



## What is the Relation between Human Practical Action and an Accompanying Discourse? - Discussing the Status of Practical Theory<sup>1</sup>

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### Forms of cognition

The main theoretical starting point of the article is the theory of practice of Pierre Bourdieu, and hence the relation between theory and practice and about the social and symbolic function of an educational system. Another starting point is an empirical tradition: One of the preconditions of the article is that a theory of human practical action (a theory of practice) sets out from theoretically reflected, empirical investigations of a concrete materialized social reality and not merely in speculations<sup>2</sup>.

Bourdieu distinguishes between practical and theoretical cognition: Practical cognition is existing only practically, and is expressed when someone is *doing* something. That is to say when somebody is *acting*, when things are brought to happen. Different forms of theoretical cognition has in common that they are brought about *afterwards*, when the practical action has ceased, when the practical action no longer exists as such. First of all this means that practical action is not theory put into practice; attempting to transform theory to practice seems fundamentally fallacious.

The theoretical basis of the present article is the empirically founded categorisation of cognition, distinguishing between theoretical and practical cognition respectively. It originally sets out from Émile Durkheim (1956), and is based on especially Bourdieu (1972, 1973, 1977) and on the discussions in the Copenhagen Bourdieu reception, especially Callewaert (1994, 1997a, 1999a, 1999b, 2001), Petersen (1994, 1995, 1996, 1996/97, 2000, 2001).

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<sup>1</sup> The present article sets out from two articles presented in a textbook for (nursery) teacher-training colleges, nursing schools etc. (Brinkkjær/Nørholm, 2001a; 2001b). These two articles were followed by a paper from NERA's 29<sup>th</sup> annual meeting in Stockholm march 2001, presented at the official symposium: "The network theory and the concept of identity of Manuel Castells and the concept of habitus of Pierre Bourdieu". In fall 2003 the paper will appear in an anthology containing the contributions from the symposium, edited by Staf Callewaert and Sverker Lindblad, Department of Education, University of Uppsala. The present article is a rewritten, edited and abridged version of the NERA paper.

<sup>2</sup> In Denmark the Bourdieu reception has been centered around professor Staf Callewaert from the Department of Education at the University of Copenhagen and the *Bourdieu-Programme* here. A number of empirical investigations has gradually been carried out: Investigations directly or indirectly treating the circumstances at the formal training of semi-professionals, first of all nurses. Pierre Bourdieu developed his theories first of all to explain why a migrated Algerian peasant kept on having poultry in his Paris backyard. However the work carried out at the University of Copenhagen develops the theories to count for the practices of semi-professionals as well (cf. esp. Callewaert, 1999a).

### Setting out from Durkheim:

In the article "The Nature and Method of Pedagogy" from 1911 Durkheim distinguishes between *art, science and practical theory* (Durkheim, 1956<sup>3</sup>):

*"It is necessary ... to reserve the name of art for everything that is pure practice without theory ... a system of ways of doing which are oriented to special ends ... One can acquire them only by coming into contact with the things on which the action is to be performed and by dealing with them oneself." (Durkheim, 1956, p. 101, our italics, UB/MN).*

*"... in order that one may be able to call a set of studies science, it is necessary and sufficient that they ... deal with verified, selected, observed facts [that] must have within themselves a sufficient homogeneity to be able to be classed in the same category ... science studies these facts to know them, and only to know them, in an absolutely disinterested fashion." (Durkheim, 1956, pp. 92-93, our italics, UB/MN). "These theories are ways of conceiving of education, not ways of practicing it." (Durkheim, 1956, p. 91, our italics, UB/MN).*

