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Pedagogy-as-praxis: a sociocultural framework for researching pedagogy as performance and discourse

Philip Mark Nicholson 

School of Social Sciences & Humanities, University of Suffolk, Ipswich, UK

ABSTRACT

This article presents a sociocultural conceptual framework for researching pedagogy as the *performance* of teaching together with its attendant *discourse*. The framework, referred to as pedagogy-as-praxis, consists of two core elements that draw on, combine and adapt several different yet complimentary theoretical perspectives. First, Alexander's action-based framework (the *what*) and components of Bernstein's theory on educational transmission (the *how*) are combined to intricately and sensitively describe the *performance* of teaching. Second, by positioning the *performance* of teaching as the tool element within an adapted and extended activity system, the remaining activity theory elements – subject, object, rules, community and division of labour – are applied to understand the *discourse* that produces, structures and influences its modality (the *why*). When combined within the pedagogy-as-praxis framework, these theoretical perspectives enable an analysis of how socio-cultural-political factors shape and mediate educational practices. The article starts by considering the definition of pedagogy upon which the framework is based before outlining the theoretical perspectives it is underpinned by. The framework and its constituting elements are then applied and demonstrated.

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Introduction

This article presents a sociocultural conceptual framework capable of researching pedagogy as both the *performance* of teaching together with its attendant *discourse*. The framework, referred to as pedagogy-as-praxis, was developed as part of a doctoral study exploring pedagogies of the transition from Early Childhood Education to Compulsory School Education in two schools in England (Nicholson 2022). The study explored how the socio-cultural-political conditions unique to each school in the study – a maintained-sector school and an independent-sector school – produced and structured particular modalities of classroom practice. By constructing and applying the pedagogy-as-praxis framework, it was possible to describe teaching practices (*performance*) in each year group in each setting and understand how their enactment was shaped by structural and institutional factors (*discourse*).

Although the premise of the pedagogies of transition research (Nicholson 2022) was clear – connect micro-level classroom practices to macro-level influences in two different year groups in two different settings – its implications were not. Researching pedagogy is, as Curtin and Hall (2018, p. 367) observe, a 'tremendously challenging' endeavour. Not only does it require intricate

CONTACT Philip Mark Nicholson  p.nicholson2@uos.ac.uk  School of Social Sciences & Humanities, University of Suffolk, Waterfront Building, 19 Neptune Quay, Ipswich IP4 1QJ, UK

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and sustained engagement with the practice of teaching itself but also exploration of the socio-cultural-political conditions that enable and constrain it. Locating practice within the concentric circles of classroom, school, system and state is a process of making visible that which is often 'hidden and hard to know' (Curtin and Hall 2018, p. 369). It involves questioning and attempting to understand both how the outside comes in and how the inside goes out (Daniels and Tse 2021). This makes researching pedagogy a complex and nuanced endeavour, one that Curtin and Hall (2018) argue challenges researchers to develop creative and innovative frameworks that are capable of weaving together micro- and macro-contexts. The pedagogy-as-praxis framework is a response to this challenge. It draws on, combines and adapts the different yet complimentary theoretical perspectives put forward by Alexander (2001), Bernstein (2000), Daniels (2001) and Engeström (2015), enabling an analysis of how macro-level, socio-cultural-political factors (*discourse*) shape and mediate micro-level educational processes (*performance*).

In the sections that follow, the theoretical principles that underpin and inform the pedagogy-as-praxis framework are outlined in more detail and each of the elements are applied and demonstrated. Prior to this, however, it is necessary to first briefly unpack the definition of pedagogy that underpins the framework. Pedagogy has a spectrum of meanings, ranging from the 'societally broad to the procedurally narrow' (Alexander 2008, p. 45). The construction and meaning of pedagogy is different in different contexts and cultures, as well as between different groups of people, such as policymakers, researchers and educators (Daniels 2001). When researching pedagogy, therefore, the importance of being stipulative with regards to how it is being interpreted is emphasized (Alexander 2009, Curtin and Hall 2018).

Defining pedagogy

In education, pedagogy is a term that is applied and understood with great variation. Though its meaning is often assumed to be self-evident (Murphy 2008), pedagogy exists in a 'contested and dynamic space', understood, defined and experienced in a number of different ways (Murray 2015, p. 1719). This is particularly the case in England – the country within which the doctoral research took place – where Simon (1995) notoriously questioned '*Why no pedagogy in England?*'. In his discussion of the meaning and status of pedagogy in England, Simon noted that in contrast to Continental European countries where it has an 'honoured place' (10), pedagogy 'has never taken root and flourished in Britain' (14). Simon's assessment was not an indication that no teaching took place during this time but instead was a concern that perspectives and thinking on education were confused and anecdotal rather than coherent and purposeful.

For some researchers, the status of pedagogy has improved considerably since Simon's (1995) critique. For example, Curtin and Hall (2018, p. 367) note how pedagogy has enjoyed a 'well-deserved elevated status' over the last several decades, a shift they argue has taken it from 'irrelevancy and invisibility', where it was 'under-researched' and 'under-theorised', to 'appreciation' and 'visibility', increasingly understood and valued for its ability to comprehend the complexity of educational practice. Yet other researchers (Adams 2011, 2022, Alexander 2008, Little 2020) have argued that any progression of the status of pedagogy since Simon's treatise has been at best modest and at worst regressive. Adams (2022, p. 108), for instance, concludes that pedagogy remains a 'thorny issue at the heart of education' in Anglophone countries. He identifies, in congruence with Shah (2021) and Stephen (2010), that pedagogy is a term sparsely deployed by educators in these contexts. The reasons for this are multiple and diverse, ranging from etymological constraints (Alexander 2008) to difficulties with pronunciation (hard or soft 'g?') (Daniels 2001) to trends in national and international educational policy (Adams 2022). Even still, Alexander (2008) and Adams (2022) observe that when the term is deployed it is often done so to equate with the methods and practices of teaching only. This conflation – between the terms 'teaching' and 'pedagogy' – sits at the heart of pedagogy's precarity in England. Understanding and clarifying the differences between these terms is central to the development of a framework for researching pedagogy.

Distinguishing between ‘pedagogy’ and ‘teaching’ is a central feature of Alexander’s (2001, 2008, 2009) research on pedagogy. He suggests that teaching is *performance* whereas pedagogy is both *performance* and *discourse*. The *performance* of teaching, according to Alexander, is the self-contained, observable actions of and interactions between educators and learners. Teaching is thus concerned with what educators and learners do but not why they do it, described by Alexander as action divested of its justifications, values, theories, evidence and relationship with the wider world. Pedagogy, on the other hand, is both *performance* and *discourse*, encompassing the ‘bigger picture’ of teaching, including both what educators and learners do as well as why they do it (Alexander 2008, p. 1). Alexander (2001, p. 540) thus defines pedagogy as ‘the *performance* of teaching together with the theories, beliefs, policies and controversies that inform and shape it’.

