

2007

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### Recommended Citation

Dickson, B. (2007). Defining and Interpreting Professional Knowledge in an Age of Performativity: a Scottish Case-Study. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 32(4).  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2007v32n4.2>

This Journal Article is posted at Research Online.  
<http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol32/iss4/2>

## **Defining and Interpreting Professional Knowledge in an Age of Performativity: a Scottish Case-study**

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*Abstract: This paper will argue that by considering in detail the Scottish Standard for Initial Teacher Education [SITE] (Quality Assurance Agency [QAA], 2000), the foundation document of the teaching profession in Scotland, a model exists that synthesises the positions of those involved in education who support a “technical-rational” position and others who support a “values” discourse. The paper will consider how the authors of SITE were affected by the contextual factors of policy and epistemology. Literary methods of reading will be used to show that SITE defines professional knowledge as being dynamic, intellectual, personal, developmental, research-informed and achieved in synthesis and it will be argued that the success of this definition lies in the breadth of these categories rather than in the enumeration of unwieldy lists of competences.*

The *Standard for Initial Teacher Education in Scotland Benchmark Information* (QAA, 2000) contains a national, professional interpretation of the literature on professional knowledge, the purpose of which is to enable teacher education institutions to undertake “the process of designing suitable programmes of study’ as well as providing, through benchmark information, ‘criteria for assessment’” (QAA, 2000, 1). Thus it becomes the foundation document for beginning primary and secondary teachers. The phrase “professional knowledge” is used widely among teacher educators with the assumption that the definition is obvious. However, literature about professional knowledge in teacher education illustrates that the term can be used by those holding competing ideologies. Some, often policy makers, hold “technical-rational” views of education, while others look for broader definitions of the scope of education. The discourse, with its managerialism and target-setting (ideas taken from market economics) is paralleled by lingering unease among teachers in schools and universities about what is being measured and produced.

The purpose of this paper is to consider whether “professional knowledge” is as transparent as is commonly thought and will demonstrate that in order to operate, teaching professionals must construct their own working definition of the term. Because the term has both ideological and epistemological connotations, the process of constructing a definition requires interpretative skill and it is also value-intensive. It is this theoretical process which has a crucial role in the formation, or production, of teachers. A broad academic literature covers both “professionalism” and

“professional knowledge”. Discussions of epistemology shade into discussions of values, politics, history and teachers’ lives.

A working definition was achieved in professional collaboration. Its writers had not only to select and prioritise from existing academic literature but also to take account of the current policy context. In addition, as subjects themselves, they brought to the interpretative process all their own knowledge, experience and values. The document that they authored attempts to take a rounded view of professional knowledge, neither rejecting the language of performativity out of hand, nor judging it to be a sufficient language for expressing educational purpose.

### Thematic Contexts

In his book *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (1987) Schön argued that “technical rationality” was of limited use in educating professionals. He critiqued ideas that education consisted in the transmission of data. Being able to reproduce codified knowledge was no guarantee of being able to apply it because so many problems existed in “indeterminate zones of practice - uncertainty, uniqueness and value conflict” (Schön, 1987, 8). By contrast, Schön upheld an ideal of reflective practitioners who could hold a variety of interpretations, some traditional, some contradictory, in their minds before selecting some and rejecting others in order to solve a specific problem. This “reflection-in-action” had a “critical function” (Schön, 1987, 28). In 1994 Michael Eraut judged that Schön was concerned with developing an “epistemology of professional creativity rather than a complete epistemology of everyday professional practice” (Eraut, 1994, 143) and argued that it was difficult to distinguish between reflection in, and reflection on, action. Eraut (following Broudy’s typology) described four modes of knowledge use: *replicative* for routine decisions; *applicatory* which uses technical knowledge to produce a prescription for action; *interpretative* which is a mix of technical knowledge, experience and personal insight/ability; and *associative* which often exists in the profession’s guiding metaphors (Eraut, 1994, 47-50). Eraut also observed that the acquisition of professional knowledge is highly dependent on its context of use (Eraut, 1994, 33).

