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Re-conceptualising authority relations in education: a micro-situational approach

Abstract

This article explores the conception of authority relations in the classroom that are implicit in some examples of related policy documentation in Scotland and England. We argue that the importance of the constitutive role of the micro-dynamics of face-to-face interaction in classroom settings is neglected in documentation of this type. We explore this claim with reference to examples of policy in two jurisdictions of the UK, namely *The Donaldson Review* and *The Standards for Registration* in Scotland; and policy-related guidance from England on improving discipline in schools and pupils' behaviour. We also consider how authority relations are conceptualised in a recent article that has made a significant contribution to the literature in the field (Macleod et al, 2012). Finally, we present a theoretical account that counterbalances prevailing approaches to authority relations in the classroom. We suggest that authority is continuously negotiated, challenged, accepted, defined, and ultimately constituted in and through the dynamics of interaction between and amongst pupils (and between pupils and teachers).

Introduction

In Scotland, the promotion of the full engagement of teachers with the complexities of education has been a priority since the publication of *Teaching Scotland's Future. Report of a Review of Teacher Education in Scotland* (Scottish Government, 2011) (henceforth *The Donaldson Review*). The theme of authority relations in the classroom context is a prime example of a complex issue in education that merits such attention. We argue below that the aspirations contained in *The Donaldson Review* can best be served if authority is conceived as *emerging in* and *through* particular forms of situated social interactions rather than as something that neophyte teachers are expected to possess before they enter practice. In sum, we shall argue that authority relations are *intrinsic* to particular classroom dynamics such as the reciprocal influences exerted by pupils on each other, by teachers on pupils, and *vice versa*. We draw upon the work of Rafanell (2013) and Rafanell and Gorringer (2010) to argue that authority should be seen as *granted* through social interaction in the

classroom rather than *possessed* by the teacher prior to entering the classroom. We also implicitly question the assumptions of some of the exponents of symbolic interactionism. As Payne and Hustler (1980, p. 51) pointed out over forty years ago, there was a shift in emphasis ‘from teachers’ “perspectives” ... to pupils’ “perspectives”. Yet the emphasis on pupils as a class or cohort fails to take account of the heterogeneity of pupils, and of the role of micro-interactions among *pupils* in the granting of authority to the teacher *in situ*.

In order to demonstrate how authority relations are implicitly and explicitly construed in recent policy documentation, we shall consider two examples from England (Department for Education, 2011; 2012) and two key documents relating to teacher education in Scotland, namely *The Donaldson Review* (Scottish Government, 2011) and *The Standards for Registration* (GTCS, 2012). Given the scope of this article, it has not been possible to consider examples from Wales or Northern Ireland, nor to engage in a detailed consideration of policy enactment in different jurisdictions of the UK. The limited range of examples considered here serves to illustrate the extent to which the notions of ‘behaviour management’ and ‘pupil behaviour’ are central problems and core concerns for beginning teachers, irrespective of the jurisdiction in which they practise, and how educational discourse has tended to focus on these dimensions. We contend that this has had the unfortunate effect of thwarting the development of a broader understanding of authority relations in education.

We shall explore the nexus between recent developments in initial teacher education (ITE) in Scotland, particularly the emphasis on creating a ‘more reflective and inquiring culture’ (Scottish Government 2011, p. 11) and the rather narrow conception of authority relations that prevails in the examples of policy and educational research considered below. The Scottish context is of particular relevance, given the emphasis on reinvigorating teachers’ professionalism that was the driving force behind *The Donaldson Review*. The aspiration was to develop teachers ‘as reflective, accomplished and enquiring professionals who have the capacity to engage fully with the complexities of education’ (Scottish Government 2011, p. 10). The main focus of this article is the generalizable theoretical claim that interactional dynamics are part and parcel of the constitution and maintenance of a teacher’s authority.

In Scotland, the impetus behind *The Donaldson Review* was a perceived need to counter the tendency of pre-service teachers to seek ‘narrow training of immediate and direct relevance to the classroom’ and a reluctance to ‘extend their own scholarship’ into ‘the values and intellectual challenges which underpin academic study’ (Scottish Government 2011, p. 6). As we shall endeavour to demonstrate below, these exalted purposes appear to be at odds with the under-theorised view of authority relations and the rather narrow focus on ‘behaviour management’ that emerge through close reading of key policy documents from the same jurisdiction.

