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Cultural differences in teaching & learning:

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1. Students and their learning – a contextual approach

The cultural diversity of an international school poses many methodological problems for practitioners wishing to carry out action research or case studies. A lack of cross-cultural validity precludes many of the methods commonly used in national educational research from being applied in international schools.

Part of the problem has undoubtedly been due to the fact international schools are not homogenous and that the use of structural models as a way of understanding schools is limited by the lack of uniformity in the identification and measurement of inputs and outcomes. Scientific methodology is thus prohibited by a lack of generalisability and the scale of comparative models is usually too large to be considered by most researchers.

This paper examines ways in which the cultural complexity of school and classroom can be penetrated by interpretive methodology, enabling crucial process factors to be identified and described within the context of the international school. This enables such issues as classroom interaction, cognitive development, international pedagogy and the effect of culturally specific discourses and cross-cultural interaction on learning and cultural identity to be investigated. It explores how researchers can endeavour to provide these situated understandings by examining more critically the theoretical constructs that currently underlie the educational treatment of linguistically and culturally diverse students and the routine practice of international schools.

In this paper, the importance of context both in the determination of states of affairs and in their interpretation is examined initially. Various types of ethnomethodology from within the interpretive paradigm are assessed as a means of understanding the complex nature of international schools, particularly those approaches derived from cultural studies, applied linguistics and discourse analysis. An example of one such methodology, the ethnographic case study, is then described in more detail and finally a syncretic research model using a combination of theoretical and methodological tools is suggested for use in international schools.

2. The importance of context

“The primary objective of school, success for all, ...is rarely achieved because...institutions do not consider the cross-cultural context in which teaching and learning occur” (Cushner, 1990)

International schools are areas where different cultures operate in the same environment, where there is often a dominant cultural ethos, both among the faculty and the students and the culture of the host country can impinge on this school culture in varying degrees and ways. This will produce a school culture with individual and specific characteristics. Into this cultural space will come students of differing cultural backgrounds and academic histories, bringing with them certain experiences, attitudes, expectations and preconceptions which constitute their own individual cultural characteristics. They will encounter the characteristics of the school culture, creating could be described as “cultural borderlands” (Allan 2002b), where the students’ experience of the school will take place.

A simple model, Figure 2, of the nature of a Venn diagram may illustrate this process figuratively.

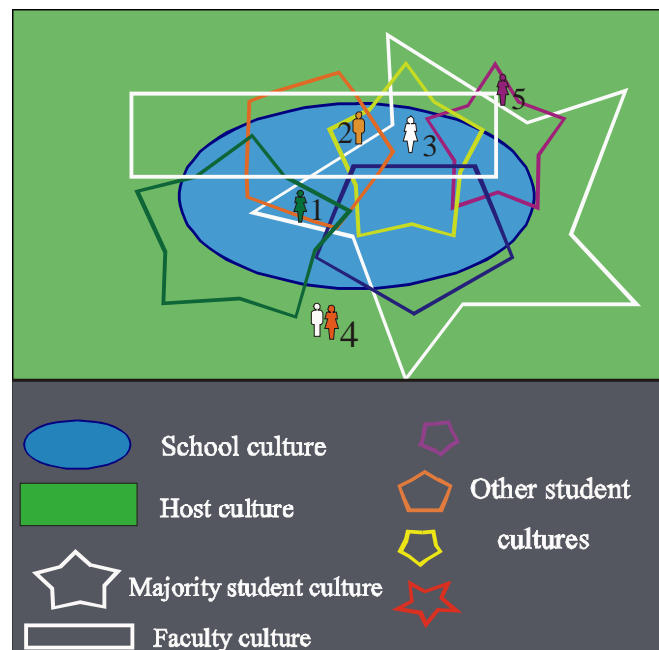


Figure 1: Cultural borderlands - areas of cultural interaction (Allan, 2002, p78)

The example illustrated shows the overlapping cultural environments of school, host country, majority student culture, other student cultures and own culture. It is apparent that an international school experience is far from homogenous, and a student can find him/herself in a number of different situations, for example:

1. In an in-school social situation with students from different cultures.
2. In a class, perhaps an ESL or third language class without any students from the majority culture.
3. In a normal class where the majority student culture might predominate.
4. In a social situation outside school with a friend of a different culture.
5. At home in their own culture (which may also be bi-cultural).

Each one of these situations will involve one or more cultural frontiers, and the model uses only six student culture groups, when the typical international school will have up to 40 nationalities (Matthews, 1989a). Crossing these frontiers daily is bound to engender cultural dissonance, if not conflict, in the myriad cross-cultural interactions which take place. A student's daily experience of an international school is therefore by no means homogenous. As Dewey vividly described,

“The child’s life is an integral, a total one. He passes quickly and readily from one topic to another, but is not conscious of transition or break. There is no conscious isolation, hardly conscious distinction. The things that occupy him are held together by the unity of the personal and social interests which his life carries along.....(His) universe is fluid and fluent, its contents dissolve and reform with amazing rapidity. But after all it is the child’s own world. It has the unity and completeness of his own life”.
(Dewey, 1956, pp 5-6)

Any study which hopes to present an understanding of the experience of different groups (see Brislin/cushner) must be able to incorporate the school effect. The international school environment defines the situation in which cultural interactions take place, and in doing so can ameliorate or worsen the process of acculturation of different cultural groups.

