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# Chief Examiners as Prophet and Priest: relations between examination boards and school subjects, and possible implications for knowledge

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Steven Puttick

Bishop Grosseteste University

Lincoln, LN1 3DY

01522 527347

[steven.puttick@bishopg.ac.uk](mailto:steven.puttick@bishopg.ac.uk)

## Abstract

Evidence from an ethnographic study of three secondary school geography departments in England is drawn on to describe aspects of the relationships between examination boards and school subjects. This paper focuses on one department, in 'Town Comprehensive', and the argument is illustrated through a discussion of observed lessons with a teacher in this department. Ofqual have recently announced that examination boards may continue to endorse commercially available teaching resources. The argument presented in the current paper extends possible areas of 'risk' identified beyond those they currently consider. Specifically, it is argued that chief examiners play multiple roles in the recontextualisation of knowledge, holding substantial power over school subjects. The strong role of accreditation as a rationale is argued to restrict knowledge taught in school geography to horizontal discourses, limiting students' access to powerful knowledge.

## Key terms

Geography, Powerful knowledge, Assessment, Secondary schools, Chief Examiners

## Introduction

Ofqual (Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation) recently ruled that examination boards in England may continue to endorse textbooks. Chief examiners may continue to author textbooks, teaching resources, examination specifications, questions, and mark schemes. Ofqual's decision, announced alongside new controls and regulation, is based on the belief that 'endorsed resources offer often vital support to teachers and students throughout the course and when preparing for exams' (Ofqual 2014). Ofqual identify the following possible risks associated with examination board endorsed resources: the undermining of standards; giving of unfair advantage to some students; and predictability or repetition of questions, for example, through an examiner writing the same question in a textbook or revision guide as they later set for an examination.

The 14 to 19 qualifications structure in England has attracted considerable debate and policy intervention (Pring et al. 2009; Richardson 2007). A recent critique of textbooks in England argued that a challenge to the production of higher quality textbooks is the 'frequent change in the form and content of national qualifications' (Oates 2014, p.4). Oates contrasts textbooks in England against examples from Singapore and Hong Kong. Praising these international examples he argues that, against them, 'the narrow instrumentalism, poor organisation and poor theoretical underpinning, of the (entirely typical) GCSE textbook is extraordinary by comparison' (p.19).

A significant change to the form and content of national qualifications in England happened in 1986 when the main leaving examinations – CSEs (Certificate of Secondary Education) and O Levels - were combined into the new General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). Pring et al. argue it is significant this merger left ‘less room for teacher judgement in the assessment of the learners’ work’ (p.4), and also that ‘Grade C in fact, if not in theory, came to be perceived as the ‘pass mark’, with the proportion of pupils gaining five A\*-C grades becoming a major school performance indicator’ (p.4). The qualification is the most common awarded to students in England at 16 (although GCSEs are also taken at other ages, most notably students later retaking English and Maths); over one million GCSE papers are sat in the UK every year (JCQ, 2014).

The current paper presents an argument against existing accreditation arrangements in GCSE geography by analysing the multiple roles played by chief examiners in relation to school geography, and by analysing possible implications for the nature of knowledge taught in the school subject.

Exploring the field of school subjects from the perspective offered by Bernstein’s (2000) pedagogic device, chief examiners are argued to hold considerable power over the school subject, occupying positions of, in Bernstein’s terms, Prophet and Priest. After making this argument, possible implications for the nature of knowledge taught in school subjects are discussed. I argue that the current role of accreditation – particularly in terms of the multiple roles played by chief examiners - in school geography potentially restricts the knowledge taught to horizontal discourses, limiting the extent to which students might be given access to powerful knowledge (Young & Muller 2013). This argument extends the analysis of powerful knowledge in school

geography offered by Roberts (2014) by considering the particular implications of accreditation as a rationale for knowledge.