As Priestley and Humes (2010, p. 346) have pointed out in relation to curriculum innovation in Scotland, ‘the enactment of such a major policy innovation inevitably raises a series of questions relating to its translation from policy ideal to social practice.’ We suggest that the same applies to the conceptualisation of authority relations that emerges through close scrutiny of some examples of policy documentation relating to pupils’ behaviour and authority relations more broadly. Priestley and Humes (2010, p. 346) distinguish between coherence, ‘i.e. issues of workability that relate to ... internal structure [of the curriculum]’ and methodology, which they define as ‘the mechanisms through which teachers are engaged with the policy’. The focus in this paper is on the former, i.e. coherence and ‘workability’ rather than methodology. In this article we seek to expose the assumptions that underlie current policy relating to the cultivation of authority relations in education, with particular reference to the narrow focus on ‘behaviour management’.

We shall now turn our attention to how authority relations are conceptualised in two examples of policy documentation from England and two from Scotland, before embarking upon a critical exploration of how authority relations in education are addressed in a recent article (Macleod et al, 2012). As authority relations are an international concern that crosses borders, we begin by considering a document that provides guidance for teachers in England on how to improve discipline in the classroom.

The policy context: rethinking authority in the classroom

Macleod et al. (2012, p. 493) have drawn attention to the powers issued in the wake of guidance provided by the Department for Education in England. The principal aim is ‘*unequivocally* [to] restore adult authority to the classroom’ (Department for

Education 2011, p. x) (our emphasis). We suggest that each of the terms used in this phrase merits careful scrutiny. The aim of restoring ‘adult authority’ reinforces a view of authority as something that is (or ought to be) possessed by adults rather than children. This stems from the narrow conception of power that envisages that the teacher commands and the pupils obey. The seminal work of Willis (1977) in the 1970s illustrates the difficulties of translating policy ideals into educational practice. Willis’s well-known ethnographic account clearly shows that wider structural determinants impinge upon the relations between pupils and teachers. However, his nuanced analysis of the micro-dynamics of interaction in the setting of a particular school environment demonstrates that pupils have at their disposal mechanisms to subvert the intentions of teachers. Willis’s work shows that the prevailing view of a teacher’s authority fails to take account of the counter-culture, e.g. how working class boys challenge and resist the culture of the school as an institution and generate their own internal codes of behaviour that challenge the authority of the teacher. One of the features of what has become known as the counter-school culture in Willis’s work was how the ‘lads’ constantly tried to win ‘symbolic and physical space from the institution and its rules and to defeat its main perceived purpose: to make you “work”’ (Willis 1977, p. 26).

A detailed consideration of the legacy of interactionism falls beyond the scope of this article. For our current purposes, it will suffice to observe that the legacy of the interactionists might lead us to regard with a degree of scepticism the claim that the authority of the teacher can be ‘unequivocally restored’ (Department for Education 2011, p. x). The implication in the guidance provided to teachers in England is that authority can be *possessed* by right and imposed by the teacher in the classroom. This effectively precludes the possibility that authority may be a quality that emerges in and through relationships between pupils and teachers (and, for that matter, among pupils and their peers). The legacy of interactionism suggests that authority might be regarded as *granted* through social relations, ‘contingent upon its accomplishment “there and then”, every time’ (Payne and Hustler, 1980, p. 50).

In recent years, there has been relatively little consideration given to how relationships among *pupils* (rather than between teachers and pupils) engender power relationships and authority statuses, and to the manner in which the dynamics of affective sanctioning among pupils constitute collective behaviour that crystallises

over time. We argue that such dynamics are central to understanding and explaining how teachers' authority emerges from the situated micro-dynamics in a classroom. Such an approach calls into question the idea of the 'unequivocal restoration of adult authority' (Department for Education 2011, p. x). The latter view implies that authority is something that is possessed unambiguously by one party (the teacher) prior to entering into relation with others (the pupils). In contrast, we argue that the classroom be regarded as a particular 'life-world' that emerges from the interactions of a group of heterogeneous individuals who generate collective patterns of behaviour, practices and beliefs in and through their interactions (Rafanell, 2013).

We referred above to guidance issued on the part of the English government that aimed 'unequivocally [to] restore adult authority to the classroom'. It is informative to consider the language used and the themes addressed in work subsequently commissioned by the Department for Education on the issue of 'pupil behaviour' (Department for Education, 2012). From the outset, the repeated references to 'pupil behaviour' suggest that only pupils manifest behaviour, and that teachers are by definition excluded from any consideration of group dynamics. We suggest that teachers also manifest behaviour, which not only has a significant impact on classroom dynamics, but also has to be seen as influenced by these in turn.