Hoyle & John (1995) having considered the work of Elbaz, Leinhardt, Smith and Shulman, summarised knowledge categories as: *positivist; interpretive; critical; cognitive; practical; biographical; contextual; and knowledge of subject* (Hoyle & John, 1995, 54-63). The work of Clandinnin & Connelly (1995) in emphasising the importance of teachers’ narrative of their experience was categorised by Hoyle & John as “practical”; although there seems to be no *a priori* reason why it should not be considered under their next category “biographical” (Clandinnin & Connelly, 1995, 58-60). This demonstrates the difficulty caused by there being no agreed taxonomy as similar concepts are often named differently thus giving rise to distinction without difference.

Epistemology, as far as teaching is concerned, may be conceptualised as being informed by politics, society, aims, ethics and personal experience; all complex categories in their own right before their relationship with education is explored.

The literature referred to above critiques positivist constructions of knowledge which prioritise codes of knowledge and assessable outcomes, by demonstrating that investigation leads not to positivists’ definitions but to what Tom (1992) describes as “the infinite number of variables, trade-offs and human nuances that make up the teacher-pupil relationship” (quoted by Hoyle & John, 1995, 50). Such indeterminacy

makes the ability to interpret, to reflect on existing interpretations in order to produce new interpretations for specific purposes indispensable.

All these writers resist definitions of professional discourse which are purely “technical-rational”, yet in the 1980s and 1990s, the rise of neo-conservative ideology in Britain and the English-speaking democracies, sought to bring the values of private companies to the public sector services because it was argued that national well-being depended on such methods of management. This policy context had its own understanding of professional knowledge. The credibility of (what became known as) New Public Management was based on audit (Power, 1997, 10). This in turn meant that among policymakers technical-rational conceptions of the policy process were valued because they were constructed as offering an untroubled relationship between business and education. Commercial input equated mechanistically with pupils and output equated to what they learnt at school (Angus, L. 1993, quoted in Mahony & Hextall 2000, p.86).

“Standards” could therefore be drawn up and used in order to measure “progress” of pupils and competence of teachers. Such competences were often conceived narrowly and teachers’ work was judged on how well they overtook managerial targets set for them. The process has not been without its dissenters. Mahony & Hextall note that “what counts as good teaching and how to reward it are increasingly being underpinned by ‘teaching standards’ or competence based models of teacher education which are well-advanced in Australia, USA and the UK” and they record teachers’ concerns about whether “today’s new teacher might even be able to adequately achieve the Standards while at the same time being indifferent or ill-disposed to the young people’ in school classrooms as policy documents prioritise ability to teach above the relational aspects of teaching” (Mahony & Hextall, 2000, 10; 50).

Bottery & Wright argue that performance management is seen as “the principal means of generating improvement within education”. By “singling out and rewarding individuals, instead of seeing schools as collegial bodies within which individuals contribute to the general good of the institution, it extends the principles of the marketplace introduced by previous Conservative governments, and in effect sets one member of staff in competition against another” (Bottery & Wright, 2000, 479). The demotivation which accompanies the economic ethos of schools leads Hartley to conclude “The standards movement in teacher education may be efficient (because it is cheaper), but it may not necessarily be effective for an emerging knowledge-based economy” (Hartley, 2002, 253).

While writers stress the damage which they argue is being done to education by the drive for efficiency and effectiveness, they are keen to point out that they support the development of a professional teaching force. Mahony & Hextall “are entirely supportive of attempts to make what is required of teachers more open and explicit” (Mahony & Hextall, 2000, 29). While Goodson recognises a role for teachers in critiquing government policy, he is cautious about using teachers’ narratives without taking account of the particular political and social contexts. He argues for a “principled professionalism” which works to interpret government standards in the light of other sources of knowledge (Goodson, 2003, 126). For Sachs in Australia “managerial professionalism” can be usefully be challenged by “democratic professionalism” in which professional knowledge is constructed in a collegial manner in communities of practice, not through the individualism and competitive drives of the ‘entrepreneurial [teacher] identity’ preferred by management. Despite areas of disagreement, the connotations of “professionalism”

are still sufficiently positive that both sides wish to lay claim to the term (Sachs, 2003, 156-7).

