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# A time for discipline: disciplinary displacement and mythological truths

Ken Harley and Volker Wedekind

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## Abstract

We argue that the study of education and more specifically education policy studies has become impoverished by the lack of ‘disciplined’ and ‘disciplinary’ approaches to specific research problems. We illustrate our argument by examining the ways in which educationists, policy makers and researchers have embraced certain educational myths or mythological truths without taking cognisance of substantial and sustained evidence and argument that counters the myth. Specifically, in order to illustrate our argument, we explore the predominance of progressive pedagogy in education policy, viewed unproblematically as emancipatory and empowering, despite sustained theoretical critique and empirical evidence that should temper these views.

We suggest that educational research operates increasingly in the realm of what Durkheim described as ‘mythological’ rather than ‘scientific’ truth. While we recognise the important function of mythological truth for social practices, we argue that educational research best serves social justice and equity when it is located within the realm of scientific truth, and that the socially constructed disciplines currently offer the most useful vehicle for operating in that realm, or at the very least providing a baseline for working within the field.

## Introduction

This article arises out of a concern with developments in the field of the study of education both at the level of the curriculum and at the level of the production of knowledge. Two issues concern us: firstly, there has been a rapid move away from the establishment of firm foundations in the disciplines that underpin educational knowledge, and secondly, there is a disturbing tendency for educational researchers and teachers uncritically to accept certain concepts, beliefs and ideas about education as unproblematic truths. While the latter is not a new phenomenon, we suspect that the former tends to exacerbate the latter.

In order to develop this argument, we first attempt to trace some of the forces that have played themselves out in the field of education and which have resulted in the decline of the disciplines. We then explore one of the growing areas of educational research, namely policy studies, and suggest that there is reason to be concerned at the state of the field. By examining in some detail the case of progressive ideas in education, we suggest that there is an alarming disjuncture between what a range of disciplinary based studies reveal about progressivism, and the almost wholly uncritical nature of the response from within policy studies. In this article we seek to understand why this has been the case and suggest some consequences of this failure for the *longue duree*. Our thesis is that the seeming inability to challenge myths is a direct consequence of the decline in disciplinary forms of knowledge within the field of education, both nationally and internationally.

## Change in knowledge production

Understanding the shifts in the production and recontextualisation of educational knowledge, and specifically the decline in disciplinary teaching and research, requires a contextual understanding of a number of exogenous and endogenous forces acting on the field of education over the past decade. For purposes of this paper these can be cursorily highlighted, but they have been elaborated elsewhere.

Firstly, there have been significant ideological shifts in the international political economy that have had direct consequences for the organisation of higher education. The 1970s and 1980s witnessed an onslaught on those branches of the social sciences –such as sociology - that were regarded as threatening. The Thatcher period effectively drove sociology of education in Britain underground and into applied areas such as policy studies, educational management, school improvement. Philosophy all but disappeared from courses, and philosophers too were required to reinvent their specialisations in applied forms. The exception was psychology, which remained relatively unaffected by these developments because, we suspect, its focus on the individual suited the individualist ideology of the period. Given the South African English medium universities' orientation toward the Anglophone world, these developments in Britain and the USA trickled into South Africa as well.

These global political pressures were coupled with a number of related developments in the spheres of technology and economics that have been extensively debated under the banners of globalisation, informationalism, and late/postmodernity. These developments all highlight the shift to applied (mode 2), responsive, problem-based, life-long learning systems in which knowledge is a commodity that is packaged and sold in chunks. This form of knowledge is usually inter- or non-disciplinary and views boundaries as archaic markers of elitist territoriality to be regarded with suspicion. These ideological and economic forces became allied to the dominant constructivist approach that underscored the need for a problem-based approach to learning. Increasingly, knowledge production organisations such as universities constitute their institutional form along the lines of this new knowledge economy in order to service that economy. Disciplinary depth and ‘purity’ are necessarily compromised.

