

RESEARCHING INNOVATION IN CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGY FROM A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

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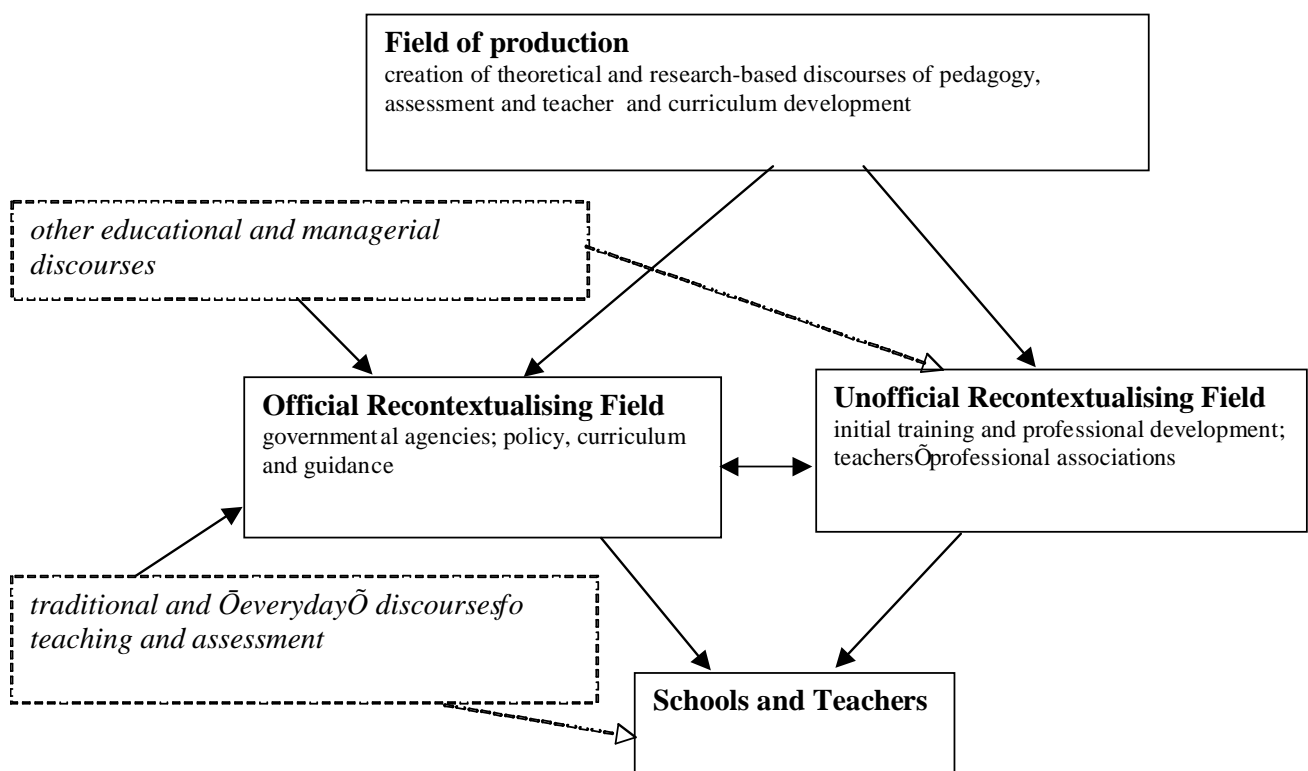
Traditional discourses of curriculum and pedagogic reform frequently make use of an individualistic transmission or acquisitionist view of teacher learning. The principles of the reform are stated and exemplified and it is expected that teachers should adopt and implement them. In practice, we know that this adoption does not happen quite so simply. Rather, some parts of proposed programmes of reform are rejected or ignored, while others are transformed. Explanations of problems in implementation of curriculum development tend to focus on teachers' resistance to or distortion of new curricula (e.g. Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992) or on a lack of "teacher capacity" in subject or pedagogic knowledge (e.g. Earl et al., 2003). Such identification of teacher deficit as a barrier to successful development focuses attention on intervention at the level of training and support structures for teachers but fails to take into account other factors that may affect the success of curriculum development, including those related to the form of the development itself and to the wider context within which teachers are situated. Alternative discourses of teacher development through participation in communities of practice recognise the transformations that occur as teachers adopt new practices and the role of participation with others in this process, but do not generally provide analytic tools that might enable us to predict the ways in which a given development programme may be implemented or resisted.