An important subset of this literature emerged from the mid-nineties and challenged the move towards “standards” by concentrating on the “teacher’s inner life”, a more subjective category of professional knowledge. In 1996, Veronica Voiels argued that “the continuing efforts to impose principles and practices of the market economy into institutions of education produce conflicts of interest which undermine the principles of affirmation, co-operation, respect and open-mindedness characteristic of global education” (Voiels, 1996, 159). In 1998, Andy Hargreaves argued from Canada, “Teachers’ emotions are inseparable from their moral purposes and their ability to achieve those purposes” (Hargreaves, 1998, 838). Voiel’s gentle rationale that the inner life of the teacher should be attended to because of an unhelpful social privileging of extroversion over introversion has been largely overtaken by the conditions described by Ball in ‘The Teacher’s Soul and the Terrors of Performativity’ (2003) where in the middle of a largely secular discourse, he chose to use the word “soul” borrowed from religious discourse, often considered socially regressive, and linked it with the emotionally fierce word “terror” to attain the levels of polemic necessary to draw attention to his point that unless the agonies of the teacher’s inner life were taken seriously, there would be serious social consequences which would leave “no room for caring” (Ball, 2003, 224).

While it is fashionable to denigrate the “standards” movement because it does not take sufficient account of the other aspects of professional knowledge discussed in the research literature, it is worth reflecting on why it arose and why it had such a strong appeal. Although teaching has a history as long as humanity itself, it is only relatively recently that it has been a mass phenomenon in industrialising societies; 1870 and 1872 are the relevant dates for universal primary education in England and Scotland respectively. In the UK, education is publicly funded and can be thought of as one of the last nationalised industries. The privatising, corporatising processes which affected nationalised UK industries in the 1980s eventually came to teacher education.

Standards are the *sine qua non* in the development and delivery of products for mass consumption. They allow products to be measured against each other, to be returned if they are faulty or to be priced more expensively if they can be shown to have features which give them added value. Measurement guarantees a standard which is a reliable source of value and can be endlessly reproduced. The standard gauge of railway tracks, for example, is a key factor in allowing fast, extensive travel every day of the week.

In Scotland the curriculum which was introduced in 1987 to ensure that all secondary pupils left school with qualifications was called “Standard Grade”, whereby a pupil could achieve one of six grade-related results expressed in a national language of outcomes allowing pupils, their parents, teachers and employers to make necessary decisions.

Standards also ensure that poor educational provision can be identified. Standards have definite uses and are related to effective, reliable delivery which is regarded as normative in many walks of life. It has been argued that when “standards move from being perceived as ‘facts of life’ to being an ideology, a set of socially internalised beliefs and values, imposing uniformity on a class of objects, can produce strong, legitimising social effects (Milroy, 2001, 530).

## The Scottish Context

During the 1990s, Scottish teacher training institutions were assimilated into the Higher Education sector (Christie, 2003a, 933) which meant that they were subject to the standards of the Quality Assurance Agency which sought to apply the benchmarks associated with university degrees to Initial Teacher Education degrees (Christie, 2003b, 954). Benchmarks were associated with the competence-based model of education. Competence-based models were introduced in the United States after the Second World War as a temporary measure to increase teaching supply by drawing up a list of competences and then checking applicants against them, so that those who seemed to possess a variety of competences could be fast-tracked through the system. Though never intended to be a permanent method, it was attractive to the New Right because of the apparent possibility of assessing whether or not standards had been achieved.

*SITE* was preceded by *Guidelines for Teacher Training Courses* (Scottish Office, 1993) and *Guidelines for Initial Teacher Education Courses in Scotland* (Scottish Office, 1998) which set out a list of competences for each of the Initial Teacher Education qualifications.

To these competences, *SITE* adds a series of benchmarks which specify the standard of knowledge, skills and values which teacher education programmes should address and assess (QAA, 2000, 1). The process parallels the introduction of competence-based ITE in England and Wales in primary (1992) and secondary (1993) which led to the national standards for Qualified Teacher Status in 1997-8.

*SITE* was written at the height of the political desire for standards in education.

However, political conditions in Scotland were dissimilar from those prevailing in England. Although it was governed by the UK Conservative administration, the number of Conservative MPs being returned in Scotland was decreasing and there was a great deal of popular discontent with the administration (Pickard, 2003, 229-38). In addition, the Scottish education system is different from the English system and with a separate history. With separate legal and religious institutions, education is commonly cited as a unique marker of Scottish national identity. The confident strength of this identity together with the relative weakness of the government perhaps allowed the authors of *SITE* more room for manoeuvre than writers of parallel English documents.