### **Geography education knowledge debate**

The 'knowledge debate' (Biddulph 2011, p.89) in geography education research has been stimulated by on-going reviews of the NC in England and Wales, and by broader discussion of knowledge in social realism. Contributions to the knowledge debate in geography education research have contended, following debates in social realism (Maton 2014; Young & Muller 2013; Young 2008), and other theoretical perspectives, such as pragmatism (Biesta 2014), that there is a need to give knowledge greater attention. Forceful critiques of knowledge in school geography have been made, including charges of 'objectivism', 'scientism', and 'naïve realism' (Firth 2013; 2012; 2011; Morgan 2012, 2011; Butt & Collins 2013; Lambert 2011; Winter 2009; Winter & Firth 2007).

Critiques of school geography are also stimulated by engagements with academic geography. For example, Firth (2007) relates Heyman's (2007, 2000) and Castree's (2003) concerns – that undergraduate pedagogy does not reflect the different epistemological perspectives of the discipline – to school geography. In Heyman's terms:

Little space has been devoted to discussing the implications of new epistemologies for classroom practice and pedagogical theory. Despite all the post-reflexivity on the research process, academic knowledge is still overwhelmingly treated instrumentally...conceived of as information that is unproblematically transmissible as a commodity. (Heyman 2000, p.299)

Here, a disconnect is suggested between the epistemological stances developed in the discipline, and the way in which the discipline is taught to undergraduates. The contrast between 'new epistemologies' and 'information' is echoed in discussions of the relationship between school and academic geography. Similarly, Heyman's contention that 'little space has been devoted to discussing the implications of new epistemologies' has been echoed by geography education researchers. For example, Morgan and Lambert (2011) argue that 'thinking skills, learning to learn and the emotional dimensions of learning [have] assumed more immediate or urgent attention than a critical gaze on the material content of lessons' (p.281). Consequently, a narrowly defined focus on pedagogy 'has marginalised knowledge in the practical day-to-day work of making the curriculum' (p.281). In Firth's (2011) terms, 'geographical knowledge...has been marginalised by the exigencies of everyday practice and the imperatives of policy' (p.312).

Alternative contributions to the knowledge debate, while disagreeing on the purposes of geography education, nevertheless agree that knowledge has been given insufficient attention (Wright 2013; Standish 2012, 2008). The focus on knowledge, conceptualised through Bernstein's pedagogic device and through a distinction between vertical (powerful) and horizontal (everyday) knowledge is offered as one possible opening for discussion about knowledge, analysing the currently under-explored relations between awarding bodies, chief examiners, and schools.

### **Bernstein's pedagogic device**

Bernstein's (2000) discussion of the pedagogic device begins with (and the device is an attempt to answer) a question he poses: 'are there any general principles underlying the

transformation of knowledge into pedagogic communication, whether knowledge is intellectual, practical, expressive, or official knowledge or local knowledge?' (p.25). His pedagogic device is an attempt to analyse the fields, agents, and sites involved in the transformation of knowledge from wherever they are produced into the content of school lessons. Bernstein's work has exerted a considerable influence on social realism, and the pedagogic device is presented in <Table 1 incorporating additions by social realists, and providing more specific examples of fields, agents and sites of particular relevance to the current study. Bernstein distinguishes between three areas of rules (which he also refers to as principles and discourses): distributive rules; recontextualising rules; and evaluative rules. These principles are presented as hierarchically interrelated, with each set associated with different agents, who have different functions, and operate in different fields.

<b>Rules (principles)</b>	<b>Fields</b>	<b>Agents</b>	<b>Typical sites</b>
<b>Distributive</b>	<b>Production of discourse</b> <i>academic discipline</i>	<b>Producers</b> <i>academics</i>	<i>Research papers, conferences, laboratories</i>
<b>Recontextualising</b>	<b>Recontextualising of</b> <i>knowledge for school subjects</i>	<b>Recontextualisers</b> <i>divided into ORF and PRF</i>	
	<i>ORF (Official Recontextualising Field) / PRF (Pedagogic Recontextualising Field)</i>		
	<i>ORF</i>	<i>ORF: the state and its selected agents and ministries</i>	<i>National Curriculum</i>

