On Bourdieu's Theory of Practice and Reflexive Pedagogic Training

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Introduction

The 1970s was a groundbreaking decade for language teachers, giving birth to the communicative language teaching movement. Dell Hymes rejected Chomsky's focus on linguistic knowledge as the sole arbiter of language competence and formed his own model which situated the performing linguistic agent firmly at the centre of a social matrix; competence within the locus of social parlance thus necessitated knowing "rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless" (Brumfit, 1987, p. 3). Following Hymes a number of seminal works by pedagogic figures such as Widdowson, Brumfit, Wilkins and Krashen (Ellis, 1982, pp. 77–79) attempted to circumscribe CLT as a unified theoretical and practical teaching approach that could be employed by the burgeoning ELT industry and which could also be used by those working as language teachers within the state school system. Yet, while the 1970s saw a great deal of emphasis placed upon the role of the performing student in classroom practice, less attention appeared to focus on the schoolteachers themselves. In particular, a schism appeared to open between linguistic theorists occupying academic positions and individual language practitioners working within the school system, especially in relation to how the latter group should best be trained. Grenfell notes "a good deal of teacher education theory seemed to be constructed around oppositions — theory/practice, school/training institution" (Grenfell, 1998a, p. 137). These opposi-

tions meant that teacher training theory was embedded in "political rather than epistemological terms" (p. 137). Overarching institutional emphasis on these conceptual dualities tended to presuppose that theory and practice were systemically irreconcilable, and, in this sense, pedagogic theorists, trainers and practitioners have remained prisoners of their own systems of simplification through viewing theoretical training and classroom practice as oppositional metaphors.

Within the field of sociology, however, the late 1970s also saw the publication of a fundamentally important text that, while having direct implications for a wide range of social and aesthetic disciplines, can also be used to examine schoolteacher training more epistemologically. Pierre Bourdieu's 1977 *Outline of a Theory of Practice* saw social institutions as containing a series of conceptual systems of thought which arranged themselves in hierarchical positions, and Bourdieu sought to connect these theoretical ideas with empirical research embedded in everyday life, so that he synthesized "the theory of practice" with "the practical mode of knowledge inherent in all practice" (1977, p. 4). Bourdieu's seminal text, with its emphasis on how "'practical ideology'" (Eagleton, 1996, p. 50) is "transmutted into forms of routine social behaviour" (p. 5), can also be used as a "post-structural epistemology of the processes of developing as a teaching professional" (Grenfell, 1996, p. 301). It is therefore the intention of this paper to investigate these processes in relation to school language teacher-training, and, while considering various positions, to examine how Bourdieu's conceptual thinking tools may shed light on pedagogical training praxis.

Bourdieu and the Philosophical Tradition

Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977) and later works such as *Distinction* (1984) and *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993) can be seen as

primarily philosophical in origin, and built upon work established by earlier French conceptual thinkers. While the French intellectual tradition is a widely rich and dense field of study, post Second World War thought sees its modern genesis as grounded in the ideas of the German phenomenologists Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, the latter of whom had an "enormous influence on French philosophical discussion" (Rockmore, 1995, p. 2). Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927) rejected Kant's *a-priori synthetic* concept that one's understanding of the world was restricted solely to one's perception of it, and instead tried to return "to the early Greek origins of the problem of ontology" (Rockmore, 1995 p. 184) to develop his own philosophy. Heidegger thus rejected the Western cultural tradition and drew from the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche who, in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), had celebrated the practical sophistry of pre-Socratic philosophers, blaming Socrates, Plato and Aristotle for erroneously attributing the "power of a panacea to knowledge and science" (2003, p. 74). Unlike post-Socratic philosophers, such as Kant, however, who had placed people's knowledge of the world into oppositional categories, Heidegger saw the individual agent as embodied within the world due to his/her position as *dasein*, or being-there. In other words, what was fundamental to Heidegger was that an agent's "understanding of being is itself a determination of being" (1996, p. 10). This notion of being-in-the-world pervaded French Postwar philosophy, influencing Merleau-Ponty's *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), which connected the thinking human subject and the objective world around him/her through his conception of the *lived-in body*, and Bourdieu can also be considered as inhabiting this philosophical tradition.