'Behaviour' is more adequately conceptualised as a fluid phenomenon that assumes particular characteristics in different classroom settings. In the classroom context, this encompasses peer relations as well as relations between pupils and teachers. In addition, the term 'pupil behaviour' fails to convey the empirically evident heterogeneity of individuals and their shifting alliances. This is not to deny that each class has a particular character. Over time, interpersonal dynamics take on a fixed character, the product of micro-interactions that crystallise into recognisable patterns of behaviour.

It is illuminating to consider the scope of the survey of 'pupil behaviour' referred to above (Department for Education, 2012, p. 1):

The aim of this topic note is to bring together the evidence around pupil behaviour in schools in England. It examines what is known about the nature and standard of behaviour in English schools; the impact of poor behaviour on pupils and teachers and what schools can do to promote good pupil behaviour.

The striking feature of the paragraph quoted above is the immediate shift in focus from [the nature and standard of] ‘pupil behaviour’ writ large, as it were, to an almost exclusive emphasis on ‘poor behaviour’ by pupils.¹ Further scrutiny of the contents page of *Pupil Behaviour in Schools in England* (Department for Education, 2012) reveals that the majority of the report addresses themes such as defining *problematic behaviour* (p. 9); types of *misbehaviour* (pp. 13-15); characteristics of pupils who *misbehave* (pp. 27-32); children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) and *behavioural disorders* (pp. 32-34); the consequences of *poor behaviour* (pp. 35-36); the impact of poor behaviour on the learning of other pupils (p. 37); *disengagement* (pp. 40-41); and exclusion from school (pp. 49-51). Chapter Five (pp. 56-68) considers the role of schools in improving behaviour (including a section on ‘specific punishments or sanctions’) (p. 67). The final chapter considers the role of teachers, specifically addressing their ‘use of powers to discipline’. This only serves to underline the point made by Macleod et al. (2012, p. 494), namely that

... the idea of using force to build authority is inherently contradictory (they are different forms of power relationship), and as with much writing on school discipline, rests on an under-theorised understanding of authority.

In the Scottish context, the narrow focus on pupils’ behaviour is reflected in some of the evidence gathered to inform the development of *The Donaldson Review*. The evidence from a large-scale survey of practising teachers conducted to inform the review suggested that ‘behaviour management’ was perceived to be one of the ‘most useful aspects of course, in terms of areas of learning, in preparation for first post’ (Scottish Government 2011, p. 35, Chart 4.1). This is not surprising, given that ‘unnoticed ways of maintaining order’ have long been considered one of the hallmarks of teachers’ expertise (Payne and Hustler, 1980, p. 49). Nevertheless, it brings to mind the perceived flaws of ITE in Scotland, namely the emphasis on ‘narrow training of immediate and direct relevance to the classroom’ (p. 6). *The Donaldson Review* identifies as a priority that ‘all new teachers should be confident in their ability to know how to manage challenging behaviour’ (Scottish Government 2011, p. 36). It is thus not surprising that effective ‘classroom management and organisation’ feature prominently amongst the professional standards that teachers are expected to master in order to obtain provisional and full registration with the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS 2012, p. 16). This has further narrowed the

terms of the debate among practitioners, policy-makers and teacher educators in respect of authority relations in education. This is not to say that *The Standards for Registration* fail to address broader issues of diversity, equity and social inclusion. Our aim here is merely to draw attention to the assumptions behind the statements relating to the establishment and maintenance of authority relations.

We certainly do not dismiss as illegitimate the concerns of neophyte teachers in respect of addressing challenging behaviour. However, we suggest that these can only be addressed if pre-service and early-career teachers are encouraged to develop an understanding of authority relations that extends beyond a narrow focus on ‘behaviour management’. There needs to be concomitant attention to how authority relations are established in practice. There is nothing in *The Standards for Registration* that necessarily precludes engagement with educational sociology within university-based programmes. However, many teacher educators have a professional formation as primary school teachers, and thus may lack a sound foundation in the disciplines of education. Moreover, the emphasis on work-based placements during initial teacher education may further serve to reinforce the emphasis on skills and techniques rather than encounters with sociological theory. As Gillies (2016, p. 156) observes in his critique of the notion of ‘reflective practice’ in relation to ITE:

Of more direct significance to the issue of reflective practice, however, the development of enlarged thought would involve exposure to, and increasing familiarity with, a range of relevant viewpoints and perspectives ... The increasing focus on placements and school settings as the sites of initial teacher education, and the political antipathy to theory and to university involvement (in England, for example), render this much more problematic.