While the above trends are not peculiar to South Africa, there have been national imperatives and shifts in the higher education system that arose out of the political realignments after 1990. Post-apartheid South Africa required academics to reorient themselves away from an oppositional stance to one of constructive engagement with national priorities. As many academics from a critical location became involved in policy development, materials writing and consultancy, there has been a consequent loss of the development of the various disciplines in education, as well as the critical distance those academics had from the state prior to 1990. This trend has some resonance with the development of schooling in early USA:

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries American educators paid theory scant heed. Theorizing, they thought, was a luxury they could ill afford. More important work awaited them ... With ... great practical problems facing American education, it is easy to understand why educational philosophers had a holiday. Whatever theory seemed imperative to guide educational practice could be imported from abroad ... (Power, 1970, p.601).

In addition, in South Africa the political commitment to democracy often translated into an ideological appeal that disparaged disciplinary approaches as part of the elitist establishment, sought to make teaching and research directly relevant to practice, and celebrated previously ‘disempowered’ voices.

These forces played themselves out at the level of the curriculum in a number of ways. Elsewhere we have identified the following as key trends within the Education Studies curriculum at our own university over the past decade (Wedekind and Harley, 2002):

- Semesterisation and modularisation
- Knowledge integration and inter-disciplinarity
- Active learning and constructivism
- Opening of access
- Instrumental relevance and application.

Essentially, what has happened since 1990 is that the curriculum has changed from a face-to-face, content-based, disciplinary curriculum where history, comparative studies, sociology and philosophy were taught as *singulars*, to a materials-based, process/problem-based, interdisciplinary curriculum where education was taught as a *region*.<sup>1</sup> To put it into the language of so many pamphlets, our curriculum shifted from the ‘old’ to the ‘new’.

Paradoxically, in one of the few areas where there has been a growing critical voice, disciplinary failure in *schooling* is being increasingly recognised as a major problem (Taylor, 2000). Empirically, research conducted toward the President’s Education Initiative (PEI) (see Taylor and Vinjevoled, 1999) and, somewhat more coyly, the report of the Review Committee on C2005, suggests that in the school curriculum “integration has overshadowed attention to conceptual coherence and progression”; that “there has been an under-specification of the requirements for conceptual coherence across all the eight learning areas”; and that there is a “relative neglect of conceptual coherence ...” (2000, pp. 39-40). This view is supported by a growing international body of evidence that depth of disciplinary content knowledge in teachers is significant for student learning (see BERJ, 2002; Grossman, 1990; Grossman and Stodolsky, 1994, 1995; Stodolsky and Grossman, 1995). Thus, while there is growing recognition that the quality of education offered in the schooling system is undermined by a lack of conceptual coherence, this insight is not translated into the realm of the study of education itself, if the above case of changes in Education Studies is reflective of a general trend.

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<sup>1</sup> Singulars are intrinsic to the production of knowledge in the intellectual field, and address only themselves. Regionalisation occurs with the technologizing of knowledge. Regions are the interface between the field of production and a field of practice (Bernstein, 1996, pp.23).

## Research and knowledge production in policy studies

Ever since NEPI, academics have been recruited in large numbers into policy development. This trend is especially notable in the development of the Norms and Standards for Teacher Educators, and the C2005 Review. (More direct recruitment occurs too in the form of DoE employment of one-time academics.) This is an unusual occurrence when compared with other contexts where academics often feel that they are ignored in the processes of policy development (see BERA, 1999 and 2000). In South Africa, there were significant opportunities for the academic community to inject the policy development process with insights from research.

