

Book Review

Maton, K. *Knowledge and knowers. Towards a realist sociology of education.* London: Routledge.

ISBN 978-0415-47999-8

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The late and well-known British sociologist of education, Basil Bernstein, claimed that in educational research (although this could apply to many more fields) we need less of an allegiance to a theory and more of an allegiance to the problems we need to solve (Maton, 2013). There are indeed many problems in education around the world today that need to be solved and many questions that need to be answered. But in order to tackle these problems and begin to answer our many questions, we need theoretical and analytical frameworks and conceptual tools that we can put to work to look not just at the problems themselves, but at what is beneath or behind them so that we can better understand the nature of the struggles within education, as well as how to bring about sustainable and necessary changes. Legitimation Code Theory, or LCT, the subject and focus of Karl Maton's book, *Knowledge and Knowers*, is such a framework.

In *Knowledge and Knowers*, and in his work leading up to this book, Karl Maton introduces us to a way of thinking and working that represents a focus on solving problems with a strong explanatory and conceptual framework that allows researchers to go beyond and beneath what can be seen and understood through a constructivist or instrumentalist lens. His broader aims, in a body of research that reaches beyond this book, are to address a significant gap in educational research left by a lack of strong, generative theoretical and conceptual frameworks and tools, and an inability of much educational research to build on past research findings more cumulatively (something noted by the National Research Foundation in South Africa in a recent report). This lack of cumulative building of knowledge about education and about the nature of educational knowledge and knowing itself is something with which LCT is particularly concerned.

Legitimation Code Theory, or LCT as it is known, is the conceptual and explanatory framework that is the focus of this book. This is a theory, as Maton argues, in Bourdieu's sense, where the latter argued that 'Theories are

research programmes which call not for “theoretical discussion” but for practical implementation’ (Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron, 1991, p.255). This is an important point to understand when reading this book and other papers and books that use LCT as ‘theory’ or as a basis for analysis of data. The book draws on data from different studies to illustrate and clarify more abstract theoretical arguments, showing consistently that this is indeed a ‘research programme’ that poses at least as many questions as it answers and that does indeed call for ‘practical implementation’. LCT, even though a work in progress, is more than a call to arms, though. It provides researchers with a range of tools, some more well developed and tested out than others, that can be used both within educational research and without to delve into problem situations and attempt to find answers and a way forward in research and practice.

LCT is a realist framework, and draws on insights from critical realism, critical rationalism and social realism. One of the most important insights, drawn from critical realism, is Bhaskar’s layered ontology, arguing for the need to look beyond and beneath empirical reality to understand and see the generative mechanism and tendencies (Bhaskar, 1989) or, in LCT terms, the organising principles that generate or give rise to that reality. Another is critical realism’s three commitments: to ontological realism; to epistemological relativism; and to judgemental rationality (Archer, Bhaskar, Collier, Laurie and Norrie, 1998). Ontological realism holds that we need to recognise that knowledge is ‘about something other than itself’ (Maton and Moore, 2010, p.4); there is a reality that does exist beyond that which we can behold, and while we can believe in anything we want to, we cannot know anything in the same way. Epistemological relativism says that this knowledge that exists independently of us is not universal or unchanging or True. Rather, it is socially produced over time in socio-historical contexts and is thus fallible and mediated by and through those contexts (Archer *et al.*, 1998; Maton and Moore, 2010). Our knowing is further mediated by these socio-historical contexts. Finally, judgemental rationality holds that there are ‘intersubjective bases for determining the relative merits of competing knowledge claims, because some knowledges are more powerful and productive than others’ (Maton and Moore, 2010, p.4). Thus, knowledge is not the same as knowing and can indeed be seen in its own right as an object of study. It emerges from but is not able to be reduced to or conflated with the condition or contexts or minds from which it emerges (Maton and Moore, 2010). This is very important to understand as a foundation for LCT, because

it is the framework's realist underpinnings that enable it to be focused on both knowledge and knowing without excluding or being blind to either.