Bourdieu's work similarly rejects Kant's epistemological definitions and is also irreconcilable with the system building of structuralist thinkers such as Levi-Strauss, who perceived the world as exemplifying a deterministic rela-

tionship between meta-structure and human agency. Yet Bourdieu also opposed the existentialism of Sartre, which placed emphasis upon individual freedom and autonomy (Grenfell, 2004, p. 86); for Bourdieu man was a composite of embodied dispositions but was also fundamentally structured by the society and social strata in which he found himself. Bourdieu's work can perhaps be situated more comfortably within the discipline of post-structuralism, which rejects strictly theoretical determinism and relates the "cause and effect of structural signification in human activity" (Grenfell, 1996, p. 288). Post-Structuralists, such as Derrida in *On Grammatology* (1977), followed a similar philosophical approach to Heidegger, and criticized the Western philosophical tradition and its creative proliferation of conceptual forms about the substantive elements of the world. Derrida held that by separating philosophical knowledge into categories these structures fell automatically into *logocentric* opposition with one another and became defined hierarchically (1977). In other words, the second concept would be tacitly perceived as a corruption of the first, and therefore categories which appeared on the surface to be equal were actually unequal in relational power. Bourdieu similarly noted that these forms were "based on characteristics which are not in the slightest respect natural and which are to a great extent the product of an arbitrary imposition" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 222) which was achieved through "principles of di-vision" (p. 221).

Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, however, provided a new way of approaching these oppositional dichotomies and had a fundamental impact upon French philosophical thought when it was published in 1977. In particular, Bourdieu argued that conceptual metaphors such as theory and practice are not mutually exclusive, or necessarily hierarchical, but instead intertwine and converge. As Grenfell & James explain, "social agents are incorporated bodies who possess, indeed, are possessed by structural, generative schemes

which operate by orientating social practice" (1998b, p. 12). Bourdieu's central contribution to sociological and philosophical theory is therefore his attempt to find a middle ground between individual agency and structural determinacy, where men and women "act in accordance with such internalized systems" (Eagleton, 1996, p. 156). Central to this are his concepts of *habitus* and *field*, the former being a system of acquired dispositions obtained through a relationship within a certain social arena, and Bourdieu explains "the structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (e.g. the material conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition) produce *habitus*" (1977, p. 72). Thus when one speaks of Bourdieu's *habitus*, one is not referring to character or morality, but to socially acquired structures which are personally manifested in agents' cognitional phenomena, such as ideas and opinions, and in embodied physical manifestations such as speech, deportment and body language.

Yet these dispositions were engendered by and contingent upon the context in which one is situated, so that "only at the level of the *field* of positions is it possible to grasp both the generic interests···and the specific interests" (Bourdieu, 2010, p. 4). Thus successfully operating within a *field* was dependent upon one's ability to align one's *habitus* in accordance with its rules, placing some at an advantage and some at a disadvantage. This is because, as Bourdieu argued, success involves either possessing or learning how to cultivate skills and behaviour that are highly valued within a specific *field*. In the field of education, for example, the teacher holds an advantage within a classroom, "being perceived as in possession of an amount of 'cultural capital' which the student needs to acquire" (Eagleton, 1996, p. 157). Such competence, be it aesthetic, economic or socio-political, represents "a capacity to produce expressions which are appropriate for particular situations" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 15). It is the arena of pedagogic competence, however, and in particular the

field of teacher-training, which is the main focus of this discussion. While the personal and social aspects of education fascinated Bourdieu throughout the duration of his life (Grenfell, 2004, p. 82), his work also has implications for understanding how teacher's themselves come into being. His ideas can thus be directed towards discussing and examining teacher-training pedagogy.