In addition to the direct involvement in policy development, writing about policy seems to have acquired its own dynamic. The field appears healthy, with a spate of recent books being published: Kallaway et al (1997); Morrow and King (1998); Jansen and Christie (1999); Sayed and Jansen (2001); Kraak and Young (2001); Motala and Pampallis (2001). Throughout this literature, policy *fidelity* is a powerful theme (fidelity naturally being a good thing). Within this lies a pragmatic question: “Is policy being implemented, and is it ‘working’?” Policy fidelity can also be viewed from the perspective of whether it is true to the original visions of the education struggle and the first years of political democracy. Chisholm and Fuller (1996) provide an early review, using the concept of ‘people’s education’ as a benchmark against which to analyse reasons for the “centering and narrowing of educational policy” (1996, p.693). More recently, the term “slippage” has acquired currency. For example, in the Introductory Chapter in Kraak and Young (2001), the period 1990-2001 is interrogated in terms of policy slippage (Kraak’s view) or policy maturation (Muller’s). Editors Young and Kraak argue that “there has inescapably been policy slippage from the idealism of the early 1990s to the realism of a decade later” (2001, p.11).

While policy studies are of varying sophistication, one cannot escape the impression that quite a lot of it (eg. in Sayed and Jansen, 2001) operates within the constraints of a research, development and diffusion (RD&D) model. RD&D was characteristic of agriculture where innovations were targeted at farming practices, and it posited an orderly passage of knowledge from research to development and diffusion and adoption. It diverges from conventional academic research because of

the assumption that it is products embodying solutions, rather than hypotheses or ideas behind those products, which are being tested. The main concern [of RD&D] is getting the product 'right' and then marketing it (Stenhouse, 1989, p.219).

Consistent with this model of research is the overwhelming predominance of studies on policy implementation in South Africa. There are few examples of analyses grounded in history, economics, sociology, comparative studies or psychology. Furthermore, writing about policy does not appear to have much of a theoretical base, or the base is misrecognised. Witness, for instance, from the Introduction to Jansen and Christie: "Ken Harley and Ben Parker conclude this section with an important Weberian analysis of OBE which presents one of the few incisive, theoretical treatments of the subject in the international literature" (1999, p.16). One wonders if anyone noticed, or cared, that this analysis was actually based on the work of Emile Durkheim.

Interestingly, notwithstanding its strong pragmatic fidelity perspective, policy studies has been strongly criticised by Rensburg (2001) for not helping the post apartheid mission. Indeed, policy studies are characterised as policy commercialism. The basis of Rensburg's criticism is significant:

I am arguing here that in South Africa policy analysis and research has drifted alarmingly away from what I wish to call a conversation, a debate, the elucidation and elaboration of a theory of education transformation, at systems and institutional levels. (2001, p.129)

In a recent critique, Unterhalter argues that:

... the mode of analysis appears to be descriptive, strategic or rhetorical. Possibly the pressing task of transformation has not left time for questions of epistemology and methodology, but the silence signals unexamined theories ... (2000, pp.13-14).

An interesting and disturbing recent analysis of policy formation argues that there are indeed some disciplinary influences. But the problem, argues Skinner (2003), is that influential disciplinary influences are of the kind that undermine social justice. In particular, Skinner argues that 'cognitive science' and economics become increasingly influential as so-called 'hard' sciences offering the potential to make social policy amenable to analysis and prediction by 'expert' scientists and economists.

While we have not attempted a comprehensive review of the strengths and weaknesses of policy studies in South Africa, we would suggest that there is sufficient anecdotal evidence for concern. We may write about policy slippage, but it is clear that there has been a case of slippage within the academy itself. There has been a failure to infuse into policy studies those

findings and debates that expose inherent flaws in policy. As these findings and debates are rooted in disciplinary traditions, it is clear that the research community has been impoverished by disciplinary displacement or disciplinary amnesia.<sup>2</sup>

We illustrate this argument by examining the case of the rise of progressivism within education policy. Our own review of published research and higher degree work on Curriculum 2005 has highlighted the overwhelming extent to which analyses of the new curriculum and its implementation are framed by an imperative to improve implementation, rather than to examine the curriculum critically from a disciplinary perspective (see Harley and Wedekind, forthcoming). What is particularly striking is that a key dimension of the curriculum, namely its implicit pedagogical model, is singularly absent from the analysis and discussion of the new curriculum. Progressive pedagogy and related traditions appear to have infused policy debates in South Africa, and thus presents a useful case for examining the relationship between policy studies and knowledge generated within specific disciplines. What follows should not be read as a rejection of the tenets progressivism, but rather an illustration of the strategic problems that arise when the history of the progressive movement and its applicability in a developing context is simply overlooked.