	<i>PRF</i>	<i>PRF: including school teachers</i>	<i>Schemes of work, teaching resources</i>
<b>Evaluative</b>	<b>Reproduction</b>	<b>Acquirers</b> <i>school students</i>	<i>Classrooms, examinations</i>

<Table 1. Summary of Bernstein's pedagogic device, adapted from Bernstein (2000, p.37), and Maton and Muller (2007, p.18). >

Moving from left to right across the table, and starting at the top, the 'distributive rules translate, in sociological terms, into fields of production of knowledge with their own rules of access' (Bernstein 2000, p.33). Similarly, the recontextualising rules

create recontextualising fields...[and] agents with recontextualising functions. The recontextualising functions then become the means whereby a specific pedagogic discourse is created. Formally, we move from a recontextualising principle to a recontextualising field with agents and practising ideologies. (p.33)

Recontextualising rules are closely linked to evaluative rules; the specific, unique realisations of the pedagogic discourse at the level of the classroom, happening at a particular time, with a particular text, in a particular space. In Moore's (2013) terms

the construction of pedagogic discourse is essentially to do with the movements of meaning from one place to another and their selective reconfiguration *as a discourse* - the things that can be put together and those to be kept apart, a *regulative* discourse. This is the process of recontextualisation. (p.162)

The different fields are hierarchically related, and school geography is positioned below academic geography: knowledge is produced in one and recontextualised for the other. In the process of recontextualisation, Bernstein (2000) argues that knowledge is 'ideologically transformed...from an actual discourse, from an unmediated discourse to an imaginary discourse' (p.33). Recontextualising principles 'selectively appropriate, relocate, refocus and relate other discourses to constitute its own order' (p.33), operationalized here as being about the sources of knowledge teachers draw on for the

content of their school geography lessons. The inclusion of 'other discourses' mean that, rather than being restricted to a single, specialised area of research, what is available to recontextualisers is the 'totality of practices which is called [geography]' (p.34).

Consequently, the 'selections and arrangements that go to make up the curriculum create a quite different animal to the discipline' (Muller 2009, p.215).

### **Powerful knowledge**

Bernstein describes the knowledge that is transformed through the pedagogic device as horizontal and vertical, a distinction strongly echoed in ongoing discussion within social realism. In particular, Young (2008) contrasts powerful knowledge (vertical) against everyday knowledge (horizontal), arguing that the aim of schooling is to introduce all students to powerful knowledge. Young and Muller (2013) use the terms powerful knowledge and specialised knowledge almost synonymously, and describe this knowledge through four properties:

1. It is *systematically revisable*, primarily by disciplinary communities, who develop 'robust and generally agreed-upon way[s] to distinguish the best proposition from other likely contenders' (p.236).

2. It is *emergent*, by which they mean that 'specialised knowledge is produced by social conditions and contexts but cannot be reduced to them' (p.237); they go on to consider an opposing view of the 'emergence' of knowledge, and reject the view that 'no knowledge, even natural scientific knowledge, can emerge as fully independent from its context' (p.237). It is notable, given the importance of developments in critical realism for their own theoretical position, that they do not explicitly engage with the use of the term in this field (Cf. Smith 2010). The sense in which Young and Muller want to argue

for a form of powerful knowledge as emergent has clear parallels with critical realist use of the term as

the process of constituting a new entity with its own particular characteristics through the interactive combination of other, different entities that are necessary to create the new entity but that do not contain the characteristics present in the new entity...The whole is more than the sum of its parts. (Smith 2010, pp.25–26)

Social context of knowledge production is seen as important, but cannot be used to 'debunk' knowledge claims.

3. It is *real*, which they define as it being 'about something other than itself about which it says something in a robustly reliable way' (Young & Muller 2013, p.238), with the reliability drawing on property (1). The 'test of this reality [is] whether 'the world' answers to knowledge claims' (p.238), explicitly defining the world as more than simply 'nature', and also including 'cultural kinds', although they do also acknowledge (but then essentially pass over) a debate which they see as 'not settled' in which it is argued that knowledge about cultural or social phenomena 'can only become reflexively – that is partly – distanced from it' (p.238). They simply assert that 'conceding that the human and social sciences are about cultural [phenomena], however, does not mean that they cannot be objective, nor that the worlds that they provide an account of are not real' (p.238).