A full consideration of these factors falls beyond the scope of this paper. For now we shall maintain focus on the implications of the language used in respect of (teachers) developing positive relationships (with pupils) in the standards document.

In order to satisfy the demands set out by the GTCS, teachers in Scotland are expected to ‘develop positive relationships’ and *positive behaviour strategies*’ (GTCS 2012, pp. 13 and 17). To this end, pre-service teachers are expected ‘to apply the school’s positive behaviour policy, including strategies for understanding and preventing bullying’; and to identify any need for advice on behaviour management, seeking support where necessary. In addition, they are expected to demonstrate an

awareness of the research-evidence base in justifying their choice of behaviour management strategy (GTCS 2012, para. 3.2.2). The reference to strategy might be taken as a marker of the kind of narrow instrumental approach explicitly rejected by *The Donaldson Review*.

It is perhaps to be expected that there is a lack of theoretical and empirical understanding of the nature of classroom dynamics in *The Standards for Registration*, given that these are in essence a statement of mandatory requirements for pre-service teachers. Although it is possible to see references to diversity, equity and social inclusion elsewhere in the document, there is no account of variations in patterns of behaviour due to socio-economic differences; gender; race and other variables that may have a profound influence on power relations in the classroom. The classroom is construed as a monolith: powerful, indivisible and therefore not subject to variation according to socio-economic context. There are references to ‘classroom practice’ (p. 23), ‘classroom organisation and management’ (p. 20), ‘classroom resources’ (p. 20), but none to the classroom as a locus for interaction. We suggest that there is a need for greater emphasis on *phronesis*, on the practical wisdom of teachers rather than upon *techne*, the development of a set of skills. The latter does little to serve the aim of ‘revitalising’ and extending teachers’ professionalism. Furthermore, the narrow construction of authority relations that is implicit in the examples of policy documentation considered above diverts attention from the many instances in which there is *consensus* rather than *conflict* in the classroom. Such consensus is borne out of layers of micro-situational dynamics of interaction that underpin pre-existing traits that are brought into the interaction by pupils and teachers.

In sum, the net effect of the focus on positive behaviour strategies in *The Standards for Registration* is to invest the teacher with authority as an essential attribute that is the product of an *extrinsic* conception of power relations (Rafanell and Gorringer, 2010). As Macleod et al. (2012, p. 493) point out, the implication is that teachers used to have authority, that they no longer do so, and that this is a situation that requires urgent redress. In contrast, we suggest that authority emerges as an *intrinsic* relation that is constituted through face-to-face interactions with others (Rafanell, 2013).

We now turn our attention to a contemporary exploration of authority relations in the classroom (Macleod et al, 2012). We shall explore the extent to which their mode of argument demonstrates similar characteristics to those that were evident in the policy

examples considered above. We suggest that there is an indirect appeal in the article by Macleod et al (2012) to a vision of ‘a social world carried along by its *vis insita* which frees agents from this endless work of creating or restoring social relations’ (Bourdieu, 1995, p. 130).

Understanding authority in ‘student-teacher’ relationships

Macleod et al. (2012) make a substantial contribution to broadening our understanding of authority relations in the classroom. For instance, they point out the ‘narrow and restricted’ conceptualisation of authority in education policy and educational research. For all its merits, however, we suggest that their contribution reveals the tacit adoption of approaches that reify a series of actions and recast them as ‘positive behaviour management’, as well as treating individuals (students and teachers) as homogenous groups. The implication is that these two elements are configured *outside* the classroom. Where there is attention to classroom dynamics, it is largely restricted to a consideration of relations between pupils and teachers, understood as a relationship between two ready-formed entities. In contrast, we suggest that authority relationships are constituted via ‘the phenomenon of mutual susceptibility to sanctioning practices’ of *all* the individuals involved in the classroom setting, teachers and pupils alike (Rafanell, 2013, p. 20).