The writers' task had four elements:

- to relate to the policy context in which prestige political views of education were technical-rational
- to grapple with the seemingly infinite epistemological phenomenon of professional knowledge
- to maintain or enhance teacher professionalism by composing the foundation text of the profession; and
- to express all of these issues in a document which was fit for the specific purpose of teacher preparation.

## Reading *SITE*

As a teacher of English recently appointed to an academic post as a teacher educator, the interpretative tools of academic English seemed to me naturally suited to the analysis of *SITE*.

Thus Ball's definition of "policy as text" as representations which are encoded in complex ways (via struggles, compromises, authoritative public interpretations and re-interpretations) achieved "somewhat under the influence of literary theory" seemed familiar territory (1994, p.16).

It was suggested by colleagues that Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, which included analysing texts, might provide a useful starting point. Yet while there were similarities in the method, dissimilarities became apparent both at the level of method and theory.

In *Language and Power*, Fairclough advocates ten questions which his readers may use in order to analyse texts. He is aware that the set of textual features is "highly selective" and his chapter is deliberately written "at an introductory level for people who do not have extensive backgrounds in language study" (2001, 92-93). Unlike many analysts, Fairclough is explicit about his neo-Marxist theoretical stance and is clear that these questions are being asked from that position in order to transform discourse for those who experience it as discrimination. For Widdowson this leads to interpretation, not analysis (Widdowson, 1995 quoted in Titscher et al., 2000, 163).

His ideological position leads Fairclough to make debatable judgements about the motives of other subjects within discourse: "The general point is that education, along with all the other social institutions, has as its 'hidden agenda' the reproduction of class relations ... in addition to its overt educational agenda". Derived from Bourdieu's insight that the actions of subjects in discourse have "more meaning than they know", it remains to be argued that "more meaning" is in every case counter to the stated aims of education (Fairclough, 2001, 33).

The selective status of the questions is not necessarily problematic. All interpretation has to select from an extensive range of rhetorical techniques and linguistic phenomena to proceed and selection is based on other contextual factors; there is no single, universal method of interpretation. Yet Fairclough's approach presents two difficulties for someone trained in the study of literature. The first is that a reader should go to the text only expecting answers to particular questions. The second is that because of the theoretically circumscribed ground from which the questions originate, there is a danger that texts will merely be "read" in order to demonstrate the assumptions of the reader. Paradoxically, therefore, a radical theoretical position could lead to complacent readings because the method of reading adopted simply allows theory to reproduce itself, rather than allowing for the possibility that the text might challenge the reader's presuppositions.

Over the last fifty years the study of literature has undergone a revolutionary change, such that methods which were once used to study imaginative literature are now used to study all kinds of texts. The boundary between imaginative and pragmatic texts is itself imaginary and constructed. New historicist critics understand literature as textual practice shaped by collective beliefs, social practices and cultural discourses. Rather than literature being "autonomous", or "reflecting" the external world, new historicism argues that through representation texts reproduce, negotiate and contest social power. All texts, not just literary ones, display "textual traces", metaphors, linguistic practices and shared imaginative representations from a range of discourses from the literary to the political or educational. Such methods may be used

to produce a new reading of *SITE*, not because applying this sort of literary analysis is a mannerism but because it allows the processes by which *SITE* constructs, and is constructed by various discourses (some of which are in conflict) to become visible. Social power is not external to *SITE*. *SITE* is a move within social power. It is part of the textual world of culture where texts circulate, exchanging and negotiating ideas and language to produce meaning.

Bazerman & Paradis, who have also studied the construction of professional texts, argue that “The textual autonomy associated with the library fails in the workplace, where textual dynamics are a central agency in the social construction of objects, concepts and institutions” (Bazerman & Paradis, 1991, 4.) It is because of the power the text has to construct context that it is important to study it on its own: “In the pragmatic world of [...] specialized work communities, text is a force that transforms human physical and conceptual limits...[and] still exploits all the underlying rhetorical resources of language” (Bazerman & Paradis, 1991, 4).