### Disciplinary displacement: the case of progressivism

There is little doubt that it is for historical and political reasons that curriculum policy has twinned OBE with progressivism and constructivism. Although seldom explicitly named, progressivism pervades policy documents on the 'new' system and underpins the approaches taken within in-service and pre-service teacher training programmes. Learner-centredness, critical thinking, and groupwork are central to C2005 (DoE, 1997). Indeed, the C2005 Review Committee identifies learner-centredness as one of the three underpinning tenets of C2005 (together with outcomes-based education and integrated knowledge).

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<sup>2</sup> By amnesia we refer to the short changing of theory or the current debate being seemingly unaware of the literature.

The transformation impulse underpinning educational policy throughout the 1990s set up a dichotomous model in which 'the old' equalled 'bad', and the 'the new' equalled 'good'. 'The old' was characterised by 'tradition', 'teacher authority', 'content knowledge' and 'compartmentalisation', and so, almost by default, 'the new' had to be everything opposite (see also Morrow, 2001). Furthermore, there were residual traces of the image of people's education, which had been conceptualised within a radical democratic framework. The political reasons for the coupling of a particular pedagogic approach with the new curriculum policy are not difficult to understand. However, what is less clear is why this coupling has met with nothing but tacit, or more commonly, uncritical active approval from within educational research and policy analysis communities. There are no necessary reasons from education research why the coupling should be regarded as axiomatic, yet it remains almost totally unquestioned.

### Historical roots of progressivism: liberation or control?

A number of traditions of disciplinary thought suggest that the academy would have had grounds to question progressivism and constructivism as unproblematic 'good things'. Even a cursory glance at the historical roots of progressivism suggests that there are reasons for caution. The teleological roots of progressivism can be traced back variously to the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the invention of the printing press (Chung and Walsh, 2000), to the Jesuit orders of the middle ages (Durkheim<sup>3</sup>, 1977) or more commonly, to the 19<sup>th</sup> century influence of European idealists on American democrats. Perhaps the single most influential moment was the confluence of ideas on child-centred developmentalism and Dewey's democratic educational ideas. However, as Chung and Walsh's historical review shows, the development and defence of particular forms of progressive pedagogy (such as the use of small groups) had at least as much to do with the maintenance of jobs for teachers threatened by retrenchment, as they had to do with philosophical or psychological theories of learning (2000). Progressive education emerged in a specific historical context within a specific cultural milieu, not as some unproblematic good, but rather as a pragmatic response to a social problem. This particular approach then became codified and legitimated so that a century later it was possible for it to be imported into another social context as if it represented a universal good.

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<sup>3</sup> Although Durkheim doesn't name it as such.

Historical analysis provides a useful basis for policy analysis. However, other disciplines in education have also examined the phenomenon of progressivism and its impact. In particular, the sociology of education throws out a rich vein of critique that seems remarkably unmined in the South African policy literature. What sociological analysis has done is consistently expose the roots of progressivism as a form of control with the potential to undermine impulses of transformation and equity, contra all the populist rhetoric and, no doubt, genuine intentions of both progressivism's founding fathers and its contemporary adherents.