4. It is *material and social*, in the sense that it 'is produced in particular socio-epistemic formations' (p.238), normally in the forms of university-based disciplinary communities. They argue that the 'internal rules of solidarity, hierarchy, and truth norms...holds in place the criterial or disciplinary norms...constitute of specialised knowledge' (p.238).

They argue such knowledge is universal; ‘for example, physics is the same everywhere’ (p.232), and they devote significant energies to articulating a position for the social sciences that might also meet their criterion of powerful knowledge. In making this argument they place considerable weight on the role of ‘methodological rigour as policed by the relevant peer community’ (p.244), particularly through peer review, welcoming a ‘tightening up on the importance of ensuring anonymity in patrolling the boundaries of what is and what is not admissible as social science’ (p.244).

In the current study of geography teachers’ subject knowledge, in part aimed at analysing this knowledge in relation to horizontal and vertical typologies, an ethnographic approach was developed in response to the relatively limited existing research on knowledge in school geography.

### Summary of methodology

The ethnographic approach of the current study is most similar to the ethnography of the British sociology of education tradition (Jeffrey & Troman 2012; Ball 1981), and I also sought to draw on academic geographers’ engagements with ethnography (Paterson 2009; Crang & Cook 2007; Lees 2003). I use the term ‘ethnographic approach’ to refer to a general disposition that seeks to be alert to, and engaged with everyday practices, (Mills & Morton 2013; Paterson 2009).

The ethnographic approach is represented in **Error! Reference source not found.**, showing specific methods of data generation used in all three schools across the year of fieldwork.

The study was designed in such a way that different times of the school year might be experienced, and that time might be preserved between visits: rather than spending a

continuous block of time in each department, the departments were each studied for two blocks of two weeks so that I might experience them at different times of the year; a design described by Jeffrey and Troman (2004, p.542) as 'recurrent time mode ethnography'. The three departments studied were sampled according to their organisational structures (Busher and Harris, 1999); a single full time geography teacher ('impacted'), a department within a faculty ('federate'), and a department standing alone (including having its own budget, physical space, and HoD reporting directly to SLT; 'unitary')

### **Summary of Town Comprehensive**

Town Comprehensive is a mixed, comprehensive 11-19 secondary school in a town in Oxfordshire. There are several other secondary schools (some independent, some comprehensive) within the town, and the comprehensive secondary schools work together as a 'consortium' for 6<sup>th</sup> form students. The geography department is organisationally federate, being situated within a humanities faculty. The HoD's line manager is the head of humanities. There is a humanities office (<Figure 1), and budget. There are three geography teachers in Town Comprehensive. Their experiences of geography are different, and they conceptualise the subject in contrasting ways, explored further below through their maps of areas of subject knowledge in geography.

#### **<Figure 1. Town Comprehensive Humanities office>**

The discussion now focuses on one teacher – Gemma – exploring the ways in which she conceptualises geography, and contrasting her expansive view of the subject against what I argue to be the restrictive role played by examination specifications.

## Gemma: background and conceptions of geography

Gemma had taught geography for nine years, all in Town Comprehensive. She was the head of year eight, and much of her time was spent handing out report cards, seeing students, and giving detentions. Gemma described her own experiences of school geography as having been affected by the high expectations placed on her as the youngest of four siblings. After a 'sort of minor meltdown' during sixth form Gemma re-took her A Levels, a year she described as the hardest of her life. Amid the struggles of that year she got enjoyment from geography which led her to study it at University:

I wanted to do a geography degree cos I...I enjoyed it – it was the only A Level that I really enjoyed...I had two fabulous teachers, who had completely different teaching styles...One was an NQT who was full of enthusiasm – she was young, interesting, she was really kind of fired up about, you know, things, she'd come in the room and she'd be fascinating in that respect, and then I had [laughing] and then I had a guy, erm, who was just like...a very serious man...but had the driest sense of humour, but he was also incredibly intelligent, and he could have taught any subject to any level. He was the most knowledgeable man I think I've ever met in my life. (Gemma, interview 1:166-170)

Gemma's teachers' personalities, enthusiasm, and knowledge were important in her decision to study geography at university. She now describes her own experiences of teaching school geography in relation to the department in which she works, often speaking about aspects of the other teachers' knowledge that she does not have.