*"Instead of acting on things or on beings in a determinate way [art], one reflects on the processes of action which are thus employed, not to understand them and explain them [science], but to appreciate what they are worth, if they are what they should be ... These reflections take the forms of theories; They are combinations of ideas, not combinations of acts [practice], and in this they become closer to science. But the ideas which are so combined have, as their object, not to express the nature of things as given [science], but to direct action. They are not actions, [but] they are at least programs of action, and in this respect they are like art. ... To express the mixed character of these speculations, we propose to call them practical theories." (Durkheim, 1956, pp. 101-102, our italics, UB/MN).*

So, we are talking about

- *art or practical practice* - a practical, incorporated, embodied, situation adequate mastery of practical actions; a pre-reflexive capacity or capability of the body to *do* the right thing at the right moment. Present in a practical state, trained practically, invented or improvised synchronously; *Practical practice* is performed here & now, takes place in the present; builds on an inventive practical sense (*habitus*), is implicit, non-discursive.
- *practical theory* - ideas of how practice is or ought to be; directions for doing things (right or better) under certain arbitrary social, historical, economical or other conditions; normative regarding the suggested human action, and normative regarding the structure and genesis of the object (human action); sets out from *ideas* of the world; based on value judgements; technology; *practical theory* regards the future, is explicit, discursive.
- *science or theoretical theory* - an empirically founded and scientifically (re)constructed explanation to how things are, and why they are as they appear to be; understanding, comprehensive knowledge, explaining/understanding/predicting; *theoretical theory* regards the past, is explicit, discursive.

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<sup>3</sup> The English version of the text was published in 1956. Originally the text was written for Buissons *Nouveau Dictionnaire de pedagogie et d'instruction primaire* (Paris 1911).

This schematic categorisation of knowledge or cognition is neither satisfactory nor thorough. One basic principle though is the distinction of practical cognition from theoretical cognition. However, there seems to be a lot of cognition 'in between' - practical theory ranging from technological prescriptions or directions for practical action to comprehensive elaborated, systematically developed, and theoretically founded philosophies of society like Jürgen Habermas (for instance Habermas, 1981, cf. Callewaert, 1997b).

The outlined division of cognition suggests that we are talking about three distinct and distinctly different forms of cognition. But the discussions in the present article argue how practical theory should be regarded as part of practice. This implies maintaining the theory-practice dichotomy, and it implies that the function of practical theory is to reproduce and re-establish a 'common preconsciousness' conditioning the meaningfulness of practical theories. Subsequently this calls for a theory about symbolic economy (to explain how this meaningfulness is reproduced) and about social fields (to explain the distribution of this meaningfulness).

### **Practical theory - neither theory nor practice**

In Brinkkjær & Nørholm (2000a) it is argued that the form of 'theory' offered in the training of so-called semi-professionals is neither theory nor practice. In Brinkkjær & Nørholm (2000b) the social and symbolic function of training/formal education is discussed, having Bourdieu's theory of reproduction of society in focus: An increasing content of so-called 'theory' - *i.e.* practical theory - in the training/formal education of *i.a.* (nursery) teachers and nurses does not take the relation between theory and practice seriously: Practical theory seems to presuppose a rationalistic theory of action without a theoretically reflected empirical foundation. Ultimately this implies an ideological vision of man as a rational being.

Practical action takes place in concrete situations where action is urgent, and where the decision to act is taken here & now at the present basis. The action does not exist before the action; it is created the while the action is carried out; expressing what is necessary, adequate, possible to do. Practice can be described with words as tact, skill, ingenuity, a feel for the game, knowing ones place<sup>4</sup>, or *know-how*. We are not talking about deliberate calculations; we are talking about social agents who at the basis of embodied experiences are sizing up the situation and are *doing* something, being submitted to the constraints of the situation to act.

Bourdieu talks about *habitus* as the theoretical reconstruction of an inventive practical sense. Staf Callewaert talks about the socialised body (*habitus*). This underscores that competences are *produced*; they are a product of work and of historical, material, social or other conditions. The competences are not just there, originating from miraculous or genetical circumstances.