Macleod et al. (2012, p. 493) note that

The apparent reluctance of educationalists [i.e. policy-makers, practitioners and academics] to engage with the concept of authority (except to consider the consequences of a breakdown of authority for discipline in schools) may stem from [an] association of authority with power and domination

They link this tendency with broader developments in social theory, ‘where the concept of power is construed almost entirely in negative terms and understood as synonymous with domination’ (p. 494). As we saw above, the implication in the policy documentation is that authority is a pre-formed entity that can be made manifest by the implementation of, say, a ‘behaviour-management’ strategy. The contribution of Macleod et al (2012) to the debate has been invaluable, not least because it has opened up educational research to the wider influences of social theory, drawing *inter alia* upon the work of Hearn (2012) and Wrong (2002). Nevertheless, we suggest that their work reveals a particular understanding of power dynamics that also merits further exploration. We shall now explore the assumptions

that underlie the approach adopted by Macleod et al. (2012) in order to demonstrate the extent to which these might be considered to *support* rather than *challenge* the assumptions evident in the policy examples considered above.

Drawing on Peters (1966), Macleod et al. (2012) make a distinction between authority in relation to knowledge (i.e. 'being *an* authority' on something) and authority in relation to conduct (i.e. 'being *in* authority' over someone). Their contribution rests upon revalidating the latter through an exploration of the notion of 'personal authority'. The latter term is derived from the work of the American sociologist Dennis Wrong (2002). The authors offer the following definition of personal authority, based on Wrong's typology, with specific reference to educational contexts:

Personal authority is compliance [on the part of the pupil] that rests on the personal qualities of the teacher. The pupil's compliance arises from a desire to please the teacher, rather than the fact [that] the teacher is perceived to have powers, expertise or status endorsed by the school community (although it is possible for someone with those assets to exercise personal authority). (Macleod et al., 2012, p. 502)

The implication of the above is that personal authority emerges through a restricted, dyadic, unidirectional relationship. According to this view, personal authority is inherent in the relationship between the teacher and the pupil, a relationship in which the power dynamics have been pre-determined by overarching structural norms or other factors that are external to the classroom dynamics. In the account provided by Macleod et al (2012), the agency of the teacher is foregrounded: the respective position of the pupil (as a unified category, writ large, as it were) is also pre-determined. The pupil is the individual agent from whom consent and compliance are expected; the teacher is the one to whom pupils owe compliance and respect. The positioning of the pupil as she who desires to please the teacher presupposes a particular conception of power dynamics, in which the relationship is perceived as between pupils as isolated entities and the teacher as the one to whom unequivocal compliance is owed. Moreover, this conception of the teacher's authority establishes a causal relation between the personal authority of the teacher and the disposition and behaviour of the pupils in the classroom.

As we indicated above, this causal relation is also evident in the policy documentation. Consider, for example, the following title: *Better Behaviour, Better*

Learning. Report of the Discipline Task Group (Scottish Government, 2001). The view that better behaviour necessarily precedes better learning implies that the pupil is implicated in the reproduction of arrangements that once instituted ‘can then subsist without the agents having to create them continuously’ (Bourdieu 1995, p. 131). Bourdieu’s conception of power helps us to understand the tacit conception that pervades the policy documentation considered above: teachers enter into classrooms with certain sets of skills that allow them to create a relationship of authority/compliance between themselves and the pupils. This tacit conception of power thus ignores the fundamental aspect of group dynamics that conceives the member of the group as the product of continuous interaction on a daily basis.

The conception of personal authority adumbrated by Macleod et al. (2012) leaves no room for an account of the interpersonal dynamics between *pupils* in an emerging collective. Macleod et al. (2012) are right to regard personal authority as a necessary counter-weight to research that has emerged in recent years in response to the dominant policy agenda and focused on measuring levels of indiscipline or evaluating new approaches to restoring discipline in the classroom, such as restorative practices (Munn, Sharp, Lloyd, Macleod, McCluskey, Brown and Hamilton, 2011; McCluskey, Lloyd, Kane, Riddell, Stead and Weedon, 2008). They are also correct to suggest that the narrow focus on discipline and control ‘prohibits full consideration of the range of relationships in which authority manifests itself’ in educational contexts. However, a consideration of the interpersonal dynamics between and among *pupils* falls beyond the scope of their inquiry and thus merits further exploration.