I propose an approach to conceptualising and studying the implementation of curriculum development, drawing on the theoretical and analytic tools of Critical Discourse Analysis (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 1995). When a new development in the curriculum is introduced, it provides new discursive resources for teachers to use in their practice. These do not simply replace existing resources but are likely to be used alongside them. Analysis of the discursive resources on which teachers may draw, of the broader cultural context within which they are situated and of factors that may influence the ways in which teachers select from the resources available to them allows identification and prediction of possible positions that teachers may adopt in relation to the proposed development and hence of the ways in which it may be implemented.

Attempts to reform pedagogic practice originate at different places within the education system, developed and disseminated by agents with different interests and different relationships to teachers. My focus in this paper is on 'official' reform – endorsed and promoted by official agents of the state. While the ideas behind the reform may originate in theories of education, the construct of recontextualisation (Bernstein, 2000) helps us to recognise that the selection and transformation of these

ideas are structured by principles developed within intermediary recontextualising fields, involving both official and non-governmental agencies. In order to understand the transformed implementation of a reform, we must acknowledge and analyse the fields of production and recontextualisation of pedagogic knowledge and recognise the interests of the agents in these fields.

The United Kingdom has seen a plethora of official curriculum developments, supported by programmes of in-service training and regulated by punitive regimes of measurement and inspection. I shall consider two texts produced and disseminated by government agencies and addressed to teachers. One presenting a definition of ‘good teaching’, taken from guidance for mathematics teachers in secondary schools (DfES, 2001); the second attempting to persuade mathematics teachers to adopt recommended techniques of ‘Assessment for Learning’ (QCA, 2003). The analytic approach has two stages, characterised as structural and textual. The structural stage attempts to locate the text within its broader context, identifying the discourses that may be drawn upon by teachers in interaction with the text and the ways in which they may be positioned within these discourses. The textual stage pays close attention to the text itself, making use of tools drawn from structural functional linguistics (Halliday, 1985) to identify the ways in which teaching, teachers and students are constructed within the text and how its readers are positioned. The space available in this paper does not allow full textual analyses but I provide summaries from analyses published elsewhere.



Education in England is regulated by a regime of inspection of teachers and of schools and by systems of national examination of students, the results of which are used as measures of effectiveness of schools and for performance management of teachers. The official discourse of teaching thus draws on managerial discourses as well as those produced within the field of education itself (see Figure 1). The managerial use of examination results produces positions of *effective/ineffective* teacher, based on the application of quantitative criteria. At the same time, the inspection regime uses observation of classroom teaching to make qualitative judgements about teaching based on criteria that can be traced to educational theories of learning, placing value on concepts such as 'active learning'. This produces positions of *good/satisfactory/unsatisfactory* teacher which overlap with but are not identical to the effective/ineffective positions. The introduction of the National Strategy as a programme of curriculum and teacher development, has introduced a further pair of positions: *compliant/non-compliant* with Strategy recommendations.

For mathematics teachers, establishing a positive professional identity involves positioning themselves within discourses of education and of mathematics teaching in particular in ways that allow them to be seen by others and by themselves as

Figure 1: Discourses and agents of recontextualisation of curriculum development (adapted from (adapted from Morgan, Tsatsaroni, and Lerman, 2002)

'good' teachers of mathematics. They must thus be able to demonstrate that they have the qualities valued within the relevant discourses as qualities of good teachers of mathematics and that their teaching practices are consistent with those that are valued as 'good practice'. However, the definition of 'good teacher' is contested. In opposition to the official descriptions and inspection criteria for good teaching, alternative discourses of teaching are available, produced and disseminated by those involved in initial training and professional development and by teachers' professional associations. Like the official discourse, these draw on educational theory, but recontextualise it in ways that reflect the interests of the agents in the unofficial field. Discourses produced within this unofficial field tend to reflect 'progressive' forms of pedagogy, accepting a definition of mathematics wider than that defined by the official curriculum and valuing a range of student activity beyond that endorsed by testing regimes. Moreover, rather than valuing compliance with the official curriculum and guidance, unofficial discourses are more likely to value such concepts as innovation and reflective practice, which incorporate 'good teachers' into those who contribute to a self-regulated profession, capable of determining the nature of good practice without governmental decree.

