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Towards a broader understanding of authority in education

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Introduction

Recent guidance from the Department of Education on pupil behaviour (Department for Education, 2011a) aims to ‘unequivocally restore[s] adult authority to the classroom’. A number of assumptions are being made here which would merit investigation. Is authority something which adults in schools once had? Is it desirable? Has it now been lost? In the government document, immediately following the claim to restore adult authority, is a list of new powers including the ‘legal power to use reasonable force’ and the right to search without consent. This raises the even more fundamental question of what kind of authority does the Department of Education (DfE) have in mind when it states it can be restored by the use of force? Indeed the idea of using force to build authority is inherently contradictory (they are different forms of power relationship), and as with much writing on the topic of school discipline, rests on an under-theorized understanding of authority.

Hearn (2012) comments on a similar trend in social theory, where the concept of power is construed almost entirely in negative terms and understood as synonymous with domination. As Wrong (2002) observed, even in those definitions of power which do not invoke the notion of coercion ‘the term nevertheless manages to maintain something of a malign, sinister, even demonic aura.’ (p. xii). The consequence is that those forms of power relationships that might be viewed in a more positive light are often ignored. Authority in education is a case in point. Although educational researchers have scrutinized power relationships in schools, authority is usually absent from these discussions or is conflated with (?) other forms of power. There is a multitude of research exploring classroom dynamics and interaction, however as Pace and Hemmings (2007) point out ‘these studies have not included explicit and theoretically grounded analysis of student-teacher authority relations’ (p. 5). Nevertheless, understanding the teacher-pupil authority relationship

is central to understanding what goes on in classrooms, in particular in relation to school discipline. The apparent reluctance of educationalists to engage with the concept of authority (except to consider the consequences of a breakdown of authority for discipline in schools) may stem from this association of authority with power and domination.

The apparent meaning of authority in the DfE document quoted above has more in common with what social theorists would label as 'force'. Elsewhere in recent guidance from the Department (DfE, 2011b) there are references to the importance of 'classroom management' and 'rewards and sanctions', and frequent references to 'disciplinary penalties for breaking rules', 'powers to discipline' and 'disciplinary action'. There is mention in the same document of 'pastoral care', but it refers to pastoral care for staff, not pupils. In a similar vein, by far the most popular texts for teachers, judging by sales rankings, are of the 'how to control your class' variety. In this literature, as with the recent policy it appears to be an understanding of authority as 'strategies for controlling unruly behaviour' that dominates.

However, authority is not the one-dimensional concept that a reading of education policy and professional literature might imply; it is a multi-dimensional concept that encompasses a range of different forms. It is not just in policy and practice that a narrow, restricted meaning of authority exists. Current research into school discipline tends to focus on large-scale analyses of the nature and extent of 'the problem' of indiscipline (e.g. Munn *et al.*, 2011), or on smaller scale evaluations of specific interventions (e.g. Blatchford *et al.*, 2009; McCluskey *et al.*, 2010; Cross *et al.*, 2011). Although some of these interventions are aimed at moving away from traditional behaviourist strategies, and attempt to promote an ethos in which indiscipline is less likely to occur, the authority relationship between pupils and teachers is not addressed directly. Overall in educational research there is little in the way of consideration of the pedagogical relationship at the heart of the teaching project (Griffiths, 2011). We suggest that, at least in part, it is the absence of an adequate theorizing of authority in educational research that has led to the domination of the narrow discourse of authority as control or force and a focus on pupils' behaviour and on the theme of discipline in schools. This narrow understanding of authority prohibits consideration

of the range of relationships in which it manifests itself. In particular we believe it has led to a neglect of the important notion of personal authority (Wrong, 2002).