An understanding of pedagogy as both *performance* and *discourse* offers a broad, complex and holistic definition. It recognizes that pedagogy includes but also transcends action, as explained by Leach and Moon who state that:

Pedagogy is more than the accumulation of techniques and strategies, more than arranging a classroom, formulating questions and developing explanations. It is informed by a view of mind, of learning and learners and the kinds of knowledge and outcomes that are valued. (Leach and Moon 2008, p. 6)

In this sense, pedagogy invites us to steer back and forth between the nature and purpose of education and the methods through which they can be pursued. As such, pedagogy – far from being a ‘mindless activity’ (Alexander 2009, p. 928) or a ‘disembodied technique’ (Adams 2011, p. 470) – is an amalgam of both practice and theory. It is thus based on the notion of praxis, a term used to describe the dialectical relationship between, and constant renewal of, action and theory (Freire 2017, Kemmis and Smith 2008).

By connecting ideas to action and theory to practice, broader constructions of pedagogy invite an examination of the discourse that underpins educational practice. This challenges the narrow representation of pedagogy as an innocent and technical act that can be frozen from one context and replicated in another (Biesta 2007). Instead, it directs attention to and engenders an appreciation of pedagogy as being shaped by the socio-cultural-political conditions unique to each individual, setting and community.

Having briefly defined and explored the concept of pedagogy¹, the remaining sections of this article present the pedagogy-as-praxis framework as an approach capable of researching it, as both the *performance* of teaching together with its attendant *discourse* (Alexander 2001). The next section of the article considers how the pedagogy-as-praxis framework was developed and the theoretical perspectives it is underpinned by. Following this, each of the elements included within the framework and their practical applications are discussed.

Part one: development and theoretical underpinnings of the pedagogy-as-praxis framework

The performance of teaching

The starting point for developing the pedagogy-as-praxis framework was to create a ‘language of description’ where the *performance* of teaching could be sensitively described and then related to socio-cultural-political, macro-level influences. For Daniels (2009), the development of a ‘language of description’ is an essential aspect of distinguishing between different social practices. It enables researchers to:

identify and investigate: the circumstances in which particular discourses are produced; the modalities of such forms of cultural production; and the implications of the availability of specific forms of such production for the shaping of learning and development. (Daniels and Tse 2021, p. 4)

This stresses the interdependent nature of micro- and macro-levels when researching pedagogy. It indicates that it is only possible to comprehend how teaching practices are shaped by socio-cultural-

political forces when ‘unambiguous descriptions’ (Bernstein 2000, p. 208) of such practices have been generated. Put simply, to be in a position to ask *why* practices are structured in the ways that they are, it is necessary to first know the *what* and *how* of those practices.

Developing a language through which the *performance* of teaching can be uniquely described is a complex undertaking. The *performance* of teaching encompasses all the interactions between educators and learners and takes into consideration how the environment shapes teaching and learning. It involves a number of different ‘versions of teaching’ (Alexander 2008, p. 78) that, in turn, ‘provide opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions’ (Siraj-Blatchford 2002, p. 28). Although these processes are visible and hence can be observed, describing them in a way that stays faithful to the nuances inherent in their enactment yet comprehensible to a wider audience is challenging. As Alexander (2001, p. 323) observed, models of teaching often fall in to one of two categories in that they are either ‘too complex to provide illumination’ or ‘not detailed enough to provide a guide to practical action’. In an attempt to negotiate a balance between these two extremes, Alexander developed the ‘action-based framework for the analysis of teaching’, which, he suggested, is a model that is capable of ‘researching teaching in any context and by any means’ (2009, p. 930). The model Alexander proposed informs the approach developed to describe the *performance* of teaching within the pedagogy-as-praxis framework.

Motivated by ‘keeping it simple’ and staying ‘as close as possible to everyday understanding and action’ (Alexander 2001, p. 323), the action-based framework for the analysis of teaching (Figure 1) is built on the premise of two ‘simple and irreducible propositions’:

- teaching, in any setting, is the act of using method *x* to enable learners to learn *y*.
- teaching has a structure and form; it is situated in, and governed by, space, time and patterns of learner organization; and it is undertaken for a purpose. (Alexander 2008, p. 77)

The framework – which Alexander stresses is intended to be ‘descriptive rather than prescriptive’ (2001, p. 323) and ‘conceptual rather than technical’ (2009, p. 931) – provides a way of understanding the key elements of teaching that hold true in most, if not all, settings.

The elements of the framework are grouped under the category headings of *frame*, *form* and *act*, all of which exist in a symbiotic relationship:

The core *acts* of teaching (task, activity, interaction and judgement) are *framed* by classroom organisation (space), pupil organisation, time and curriculum and by classroom routines, rules and rituals. They are given *form* in the lesson or teaching session. (Alexander 2001, p. 325)

While overlaps will be present, and should be expected, Alexander’s demarcation is helpful as it provides a focus for making comparisons of the different categories and elements of teaching that are largely ‘stable across time, place and culture’ (2010, p. 301). Yet, in order to generate more intricate descriptions of the micro-level processes and interactions that exist within these categories and

Frame	Form	Act
Space		Task
Learner organisation		Activity
Time	Lesson	
Curriculum		Interaction
Routine, rule and ritual		Judgement

Figure 1. An action-based framework for the analysis of teaching (Alexander 2001, p. 325).

elements, further development is required. For this, components of Bernstein's (2000, 2003) theory on educational transmission are particularly helpful.

Through his work, Bernstein (2000, 2003) developed a language that enables researchers to investigate, describe and take measures of pedagogical modality. In particular, his concepts of *classification* and *framing* provide a way of understanding in more detail the underlying structure of the *frame*, *form* and *act* of teaching. Classification refers 'to the degree of boundary maintenance' between different categories (2003, p. 88) and, using the terms 'strong' or 'weak', can be applied to describe the nature of a number of different relationships in education, such as those: between educators and learners, between groups of learners and between curriculum areas and subjects. Where classification is strong, categories are 'well insulated' from one another and boundaries are distinct; where classification is weak, there is less insulation between categories and boundaries are ambiguous (2003, p. 88). While classification establishes the boundaries between categories, framing refers to the form in which behaviour and communication between and within categories are 'transmitted and received' (2003, p. 89). Framing thus determines who has control over principles such as selection, organization, sequencing, pacing and criteria (2000, pp. 12–13). If framing is strong, the locus of control rests explicitly with the 'transmitter' (educator), whereas if framing is weak, the locus of control rests more evenly with the 'acquirer' (learner) (2000, p. 13).