The context of the school culture not only forms the frame that will define the situation and the students' experiences, it is also a determinant factor in the process of cross-cultural interaction, students will interact with the school culture as much as with each other. This school culture is manifest in many ways and on many levels. Language issues, including the status of languages other than English, and their accompanying cultures, are fundamental, but the cultural values of the predominant student nationalities, as well as the cultural rules (behaviour and discipline) of the school, the cultural style and content of the lessons and the teaching styles and attitude of the staff, also form the 'framework' which defines the situation. As Robin Alexander puts it,

“Culture both drives and is everywhere manifested in what goes on in classrooms, from what you see on the walls to what goes on in children’s heads” (Alexander, 2000, p. 266).

Thus for any study to have meaning and validity, an understanding of the context is of paramount importance. The word is derived from the Latin root *contexere*: to weave together (OED). The actions, variables and factors involved are interwoven in constant reciprocal interaction; a dialectic in which the subjects both influence and are influenced by the context in which their actions take place.

Traditional quantitative techniques are inadequate here, since they rely on the concept of testing empirically a hypothesis generated from theory on a sample, and generalising from the sample to a larger population, “the systematic, controlled empirical and critical investigation of hypothetical positions” (Kerlinger, 1969, p4). Quantitative tradition also reflects an underlying tendency to look for causal factors explaining individual behaviour, where causality is denoted by the use of dependent and independent variables, and relies on other factors being controlled. In a complex, dynamic process of cultural interaction, variables cannot be controlled.

Qualitative research can, on the other hand, investigate by comparing cases to each other rather than using a predetermined formula,

“In this method the different elements or dimensions of the phenomenon being studied are thought of as causal factors, that is independent variables, linked to each other by (possibly complex) mutual causal relations” (Alasuutari, 1995, p16).

In studying international schools the methodology must permit the researcher to step outside culture-specific ideas of education and examine the process of interaction, or dialectic, of the various actors and the context which frames this. When we are trying to study a situation, such as classroom interaction in a science lesson, or an attitude such as intercultural awareness in an institution, or the implications of both external and internal school policy, we cannot isolate one from the other. A post-structuralist view in the broad sense also recognises the reflexive nature of the effects of these contexts and the dialectics involved, which, in a cross-cultural situation more than any other, may vary along a consonant/dissonant dimension. Ethnomethodology can provide the means of penetrating the complexity of the context of school culture and of understanding the relations and processes that govern the outcomes of education, a proposition which will be considered in the next section.

3. Ethnomethodology

People are constantly trying to understand what is going on in any situation and using these understandings to produce appropriate behaviour of their own. Ethnomethodology is the study of the methods ordinary people use for producing and making sense of everyday social life. Artefacts and text for analysis do not have any independent objective meaning or nature, only the interpretations that the various actors place upon them. It is these interpretations that ethnomethodology tries to discover and the task of the researcher is to provide the rich, thick description that enables readers of research to gauge its plausibility and transferability. In this section the ethnographic approaches of cultural, sociolinguistic and discourse analysis are examined.

Cultural studies, or a phenomenological approach

Schools and classrooms are complex social environments. They consist of different groups of people interacting with each other in various ways. The most obvious area where this can be observed is in the pupil-teacher and pupil-pupil interaction and communication patterns (Stables, 2003). Much research in recent years has focused on the verbal interchanges between teachers and pupils, including issues such as the style of teacher talk and learning (Edwards and Westgate, 1994, Ripich and Creaghead, 1994, Cazden, 2001). Other research has focused upon the ways a child's culture shapes communication and interaction in the classroom (Hofstede, 1986; Cushner, 1990). The common denominator in all of this research is that what teachers and pupils actually say and do becomes the major focus for attention. However classrooms and lessons have a history, and meanings must be 'situated', (Gee, 1999) that is interpreted within wider school culture/discourses, and in international schools, within the respective cultures of the students and teachers. Teachers and students make constant references to the social contexts of the lessons and the identities of the students. It is impossible to appreciate fully what is happening without paying attention to these contexts.

Alasuutari (1995) asserts that this idea aligns with the discourse-analytical or ethno-methodological approach to what Goffman (op cit.) describes as the concept of frame, the sets of rules that constitute activities of a certain type. When in everyday life we form some kind of picture of 'what is going on', we have located a frame that makes the situation (at least partially) understandable. Rather than being a framework for interpretation, as in symbolic interactionism, or a means of regulating interpretation within the cultural context, as in structuralism, here it is asserted that in situations which are always 'framed' in one way or another, it is not so much that the situation is interpreted within this framework, rather that the framework defines the situation.