In this paper we suggest that a turn to sociological and philosophical understandings of authority will offer a more nuanced account of teacher-pupil authority; one that will problematize dominant practitioner views as well as offer a conceptual framework for educational researchers who have an interest in school discipline. We begin by examining the context of the apparent demise in teachers' authority, by briefly noting recent ideological shifts in education policy and in particular the impact this has had on the professional status of teachers. Then we provide an account of how authority has been theorized, highlighting the approach of Wrong (2002). In Wrong's typology we believe there is a comprehensive analysis of the forms of authority open to teachers. Wrong (2002) offers a neutral conceptual framework to assist understanding of the forms of authority that are being enacted. It is our contention that an understanding of both the descriptive and the normative writing on authority are important if teachers are to be well equipped to reflect on their own authority relations in the classroom. We shall draw upon the sociological and philosophical literature on authority, discipline and control in schools. We conclude with the suggestion that 'personal authority' as described by Wrong (2002) offers particular potential to teachers in their day-to-day interactions with pupils.

Challenges to teachers' authority

As Giroux and MacLaren note 'authority is inescapably related to a particular vision of what schools should be' (1986, p. 224). Different assumptions and values that comprise the hidden structures of schooling result in different views on what constitutes ideal authority relations in schools. For example, the radical agenda of education for citizenship invokes the notion of emancipatory authority (Pace and Hemmings, 2006b). Others focus on the role of schools in inducting pupils into their cultural heritage (Furlong, 2005). Representatives of the child-centred progressive movement speak in terms of 'sharing authority' (Gore, 1993) and of the importance of pedagogy over subject knowledge (Lawlor, 1990).

The recent evolution of education policy in the UK has played out in the context of the global rise of neo-liberalism. Giroux and MacLaren (1986) commented on what they saw as a redefinition of teachers' work in the US, where thinking is divorced from implementation, and the teacher becomes a mere technician. In England and Wales secondary teachers have been caught up in the 'impoverished' language of performance management (Nuffield Foundation, 2009). The Nuffield report recognises the current threat to the authority of teachers as professionals: '[T]eachers should be central to curriculum development, not the 'deliverers' of someone else's curriculum.' (p. 8). Other aspects of neo-liberalism will also have an impact. These include the rise of managerialism, and loss of trust in the professions alongside a rise in accountability (O'Neill, 2002). Indeed, the status of teaching as a profession since the 1970s is the subject of debate. Hoyle and John (1995) describe the 'new professionalism' as one that moved away from notions of autonomy, individual knowledge and responsibility. There are some differences between Scotland and England that would bear further empirical investigation. In England there is a discernable trend to view ITE as a 'technical rationalist procedure' best situated in schools (Furlong, 2005). In Scotland, on the other hand, the Donaldson Report placed explicit emphasis on the need for teacher education to go beyond classroom-based apprenticeships.

In addition to changes in the professional status of teachers, current curriculum developments and reviews across the UK raise questions about teachers as experts. In which areas do teachers in the 21st century have specific expertise? Traditionally their expertise resided in discipline knowledge, but the Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland has been criticized for sidelining the place of subject disciplines, famously being renamed by Chris Woodhead as 'curriculum for ignorance' (Woodhead, 2009). In addition we are living in 'digital times', and the 'knowledge economy' demands that the school curriculum prepares pupils for this new context, but what are the implications for teacher pupil relations of these new technologies in which pupils often display more competence than their teachers? Although this feels like a new challenge to teachers' authority it is similar to that described over 40 years ago by R.S. Peters (1966) who wished to preserve the status of teachers as experts by

emphasizing their expertise in the ‘science’ of teaching as well as in their subject knowledge.

There are implications here for initial teacher education (ITE) and continuing professional development (CPD). Developments in England and Wales in providing alternative routes to Qualified Teacher Status that do not rely on the university sector raise issues for the kinds of expertise to which teachers can lay claim. Pring (2002) describes the shift over time as one from ‘theoretically based practice to more practically based theory’ (p. 291). The Sutherland Report (1997) identified three aspects that were central to the professional status of teachers: theoretical knowledge and understanding, research informed practical competence and a commitment to high standards of teaching. Pring (2002) argued that the particular nature of the practical knowledge required by teachers, ‘intelligent, complex, critical, suffused with moral values, research-based, but none-the-less practical’ (p. 306) necessarily leads to a reduced role for universities in teacher education. However, this is not to deny that there is a role for universities. It will be important to explore and monitor whether changes in how teachers are educated have had any impact on their status as experts, as the consequences for teachers’ authority may be significant.

