

BOOK REVIEWS

***Authority and the Teacher*, by William H. Kitchen**

London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014, 202 pp., £16.99 (pbk), ISBN 978-1-4725-2984-8

Authority and the Teacher is a book based on the doctoral thesis of William H. Kitchen, a former teacher of mathematics. The author sets out to re-examine and pursue the debate around authoritative education, which centres on teacher authority. The author builds on the work of philosophers such as Polanyi, Oakeshott, and Wittgenstein to build a conceptual understanding of knowledge, teaching, and learning so as to highlight the need for a foundational authority in education, at the same time addressing counterarguments from the progressive tradition. The arguments for bringing back trust and faith in the judgement of teachers are persuasive; however the case for establishing unquestioned acceptance among young pupils of the judgements of this authority is problematic. Nonetheless, the project has managed to forge useful connections and ask some tough questions: Why is teachers' authority being undermined? Why do we need this authority in education? What is the relationship of teachers' authority to teaching and knowledge development? What are the consequences for education and learning of an absence of teachers' authority? Such questions are worthwhile and important to engage with in the quest to better understand and define teachers' authority and, more broadly, the role of other authorities within education.

In 'A definition of authority' (chapter 3: 53) the author mentions that one needs to separate authority from power. He explains that the component of legitimacy within authority accompanied by discipline, i.e. habit formation, differentiates it from power, whereas power involves punishment to instil fear in the pupil and is rather damaging. However, one is left wondering whether teachers could ever have authority without any real power, an aspect left unexplored by the author. This is because of his focus on a singular kind of authority, rather than on the multiple kinds that are operational within the education system. On the other hand, the author believes that legitimacy can be achieved only from the process of training within the community, without any mention of gaining classroom legitimacy. He argues that this is because children have neither knowledge, nor the capacity to reason, nor doubt to begin with. The teacher, then, is the sole individual who can teach them and make them learned individuals like herself. Although the author acknowledges the importance of discussion in the classroom, he maintains that the teacher should be the one to stir children towards an idea of correctness (chapter 4: 70). This notion of correctness espoused by the author may hold for mathematics teaching, but becomes problematic in other disciplines like social sciences, which in many ways rely on students relating their classroom knowledge to their knowledge and understanding of the world outside and on adding to the collective knowledge of their peers and teacher.

A good part of the first chapter is spent in an attempt to persuade the reader of the worthwhileness of engaging with arguments for authority in education, in the climate of child-centred and progressive ideals that have come to evoke suspicion about any discussion of authority. This chapter draws heavily on the sociological perspective of Frank Furedi (2009), a proponent of adult authority in education, who claims that the loss of interest in the topic is a consequence of misconceptions and confusions around the idea of authority and what it represents. Education, Furedi says, is being perceived as a battleground whereon societal problems are fought over and

educational goals are directed towards the future, with little concern for the present, leading to instability within the education establishment. Furedi argues that this has caused the demise of traditional authority, alongside frequent rather than occasional 'educational intervention with an anti-knowledge and anti-authority campaign' (City and Guilds Group, 2014: 12), i.e. a move towards lifelong learning models that accord diminishing importance to formal schooling, subject disciplines, and the authority of the teacher. Building on the sociological arguments of Furedi, the author explores the role of the teacher in relation to knowledge. The author states that knowledge should be seen as a collective inheritance of experiences and judgement, contrary to the current rhetoric in education of change, skills-based education, and lifelong learning, which he considers an effort to disown our past practices and intellectual heritage without any critical engagement, as when he notes that 'one wonders if Euclid's geometry ever becomes redundant?' (p. 18). He argues that there is no better candidate to initiate the young into this knowledge than the teacher, with the legitimacy she gains from the adult community as a trained expert; trust in teachers, hence, is not ill founded.

Previous arguments made in favour of authoritative education are taken up in chapter 2. According to the author, G.H. Bantock and R.S. Peters both defend authoritative education against the popular progressive ideology. However, to identify progressivism with an ideology is not just a misrepresentation of the progressive movement but points to a misunderstanding of the term. Bantock is recognized for bringing the ideas of freedom and authority together, while R.S. Peters is noted for elucidating the role of the teacher in initiating the child into a shared value system. Lawrence Stenhouse's contribution is acknowledged in bringing forth knowledge as a force for the emancipation of teachers and students, but the author distances himself from Stenhouse's suggestion of extending more control to students over their learning. The author thinks that the child-centred movement has provided important criticism of traditional education but failed to provide any solutions. In the author's view, this movement promotes an anti-authority campaign through its support for the idea that the child should be able to create her own meaning of the world, thus reducing the teacher's status to that of a facilitator. This position is thus characterized by the author as irresponsible and restrictive of the idea of knowledge. In addressing the topic of creativity, which under authoritative education is assumed to be confining, the author argues that this claim is baseless, as even creative processes require initiation by an expert teacher to hone students' skills for creative endeavours later. Choice is often associated with freedom, yet, drawing from Bantock (1970), the author believes this needs to be seen alongside responsibility, which is learnt only after a process of discipline and initiation by educators, before choice is made available to children.

Knowledge is explored through Polanyi, Oakeshott, and Wittgenstein (chapters 5, 6, and 7) as involving not just facts but also judgement, which can be developed under submission to the teacher's authority. While information can be gained from sources other than the teacher, this information is useless until combined with judgement and can only be taught by the teacher and imbibed by the pupil in imitation of the teacher and her practice. At the same time the question of foundationalism in knowledge, i.e. of what knowledge is based on, ultimately culminates in chapter 8 (156) with Wittgenstein's categorical distinction between Certainty and Knowledge, the idea being that knowledge results after a proposition has been subjected to doubt and the doubt circumvented. Certainties on the other hand are indubitable. It is these habitual bedrock certainties, previously debated by the community, on which knowledge is founded. Teaching is, then, based on trust rather than reason. But these are the very ideas on which one finds it difficult to side with the author. Even if one agrees that one begins with no foundation in knowledge, one is left with crucial questions: for instance, at what point in time is that foundation of knowledge achieved? Even if this judgement is left to the discretion of the teacher, to claim that certain

knowledge has been subjected to doubt by people in the past and hence should be taken at face value is unacceptable if one does not want to undermine the intellectual capacity of children and wants to promote critical thinking skills. Questions and doubts are not just for challenging the legitimacy of the teacher or her knowledge but can work as a mechanism in the process of learning (Legare *et al.*, 2013). They help further the process of thinking and channel our search for further clarification or information on the topic. They can also provide feedback to teachers about student understanding, an aspect the author fails to consider.

William H. Kitchen's work brings to the surface important questions in relation to knowledge, teaching, and learning. There remain several issues, as I have highlighted, that the author has not considered in his project and that need further work. However, the book has paved a useful path to re-examine arguments for and against an authoritative education.

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