Wieder (1974a and 1974b) identified a particular institutional context through the 'code' which is used in, and at the same time delineates, the frame of the situation. He showed how the 'code' is derived, and the rules of the 'code' are picked out, in the course of conversations with the subjects, but then abstracted from those conversations into claims and categories to serve as explanatory resources for the researcher. Narrative analysis in cultural studies takes this code as the "topic" of study, and asks how it is used, thus shifts from talk as an explanatory resource to a topic in its own right – it takes subject's explanations as the object of study rather than as a validation of their own explanations. Why has this version been produced? What does the talk do and what does it achieve? It produces a version of what is going on in

the immediate circumstances – it establishes the interaction in one way rather than in another (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Ethnomethodology has this characteristic to use talk to reproduce role relations not just a pre-written script – “the nature of interaction does not arrive pre-packaged and pre-ordained but is reproduced on each occasion. To put it another way, the participants do not passively respond to what is going on but actively produce it” (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p21). This type of approach in anthropology and cross-cultural psychology is an emic approach (Patton, 1987), as the stories are situated within the subject’s own discourse. “According to this view, cultural behaviour should always be studied and categorized in terms of the inside view - the actor’s definition - of human events. That is the units of conceptualization in anthropological theories should be ‘discovered’ by analyzing the cognitive processes of the people studied, rather than ‘imposed’ from cross-cultural (hence, ethnocentric) classifications of behaviour.” (Pelto and Pelto, 1978, p. 54)

A phenomenological approach to the use of discourse analysis in ethnography, tries to avoid semiosis, the interpretation of meanings, and concentrates on studying observable clues, such as practices or modes of speech used, in making interpretations about the discourses or structures of meaning. The identification of such discourses “methods of common understanding” (Garfinkel, 1984, p31) however, enables the understanding of the phenomenon. Polyani (1979) believes that oral narratives of personal experience illustrate core concepts of culture and are sources of insights into those concepts. The point of the narrative must be "culturally salient material generally agreed upon by members of the producer's culture to be self-evidently and importantly true" (ibid, p. 207). Narratives are cultural texts available for analysis, this is "a methodology for identifying and investigating beliefs about the world held by members of a particular culture" (ibid, p. 213). An example of this type of ethnographic case study is discussed in further detail in Part 4.

Sociolinguistic approaches

There are a number of important points of contact between sociolinguistic and ethnographic research in educational settings. Both are ethnomethodological in that they are concerned with what participants are doing in making sense of each others’ utterances and both look at patterns and irregularities in classroom talk. Sociolinguistic analyses can focus upon the way in which talk is oriented towards particular parties, for example how are teachers’ utterances or questions heard by pupils as demonstrated in the contextual features of the transcripts, and conversely how do teachers hear and respond to pupils’ contribution to the lesson. Ethnographic approaches widen the focus of interest to include a much broader range of factors that may influence what goes on between the teacher and pupils in the classroom.

There are a number of policy areas relevant to international schools where sociolinguistic research has made an impact, for example the question of bilingualism and bilingual schools, mother tongue teaching, teaching standard English to speakers of non-standard English, the organisation of classroom talk and, in particular, teacher talk itself, have all been examined using a sociolinguistic perspective.

Talk in the classroom displays some important individual characteristics – it is typically organised around the completion of tasks and activities, and perhaps the most important characteristic is the way one speaker, the teacher, attempts to control and direct the talk (Cazden, 2001). Sociolinguistic analyses can focus upon the way in which talk is oriented towards particular parties, for example how are teachers’ utterances or questions heard by pupils as demonstrated in the contextual features of

the transcripts, and conversely how do teachers hear and respond to pupils' contribution to the lesson. Following Garfinkel (1967) ethnomethodologists refer to phenomena of this kind as reflexive features of talk. As Potter and Wetherell (1987) point out, "Talk is not just about actions, events and situations, it is a potent and constitutive part of those actions, events and situations" (ibid p21). An utterance is not just a description of a rule, it also formulates the nature of the action and the situation and has a number of practical consequences within that situation.

Culture can also be seen in Riessman's way of looking at the pragmatics of the language being used in asking why stories are told in a certain way "The methodological approach examines story and analyses how it is put together, the linguistic and cultural references that it draws on" (Riessman, 1993, p2). Riessman's methodology for analysing narratives in texts, an extension of the Labov-Mishler model (Labov, 1992; Mishler, 1986) also incorporates context "The story metaphor emphasizes that we create order, construct texts in particular contexts" (Riessman, 1993, p2). In her method, narrative analysis limits itself to investigation of story - first person accounts by respondees of experience. "The purpose is to see how respondents in interviews impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and notions in their lives" (Riessman, 1993, p2). This approach gives the opportunity to recognise wider cultural influences on the construction of a respondent's narrative, as well as those of the individual situation and understand how the subject experiences the situation, rationalises it and how this determines action and interaction with other parties. If we consider voice, as well, however, we can also achieve an understanding of how power relationships are perceived by each actor, using grammatical syntax as a metaphor to understand how they create their narrative. Cortazzi (1993) describes the manifestation of Goffman's "multiple selves" in narratives in this way, as well as his ideas of 'frames' (Kintsch and van Dijk, 1983) 'ritual and face' and 'performance' (Goffman, 1975). This means that we do not need to be limited to individual narratives, conversation such as classroom discourse can be transcribed and analysed in this way. According to Cortazzi (1993), conversation analysis has shown that long stretches of apparently casual conversation are in fact highly structured and demonstrate the social knowledge needed to tell a narrative in conversation. Conversation analysis has been widely applied to study classroom talk by Hymes (1985) Edwards and Westgate (1994), and Cazden (2001) *inter alia*.