A further feature of the impact of the neo-liberal political agenda on teachers is the emphasis that it places on the rights and responsibilities of pupils, and on the role of schooling in developing active citizenship. The extent to which this happens in practice has been questioned. For example Cunningham and Lavalette (2004) point to a ‘deception’ at the heart of citizenship education, as evidenced by the response to pupils who participated in strikes against the war in Iraq. Similarly Gewirtz (2000) argues that pupils continue to be seen as problems to be managed rather than as individuals capable of making decisions. However the policy rhetoric remains, and there is at least an appearance of the rights of children being given due attention in schools. Indeed the ‘rights agenda’ has been identified by some as a key factor in the ‘breakdown’ of authority (for a detailed account see Arum, 2005). The fact that Bill Rogers (1998) prefaces his textbook on behavior management with the following claim is a case in point: ‘students are more conscious and vocal about “their rights”, less “compliant” (much less) to adult authority *per se...*’ (p. vii).

The concern with indiscipline in schools, which implies a challenge to teachers' authority, is nothing new (Ref XXXX). What has changed is the type of interventions which teachers are permitted to use in response to indiscipline. A shift towards promoting positive discipline, with an emphasis on relationships has been apparent over the previous decade or more, evidenced by the emphasis on children's rights, school ethos, pupil participation, social emotional aspects of learning and interventions such as restorative practices (RefS XXX). These changes imply qualitative shifts in the power relationships between teacher and pupils, and therefore it is no surprise that they are frequently identified as a *cause* of the breakdown of authority rather than as part of the solution. However the nature of these relationships has been inadequately theorized, and the possibility of teachers maintaining authority other than through exercising control has not been adequately explored. This is of particular importance now as the Westminster government guidance referred to in the opening paragraph suggests that control is firmly back on the agenda. Therefore we now turn to offer what we hope might be seen as a first step on the way to a broader theorization of teacher-pupil authority relationships.

Theorising authority

Hearn (2012) argues that the related concepts of domination, authority and legitimacy are required in order to develop a more comprehensive analysis of power relations. The link between these concepts is complex, with confusion stemming from difficulties with the translation of Weber's term *Herrschaft*, which has no single English cognate. Weber (1958) argued that specific systems of domination enjoy legitimacy to the degree that these are supported by people's belief in the rightness and validity of the commands and expectations imposed on them. This is more akin to a contemporary understanding of authority, the most straightforward definition of which is the ability to give orders (or instructions) and to have them obeyed. As Hearn (2012) notes '[the exercise of authority] implies a communicative relationship, however broadly defined, between the givers and receivers of orders' (p. ?).

Confusingly, Weber's term *Herrschaft* has been translated both as 'domination' (Roth & Wittich, 1968) and as 'authority' (Wrong, 2002). However it is translated, a

key aspect of his concept appears to be the notion of discipline – understood here as the habituated obedience to a command. For many commentators, Weber’s analysis amounts to a view of authority as ‘legitimate domination’. According to Weber, there are three bases on which authority is made legitimate – rational, traditional and charismatic (Spencer, 1970; Ritzer, 2000). Authority that is legitimized rationally is based on a belief that the rules that are being enacted are legal and that the person who is asking you to comply has the right to do so. For Weber, this rational-legal authority lay at the heart of the development of modern Western societies. Traditionally legitimized authority is based on a belief in the sanctity of traditions, and again in the legitimacy of those who are exercising authority. Charismatic authority is legitimized by the devotion of people to exceptional leaders (or leaders who are thought to be exceptional) and to the values that they profess.