Opposed to this is the *theoretical theory*. Knowledge about what has been done (in the past tense). Knowledge *about* action that no longer exists. Any consequence of the action is known, and by principle any condition and element of the action can be taken into consideration. The aim of this form of knowledge is to offer *explanation* and *understanding*, that is to say answer questions about *what was done, why it was done, under what circumstances*, and so on. Theoretical knowledge is produced *against* any immediate or everyday understanding.

Practice is taking place as a *modus operandi*, that is to say in a double sense *in time*. Practice is irreversible, and these aspects seem to disappear if one does not remember that practice and the

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<sup>4</sup> Bourdieu uses the terms "a feel for the game" or "a sense of ones place", and refers to ball-game metaphors in the chapter "Belief and the body" from Bourdieu (1990). In a Danish setting see chapter III in Callewaert (1997a).

explanation to practice has two different relations to time: One of the major mistakes is to regard practice as an *opus operatum*, that is to say *out of time*. To the scientist time seems to disappear. The scientist not only arrives when the practice is over, and hence has no doubt about the outcome of the practice. The scientist also has the time and the privileges to ignore the significance of time. This seems exactly to ignore the nature of practice as a *modus operandi* instead of an *opus operatum*.

Practical theory seems to be neither theory nor practice. It is not practice, regarded as the practical practice described/prescribed. And it is not theory, regarded as explanations to how/why things are as they appear to be.

### **Practical theory - a down-to-earth example**

When a child in an after-school recreation centre states that she wants to ride a monocyce, knowing that she has never done this before, as a leisure-time teacher you choose one out of several different strategies. We are only mentioning four of these strategies:

1. You can simply hand the child a monocyce. Doing that you run the risk of the project coming to nothing because one painful fall might spoil the fun and stand in the way of the child to ever try again. This suggests how there are many factors at stake and in play: Fear of falling might mean more than knowing what to do.
2. You can give a 'theoretical' (technological) lecture on how to ride a monocyce. This suggests the idea that *knowledge* is a precondition for *ability* or a skill.
3. You can refer to a 'monocyce companion' (for instance Thonesen, 1989). This suggests how presenting the practical theory in writing adds to the status of the specific practical theory. Furthermore, referring to written practical theory prepares for systematised control of a specific knowledge being present or not.
4. You can give a lecture on what is actually happening when riding a monocyce. That is to say give a theoretical explanation to the physics of monocyce riding, presenting a theoretical theory explaining the rather peculiar fact that riding a monocyce is actually possible.

etc., etc.

However, following Bourdieu it is important to maintain that *riding* a monocyce is a bodily mastered practical action, that the mastering is only present in a practical state, and that the training of a practical competence is done practically: The mastering as well as the acquiring are only present *in the doing*.

The discussion is on the influence of the accompanying discourse, whether it consists of practical theory (technologies or directions) or theoretical theory (scientific explanations). The accompanying discourses *are* there. The question is not to adopt an attitude towards them, but to try to explain *why* they are there, and to try to explain which role they *do* play.

The theory of practice of Bourdieu implies that the practical mastery precedes any theory of any kind (Bourdieu, 1973, p.64; Callewaert, 1997a). This means that any form of theorising is subordinate to or conditioned by *habitus* in connection with the training of practical competences. The practical sense (*habitus*) is behind or underlying any practical (or theoretical) theory (Bourdieu, 1973; Callewaert, 1997a)<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> The history of man is very long, so it makes no sense to try to determine what ultimately came first. Probably

Furthermore, most verbal utterances are never solely verbal. They are followed by bodily movements, pointing fingers, shrugging of shoulders, smiles, grimaces, glances, frowns and any other form of 'body language' - referring to or illustrating the words - or *vice versa*. This too is an example of how practical action cannot be separated from an accompanying discourse. Believing that communication only consists of the words, ignores the role played by the accompanying bodily movements, and ignores that communication takes place at a particular time and place. Simultaneously it stresses how speaking/communication is a practical competence and not solely an intellectual exercise. One of the results of the 'fallacy of the linguistic turn' is the disregarding of the fact that the use of speech/language is just as practical an activity as riding a monocycle.