Macleod et al. (2012, p. 493) draw upon the other elements of the typology of power relations elaborated by Wrong (2002) (in addition to personal authority) as a ‘useful conceptual framework’ for exploring the ‘domination of the narrow discourse of authority as control or force and a focus on pupils’ behaviour’. They then proceed to demonstrate how the five forms of authority outlined by Wrong (2002), namely coercive, legitimate, competent, personal and authority by inducement, have ‘some application to the classroom setting’ (Macleod et al. 2012, p. 499). The authors point to the undue emphasis on coercive authority and authority by inducement in ITE programmes and recommendations for classroom practice. These approaches underpin many systems of what is commonly referred to as ‘behaviour management’ in the classroom context. This is in accordance with the focus on the ‘behaviour

management' dimension of authority relations that is evident in the examples of policy documentation considered above (Scottish Government, 2011; General Teaching Council for Scotland, 2012).

The approach proposed by Macleod et al. (2012) offers much of value, yet it embeds certain weaknesses that merit detailed consideration, especially in the context of a critique of conventional analyses of domination (see, for example, Rafanell and Gorringer, 2010; Rafanell, 2013). Macleod et al. (2012) implicitly reject the role of micro-interactions as constitutive and thus fall prey to a deterministic bias that places undue emphasis on reified macro-structural features, such as the elements of Wrong's typology. In so doing, they fail to acknowledge 'the central role that *all* individuals play in the creation of regimes of power' (Rafanell and Gorringer, 2010, p. 605) (emphasis added). By appealing to notions of competent and legitimate authority as a means of achieving a more nuanced understanding of authority relations, Macleod et al. (2012) appear to subscribe to the Bourdieusian view that power is possessed by particular individuals by virtue of their structural positioning in particular hierarchies. The fact that teachers are located in a particular structural milieu places them in relation to existing structural arrangements and results in their incorporation, their embodiment in a 'habitus'. This set of dispositions is established through particular forms of socialisation and acquires a durable, constant quality that can be transposed to other fields.

Drawing upon Wrong (2002), Macleod et al. (2012) argue that competent authority is derived from the teacher's status as a professional; legitimate authority, on the other hand, is enacted as a result of a consensus that 'the person issuing the instruction has an acknowledged right to command' (Macleod et al. 2012, p. 499). In adumbrating these terms in respect of authority relations in education we suggest that these authors put undue emphasis on individual teachers' capacity to act in the context of reified macro-structures such as professionalism and legitimacy. There is thus scant regard to the fact that collective patterns of behaviour, such as those that would enable a teacher to enact her authority, come into being through micro-situational interactions amongst all parties in the classroom: between teachers and pupils, between pupils and pupils, and between teachers and the wider institutional setting. This is not to say that Macleod et al. (2012) take no account of micro-situational interactions. Indeed they point out that 'in educational research there is little in the way of consideration of the

pedagogical relationship at the heart of the teaching project' (p. 495). However, as this quotation illustrates, these relationships are primarily conceptualised in terms of interactions between teachers and pupils, and are 'educational' in the narrow sense of the term, i.e. related to teaching.

Moreover, in this discourse 'teacher' and 'pupil' are regarded as reified categories 'writ large' (as in the locution 'student-teacher relationship') rather than as 'heterogeneous and calculative but mutually susceptible individuals engaged in continuous interaction (Rafanell and Gorringe 2010, p. 604). Macleod et al. (2012) do not take account of interactions between and among pupils. Indeed they appear only to ascribe agency to pupils in so far as the latter are collectively viewed as bearers of rights. For instance, they note that it is 'legitimate authority that may be most challenged by the rights agenda in schools' (p. 499). Drawing on the work of R.S. Peters (1966), they introduce the notion of 'self-liquidating authority'. By this they mean that 'teachers encourage pupils not to accept what they say without question just because a teacher is saying it, but to exercise their own judgement about what is being said' (Macleod et al. 2012, p. 500). Although this seems to provide an opening into at least the possibility of acknowledging the existence of micro-situational dynamics that open up the capacity of pupils to contest and resist teachers 'authority', this is not conceived as part and parcel of the constitution of such 'authority'. On the contrary, there is an immediate appeal to another corpus of reified (and embodied) knowledge in the further explication of the notion of legitimate authority. As they explain:

What Peters and Wrong both seem to be concerned with is how the status that comes from being seen as an expert could be undermined if teachers are successful in developing expertise in their pupils. For Peters this can, at least in part, be ameliorated by the expertise that teachers also possess in disciplines in education that is not (necessarily) to be passed on to pupils (Macleod et al. 2012, p. 500)