The leading writers on authority in schools in the US (Pace and Hemmings, 2007) also take Weber as a starting point, but following Parsons (1947) consider the notion of ‘professional authority’. However, they miss possibly the most relevant contribution to the theorizing of authority from social theory, namely the work of Dennis Wrong (2002). Unlike other theorists who viewed all authority as legitimate, Wrong argued that legitimate authority is only one of a range of forms of authority. As we believe that these will be of great interest to educators and policy makers, we outline them in some detail below.

Wrong’s five forms of authority

Wrong (2002) considers that authority is a form of power that can be distinguished from other power relationships such as persuasion, manipulation and force because unlike these other relationships what is important is the source of the instruction. The source may be regarded as an authority for various reasons, perhaps because of perceived status, resources to which they have access, or personal qualities. What differentiates the forms of authority is the motivation of the individual for obeying. Wrong’s (2002) expanded concept of authority clearly distinguishes between domination, which involves the use of force, and coercive authority, which may involve the threat of the use of force.

In this section we will show how each of the five forms of authority as outlined by Wrong (2002) - coercive, legitimate, competent, personal and authority by inducement - has some application to the classroom setting. Wrong (1976) acknowledges that the lines between forms of authority are permeable as these different forms can overlap. A person becomes a member of a profession by virtue of education and certification, and is accorded some professional status that will translate into legitimate authority, the extent of which will depend upon the specific profession. Similarly, access to positions within an organisation that control sanctions (coercive authority) may rest on demonstrable competence and expertise in management (competent authority). Although each of these will never exist in 'pure' form, we do believe that the typology is a potentially useful conceptual tool for reflecting on teacher-pupil relations.

Legitimate authority

Legitimate authority is being enacted when the person issuing the instruction has an acknowledged right to command. It is therefore 'grounded in the consensus of the group' (Wrong, 2002, p. 61). Legitimate authority relies on a perceived obligation to obey because of the social context and the existence of shared norms. Authority relationships of this kind exist between individuals who are social actors and occupy social roles between which there are established patterns of relationship. On this understanding a child will obey a teacher, even if they do not want to, because they are aware that that is what children in schools do. The legitimate authority of the teacher rests on the pupil recognizing the right of the teacher to issue a command and their duty to obey by virtue of their respective social roles. It is legitimate authority that may be most challenged by the rights agenda in schools. The relationship between the social roles occupied by teachers and pupils has changed to one in which it is no longer the duty of the pupil to do as they are told, but rather their right to question what they are being told and to resist.

Peters (1966) made a case for the form of social order that he believed ought to exist in schools, which resonates with legitimate authority. He began with the statement that authority is 'inseparably connected with a rule-governed form of life' (p. 1). 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 which they ought to follow. Peters' hope was that over time pupils who followed rules as laid down by teachers would develop self-discipline. Legitimate authority can be appealed to in situations where there are agreed correct forms of behaviour and where there are recognized experts (teachers) in what constitutes correct behaviour. Similarly, Metz (1978) observed in relation to the school setting that legitimate authority works when there is a shared value system, a moral order that everyone believes in. In the absence of a shared moral order, Metz believes that conflict will occur. Legitimate authority may therefore be further under threat if the warnings of a breakdown of social order are correct (Young, 2007; Minton, 2009).

Competent authority

Competent authority receives the fullest exposition in Wrong (1976) and has the clearest link to the authority of teachers that derives from their status as professionals. Wrong (1976) traces the origins of the notion of competent authority to the work of Aristotle and Plato, who were both clear that such authority is exercised for the 'good of the governed' (Aristotle, 1952). Competent authority for Wrong (1976) is 'a power relation in which the subject obeys...out of belief in the authority's superior competence to decide which actions will best serve the subject's interests and goals' (p 197). Here Wrong clearly distinguishes between competent authority, which rests on a belief in the knowledge and skills of the authority, and legitimate authority, which is dependent upon on the role occupied by a particular individual in a hierarchy. Competent authority is also to be distinguished from persuasion, in which compliance with an instruction depends on the content of the instruction. Patients who heed the advice of their doctors do so not because they are convinced by a professional's rational appraisal of their disease, but because they believe that doctors have specific expertise and the best interests of their patients at heart. It is this understanding of authority which is perhaps closest to our everyday usage, for example, as when people are described as 'authorities' on a subject.