However, she also describes knowledge as something the teacher is *supposed* to have:

when you're teaching A Level if they're asking questions and you can't answer it you look like an idiot, and it's like that's not a good feeling - let's be honest [laughing], you don't want to stand there at the front and think I'm supposed to be- look like - I'm the one that knows what they're doing, and you've just asked me a question and I've got no idea how to answer it...I wouldn't like to feel that at sea, if you know what I mean...because otherwise I'd probably poo my pants and wouldn't know what to do [laughs]... (Gemma, interview 1:144-146)

Here, knowledge is important for maintaining the students' perceptions of the teacher as the one who 'knows what they're doing', and for *protecting* the teacher. During the department interview I asked how confidently we should hold geographical knowledge. Gemma personalised her response, applying the terms to her position as a teacher:

I think maybe when you're teaching...we've taught things at A Level which were things we hadn't taught before, or had very much experience of – that was only the time when I felt tentative about making sure that I...was completely jenned up on everything (S: yeah, you have to), so that if they asked me a random question then I could go, yeah, erm, so and so and so and so – erm, that's the only time I've probably felt a bit under-confident about, erm, knowledge... (Town Comprehensive department interview: 221)

Affective dimensions were invoked; Gemma discussed feeling tentative or under-confident, although this was qualified as 'the only time' and even then only 'probably'. Gemma's subject knowledge is defended and personalised. Raising questions about how confidently knowledge should be held was seen by all teachers in Town Comprehensive as a potential attack on their professionalism. They were expected to be knowledgeable, and this knowledge is objective, separate to them as teachers; it is something they get, hold, and give to students. Not being confident about knowledge was seen in negative terms as something to be avoided, rather than an epistemological position based on the partial nature of geographical knowledge. One reason Gemma gives for this defensive, objective view of knowledge are the situations she anticipates facing ('if they asked me a random question'). Gemma expects her subject knowledge to be *tested* by her students, particularly at A Level, the only Key Stage named on her map (<Figure 2). She contrasted traditional geography against current issues, and included 'current' three times.

<Figure 2. Gemma's map of areas of subject knowledge>

The areas of traditional geography, and current issues were directly linked to her geography node. Her map is unbounded and several-centred. For Steve and Ruth human and physical geography were the organising categories of the subject (Figures 4 and 5), whereas, Gemma visually divided geography into current and traditional; the terms human and physical did not feature. However, this does not mean that physical/human were not important categories for her, and she often used the terms when verbally describing geography. The central node 'My knowledge in geography' also represents Gemma's discussion of geographical knowledge in terms of identity politics; this knowledge is something held in different quantities by people between whom she differentiates (students, and other teachers in the department). The knowledge has use value between these people, creating and sustaining status and identity. The teacher is different to the students, demonstrated by their subject knowledge (in terms of the teachers' ability to answer students' questions), and they are also different to the other teachers because of their subject specialism. In this department there is a very clear allocation of roles and identities.

Gemma's areas of geography were described as parts of the same whole, sharing the same 'basic concepts that under-run' (Gemma, interview 1:142). The unity of fundamental concepts meant that categories of traditional/current were not presented as dichotomies. Instead, there are timeless, unchanging concepts ('traditional geography', concepts that 'under-run'), which the school subject studies through current issues. What these current issues might include was left open. Her map is unbounded, and she believed that

fundamentally geography underpins pretty much every subject in the school, because – and this is what the kids need to understand – because there are elements of geography in pretty much every subject. (Gemma, interview 1:160)

Here the identity politics of geographical knowledge move beyond the teacher-student and departmental relations, to those with other subject areas. It is seen as important; 'kids need to understand' that geographical knowledge is not restricted to geography lessons, but underpins and is in almost all other subjects: the type of current issues included within geography is open, and nothing was described as necessarily out of range. Detail has been provided of Gemma's conceptions of geographical knowledge, and in particular of her belief in its expansiveness, in order to provide a contrast against the restrictive role played, in the following situations, by the examination board's specifying of case studies.