Issues of Theory and Practice in Teacher-Training

Binary oppositions that pervade the humanities may also exist within the field of education, which can be argued to be ideationally divided. A lack of rapprochement between theorists and practitioners has meant that theory and practice have become seen by some as hierarchical and indeed oppositional concepts; such a divide may be especially chiasmic in relation to school language teacher training rationale and application. Some academic theorists may see teaching practice (and indeed schoolteachers) as lacking in scholastic rigor whereas schoolteachers may view theory with acute, if myopic, suspicion. In addition, this ongoing debate between theorists and practitioners offers conflicting examples as to what is perceived to constitute professional knowledge: Richards & Rogers argue that techniques in language teaching have frequently focused too much on a theoretical stance "rather than on the basis of any form of evidence" (1986, p. 166). Some teaching theorists, such as Elliot, have argued that "theory undermined the authenticity of teachers' craft knowledge" (Grenfell, 2008a, p. 11), while such suspicion of academic theory has also been displayed by those embarking upon pedagogic careers, as teaching trainees "criticised their training courses for being 'too theoretical'" (p. 11). This point is also addressed by Ur, who cites a complaint made by a nascent teacher that "my course was too theoretical, it didn't help me to teach at all⋯It's fine in theory but it doesn't work in practice" (1998, p. 3).

How trainee language teachers perceive theory may give us an insight into

how more seasoned practitioners in the field potentially subordinate it to practice. With too much theory teachers can feel overwhelmed or, worse, alienated from the institution from which they were trained because for them, as they perceive it, theoretical concepts are not practically applicable to their pedagogic context. Some language teachers are thus suspicious of the merits of theory, and may tend to identify more closely with the more practical aspects of their training because the latter offers a set of skills which can be cashed-in and used within classroom contexts (Ur, 1998, p. 3). Indeed, Ur notes that when she has asked teachers about which aspects of training were most important the majority considered "that personal teaching experience was the most important" (p. 3). She also notes, however, that in making the particular distinction that they do between theory and practice, teachers are defining theory very directly as an "abstract generalization" and practice as "tips about classroom procedure" (p. 3). These types of practical 'tips' are exemplified by the kind of advice found in *Teachers of English as a Second Language: Their Training and Preparation* (1968). In this practical text Hornby details how lesson plans should be "well-planned" (1968, p. 102) and that teachers should not "monopolise the 'speaking' part of the lesson period" (p. 102). These kinds of practical teacher training tips are easy to understand and activate for trainees, because they can be immediately related to the exigencies of the classroom dynamic. The 'craft model' of teacher training is another practical paradigm that has enjoyed some popularity in pedagogic circles due to its dismissive stance of too much theory. In the 'craft model' an experienced teacher goes about their craft while the trainee watches and slowly imbibes the correct pedagogic methods and procedures. The young trainee learns by imitating the expert's techniques and by following the expert's instructions and advice (Wallace, 2001, p. 6), and the 'craft model' remains a popular exemplar of the type of practical theory which can be seen to offer

quick and linear classroom results.

Personal Practice and the Reflective Teacher

Donald Schon's *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983), which advocated the concept of personal reflection in the classroom, further championed the superiority of teaching practice over academic theory. Schon maintained that a practitioner would "construct an understanding of the situation as he finds it", and would finally "reframe it" (1983, p. 129) as he/she proceeded vocationally in the light of experiential knowledge. Schon's book offered a "new 'epistemology of practice'" (Grenfell, 1998a, p. 14) which was "predicated on a holistic, creative view of the relationship between professionals and their practical contexts" (p. 14). The text proved to be highly influential within educational circles, and subsequently became popular with teacher trainers and their trainees as a way of further embedding the importance of creative practice within the pedagogic learning process. Some trainers have thus rejected the 'Applied Science' theoretical model of training, instead favouring the more practically focused 'enriched reflection model', which is based on Schon's 'Reflective Practitioner' paradigm. For example, Ur marginalises the role of theory as she claims "the most important basis for learning is personal professional practice; knowledge is most useful when it···derives from such practice" (Ur, 1998, p. 7).