Emile Durkheim's (1977) work locates the roots of progressivism in the Jesuit orders of post reformation Europe. This is perhaps an unorthodox interpretation of Durkheim's study of the evolution of educational thought, but his analysis is suggestive of a fruitful critique of progressivism. Durkheim argues that the Jesuit order arose from the need of the Catholic Church to check the spread of Protestantism. Since people were eluding the church, the church had to move closer to people in order to maintain its influence over them. Unlike most of the other Catholic orders, Jesuits left the monasteries and mingled with the world. Yet leaving the cloisters and preaching to the people was not enough: the key to the mastery of the human soul, for the Jesuits, was education of the young. And the methods they adopted? Intensive personal contact. Education became highly individualised, or to put it another way, learner-centred. Unlike other pedagogical approaches, "... the educator, instead of remaining distant from the pupil, came close to him to get to know him better and to be able to vary his actions according to his individual nature" (1977, p.104). Jesuit educational philosophy saw a shift in disciplinary technology: "... discipline had to become more personal, to take greater account of individual feelings, and consequently to allow for a degree of competitiveness" (1977, p.105). What Durkheim's analysis should alert us to is *the potential* for individualisation and ongoing assessment (*a la* C2005) to serve not to liberate, but to draw a tight noose of social control around each individual.<sup>4</sup>

More recently, Basil Bernstein has developed Durkheim's analysis and labelled these pedagogies as 'visible' and 'invisible'. Visible pedagogies are those where hierarchical rules, and rules of organisation (sequence, pacing) are explicit. Invisible pedagogy, on the other hand, is that (such as the pedagogy of the Jesuits) where

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<sup>4</sup> A similar point with an emphasis on *surveillance* was made much later by Michel Foucault (1977).

... the hierarchical rules, the rules of organisation criteria were implicit and so not known to pupils ... In the invisible pedagogic practice it is as if the pupil is the author of the practice and even the authority, whereas in the case of visible practices it clearly is the teacher who is the author and authority. ... Visible forms are regarded as conservative, and invisible forms are regarded as progressive. (Bernstein, 1996, p.112)

This ideological labelling serves to obscure the fact that the ‘progressive’ pedagogy has deeply rooted social class assumptions about how children think and communicate, and that in practice, invisible pedagogies are as likely to disadvantage those who do not have cultural capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) as are the visible pedagogies. Indeed, as Muller also recently pointed out, the cultural Marxist Antonio Gramsci, who has often been recruited to the side of the critical pedagogues with their radical progressive ideas, was quite unequivocal in his belief that the working class could only overthrow the ruling class if they mastered the rules of the game. Such mastery is more likely if the rules are explicit (Muller, 2001).

Even those writers who do raise questions about progressivism are sometimes seemingly unaware of earlier insights. In an important recent essay, Muller (2001) states that the English did not have a movement called progressivism. Yet, writing in England in 1975 in a book subtitled “A study in progressive primary education”, Sharp and Green argue as follows:

Developing as a reaction to what was held to be the rigidity of traditional educational structures which denied opportunity to the many, the progressive child centred movement was impelled by a moral rhetoric which sought to re-establish the rights of the individual for freedom, self development and individual expression, over and above the demands of society. (1975, p.234)

Sharp and Green point out that there is an intimate connection between the development of progressivism in England and the ‘demands’ of society.

... there is a need to socially structure over optimistic aspirations as a result of the disjuncture between the mass demand for education and educational provision and occupational opportunities available. We suggest that the rise of progressivism and the institutional support it receives are a function of its greater effectiveness for social control and structuring aspirations compared with more traditional educational ideologies whose legitimacy was already being questioned.

Within child centred progressivism, far wider ranges of the child’s attributes become legitimate objects of evaluative scrutiny and explanatory variables in the construction of success and failure. Not merely intellectual but social, emotional, aesthetic and even physical criteria are often employed in the processing of pupils in educational institutions, the social control possibilities thus being enhanced. (1975, p.224-225)

Compare this with Gee's assessment of the contemporary strands of critique: Firstly, progressivism hides the rules of the game from the disadvantaged and secondly, "confessional strategies of progressive pedagogy causes learners to put their inner life on display, and therefore amenable to surveillance and discipline" (cited in Muller 2001, p.64). Muller cites other work saying the same thing. Almost thirty years after Sharp and Green published their study, the basic lines of the critique have not changed. At the same time, there does not appear to be much awareness of the continuity of the critique.