### Gemma: restrictions of examination specifications

As I walked with Gemma to a year 10 class one Wednesday morning (24/04/13) she joked that she had no idea what she was going to do; 'Year 10, right. What are we doing? No idea! I'm running on empty today' I say she was joking because when we reached the classroom she had two PowerPoints ready, and stacks of photocopied resources. The room began to fill up with students; some sitting down and getting books out, others pausing to speak to one another and then being hurried along by Gemma; 'that's it, come in, let's get started. Jonny! Coat off please...Thank you, lovely – let's get started... Ready to start? We've got lots to get through so we've got to be quick' (lesson observation, p.3 24/4/14).

Once they were sat down a student raised his hand: 'Miss, why are we going so fast?' Gemma said they were 'a bit behind the other groups' and so she was pushing them harder than she normally would. The student who asked the question nodded at this, and Gemma continued: 'Today we're getting on to looking at examples, because in your exams you will need to use examples in your answers' (lesson observation, p.3

24/4/14). During this lesson Gemma articulated her critique of statements about the area, based on her reading of a map of the area; an example of disciplined judgement (Stemhagen et al. 2013), illustrative of the knowledge-how teachers practice, modelling to students aspects of what it means to *do* geography.

The following morning Gemma came into the humanities office when the first bell sounded, and began preparing for her first lesson. 'Year 10 – aaahh!' Another bell sounded shortly after this and we went back to her classroom, followed by her year 10 students. As soon as the students were seated she apologised to them for the previous lesson:

I forgot that your syllabus has changed. We didn't need to do Boscastle yesterday. Your case study has changed. The current year 11's were examined about it, but you won't be. Sorry! [The HoD] did tell me, but I was so busy that I didn't have time to remember and I forgot! So, we're going to do the case study you need today. (Gemma, fieldnotes 25/04/13)

In this apology the students were told they did not need to learn about Boscastle, because the examination board have changed the case study: the students do not need to know that information, because they will not be examined on it. She then continued with the lesson, explaining the new case study that they do need to learn, and telling the students that they need to learn it because they will be examined on it.

Examination board specifications play a powerful role in determining what teachers teach, and this example from Gemma is particularly, although not uniquely, explicit. Students were often told that a topic was being studied 'because we have to', or because 'it's on the specification', and 'it will be on the exam'. Students expected, and accepted, a rationale based on accreditation. When they were unhappy to be studying a topic the first question they asked (if the reason had not already been given) was whether or not they 'needed' to know this. Will it be on the exam? The implicit value attributed to

studying school geography both by teachers and students was often expressed in terms of accreditation (gaining a GCSE or A Level grade). These teachers and students contrast against those studied by Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2013), whose data gives 'little sense...of teachers seeing education as being about the acquisition of knowledge. Similarly, and equally surprisingly, there is also little about accreditation as a purpose of education' (p.196).

### **Chief Examiner as Prophet and Priest**

The exam specification was displayed on the wall in the department, and the exam board's scheme of work provided the structure, and majority of content. The specification regulated the content of lessons to the extent that Gemma apologised to a class for teaching a case study that is no longer on the exam board's official list.

The nature of the examination specification's authority was rooted in the accreditation provided, rather than in the authority held by examiners or textbook authors (the same people), whose testimony was accepted, but about whom little was known: 'I'm not sure who [the textbook authors / chief examiners] are. I'm assuming they're geographers...[laughing] or I'd hope, anyway' (Gemma, interview 1:222-124). The chief examiners were universally believed to be geographers, who are *probably* involved in geographical research. The teachers in the current study believed these things about the chief examiners based almost exclusively on their status as chief examiners; when pushed they *hoped* and *assumed* the chief examiner would be these things.

