

# What is the attraction of nurse training as a model for professional education? An analysis of field and habitus in the construction of curricula for nurse, teacher and police officer training.

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'Nurse training' looks like the new 'gold standard' for educating public service professionals. The Education Secretary, Michael Gove, cites it for the restructuring of teacher training in the Education Bill now before Parliament; and the Home Office commissioned Neyroud Report (2011) is similarly motivated in recommending a new police training approach. With consultation on the latter now underway, legislation is expected in the next Parliament. This paper questions the rush to uniformity in professional education.

'Uniformity' assumes quality control through ownership of the relevant competences by an agency which then validates a syllabus for delivery by approved HE/ profession partners. The partnership implies a value-free, technical delivery-vehicle, independent of the historical and cultural forces structuring professional fields.

Our research was based on a pilot study of interviews with nurse, teacher and police educators. The aim was to understand the part lecturers play in the construction of professional curricula. We use the concept of 'field' to model the interplay of academy and profession influences; and the concept of 'habitus' to understand lecturers' participation within it.

We suggest HE partnerships are characterised by field structures constituted by idiosyncratic professional demands for education and training, and the specific historical and cultural influences of the contributing institutions. Professional curricula are the product of lecturers positioning themselves within those institutional fields.

There is little precision in any formulation for training, i.e. its ability to produce intended outcomes. It is not the form *per se* which produces the practitioner, thus policy-makers cannot anticipate how a nursing approach will work for teaching or policing. The curriculum is produced by complex and unpredictable interactions between habitus and field; tinkering with it may have unexpected consequences – and this includes the loss of what we already think is good.

## Introduction

The widening of access to UK universities over recent decades has prompted changing relationships between higher education (HE) and public sector professions like teaching, nursing and policing. Some of these changes are driven by Government policy and others from within professions themselves. As more young people see HE as the desirable route into employment, so have professions sought to define 'professionalism' in terms of higher learning.

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At the policy level, successive governments over the last 30 years have aimed to control the quality of service provision. The key drivers for policy have been 'national standards' (so called *professionalisation*) and accountability. Recent developments (post May 2010) have seen the new coalition government holding-up nurse education as the preferred model for other forms of professional training.

A ten-year strategy initiated by Project 2000 will see Nursing become a full graduate-entry profession from 2013. The pre-registration training model involves student nurses sharing their time equally between academic and on-the-job (hospital-based) learning.

The Education Bill currently before Parliament will seek to re-centre teacher training from universities to schools, and the nurse training model is the example cited by the Education Secretary, Michael Gove. Currently teachers' pre-qualification training is led by universities, with relatively short periods of 'school experience' used primarily for skill-assessment. Whilst proposals have stumbled in recent months, Gove's preferred vision is a reversal of this emphasis.

Teacher and nurse education are both pre-registration and pre-employment models. Police officers do not have a registration process, and their training is post-employment. There is currently no national model for police training, although individual employers (the 42 police forces in England and Wales) must train new officers against national standards. Over the last five years a small number of forces have experimented with HE partnerships. The recently published Neyroud Report on police leadership and training (April 2011) recommends change to a nursing-type model. This would see establishment of a registration system, and pre-employment training at HE level. It is unclear how the on-the-job element of training would be achieved.

A neat and uniform model of professional training looks attractive to a government seeking to deliver national standards, accountability and choice. This paper problematises the idea of a de-contextualised/ objectified 'training model', and seeks instead to understand how a curriculum is produced within competing academic and professional interests.

### **Curriculum theory**

The terms 'syllabus' and 'curriculum' are often used interchangeably to indicate the overall package of learning which, to use the new HE metaphor, is sold (taught) to the customer (student). Where the two terms are distinguished then 'syllabus' is used to indicate a subset of the curriculum, for example the content of a particular module; or alternatively the 'curriculum' is seen as a higher order description (aims) of the syllabus (objectives).

However there is a tradition in educational thought which clarifies the different work done by each of these two concepts, e.g. Dewey (1956)[1902]; Stenhouse (1975); Kelly (2004). It problematises a notion of 'learning' which assumes: (a) a fairly direct relationship between teaching and learning (i.e. the syllabus is what students *learn*); and (b) that learning takes place in the classroom (where the syllabus is taught). If these assumptions are removed then the syllabus (understood as the course content) will constitute *part* of what students learn; but equally, parts of it will not be *learned* and other things will be learned besides. Additionally, it implies what is learned will be learned both inside and outside the classroom. The concept of 'curriculum' captures this wider understanding of learning.