It is in his discussion of competent authority that Wrong (2002) makes one of his few direct references to the teacher-pupil relationship, and it is to show how teaching differs from other professions in a key respect. Wrong (2002) uses the term 'self-liquidating' to describe the competent authority of teachers. He argues that one

element of the professional responsibility of a teacher is to share their expertise with their pupils, thereby sharing (liquidating) the grounds of their authority. This argument rests on the assumption that the expertise that a teacher holds is exclusively in relation to their subject discipline: maths, history, music and so on. However, for Peters (1966) teachers ought not only to be experts in their subject disciplines, but also in the 'sciences' that underpin education. Like Wrong, Peters (1966) asserted that 'a teacher must both be an authority and teach in such a way that pupils become capable of showing him where he is wrong.' (p. 9). As 'an authority' teachers encourage pupils not to accept what they say without question just because a teacher is saying it, but to exercise their own judgment about what is being said. The idea of self-liquidating authority might be thought to imply a notion of knowledge as a commodity that is quantifiable and transferable from the mind of the teacher into the mind of the pupils. However other readings are possible. 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 pedagogy, which is not (necessarily) to be passed on to pupils.

Coercive authority and authority by inducement

Coercive authority is perhaps the most difficult to accept as a form of authority rather than as a form of domination, as it relies on compliance based on the threat of the use of force. Wrong acknowledges that this is controversial because authority in common usage has overtones of consensus, although as we have argued this is less the case in education discourses of authority. Coercive authority is, like the other four, a form of a command-obedience relationship. For coercive authority to be effective the person obeying the command must believe that the instructor has the ability to carry out their threat of (physical or psychological) force, and that they are willing to do so. However as Wrong indicates, it is the belief of the person who is being commanded that is important. If a pupil believes that a teacher might humiliate them in front of the whole school then it does not matter that the teacher would never do such a thing.

Authority by inducement is closely related to coercive authority. It relies on the ability of the person or institution expecting compliance to issue rewards. In an organizational context this might mean, for example, employees performing tasks because they may be eligible for performance related bonuses. The effectiveness of inducement depends on how desirable the reward is, and it can tend to shade into coercion if the reward is overused and becomes expected, as withholding of the reward in that context may be experienced as a punishment. The application of this understanding of authority to the classroom context is clear: many systems of behaviour management rest on this understanding of the authority of the teacher, that is, one that is derived from their ability to issue rewards.

Coercive authority and authority by inducement sit closest to, and perhaps run the risk of shifting into, two other forms of power relationship identified by Wrong (2002), namely force and manipulation. Here it is important not only to think about what kind of authority is possible, but what kinds are desirable. Within educational philosophy there are two main strands in writing about authority as it relates to discipline in schools. The first of these stresses the importance of rule-following, and on the obedience of pupils to the instructions of their teachers. The second strand, from the child-centred tradition, suggests that discipline relates to the individual interests and perseverance in pursuing those interests. Underlying these different views are different perspectives on how order ought to be achieved in schools. This can be summed up as the difference between traditional 'order by control', versus the progressive child-centred 'order by discipline'. Clark (1998) sets out the difference:

Controlled children believe in the external value of the directions of the controller at least sufficiently to follow them. Disciplined children, on the other hand, observe the internal value of the activities that they are engaged in because they subscribe to them. (p. 295)

Wilson (1981) developed a philosophy of school discipline based on submission to rules. Wilson appears to agree with Clark when he insists that it is vital to observe the distinction between a well disciplined and a well-controlled class. However closer scrutiny reveals that Wilson and Clark have different understandings of those terms. Wilson (1981) emphasizes that a trouble free and organised class is not a disciplined class if order has arisen because pupils were prevented in some way from disorder.

