

The importance of ideas  
Newton Saville & Oates

Necessary philosophical  
underpinnings:  
towards a critical realist  
perspective



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# Assessment

**Assessment**



**Culture  
Context**

**Assessment**



**Culture  
Context**



**Impact**

**Assessment**



**Culture  
Context**



**Explanation**



**Impact**

**Assessment**

**Action**



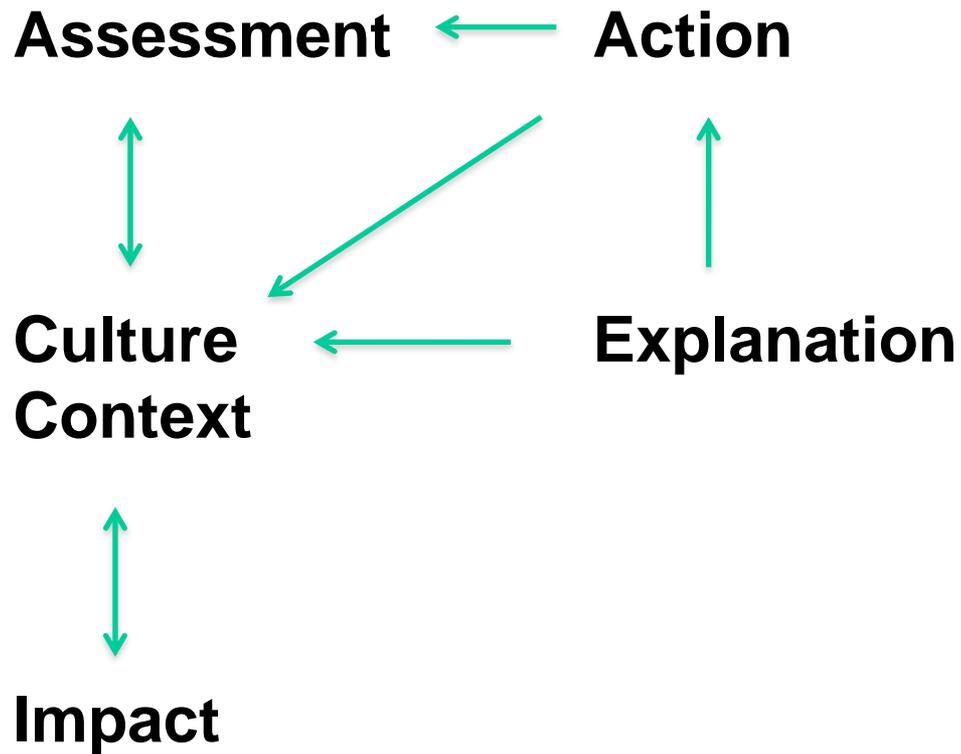
**Culture  
Context**



**Explanation**



**Impact**





## Why bother about philosophy?

Because perception and action is theory-laden (Fleck, Kuhn, Polanyi, Feyerabend, Kriege, Boden)

Because it makes life easier

Because it enables context, impact and cause to be better understood

It seems esoteric – but ultimately it is prosaic

Theory determines what you look for, and what you observe

Explanation

Causal relations

Prediction

Action - praxis

**‘...well, it may be all right in practice, but it will never work in theory...’**

Warren Buffet (an implied criticism of econometricians)

David Carless

Berlin Nov 2012

Analysis of the implementation of AfL in Hong Kong

‘...my mother is like a policewoman....’



Semiotic 'signs' of culture – 'you can't change culture'

Defining culture as restriction: constrained practise and thought

Culture as 'exotic', interesting and intriguing



Culture as systematically repressive



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culture as an explanatory factor  
culture as an element of policy

Culture as systematically repressive



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## Methodological antecedents

Margaret Archer

Andy Green

David Raffe

Philips and Ochs

Alexander

Stigler & Stevenson

Schmidt & Prawat

Oates & Coles

OCED

Hegel

Gramsci

Salter & Tapper

Polanyi

Bhaskar

Sayers



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## Analytic concepts

- dialectical transformation of transitive systems
- objective forces
- Ideology
- overdetermination
- false consciousness
  
- enacted/constructed curriculum



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## Judging the qualities of theory

- Explanatory power
- Causal power
- Predictive power

Popper, Kuhn, Merton, Bhaskhar

## Post-modernism

### Form 1

Enhanced explanation of power and control, and of constructed reality

### Form 2

The uniqueness of formation – and the impossibility of dependable intersubjectivity

## Post-modernism

‘...I don’t believe in a knowledge-based curriculum...’