The context in which learning takes place gives value and meaning to the syllabus. Stenhouse (1983:156) vividly illustrates this in his analogy with Wind in the Willows, “Mr. Toad’s curriculum of derelict skiffs and canary coloured caravan.” Toad learned the syllabus - he could row a boat and drive a car, but the values and implied social responsibilities were lost to him. Snyder (1971) coined the term ‘hidden curriculum’ to capture the idea of unexpected and unpredicted learning; but for the sake of simplicity ‘curriculum’ will do just as well.

The syllabus is constituted by the tangible ‘package’ of learning materials. The curriculum is provided by the values and expectations, both enacted and implied, of the learning institution involved, the teachers and administrators on the course, the profession, and by contributing employers and their staff. For public sector occupations the sphere of influences is much wider; patients, students, clients, customers, service users etc. all shape expectations of future professionals. Indeed the curriculum is shaped by participating students themselves.

This paper is particularly concerned with institutional influences on the curriculum – those provided from within the academy and the contributing professions.

### **Field and habitus**

The idea of a ‘curriculum’ formed by the interaction of competing influences, which then gives meaning and value to the actions of teachers and learners working with a syllabus is paralleled in Bourdieu’s (1990) sociology by the conception of a ‘field’. Fields are constituted by social relationships, and objectified in artefacts and practices. For the purposes of this paper we argue a syllabus is just such an artefact. Its value as *social capital* is decided, along with the other paraphernalia of education, by the balance of influences within the field. Participants (lecturers, students, managers etc.) interact with the objective structures of the field. Professional practice, or *habitus*, describes the form of that engagement.

This research explored with HE lecturers the nature of their habitus. Working theoretically, we then infer the presence of the structuring forces within the field. This last step may appear somewhat controversial since the ‘forces’ will always remain hypothetical. However from a pragmatic standpoint, we ask: do our interpretations have verisimilitude? And, do they give any theoretical purchase on our understanding of how professional training in HE plays-out?

### **Key comparisons in the interview data**

Unstructured interviews lasting between 70 and 90 minutes were conducted with lecturers from each of the three disciplines. For the purposes of this paper we have picked out some key *intra*-discipline themes which seem important in understanding the habitus of lecturers. We use comparative analysis to identify and understand what seem to be the significant differences.

Nurse and teacher educators both teach a professional practice. This contrasts with a professional studies degree, where students would learn *about* health or education rather than learning to *practice* it. Consequently lecturers are required to be registered practitioners themselves.

The nurse educators we interviewed had strong practitioner identities, which were woven into their new identities as HE lecturers. For some the identities were combined – the nurse in a lecturers hat; and for others there were multiple identities between which they swapped depending on

circumstances. The role of nurse-educator was seen by one participant as a type of nursing *specialism*.

The closeness of the nurse educators to their profession was significant when compared with the teacher educators. When the latter joined the university they ceased being teachers, and became *academics*. Their identity as lecturers was much less related to school teaching than was the nurses'. As academics they felt a dual loyalty, on the one hand to teacher-education (their lecturing discipline), and on the other their 'home' affiliation, usually their first degree discipline. Thus they self-identified as historians, scientists and writers, as well as being teacher-educators. In contrast the nurse-educators were nurses, whose discipline was nursing.

This point about 'discipline' was significant. Teacher-educators could distinguish between: discipline content (e.g. history, science, English Literature); subject pedagogy (i.e. the teaching of history, etc.); and professional studies (practical and generic teaching skills like classroom management, subject leadership, guidance and counselling etc.). Nurse-educators just taught their discipline – nursing, and there was no further significant differentiation. For the teacher-educators the more diverse identities entailed engagement with a variety of different professional associations, and also permitted engagement with the academy in other ways (e.g. research).

This diversity of engagement was not open to the nurse-educators. One described to us how developing an academic profile as a researcher would entail moving away from the field of nurse teaching and joining discipline specific research teams. The movement away was metaphorical in the sense it implied letting go of the nurse-identity and its association with practice; but was also literal in the sense they would be expected to withdraw from nurse-education. Teacher-educators seemed to make a symbolic and literal withdrawal from school teaching when they joined the university. In this sense the teacher-education curriculum was already different in nature to a nurse-education one.