For Wilson then, control seems to imply the use of force, whereas discipline involves pupils doing as they are told because they have learned to be obedient. Wilson thought that school discipline is ultimately constituted by obedience to the teacher. For Clark, children who are simply obedient to the teacher are better described as controlled, even in the absence of force. Clark is highly dismissive of order by control, on a number of counts, including doubting the possibility raised by Peters (1966) of 'internalization' of external rules leading ultimately to self-discipline. He suggests that if it leads to anything it will be 'full-blooded conformity' (Clark 1998, p. 293).

Coercive authority and inducement form the backbone of most behaviour management strategies as enacted through systems of reward and sanction. However a teaching profession that relied *too* heavily on these forms would be likely to lead to what Clark (1998) would suggest is control rather than discipline. However these forms of authority may indeed have their uses. We suggest these include helping newly qualified teachers feel confident and that they have some system to call on; inducting very young children into basic classroom conduct rules; and supporting young people who require a high degree of structure and predictability to manage their day.

Clark (1998) writes in the tradition of child-centred education. At its extreme the suggestion is that young people will eventually reach a mature state of moral authority if they are left to their own devices. Clark takes a more moderate view and suggests that education need not do away with authority entirely, rather should re-focus it onto the pupil's active experiences. Clark acknowledged some of the challenges of this approach. As the attention of children cannot be compelled it needs to be secured through the relationship that the teacher has with the pupil. The teacher invites pupils to participate and on the basis of their trust in the teacher and does so for long enough for the pupils' own interest in the activity to develop. The relationship with the teacher is clearly fundamental in this process. However even a more moderate version of the child-centred approach can be viewed as resting on too romantic and utopian a conception of the child. MacAllister (2010) finds both the liberal and child-centred approaches to discipline in schools to be lacking and proposes an alternative approach that endorses the view that the character traits of individual teachers (i.e. virtues in the

Aristotelian sense) may be an important source of positive classroom authority relations. This links with Wrong's (2002) final form authority, personal authority and it is to this that we now turn.

Personal authority

Personal authority is compliance 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 the teacher is perceived to have powers, expertise or status endorsed by the school community. (However, it is possible for someone with those assets to exercise personal authority). Weber's charismatic authority is one particular form of personal authority. Wrong (2002) describes this as more extensive and intense than other forms of authority, although also more unstable. In relation to teaching, it is the more prosaic personal authority that is of interest, as only a very few teachers inhabit the role of the charismatic as envisaged by Weber. Research with younger pupils suggests that 'pleasing the teacher' is a key factor in their experience of school (Broadfoot & Pollard, 1996). Indeed research in this area, particularly with pupils who have been in difficulty in school is remarkably consistent in its findings. Pupils value those teachers who make an effort to establish a relationship with them (Pomeroy, 1999; Galton, 2007; Sellman, 2009) and who are 'nice and kind, smart and funny' (Hutchings *et al.*, 2008). The importance of personal relationships, in addition to the possession of pedagogical skills and subject knowledge has been a key finding of research since studies into pupil voice began.