LCT subsumes and extends parts of the work of two well-known sociologists, Basil Bernstein and Pierre Bourdieu. From Bernstein, LCT takes code theory – Bernstein's educational knowledge codes and their orientation to examining what gives rise to practices rather than just what practices themselves are – as well as the pedagogic device and knowledge structures. From Bourdieu, LCT draws on field theory, and central concepts of habitus, capital, field and practice. Neither Bernstein's work nor Bourdieu's can provide a whole picture in terms of understanding the field of education, and there are gaps left by both of these theorists that need to be filled if we are to solve the problems facing the field in terms of intellectual and educational development as well as pedagogy and student success. But rather than creating a break with these foundations and carving out a new path, LCT draws code and field theory into the framework and builds cumulatively on these foundations, using the prior tools and in so doing developing them in new and very productive directions. This is a significant development for the sociology of education, because it creates the capacity for a different kind of research programme – one that builds cumulatively on its foundations, showing how the prior thinking and research can be re-analysed, re-interpreted, developed and also critiqued within a framework that seeks to bring these insights together into a larger whole that has greater explanatory power as well as more conceptual economy.

Maton begins the book by laying down the aims of the book as well as discussing the broader concerns with which LCT is concerned and the framework's realist underpinnings. The main point of the book, and about LCT itself, and one Maton demonstrates consistently throughout, is that this book is about 'building knowledge about knowledge-building' (p.3) and that rather than a 'new' sociological approach, LCT is building on and extending prior approaches and in so doing is evolving into a 'sophisticated toolkit' (p.3) for research and also for practice. A more practical point of the book is the laying out or unfolding of the framework, or at least the two dimensions of it that are able to be discussed in detail in this limited space: Specialisation and Semantics. As Maton explains in the first chapter, there are five dimensions of LCT currently, but not all of these are as developed as the first two dimensions, and much work, research, and development lies ahead.

What is very clear throughout the book is the process that Maton has undertaken to do what he claims LCT is designed to do: to cumulatively build on prior tools and foundations and to extend research, primarily into education, in new, exciting and more generative and productive ways. Thus, each chapter builds on the one before, and although there is some repetition, this works to keep the reader in step with the text. It also makes the text more accessible, as some of the concepts are fairly complex, and require careful reading. Chapter two begins the unfolding of Specialisation. In this chapter the Legitimation Device is explained, about which there is much more to say than I could do justice to here. In essence, all academic disciplines comprise fields, in which there are a range of actors and resources. Actors within these fields are either in accord, if they are working together towards the same goals and have the same underlying orientations or principles or, if they do not they may well struggle over these resources, and over the rights to make their orientations and principles the 'ruler' for the field. Thus, all academic disciplines (and this applies to fields outside of the academy too) are sites of struggles over what counts as legitimate and what does not, and who gets to decide that and when they get to do so. In order to understand the nature of these struggles and the changes and shifts within field over time, we need to be able to see the underlying orientations or principles of the actors and their practices. Otherwise we are likely to be working with assumptions about why things happen as they do rather than reasoning based on knowledge and understanding. The dimensions of the Legitimation Device – the symbolic ruler of consciousness that allows those who control it to set the bar as it were in terms of what knowledge, practices, habituses and resources are valued and why and how – provide these tools. This chapter goes on to explain the first part of the 'toolkit', epistemic and social relations and how these can be brought together to create legitimation or specialisation codes. Simply put, they allow us to see what it is that counts in particular fields in terms of success and claiming legitimacy or recognition.

Epistemic and social relations are concepts and also analytical tools that are returned to in subsequent chapters, and simply explained they allow researchers to look both at the relationships between knowledge and its objects (what is known) and knowledge and its subjects (who is doing the knowing) so overcoming both a blindness to knowledge and knowers. This is important to understand when moving on to chapters three and four, where the following two parts of Specialisation are unravelled and discussed, namely the epistemic-pedagogic device and knowledge-knower structures. All of these parts of Specialisation build quite deliberately on Bernstein's code

theory, with specific reference to his collection and integrated codes and classification and framing, as well as his work on the Pedagogic Device as a way of seeing education as comprised of three distinct yet interrelated fields. Knowledge-knower structures build quite specifically on Bernstein's later work on knowledge structures.