'Nursing' is the nurse-educators discipline. We were struck by the extent that nursing and nurse-professionalism were at the centre of everything they did. Their curriculum was driven by the need to produce professional nurses. In comparison, the teachers took a more circumspect view of their curriculum. Our participants did not see themselves as 'producing' new teachers; their students learned the classroom skills whilst on 'school experience', but whilst at the university their preparation was broader and more contextual. The historian argued students became better teachers by developing an historical perspective on the present; the English Literature expert argued his students became better teachers of English by becoming writers themselves; and one participant, a political activist, argued students became better teachers when attuned to issues of social justice. Teaching was a collection of disciplines, whilst nursing was a discipline *per se*.

When comparing the academic and professional identities of lecturers we felt the nursing curriculum was an education for practice; whilst the teacher curriculum was an education for practitioners. One educated people to be practitioners, and one provided education for people who may become practitioners.

The police-educators presented a quite different case. To begin with they were not necessarily practitioners themselves, and they taught a professional *studies* degree rather than a professional *practice* one. This reflects the current position with police training; the training for police *practice* takes place in dedicated police colleges and on-the-job; the academy provides a contextual enhancement to that. The distinction reflected a strong and culturally significant theory/ practice distinction (White and Heslop 2010).

Our participants had a variety of backgrounds; but the majority were retired police officers or former practitioners in a related field (e.g. crime scene investigation). For the purposes of this paper we are concentrating on the lecturers with policing backgrounds. Each of our participants became interested in teaching through involvement in police training when they were serving police officers. The interest in teaching led typically to a CertEd in post-compulsory education (HE level-4 qualification); followed by top-up to a degree in adult education; and later a Master's degree in education. The specialism in education then provided an employment route following retirement from the police service.

This professional history provides an interesting mix of influences on the formation of an HE habitus. These police-educators are in second careers having put policing behind them. This distance from policing is reinforced by their subject content which is the criminology and the sociology of policing rather than policing practice. In this sense their position is closer to that of the teacher-educators than to the nurse-educators.

However, there is a third influence, provided by their academic qualifications, which sets them apart even from the teacher-educators. Their 'home' academic discipline is adult education – the subject of their Bachelor and Master's degrees. Our participants were strongly influenced by humanist educational ideas emphasising life-long learning and self-actualisation through education. They expressed their interest in education in terms of solving teaching problems (e.g. the social dynamics of a class of students with disparate academic backgrounds), but in particular supporting and motivating students with few educational achievements beyond compulsory schooling.

Of course the police studies syllabus has a relationship to the practice of policing, and our participants all emphasised the need to make teaching relevant to the student-officers' professional lives. However, our argument is that the syllabus is given meaning and value through the influence

of the wider curriculum. We have described the police training model elsewhere (White and Heslop 2010) as an *accessorising* of the practitioner, since the HE element is an additional but non-essential element in the training of a police officer. However these lecturers saw HE as an opportunity with intrinsic value for the individual, quite separate from their development as practitioners.

### Three models of professional training within HE

#### (i) Teacher training: *education for the professional*

Initial teacher education (ITE) is funded by the Teacher Development Agency (TDA). The TDA also own the teacher professional competences against which students are measured during their school experience placements. The university ITE provision is subject to OFSTED inspection and approval, without which the *qualified teacher status* (QTS) element of the degree could not be offered. Despite these regulatory bodies universities have a relatively free hand in how they design and deliver a teacher training syllabus.

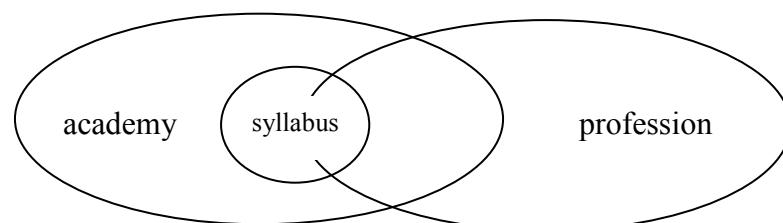
The academic freedom allowed to the teacher-educators to develop identities separate from their former teacher identities was reflected in the academy-profession separation. The lecturers experienced freedom to develop spaces in the course to realise their own subject related interests. Problems with a theory/ practice tension rarely arose because the students were manifestly ‘owned’ by the university, and their periods in the workplace were relatively short.