Discourse Analysis

The relationship between discourse analysis and social research could be said to have started with the literary analysis of Vladimir Propp in his attempt in 1928 to improve the classification criteria for stories (Alasuutari, 1995). He analysed 100 Russian folk tales in order to allow the classification to emerge from their structure, rather than start with the contemporary pre-determined classification system, which he said "is precisely the reverse, the majority of researchers *begin* with classification, imposing it upon the material from without, and not extracting it from the material itself" (Propp, 1975, italics in original).

While structuralism takes the view that culture contains deep structures which are primary in relation to the subjects they produce, in post-structuralist discourse theory, the 'deep structures' of culture only exist as people act and behave in accordance with those structures, or make use of them in their activities. "To say that two people belong to the same culture is to say that they interpret the world in roughly the same ways and can express themselves, their thoughts and feelings about the

world, in ways which will be understood by each other. Thus culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is happening around them, and ‘making sense’ of the world, in broadly similar ways” (Hall, 1997, p2). On the other hand, it is stressed that the meaning structures commonly used constitute the culture of that society, and it is precisely this dual nature of meaning systems that the post-structuralist concept of discourse seeks to understand, the juxtaposition between reality and constructions of reality.

Meaning structures do not use people, people use meaning structures to understand the world and their place in it, and the chief concern in an ethnomethodological approach is to look at how the individual makes sense of the world and tries to interpret it. Geertz (1973) argues that to understand the meanings others have placed on experience is a cultural approach to the study of communication. Critical theorists take this view further, stating that traditional ethnographers’ “concern with describing a social setting ‘as it really is’ assumes an objective, ‘common-sense’ reality where none exists. Rather this reality should be seen for what it is – a social and cultural construction, linked to wider power relations, which privileges some and disadvantages other participants” (May, 1997, p. 199).

It is the reflexivity, or dialectic, inherent in the post-structuralist approach to discourse, incorporating theorists such as Fairclough (1995) and Edwards (1997) *inter alia*, who have taken this further in different fields, that makes it so suitable for exploring a culturally diverse institution. No societal nor institutional situation is static, neither are personal attitudes and characteristics. Post-structuralist discourse theory allows both for the influence of the current state of affairs on the group, or individual, discourse; action and relations between them; and the way in which these discourses are acting to change the situation. In this dynamic, cross-cultural interaction in terms of relations of power between discourses of different actors, or voices, are also taken into account, and changes in power structures in society such as cultural hegemony; or micro-politics in institutions, such as the influence of a predominant cultural group; or within groups, such as a class or peer groups, can be incorporated and explained.

Critical theory

The importance of context in post-structuralist discourse theory is also paramount in the theory, propounded most notably in the writings of Michel Foucault, of the conjunction of power and knowledge (Foucault, M., 1972, 1979, 1980). From Foucault comes the idea of discourse as a regulated way of speaking that defines and produces objects of knowledge, thereby governing the way topics are talked about and practices conducted. For Foucault ‘truth’ did not mean objective or intrinsic facts about the nature of people, rather that in constructing ideas that are ascribed the status of ‘truths’, they become ‘normalising’ in the way they shape and constitute people’s lives. He asserts the inseparability of power and knowledge in showing how the ‘truths’ of traditional notions of knowledge positioned one form of knowledge in ascendancy over another (White and Epston, 1990). Discourse thus embodies meaning and social relationships and itself serves to empower its users and marginalise others from the debate by determining the frame of reference within which their standpoint may be judged. The discourses then not only form the objects of discussion but become them, “Discourses.... do not identify objects, they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention” (Foucault 1971). In this paradigm, knowledge does not reflect the power relations between different groups of society, but embodies them. Power and knowledge are inseparable and mutually reinforcing,

and are made manifest in discourse. “Discourses are therefore about what is said and thought, but also who can speak, when and with what authority.....The possibilities for meaning and interpretation are pre-empted through the social and institutional position from which a discourse comes.” (Ball, 1990, p.17).

This has led to a body of thought in recent post-modern educational work which generally falls under the title of critical theory. Although this was originally a post- Marxist view of knowledge expressed by the “Frankfurt school” (Adorno, Horkheimer) and later associated with Gramsci and Habermas, critical theorists in education have come to be more concerned with combining this view of epistemology with Foucauldian ideas of discourse and power, Vygotskian perspectives on learning and the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire, in examining the position of discourses of underprivileged groups in schools (Giroux, 1992, McLaren, 1997, Corson, 1998, Cummins, 2000) This standpoint became apparent in feminist studies (hooks, 1989) but more especially in the examination of treatment and performance of cultural minorities in Western education systems, which are characterised as consisting of modernist discourses where “the dualistic way of seeing reinforced a rationalistic, patriarchal, expansionist, social and political order, welded to the desire of power and conquest” (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1997, p 36). Critical multiculturalism attacks the privilege and bias afforded by Eurocentric (white, middle-class and patriarchal) discourses in schools and de-constructs learning, enabling the power structure implicit in the relative positions of different discourses to be exposed and attacked (McLaren, 1997). As these are not always congruent, dissonance among discourses must result, though not necessarily to the extent that they can be described as conflict. A school may not be “ a cultural arena where ideological, discursive and social forces collide in an ever-unfolding drama of dominance and resistance” (Kumaravadilevu, 1999, p 475), but critical discourse analysis can be seen as a way of exposing the dynamics of interaction among culturally different groups as well as situating them within wider context.