Bernstein's formulation of the concepts *classification* and *framing*, and the extent to which they are strong or weak, are helpful as they distinguish between different modalities of educational practice (Daniels 2004). In this sense, while Alexander's (2001) framework enables us to understand the *what* of teaching, the tools developed by Bernstein (2000, 2003) help us to discern the *how* of teaching. It is important to clarify at this point that while Bernstein often distinguished between two extremes, researchers wanting to develop more nuanced descriptions of the *performance* of teaching, can, and should, take a relational approach and consider whether different elements contain stronger or weaker classification and framing than others.

It is proposed that infusing Alexander's (2001) action-based model with Bernstein's (2000, 2003) theory of educational transmission creates a powerful 'language of description' where micro-level processes and interactions – the *performance* of teaching – can be intricately and sensitively described. This description provides the foundation for understanding how different modalities of teaching practice are shaped by the socio-cultural-political contexts in which they are enacted (Daniels 2004, Daniels and Tse 2021).

The synthesis of Alexander and Bernstein to describe the *performance* of teaching will be applied later in the article. Before then, however, the theoretical lens through which pedagogical *discourse* is comprehended within the pedagogy-as-praxis framework is considered.

Pedagogical discourse

After an approach for describing the *performance* of teaching was formulated, the next step within the development of the pedagogy-as-praxis framework was to consider the *discourse* that shapes it. This requires engagement with the 'bigger picture' of teaching and focussing on the factors that mediate educator actions and learner experiences (Alexander 2001, Leach and Moon 2008). However, such factors have the potential to be profuse and potentially unwieldy; as argued by Nind et al. (2016, p. 238), 'pedagogy is hard to know'. One of the key elements that shapes pedagogy is individual factors, such as educator's values (Alexander 2009), mindset (Allison 2010) and the image of the learner that they hold (Dahlberg et al. 2007). However, pedagogies are also influenced by the physical, cultural, social and political contexts in which they are enacted (Adams 2011, Stephen 2010). Such complexity necessitates a sociocultural analysis that is capable of identifying these different layers of influence and connecting them to particular modalities of teaching. The goal of a sociocultural approach, according to Wertsch et al. (1995, p. 11), is to 'explicate the relationship between human action, on the one hand, and the cultural, institutional, and historical situations in which this action occurs, on the other'. Sociocultural theory thus enables an analysis of how micro-

and macro-contexts are weaved together (Edwards 2001), making it possible to understand how the *performance* of teaching is mediated by socio-cultural-political conditions.

While a number of frameworks underpinned by sociocultural principles have been developed in an attempt to comprehend the structural and institutional determinants that mediate teaching practices – see for example, Alexander’s (2009) ‘pedagogy as ideas’, Nind, Curtin and Hall’s (2016) pedagogy as ‘specified, enacted and experienced’ and Kemmis’ (2005, 2022) work on ‘practice architectures’ – no one model predominates. Rather, researchers are encouraged to develop nuanced and innovative approaches to exploring the hidden and hard to know of pedagogy, ones that can meet the aims and objectives – but also the constraints – of their research (Curtin and Hall 2018). In the pedagogies of transition research (Nicholson 2022), an understanding of pedagogical *discourse* needed to attend to both conceptual and practical considerations. Conceptual considerations concerned the need to build on, connect and accommodate the synthesis of Alexander and Bernstein, used to describe the *performance* of teaching. Practical considerations related to the need to be succinct and bounded; the study drew comparisons both within-case (different year groups in the same setting) as well as cross-case (same year groups in different settings), accounting for four different year groups across two different settings. Both of these considerations were achieved by drawing on, but also adapting, the sociocultural account developed within Cultural Historical Activity Theory, referred to hereafter as activity theory (Engeström 2015).

Activity theory positions the individual and the cultural as ‘mutually formative elements of a single, interacting system’ (Daniels 2001, p. 84). It draws on Vygotsky’s (1978) notion of ‘mediation’ to conceive human activity as a ‘culturally mediated phenomenon’ and focusses attention on the ‘systemic relations between the individual and the outside world’ (Engeström 2015, pp. 32–33). Engeström (2001) discussed three generations of activity theory, the first of which (Figure 2) draws heavily on Vygotsky’s concept of the mediated act. Vygotsky (1978) brought together cultural artefacts with human actions and, in doing so, moved beyond an individual/social dualism.

Although first generation activity theory presented a ‘revolutionary’ way of understanding human actions, it was limited in that the unit of analysis tended to focus on individuals (Engeström 2001, p. 134). It was this limitation that gave way to the second generation of activity theory – the generation upon which the pedagogy-as-praxis framework is based – which takes into consideration the deep social structures that enable and constrain human activity. Engeström makes this distinction clear by stating the importance of human activity not being reduced to the triangle depicted in Figure 2:

Human activity is not only individual production. It is simultaneously and inseparably also social exchange and societal distribution. In other words, human activity always takes place within a community governed by a certain division of labour and by certain rules. (Engeström 2015, p. 114)

Accordingly, Engeström extends the activity system to include rules, community and division of labour (Figure 3). The expansion of the upper sub triangle to include these elements emphasizes

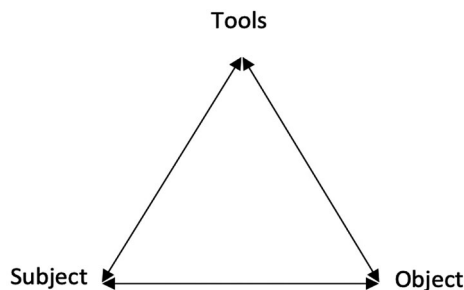


Figure 2. First generation Activity Theory model (Engeström 2001).

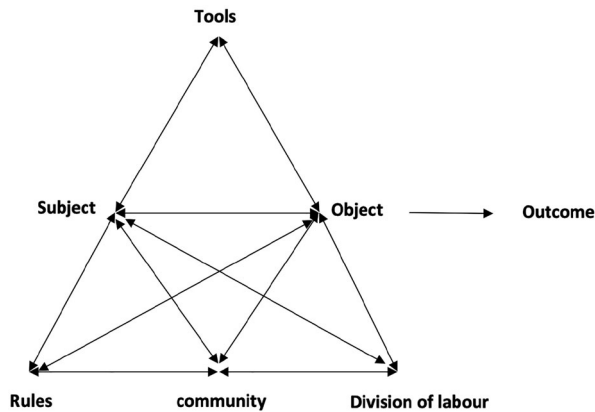


Figure 3. Second generation Activity Theory model (Engeström 2001).

the collective and social elements of human activity, making it possible to examine how actions are shaped by socio-cultural-political, macro-level forces within and outside the setting in which the action occurs (Edwards et al. 2002).

