

Powerful Knowledge in History: Disciplinary Strength or Weakened Episteme?

Barbara Ormond

Introduction

History is an academic subject rich in powerful knowledge. It is a specialised discipline which practises robust self-critique and contributes to universal understandings. Nevertheless, when the discipline is reframed for teaching school students, there are pitfalls and obstacles which can affect the ability of the discipline to maintain its epistemic status. This chapter examines the characteristics of strong disciplinary knowledge and illustrates how that knowledge may be weakened in school settings. Assessment and pedagogical practices can manipulate history's knowledge structure and dislodge its disciplinary coherence. Perspectivism and relativism may influence knowledge selection to impact upon the potential of the subject to deliver critical universal knowledge. Teachers play a crucial role in reshaping the discipline for teaching at school. What happens when, as in New Zealand, history teachers have complete authority to determine the knowledge they teach? Such autonomy places knowledge in a fragile position. There is the potential to deliver powerful knowledge but also the possibility of weakening the subject's episteme.

The place of knowledge in the New Zealand

Curriculum

Knowledge occupies an uncertain place in *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007). The broadly framed curriculum mirrors global trends in its emptying of content and its ambiguity over the question of knowledge. Bronwyn Wood and Mark Sheehan (Wood and Sheehan, 2012) argue that ‘in a curriculum that is designed to contribute to building a “knowledge economy”, neither the place of knowledge in *The New Zealand Curriculum* is clearly defined nor is the question of “What is knowledge?” in the context of the curriculum addressed’ (p. 17). Michael Young (2013) claims that there is ‘increasingly widespread acceptance among educational researchers of the idea that knowledge itself has no intrinsic significance or validity’ (p. 106). ‘The retreat from knowledge in curriculum’, Leesa Wheelahan (2010) explains, is often justified by arguing that ‘the knowledge society has transformed the nature of knowledge so the tacit, contextual and immediately applicable is more productive than the disciplinary and codified’ (p. 3).

For history, the *Achievement Objectives*, which are the vehicle for conveying knowledge requirements in the *Curriculum*, are succinct (see Table 10.1). They do not prescribe content or context. Instead they present a way of dealing with the discipline of history by looking at the causes and consequences of historical events and the perspectives of the people involved. While these elements are viewed as critical ‘concepts’ for history, when delivered in school settings, they more strongly represent a methodological approach to the

discipline. It is debatable whether this broad focus on causality, consequences, and historical significance can, of itself, assure delivery of valuable historical knowledge.

Table 10.1 History achievement objectives levels 6–8, *the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007)

<p style="text-align: center;">Level 6 (for Year 11 students aged 15–16 years)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Level 7 (for Year 12 students aged 16–17 years)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Level 8 (for Year 13 students aged 17–18 years)</p>
<p>Understand how the <i>causes and consequences</i> of past events that are of significance to New Zealanders shape the lives of people and society.</p> <p>Understand how people’s <i>perspectives</i> on past events that are of significance to New Zealanders differ.</p>	<p>Understand how historical forces and movements have influenced the <i>causes and consequences</i> of events of significance to New Zealanders.</p> <p>Understand how people’s <i>interpretations</i> of events that are of significance to New Zealanders differ.</p>	<p>Understand that the <i>causes, consequences, and explanations</i> of historical events that are of significance to New Zealanders are complex and how and why they are contested.</p> <p>Understand how <i>trends</i> over time reflect social, economic, and political forces.</p>

The framing of ‘knowledge’ in the New Zealand Curriculum

Uncertainty about what constitutes knowledge and the role of knowledge in the New Zealand Curriculum is not confined to history. It is evident in the wide-ranging approaches taken to knowledge across different subjects. While some subjects have quite specific and detailed

Achievement Objectives, others are so broadly stated that knowledge outcomes are precarious. Ambiguity over knowledge is compounded by the multiple ways in which the *Achievement Objectives* in the Curriculum are described. They may be described variously in terms of knowledge, concepts, procedures, or skills outcomes. At Level 6 of the *Curriculum* there are detailed requirements for knowledge in Science where, for example, students distinguish between atoms, molecules, and ions. In contrast the *Achievement Objectives* for technology are framed as procedural knowledge. Students are required to analyse, undertake experimentation, evaluate an outcome, and so on (Table 10.2). While explanations for these differences may be attributed to the intrinsic features of particular subjects or to the way progression of learning is best organised, and explained in relation to Bernstein’s (1999; 2000) structuring of intellectual fields, it is possible that such variance has implications for equity between subjects and equity between schools. The opportunities students may be given to engage with powerful knowledge may vary. Where a greater degree of specificity occurs in a national curriculum, the potential for teachers to consistently deliver powerful knowledge is enhanced.