Critical theory pays much attention to the socio-economic and political nature of cultural injustice which is not applicable in international schools, although we might only have to substitute ‘international’ for “regular” to agree with Corson that parents “want the best of both worlds for their children’s education: they certainly want admission to the mainstream and high-status culture of literacy that is the chief output of regular education, but they also want schools to recognise ‘their own things’ – their own cultural values, language varieties, traditions, and interests” (Corson, 1998, p203).

4. The ethnographic case study

The ethnographic case study is an example of why a qualitative methodology was developed for use in anthropological studies of culture. Ethnography has long been used, and was indeed developed, in cultural research (Alasuutari, 1995) and has since been appropriated and adapted for use in educational contexts. The traditional ethnographic case study approach strives for cultural validity by locating the study within the culture being studied and modern versions acknowledge cultural bias in form of interaction and interpretation by the researcher. (Hammersley, 1990, 1997; Thomas, 1992; Alasuutari, 1995). This avoids problems of validity by locating the study within the situation or culture being examined. In an ethnographic case study, contingency variables, etc in the cultural sense (Berry), are constant across the population, although their effects may differ. The whole population then becomes the sample for analysis, and generalisations are not made to a greater population. This does not stop us drawing conclusions from the study however, in such a case we can generalize to a hypothetical universe,

“It is the universe of all possible samples (which may be limited universes) which could have been produced under similar conditions of time, place, culture and other relevant factors” (Hagood, 1970, p66).

Theory can then emerge from the particular situation and be grounded in the data generated by the research (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Allan (2002) adopted this approach by using narrative analysis to ascertain which cross-cultural process factors were involved in an international school education. The whole school population was taken as a sample, and students were asked to write a story describing their experiences when they first arrived at the school). These narratives were then analysed in the context of cultural dissonance, and several process factors in terms of interaction within the school culture were identified as being significant in intercultural and academic learning (Allan, 2002a.) The case study involved 171 students aged 11 to 18 years old, and used a phenomenological approach to narrative analysis which categorises phenomena occurring in narratives by examining their cultural interpretations of states of affairs. Students were asked to write a story of the experiences of a pupil starting at the school; they were told that the stories did not have to be autobiographical, but the subject should be someone of their own age, sex, language, national and cultural background and a similar personal history. This is an emic approach (Berry, 1969), incorporating the student's own interpretation of events, and situated in their own discourse and culture. Students expressed their feelings historically and contemporaneously, giving their own interpretation of causality and consequence; also dynamically, contrasting present attitudes with those on arrival at the school, giving their own version of the learning process and insights into personal development. In cultural studies, narratives as retrospective accounts of a personal past are seen as documents reflecting the storyteller's current, situation bound theories and construction of selves (Alasuutari, 1995).

This case study presented both a comparative and dynamic version of the intercultural process of change, in differing perspectives among students from different cultural backgrounds and after different lengths of time at the school, and in retrospective accounts of their changing ideas. In telling stories about past events, 'respondents narrativise particular incidents in their lives, often when there has been a breach between ideal and real, self and society' (Riessman, 1993, p3). Stories are

organized around consequential events; analyzing narratives involves looking for these accounts of consequential events or critical incidents. Coding and classification of these phenomena then enable us to construct theory. This process is characterized by Thomas (1992: 5) as follows: “The essence of the interpretive stance is a temporal cycle working backward from the present to help the construction of a defined, refined, corrected and coherent past.” In this case analysis involves looking for the cultural perspectives involved in students’ creation of their version of events.

Coding, classification and theory generation

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998: 57), traditional narrative analysis begins with micro-analysis: “The detailed line-by-line analysis [is] necessary at the beginning of a study to generate initial categories (with their properties and dimensions) and to suggest relationships among categories; a combination of open and axial coding.” In doing this by hand, the researcher uses an index system of numbered cards containing biographical details of each student, where critical or significant incidents in the data, or “phenomena” are recorded as their narratives are read. Although at this first stage the data are approached with no classification system in mind, during this process the incidence and similarity of certain events begin to suggest categories and labels. Differences or anomalies inevitably draw attention to themselves as general concepts begin to emerge, and natural curiosity will lead us to look at the cultural characteristics of the individual student as seen in their biographical details, or relate to instances in the literature or personal experience in seeking explanations. Thus the process of theory-forming starts even in the first stage of analysis. But, as Strauss and Corbin (1998: 58) explain, “analysis is not a structured, static or rigid process. Rather it is a free-flowing and creative one in which analysts move quickly back and forward between different types of coding, using analytic techniques and procedures freely and in response to the analytic task before analysts.” These suggestions and observations can be recorded as memos, to be used in later stages of coding and classification.