The lecturers felt sufficiently distanced from the profession to be able to take a critical perspective. Thus government policy for example could become a focus, and lecturers would consider it important for students to understand the ideological context of what they were currently being asked to do as teachers.

The model is not without its tensions of course. These occur at the point where the academy meets practice –the school experience phases. On one hand our participants felt the professional competences measured in this phase tested only technical skill, and on the other they admitted students would complain the course content did not prepare them in the technical competences.

These relationships are expressed in figure 1 below.

Figure 1:  
Teacher education  
model



We represent in diagrammatic form the teacher education ‘field’. Academy and teaching profession interests overlap; teacher education has a secure place within the academy, and the subject has

attained legitimacy through the diversification of its subject matter, professional interest groups and engagement with traditional forms of research. Until recently the need for graduate teachers has not been questioned, and indeed the previous labour government had planned to make teaching a postgraduate profession. Teaching brings the academy much needed revenue, and benefits from the high academic status of its staff.

The teacher training curriculum is more strongly influenced by the academy, and correspondingly more peripheral to the profession. It meets the needs of the teaching profession (the social capital in the form of a degree and QTS earned by its new recruits) but it is strongly shaped by the habitus of the teacher-educators. For them, with their closer allegiance to the academy, social capital is accrued through more traditional forms of engagement.

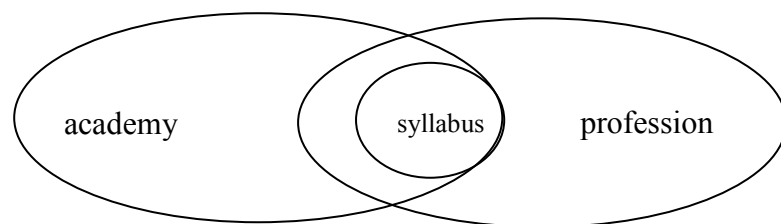
(ii) Nurse training: *education for practice*

Nurse training is funded and regulated by the Nursing and Midwifery Council. We felt the strong professional focus of the nurse-educators was probably a more effective control on quality than the audit procedures of a national body. This speaks of a much stronger professional influence on nurse training than was evident in teacher training.

Student nurses are unlike the average university undergraduate in that they spend half their week in the work place and have in effect a 52-week academic year. This affects the working lives of nurse-educators whose work rhythms are out-of-sync with the rest of university life. Our participants noted how in some ways their work was metaphorically on the periphery of the university; and how, geographically-speaking, it was actually located away from the heart of the campus.

As with teacher training there are mutual benefits of partnership for the academy and the profession. We suggest the balance of influence between the two creates the field in figure 2 below.

Figure 2:  
Nurse education model



The nurse education curriculum is primarily focused on producing professional nurses. As a discipline it is located more peripherally to the academy, leaving very little space for more traditional forms of engagement. Project 2000 is leading the nursing profession away from an apprenticeship model of learning, and challenging its place in a traditional medical hierarchy. Graduate status is valuable social capital in making that argument; hence the profession and curriculum are fully engaged with the academy. The syllabus remains peripheral to the academy because the professional grip on nurse training limits engagement in other ways. This is reflected for example in the way social capital for the nurse educators remains strongly associated with the profession, rather than with medical research groups.

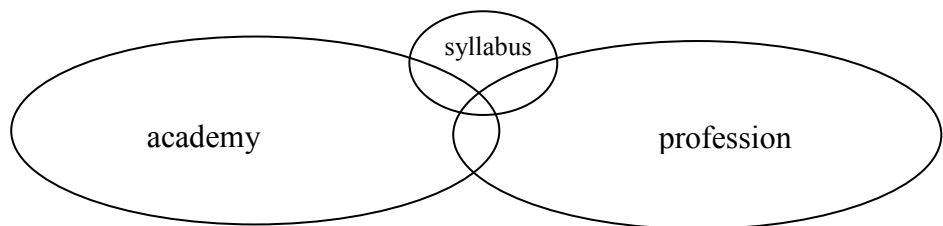
(iii) Police officer training: *accessorising the professional*

Police studies degrees are negotiated locally between a police force and an HE provider, but are funded through HEFCE in common with the majority of HE provision. They are not subject to independent inspection although course content is expected to be 'mapped' against the police officer competences owned by the sector skills organisation Skills for Justice. *Mapping* of skills and abilities is not a scientific process so universities have a free hand in syllabus design, particularly as the negotiation is with employers who may be uninformed in relation to educational design.