Table 10.2 Level 6 achievement objectives for science, technology, and history, *The New Zealand Curriculum*, 2007.

Science	Technology	History
<p>Investigate the interactions between the solar, lunar, and Earth cycles and the effect of these on Earth.</p> <p>Distinguish between</p>	<p>Critically analyse their own and others’ outcomes to inform the development of ideas for feasible outcomes.</p> <p>Undertake ongoing experimentation and</p>	<p>Understand how the causes and consequences of past events that are of significance to New Zealanders shape the lives of people and society.</p>

<p>atoms, molecules, and ions (includes covalent and ionic bonding).</p> <p><i>(Two examples taken from the 23 Achievement Objectives at Level 6. Note: 16 of the Achievement Objectives define 'content' while the remaining objectives deal with the 'Nature of Science')</i></p>	<p>functional modelling, taking account of stakeholder feedback and trialling in the physical and social environments. Use the information gained to select, justify, and develop a final outcome. Evaluate this outcome's fitness for purpose against the brief and justify the evaluation, using feedback from stakeholders.</p> <p><i>(One example taken from the eight Achievement Objectives at Level 6)</i></p>	<p>Understand how people's perspectives on past events that are of significance to New Zealanders differ.</p> <p><i>(There are only two Achievement Objectives)</i></p>
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History is now characterised by the considerable autonomy that teachers have to select the topics they teach. This is a recent development progressively introduced at senior secondary levels between 2011 and 2013. The commitment to teacher authority over topic selection emerged out of a Ministry of Education project which aligned *The New Zealand Curriculum* with the Achievement Standards for the *National Certificate of Educational Achievement* (NCEA) qualification. The Ministry of Education (2009) addressed the question of knowledge at the outset of the project when groups working on the Alignment Project were informed that the new curriculum was 'intended to be enabling so that standards should as far

as possible be written in such a way as to provide schools and teachers the opportunity to select contexts which are best suited for the students'. At this point the certainty of prescribed topics such as the *Origins of World War Two* or *New Zealand in the Nineteenth Century* was abandoned leaving the interrelated conceptual and skill-based Achievement Objectives and Achievement Standards to govern the choices of teachers over content. While teacher autonomy over topic selection may offer opportunities to deliver powerful knowledge through programmes which are both significant and of immediate relevance to students, there are no guarantees. Notably too, it is an approach which contrasts strongly with the traditions associated with national education in New Zealand. These traditions valued equity which was to be delivered through specified knowledge made available to all students. This standardisation was supported by national assessment of the knowledge. The change to teacher selection means that there will be a high level of variability in selections between schools. At this early stage in this development, however, the implications of that variability for achieving good outcomes in knowledge of history, and for equity of access to valuable history learning, are unknown.

Powerful knowledge

The discussion of what historical knowledge teachers should select rests on the deeper question of what constitutes powerful knowledge. The New Zealand Curriculum's focus on the development of cognitive skills is certainly critical to education. However *it is through the integration of knowledge and skills, supported by appropriate pedagogies*, that knowledge can be learned. Young (2009) argues that 'access to knowledge ... is central to the whole purpose

of education' (p. 193). He comments upon the apparent 'divorce in much contemporary writing where thinking and learning are treated as if they were processes that can be conceptualised as educational goals independently of what the thinking and learning is about' (p. 202).

Developing students' knowledge therefore lies at the core of schooling and access to powerful knowledge, or theoretical knowledge, is needed if they are 'to participate in society's debates and controversies' (Wheelahan, 2010, p. 1).

Michael Young, Johan Muller, Rob Moore, and others have discussed qualities or elements which contribute to recognising knowledge as 'powerful' in education. Moore (2007) talks of the 'voice of knowledge' and argues for knowledge that is 'critical' in being open to revision with an understanding of its fallibility, emergentist and not isolated within its circumstances of production, realist in its recognition of limitations of 'knowing', and materialist in understanding the 'intellectual fields' of its production (pp. 31–2). A 'working definition' given by Young (2010b) suggested that matters such as the reliability, testability, contestability, and specialisation are features evident in powerful knowledge. These have been developed by Young and Muller and are discussed in Chapter 3 of this volume. In identifying the properties of specialised knowledge they note that it is systematically revisable, emergent, real, material, social, and meets criterion for 'bestness'. Compliance with these criteria is therefore a means to evaluate the potential of history as a discipline to be a conduit for powerful knowledge. Such an assessment is valuable. Through considering how historians practise their discipline and how teachers may translate such 'specialisation' for school delivery, greater understanding of the nature of powerful knowledge emerges.