What are the advantages of bringing this kind of literary reading to professional texts?

Firstly, because a text is not literary does not mean that it does not share in the common textual processes of meaning-making within culture which literary readings are developed to analyse.

Secondly, rather than being based entirely on a “hermeneutic of suspicion”, this mode of reading re-asserts the possibility of openness about authorial motivation and textual meaning which when juxtaposed with deterministic interpretations allows the binary between freedom and determinism full play.

## Dynamic Knowledge

The concept of professional knowledge espoused by the document is dynamic; it is knowledge-in-action. This is expressed by the preponderance of verbs in the document – “know about; know how to; demonstrate”. The fact that these verbs often take a direct object shows that any knowledge the student has learned is not recognised as “knowledge” *until it is demonstrated*. The multiplicity of verbs in the document insists on this understanding of professional knowledge. The first benchmark requires the beginning teacher to demonstrate knowledge, understanding and practical skills in the area of the curriculum or subject(s) to be taught, referring to national guidelines as appropriate and to know how to match the level of the curriculum and subject(s) to the need of pupils (QAA, 2000, 7).

Throughout the document “demonstrate” and “know how to” are used synonymously to express the practical nature of professional knowledge. Knowledge acquisition by itself is not enough. These statements express three of Eraut’s four categories of professional knowledge. They include the *replicative* (e.g. in secondary schools a student must suit curricular programmes to age groups); *applicatory* (e.g. students must know what the curriculum contents are and plan to cover them) and *interpretative* (the ability to match the level of the curriculum to the needs of pupils require technical knowledge about the curriculum and the range of pupil needs in a classroom as well as the insight and ability to produce a meaningful lesson which meets pupil need and curricular outcomes (QAA, 2000, 10).

Although a new section begins, “Professional Skills and Abilities”, the expected features are expressed in the same dynamic verbs as were used in “Professional Knowledge and Understanding”. Thus the first feature of benchmark

2.1.1 expects that student teachers will be able to “demonstrate that they are able to use appropriate strategies to motivate and sustain the interest of all pupils during a lesson” (QAA, 2000, 10). Programmes of initial teacher education should enable student teachers to “communicate effectively, using a variety of media, to stimulate pupils and achieve the objectives of lessons” (QAA, 2000, 10). While this reads as a description of the skill of communication, it could quite easily have been worded in terms of the knowledge base from which the skill is selected. For example: “students will acquire knowledge of the means of effective communication, using a variety of media, to stimulate pupils and achieve the objectives of lessons”.

The expected features would be just as appropriate. Why are knowledge and skills being distinguished? One answer might be that in Fairclough’s terminology “skills” is an “ideologically contested” word (Fairclough, 2001, 95). It represents the New Right’s sense that teacher education needed to become much more “practical”. Given that in England there were different routes into teaching, some of them with no link to teacher education institutions, teacher educators felt that simply teaching “skills” did not provide students with the wider rationale they would need if any “skill” did not have the effect it was supposed to.

The prominence of “skill” in *SITE* signifies that the document is written in that political context. The fact that “skills” is modified by being paralleled by “abilities”, unobtrusively makes the point that “skills” by themselves are not enough, positioning the writers with those who express academic hesitation about a “skills” agenda. At this point the text is being constrained by two opposing points of view: policymakers who regard “skills” as an unqualified good and academics who regard an emphasis on “skills” as reductive. These are the signs of “struggles and compromises” which Ball expects in policy as text (Ball, 1994, 15). “Skills” are prominent enough to satisfy policy makers, but they are not the only concept on which the document is based.

However, etymology suggests an alternative understanding of why understanding and skill are differentiated yet use the same dynamic verbs to show that knowledge is present. In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, sense 1 defines skill as: “reason as a faculty of the mind” (first written record c.1200); senses 3 and 4 as a “cause” or “case or ground” and sense 5 as “to have knowledge, especially in a specified matter”. Sense 6 is the sense in which we usually think of the word, “the capability of accomplishing something with precision and certainty; practical knowledge in combination with ability”. The senses veer between describing internal, invisible knowledge and its visible external evidence. The history of the word suggests that we are looking at the same phenomenon in two manifestations and that when attempting to conceptualise it, people want to differentiate between the inner and the outer manifestations but struggle because skill implies knowledge but knowledge itself does not imply skill.