Schon's model has therefore been seen by many as being fundamentally important for trainee teachers, and "much of his book is an attempt to establish this as a coherent framework for training" (McDonough, 1997, p. 29). Shulman's (1990) taxonomy of trainees' thinking can also be linked to the 'reflective model' of theory and practice, because Shulman's topography of teacher knowledge posits the individual's own subject and curricular knowledge firmly within the locus of training outcomes (Grenfell, 1998a, p. 162).

Tanner & Green's *Tasks for Teacher Education* course book also bases its approach around "a reflective model of teacher education, where you reflect both on your experiences" (1998, p. iv) and "on your past experiences as a language learner" (p. iv). The book is hence experiential, which, as the authors maintain, is the most effective way in which to learn. Tanner & Green's course book also advocates a process referred to as 'take five', containing gaps and allocated pauses between training activities whereby the practitioner is expected to take five minutes break in which to reflect. Yet the textbook gives little or no real information for trainees on how to employ this reflection practically in dealing with problem solving. Only one and a half pages in the book are devoted to considering and brainstorming case study problems that could occur in the classroom. Schon's theory seems to supply the foundational framework underpinning this type of reflective training textbook and yet this approach appears to suggest that little other than continual personal reflection is needed to succeed.

Yet the same criticism can be levelled at both this reflective model and the aforementioned 'craft model'. Stones & Morris have pointed out that the 'craft model' lacks dynamism, and relies on an essentially static classroom environment for its success (Grenfell, 1998a, p. 16), and similarly Schon's model of personal reflection presupposes that the reflective practitioner will inhabit an unchanging environment; instead, as Grenfell argues, "reflection is context and person bound" (p. 15). This model's effectiveness will change over time, and one's reflections will be predicated by a different set of schematic criteria, presenting problems for younger trainee teachers. Therefore, the seasoned professional will have a wealth of experience and instances to draw on in his or her moments of reflection, but the trainee is bereft of this in the foundational years of his/her training and employment. One can draw comparison between the trainee and the experienced professional for whom

"unusual circumstances will be rare—This is not so for the initial trainee" (Grenfell, 1998a, p. 16). Schon's model is therefore too linear, and foresees the practitioner moving smoothly forward, storing up classroom information and drawing and reflecting on experiences as they occur. Instead teaching should be seen as a series of negotiated responses to classroom stimuli, brokered by the teacher through drawing on a multitude of personal and theoretical reflections. The fluctuating relationship between a teacher and his/her pupils is therefore different to that of a tradesman involved in a horizontal process.

Practical teaching skills learned on-the-job thus have limitations; without being applicable in a wider theoretical or methodological fashion practical teaching experiences cannot be extrapolated and employed on a different contextual basis, as "teachers work within different kinds of management and institutional structure, and the locus of change varies accordingly" (McDonough, 1997, p. 33). Teachers therefore need more than practical in-house classroom training; they also "need ideas to work towards" (Grenfell, 1998a, p. 11). While too much teaching theory is considered to lack practical merit, too little theoretical background leaves the individual context-bound teacher rudderless, lost at sea without foundation. However, if one therefore applies Bourdieu's theory of practice towards the question of how a teacher comes into being, such oppositional factions appear static and lacking in dynamism.

Bourdieu and Reflexive Teacher-Training

Bourdieu's arguments, such as his theory of practice, are frequently discussed at a purely theoretical level, and are sometimes included in philosophical or critical anthologies (see Eagleton, 1996; Lechte, 1996) where they are pitched against other oppositional concepts. Such theorizing, however, can often appear endless and lacking in practical use-value; Bourdieu therefore

argued that his ideas shouldn't be theorized, but should be used as a road-map and put into practice. This was something he applied himself, his concepts being grounded in the use of ethnographic data derived from his childhood experiences in the rural south-western village of Bearn and his national service in Algeria. Indeed, perhaps of all 20th century socio-philosophical theories, Bourdieu's are the most embedded and practically applicable within social contexts because, for Bourdieu, "practice and theorizing are not regarded as separate activities, displaced in time and place…but mutually generative" (Grenfell & James, 1998b, p. 155). Bourdieu's theory of practice also has a number of implications within the field of education, such as offering insight into how trainee teachers learn reflexively.