Bernstein's pedagogic device was presented above as involving rules, fields, agents, and sites. Rules move from distributive, to recontextualising (the main focus of the current study), and evaluative. Relations between these rules are foregrounded by the

importance attributed to chief examiners. Agents involved in the pedagogic device are positioned by Bernstein in relation to those in the religious field:

Prophet / Producers  
 Priest / Reproducers  
 Laity / Acquirers  
 (Bernstein 2000, p.37).

I want to suggest here that chief examiners in school geography assume the positions of both Prophet and Priest, being actively involved in the construction of distributive, recontextualising, and evaluative rules (Table 2). Their power may result in something of a collapsing of the distinction between the ORF and the PRF at KS4/5. The dominance of one actor in the device is significant in addressing Bernstein’s question: ‘whose regulator, what consciousness and for whom?’ (p.37).

<b>Rules</b>	<b>Agents</b>	<b>Processes</b>
Distributive	Chief examiner	Examination specification list of content. Approved textbook, PowerPoints, and resources.
Recontextualising	Chief examiner (school teachers)	Examination specification list of content displayed in department. Approved textbook, PowerPoint and resources delivered.
Evaluative	Chief examiner (school teachers, school students)	Examination specification content and definitions examined by examiners standardised and monitored by chief examiners.

**Table 2. Chief examiners and the pedagogic device**

Arguing that chief examiners, as representatives of awarding bodies, play a significant role in the pedagogic device also offers a revision to Bernstein’s (2000) suggestion that

the dominant perspective within any transmission may be a function of the power relations among the teachers, or of pressure from groups of acquirers, or,

particularly today, a function of indirect and direct pressures of the market or the state itself. (p.164)

The evidence offered through analysis of the departments in the current study would place examination boards in addition to - or replacing - the state in Bernstein's account; their relation to the market (Ball 2012) may also be worth exploring further, although there is not space to do so here. Possible implications of the powerful roles played by examination boards in school geography are now considered in relation to the types of knowledge students might be given access to.

### **Accreditation as a limit to powerful knowledge**

Bernstein offers two main categories or structures of knowledge; vertical and horizontal. He defines horizontal knowledge discourses as

contextually specific and context dependent, embedded in on-going practices, usually with strong affective loading, and directed towards specific, immediate goals, highly relevant to the acquirer in the context of his/her life. (p.159)

For each of these dimensions I now suggest that the powerful role of accreditation in school geography restricts knowledge to primarily horizontal discourses, drawing on evidence gathered throughout the ethnographic study outlined above, and illustrating the argument using the episode of Gemma's lessons (presented above).

*Contextually specific and context dependent*; the choice of case studies were presented in Gemma's lessons as being dictated by the examination specification, making the knowledge specific to the specification, and primarily dependent on the specification for its legitimacy. This knowledge might also be seen as contextually specific because many of the sources of this knowledge are specifically designed for this specification. For example, online search terms often used by teachers include the specification (for example, searching for 'edexcel geography Boscastle flooding', rather than the more general 'Boscastle flooding'). Concepts included in examination specifications also seem

to be, if not particular to the specification, then primarily used in this context. There was also a considerable usage of examination specification social media sites (such as Nings), on which teachers share resources they have made specifically for this specification. All of these departments use examination board approved textbooks, in which the definitions of terms provide the standards by which examiners will make judgements. One example of a context-specific term is the defining of 'soft' and 'hard' coastlines at GCSE by the examination board AQA. The terms soft and hard are used in a general sense by academic geographers, and I have been unable to find any of their references to coastlines as hard or soft. AQA use the terms to refer to hard and soft *rock types*. Students responding to a question about landforms found on 'soft coastlines' in an AQA GCSE geography examination with reference to features made of sand (such as spits) are not awarded any marks. The examination specification's definition of soft/hard is contextually specific and context dependent; it is not transferable to other contexts (even other GCSE geography examination specifications), and so teachers often spoke about the best resources being *those that are made for their specification*.