It tends to support, therefore the academic position that skills *cannot exist* without the knowledge they presuppose. Although superficially the text seems merely to be using politically-correct language, the language being used raises important points of epistemology. Just as English users have struggled over centuries to distinguish knowledge from skills, so by its use of the same verbs to express both categories, does *SITE*. This has implications for the structure of the document, which will be examined later, because it erodes any necessary distinction between sections one and two.

## Intellectual Knowledge

Professional knowledge is expressed in the deliberative intellectual processes of planning (intellectual deliberation on the future) and reflection (intellectual deliberation on the past). Planning is expressed in benchmark 1.1.3 and its definition is developed by the adjectives “coherent and progressive” and the verb “justify” which indicates that planning has to occur within an intellectual rationale. This detailed understanding of planning is amplified by four other factors:

- students are expected to master a range of information in vital documents (National Guidelines, curricular documentation, UN Convention of the Rights of the Child)
- planning is to be informed by factors which inform the whole school context, teaching of individual lesson and longer term educational aims
- these wider curricular considerations have also to be implemented alongside factors which affect the planning of individual lessons (QAA, 2000, 8-9)
- students are required to demonstrate awareness of the knowledge in action which leads to longer term goals such as linking a series of lessons to attainment targets (QAA, 2000, 9)

Reflection is similarly defined in detail. Benchmarks are contained in section 2.4 Professional Reflection and Communication. These are enumerated in nine expected features associated with the benchmarks which include explicitly the ability to reflect critically on relevant literature and on their own practice. Planning and reflection are internal cerebral processes of knowledge acquisition and modification.

The standards discourse thus allows *SITE*, through the enumeration of a long list of expected features within the broad competences, to construct a definition of teacher education which has considerable intellectual emphasis.

However, the broad framing of these competences allows, indeed encourages, an array of professional literature to be accessed. *SITE* thus allows for any of Valli’s categories of reflection to be invoked; and it allows teacher educators and student teachers freedom in interpreting them (Valli, 1992).

*SITE* negotiates between professional discourses in order to produce its description of teaching. Although the power that makes *SITE* legitimate comes from government, its authority is not simply based on political fiat, but on the influence it can have because of negotiations which carry wider credibility.

## Personal Knowledge

Knowledge is personal because it relates to the whole teacher and the whole child. Teachers are asked to take “professional responsibility for developing the personality, talents and mental, spiritual and physical attributes of each child or young person” (QAA, 2000, 4). So important is personal knowledge, it has its own section, Professional Values and Commitment, which accounts for the third part of the tri-partite structure. *SITE* advocates a personally engaged professionalism rather than a dispassionate one, which, though leaving room for the rational application of professional knowledge in the delivery of the personal and social education curriculum, implies that the interpersonal development of knowledge is also important.

This is the point at which the document relates to Scottish traditions of education which predate industrialisation and have endured throughout as it directs attention to older notions of vocation, the calling of the whole person into an area of work usually for the good of others.

*SITE* does not prioritise values above expertise; both have to be present in the teacher who has achieved the outcomes. Section 3 is a key means by which “skills” are defined as being present alongside understanding and values. Not only does professional knowledge become invalid if it is passive rather than active, but it also becomes invalid if the teacher, though able to implement the curriculum cycle, holds values which are opposed to those far-reaching aims which compel societies to provide education.

*SITE* cannot conceive of a teacher who sees no need to develop as a professional or who has nothing but contempt for the community in which s/he works. As well as being given its own section, the personal aspect is captured in the metaphor used in the phrase, “a vision of the newly qualified teacher” (QAA, 2000, 1). Knowledge does not only reside in books, or even in the process of teaching, but in the capacity of the *person*. Although the presence of the metaphorical use of “vision” may be construed as merely as a synonym for a target-setting policy context, that political colonisation of the word cannot completely obliterate the older aspirational ranges of the metaphor.