### **First temporary conclusion**

Preliminarily, the essence of the ability to ride a monocycle could be described as the sum of different sub-competences. The following list does not result from a systematic empirical work of observation. It represents our summary of the recommendations presented in the 'monocycle companion' (Thonesen, 1989):

1. You should be able to keep the balance,
2. you should pedal to make the wheel move, and you should lean in the direction you are moving to keep the monocycle moving along with you. Not too much and not too little.
3. You should hold on to a bar or to a friend,
4. you should go not too fast and not too slow, and
5. if all this is not going on at the same time, item 1 is not fulfilled (you have a fall, and have to try again).

In addition there are above all social conditions, but definitely also practical conditions. However, these conditions are considered fulfilled since the assumption was that the idea of riding the monocycle arose from the child 'itself':

6. You should want, wish and dare mounting the monocycle - accepting the full consequences, and
7. your wanting, wishing and daring should possess an objective (social) meaning.

If the child before or meanwhile is supplied with instructions or explanations, the preschool teacher communicates her own or other's experiences as directions (practical theory). A brilliant example of these practical theories is the above mentioned 'monocycle companion' (Thonesen, 1989). Everything is taken for granted, all practical as well as social conditions are met. The

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practical action and an accompanying discourse go together, presupposing each other respectively. First of all this complicates matters a lot. But one of the important consequences of this synchronism is that definitely the words do not precede the action.

The idea/story about the importance of practical theory tends to produce and reproduce its own conditions of existence: It seems that the concrete action and an accompanying discourse are the prerequisites of each other; under the given social circumstances it seems impossible to imagine for instance a nurse or nursing without a training/formal education containing practical theory, and it seems impossible to imagine the practical nursing theory without the nurse or the nursing (cf. Bourdieu, 1973, p. 56). A central point, though, is that the prerequisites are *practical*.

instructions seem to presuppose the presence of the competences they claim to be a prerequisite for: First of all the learner must master the handling of a 'companion', the learner must have a practical experience with riding a monocycle, etc. So it seems that the 'monocycle companion', claiming to teach riding a monocycle, makes sense only for the one who is already able to ride a monocycle.

It might be reassuring, comforting, stimulating etc. to listen to or read about other people's experiences. And it might be reassuring, comforting, stimulating etc. to know that riding a monocycle gives social meaning. However, the child has to expose itself to the risk of falling or to the risk of being ridiculed before it will learn to ride a monocycle.

Nevertheless, it is unclear how the desire or wish to learn to ride, the courage to do so, the ascribing of social meaning to the riding of a monocycle etc., is connected to the training of the practical mastery of the monocycling. And it is also unclear how, why, and to what extent this oral or written accompanying discourse must be present to make things happen. But it is certain that for instance seeing the bigger children being able to ride the monocycle and 'wishing' to be 'big' like them, does also influence the training. Just as it is certain that if you read about an activity in a book, this also influences the training.

So far, one point is that you should be more careful in maintaining how and why it is necessary to receive an explanation of how to do as a concrete condition for being able to do. The explanation seems to play a part all right, but it is almost certainly a part quite different from what is mainly believed in a more rationalistic vision of the relation between theory and practice. It seems that the 'monocycle companion' first of all provides a language to the one who wants to put her experience with riding a monocycle into words.

Who is learning what from whom?

A very widespread understanding is that the (nursery) teacher or the nurse is teaching, and is hereby teaching the learner something. The (nursery) teacher or the nurse is what Larsen (1995) is referring to as the *legitimate reference*. Consistent with this it has been more or less taken for granted that the child learns to ride a monocycle *from the nursery teacher* - or that the child learns it *'by itself'* - as if the acquisition were not going on within certain limits.