Like all forms of specialised knowledge, history is differentiated from non-specialised cultural or social knowledge that we may encounter in everyday living. History is also

specialised knowledge in meeting the ‘materialist’ criterion. The primary production site for developing disciplinary knowledge in history lies within the material culture of universities and through their academics, specialised knowledge is transmitted, debated, and revised. While it may be argued that knowledge in the social sciences is too soft, too amorphous, too much derived from the perspective of the knower to be robust knowledge, most who practise the discipline of history would dispute this. They point to the strength of the ‘internal rules’ which govern historians’ practices and their solidarity in adhering to well-recognised methodologies, which strongly positions the discipline to deliver specialised knowledge. Historians seek to reach conclusions about the past through following a rigorous process of historical investigation using appropriate and wide-ranging sources. For example, knowledge of history derived from oral accounts may contribute to specialised knowledge but historians have an understanding that such accounts are just a piece in the puzzle to explain the past. They view individual pieces of evidence, whether it is text, visual, or oral statements, with initial scepticism. Sarah Barber and Corinna Peniston-Bird (2009) comment that ‘Historians often praise their own sense of scholarship’. They add that ‘We like to think of ourselves as purveyors of a discipline which not only seeks after truth but also provides as much verification and corroboration of statements as possible’ (p. 8). Therefore on the grounds that historians have substantially practised within an agreed methodology for critique that recognises fallibility but enables knowledge to be closer to objective than subjective, history produced by academics can be said to be reliable, powerful knowledge.

Basil Bernstein (1999) distinguishes between different types of disciplinary discourse and provides analysis of a discipline’s relative strengths. Such theories provide a measure against which the discipline of history may be evaluated. As specialised knowledge, history

constitutes a vertical discourse rather than the everyday knowledge of a horizontal discourse. Within vertical discourses Bernstein (1999) makes further distinctions in terms of a discipline's hierarchical or horizontal knowledge structure. While at times the history discipline integrates and subsumes previous knowledge typical of the hierarchical form, its structure could not normally be viewed as a 'hierarchical organisation' of knowledge or as 'systematically principled' (p. 161). History, therefore, appears to exhibit features which fall within the parameters of a horizontal knowledge structure and a vertical discourse. However, this position does not deprive it of its epistemic objectivity or lessen its power as a subject capable of delivering powerful knowledge.

Disciplinary fields also develop ways to distinguish the best knowledge when compared to other possible contenders. Such knowledge is also emergent, being as Young and Muller discuss in Chapter 3 the 'nearest we have to truth at any time'. This focus on provisional truth is significant because it clearly demarcates disciplinary knowledge from everyday or social knowledge. The latter may not be verified as accurate through other means but instead expresses the untested beliefs of individuals. While postmodernists argue that there is no truth or reality, only a myriad of interpretations and a multiplicity of perspectives, historians 'remain committed to a notion of truth in which some interpretation is more justifiable than others' (Barber and Peniston-Bird, 2009, p. 10). Accepting that the study of history will always involve many perspectives, in their discussion in this book Young and Muller concur that history can nevertheless 'be objective and therefore truthful' and also argue that just 'because the perspectives were plural [it] did not mean that the grammaticality ... had to be weak'. This is a reference to Bernstein's (2000, pp. 163–6) theories on the relative, strong or weak, capacities of knowledge structures to generate 'empirical correlates' (Young and Muller,

2010b, p. 125). Stronger grammars are those exhibiting a capacity for meta-dialogue (Moore, 2013, p. 144). Through meta-dialogue, connections are plausibly made and competing explanations and change are accommodated to facilitate the development of new knowledge. Historians engage in a complex process of meta-dialogue and critique. They acknowledge and compare different historical accounts and subject their interpretations to scrutiny through peer review. Theories derived from this critical dialogue can then be explained using empirical evidence showing how a society of the past may have acted and responded. Strong grammars also lend themselves to cumulative knowledge-building. In contrast weaker grammars feature segmental knowledge acquisition and describe circumstances with a reduced capacity to propagate new knowledge (Young and Muller, 2010b, p. 125). Having a stronger grammar infers a more stable, consistent ability to validly explain the world, approach the ‘truth’, and advance knowledge.