Bourdieu's philosophical ideas were influenced by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), which held that one interacts with the world in a pre-reflexive, circular way. Walking, for example, can generally be considered an embodied, pre-reflexive action, where one's legs draw on a type of muscle memory which appears to precede proactively cognitive decision-making, and for Merleau-Ponty, many such behavioural traits were tacitly performed. Bourdieu can be considered as an inheritor of this tradition, but his phenomenology is socially rather than just personally embodied. Bourdieu's social perspective on reflexivity sees the world as bidirectional, where individual agents and social institutions both affect each other, but neither can be exclusively designated as the cause or the effect of these processes. Indeed, *both* are the cause of such process, but *both* also manifest the effects, with each bending back on each other and affecting the other in an ongoing reflexive cycle. Unlike traditional sociology, therefore, which sees a strict demarcation between structure and agency, using Bourdieu's concepts entails holding two oppositional concepts in one's head at the same time. This can be a confusing and off-putting activity for some, rather like accepting the

Einsteinian notion that mass, energy and space-time are a series of relative processes, yet Bourdieu saw reflexivity as a way of solving traditional sociological problems rather than creating them. For example, in traditional sociological thought emphasis was strictly placed upon the researcher, or field worker maintaining a distance between himself/herself and the observed in order to preserve objectivity. Bourdieu argued, however, that a great deal of sociological study was undermined by the problem of structural bias which compromised the veracity of researcher "participant objectification" (Grenfell, 1998a, p. 155). For Bourdieu, therefore, "the researcher's social relationship to the object of study is itself a necessary object of study" (Grenfell & James, 1998b: 126), and only through becoming reflexively aware of these dispositions could researchers become truly objective in their practice. In other words, for Bourdieu, the field worker and his/her social relationship with the subjects should be incorporated into the body of research in a more integrated way, with the researcher turning the tools of criticism back upon himself/herself. Developing a self-reflexive *metanoia*, or new gaze, Bourdieu held, would instigate a self-analytical conversion in the way one saw oneself in relation to the world.

This emphasis on reflexivity also has ramifications for understanding teacher-training, and the processes involved, so that the trainee teacher becomes repositioned more as an organic part of the overall classroom dynamic rather than as a pedagogic figure entrenched behind a desk giving orders. Experiencing such reactions to one's students and one's own praxis as a dual observer-participant affords a reflexive training approach, and McDonough & McDonough refer to this type of more social integrated trainee as one who "becomes immersed in the setting as a 'participant observer', a term which captures the role duality" (1997, p. 116). In considering Bourdieu's epistemological approach the teacher should thus turn a self-reflexive *metanoia* upon

himself/herself, applying self-participant objectification while reflecting on classes and planning and constructing lesson plans.

The question, however, is where does this reflexive action (which demands a dynamic interplay between pedagogic theory and practice) occur, and how does this theoretical synthesis square with the kind of personal reflectivity that a practitioner undergoes in the classroom where the focus is chiefly placed on experiential knowledge? The answer is that this reflexive training space occurs neither in university training centres nor indeed in the school classroom, and yet is representative of both environments, being both no-where and everywhere. Because trainee teachers must attend both institutionalised teacher-training classes and also undergo teacher training in the school classroom at the same time students are "structurally located between the two" (Grenfell, 1996 p. 300). Students are continually situated within the interstices of a double structure (p. 300), encountering an ongoing dialectic between theory and practice. Therefore, teacher training reflexivity involves practitioners inhabiting an ongoing middle space, and this is the very location in which the process of reflexive training takes place so that "by reacting, pedagogic knowledge develops" (p. 300). Institutionalised academic theory is learnt and applied reflexively as praxis within the classroom dynamic, where it is combined through a process of experiential negotiation with contextually bound teacher knowledge about the habitus of their students, the school context, and themselves and their own professional dispositions. Yet this theoretical data is actualised in a deeply personal fashion, and is derived from "tacit knowledge that is acquired in practical activity, classroom 'horse-sense'" (Grenfell, 1998a, p. 18).