The next phase of analysis involves consolidating these “hunches” and coding on the basis of a set of predetermined concepts and determining how they vary according to their properties and dimensions. These concepts in later stages become domains, categories and sub-categories, each being defined by the properties and dimensions seen in the detail of micro-narratives. This involves systematic interrogation of the data, asking more specific questions such as “who”, “when”, “why”, “where”, “how”, “how much” and “with what results?” We can also use the “flip-flop” technique (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 94) to ascertain what would happen if this were the opposite (as applied to an American student entering a Japanese-language school) to judge the significance of particular phenomena. As a result an initial classification system can be obtained, with successive visits to the data re-defining and refining categories and sub-categories, in a process of what Dey (1993: 129) calls “splitting and splicing”, that is, subdividing some categories and merging others. Here we are looking for convergence and divergence, comparing categories to similar or different concepts to bring out possible properties and dimensions not immediately evident to us, thereby creating “sensitizing”, rather than merely descriptive, categories (Woods, 1985: 58) that open our eyes to new interpretations of the data. It is easy at this stage to become bogged down in details, to get too close to the data or to resort to a type of quantification. Here it is important to remember that we are comparing concepts, not individuals or cases: the researcher is not looking for aggregate totals of

categories, necessitating homogeneity in the content of each individual story, when one richly detailed story can provide us with as much significant data as any number of superficial or less focused ones. However, it is important for reliability that any conclusions or theory derived must be applicable to all the data. To appropriate an aphorism: when we are looking in the horse's mouth, we are not interested in the number of teeth the horse has, but rather what its teeth tell us about its health relative to other horses.

By comparing phenomena in the same domain (Allan and Brown, 2002), we can see the workings of the process involved in the formation of cultural attitudes and identity in the setting of an international school. 'The essence of the interpretive stance is a temporal cycle working backward from the present to help the construction of a defined, refined, corrected and coherent past' (Thomas, 1992, p 5). The relationship between the phenomena in the narratives and their implications in the process of inter-cultural learning are complex, and derived-etic generalisations in this respect (Berry, 1969) cannot be fully understood without reference to cross-cultural psychology and other acculturation studies. The significance of the factors which emerged from, and are thus grounded in, the narratives, in cultural dissonance and their relationship to theory and existing research, will be discussed in the following sections.

The situating of the conclusions in the context of other research forms part of the process of this type of discourse analysis in which theory is formed in the interpretation of data by comparing phenomena to each other, the experience of the researcher and also to the literature. (Dey, 1993; Alasuutari, 1995; Strauss and Corbyn, 1998). Psychology is used to understand processes such as stereotyping, attitude formation and attitude change, in-group and out-group formation, and inter-group interactions. Social psychology relating to identity formation is also particularly relevant to this age group, but application of these theories must be applied within the workings of the cross-cultural factors involved and the context of the school culture. Analysis thus enables a model of the process of inter-cultural learning to emerge in the form of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This can be generalised in terms of process to other situations where enough similarity exists for researchers to be able to say reliably that the same process is operating (Hagood, 1970), even though contingency variables (Tayeb, 1988), in terms of, for example, size, nationalities among student groups, or host country, may vary.

Although there are many methods of data collection associated with this methodology (such as interviews, observation, and discourse analysis), one common element is that the primary data are the interpretations of the observer: "the observer is the instrument" (Robson, 1993: 195). This element of the methodology enables the teacher to use his or her most valuable asset as a researcher—his or her experience: "Experience and knowledge are what sensitize the researcher to significant problems and issues in the data and allows him to see alternative explanations and to recognize properties and dimensions of emergent concepts" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 59). Any extensive experience of international schools that teachers may have will also enhance the cultural sensitivity of researchers that Alasuutari (1995) claims is essential if confidence in their interpretation of cross-cultural situations is to be generated.

There is a danger that, in carrying out research in a familiar situation where the researcher is known, he or she is open to factors such as respondent bias, personal reactivity, observational bias, selective encoding, personal expectations or the

pressure of rushing to make a judgment (Hammersley, 1990). According to Alasuutari (1995), the general strategy is “to seek to recognize and discount all biases” by including them in the realm of competence of the researcher, and by being open about them with the subjects (and the subsequent readers) of the research. Most importantly, ethnographic research needs to describe its methodology clearly and in detail so that, as fellow researchers, we can determine its trustworthiness.

5. A combined or ‘layered’ approach

Language in the anthropological ethnographic tradition of cultural studies can be seen in terms of the social, cultural and interactional aspects which influence the interaction of teachers and pupils in school and classroom contexts. The ethnography of communication in sociolinguistic analysis aims to “examine the situations and uses, the patterns and functions of speaking as an activity in its own right” (Frake, 1962, p101). Critical discourse analysis draws attention to “how texts selectively draw upon *orders of discourse*” (Fairclough, 1998, p.188). But as Corson says, “A major task of critical realist researchers is to untangle the ways in which wider structures and processes filter into educational institutions and then into classrooms” (Corson, 1998, p208). A combined approach opens up a wide range of possibilities, especially in terms of the relationship between language, culture and classroom behaviour outlined in Sections 2.4, but will entail a combined use of the methodological approaches of cultural and linguistic (formalist, post-structural and critical) discourse analysis. This is illustrated in Figure 1, and its nature described in Table 1, showing how the “nested contexts” (Cazden, 2001) of the discursive interaction in the school which forms the process of education can be investigated.