Section three enables *SITE* to accommodate with comparative ease the insights belonging to the literature on a teacher’s inner life and articulates well with the reasons which applicants give when entering the profession, namely the desire to contribute to society (Younger, Brindley, Pedder and Hagger, 2004, 258). This is not the result of a new insight by *SITE* but the retention of older educational values which predate massification and which clearly signal the importance of caring, the possible loss of which causes Ball deep anxiety. While it is clear from the previous sections that *SITE* takes a high view of the intellectual processes and skills which a teacher must demonstrate, and so is not averse to performativity, values are a parallel and indispensable element in its understanding of professional knowledge. This synthesis allows older values to humanise the more necessarily mechanistic processes which produce effective delivery.

### **Research-Informed Knowledge**

As Scottish teacher education institutions merged with universities, the contribution of research to professional knowledge has become more explicit. Benchmark 1.3.2 expects students to acquire an understanding of research and its contribution to education (QAA, 2000, 9). Given the rapid change faced by Scottish society, *SITE* envisages teachers who are flexible enough to change educational practice as necessary. Partnerships between schools and universities may allow the benefits Eraut sees flowing from “recognizing that much of the relevant expertise lies outside the higher-education system, but its development is limited by the lack of appropriate structures for knowledge exchange between higher education and the professions” (Eraut, 1994, 20-1). Phrases such as “research-informed” and “research-led” are common professional jargon. I do not use jargon pejoratively but to indicate a professional patois. Like “skills”, “research” indicates an area of continuing professional argument. These disagreements are masked by the coolness of tone, a convention of professional documents, which is achieved through the use of abstract

language often involving words with Latin or Greek roots and repetitious sentence structure necessary for definition. Despite the harmonising effect of tone, it is important to note two caveats raised by Bottery & Wright who argue that universities must not simply provide the academic credibility for “best-practice” projects: “there are issues beyond the implementational and the technical-rational with which universities need to be concerned”. If teachers are to be limited working with the “technical-rational” and are not free to ask critical research questions, then they will contribute to a “restricted” professionalism in which teachers become the implementers of other peoples’ policies (Bottery & Wright, 2000, 483-4).

### **Developing Knowledge**

*SITE* is aware that professional knowledge is appropriated and demonstrated by the knower over time. This is seen within the document when the lesser measure “know about” is used instead of “know how to”. Students are expected to “know about the ways of producing reports for parents” (QAA, 2000, p.11). In such cases student inability to demonstrate such a feature is not due to lack of cerebral knowledge about the importance of this issue or the processes by which it is carried out, but lack of opportunity. Students are rarely on placement long enough to be able to track a class through a reporting period. Their knowledge here is embryonic, not becoming fully professional until as probationer teachers they write their first reports.

That professional knowledge cannot be gained instantaneously, is also seen in the intertextual context of *SITE* which is structured as the first of a series of documents which relate to different stages of a teaching career. Successful probationer teachers gain the *Standard for Full Registration*; longer-serving teachers may achieve the *Standard for Chartered Teacher*; those intending leadership can undertake the *Standard for Headship*. Thus both within *SITE* itself and within the series of which it forms part, it can be seen that professional knowledge is a process. This sequence of documents bears out Eraut’s observation, “that knowledge acquisition is a continuing lifelong process, and that new knowledge will be put to good use” (Eraut, 1994, 30).

### **Knowledge Achieved in Synthesis**

Although *SITE* envisages itself as the first in a series of texts, thus asserting that professional knowledge develops over time, it does not apply that insight systematically to itself. Differentiating between understanding in section one and skills in sections two allows *SITE* to be structured in broad sections which break up the list structure which the authors are determined to avoid. They state that it is not a “crude checklist” (QAA, 2000, 1). However, if the distinction between knowledge and skills is epistemologically artificial as the etymology of “skill” suggests, and that what is actually going on is a constant cycle of cerebral knowledge being worked out in action and that experience then modifying cerebral knowledge, then there is no necessary distinction between sections one and two. At this point *SITE* is pressured not by tick-box policy preferences but by epistemology. While it could be argued by academics that *SITE* presents a reductivist view of teaching constructed to please politicians, it could equally well be argued that unless and until epistemology is reduced, it is so unwieldy that it is of no practical use, and therefore the writers were

performing a vital task for student teachers by reducing knowledge to make it fit for purpose. Bazerman & Paradis write “[Professional] texts are the transaction that make institutional collaboration possible; they are the means by which individuals collectively construct the contexts out of which intellectual and material products emerge” (Bazerman & Paradis, 1991, 4).