In (Morgan, 2005) I discussed the widespread acceptance and implementation of the guidance for teachers provided by the National Strategy (DfES, 2001) and the apparent contradiction between this successful implementation of a curriculum development and the continuing observable diversity in the practices of secondary teachers in England. Analysing the official description of 'good teaching', I identified

characteristics of the discourse that allow teachers to claim compliance with the guidance while using a wide variety of practices. Significant features of this text construct an image of 'good teaching' as:

unquestionable – The use of passive voice and impersonal language provides no author to debate with and the qualities of good teaching are presented as scientific facts, without any argumentation or reasoning that would allow space for disagreement or debate.

unitary – Only one type of teaching is named. This is contrasted and opposed to "lecturing" (which is not teaching) and to pupils teaching themselves (which again is not teaching).

verbal and, to a high degree, teacher-centred – In spite of the claim that good teaching is not lecturing, a high proportion of the verbs used to describe teaching are verbal processes, e.g., explain, question. This appears to provide an image of a 'traditional' pedagogy with clearly defined mathematical content and strong teacher control.

But it is simultaneously constructed as:

all encompassing – The description of teaching incorporates concepts such as investigation, exploration from other discourses of mathematics teaching, allowing a more 'progressive' pedagogy in which students themselves have some control over the direction of their activity.

In spite of the ambiguous image of good teaching, incorporating features of both traditional and progressive pedagogy, the text prevents debate about its nature. While individual teachers are able to preserve their professional identities as good teachers whatever form of pedagogy they adopt, they are nevertheless incorporated into compliance with the official definition and are thus subject to the official forms of evaluation. The stifling of debate allows the government to claim a high degree of success for this curriculum reform.

Similarly, in (Morgan, 2007) I analysed an extract from guidance about Assessment for Learning in mathematics issued by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA, 2003), looking at the positions constructed for teachers and students. This extract exhorts teachers to use methods that involve students in taking responsibility for their own learning, claiming that this would lead to improved outcomes. It ends with the claim:

When pupils take responsibility in this way their performance standards can rise across the board. It is true that some pupils will resist this, wanting to blame the teacher rather than themselves for their lack of learning, but such methods are surprisingly successful if persisted with.

In this case, the text includes space for teachers to position themselves as 'good teachers' even if their attempts to use the recommended methods of assessment appear unsuccessful. Failure is to be seen as the fault of deviant (resisting) students rather than teacher incompetence. This text again draws on apparently opposed discourses of teaching: on the one hand, the stress laid on student responsibility for

their own learning suggests a progressive child-centred pedagogy; on the other, measuring the success of this by 'performance standards' uses the language of a more traditional form of pedagogy. In both cases, the texts allow teachers to preserve positive professional identities as good teachers while drawing on a number of different discourses of teaching. The problem of conflict between existing practice and the introduced curriculum reform is thus avoided.

The CDA approach allows us to understand how official curriculum developments in the UK act to regulate teachers by suppressing debate but providing discursive resources that allow teachers to be compliant in a variety of ways while maintaining positive professional identities. The texts considered here are written, official publications, but similar analyses of other types of written and oral texts, including those produced by teachers, can provide insight into the concepts and values employed by curriculum developers, teachers and others, identifying areas of conflict and contestation that may influence the implementation of an innovation (Morgan, Tsatsaroni, and Lerman, 2002). Structural analysis of the discourses and agents involved in the production, dissemination and recontextualisation of reform ideas enables interpretation of the textual analysis and, by identifying the positions available for teachers, makes it possible to predict a range of practices resulting from the reform (though not, of course, the practices of individual teachers).

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