The three contexts or layers of discourse are those of ‘discourse’, ‘narrative’ and ‘voice’. In the cognitive dimension, the three contexts can be said to parallel Cazden’s ideas of nested contexts: in the mind (students), in learning communities (schools and classrooms) and communities (local educational policy makers) (Cazden, 2001). In terms of cognitive developmental processes, they are sometimes concentric, sometimes overlapping, rather than the cycle of Haste’s “intra-individual, interpersonal and sociohistorical”, Haste (1987, p. 175), and the dialectic, or “negotiation of meaning” (ibid.) among them which she describes as interpersonal processes, is seen as a discursive dialectic.

In the three dimensional framework of critical discourse analysis, “the link between sociocultural practices and the other two dimensions involves the integration of ‘macro’ and ‘micro’ analysis of discursive events, where the former includes analysis of discourse technologization process” (Fairclough, 1985, p97) (cf. Foucault’s hegemony, 1979). The “discursive events” can be seen in the ‘phenomena’ of the cultural studies approach and also their manifestations via the semiotics of ‘visual sociology’ (Prosser and Warburton, 1999). In a multi-lingual/cultural setting, not only the ‘ideology’ of the discourse, but the pragmatics of the language itself becomes the ‘technology’ which asserts power, therefore must be explored using more traditional sociolinguistics. Narrative analysis gives insight into the connection between discourse and cognition, which may tell us whether this will also result in a culturally specific transference of ‘knowledge’ from teacher to student; or whether, in their internal ‘intrapsychological’ narratives, students are able to construct their own ‘culture-critical’ version of knowledge.

These perspectives are represented in Table 1 and Figure 4, which attempt to link the ‘layers’ of discursive practice: the *discourse*, *narrative* and *voice* defined in

the introduction, with theoretical and methodological perspectives. It can be seen that in the more physical dimension they also correspond to Haste and Cazden's views of schools and classrooms respectively, and their interdependence is echoed in Alexander's stricture: that "separating the cultural, educational and social into three apparently independent free-wheeling 'systems', which can then be translated into a collection of factors for the purposes of statistical correlation, is conceptually untenable" (Alexander, 2000, p. 29). As these are "nested contexts" there is interplay or dialectic conversation between each level, which is reflexive and will manifest itself in each layer.

Fairclough describes the critical approach to discourse analysis as follows, "The method of discourse analysis includes linguistic *description* of the language text, *interpretation* of the relationship between the (productive and interpretative) discursive processes and the text, and *explanation* of the relationship between the discursive processes and the social processes" (1995, p 97, emphasis in original).

The model that I suggest is appropriate for international schools tries to discover the effects on learning of cross-cultural aspects of the nature of discourse rather than the nature of discourse itself. It corresponds to CDA in that the generation of discourse is seen to be reflexive, productive and multi-dimensional, but differs from CDA in the following ways, First, I find it hard to differentiate among the techniques of *description*, *interpretation* and *explanation*, they all seem to me to be interpretive, what varies is the means of interpretation. The idea that 'description' can be objective, seems to ignore the subjective position of the researcher. Description, using sociolinguistic narrative analysis is also interpretive, insofar as the researcher is trying to give the subject's interpretation rather than a formalist, grammatologist interpretation. If 'explanation' refers to some overarching sociohistorical framework then it seems to be at odds with other references to Foucault's ideas of discourse being self-generative or self-reinforcing in practice. "the link between sociocultural practice and text is mediated by discourse *practice*.....and how they [orders of discourse] are articulated together depends upon the nature of the sociocultural *practice* which the discourse is a part of" (ibid p.97, my emphasis), and it is here that discursive and cultural practices in the form of sociolinguistic pragmatics (e.g. classroom discourse) can be observed and that cultural hegemony is also active. The dialectic between "macro phenomena" and discursive "practice" can be seen using in the 'phenomena' of the cultural studies approach and 'control over the discursive practices" (ibid. p.88) in the socio-linguistic realm. The most fundamental difference is the adding of another level, the intrapsychological or '*voice*', and the incorporation of the sociohistorical into the culture of the institution, where there may be more than one version operating.

Phillips (1972), is an early example of a combined anthropological and sociolinguistic approach, which found that where there is a 'congruence' between the sociolinguistic styles and social relationships of both the school and the home culture then the children tended to perform better and develop greater levels of verbal interactional participation. The application of narrative analysis in discursive psychology links to the intrapersonal, as well as the cognitive, "The reflective condition of the inner dialogue also deserves, therefore, to be valued for its contribution to learning, and the oscillation of inner and outer speech can be promoted and utilised in a variety of ways that have not yet been clearly documented or evaluated" (Stables, 2003, p21).