The discipline has a strong focus upon historiography – on writing histories that are ‘systematically revisable’. Historians recognise that the selection of evidence and writing of history are contestable and open to future reinterpretation. Historians, however, have confidence that their methodologies can bring sufficient objectivity to their conclusions. In Chapter 3 Young and Muller note that ‘the human and social sciences are ... more “contextual” than the natural sciences’ and that this has the potential for them to be criticised or categorised as horizontal forms of knowledge. Undoubtedly historians clearly listen to the voice of society’s knowers through documents and other sources written by peoples of the past. Indeed everyday experiences of peoples of the past are a significant component in determining truths. However, the capacity of the discipline to weave a path through the multitude of voices that project from the past, along with the abstraction of ideas and weighing of significance of

evidence, lifts history from its horizontal origins to its vertical position. In this sense it fulfils further criteria for specialised knowledge in being both ‘emergent’ and ‘real’. These terms refer to the original historical contexts and social conditions as a production site for knowledge. From these conditions emerges powerful knowledge that is much more than the data and perspectives contained in the original collection of historical information and evidence. History is a discipline which has the potential to speak on conceptual matters. It takes events and people from the specificity of a period of time and place to a more universal or abstract sphere.

The fragility of knowledge – pitfalls and obstacles

Powerful knowledge, as established above, is specialised knowledge derived from rigorous and well-recognised methodologies. The question that follows is, can history’s robustness as an academic discipline be realised in the school environment? In New Zealand, the question then becomes, can the robustness be realised when teachers, rather than national history prescriptions, determine the historical knowledge being taught? It is possible that the specialisation generated within the academic history community and understandings of disciplinary methodologies is transmitted directly to future history teachers during their study of history at university. Indeed, teachers of history in New Zealand schools are required to have university qualifications in their primary discipline. This experience in the discipline suggests that history teachers will maintain the epistemic quality of the subject once they begin teaching. With the autonomy that teachers now have to determine history topics, there is a higher possibility that the knowledge learned at University can be more directly brought into

the classroom. In the past, prescribed topics for study in schools may not have matched those historical areas studied at University, so the knowledge itself may not have been utilised. This argument would support the shift to teacher selection of content.

However, the matter is considerably more complicated than linking teacher historical knowledge to topic selection. There is potential for derailment of the knowledge journey at various points. Disciplinary dislocation and the destruction of the internal logic of the subject of history may occur when teachers recontextualise and mediate knowledge in response to the external imperatives of curriculum and assessment. The complete freedom to select historical topics is interrupted through requirements that students frame their responses in relation to causes, consequences, and perspectives. Through this, the discourses of historians are often radically reformed into somewhat artificial constructions. The desire to achieve high grades for their students may place pressure on teachers to be highly selective and focus upon a narrow or containable historical event which they then teach in terms of causes, consequences, or perspectives. This is in contrast to teaching the power of historical concepts and ideas which show connectivity between historical situations.

An example of imposing narrow limits on a topic is the selection of the Battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954. In recent years in New Zealand this battle has sometimes been taught in isolation from the teaching of the Vietnam War and without reference to the significant period of US involvement a decade later. Selecting and isolating a single battle from its surrounding context of a wider war in this way has limited value. Knowledge is manipulated through framing these suitably selected 'knowledge bites' to relate precisely to what will be assessed. The potential for a piecemeal approach to knowledge demonstrated by this example was acknowledged in a review of the literature on standards-based assessment in New Zealand.

Rawlins et al. (2005) noted that ‘holistic knowledge and understanding gives way to knowledge that is more easily measured at the expense of critical, creative and integrated thinking’ (p. 109). Students’ experiences of history may be recontextualised so significantly that history’s position as a discipline exhibiting ‘strong grammars’ is disturbed (Bernstein, 2000, pp. 163–6).

In this way, assessment operates as the driving force for teacher topic selection. The assessment requirements also have a tendency to limit the knowledge that students are required to learn each year. Compounding the aforementioned impact of history selected on narrow grounds is that students only need to demonstrate, for example, understanding of cause and consequence using one historical event in an entire year’s course. The single examination question is also highly predictable from year to year because of the requirement that the question be written to fully align with the Curriculum Achievement Objective and its related Achievement Standard (see Table 10.3). This enables students to pre-prepare their answers and teachers to teach a limited course, detailing the causes and consequences of a single event. It is feasible for students to use the same event for assessment of their understandings of ‘perspectives’, so a very limited knowledge can suffice for assessment purposes. Even when teachers encourage learning of much more extensive knowledge, students are astute and can limit their learning in the understanding that such an approach will be adequate to address the examinations.