Recent quote from an exchange on the revised National Curriculum

The irreducibly oppressive and repressive nature of cultural reproduction

Althusser, Alexander

The problem of ‘culture’

Alexander

The debased concept of ‘control’ and more progressive expression

Schmidt & Prawat

# Explaining Finland

High autonomy

Low accountability (absence of national assessment and inspection)



Small nation, homogenous society

Long tradition of literacy and home learning

National curriculum for 120 years

High levels of social debate

Coherent policy formation

Dirigiste control in improvement phase

High levels of inspection, state approved textbooks, initial training as restriction, 'the steering mechanisms of education'

Models of ability and uniform commitment to comprehensive education

Commitment to high equity and high attainment

# Explaining Finland

High autonomy

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Small nation, homogenous society

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High levels of social debate – **formation of ideas and of consensus**

Coherent policy formation

Dirigiste control in improvement phase

High levels of inspection, state approved textbooks, initial training as restriction, 'the steering mechanisms of education' – **control**

Models of ability and uniform commitment to comprehensive education

Commitment to high equity and high attainment

Shared ideas (culture) are highly instrumental in the success of the system

What if the consensus around the ideas begins to break down?

Explanatory power

Causal power

Predictive power

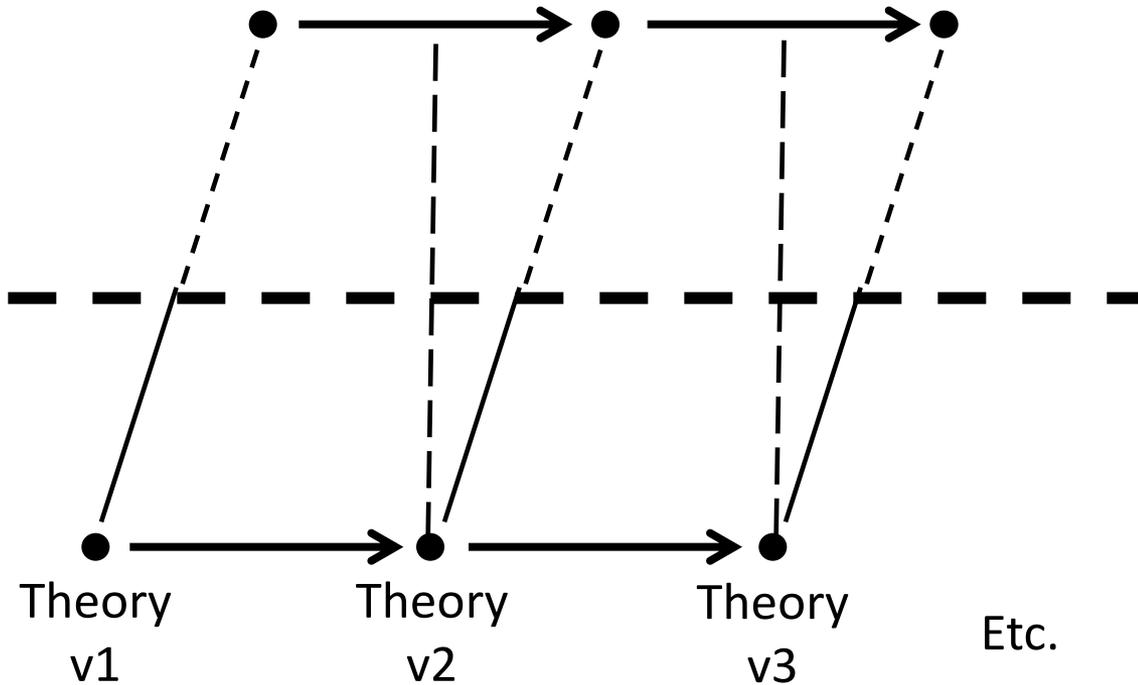
Explaining any social system



If post-modernism can't explain Finland, what can?