It is proposed that second generation activity theory, by recognising that individuals influence and are influenced by the cultural-historical contexts in which they live and work, presents a powerful framework for understanding the factors that mediate human activity (Engeström 2015). By building on the work of Vygotsky, who himself recognized that ‘pedagogies arise and are shaped in particular social circumstances’ (Daniels 2001, p. 5), activity theory provides tools for investigating why certain activities are performed in certain ways. It allows, as Roth and Lee (2007, p. 217) suggest, ‘a questioning of the structural determinations of current educational practices’.

However, while Daniels (2001, p. 2) acknowledges that activity theory provides ‘important tools for the development of an understanding of pedagogy’, he also argues that the theory is somewhat ‘constrained’ when it is applied to the study of pedagogy. This, Daniels (2001, 2009) asserts, is because activity theory tends to focus on the production of the outcome, rather than the development, structure and production of the tool itself. For reasons which will now be explored, Daniels’ distinction is a crucial consideration within the development of the pedagogy-as-praxis framework. It results in activity theory being adapted and extended, so that the focus is on the *structure* of the tool rather than the *function* it performs in mediating the object. This enables an exploration of pedagogical *discourse* in a way that connects and relates it to the *performance* of teaching but does so in a way that remains bounded.

From function to structure: shifting focus to the ‘tool’

For Engeström (2001, p. 136), the ‘first principle’ of activity theory is that ‘a collective, artifact-mediated and object-oriented activity system ... is taken as the prime unit of analysis’. The focus of activity theory therefore lies in how tools/artefacts are employed by subjects to facilitate and transform the object. While tools can be technical, serving as the ‘conductor of human influence’ and leading to physical changes in the object (Vygotsky 1978, p. 55), they are also psychological, positioned as devices for mastering or controlling the mind and behaviour (Daniels and Tse 2021). Tools, whether technical (e.g. resources) or psychological (e.g. language), are thus practices and structures that mediate thinking and feeling, flows of communication and forms of interaction (Daniels and Tse 2021, pp. 10–11). In this way, the *performance* of teaching – by referring to the actions and interactions that take place between educators and learners in particular contexts (Alexander 2001) – is a tool. It represents the means through which educators (subject) intend learners (object) to make certain conceptual advances (Alexander 2001).

Yet because activity systems are ‘object-oriented’ (Engeström 2001, p. 136), ‘the production of the outcome is discussed but not the production and structure of the tool itself’ (Daniels 2001, p. 135). In this sense, activity theory focusses on how tools function in mediating and transforming the object, with relatively little attention, if any, given to the processes that regulate, structure and constitute tools themselves (Daniels 2001, Daniels and Tse 2021). This is significant because in the same way that ‘teaching is never innocent’ (Brookfield 2017, p. 2), ‘tools are never neutral; intrinsic to their construction are social classifications, stratifications, distributions and modes of recontextualising’ (Bernstein 1993, xvii). Hence, focussing on the object and outcome of educational activity (e.g. summative judgements) presents a number of issues when researching pedagogy; namely, a tendency to under-theorize the pedagogical differences – the what, how and why – between different settings, groups and classes (Daniels 2001). Daniels (2004) therefore argues that pedagogical research adopting an activity theory lens would be better served by shifting its gaze to the development, structure and production of the tool. By focussing on the processes that structure the tool (as illustrated in Figure 4) rather than the function it performs in mediating the object and outcome of activity, it becomes possible to consider some of the social and institutional factors that influence how modalities of teaching practice – the *performance* of teaching – are organized, structured and enacted (Daniels 2009). Indeed, such a shift provides a means of analysing the *performance* of teaching in the context of its production (*discourse*) (Daniels 2004, Daniels and Tse 2021).

By adapting activity theory to focus on the development, structure and production of the tool, which itself is positioned as the *performance* of teaching (frame, form and act), it is possible to connect micro-level educational practices to macro-level influences. This enables an analysis of pedagogy-as-praxis; that is, ‘the performance of teaching together with the theories, beliefs, policies and controversies that inform and shape it’ (Alexander 2001, p. 540). The pedagogy-as-praxis framework is represented in Figure 5. It demonstrates how the *performance* of teaching is situated at the part of the activity system that Engeström (1998, p. 79) refers to as the ‘tip of the iceberg’. Here, the tool, subject and object represent the visible actions of educators and learners (Engeström 1998, 2008), identified by Alexander (2009) as the self-contained observable actions referring to what educators *do* in learning environments. This section of the pedagogy-as-praxis framework can be seen to

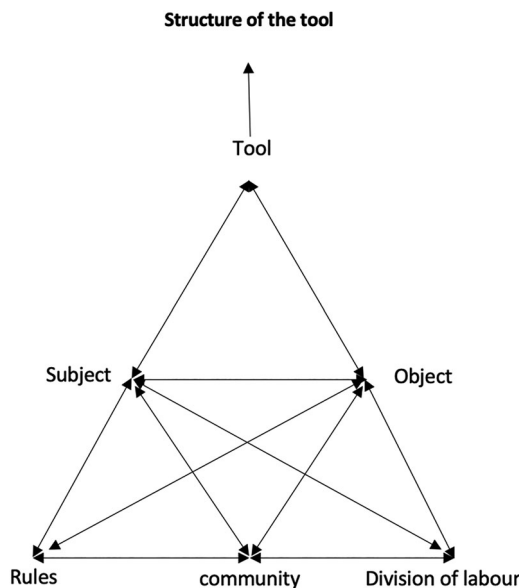


Figure 4. Shifting the focus of the activity system from the processes that mediate the object to the processes that structure the tool.