However, this seems to be misleading at two points at least: The child *learns (or teaches) itself* for instance to ride a monocycle. But the (nursery) teachers and the other children are also important in establishing the social settings that make it socially meaningful that it can happen. Or who in other kindergartens renders it impossible even though the conditions seem uniform. The inspiration making it happen, and to how it takes place seems to have many sources (cf. for instance Gulløv, 1999 (negotiations of social meaning between children), Siegumfeldt, 1995, 2001 (buildings's imposition of meaning) etc.). The exact function of a social ambition is not clear even though it seems obvious that a social ambition is always also playing an important role, and even though this role is expressed for instance in terms of the fact that directions for the activity are being (or *can be*) formulated at all.

The social meaning it must give having an ambition of becoming a monocyclist does not exist explicitly, in the head of the child. Nor is it something that the child has *as such*, as a motive, as a motor, or as an argument, nor is it the ground for learning to ride a monocycle. And this holds true even if the practical actions "... appear to be determined ... by the explicit - and explicitly stated - purpose of a project or a plan ..." (Bourdieu, 1973, p. 64). Far the most seems to be taking place at a preconscious level: Even if the child has the ambition to learn to ride a monocycle as an explicit reason, there will also be something that can only be explained subsequently; the

intention is never the full explanation, it is never the only explanation, and it is never the ground for the practical action.

The theory *about* how anyone altogether can keep the balance is in essence not a theory *for* learning in practice to keep the balance. Nor is the theory of the balance a description of what is perceived by the child when riding a monocycle, and even less of what the child subsequently will tell that it experienced meanwhile. The child's acquisition is governed by the child's practical administration of the many-sided input made up of explanations and advices from nursery teachers and friends, the child's own thoughts and experience, social ambitions and restrictions, bans, encouragements, expressions of fashion etc.

Imagine for instance the child falling or even hurting itself. This will be acquired and stored mentally, just as any event, explanation, input, advice, ban, order, ambition etc. is stored mentally, becoming a part of what conditions the practice. During this pre-conscious process the child's - *i.a.* - social and mental history (mediated by *habitus*) will affect whether the child will continue to pursue learning to ride a monocycle, will end up convinced that it is one of the most idiotic things to do, or...

So, seemingly the chronology is action → handling → new action. But all of the processes resulting in "new action", are carried out *practically*, that is to say *pre-consciously* or *pre-reflexively*, and the handling most certainly draws upon experiences from way back, complicating the elucidation of the chronology. In other words, the chronology might as well be handling → action → new handling → new action and so on. Simultaneously a representation is produced from the experience of the relation between for instance the intention to change action and the new action. Not only is the exact relation between these matters/processes not clear. It is also unclear whether the relation can be sorted out at all. This too calls for a much greater caution in trying to explain the role of these practical theories or accompanying discourses.

### **Practical theory - detached from its context**

The acquiring of such single practical competences as riding a monocycle is often followed by and urged by the interest in discussing ones own experiences with others. This first of all supports the training of a practical competence to do just that: To discuss your own experience with others. However, it is far from certain what influence this exchange of experience has to the training of the concrete practical mastery, or what influence it can have at all.

The accompanying discourses are there all the time, and they seem to form an integrated part of the acquisition of practical competences. But, there are always also endless numbers of other factors influencing the training: For instance the fact that the training takes place as well as the social meaning of the training. The discussion of seemingly locally-concrete details of the practical training is always simultaneously a part of discussing and negotiating the social meaning of the given practical action, of the social status of the actions, and of the acting.

Presenting one single competence in a textbook or as a series of advice from a nursery teacher or other children, involves a generalisation: The textbooks or the advices do not present a description of *one* specific single-competence in *one* specific practical or social context. Instead a *generalised* description of the acquiring of a *whole class* of competences is presented, disregarding the circumstances conditioning the acquiring process, and disregarding the illusory precondition of 'other things being equal'. This becomes obvious reading the 'companion':

"The book *Monocycle* is your 'coach' or 'trainer'. If for instance you wanted to play handball or do gymnastics, you'd join a club. And there you'd get an instructor telling you how to get the different skills. [...] You cannot do the same thing choosing monocycling as your sports. [...]