It can be argued that *SITE* is not reductivist and that it is not “crude”, but it is a list.

The structure enumerates a formidable list of features both curricular and pastoral. Yet, as Kirk points out, when teachers consider what they do, *SITE* is no more than an expression of certain minimal criteria which all [teacher education] courses should meet (Kirk, 2000, 23). That these criteria are minimal serves to highlight the overwhelming amount of information available in written interpretations of professional knowledge. It would simply be impossible to transmit that to a beginning teacher: reduction is imperative for comprehension.

However, there is another dynamic which allows students to deal with the scope of professional knowledge. On placement particularly students learn a number of things at once: professional knowledge is achieved in synthesis, not in sequence. Tucked away at the beginning of the document is an insight which recognises, but does not develop, the main paradox of the document. The three sections are not simply lists of competences or outcomes...They are inherently linked to each other in the development of the teacher, and one aspect does not exist independently of the other two (QAA, 2000, 7).

Although the benchmarks are listed in sequence, useful for Quality Assurance purposes, there is a contradiction between the form of the document (list) and its understanding that the items are “inherently linked” in student learning. It is the invisible (and here, largely unarticulated) reality of synthesis which allows the formidable list to become a manageable proposition for beginning teachers.

No one, however experienced, could hold all these things in mind explicitly and simultaneously. However, one professional action might demonstrate a clutch of expected features. The professional knower develops knowledge through accretion round the vital nodes of planning, implementation, reflection and pastoral interactions.

A *SITE* diagram shows the angles of a triangle labelled with the headings of the three sections (QAA, 2000, 6). Inside the triangle there is a grey circle, symbol of the inherent linking of the features. It is the circle, or better, the spiral, rather than the list, which exemplifies the document’s fleeting sense that professional knowledge is achieved in synthesis over time. By prioritising what should be known and demonstrated without saying much about how knowledge is acquired, the authors of *SITE* miss the opportunity to draw attention to the circular processes at work in acquiring knowledge and to indicate the key nodes around which knowledge gathers and coheres.

## Conclusion

The method of reading employed in this paper allows the reader to see how the writers dealt with the technical-rational views of the policy community. They employed a list structure and they used the word “skills”. However, the list is not a checklist: the competences are so described that, even in their precision, they can do

no more than indicate possible paths into the multiplicity of professional literature and experience.

While “skills” is used, it is modified by “abilities” and is contextualised between understanding and values to distance the authors from a purely skills based agenda. The authors of *SITE* clearly believe that “skills” are not enough but have related wisely to the policy context by giving enough ground in structure and terminology to ensure that their broader insight became the professional foundation.

While the method of reading allows these political conclusions to emerge, it also allows wider conclusions to be reached on the relationship between the authors and their context on one hand and between the authors and epistemology on the other. The authors of *SITE* do not conceptualise the standards movement and the literature surrounding other aspects of professional knowledge as an either-or choice but as a both-and possibility.

By retaining older professional insights into teaching, so important to a Scottish sense of educational identity, *SITE* refuses either an arid, mechanistic form of teaching or a model of teaching so subjective, it pays insufficient attention to the pragmatic need to equip young people with qualifications for life and work.

*SITE*'s interpretation of professional knowledge is that it is dynamic, intellectual, developmental, personal, research-informed and achieved in synthesis, a broad and full representation of academic formulations of professional knowledge.

However, epistemology presents challenges. *SITE* demonstrates two consequences of separating understanding from skills for quality assurance purposes. Firstly, it masks the reality that understanding and skills are two manifestations of the same phenomenon. Skills imply knowledge and *both* must be present in competent teachers. Secondly, students develop knowledge through time as they plan, implement, reflect/evaluate and interact with pupils. It may be that the policy brouhaha surrounding skills and lists deflected the authors of *SITE* from realising that their briefly-expressed epistemological insight, that students learn many things at once, was the key which would transform that list-structure, with which they express irritation, into the exciting process of relating to the multi-dimensional, variously-linked phenomena of professional knowledge which *SITE* describes.

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