Gee (1999), especially, demonstrates the use of an integrated approach to discourse analysis of spoken and written language as it is used to enact social and

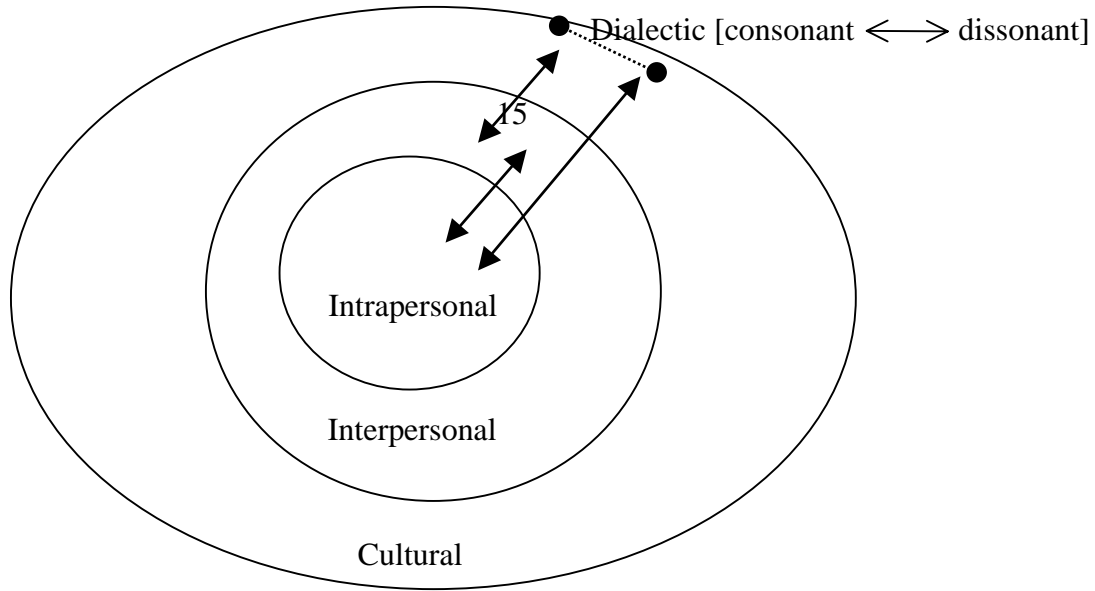


Figure 2. Nested contexts

cultural perspectives and identities. Venturelli (2002) used a combination of structuralist and critical discourse theory borrowed from communication studies in examining competing discourses of children from non-US, multi-cultural backgrounds and of the head teacher in an American school, to try to portray the particular socio-cultural system of the classroom. Chick (2001) in an ethnographic study of six post-apartheid schools in South Africa using linguistic discourse analysis, examined the influence of competing discourses, both at national and school level, on the construction of a multi-cultural national identity among the students. These studies illustrate the potential of the approach.

Layer	Socio-psychological level	Physical Concept	Methodological
Discourse(s)	Cultural	School (or societal as manifest therein)	1. Critical discourse analysis
Narrative(s)	Interpersonal	School and classroom	2. Sociolinguistic analysis
Voice(s)	Intrapersonal	School, classroom and individual	3. Phenomenological, narrative analysis

Table 1. Summary of layers

The research model is intended to be exploratory rather than confirmatory (Robson, 1998), but by focusing on an area of interaction which has been identified by analysis of literature and previous research on the subject, a well-defined focus to the study can be maintained without sacrificing ‘looseness’ in interpretation. As Goffman remarked “I assume a loose speculative approach to a fundamental area of conduct is better than a rigorous blindness to it” (quoted in Thomas, 1992, p2). Discourse theory can incorporate the various contexts and further analyse the relative effects of each on the particular situation. This also has benefits in terms of transferability. If phenomena in a case study are situated within various wider discourses, then it is easier for other researchers to transfer conclusions to a different situation, as the effect of macro-discourses will have been incorporated, and other researchers can situate their case relatively within the same discourses.

¹ The title uses Courtney Cazden’s term “Nested contexts” (Cazden, 2001, p. 181) which in turn refers to Heath (1986).

6. Conclusion

Interpretive analysis of qualitative data has sometimes been described as an art as much as a science, but although creativity must play a part it is not artistic in the sense of free-form jazz or abstract painting. It is governed by logic, which is scientific in its use of rules and categories, relationships and conclusions. Some conclusions or interpretations may be arrived at “intuitively” but this intuition is the product of the expertise and experience of the observer, who is constantly reflecting on and analysing experience in order to form an explanation of what is going on in the desire to improve practice.

Despite eloquent protestations by the more radical of interpretive theorists, who prefer “ad hoc fumbling around” to the “systematic thematic analysis” suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967), theory does not simply emerge or come into being. In the author’s view neither is the case, research techniques are valuable in that they may throw up certain cues that would otherwise have been missed, but it is the researcher who conceptualizes from data, a process that requires certain attitudes and qualities of creativity. In the last resort, research and theory construction will only be as good as the people doing it. Hammersley (1990), assessing the value of interpretive research and its usefulness to other researchers, asserts that plausibility and transferability are more important than generalisability. Here teachers are not only able to use their detailed knowledge and insider experience in providing “the rich, thick description” (Robson, 1993: 148) by which fellow practitioners can judge, but they can also bring their insight and intuition to bear on the interpretation of data and generation of theory with the authority of those who have spent their working life “in the field”.

Apart from research involving ESL, little attention has been paid to what goes on in international school classrooms – is it different from national schools? If so how? and how can we make international schools more effective and improve the teaching of culturally diverse student bodies? Although there is much to be learned from research that can locate educational problems in their larger social context, educators also need research methodologies and theoretical frames that provide the possibility of more local explanations for the dilemmas and problems facing international education.. Situated understandings of education provide insights into the cognitive and social consequences of school policies and pedagogical practices. The significance of developing a deep understanding of schools and their social organisations is that it can inform the policies and practices of international education.

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