The book *Monocycle* starts from scratch. It explains to you how you should approach monocycling from the very first time you mount the monocycle. But more important: The book tells you how to get on once you have 'learned to ride.'" (Thonesen 1989, 6, translated by UB & MN) [...].

"With this book you will get *your own personal coach* [...]

The book *Monocycle* is written by an experienced sports trainer. Sitting on the monocycle with the book in your hand you will be guided safely from the first wavering pedalling - through an alternating, joyful training - to the obtaining of control over this fascinating artist tool ..." (Thonesen, 1989, back cover, translated by UB & MN).

These generalisations imply an abstraction based on a rationalistic theory of practice. The learning process as well as the practical acquisition and mastering are lifted out of their social, material or historical context, and are treated as if they existed in a vacuum. The *concretely rooted* technical tricks, instructions, advices, input, ban, orders, ambitions etc. are hereby transformed into *practical theory*. But this reduces the practical relevance of the instructions. This holds true for riding a monocycle. And it holds true for the training of practical semi-professionals when the training is moved into controlled/controlling surroundings at school. This is earlier addressed as the 'schoolification' (Brinkkjær and Nørholm, 2000b).

When the advice is maintained as if it were universal, it gets a much more ideological character concerning how practical competences are trained: It presupposes that this is the proper way to train practical competences. So, the practical theory works in a double sense: As a practical theory training (however poorly) a concrete practical practice, and training (much more effectively) the *idea* of how this training is/ought to be taking place.

The 'monocycle companion' contains a considerable amount of distinct 'do-this, don't-do-that' sentences. It is even stated that the 'companion' should be carried along when riding(!), and it is presupposed that a book printed in hundreds of copies can be a *personal* coach. But, imagining a monocyclist training with a book in one hand, and accepting this specific use of the word "personal", makes it clear that not everything written in the 'companion' should be taken literally. However, being able to use the book properly, requires that you know what should be taken literally *beforehand*, which illustrates that what is trained, might be an ability to ride a monocycle all right, but it is also an attitude towards using a book as a trainer or a coach, and hereby an attitude towards the acquiring of practical competences: What *is* trained when using the 'monocycle companion', seems first of all to be a certain attitude towards practical theory.

### **Second temporary conclusion**

This preliminary analysis elucidates the change *from* a training/acquiring of specific practical competences in concrete on-the-job situations *to* a generalising practical theory in the introductory (or "theoretical") training of (nursery) teachers or nurses. Simultaneously it elucidates the consequences when a directly practice relevant content of the training/formal education is forced out, suggesting how training/formal education tends to train a certain attitude towards practical theory rather than the actual practical competences in question. This points to



the fact that school in its everyday practice tends to reproduce a certain attitude towards modern society, and through this to reproduce a fundamentally arbitrary ideology regarding the relation between theory and practice.

The concrete practice of a (nursery) teacher or nurse seems to be just as local or (socially) situated as riding a monocycle. This is one reason why it makes little concrete practical sense when the training consists of *general* practical theory as well as relatively firm conceptions of what a 'good practice' is. Prescriptions stating what ought to be done and what ought to be regarded as 'theory', implies the possibility of developing the 'good practice' or the 'better practice', independent of the context. Ultimately this 'theory' (practical theory) involves an ever-growing ideological element used in the struggles to maintain the borders between disciplines/occupations/practices. Most often these (mis)conceptions have no foundation in empirically founded analysis of the practical, social, material, historical or other conditions for the work.