In short, this brief historical detour leads to an important conclusion. Despite its obvious connections with the principles of liberation and democracy, progressive pedagogy has a darker side which can function, either wittingly (as in Durkheim's example) or unwittingly (as in Sharp and Green's), as a repressive form of control. The key point is surely that progressivism is neither an inherent 'good', nor a necessarily repressive form of control: it has the potential to be either. The major question is how progressivism is interpreted and manifested in particular sites of practice.

### What do we know of progressivism in sites of practice?

We have suggested that policy studies has embraced progressivism uncritically in a way that is seemingly unmindful of its historical roots and a diverse research literature that sounds alarm bells. Moreover, it appears as if policy studies is equally unmindful of increasing empirical evidence that moves beyond case studies to support the theoretical critiques referred to above. In countries where progressive approaches have been enshrined in policy for extended periods there is substantial evidence to suggest that these policies have not brought about a significant reduction in inequality or even an improvement in achievement rates. For example, in the field of literacy, progressives themselves are retreating from their earlier emancipatory positions (see Boomer, 1989; Cope and Kalantzis, 2000). Similarly, there are equally discouraging accounts of the fate of progressivism in developing Africa.

Conditions attached to funding by foreign donors and the recommendations of international consultants are generally taken seriously by African policy makers wishing to attract foreign investment by 'looking modern' (Fuller, 1991; Chisholm and Fuller, 1996). Learner-centred pedagogies are part of the imported package. Consequently, a widely reported concern with teacher education policies and curricula in Africa is their tendency to borrow

uncritically from the North with “little adaptation to make them relevant to local needs and the lifeworlds of the trainee” (Stuart, 2002, p.4). It is not surprising that case studies report difficulties that Tabulawa (1997) calls “tissue rejection”. In Botswana, teachers resisted “transferred innovations” such as learner-centredness because they “have a destabilising effect on their taken-for-granted classroom world, possibly leading to deskilling and cognitive dissonance” (Tabulawa, 1997, p.202)<sup>5</sup>. Similarly, in Namibia, the post-apartheid Basic Education Teacher Diploma implemented in 1993 was strongly influenced by Swedish advisors (see Zeichner, *et al*, 1999) in adopting a progressive, innovative curriculum positioning teachers as critical, self-reflexive agents of change. While teachers welcomed the political marketing of their new role, they struggled to understand and implement the innovations in their classrooms, reverting instead to traditional practices (Murangi and Andersson, 1997).

Comparative studies thus suggest that the adoption of progressive pedagogies is unlikely to achieve policy intentions that are, in themselves, admirable in that they are aimed at promoting democracy and social justice. Yet, apart from Muller’s (2001) questions, none of these insights have penetrated the policy debate. Progressivism is just assumed to be a good thing (with a few exceptions). And progressivism is not alone amongst educational beliefs that have been problematised through systematic enquiry and yet remain impervious to critique in the policy domain – constructivism, human capital theory and belief in the benefit of parental involvement are but three areas that spring to mind. The question then that needs to be answered is: Why this is the case? Is it simply a lack of communication between researchers and policy makers? Do we lack capacity in the field of policy studies? Or does this problem run deeper?

## Theorising disciplinary displacement

We would argue that the reasons for this apparent weakness are varied. No doubt, academics have career trajectories to consider, and ‘policy studies’ is attractive at a time when pressures for publication are mounting. It is also true that research capacity in South Africa is limited (see Unterhalter, 2000). However, we argue that there is a deeper problem that bedevils policy studies, and this has something to do with what Traub refers to as “alternative moral

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<sup>5</sup> A more extended critique is reported in Tabulawa (2003).

and philosophical systems, as fighting faiths” (cited in Muller 2001, p.63) that remain impervious to ‘evidence’. As the late Pierre Bourdieu pointed out:

It is probably cultural inertia which still makes us see education in terms of the ideology of the school as a liberating force (‘l’école libératrice’) and as a means of increasing social mobility, even when the indications tend to be that it is in fact one of the most effective means of perpetuating the existing social pattern, as it both provides an apparent justification for social inequalities and gives recognition to the cultural heritage, that is, to a *social* gift treated as a *natural* one. (1974, p.32)

Disciplinary displacement has led to a curious irony. During the dark years of apartheid, and the theoretical dominance of Bowles and Gintis (1976), the horror of South African academics in the field of education was that schooling reproduced unequal social structures. In post apartheid South Africa, there is a new and different kind of threat, one of *non-reproduction*. By this we mean the non-reproduction of a theoretically-informed academy in the field of teacher education. Instead, by uncritically embracing the view of (progressive) education as a force for liberation, we could be engaged in producing and reproducing what Durkheim (1973 and 1983) refers to as ‘mythological truth’.

The seemingly paradoxical term ‘mythological truth’ is not different in *form* from the more familiar, dispassionate scientific truth. It is a collective representation, a socially constructed understanding, but unlike representations issued by scientific communities, it idealises and communicates broader collective representations of social identity, aspirations, and ideals. Mythological truth thus differs in *function* from scientific truth in the sense that it represents society as it is conceived by its members. As with most belief systems, a mythic description becomes ‘mythic truth’ when it becomes normative. Our understanding of the key differences between Durkheim’s two forms of ‘truth’ is represented in Table 1 below:

**Table 1 : Differences between ‘scientific’ and ‘mythological’ truth**

	<b>Scientific truth</b>	<b>Mythological truth</b>
<i>Function</i>	Dispassionate description: Represents the world as it is	Idealized description: Represents an <i>image</i> of group identity, aspirations, ideals
<i>Rooted in</i>	Reason	Emotion and faith
<i>Developed in</i>	Scientific communities	A broad, inclusive social community
<i>Achievement</i>	Illuminates the nature of society	Inspires members of a social group

Mythological truth is a social practice with an important role to play in representing our collective social sense of identity and what we wish to be. In this sense, it has the potential to contribute powerfully to social solidarity, especially in a context such as South Africa where social solidarity has to be built from the divisions of the past. The potential of mythological truth to contribute to social solidarity is obviously enhanced if it is congruent with scientific truth. Equally obviously, in a social condition of modernity, the two truths are potentially in a state of tension. In his Introduction to Durkheim's *Elementary forms of religious life*, Nisbet writes that:

The great problem, he [Durkheim] suggests, that faces Western societies is the preservation of a sense of the sacred in our belief-systems and in our social structures sufficient to make possible a social order without, however, diminishing the advance of science as the way of illumination of the unknown. (1976, p. xi)

Discussion in the first part of this paper suggests that this tension has been experienced in the education research community. We have argued that this community has been reproducing politically correct but misleadingly romantic views that have acquired the status of taken-for-granted orthodoxies.<sup>6</sup> This is not to say that there has been no criticism of policy. There has, but since criticism has been mainly of policy implementation, the bedrock principles on which policy formulation rests are implicitly validated by critique focused on implementation. Thus, while the academy embraces present policy and progressivism in particular as a force for liberation, empirical studies are beginning to ask whether the gap between the formerly advantaged and disadvantaged schools is not actually widening (eg. Christie, 1999; Harley *et al*, 2000).

There is evidence to suggest that the academy is moving away from scientific truth, or at least eliding the two 'truths' in a way that privileges the mythological and that leaves uneasy and unresolved tensions. Similarly, there is evidence to suggest that this state of affairs developed as a result of policy intention that is admirable and that enjoys the support of the great majority of South Africans. In contrast with the repressive authoritarianism of the apartheid past, the principles of the new democratic order and the role of progressive education in achieving it have become *sacred*. In such a context, it is easy to slide into social meliorism, the trap into which policy studies fall when commitment to a vision of *what should be* clouds the ability to seriously consider *what is* (see Westbury, 1973; Goodson, 1991; Kliebard, 1987).