The claim that legitimate authority is under threat to the 'rights agenda' further exemplifies the inherent neglect of the role of micro-interactive dynamics as constitutive of teachers' authority in the approach adopted by these authors and thus signals a tacit adoption of a macro-structural approach. It also indicates an unquestioning acceptance of the inseparable connection between authority and 'a rule-governed form of life' (Peters, 1966, p. 1). In short, Macleod et al. (2012) appeal to an account that privileges 'the independence of [shifting] macro-structural phenomena

from individuals' day-to-day activity, that is, its "objective" nature' (Rafanell, 2013, p. 3) as a determinant of what is to be the classroom dynamics. This is evident in their explication of Peters' notion of rule-governed forms of life. They explain that

By this he meant that lying behind the idea of authority is a presumption that there is a social order, a shared understanding of how people ought to behave and the rules they ought to follow (Macleod et al. 2012, p. 499)

The assumption here is that consensus precedes interaction, in so far as it is 'automatically generated among members who inhabit a similar structural objective world' (Rafanell 2013, p. 4).

The defining feature of the approach to power relations evident in Macleod et al. (2012) and in the policy examples relating to 'behaviour management' is that individuals (in this case teachers and pupils) are portrayed precisely as if they operate in a 'pre-existing, pre-given configuration of the social world which is not affected by micro-level interactions' (Rafanell and Gorringer 2010, p. 610). It is not clear how the type of account furnished by Macleod et al. (2012) can provide the conceptual means adequately to address the corrosive effect of the low-level disruption that has persistently been identified as one of the main challenges facing teachers in the classroom (e.g. Munn et al. 2011; Scottish Government, 2013). Low-level disruption is constituted by micro-level interactions – particularly those between pupils. These remain beyond the frame in the approach to the theorisation of power advanced in Macleod et al (2012).

We now turn our attention to an exposition of the theoretical basis for an alternative approach to the conceptualisation of authority relations in the classroom.

The micro-situational foundations of classroom interaction

The guiding analytical framework that has informed the discussion of the policy documents is the theoretical position developed by Rafanell (2013). She compares two major sociological theories, Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (Bourdieu, 1995) and Barnes's less-known Performative Theory of Social Institutions (PTSI).ⁱⁱ Rafanell considers these to be paradigmatic of two opposing sociological conceptions of how social phenomena emerge. This opposition is revealed by the different treatment of the role of individuals' micro-interactive activity. She argues that by explicitly rejecting the role of micro-interactions as constitutive, Bourdieu falls prey to an

unwitting deterministic bias. This has the unfortunate effect of granting an over-deterministic power to macro-phenomena such as socio-economic structural features. Such theoretical accounts, of which Bourdieu's is a case in point, are committed to what Rafanell (2013) describes as an *extrinsic* structuralist model, which unwittingly reifies macro-phenomena as given abstract forces that determine action. Rafanell (2013) maintains that this extrinsic structuralist commitment forecloses two important aspects of sociological theorising: namely, plausible explanations of the emergence of social structures and of the empirically evident heterogeneity among individuals within collectives. In short, Rafanell (2013) suggests that 'extrinsic' structuralism such as Bourdieu's reifies both structures and individuals.

Rafanell (2013) attempts to further the interactionists' claim on the priority of the micro-dynamics of interaction by utilizing the analytical tenets of authors such as Collins (2005) and Barnes (1995). Her theoretical approach attempts to reconsider the interactionists' claim that structure, as in the permanent process of becoming, is the 'product of the collective efforts of individuals' (Blumer, 1986, 2004). This has been widely interpreted as neglecting structural constraints and over-estimating individuals' agency. She argues that this is the case because of the dearth of precise analytical explanations of the nature of the causal role of individuals' interactions upon the emergence of structural phenomena. The theoretical framework developed by Rafanell (2013) attempts to provide such an analytical foundation. This draws attention to another dimension of the reality of (empirical) individuals: namely, the nature and omnipresence of emotions in social life. That is to say that attention to the analytical concerns of the PTSI puts the emphasis on the empirical reality of individuals' constant engagement in inter-subjective validation, and the degree to which emotions are central to this activity. The disjuncture between an extrinsic structuralist account such as Bourdieu's (where the micro-dynamics of interaction and emotions are seen as epiphenomena of social structures) and the PTSI's account lies precisely in the theorising of emotions and micro-dynamics of interactions as the *cause* rather than the *effect* of macro-social phenomena. Rafanell (2013) describes this latter position as an *intrinsic* structuralist model, one that provides an analytical justification to the interactionists: namely an emphasis on affective exchanges. In short, the micro-dynamics of interaction – permeated as they are with affective, value-laden, inter-subjective appraisals of the members of a localized group – must be seen

as constituting not only individuals' subjective experience and action but also the macro-phenomena that circumscribe experience and action. Macro-phenomena are thus considered to be intrinsic rather than extrinsic to the actions of individuals.