It is significant that all police forces have retained control over the professional training of their officers, and the part offered to universities is additional to that process. Adlam (2002) argues the urge to retain control is strongly embedded in the police psyche and Wood and Tong (2009) illustrate this in relation to the problem of '*who owns the students?*' On the other hand benefits are accrued for the police service at an institutional level from partnership with the academy. At the very least there is kudos from the association, even if an HE award carries little social capital within the profession.

We represent this particular field in figure 3.

Figure 3:  
Police education  
model



Our supposition is that neither the academy nor the profession engage wholeheartedly with each other. The police service keeps the academy at arm's-length in order to retain control of its recruits' socialisation; and the academy responds by effectively completing the marginalisation of the curriculum.

For the academy such courses provide an income stream and for the profession they provide training accreditation. This leaves very little room for the generation of social capital by participants. Teaching staff tend to be recruited specifically for the award, and are often on part-time or short-term contracts. The rhythm of teaching does not fit with normal undergraduate provision, so again staff can feel marginalised. This is particularly so where courses are run within police colleges as opposed to university campuses, but our research in two campus locations also found police training geographically on the periphery.

The police studies curriculum develops in spaces relatively free from institutional influence. It gives lecturers a free hand in developing the courses and perhaps explains the flourishing humanist educational orientation. Whilst we did not interview any students for this research we detected a theory/ practice tension in our participants' responses, suggesting it was difficult to maintain the



student-officers' interest. Other research has shown the absence of professional relevance leaves students feeling dissatisfied (Heslop 2011).

## Conclusions

The relationship between academy and profession in each of these three cases is very different. The nature and balance of competing interests and influences sets up structures objectified in terms of curricula and forms of social capital competed for by participants (lecturers, students, managers). We observed how lecturers in different disciplines positioned themselves in each field, enabling them to contribute to the creation of different curricula. The fields in each case were culturally and historically determined, with few variables capable of being manipulated at the policy level.

Our argument is the training model, in the form of a syllabus, is not an objective, value-free, educational technology. It will always be historically and culturally contextualised. The 'nursing model' currently feted by politicians is the product of a specific occupation escaping from a past in which members were sub-professional technicians. There can be no unilateral declaration of professionalism because status is negotiated with other professions in the field. The Project 2000 curriculum has to be understood as part of that renegotiation of status.

The imposition of a new educational technology will have unpredictable and unexpected consequences. The new technology may change the balance of influences within the field, but it does not determine the outcome. The habitus of participants is constituted by their positioning and mode of interaction within the field – the moment by moment decisions about how to participate, based on perceptions of the objective structures of the field. Any change in the field is thus mediated through habitus.

Project 2000 was, for nursing, such a policy-designed change in the field. As we have described, the result is not merely to turn nursing into an all-graduate profession, it is to put higher education to work in a particular way and for a particular purpose. When compared with teacher-education for example, we see that nurses are a different type of 'student', and they miss out on some of the broader educational benefits available to student-teachers.

Our study of police training stands as a good example of how a new educational technology changed nothing at all. The police service gained some credibility from being seen to have a partnership with HE; but culturally there were few benefits accruing to new recruits. The service has been able to minimise the importance of the training it no longer controlled. If the Neyroud recommendations are followed and a pre-employment training model is adopted, we hypothesise a theory/ practice dichotomy in which, as always, the real training takes place "in the natural laboratory of the street" (Fielding 1988). We suggest the top-down imposition of the model does nothing to tackle the powerful inertia of the police service itself.

Our fear for teacher education if Michael Gove succeeds in centring it on schools is once again historically and culturally rooted. The *prima facie* case would be a loss of the broader educational experience offered to students. However, at a deeper level teaching could lose its socially critical praxis – the interest in social justice. Educationists will argue teachers are a force for good in terms of helping people achieve what they merit; but more importantly in challenging the social structures

which ensure some people always merit more than others. Universities are arguably the seat of that critical challenge to the *status quo*.

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