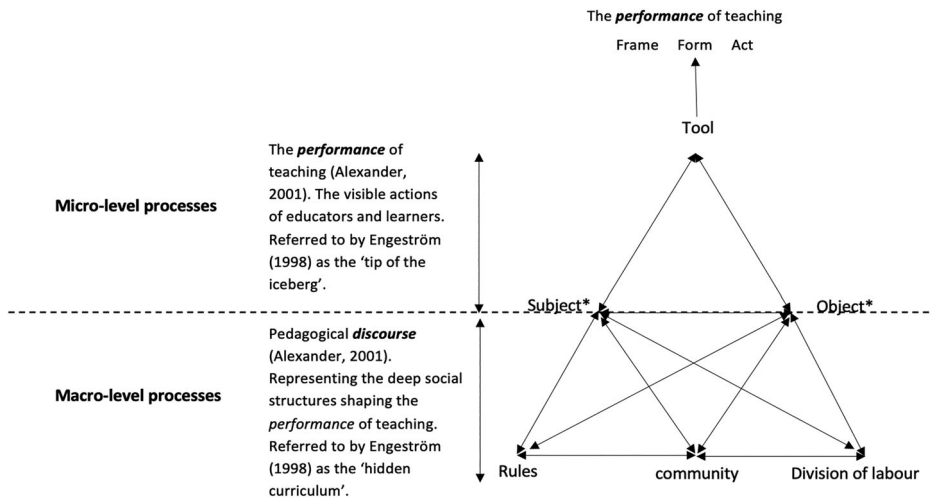


Figure 5. Pedagogy-as-praxis, a sociocultural conceptual framework for researching pedagogy as both performance and discourse. *Subject and object can be included in both micro- and macro-level analyses, depending on their visibility.

deal with the micro-level processes of pedagogy (Jaworski and Potari 2009). The remainder of the framework includes the non-visible aspects relating to the *subject* (e.g. educator beliefs) and *object* (e.g. learner perceptions) and also includes what Engeström (1998, 2008) refers to as the 'hidden curriculum'; that is, the rules, community and division of labour. These less visible and 'hard to know' (Nind et al. 2016, p. 238) elements mediate and shape how the *performance* of teaching (tool) is structured and therefore constitute pedagogical *discourse*. It is here where the pedagogy-as-praxis framework confronts the broader, macro-level influences on pedagogy (Jaworski and Potari 2009). In the next section, each element within the framework is applied and demonstrated.

Part two: application of the pedagogy-as-praxis framework

This section considers each of the elements contained within the pedagogy-as-praxis framework, starting with the *performance* of teaching (tool) before moving onto pedagogical *discourse* (subject, object, rules, community and division of labour). For each element, potential considerations are posed. Such considerations are intended to be provocative rather than exhaustive, encouraging further as well as different considerations.

The performance of teaching (tool)

In the pedagogy-as-praxis framework, the *performance* of teaching – the observable actions of and interactions between educators and learners – is positioned as the tool element of an adapted activity system, where the focus is on its structure and modality rather than the function it performs in mediating the object and outcome of activity. The *performance* of teaching is described by combining Alexander's (2001) action-based framework for the analysis of teaching (frame, form and act) with Bernstein's (2000, 2003) theory on educational transmission (classification and framing). Each element will now be briefly explored.

Frame (space, learner organization, time, curriculum and routine, rule and ritual)

Space. The element space refers to the way in which learning environments are 'disposed, organised and resourced' (Alexander 2001, p. 324). Potential considerations here relate to the scale, geography

and ambience of the space as well as the movements permitted within it. Where classification is relatively weak, learners have a degree of control over how spaces are constructed and there is an absence of boundaries limiting access and movement (Bernstein 2000). The lack of explicit demarcation can mean that there are often several communal areas that serve multiple purposes and are occupied in a number of different ways (Bernstein 2003). Strongly classified spaces, on the other hand, tend to be more explicit and movements within them more regulated. Here, Bernstein (2000, p. 46) explains that opportunities for learners to ‘construct their own pedagogic space are restricted’ and ‘boundaries limiting access and distributing movements are explicit and well marked’.

Potential considerations might include:

- Are learners allocated their own space or are spaces communal, or both?
- Are spaces relatively fixed or are they dynamic and flexible?

Learner organization. This element relates to whether teaching is carried out whole group, in small groups and/or on an individual basis (Alexander 2001). Often, such decisions are tied to the nature of tasks and activities that learners undertake (Blatchford 2008). Learner organization also invites researchers to consider forms of social integration; that is, the degree of boundary maintenance between learners. Where learner organization contains weak classification, boundaries between learners are implicit and learners are organized as a ‘heterogenous unit’ (Bernstein 2003, p. 72). Here, stratification and streaming are absent and differences between learners are viewed as ‘complementary contributions to the actualization of a common potential’ (Bernstein 2000, p. 50). In contrast, when classification is strong, learners are ‘stratified’ based on their differences. This creates a ‘series of different homogenous units’ (Bernstein 2003, p. 72), often meaning that individuals interact with peers with whom they share certain characteristics (e.g. perceived ability level).

Potential considerations might include:

- How are learners organized and how explicit is this organization?
- Are the ways that learners are organized static or variable?

Time. The temporal element relates to how time is determined, controlled and negotiated (Alexander 2001). Where time is weakly classified, learning activities and interactions ‘select the present tense as the temporal modality’ (Bernstein 2000, p. 46). In this sense, time is elastic and does not necessarily punctuate the move to a new activity; instead, it is continually negotiated between educators and learners. In a weakly classified temporal modality, changes to the focus of teaching and learning, instead of being instigated by time, are based on a range of factors, including the understanding, engagement and enjoyment of learners. When strongly classified, time is pre-determined and lessons are explicitly punctuated from one another (Bernstein 2000). Often, this punctuation comes in the form of a school bell which signals the end of one lesson and the start of another. In this structure, learners participate in a set number of lessons of equal length, each with a discrete focus. Time, rather than learning, dictates the move to a new activity.

Potential considerations might include:

- What tense – past or present – is time governed by and how?
- To what extent does time punctuate a change of focus, activity or lesson?

Curriculum. Although curriculum and pedagogy are often identified as overlapping (Anders 2015) – which can result in them being applied ‘synonymously’ and appearing as ‘indistinguishable’ from one another (Siraj-Blatchford 2008, p. 149) – Alexander (2004) positions curriculum as an element of pedagogy. However, the pedagogy-as-praxis framework does differentiate between curriculum as frame and curriculum as rule. Curriculum as frame is an element of the *performance* of teaching; a broad concept that relates to all of the experiences that are planned for learners. In

Table 1. An example of a collective-type curriculum (Nicholson 2022).

	1st session	2nd session	3rd session	4th session	5th session
Monday	Maths	History	Phonics (English)	English	English
Tuesday	Physical Education	Maths	Phonics (English)	English	Nativity
Wednesday	Outdoor learning	Outdoor learning	Phonics (English)	Religious Education	English
Thursday	Maths	Maths	Phonics (English)	History	English
Friday	Physical Education	English	English	Art	Assembly

Table 2. An example of an integrated-type curriculum (Nicholson 2022).