The importance of affective dynamics in inter-subjective social sanctioning can be traced beyond the early interactionist debates to Durkheim's structuralist debate about what constitutes a social 'fact' (Rafanell, 2009). Such emphasis on the inner or intrinsic power of individuals' subjective experiences, permeated by affective sanctioning dynamics, connects with what Collins (2005:xi) has described as a 'radical microsociology'. This acknowledges the phenomenological emphasis on the 'existential modality of the social', that is to say on the relevance of 'being with others' (Bauman, 1989) as prior and constitutive of the 'structural' world. Central to such an intrinsic structuralist model is the premise that affective experiences do not exclude rationality and calculative behaviour: rather they are their precondition. In this account both the 'structural' and the 'individual' are ontologically equivalent in so far they both emerge from the dynamics of the micro-interactive actions by which individuals align themselves to the beliefs and practices of others in and through communicative inter-subjective exchanges. These are permeated by the monitoring, controlling and sanctioning of differing individual tendencies, and thus generate collective behaviour and agreement.

Conclusion

We have attempted to counterbalance prevailing approaches to authority relations in the classroom by suggesting that authority is continuously negotiated, challenged, accepted, defined, and ultimately constituted in and through the dynamics of interaction between and amongst pupils (and, by extension, between pupils and teachers). As we saw above, this brings into sharp relief an assumption that is evident in the examples of the policy documentation reviewed above, namely that authority can *unequivocally* be restored to the classroom. Drawing on the work of Rafanell (2009; 2013) and Rafanell and Gorringer (2010), we have attempted to expose the implicit methodological assumptions that underlie this aspiration. For to regard authority as something that has been fully formed outside the classroom, and that can be called into being through the implementation of a strategy is to ignore the complexity of lived experience. Our aim in this article has been to reveal the

pervasive neglect of the importance of the constitutive role of micro-interactions in authority relations as well as an unwitting deterministic bias. The latter is evident in the aspiration unequivocally to restore the authority of adults in the classroom that is evident in the policy documentation, and in the example of educational scholarship considered above.

We examined the tacit assumptions about power dynamics and authority relations that are manifest in some examples of policy documentation relating to pupils' behaviour in the classroom. We make no claims to have conducted an exhaustive survey of policy in this area. Such an enterprise, although potentially valuable in itself, would fall well beyond the scope of this article. We have also attempted to expose the fundamental tensions between the aspiration to revitalise the teaching profession in Scotland by developing teachers as 'reflective, accomplished and enquiring professionals' and the rather narrow and restricted view of authority that is implicit in the very document that sets out these aspirations (Scottish Government 2011, p. 10). This too is an issue that merits further attention, and has implications for the manner in which authority relations are addressed in initial teacher education. As we saw above, the focus in the few examples of policy documentation considered above was primarily on 'managing behaviour', although in more recent documentation there are nebulous invocations of the importance of relationships that 'are rooted in strong values' (Scottish Government, 2011, p. 15), to positive relationships as well as positive behaviour (Scottish Government, 2013). In future work we hope to contribute to the growing debate on authority relations in education by further developing theory for understanding classroom dynamics, based upon close scrutiny of the micro-dynamics of interaction.

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¹ In an article published in 1980, Payne and Hustler pointed out that 'teachers routinely cope with their collections of pupils, managing them without too much difficulty. At least it is our impression that this is the case from mixing with, talking to and observing teachers, although it is not the impression we gain from many sociological studies, where teachers constantly appear to find the classroom situation threatening' (p. 49). On the basis of admittedly limited evidence, it appears that the latter view has gained broad purchase.

ii This is the sociological theory that emerged from the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge (SSK) of the Strong Programme founded by Barry Barnes and David Bloor of the University of Edinburgh (Barnes, Bloor and Henry, 1996).