Carr takes a similar view to MacAllister (2010) and argues that teaching enhanced by the 'possession and exercise of personal qualities and practical proficiency is significantly dispositions that are not entirely reducible (if at all) to academic knowledge or technical skills' (Carr, 2007, p. 369). Particularly praiseworthy character traits that he identifies include: trustworthiness; respectfulness; fairness; patience; loyalty; discretion; conscientiousness; good humour; wit; optimism; self-restraint; persistence and liveliness. Importantly, he speculates that learning and class discipline may often break down, not so much because of a failure of pedagogical or managerial technique, but more due to underlying shortcomings in the personal character of the teacher:

In order to establish discipline and authority with a class of variously motivated and potentially unruly teenagers, teachers need to acquire or have acquired a range of qualities of personality and character more than any of the classroom management skills (Carr, 2003b, p. 261)

Carr implies that authentic pupil involvement in learning is most dependent on teachers being able to make practically wise and context specific judgements that promote the delivery of interesting and relevant lessons. While 'behaviour incentive schemes...can go some way to restoring order...teachers may forfeit the attention of pupils because their lessons are insufficiently stimulating' (Carr, 2007, p.380).

The teacher who has friendly and agreeable relations with students is also probably more likely to bring on their learning than the one with awkward and/or adversarial habits of communicating. Kristjánsson (2007) actually classifies agreeableness as a moral virtue of teachers. Agreeableness, he says is a sort of 'social glue that binds relationships and communities. By exuding likeability, positivity and good manners, the agreeable person strengthens that glue, and thus contributes to eudaimonia' (p.142). In any event, good teaching probably does most often involve a considerable degree of personal give and take, and dialogue between, teacher and pupils. Both parties must share a commitment to the learning at hand. Moreover, teachers who themselves possess commendable character traits may well be able to inspire and guide the development of morally virtuous dispositions in pupils.

When asked what makes a good teacher, pupils give impressively consistent answers, one of which is always the personal qualities of the teacher. This is evidence that personal authority is something which school children are naturally predisposed to recognize and respond to. However while we know what pupils tend to say they like, pedagogical relationships remain under theorized despite being key to understanding good teaching (Griffiths, 2011). Whether a teacher enacts personal authority appears to depend on their pre-existing personal qualities and dispositions, as teacher education programmes rarely give much time and space to exploring the kinds of personal qualities that are important. Further, there is no attempt to help student teachers develop these qualities if they do not already possess them. It may of course

be the case that ‘good teachers are born not made’, although this has been described by Darling-Hammond (2006) as one of education’s ‘most damaging myths’ (p. ix). However as Scott and Dinham (2008) demonstrate, it is a myth that has taken on the status of truth amongst many members of the profession. We believe that in teacher education more attention needs to be given to the character of teachers. Empirical research is required to explore further the possibilities of different approaches to character development within teacher education.

Conclusion

In this paper we have set out some of the key sociological and philosophical thinking relating to authority and have discussed its relevance for a conceptualization of teacher-pupil authority relations in schools. We believe that the five forms of authority as described by Wrong provide a useful conceptual framework for teachers as they encompass all the forms of authority that are common in a classroom setting. We have shown how the current policy context presents some challenges to particular forms of authority. Legitimate authority differs from the others in that it relies on the social roles inhabited by teachers and pupils as social actors and the shared norms and values that exist in the underpinning social order. Challenges to legitimate authority may therefore come from broader structural changes in society rather than from things that teachers as individuals might do. The competent authority of teachers, although an individual matter, also relies to some extent on the nature of their professional education, and on the presence of a shared belief that teachers have the best interests of their pupils at heart. Coercive authority and authority by inducement rely on the pupils’ belief in the teachers’ access to rewards or sanctions and willingness to use them. But authority is not simply an individual matter as there are wider institutional factors to consider, such as the school or local authority’s policy on behavior management approaches. Of all forms of authority it is the personal that would seem to be under the most direct control of the individual teacher, although the extent to which dispositions are a matter of choice is of course open to question.

It would appear that of the five forms of authority described by Wrong, competent and legitimate may be most under threat from recent policy developments. Coercive

authority and authority by inducement seem to be allied with a traditional view of education which emphasizes control over discipline, and runs the risk of shading into other forms of power relationships. It is therefore perhaps in personal authority that teachers can find most optimism for their profession. We have also identified that there is a gap in empirical research on the topic of teachers' authority. This would be problematic at any time, but is becoming, we would argue, more pressing given current challenges.

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