	09:25–10:55	11:20–12:50	13:45–15:30
Monday	CCA	CCA	Guided reading (one-to-one, rest of group CCA)
Tuesday	Forest School	CCA	CCA Music
Wednesday	Physical Education	CCA	CCA
Thursday	Spanish & CCA	CCA	Physical development CCA
Friday	Physical Education	CCA	Show & Tell Performing Arts

Bernstein's (2003, p. 79) terms, curriculum as frame is 'the principle by which certain periods of time and their contents are brought into a special relationship with each other'. Curriculum as rule, and therefore a part of *discourse*, deals with what is formally required to be taught. Often this comprises the knowledge, understanding and skills deemed most of worth to the individual and society, as outlined in centrally devised curricula.

Bernstein (2003) distinguished between two broad types of curriculum: a collection type, where contents stand in a closed relation to one another; and, an integrated type, where contents stand in an open relation to one another. Bernstein stressed that a continuum between these two 'extremes' is essential for as there can be various 'degrees of integration' (80). A collection type curriculum contains strong classification and contents are well insulated from one another. Here, contents form discrete or stand-alone units of disciplinary knowledge, understanding, skills and/or abilities that need to be taught and assessed. A predominantly collective type curriculum was identified in the pedagogies of transition research (Nicholson 2022) where a Year One (ages 5-6) class organized their curriculum (Table 1) into clear-cut, discrete subject areas.

An integrated type curriculum is characterized by contents that are weakly classified from one another. This blurring of content areas places emphasis on breadth rather than depth and learners engage with ideas and concepts that have the potential to transcend disciplines (Bernstein 2003). In the pedagogies of transition research (Nicholson 2022), a largely integrated type curriculum was observed (Table 2) in a Reception (ages 4–5) class. In this particular curriculum, periods of time were allocated to Cross Curricula Activities (CCA).

Potential considerations might include:

- To what extent does the curriculum as outlined (planned) correspond with the curriculum as enacted?
- To what extent is the broad curriculum (*curriculum as frame*) influenced by the specified curriculum (*curriculum as rule*)?

Routine, rule and ritual. Routine, rule and ritual are three distinct yet contingent concepts that together form the classroom microculture (Alexander 2001). These three Rs are identified by Alexander as the 'cement' which binds together those participating in the learning encounter. By giving attention to routine, rule and ritual, Alexander's framework for the analysis of teaching recognizes that 'teachers and teaching convey messages and values that may reach well beyond those of the particular learning tasks that give a lesson its formal focus' (325). This alludes to Bernstein's (2003, pp. 54–55) contention that the 'instrumental order' – 'the transmission of facts, procedures and

	Routine	Rule	Ritual
Temporal			
Procedural			
Behavioural			
Interactive			
Linguistic			
Curricular			

Figure 6. A framework for mapping routines, rules and rituals, taken from Alexander (2001, p. 384).

judgements involved in the acquisition of specific skills' – is always embedded within, and contributes towards, the 'expressive order', which is the deliberate but on occasions inadvertent transmission of beliefs, values, morals and ethics.

Researching routines, rules and rituals (RRRs) in educational contexts is a complex task. Alexander (2001, p. 383) concedes that 'to map out the full array of routines, rules and rituals in any classroom would be a formidable undertaking'. However, he did propose a framework consisting of six categories, as shown in Figure 6. *Temporal* RRRs relate to school and class timetables as well as the structure of the year, week, day and lessons; *procedural* RRRs concern how learners should conduct themselves in relation to space, equipment and materials; *behavioural* RRRs deal with how learners are expected to relate to educators and each other; *interactive* RRRs concern turn-taking; *linguistic* RRRs govern the content of classroom interaction; and, *curricular* RRRs establish the conceptual boundaries and requirements for the subjects taught and learned. These categories indicate, but by no means prescribe, where researchers and educators might direct their attention when considering the microcultures – routines, rules and rituals – of educational practice.

Potential considerations might include:

- What aspects of teaching and learning appear habitual and how?
- What rules – explicit and implicit – appear to govern teaching and learning and how?
- What rituals² do learners appear to participate in and what are their purpose?

Form (lesson)

Lesson. The lesson element is concerned with the structure and form of teaching (Alexander 2001). Hence, Bernstein's (2000) notion of framing – 'who controls what' (12) – is particularly helpful. It is here where taking a relational approach to Bernstein's theory is perhaps most beneficial, helping descriptions of framing to move beyond the dichotomy of 'strong' or 'weak'. A relational approach also avoids the nebulous – but nevertheless popular – labelling of teaching as either 'educator-centred' or 'learner-centred' (Alexander 2009). As stated earlier, framing focusses on the degree of control educators and learners have over the selection, organization, sequencing, pacing and criteria of the knowledge transmitted and received (Bernstein 2000, pp. 12–13). These framing values, Bernstein stressed, can vary independently of one another so it is possible, for example, for framing to be weak over pacing but strong over criteria. It is thus helpful to position each framing value as existing along its own continuum (Figure 7), enabling more intricate and sensitive descriptions of the structure and form of lessons to be generated.

Potential considerations might include:

- Do different framing values appear to vary independently of one another and if so, how?
- How does the strength of framing shift within any one *lesson* and what appears to initiate such shifts?

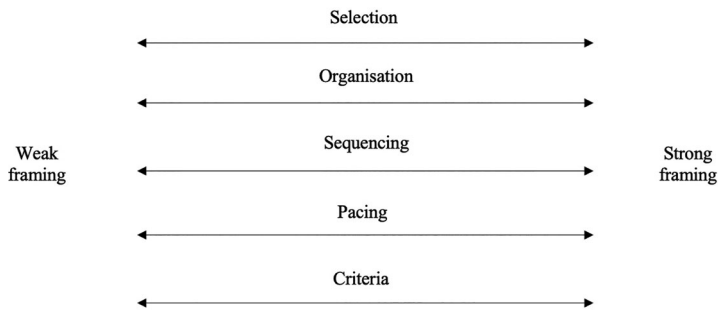


Figure 7. Framing values continuum.