Attempting to capture an explanation to this motion *from* a local-concrete training *to* a symbolic learning at school is exactly to regard the learning as learning of *symbolic* competences. It is also to view the generalised practical theory as the *story* that has to be told over and over to make everybody agree that this ('naturally') is the way things are going on. What is learned, tends to lose its concrete practical meaning. It seems that this *story* in a quasi-magical way is detached from what has been shown regarding the structure and genesis of the human practical competences. The competences seem to refer to a *habitus* resulting from a more general informal pedagogic work carried out first of all in early childhood - *before* attending (nursery) teacher-training colleges or nursing schools (cf. Bourdieu & Passeron 1990). So, practical theory neither conveys the *understanding* of the structure and genesis of human practical action, nor promotes the *training/practise* of human practical action. The teaching of practical theory does convey an ability to go to school and to pass exams. So, the teaching of practical theory seems first and foremost to train a practical mastering of *talking about* practice. In this sense the 'monocycle companion' seems first of all to train the practical mastering of *talking about* riding a monocycle and *talking about* how this mastery is acquired.

This does not imply that you go to school for the sake of the school and not for the sake of the work that will be done afterwards. It seems that an ability to reproduce a practical theory is appointing the ones that know how, and is separating them from the ones that do not. And it seems that the practical theory (ultimately institutionalised as a diploma) guarantees that the way the 'consecrated' (holding a diploma) are acting, is how things are done properly. The ability to reproduce a practical theory (and to get a diploma) hence implies the exertion of a *double sorting* or *double legitimising* effect: It is *separating* the 'wrong' from the 'right', and it is *uniting* the 'right' by uniforming the way things can be done properly or legitimately.

### **Practical theory - without practice**

In the example with the training of the competence to ride a monocycle it was in a sense the child 'itself' that had pointed out the activity as desirable.

You cannot do just anything in an after-school recreation centre, but the possibilities are not as limited as in a training/formal education, where most often a range of subjects and disciplines that belong together are presented as a *fait accompli*. And despite the students's joint influence the choices are between possibilities and alternatives that are laid down beforehand.

This is supported and expanded considering the planning of the training of the practical

competences relevant for working in the semi-professions - as (nursery) teacher, nurse and so on. The practical training is reduced and tends to be replaced by practical theory. Consequently the training for a job as (nursery) teacher or nurse gives a higher priority to the possibility of acquiring the society-born (symbolically necessary) *story* or common (mis)conception of the genesis of human practice, at the expense of the possibility of acquiring practical competences (on-the-job training). Simultaneously a certain attitude towards the practice, towards the training, and towards the occupation is acquired: A certain professional identity is acquired, an essential aspect necessary for maintaining the *illusion* of the fundamental differences of the semi-professions. The 'monocycle companion' shows how this *illusion* is reproduced also when dealing with a relatively simple matter: Riding a monocycle.

Furthermore, when the legitimate way to acquire (or teach) practical competences becomes by reading about them or listening to *stories* about them, the risk is that the practical handing down of practical competences is quite simply, gradually hindered. And the risk is that an ability to talk about practice (ultimately the condition for standardisation and control) is gained, at the expense of the practical competences that are quite simply lost. The relevant practical competences are sacrificed at the altar of modernity.

### **Third temporary conclusion**

The point is at least double: On the one side the ability to reproduce a practical theory (the *story* of the occupation, or the *story* of monocycling) is becoming a more and more crucial part of the access to the occupation. On the other hand this *story* is one of the unifying conditions for the occupation or the practice, which is simultaneously separating it from any other occupation or practice. So the practical theory becomes a crucial part of the common understanding within a certain occupation or within a group of practitioners of a certain practice, and for maintaining the borders to other disciplines/occupations/practices.