Therefore, the trainee reflexive practitioner may actualise knowledge either of an established teaching methodology or deep held personal views based on previous experience during his or her performance in the class, but the argu-

ment is held that this will be operationalised tacitly. As a teacher, one knows that the act of teaching is influenced by a multitude of different factors, such as experience in the field, lifestyle and cultural influences and intellectual involvement with issues and theory. However, it is this tacit classroom knowledge that helps us to arbitrate and mediate between what to use and when, especially as and when disruptions occur. Perhaps trainees should not be evaluated in terms of how well they operationalise a particular educational methodology in a particular class and instead be judged as to whether, in the light of existing theory, reflections on practice, and their ongoing training, they can display the reflexivity and intuitive sense to work through dilemmas and try things out, developing their own particular ideas and pedagogic concepts. Similarly to Merleau-Ponty's pre-reflexive theory, by applying Bourdieu's socio-reflexivity to pedagogic training one can see that the trainee practitioner is learning by reacting, and "moving forward by accumulating pedagogical experience" (Grenfell, 1998a. p. 172). Failure, moreover, is merely the obverse of this approach, and can be explained as a failure to be reflexive and react appositely to context.

Conclusion

Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice* looked to subvert the sociological focus on binary opposites such as structure vs. agency, competence vs. performance, and theory vs. practice, and in so doing, illustrate the pedestrian nature of such structured thinking. His conceptual thinking tools, while commonly applied to academic fields such as the arts, sociology and epistemology can also be directed towards educational paradigms to better understand how and why teachers become successful practitioners or, conversely, fail to do so. A pedagogic personality can therefore be seen as coming about through "a dialogic relationship between a developing pedagogic understand-

ing (theory) and continuing classroom action (practice)" (Grenfell, 1998a: p. 166).

Acquiring such knowledge may better aid academics and teacher trainers, and yet greater awareness of the co-terminous relationship between theory and practice will also be of benefit to practitioners working in the field. Attempting to avoid theory, or bemoan its inclusion in teacher training courses is to misunderstand the practical and embodied benefits that theory affords one's teaching praxis. Such avoidance also ensures that one misunderstands one's position both as an individual and as a theoretical product; we are both ontological and epistemological entities, being the speaking subjects of a phenomenological exchange between theory and practice. In other words, we theorize continually as we teach, and react practically as we theorize, and these processes are bidirectional and bend back upon one another in a series of reflexive cycles. Ultimately, training to become a teacher means to sign up for a vocational process that never stops moving forward, or ideally should never conclude. Developing a more dynamic understanding of why theoretical knowledge is important, therefore, and how it works in systemic and yet tacit tandem with practical teacher-training may afford practitioners a more profound understanding of both its experiential importance and their own place in relation to it.

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Bourdieu, P. (1977). Outline of a theory of practice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.CrossRefGoogle Scholar. Bourdieu, P. (1984). Â Reflexivity and the transformation of gender identity: Reviewing the potential for change in cosmopolitan city. Sociology, 42(3), 503â€"522.CrossRefGoogle Scholar. Burawoy, M., & Von Holdt, K. (2012). The Logic of Practice. Pierre Bourdieu. Translated by Richard Nice. Contents.Â That is why it requires one to return persistently to the same objects (here, those examined in Outline of a Theory of Practice and, secondarily, in Distinction); each doubling-back is another opportunity to objectify more completely one's objective and subjective relation to the object. I One has to endeavour to reconstruct retrospectively the successive stages of the relationship, because. this labour, which is first exerted on the person who performs it (and which some authors have tried to write into the texture of their 'work in progress', as Joyce put it), tends to remove ...Â so when their authors had no specific training and therefore lacked both.