ball, 1995) of objective approaches foregrounded in education) theoretical distancing is required to make the 'familiar, unfamiliar' (MacDougall & Trotman, 2009:13). Here is a key element of 'cultivating learning through evidence-based teaching' (Philpott, 2016a) and dialectical critical enquiry. It involves practitioners breaking down the artificial, discursive barriers set up between theory and practice to enable new approaches via *praxis* (Carr, 1993:167-168; MacDougall & Trotman, 2009:15). Although the theoretical constructs of Bourdieu have been useful within the situated context of work carried out here, readers of this paper should not unquestioningly align the use of this within their own work. This theoretical position provides particular practitioner alignment to the learners worked with here as well as the lead author's reflexive positioning; but this may not be the case for others. However, rather than being perceived as having no role in the work of a teacher (Adams, 2014:139), theory should help to work within objective discursive realities experienced, such as ideologically framed corrective best practice (ibid:128) and the uncritical assumption that idealised models provide a superior and objectively evidence-based mode of professional development (Philpott, 2016b:8-9). These ideological facets align to a structurally managed professionalism (Furlong, 2005:123) that practitioners need to dialectically 'remix' (MacDougall & Trotman, 2009:19) with theory for their situated contexts in order to find authentic situated meaning via *praxis*.

### **Dedicate space for reflexive comfort in the critical uncertainty of the past and present**

With practitioner research emphasising the need to be self-conscious of presence (Dadds, 2006:2), and reflection requiring individual self-awareness to learn from experience and gain new insights (Finlay, 2008:1), reflexivity can be seen as a key part of critically considering practice (Finlay, 2008:5). This has an important role in guiding the use of theory to help resist the *habitual* reproduction of problematic structures within practice, such as the prioritisation of subject knowledge over pedagogical practice (Adams, 2014:132). Yet again, this is not an easy task with performativity measures threatening any sense of agency, leaving practitioners with little time to reflexively negotiate their own professional identities due to the treadmill of meeting standards (Adams, 2014:129-130). It is important to note here that there is no clean or objective certainty to be achieved here (Dadds, 2006:3) and practitioners need to find continuing critical comfort in the subjective uncertainties of the past and present, to provide more considered possibilities on what the future could hold in the messy realities of educational enquiry (Bryman, 2012:15). The type of reflexivity advocated for here requires conceptual work on how professional identity is defined by structures and the individual in question (Finlay, 2008:6) and, in the case of the work presented here, Bourdieu's work has provided a key bridge from personal reflexivity into reconceptualising pedagogical approaches. This dynamic reflexive work (Grenfell & James, 1998:12) is not easy, and practitioners must be alert to the limitations of a more structurally managed professionalism that takes away judgement and autonomy (Ball, 2013:106). Finding space for this, and the previous points, will at least move practitioners into positions where the micro-autonomy in the classroom (Wilkins, 2011:405) can be taken advantage of, to enrich professional identities and the experience of all learners (Mills, 2008:87).

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