*Embedded in on-going practices, usually with strong affective loading*; Bernstein seems to suggest that the 'on-going' aspect of practices should be considered in contrast to the more objective, and timeless characterisation of vertical discourses. As on-going, horizontal knowledge is needed for tasks, and is a part of these tasks, rather than being independent of these particular uses. The way in which knowledge in school geography is viewed in terms of its use in an examination situation is explored further below.

Here, I want to emphasise the strong affective loading that is particularly associated with examinations. For both students and teachers, examinations, and the teaching and learning of knowledge for them might be described as having strong affective loading.

On several occasions students were brought into staff areas -such as the geography office - because they were crying or upset about their performance in an examination, including internal mock examinations. Teachers only wished one another 'good luck' when facing a lesson observation, or when students were sitting an examination. An important reason behind the HoD at City Academy's decision to leave was the pressure he faced over managing examination entries for multiple subjects.

*Directed towards specific, immediate goals, highly relevant to the acquirer in the context of his/her life.* Framing knowledge in terms of its use value in an examination may make knowledge specific to that context, and dependent upon it. In the example discussed above, Gemma's year 10 class are told they need to know about this case study because it is on the examination specification; they are told they do not need the other example – and are apologised to for having been taught it – because they will not be examined on it. In another lesson, students were told they 'need to be really quiet and concentrate to understand this – the chances of you getting a question on it are extremely high' (Lesson observation, TC, 19/4/13, period 5), a rationale which all teachers in the current study used at some point, and throughout the year. Examinations and accreditation were used as important justifications of knowledge not only in the revision period preceding the examinations, but throughout KS4/5. Reinforcing performances in examinations involve public displays of grades achieved (that is, A\*-C) for whole year groups, and for individual students, which also included levels at KS3 (presented through 'flight paths'). The goal of an examination may not be 'immediate', but it is very specific, and has a set date. The extent to which the grades achieved in examinations by students might be said to be 'highly relevant' for their lives may be contended. However, the evidence from the current study is that, as a justification of what students needed to do or learn it

was highly effective. In all cases where teachers justified lessons or tasks in terms of needing to be done or learnt for an exam, I did not hear a single objection from a student. Instead, they also seemed committed to this narrative, and would themselves often ask teachers *if we need this for the exam*. Through performance management procedures the high relevance of particular knowledge specific to examination specifications may also be applied to teachers, whose pay and status can be directly linked to the grades achieved by their students.

In the three dimensions of horizontal discourses outlined here (contextually specific, affectively loaded, and aiming at specific goals relevant to individuals' lives), it is argued that the strong role played by accreditation may characterise geographical knowledge in school geography - particularly at KS4/5 - as horizontal discourses. The description offered here also offers a corresponding contrast against dimensions of the summary of powerful knowledge discussed above. In particular, the significance Young and Muller give to disciplinary communities in 'distinguish[ing] the best proposition from other likely contenders' (p.236), and in the production (p.237), and regulation of such knowledge according to disciplinary norms (p.238) contrasts strongly against the role of accreditation described in the current paper. Most significantly, I have argued that the roles of chief examiners as Prophet and Priest prevent engagement with disciplinary understandings and revisions of knowledge.

### **Concluding remarks**

This paper has offered an argument about accreditation - and in particular the multiple roles of chief examiners - in the context of secondary school geography in England. The argument was made through a presentation of aspects of an ethnographic study of three secondary school geography departments, illustrated through a portrayal of a sequence

of lessons taught by Gemma, a teacher in one of these schools. Ofqual have recently announced that examination boards may continue to endorse commercially available teaching resources, and the argument presented in the current paper extends possible areas of 'risk' identified. Specifically, it has been argued that chief examiners play multiple roles and hold substantial power over school geography. The absence of engagement with academic geographers, or of chief examiner's accountability to academic geographers, may be particularly problematic. The strong role of accreditation in offering a rationale for particular knowledge to be taught has been argued to limit knowledge in school geography to horizontal discourses, potentially limiting students' access to powerful knowledge.

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