

**Researching the interdisciplinary curriculum: a case study
in developing theory and method [abstract only]**

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[4366288] Researching the interdisciplinary curriculum: a case study in developing theory and method

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In this presentation we draw on our collection of three papers, two published and a third in progress, to explain a mode of researching and theorising the design of the interdisciplinary curriculum and how curriculum making has emerged as a specific object of study. Paper 1 (Pountney and McPhail, 2017) explored how the design of the interdisciplinary curriculum can be researched and identified a translation device suitable for this. Paper 2 (Pountney and McPhail, 2019) applied this device to a case study of an interdisciplinary curriculum to theorise a model for knowledge-led, learner-engaged curricula. Paper 3 (in progress) aims to examine the attendant pedagogic identities that emerge in these contexts. We model the theoretical and methodological progression in these papers as an elaboration of what Basil Bernstein referred to as the 'ethnographic position' (Bernstein, 2000: 134), in which the researcher digs beneath the empirical features of education to explore their underlying structuring principles, and then excavates further to analyse what generates these principles, by means of both empirical research and theory building (Maton and Muller, 2007).

We begin by explaining the conceptual and methodological challenges facing us as we investigate the development of interdisciplinary curricula in secondary schools in the UK and New Zealand. The key issue we identify is one for both researchers and teachers: how might the concepts and perspective of one discipline be brought into a relationship with another to enable deep learning? This question in turn highlights a key methodological challenge for us: developing the means to describe and evaluate new forms of curricular design and implementation where a traditional discipline-based curriculum has been rejected in favour of interdisciplinary ones. We employ Bernstein's (2000) concept of knowledge structures and languages of description to theorise a continuum of approaches to curriculum integration, from functional to principled, as a form of translation device. We show how this methodological manoeuvre makes accessible to analysis the organising principles that are in play in the interdisciplinary curriculum design practices we have observed.

Building on the translation device for researching the interdisciplinary curriculum developed in Paper 1, we next asked how and to what effect an interdisciplinary curriculum can be realised. We describe a methodological heuristic, the Young and Muller 3 Futures model (Young and Muller, 2010), in the case study of a new school in the UK, chosen to examine the school's claim to be both knowledge-led and learner-engaged; characteristics of the Future 3 scenario. The value to us of Bernstein's concepts of classification and framing, and the idea of open schools, will be explained, with indications of how we progressed the curriculum integration model developed in Paper 1 (Pountney & McPhail, 2017). The theorisation we offer of the school's approach may provide insights for researchers of schools embarking on a futures model for education and for twenty-first century educational discourses more generally.

Finally, we return to the analysis of the interdisciplinary curriculum to examine how teachers are active in curriculum making, taking up the notion of teachers as curriculum makers emerging from paper 2 (Pountney and McPhail 2019) to explore teachers' epistemic orientations to designing and teaching the curriculum. We will share our emerging research design to investigate the pedagogic identities (Bernstein, 2000: 45) operating on points of the continuum of curriculum integration developed in paper 1 (Pountney and McPhail, 2017). By means of this excavation method, elaborated in the series of papers, we will discuss how the curriculum develops, and, importantly how change in the curriculum can be imagined and made possible. The discussion of our research will be of interest to curriculum researchers because of both the methodological challenges discussed and the responses we have made.

References

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