Table 10.3 Illustration of the close alignment between *The New Zealand Curriculum* and the NCEA assessment (Ministry of Education, 2007; New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2010; 2012; 2013)

<p>Achievement Objective <i>The New Zealand Curriculum 2007</i></p>	<p>Achievement Standard 91005 NCEA Level 1</p>	<p>Examination Questions for Achievement Standard 91005 NCEA Level 1 2012 and 2013</p>
<p>Understand how the causes and consequences of past events that are of significance to New Zealanders shape the lives of people and society.</p>	<p>Describe the causes and consequences of an historical event.</p>	<p>2012 Examination <i>Choose ONE historical event from any context you have studied this year, to write about.</i></p> <p>Identify and describe the causes that led to your chosen historical event.</p> <p>What were the consequences of this event on people or groups in society?</p> <p>2013 Examination <i>Write an essay on ONE historical event you have studied this year, using the following question. Write your chosen historical event in the two spaces in the box below to complete your question.</i></p> <p>Identify and describe the causes of _____.</p> <p>What were the most significant consequences of _____.</p>

If knowledge components are reduced significantly it is difficult to develop the abstracted conceptual thinking that powerful knowledge entails and that the New Zealand Curriculum claims to encourage. Narrowed or piecemeal selections of knowledge may limit students' ability to recognise and understand recurring themes, ideas, actions, and consequences in history. It may also limit the capacity of students to move beyond ideas they

have formally been taught into the arena of what Bernstein (2000) referred to as the ‘unthinkable’ or ‘yet to be thought’ (p. 30). This means that, in deciding what constitutes powerful knowledge, the quantity of knowledge, and the complex interplay of breadth and depth need to be accounted for.

Bernstein’s (1999) structuring of intellectual fields also suggests what conditions are required for progression in knowledge in social sciences. There is the possibility that historical knowledge will be weakened if attention is not given to the interrelationships between bodies of knowledge taught in successive years. There is a need to build upon conceptual understandings and produce programmes which logically build knowledge of time and place. In New Zealand, this matter is again left to chance and reliant upon the professionalism and expertise of history departments in schools. Inevitably the result will be very different knowledge outcomes across New Zealand.

Knowledge and skills

The ambiguity over the place of knowledge in the New Zealand Curriculum affects teachers’ perceptions of both the importance and nature of knowledge. The ‘directions for learning’ section of the national curriculum places high importance on understanding of ‘values’ (for example, ‘equity, through fairness and social justice’), ‘principles’ (for example, ‘cultural diversity’), and ‘key competencies’ (for example, ‘thinking’) (*The New Zealand Curriculum*, 2007, pp. 9, 10, 12). Where the term ‘knowledge’ appears it is frequently stated in the same breath as skills or competencies, for example, ‘equipped with the knowledge, competencies, and values’, ‘develop the values, knowledge, and competencies’, ‘through the social sciences

students develop the knowledge and skills' (*The New Zealand Curriculum*, 2007, pp. 4, 8, 30).

This suggests that the place of disciplinary knowledge in learning has morphed into, or is indistinct from, a focus on learning processes.

'Knowledge and skills' has become a lexical cluster (like 'checks and balances') where the individual words of the cluster may be weakened through their constant association. Indeed, in Chapter 7 of this volume, Chris Corbel goes further to argue convincingly that 'knowledge and skills has become a single lexical item in which the word knowledge in particular has become "delexicalised"'. David Lambert (2011) argues that at play are 'cultural and economic influences that value skills over knowledge and "learning how to learn" over understanding' (p. 248). Similarly, with reference to the teaching of history in England, Christine Counsell (2000) argues that 'when content is compared to skills as a teaching objective it gets bad press' (p. 60).

In history teaching, the focus upon developing students who can follow disciplinary practices and 'act like historians' has been prevalent for several decades and is very clearly captured in the New Zealand Curriculum's emphasis on methodology at the expense of content. Students engage in processes of historical research, primary source interpretation, and weighing up evidence for its bias and reliability. It is assumed that, through inducting students into historians' practices, induction into historical knowledge will follow. However, as Keith Barton (2005) points out, in educational settings, attempts to replicate historians' approaches to primary source material 'often reveals fundamental misconceptions about history' (p. 746). Barton and Levstik (2004) argue that when learner processes are 'linked exclusively to presumed disciplinary structures' or reduced to a set of narrow and specific procedures 'they become ends in themselves rather than tools for pursuing historical understanding' (p. 187). While there can be little doubt that students benefit from pedagogies which target skills development it raises concerns that the power implicit in knowledge acquisition is being overlooked. So it is the ingredient of historical content and its interrelationships with these

history concepts and methodologies that need careful consideration if powerful knowledge is to be delivered to students. The power of any knowledge of history only emerges when such concepts are perceptively applied to suitable contexts. The power lies in the understanding of the historical circumstances under study, and on the transferability and universal relevance of such knowledge. Therefore an appropriate balance between skills and knowledge needs to be debated and the role of curricula in this issue requires consideration.