Act (task and activity, interaction and judgement)

Task and activity. Task and activity are two interconnected elements, and hence discussed here together, which form the learning encounter (Alexander 2001). The task element is conceptual and relates to the particular area(s) of the curriculum under focus and the activity element is 'the task's practical counterpart', relating to the 'means through which the [educator] intends the [learner] to make the required conceptual advance' (Alexander 2001, p. 351). Understanding task and activity is enhanced by applying Bernstein's (2003) concepts of visible (strong classification and strong framing) and invisible (weak classification and weak framing) pedagogy. Bernstein (2003, p. 116) defines the basic difference between visible and invisible pedagogies as 'the manner in which criteria are transmitted (activity) and in the degree of specificity of the criteria (task)'. As demonstrated in Figure 8, when highly specific criteria are transmitted explicitly, a visible and unambiguous pedagogy is said to be enacted. Alternatively, if criteria are diffuse and their transmission implicit, the approach is invisible and ambiguous. While the specificity of criteria and explicitness of transmission can vary independently of one another – and hence a continuum remains useful – the area of the curriculum under focus (task) is often a strong determinant of the mode of transmission (activity).

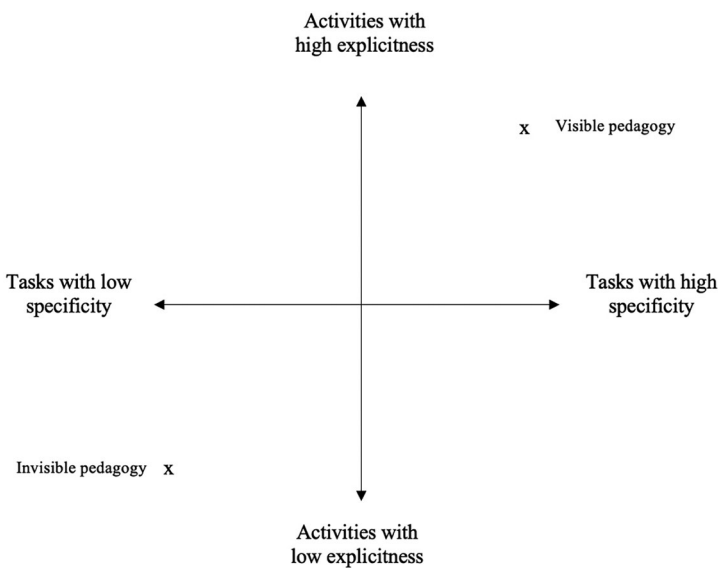


Figure 8. Task-activity continuum.

Potential considerations might include:

- To what extent does the specificity of *tasks* determine of the explicitness of *activities*?
- To what extent does pedagogy shift along the visible-invisible continuum over time?

Interaction. Alexander's (2001) framework also takes into consideration the balance of interactions between educators and learners. Overlapping somewhat with Bernstein's concept of framing, interaction invites consideration of how educators 'present, organize and sustain the learning tasks and activities' (Alexander 2001, p. 324). For his research on primary education in five different cultures, Alexander outlined how interactions can be subjected to four kinds of analysis³:

Interaction participants: the number and proportion of interactions between educators and learners and between learners and learners

Utterance length: calculations for educators and learners

Interaction mode: classified into the categories of 'instructional', 'monitoring', 'routine', 'disciplinary' and 'other'

Interaction and lesson stage: considers whether the lesson is treated as a single unit and/or as a more finite, stage-by-stage analysis of the different stages through which lessons pass. (Alexander 2001, p. 396)

Potential considerations might include:

- What is the balance of interactions between educators and learners?
- How diverse are interactions between those participating in the learning encounter?

Judgement. The final element of Alexander's (2001) framework is judgement which relates to the way in which educators assess learners. Weakly classified judgements blur the boundaries between the learning encounter (task, activity and interaction) and, as a result, learners are not necessarily aware that they are being assessed (Bernstein 2003). When weakly classified, assessment procedures are subjective, multiple and diffuse and the 'emphasis is upon what is present in the acquirer's product' (Bernstein 2000, p. 46). In contrast, strongly classified judgements are explicit; they are separate from the learning encounter (task, activity and interaction) and attempt to diagnose 'what is absent in the acquirer's product' (Bernstein 2000, p. 47). When strongly classified, judgements are often based on an 'objective' framework consisting of clear criteria and explicit boundaries separating success and failure. Bernstein (2003) suggests that this approach to assessment generates a standardized academic profile of the learner, enabling comparisons to be drawn locally, nationally and, as is increasingly the case, internationally.

Potential considerations might include:

- To what extent are learners aware of the judgements made about them?
- What role, if any, do learners play in the assessment process?

As can perhaps be inferred from the brief description of each, the elements contained within the frame, form and act of teaching are both symbiotic and overlapping. Here then it seems important and necessary to echo Alexander in stressing the descriptive and conceptual nature of the framework. Just as important is acknowledging and being mindful of the messiness and contingent nature of day-to-day teaching practice (Kemmis and Smith 2008). As such, it is extremely difficult – if not impossible – to capture and account for every action, interaction and arrangement.

Yet, a synthesis of Alexander's and Bernstein's theories presents an 'empirical referent' where potentially 'unambiguous descriptions' of educational practice can be generated (Bernstein 2000, p. 208). This can enable researchers and educators to identify and distinguish between different modalities of teaching practice (the '*what*' and '*how*'). At the same time, it provides the foundation

for connecting and relating different modalities of teaching practice to the socio-cultural-political conditions that shape how they are enacted (the 'why'). It is these conditions to which the second part of the pedagogy-as-praxis framework attends.

Pedagogical discourse (subject, object, rules, community and division of labour)

With the *performance* of teaching located as the tool within the pedagogy-as-praxis framework, the remaining activity system elements – subject, object, rules, community and division of labour – are positioned as a way of understanding pedagogical *discourse*. Collectively, these elements consider the *discourse* that shapes how the *performance* of teaching is developed, structured and enacted. Each activity theory element will now be briefly outlined.

Subject

The subject of an activity system is the individual or group whose agency is chosen as the point of view in the analysis (Engeström 1993). Subject thus invites consideration of the values educators hold in relation to learners, teaching and educational purpose. For their influence in determining how practices take shape, Alexander (2002, p. 12) argues that values 'must be kept centre-stage' when researching pedagogy. Yet it is also important to note how educator's 'espoused theories' can often be quite different from their 'theories in use' (Argyris and Schön 1974). This is because correspondence between values and practice is moderated by the cultural and structural contexts in which such practices are enacted (Biesta and Tedder 2007, Priestley et al. 2015). Understanding the extent to which intentions are productive of practice thus requires engagement with the other social structures – object, rules, community and division of labour – that shape activity.

Potential considerations might include:

- To what extent do values correspond with practice (as observed and documented in the *performance* of teaching)?
- How do values interact – tensions, contradictions, alignments – with other elements of the activity system?