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<sup>6</sup> Morrow (2001) argues persuasively that these views have achieved 'scriptural' status.

Hence, in the fields of policy construction and academic endeavour, the good intentions of social reconstructionism and its attendant mythological truths seem to overshadow the necessity of exploring the reality of constraints and practices in schools.<sup>7</sup>

From this standpoint it is logical to make the obvious point that research should operate within the domain of scientific truth. Here we concur with Norbert Elias' argument that although social scientists could not avoid being part of the world they study, and that social-scientific knowledge develops as part of the social processes and never outside them, engagement or involvement in the world may act as a barrier to better understanding of the relations in the world (Elias, 1956). Elias thus argues that social scientists should attempt to remain at a distance in order to move beyond ideology and everyday knowledge, and destroy the myths that muddy understanding of social problems (Elias, 1978, and 1987). A hard boundary between our role as citizens and as academics would allow us to work more unambiguously in the domain of scientific truth. Although as citizens we have compelling concerns linked to mythological truth, this is a separate social practice and should not be conflated with research.

Furthermore, we suggest that scientific truth would be well served by the infusion of greater disciplinarity into academic endeavour. In Bernstein's terms, education is a 'region', a practice that takes place at "the interface between the field of the production of knowledge and any field of practice" (Bernstein 1996, p.23). The production of knowledge does not take place within an autonomous discipline because "education is a field, like politics, where the disciplines of history, philosophy, psychology and sociology have application" (Peters, 1964, p.7). The more complex the region or field, and the greater the number of contributing disciplines, the more important it becomes to respect disciplinary perspectives. We recognise that the maintenance of such a boundary is no easy matter: as teacher educators, we are charged with a responsibility to mount coherent multi-disciplinary programmes that induct aspirant teachers into policy-prescribed practices that we may, as researchers, seriously question. In sum, as researchers, our role has an uneasy tension with

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<sup>7</sup> Stephen Appel argued persuasively at the beginning of the policy period that academic research and policy work were distinct sets of social practices that were necessarily often at logger-heads and that the boundaries between these need to be maintained (Appel 1993, 1994). In a chapter called "Critics and Reconstructors", Muller (2000) provides an illuminating account of the dynamics of the collapse of apartheid that led to a blurring of boundaries between analytical and strategic knowledge. We would suggest that too much work in the present field of policy studies has elided these boundaries.

our roles as citizens *and* as teacher-educators. It is this ambivalent identity that makes research-led teacher education a difficult and challenging task.

The conclusion is not the best place to introduce a new topic. Nevertheless, as a postscript, we add that our argument for stronger disciplinarity in research is neither premised on a 'hard', realist epistemology, nor on a necrolatry that defers simply to the traditional disciplines and grand masters. Both mythological and scientific truths are social constructions or, in Durkheim's terms, collective representations. Both represent collective realities as being socially constructed and defined. Social constructivism within research networks, however, does not undermine truth. On the contrary: "... it is the social nature of knowledge that in part provides the grounds for its objectivity and its claims to truth" (Moore and Young, 2001, p.445). This "social realist" view of knowledge proposed by Moore and Young suggests that it is, in fact, the networks of social relations that support truth claims. This view is well illustrated in Collins' (1998) dauntingly expansive historical review in which the network of links and energies that shaped intellectual thought are exposed. But we do argue that in education, debate at the intersection of contributing disciplines is most likely to promote the cause of scientific 'truth' and social justice.

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---

Ken Harley and Volker Wedekind  
School of Education, Training and Development  
University of Natal  
Pietermaritzburg

[harleyk@nu.ac.za](mailto:harleyk@nu.ac.za)

[wedekind@nu.ac.za](mailto:wedekind@nu.ac.za)