Chapter five discusses gazes, using an idea of Bernstein's that was not fully explored in his work, but which has potential in terms of understanding the growth and development of fields that exhibit horizontal knowledge structures. In the chapter Maton develops a notion of four different gazes that denote different strengths of the relation of knowledge to its subjects or knowers, and in doing so shows how fields that can often seem segmented, and to be exhibiting weaker 'verticality' (Muller, 2007) or ability to develop cumulatively over time can actually have the potential to develop cumulatively through the specialisation of knowers rather than of knowledge. There are questions raised by this chapter that have yet to be answered. One such question is whether social gazes, which knowers possess by virtue of being part of specific social groups, really do lead to the fragmentation of intellectual fields or educational knowledge fields in the ways they have in Cultural Studies (the case used in the book). The differences between social and cultivated gazes, the latter possessed by those who have immersed themselves in a field for a lengthy period of time and thus learned the particular methods and knowledge of a specific discipline, need to be further explored in empirical studies. Maton acknowledges very clearly that the framework is evolving, and while he shows explicitly and with reference to data and analysis thereof both how Specialisation subsumes and extends particular parts of Bernstein's work, thus building the LCT framework cumulatively, there remains much work to be done. This is a strength, because LCT is a framework that poses questions as well as answering them, thus driving the research programme on.

A second dimension, Semantics, comprising the two key concepts of semantic gravity and semantic density, is built on Bernstein's early work on elaborated and restricted codes, and as a further dimension of the Legitimation Device it does not represent a break with Specialisation but rather 'codes' different elements of practice. In chapters six and seven Maton lays out first semantic gravity and then semantic density, connecting them to preceding chapters where relevant and moving towards perhaps the most exciting part of the framework for analysing whole fields as well as parts of them: constellations. Using accessible metaphors, and well-known examples of student-centred and

teacher-centred learning, Maton shows how both Specialisation and Semantics can be brought together to analyse the differences between certain stances taken within fields, and the reasons why some of these may be well-supported and others not, even though those stances not well supported may be sound.

In chapter nine, Maton moves into newer territory, referring back to epistemic and social relations to develop what he calls his '4-K' model encompassing knowledge, knowers, known and knowing. He also further develops the gazes discussed in chapter five expanding this concept to include insights and lenses. This chapter shows how fine-grained and sophisticated LCT can be, and highlights for researchers the potential for developing other parts of the framework in similar directions as needed, creating finer typologies for more nuanced, less fuzzy and more focused analysis and research. However, as Maton continually argues, you only need as much theory as the problem requires, and you only need to choose the parts of the toolkit that will help you look at your particular research questions as clearly as possible. Thus, while the book is truly a grand journey through what has currently been developed of LCT and published, researchers need not feel overwhelmed by the depth and breadth of the framework, because one will never use all of it in one project.

The final chapter points quite clearly to the ways in which the framework is still building on the work of Bourdieu and Bernstein, primarily. It discusses new directions in which LCT is beginning to move as a field – and makes quite clear that LCT is a field with a growing number of newer and more established voices who are beginning to think in different ways about educational research and practice and also about fields outside of the realm of education. It also points to other complementary frameworks that have been brought together with LCT that are leading to productive new forms of research, for example Systemic Functional Linguistics. Maton's own words perhaps sum up best what LCT is and can be when he says 'An adequate working theoretical tradition is not only epistemologically powerful but also socially inclusive. By making visible the workings of the gaze, we have a chance to make that gaze more widely available. We can climb on the shoulders of. . .giants. Not only can we then see further, more of us can do so' (p.147). This book, and the conceptual tools and framework it lays out and discusses, is most certainly an attempt to make visible the workings of this particular sociological gaze, and is aimed at making it possible for more scholars to immerse themselves in the tools they find most relevant and

productive to their work in order to use this gaze to research substantive problems that need solving. It is a must-read for students of the sociology of education, and for scholars who find that their current approaches may not be providing the answers they need. LCT is not the only answer, but it is a very good place to start working from.

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