Object

The object element is the 'problem space' at which activities are directed (Engeström 1993). In educational practices, this is the learner(s) and their learning and development (Engeström 2008, p. 89). It is important to state here that the terminology employed within activity theory should not position learners as 'mere objects of [educator's] actions' (Freire 2017, p. 67). Rather, it should generate consideration of how a range of factors related to learners – including individual (perceptions, experiences, engagement, enjoyment) and collective (class size, class cohesion) elements – shape modalities of teaching practice. As an example, in the pedagogies of transition research (Nicholson 2022), a Year One class were identified by their teachers as the 'perfect class', which played a role in shaping how teaching and learning activities were carried out:

It's been a lot easier to cover things that we want to cover because we can do it more whole-class. Whereas last year we did a lot more 'carousel-ing' and kind of splitting the class. Whereas this year we do split the class but if there is not a Teaching Assistant there it doesn't matter, the whole class can kind of do what you want them to do at the same time. (Year One educator)

This extract demonstrates that learners are not only influenced *by* but also have an influence *on* how teaching practices are enacted.

Potential considerations might include:

- How do learners perceive and experience teaching activities?
- How do educators perceive learner's participation in teaching activities?

Rules

Engeström (1993, p. 67) defines rules as ‘the explicit and implicit regulations, norms and conventions that constrain actions and interactions within the activity system’. Rules can play a powerful role in shaping educational practice, particularly in systems characterized by high levels of centralized control (Kemmis and Smith 2008). Rules often take the form of ‘policy technologies’, which are defined by Rose (1999, p. 52) as mechanisms ‘for the shaping of conduct in the hope of producing certain desired effects and averting certain undesired events’. Policy technologies are diverse and multiple, including, for example, curriculum content; modes of assessment; teacher training and professional development; accountability arrangements; inspection; and incentives and sanctions (Moss 2019). Each of these serve as a mechanism for steering educators towards greater compliance to the demands of the state and/or management. By inserting themselves as *rules* that should – often must – be followed, policy technologies can mean that educators find themselves working in a ‘vice of externally imposed ends’ (Dewey 2011, p. 61). This can limit their agency, professional judgement and praxis (Alexander 2008, Kemmis and Smith 2008). Hence, an analysis of the way in which rules interact with other elements, particular educator values (subject), is a potentially central consideration.

Potential considerations might include:

- To what extent do rules align with educator values (subject)?
- How are rules internalized (and externalized) by educators?

Community

The community element within an activity system comprises multiple individuals and groups who are involved and take an interest in the activity. This is a broad element that can include the perceptions, experiences, expectations and values of senior leaders, teaching assistants, governors, parents, and wider members of the community. All of these groups can play a role in mediating how educational practices take shape. In the pedagogies of transition research (Nicholson 2022), for example, the support of parents was acknowledged as being instrumental in supporting teachers in one school to extend a competence model of education (Bernstein 2000) into the first years of compulsory school (ages 5-7). Given that extending competence-based pedagogies into compulsory school contexts is associated with a number of challenges (see for example, Nicholson and Hendry 2020), the support of parents in this setting was crucial to achieving pedagogical change.

Potential considerations might include:

- Who makes up the community and what might their role be in shaping practice?
- To what extent are individuals within the community aligned in their perceptions, experiences and values or are there tensions and contradictions?

Division of labour

Division of labour refers to how tasks are distributed between members of the community (Engeström 1993). It relates to the roles and responsibilities of – and relationships between – educators, senior leaders, teaching assistants, governors, parents, and wider members of the community. An example to draw on here, given its timeliness, would be how educators and parents divided labour during the Covid-19 pandemic when schools were required to close. Roles, responsibilities and relationships not only involve practical considerations (who does what) but also contain within them divisions of ‘power’ and ‘status’ (why they do it) (Engeström 1993, p. 67). The extent to which divisions of labour are explicitly demarcated between individuals, year groups and phases of education and the reasons underlying such arrangements invites particular attention. This is apparent in strictly hierarchical education systems where higher year groups and phases are positioned as the frame of reference to which educators working in the lower must work

towards. Here, as Moss (2013, p. 9) observes, pedagogical ideas and practices can ‘cascade down the system, from top to bottom’.

Potential considerations might include:

- How is the process of establishing roles and responsibilities carried out?
- To what extent do power and status impact how tasks are distributed among the community?

When using activity theory to access pedagogical discourse, researchers and educators should be attentive to the interactions within (primary) and between (secondary) elements and whether there is alignment, tension and/or contradiction. It is also important to recognize that the elements discussed are not static and fixed but are constantly evolving and renewing (Engeström 1993). Hence, much like researching the *performance* of teaching (tool), accessing pedagogical *discourse* through activity theory does not provide an ultimate truth about the socio-cultural-political conditions shaping human activities. Instead, it is a heuristic device that is contingent on the aims and purposes of researchers and educators (Lin 2007).

Conclusion

This article has presented pedagogy-as-praxis as a sociocultural conceptual framework capable of researching pedagogy. Underpinned by a construction of pedagogy as the *performance* of teaching together with its attendant *discourse* and stressing the relationship between both of these concepts, the framework consists of two core elements that draw on, combine and adapt several different yet complimentary theories. First, Alexander’s (2001) action-based framework (frame, form and act) (the *what*) and components of Bernstein’s (2000, 2003) theory on educational transmission (classification and framing) (the *how*) are combined to intricately and sensitively describe the *performance* of teaching. Second, by positioning the *performance* of teaching as the tool element within an adapted and extended activity system (Daniels 2001) the remaining activity theory elements – subject, object, rules, community and division of labour – are applied to understand the discourse that produces, structures and influences its modality (the *why*) (Engeström 2015). Taken collectively, the pedagogy-as-praxis framework provides a way through which micro-level processes can be uniquely described and related to macro-level influences, connecting the *performance* of teaching to culture, structure and mechanisms of social control. By increasing the visibility of socio-cultural-political factors and demonstrating how they operate and to what effects, the framework captures the relationship between theory and action and charts the journey from policy to practice. In doing so, it supports individuals to develop and increase consciousness of the conditions that mediate and produce particular educational practices, opening up possibilities for analysis, understanding and transformation.

Notes

1. Space does not permit a thorough consideration of the different constructions, meanings and traditions of pedagogy. For more in-depth analyses, see Alexander (2008), Klitmøller (2018) and Shah (2021).
2. For an in-depth account of ritual in education in particular, see Bernstein (2003, pp. 54–66).
3. For an in-depth account of these four kinds of analysis, see Alexander (2001, pp. 391–426).

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ORCID

Philip Mark Nicholson  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1861-2481>

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