Add to this that the border-struggles are never stronger than between occupations that have a lot in common. Nursery teachers and nurses are taught each their *stories* about for instance "caring". These different *stories* are implying and maintaining the idea that caring is at the core of both occupations, and are simultaneously implying and maintaining the idea that the two forms of "caring" has got nothing in common whatsoever. Paradoxically, a condition for this is that the work of the two groups of semi-professionals has a lot in common: The content of the different textbooks becomes part of a struggle for workplaces, or of an ideological struggle functioning as tools of inclusion/exclusion. And this kind of distinction seems to be one of the most central elements in the way these groups of semi-professionals are defining themselves in relation to (that is to say: Against) each other. Subsequently this exemplifies how the definitions are relative and not absolute.

The descriptions of the content of the occupations or the descriptions of the content of the act of riding a monocycle tend to be mere ideologies. They act as ideologies, but they should by no means be regarded as formulated as ideologies. The ideological function is misrecognised, expressing that this formulation of what seems to function as ideologies, is carried out practically and pre-reflexively.

### **Concluding remarks**

The point of the analysis in this article is first of all to call for greater humility in pointing at the (oral or written) directions for action as the source of cognition directing human practical action,

and to call for greater humility in pointing at the expressed intentions as the ground for the action. Concluding the discussion in the present article, following the theory of practice of Pierre Bourdieu, practical theory should be regarded as an indispensable, *symbolically* necessary part of human practice, not as theory.

No matter if the practical theory is presented in a 'monocycle companion' or in textbooks used at (nursery) teacher training colleges and nursing schools, an accompanying discourse seems to have similar functions: It provides the future monocyclist or the future (nursery) teacher or nurse with a language to *talk about* the practice, and it provides her with an *attitude towards* talking about practice and about the genesis of practice - or it builds upon already existing attitudes. Practical theory becomes a tool in the reproduction of one fundamentally arbitrary view of how practical competences are acquired, and ultimately this implies the reproduction of one fundamentally arbitrary social order. Consequently the practical theories might be regarded as ideologies, and it even seems that these ideologies are enhanced by containing claims of their own necessity.

The increasingly longer time it takes to complete the training/formal education, and thus to acquire the right to perform the occupation/semi-profession in question, seems to be in the way of the student's acquiring of the relevant practical competences (cf. Bourdieu *et al.*, 1999, 185). This is one of the more problematic consequences of the planning of modern training/formal education: That practical theory is mistaken for and recognised as theory (theoretical theory). The problem is that no distinction is made, and that training/learning of practical theory both regarding time and mentally is replacing and is forcing out the training/learning of theoretical theories *about* the structure and genesis of human practice.

Furthermore, the ever growing content of practical theory, and the ideologies of how necessary it is mastering this seems problematic: Nobody is learning anything about the conditions of possibility of human action nor are they being trained practically: The graduates from (nursery) teacher colleges, nursing schools etc. are becoming still worse practically prepared for the occupation/semi-profession, and are becoming still less enlightened regarding the conditions for the practical mastering of the occupation/semi-profession. This contradicts the promises of enlightenment in the spirit of von Humboldt, and it seems that the problem is extended when endless hours on end are being used to *talk about* doing something, and to *talk about* how this *ought to be* done, instead of either somebody doing something, or somebody imparting someone an understanding of the structure and genesis of human action.

The present article suggests how the symbolic importance of the practical theories is accentuated when the content of the training/formal education is turning into practical theory. The similar function seems to be connected to the 'monocycle companion'; the training and conferring of a common language for *talking about* the practices and the acquisition hereof to the student or child respectively, seems to be the most important issue.

Finally, it seems problematic that if practical theory 'works' by referring to already existing practical competences, acquired before attending training/formal education, that sorting function which might always be an essential role of a system of training/formal education, is maintained and extended. However, one could wish for the sorting to take place against a background of relevant practical competences and not against a background of symbolic competences, of competences to *talk about* and *reproduce* the common illusion of the genesis of human practical

action and of the role of practical theory/accompanying discourse. Ultimately this is only reproducing and extending a fundamentally arbitrary social order.

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