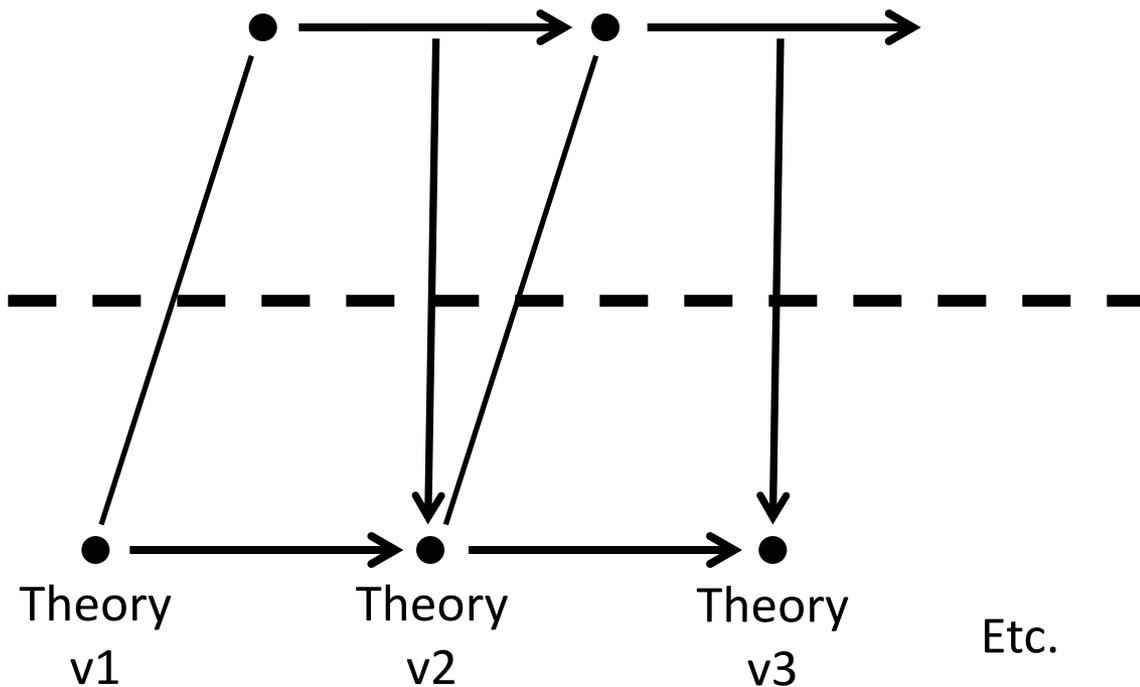
The power of a critical realist ontology

# Light: Particle or wave?



Explanatory power  
Causal power  
Predictive power

# Women: Intelligent in the same way as men?



Explanatory power  
Causal power  
Very limited  
predictive power

# Cohesion, culture and 'control'



Explanatory power

Causal power

Predictive power

# Curriculum control

A system must **exercise control**, it is not that individual agencies should **take control**:

‘...our purpose in introducing alternative ways to govern curriculum...is not to advocate one approach or another. As analysis by Cochran-Smith and Fries (2001) indicates, disagreements about teaching and, by implication, curriculum, often divides along ideological lines, an outcome that occurs no matter how pragmatic the veneer. A functional approach, by specifying in advance the criteria that an effective curriculum-governance system must meet, lessens the tendency to judge these systems in terms of the political values they represent (eg regulation vs deregulation, public interest vs private interest...’

# Cohesion, culture and ‘control’



Ideas are both express the rationale embedded in education arrangements – and are constitutive of those arrangements – they exist partly by virtue of the ideas, not independently of those ideas

**Ideas count**