Knowledge selection

Given that suitably selected history knowledge has the potential to be powerful, those who decide 'what knowledge' play a critical role. This brings us to the point where powerful knowledge, the power of the knower, and the knowledge of the powerful intersect. Counsell (2000) suggests that 'To decide what history is to be taught ... is to exercise phenomenal power. Better, then, say the nervous, not to prescribe it at all' (p. 61). History education is often criticised for being associated with 'collective memorialising', where heroic figures and events in a nation's history are taught in the interests of the nation building. History curricula are also sometimes criticised for overemphasising national histories and not adequately catering for multicultural communities of learners. However, 'the holy grail of an ethnically, culturally, socially neutral history ... is arguably just as dangerous' (Counsell, 2000, p. 61) and problematic. The opportunity for the 'knowledge of the powerful' to influence what history is taught is currently evident in debates over history education in England. The close association of England's Education Secretary, Michael Gove, with what should be taught in the 'New History' suggests a high degree of political interest in school history (Ellis, 2013; Mansell, 2013).

In shifting responsibility for the selection of knowledge from a national body to individual schools and teachers, the sensitivity and contestability often associated with mandated national history curricula can be avoided. Criticisms of school history being socially constructed and the outcome of influential power relations may be reduced. However, the absence of direction in a national document may give absolute power to an individual history teacher or to a community lobby group. Whether history in the New Zealand Curriculum exemplifies a ‘hands-off’, high-trust approach, or an indifference to the importance of knowledge, is debatable. What is clear is that the present autonomy over selection of history content gives considerable responsibility to teachers and schools for powerful knowledge and that, despite a national curriculum, such freedom will inevitably produce marked variability between schools.

Perspectivism and relativism

A danger in the open New Zealand approach is that, at the point of knowledge selection, teachers may shift unknowingly into the realm of perspectivism and relativism where their choices are blinkered in several ways. These include their own personal biases, the limitations of their own knowledge, and an overemphasis on matching selection to the cultural or social environment of their students. The drive to make courses relevant to a school’s community of learners can be a misunderstood notion. It may result in selections which limit understanding of the global world. For example, if students were to spend large amounts of time researching their family’s histories through their family’s stories then the knowledge they discover could be limited to ‘memories’. This lacks the disciplinary strength of knowledge of historical

context or reference to other primary or secondary sources. This is not to say that studying family is 'bad' per se but that its power in a disciplinary sense may be limited where it is not supported by acquiring further knowledge. Such a study may also fail the test of objectivity and may be perceived to adopt a clearly horizontal position, to use a Bernsteinian term, a position rooted in social knowledge.

Conclusion

History as a discipline has the potential to project a powerful epistemic voice. However, its position is a fragile one. Disciplinary strength can be weakened when history is reframed by teachers to meet curriculum learning objectives. Complexities of programming and progression, the forces of assessment, and knowledge autonomy are elements of uncertainty which have the potential to dislodge history from a powerful knowledge spectrum. To achieve its epistemic status the knowledge selected and taught needs to derive from specialised disciplinary knowledge and to show an awareness of the broader conceptual, or bigger picture, implications that the knowledge will serve. The knowledge needs to take students beyond their existing experiences into the 'unknown', into the previously unlearned. This positions the knowledge within the scope of 'vertical' knowledge, and away from 'horizontal' or 'social knowledge'. Knowledge also needs to be understood as knowledge which is capable of change, recognising new interpretations and contestability. Furthermore history programmes need to be structured in a manner that reflects the complexity of weaving conceptual understandings, specificity, sufficiency, and progression in a robust manner. The power of knowledge in history therefore lies in its conceptual scope, its ability to transcend particulars of time and

place, and its disciplinary rigour. In New Zealand, where teachers have the autonomy to determine knowledge selections and where the New Zealand Curriculum has broadly stated objectives, there can be little certainty over the power of the knowledge taught in schools.

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